

Faith That Lasts a Lifetime

The Well Conference 2025

Part 1. Seeing the Big Picture: Faith for a Lifetime

1. Thinking Systemically about Faith Formation
2. Vision and Goals for Maturing in Faith

Part 2. Principles & Practices of Faith Formation

1. Guiding Principles and Practices
2. Emerging Practices
 - Faith Pathways
 - Christian Practices
 - Accompaniment
 - Agency

Part 3. Envisioning Faith Formation in the First Two Decades of Life

1. Life Tasks & Faith Development : A Three Decade View
2. Faith Formation with Parents and Families
3. Faith Formation with Children
4. Faith formation with Young People
5. Intergenerational Faith Formation
6. “Front Porch” Faith Forming Experiences

Part 4. Designing Faith Formation

Resource: Implementing a New Initiative

The Switch Framework (Chip and Dan Heath)
The Reset Framework (Dan Heath)

Resources

Lifelong Faith Website: www.LifelongFaith.com

Conference Materials: <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/the-well-conference.html>

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Part 1. Seeing the Big Picture: Faith for a Lifetime

1. Thinking Systemically about Faith Formation

In an age of dramatic change we need to re-think the system of faith formation in churches – a system we have inherited from prior eras.

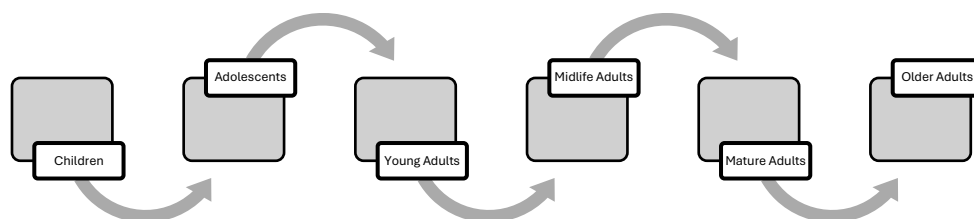
Consider some the questions that we have been asking about children, youth, families – for a long time. For example:

- ◆ *How do we make sure our families are practicing their faith at home and bringing their children to church and classes?*
- ◆ *How can we keep our teens involved in church?*
- ◆ *How do we involve young adults who have left our churches?*
- ◆ *How do we get more people to come to Sunday worship and get involved in church life?*

While the initiatives that are created in response to questions like these may be excellent, they are not systemic. They make us think the problem lies with the people – teens or young adults or parents –and all we need to do is design something to “fix” the problem.

We don’t have a program or people failure. We have systems problem. *We have a religious belonging challenge; a religious identity challenge; a religious content challenge, and an educational approaches and methods challenge.* Nothing short of re-thinking everything we do will address these challenges. We need a new 21st century system of faith forming with people of all ages.

Systems thinking is a way of helping us view a church’s faith forming systems from a broad perspective that includes seeing the whole life span and the context of people’s lives today, rather than seeing only specific issues or concerns (e.g., we’ve got to solve the youth problem). By focusing on the entire system of faith formation, we can attempt to identify solutions that address as many problems as possible in the system. The positive effect of those solutions leverages improvement throughout the system. Thus, they are called “leverage points” in the system. This priority on the entire system and its leverage points is called whole systems thinking.



How Can We Think Systemically and Create Leverage Points?

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

First, become goal-centered, rather than program-centered. Envision your church’s goals for maturing in faith for lifetime and design faith formation to make these goals a reality in people’s lives. *Toward what ends or goals are your church’s faith formation efforts directed? What is your*

church trying to accomplish in the lives of people at each stage of life from childhood to older adulthood?

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

Third, start early in life and engage the whole family (three generations: children, parents, and grandparents) throughout the childhood years. We need to start early in the family and build a foundation for a life of faith in the new generation if we hope to address the decline in passing on faith from generation to generation. In most churches, it would be a systemic change to shift priorities and energies to focus on families with young children (0-5 years old) and families with grade school children – moving beyond a “classroom” approach to engage the whole family—at church and at home. We need to enrich the faith life of parents and grandparents and equip them to transmit the Christian faith to the young.

Fourth, design faith formation for the unique spiritual and religious profiles of people today. We need to stop agonizing over the change in religious practice and belonging, and address people where they are. We need to personalize our approaches so that we offer content and methods that specifically respond to the diverse spiritual and religious lives of people today: Active Believers, Believers, Inactive Believers, Non Believers.

Fifth, move from one-size-fits-all programming to a variety of experiences, activities, content, programs for diverse needs and interests; in a variety of formats (on-your-own learning, mentored, small group, large group, church-wide, in the community); with gathered in-person, online, and hybrid models of faith formation. Develop menus of faith formation experiences from which people can select.

What Is your current “system” of faith formation
How can you begin to think more systemically?

2. Maturing in Faith

Faith grows and matures over a lifetime as people come to know, love, and serve God. The Christian faith is above all a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and a commitment to follow his way of life. Christian faith is living the holistic faith that Jesus taught, modelled, and made possible. Learning how to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ is a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ.

- ◆ *What's your vision for lifelong maturing in faith? Your church's vision?*
- ◆ *What are your goals for maturing in faith – for developing committed Christians who are growing in faith and discipleship? Your church's goals?*
- ◆ *How does your vision and goals guide the development of faith formation with children, young people, and families?*

Goals for Faith Maturing

What would it be like to develop faith formation around goals for maturing in faith? Here is an example of ten goals, drawn from the Christian tradition and research insights on what promotes faith growth, that when taken together, describe a person maturing in faith.

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

Guided by a “goals approach” we can ask what we need to do to help faith and discipleship flourish in the lives of our people from childhood through older adulthood. This is a huge shift in emphasis from our current church-centric focus on providing curriculum, courses, classes, programs, and activities—often with little reference to how we see faith flourishing at each stage of life. This change of focus reflects a significant shift from a provider-centered, program- and content-driven approach to a *person-centered* approach to faith formation. Becoming goal-centered opens up multiple ways (activities, methods, programs) to promote faith and discipleship through developmentally-appropriate faith forming experiences at each stage of life.

What are your goals for maturing in faith – for developing committed Christians who are growing in faith and discipleship?

Goals Guiding Practice

How does faith formation in your church address the goals?

Explore how your goals are being practiced in your church today by creating a profile of your current faith formation programs, activities, and initiatives. Use a simple chart like the one below to organize your profile. List your goals in column one and then identify what your church is currently doing to implement each goal with families and age groups. Record your responses by recreating the template below on a large sheet of paper or by creating a spreadsheet and printing your profile.

Goals	Family	Children (0-10)	Youth (11-19)	Young Adults (20s-30s)	Midlife Adults (40s-50s)	Mature Adults (60s-70s)	Older Adults (80+)
1.							
2.							
Etc.							

Analyze Your Profile

Strengths

- ✦ What are the strengths in your current faith formation with families and age groups?
- ✦ Which goals are being addressed most effectively with families and life stages?

Improve or Expand

- ✦ Which goals need to be addressed more effectively by strengthening or improving faith formation programs, activities, and experiences?
- ✦ What needs to be expanded or extended to reach and engage more people?

Stop

- ✦ What do we need to stop doing?

Initiate

- ✦ What do you need to start doing? What new initiatives need to be created to address gaps, respond to new needs and challenges, engage new audiences?

Part 2. Principles & Practices of Faith Formation

1. Guiding Principles and Practices

- ✦ Faith formation is accompaniment, education, and formation in the faith and for the faith – for the whole of life.
- ✦ Faith formation promotes a living encounter with Christ – mind, heart, and body – forming people in getting to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel of liberating salvation, choosing Jesus’ way of life, and living the mission of Christ in the world today. Learning how to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ is a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ.
- ✦ Faith formation incorporates knowing and understanding more fully the Christian faith (*informing*), developing and deepening a relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community (*forming*), and living the Christian faith in every aspect of one’s life (*transforming*).
- ✦ Faith formation incorporates three essential environments for faith maturing at each stage of life. Throughout the year children, young people, and their families experience faith forming programs, activities, and relationships in all three environments.
 - *Intergenerational relationships and faith forming experiences in the faith community*
 - *Family faith forming experiences – at home and at church*
 - *Life stage/age group/peer group faith forming experiences*

- ✦ Faith formation is responsive to the diversity in the religious-spiritual lives of people today – personalizing faith formation to address their spiritual-religious needs and journeys.
 - *Active Believers* who have a vibrant faith and relationship with God and are engaged in a faith community.
 - *Believers* who participate occasionally in a faith community and whose faith is less central to their daily lives.
 - *Inactive Believers* who are not involved in a faith community, but may value and live a spiritual life.
 - *Inactive Nonbelievers* who have little need for God or religion.

- ✦ Faith formation guides people in interpreting their life experiences in the light of the Gospel, in order to make the Christian message intelligible to people of all ages utilizing a methodology of life experience to faith tradition to life application:
 - *Life experience*: Acknowledging and understanding the real-world contexts in which people live; and recognizing that education and formation should be relevant to people’s lives and experiences.
 - *Faith tradition*: Presenting the Bible and Christian tradition and teachings, and helping people develop a deeper understanding of their faith and how it can inform their thoughts, actions, and decisions.
 - *Life application*: Encouraging people to apply their faith and learning to their real-life situations; seeing how faith can be lived in various aspects of life, including relationships, family, work, community, and the world.

- ✦ Faith formation utilizes a variety of processes and methods for educating and forming people in the faith and for the life of faith in ways that are developmentally-appropriate. Faith formation offers a diversity in programming to address the lives of people:
 - A variety of learning methods to address the whole person and how he or she learns best
 - A menu of faith formation experiences for individuals and families
 - A variety of content, experiences, activities
 - A variety of formats: on your own, mentored, at home, small group, large group, community-wide formats
 - A variety of settings: in-person, online, and hybrid
 - A variety of schedules by offering programming in synchronous and asynchronous modes and making programming available anytime and anywhere

What are the principles and practices that guide faith formation in your church?

How do (or could) these principles and practices inform your approach to faith formation with children, young people, parents, and/or the entire family?

What would you add or adapt?

2. Emerging Practices in Faith Formation

#1. Faith Pathways

We are addressing a greater diversity of faith and practice today – from active and engaged Christians to those who are not (or no longer) believers in God. Our challenge is to personalize our approach around the lives of people by providing them with “faith pathways” that help them discern where they are in their faith journey and chart a path for faith growth that helps them grow into a deeper relationship with Jesus and practice of the Christian faith. Personalizing faith formation gives people an active role in moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth.

We can design faith formation experiences that are responsive to each religious profile:

- ✦ *Active Believers* who have a vibrant faith and relationship with God and are engaged in a faith community.
- ✦ *Believers* who participate occasionally in a church community and whose faith is less central to their daily lives.
- ✦ *Inactive Believers* who are not involved in a church community, but may value and live a spiritual life.
- ✦ *Inactive Nonbelievers* who have little need for God and religion.

We can guide parents, families with children, young people, and adults in discerning where they are in their faith journey; helping them chart a path for faith growth; and providing faith formation experiences, programs, activities, and resources tailored to their religious needs with a variety of times, places, and ways to participate.

Faith formation can be developed as a *menu of faith forming experiences* with wider variety of content, experiences, and activities to help people grow and mature in faith and discipleship that is responsive to their needs. For example:

- ✦ “Taste and see” experiences
- ✦ “Refresher” experiences
- ✦ “Growing” experiences
- ✦ “Going deeper” experiences

A menu approach has 1) a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources; 2) a variety of formats—on your own, mentored, small groups, and large groups; 3) a variety of times to participate and scheduling options (synchronous and asynchronous); and 4) a variety of settings: hybrid, online, and gathered modes of programming.

Parents, children with their parents, and young people can select from a menu to create their plan for the year or a season. For example:

- ✦ Select two in-person programs (mini course, one-day program, retreat, etc.) chosen from a list of offerings.
- ✦ Engage in one service activity or project – alone or with a small group – chosen from a list of projects, followed by an online session to debrief the service experience.
- ✦ Participate with other generations in a church-wide activity or take a leadership role in a church-wide activity.
- ✦ Participate in two liturgical experiences with the whole community.

- ◆ Develop a daily prayer practice by participating in a retreat experience and using the online resources.

#2. Christian Practice

Jesus's first disciples called themselves "followers of the Way" and the first name given to the church is the "Way" or the "Journey" (see Acts 9:2, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, 22). To live as a follower of Jesus and the Way we are called to embrace him as our teacher, to seek wisdom and understanding for what the path and cost of discipleship entails. To be a follower means entering a lifelong process of learning from Jesus, to come to know who and what Jesus is, and what Jesus is claiming about God's call to community and mission. Christianity is a "way," a path, a way of life. Practice is about the living of the Christian way.

How do we offer a compelling vision of an integral way of life that is worth living?

How shall we live the Christian way of life in this time?

How do we form people in a Christian way of life today?

People come to faith and grow in faith and in the life of faith by participating in the practices of the Christian community. And they learn these Christian practices not only through experience but through the guidance, mentoring, and teaching of other Christians who live these practices.

Consider what it takes to be an actor, musician, artist, dancer, writer, or athlete. They all require developing skills, performing, thinking, and practicing over and over again. While singers and musicians must learn music theory, that is not enough. They have to actually play the instrument and practice. An artist may know art history and the different forms and styles of painting, but the artist must actually paint and continue to do so to master his or her craft. We have a lot to learn from their example.

The following Christian practices emerge repeatedly in the Bible and Christian tradition and have demonstrated their importance in forming a distinctively Christian way of life. These practices are illustrative of the wisdom available to us that speaks to the challenges of living faithfully today. (See also: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/faith/a-methodist-way-of-life/visit-every-station>).

- ◆ Caring for Creation
- ◆ Discernment
- ◆ Doing Justice
- ◆ Forgiveness and being reconciled
- ◆ Giving generously
- ◆ Healing
- ◆ Interpreting the Bible
- ◆ Keeping Sabbath
- ◆ Praying – alone and together
- ◆ Peace and reconciliation
- ◆ Providing hospitality and care
- ◆ Criticizing and resisting forces that destroy life
- ◆ Serving the poor and vulnerable
- ◆ Suffering with and for one another
- ◆ Witnessing and giving testimony
- ◆ Worshipping God

We form people in these practices of the Christian way of life by. . .

- ◆ drawing upon the wisdom of the Bible and Christian tradition
- ◆ connecting the practices to the “signs of the times”—the struggles, joys, needs, and hungers of people and communities today
- ◆ immersing people in the practices through faith formation, the life of the community, mentoring relationships, apprenticeships and internships
- ◆ equipping people with the knowledge, skills, and ways to live the practices in their daily life

There are a variety of ways to immerse (young) people in learning and living Christian practices. Here are two examples:

- ◆ *Christian practice apprenticeships*: Identify “practice mentors” in your church, who are living embodiments of a Christian practice, such as service or hospitality or prayer. Develop formation programs around these mentors in individualized and small group settings where mentors can apprentice young people who want to learn how to live the Christian practice. For example, if people wanted to learn how to serve people in need at the local homeless shelter, they could accompany the “practice mentor” when he or she works at the shelter and learn about homelessness and the practice of hospitality and serving others. If a young person wants to learn how to pray they can be mentored by an adult who has a vibrant prayer life. Each apprenticeship can include a study component to learn about the teachings and examples from the Bible and Christian tradition.
- ◆ *Christian practice learning programs*: Through courses, workshops, retreats, action projects, field trips, and practice-focused small groups, provide people with learning experiences that include:
 1. Preparing people with the Scriptural and theological understanding of the practice
 2. Engaging people in hands-on experience of the practice (with peers or intergenerationally)
 3. Reflecting on the experience and its meaning for them
 4. Integrating the practice into their daily lives

#3. Accompaniment

The art of accompaniment involves. . .

- listening and entering in the dynamics of human growth: its questions, concerns, experiences, situations
- becoming a traveling companion with patience and a sense of gradualness
- listening to the joys and hopes of young people and situating their joys and hopes in relation to the Gospel of Jesus
- guiding children, young people, and parents in maturing in the Christian life and the journey toward God through the processes of formation
- giving ample time, space and freedom so that God can move in their lives

Accompaniment in faith formation is about journeying alongside young people as they grow spiritually. It involves mentorship, personalized guidance, community support, and a commitment to helping the young person grow in their relationship with God, integrate faith into all aspects of life, and live their faith in daily life.

Accompaniment occurs when one Christian becomes a companion to another to help that seeker pay attention to what God might be asking of him or her in a specific situation in life. In “the companionship of accompaniment,” we walk with each other, listening without judgment or rejection. We help each other form, listen to, and follow our conscience. By this method we help each other find a home in the family of God. (Bill Huebsch)

How do we accompany parents, children, and young people in their faith journeys?

#4. Agency

Young people and young adults are turning to a wide range of traditions, practices, and beliefs when asking and answering important questions about their faith: What do I believe? Who am I? What is my purpose in the world? What practices have value?

Religious young people are not relying on a single religious tradition or organization to form and inform their beliefs and practices. Instead they mix together things from various traditions, religious and otherwise.

Faith Unbundled is a term that describes the way young people increasingly construct their faith by combining elements such as beliefs, identity, practices, and community from a variety of religious and non-religious sources, rather than receiving all these things from a single, intact system, or tradition. (Springtide Research Institute)

Religious agency for young people and young adults allows them to be active participants in their spiritual lives, granting them the authority to shape their own religious identities.

Agency, in essence, is about empowerment—having the ability and the freedom to choose and to act in a way that reflects one's own faith, values, and goals.

How do we support young people in exploring, questioning, and expressing their faith on their own terms, while drawing on the riches of the Christian tradition and church community?

How do we empower, equip, and support young people in constructing their religious/spiritual identity, in acquiring the skills for taking ownership of their religious beliefs, and in developing the practices for living their faith in the world.

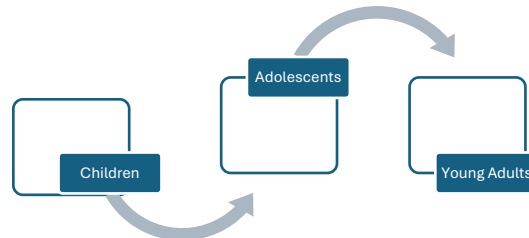
Which of these four emerging practices affirmed your current practice of faith formation with children, young people, parents and the family?

Which of these four emerging practices challenged your current practice?

How could you apply these practices in your church?

Part 3. Envisioning Faith Formation with Children and Young People

#1. Life Tasks & Faith Development: A Three-Decade View



Children (0-10): Experiencing

- ✦ Building on their innate spiritual sense
- ✦ Experiencing faith
- ✦ Discovery and creativity
- ✦ Meaning-making: processing experiences and making meaning of them
- ✦ Belonging (affiliating) to a faith community
- ✦ Being immersed into faith practices at church and home
- ✦ Living faith at home
- ✦ Experiencing intergenerational relationships and faith forming experiences

How do we understand the major life tasks and faith development of children?

How does children's faith formation provide a foundation for the second decade of life?

Young People (11-19): Constructing

- ✦ Constructing a faith identity (who am I and what do I believe)
- ✦ Finding a place in a faith community and in the world
- ✦ Finding meaning and purpose
- ✦ Developing agency
- ✦ Exploring how to live – what practices have value in my life
- ✦ Developing significant, trusted relationships
- ✦ Discovering how to make a difference

How do we understand the major life tasks and faith development of young people?

How do we prepare adolescents for the third decade of life?

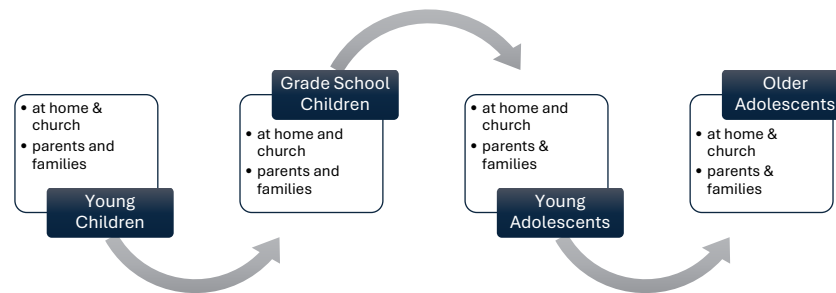
Young Adults (20s): Integrating

- ✦ Integrating beliefs and practices into an identity
- ✦ Developing personal spiritual practices
- ✦ Developing a way of life and faith practices
- ✦ Finding a community to belong to

How do you see the major life/religious tasks of each stage?

What would you add or revise?

#2. Faith Formation with Parents & Families



1. Insights from Research

Focus on Parents

Parents are the most significant influence on the religious and spiritual outcomes of young people.

The parental factors that make a significant difference in promoting faith in children and youth include: a parents' personal faith and practice, a close and warm parent-child relationship, parent modeling and teaching a religious faith, and parent involvement in church life and Sunday worship. It is critically important that parents are authentic examples of what they claim to believe. Their authenticity includes faithful living as well as sharing with their children their struggles and failings.

Focus on Daily Life

The primary way by which a Christian identity becomes rooted in children's lives are the day-to-day religious practices of the family and the ways parents model their faith and share it in conversation, collaboration, and exposure to outside religious opportunities.

To raise children to understand and carry on their family's religion parents need to practice their own personal religious faith, naturally, for its own sake and as role models for their children. If all goes well, children will over time learn, absorb, and embrace their own version of that faith, almost unconsciously.

Focus on Practice

The family is the primary community where Christian faith practices are nurtured and lived.

Raising religious children is primarily a practice-centered process. Parents modeling religious practices is primary. Among the most important practices are:

- Reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly
- Praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally
- Serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people
- Eating together as a family
- Having family conversations about faith
- Talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts
- Ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences
- Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home
- Providing moral instruction
- Being involved in a faith community and participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family

Focus on Relationships

The quality of a parent's relationships with their children or teens and the parenting style they practice make a significant difference in faith transmission.

- Parents cultivate relationships of warmth and love which makes everything else possible.
- Parents balance religious firmness with religious flexibility in their parenting.
- Parents balance desire for religious continuity with children's agency.
- Parents talk with their children about religious matters during the week.
- Parents practice an "authoritative" parenting style (as opposed to authoritarian, permissive, or uninvolved style); they maintain and enforce high standards and expectations for their children.
- Parents listen more and preach less; conversations are more youth-centered.

Focus on the Needs of Parents and Families

The top results from 8000+ parent surveys in the U.S. found that at least 40% of all parents indicated that they were very interested in the following:

- Discussing tough topics with my children
- Learning to listen to my children/teens and talk with them about things that matter to them
- Managing screen time and social media use with my children/teens
- Getting involved with my children/teens in serving people in need
- Developing the strengths and potential of my child
- Managing my time and balancing the many commitments as a parent
- Developing strong relationships of warmth and love in our family and express care for each other
- Encouraging children/teens to talk about their doubts and questions about faith
- Providing moral and values instruction to my children'/teens and teaching them healthy concepts of right and wrong
- Growing in my (parent) relationship with Jesus Christ and what it means to follow Jesus in daily life
- Growing in my (parent) understanding and practice of the Christian faith
- Praying together as a family

Focus on the Motivations of Families and Parents

There are many motivations for **families** to engage in faith formation activities. For example:

- Grow close to God
- Improve the wellbeing of the family
- Improve family community and relationships
- Spend quality time together
- Experience spiritual growth
- Experience personal growth
- Develop sense of community with other families
- Finding meaning and purpose in life
- Learn how to practice their faith
- Seek comfort and strength
- Celebrate holidays and milestones
- Pray together

Parents are motivated by a variety of reasons to participate or engage in a parent program or activity, for example:

- Enhance parenting skills
- Support child (teen) development
- Build stronger family relationships
- Grow in confidence as a parent
- Desire for community with other parents, build a support network
- Prepare for upcoming developmental stages or transitions
- Experience personal growth
- Experience faith growth
- Desire to be effective as parents
- Build strong relationships with their children or teens
- Seek solutions to specific family challenges
- Be able to share their faith with their children or teens
- Provide moral guidance to their children and teens
- Keep their children safe, especially on social media

2. Developing a Parent & Family Faith Formation Plan

At each stage of life faith formation incorporates programs, activities, resources, and relationships that are developmentally appropriate and responsive to the diverse religiosities of parents and families – *Active Believers, Believers, and Inactive Believers.*

Forming the faith of the family at home – faith practices at home

- ✓ reading the Bible
- ✓ praying
- ✓ serving, working for justice, caring for creation
- ✓ eating together
- ✓ having family faith conversations
- ✓ providing moral instruction
- ✓ celebrating Church year feasts and seasons
- ✓ liturgical formation
- ✓ milestones rituals

Forming the faith of the family in the church – engagement in church life

- ✓ Sunday worship
- ✓ celebration of Church year feasts and seasons through the year
- ✓ church-wide service projects to those in need
- ✓ church-wide gatherings

Equipping parents with practices and skills appropriate to each life stage

- ✓ knowledge about the growth and development at each life stage
- ✓ knowledge and effective practices and skills for parenting at each life stage
- ✓ practices and skills for developing quality relationships with children and adolescents
- ✓ family life skills

Equipping parents to be faith formers of their children and adolescents

- ✓ faith formation (theological and biblical) for parents
- ✓ skills and practices for forming faith of children and teens

Providing family learning for the entire family

- ✓ family learning programs
- ✓ family workshops
- ✓ church year seasonal family festivals

Fostering intergenerational relationships

- ✓ connecting families with other generations in worship and church gatherings and events
- ✓ intergenerational faith forming experiences that incorporate the whole family
- ✓ intergenerational mentoring for parents, e.g., Baptism mentors

3. Ideas for Family Faith Formation

Use a variety of programming formats to implement your strategies, such as a digital platform for families with the resources in print, audio, and video formats; a monthly print or digital newsletter/magazine; family faith formation programming on a topic, theme, season, or practice; monthly parent gatherings in conjunction with existing age group gatherings; courses, workshops, and webinars; mentoring, small groups (in-person and online).

Connect to Sunday worship with a variety of resources that help families experience, reflect, and apply the theme from Sunday to their family life throughout the week. For example:

- Family conversation questions on the theme of the Sunday readings
- Activities for the Church year feast or season
- Weekly table ritual
- Podcast or video of the sermon with a study guide for the parents, children's creative Bible activities, storybooks, video presenting the Bible story
- Daily prayer, weekly family devotion
- Short Bible reading for each day of the week, online resources for studying the Bible (print, audio, video)
- Ideas for living the biblical teaching in the family or in the community.

Celebrate the seasons of the year at home by identifying a monthly seasonal event and incorporating Scripture, prayer, learning, service/action, ritual, and family conversation into each seasonal event. Highlight a Christian practice that will be communicated and experienced through the event. For example: March and Lent (praying, serving/almsgiving, forgiving).

Provide formation in Christian Practices in a variety of formats: Raising religious children is primarily a practice-centered process, not chiefly a didactic teaching program. Certain faith practices make a significant difference in nurturing the faith of children and adolescents at home, especially:

- Reading the Bible as a family and encouraging young people to read the Bible regularly
- Praying together as a family and encouraging young people to pray personally
- Serving people in need as a family and supporting service activities by young people
- Eating together as a family
- Having family conversations about faith
- Talking about faith, religious issues, and questions and doubts
- Ritualizing important family moments and milestone experiences
- Celebrating holidays and church year seasons at home
- Celebrating milestones and sacraments in the lives of individuals and the whole family
- Providing moral instruction

- Being involved in the church community and participating regularly in Sunday worship as a family

Offer annual retreats for each life stage: Family retreats (half day or full day) focused on following Jesus and introducing the practices of discipleship or each of the four stages of life (half-day or full day)

Develop a yearlong focus on the Bible, such as the “Bible Story of Month” to introduce important stories and teachings in the Bible by teaching the practices for reading, interpreting, praying, and applying the scriptures to their lives. Select twelve of the most relevant and developmentally appropriate Bible stories for each age. Integrate the Bible teaching into one session or program each month. Provide online resources for parents to reinforce the Bible story online: reading the story, watching the video, discussing the story.

Develop the prayer life of children, teens, and families by focusing on learning prayers, teaching the different forms of prayer, and/or experiencing a prayer practice each month during the class or program. Have children and teens experience the different types of prayer: contemplative, Scriptural, intercessory, praise (adoration), and thanksgiving. Develop a short video of the children or teens praying so that parents can see prayer in action. Develop the “prayer of the month” for families.

Engage families in serving those in need, caring for creation, and working for justice. Develop an annual family or church-wide Service Day, a monthly family Service Project, and family Service Nights at the church. Create immersive experiences for families where they can experience service/justice/care for creation firsthand, such as hospitality at a homeless shelter or serving a meal at a soup kitchen or caring for creation by planting a garden. Combine the at-church experience with activities for families to do at home.

Celebrate one-time milestones and annual milestones through experiences at home and programs in the church with activities that include learning, prayer, celebrating a ritual, and reflecting together on the experience. Consider for example: Birth and Baptism, anniversary of Baptism, welcoming young children to worship, beginning faith formation at church, annual blessing of the backpacks at the beginning of a new school year, first Bible, school graduations and transitions, driver’s license, and more.

Develop family life skills by adding a parent-child/teen component to age group faith formation or by adding special parent-child/teen programs throughout the year. Focus on the types of skill-building that will strengthen family life, and parent-child/teen relationships, such as: communicating effectively, discussing tough topics, making decisions and solving problems as a family, learning how to build strong relationships and express care for each other, supporting each other (encouraging and praising, giving feedback, standing up for each other), and treating each with respect and dignity. Many of these skills can be developed using movies selected for their positive messages. 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.

4. Ideas for Parent Formation

Develop a progression of “Stage of Life” parent workshops (in-person and online) and a resource kit for parents (digital) to prepare as the family enters a new stage of life. Consider workshops, webinars, or courses through the life cycle as children and adolescents enter a new

stage of life—birth: parenting young children; start of school: parenting older children; parenting young adolescents; parenting older adolescents; parenting emerging adults.

Provide targeted programs of theological and biblical formation for parents 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. This content needs to be tailored to the four spiritual-religious identities of parents—active, occasional, spiritual/uninvolved, and unaffiliated; and to the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the particular Christian tradition.

Add a parent component to existing programming. For example:

- 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 Holiday Club / Vacation Bible School in the evenings or online.
- Incorporate parent formation and education into church events that already engage parents, such as parent preparation programs for baptism, first communion, or confirmation, as well as the celebration of milestones

Provide parent support through gathered settings (church, home, community) and in online groups (such as a Facebook parents group) that 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. Churches 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).

Equip parents with the knowledge and skills for passing on faith so they can incorporate faith practices into the day-to-day religious practices of the family by providing courses, workshops, webinars, mentoring, resources (digital, print, audio, video), online small groups, and more, focused on:

- having family conversations about religious topics
- reading and discussing the Bible with children and teens
- prayer as a family and encourage children and teens to pray
- participating in Sunday worship as a family
- celebrating family rituals and milestones
- celebrating holidays and seasons as a family
- engaging in actions of service, justice, and care for creation as a family and encouraging children and teens to serve
- talking about faith and the religious tradition, and providing moral instruction and discussing moral issues with children and teens

Equip parents with the knowledge and skills for developing quality relationships with their young people and applying styles of parenting that make a difference in faith transmission by providing courses, workshops, webinars, mentoring, resources (digital, print, audio, video), online small groups, and more, focused on:

- Cultivating relationships of warmth and love which makes everything else possible
- Balancing religious firmness with religious flexibility in their parenting so as to maintain more positive relationships with their children

- Transmitting their faith to their children while honoring their agency by teaching principles and values, providing expectations of religious participation and responsibility, not forcing faith, allowing exploration and mistakes, and showing respect for children's views
- Talking about religious matters during the week – when parents talk about their religion in personal terms that sends a strong message to their kids that it's important to them
- Practicing an “authoritative” parenting style (as opposed to authoritarian, permissive, or uninvolved style) by maintaining and enforcing high standards and expectations for their children while simultaneously expressing a lot of open warmth and connection to their children, and confidently giving them enough space to work out their own views and values
- Listening more and preaching less. It is a more satisfying and successful religious and relational experience when the conversations are more child/youth-centered than parent-centered

Equip parents with the knowledge and skills for effective parenting by providing courses, workshops, webinars, mentoring, resources (digital, print, audio, video), online small groups, and more, focused on:

- Expressing care to young people by listening to them, being dependable, encouraging them, and make them feel known and valued
- Challenging young people by expecting them to do their best and live up to their potential
- Providing support for young people by encouraging their efforts and achievements and guiding them to learn and grow
- Treating young people with respect, hearing their voices, and including them in decisions that affect them
- Inspiring young people to see possibilities for their future, expose them to new experiences and places, and connect them to people who can help them grow
- Demonstrating a warm and affirming parenting approach
- Creating a warm, caring supportive family environment
- Practicing effective communication skills
- Managing screen time and social media use
- Learning effective discipline practices
- Creating a warm, caring supportive family

Provide parent mentors (or coaches) who can offer guidance and support for parents and the whole family at each stage of life from birth through the end of adolescence. Mentors can accompany parents and families in their spiritual lives, guiding them in growing in their relationship with God and learning more about the faith. Mentoring can be life-cycle specific with mentors who focus on children or adolescents. Parents mentors can be drawn from the grandparent generation who are actively engaged in church and bring decades of parenting and family life experiences. Churches can provide training for mentors (mentoring skills, understanding today's family, learning how to access online resources and activities).

Use online platforms and digitally enabled strategies that can 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 parents (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, 24-7-365. 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.

4. Ideas for Family Learning

Churches can engage the whole family in learning experiences (parents and caregivers, young people, and grandparents). A family learning model usually involves five elements, conducted in an extended time format, e.g., 90 minutes.

1. A Shared Meal: Depending on the time of day, a meal begins the program, introducing people to the theme of the learning program, building community among the participants, doing table activities that model at-home faith practices, such as prayer or a table ritual.
2. A Shared Prayer Experience for All Families
3. An Opening Learning Experience for All Families: Introducing families to the topic of the program with content and methods appropriate to all-ages, such as:
 - ritual or extended prayer service
 - dramatic presentation of a Scripture passage or real life story
 - storytelling or retelling a Scripture passage with contemporary examples
 - witness presentations by church members (of all ages)
 - learning games or TV game show formats
 - film or media presentation using art/photos and music
 - table group activity and discussion in intergenerational, family and/or age-groups.
4. In-depth Learning Experiences Conducted in One of Three Ways: Conducting in-depth learning activities that explore the theme or topic organized in one of three formats:
 - a) family learning together with activities appropriate to all ages
 - b) parallel groups (children, teens, parents) learning at the same time with content and learning activities appropriate to each age group
 - c) learning activity centers designed for the entire family and/or age groups
5. Closing Activity for All Families: Guiding families in discovering how to apply their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or digital formats.
6. Closing Prayer Experience

[For examples of family learning programs go to: <https://www.intergenerationalfaith.com/>]

Family learning can become a church's primary learning model for parents, children, and young teens, developed around monthly or yearly themes drawn from the Christian teachings, sacraments, morality, justice and service, prayer and spiritual life, Church year seasons, Scripture, Christian practices, and more.

Family learning models blend gathered experiences (at church or in family small groups in homes or other settings), at-home faith formation, and online resources. They can be

structured and scheduled in several ways to respond the needs of a church community, such as monthly, twice monthly, or weekly programming.

A Monthly Plan with a family session and at-home faith formation:

- Week #1. Family session at church or in small groups of families (90 minutes to 2 hours)
- Week #2. At-home faith formation with online resources
- Week #3. At-home faith formation with online resources
- Week #4. At-home faith formation with online resources

A Monthly Plan with a family session, at-home practice, and age group learning:

- Week #1. Family session at church or in small groups of families (90 minutes to 2 hours)
- Week #2. At-home faith formation with online resources
- Week #3. Age group learning session at church for children, young teens, and parents (90 minutes)
- Week #4. At-home faith formation with online resources

A Twice Monthly Plan with a family session and at-home faith formation:

- Week #1. Family session at church or in small groups of families (90 minutes to 2 hours)
- Week #2. At-home faith formation with online resources
- Week #3. Family session at church or in small groups of families (90 minutes to 2 hours)
- Week #4. At-home faith formation with online resources

A Weekly Plan with family sessions at church or in small groups of families:

In the Weekly Plan the movements of the learning process are assigned to individual weeks. Over a month the entire learning process is experienced. Each session is usually one hour in length.

- Week #1. A whole family learning experience with content and methods appropriate to all-ages
- Week #2. An in-depth learning conducted in one of three ways: a) the whole family learning together with activities appropriate to all ages in the family; b) parallel groups (children, teens, parents) learning at the same time with content and learning activities appropriate to each age group; c) learning activity centers with whole family and age-specific learning activities
- Week #3. A whole family activity to discover how to apply their learning to daily life using resources and activities provided in print or digital formats.
- Week #4. At-home practice with online resources

Integrated within the age group curriculum for grades 1-8. The themes for family learning can flow from the age group curriculum or focus on core faith themes and Church year seasons. Here is an example of a 4-week sequence. (*This continues throughout the year.*)

- Weeks #1-3. Age group faith formation
- Week #4. Family learning experience
- Weeks #5-7. Age group faith formation
- Week #8. Family learning experience

A **Seasonal Plan** is built around the Church year seasons and feasts – Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, and more. Family learning sessions are incorporated into the schedule of the year so that age group programs and activities are not scheduled during a family learning program.

A **Workshop Plan** is designed around family life skills that will strengthen family life, and parent-child/teen relationships, such as communicating effectively, discussing tough topics, making decisions and solving problems as a family, learning how to build strong relationships and express care for each other, supporting each other (encouraging and praising, giving feedback, standing up for each other), and treating each with respect and dignity. A Workshop Plan can provide occasional family or parent-only gatherings throughout the year. Workshops can also be designed as mini-conferences (e.g., 3 hours) on a Saturday or Sunday with a general session for the whole family and break-out sessions for parents, children, and teens.

Additional Family Learning Models

1. Family cluster or small group learning programs
2. Family-centered Holiday Club / Vacation Bible School
3. Family retreats and camps
4. Family Bible study

#3. Faith Formation with Children

1. Develop faith formation with children guided by the research on the most important contributors to faith forming with children.

Discovering and nurturing a child's spirituality is crucial at this stage in their development. It helps them embrace faith and faith practices later in life. We owe it to every child to help them discover and respond to God's loving and gracious presence in their life. This faith formation process culminates when a young person or young adult makes a personal decision to make their faith and religious practice *central* to their identity and life.

The experts in the field of children's spirituality and faith formation identify four broad and intertwining contributing factors.

- ◆ **Meaning-making.** Effective faith formation with children recognizes that they are continually processing their experiences, making meaning of them, even if they cannot express or articulate the meaning. They have an innate spiritual sense and are predisposed to spiritual, God-connected meaning-making. Even if adults don't understand, children regularly construct concepts based on their experiences, and when these are applied to the spiritual landscape, they begin to grasp big-picture concepts such as *God is good, God loves me, God is real and present in my life.*

Children approach meaning-making through a combination of verbal communication, play, story, art, and mirroring behaviors in which relationships are a critical link between engagement and articulation of understanding. We can get a glimpse of how children perceive God simply by asking them to draw a picture of God.

- ◆ **Discovery.** Through creative play, story, and imagination, faith formation provides ample opportunity for children to develop and form their own relationships with God and with others who believe in God. Effective faith formation with young children is not linear or strictly tied to curriculum. But that does not mean it is without planning or forethought. Encounter is primary. A child's encounter with Jesus leads to a natural desire to learn more about God.
- ◆ **Conversation.** Conversation is an important element in the process of spiritual discovery. Children need to be allowed space to dialogue, listen, and question. In doing so, they will engage in meaning-making as they share with one another.
- ◆ **Posture of family and Church.** Spirituality is an innate capacity. It cannot be taught. It must be supported and cultivated through lived experiences and meaningful relationships. Historically, such support has been offered by families as well as religious communities and schools. Children have strengths and gifts to offer the whole community. While they possess spiritual capacity, they still require significant and nuanced guidance.

Faith formation leaders need to create a culture of joy, welcome, wonder, discovery, exploration, imagination, and meaningful learning. To create this culture and foster the desire to learn about God, we need to keep in mind these tasks.

- ◆ **Having a multidimensional view.** We need to keep children's strengths and vulnerabilities in mind and prepare adults to facilitate their spiritual growth *and* to learn from them. This mindset equips adults to welcome children in the church community and family with a

healthy mutuality and encourages church communities to plan for and benefit from offering both age-specific and multigenerational faith experiences.

- ✦ **Creating intentional experiences.** Through a variety of activities, children can explore, engage, and express their faith in unique ways. These should engage emotions as well as cognitive faculties where children can engage both physically and intellectually. Consider faith-related games and Bible story skits or plays.
- ✦ **Using open-ended stories and parables.** Jesus taught using parables, frequently without explanation. When leaders allow children to discover God through open-ended presentations of parables and narratives, they foster children's natural strength of opening meaning in contrast to adults' proclivity to close meaning.
- ✦ **Playing.** We engage children in creative play, relationship building, independent and cooperative play, spontaneous prayer, and much more.
- ✦ **Processing experiences.** Children need tools to process their experiences and discoveries. Tanya Campen suggests using these six tools:
 1. *Story.* Story invites children into a time and space where they can do the holy work of active wondering and meaning making.
 2. *Liturgy and Ritual.* The words, actions, and rhythm that make up our time together and are the tools for a child's meaning making process.
 3. *Relational Awareness.* Through their actions, wondering, and work, it became clear that children are very aware of themselves, others, and God.
 4. *Memory Markers.* Children's ways of remembering what they have experienced and learned as they do the holy work making meaning.
 5. *Wonder.* Creating a place for children to wonder and use their imagination is essential to their meaning-making process.
 6. *Work.* The child begins to identify their work and begins seeking ways to respond with faithful action.(Tanya Campen. *Holy Work with Children: Making Meaning Together*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021. See chapter 6.)
- ✦ **Participating in Worship.** When we find ways for children to both participate and lead us in worshipping, we discover that they are capable. When children are given the opportunity to enter a holy space and meaningfully participate in liturgy, they respond. Children can read Scripture, sing, pray, welcome people, and give announcements. This participation fosters belonging and helps faith to become real in their lives.

2. Incorporate the ways that Generation Alpha (2012–) children learn into all faith formation programming and experiences.

As the Alpha generation is relatively young, their learning preferences are still emerging and evolving. Based on research in the learning sciences and current trends and observations, there are characteristics that can guide effective learning approaches for this generation.

- ✦ *Personalization and adaptability:* Alpha children benefit from personalized learning pathways tailored to their individual needs and interests.
- ✦ *Incorporate technology thoughtfully and with limits:* Leverage technology to connect with them but be mindful of its potential pitfalls. Use interactive apps and educational games to provide information, foster discussions, and create virtual communities.

Create digital assessments using games based on their lessons, or group games like *Jeopardy*.

- ◆ *Short attention spans*: The abundance of information and stimuli in the digital age has contributed to shorter attention spans among Alpha children. Learning experiences that are broken into smaller pieces, concise, visually appealing, and interactive can help maintain their focus.
- ◆ *Multimodal learning*: Alpha learners respond well to diverse forms of media and content. Utilize a mix of text, images, videos, and audio to cater to their different learning preferences.
- ◆ *Hands-on and experiential learning*: Alpha learners benefit from hands-on and experiential learning opportunities. Incorporate practical activities, experiments, simulation games, and real-world experiences to deepen their understanding, such as a hunger banquet for the families or a project in which the children build a model of a just society with materials you give them.
- ◆ *Visual and spatial learning*: Visual content, such as infographics, diagrams, and animations, can be particularly effective in conveying information to Alpha children, as they are drawn to visually stimulating and colorful materials.
- ◆ *Collaborative learning*: The Alpha generation is growing up in a highly connected world. Encourage collaborative learning experiences, both in person and through digital platforms, to promote teamwork and communication skills. Create skits, role-playing experiences, problem-solving activities, team games, and more.
- ◆ *Interactive*: Interactive experiences can foster better understanding and engagement. Encourage discussions, questions, and activities that allow them to apply their faith to real-life situations. Engage in “What if?” questions and allow for open discussion.
- ◆ *Encourage curiosity and exploration*: Alpha children are naturally curious and eager to explore. Create a learning environment that fosters curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Don’t be afraid to move outside as well. Do a prayer walk, a creation exploration, or a “Where do I see God?” exercise.
- ◆ *Encourage critical thinking*: Foster their ability to think critically about their faith, beliefs, and the world around them. Encourage them to ask questions and explore different perspectives. Affirm and encourage different opinions.
- ◆ *Emphasize emotional intelligence*: Foster emotional intelligence and social skills through activities that promote empathy, understanding, compassion, friendship, and emotional expression.
- ◆ *Play-based learning*: For the youngest Alpha learners, play-based learning can be an effective approach to engage their imagination and cognitive development.
- ◆ *Storytelling*: Stories are a powerful tool for teaching moral and spiritual lessons. Share age-appropriate stories from the Bible that resonate with their experiences. Have them act out Bible stories or draw them as they understand the stories.
- ◆ *Address difficult questions*: Alpha Generation children are exposed to diverse perspectives and challenging questions early on. Address their doubts and questions in an open, respectful, and age-appropriate manner.

3. Implement a comprehensive plan for forming the faith of families with young children (after Baptism) with age-appropriate programs, activities, and resources to guide the family from birth through the start of school (age 0–5).

Every six months, from birth to five years old, parents can receive age-appropriate faith-forming resources (print, audio, video, digital) to use with their children and parenting tips for the new phase of their child’s growth, published on the family faith formation website and communicated via email or text.

- ✦ *Developing faith practices at home:* reading the Bible, learning the Christian tradition, praying, celebrating the seasons of the Church year, serving those in need, working for justice, caring for creation, eating together, having family faith conversations, providing moral instruction, and more
- ✦ *Celebrating milestones:* birthdays, Baptism anniversaries, “first” milestones, entry to preschool and kindergarten, and more
- ✦ *Parenting knowledge:* understanding young child development and practices for effective parenting of young children
- ✦ *Parenting for faith skill:* reading a Bible story, praying with a young child, having faith conversations, answering difficult questions, and more
- ✦ *Online groups for parents of young children:* forums, chat rooms, online groups, social media
- ✦ *Mentors from the church community* (e.g., grandparents) to accompany parents on the journey from Baptism to start of school
- ✦ *Gatherings for parents and for families at church*

4. Provide a holistic curriculum for grade-school children that provides a rich menu of faith-forming experiences each year, incorporating intergenerational, family, and children’s programs and activities. (See earlier description of pathways and menus.)

5. Engage grade-school children and their parents (and grandparents) in a family learning program. (See description under Family Faith Formation.)

6. Provide environments that allow children to encounter the living God directly.

Children’s relationship with God is shaped and formed by the way they experience God through goodness, beauty, wonder, and awe; through relationships with other people, nature, art, wonder, and mystery; through the woundedness of human experience that opens them to God’s healing presence; through Jesus’ life and how he modeled the way God intends us to live.

Churches can provide safe and trusting environments for children to experience prayer in a variety of forms and settings, to participate actively in Sunday worship, to experience the liturgical seasons, to celebrate rituals and sacraments, to participate in retreat experiences, to serve people in need, to care for creation, and more. Children can experience God through hands-on participation in the life, ministries, and activities of the church community according to their abilities.

Faith formation guides children’s participation by providing them with resources—language, practices, rituals, habits—that enable them to participate with all their senses in the life of the community. This restores the connection between learning and practice—precisely what is missing in the traditional model of classroom learning, where the material presented stands

divorced from the practice of faith. It also overcomes the age segregation so prevalent in churches today.

7. Create safe spaces for children to wonder, discover, and make meaning.

Faith formation seeks to create a space in which children can share their stories, practice wondering, use their imaginations, and learn from the entire community. Rather than attempting to *give* children faith, creating spaces for wonder, discovery, and meaning-making nurtures the spiritual presence that is already in the lives of children. Nurturing spiritual growth in children includes recognizing the Divine presence in their lives. It involves nurturing the spiritual growth process and guiding all children as they make meaning from their experiences and relationships. Spiritual growth honors the individual child and affirms their particular developmental process.

Faith formation helps children to know, interpret, and incarnate the faith. It provides an intentional space where teachers and children share their faith stories with each other, engage in intentional theological reflection, and use developmentally appropriate methods that help every child learn, make meaning, and respond to their experience with the Holy. We do this by creating a safe space where children are valued and respected and by inviting them into the process of learning through claiming and responding to God's presence in their lives.

Through intentional and authentic conversations, children and adults find space to listen to God and to discern how they might respond to all they are hearing and experiencing. Through this process, we encourage children and model for them how to do the work of meaning-making, not by giving them information but by inviting them and guiding them, by sharing stories and asking questions, by inviting them to share stories and ask questions, and by listening to what they say.

As children **engage** in the word and traditions of the faith, **recognize** the presence of God and others, **claim** their own experiences, and **respond** to these experiences, they make meaning that informs and affects their individual faith narrative. In doing the important work of engaging, recognizing, and claiming God's presence in their lives, children begin to hear God's call to respond, and they know what to do next. In responding to God's grace and love, they enter into another experience, another possibility, continuing their meaning-making in response to this new information and wisdom.

Using these four elements, doing the holy work of meaning-making, and participating in this process, children build their faith narrative and develop religious language to articulate and celebrate how God is working in their lives. Adults support children in this process by modeling language and creating space for them to discover and practice their faith. They encourage children in the work of engaging, recognizing, claiming, and responding to God's presence in their lives.

#4. Faith Formation with Young People

Some of the essential elements for faith formation with young people that are emerging from research and practice include:

- ✦ Supportive, nurturing parents
- ✦ Supportive, youth-friendly, engaging faith communities
- ✦ Supportive peer relationships and groups
- ✦ Intergenerational relationships between young people and the older generations
- ✦ Significant relationships with adult role models
- ✦ Mentoring relationships
- ✦ A focus on adolescent becoming, belonging, and developing meaning and purpose in life
- ✦ Significant, and potentially, life changing experiences such as retreats and service weeks
- ✦ Safe spaces for conversation and religious experiences

Here are several specific strategies:

1. Incorporate the ways that Generation Alpha (2012–) and Generation Z (1997–2012) young people learn into all faith formation programming and experiences.

By incorporating these strategies into learning experiences, catechists can create engaging and effective learning opportunities that align with Generation Alpha's and Generation Z's preferences and learning styles, fostering a positive and productive learning environment. (See Children's section for Generation Alpha.)

Generation Z Learning Strategies

- ✦ *Personalized learning*: Tailor learning experiences to individual interests and abilities. Find out what is meaningful to them. Ask them what they want to discuss in youth ministry or on a retreat. This fosters interest and ownership. Create a learning website just for them. Offer relevant prayers, music, appropriate videos that coincide with lessons, and more.
- ✦ *Flexibility and autonomy*: Offer flexibility in learning schedules and pathways. Gen Z appreciates the ability to learn at their own pace and on their own terms.
- ✦ *Digital and interactive learning*: Gen Z is highly comfortable with technology and often prefers digital learning environments. Utilize online platforms, educational apps, interactive online modules, and virtual simulations to engage them effectively.
- ✦ *Microlearning (short and engaging content)*: Gen Z has a shorter attention span due to the rapid information consumption they're accustomed to. Break down content into bite-sized, easily digestible, shorter, and engaging segments using videos, quizzes, and interactive elements. Use apps to play games in gatherings. Have them create video presentations to music or personalized design journals to use in your programs.
- ✦ *Visual and multimedia learning*: Incorporate visual aids, infographics, videos, and other multimedia content. Visuals can help convey complex information quickly and effectively. Music is extremely meaningful.
- ✦ *Mobile-friendly learning*: Ensure that learning materials are accessible on mobile devices, as Gen Z is accustomed to learning on their smartphones and tablets. You can also use apps to send daily Bible verses or weekly reflections and even create a discussion group. Collaborative and social learning is important and fosters interaction and teamwork.

- ✦ *Hands-on experiential learning:* Gen Z tends to learn better through practical and experiential learning opportunities. Provide practical, real-world applications of concepts through projects, simulations, and hands-on experiences. Gen Z learns best when they can apply knowledge in real-world scenarios. Ideas include a hunger banquet or creating Bible skits in today's language. They can recreate a parable or Bible story using text messages in their own language.
- ✦ *Feedback and recognition:* Provide regular feedback and recognition for their efforts. Gen Z responds well to immediate feedback and appreciates acknowledgment of their achievements.
- ✦ *Purpose-driven learning and context:* Highlight the real-world significance and impact of the learning material. Gen Z is motivated when they understand how their learning can contribute to a better future and how it can be applied to a specific problem or issue. Have them research an issue such as the need for water in developing communities. How would they provide water? Combine local service projects with teaching about the larger worldview of the issue.
- ✦ *Creativity and self-expression:* Provide opportunities for Gen Z to express themselves creatively, whether through multimedia projects, storytelling, poetry, drawing, creating videos, finding current music with faith themes, or other forms of self-expression.
- ✦ *Critical thinking and problem-solving:* Gen Z values the ability to think critically and solve problems. Include activities that challenge them to analyze information and develop problem-solving skills. Encourage critical thinking by presenting open-ended questions and real-world problems. Social justice issues work well here—share a problem and have them work together to see what they can do or how they can advocate for change. Teach the difference between charity and justice.
- ✦ *Sustainability and social responsibility:* Gen Z is particularly concerned about environmental and social issues. Integrate themes of sustainability and social responsibility into the learning content. Again, create projects through which they can learn about local and global issues and create service projects that stress local charity but also encourage them to consider the larger theme of justice.

2. Provide a holistic curriculum for young people that provides a rich menu of faith-forming experiences each year, incorporating intergenerational, family, and youth programs and activities. (See earlier description of pathways and menus.)

3. Immerse young people into the practices that constitute a Christian way of life that address young people's quest for becoming (identity), belonging (relationships and community), and meaning (how to live with meaning and purpose today). (See earlier description of Christian practices.)

4. Provide safe spaces, small communities, trusted adults, and faith-building skills to guide young people in the process of constructing their identity and faith.

Springtide Research has described a phenomenon as ***faith unbundled***—a term that describes the way young people increasingly construct their faith by combining elements such as beliefs, identity, practices, and community from a variety of religious and non-religious sources, rather than receiving all these things from a single, intact system or tradition. Young people with unbundled faith will partake in religion, including practices, beliefs, and communities to the degree that suits them, with no formal or permanent commitment. (*The State of Religion and Young People 2021*, Springtide Research Institute)

Young people are turning to a wide range of traditions, practices, and beliefs when asking and answering important questions about their faith: *What do I believe? Who am I? What is my purpose in the world? What practices have value?* Springtide Research uncovered four characteristics of young people’s searching and exploration. They are **curious**, they desire to be **whole**, they deeply crave **connection**, and they value **flexibility**. A question to consider is this: *“How do we allow these things in our models of faith formation for young people?”*

Focus on the big questions in young people’s lives and equip them with the skills for constructing a meaningful faith life by drawing upon the Scriptures and Christian tradition. Consider offering small groups on the big questions, “life-building” workshops with practical skills and tools, retreat experiences for reflection, and more. Having a physical space that young people can call their own is also important. The community has an important place in the accompaniment of young people, and it should feel collectively responsible for loving, motivating, and forming them. It is important that mentors not be judgmental but actively listen and respond with kindness and understanding. Mentors need to be able to acknowledge their own faults and be able to walk alongside young people, nurturing the seeds of faith with genuine care.

5. Provide interest-centered small groups or sessions on a variety of topics that integrate faith and life around the interests and gifts of young people.

Small-group formats provide lots of flexibility in content, schedule, and location (in physical settings, online settings, or hybrid settings). Groups can meet at times and places that best fit young people’s lives. They can have short commitments to make it easier for young people to participate. Interest-centered groups can draw upon a wide range of gifts and talents from people of all ages—including young people. Small groups can be developed around a variety of topics, with each one connecting life and faith. Each small group can include a teaching component, along with practice, and performance components. Here are several examples:

- ◆ *Life-centered*: preparing for life after high school, dealing with transition, life skills (communication, decision-making), relationships, dealing with loss, and more
- ◆ *Creative*: art, music, drama, graphic arts, and more
- ◆ *Spiritual*: how to pray, spiritual practices, spiritual direction, and more
- ◆ *Biblical*: Bible basics: what’s in it, how to read and interpret it, how to understand its history and literary forms, how to seek answers for big questions, and more
- ◆ *Action*: serving people in need, responding to justice issues, caring for creation
- ◆ *Leadership*: involvement in leadership roles in the church and the community, such as a council or committee position, retreat leaders, liturgical ministers, and more
- ◆ *Theological*: what Jesus means for our life today, how to live morally today, and how to live like Jesus did

#5. Intergenerational Faith Formation

Integral to lifelong faith formation is the primacy of intergenerational community, relationships, and faith-forming experiences for developing and sustaining faith and discipleship in people of all ages and generations. When a church commits itself to building a culture of intergenerationality, it becomes a sign of and instrument for the full experience of the body of Christ by all ages and generations. We see this intergenerational culture demonstrated in the specific ways a church community does the following:

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

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

The journey to a more intentionally intergenerational faith formation community is unique for each church. There are practical strategies that every church can use to create, sustain, and deepen the intergenerational culture of their community.

1. Transform Multigenerational Settings into Intergenerational Experiences

Every church has multigenerational environments in which at least two generations are participating in an event or activity—Sunday worship, church events, social gatherings, educational classes. Churches can utilize these environments to connect generations through relationship building and shared experiences. ***How can your church transform multigenerational environments into experiences of intergenerational connection and community?***

- ◆ *Consider relationships:* How will the generations interact with each other, get to know each other, share stories with each other? How will the experience incorporate intentional relationship building activities? How will everyone feel welcomed and safe?
- ◆ *Consider the content:* How will the experience engage generations in shared activities and in generationally appropriate activities?
- ◆ *Consider leadership:* How will each generation be involved in leadership roles, appropriate to their gifts, abilities, and age? How will the leadership team engage multiple generations?
- ◆ *Consider inclusion:* How will each generation feel valued and recognized in the experience?
- ◆ *Consider communication:* How will communication and social media channels be inclusive of all generations and provide connection among the generations?

2. Redesign Age-Specific Programs into Intergenerational Experiences

Age-specific programs and activities can provide opportunities for intergenerational connection, relationship building, and shared experiences. Opportunities abound, in children and youth programming, service and mission trips, retreats, Bible studies, and more. ***How can you transform age-specific programs by adding intergenerational activities or by redesigning the program into an intergenerational experience?***

- ◆ *Consider adding intergenerational activities:* How can your church incorporate another generation in sharing their faith, wisdom, and interests in the program (interviews, storytelling, presentations, demonstrations)? How can you add mentors or spiritual guides to a program (grandparent mentors for young parents or spiritual guides for young people in confirmation)?
- ◆ *Consider replacing age-specific for intergenerational throughout the year:* How can your church incorporate regular intergenerational gatherings into your age group programs throughout the year?
- ◆ *Consider redesigning the program:* How can your church redesign an age specific program into an intergenerational program involving at least one additional generation, such as transforming camp or Holiday Club / Vacation Bible School into a grandparent-grandchild program or transforming a youth service program or mission trip into an intergenerational service activity for all ages? Here are several ideas that illustrate how to transform age-specific programming into intergenerational opportunities:
 - Include all generations in Sunday worship and involve all generations in leadership roles—music, art, hospitality, reading scripture, and more. While there may be time during the scripture readings and sermon when children have a separate experience, it's important to have children involved with the whole worship community for most of the service.
 - Add other generations into current age-group programs, such as mission trips, service projects, retreat experiences, and Holiday Club / Vacation Bible School. Consider adding intergenerational experiences into VBS such as a grandparent component or redesigning the youth mission trip into an all ages mission trip.
 - Incorporate intergenerational dialogues, interviews, and presentations into programming—providing opportunities for children and youth to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of (older) adults; and then reverse the process and provide opportunities for the (older) adults to experience the wisdom, faith, and interests of children or teens through presentations, performances, and discussions.

- Add a mentoring component into programming for children, adolescents, and parents: parent mentors for baptismal parents, confirmation mentors, learning-to-pray mentors, justice and service mentors—to name a few possibilities.
- Connect people of different generations who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to other generations, for example midlife and mature adults helping new parents with financial management and household management, or young people helping older adults navigate the digital and online world.
- Add intergenerational relationship building and activities into social and recreational activities in the church community, such as the church picnic and after worship gatherings.

3. Design New Intergenerational Initiatives

Designing for intergenerationality through new initiatives is an opportunity to create new programs, activities, or experiences that bring together all the generations for learning, celebrating, praying, reading the Bible, serving and working for justice, worshipping, and more. Consider designing a new intergenerational Holiday Club / Vacation Bible School, summer camp, service projects and mission trip, retreat experience, field trip, as well as grandparent and children program. This is also an opportunity to eliminate those activities that work against intergenerationality and replace them with new initiatives. ***Where are the greatest needs and/or opportunities for creating new initiatives that will contribute toward building an intergenerational culture in your church?***

- ◆ *Consider celebrating and worshipping:* How can your church involve all generations more fully in Sunday worship and utilize their gifts throughout the service?
- ◆ *Consider learning:* How can your church create intergenerational models of learning—weekly, biweekly, monthly, or seasonally—for the whole faith community? How can you create intergenerational models of Holiday Club / Vacation Bible School or camp programs or Bible study programs?
- ◆ *Consider praying:* How can your church create prayer experiences, retreat experiences, spiritual formation programs, spiritual direction, and prayer groups that engage multiple generations?
- ◆ *Consider serving:* How can your church offer local and global service projects and mission experiences that engage all the generations together? How will you provide opportunities for reflection after the service and mission projects?
- ◆ *Consider mentoring:* How can your church offer intergenerational mentoring to accompany people of all ages, especially younger generations and new Christians, in their walk with Jesus as they develop a Christian way of life?

4. Make Intergenerational Learning Central

Intergenerational learning provides a way to educate the whole community, bringing all ages and generations together to learn with and from each other, build community, share faith, pray, celebrate, and practice the Christian faith. The key is that everyone is learning together—young and old, single and married, families with children and empty-nest families, and it involves the whole family—children, parents, grandparents, in a shared experience of the Christian faith. Churches can make intergenerational learning central to lifelong faith formation in at least two ways: as their core faith formation program for all ages, supplemented by age-specific and affinity group faith formation models, or as one element in a lifelong approach with age-specific and affinity group learning. (See Family Learning for the models and learning process.)

#6. “Front Porch” Faith Forming Experiences

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part 4. Designing

Essentials

1. **Assess:** What are we currently doing in faith formation with children-young people-young adults?
2. **Explore:** How can we build a comprehensive approach that speaks to our context?
3. **Plan:** How does our church integrate the best understandings and practices of faith formation into a three-decade plan that addresses the needs of my community?
4. **Act:** How do we launch our plan over the next three years?

Designing

1. **Audience:** *Who is your target audience?*
2. **Goals:** *What do you want to accomplish? Which faith maturing goal(s) are your focused on?*
3. **Needs:** *What are you addressing in the lives of your target audience? Consider the life tasks specific to their stage(s) of life; their interests, concerns, needs, and questions; their religious and spiritual characteristics and needs/hungers; and more.*
4. **Content:** *What are the essential topics or themes that need to be incorporated in programming that is responsive to the lives of your target audience and addresses your faith maturing goal(s)?*
5. **Personalized:** *How can you design faith formation that addresses the diverse styles of faith and practice – with active believers, believers, inactive believers, and inactive nonbelievers – with experiences, programs, and activities personalized to people’s faith journey?*
6. **Programming:** *Which formats can be utilized for this content (themes or topics)?*
7. **Scheduling:** *When will each program format be scheduled? What is the duration?*
8. **Personnel:** *Who will lead and implement each program?*
9. **Resources:** *What resources are needed to implement each program?*

Plan in a Three-Year Timeframe

- ✦ **Short-Term Planning:** ideas that can be integrated into existing plans and programs or can be designed and implemented quickly in the first year. This would be especially true for initiatives that are enhancements or an expansion of a current program or activity.
- ✦ **Mid-Term Planning:** ideas that need more design time and that can be implemented within one or two years. These initiatives need to be seen over a one-two year timeframe with a more sequenced implementation that might involve piloting the new initiative first before expanding it to a wider audience.
- ✦ **Long-Term Planning:** ideas that need design time, piloting and testing, and then implementation over the next several years. The initiatives are long term projects that require more time for planning and building capacity, and need to be introduced in stages over multiple years.

Planning Template

Goal: What do we want to accomplish?

Strategies/Activities: How we will accomplish the objectives over three years?

Year 1 Year 2 Year 3

Personnel: Who will lead and implement the objectives?

Resources: What resources are needed to implement the objectives?

Resource: Implementing a New Initiative

HOW TO MAKE A SWITCH

*For things to change, somebody somewhere has to start acting differently. Maybe it's you, maybe it's your team.
Picture that person (or people).*

*Each has an emotional Elephant side and a rational Rider side.
You've got to reach both. And you've also got to clear the way
for them to succeed. In short, you must do three things:*

➔ DIRECT the Rider

FOLLOW THE BRIGHT SPOTS. Investigate what's working and clone it. [Jerry Sternin in Vietnam, solutions-focused therapy]

SCRIPT THE CRITICAL MOVES. Don't think big picture, think in terms of specific behaviors. [1% milk, four rules at the Brazilian railroad]

POINT TO THE DESTINATION. Change is easier when you know where you're going and why it's worth it. ["You'll be third graders soon," "No dry holes" at BP]

➔ MOTIVATE the Elephant

FIND THE FEELING. Knowing something isn't enough to cause change. Make people feel something. [Piling gloves on the table, the chemotherapy video game, Robyn Waters's demos at Target]

SHRINK THE CHANGE. Break down the change until it no longer spooks the Elephant. [The 5-Minute Room Rescue, procurement reform]

GROW YOUR PEOPLE. Cultivate a sense of identity and instill the growth mindset. [Brasilata's "inventors," junior-high math kids' turnaround]

➔ SHAPE the Path

TWEAK THE ENVIRONMENT. When the situation changes, the behavior changes. So change the situation. [Throwing out the phone system at Rackspace, 1-Click ordering, simplifying the online time sheet]

BUILD HABITS. When behavior is habitual, it's "free"—it doesn't tax the Rider. Look for ways to encourage habits. [Setting "action triggers," eating two bowls of soup while dieting, using checklists]

RALLY THE HERD. Behavior is contagious. Help it spread. ["Fataki" in Tanzania, "free spaces" in hospitals, seeding the tip jar]

SUMMARY OF RESET

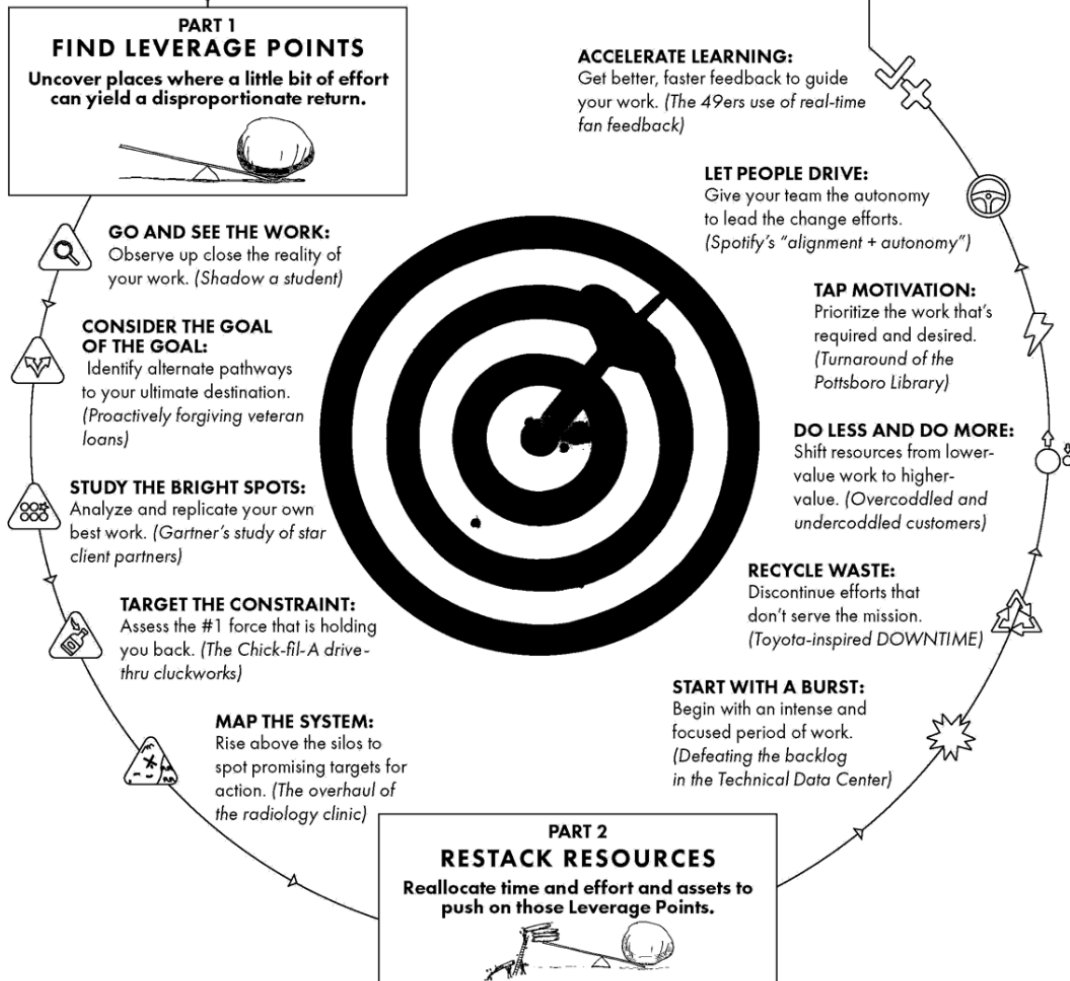
by DAN HEATH



Changing how we work can feel overwhelming. Like trying to budge an enormous boulder. But with the right two-part strategy, we can move the boulder.



What if we could take the same people and the same assets ... but achieve dramatically better results? Yesterday, we were stuck. Today, we RESET.



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