



## Lifelong Faith Workshop

# *The Church as a Center of Lifelong Learning & Faith Formation*

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### Goal

To develop a blueprint for lifelong faith formation in a church, incorporating six seasons of life – children (0-10), adolescents (11-19), young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-50s), mature adults (50s-60s), and older adults (80+) – and design a plan to implement the blueprint over a three-year timeframe.

### Topics

1. Think Systemically about Faith Formation
2. Develop Goals for Maturing in Faith
3. Utilize 7 Elements for Lifelong Faith Formation
4. Ideas for Enhancing and Expanding Faith Formation

### Online Resources

Lifelong Faith website:

[www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com)

Lifelong Faith Training website:

[www.lifelongfaithtraining.com](http://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com)

Lifelong Faith Studio website:

[www.lifelongfaithstudio.com](http://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com)

Intergenerational Faith website:

[www.intergenerationalfaith.com](http://www.intergenerationalfaith.com)

#### Examples of Faith Formation Networks

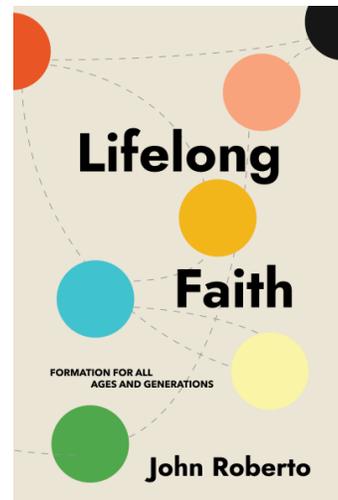
Family Faith Practice website:

[www.familyfaithpractice.com](http://www.familyfaithpractice.com)

Seasons of Adult Faith website:

[www.seasonsofadultfaith.com](http://www.seasonsofadultfaith.com)

### Book



# #1. Think Systemically about Faith Formation

Systems thinking is a way of helping us view the challenges we face in faith formation from a broader perspective that includes seeing the whole life span and the context of people's lives today, rather than seeing only a specific issue or concern in isolation, for example: "We've got to solve the youth problem" or "We've got to get families back to church." Our immediate response to the problem or challenge is to create a targeted program or strategy to solve the problem that has surfaced: *How can we keep our teens involved in church? How do involve young adults who have left our churches? How do we make sure our families are practicing their faith at home and bringing their children to church and classes?* Etc.

While the initiatives that are created may be excellent, they are not systemic. They make us think the problem lies with the people – teens or young adults or parents – and all we need to do is design something to "fix" the problem. In large part, the changing religious participation and practice trend is a failure of the whole system of faith forming in churches.

Systems thinking sees individual problems or challenges as connected to a larger system of faith forming that might not be working well. By focusing on the entire system of faith formation, we can attempt to identify solutions that address as many problems as possible in the system. The positive effect of those solutions leverages improvement throughout the system. Thus, they are called "leverage points" in the system. This priority on the entire system and its leverage points is called whole systems thinking.

One important way to think systemically is to adopt a goal-centered mindset, rather than a program-centered one. Envision your church's goals for maturing in faith for lifetime and design faith formation to make these goals a reality in people's lives. By starting with goals, you can develop multiple ways (approaches, programs, activities) to help people grow in faith. Consider:

- ◆ What is your vision of maturing in faith and discipleship for a lifetime?
- ◆ Toward what ends or goals are your church's faith formation efforts directed?
- ◆ What is your church try to accomplish in the lives of people at each stage of life from childhood to older adulthood?
  
- ❖ Read more about goals in the article: "Goals for Maturing in Faith" on the Lifelong Faith website: [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).

A second way to think systemically is to develop a lifelong mindset. See every age and stage of life connected to the whole life span and the other five generations. Don't try to design or improve faith formation with adolescents without considering their family's faith, childhood faith formation, and the challenges that teens will face living their Christian faith in their 20s. Don't try to design or improve faith formation with adults in their 60s and 70s without considering their connections to other generations in the church and in their family (e.g., many are grandparents).

## #2. Develop Goals for a Lifetime of Maturing in Faith

### Reflect

- ◆ *What is your vision of maturing in faith and discipleship?*
- ◆ *Toward what ends or goals are your church's faith formation efforts directed?*
- ◆ *What is your church try to accomplish in the lives of people at each stage of life from childhood to older adulthood?*

### Describe

- ◆ **What is your church's vision and goals for maturing in faith and discipleship?**

- ◆ **Which of these goals reflect your vision of maturing in faith?**

1. To develop and sustain a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ.
2. To live as a disciple of Jesus Christ and make the Christian faith a way of life.
3. To read and study the Bible and apply its message and meaning to living as a Christian today.
4. To learn the Christian story and the foundational teachings of one's particular faith tradition and integrate its meaning into one's life.
5. To worship God with the community weekly, in ritual celebrations, and through the seasons of the church year.
6. To pray, together and alone, and seek spiritual growth through spiritual practices and disciplines.
7. To live with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and apply Christian moral values to decision-making.
8. To live the Christian mission in the world by serving those in need, caring for God's creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace—locally and globally.
9. To be actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the Christian community.
10. To practice faith in Jesus Christ by using one's gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world.

- ◆ **What would you add?**

✦ Explore how the Ten Goals for Maturing in Faith are being practiced in your church. Use this simple chart to organize your profile.

	Children	Teens	Young Adults	Midlife Adults	Mature Adults	Older Adults
Developing and sustaining a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ						
Living as a disciple of Jesus Christ and making the Christian faith a way of life						
Reading and studying the Bible, and its message, meaning, and application to life today						
Learning the Christian story and the foundational teachings of the Catholic faith tradition and integrating its meaning into one's life						
Praying—together and alone—and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual practices and disciplines						
Living with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and values						
Living the Christian mission in the world—serving those in need, caring for God's creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace—locally and globally						
Worshipping God with the community at Sunday worship and ritual celebrations, and through the seasons of the church year						
Being actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the faith community						
Practicing faith in Jesus Christ by using one's gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world						

- ✦ Which goals are being addressed most effectively?
- ✦ Which goals need to be addressed more effectively?
- ✦ Which goals need new initiatives so they can be addressed effectively?



## #3. Utilize Seven Elements for Lifelong Faith Formation

The mission of making disciples and forming faith for a lifetime can seem overwhelming. Leaders want to make lifelong faith formation a reality. They want to nurture, sustain, and deepen the Christian faith for a lifetime. What if we could identify the essential elements that make lifelong faith formation work—key elements that could guide decision-making and planning in every single church? I propose seven elements that I believe are essential for developing lifelong faith formation. These are elements that every church can contextualize and customize to their size, location, and diversity of their people.

### 1. Goals—for Maturing in Faith for a Lifetime

The first element is foundational to all the others: a vision of lifelong maturing in Christian faith expressed in ten goals. Each goal incorporates knowing and understanding more fully the Christian faith (informing), developing and deepening a relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community (forming), and living the Christian faith in every aspect of our lives (transforming).

1. To develop and sustain a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ.
2. To live as a disciple of Jesus Christ and make the Christian faith a way of life.
3. To read and study the Bible and apply its message and meaning to living as a Christian today.
4. To learn the Christian story and the foundational teachings of one's particular faith tradition and integrate its meaning into one's life.
5. To worship God with the community on Sunday, in ritual celebrations, and through the seasons of the church year.
6. To pray, together and alone, and seek spiritual growth through spiritual practices and disciplines.
7. To live with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and apply Christian moral values to decision-making.
8. To live the Christian mission in the world by serving those in need, caring for God's creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace—locally and globally.
9. To be actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the Christian community.
10. To practice faith in Jesus Christ by using one's gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world.

The ten goals are a framework for designing developmentally appropriate experiences, programs, activities, and resources for each stage of life: children, adolescents, young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (60s–70s), and older adults (80+). The goals provide a seamless process of fostering faith growth from birth through older adulthood because everyone shares a common vision of maturing in faith. This is a huge shift in emphasis from the current church-centric focus on providing curriculum, courses, classes, programs, and activities, to a person-centered approach to faith formation with all ages, developed around a lifelong vision of maturing in faith.

### 2. Practices for Forming a Christian Way of Life

The practices of the Christian faith seek to answer the question: How shall we live? Spiritual practices form the essential content for discipleship and faith growth. Lifelong faith formation guides people in

learning basic practices of the Christian faith, participating in them, and living them with increasingly deepened understanding and skill. We come to faith and grow in faith through the practices of the Christian community. And we learn to live these Christian practices not only through doing them ourselves, but through offering guidance, mentoring, and teaching them to others.

Christian practices include caring for creation, discerning, embracing diversity, finding God in everyday life, practicing forgiveness, healing, honoring the body, keeping Sabbath, praying, working for justice, fostering peace and reconciliation, reading the Bible, serving the poor and vulnerable, being generous, giving testimony, and worshipping.

### 3. Intergenerational Faith Formation through Christian Community

Integral to lifelong faith formation is the primacy of intergenerational community—relationships, and faith-forming experiences for developing and sustaining faith and discipleship in people of all ages and generations. When a church commits itself to building a culture of intergenerationality, it becomes a sign of and instrument for the full experience of the body of Christ by all ages and generations. Churches with a vibrant intergenerational faith-forming community create a welcoming environment of hospitality and care that is conducive to promoting faith growth and mutual support across generations. They build caring relationships among the generations through worship, learning, service, and community events and activities. They create intentional opportunities for bringing the generations together to build relationships and engage in shared activities. They involve all generations together in Sunday worship, and engage all generations together in learning experiences that teach the Bible and the Christian tradition and form disciples of all ages in Christian identity. They nurture the spiritual life of all generations together through the community’s prayer life, rituals, and blessings. They engage all generations together in service to the poor and vulnerable, in the works of justice and advocacy, and in care for creation.

### 4. Family Faith Formation with Three Generations

A family is the first community and the most basic way in which God gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world. The family is the primary mechanism by which Christian identity becomes rooted in the lives of young people through the day-to-day religious practices and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities. Through the processes of religious socialization, young people with seriously religious parents come to think, feel, believe, and act as serious religious believers, and that that training “sticks” with them even when they leave home and enter emerging adulthood.

Churches that make families a priority equip parents and grandparents with practices for forming faith at home (celebrating rituals and milestones, observing the seasons of the church year, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, reading the Bible). They provide the knowledge and skills for parenting and grandparenting today. They provide experiences for the whole family that promote growth in faith and discipleship, and resources to strengthen the connection between what happens at church and Christian practice at home. Churches also involve families in congregational activities. Churches can create a plan for family faith formation designed around the specific life stage needs of families with young children (0–5) elementary school children (6–10), young adolescents (11–14), and older adolescents (15–19).

## 5. Networks for Forming Faith for All Ages

Lifelong faith formation is designed as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces—for children, adolescents, young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, older adults, and the whole family. A network approach transforms faith formation from a provider-centered, program-driven model to a learner-centered model where the content and experiences are designed around the people and where they have control over their learning. In a network model, faith formation shifts from “one size fits all” curriculum and programming to religious content and experiences that connect with people’s spiritual and religious needs.

A network approach incorporates a variety of methods for and styles of learning. A variety of formats for learning are also provided—on your own, with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the church, and in the community and world—delivered in physical gathered settings and online settings. A network approach is designed in three modes: gathered programming in physical places, online programming, and hybrid programming that integrates both. Synchronous (real time) and asynchronous (on your own time) offerings expanding the opportunities for people to engage in faith-forming experiences that are responsive to their time, commitments, and availability.

## 6. Pathways for Personalizing Faith Formation

Personalizing faith formation addresses the diverse faith growth needs of people by tailoring the environment—what, when, how, and where people learn and grow—to address the spiritual and religious interests and needs of all ages. Faith pathways help people find where they are in their journey and to chart a path for faith growth toward a deeper relationship with Jesus and the life and practices of the Christian community. People should be able to clearly understand where they are in their faith journey and find their next steps forward. A pathways guide is created around the ten goals for discipleship and maturing in faith so that people can discern their needs, and together with mentors and small groups, develop a personalized faith growth plan that accesses the offerings in the faith formation network a church has created and the activities in specially designed playlists of content (print, audio, video, online) and experiences (intergenerational, family, and age-group programming) to address those needs.

## 7. Playlists for Providing Personalized Faith Formation

Faith formation playlists provide a variety of curated experiences (in-person and online), published on a digital platform, that families, individuals, and/or small groups can use to address areas of faith growth identified in the pathways guide. Playlists can also be developed on life issues, biblical and theological topics, Christian practices, seasons of the church year, and more to provide faith-forming content for families, all ages, or specific groups or life cycle stages. Playlists incorporate intergenerational, family, age group, and online/digital faith-forming content, experiences, and activities. A learning playlist is similar in concept to a music playlist where people curate music from a variety of artists into a group of songs selected because they are favorites or represent a musical genre or theme.

## #4. Ideas for Enhancing and Expanding Faith Formation

There are several ways we can introduce systemic initiatives into lifelong faith formation

- ✦ By expanding **hybrid approaches** we involve more people with time- and schedule-friendly programming, reach more people through different learning formats, promote more engaged learners, and find multiple ways to use the programming we create.
- ✦ By creating **seamless family faith formation** from birth to high school graduation we strengthen the primary faith forming community and support parents in providing religious socialization at home.
- ✦ By **strengthening the intergenerational fabric** of our faith community we create relationships and faith forming experiences among all generations, providing an important context for all ages to grow in faith and discipleship.
- ✦ By creating a **menu of faith forming experiences** we address the diversity of people's learning needs and religious-spiritual needs, overcoming the limitations of the one-size-fits-all approach.
- ✦ By building **"front porch" experiences** we provide spaces to engage with people and build relationships out in the community.

### Systemic Idea #1. Expand Hybrid Approaches to Faith Formation

Since the early 2010s we have had the tools, methods, media, and models to do faith formation in **Online** models and in **Hybrid** models that blend the physical and online spaces. Over the past three years churches accelerated their adoption of online and hybrid models of faith formation. Now churches have three modes of programming: gathered in a physical space, online in a digital space, and hybrid in both spaces together.

Church have adopted – and many are expanding – hybrid models that integrate in-person gatherings at church or in family groups or in small group meetings with online content such as playlists that provide a menu of learning experiences on the theme of the program, and online meetings for discussion and more in-depth learning.

The creation of online and hybrid models of faith formation means that faith formation programming can be **synchronous** (real time) and **asynchronous** (on your own time)—thereby expanding the opportunities for people to engage in faith forming experiences that are responsive to their time, commitments, and availability. We deliver synchronous faith formation using physical gatherings, live streaming, video conferencing, online courses, and online small groups. We deliver asynchronous faith formation using online playlists, video and audio programs, online discussion groups, online learning platforms, websites, and more.

Now is the time to expand hybrid faith formation to address the time constraints of gathered participation for those who are engaged in our church community and to (re)engage those who participate occasionally or who have stopped participating in the church community. Hybrid models hold together two important values in faith formation: the importance of in-person relationships and faith forming experiences, and the importance of being responsive to the complexity of people's lives and their religious-spiritual needs. Hybrid models expand faith formation opportunities for everyone.

We can become much more strategic and careful about when, where, how, and for what we gather people because we can now integrate online with in-person faith forming. *Hybrid models of faith formation are more resilient, flexible, and adaptable—just what we need to respond to the challenges of change in our world and in lives of our people!*

Hybrid programming provides a way to offer one program in multiple formats. With multiple ways to program in physical, online, and hybrid spaces, one program or experience can be designed in all three spaces, increasing the availability to a wider audience of people. The choice is no longer whether to participate or not, but which option best suits a person's time, schedule, and learning preferences. Here is an example of a video-based program that is conducted in multiple formats – same program, multiple ways to experience it.

- ◆ *Large group physical gathering:* People gather at church and a leader facilitates the program—showing a video, providing time for people to read and reflect, and guiding small groups in discussing the content.
- ◆ *Small group physical gathering:* People gather in small groups in homes or coffee shops or other conducive setting, watch the video, read and reflect on the content, and discuss the content.
- ◆ *Small group hybrid:* People gather online in a small group (Zoom or other video conferencing platform) to watch the video together, read and reflect on the content, and discuss the content.
- ◆ *Online with interaction:* People complete the sessions on their own and share reflections in a Facebook group (asynchronous) or meet on Zoom to discuss the program (synchronous).
- ◆ *Online independent:* People complete the learning program on their own.

Design a three-year plan for expanding hybrid faith formation with a mix of expanding current efforts, reinventing current programs, and creating new hybrid programs. Consider how the following aspects of faith formation can be strengthened through a hybrid approach: formation for church year seasons, marriage preparation, baptism preparation for new parents, formation with families with young children, at-home family component in children's faith formation, First Communion preparation for parents and the family, confirmation preparation, almost any adult faith formation program (Bible study, theology study), and outreach initiatives to the uninvolved.

## Resources

- ❖ Read more about hybrid faith formation in the article: "A Hybrid Future for Faith Formation" on the Lifelong Faith website: [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).
- ❖ For videos and articles on hybrid faith formation go to the "hybrid" section of the Lifelong Faith website: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/hybrid.html>.

## Systemic Idea #2. Create Family Faith Formation from Birth through Adolescence

Faith formation needs to start early in life and engage the whole family (three generations: children, parents, and grandparents) throughout the childhood years. We need to start early in the family and build a foundation for a life of faith in the new generation if we hope to address the decline in passing on faith from generation to generation. In most churches, it would be a systemic change to shift priorities and energies to focus on families with young children (0-5 years old) and families with grade

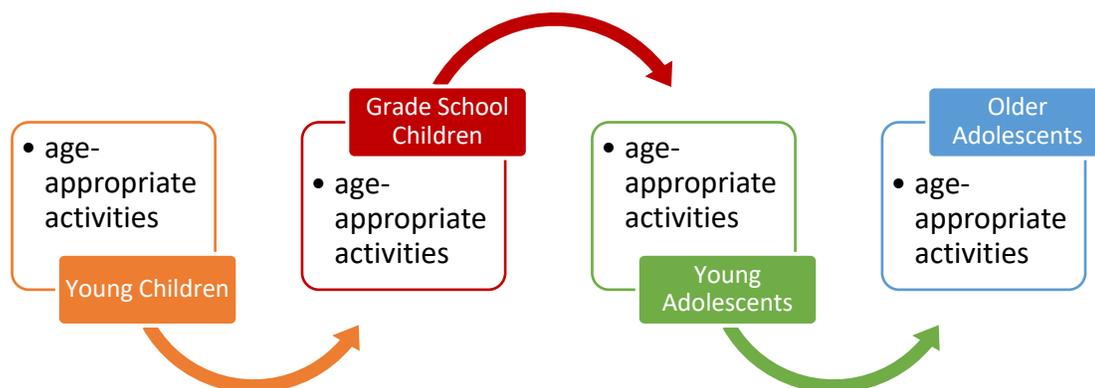
school children – moving beyond a “classroom” approach to engage the whole family—at church and at home. We know that the research leads us to this priority:

- ✦ Parents are the most significant influence on the religious and spiritual outcomes of young people.
- ✦ The primary way by which a religious identity becomes rooted in children’s lives are the day-to-day religious practices of the family and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities.
- ✦ The family is the primary community where Christian faith practices are nurtured and practiced.
- ✦ The quality of a parent’s relationships with their children or teens and the parenting style they practice make a significant difference in faith transmission.

Family faith formation is designed to *encourage* parents to grow in faith and become faith formers, *equip* parents to incorporate faith practices into family life at home, and *engage* parents in education and formation, as well as the whole family in faith forming experiences and program.

Over the next three years design and implement a plan for forming the faith of families that incorporates four stages of life: young children, grade school children, young adolescents, and older adolescents. Develop a template that you can use for each stage of life and then design or select age-appropriate programs, activities, and resources. A template can include the following elements:

- ✦ *Family faith practices:* reading the Bible, praying together, serving people, working for justice, caring for creation, eating together, having family faith conversations, providing moral instruction
- ✦ *Celebrating Milestones:* ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences
- ✦ *Celebrating church year seasons*—at church and home: Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, and more
- ✦ *Parenting practices and skills* appropriate to the stage of life
- ✦ *Parenting for faith* programs, videos, and activities
- ✦ *Family-centered gatherings and programs* at church



To create a plan for families with young children we could include the following types of activities that would be offered on a website designed for families, and supported by a monthly e-newsletter highlighting activities that are especially relevant in that month. Activities can be structured in a way

that identifies what's appropriate for each year of early childhood: 0-1, 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, and 4-5. The goal is to provide a comprehensive formation process at church and at home with the parents-only and with the whole family.

1. *Baptism preparation* that engages the parents in their own faith growth and prepares them for nurturing faith in young children
2. *Mentors* from the church community (e.g., grandparents) to accompany parents on the journey from Baptism to start of school (5 years old)
3. *Faith practices* such as Bible stories, prayers, meal rituals, moral values
4. *Seasons of the year* including activities for the church year seasons, holidays, and the four seasons
5. *Milestones* such as birthdays, baptism anniversaries, "first" milestones, entry to preschool and kindergarten
6. *Parenting knowledge* such as understanding young child development and practices for effective parenting of young children
7. *Parenting for faith skills* such as reading a Bible story, praying with a young child, having faith conversations
8. *Online group* for parents of young children (e.g., Facebook group)
9. *Gatherings for parents and for families* at church

## Resources

- ❖ For videos and articles on family faith formation go to the "family" section of the Lifelong Faith website: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/family.html>.
- ❖ For video-based training to design family faith formation go Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/family-faith-formation.html>.
- ❖ For an example of a family faith formation website go to the Family Faith Practice website at <https://www.familyfaithpractice.com>.
- ❖ For curated resources for families go to the Lifelong Faith Studio website and find the "family resources" for each content area: <https://www.lifelongfaithstudio.com>.
- ❖ For free family programs go to the Intergenerational Faith website: <https://www.intergenerationalfaith.com>

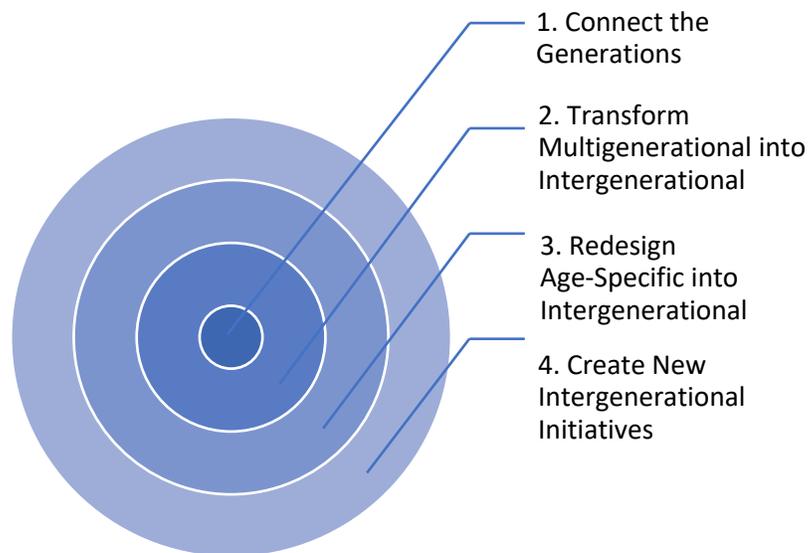
## Systemic Idea #3. Strengthen the Intergenerational Fabric of the Church Community

It is well documented now that there has been a decades-long trend toward greater generational isolation in our society, now accelerated by the pandemic. A study by Springtide Research, *The State of Religion & Young People 2020: Relational Authority*, found that nearly 70 percent of young people ages thirteen to twenty-five report having three or fewer meaningful interactions per day. Nearly 40 percent say they feel they have no one to talk to and that no one really knows them well, at least some- times. More than one in four young people say they have one or fewer adults in their lives they can turn to if they need to talk. As the number of trusted adults in a young person's life increases, their reported feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and stress decrease. The pandemic heightened the experience of isolation and loneliness across generations. Individuals and families shifted so many social things to home—work, school, shopping, food, fitness, and even church—that they lost social connection. Older adults dramatically reduced their outside interactions. Families with children and teens worked hard to

limit outside exposure, and often selected particular family members or a few local families to create a safe “pod.”

People have a tremendous hunger for in-person relationships and shared experiences, like celebrating holidays, birthdays, and milestones with other generations. One of the best ways to overcome the loneliness and isolation people have experienced during the pandemic is to increase the number of opportunities for intergenerational relationships, experiences, and activities. Connecting the generations—(re)building intergenerational community, relationships, and experiences—is a tremendous opportunity for every church community.

A systemic response is to build a church culture of intergenerationality – to make a commitment to become more intentionally intergenerational in everything we do. Faith formation can take a lead in strengthening an intergenerational culture in four ways with increasing depth and scope:



Here are ideas to spark your own creativity for each of the four ways to strengthen an intergenerational church culture:

1. *Connect the Generations*: Creating small actions to build relationships, trust, and respect by praying for other generations; mixing generations in leadership and ministry teams; developing mentoring relationships between generations (old to young, young to old); and encouraging generations sharing and contributing at worship.
2. *Transform Multigenerational Settings into Intergenerational Experiences* by including relationship building activities; engaging in storytelling; praying for each other; participating in shared activities as mixed-generation groups; sharing leadership roles appropriate to gifts, abilities, and age; and making people feel welcome, respected, valued, and recognized by other generations.
3. *Redesign Age-Specific Programs into Intergenerational Experiences* by incorporating another generation to share their life story, faith, wisdom (interviews, storytelling, presentations,

demonstrations); adding mentors or spiritual guides such as grandparent mentors for young parents and spiritual guides for young people in confirmation; adding regular intergenerational gatherings into age group programs throughout the year; and redesigning an age-specific program such as camp or vacation Bible school into a grandparent-grandchild program and a service program or mission trip into an intergenerational activity.

4. *Create New Intergenerational Initiatives* that will contribute toward building an intergenerational culture in your congregation by celebrating milestones throughout life as intergenerational experiences at church and home, conducting intergenerational learning programs—weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or seasonally—for the whole faith community; offering intergenerational models of vacation Bible school, camp programs, Bible study programs; retreat programs (in a variety of time formats); and intergenerational local and global service projects, actions for justice, care for creation.

Develop a three year plan for strengthening the intergenerational fabric of your church community through faith formation by creating strategies for the four ways described above. Move from *connecting* and *transforming* into the more challenging *redesigning* and *creating* over three years. No one action brings about an intergenerational church culture. It is the cumulative effect of becoming intentional using these four ways that leads to strengthening the intergenerational fabric of your church community.

## Resources

- ❖ For videos and articles on intergenerational faith formation go to the “intergenerational” section of the Lifelong Faith website: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/intergenerational.html>.
- ❖ For video-based training to design intergenerational faith formation go Lifelong Faith Training: <https://www.lifelongfaithtraining.com/intergenerational-faith-formation.html>.
- ❖ For free intergenerational programs go to the Intergenerational Faith website: <https://www.intergenerationalfaith.com>

## Systemic Idea #4. Create Menus of Faith Formation Experiences for All Ages

A significant systemic change in faith formation programming is the move from one-size-fits-all programming to multiple approaches and programming for each season of life (children, teens, young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults) that provide a variety of experiences, activities, content, and resources for diverse needs and interests; in a variety of formats (on-your-own learning, mentored, small group, large group, church-wide, in the community); with gathered in-person, online, and hybrid modes of faith formation.

The assumption of the one-size-fits all approach is that people of a certain age or stage of life learn in the same way, are in a similar place in their faith journey, have similar religious backgrounds, share common interests and learning needs, and, therefore, have the same religious and spiritual learning needs that can be addressed by one program. This mentality focuses churches on how to get everyone (whoever the audience might be) to participate in the one program.

Even though we all recognize the diversity of people’s religious experience and practice, churches continue to design “one-size-fits-all” programming because that mindset is so deeply ingrained in our practice. We know that the one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum and programming does not address the diverse spiritual-religious identities and needs of people. No one program, class, or resource can do that. Churches can offer a **menu of experiences** with wider variety of content, experiences, and activities if we are going to help people grow and mature in faith and discipleship.

At every stage of life we can build a **menu of experiences** that include intergenerational, family, and age group activities. People can select programs, activities, and experiences from the menu to create their own learning plan for the year or for a season of the year. You can establish participation guidelines so that each year or season children (and their families) and youth would select a certain number of intergenerational experiences, family at-home activities, and age-specific programs at church. This approach puts the learner at the center of faith formation and gives them choice over what and when and where they will learn.

The menu approach can transform current one-size-fits-all marriage, baptism, first communion, and confirmation preparation programs. We can create a menu of faith-formation experiences—intergenerational, family, and age group-specific—tailored to the religious experience and practice of the people (i.e., people who are actively engaged in practicing their faith, who are minimally engaged, who are not engaged but want to participate in a significant milestone or sacrament). Use a menu approach to structure learning with experiences, programs, and activities designed to promote growth in faith for people who want to grow deeper in the faith, for those who are inquiring or aren’t sure the Christian faith is for them, and for those who don’t need God or religion in their lives.

At every stage of life – children (0–10), adolescents (11–19), young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+) – we can offer people faith-forming experiences in intergenerational, family, and life stage settings with (1) a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources; (2) a variety of formats—on your own, mentored, small groups, and large groups; (3) a variety of scheduling—synchronous and asynchronous; and (4) in hybrid, online, and gathered modes of programming.

## Resources

- ❖ Read more about the menu approach to faith formation in the article: “Networks of Faith Formation” on the Lifelong Faith website: [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com).
- ❖ For an example of an adult menu approach go to the Seasons of Adult Faith website at [www.SeasonsofAdultFaith](http://www.SeasonsofAdultFaith). See especially the Bible and Prayer and Spiritual Life sections for illustrations of a menu of faith forming experiences.
- ❖ For an example of a family menu approach go to the Family Faith Practice website at <https://www.familyfaithpractice.com>. See especially the Just for Parents section for an illustration of a menu of faith forming experiences.

## Systemic Idea #5. Build “Front Porch” Faith Forming Experiences



Churches are feeling the impact of the dramatic rise of disaffiliation from organized religion, and the challenge of greater diversity in religious practice. We know that people’s participation in church life and Sunday worship has been declining for the past two decades and has only accelerated during the pandemic. Many churches are expending a lot of time and energy on getting people “back to church” for worship and faith formation programming. This focus on “bringing back” needs to be balanced with an emphasis on “going out.”

What if churches and faith formation began to focus on “bringing the church to people”? What if we created “front porch experiences” – spaces, programs, and experiences that expand the scope and reach of the church into the lives of people in the neighborhood and community? What if we made a special effort to reach and engage people who are not involved or have given up on church or were never affiliated with any church or religion?

One way to build a “front porch” is to move some of the at-church programs and activities into community settings, such as Bible study offered in a café or a prayer/retreat experience offered at a retreat house or other quiet setting. Changing the location of a program opens up the possibility of inviting people to join in a “neutral” setting.

A second way is open-up programs currently sponsored by the church to the whole community, such as a vacation Bible school offered for all of the children in the community, and service projects and care for creation projects that welcome people from the community to get involved.

A third way is to offer activities directed to the needs, hungers, and interests of people sponsored by the church in a variety of settings and spaces so that everyone feels comfortable participating. We have seen examples of this type of outreach in the variety of “theology on tap” or “God on tap” programs offered for young adults in pubs. A church could offer a variety of projects targeted to different ages or audiences, for example:

- ◆ Workshops, resources, and support groups targeted to all parents of young children, grade school children, middle school and high school adolescents

- ◆ Family events for the whole community such as concerts, movie nights, games day
- ◆ Programs and activities designed for older adults at the senior center or adult living center or nursing home.
- ◆ A Dinner Church ministry (<https://dinnerchurch.com>) that brings people together over a meal to share stories, build relationships, and engage with each other spiritually.
- ◆ Career and life mentoring or coaching, especially for young adults
- ◆ Life skills courses for teenagers and young adults
- ◆ An arts program such as art exhibits or arts workshops
- ◆ A music program such as concerts, opportunities to join a musical group, and music workshops
- ◆ Community-wide service days, service projects, and mission trips
- ◆ And much more