# Lifelong Faith Workshop

# *Developing a Lifelong Plan for Faith Formation*

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### Workshop 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.

Each season of life can have a particular focus or theme reflecting the most essential content and experiences, designed around the unique developmental characteristics, life tasks and issues, and religious and spiritual needs of people in each season of life. No decade would be viewed in isolation—each would be seen as part of a ten-decade view of faith growth and maturing in faith.

### Workshop Program

**Introduction to lifelong faith formation**

**Models of lifelong faith formation**

**Step 1. Developing a parish profile of faith formation with all ages and generations**

**Step 2. Analyzing the current faith formation programs and activities**

**Step 3. Formulating a vision and goals for maturing in faith for a lifetime**

**Step 4. Developing an integrated approach to lifelong faith formation: intergenerational, family, and life stage faith formation**

**Step 5. Exploring a variety of programming approaches, formats, and methods for faith formation**

**Step 6. Creating a lifelong faith formation plan**

**Step 7. Developing a 3-year timeframe for implementing the plan & developing an implementation plan for Year 1 Plan: leadership, resources, finances, etc.**

**Step 8. Designing faith formation programming for the lifelong faith plan**

### Meeting Dates

#1 – February 26 #2 – March 12 #3 – March 26 #4 – April 23

### 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)

## #1. Vision: Seven Elements of Lifelong Faith Formation

The mission of making disciples and forming faith for a lifetime can seem over- whelming. 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 under- standing 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 set- tings. 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 con- tent, 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.

## #2. Models of Lifelong Faith Formation

A model of lifelong faith formation integrates intergenerational, family, and life stage faith formation into a whole, providing direction for promoting maturing in faith through all of the ages and stages of life. A clearly articulated model helps everyone understand the purpose and goals of lifelong faith formation and how your church is implementing them.

### Intergenerational Model

In the **Intergenerational Model**, faith formation for all ages together is at the center of lifelong faith formation. Intergenerational programming, involving all ages and conducted monthly, biweekly, or weekly, is the shared faith formation experience for all ages. Churches develop a multiyear curriculum of themes that apply to all ages—focusing on one theme per year or integrating multiple themes in one year. The multiyear curriculum can include programming on scripture, Christian beliefs, Christian practices, prayer and spirituality, worship and sacraments, morality, the Sunday lectionary cycle readings, church year feasts and seasons, and social justice.

While intergenerational formation is the central experience for the whole community, churches also offer a variety of life stage networks and milestone networks throughout the year. They offer preparation formation for Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation. They also offer life stage faith formation programming that focuses on specific needs of each life stage and complements the all-ages focus of intergenerational formation.

### Worship Model

In the **Worship Model**, faith formation is developed around Sunday worship— the scripture readings, sermon, and ritual—with a weekly or monthly theme to focus formation. For churches that are lectionary-based, the cycle of scripture readings forms the basis for themes addressed in faith formation. For churches that develop topical worship series, the theme of the series, as found in the sermon and scripture readings, forms the basis of formation. Churches use a variety of programming to address the theme: intergenerational gatherings, life stage experiences, small group programs, online faith formation, and more. For example, a monthly theme that is the focus of the Sunday worship experience can be deepened through an intergenerational program on the first Sunday of the month, life stage programming in a variety of formats throughout the month, and a playlist on the theme with activities for all ages.

While worship is at the center of all faith formation experience for the whole community, churches also offer a variety of life stage networks and milestone net- works throughout the year. Churches offer preparation formation for Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation. They also offer life stage faith formation programming that focuses on specific needs of each life stage and complements the all-ages focus of worship formation.

### Thematic Model

In the **Thematic Model**, faith formation is built around an annual (or seasonal) church-wide theme that becomes the central focus of the whole community. This theme can emerge from the lives of people, the life of the church community, events in the community and world, the Bible and theology, Christian practices, and more. Faith formation on the theme can include intergenerational gatherings, family programs, life stage programs, online programs and activities, and more.

While the theme is at the center of all faith formation experiences for the whole community, churches also offer a variety of life stage networks and milestone networks throughout the year. Churches offer preparation formation for baptism, first communion, and confirmation. They also offer life stage faith formation programming that focuses on specific needs of each life stage and complements the all-ages focus of thematic formation.

### Life Stage Model

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In the **Life Stage Model**, faith formation is developed around each stage of life: children and families (0–10 or 0–5 and 6–10), adolescents (11–19), young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+). (Many churches combine several adult stages, such as mature and older adults.) Each stage of life incorporates three essential faith-forming experiences: intergenerational relationships, activities, and church life and events (including Sunday worship), family faith practice at home, and life stage activities and experiences designed to address life stage needs and situations, interests, and religious and spiritual journeys at each stage of life.

Life stage networks are supported by milestone (or sacrament or life transition) formation. Networks can be created for Christian initiation and new member formation, marriage preparation, parent formation for the baptism of their child, family preparation for first communion, preparation of adolescents for confirmation, and more.

## #3. A Profile of Lifelong Faith Formation

Develop an inventory of your church’s current intergenerational, family, and life stage activities correlated to the ten maturing in faith goals (or the goals your church has developed). Use the following life cycle stages as a guide for your profile:

1. Childhood (0–10)
2. Adolescents (11–19)
3. Young adults (20s–30s)
4. Midlife adults (40s–50s)
5. Mature adults (60s-70s)
6. Older adults (80+).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Life Stage Faith Formation****- with this age group -**  | **Family Faith Formation****- with the family -**  | **Intergenerational Faith Formation****- with other generations-** |
| Young Children |  |  |  |
| Grade School Children |  |  |  |
| Young Adolescents |  |  |  |
| Older Adolescents |  |  |  |
| Young Adults |  |  |  |
| Midlife Adults |  |  |  |
| Mature Adults |  |  |  |
| Older Adults  |  |  |  |

**Analyze your profile using the following questions:**

* What are the strengths in our current programming?
* What do we need to continue doing?
* What do we need to stop doing?
* What needs to be strengthened or improved?
* What needs to be expanded with more programming or needs to be extended to reach and engage more people?
* What do we need to start doing? What new initiatives need to be created to address gaps in lifelong faith formation, to respond to new needs and challenges, or to engage new audiences?

## #4. 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.**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **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 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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* **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?**