Lifelong Faith Workshop

Developing a Lifelong Plan for 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.

Program

1. Essay: Seven Elements of Lifelong Faith Formation
2. Challenges & Opportunities in Faith Formation Today
3. A Lifelong Learning Paradigm
4. A Profile of Faith Formation with all Ages and Generations
5. Models of Lifelong Faith Formation
6. Goals for Maturing in Faith for a Lifetime
7. An Integrated Approach to Faith Formation: Intergenerational, Family, Life Stages
8. Networks, Pathways, and Playlists for Faith Formation
9. New Leadership Roles for Faith Formation

Online Resources

Lifelong Faith website:
www.LifelongFaith.com
Lifelong Faith Training website:
www.lifelongfaithtraining.com
Lifelong Faith Studio website:
www.lifelongfaithstudio.com
Intergenerational Faith website:
www.intergenerationalfaith.com
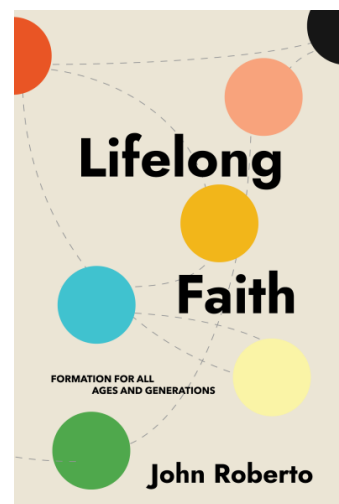
Examples of Faith Formation Networks
Family Faith Practice website:
www.familyfaithpractice.com
Seasons of Adult Faith website:
www.seasonsofadultfaith.com

Book

#1. Essay: 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 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.

2. Challenges & Opportunities

- ✦ We have become a ten-decade society.
- ✦ We have become a society of lifelong learners.
- ✦ We have a capacity challenge in churches.
- ✦ We have a religious participation and religious socialization challenge.
- ✦ We have a hybridity challenge as Christian communities.
- ✦ We have a generational connection challenge.
- ✦ We have a post-pandemic challenge.

Opportunity: Thinking Systemically

In large part, the changing religious participation and practice trend is a failure of the whole system of faith forming in churches. *This trend is a religious belonging challenge; a religious identity challenge; a religious content challenge, and an educational approaches and methods challenge.* Nothing short of re-thinking everything we do will address this challenge.

So, how can a lifelong and life-wide approach to faith formation provide a systemic response to addressing the challenges of religious change and post-pandemic life?

Systems thinking is a way of helping us view a church's faith forming systems from a broad perspective that includes seeing the whole life span and the context of people's lives today, rather than seeing only specific issues or concerns (e.g., we've got to solve the youth problem). 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.

Here are five ways to think and plan systemically, and create leverage points or bright spots that can improve everything your church does in faith formation.

First, become goal-centered, rather than program-centered. 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.

Second, develop a lifelong mindset. See every age and stage of life connected to the whole life span and the other five generations.

Third, start early in life and engage the whole family (three generations: children, parents, and grandparents) throughout the childhood years.

Fourth, design faith formation for the unique spiritual and religious profiles of people today—including the Engaged, the Occasionals, the Spirituals, and the Unaffiliated.

Fifth, move from one-size-fits-all programming to a network approach for each season of life (children, teens, young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults) – that provides a variety of experiences, activities, content, programs 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 models of faith formation.

#3. A Lifelong Learning Paradigm

The paradigm of education has shifted over the last several decades. It has moved from an *instructional, schooling paradigm* focused primarily on children and youth in age-graded classroom settings **to** a *lifelong learning paradigm* focused on people learning in a diversity of settings for the whole of life. Paradigms shift slowly over time, so we may have missed the significance of this change.

The new lifelong learning paradigm emerged when the older paradigm of education could no longer address the rapid changes in society. In a society where the growth of knowledge was relatively slow, the older paradigm worked well. People could receive an education in their younger years knowing it would last for a lifetime—and prepare them for a career and job that would also last a lifetime. With the exponential growth of knowledge in our world today, it's impossible to acquire all the knowledge needed in the early years of one's life. You have to become a lifelong learner.

The embrace of lifelong learning in the U.S. has happened relatively quickly. A recent Pew Research Center study showed that 73% of adults consider themselves lifelong learners; 74% are personal learners—that is, they have participated in at least one activity in the past 12 months to advance their knowledge about something that personally interests them. These activities include reading, taking courses or attending meetings, or events tied to learning more about their personal interests. The study also found that 63% of those who are working (or 36% of all adults) are professional learners—that is, they have taken a course or gotten additional training in the past 12 months to improve their job skills or expertise connected to career advancement. (Pew Research Center, "Lifelong Learning and Technology," March 22, 2016)

Supporting this new paradigm of lifelong learning is the fact that we have become a ten-decade society. People are living into their 90s and even 100s. This expansion of the life cycle is changing society as a greater share of the population are 60 and over—and they want to continue learning. For example, Road Scholar (formerly Elderhostel—notice the strategic name change) offers 5,500 learning adventures, serving more than 100,000 participants annually. Their programs combine travel and education to provide experiential learning opportunities featuring an extraordinary range of topics, formats and locations, in every state in the U.S. and 150 countries around the world.

Every church operates from a paradigm that governs how leaders design and conduct faith formation. Try this simple activity to uncover the paradigm at work in your church. Imagine a pie representing 100% of your church's investment in faith formation: people, time, energy, resources, money, and programming. What would the percentages look like for the following categories?

1. Children (0-5)
2. Children (6-10)
3. Adolescents (11-19)
4. Young Adults (20s-30s)
5. Midlife Adults (40s-50s)
6. Mature Adults (60s-70s)
7. Older Adults (80+)
8. The Whole Family Together (church and home)
9. All Ages Together Learning (intergenerational)
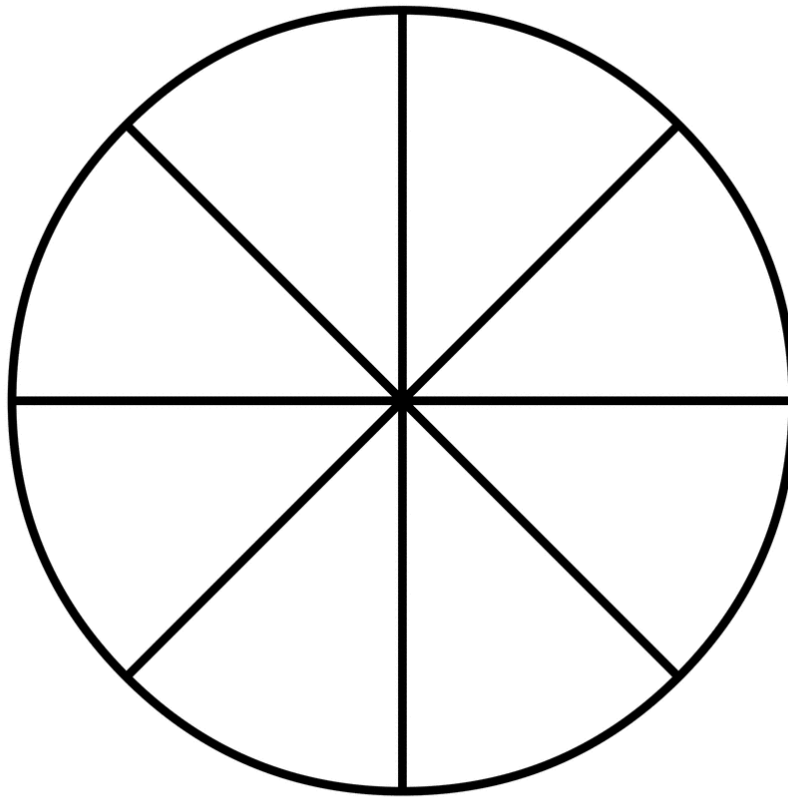
Reflect on the results of your chart by using the following questions to help you uncover your paradigm.

✦ **What does the pie chart tell you about your church's paradigm of faith formation?**

✦ **How would describe your current paradigm of faith formation?**

✦ **What assumptions is your church making about growing in faith: How? When? Where? With Whom?**

✦ **What assumptions is your church making about learning?**

#4. 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+).

	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?

#5. 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.

1. 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.

✓ Provide faith formation for all ages and generations together in one learning model, conducted monthly or twice per month. (Learning sessions are usually 2 hours in length with prayer, community building, learning, and a meal.) The intergenerational program includes all ages learning and age-group sessions with children, teens, and adults.
✓ Provide foundational faith formation with an annual theme or multiple themes each year.
   Themes can include Bible, Creed and beliefs, Christian practices, prayer and spirituality, worship and sacraments, morality, service and social justice, Sunday lectionary readings, church year feasts and seasons, and social justice.
✓ Offer the intergenerational program on multiple dates and times to accommodate the size of your meeting space and to give people choices to choose from.
✓ Develop an online faith formation resource center that extends the monthly theme with family, teen, and adult activities throughout the month.
✓ Continue to offer specialized, short term preparation programs for Marriage, Baptism, First Communion, First Reconciliation, and Confirmation.
✓ Continue to offer specialized programs for age groups that complement intergenerational learning, such as a summer Bible camp, service projects, or adult Bible study.

2. 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.

- ✓ Develop faith formation for all ages around Sunday worship: the Lectionary readings, homily, and ritual—with a theme to focus formation (weekly, monthly).
- ✓ Provide a variety of programming to address the theme:
    - intergenerational programs (monthly)
    - family programs
    - age group programs
    - small group programs
    - online faith formation with a playlist of activities for all ages each Sunday
- ✓ Develop an online faith formation resource center that extends the Lectionary readings with family and on your own youth and young adult activities throughout the month.
- ✓ Continue to offer specialized, short term preparation programs for sacraments
- ✓ Continue to offer specialized programs for age groups that complement intergenerational learning, such as a summer Bible camp, service projects, or adult Bible study.

3. 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.

- ✓ Design faith formation around an annual (or monthly 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.
- ✓ Provide a variety of programming to address the theme:
    - intergenerational programs (monthly)
    - family programs
    - age group programs
    - small group programs
    - online faith formation with a playlist of activities for all ages each Sunday
- ✓ Develop an online faith formation resource center that extends the Lectionary readings with family and on your own youth and young adult activities throughout the month.
- ✓ Continue to offer specialized, short term preparation programs for sacraments.
- ✓ Continue to offer specialized programs for age groups that complement intergenerational learning, such as a summer Bible camp, service projects, or adult Bible study.

4. Life Stage Model

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.

- ✓ Design faith formation for 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 mature and older adults.)
- ✓ Incorporate three essential faith-forming experiences at every stage of life
  - intergenerational relationships, activities, and church life and events (including Sunday worship),
  - family faith practice at home
  - life stage activities and experiences designed to address life stage needs and situations, interests, and religious and spiritual journeys at each stage of life
- ✓ Offer programming in multiple formats: gathered in physical locations, online (website, social media), and hybrid formats combining gathering in-person and online.
- ✓ Develop an online faith formation resource center for every stage of life.
- ✓ Incorporate specialized, short term preparation programs for sacraments.

Design Your Model of Lifelong Faith Formation

1. **Prepare for Designing a Model.** Review the four models of lifelong faith formation. These are examples that can be used to stimulate thinking about how to create a model. Any of the four models can easily be adapted for your church or used to create your own unique model.

2. **Name Your Current Model.** Engage the task force in discussing the following questions:
   - How would we describe our current model of lifelong faith formation?
   - Do any of the models help us name our church's model of lifelong faith formation?
   - Develop a visual diagram of your current model of lifelong faith formation.

3. **Analyze the Current Model.** Identify the strengths and weaknesses in your current model and determine if you need to improve it or if you need to create a new model to better accomplish your goal of providing lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations.

4. **Apply the Four Models**. Each model has strengths and weaknesses. Consider the following questions for **each** model:
   - What it would be like if our church selected this model of lifelong faith formation?
   - What are the features I like best?
   - What questions do I have about adopting this model?
   - Even if we don't adopt this model, what features do I think need to be included in our model of lifelong faith formation?

5. **Design Your Model.** If you use your current model, incorporate programming into the model, and then develop recommendations for the future that can include improving current programming, expanding programming, extending programming to engage more people, and /or creating new programming to engage new audiences and/or meet new needs.

   If you create a new model, select one of the models presented and adapt it for your church and context or create an entirely new model. Diagram your model. Incorporate programming that you want to continue offering. Develop recommendations for the future that can include revising current programming, expanding programming, extending programming to engage more people, and creating new programming to engage new audiences or meet new needs.

6. **Promote Your Model.** Find ways to make your model understood by the church community. Design a graphic illustrating your model. Develop a brochure (print and digital) that presents the church's vision (goals of maturing in faith) and model of lifelong faith formation. Send regular e-newsletters describing lifelong faith formation. Make a short video describing your model and post it online.

7. **Create a seasonal or annual catalog** (print and digital) with descriptions of all the offerings and a calendar of events. The catalog can include descriptions of every faith formation activity, clearly indicating the content or focus of the program and the particulars, such as date, location, cost, time, website location, and so on. Be sure to describe how your offerings respond to the lives of people. Highlight the relationship between the programming and meeting people's spiritual or religious needs, interests, passions, concerns, or life issues. Describe two to three benefits of participating or engaging in faith formation. Explain how to use the network and how to access the activities and resources.

8. **Grow Your Model.** Use your model of lifelong faith formation to guide the development of new initiatives.
   • 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?

#6. 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?**

#7. An Integrated Approach to Faith Formation: Intergenerational, Family, Life Stages

1) Intergenerational

An Intergenerational Culture

An intergenerational culture. . . .

- creates a welcoming environment of hospitality, trust, acceptance, emotional safety, and care that is conducive to promoting faith growth and mutual support across generations
- builds caring relationships among the generations in the church through worship, learning, service, and community events and activities
- creates intentional opportunities for bringing the generations together to build relationships and engage in shared activities
- involves all generations together in Sunday weekend worship; give special attention to being inclusive of children and teens in Sunday worship; and engages all generations in leadership roles in Sunday worship (music, reading, praying)
- engages all generations together in learning experiences that teach the Bible and the Christian tradition, and form disciples of all ages in Christian identity
- brings together the generations to learn from each other, share their faith stories, and find support for practicing their faith in daily life
- nurtures the spiritual life of all generations together through the community's prayer life, rituals, and blessings; brings together all generations to nurture their spiritual life through prayer and spiritual practices and disciplines
- engages all generations together in service to the poor and vulnerable, in the works of justice and advocacy, and in care for creation

An intergenerational church culture forms and deepens Christian identity and commitment as people develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model, and live the Christian tradition and way of life. It strengthens relationships, connections, and community across generations; enhances their sense of belonging in the faith community; and provides valuable adult role models for children and adolescents. It supports families by surrounding them with a community of faith and engaging the whole family in a variety of faith-forming experiences together (caring relationships, celebrating, learning, praying, serving) and providing parents with opportunities to learn from Christians who are practicing their faith and raising faithful children.

Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational

How is your church engaged in forming faith through the life and ministries of the intergenerational Christian community? Use these questions to develop a profile of how your church forms the faith of all ages and generations together.

- **Caring Relationships:** How does your church build caring relationships between and among all the generations? How does your church welcome and include all generations in the life of the community?

- **Worshipping**: How does your church involve all generations in Sunday worship and your church's liturgical life throughout the year? How are people formed for participating in Sunday worship and celebrating the feasts and seasons of year?

- **Celebrating**: How does your church celebrate rituals, sacraments, and milestones as a whole community, providing a way for people to experience God's love through significant moments in the journey of life and faith?

- **Learning**: How does your church gather the generations to learn together, providing formation experiences in Christian practices, scripture, and the Christian tradition.

- **Praying**: How does your church engage all the generations together in praying, devotions, and spiritual disciplines?

- **Serving**: How does your church involve all generations together in living the Christian mission in the world by engaging in service to those in need, care for God's creation, and action and advocacy for justice?

- **Ministering and Leading**: How does your church equip the whole community to use their gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world? How does your church involve all generations in leadership roles appropriate to their age and abilities?

Five Strategies

Strategy 1: Design All-Ages Faith Formation around Intergenerational Church Life Events

Strategy 2: Transform Multigenerational into Intergenerational
Identify ministries, programs, and activities that are already intergenerational (with generations building relationships, learning, praying, worshipping, serving, and/or leading together); and develop strategies for strengthening and expanding intergenerational ministries, programs, and activities.

Strategy 3: Transform Age-Specific into Intergenerational
Identify ministries, programs, and activities that are multigenerational (with all ages present without the intergenerational connection and experiences) that can be transformed into more intentionally intergenerational experiences.

Strategy 4: Design New Intergenerational Initiatives
Identify age-specific ministries, programs, and activities that can be redesigned by including additional generations, building intergenerational relationships, engaging in intergenerational experiences, and more.

Strategy 5: Make Intergenerational Learning Central to Church Life
Identify new opportunities for creating intergenerational experiences by intentionally designing programs, activities, and ministries to meet this objective.

Family and Intergenerational Learning Model

Welcoming Participants & Meal

Depending on the time of day, a meal begins the program. Use the mealtime to introduce people into the theme of the learning program, build community among the participants, do table activities (especially for children) or model at-home practices, such as prayer or a table ritual.

Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

Part 2. All-Ages Learning Experience

Conduct an All-Ages Learning Experience to introduce the whole assembly to the theme/content of the program. Select or design learning activities that will engage all ages. Examples of all-ages learning activities include:

- ritual or extended prayer service
- dramatic presentation of a Scripture passage or real-life story
- storytelling or retelling a Scripture passage with contemporary examples
- witness presentations by church members (of all ages)
- learning games or TV game show formats
- film or media presentation using art/photos and music
- table group activity and discussion in intergenerational, family and/or age-groups.

Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience

Conduct learning activities that explore the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) <u>or</u> for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults).

1. **Whole Group Format**: learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room in one of two ways: 1) age-specific groupings and/or 2) intergenerational groupings.
2. **Learning Activity Center Format**: learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers targeted to specific age groups, or organized by family and/or all age: 1) age-specific learning centers, 2) family-centered learning centers, and 3) intergenerational learning centers
3. **Age Group Format:** learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages:
   - pre-school children <u>or</u> parents with young children (ages 3-5)
   - parents with children (grades 1-5)
   - young adolescents (middle school)
   - older adolescents (high school)
   - young adults
   - adults

Part 4. Sharing Reflections and Home Application

Engage people in sharing reflections on what they learned during the program. Present activities and resources for continued faith growth and practice, and demonstrate how people can use them in their daily lives.

Part 5. Closing Prayer

2) Family Faith Formation

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 of the family 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.

Over the past two decades research has confirmed the role of parents and the family in forming the faith of children and young people. These studies have affirmed the centrality of parents, and the whole family, in forming the faith of children and youth. The following four findings from these research studies point toward approaches and strategies that can engage, encourage, and equip parents for faith transmission and formation in the family.

1. **Parents are the most significant influence on the religious and spiritual outcomes of young people.** The single most powerful force in a child's religious formation is the spiritual personality of the parent. We know the parental factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and youth include: parents' personal faith and practice, a close and warm parent-child relationship, parent modeling and teaching a religious faith, parent involvement in church life and Sunday worship, and grandparent religious influence and relationship**.**

2. **The primary way by which Christian 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.**

3. **The family is the primary community where Christian faith practices are nurtured and practiced.** Among the most important practices are:
   • reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly
   • praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally
   • serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people
   • eating together as a family
   • having family conversations about faith
   • talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home
   • providing moral instruction
   • being involved in a faith community and participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family

4. **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**. Crucial to parent transmission of religion to children is having generally warm, affirming relations with them.

Five Strategies

Strategy 1: Family Faith Practices
Strategy 2: Milestones
Strategy 3: Seasons of the Year
Strategy 4: Sunday Worship and Scripture
Strategy 5: Parent Formation and Parenting Skills

Reflection Tool

Reflect on how well your church and faith formation serves, equips, supports, and resources parents and the whole family. **First**, identify how your church does each characteristic of family faith formation (Rating: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral/unsure, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.) **Second**, identify the ways that your church is addressing each characteristic. **Third**, analyze your current approaches and identify how your church can strengthen family faith formation.

1. Our church helps parents (or caregivers) grow in faith and discipleship and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.   1 2 3 4 5

2. Our church helps grandparents grow in faith and discipleship and practice a vital and informed Christian faith.   1 2 3 4 5

3. Our church teaches parents the practices for forming faith at home (for example, celebrating rituals and milestones, praying, serving, learning the Christian faith, reading the Bible).   1 2 3 4 5

4. Our church teaches grandparents the practices for forming faith at home.   1 2 3 4 5

5. Our church equips parents with the knowledge and skills for parenting today.   1 2 3 4 5

6. Ways our church addresses this characteristic:

7. Our church provides experiences for the whole family that promote growth in faith and discipleship.   1 2 3 4 5

8. Our church provides families with resources to nurture growth in Christian faith and practice at home.   1 2 3 4 5

9. Our church connects with families at home through social media and a website with content for family faith practices and parent formation   1 2 3 4 5

Analysis
- What are the strengths in our current approaches to 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 or needs to be extended to reach and engage
- more families or parents?
- 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?

3) Life Stages: Networks of Faith Formation

In an earlier era of faith formation if you wanted to learn more about the Bible or a theological topic, you could take a course at a fixed time—at a church, seminary, college, or other education provider, or read a book—perhaps recommended by your pastor and borrowed from your church library or you could watch a video—on VHS of course! Your options would have been limited by both time and space. In the twenty-first century if you want to learn more about the Bible or a theological topic, or just about any other topic or interest, your options have greatly expanded.

Today, among many options, you can engage in any combination of the following learning experiences:

- ✦ Take a course at church or at a college or a seminary.
- ✦ Take a course online—at a scheduled time with a group or at your own time and pace—using a resource like Yale Bible Study (https://yalebiblestudy.org) .
- ✦ Read and view videos online for every book of the Bible at Enter the Bible from Luther Seminary (www.entertheBible.org).
- ✦ Join an online Bible study group at another church or in a Facebook group.
- ✦ Watch a video series on YouTube from a scripture scholar, such as N. T. Wright, as you read his book, or watch a video series produced by another church that is available for free on their website.
- ✦ Find a mentor in your church or online who will guide your self-directed Bible study.
- ✦ Listen to audio versions of your book as you commute to work each day.
- ✦ Develop your own course of study using the videos and podcasts on The Bible Project website (https://bibleproject.com).
- ✦ Download a Bible app (such as YouVersion: https://www.bible.com) to study the Bible, engage in daily Bible readings and reflections, and share your reflections with others who are studying the Bible using the app.
- ✦ Create a blog to post your thoughts on what you are learning and invite others to offer their insights.
- ✦ Organize your own learning group by gathering a group of people who are interested in learning more about the Bible and using print, audio, video, and/or online resources to guide your small group.

This example illustrates the dramatic shift in how we learn today. We now have the ability to construct our own networks of learning, utilizing a variety of new technologies and the abundance of high-quality print, audio, video, and online resources that are readily available to us. Learning networks not only provide access to a virtually endless array of opportunities that also offer us multiple points of entry, providing individualized pathways of learning and faith growth.

What if we imagined lifelong faith formation as a network of relationships, content, experiences, and resources—in physical places and online spaces—for every stage of life organized around goals for maturing in faith for a lifetime? A network approach to faith formation moves us 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 the what, when, how, and where of their learning. In a network model, faith formation shifts from "one size fits all" curriculum and programming to a variety of religious content and experiences that connect with people's spiritual and religious needs.

This represents a huge shift for churches where faith formation programming is still designed in a one-size-fits-all style. The assumption 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 need to offer a wider variety of content, experiences, and activities—guided by goals for maturing in faith—if we are going to help people to grow and mature in faith and discipleship. A network approach enables this to happen.

Imagine creating a children's faith formation network with a wide variety of developmentally appropriate faith formation experiences that utilize the faith maturing goals as the framework and integrate intergenerational, whole family, and age group activities. Children would have intergenerational faith-forming experiences (Sunday worship, seasonal celebrations, intergenerational learning, mentoring relationship with older members, ministry opportunities in the church), and family faith-forming experiences (whole family programs at church, grandparent-grandchild activities, activities for faith practices at home), and age group faith-forming experiences (classes, courses, retreats, Vacation Bible School, Christmas play, service activities).

In a network approach, families with children could select from a menu of faith formation experiences to create their plan for the year or for a season of the year. The menu would include intergenerational, family, and age group activities. Churches could establish participation guidelines for families and children, so that each year or season they would select a certain number of intergenerational experiences, family at-home activities, and children's programs at church. This approach puts the learner (families and children) at the center of faith formation and gives them choice over what and when and where they will learn. Churches provide the network of faith-forming activities that reflect their goals for maturing in faith and provide holistic formation in intergenerational, family, and age group settings.

This same approach—with different content and activities—can transform the one-size-fits-all confirmation program, where one program is assumed to address the wider spectrum of adolescent religious practice and interests. Churches can create a network of faith formation experiences—intergenerational, family, and age group-specific—tailored to the religious experience and practice of the young people participating (those who are actively engaged in practicing their faith, those who are minimally engaged, those who are not engaged but participating because of their parents). For most churches it's not possible to offer three different programs. A network approach can offer enough variety to address diverse needs and provide pathways for adolescents to grow in faith in ways appropriate to their faith journey. A network provides a structure for offering experiences, programs, and activities designed to promote growth in faith for young 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.

Even with all the diversity in adulthood, from those in their twenties to those in their nineties, churches still try to get everyone to participate in one type of small faith-sharing group or one Lenten series or one Bible study on one book of the Bible. In the network approach it is no longer about finding the "right" program to attract everyone. It is about addressing the diversity of the audience with a variety of content, experiences, and activities. It is about offering faith formation that is varied in content, expectations, depth, involvement, and timing. By expanding the options—a "something for everyone" approach—churches can engage more adults in faith formation, even if some of the offerings involve only one person (reading, watching videos, taking an online course). The new reality of adult faith formation programming is that churches can offer activities that cater to niches—individuals and small groups with a particular spiritual or religious need, interest, passion, concern, or life issue. They no longer have to worry about reaching a "critical mass."

The movement from one-size-fits-all to a variety of faith formation offerings is made possible by the abundance of religious content and programming—print, audio, video, online, and digital—that is now available. And this abundance can now be made accessible to people by the creation of online platforms (websites and social media) and digital playlists that integrate, deliver, and communicate the content and programming with a variety of ways to learn that is easily available, anytime and anywhere.

We can design networks to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of families and individuals at each stage of life: childhood (0–10), adolescents (11–19), young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid 50s–mid 70s), and older adults (75+). At every stage of life, we can offer people a wide variety of faith-forming experiences in intergenerational, family, and life stage settings; a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources; and a variety of formats: on your own, mentored, small groups, and large groups—all designed around goals for maturing in faith.

Network Approach

A network approach is guided by lifelong goals for maturing in faith. The ten goals for maturing in faith) provide the framework for building the network, designing programming, and selecting resources. If your church has developed its own goals for maturing in faith, use those as the framework for developing networks.

A network approach is person- or learner-centered, placing the individual or family at the center of faith formation. A person-centered approach addresses the diversity in prior knowledge, learning styles and strategies, interest, and motivation, as well as linguistic, ethnic, and social background. Of special importance is the ability to offer faith formation programs and activities that are designed around the spiritual and religious practices and commitments of the Engaged, the Occasionals, the Spirituals, and the Unaffiliated.

A network approach embraces learning and faith growth as a process of active inquiry with the initiative residing within the individual. Motivation for learning is intrinsic to the person and is driven by a need for autonomy (self-directedness), mastery, and purpose and meaning. A network approach gives people agency in determining what, how, when, and where they will engage in faith-forming experiences and programs.

A network approach personalizes learning and faith formation around the lives of people and their spiritual-religious strengths, needs, and interests. It enables faith formation to be individualized and differentiated. Personalization gives people choice and ownership in what, how, when, and where they learn; and equips them to make decisions about the direction of their learning and faith growth. A network approach provides a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys across the lifespan. It utilizes the abundance of spiritual-religious content that is available in print, audio, video, digital, and online formats.

A network approach incorporates a variety of formats for learning—on your own, with a mentor, at home, in small groups, in large groups, in the church, in the community—delivered in physical gathered settings and online settings. This approach provides a way to offer a diversity of programs in different formats and to offer one program or experience in multiple formats, expanding the scope of faith formation offerings and providing people with more options to participate.

A network approach provides a variety of methods for learning, ways to learn, and styles of learning. It addresses the whole person and how people learn best by offering programs, activities, and resources that incorporate different ways to learn (multiple intelligences: word-centered, verbal-linguistic, logical, musical, visual, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and bodily-kinesthetic); and different styles of learning (direct hands-on experiences, reflective observation, exploration and analysis, and active experimentation).

A network approach is built on a digital platform that integrates and connects content and people, offers continuity across different learning experiences, and is available anytime, anywhere. The digital platform provides a seamless learning across a variety of experiences, resources, locations, times, or settings, and links faith formation at church, at home, in daily life, and online.

A network approach nurtures communities of learning and practice around the shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities. People can connect with each other through a shared activity or program or experience. With a diversity of programs and activities targeted to different needs and life stages, groups can form naturally as people connect with others who share their interests, life issues, or religious and spiritual needs. Participation in these groups and their shared activities develop relationships, provide a supportive community, promote learning, and encourage the application of learning in practice.

A network approach is designed in three seasonal menus of programming, such as September–December, January–April, May–August. A seasonal approach provides flexibility in adjusting to the environment and the changing needs, schedules, and interests of people. A seasonal approach also allows the piloting of new initiatives and programs in one season and expanding them in the next season. It provides a blueprint for the whole year, but focuses on implementing one season of programming at a time. Over the course of a year (three seasons), content and programming can be added so that the plan is fully implemented by the third season. Some programming will be consistent in every season, while other programming will be specific to a season. The goal of a seasonal plan is to provide holistic faith formation that integrates a variety of faith-forming experiences—intergenerational (including whole church experiences), family-centered at church and home, and age-group or peer activities—in online, hybrid, and physical settings.

Programming Modes

Faith formation programming can be designed in three modes. One program can be designed and delivered in three modes and increase the number of opportunities for faith formation for people, but not increase the number of unique programs that a church creates.

- **gathered** physical settings (churches, homes, camps, retreat centers, community places, colleges or seminaries),
- **online** settings (websites, social media, online communities, online classrooms, and more)
- **hybrid** or blended settings that combine physical gatherings with online content and experiences.

Hybrid Approaches

One way to develop hybrid programming is by beginning with in-person faith formation and then deepening it with online faith formation. Extend the theme of an in-person event or program by curating a variety of faith-forming experiences that provide more depth and application of the theme through images, video, audio, and readings. Deliver the content using a multimedia newsletter, social media posts, and/or a playlist on a website. Here are several examples you can adapt.

WORSHIP AND ONLINE FORMATION
- Participate in weekly worship (in-person or livestreamed). (Synchronous)
- Engage in faith-forming activities online using an all-ages playlist on Sunday's theme: prayers, readings, video, podcast, art, music, creative activities, conversations, and action ideas. (Asynchronous)

IN-PERSON AND ONLINE FORMATION
- Meet in-person once per month (or every other week). (Synchronous)
- Engage in online faith formation for the other weeks of the month using a playlist on the theme. (Asynchronous)

IN-PERSON AND ONLINE FORMATION WITH VIDEO MEETINGS
- Week 1: Meet in-person for the program. (Synchronous)
- Week 2: Engage in online faith-forming experiences using a playlist on the theme. (Asynchronous)
- Week 3: Continue with the playlist learning on the theme. (Asynchronous)
- Week 4: Conduct an in-person or video meeting (Zoom) for small groups or age groups or families to discuss and apply the online learning. (Synchronous)

IN-PERSON AND LIVESTREAMED OR VIDEO AND ONLINE
- Week 1: Meet in-person for the program. (Synchronous)
- Week 2: Engage in online faith-forming experiences using a playlist on the theme. (Asynchronous)
- Week 3: Conduct a livestream presentation or demonstration, or a pre-recorded video (using Zoom, Facebook Live, or YouTube Live) on the theme of the month's program. (Synchronous)
- Week 4: Continue with playlist learning on the theme. (Asynchronous)

Another way to develop a hybrid model is to begin with online faith formation, leading to in-person experiences. This approach is known as flipped learning in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space online, and the group space is transformed into a dynamic interactive learning environment where the leader/teacher guides participants as they creatively discuss, practice, and apply the content.

ONLINE AND MONTHLY GATHERING
- Create a blog post or newsletter or online playlist on the theme of the month, and give people time to engage in on their own learning. (Asynchronous)
- Participate in a large group or small group gathering to discuss, reflect, and apply the theme of the month. (Synchronous)

ONLINE AND SMALL GROUP GATHERINGS (ASYNCHRONOUS)
- Week 1: Engage in online learning using playlist #1 on the theme.
- Week 2: Participate in a small group gathering to discuss and apply the learning (in-person or through video conferencing) (Synchronous)
- Week 3: Engage in online learning using playlist #2 on the theme. (Asynchronous)
- Week 4: Participate in a small group gathering to discuss and apply the learning (in-person or through video conferencing) (Synchronous)

Flipped learning is helpful when it is difficult to gather people. We can prepare people online with the appropriate content (experiences, activities, video/ audio, and resources); then engage them in-person for the event or program; and sustain and apply the experience through online faith formation. A good example of this is an adolescent confirmation program. Here is a flipped approach illustrated in a monthly format that can be woven into a year- long program.
- *On Your Own*: Engage young people with a monthly learning playlist— watching videos, reading short articles, praying, writing reflections in a journal—on the theme.
- *In a Small Group*: Have young people participate in one small group experience (online or face-to-face) to discuss the content in the playlist and what they are learning.
- *In a Large Group*: Involve young people in a monthly meeting with all groups for community sharing, interactive activities, short presentations, and ideas for living faith.

Online-Only Models

Churches can develop fully online programming (asynchronous) by offering independent (on your own) faith formation using the abundance of online programs and resources for all ages, especially adults. Leaders can curate courses and resources from seminaries, universities, and Christian publishers and organizations, and use a thematic approach (for example, ten goals for maturing in faith) to organize playlists or webpages with self-directed learning topics like scripture, prayer and spiritual formation, social justice issues, theological themes, or morality and ethics.

One option is to develop an online faith formation experience with content and experiences such as an online "forty-day Lenten curriculum" that connects the Lent events at church with online content for experiencing and practicing Lent in daily and home life. The online experiences can include prayer activities, daily Bible readings, daily devotions, Lent study resources, videos, service activities, and more.

Churches can use video conferencing to create webinar programming, such as a monthly theology presentation for adults or a monthly one-hour parent formation. A parent webinar series can be designed around the knowledge, skills, and practices for faith forming and effective parenting, and utilize guest presenters to conduct the webinars. A church could blend the monthly webinars with one or two parent dinners (babysitting provided) during the year for parents to gather in-person to meet each other and discuss what they are learning through webinars. Here are two examples of programming that is primarily online with interactive features.

ONLINE ONLY
- Week 1: Livestream (or video recording) of the class, program, or presentation. (Synchronous)
- Weeks 2–3: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the content/ activities on a website. (Asynchronous)
- Week 4: Facebook Group (or online learning platform) for engaging people in discussion and presenting projects. (Synchronous or asynchronous)

ONLINE WITH INTERACTION
- Week 1: Livestream of the class, program, or presentation. (Synchronous)
- Week 2: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the content/activities on a website. (Asynchronous)
- Week 3: Zoom meetings for small groups or family groupings. (Synchronous)
- Week 4: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the activities/content. (Asynchronous)
- Add an interactive feature by using a Facebook Group (or online learning platform) to engage people in discussion, sharing learning, and presenting projects.

One Program, Multiple Programming Models

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, but which option best suits a person's time, schedule, and learning preferences. Imagine taking a four-session, video-based, online course on a topic in theology, scripture, social issues, or life stage issues and offering it in all three spaces:

1. **Large group physical gathering**: People gather at church and a leader facilitates the program—showing the video presentation, providing time for people to read and reflect, and guiding small groups in discussing the content.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **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).
5. **Online independent**: People complete the learning program on their own.

The "one program, multiple models" approach can be used in designing programming for families and all ages. It dramatically increases the offerings on the faith formation network and gives control to people so they can choose what and when and how and where they will learn.

Programming Formats

On Your Own

On Your Own formats provide maximum flexibility for the learner—when to learn, how to learn, where to learn, and what to learn. With the increasing number and variety of books and printed resources, audio podcasts, video presentations, video programs, online courses, and online resource centers, independent learning offers a 24/7 approach to faith growth and learning. Churches can serve as guide to help people find the best learning format and content to address their learning needs.

> **Examples**: 1) Reading or listening to books and online recommended reading lists; 2) Websites for learning, justice issues, prayer and spiritual formation; 3) Online courses: Bible, theology, spirituality, life issues, and more; 4) Online retreat; Podcasts; Videos and video-based programs; 5) Online prayer websites; 6) Daily activities online and through apps: prayer, Bible reading, devotions, etc.

Mentoring

Mentoring provides a one-to-one relationship that can be utilized as an individual program option, such as a spiritual director/guide with an individual, or as a component in a larger program, such as having mentors for each person in the Christian initiation process or for those who want to explore Jesus and Christianity after leaving church earlier in life. Mentoring works older to younger, but also younger to older as in the case of young people mentoring adults.

> **Examples**: 1) Spiritual direction; 2) Apprenticeships; 3) Career and life planning; 4) Life transitions; 5) Gifts discernment; 6) Vocational or calling discernment and formation Strengths discernment

At Home

At Home formats provide individuals and whole families with experiences, programs, activities, and resources designed for use at home or in daily life. This can include a wide variety of print, audio, video, digital media, and online programs and resources.

> **Examples**: 1) Online resources and playlists for faith practice at home; 2) Milestone preparation and celebrations; 3) Celebration of seasons of the church year and the calendar year; 4) Sunday worship activities for families; 5) Online ideas and resources for parents—faith sharing, parenting skills, family life activities; 6) Parent support groups online or in physical spaces

Small Group

Small Group formats provide lots of flexibility in content, schedule, and location (online, home, coffee shops, at church, and more). Groups can meet at times and places that best fit members' lives. Small groups create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed. It is not always necessary for the church leaders to conduct small group programs. Churches can provide resources, support, and training for small group leaders, thereby enabling people to organize their own small groups.

Examples: 1) Discipleship, faith sharing, or study groups such as Bible study groups, theological study groups, thematic or issue-oriented study groups; 2) Sunday lectionary-based faith-sharing groups, seasonal small groups such as Lenten study groups; 3) Prayer and spiritual growth groups; 4) Book or video study groups; 5) Practice-focused groups such as prayer groups and service/faith in action groups; 6) Support groups for caregiving, recovery, grief, divorce; 7) Parent support groups for different stages of family life; 8) Ministry groups involved in leadership in the church and world; 9) Life transition groups—college, careers, retirement

Large Group

Large Group formats provide a way to engage a wider audience with programming and experiences that can be utilized for a variety of theological, biblical, and life-centered themes and topics.

Examples: 1) Presentations and single-session programs; 2) Multisession program such as a speaker series or video series; 3) Seasonal celebrations and presentations through the church year; 4) Roundtable discussions after Sunday worship to explore the scripture readings and sermon; 5) Workshops focused on practical knowledge and skills for age groups or families or all ages; 6) Field trips such as visiting a museum or cultural site; 7) Retreat experiences such as an evening, one-day, or weekend program; 8) Intergenerational programs for all ages; 9) Church-wide action projects for service, justice, or care for creation; 10) Intergenerational faith formation programs; 11) Whole family faith formation programs; 12) Music, art, film, drama or dance programs, performances, and festivals; 13) Conferences

Community

Community formats offer a way for churches to utilize programs, courses, clinics, workshops, and presentations sponsored by other churches, community organizations (libraries, the Y, museums), regional and national church agencies, retreat centers, Christian camps, and colleges and universities as part of a lifelong faith formation network. This is an important format for developing local partnerships and initiatives for serving, working for justice, and caring for creation. Many organizations—locally, nationally, and globally—have already created programs that can be adopted by a church as part of a lifelong faith formation network.

#8. Pathways and Playlists for Faith Formation

I wonder if one of the major reasons people of all ages "give-up" on church is that we are not addressing their personal relationship with God, their personal spiritual and religious journey, and their real life situation. Is our current practice of one-size-fits-all faith formation contributing to the decline in engagement of people of all ages? Are we actually working against promoting lifelong growth in faith?

1) Pathways for Faith Growth

We need to fashion faith formation around the spiritual and religious journeys and needs of our families and individuals at each stage of life. It's moving from one-size-fits-all to a much more personal approach to faith growth that uses all of our resources—our people who will serve as mentors, our community life, our programs and activities, our online resources, and more.

✦ We can help families and individuals at every stage of life *discern* where they are in their religious and spiritual journey, and then tailor faith formation experiences to fit their needs.

✦ We can develop descriptions of *key elements* of the Christian faith that would serve as the basis for helping families and individual discern their faith growth needs.
1. their relationship with Jesus
2. the ways they live their faith in daily life
3. the importance of the Bible for their lives and growth in faith
4. the importance of the Christian story and their own faith tradition in their lives
5. the ways they worship God on Sunday, in rituals, and through the church year
6. their prayer life and how they are growing spiritually
7. the ways they live with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and moral values
8. the ways they seek to live their faith by serving others, caring for creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace
9. the ways they are engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the Christian community
10. the ways they use gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world

✦ We can develop a *pathways guide* for families and individuals that helps them chart their growth in each of the ten essential elements of the Christian faith using a simple tool with four ways to reflect on their journey.
1 = I'm a beginner in this aspect of my faith.
2 = I'm growing in this aspect of my faith.
3 = I'm maturing and going deeper in this aspect of my faith.
4 = I'm sharing my faith and gifts with others.

✦ We can guide people in creating an annual(or seasonal) *faith growth plan* with the experiences, programs, activities, and resources that best match with their faith growth needs.

✦ We can help people discover a *variety of resources* that can help them take their next best steps in their spiritual and religious journey.

- ✦ We can create an annual (or seasonal) *faith formation catalog* with all of the faith formation experiences, programs, activities, and resources that people could access to create their personal or family faith growth plan.

- ✦ We can incorporate discernment and the creation of a faith growth plan into the start of the program year for families or age groups (children, youth, adults), and into milestones and sacramental moments, such as marriage, baptism, first communion, confirmation, graduations, retirement, etc.

- ✦ We can accompany people through *mentoring* (one-on-one or in small groups) to discern their faith growth needs and create a plan. What if we could utilize a mentor approach for the new couple at marriage, for parents and the family at baptism and first communion, for teens at confirmation, and much more.

The centerpiece of the personalizing process is to create a **Pathways Guide** for a particular audience. A Pathways Guide is created around characteristics of maturing in faith that can be used to help people discern their faith journey and chart a path for growth.

A **Life Stage Pathways Guide** can be created for every of stage life: children and families (0–10), adolescents (11–19), young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (mid-50s–mid-70s), and older adults (75+). The Guide can be used at the beginning of a new year of faith formation programming to provide a personalized experience for people as they select faith growth experiences from the church's gathered programs and online experiences. It can be used at parent meetings and family programs to discern parents' faith growth needs as well as the faith growth needs of the whole family. It works best in an environment where you can guide people in discerning their faith growth needs and connecting them to faith formation. It's helpful to create a faith formation catalog (print, digital) with all of the faith formation experiences, programs, activities, and resources that people can access to create their personal or family faith growth plan.

A **Milestones Pathways Guide** can be created for the preparation of individuals and families for a significant life milestone, life transition, or sacrament. Milestones pathways guide 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. It's helpful to create a catalog that is specific to the milestone with faith formation programs, activities, and resources (online and in-person) that people can use to create their faith growth plan.

Step 1. Identify a target audience for the *Pathways Guide*: life stages or milestones or another audience.

Step 2. Develop the characteristics of growing in the Christian faith that would serve as the basis for helping discerning faith growth needs. A Life Stage Guide can use the ten goals I have proposed for lifelong faith formation as a starting point. A Milestones Guide can use the ten goals or can use the "content" of the milestone to be more specific.

Step 3. Develop a stages of growth discernment rating to help people identify where they are currently in their faith journey. The stages of faith growth should be designed as a continuum of deepening faith practice and commitment. Try to incorporate at least three categories. Use age-appropriate language as you determine the names for each category. Here are several examples of growth ratings.

- ✦ Searching—exploring—beginning—growing—maturing
- ✦ Inquiring—learning—growing—sharing
- ✦ Exploring—growing—maturing—rooted
- ✦ Beginning (getting started)—growing—maturing (going deeper)—sharing (ministering)

Step 4. Create a *Pathways Guide* for your target audience that combines the stages of growth with each item (goal or description). You can develop the *Guide* by creating a grid with goals listed in one column and the stages of growth in the other columns, like the example below.

Goals or Characteristics				
Growing in a personal relationship with Jesus	1	2	3	4

Rating Scale
1 = I'm a beginner in this aspect of my faith.
2 = I'm growing in this aspect of my faith.
3 = I'm maturing and going deeper in this aspect of my faith.
4 = I'm sharing my faith and gifts with others.

Your *Pathways Guide* can also include short descriptions to illustrate the stages of growth for each goal. Here is an example for the Bible:

Goal: Reading, studying, and applying the Bible to my life
1. *Beginning*: I feel drawn to the story of God in the Bible and want to learn how to read the Bible and be open to God.
2. *Growing*: I am reading the Bible regularly and learning how to interpret the Bible and its meaning for today.
3. *Maturing*: I am reading and praying with the Bible and studying the books of the Bible and their message for today.
4. *Sharing*: I am sharing my understanding of the Bible and leading Bible activities and programs.

Step 5. Add questions to *Guide* people in reflecting on their future growth in faith. For example:
- ✦ Areas Where I Need to "Get Started"
- ✦ Areas Where I Need to "Grow"
- ✦ Areas Where I Want to "Go Deeper"
- ✦ Areas Where I'm Ready to Share My Faith and Gifts

Step 6. Develop the format for introducing and using the *Guide* to help people discern their faith growth needs. For example, it could be introduced in a large group setting with time for discernment and small group interaction, or in small groups facilitated by a guide or mentor, or in a one-to-one setting with the guidance and support of a mentor. Provide time for people to reflect on the results of their discernment using the questions in Step 5.

Step 7. Guide people in matching faith formation programs and experiences (the catalog) with faith growth needs and creating their *Faith Growth Plan*.

Step 8. Provide continuous support (small groups, mentors, and more) and opportunities for people to reflect on their progress in fulfilling their *Faith Growth Plan*.

2) Playlists of Faith Formation

The idea of a playlist is simple: it is a sequence of activities and resources on a topic designed for individual and/or small group learning, usually available on a digital form. Playlists make faith formation available at any time. They are a way to personalize faith formation around the needs and interests of each life stage and the diversity of people's spiritual and religious needs. Playlists make the learner of any age the center of faith formation, providing multiple ways to grow in faith. The responsibility for learning and growing in faith shifts from the provider to the person.

Playlists can be designed to provide the faith-forming activities for a **pathways** guide by connecting content and experiences to each goal and the stages of faith growth (like getting started, growing, and going deeper). Playlists can be **topical** by designing content and experiences for a season of the church year, a theological topic, a biblical story or teaching, a social concern, or a life cycle issue.

Approach 1. Playlists can be designed using a **menu approach** of faith-forming activities where people select activities that address their needs, interests, or time availability. Create a menu for an individual topic or event by curating a variety of ways to explore and experience a season of the church year, a theological topic, a biblical story or teaching, a social concern or a life cycle issue. People are given a variety of options for faith formation in each category from which they can select activities. It is helpful to include an estimate of how long each activity lasts. Creating a menu playlist for a pathways guide means connecting content and experiences to each goal and the stages of faith growth.

Approach 2. Playlists can be designed using a **sequenced approach** using a learning process to structure the faith formation experiences and activities. Playlists can include synchronous (real-time scheduled activities) and asynchronous activities (on your own activities).

In the sequenced approach, a learning process structures the faith formation experiences and activities on the playlist. Playlists can include synchronous (real-time scheduled activities) and asynchronous activities (on your own activities). An excellent process for learning, based on the 4MAT learning cycle developed by Dr. Bernice McCarthy (see https://aboutlearning.com) has four movements:

1. Experience the topic
2. Explore knowledge about the topic
3. Practice and demonstrate personal learning
4. Perform and present the learning

Design Process

1. Develop *Playlists* for a target audience.

2. Select content and experiences to address each faith maturing characteristic with activities for each "level" of discernment, e.g., Getting Started, Growing, Going Deeper. Use the four types of content and experiences in your *Playlists* as appropriate. Some of the resources and programming will apply to multiple "levels" of faith growth needs.

3. Using a variety of settings or environments for faith growth: independent, mentored, at home, small group, large group, intergenerational /whole church, and world.

4. Address the ways people learn 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).

5. Use a variety of methods: reading; writing/keeping a journal; storytelling and creating stories; watching feature films, TV shows, videos; creating a media project or video; viewing or creating art; viewing or taking photographs; watching drama or acting; listening to or creating a podcast; listening to or creating music; conducting a demonstration or exhibit; experiencing games, simulations, video games; analyzing or creating a case study; developing an apprenticeship or internship; experiencing prayer and rituals; creating prayer experiences; taking a field trip; participating in a mission trip; engaging in or creating a service/action project; developing a mentor relationship; and more.

6. Published the playlist on a website or in a learning management system or even in a newsletter or blog that allows for video to be embedded. Social media, especially Instagram, is useful for sharing learning projects and reflections. It is important that the playlists are available 24/7 on a digital platform. Here are some digital resources to assist you in publishing your playlists:

    - **Website**: One of the easiest tools for creating a website for online programming is to use a website builder. There are three very good options: Weebly (https://www.weebly.com), Wix (www.wix.com), and Squarespace (https://www.squarespace.com). Purchase the website builder plan (no need for e-commerce). Weebly is probably the easiest of the three web-site builders. All three services will host your website and provide a free domain name. There are tutorials available for all three.
    - **Online Learning Platform**: An online "classroom" provides an environment for publishing a playlist and sharing content, texts, videos, and projects with people online. It is an environment where teachers or leaders can guide learning and where they can interact with participants in a safe space. Investigate Edmodo (https://new.edmodo.com) Seesaw (https://web.seesaw.me), and Google Classroom (https://edu.google.com). There are free versions for individual teachers.
    - **Facebook Groups:** Facebook groups provides an online interactive environment where you can publish a playlist, engage people in learning, and facilitate discussion.
    - **E-Newsletters**: An e-newsletter can be formatted as a playlist and e-mailed to people. There are three very good online e-mail services: MailChimp (https://mailchimp.com), Constant Contact (https://www.constantcontact.com), and Flocknote (https://flocknote.com). The three services are very similar (Flocknote adds texting) so review the prices and features. Check into nonprofit discounts.
    - **Social Media**: Instagram provides an excellent way to communicate and share faith-forming content, and to invite people to share what they are learning and doing through videos, images, and text. A YouTube channel is another a great way to share content.

#9. New Leadership Roles for Lifelong Faith Formation

In order to bring to life the seven elements of lifelong faith formation leaders will need to develop or enhance a new set of faith formation leadership competencies. Here are several of the essential competencies needed for leadership in lifelong faith formation.

Leaders in Lifelong Faith formation. . . .

1. Create a lifelong vision and goals for discipleship and faith growth.
2. Understand and respond creatively to the life stages and religious diversity of people today.
3. Build a culture of intergenerationality in the church.
4. Strengthen the faith of families and equipping parents.
5. Design networks of faith formation with a variety of content and multiple programming approaches.
6. Personalize faith formation around the lives and faith journeys of people today.
7. Design playlists of faith-forming content and experiences for families and life stages.
8. Curate religious content and experiences for networks and playlists
9. Create innovations to better promote growth in faith and discipleship.
10. Facilitate change that leads to the implementation of innovations in faith formation.
11. Build capacity for lifelong faith formation, i.e., leadership, financial sustainability, communication, technology, collaboration with other churches and community organizations, and programmatic resources in all forms—print, audio, video, digital, and online.

Reflection on the Faith Formation Leadership Competencies

✦ Which of these competencies do you consider your greatest strengths as a faith formation leader?

✦ Which of these competencies do you want to improve or enhance as a faith formation leader?

✦ How can you develop a personal learning plan to strengthen the areas you identified for growth as a faith formation leader?