

“Global” Trends Affecting the Future of Adult Faith Formation

Economic

1. Increasing income gap/divide between the rich and everybody else, especially the poor
2. Increasing economic uncertainty—undermining personal sense of security and the future
3. Increasing economic challenge for young adults
4. Financial stress—multiple jobs, family stress, double-income homes, working on Sunday, multiple jobs

Ethnic-Cultural

1. Ethnic diversity is rapidly increasing
2. Rise of immigration; refugees and immigrants from a variety of places around the world present challenges and opportunities
3. Forming community in a multicultural society
4. Lack of multicultural inclusiveness in religious communities (worship, community, service)
5. Societal understanding of gender is changing
6. Increasing awareness of the institutional racism

Generational/Family

1. Increase in multigenerational families; grandparents raising grandchildren
2. Changing family structures—more fragmented, more diverse family forms; definition of “family” is fluid and changing; many families are judged/excluded because they have a different family format
3. Changing family structures and the weakening of family authority influences children
4. Changing views of marriage and sexuality
5. Increased inter-marriage (ethnic, religious)

Religious

1. Church is no longer a priority of the center of life—Sundays are no longer sacred, activities and gatherings no long centered around church; people don’t have time for church in their busy lives; competition with other groups/institutions for time (sports, schools, attention, participation; people are overwhelmed: jobs, family, commitments, etc.
2. Consumerist Christianity – church as consumer product, shopping for faith or church

3. Lack of leadership in faith formation; lack of leadership training for faith formation
4. Rise of the non-affiliated; more unchurched parents coming to church with unchurched children; young adults finding communities outside of church
5. What churches offer spiritually often does not connect with what people of all generations are looking for
6. Divisiveness in the church: theological divide, leadership-people divide

Societal

1. Busyness of everyday life; frenetic pace of life; “overwhelmed” experience of modern life; people are overscheduled
2. Work demands more attention, 24/7; traditional 40 hour work week no longer exists
3. Awareness of the impact of changes in the environment/climate and its impact on people
4. Distrust (disinterest) of institutions
5. Increasing mobility—leading to loss of local roots/traditions/rituals; not time to build community
6. Individualism vs. community; increasing dissatisfaction with political process and institutions
7. Gender issues—needs and rights of LGBTQ adults

Technology

1. Technology is pervasive throughout society and in use 24/7
2. Keeping up with rapidly changing technology
3. Technology can be isolating between generations and socioeconomic groups; technology can unite or divide; lack of technology in lower income groups;
4. Helping older adults use technology
5. Impact of technology on socialization methods
6. Technology provides increase access to educational/formational resources
7. Technology is redefining the way we related to each other and the way we gather

“Adult” Trends Affecting the Future of Adult Faith Formation

Young Adults

1. Use of new technologies and social media in everyday life; new ways of connecting and communicating; new ways of accessing information and learning
2. Deep institutional ambivalence—suspicion of authority, detaching from institutions, finding faith outside institutional churches
3. Looking for authenticity in relationships, work, organizations, and faith
4. Still developing their identity; seekers and makers of meaning
5. Living in a culture of “unlimited” choices
6. More “spiritual” than “religious”
7. Seeking to make a difference in the world; service, social justice, care for creation
8. Delay in marrying and having children (in their 30s)
9. The world is unpredictable, danger is a part of life
10. Most diverse generation, especially ethnically
11. Enter the workforce in a time of economic uncertainty, a shifting/changing economy, and diminishing job prospects
12. Carrying large debts from college loans; increasing cost of college

Midlife Adults

1. A time in life of high competence and functioning
2. Search for identity and relationships vs. functional as they move toward mature adulthood and retirement; quest to be the best version of myself
3. Need/hunger for deeper relationships
4. Need to reflect on who they are in relationship to God, others, self as opposed to what they do
5. Busyness of life inhibits participation in church
6. A time for renegotiating commitments; assessing career and the future
7. Concerns about finances and work
8. Seek a learning environment that allows questions
9. Relevance of religion to their everyday lives and to their stage of life; connecting faith and life
10. Need/hunger for sensual, symbolic, inclusive, non-dualistic religion (especially worship)
11. Increasingly becoming a “sandwich” generation—raising children and caring for parents; need for balance in commitments
12. Seek authenticity in life, work, leadership, institutions, church

Mature Adults

1. Working longer; changing careers; encore/2nd careers

2. Seek to continue to make a difference in the world; social justice, service; making a difference in the local community
3. Desire to share their lives/wisdom/experience with younger generations; mentoring
4. Loss of trust in institutions and leadership; difficulty trusting spiritual leaders and institutions
5. Looking for depth; seeking wisdom not just knowledge
6. Seeking new learning experiences and new ways of learning
7. Need to leave a legacy (generativity)
8. Experiencing a variety of life transitions and milestones—aging, relationships, retirement, grand parenting, social security, health care/Medicare
9. Aging issues: financial security, health, housing arrangements
10. Integrating faith with the life issues and transitions of mature adulthood
11. Increasingly living a “mosaic” life—working, retiring, grand parenting, vacationing, volunteering, etc.

Older Adults

1. Older adults are living in NORCs—naturally occurring retirement communities
2. Grandparents working as caregivers
3. Family members living at a distance from each other
4. Longevity is changing society, the church, and the rules of dying
5. Barriers divide the generations into separate groups for spiritual and social opportunities
6. Respect for adults over 75 years old through AFF; honoring the elderly through church activities; providing ways to share their insights and wisdom with others
7. Reaching older adults who are homebound and unable to participate in church and community events
8. Increasing connectivity and mobility by technology and other means
9. Adults are working longer; financial difficulties
10. Older adults experiencing transitions: emotional, relational, physical, loss of control
11. Importance of memories
12. Elder storytelling—witness of their spiritual journey, connecting to a purpose
13. Physical limitations of older adults; transportation and accessibility issues, isolation
14. Facing decisions about death and dying