



Faith Formation in a Changing Church

April 13, 2020 | Adult Formation, Children's Ministries, Discipleship, Faith & Culture, Mission, Resources, The Church | COVID-19, Diocese of Olympia, future, generations, VUCA world



About six months ago I was invited to the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia (western Washington state) to deliver a keynote address for their annual **Better Together** Christian formation event. I was asked to speak about where I saw the church heading in the future based on my 40+ years of experience in formation, drawing upon what I had seen and learned along the way. I entitled it *Faith Formation in a Changing Church: Learning from the Past, Preparing for the Future*. My intention was to share a little

history of Christian education in the church through the lens of four generations of my family. I planned to talk about my perception of how the church needed to adapt to a new reality in the twenty-first century. How would my granddaughter (a fifth generation – the Alpha generation) be formed in faith?

Little did I know that much of my preparation in talking about the “future” would become the present. A week before I was scheduled to fly to Seattle, the area became a COVID-19 hotspot. Twenty-four hours in advance, Bishop Rickel made the decision to cancel all diocesan events where more than fifty people would be present. I cancelled my flight and said a prayer.

However, with flexibility and technology, I was able to give my (now altered) keynote from my home via a live webinar just a few weeks later. The Diocese of Olympia has made the recording available on [their website](#), **along with the handout** I had planned on distributing during my presentation. I offer it here now for your reflection. As I have mentioned, little did I know when I began to prepare my remarks that my comments about the future would have come to pass.

Faith Formation in a Changing Church: A Better Together Webina...

I have written previously about a number of the points in my presentation. You can dig deeper with those topics here:

A VUCA World

This information comes from the work of the **Institute for the Future** which I have previously written about **here**. How do we adapt and move from **V**olatility to **V**ision, from **U**ncertainty to **U**nderstanding, from **C**omplexity to **C**larity, and from **A**mbiguity to **A**gility? One of the driving forces of the future has become a reality: health insecurity. As the world grows more connected, challenges like pandemics will get close and personal (this was written in 2009!). Anxieties about health, hunger, and longevity will grow, and the intersection between the environment, health, and lifestyle will receive increasing attention. The questions below come from a brochure that was developed by IFTF in 2009 for the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes (**CEEP**):

- In what ways could the clarity of the Episcopal principles and practices around Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience help provide meaning for people in the VUCA world? How might church leaders help people make their own sense out of the VUCA world – which often seems to make no sense at all?
- How can you nurture a faith that allows each person to avoid judging too soon, but still have the courage to act when action is needed?
- How does your congregation stack up in terms of the leadership style needed to thrive in a VUCA world (using vision, understanding, agility, and clarity)?
- How might your church function more like a social network and less like a hierarchy?
- What if you re-imagined your congregation as a “smart mob” of loosely connected but amplified individuals working together for a common goal? If you are already a smart mob, how could you improve your abilities to perform? How could you leverage smart networking to accomplish social mission?
- How might you re-imagine your congregation as both a physical and a virtual presence in the lives of your members and in the life of your community – beyond your church buildings? After all, many of us were able to go digital when we couldn’t be physical!
- How might you help people navigate personal dilemmas caused by always-on lifestyles when there is no quiet place to focus attention on family or their own personal reflection?
- How would you describe the online identity of your congregation? What would you like it to become?
- What are possible alternatives that move beyond traditional forms of public generosity in response to rich/poor dilemmas and the widening gap between the two?
- How can your church be relevant to the very rich and encourage their ability to contribute to those who are poor?
- The climate challenge is about respect for God’s creation. How could the wisdom of the Church’s tradition(s) help people engage with the dilemmas of extreme climate change?
- What is the carbon footprint of your church? What is your own personal carbon footprint?



The Changes that are a Reality

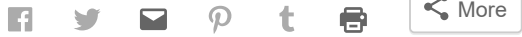
Several years ago I created a five-part post on *Christian Formation in a Changing World* based on a presentation I did in the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. Some of what I wrote in those posts informed this more recent presentation. You can begin that series [here](#).



Holy Week and Easter in the Year 2020 will be the year we remember how churches offered a week's worth of online worship in new ways. Digitally, we have become the Early Church. While not hiding in the catacombs, we are sequestered from a different enemy. Life will never be the same in the future. Will our churches change and adapt, or will we resume where we left off before COVID-19?

God is still present with us. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Share this:



Reblog

Like



One blogger likes this.

Related

[Resourcing for the Future](#)
In "General Convention"

["Rooted in Jesus"](#)
In "Adult Formation"

[The Black Plague, COVID-19,
and Julian of Norwich](#)
In "Christianity"

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. [Learn how your comment data is processed.](#)

