

Developing Pathways and Playlists for Discipleship and Faith Growth

John Roberto, Vibrant Faith Leadership Team
www.VibrantFaith.com www.LifelongFaith.com

Part 1. Pathways

Personalized learning is tailoring learning (faith formation) around each person's strengths, needs and interests— including enabling choice in what, how, when and where people learn (grow in faith and discipleship).

A Pathway is a process for helping people discern where they are in their faith journey and to chart a path for faith growth—to get from where they are to a closer relationship with Jesus and a deeper practice of the Christian faith.. People should be able to clearly understand where they are in their faith journey and their next steps in faith growth. They don't have to do everything, they just need to do the one next thing..

A Pathway is life-centered, reaching into every area of a person's life: relationships, family life, life transitions, marriage, parenting, financial stewardship, spiritual formation, professional and work life, service to others, and more.

A Pathway is holistic incorporating the whole person: head, heart, and hands.

- *A way of the head* (inform) demands a discipleship of faith seeking understanding and belief with personal conviction, sustained by study, reflecting, discerning and deciding, all toward spiritual wisdom for life. This requires that we educate people to know, understand, and embrace with personal conviction Christianity's core belief and values.
- *A way of the heart* (form) demands a discipleship of right relationships and right desires, community building, hospitality and inclusion, trust in God's love, and prayer and worship. This requires that we foster growth in people's identity through formation and the intentional socialization of Christian family and community.
- *A way of the hands* (transform) demands a discipleship of love, justice, peace-making, simplicity, integrity, healing, and repentance. This requires that we foster in people an openness to a lifelong journey of conversion toward holiness and fullness of life for themselves and for the life of the world.

(See *Will There Be Faith: A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*. Thomas Groome, HarperOne, 2011, pages 111-119).

A Pathway focuses on faith maturing. The goal of a Pathway is to develop disciples and promote faith growth. A Pathway is created around the church's vision of discipleship and mature faith—identifying characteristics of faith maturing that can be used for people to discern their faith journey and chart a path for growth.

Designing a Pathways Model for Discipleship & Faith Growth

(See the examples beginning on page 7 for illustrations of Pathways models.)

1. Identify a target audience(s): children and parents, adolescents, young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, older adults.
2. Describe the life stage and religious-spiritual characteristics of your target audience.
3. Identify how you will use the Pathways model, for example:
 - Sacraments/milestones: Marriage, Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, beginning church faith formation, etc.
 - RCIA, evangelization, and new member processes
 - Gathered faith formation events and programming
 - Parenting meetings
 - Small groups: affinity groups, interest groups, Bible study groups,
 - On-ramps where people in your church might start the discipleship journey
4. Develop the characteristics of faith growth you want to use in your Pathways model. For example:
 - Option 1. Use characteristics of faith growth specific to the life stage (such as family faith practices) or the content of the event (such as preparing for confirmation)
 - Option 2. Use characteristics of maturing faith (see the “Faith Maturing Characteristics” below)
 - Relationships with Jesus Christ
 - Living the Christian way of life - discipleship
 - Living with moral integrity
 - Learning and articulating the teachings of the Christian tradition
 - Praying and seeking spiritual growth
 - Studying and reading the Bible
 - Engaging in service and mission to the world
 - Worshipping with the community
5. Develop a ‘discernment continuum” that gives people a way to reflect on their current growth, for example:
 - Inquiring---Getting Started---Making Progress---Going Deeper
 - How true is each statement for you: 1= not true from me , 3=somewhat true for me, 5=very true for me

Example of Faith Maturing Characteristics

(Developed from research studies on faith maturing)

Key Characteristics of Maturing Faith

1. Relationships with Jesus Christ
2. Living the Christian way of life - discipleship
3. Living with moral integrity
4. Learning and articulating the teachings of the Christian tradition
5. Praying and seeking spiritual growth
6. Studying and reading the Bible
7. Engaging in service and mission to the world
8. Worshipping with the community

Descriptions

1. Sustaining a personal relationship with Jesus Christ supported through regular prayer, faith sharing and Bible reading.
2. Making the Christian faith a way of life by integrating their beliefs into the conversation, decisions, and actions of daily life.
3. Possessing a vital faith and being aware of God present and active in their own life, the lives of others, and the life of the world.
4. Seeking spiritual growth by actively pursuing questions of faith, learning what it means to believe in God, and what it's like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.
5. Living a life of service by caring for others, reaching out those in need, and addressing injustice in the world.
6. Sharing the Good News through words and actions, through Christian stewardship and working for peace, justice and human dignity.
7. Participating fully, consciously, actively and regularly in the ritual and worship life of the faith community.
8. Articulating the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith and demonstrating a commitment to learning and growing in this faith.
9. Exercising moral responsibility by applying Christian ethics, virtues, principles, values, and social teaching to moral decision-making, life situations, and in interactions with the larger culture.
10. Practicing faith in Jesus Christ, privately and publicly, through participation in the congregation's worship, ministries, and leadership.
11. Discerning and using their gifts to actively belong to and participate in the life and mission of the Christian community.
12. Exploring God's call to vocation through prayer, reflection, and discernment.
13. Possessing a positive spirit with loving and hopeful attitudes toward others and life, convinced that they can make the world a better place.

Part 2. Developing Playlists of Content & Experiences

A faith formation playlist is a curated group of digital (online, video, audio, print) and gathered (church, home, small groups, etc.) faith forming experiences and resources that are tailored to the specific faith growth needs of people around a particular characteristic of faith maturing or theme/topic. Playlists are developed for each "stage" on the discernment continuum, such as Inquiring, Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper. Each playlist provides a variety of ways for people to learn and grow in faith.

Pathway-Specific

- Content and experiences are selected to address each pathway, for example resources for Inquiring, Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper

Utilize the Faith Forming Experiences in the Life of the Church

- Sunday worship
- Sacramental celebrations
- Faith formation programming
- Intergenerational and family programming
- Service and justice ministries
- Pastoral care

- Church events and community life

Provide a Variety of Settings or Environments for Faith Growth

- Independent/Individualized
- Mentored
- Family / At Home
- Small Group
- Large Group
- Intergenerational /Whole Church Community
- Community and World

Address the Ways People Learn (Multiple Intelligences) through a Variety of Activities

- Verbal-linguistic (word / book smart)
- Logical-mathematical (number / logic smart)
- Visual-spatial (art / picture smart),
- Bodily-kinesthetic (body / movement smart)
- Musical-rhythmic (music / sound smart)
- Naturalist (nature / environment smart)
- Interpersonal (people / group smart),
- Intrapersonal (self / introspection smart)

Use a Variety of Methods

- Read
- Write
- Engage in storytelling and create stories
- Feature films, TV shows, videos
- Converse with others
- Create a media project or video
- View or create art
- View or take photographs
- Watch or engage in drama
- Listen to or create a podcast
- Listen to or create music
- Conduct a demonstration
- Experience games, simulations, video games
- Analyze or create a case study
- Develop an apprenticeship or internship
- Create an exhibit
- Experience prayer and rituals
- Take a field trip (e.g., churches, museums)
- Participate in a mission trip
- Engage in or create a service / action project
- Keep a journal
- Develop a mentor relationship
- Experience events in the congregation

Part 3. Publishing Playlists

Publish the Playlists on a digital platform and use social media for connection, interaction, and sharing learning reflections. You can add the playlists to your existing church website or create a website just for faith formation and link it to your church website. Examples of faith formation websites: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com and www.FamiliesattheCenter.com.

Building a website is made much easier today by the availability of online website builders that provide predesigned website templates, drag-and-drop features to create webpages, and hosting for the website. Three popular website builders to explore are *Weebly* (www.weebly.com), *Wix* (www.wix.com), and *Squarespace* (www.squarespace.com). All three have easy to use features and very reasonable subscription fees. For advanced users *WordPress* (<http://wordpress.org>) provides thousands of predesigned templates, lots of customization features, and ready-to-use apps. *WordPress* does require an understanding of web design and some programming ability.

Here are several suggestions for web usability to keep in mind as you design (from Steve Krug's excellent and easy-to-use book *Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability*, Third Edition, Berkeley: New Riders, 2014).

1. Don't make the user think—make web pages self-explanatory so the user hardly has any perceived effort to understand them, or example, clear choice of labels, clearly “clickable” items, simple search.
2. People generally don't read web pages closely; they scan, so design for scanning rather than reading.
3. Create a clear visual hierarchy and menu system (main menu, submenus).
4. Make it very clear how to navigate the site, with clear “signposts” on all pages.
5. Omit needless words.
6. The home page needs the greatest design care to convey site identity and mission.
7. Promote user goodwill by making the typical tasks easy to do, make it easy to recover from errors, and avoid anything likely to irritate users.

Worksheet: Designing a Pathways Model

1. Identify a target audience(s): children and parents, adolescents, young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, older adults.

2. Describe the life stage & religious-spiritual characteristics of your target audience.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

3. Identify how you will use the Pathways model. For example:

- ✓ Sacraments/milestones: Marriage, Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, beginning church faith formation, etc.
- ✓ RCIA, evangelization, and new member processes
- ✓ Gathered faith formation events and programming
- ✓ Parenting meetings
- ✓ Small groups: affinity groups, interest groups, Bible study groups,
- ✓ On-ramps where people in your church might start the discipleship journey

4. Develop the characteristics of faith growth you want to use in your Pathways model. For example:

- ✓ Option 1. Use characteristics of faith growth specific to the life stage - such as family faith practices (see example) or the content of the event (such as preparing for confirmation)
- ✓ Option 2. Use characteristics of maturing faith (see "Faith Maturing Characteristics") – such as adult faith formation (see example)
 - Relationships with Jesus Christ
 - Living the Christian way of life - discipleship
 - Living with moral integrity
 - Learning and articulating the teachings of the Christian tradition
 - Praying and seeking spiritual growth
 - Studying and reading the Bible
 - Engaging in service and mission to the world
 - Worshipping with the community

5. Develop a 'discernment continuum' that gives people a way to reflect on their current growth. For example:

- ✓ Inquiring---Getting Started---Making Progress---Going Deeper
- ✓ How true is each statement for you: 1= not true from me , 3=somewhat true for me, 5=very true for me

Family and Parent Growth Pathways

We believe God dwells in every family and that family life is sacred. The profound and the ordinary moments of daily life—mealtimes, workdays, vacations, expressions of love and intimacy, household chores, caring for a sick child or elderly parent, and even conflicts over things like how to celebrate holidays, discipline children, or spend money—all are the threads from which families can discover God and weave a pattern of family faith.

We believe that parents are the most important religious influence on their children, and it is our responsibility as a church to support and encourage you. We know that faith is formed when there is a substantial investment of thought, time, and intimacy by parents. Our church is here to support you as a parent in developing a strong, healthy, faith-filled family life.

To help you discover areas for growth and to help us serve you better, please take a few minutes to complete the Family Practices and Parent Practices. It will help you identify strengths and areas of growth in your own life and in your family's life by identifying how frequently you (or your family) engage in particular faith practices and parenting practices.

Rate each item on the following scale, based on how frequently you engage in the practice:

- 1 = Never
- 2 = Rarely
- 3 = Occasionally
- 4 = Frequently
- 5 = Regularly

After you complete the review, identify areas of strength in your life as a parent and in your family life. Then identify areas that you and/or your family need to develop.

Family Practices

1. We eat together as a family.	1 2 3 4 5
1. We engage in positive communication as a family.	1 2 3 4 5
2. We have family conversations about things that are important to us.	1 2 3 4 5
3. We make decisions and solve problems as a family.	1 2 3 4 5
4. We treat each other with respect and dignity.	1 2 3 4 5
5. We support each other: encouraging, expressing care, standing up for each other	1 2 3 4 5
6. We talk about faith as a family.	1 2 3 4 5
7. We pray as a family (meal time, bedtime).	1 2 3 4 5
8. We pray as a family during times of struggle or crisis.	1 2 3 4 5
9. We celebrate meaningful traditions and rituals as a family (holidays, birthdays, accomplishments, etc.).	1 2 3 4 5
10. We read the Bible as a family.	1 2 3 4 5
11. We use the Bible as guidance for how we should think and act as a family.	1 2 3 4 5
12. We serve people in need as a family..	1 2 3 4 5
13. We work to overcome injustice in our world as a family.	1 2 3 4 5
14. We engage in projects to care for the environment as a family.	1 2 3 4 5
15. We encourage children/teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith.	1 2 3 4 5
16. We talk about faith and our religious tradition with our children and teens.	1 2 3 4 5
17. We ask about our children/teens perspectives on faith, religion, moral issues, social issues, etc.	1 2 3 4 5
18. We participate in Sunday worship as a family	1 2 3 4 5
19. We participate in church activities as a family	1 2 3 4 5
20. We celebrate the church year seasons at church (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)	1 2 3 4 5
21. We celebrate the seasons of the church year at home (Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter)	1 2 3 4 5
22. We encourage and support our children/teens to participate in church activities.	1 2 3 4 5

Areas We Are Strong as a Family (Review ratings of 4 and 5)

Areas We Need to Grow as a Family (Review ratings 1, 2, and 3)

Parent Practices

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. I express care to my children/teens by listening to them, being dependable, encouraging them, and make them feel known and valued. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. I challenge my children/teens by expecting them to do their best and live up to their potential. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I provide support for my children/teens by encouraging their efforts and achievements and guiding them to learn and grow. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I treat my children/teens with respect, hearing their voice, and including them in decisions that affect them. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I inspire my children/teens to see possibilities for their future, expose them to new experiences and places, and connect them to people who can help them grow. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. I demonstrate a warm and affirming parenting approach | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. I create a warm, caring supportive family environment. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I practice effective communication skills with my children/teens. | |
| 9. I work with my children/teens to manage “screen time” and social media use. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. I read and study the Bible. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. I use the Bible to discover how I should think and act. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. I encourage my children/teens to read the Bible. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. I pray to God and take quiet time to reflect and listen to God. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. I encourage my children and teens to pray. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. I am engaged in service to people in need . | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. I work to overcome injustice in our world. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. I am engaged in projects to care for the environment. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. I provide moral instruction and how to decide right and wrong. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 19. I take time to grow in my relationship with God as a parent | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 20. I take time to grow in my understanding and practice of the Christian faith. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Areas I Am Strong as a Parent (Review ratings of 4 and 5.)

Areas I Need to Grow as a Parent (Review ratings 1, 2, and 3)

Adult Faith Growth Pathway

We believe that growth in our relationship with God and in following Jesus (discipleship) is a lifelong process. We are constantly trying to grow deeper in our relationship with God and in living the Christian way of life each day. Our church is committed to helping you grow wherever you may be in your faith journey. We are committed to helping you live the Christian way of life everyday.

To help you discover areas for growth and to help us serve you better, please take a few minutes to complete the Adult Faith Growth Pathway. It will help you identify strengths and areas of growth in your own life. Use these statements to assess where you are honestly and prayerfully. Rate “How true each statement is for you” using the rating scale: 1 = Rarely true of me, 2 = Sometimes true of me, 3 = Occasionally true of me , 4 = Almost always true of me, 5 = Always true of me.

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. I am growing in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I make the Christian faith a way of life by integrating my beliefs into the conversation, decisions, and actions of daily life. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I am aware of God present and active in my own life, the lives of others, and the life of the world. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I have a real sense that God is guiding me. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. I seek spiritual growth by actively pursuing questions of faith, learning what it means to believe in God, and what it’s like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. I devote time to reading and studying the Bible. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I use the Bible to discover how I should think and act. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. I pray to God and take quiet time to reflect and listen to God. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. I am growing spiritually through spiritual practices such as contemplation, <i>lectio divina</i> , praying Scripture, daily Examen (reflection), and meditation. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. I can articulate the fundamental teachings of the Christian faith. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. I am growing in my understanding of the Christian faith—beliefs, traditions, and practices. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. I exercise moral responsibility by applying Christian ethics, virtues, and values to making moral decisions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. My faith helps me know right from wrong. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. I live a life of service by caring for others and reaching out those in need. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. I am involved in ways to promote social justice and address injustice in the world. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. I am involved in actions to care for creation. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. I share the Good News of Jesus through my words and actions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 19. I participate actively and regularly in the worship life of the church community. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 20. I participate in the life, ministries, and leadership of the church community. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Ways I Can Grow

- Areas Where I Need to “Get Started” (look at the numbers 1 and 2)
- Areas Where I Need to “Grow” (look at the numbers 2 and 3)
- Areas Where I Want to “Go Deeper” (look at the numbers 4 and 5)

Additional Adult Faith Formation Topics

Use the following topics to provide more specific adult faith growth content for a Pathways model.

Bible

- ✓ Study and read the Old Testament: The Pentateuch –to discover its message and meaning for life today
- ✓ Study and read the Old Testament: The Prophets – to discover the message and meaning of the prophets for our world today
- ✓ Study and pray the Psalms as a spiritual practice
- ✓ Study and read the four Gospels to discover the life, ministry, and message of Jesus and how it applies to our lives today
- ✓ Study and read the Letters of Paul to discover how his message to the first Christians applies to us today

Relationship with Jesus

- ✓ Discover how to begin (or begin again) my faith journey by exploring the heart of Christianity: Jesus, the Gospels, the church, and spiritual life
- ✓ Learn how to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ and explore what it means to be a disciple today in daily life – at home, at work, in the world

Christian Faith and Tradition

- ✓ Learn more about what we believe as a (religious tradition) today and why
- ✓ Explore how contemporary theologians present what it means to be a Christian in today's world, and how that can inform our experience of the God in our daily lives
- ✓ Become familiar with the great teachings of Christianity (its creeds and doctrines)
- ✓ Learn the richness of the Church's tradition, explore the theological and cultural heritage in which faith is expressed, and gain perspective on contemporary events and trends through an understanding of church history
- ✓ Learn the Church's teaching on the nature and mission of the Church,.

Worship

- ✓ Understand, live, and bear witness to the paschal mystery, celebrated and communicated through the sacramental life of the Church.
- ✓ Acquire the spirituality, skills, and habits of full, conscious, and active participation in the liturgy, especially the eucharistic liturgy.
- ✓ Appreciate and appropriately participate in the Church's daily prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, and learn to pray the psalms, "an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church."

Prayer & Spirituality

- ✓ Develop spiritual practices to sustain my life as a Christian
- ✓ Learn the stages of spiritual growth and experience spiritual practices to deepen my spiritual life
- ✓ Explore a spirituality for the second half of life and how to sustain and deepen the spiritual life after 50
- ✓ Learn and practice ways to pray and meditate as part of daily life
- ✓ Get away for a retreat experience to reflect and deepen my spiritual life

- ✓ Receive spiritual guidance from trained spiritual directors who will help me on my faith journey
- ✓ Explore the history and meaning of Christian worship and how to get the most out of Sunday morning worship.
- ✓ Become familiar with the diverse forms and expressions of Christian prayer.
- ✓ Experience and appreciate the richness of the Catholic ascetical-mystical tradition as it has taken form across the centuries in diverse historical and cultural settings.
- ✓ Develop a regular pattern of personal prayer and spiritual reflection, recognizing vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer as basic and fruitful practices in the life of a disciple of Jesus.

Moral Living

- ✓ Study the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the moral catechesis of the apostolic teachings, and live in accord with them.
- ✓ Study the Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person in its social doctrine, including its respect-life teaching
- ✓ Appreciate the dignity, destiny, freedom, and responsibility of the human person, together with the reality of sin and the power of God's grace to overcome it.
- ✓ Learn how to acquire and follow a well-formed conscience in personal and social life, clarifying current religious and moral questions in the light of faith, and cultivating a Christian discernment of the ethical implications of developments in the socio-cultural order.
- ✓ Live a lifestyle reflecting scriptural values of holiness, simplicity, and compassion.

Service & Justice

- ✓ Explore major social issues and the responsibility of Christians to transform the world
- ✓ Engage in projects and actions of service to those in need in our community and region
- ✓ Engage in projects and actions of service to those in need in our world
- ✓ Participate in mission trips to serve those in need in our country and around the world

Life Issues

- ✓ Discover my strengths as a person (gifts and talents) and how to utilize them to develop my “calling” in life
- ✓ Figure out how to balance the many commitments in my life: relationships, family, work, and more
- ✓ Develop life skills such as coping with stress, communicating effectively, managing my time, dealing with anger and sadness,
- ✓ handling conflict, and more
- ✓ Develop a financial “plan” by learning the skills and tools for creating savings, develop a personal/family budget, planning for the
- ✓ future (college, retirement), investing wisely, reducing debt, and more
- ✓ Discern my purpose in life as an adult: what am I committed to, where I am spending my time, what are my goals for the future,
- ✓ and more.
- ✓ Learn how to develop healthy relationships and let go of unhealthy ones
- ✓ Learn how to plan for life after retirement—relationships, finances, spiritual life, contributing to the church and the community, and
- ✓ more
- ✓ Join with a group of single adults for support, storytelling, and faith sharing
- ✓ Participate in a support group with those recovering from an addiction