

Families at the Center of Faith Formation
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Chapter Six
Developing the *Family-at-the-Center Approach*
to Faith Formation
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The *Family-at-the Center Approach* to family faith formation is developed around the belief that parents and the family are the most powerful influence for virtually every child and youth outcome—personal, academic, social, and spiritual-religious; and that parents are *the* most important influence on the social and religious lives of children, youth, and emerging adults. Given the central role of families in shaping the lives of children and youth, the value of engaging, supporting, and educating families should be self-evident to all of us.

We believe the *Families-at-the-Center Approach* to family faith formation is better suited to the challenges and opportunities of twenty-first century parents, families, and congregations. We seek to promote growth in faith and discipleship, develop the family as a community of faith and school of discipleship, and equip parents (and grandparents) to transmit the religious tradition at home. This new approach is grounded in solid research on what promotes growth in faith and healthy individual and family development, and addresses the family as a whole, its individual members (children, teens, emerging adults), parents/grandparents, and the faith community. It builds a connection between families and the congregation, and provides congregations with a plan for how they can engage and equip families toward the goals of deeper faith and discipleship.

In Chapter Three we introduced the *Family-at-the Center Approach* by describing seven foundational insights that guide the vision of the new approach:

1. God is actively present in family life.
2. The family is a community of faith and a “school of discipleship,”
3. Faith is formed through eight essential processes.
4. Faith is formed in intergenerational faith communities
5. Faith is formed in developmentally-appropriate ways.
6. Parents and the family are the most important religious influence on religious transmission.
7. Parents and families have a diversity of religious-spiritual identities.

We believe that family-appropriate goals for faith formation—goals that are viewed through the lens of family life—can guide the development of a congregational plan for faith formation that begins with families at the center and cultivates the family as a faith community and school of discipleship. We believe that congregations should empower families to:

- Believe in God and that God cares about them, and turn to God for support, guidance, and strength

- Love and believe in the value of another person
- Foster intimacy between spouses, among family members, and with God
- Care for one another and be willing to sacrifice for each other
- Initiate the young into a living relationship with God
- Educate the young through teaching knowledge of the Bible and Christian tradition and how to live that faith in daily life
- Read and reflect on the Bible and its message and meaning for their lives
- Be witnesses to their faith in God and set an example of Christian living for each other and the community
- Live with moral integrity guided by Christian values and ethics
- Pray together, thank God for blessings, ask for strength and guidance, especially during difficult times
- Forgive and seek reconciliation
- Celebrate life's passages and milestones throughout life as moments of grace and faith growth
- Serve people in need in the local community and around the world, act justly to alleviate oppressive conditions, care for creation, and affirm life
- Participate in Sunday worship and the life of their church community
- Live as disciples of Jesus Christ at home, at school, in the workplace, in the community, and in the world

Every congregation will bring these goals to life in unique ways based on their congregational culture, size, geography, ethnic makeup, and more. The practices and plans described in this chapter are designed to guide congregations in implementing these goals by developing strategies, programs, and activities that are tailored to the parents and families in congregation and wider community.

Online Resource Center: Reimagine Faith Formation

Articles, models, strategies, and resources for family faith formation can be found in the **Family** section on the *Reimagine Faith Formation* website developed by LifelongFaith Associates: www.reimaginefaithformation.com.

Strategies for Developing Family Faith Formation

The dictionary defines a **strategy** as *a careful plan or method for achieving a particular goal usually over a long period of time*. Each of the following *strategies* describe plans for developing family faith formation at home, in the congregation, and in the community that brings to life the goals for family faith formation described previously. These strategies work together to form a comprehensive plan for family faith formation. (See Chapter Seven for designing a plan.)

We present eight strategies that make families the center of faith formation and provide the building blocks that a congregation can use to develop a comprehensive plan for family faith formation.

1. Discovering God in Everyday Life
2. Forming Faith at Home through the Life Cycle

3. Forming Faith through Milestones
4. Celebrating Seasonal Events through the Year
5. Encountering God in the Bible through the Year
6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally
7. Developing a Strong Family Life
8. Empowering Parents and Grandparents

Developing Strategies

There are five important design considerations that permeate the development of family faith formation strategies.

1. Contextualized Faith Formation

The design of each strategy needs to be customized or tailored to the life situations and life tasks, needs and interests, and religious-spiritual journeys of families, parents, and/or young people. The profile of today's families in Chapter Two provides research findings that can influence the development of strategies, programs, activities, and resources to reach and engage families. Consider the impact of the following characteristics on the design of strategies.

- *Family Forms*: There is no one dominant family form in the U.S, and, in many cases, young people experience multiple forms from childhood through adolescence. Young people live in families with two married parents in their first marriage, with two parents who are remarried (blended family), with cohabitating parents, with a single parent, and with no parent.
- *Spiritual-Religious Identities*: There are at least four unique spiritual-religious identities among parents and families: the *Engaged*—vibrant faith with active engagement in church life, the *Occasionals*—variable faith practice with occasional engagement in church life, the *Spirituals*—spiritually committed but not engaged in church life, and the *Unaffiliated*— not affiliated with a church and not interested in religion and spirituality.
- *Generations*: Generation X parents and Millennial parents have distinct parenting styles that reflect their generational experiences as well as the current world in which their children are growing up. In general Gen X parents approach child-rearing as a set of tangible practices that will keep their children safe, reasonably happy, well-behaved, and ready to take on life's challenges. They practice protective parenting. In general, Millennial parents, reflecting their values of individuality and self-expression, focus more on a democratic approach to family management, encouraging their children to be open-minded, empathetic, and questioning—and teaching them to be themselves and try new things. They are moving away from the overscheduled days of their youth, preferring a more responsive, less directorial approach to activities.
- *Ethnic Diversity*: Most communities today are multi-ethnic. In a few short decades the United States will be a country of ethnic minorities with no majority ethnic group. Each ethnic culture has a distinctive ethnic identity, history, and religious traditions and practices; and each has unique needs and life situations.

2. Holistic Faith Formation

The design of each strategy needs to promote a holistic faith formation through the eight essential faith forming processes:

- *fostering caring relationships* within the family, across generations, and with other families/parents
- *celebrating the church year seasons* and events through which families experience the story of faith
- *celebrating rituals and milestones* that provide a way to experience God's love through significant moments in the family's life journey and faith journey
- *learning the Christian tradition* (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality and ethics), reflecting upon the tradition, integrating it into one's faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world
- fostering personal and communal *prayer* and being formed in the *spiritual disciplines*
- *encountering God in the Bible*, and studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today
- *living the Christian mission in the world*—engaging in service to those in need, caring for God's creation, and working for justice
- *worshipping God* with the community of faith—experiencing God's living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist

3. Connected Faith Formation

The design of each strategy needs to connect church life with home life, or home life with church life. The flow goes both ways. Congregational experiences (worship, seasons of the year, learning, service, and more) are extended into the home through experiences, activities, and resources that deepen faith. Family life issues, concerns, interests, milestones, and more become central to the design of church experiences (celebrations, programming, activities, and more).

4. Intergenerational Faith Formation

The design of each strategy needs to engage families in the intergenerational life, events, and experiences of the faith community. This can involve developing intergenerational experiences at church that include family participation (worship, learning, service, social), and preparing families for participation in the central events of church life and the Christian faith and guiding their participation and reflection upon those events.

5. Digital Faith Formation

The design of each strategy needs to utilize digital approaches and online platforms for delivering programs, activities, and resources to families; and in engaging families in faith formation at home or in the community, 24x7. This can involve extending a church event or program into people's daily lives through online content and activities, blending online faith formation with participation in a gathered program, providing online faith formation that can be experienced as parents or a whole family at home, and much more. (This is developed more fully in Chapter Seven.)

Strategy 1. Discovering God in Everyday Family Life

The first strategy explores how we can help families discover God and the sacred in the rhythms and practices of everyday life. This builds on the foundational conviction that God is truly present to us each day, and this presence is discovered in the fabric of our lives—our experiences, our relationships, and more; and that all humans are essentially spiritual beings. We do not have to “bring God” to families or “make” them spiritual; we help them discover the spiritual in their everyday life—recognize, understand, and respond to God’s presence in their midst.

In her research on the spiritual lives of America’s Nones, Elizabeth Drescher conducted a small scale survey which “made it clear that everyday experiences are the core resources of spiritual narratives, even for those affiliated with traditional religious institutions” (44). Based on her research she developed what she calls “the 4Fs” of contemporary spirituality: Family, Friends, Food, and Fido. “People feel most connected to whatever they understand as God, the divine, a Higher Power when they’re deeply engaged in the fabric of everyday life, spending time with family, with friends, preparing and sharing food, enjoying their pets” (43). Prayer was the only traditional spiritual practice that was seen as spiritually meaningful. It ranked fifth after the ‘4Fs.’”

When Drescher asked people to rank a list of spiritually meaningful practices, the items that rank at the top of the list included: 1) enjoying time with family, 2) enjoying time with friends, 3) enjoying time with pets or other animals, 4) preparing and/or sharing food/meals, 5) praying, 6) enjoying nature, 7) listening to/playing music, 8) enjoying/creating art, 9) physical activity/sports, and 10) yoga and meditation. On the list of 25 items, the last three items were reading/studying scripture, attending worship, and attending a non-worship activity, event or meeting at church. (Drescher 43)

Reflecting on the spirituality of the Nones, she writes,

... “spirituality,” as it is variously articulated, moves throughout the lives of Nones as they craft stories that are (1) embedded in everyday life; (2) center primarily on relationships rather than individualistic pursuits or institutionalized rituals; and (3) are composed of practices focused on the integration of body, mind, and spirit. Over time, these stories make up the “spiritual life.” (51)

From research and our own personal experiences, it is clear that meaning-making is rooted in everyday experiences: enjoying family and friends, pets, food, nature, music, art, and physical activity. These are activities and practices that people (religiously affiliated and unaffiliated) themselves identify as spiritually important experiences.

How can congregations help parents and the whole family discover God within their daily life and experiences? Here are two strategies that provide a way to reach and engage families of diverse spiritual-religious identities and that can be designed for a number of environments: at home, at church, online, small groups, and more.

Discovering God in Daily Life Experiences

One process for guiding parents and the whole family in discovering and naming the sacred in their daily life experiences is the practice of the Examen from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. Tim and Sue Muldoon describe it in this way,

There is an old form of Ignatian prayer known as the Examen which is a kind of practice of reflection on one's past experiences, looking for places where one has felt God's presence. This prayer of awareness allows us the time to pause and recognize God even in the midst of difficult life situations. Over time, the practice of this prayer has helped us to notice how God moves in our lives in small, often quiet ways, beneath the loud clanging of the things that take our attention. We discover what is the starting point for the spiritual life: the deep sense that our experiences really *mean* something and that in reaching out toward the source and goal of that meaning, we encounter God. (Muldoon, 19-20)

Here is an adapted version of The Examen for helping parents discover God in their daily life.

1. *Become aware of God's presence.* Find a comfortable place where you can secure ten or fifteen quiet minutes. Close your eyes and relax your body.
2. *Review the events and experiences of the day* with gratitude to understand how God is acting in your life. Move through the day as if you were watching it on video.
3. *Pay attention* to the feelings that your experiences evoke. Ask what God is saying through these feelings.
4. *Choose one feature of the day, reflect upon it, and pray from it.* How are you discovering God in the midst of your daily life? Are you drawing closer to God or further away?
5. *Look toward tomorrow.* Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges.

Here is an "Examen for Children" developed by Tim and Sue Muldoon.

1. Quiet the children before bedtime.
 2. Ask them what made them happy over the past day.
 3. Ask them what made them sad over the past day.
 4. Ask them what they look forward to tomorrow.
 5. Remind them to thank God for what made them happy, ask for God's help when they are sad, and pray for God's presence in the coming day.
- (Muldoon, 22)

FAITH5™ developed by Rich Melheim in his book *Holding Your Family Together* provides another process that helps families discover the sacred in every day life. It involves five steps.

1. Share the highs and lows of the day every night.
2. Read a key Bible verse or story every night.
3. Talk about how the Bible reading might relate to your highs and lows.
4. Pray for one another's highs and lows aloud every night.
5. Bless one another before turning out the lights of the day.

The Examen and FAITH5™ can be woven into the family's daily life at meal time or bed time or family time each day. They can even be used with the whole family in the car on their way to an activity.

Discovering God through photos is a visual approach to guiding families in discovering God in daily life. One example of this in practice is "Picturing God: Faces and Traces of the Divine," a photo blog on IgnatianSpirituality.com which shares a photo every day of the people, places, and scenes where we find God's presence. Picturing God helps us discover the grace of God in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of daily life, from a lone flower growing in a parking lot to sweeping mountain views on a

hike. (Go to <http://picturinggod.ignatianspirituality.com>.) Imagine family members sharing a photo where they found God in their day and then use questions from the Examen to talk about the photo.

Discovering God in the Practices of Everyday Life

Everyday people engage in practices that have the potential of becoming spiritually significant and formative. In her book, *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor affirms the spiritual nature of the everyday activities of our lives. She writes that spirituality “may be the name for a longing for more meaning, more feeling, more connection, more life. When I hear people talk about spirituality, that seems to be what they are describing. They know there is more to life than what meets the eye. They have drawn close to this ‘More’ in nature, in love, in art, in grief. They would be happy for someone to teach them how to spend more time in the presence of this deeper reality. . . .” (xiv)

She observes that “the last place most people look is right under their feet, in the everyday activities accidents, and encounters in their lives. . . .the reason so many of us cannot see the red X that marks the spot is because we are standing on it” (xiv-xv). One way to begin paying attention is to uncover the practices of everyday life.

. . . . To make bread or love, to dig in the earth, to feed an animal or cook for a stranger—these activities require no extensive commentary, no lucid theology. All they require is someone willing to bend, reach, chop, stir. Most of these tasks are so full of pleasure that there is no need to complicate things by calling them holy. And yet these are the same activities that change lives, sometimes all at once and sometimes more slowly, the way dripping water changes stone. In a world where faith is often construed as a way of thinking, bodily practices remind the willing that faith is a way of life.” (xvi)

In *An Altar in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor presents twelve practices that have the potential of becoming spiritually significant and formative for people—if we pay attention to them “under our feet.” Each of these practices provides a pathway for guiding people to discover God in everyday life.

1. The Practice of Waking Up to God (Vision)
2. The Practice of Paying Attention (Reverence)
3. The Practice of Wearing Skin (Incarnation)
4. The Practice of Walking on the Earth (Groundedness)
5. The Practice of Getting Lost (Wilderness)
6. The Practice of Encountering Others (Community)
7. The Practice of Living with Purpose (Vocation)
8. The Practice of Saying No (Sabbath)
9. The Practice of Carrying Water (Physical Labor)
10. The Practice of Feeling Pain (Breakthrough)
11. The Practice of Being Present to God (Prayer)
12. The Practice of Pronouncing Blessings (Benediction)

In *Practicing Our Faith*, Dorothy Bass and a team of writers recover the importance of historic Christian practices for developing a way of life today: honoring the body, hospitality, household economics, saying yes and say no, keeping Sabbath, testimony, discernment, shaping communities, forgiveness, healing, dying well, and singing our lives.

Christian practices are the ways by which we live the Christian way of life and deepen our relationship with God. Each practice addresses a basic area of human need, and is something we learn from and do together with other people. “Each practice address fundamental human needs that appear in every life and every society—the need to learn, for example, or to gain material sustenance, know another person intimately, care for the earth, or encounter strangers without harm. These are things that all people—not just those who are Christian—do, so basic are they to who we are as human beings.” (Bass and Briehl, 11)

Each practice has taken shape in Christian communities throughout the ages and around the world today. Participating in these practices is a way of responding through action to God’s love for us. “Christian practices do more than address fundamental human needs and conditions; they also respond to God’s active presence for the world in Jesus Christ by fostering care of the larger *oikos* of which we human beings are part, the household of the earth” (Bass, xvi).

In their book *On Our Way*, Bass and Briehl describe five characteristics of the way of life embodied in the Christian practices. “To embrace a way of life abundant requires us to be *attentive*. No one can live this way in isolation from others; life abundant depends upon and arises within life *together*. It does not lead into a fantasy future or purely spiritual realm but *into the real world*. There, Christians practice these practices not our own sake but *for the good of all*, and not by our own power or vision but *in response to God*, whose own grace and call provide this way of life.” (12)

How can we guide families in reflecting on their everyday practices? Here is a simple five-step process that guides parents and families in discovering God’s active presence in the world through everyday life practices and explores their spiritual significance for living an abundant way of life. This process can be taught and experienced through congregational events and programs and made available at home through online experiences and resources. (To see the process in a family resource go to *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*, available for free at <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/faith-formation-in-christian-practices.html>.)

1. *Yearning* taps into our hunger for living well by addressing a basic area of human need through the real-life stories of people seeking meaning and purpose for their lives through a particular practice.
2. *Reflecting* gives people an opportunity to become aware of how they experience the basic human need and hunger for the Christian practice in their own lives, and how they may already be living this practice.
3. *Exploring* presents the biblical teaching on the practice, how the practice addresses our basic need and hungers, and why the practice is important for living a Christian life.
4. *Living* provides people with a variety of ways to live the practice—activities, ideas, and strategies—that they can use to integrate each Christian practice into their daily life.
5. *Praying* offers God thanks and praise, and asking for God’s help in living a Christian way of life.

There are many ways that congregations can focus on Christian practices as a way to guide parents and families in discovering God in their everyday life and in nurturing a Christian way of life at home and in the world. Here are three ideas to help your congregation imagine how to implement this strategy.

1. **A Focus for the Whole Year:** Make Christian practices a church-wide focus for the whole year through family or intergenerational learning, worship and preaching, service/mission, and more. Here’s an example of a one-year plan that uses the Christian practices presented in

Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life (available for free at <http://www.lifelongfaith.com/faith-formation-in-christian-practices.html>.)

September: Caring for Body
October: Celebrating Life
November: Discernment
December: Eating Well
January: Forgiving
February: Keeping the Sabbath
March: Managing Household Life
April: Praying Well
May: Reading the Bible
June: Transforming the World (serving, working for justice, caring for creation)

2. **A Focus for a Season or a Month:** Make a Christian practice the focus of a season or individual months through all family or intergenerational learning, worship and preaching, and service/action. For example, during the Lenten Season the congregation and family can focus on one or more practices that reflect the theology and liturgies of the season, such as forgiveness, discernment, prayer, or transforming the World.
3. **A Connection to Worship and Preaching:** Connect the Sunday readings or themes and preaching to Christian practices and offer faith formation programming to prepare families for the practice and guide their reflection upon the worship experience. Make resources and experiences available online to extend the learning and worship into family life.

Programming Ideas

There are a variety of ways that congregations can incorporate the activities for discovering God in daily life and in the practices of everyday life. Consider the following

1. **Embed and Equip:** Congregations can embed these processes into church life and programming—worship, learning, milestones, retreats, Christian initiation, preparation programs for marriage, baptism, first communion, and more. Consider embedding the “discovering God in daily life” processes into a marriage preparation or embedding Christian practices, such as eating well and keeping the Sabbath in first communion preparation.
2. **Create and Sponsor:** Congregations can create new programming where parents and families can experience the processes and learn how to use them at home. Consider creating family or intergenerational programs that teach Christian practices in large group or small group settings. Consider creating immersion experiences where families can experience a practice first hand, such as hospitality at a homeless shelter or serving a meal at a soup kitchen or caring for creation by planting a garden.

Consider developing small groups for parents and/or families on a variety of themes from life-centered to faith-centered that meet in a variety of locations (homes, coffee shops, community centers, church) where people can experience the “discovering” activities in a small, welcoming environment. Small groups can include moms and dads groups, grandparent groups, interest or activity groups, discipleship or spiritual sharing groups, Bible study groups, support groups, service/action groups, and more .

3. **Equip and Resource:** Congregations can create or curate digital content that provides print, audio, and video resources for discovering God in daily life and in the practices of everyday life. Consider resources for practicing the Examen: <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen#examen-part-of-your-day> or picturing God in photos: <http://picturinggod.ignatianspirituality.com>.

Connect with resources such as the *Spirituality and Practice* website which seeks to encourage everyday spiritual practice as an integral part of individual and community life. Their website is filled with thousands of activities and resources. Of particular interest is the *Spiritual Practices Toolkit* which consists of more than 260 classic and informal spiritual practices: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/features/view/27713/spiritual-practice-toolkit>.

4. **Connect and Engage:** Congregations can use the “discovering” activities for connecting with parents and families who are not involved in the congregation—the *Spirituals* and the *Unaffiliated*. Consider developing outreach programs in community setting such as spiritual conversations in a café setting (see Lifetree Café: <http://lifetreecafe.com>), speaker series, worship experiences, courses and workshops. Consider providing print, audio, and video resources and activities on a website or on social media platforms that connect to people’s life issues. Consider inviting people into online communities where they can share their lives, have spiritual conversations, and experience the “discovering” activities.

Strategy 2. Forming Faith at Home

We know from research (Smith, et al; Bengston, et al.) that the family is the primary way in which religious socializations occurs and that faith and values are transmitted. Richard Gaillardetz writes about the unique way in which faith is formed at home, pointing us to how faith is woven into the fabric of daily living.

As virtue ethicists remind us, we do not become virtuous by memorizing rules or church maxims. We become virtuous by being engaged, at as many levels as possible, with other people who live the life of virtue. Gospel values are not passed on so much by explicit moral catechesis as by the way in which a set of values has shaped basic human interactions. And so it is with the Christian household. Basic gospel values are internalized through our most mundane domestic interactions. When our household members learn how decisions are made and conflicts resolved, how work gives way to healthy play, how household tasks are undertaken out of a sense of commitment to the welfare of others, how affection and encouragement dominate household interactions, how challenges, corrections and even discipline are engaged in ways that never demean but rather affirm the dignity of all—those household members are being schooled in the life of discipleship. They become a Christian virtue community.

Even if our current practice places the primary emphasis on the congregation’s role, the family remains the most important community for faith nurture. *What would it look like to view faith formation as a home activity, rather than a congregational activity? What if the home was the primary environment for forming faith—empowered, resourced, and supported by the congregation? What if parents, grandparents, and other significant adults were the primary teachers—empowered, resourced, and supported by the congregation to share, practice, and mentor faith at home?* This would be quite a shift

in the way we do faith formation today. It would align congregational faith formation around the family. It would be transformational for families and for the whole faith community.

With this shift we can now envision a “curriculum for the home.” The word *curriculum* is derived from the Latin verb *currere*, which means to run. In literal terms, a curriculum is a course to be run; it is a *journey*. A household faith formation curriculum is a journey of discipleship—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as parents, children, and the whole family seek to follow Jesus and his way in today’s world.

First, the eight faith forming processes provide the *content* of family faith formation at home through the experiences, activities, programs, and resources for growing faith at home in developmentally-appropriate ways.

1. *Fostering caring relationships* within the family, across generations, and with other families/parents
2. *Celebrating the church year seasons* and events through which families experience the story of faith
3. *Celebrating rituals and milestones* that provide a way to experience God’s love through significant moments in the family’s life journey and faith journey
4. *Learning the Christian tradition* (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality and ethics), reflecting upon the tradition, integrating it into one’s faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world
5. *Fostering a prayer life* (personal and communal and being formed in the *spiritual disciplines*)
6. *Encountering God in the Bible*, and studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today
7. *Living the Christian mission in the world*—engaging in service to those in need, caring for God’s creation, and working for justice
8. *Worshipping God* with the community of faith—experiencing God’s living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist.

Second, the content of faith formation at home is developed in four *settings*—Home, Intergenerational, Church Life, and Parents.

1. **Home:** *What are families doing to grow in faith and discipleship in each of the eight faith forming processes?* This is the first step in designing curriculum plan—building the content, experiences, and activities around the life of the family and describing what is happening at home when families are experiencing, sharing, practicing, and living their faith through the eight faith forming processes.
2. **Intergenerational:** *How are families connected to the other generations at church?* This involves connecting the eight faith forming processes to the intergenerational life, events, and experiences of the faith community. This can be done in a number of ways such as developing intergenerational experiences at church that include family participation (worship, learning, service, social); and connecting what families are learning at home to intergenerational experiences at church, for example families can learn about worship and how to worship at home, experience Sunday worship with the faith community, and live the Sunday worship experience at home and in their daily lives.

3. **Church Life:** *How are congregations empowering, resourcing, and supporting families to grow as disciples and practice their faith?* There are a variety of ways to do this but central to every idea is aligning church ministries and programming to focus on faith formation at home. Congregations can redesign church ministries and programming to teach, model, and demonstrate faith forming practices when families are gathered at church. Sunday worship, educational programs, and seasonal church year events are significant opportunities for families to experience the eight faith formation processes which can be extended into family life through resources that are available online at family faith formation website.
4. **Parents:** *How are congregations empowering, resourcing, and supporting parents as faith formers?* This can be done by providing 1) a variety of educational opportunities for parents (at church, in small groups of parents, and online through webinars, podcasts, video programs); 2) online information about healthy children/adolescent development and parenting practices (in print, audio, and video, links to online resource centers); 3) parent mentors or coaches (from “empty nest” parents and from the grandparent generation) beginning at baptism or at the start of school; and 4) support groups for parents for each stage of development (like a MOPS group—Mothers of Preschoolers, <http://www.mops.org>). (See the Empowering Parents and Grandparents Strategy for more information.)

Third, the content and settings of the curriculum are planned in *developmentally-appropriate ways*, accommodated to the needs and interests of young children (0-5), older children (6-10), young adults (11-14), older adolescents (15-18), and emerging adults (19-29), *and* to the way young people think and assimilate information and values at each life stage. In Chapter Five, Jolene Roehlkepartain developed ten faith factors that help us understand *how to form faith* in young people at each stage of life.

Use the eight forming processes (content), the four settings (home, intergenerational, church life, and parents), and *developmentally-appropriate ways to form faith* (young children, older children, younger adolescents, and older adolescents), to create life-cycle specific faith formation for families to experience at home.

Use the other ideas in the other seven strategies to “program” the home curriculum: God in everyday life, milestones, seasonal events, Bible through the year, connecting families intergenerationally, developing family life, and empowering parents and grandparents.

The following chart outlines how to design family faith formation at home integrating content and settings for each life stage: young children, older children, young adolescents, older adolescents, and emerging adults.

Forming Faith at Home – A Plan

Life Stage Focus: _____
 (Young Children, Older Children, Young Adolescents, Older Adolescence, or Emerging Adults)

For each of the eight faith forming processes address the following questions:

- **Home:** What are families doing to grow in faith and discipleship
- **Intergenerational:** How are families connected to the other generations at church?
- **Church:** How are congregations empowering, resourcing, and supporting families to grow as disciples and practice their faith?
- **Parents:** How are congregations empowering, resourcing, and supporting parents as faith formers?

	Home	Intergenerational	Church	Parents
Caring Relationships				
Celebrating Seasons				
Celebrating Rituals and Milestones				
Learning the Christian tradition				
Praying and Spiritual Formation				
Reading the Bible				
Serving, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation				
Worshipping God with the Faith Community				

Strategy 3. Forming Faith through Milestones

A milestone is a an action or event marking a significant change or stage in development. These life and faith markers can provide important times for engaging families when they are most open to change and growth. Milestones are significant moments in life’s journey that provide the opportunity for families to experience God’s love, and grow in faith through events in the life of the church community and family life. Milestones faith formation provides a natural opportunity to create a partnership between the congregation and the home.

Milestones can come from the life of the family or the life of the congregation and Christian tradition. Some milestones are predictable (see the chart below); others are unpredictable such as moving to a new home, getting a pet, the death of a pet, chronic or acute illness or injury, divorce, death of a loved one, leaving home, and more. These can also be opportunities for “just-in-time” faith formation with outreach to the family and resources online for them to access.

A milestones faith formation plan blends milestones from our Christian religious tradition (baptism, first communion, first Bible) and milestones from the life of the family (birth of child, start of school, graduation). Milestone faith formation provides a natural or organic way to promote the spiritual and

faith growth of families and strengthen their engagement in the church community. It is also a way to reach families who are not engaged in the church community.

A milestones plan for church and home for the first three decades of life could be designed around the events below. Develop an annual calendar of milestone celebrations designating specific Sundays or months of the year for the milestone celebration. Preparation programs for a milestone also need to be included in this annual calendar. For information and resources on milestones faith formation, and milestone faith formation resources go to <https://milestonesministry.org>.

Age	Milestone Possibilities
Birth	Baptism
Young Children (preschool)	Anniversary of Baptism Bible Storybook (Children’s Bible) Prayer Welcoming Children to Worship Entering School
Older Children (elementary school)	Blessing of the Backpacks (all ages) The Lord’s Prayer Friendship First Communion Bible Presentation The Ten Commandments The Apostles Creed
Middle School	Preparing for Adolescence Relationships Religious Identity Stewardship / Money Matters Sexuality
High School	Confirmation / Affirmation of Faith Witness and Gifts for Ministry Mission Trip/Service to Others Driver’s License Graduation
Emerging Adult Years	Leaving Home (college, military, work) Graduating College Returning from College or Military Establishing a New Home Starting a New Job Marriage

Five Elements

Milestone faith formation can be developed around five elements: *naming*, *equipping*, *blessing*, *gifting*, and *reinforcing*.

1. *Naming* the sacred and ordinary events that take place in daily life—beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, and rites of passage, and creating rituals and traditions that shape our identities and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.

2. *Equipping* brings people together for learning, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. A family or intergenerational learning program—at church or home or in the community—prepares the individual and the whole family for the milestone and for living faith at home.
3. *Blessing* the individual and marking the occasion in a worship service and in the home, says that it is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred. Offer a prayer to bless the lives of those involved in the milestone moment: a prayer during worship for those participating in the milestone moment, and a prayer at a small group or with family at home.
4. *Giftng* offers a tangible, visible item that serves as a reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, as well as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life.
5. *Reinforcing* the milestone with a follow-up gathering of those involved in the milestone moment to help it gain deeper roots in the life of faith of those who participated.

It is important that each milestone include a family gathering (parents, children, grandparents) as a time to connect, learn, and pray together, as well as to learn how to share, practice, and live faith at home. Sometimes this gathering is planned several weeks before the milestone celebration and at other times it happens on the same day as the milestones celebration

Example: Baptism Milestones Faith Formation

Here is an example of milestone faith formation for baptism that utilize the five elements above—naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing, and incorporates the faith forming processes—caring relationships, celebrating rituals, learning, praying, reading the Bible, serving, and worshipping together—at home and at church. This example can be adapted for every milestone.

Church

- *Mentors/Coaches*: New parents can enter into a mentoring relationship with a member of the congregation (“empty nest” parents or grandparents) who will guide the new parents through the Baptism process and the first years of establishing a new family and faith traditions.
- *Parent Preparation*: The content for parents can include preparing for baptism (theological enrichment), raising an infant/young children, parenting for faith growth with young children. There are many ways to deliver this program content today: gathered programs, one-on-one mentoring, online programming (webinars, audio and video programs), small groups, and more.
- *Family Gathering*: This is an opportunity for the whole family to gather for learning about Baptism and for experiencing ways to grow in faith as a family at home—praying, reading the Bible, celebrating rituals and the church year seasons, and more
- *Ritual*: A welcoming rite can be celebrated several weeks prior to the Baptism so that the faith community becomes aware of the forthcoming Baptism.
- *Intergenerational Connection*. The church community can be involved in the Baptism by writing letters of welcome to baptismal families, becoming prayer partners and circles of support for each baptismal candidate and their family, creating faith chests for each newly

baptized child with a variety of resources for the new child and family (see <http://store.milestonesministry.org/product-p/fcmm.htm>).

- *Celebration of Baptism*: The Baptism celebration can involve the family and congregation more fully by including siblings and family members in the preparation and celebration of the rite, creating a photo or video story of the baptism for the family, creating a “Book of Blessings” for family, friends and the congregation to contribute words of welcome, support, and/or hopes and dreams for the child; and much more.
- *Reunion*: The congregation can host a reunion breakfast or dinner for families who have had children baptized in the past year. This practice could be extended as an annual event for all families until five years old (or the start of school).
- *Baptismal Anniversaries*: The congregation can celebrate baptismal anniversaries each month at Sunday worship with a special remembrance and blessing. On the anniversary of each baptism the congregation can send families a note of congratulations and a prayer ritual to renew baptismal promises.

Home

Congregations can develop a variety of resources for celebrating Baptism at home and helping the family begin faith practices and traditions with young children through print, audio, and video content delivered online at the family faith formation website. Congregations can use social media (such as Facebook groups) to keep parents of young children connected to each other.

- *Caring relationships*: sharing stories, connecting children with grandparents and other adults, family time together (social and fun activities), starting a tradition of reflecting on the day such as the FAITH5™ process: 1) share the highs and lows of the day every night; 2) read a key Bible verse of story every night; 3) talk about how the Bible reading might relate to your highs and lows; 4) pray for one another’s highs and lows aloud every night; and 5) bless one another before turning out the lights of the day.
- *Celebrating rituals*: Baptism anniversaries (prayers, symbols—light, water, oil), marriage anniversaries, a home altar with baptism symbols, pictures, a Bible, as well as seasonal symbols such as an Advent wreath
- *Learning*: children’s storybooks with positive values and/or spiritual themes, music and video programs that teach positive values and/or spiritual themes
- *Praying*: meal time and bedtime prayers, first book of prayers and devotions,
- *Reading the Bible*: Scripture readings and reflections on Baptism, children’s Bible storybook children’s Bible stories (music, video), Bible videos (*Veggie Tales*, *What’s in the Bible*, and more)
- *Serving*: helping activities at home, caring for creation (planting a garden)
- *Worshipping together*: participating in Sunday worship as a family, reading the Sunday Scriptures at home

Milestones faith formation presents a great opportunity to connect with parents about their own faith journey (see Strategy One for processes). Significant milestones and life transitions provide churches with “moments of return” when people who have not been involved in church life can return to the church for a ritual experience, family celebration, religious perspective on life’s transitions, encouragement, and/or comfort and support. By maximizing these opportunities churches are nurturing people’s faith *and* welcoming them back into the life of the faith community. Marriage, baptism, moments of sickness (personal, family, friends), the death of a loved one, and life decisions are all important milestones or life transitions that provide an excellent opportunity for “moments of return.”

An Illustration of Milestones Faith Formation in Action

Here is a milestones faith formation case study from Westwood Lutheran Church in St. Louis Park, MN. Their approach is a great illustration of how to implement milestones faith formation. The content reflects the Lutheran tradition, but as you will see their approach can serve as a model for any church. (For the complete plan go to “Rooted in Faith” at <http://www.westwoodlutheran.org/Rootedinfaith>.)

Milestones Plan

Milestones are based on the promises made in Baptism. They are intended to help support the faith development of both the individual child and the family. We focus on one milestone at each age/grade level but all are welcome to participate in the Milestone classes and celebrations.

Typically, Milestones represent the attainment of a new skill or developmental level. Learning to walk, tie your shoes or drive a car are all developmental milestones in the faith life of a young person. Milestones are an extension of our promises made in Baptism. Here at Westwood we use the term to denote a new understanding in the faith life of our children, youth and families that we celebrate with the whole congregation. Milestone Ministry helps the entire congregation remember and keep their promises made in baptism.

Age	Milestone
Birth	Baptism
First Year	Baptismal Remembrance (Gathering for newly baptized)
Toddlers	Creation (Care for the World God made)
Pre-School One	Bible (Receive a Story Bible)
Pre-School Two	Worship (Proclaim Christ and help in worship)
Pre-K/K	Service (Serve your neighbor as Jesus commanded)
1st Grade	Lord’s Prayer (Learn about prayer)
2nd Grade	First Communion (Share in the Lord’s Supper)
3 rd Grade	Bible and God’s Story (Receive a more age-appropriate Bible)
4 th Grade	Baptism (Learn about Lutheran Baptism)
5 th Grade	Ten Commandments (What do they really mean?)
6 th Grade	Apostle’s Creed (What do Lutherans believe?)
7 th Grade	Bible and God’s Story Continues (Receive a Bible with commentary and questions)
8 th Grade	Elder Wisdom (Faith through the generations)
9 th Grade	Sexuality (Sexuality as gift)
10 th Grade	Affirmation of Baptism (Public affirmation of promises)
11 th Grade	Vocation (Live among God’s people with care)
12 th Grade	Real World (Tools for living on own, importance of faith)

Faith Portfolio

Each year your child will have pieces of his/her faith journey that we will encourage you to keep in a binder. These will include milestone and education pieces, and will be a snapshot of the journey your child has gone on at Westwood. We think it will be especially interesting for you and for them as they write their faith statements as a part of their Affirmation of Faith in Confirmation.

Education Programming

(Note: Milestones faith formation works together with the education program from birth to twelfth grade.)

Birth to Kindergarten

- **Baptism Class:** Offered monthly for families looking to have their child baptized. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet other families, hear about Westwood and learn what it means to be Lutheran. Baptisms are typically held the 2nd Sunday of the month.
- **Toddler Joy School (16 months –3 years):** The first class in our Sunday School series. This is a non-separating class for parents and their child and lasts approximately an hour on Sunday mornings. Parents take turns reading the Bible story and leading a simple craft, if desired. There is also time for the toddlers to play and interact with each other (as well as time for parents to connect as the toddlers play) and we generally open and close with music.
- **Pre-School 1 (3-4 years):** Children enjoy age-appropriate worship in the classroom. Children are led through the basic stories in their new Bible Story Book, which they receive at the beginning of the year.
- **Pre-School 2 (4-5 years) & PreK/K (5-6 years):** Children begin the hour with age-appropriate worship in the classroom. Children spend 3-4 weeks focusing on a Bible story, engaging it in a variety of ways through drama, art, games and prayer. These same stories are simultaneously being studied by children in grades 1-5.

First to Sixth Grade

- **Rotation:** First–fifth graders spend 3-4 weeks on a story (the same story as the 4-year-olds & kindergarteners) They rotate each week to a different workshop: computers, drama, cinema, games, art, storytelling, and science to experience the story from a different perspective, engaging different senses and learning styles.
- **6th Grade Pre-Confirmation:** Engage questions through the Re:Form curriculum. They look at questions such as: Was Jesus really human? Is the Bible true? Is divorce a sin? The discussions are very interactive and engaging for kids and adults.

Confirmation: Seventh to Tenth Grade

- In confirmation youth will participate once a month in Parent/Student Learning during the confirmation hour. We ask parents or guardians to join their children as they learn. Sermon conversations, retreats, large and small group gatherings, worship together and have service opportunities are all a part of confirmation curriculum.
 - 7th Grade Confirmation: Old Testament
 - 8th Grade Confirmation: New Testament
 - 9th Grade Confirmation: Is centered on the Luther's Small Catechism. They also choose a mentor to walk the last part of the confirmation journey with them.
 - 10th Grade Confirmation: Craft Faith Statement and participate in an interview with staff. In preparation for the Affirmation of Baptism celebration in worship.

Ninth-Twelfth Grade

- Engaging faithful conversations on Wednesday nights. This is done through small groups, Sundaes on Wednesdays and as we worship together. Youth are invited to be a part of trips, retreats and camps, and participate in Bible study and fellowship opportunities.

Guide to Developing a Milestones Plan

Here is a sample planning guide for developing a congregational plan for milestones faith formation.

1. Identify and describe the milestones at each stage of life.
2. Develop an annual calendar that designates specific Sundays or months of the year for each milestone celebration. Preparation programs for a milestone also need to be included in this annual calendar.
3. Use the five elements of milestones faith formation to develop the plan for each individual milestone: naming, equipping, blessing, gifting, and reinforcing
4. Develop the *at church* and *at home* activities. Use the faith forming processes—caring relationships, celebrating rituals, learning, praying, reading the Bible, serving, and worshipping together—guide the development and/or select of activities and resources.
5. Develop the parent formation/involvement activities for the milestone.
6. Schedule a family gathering (parents, children, grandparents) for milestone as a time to connect, learn, and pray together, as well as learn how to share, practice, and live faith at home. Sometimes this gathering is planned several weeks before the milestone celebration and at other times it happens on the same day as the milestones celebration

A Milestones Faith Formation Plan

Age	Milestone	At Church	At Home	For Parents
Young Children				
Older Children				
Young Adolescents				
Older Adolescents				
Emerging Adults				

Examples of Milestones Resources

Burns, Jim and Jeremy Lee. *Pass It One: Building a Legacy of Faith for Your Children through Practical and Memorable Experiences*. Colorado Springs: David C. Cooke, 2015

Faith Stepping Stones. Faith Inkubators. (<http://www.faithink.com>)

Haynes, Brian. *Shift—What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today*. Loveland: Group, 2009.

Keeley, Laura and Robert J. *Celebrating the Milestones of Faith: A Guide for Churches*. Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2009.

Milestones Ministry Modules. Milestones Ministry. (<https://milestonesministry.org>)

“Rooted in Faith.” Westwood Lutheran Church, St. Louis Park, MN. (<http://www.westwoodlutheran.org/Rootedinfaith>)

Smith, Traci. *Seamless Faith: Simple Practices for Daily Family*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2015.

Strategy 4. Celebrating Seasonal Events through Year

Calendar events and the feasts and seasons of the church year provide a natural rhythm to faith formation at home throughout the year. The seasonal celebrations through year (calendar and church year) engage families in the intergenerational life of the church and/or wider community—building relationships across the ages through shared experiences. And provide a natural way to connect church and home in faith formation. Consider some of the opportunities that occur each year. These are just illustrations. Add seasonal events that are particularly meaningful for your church and community.

Calendar Year	Church Year Feasts and Seasons
New Year's Eve and Day	Advent
Martin Luther King Jr. Day	Christmas
Valentine's Day	Epiphany
St. Patrick's Day	Ash Wednesday
Earth Day	Lent
Mother's Day	Holy Week
Memorial Day	Easter
Father's Day	Pentecost
July 4 – Independence Day	St. Francis Day–Blessing the Animals (October 4)
Labor Day	All Saints and Souls (November 1-2)
Start of School	
Halloween	
Thanksgiving	

Congregations can guide parent and families in discovering the spiritual significance of calendar year events—familiar to everyone and celebrated by many—by providing opportunities for faith formation developed specifically for each event. Congregations can celebrate calendar year events at church (Martin Luther King Jr. prayer service and service projects), celebrate a ritual at church (Thanksgiving worship service), bless people on their special day (Mother's Day, Father's Day), develop resources for the home celebration, learning, and much more.

The feasts and seasons of the church year provide an organic and natural sequence of faith growth for families and the whole community. People grow in faith by experiencing the feasts and seasons of the church year—rich in theology, ritual, and spiritual significance. Congregations can develop programs and activities—at church or home—that prepare families for participation in the feasts and seasons and guide their participation and reflection upon those events.

There is an abundance of print and digital products for celebrating the seasons of year, designing family learning programs around the seasons, and creating at-home faith forming experiences that extend and deepen the church experience. A great example of online resources is from Illumination Learning, an online collection of Orthodox Christian resources for family-centered catechesis, which has a section devoted to seasonal resources: <http://illumination-learning.com/main/connecting-church-home>. For additional digital resources consult the seasonal resources on the www.curatingfaithformation.com website from LifelongFaith Associates.

Example: Lent with a Home—Church Connection

Let's take the example of the Lent season from Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday. Imagine providing a forty-day Lenten experience for the home that connects the theology and spirituality of Lent and the Lent events at church with home life through a variety of activities for experiencing and practicing Lent at home—delivered online through the congregation's faith formation website. The faith forming processes provide a framework for designing at home Lent activities and resources, in particular celebrating rituals, learning, praying, reading the Bible, and serving and working for justice. The following example can be adapted for other feasts and seasons of the church year.

Lent at Church	Lent at Home (print, audio, video, online activities)
Ash Wednesday Sunday worship and Scripture readings Friday simple meals Stations of the Cross Lent service projects Lent Bible Study Palm Sunday Holy Thursday/Maudy Thursday Good Friday Easter Vigil Easter Sunday	Fasting activities Praying through Lent daily Serving (almsgiving) Reflections on the Sunday readings and sermons Daily Bible readings Lent devotions Lent study resources and videos Lent children's activities

Example: Earth Day with a Home—Church—Community Connection

Let's take the example of the celebration of Earth Day in April and use this event as an opportunity to connect home, church, and community. The following example illustrates programs and activities in the community and at church in gathered settings with activities delivered to families online through the congregation's faith formation website.

Earth Day in the Community	Earth Day at Church	Earth Day at Home
Community cleanup Planting a community garden Planting trees in the community All ages workshop on caring for creation Story time at the public library focused on environmental awareness books	Ecumenical prayer service for caring for creation Intergenerational program on the theological and biblical foundation of caring for creation Church audit: energy use and creation-friendly practices Adopting a global project to address the effects of climate change	Recycling activities Planting a family garden Meal time creation prayer Daily Bible verses on caring for creating for April Children's activities to explore and experience caring for creation Storybooks and videos on caring for creation themes

		House audit: energy use and creation-friendly practices
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The calendar year events, such as Earth Day, provide a way to engage in missional outreach to parents and families. Imagine hosting a blessing of the animals at church for the whole community on a weekend close to the feast of St. Francis on October 4th.

Example: Family Seasonal Celebrations

Sometimes it's not possible to involve the church and/or community in a seasonal celebration. Congregations can engage families in seasonal events—calendar year or church year—by developing family (or intergenerational) programs at church or in the community that immerse people in learning about and celebrating the seasonal event. Congregations can use the church's faith formation website and/or social media to deliver content and experiences, 24X7, directly to parents and the whole family at home as a follow-up to the family program/celebration or as stand-alone content for the family to use in celebrating the season at home.

One way to implement this idea is to develop four seasonal family gatherings or festivals—Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer—and select an event within each season as a focus. To design the family gathered review the intergenerational learning process in Strategy Six.

Strategy 5. Encountering God in the Bible through the Year

Strategy Five provides a way for families (and all ages) to encounter God in the Bible, study the Bible, and apply its message and meaning to life today. The first example builds on the Scripture readings in Sunday worship; the second example illustrates a yearlong plan for exploring the Bible through family learning programs at church. Both examples begin with church-based experiences that then are extended into the home to deepen the family's understanding of the Bible and its application to daily life.

Example 1. Scripture in Sunday Worship

The first example for encountering God in the Bible through the year builds upon the pattern of Scripture readings and/or themes that are integral to the worship life of the congregation. The *Revised Common* and *Catholic Lectionaries* provide a rich resource to build family faith formation with a three-year cycle of weekly readings from the Old Testament, Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels built around the seasons of the church year beginning in December with Advent. The *Narrative Lectionary* provides a second resource for family faith formation with its four-year cycle of readings from September through May—each year following the sweep of the biblical story, from creation through the early Christian church. Worship services and sermon series with multi-week themes provide a third resource to create family faith formation focused on a variety of themes rooted in the Bible.

This can be implemented in a number of ways. St. Elizabeth of Hungary Church in Acton, MA offers monthly family/intergenerational learning that utilizes the Roman Catholic Lectionary as its primary content (see <http://www.seoh.org/faith-formation/gift>). Here is an example for a September through April plan developed around the readings in Cycle C (Luke) and Cycle A (Matthew) of the lectionary

and focused on themes drawn from the Scripture readings from the lectionary and/or from the events of the church year. (To design family/intergenerational learning review the process in Strategy Six.)

1. September: Stewardship (25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Luke 16:19-31)
2. October: Pray Always (29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Luke 18:1-8)
3. November: Last Things and Heaven (33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Luke 21:5-19)
4. December: Mary, Immaculate Conception (Luke 1: 26-38)
5. January: The Baptism of the Lord (Matthew 13–17)
6. February: You are the Salt of the Earth (5th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Matthew 5:13-16)
7. March: The Temptation of Jesus (First Sunday of Lent, Matthew 4:1-11)
8. April: Palm Sunday (Matthew 26:14-27)

Many churches engage in lectionary-based faith formation using the Revised Common or Catholic Lectionary as a primary resource for learning. Most of these programs provide age-specific learning from children through adults; some even have family or multi-age learning components. (For examples of lectionary-based resources see the resource list at the end of this section.)

Churches who do not use a lectionary-based approach often develop a thematic approach—drawn from life issues, popular culture, religious or biblical topics, or contemporary social issues—and create a multi-week sermon series that connects the theme with Biblical teachings.

Family faith formation at home is developed around the biblical content from Sunday worship whether it is lectionary-based or thematic. The key is to extend and deepen the experience of Sunday worship at home through experiences, practices and resources. This includes providing a variety of age-appropriate and whole family digital content on the church’s faith formation website. Determine a focusing theme or topic that emerges from the Scripture readings and make that the lens you use to select resources. A family faith formation plan can include the following elements, designed around the theme from Sunday worship:

1. Caring Relationships: family conversation questions on the theme of the Sunday readings
2. Celebrating Seasons: activities for the church year feast or season (when appropriate)
3. Celebrating Rituals: weekly table ritual
4. Learning: a podcast or video of the sermon with a study guide for the parents, children’s creative Bible activities, storybooks, video presenting the Bible story
5. Praying: daily prayer, weekly family devotion
6. Reading the Bible: short bible reading for each day of the week, online resources for studying the Bible (print, audio, video)
7. Serving/action: ideas for living the biblical teaching in the family or in the community

Tri-Saints Lutheran in Hardy, NE provides weekly online faith formation for families and age groups centered in Sunday worship, the readings, and the sermon. Review their current Sunday worship plan at <http://tri-saintsworship.weebly.com>.

There are a variety of sources that provide digital resources—website content, blogs, podcasts, videos, and apps—for developing Bible-centered family faith formation at home. And many of these resources are free. For a list of digital resources consult the Bible and Worship resource listings on the www.curatingfaithformation.com website from LifelongFaith Associates.

Examples of Lectionary Resources

Living the Good News lectionary-based curriculum: <https://www.livingthegoodnews.com>

Feasting on the Word lectionary-based curriculum: <http://www.feastingontheword.net/Curriculum/>

Seasons of the Spirit lectionary-based curriculum: <http://www.seasonsonline.ca>

Sparkhouse lectionary-based curriculum: <http://wearesparkhouse.org/kids/spark/lectionary/>

Taking Faith Home: <https://milestonesministry.org/taking-faith-home/>

The Text This Week (all lectionaries): <http://www.textweek.com>

Working Preacher (RCL and Narrative lectionaries): <https://www.workingpreacher.org>

Example 2: Exploring the Bible

The second example for engaging families with the Bible is creating a yearlong family/intergenerational learning program—in a large group format or in small groups of families. This can be organized monthly, bi-weekly, or weekly. Each of the family-intergenerational themes and programs would be combined with online resources for continuing faith formation at home. The content of the program can focus on a tour of the Bible, individual books of the Bible, major themes in the Old Testament and New Testament, important and enduring stories in the Bible, and much more.

A yearlong “Tour of the Old Testament” could include sessions on: 1) Navigating the Bible, 2) God Creates—Book of Genesis, 3) God Frees—Book of Exodus, 4) God Teaches—Book of Deuteronomy, 4) Messengers of God—Books of the Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), 5) Praying to God—the Psalms, and more. A yearlong “People of the Old Testament” series could focus on Noah, Abraham, Joseph and his Brothers, Moses, Samuel, David, and Ruth. A yearlong introduction to the New Testament could focus on understanding the four Gospel portraits of Jesus: life, teachings, actions, death and resurrection; and exploring several of Paul’s Letters: community he wrote for, key teachings, application to life today. There are lots of possibilities

One example of a family-intergenerational resource on the Bible is the WE curriculum from Faith Alive with volumes on: *The Tabernacle*, *The Epic Story*, and *The Unshakable Promise* (<http://www.faithaliveresources.org/Pages/Item/58934/WE-Curriculum.aspx>). For example, *WE: The Epic Story* includes ten intergenerational events that trace the narrative of God’s big story from creation to new creation: creation, the fall, Abraham, the exodus, David, Jesus’ birth, Jesus’ ministry, Jesus’ death and resurrection, the spread of the gospel, and the new heaven and new earth.

The at-home faith formation includes a variety of print, audio, video, and online resources to explore, experience, and apply the teaching from the family-intergenerational session. This can include similar content to the suggestions in Example One. The at-home resources might focus more directly on the Bible content through age-appropriate learning activities, family devotions and conversations on the book of the Bible or Bible story or Bible teachings, and biblically-focused prayer activities.

There is an abundance of Bible resources for creating at-home faith formation to deepen the learning from the church program: print (books and curriculum), audio/music, video (e.g., *What’s in the Bible* video programs), and digital online content (much of which is free). For a list of digital resources consult the Bible and Worship resource listings on the www.curatingfaithformation.com website from LifelongFaith Associates.

Strategy 6. Connecting Families Intergenerationally

Participating in the intergenerational life and experiences of a congregation is an essential environment for developing discipleship and nurturing faith growth in parents and the whole family. The life of the Christian community is formative: feasts and seasons of the church year, Sunday worship, sacramental and ritual celebrations, holidays and holydays, works of justice and acts of service, times of prayer, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation. All of the generations need to be engaged together in the life, ministries, and events of the church.

Through intergenerational participation Christian commitment is formed and strengthened as persons develop relationships and actively participate in a community that teaches, models, and lives out the community's beliefs. People learn the Christian way of life as they participate authentically and relationally with more experienced members of the community.

Intergenerational experiences strengthen and create new relationships among people of all ages, enhance their sense of belonging in the faith community, and increase participation in church life.

Intergenerational experiences provide “up close and personal” formation in faith as children, teens, young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults engage in sharing faith, teaching, learning, serving, celebrating, and praying for one another.

An intentionally intergenerational congregation supports families by surrounding them with a community of faith and engaging the whole family in caring, celebrating, learning, praying, and serving together; and providing parents with opportunities to learn from Christians who are practicing their faith and raising faithful children. Participation in intergenerational experiences helps to develop the faith of parents and grandparents and increases their confidence and competence for engaging in faith practices at home. Intergenerational participation creates a shared experience, often missing from everyday life—of families.

Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational

Most congregations are multi-generational by membership. Some are *intentionally* intergenerational. They make their intergenerational character a defining feature of their community life, ministries, and faith formation. These churches make it a priority to foster intergenerational relationships, faith sharing, and storytelling; to incorporate all generations in worship; to develop service projects that involve all ages; and to engage all generations in learning together. For these churches, being intergenerational is a way of life. It is an integral element of their culture. It is who they are!

Conduct an *intergenerational audit* to analyze how well families are engaged intergenerationally in Sunday worship, community life events, ministries, programs, and activities. Identify strengths and the areas for development. Develop ideas for specific ways that the congregation can strengthen the intergenerational connection with families in existing ministries and programming, *and* identify new ideas and projects that engage families with the other generations in the congregation.

Church Life, Ministries, and Programming	Identify ways families are currently connected and engaged intergenerationally	Develop ways to strengthen current intergenerational connection and engagement	Create new ways to connect and engage families intergenerationally
Sunday Worship			
Education			
Service, Justice, Care for Creation			
Church year seasons			
Prayer life			
Social life			
Rituals and sacramental celebrations			

For more ideas for intergenerational ministry and faith formation consult Chapter Five in *Generations Together: Caring, Praying, Learning, Celebrating, and Serving Faithfully* by Kathie Amidei, Jim Merhaut, and John Roberto (Naugatuck: LifelongFaith Associates, 2014); and the Intergenerational section of the Reimagine Faith Formation website: <http://www.reimaginefaithformation.com/intergenerational.html>.

Intergenerational and Family Learning

One of the best ways to connect the generations and engage the whole family in faith formation is intergenerational learning. We have already seen how intergenerational learning can be incorporated into Strategy Three—Milestones, Strategy Four—Seasonal Events (church year and calendar year), and Strategy Five—Bible (Sunday worship and study of the Bible). Family/intergenerational learning can be incorporated into Strategy Seven—Developing Family Life through programs such as family workshops (children, parents, grandparents) focused on family life topics and skills such as communication, technology use, family time, and more. Churches have also redesigned vacation Bible school to involve the whole family and multiple generations. And summer camps can offer camp programs that are designed for the whole family, as well as grandparent-grandchild camp experiences.

One model for family/intergenerational learning that is being used in churches in the U.S. and Canada incorporates four movements: 1) all ages learning, 2) in-depth whole family or intergenerational or age-specific learning, 3) intergenerational contributive experiences, and 4) reflection and application of learning. Here’s an outline:

1. Welcome, community building and opening prayer
2. *Part 1: All-Ages Learning Experience* for the whole assembly that introduces the theme or topic for the program.
3. *Part 2: In-Depth Learning Experiences* that probe the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) *or* for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and conducted in one of three formats:
 - *Whole Group Format*: learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room (age-specific or all ages small groups);
 - *Age Group Format*: learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages;
 - *Learning Activity Center Format*: learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers (age-specific and/or all ages learning centers).
4. *Part 3. All-Ages Contributive Learning* experience in which each generation teaches the other generations.
5. *Part 4. Reflection and Application*
6. Closing Prayer

Many of these churches have made the intergenerational curriculum the center of faith formation for all ages and teach the Christian faith (Trinity, Jesus, church, beliefs, morality and ethics, prayer and spirituality, and more) using the intergenerational learning model. To learn more about intergenerational learning consult *Intergenerational Faith Formation* by Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald (New London: Twenty-Third, 2008). For case studies and program models of intergenerational learning go to: <http://www.reimaginefaithformation.com/intergenerational.html>.

A second model of family/intergeneration learning has been created by *GenOn Ministries* (www.genonministries.org) and includes weekly intergenerational experiences for children and/or youth that creates an intentional arena where all ages can learn about and practice the art of Christian relationships. In these cross-generational gatherings, everyone eats together, plays together, studies together, and prays together. These four parts, plus weekly congregational worship, make up the whole, providing everyone involved a cross-generational arena in which to have a complete, holistic experience of Christian nurture. In addition, young people also lead in congregational worship on a regular basis.

The four-part learning model includes:

1. *Bible study*: A time for each grade or a combination of grades to study the Bible as the model for Christ-centered living. Churches can use a non-denominational curriculum developed by GenOn for LOGOS or their own curriculum.
2. *Worship skills*: Choir, drama, bells, or other arts are rehearsed at LOGOS and then presented regularly in corporate worship. Each church decides the best fit with its own liturgy and worship style.
3. *Family Time*: The shared meal is a time to gather regular “table families” of various ages who eat together each week for the entire program year. Kitchen teams prepare dinners that are served family style, using table settings and serving dishes practicing the art of serving one another.
4. *Recreation*: All have great fun in a cooperative atmosphere, often drawing on the hobbies and interests of adults in the congregation willing to share their passions on a one-time basis or longer.

A third model of family/intergeneration learning is *Messy Church* (<http://www.messychurch.org.uk>, <http://messychurchaustralia.com.au>) started in 2004 in the UK with a simple question: “How can our small church reach the many families in our community?” Messy Church was created for those outside the church, and became church for them, not a stepping stone to Sunday morning church. Messy Church is church for families who may not find other forms of church appealing and who don’t yet belong to a church. There are now thousands of Messy Churches all around the world in most denominations.

A typical Messy Church meets monthly and includes four parts:

1. A flexible, relaxed arrival time with drinks and snacks
2. Creative exploration of a Bible story or theme through many creative experiences for people of different learning styles and of all ages. Children and adults are not separated and are encouraged to explore the story or theme together
3. A short but explicit time of worship with story, music and prayers that builds on the creative exploration that has already occurred.
4. A generous welcome and hospitality is expressed through an invitation to share a delicious home-cooked, sit-down meal with others

The key values which define Messy Church are Christ-centeredness, creativity, and joyful celebration in a spirit of generous, inclusive hospitality. Messy Church tries to focus on people as they are and form relationships with whole families, no strings attached.

A fourth, emerging model is family/intergenerational vacation Bible school. Congregations have begun to re-think vacation Bible school, redesigning a child-only experience into a family or intergenerational experience. One approach to intergenerational VBS has all ages participating for three or four evenings in the summer with food, fun, music, learning, and games. The program incorporates typical VBS Bible content and interactive learning, but everything is intergenerational. A typical evening design (3 hours) could look like this: registration, light meal, opening /music, Bible story, outdoor activity/inside craft, and snacks and closing. A second approach begins each evening with a family-style meal. Then the children participate in Bible stories and activities, while the adults (parents, grandparents) participate in an adult-themed session. Families then reunite in the church for music and prayer to close the evening.

Family Faith Formation at Home

Intergenerational learning creates a shared experience among family members (and the all ages church community). Families are learning together, sharing faith, praying together, celebrating rituals and traditions, and being empowered to live as disciples in the world. Intergenerational learning experiences lead to family faith practice. Congregations can develop family resources specific to the program that can expand, deepen, and apply learning from the program at home. At home is where the learning really happens.

There is an abundance of faith formation resources on every faith theme that can be used for creating at-home faith formation: print (books and curriculum), podcasts, music, video, blogs, online games, apps, and website content (much of which is free). For a list of digital resources consult the www.curatingfaithformation.com website from LifelongFaith Associates.

Use the eight forming processes as a framework for curating content specific to your program and tailored to your families: 1) Caring Relationships and Conversations, 2) Celebrating Seasons, 3)

Celebrating Rituals, 4) Learning, 5) Praying, 6) Reading the Bible, 7) Serving, Working for Justice, Caring for Creation, and 8) Worshipping Together at Church.

Target the activities to the real lives of families so that they integrate easily into family life and schedules. Consider how activities be used at meal times, car times, morning and bedtime, exits and entries from the home, family sharing times, waiting times (at games).

Make the activities available on a mobile-responsive faith formation website that can easily be access on a mobile device. Connect with families via social media to invite them to access the faith formation activities; invite them to share what they are learning and experiencing at home (comments, photos, video), and even join an online group of parents. Ask families to use their social networks to share content and experiences with other families. Use email, text, social media to guide families in using the at home content after an intergenerational learning program.

Intergenerational and Family Service

Intergenerational service engages people of all ages in working together to serve the poor and vulnerable, work for justice, be peacemakers, and care for creation. It connects families to other generations and engages the whole family in making a difference in the world. Intergenerational service provides benefits to individuals, families, and the whole church community:

- Intergenerational service helps narrow the generation gap between older and younger church members.
- Intergenerational service helps people grow spiritually as they pray for, give to, and do service together.
- Intergenerational service recognizes that all people in the church, regardless of age, have talents to contribute that are valuable and important.
- Intergenerational service assists children and youth in feeling a part of the church today, not just the church of tomorrow.
- Intergenerational service appeals to busy families who want to spend more quality time together.
- Intergenerational service connects the generations and builds relationships as they serve God by serving their neighbor. It builds teamwork across the congregation.
- Intergenerational service communicates that it is the responsibility of all Christians, regardless of age, to serve people and work for justice as followers of Jesus Christ.

Eugene Roehlkepartain and Jenny Friedman offer a number of practical guidelines and suggestions for family service. They suggest the following:

1. Make the activities meaningful, so that every person, regardless of age, can contribute in a significant way.
2. Supply mentors or mentor families to individuals or families that have had little or no experience in service.
3. Offer various options to suit individuals and families with different ages, interests, time constraints, and locations.
4. Include preparation and reflection as part of any church-sponsored service activity.

5. Offer some simple “in-house” activities. Although some people are enthusiastic about and ready for community ministry, others may be more comfortable initially with simple service activities they can complete at the church.
6. Hold a service fair for all generations.
7. Provide service resources (books, media, websites) for families and all generations; include children’s books that focus on caring for others.
8. Become a clearinghouse for local and global service opportunities.
9. Organize regular family and intergenerational service days and events.
10. Organize an annual family and/or intergenerational mission trip.
11. Celebrate what church members are already doing.

Congregations can offer a variety of developmentally-appropriate service/mission projects that engage families with other families and/or with other generations and that allow families to choose from different levels of commitment from beginner experiences to advanced projects that are local, regional, national, and international.

- Local mission projects lasting anywhere from a few hours to one day in length
- Short-term mission trips lasting anywhere from two to five days and requiring an overnight stay on location
- Weeklong mission trips within the United States as well as to foreign countries, designed for those who are ready to take the next big step in service
- Global expedition trips of ten to fourteen days that provide the opportunity to be immersed for a longer period in the targeted community and culture
- Personalized small group mission trips, organized around the interests and time of the group

Each service/mission project includes a learning component that focuses on understanding the issue being addressed, exploring the teachings of Scripture and tradition, developing the skills for mission and service, and then, upon completion of the project, reflecting upon the involvement. This means incorporating social analysis and theological reflection with action projects to guide people in developing a deeper understanding of the causes of injustice and the teachings of scripture and the Christian tradition. The process includes: 1) connecting to a social issue (experience)—how people are personally affected by an issue or how the issue affects others, 2) exploring the social issue (social analysis) to understand the causes and underlying factors that promote or sustain the issue; 3) reflecting upon the teachings of scripture and the Christian tradition (theological reflection) to develop a faith perspective on the social issue and how people of faith can address the issue; and 4) developing ways to address the issue (action) by working for social change and serving those in need as individuals, groups, communities, and/or organizations.

Families on a Mission, created by Jim Merhaut, is an example of a local mission experience to complement the usual long-distance mission trips that churches sponsor for teens and adults. The local emphasis helps a church fulfill its role of being a leaven for the community in which it is established. It strengthens the relationship between the church and the poor and vulnerable members of the surrounding community, and promotes the church as a valuable resource in the community. The model gives parents and other adults an opportunity to mentor children and teens into the Christian life of service. It gives children and teens an opportunity to feel the power of making a significant difference in the lives of others. It gives local service agencies the opportunity to partner with a church that can provide much needed volunteer hours. And it gives the recipients of the service an opportunity to show the face of Christ to church members in a way that only they can do.

Families on a Mission is a three-day experience. All of the families meet in the morning at church to pray together, engage in a thematic icebreaker experience, and anticipate some key dynamics that would likely happen at the service sites. Families work each morning at agencies and organizations close to the church. Entire families offer service together—parents (grandparents) and children working side-by-side to serve the needs of poor and vulnerable members in the local community. In one church, families served at an educational facility offered for single mothers and their young children, provided recreational activities in a nursing home, and worked at a facility that serves children from families who have a member suffering from HIV/AIDS. After working at their individual service sites (where they serve all three days), the families return to the church to engage in two to three hours of service learning experiences. The families then depart to their homes for the evening.

An *annual church-wide service day* is a way to engage families with the whole faith community. An example of this type of church-wide involvement is *Faith in Action Day* sponsored by World Vision and Outreach, Inc. (www.putyourfaithinaction.org). This is a four-week, church-wide campaign that culminates on a Sunday where the entire congregation engages in service projects in and with the community. As an individual church or with churches in your area, select a local and global project already developed by a justice or service organization. Then develop an annual theme, such as poverty, care for creation, peacemaking. Prepare the whole community for the service engagement, utilizing the resources developed by the partner organizations. Include 1) worship and prayer experiences focused on the particular theme or project; 2) educational sessions including social analysis of the issues and reflection on the teachings of scripture and the Christian tradition; 3) household activities on the theme or project such as prayers, learning resources, and action suggestions; 4) a website with the resources, activities, action projects, and features to allow people to share what they are doing; and 5) special presentations by experts on the issues and by people engaged in action on the issue.

Using the same design as the church-wide service day, a congregation can develop a *monthly service project* that addresses one particular need or issue (local and/or global) each month. Each month's project can include a short educational program of the topic, an action project, and reflection on the project. Themes for the service projects can correspond with calendar events and seasons, as well as church year seasons. Examples include Back to School (September) and school kits for students Thanksgiving (November) and feeding the hungry, Lent (February or March) and serving the poor, and Earth Day (April) and caring for creation.

Service nights are simple, self-contained programs at church that feature five to ten service activity stations that engage all ages in doing a simple project for the benefit of someone or some group in need. At one station people might create greeting cards for the elderly or for sick church members. At another booth they might make blankets for a homeless shelter. At another booth they might bake cookies or make sandwiches for a soup kitchen. There are lots of ways to contribute to service organizations without having to leave your church building. Doing Good Together is an organization that promotes and supports family service. They publish a manual on how to organize a family service night. You can learn more about them and their family service night resources at www.doinggoodtogether.org.

One church offers a repeat opportunity every month for church members of all ages to participate in a simple service project. The church has partnered with a program called Feed My Starving Children (<https://www.fmsc.org>). Intergenerational groups gather monthly to pack food that will be shipped overseas by the charity. The simplicity of this experience would make it easy to build service learning around it, and it could be a very non-threatening entry point for many people to get started on building their practice of Christian service.

Family/Intergenerational Service Project Ideas

There are so many ways to act on a particular need or issue. And there are so many people and organizations already engaged in transforming the world that will provide assistance in developing intergenerational service projects. The internet provides easy access to ideas and organizations to assist you. Be sure to check with your denomination for ideas and recommendations. Below is a list of project ideas that are great candidates for intergenerational service. For suggestions on how to organize intergenerational service projects and more great ideas, check out the book *Doing Good Together: 101 Easy Meaningful Service Projects for Families, Schools, and Communities* by Jenny Friedman and Jolene Roehlkepartain (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 2010).

Serving the poor and vulnerable

- Prepare and serve a meal at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter.
- Donate goods such as food for the local food bank, clothing, school kits for children, “personal essentials” for those at a homeless shelter, a toy collection at Christmas, gift packages for prisoners.
- Care for the elderly by visiting them at a convalescent home or senior citizen facility or doing chores and shopping.
- Build or repair homes.
- Support efforts to provide vaccines and medical care to the world’s poor, such as provide mosquito nets for malaria prevention, immunizations against childhood disease, and HIV/AIDs treatment.
- Work with people who have disabling conditions.
- Conduct a church-wide or community-wide intergenerational fundraising project to (a) support the efforts of local and national groups who work directly with the poor, (b) adopt a community in another country by supporting them financially and learning about their culture and community life, (c) support organizations that are building schools and libraries for children in the poorest countries of the world by providing books and/or our money to purchase books for children.

Acting for justice to ensure the rights of all people

- Develop intergenerational justice teams to advocate for just policies and priorities that protect human life, promote human dignity, preserve God’s creation, and build peace by (a) becoming familiar with pending legislation or proposals that affect people’s basic needs, (b) writing advocacy letters or emails, (c) working with advocacy groups, (d) working with organizations that are changing the structures that promote injustice.
- Support organizations that are working for justice—locally, nationally, and internationally by promoting the purpose and activities of organizations, providing financial support, and volunteering time to work with the organization.
- Develop a program or campaign to educate people in your church or community about a particular justice issue.
- Hold a Fair Trade Festival to provide a way for members of the church community to buy fair trade products, such as coffee, chocolate, and crafts that benefit local producers in the developing world.

Working for peace

- Work to end the violence of human trafficking of children by working with organizations seeking to shut down trafficking rings and providing support for the victims.
- Address violence in the media through a church-wide or community-wide campaign that encourages by not purchasing and/or abstaining or limiting exposure to violent TV shows, movies, video games, and toys.

- Sponsor an intergenerational community-wide peace festival, working with organizations that seek to build bridges of understanding among people.

Caring for creation

- Conduct an campaign to educate and raise funds to adopt a piece of the planet through the Nature Conservatory’s “Adopt an Acre” and “Rescue the Reef” programs, and the Rainforest Alliance’s “Adopt-a-Rainforest” program; or protect endangered species and their habitats through the World Wildlife Fund’s projects.
- Sponsor a community-wide “care for the environment day” by planting trees in your community and cleaning-up the community.

Strategy 7. Developing a Strong Family Life

Family faith formation strengthens *family life* by developing the assets/strengths and skills for healthy family life and providing a supportive context for forming faith, living the Christian faith, and promoting positive development in children and youth. A strong family life provides the supportive context for forming faith and living the Christian faith. There are two elements of a strong family life: the first is developing assets or strengths as a family; the second is promoting character strengths in young people through developmental relationships. Two studies from the Search Institute provide research-based understandings for building a strong family life together.

Family Assets

There are *family assets* or strengths which help all kinds of families become strong. These assets help to keep youth safe, help each other learn and pursue their deep interests, create opportunities to connect with others, teach youth to make good decisions, foster positive identity and values, nurture spiritual development, build social-emotional skills, and encourage healthy life habits. The twenty-one “Family Assets” that contribute to building a healthy and strong family life. When families have more of these research-based assets, the children, adolescents, and adults in the family do better in life. The twenty-one family assets discovered through the Search Institute’s research are organized into five categories:

Nurturing Relationships

- Positive communication—Family members listen attentively and speak in respectful ways.
- Affection—Family members regularly show warmth to each other.
- Emotional openness—Family members can be themselves and are comfortable sharing their feelings.
- Support for sparks—Family members encourage each other in pursuing their talents and interests.

Establishing Routines

- Family meals—Family members eat meals together most days in a typical week.
- Shared activities—Family members regularly spend time doing everyday activities together.
- Meaningful traditions—Holidays, rituals, and celebrations are part of family life.
- Dependability—Family members know what to expect from one another day-to-day.

Maintaining Expectations

- Openness about tough topics—Family members openly discuss sensitive issues, such as sex and substance use.
- Fair rules—Family rules and consequences are reasonable.
- Defined boundaries—The family sets limits on what young people can do and how they spend their time.
- Clear expectations—The family openly articulates its expectations for young people.
- Contributions to family—Family members help meet each other’s needs and share in getting things done.

Adapting to Challenges

- Management of daily commitments—Family members effectively navigate competing activities and expectations at home, school, and work.
- Adaptability—The family adapts well when faced with changes.
- Problem solving—Family members work together to solve problems and deal with challenges.
- Democratic decision making—Family members have a say in decisions that affect the family.

Connecting to Community

- Neighborhood cohesion—Neighbors look out for one another.
- Relationships with others—Family members feel close to teachers, coaches, and others in the community.
- Enriching activities—Family members participate in programs and activities that deepen their lives.
- Supportive resources—Family members have people and places in the community they can turn to for help.

(The American Family Assets Study)

Developmental Relationships

Developmental relationships are close connections through which young people develop the character strengths to discover who they are, gain the ability to shape their own lives, and learn how to interact with and contribute to others. The Search Institute identified five key actions that promote healthy development, each of which is described from the perspective of a young person.

Express Care: Show that you like me and want the best for me

- Be Present—Pay attention when you are with me.
- Be Warm—Let me know that you like being with me and express positive feelings toward me.
- Invest—Commit time and energy to doing things for and with me.
- Show Interest—Make it a priority to understand who I am and what I care about.
- Be Dependable—Be someone I can count on and trust.

Challenge Growth: Insist that I try to continuously improve.

- Inspire—Help me see future possibilities for myself.
- Expect—Make it clear that you want me to live up to my potential.
- Stretch—Recognize my thoughts and abilities while also pushing me to strengthen them.

- Limit—Hold me accountable for appropriate boundaries and rules.

Provide Support: Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.

- Encourage—Praise my efforts and achievements.
- Guide—Provide practical assistance and feedback to help me learn.
- Model—Be an example I can learn from and admire.
- Advocate—Stand up for me when I need it.

Share Power: Hear my voice and let me share in making decisions.

- Respect—Take me seriously and treat me fairly.
- Give Voice—Ask for and listen to my opinions and consider them when you make decisions.
- Respond—Understand and adjust to my needs, interests, and abilities.
- Collaborate—Work with me to accomplish goals and solve problems.

Expand Possibilities: Expand my horizons and connect me to opportunities.

- Explore—Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places.
- Connect—Introduce me to people who can help me grow.
- Navigate—Help me work through barriers that could stop me from achieving my goals.

(Don't Forget the Families: The Missing Piece in America's Effort to Help All Children Succeed.)

The Search Institute found that one of the most powerful things parents in all circumstances and from all backgrounds can do for children and youth is to build and maintain a strong relationship with them. That is not always easy, but intentional investment in relationships with their young people is one of the most important ways parents help their children develop the strengths they need to be their best in school and life.

Think about how your congregation and community currently equips, supports, and partners with families, and imagine how you could in the future.

- To what extent do we *express care* with the families in our congregations and communities, including listening to them, showing interest in their lives, and investing in them?
- In what ways do we *challenge growth* in families by expecting them to live up to their potential and helping them learn from their mistakes?
- How do we *provide support* and advocacy when families really need it?
- How do we *share power* with families, treating them as true partners by giving them voice in things that matter to them and collaborating with them to solve problems and reach goals?
- How do we encourage families to *expand possibilities* by connecting them with other people, ideas, and opportunities to help them grow?

Create a Family Life Plan for Each Life Cycle Stage

How can congregations equip, resource, and support parents and families at home to cultivate a strong family life and strengthen developmental relationships?

Congregations can play an important role in building family assets. Congregations can utilize the family assets and developmental relationships as the framework for working with families to develop their

strengths, build skills, and promote the positive growth of young people. The content of a congregational plan is built upon the research from the Search Institute—the twenty-one family assets and the five key characteristics of developmental relationships. A congregational plan for developing strong families connects programming at church or in the community with at-home activities and resources.

A congregational plan should include partnering with other congregations, schools, and community organizations in a collaborative effort to build strong families in the community. In every community there are congregations, schools, and community who share a common commitment to building strong families, and have programs and resources that can be utilized to implement a shared plan for working with parents and families.

In *Don't Forget the Families: The Missing Piece in America's Effort to Help All Children Succeed* the Search Institute reminds us that six shifts are needed in the approaches taken to recognize and engage with families as important actors and full partners in developing strong family life and nurturing key character strengths in young people. Our plans need to include

1. Listening first to families rather than just developing and sending messages that don't resonate or motivate.
2. Focusing on building relationships with families, rather than only providing programs.
3. Highlighting families' strengths, even amid challenges, rather than adopting and designing approaches based on negative stereotypes.
4. Encouraging families to experiment with new practices that fit their lives, rather than giving them expert advice on what they need to do.
5. Emphasizing parenting as a relationship more than a set of techniques.
6. Broadening coalitions focused on young people's success to actively engage families as a focal point for strengthening developmental relationships

Using the content of the Family Assets and Developmental Relationships, congregations can curate and create developmentally-appropriate programs, activities, and resources for young children, older children, young adolescents, and older adolescents. The ideas suggested below—family website, parent programs, family programs, family mentors, and life cycle support groups for parents, and the resources in your congregation and community, can become essential elements of a congregational plan for developing the assets/strengths and skills for healthy family life.

1. An **online family website** can provide parents and the whole family with activities to use at home: print, audio, video, apps, games, links to selected family and parent websites, and more. The website can also extend learning from a gathered program into everyday family life and parenting. For a great example of a parent/family website with a variety of media resources designed around the developmental relationships go to ParentFurther at <http://www.parentfurther.com>. An example of a parent/family website targeted to one life stage is Zero to Three: <http://www.zerotothree.org>
2. **Parent programs**—in gathered settings (large group or small group) or online (webinars, online courses, video programs)—can be created and curated to equip parents with the knowledge and skills for building strong families and strengthening developmental relationships. For example the Search Institute offers six one-hour interactive sessions for parents of young adolescents that can be offered on a schedule that works for the sponsor (and parents). Between each session parents engage in relationship-building activities with their middle schoolers. The six sessions include: 1) the power of parent-teen relationships, 2) learn and talk about family priorities, 3) strengthen relationships, 4) prepare for the future, 5) goal setting, and 6) expand your child's web of relationships. This type of

course could be developing for the other three stages of the life cycle. (For more information about the Search Institute program go to: <http://www.parentfurther.com/content/keep-connected-program>. For videos programs for parents from the Search Institute go to: <http://www.parentfurther.com/content/workshops-webinars>.)

Parent programs can be incorporated into congregational events and programs that already engage parents, such as parent preparation programs for baptism, first communion or confirmation. They can be incorporated into the celebration of milestones (see Strategy Three). They can also be offered at the beginning of each life stage transition: birth, start of grade school, start of middle school, start of high school, graduation from high school.

3. **Family programs**—in gathered settings or at home—can engage the whole family (parent-child, parent-teen) in developing family life skills. Congregations can sponsor family workshops throughout the year (perhaps in partnership with other congregations or community organizations) using the content in the Family Assets and Development Relationships. For example:
 - Communicating effectively
 - Establishing family routines: family meals, shared activities, daily commitments
 - Celebrating meaningful traditions and rituals
 - Discussing tough topics
 - Making decisions and solving problems as a family
 - Learning how to build strong relationships and express care for each other
 - Developing the strengths and potential of children and youth
 - Supporting each other: encouraging and praising, giving feedback, standing up for each other
 - Treating each with respect and dignity

Another example of a program that builds assets and relationships at home is a list of books, developed by Search Institute and First Book, as a fun way for parents and kids to grow stronger as a family by reading books. A list of curated books is available online with a free, downloadable guide for each book. Each guide has questions and activities to help the family explore their strengths. The books all tie to Search Institute's research on family strengths and relationships. They are organized into these topics: Express Care, Provide Support, Challenge Growth, Expand Possibilities, Share Power, Create Routines and Traditions, and Connect to Your Community. Go to the ParentFurther website for the program <http://www.parentfurther.com/content/build-strong-families-stories>.

Family programs can be built around film festivals with movies selected for their positive messages about family life or growing up. In addition to viewing the movie, there can be family discussion of the movie, skills development, and lots of popcorn. An example of a movie that provides a foundation for follow-up activities is Disney/Pixar's *Inside Out* about the emotional life of child growing up. There are lots more. To select movies for the film festivals check out reviews at: Common Sense Media (<https://www.commonsensemedia.org>), Pauline Center for Media Studies (<http://media.pauline.org>), Spirituality and Practice (<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films>), and Visual Parables (<http://www.readthespirit.com/visual-parables>).

4. **Family mentors** can provide guidance and support for parents and the whole family at each stage of life. Every congregation has mentor resources in the grandparent generation, who are actively engaged in church and bring decades of parenting and family life experiences. Congregations can identify and provide training for mentors (mentoring skills, understanding today's family, learning

how to access online resources and activities, and more). Developing relationships between parents and mentors can begin with birth/baptism. Mentoring can be life-cycle specific—mentors who focus on children or adolescents.

5. **Life cycle support groups for parents**—in gathered settings (church, home, community) and in online groups (such as a Facebook parents group)—provide opportunities for parents with children in the same age group to talk about parenting, get information and encouragement, discuss family life issues and challenges, and more. Congregations can also sponsor support groups for divorced parents, parents in blended families, parents of children with special needs, and other affinity groupings. An example of a life cycle support group is MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers). Go to their website to learn more about <http://www.mops.org>.

Family Life Resources

ParentFurther website: <http://www.parentfurther.com>.

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Strategy 8. Empowering Parents and Grandparents

Parents (and grandparents) are the most important social and religious influence on their children, adolescents, and emerging adults. The faith of parents and grandparents, their role modeling, their teaching, their warm and affirming parenting style are key factors in religious transmission and developing highly religious children, youth, and young adults. We know from research studies that the religious tradition of parents, their religious involvement, and whether the parents were of the same religious faith at marriage have a huge impact on how a faith tradition is transmitted to the next generation. Parental behaviors influence religious development through “role modeling”—what parents do in setting examples for religious practice and belief, such as attending church regularly, participating in church activities, and encouraging faith development at home through prayers, scripture reading, and religious stories. It is important that parents show consistency between belief and practice: “walking the walk and not just talking the talk.” (Bengston, et al., 185)

Grandparents and great-grandparents are having an increasing influence on religious transmission, support, and socialization. One way they do this is by reinforcing or accentuating parents’ religious socialization. A second way is by providing, replacing, or substituting for parents’ religious socialization by becoming the moral and religious models and teachers for their grandchildren. (Bengston, et al., 185)

Congregations can empower parents and grandparents to be *faith formers* of young people in three interrelated ways: 1) promoting their growth in faith, 2) teaching the skills for parenting for faith growth, and 3) developing their competence and confidence as parents. We explore relevant research in these three areas that can inform the creation and curation of programs, activities, and resources for parents and grandparents. We conclude with practical ideas for bringing these three ways to live in a congregation.

Promoting the Faith Growth of Parents

Congregations promote the growth of parents/grandparents in faith and discipleship and the practice of a vital and informed Christian faith. Parents who possess and practice a vital and informed Christian faith have a huge impact on the faith of their young people. We know from research that parents will end up getting religiously in their children what they themselves are. A strong, vital, mature faith in parents is one of the most important contributors to nurturing sons and daughters of vital, committed Christian faith.

In the “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry,” reported in the *Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry*, young people of mature Christian faith had parents who were committed to Jesus Christ, experienced the presence of God in their daily lives and relationships with others, had a faith that helped them decide what is right or wrong and take responsibility for serving those in need. Parents in the study sought out opportunities to grow spiritually.

The “Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry” found that parents rated the following characteristics of the Christian faith as highly important to them (ranked in order). These findings could easily become a topics in a formation program for promoting the faith growth of parents and grandparents.

1. My faith helps me know right from wrong.
 2. I have a sense of sharing in a great purpose.
 3. I have had feelings of being in the presence of God.
 4. I have a sense of being saved in Christ.
 5. I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God’s creation.
 6. God helps me decide what is right or wrong behavior.
 7. I have found a way of life that gives me direction.
 8. Religious faith is important in my life.
 9. My life is committed to Jesus Christ.
 10. My life is filled with meaning and purpose.
 11. I have a real sense that God is guiding me.
 12. I feel God’s presence in my relationships with other people.
 13. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.
 14. I try to apply my faith to political and social issues.
 15. I talk with other people about my faith.
 16. I give significant portions of time and money to help other people.
- (Martinson, et al., 174)

The overwhelming majority of these parents were involved in spiritual support groups in their churches. They reported that they belonged to at least one church group in which others will prayer with them and for them as needed; in at least one church group in which they can talk about spiritual issues; and in at least one church group in which it is possible to talk about personal problems. (Martinson, et al., 174-175)

The challenge today is the dramatic changes in the spiritual-religious identities of parents (see Chapter Two). We know from research that Generation X and Millennial parents reflect an increasing diversity in religious beliefs, practices, and affiliation. A growing number of parents and whole families are now religiously unaffiliated and/or spiritual but not religious. Twenty-three percent of Generation Xers and over thirty-four percent of Millennials are not religious affiliated and the number of unaffiliated

Millennials is growing. We know that families of Generation X and Millennial parents are participating less in church life and Sunday worship. Parents may bring their young people to educational programs and milestone celebrations (first communion, confirmation), but they are not participating in Sunday worship or other church activities. Religion and spirituality may be important to families today, but for many it is not usually expressed by participation in churches.

We now see that the first generations of not religiously affiliated parents (Generation X and Millennial) are raising their children to become the second generation of not religiously affiliated. Families can transmit the importance of religion—the Christian faith and practices, and belonging to a church community, but they can also transmit non-affiliation and how religion and faith are not important in daily life. What we are seeing today is large numbers of parents transmitting non-affiliation. As the number of “Nones” grows among the younger generations, we can expect this trend to continue.

Promoting the faith growth of parents needs to begin with their spiritual-religious identities. We can identify at least four spiritual-religious types of parents. Each will need spiritual and theological formation tailored to their spiritual-religious identities and their religious-spiritual needs and hungers. Their formation will need to be personalized with different content and experiences that address their needs, interests, and hungers.

- The ***Engaged*** are parents for whom faith is central to their lives, who are transmitting this faith to their children and are actively engaged as a family in a church community. They are spiritually committed and growing in their faith.
- The ***Occasionals*** are parents who participate only occasionally in church life and for whom transmitting a religious faith primarily means bringing their children to educational programs at church. Some may even attend worship regularly. Their spiritual commitment is low and their connection to the church is more social and utilitarian than spiritual. While receptive to an established church, these parents/families do not have a faith commitment that would make their relationship with God and participation in a faith community a priority in their lives. Their occasional engagement in church life does not lead them toward spiritual commitment.
- The ***Spirituals*** are parents who identify themselves as spiritual, and even Christian and practicing their Christian faith, but with no connection to a church community. They identify themselves as spiritual—they pray, read the Bible, serve others—but don’t identify themselves as Christian necessarily. They may be searching for God and the spiritual life, but are not affiliated with organized religion and an established Christian tradition. These parents may involve their children in educational programs and vacation Bible school sponsored by a church.
- The ***Unaffiliated*** are parents who are non-affiliated and for whom religion and spirituality are not important elements of their family life. They may believe in God (most “Nones” do), but religious faith or spiritual practices are not present in their family life. It is not only the parents who are not affiliated, the whole family is not affiliated. They tend to reject all forms of organized religion.

In her book *Losing Our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents Are Raising their Children* Christel Manning provides more insight into the world of the *Spirituals* and *Unaffiliated* and how they are raising their children religiously. She identifies five different ways that parents incorporate religion in the lives of their children. (See Chapter Three for more information.)

1. *Nonprovision*: These are parents who do not incorporate religion into their children’s lives. They do not intentionally include religion or spirituality in the home life or enroll the child in institutional religious education programs.
2. *Outsourcing*: These are parents who rely on other people to incorporate religion into their children’s life. They do not intentionally incorporate religion or spirituality in the home, but do enroll the child in formal program. They are not members of a religious institution.
3. *Self-provision*: These are parents who try to incorporate religion into their children’s upbringing without institutional support, do not enroll the child in formal religious education program, and intentionally incorporate religion or spirituality into home (talk to child about God or higher power; pray or meditate with child, read religious stories).
4. *Alternative*: These are parents who were unaffiliated before they had children and reported searching for and eventually affiliating with an organization that welcomes doubters and the nonreligious. They enroll their child in a programs that teach children about many different religions, intentionally incorporate religion/spirituality in the home from a variety of traditions.
5. *Traditional*: Some unaffiliated parents return to the religion they were raised in, enroll their child in a conventional religious education program, and incorporate religion in the home. (Manning 2013, 13-19)

Manning found that in most cases, there was a great deal of consistency between the parent’s religious or secular identity and how they raised their children. She observes, “the fact that most parents in the study took steps to incorporate religion into the lives of their children is surprising only if we take None to mean the absence of any religious, spiritual, or philosophical worldview. Once we discover the more substantive dimensions of unaffiliated parents’ worldviews, we see that they transmit those beliefs and practices to their children much as affiliated parents do.” (Manning 2013, 19)

The five approaches to how unaffiliated parents are raising their children religiously provides a much need understanding of what drives parents to engage (or not to engage) their children in religious education and congregational life. This new understanding calls congregations to be cognizant of parent motivations as they communicate with parents, assess current programming, and design new initiatives to reach and engage parents.

This more complex and nuanced portrait of religiosity calls upon congregations to create parent formation that is responsive to the needs, interests, concerns of parents and families in each of the four spiritual-religious types—Engaged, Occasional, Spiritual, Unaffiliated. There is no “one size fits all” model of parent faith formation that will work today.

Developing Faith Forming Skills

Congregations equip parents and grandparents with the knowledge and skills necessary for faith forming—learning how to transmit faith and values to children, becoming a Christian role model for children and adolescents, building a community of faith at home that nurtures faith growth in the young.

Parenting and Spirituality

In the *Spiritual Children* Lisa Miller identifies key findings from the growing body of research (including her own) on parenting and spirituality that can inform how we equip parents as faith formers of their children.

- A parent, grandparent, or other spiritually engaged, loving adult is equally capable of transmitting spirituality and religion to a child. The transmission comes through the child's sense of parental love and transcendent love (some call it God's love) mixed together as one felt experience.
- The intergenerational transmission of spirituality is passed through its practice, whether in personal prayer, religious observance, or other spiritual practice: an ongoing shared awareness of spiritual presence in the world. The child sees the parents' experience of spirituality, and then follows suit, while being immersed in the love of the parent.
- The parent living out spiritual values and morality together with the children guides the intergenerational transmission of lived spirituality and spiritual values. This is spirituality put into action, with care, respect, moral courage, and compassion.
- Components of intergenerational transmission of spirituality are often held in religion—through family prayer, attending services or holidays together, and other religious practices, for instance. However, they can exist and do exist outside of religion, when the spiritual value or spiritual presence in living is clear and spiritual life is made apparent by parents.
- The intergenerational transmission of spirituality is more protective than anything else against alcohol, depression, and risk taking for children.

The common thread through all of these is a child's experience of a parent's unconditional love and spiritual values together embodied in everyday interactions. This means the parent represents or acknowledges the transcendent relationship and provides a spiritual road map for living, along with a spiritual compass for doing the right thing. Intergenerational transmission of spirituality works because the child's experience and guidebook to spirituality is taught through the parent-child relationship. A child's innate natural spirituality becomes a powerful lifelong capacity through the unconditional love of the parent-child relationship. (Miller, 89-90)

Parenting Style

Reinforcing this view of the role of the parent and grandparent in transmitting spirituality and faith is the research on the influence of parenting style. We know from research that parents who are warm and affirming are more likely to have children who follow their religious preferences. This points to the importance of *parenting style* for faith transmission. Research indicates that an *authoritative-communicative parenting style* seems best suited to promoting faith transmission and nurturing faith growth.

After reviewing research studies on parenting styles and children's spirituality, Sungwon Kim summarizes the impact of parents in this way,

A variety of parental factors—religiosity, God-concept, the parent-child relationship, parenting styles, and discipline styles—influence children's spirituality, religiosity, and God-concept. Concerning the parent-child relationship, parental love, support, care, and acceptance are always required for children's healthy spiritual growth. Several studies, however showed varying results regarding parental discipline. Two key factors the research identifies are the motivation and manner of discipline. Love-oriented discipline (verse power- or punishment-oriented discipline) appears to be most helpful for the children's spiritual development. The affectionate constraint style, also known as the authoritative style, results in the most positive spiritual outcomes in children. (p. 244-45)

The parenting style that exhibits most nearly the balance between love and control is the authoritative style. Authoritative parents communicate to their children in a respectful and rational manner; the children are accepted and respected by parents. The parents value both autonomous self-will and discipline conformity; they affirm the child's present qualities but also set standards for future conduct. In sum, authoritative parents are loving and supportive, while offering and enforcing appropriate boundaries and guidelines. Recent research suggest that the principles undergirding authoritative parenting, in particular, promote children's spiritual growth and development. (p. 247)

Donna Habenicht affirms these finding and provides the following characteristics of the authoritative-communicative parenting.

Authoritative-communicative parents are seeking to follow God's model for parenting: unconditional love and grace, clear guidelines for moral values and behavior, and disciplinary action when needed.

Authoritative-communicative parents have warm relationships with their children and are considerate of and attentive to their needs. Parents are firm, patient, loving, and reasonable. They teach their children to reason and make decisions. The rights of both parents and children are respected.

Authoritative-communicative parents are interested in and involved in their children's lives. They know their kids' whereabouts, activities, and associates when away from home, and they keep up with what is happening at school. Parents and children converse daily. The children know that their parents will listen, consider, and value their opinions.

Children of authoritative-communicative parents tend to be more securely bonded to their parents. Their moral development is strong and firm. They are confident, friendly, happy, and cooperative, and they enjoy personal self-respect and self-esteem. Usually they do well academically and are achievement-oriented and success-ful. Responsible and independent, they often show leadership skills.

Usually they choose to embrace the values and the religion of the family they grew up in. A strong, reasonable conscience enables them generally to have the strength to resist peer pressure and do what they know is right. Their God is the perfect blend of mercy and justice, a God who continually loves them and draws them closer to Himself. (Habenicht, 21)

She notes that the positive effects of authoritative, directive parenting are strong for every cultural group studied. "Responsiveness or emotional closeness has cultural specific components. Children understand how their culture expresses closeness between parent and child. Regardless of how specific cultural groups define and express responsiveness, the fun-damental premise of the authoritative model that children need to feel loved, respected, and firmly guided while they are maturing into adults seems to be true for all children." (22)

Parenting Faith Practices

Marcia Bunge has identified practices from the Christian tradition that describe how parents can fulfill their duties as Christian parents. These eight practices are often mentioned in the Christian tradition as

ways to strength a child’s moral and spiritual development. These practices resonate well with the research on faith transmission and can serve as the basis of programs and resources for equipping parents and grandparents as faith formers of their young people.

1. Reading and discussing the Bible with interpretations with children
2. Participating in community worship, family rituals, and traditions of worship and prayer
3. Introducing children to good examples and mentors
4. Participating in service projects with parents or other caring adults and teaching financial responsibility
5. Singing together and exposing children to the spiritual gifts of music and the arts
6. Appreciating the natural world and cultivating a reverence for creation
7. Educating children and helping them discern their vocations
8. Fostering life-giving attitudes toward the body, sexuality, and marriage
(Bunge, 14-17)

The eight faith forming process also provide rich content for developing faith forming skills for talking about faith at home, reading the Bible and sharing Bible stories, praying at home and teaching children to prayer, teaching how to teach right from wrong (moral decision-making), celebrating rituals and holidays, participating in service at home and in the world, worshipping with the church community, and more.

Developing Skills for Parenting

Congregations provide *parent education* that develops the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents (and grandparents) for parenting children and teens, informed by the best research on effective child-rearing and parenting practices. The Developmental Relationships (Search Institute) in Strategy Seven provide an important source for developing parent education. This section presents additional sources of content and perspectives for developing parent education.

Child-Rearing Practices

In “What Makes a Good Parent?” Dr. Robert Epstein identifies the ten most effective child-rearing practices—all derived from published studies and ranked based on how well they predict a strong parent-child bond and children’s happiness, health and success.

1. *Love and affection.* Parents support and accept the child, are physically affectionate, and spend quality one-on-one time together.
2. *Stress management.* Parents take steps to reduce stress for themselves and their child, practice relaxation techniques, and promote positive interpretations of events.
3. *Relationship skills.* Parents maintain a healthy relationship with their spouse, significant other, or coparent and model effective relationship skills with other people.
4. *Autonomy and independence.* Parents treat their child with respect and encourage him or her to become self-sufficient and self-reliant.
5. *Education and learning.* Parents promote and model learning and provide educational opportunities for their child.
6. *Life skills.* Parents provide for their child, have a steady income, and plan for the future.
7. *Behavior management.* Parents make extensive use of positive reinforcement and punish only when other methods of managing behavior have failed.

8. *Health.* Parents model a healthy lifestyle and good habits, such as regular exercise and proper nutrition, for their child.
9. *Religion.* Parents support spiritual or religious development and participate in spiritual or religious activities.
10. *Safety.* Parents take precautions to protect their child and maintain awareness of the child's activities and friends.

Parenting Practices

In a meta-analysis of research studies, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) focused on the content in parent education programs that had the greatest impact on parenting approaches. Their findings point to important knowledge and skills to incorporate in parent education.

- *Teaching parents emotional communication skills.* This includes using of communication skills that enhance the parent-child relationship: developing active listening skills; and teaching parents to help children recognize their feelings, label and identify emotions, and appropriately express and deal with emotions. This also included allowing children to feel like they are part of the conversation, equal contributors to the communication process.
- *Teaching parents positive parent-child interaction skills.* This includes teaching parents to interact with their child in non-disciplinary situations (e.g., every day activities) and engaging in a child's selected and directed play activities. This can include showing parents how to demonstrate enthusiasm and provide positive attention for appropriate child behavior and choices.
- *Teaching parents discipline practice such as the correct use of time out.* This includes the correct application of time out and how it reduces the need for other forms of discipline when used correctly and consistently.
- *Teaching parents to respond consistently to their child.* This includes teaching parents the importance of consistent responses to child behavior. Parents learn to use consistent rules across settings

The CDC's analysis also included an important characteristic of effective parent education programs: *having parents practice with their own child during program sessions.* This is in contrast to training programs where no practice takes place or where parents are asked to role play with another parent or the group leader.

Agile Parenting

Bruce Feiler, the author of *The Secrets of Happy Families*, developed his ideas for effective parenting from his three-year journey to find the smartest ideas, cutting-edge research, and novel solutions to make his family happier. Instead of the usual psychologists and family "experts," he sought out the most creative minds from Silicon Valley to the country's top negotiators, from the set of the TV show *Modern Family* to the Green Berets and asked what team-building exercises and problem-solving techniques they use with their families. Feiler then tested these ideas with his own wife and children.

Through his research and practice Feiler developed the concept of an "agile family." Agile is a system of group dynamics in which teams do things in small chunks of time, adjust constantly, and review their progress frequently. Ideas don't just flow down from the top but percolate up from the bottom. The best ideas win, no matter where they come from. Many families have been using similar techniques to

improve how their families function. Agile families have a system to change and react to family chaos in real time.

The Agile Family Manifesto

1. Commit to constant improvement—innovate and practice, practice, practice.
2. Solutions exist: Don't rely solely on a family expert; talk to anyone who's an expert in making groups run smoothly. Solutions are out there—you just have to go find them.
3. Empower the children: teach them executive skills by allowing them to take a role in their own upbringing. Let them plan their own time, set weekly goals, evaluate their own progress, suggest rewards, and set appropriate punishments.
4. Parents aren't perfect: break free from the all-knowing parent and give everyone an equal say.
5. Build in flexibility: Evaluate and adapt—and always remember it's okay to change.

He decided to adapt what he learned about creating an agile family from inside his own house. He and his wife experimented with a morning list, and then presented the idea to their girls. Together, they assembled their list, creating a homemade poster and a daily chore chart. In the first week alone, the Feilers cut parental screaming in half. Soon they began holding a weekly family meeting. After some trial and error—learning to ask the right questions—something amazing happened. Bruce and Linda began to see into their daughters' emotional lives and their deepest thoughts and feelings. "When Linda and I adopted the agile blueprint with our daughters, weekly family meetings quickly became the single most impactful idea we introduced into our lives since the birth of our children. They became the centerpiece around which we organized our family. And they transformed our relationships with our kids—and each other—in ways we never could have imagined," Bruce explains.

In addition to the practices of developing a morning checklist and holding weekly family meetings, Feiler describes how to rethink the family dinner (what you talk about is more important than what you eat), create a family mission statement, resolve conflicts through negotiation, set an allowance (like Warren Buffet manages money), have difficult conversations and keep talking, share the family history, to name a few of the practices in the book. Feiler's TED Talk, "Agile Programming for Your Family" (https://www.ted.com/talks/bruce_feiler_agile_programming_for_your_family) presents the key concepts and his book *The Secrets of Happy Families* (William Morrow, 2013).

Generation X and Millennial Parenting Styles

Generation X parents (born 1962/64-1979) and Millennial parents (born 1980-1999) have distinct parenting styles that reflect their generational experiences as well as the current world in which their children are growing up. Parent education programs and activities need to be responsive to the concerns, interests, and approaches of Gen X and Millennial parents. (See Chapter Two for more information.)

Generation X parents approach child-rearing as a set of tangible practices that will keep their children safe, reasonably happy, well-behaved, and ready to take on life's challenges. They practice protective parenting. Gen X parents approach child-rearing like any other technique—there must be a good way and a bad way to get the job done. They are also much more scientific—books and other resources need to show that there's empirical evidence favoring one way over another, because skeptical Xers don't take advice on faith. Gen X parents are practicing more traditional bedtimes and scheduled mealtimes and playtimes. They want to create a family life with more order and structure (than they may have had when they were growing up). Gen X parents are focused on control. They often have an extreme distrust of institutions—really, of anyone and everything outside their inner circle of family and friends.

Combine that with the tight bonds they have with their children, and you get parents who demand control, options, transparency and oversight. When volunteering, they tend to choose roles that allow them to supervise what's happening directly. They advocate for whatever helps their own kid.

Millennial parents, reflecting their values of individuality and self-expression, focus more on a democratic approach to family management, encouraging their children to be open-minded, empathetic, and questioning—and teaching them to be themselves and try new things. They are moving away from the overscheduled days of their youth, preferring a more responsive, less directorial approach to activities. Helicopter parenting is frowned upon by Millennials, who are now developing a new technique as “‘drone -parenting’—the parents still hover, but they’re following and responding to their kids more than directing and scheduling them.” Instead of hyper directing their kids, many researchers believe, there’s a focus among today’s millennial parents on a democratic approach to family-management—constantly canvassing their children for their opinions. “Open-minded” “Empathetic” and “Questioning” are the qualities Millennial parents most want for their children.

Parenting and Technology

One of the emerging areas of parent education is equipping parents with the knowledge and skills for managing technology in their families. Alexandra Samuel spent two years conducting a series of surveys on how families manage technology. Her findings revealed that parents could be roughly divided into three groups based on how they limit or guide their kids’ screen time. *Digital Limiters* raise their children offline and prefer to keep their children away from the Internet. *Digital Enablers* trust their own children online and give them plenty of screen time and access to devices. *Digital Mentors* guide their children online, enjoy spending time online with their children, cultivate their children’s digital skills, and foster online learning.

Samuel found that *digital mentors*, in fact, may be the parents who are most successful in preparing their kids for a world filled with screens, working actively to shape their kids’ online skills and experiences. Mentors are more likely than limiters to talk with their kids about how to use technology or the Internet responsibly. They’re also more likely to research specific devices or programs for their kids; and they’re also the most likely to connect with their kids through technology, rather than in spite of it. (See Chapter Two for more information.)

The American Academy of Pediatrics developed ten tips for helping parents manage the digital landscape—all of which could be content in a parent education program. (For the complete presentation go to: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Tips-for-Parents-Digital-Age.aspx>)

1. Treat media as you would any other environment in your child’s life. The same parenting guidelines apply in both real and virtual environments. Set limits; kids need and expect them. Know your children’s friends, both online and off. Know what platforms, software, and apps your children are using, where they are going on the web, and what they are doing online.
2. Set limits and encourage playtime. Tech use, like all other activities, should have reasonable limits. Unstructured and offline play stimulates creativity. Make unplugged playtime a daily priority, especially for very young children.
3. Families who play together, learn together. Family participation is also great for media activities—it encourages social interactions, bonding, and learning. Play a video game with your kids.

4. Be a good role model. Teach and model kindness and good manners online. And, because children are great mimics, limit your own media use.
5. Know the value of face-to-face communication. Very young children learn best through two-way communication. Research has shown that it's that "back-and-forth conversation" that improves language skills—much more so than "passive" listening or one-way interaction with a screen.
6. Create tech-free zones. Keep family mealtimes and other family and social gatherings tech-free. Recharge devices overnight—outside your child's bedroom. These changes encourage more family time, healthier eating habits, and better sleep, all critical for children's wellness.
7. Don't use technology as an emotional pacifier. Media can be very effective in keeping kids calm and quiet, but it should not be the only way they learn to calm down.
8. Apps for kids – do your homework. Look to organizations like Common Sense Media for reviews about age-appropriate apps, games, and programs to guide you in making the best choices for your children.
9. It's OK for your teen to be online. Online relationships are part of typical adolescent development. Social media can support teens as they explore and discover more about themselves and their place in the grown-up world. Just be sure your teen is behaving appropriately in both the real and online worlds.
10. Remember: Kids will be kids. Kids will make mistakes using media. Try to handle errors with empathy and turn a mistake into a teachable moment.

Creating a Plan for Parent Formation and Education

How can congregations equip, resource, and support parents and grandparents to be faith formers of their children, adolescents, and emerging adults by promoting their growth in faith, teaching the skills for parenting for faith growth, and developing their competence and confidence as parents.

Content for Parent Programming

The first content area is the **spiritual and religious growth of parents**. This content will need to be tailored to the four spiritual-religious identities of parents and to the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the particular Christian tradition. The characteristics of mature Christian faith embraced by highly religious parents (from "The Study of Exemplary Congregations in Youth Ministry) provides direction parent faith formation: developing a relationship and commitment to Jesus, experiencing the presence of God in daily life and relationships with others, praying, having Christian moral and ethical values to decide what is right or wrong, serving those in need and applying faith in the world, growing spiritually, and developing a well-informed Christian faith (Bible, Christian beliefs).

The second content area is **developing the faith forming skills of parents**. This would include an understanding of and skills for developing an authoritative parenting style; understanding the characteristics of each life cycle stage (see Chapter Five), skills for faith growth, and confidence in sharing faith with the young. The practices identified by Marcia Bunge can serve as the basis for parent programming that engaging parents in learning how to read and discuss the Bible with interpretations; participating in community worship, family rituals, and traditions of worship and prayer; participating in service projects; exposing children to the spiritual gifts of music and the arts; appreciating the natural world and cultivating a reverence for creation; educating children and helping them discern their vocations; and fostering life-giving attitudes toward the body, sexuality, and marriage.

The third area is specific **knowledge and skills for parenting** the young and building strong families. Based on the research from the Search Institute on Developmental Relationships (Strategy Seven) and in this section we can identify important themes for parent education.

- Expressing care, love, affection, and support for children
- Balancing time and commitments, managing stress
- Practicing healthy relationships
- Disciplining children and learning discipline practices
- Creating a warm, caring supportive family.
- Set boundaries and high expectations for children
- Managing technology and media use
- Challenging children to grow and continuously improve
- Providing support to help children complete tasks and achieve goals
- Sharing power with children so that their voice is heard and they share in making decisions.
- Expanding possibilities and connecting children to opportunities for growth
- Developing emotional communication skills
- Developing positive parent-child interaction skills
- Learning to respond consistently to their child
- Developing the skills and practices for agile parenting

Guides for Developing Parent Programming

1. Address diverse spiritual-religious identities of parents. Parent formation need to be responsive to the needs, interests, concerns of parents and families in each of the four spiritual-religious types—Engaged, Occasional, Spiritual, Unaffiliated. There is no “one size fits all” model of parent faith formation that will work today.

2. Have parents practice new skills with their own children during program sessions. This one of the CDC’s conclusions about important characteristics of effective parent education programs. This is in contrast to training programs where no practice takes place or where parents are asked to role play with another parent or the group leader.

3. Give parents a plan. Reggie Joiner and the Think Orange team emphasize how important it is to give families a plan. “When parents show up at church, they are often asking silent questions that we must answer; questions they don’t even know they’re asking. To begin looking at parents through a different filter, imagine that every time a parent walks through the door, he or she is asking you to do three things:

1. *Give me the plan.* Most parents are parenting reactively, yet many of them desire to be proactive. They want a plan that will give them a system of support, consistent influence, and a steady flow of relevant information. In essence, what they need from the church is a partner.
2. *Show me how it works.* Parents need to be influences as much as children do, and they desire to be engaged in the process in a way that prompts them to take the best next step. Church leadership has the potential to challenge them collectively and give them a network of families to connect with personally.
3. *Tell me what to do today.* If we are going to truly partner with parents, we have to give them specific instructions or resources to use this week. Sometimes parents have a lack of vision,

but often they just don't know where to start. Give parents a map and a schedule. (Joiner 2010, 89-90)

4. Address the levels of partnership with parents. Every parent is a partner with the congregation and faith formation, but they may be partnering with you at different levels. These four levels help clarify how parents are already partnering so you can move them toward a strategic goal. It is important to *act like every parent will do something*.

- *Aware:* These parents are concerned about a particular situation or development. These parents are outside the church but open to it, and they're interested in becoming better parents because they genuinely care their families.
- *Involved:* These parents have a basic or entry-level relationship with the church. Even if it's just bringing their young people to church, these parents are taking steps to influence their young people's spirituality.
- *Engaged:* These parents are committed to partnering with the church. They are growing in their relationships with God and assume some responsibility for spiritual leadership in the home. They represent a wide spectrum of diverse stages of faith and experience.
- *Invested:* These parents proactively devote time and energy to partnering with the church. They understand and value the strategy of your ministry. They are in community with Christians and can help in key leadership roles and encouraging other parents. (Joiner 2010, 87-90)

Not every parent will be invested. The goal is to help those who are Aware and Involved to at least become engaged. Aware and Involved parents have a lot of untapped potential. Congregations need to help them become more engaged parents.

5. Design programs that engage parents in the learning experience. Parent programs need to have content that is relevant to parents and processes that help parents learn and want to participate in new learning. Here are several tips for designing and leading effective educational experiences for parents.

- Create a supportive, caring environment for learning. Greet parents, provide time for them to get acquainted with one another, and encourage mutual support during and after the experience.
- Actively engage parents in the learning. The amount they learn will be in direct proportion to how much they put into the experience.
- Let parents be the experts. Show that you value their knowledge and experience by giving them opportunities to contribute to the learning experience.
- Tie the learning activities around the parents' experiences and values so they know "this is for me and about my family."
- Focus the content on real needs, issues, and concerns, not just on content that parents ought to know. If, for example, you want to help parents teach their child/teen about healthy concepts of right and wrong, first identify the ways this connects with parents' needs or concerns regarding moral values, then develop the experience to reflect those concerns.
- Include information and skills parents can put into action immediately. Such application [reinforces and helps parents internalize what they learn.
- Demonstrate how to use skills and practices during the program so that parents have a direct experience of how to use the skills or practice at home.

- Provide resources that parents can use for their own personal growth and with their family. Consider developing a parent website with resources and links to websites to enhance and expand the learning experience.

6. Use a variety of environments and methods to engage all parents, anytime and anywhere, in a variety of settings—independent, mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, church-wide, in the community, and in the world. The seven environments provide a way to offer a diversity of programs in different learning environment, as well as to offer the same program content in multiple learning environments—all of which provides parents with more options to participate and broadens the scope of parent formation and education offerings. (See Chapter Seven for descriptions and examples of each environment.)

7. Use online platforms and digitally enabled strategies by blend gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilize the abundance of digital media and tools for parent formation and education—to engage parents anytime, anyplace, and just-in-time—and extend and expand faith formation from physical, face-to-face settings into their daily lives through digital content and mobile delivery systems.

Online platforms for parent (websites) integrate the content (programs, activities, resources), connect people to the content and to each other, provide continuity for people across different learning experiences, and make everything available anytime, anywhere, 24x7x365. Digital media tools and resources—social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and more), webinars and online learning, video conferencing, videos, audio podcasts, and much more—provide more features in designing parent programs, more methods for delivering programs, and more ways to connecting parents to each other.

Blended learning models provide ways to integrate online and face-to-face learning in a variety of ways—from online programs with minimal interaction in physical settings to programs in physical settings that utilize online content or extend the program using online content. There are least five ways to blend online and gathered. (See Chapter Seven for descriptions and examples of the five ways.)

- Gathered program using online content from websites, podcasts, videos, blogs and other social media.
- Gathered program with online content that extends and deepens the experience with additional resources for learning
- Online and gathered programming in one design with substantial program content (that people would have experienced in the gathered setting) in an online platform using digital media (print, audio, video, apps, websites) that parents can experience at their own pace and time in preparation for a gathered session that emphasizes interaction, demonstration, practice, and application.
- Mostly online learning program with occasional opportunities for interaction in a gathered setting, web conference, or other formats.
- Fully online learning program that provides a variety of ways to learn independently, with a mentor, or a small group that that makes available a variety of resources, such as online courses, activities, print and e-books, audio podcasts, video programs, and content-rich websites.

Ideas for Parent Programming

Using the content and guides for creating a parenting plan, congregations can curate and create parent programming—activities, resources (print, audio, video, digital, online) that applies to all parents and that is specific to the life cycle stages: young children, older children, young adolescents, older adolescents, and emerging adults. These ideas can be used with all three components of empowering parents and grandparents to be *faith formers* of young people: 1) promoting their growth in faith, 2) teaching the skills for parenting for faith growth, and 3) developing their competence and confidence as parents. All of the ideas below can be targeted to specific life cycle stages: young children, older children, young adolescents, older adolescents, and young adulthood.

1. An **online parent website** or a parent component of a family faith formation website can provide parents online learning experiences (workshops, webinars, courses, audio podcasts, video programs) that 1) promote their growth in faith, 2) teach skills for parenting for faith growth, and 3) develop their skills as parents. A website can provide parents with resources in all three content areas in a variety of media: print, audio, video, apps, games, links to selected parent websites, and more. The website can also extend learning from gathered parent programs. A great example of a website designed for parents ParentFurther (<http://www.parentfurther.com>). The website can include original program created by the congregation and curated programming from other sources. Digital initiatives, such as the website or webinars, provide a way to reach a wider audience of parents in the community.
2. **Parent programs**—in gathered settings (large group or small group) or online (webinars, online courses, video programs)—can be created and curated to 1) promote their growth in faith, 2) teach skills for parenting for faith growth, and 3) develop their skills as parents, using the content suggested in this Strategy. Parent programs can be organized in partnership with other churches and community organizations.
 - Develop a progression of parent workshops, webinars, or courses through the life cycle as children and adolescents enter a new stage of life: 1) birth: parenting young children, 2) start of school: parenting older children, 3) parenting young adolescents, 4) parenting older adolescents, and 5) parenting emerging adults.
 - Incorporate parent formation and education into congregational events that already engage parents, such as parent preparation programs for baptism, first communion or confirmation. They can be incorporated into the celebration of milestones (see Strategy Three).
 - Provide targeted programs of theological and biblical formation for parents and grandparents in a variety of learning formats to make it easy for them to access the opportunities: independent (online), mentored, at home, in small groups, in large groups, or church-wide. Incorporate a parent component into an adult faith formation program so that the specific needs of parents can be address.
 - Add a parent-only component to family-intergenerational learning programs which address parent faith formation or skills development while their children are participating in child-focused activities; and then gather them together for a shared experience of put into practice what they learned.
 - Add a parallel parent experience to the existing children and adolescent program where parents can gather occasionally for a targeted program while their children are in age-specific programs.
 - Add a parent component to vacation Bible school in the evenings or online.

- Provide online faith formation for parents using college and seminary programs, and organizations such as ChurchNext (<https://www.churchnext.tv>) which offers hundreds of short online courses in spiritual and faith enrichment.
3. **Laboratory experiences** that immerse parents in hands-on experiences—with or without their children—can teach knowledge and skills for faith forming and parenting. A family-centered worship experience can be an opportunity to teach parents about worship, reading the Bible, and how to do these things at home. A church-wide service day can be an opportunity to teach parents about the biblical basis of service and how to integrate service into family life. A church year seasonal celebration can be an opportunity to teach about ritual and how to celebrate rituals and church year seasons at home. These immersion experiences can be supported with online content for parents and for the whole family.
 4. **Parent mentors** can provide guidance and support for parents and the whole family at each stage of life. Every congregation has mentor resources in the grandparent generation, who are actively engaged in church and bring decades of parenting and family life experiences. Congregations can identify and provide training for mentors (mentoring skills, understanding today’s family, learning how to access online resources and activities, and more). Developing relationships between parents and mentors can begin with birth/baptism. Mentoring can be life-cycle specific—mentors who focus on children or adolescents. Churches can also identify mentors (spiritual guides) who attend to people’s spiritual life—guiding them in growing in their relationship with God and learning more about the Christian faith.
 5. **Life cycle support groups for parents**—in gathered settings (church, home, community) and in online groups (such as a Facebook parents group)—provide opportunities for parents with children in the same age group to talk about parenting, get information and encouragement, discuss family life issues and challenges, and more. Congregations can also sponsor support groups for divorced parents, parents in blended families, parents of children with special needs, and other affinity groupings. An example of a life cycle support group is MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers). Go to their website to learn more about <http://www.mops.org>.
 6. **A parent catechumenate**—developed around marriage, baptism, first communion, and or confirmation—recognizes that milestone events can be “moments of return” for married couples and parents. These milestone events are an opportunity for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith and to encounter Jesus and the Good News. The *Catechumenate* of the early church, now restored for the contemporary church, provides a guided process moving from evangelization (inquiry) to catechesis (formation) to spiritual discernment (during Lent) to a ritual celebration of commitment (Baptism-Eucharist-Confirmation at the Easter Vigil) to post-baptismal faith formation (mystagogy). The catechumenal process offers a multi-faceted formation process: participation in the life of the faith community, education in Scripture and the Christian tradition, apprenticeship in the Christian life, intimate connection with the liturgy and rituals of the church, moral formation, development of a life of prayer, and engagement in actions of justice and service. The journey from inquiry through formation to commitment and a life of discipleship within a faith community is a process that can be applied to all types of situations and settings for people of all ages.

Congregations can create a “catechumenate for parents” around key milestone—engaging parents in a multi-faceted formation process along side the preparation of their young people. This formation process could be an introduction to the Christian faith for some, and an enrichment program for others. It would include all of the elements of the catechumenate adapted for parents and could take

place over a twelve month timeframe. In addition to faith formation, workshops could be included that focus on skills for parenting for faith growth.

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Online Resource Center: Reimagine Faith Formation

Articles, models, strategies, and resources for family faith formation can be found in the **Family** section on the *Reimagine Faith Formation* website developed by LifelongFaith Associates: www.reimaginefaithformation.com.