

Episcopal **teacher**

SPECIAL ISSUE



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Welcome to our special issue on adult faith formation. You will note that it is longer and does not have familiar features of regular Episcopal Teacher issues. We decided that this topic deserved time and space for a deeper conversation about its role in lifelong formation.

Our colleague John Roberto, director of LifeLong Faith Associates, wrote in the first article:

“We’ve discussed the importance of adult faith formation; we’ve produce official documents and vision statements; we’ve sponsored conferences and workshops; and we’ve even produced a variety of resources for adults. But to no avail. Adult faith formation remains stuck in neutral. It is the weakest ministry in most congregations—even though we are talking about everyone over 18!”

Kyle Oliver, digital missionary for the Center for the Ministry of Teaching (CMT), and I have been working with John and several other colleagues over the past year to change this discouraging paradigm. Together we produced a book last fall called *Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*, which explored contemporary understandings of young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

We followed this book with a special issue of the *Lifelong Faith Journal* that included practice-centered articles for the same four age adult age groups. This issue of Episcopal Teacher includes excerpts of the four journal articles that look more closely at effective practices for each stage of adulthood.

More than 100 people gathered in Connecticut last fall to talk about the book and journal contents and to analyze the forces affecting the lives of adults and faith communities today. Using scenario planning, they envisioned potential futures for adult faith based on current realities and future possibilities, and developed strategies for more effective and comprehensive adult faith formation. A summary of their work is in the final article of this issue.

The CMT is ready to work with people like you in forming the faith of adults in our churches and communities. John says it best:

“Let’s commit ourselves to developing faith formation for every adult in our congregations and in the wider community. We will need to learn new ways of thinking and acting. But adult formation for every adult is possible if we use 21st century practices, approaches, and resources.”

Dorothy Linthicum

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Faith Formation for All the Seasons of Adulthood

By John Roberto



It’s time for every Christian church to commit itself to developing faith formation for every season of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults! We’ve discussed the importance of adult faith formation; we’ve produced official documents and vision statements; we’ve sponsored conferences and workshops; and we’ve even produced a variety of resources for adults. But to no avail.

Adult faith formation remains stuck in neutral. It is the weakest ministry in most congregations—even though we are talking about everyone over 18!

Let’s commit ourselves to developing faith formation for every adult—young adult, midlife adult, mature adult, older adult—in our congregation and in the wider community. We will need to learn new ways of thinking and acting. But adult formation for every adult is possible if we use 21st century practices, approaches, and resources.

We will need new insights—drawn from research, theory, and practice—to guide the development of adult faith formation through the four seasons of adulthood. We will need new approaches and practices to engage all the seasons of an adult’s life. We will need a new model of faith formation that provides a platform to reach every adult in our faith communities and the wider community.

This article presents a holistic vision of faith and faith

forming processes along with eight practices to guide the development of 21st century faith formation. It focuses on a new faith formation model committed to reaching and engaging every adult throughout the seasons of adulthood.

A HOLISTIC VISION OF FAITH AND FORMATION

Adult faith formation is guided by a holistic vision of the Christian faith as a way of the head, the heart, and the hands—informing, forming, and transforming adults in Christian faith and identity.

- *A way of the head* (inform) demands a discipleship of faith seeking understanding and belief with personal conviction, sustained by study, reflecting, discerning and deciding, all toward spiritual wisdom for life. We educate people to know, understand, and embrace Christianity’s core beliefs and values.
- *A way of the heart* (form) demands a discipleship of right relationships and right desires, community building, hospitality and inclusion, trust in God’s love, and prayer and worship. We foster growth in people’s identity through formation and the intentional socialization of

Christian family and community.

- *A way of the hands* (transform) demands a discipleship of love, justice, peacemaking, simplicity, integrity, healing, and repentance. We foster openness to a lifelong journey of conversion toward holiness and fullness of life for themselves and for the life of the world (see Groome, 111–119).

The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation from the Episcopal Church describes Christian faith formation as “a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ, and to Christ. Lifelong Christian faith formation is lifelong growth in the knowledge, service and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by scripture, tradition and reason.” Formation is woven into all aspects of congregational life, including community, prayer, teaching, proclamation, and service (see Harris).

EIGHT FAITH FORMING PROCESSES

We have identified eight essential processes of forming faith, informed by scripture, theology, research and contemporary reflection, that bring the holistic vision of the Christian faith to life with all age groups, families, and generations. These eight faith-forming processes are central to Christian lifelong faith formation, providing a foundation and a framework for promoting growth in faith and discipleship.

The eight processes include:

- *Caring relationships.* Growing in faith and discipleship through caring relationships across generations and with peers in a life-giving spiritual community of faith, hope, and love—in the congregation and family.
- *Celebrating the liturgical seasons.* Growing in faith and discipleship by experiencing the feasts and seasons of the church year as they tell the story of faith through the year in an organic and natural sequence of faith learning.
- *Celebrating milestones through lifewide formation.* Growing in faith and discipleship by experiencing God’s love through significant moments in one’s life journey and faith journey.
- *Reading the Bible.* Growing in faith and discipleship by encountering God in the Bible, and by studying and interpreting the Bible—its message, its meaning, and its application to life today.
- *Learning the Christian tradition and applying it to life.* Growing in faith and discipleship by learning the content of the tradition, integrating it into one’s faith life, applying it to life today, and living its meaning in the world.
- *Praying, devotions, and spiritual formation.* Growing in faith and discipleship through personal and communal prayer, and being formed by the spiritual disciplines and practices.
- *Serving and justice.* Growing in faith and discipleship by living the Christian mission in the world—engaging in

service to those in need, caring for God’s creation, and acting and advocating for justice.

- *Worshipping God.* Growing in faith and discipleship by worshipping God with the community of faith—praising God; giving thanks for God’s creative and redemptive work in the world; and experiencing God’s living presence through Scripture, preaching, and Eucharist.

FEATURES OF 21ST CENTURY ADULT FAITH FORMATION

Drawn from research studies, current thinking and practice in adult education and learning, and contemporary theory and practice in faith formation, are eight features that provide the foundations upon which to build a 21st century approach to adult faith formation for all of the seasons of adulthood.

Adult faith formation is life-stage/generational—addressing the unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual journeys of people at each stage of adulthood; and intergenerational—engaging adults in the life and events of church life and the Christian faith through participation in intergenerational faith experiences.

Rather than thinking about adult faith formation as religious content and programming, think of adult faith formation as the processes and practices that contribute to growth in faith and discipleship—a far more dynamic approach than a content-driven one. Instead of thinking of adult classes, small group studies, and large group programs, think about processes—how we guide adults in living Christian lives today.

A comprehensive and holistic approach to adult faith formation promotes discipleship and faith growth with developmentally- and generationally-appropriate knowledge, experiences, and practices. These provide a framework to guide the development of adult faith formation across the seasons of adulthood, and a focus for designing new adult programs and activities, as well as redesigning current programming.

Intergenerational faith formation provides whole-community experiences and learning, focused on the central events of church life and the Christian faith. Intergenerational formation and whole community faith experiences form and deepen Christian identity and commitment as adults develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model, and live the Christian tradition and way of life. Whole community experiences also strengthen relationships, connections, and community across generations and enhance adults’ sense of belonging in the faith community.

People learn by participating in the life of a community. Practices of faith are taught through the interrelationships of worship, learning, service, ritual, prayer, and more. Among the events central to the Christian community are the feasts and seasons of the church year, Sunday worship and the

lectionary, sacramental and ritual celebrations, holidays and holy days, works of justice and acts of service, times of prayer, spiritual traditions, and events that originate within the life and history of a individual congregation.

Adult faith formation is missional—expanding and extending the church’s presence through outreach, connection, relationship building and engagement with adults where they live; and providing pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community.

Missional faith formation focuses on the lives of adults who are spiritual but not religious or unaffiliated and uninterested in religion (adults who are “unchurched” and “de-churched”). Research describes the growing number of unaffiliated (the “nones”) especially in the young generations, and the growing number of older adults (especially Boomers) who are leaving established Christian churches after a lifetime of participation (the “dones”).

First, missional faith formation expands and extends the church’s presence through outreach, connection, relationship building, and engagement with adults where they live—

Adult faith formation is guided by a holistic vision of the Christian faith as a way of the head, the heart, and the hands — informing, forming, and transforming adults in Christian faith and identity.

engaging with them around their life situation (needs, interests, concerns), their quest for meaning and purpose in life, their drive to make a difference in world and in lives of others, and more. This type of missional activity provides a safe environment for people to explore life-centered and spiritual-centered activities.

Second, missional faith formation provides pathways for people to consider or reconsider the Christian faith, to encounter Jesus and the Good News, and to live as disciples in a supportive faith community. Missional faith formation guides people as they move from discovery to exploration to commitment.

Adult faith formation addresses the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood— young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s), and older adults (75+).

Much of adult faith formation is developed from a provider-centered, program-driven model where denominations, publishers, and churches determine the content and programming and deliver it to adults.

Today the *diversity of the seasons of adulthood* makes this approach ineffective. Adult faith formation is person-centered, not content- or program-centered. The content, experiences, programs, methods, and delivery systems are designed around the lives of the adults. Adult faith formation addresses the whole life of adults—social, ethnic-cultural, psychological, physical, spiritual, religious, and more

Adulthood is a time of change and transitions, rather than continuity and sameness. Of particular importance to adult faith formation is the kinds of transitions, developmental tasks, and changes in personal meaning that mark the journey of adulthood. Understanding the many ways adults change and grow alerts us to the dynamics of adult Christian growth.

Adult faith formation provides a variety of content, methods, formats, and delivery systems to address the diverse life tasks and situations, needs and interests, and spiritual and faith journeys of adults in four stages of adulthood.

To address the increasing diversity within the adult population, *churches need to offer a greater variety of adult faith formation topics and activities.* In the past, churches have often chosen the “one size fits all” mentality for adult faith formation: How do we get every adult to participate in a small faith sharing group or to come to the Lenten series or to study the Bible?

Adult faith formation is no longer about finding the program to attract all adults. It is about addressing the diversity of adult learning needs with programming that is varied in content, expectations, depth, involvement, and timing.

By expanding the options for adult learning (offering “something for everyone”), churches can engage more adults in faith formation through activities that cater to niches—individuals and small groups with a particular spiritual or religious need, interest, passion, concern, or life issue.

Adult faith formation recognizes that learning and growth is a process of active inquiry with initiative residing in the adult learner and that adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that adult learning activities will satisfy.

Adults prefer to determine their own learning and faith formation experiences. The traditional model of schooling has conditioned adults to perceive the proper role of learners as being dependent on teachers to make decisions for them

as to what should be learned, how it should be learned, when it should be learned, and if it has been learned.

Today's adults are accustomed to searching out what they want to know, when they want and need to know it. People are becoming more and more self-directed in their learning, and they have almost unlimited access to information through the Internet and the wide variety of print and media learning resources available in our society today.

Adult faith formation provides the opportunity for personalized and customized learning and faith growth, giving adults an active role in shaping their own learning and moving along their own personal trajectories of faith growth. Adults are guided by trusted mentors to find their learning and spiritual needs.

We know from learning sciences research that more effective learning will occur if each person receives a *customized learning experience*. People learn best when they are placed in a learning environment that is sensitive to their learning needs and flexible enough to adapt strategies and resources to individual needs. We can now meet people at the point of their spiritual, religious, and learning needs and offer personalized pathways for faith growth.

Adult faith formation is *digitally-enabled*—blending gathered community settings with online learning environments and utilizing the abundance of digital media and tools for learning and faith formation. It is also *digitally-connected*—linking intergenerational faith community experiences, adult peer experiences and programs, and daily/home life using online and digital media.

The *digital revolution* has transformed almost every aspect of society. No facet of this revolution has more potential than its ability to change the way people learn. The availability of a vast array of knowledge and resources at the click of a mouse or the touch of a screen, together with the ability to connect instantaneously with peers and mentors across the street and around the world, make possible completely new learning environments and experiences.

These opportunities are highly engaging and collaborative, and they are based on learners' own interests and strengths. People can truly learn any time, any place, and at any pace today.

Adult faith formation intentionally nurtures *communities of learning and practice* around shared interests, needs, life stages, and activities.

Adult faith formation can connect adults to each other through communities of practice—groups of people who have a shared interest, passion, religious or spiritual need, life stage—who come together to learn with and from each other.

Communities of practice use a variety of approaches to connect, such as face-to-face meetings, teleconferences, video conferencing, social networking, working on projects together. It is a mix of formal and informal methods. Some of them are online; some of them are face-to-face. Some of them happen weekly; some of them happen monthly or yearly.

A congregation is a community of practices like worship, liturgy, pastoral care, outreach, and social justice. Most of the skills and expertise are learned through practice. We don't learn it in a course or book. Communities of practice can connect people within congregations by diffuse learning and through Christian traditions.

CONCLUSION

We began with the questions: What could adult faith formation look like in the 21st century? What insights should inform us and guide the development of adult faith formation for the four stages of adulthood: young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults? How do we engage all the seasons of an adult's life in the lifelong journey of discipleship and faith growth—a process of experiencing, learning, and practicing the Christian faith as we seek to follow Jesus and his way in today's world.

The answers to these questions can be found in the holistic vision of faith and faith forming processes, in the features that can guide the development of 21st century faith formation, and in our flexibility that allows us to reach all adults throughout the seasons of adulthood.

John Roberto of Lifelong Faith Associates is editor of the Lifelong Faith Journal and works as a consultant to churches and religious organizations, teaches courses, and conducts workshop in faith formation.

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Faith Formation with Young Adults

By Kyle Oliver

As a dedicated faith formation resource person with a specialization in digital media, I have observed that young adult ministers are asking very different questions from other age-based or lifelong faith formation professionals and volunteers who seek out our center's guidance. They want to know:

- How can we find new ways of funding our outreach to young adults?
- What is the relationship of campus ministry to young adult ministry?
- What kind of church are we becoming?

The difference is that young adult and campus ministers are always working at the margins of the church, especially in the "oldline" churches (Mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics considered together). When you live at

the margins, you need to ask questions about how you relate to the center.

Young adult ministry operates on the margins in three distinct ways: demographic, cultural and developmental. At the demographic margins, Millennials are the largest generational cohort in American history. Young adults are everywhere, except, of course, in church. Pew Research reports that only 18 percent of Millennials say they attend religious services "nearly every week" or more as of the late '00s.

Religion may well become more important to the Millennials as they age, but slight upward trends do not change the experience of church for the young adults who are currently attending, where the young adult experience can be one of isolation and alienation. It is often difficult to form a "critical mass" for young adult fellowship or programs.

At the cultural margins, there is a disconnect between young adults and

the rest of the church: Churches led primarily by Baby Boomers are not responding well to the needs and values of the younger generations, and at the same time, it's sometimes unclear precisely what young adults are looking for. Although such strategies as ordaining more young adult clergy or placing more young adult leaders on church governance bodies are helpful, they will not by themselves make churches more attractive or responsive to young people.

We need a broad and inclusive conversation about the values each generation brings to what it means to be Christ's church in the world. Young adult ministries will flourish if the values Millennials bring with them to church find a place to take root.

At the developmental margins, the in-betweenness of young adults is a huge part of why congregations are so flummoxed about them. Churches

We need a broad and inclusive conversation about the values each generation brings to what it means to be Christ's church in the world.



have long served children, youth, parents, empty-nesters, and elders. But emerging adults are a special kind of moving target, no longer youth but not quite adults.

How can churches meet twenty-somethings where they are developmentally, supporting them in their transitions without condescension? How can the self-focused still contribute in a mutual way in intergenerational relationships? Those who are finding creative answers with specific approaches provide some helpful ways forward in young adult ministry.

FINDING CRITICAL MASS: A MOVE TOWARD THE REGIONAL AND THE POST-DENOMINATIONAL

A common way to create a critical mass is for faith groups to band together for young adult fellowship and ministry. Just as judicatories and larger regions have long employed youth coordinators to resource congregations, so now many are hiring young adult ministers.

A related trend is happening in college ministry. Once, campus “chaplaincies” functioned like university student organizations for particular denominations. Today multiple denominations sponsor unified ecumenical ministries; campus missionaries bring students from multiple colleges together for regional student fellowship; and distinctions are dissolving between young adult and campus ministry.

Examples of this first trend are only as far away as your nearest college campus. Emblematic of the second and third trends is a network coordinated in part by the Episcopal campus chaplain at New York University. Some of that chaplain’s best practices include focusing on relationships—a lesson that churches everywhere are (re) learning with help from community organizers after years in the program-based wilderness—and letting go of competitive worries.

Commonplace is a yearly young adult gathering for prayer, fellowship, and leadership development that started in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington but has grown to a regional event. Our denomination is looking to sponsor similar events in other regions.

What no denomination can afford to continue is the habit of trading on denominational loyalty alone. In the Episcopal Church, campus ministries flounder when they say “We’ll be a home for all the Episcopalians on

campus.” Many Episcopalians aren’t looking for such a home, and many more don’t particularly care if the Episcopal shield is on the sign out front.

A post-denominational approach acknowledges that the broader Christian tradition is much more important than the way denominations slice and dice that tradition. Denominational identities can help us form distinctive, authentic Christian communities that don’t assume a membership model of the past (“every Methodist will join our group”), nor require a degree in the history of the Reformation in order to keep up with community worship and prayer practices.

This is good news for faith formation leaders. We’ve long known that the message of the gospel, the power of personal relationships, and the freedom to explore the rich diversity of the Christian way are more important factors than denominational brand identity in the forming of a mature and lively faith.

CHANGING CHURCH CULTURE: AN EMPHASIS ON SERVICE IN COMMUNITY

Following the popularity of secular programs like the Peace Corps, Teach for America, and AmeriCorps, almost every Christian denomination has created some program for service in the U.S. or abroad, many of which predate their secular counterparts. These programs are a terrific response to the realities of emerging adulthood, providing food, housing, and employment at a time when many cannot find work; bringing young adults seeking to make a difference to areas of great need; incorporating vocational discernment about the future; and connecting them to faith communities when they are least likely to seek such connections.

These programs are changing Christian culture because they provide a positive

model for how being the church is about more than Sunday worship. They serve as catalysts for outreach in their host communities. Participants become living signs of being a Christian in the world. The director of one program speaks of these ministries as fundamentally diaconal: Interns bring the needs of the world to the caring attention of the church. In so doing, they are changing church culture.

Many secular and faith-based organizations find that an emphasis on service addresses the issues springing from Millennials’ waning religiosity and distrust of institutions. The 2013 Millennial Impact Report found that 73 percent had volunteered in 2012 through some nonprofit organization (22), compared to 18 percent who regularly attended religious services.

Service connects with young adults in a way that worship or church activities may not. It may not be easy for most Millennials to invite a friend to church. But inviting them to serve? That is a way to plant the seed of faith.

CHANGING CHURCH CULTURE: THE LENS OF AUTHENTICITY

In his book *Varieties of Personal Theology: Charting the Beliefs and Values of American Young Adults*, David Gortner found that social capital and education levels are far more significant factors than religious background in shaping the theological beliefs of young adults. An upbringing in a faith community, says Gortner, hasn’t mattered much for most of today’s young adults when it comes to their beliefs about God and the world. Yikes.

Nevertheless, Gortner found that “many young adults engage in [the] work of theological re-evaluation and reinvention—regardless of their affiliation or involvement with actual religious institutions” (328). Robert Wuthnow believes young adults’ often-individualistic approach to faith is the natural result of the lack of support religious institutions have offered them

in their developmental transitions compared to that offered to youth (12).

We can both change church culture and further respond to young adults’ developmental needs by becoming a place where they feel safe to be themselves: anxious about their economic prospects, conflicted (or not) about their sex lives, doubtful about historical doctrines of the church, etc. We have to be not just tolerant of tinkering, but pro-tinkering co-tinkerers.

They need to be encouraged to own their faith, to make it real and concrete in their lives. The motto of the catechumenate program at Christ Church Cathedral in Indianapolis: “Your questions are not in the way—your questions *are* the way” (emphasis added). This is the appropriate backdrop for understanding the overwhelming emphasis, in communities successfully reaching young adults, on authenticity.

This theme has been particularly important at the Commonplace gatherings mentioned earlier. At the first event, participants were invited to share personal faith stories and to make sense of the idea of “resonance.” But the storytelling wasn’t the only way participants exercised their individual expressiveness. Musical and visual arts, including traditional hymns in non-traditional arrangements on some instruments rarely used in worship, were incorporated into our worship and prayer.

Prayer stations allowed us to share our intercessions and thanksgivings with God through drawing, writing, and sitting with images. A designated live note-taker drew together the evening’s themes by painting an entire canvas in the span of our time together. It was a holy thing to see the fruit of our creativity laid before God as an offering.

At the expanded Commonplace event the following year, my colleague Jason Evans of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington made a helpful distinction in a workshop about making space for young adults in congregations. He proposed that congregations ask their young adults, “What can we build

together?” rather than “What do you need?” because it encourages authentic contributions to the wider church from a contingent who loves to tinker, to hack together, to build with and on what they already have. By contrast, “What do you need?” smacks of consumerism and the notion that the church has the answers.

The lens of authenticity is helping many young adult ministers find success by gathering around food and drink. Pub Theology brings the church to an authentic young-adult gathering place and usually destabilizes the expert-novice distinction often present in parish-based theological formation. Presbyterian pastor Adam Walker Cleveland has written blog posts about his experience (start with “Theology Pub (2.0) in Ashland, Oregon”), and

**“Your questions are not in the way—
your questions *are* the way.”**

RENEW International offers resources for the licensed Roman Catholic version, Theology on Tap. If music and praise trumps reflection and study in your community, Beer and Hymns is a more recent development. Lutheran author and pastor Keith Anderson has a helpful “How to Host Your Own Beer and Hymns Night” post.

The Dinner Church model helps demystify the Lord’s Supper by putting it back into its original context: table fellowship. A founding model is St. Lydia’s, now in Brooklyn. The mini-documentary produced by StoryKeep introduces the St. Lydia’s approach.

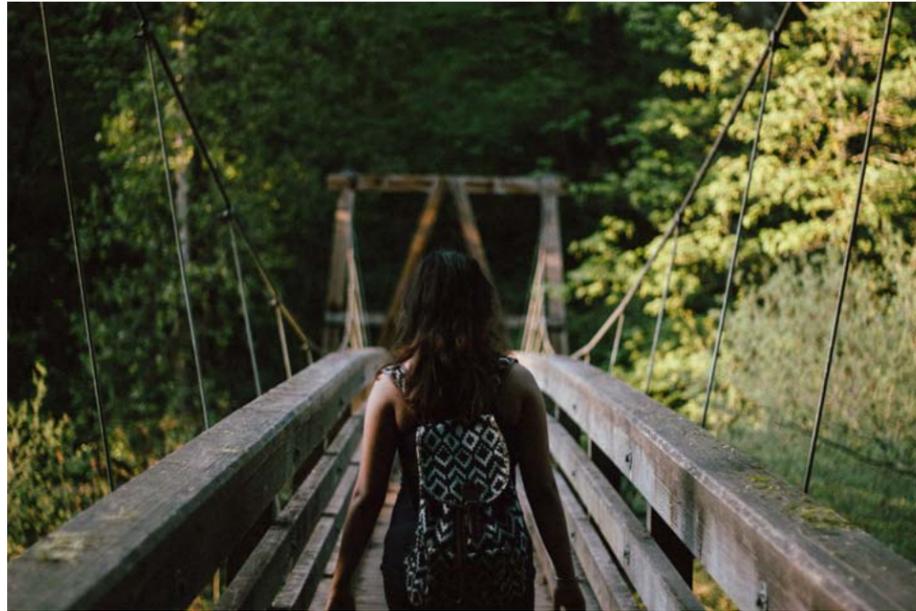
It’s wrong to think of these approaches as merely luring in young adults with promises of food and booze. It’s about meeting them where they already are, trusting in Christ’s presence among any gathering of the faithful and the seeking, easing barriers to invitation, and acknowledging that the kinds of faith questions you’d ask in a pub or at a dinner table are just as legitimate as the ones you ask in the pastor’s office or parish hall.

I would not be much of a digital missionary (my official job title) if I did not finally mention the intersection of digital media with young adult ministry. Online spaces are a primary outlet for all kinds of authentic expression, including religious expression. We shouldn’t assume that young adults demand or even desire that all our faith formation practices have an online component, but strategic efforts can lead to additional “faith touches” amid busy young-adult lives, reach new young adults (see Naughton and Wilson, 43), and help the church embrace the cultural fullness of American life in the 21st century.

A ministry to watch is The Slate Project in Baltimore. This Lutheran-funded, ecumenically shepherded church plant appeals to young adults’

longing for authenticity by promising “Christianity Without the Crap.” Four times per week, Pastor Jason Chesnut and company create savvy faith content intended both for in-person and online followers.

A recent Throwback Thursday post just before Reformation Day included an inspirational quote from Luther about everyday Christian vocation. A Jesus Coffee Monday post by co-pastor Sara Shisler Goff asked: “Just ‘Cause It Is in the Bible, Do We Have to Agree With It?” Intercutting dramatic performance of the text, video clips from popular culture, and evocative images overlaid with text, Chesnut’s YouTube videos represent a giant leap forward in biblical storytelling. The Slate Project is modeling for us all a new kind of proclamation in the native media of young adults: not slick, but real. Not preachy, but faithful. Not gimmicky, but grounded in the culture that surrounds us. If that’s not authentic gospel witness, I don’t know what is.



Though all of life, and especially the life of faith, is a journey, young adulthood is a journey of meaning and adventure in a particularly intensive way.

SUPPORTING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT: YOUNG ADULTS AS PILGRIMS

In his 2011 book *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith*, Barna Group president David Kinnaman describes three categories of church “dropouts”—nomads, prodigals, and exiles.

Nomads are “[w]andering from church” and “wrestling with faith,” Prodigals are “rejecting” Christianity or leaving for another faith, and Exiles have concluded that the church is the last thing their relationship with Jesus needs, that they can be more faithful by exiling themselves from “cultural Christianity” to seek a deeper, authentic faith in Christ (69, 69, 83).

Faith formation is for all kinds of young adults: ones who have stayed

in church, ones who have left, ones who have found other churches and communities in their time of exile, and ones who might be open to such communities. We can capture something of Kinnaman’s nomads and exiles, and something of the special developmental situation of young adulthood regardless of one’s orientation to the church, if we imagine young adults as pilgrims.

Though all of life, and especially the life of faith, is a journey, young adulthood is a journey of meaning and adventure in a particularly intensive way. Leaving home, launching a career, starting a family—these are foreign lands indeed. Remembering this may guide us as we minister to these pilgrim travelers. “What are you seeking, pilgrim? What is your quest?”

If young adulthood is to be a time of dynamic faith formation, these are the questions we need to ask over and

over again. The participants in many campus ministries and young adult fellowships do not seem to be on pilgrimage together. At its worst, the campus ministry I participated in during college was where I went to escape the pilgrimage, to grab a home-cooked meal with friends after church and avoid all the pressing questions of my future.

But a pilgrimage is just a trip if there is not both a journey and a meaning connected to the journey. There is some risk that young adults are not asking big life questions during this time in life. There is a much greater risk that they are asking them without any consideration that church or even God might have anything to do with them. I have stressed the need to focus on relationships (people before programs). As those relationships deepen, we gain the trust to share the road together. How do we help create this space for



meaning-making? How do we mark that—as a group—we are growing in faith? How do we reach out for guidance and support from others? How do we invite Christ into our hearts as we travel by the Spirit? Pilgrims in Christ is the name of the intensive, year-long catechumenate program at a parish in Washington, D.C., that has guided my listening and my contributions in these conversations.

A traditional, formal, weekly catechumenate program such as Pilgrims isn’t likely to fly in any stand-alone young adult community, though I have been shocked by the number of young D.C. professionals who make the journey as a small but significant minority in this adults-of-all-ages

experience.

I do think that the idea of the catechumenate—that there is a body of Christian knowledge and a distinctively Christ-like way of living—resonates with young adults. How should we describe it, this spiritual curriculum? At Commonplace 2014, my colleague Melanie Mullen and I jotted down the big items:

- Basic knowledge of the Bible and reading it for spiritual fulfillment;
- Basic knowledge of church traditions and worship and a commitment to letting them shape us over time;
- Basic knowledge of theology and an ability to use it to reflect on everyday life;
- Basic knowledge about prayer and spiritual practices and a willingness to explore them in a committed way;
- A passion for justice and mercy and a commitment to serving others and the common good;
- A sense that we are “in this together” as a people, sharing our joys and sorrows, marking the major passages in life.

Your community’s list might be different depending on your tradition, your gifts, your theological commitments. But you can help the people you serve make their meandering way through that territory over time.

Programs may be out. Formal curriculum may be deadly. Service may be the starting point, or fellowship over beers or a good meal. But a pilgrimage requires a sense of direction, progress, and thorough exploration. If we’re serious about forming faith that will continue to sustain young adults as they age, we have to trust that the Christian spiritual tradition has much to offer. We need to give it a chance to do its work, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

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Faith Formation with Midlife Adults

By Jim Merhaut



For ministry to connect with midlife adults, church leaders must be conversant in the values and convictions of Generation X. Approaches described here, however, will be relevant for all people at midlife adulthood.

GEN X TOLERANCE

Generation X has not been as supportive of churches as previous generations. They reject dogma and possess a more open disposition to diverse groups of people and ideas. Interracial, intercultural and interreligious friendships and marriages escalated with this generation, a pattern they've passed onto their Millennial children.

As a result, these midlife adults often feel unwelcome in churches that condemn certain sexual orientations or preferences or hesitate to reach out to people of other races or cultures. Gen X will proclaim that it is the mission of the church to break down racial barriers and to promote multicultural ministry experiences. Likewise, enforcing membership rules based upon do's and don'ts is a sure way

to push them out. If someone wants to be a member, the institution must find a way to accept that someone and journey with them.

Generation X also believes that every organization needs a prophet or a whistle-blower. "Group think" is not in Gen X's DNA, and they are not interested in keeping the peace. Expect midlife adults in your congregation to be critical of most everything. The effective ministry leader will accept feedback as oxygen for programmatic growth and vitality rather than dismiss it as petty whining or complaining. Once you are a trusted listener, you can then nurture the skill of constructive criticism.

Deliberately create conversations in which church members feel free to speak what is on their minds. Master the skills of conflict management. Face disagreements head on with honesty, openness, respect and effective practices for negotiation. (A process to settle differences or to develop solutions is described in the Fall 2015 Special Issue of the *Lifelong Faith Journal*, 17.)

GEN X SUSPICION

Building trust is a key to success with Generation X. They will not be loyal to you because of the title you hold. But when you regularly display your ministry competence, you will gain their respect and you will earn their trust with organizational transparency and interpersonal honesty.

With **Organizational Transparency**, ministry leaders can show Gen X adults that all of the church's decisions are above board. These adults have seen the moral collapse of so many institutions that they expect you to let them down. You can prove them wrong by making financial records available for anyone to review and with inclusive planning processes. All topics of discussion are on the table.

Interpersonal Honesty is a general leadership trait that is important for all ages and generations, but Gen X hungers for it. The government, the church, the corporate world, the media and their parents all broke their trust. They will not trust anyone who is not completely honest with them. What Boomers will forgive, Gen X will expose. What Gen X will expose, Millennials will quietly walk away from. Gen X will fight back if you break trust with them through dishonesty or promises not kept.

And yet midlife adults are also ready to pull back from the frenetic activity of earlier years and settle into the warmth and slower pace of intimacy. Honesty builds interpersonal trust and sets the tone for deeply intimate relationships, the cornerstone of Christian faith. Midlife adults will respond to programs that help church members become more authentic with each other.

Competence is another requirement for effective ministry with Gen X adults. Because Generation X suffered so many personal and institutional betrayals, all trust has to be earned, and demonstrated competence is how a professional minister earns it.

Clergy need to be both smart and compassionate—leaders in their communities and experts in their field. Gen X parents want physicians who can give clear and proven advice on keeping their kids healthy and teachers who open the classroom door to parent participation. Likewise, they want sound advice on how to nurture their children into a healthy relationship with God (Roehlkepartain, 46).

GEN X PARENTS

While previous generations raised their kids to be independent, Xer parents want to show their kids how to function and thrive in the world. They'll have meaningful conversations with their kids. They'll devote huge amounts of time to the organizations that work with their kids. Higher education has labeled them disparagingly as "helicopter parents," but this high level of involvement can be a blessing to a church. Recruiting parent volunteers is easier today than it was 30 years ago.

Church leaders should loudly and regularly proclaim that the ministry door is always open to them. Keep parents informed

about the progress of their children and teens in your programs—when they succeed and when they struggle. Give them tips about how they can reinforce at home what you are doing at church.

If you've dreamed of diving into the **family and intergenerational ministry** ocean, the time is now. Gen X parents will be there to support your efforts. Programs such as *Logos* from GenOn Ministries, *Family-Centered Religious Education (F.I.R.E.)* from Liguori Publications, or online intergenerational resource websites such as *VibrantFaith@Home* or *Fashioning Faith* introduce intergenerational faith formation.

You can create weekend or week-long family service learning experiences just as you send teens on service trips, but these family-based trips will be more powerful. A primary goal of any service learning program for teenagers is to cultivate life-long discipleship habits of service. Teen-only service learning programs are missing the ingredient that will help them achieve that goal: parents!

Service experiences for Gen X parents and their kids don't have to be complicated. You can facilitate both gathered programs and experiences that are off-campus. Or if something needs to be done around your church, contact a handful of families to get the job done.

Neighborhood service reaches out to those who need help: a young family with a newborn, a neighbor struggling with an illness, or an elderly person who can't keep up with the house or property. Promote the idea that families can look out for the needs of neighbors. This gives families time together as well as a sense of accomplishment and purpose; it gives people in need the help they deserve; and it gives your church a good name in the community.

Family prayer, worship and discussion groups are a great way to build family faith. Try to keep families together when they are offering ministry hours at church rather than scheduling different times for teens and younger children. Family togetherness is a strong and positive value of this generation, a generation that feels they missed out on it. Whole families can serve as ushers, sing in the choir and assist with leading worship.

Faith Formation

DURING MIDLIFE CRISIS

The midlife crisis is an opportune moment for churches to intervene in the lives of midlife adults and to provide relevant faith formation opportunities and resources that will help them navigate midlife maturation. Church leaders can help members recognize the typical signs of a midlife crisis (Diller) and then encourage them to explore the crisis as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Programs and resources can help midlife adults reflect

deeply on the path their lives have taken and the career, family, personal and faith goals they set earlier in life. How have those goals been met? Are they still unmet? Are they worth keeping? Should new goals be set? Through programs around prayer and reflection, book discussion groups, among others, midlife adults can listen to the inner voice of God calling them to a more abundant future.

IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

While the most inventive technological minds, such as Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, belong to other generations, today's midlife adults are the first large-scale technology users and were the first generation to challenge churches to adopt digital delivery of faith formation content. The Pew Research Center reports that Generation X has the highest rate of technology use except for Millennials. In fact, they use digital games, e-books and tablets at the same rate as Millennials. (Zickuhr, 2010)

Today's midlife adults are the first large-scale technology users and were the first generation to challenge churches to adopt digital delivery of faith formation content.

The pressure to digitize, however, often results in sloppy efforts that resemble a glitzy tech show rather than authentic Christian ministry. The central mission of every church is to promote the Kingdom of God, which is built upon loving relationships. Technology ought to be used only when it serves the church's central mission.

Rev. Bruce Miller of Christ Fellowship Church in McKinney, Texas puts it this way: "Our focus is not technology, but how we can use that technology....The church's purpose is the same, but how we reach people is changing." His church is using software called Meet the Need that connects people in need with others in the community who can assist them. In this way, technology is being used as a tool to connect people and build relationships.

Digital tools can add value to **sermons and presentations**. It is unwise to lecture a group of people that includes Gen Xers if the event consists of you and a podium. Even if you are the most gifted orator, some audience members are primarily visual learners. Digital technology helps us engage multiple senses in every learning session.

Recently at a church in Kentucky, I enjoyed a deeply engaging sermon that included video clips, maps, a guest speaker along with the pastor, music, photos, live drawings on a digital tablet that were projected onto the screen and more. Every media element and every sensory experience reinforced the key message of the sermon, "God Is Faithful!"

The software used is easily accessible to almost any church community.

Websites remain a powerful way for an organization to express itself on the Internet. Template websites are increasingly adaptable for churches seeking an attractive and versatile site at an affordable price. Template services such as Weebly.com, Wordpress.com, Wix.com and Squarespace.com have pre-designed pages and features that are easy to add and edit.

Survey Software makes it easy to take the pulse of your church community. They provide general evaluations of programs as well as immediate insight into how parishioners are thinking and feeling about news and current events, which can help you respond to parishioners with relevant faith formation resources. Surveys are particularly relevant for naturally-critical Gen Xers, who will seize the opportunity to make their prophetic presence known.

A common mistake is developing surveys to get desired results rather than to learn the truth. A bigger mistake is to

gather the data and then ignore the results. When you ask people to take the time to express their thoughts, feelings and opinions, you must develop a response that is relevant and timely.

Easy-to-use and affordable survey tools include *SurveyMonkey.com*, *Zoomerang.com*, *Surveygizmo.com* and *Polldaddy.com*. Most are free up to a certain number of uses or responses.

Even though email is rapidly giving way to social media and texting, **email marketing software** allows your church to inform members about upcoming events, and announce and distribute survey questionnaires. Generation X still relies on email and it is a viable way to communicate with them.

In exchange for a low monthly subscription fee, you can send as many colorful and dynamic emails as you want without any additional cost. With email programs such as *ConstantContact.com*, *MailChimp.com* and *Flocknote.com*, you can include photos, graphics, videos and podcasts.

Texting is now more common than phone calling. With **mass text messaging** there is much information that you can pass along in a text message with equal or better results than a phone call. When you want a deeper personal impact, however, a voice-to-voice encounter can be more powerful. With mass texting, you can spread short, simple messages such as meeting reminders or cancellation notices to a targeted group of people quickly.

Podcasts are simple voice recordings that can be added

to a website or shared through an email or text message. Sermons or even sermon snippets make excellent podcasts. You can also make podcasts with simple prayer instructions and reflections, or post interviews with church members on a special page on your website.

Any digital recording device, including most cell phones, will allow you to create a podcast. The same software you use to edit videos can be used to edit podcasts or you can use free audio editing software called Audacity.

Christians in the 21st century, like most people, are highly visual in their learning orientation, and **video or film learning** is increasing in popularity. Generation X is, after all, the television generation. You can still produce warm feelings in their hearts with video technology.

Video production software is now included with most new computers, making it easy to produce simple educational videos that can stand by themselves or supplement a larger project. Videos can be easily embedded into websites and emails, sent to cell phones and distributed through social media.

Video should always enhance and not distract from the core content of the session. It should always be used in the context of a faith formation that brings people together in communion with each other and with God. For example, dedicate a page on your website to introduce new parishioner families with a short video of an interview with family members.

When it's difficult to get people to attend meetings at the church building, especially when there is a threat of bad weather, consider using **online meetings**. Church members can join you from the comfort of their own homes.

Webinars are another way for people to gather online, although they are usually designed as an educational event for larger numbers of participants. Webinars can also be creative teasers for gathered programs. Offer the content online, and schedule an event at a later date for group activities.

Webinars can also give a church access to a national speaker without having to pay the speaker's travel expenses. A gathered group of participants at the church can view the webinar on a large screen while others login from home. The webinar becomes an enriching experience especially if there are follow-up opportunities planned when the whole community is gathered together. At-home participants could be invited to a small group experience to reflect upon the webinar presentation. Suggested software that supports online meetings and webinars includes *AnyMeeting.com*, *GoToMeeting.com*, *GoToWebinar.com* and *WebinarJam.com*.

Social media, including *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Pinterest* and *LinkedIn*, are among the most common names in the world of social networking. Anyone can set up an account for free and be connected to thousands of people in a very short time. Churches can use social networking for informal communication about programs and events while also sending inspirational messages on a regular basis.

CONCLUSION

Involvement, diversity, acceptance, suspicion, technology, integrity and authenticity are terms that have all been used to capture the spirit of Generation X. Current midlife adults challenge our institutional approaches like no generation before them. Our success with them depends upon our adaptability, our integrity and our competence.

We must broaden our faith formation delivery systems to use technology generously and judiciously. Church leaders who recognize the spiritual significance of midlife crisis can help midlife adults recreate their futures, while honoring their current commitments, and re-engage them with fresh perspectives. If midlife adults successfully push the church to develop new ministry approaches that are meaningful and relevant for this stage of life, they will have done all of us a great service.

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Faith Formation with Mature Adults

By Janet Schaeffler

Not long from now, older adults will outnumber the youth. When this age wave crashes on our shores, says John Roberto, every aspect of society, including church, will be scrambling to respond. This article looks at key characteristics of mature adulthood that influence learning, potential themes for faith formation for mature adults, and effective practices and approaches.

Adults' readiness to learn is directly linked to needs—needs related to fulfilling their roles as workers, spouses, parents and Christian disciples, and to coping with life changes (divorce, death of a loved one, retirement). Because today's mature adults are healthy, energetic and living longer, ministries should be designed as being with and through them rather than to them. Moreover, ministry with maturing adults should be both age-specific and multigenerational—the comfort of their own environments as well as the challenge that comes from different ways of thinking.

The content for faith formation for maturing adults needs to be broad, wide, and deep, and the location should include both physical and virtual spaces. One ministry type will not meet all the needs of older adults. Some will enjoy meeting for a weekly or monthly luncheon program, while others prefer to be part of a mission team or community service project. Some are available during the day; others will be working and available only at night or on weekends.

One congregation doesn't have to do everything. It can be a clearinghouse and a curator by alerting maturing adults to the vast array of educational, formational, prayer and reflection, and service opportunities available.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MATURE ADULTHOOD

Gary McIntosh describes the Baby Boomer generation as educated, media-oriented, independent, cause-oriented, fitness-conscious, activist, quality-conscious and questioning of authority. Baby Boomer church members are:

- committed to relationships rather than organizations
- wanting to belong rather than join
- supportive of people rather than programs
- longing to live their faith rather than only talk about it
- unique individuals rather than a monolithic group
- seeking to design their own programs rather than attending ones developed for them
- yearning to serve others rather than being served
- craving meaningful activity rather than empty days

Most adults in their mid-50s through mid-70s seek continuous learning and growth. A motivation for ongoing learning flows from the needs of the participants. David Moberg argues that maturing adults have a need for or to:

- Meaning and purpose
- Love and relatedness
- Forgiveness
- Spiritual integration
- Cope with losses
- Freedom to raise questions
- Flexibility
- Prepare for dying and death
- Be useful
- Be thankful

POTENTIAL THEMES FOR FAITH FORMATION WITH MATURE ADULTS

In adult faith formation, there are no dividing lines between the content of faith learning and life learning. "Since all experience has the potential for learning, the division between sacred and secular fades away," writes Margaret Fisher Brillinger. "Whether the experience and struggle to make meaning of it are painful or joyful, the whole process is sacred. Whether the learning event takes place within a religious context or outside of one, the moment is God-given. Lifelong learning and the faith journey are one and the same."

EVERYDAY LIFE

Congregations can provide workshops, resources and support aimed at addressing the realities of the maturing ages of life, including simplifying life, nutrition and fitness, managing life transitions, or discovering or developing artistic and creative talents.

Another issue that touches many in this age group is sudden unemployment. A Michigan church hosted several sessions on the spiritual challenges of being unemployed, thoughts from an employer, the emotional effects of unemployment, and practical tips for seeking re-employment.

LIFE'S TRANSITIONS AND LOSSES

Upon reflection, most people realize that their deepest faith growth occurs during unpredictable situations—and even crises—of normal everyday life. "In times of transition," says Diane Tickton Schuster, "most people experience feelings of disorientation and tend to question personal priorities;



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they may seek to 'finish unfinished business' or develop new dimensions of their lives....They look to education to help regain 'order and stability' in their lives."

Congregations are crucial at these times, and our response, our walking with people during transitions, takes many forms beyond information (Miller). The task for churches is to be aware of all the transitions which are touching the lives of the maturing adult today. Richard Johnson suggests a program of mini-courses flowing from the life transitions of older adults, emphasizing the spiritual dimensions of these life events.

PRAYER AND SPIRITUALITY

The maturing adult is at a place and space in life where prayer can deepen experience. Prayer methods that open the door for people include meditation, Lectio Divina, centering prayer, contemplative prayer, Ignatian contemplation and consciousness examen (Feldmeier).

Mature adults need fresh ideas about spirituality and faith, and many are afraid to ask their church to help them. They should be invited into optimistic, growth-filled, practical information and formation regarding a maturing spirituality. They welcome how-to's which enable them to stay active, energetic, involved and open to spiritual growth and change which will affect their entire lives.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND APPROACHES FOR FAITH FORMATION WITH MATURE ADULTS

In most instances, congregations can offer mature adults programs and resources virtually as well as face-to-face. Small Bible study groups can share their faith and day-to-day challenges via Skype or other web conferencing service, or in a Facebook group. Churches can become curators of online faith formation resources for mature adults to use on their own, and can help people find those resources.

Prepare for a gathered program by sending a news story, questions or links to other online resources by email which participants can view ahead of time. Provide opportunities for Boomers to learn about new technologies, perhaps from younger generations serving as mentors. Offer online courses, such as those available from universities and seminaries, as well as on iTunes University, for adults to learn independently or in small groups.

SMALL GROUPS

Conversation with other adults enhances our ability to express our faith, provides a context for seeing connections between faith and life, and strengthens our faith as we hear about the faith of others (Regan). And conversations among small groups have additional benefits:

- Community building: A small group serves as a community or congregation within the congregation.
- Educational development: Small groups provide a wonderful opportunity to engage people in study.
- Spiritual enrichment: Far too many Christians limit their prayer life to

one minute before meals and one minute before going to sleep. Many find themselves just too busy to pray.

- Mission outreach: Each small group is required to look beyond themselves by engaging in ministry beyond the group (Weber).

People who have been members of small groups understand what makes small groups thrive. Group members have a shared vision of the gathering, they have common goals and engage in prayer and rituals, and they share in taking responsibility for the group.

One popular form of small groups are study groups that meet to study Scripture, review recent books, movies and videos, or explore social justice issues. Some book clubs devote themselves to one kind of book or theme, but many are eclectic. Patrick White, professor of English at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana has noted, "You can't get people together to talk about literature in a serious way over time without touching on spiritual matters." Book clubs and other study groups can happen face-to-face or virtually, lending themselves to the schedules and life situations of the maturing adult.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Members of a support group typically share their personal experiences and offer one another "you're not alone" emotional comfort and moral support. Practical advice and tips for coping and thriving help members to feel more empowered. The advice may take the form of evaluating relevant information, relating personal experiences, listening to and accepting others' experiences, providing sympathetic understanding and establishing social networks. Sometimes a support group may also work to inform the public or engage in advocacy.

Support groups can be in person, on the Internet or by telephone. They may

be led by professional facilitators or by group members. Numerous life issues can be the focus of support groups for those in their mid-50s through mid-70s, including marriage, empty nest syndrome, divorce, loss of a spouse or friend, addiction, aging parents, among others.

PROGRAMMING FOR COMMUNITIES OF LIKE INTEREST

We can no longer approach adult faith formation with a "one-size-fits-all" mentality. Richard Gentzler advises churches to "use lifestyles, not age, as the determining factor for ministry. Chronological age is not important in ministry with persons at midlife and beyond. Rather, lifestyle issues are more important. . . . Create small groups around common interests, concerns, or careers."

Certainly, there are times when "mixed groups" are extremely important; we learn from the wisdom and experiences of each other. Yet many congregations tell us that they have better response to offerings targeted to communities of like interest.

INTERGENERATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

An intergenerational mindset is crucial in our ministry to all members, especially those in their mid-50s through mid-70s. "People who age well often have growing relationships with younger people and are involved in learning and growth opportunities" (Gentzler).

Ramonia Lee recounted in a workshop that "age-segregated ministries often do not appeal to Boomers. They want partnerships with other groups in the church and the community, including mission groups, choirs, coffee conversation groups, even confirmation classes with older members studying with the children."

Likewise, intergenerational programs

benefit younger generations. John Kotre maintains that for any culture to flourish younger people need the examples, witness and stories of real-life people growing older and acquiring wisdom. Cultivating wise elders should become an integral dimension of adult learning (O'Murchu).

Fortunately, the awareness of—and the planning for—intergenerational learning is growing. Churches can respond in numerous ways by putting different ages together in small groups, prayer and worship, and service and outreach. Grace Presbyterian Church in Houston participates in a Church Apartment Ministry in which the church maintains an apartment for families of cancer patients at the Texas Medical Center. The Encore 50+ Ministry coordinates this outreach and the young adults do most of the cleaning and maintenance as well as helping the families move in. The older adults visit the families and patient, offering to bring them to church or provide meals.

One way to connect with and build on intergenerational programming is to shape all offerings to the congregation around a specific theme.

LIFE REVIEWS

Inviting and equipping people in mature adulthood to purposefully reflect on their lives is a constructive approach to cherish life, to deepen meaning, and to share legacies. There are numerous ways to invite people to participate that speak to different learning styles: writing memoirs or autobiographies, previewing and assembling photo albums, taping memories and stories, expressing life moments and history through art, creating memory gardens, among others.

Incorporated into these life histories, adults in their maturing years might also be invited to reflect on their legacy. What are they passing on to the next generations? Invite them to first identify their spiritual gifts and talents and second, name those who could receive them.

At one church, a person's journey of writing a spiritual autobiography touched many others. Mary began writing her story a few months after her husband died, a very difficult time in her life. After its completion two years later, Mary realized that the writing of her story brought healing during a time of grief, and she discovered that the moments when God was present just naturally surfaced.

Several years later Mary participated in a program that emphasized the power of writing a spiritual autobiography. She realized that she could share her experience by creating a workshop to provide insights into writing a spiritual autobiography. Through this workshop she touched many lives.

SERVICE

According to a researcher at Peter Hart Associates, "For this generation of older Americans, volunteerism is about something much more substantial and real than taking up time in their day. . . . It is about filling a need, their need to both make a difference and be involved."

Churches are responding by creating compelling opportunities for service and outreach to the community and beyond by delivering Meals-on-

Wheels, providing transportation, mentoring, serving in homeless shelters and soup kitchens, among other outreach programs. Mature adults not only provide the labor, but also the leadership and program design.

CONCLUSION

Gary McIntosh summarizes many of opportunities available for ministry and faith formation with Baby Boomers or mature adults by offering these recommendations:

1. Build a ministry for Boomers that is adventurous. Rather than mall walking, consider hiking in the mountains, cross-country skiing, or snowshoeing. Remember: Boomers have always seen themselves as a youthful generation, and they still do!
2. Build a ministry for Boomers that is fun. Rather than potluck luncheons, consider catered parties, fishing trips, paint ball competitions, and team-building camps. Remember: Boomers are not looking for a seniors' ministry; they are seeking an older youth ministry.
3. Build a ministry for Boomers that is significant. Rather than being served, consider serving others by

building a home for Habitat for Humanity, assisting missionaries, helping out-of-work people to find a job, or tutoring children. Remember: Boomers desire to make a difference in the world by taking on great causes.

4. Build a ministry for Boomers that is educational. Along with Bible studies, consider CPR, basic first aid, personal health, managing finances and public speaking classes. Remember: Boomers are an educated generation, and they wish to continue learning to the end of their days.
5. Build a ministry for Boomers that is spiritual. Rather than offering simplistic formulaic programs, consider prayer walks in the neighborhood, intercession teams, and a variety of small groups. Remember: Boomers are a mosaic of sub-groups, and it will take a multi-dimensional approach to spiritual formation to reach them.

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Faith Formation with Older Adults

By Dorothy Linthicum



When asked, “Who is your target audience?” most church leaders will say young people, Millennials, young families, or the unchurched. Yet who are sitting in the pews, or serving on altar guilds, or ushering, or pledging, or manning the food programs? Many are nearing 75 or are already in that age group.

Can a church be vibrant if it offers well-rounded activities for all ages, but targets older people?

The lay governing body at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Montrose, Pa. decided to focus the church’s ministry on older people at the church and in the community. They made a gallant effort in 2008 to create a ministry for young families, but after four years, concluded that other churches were better equipped to serve them. When the rector first described the situation at his church, my heart cried out, “No, you can’t have church without children.” But then another thought slipped into both my mind and heart.

At the eFormation Conference 2014 at Virginia Theological Seminary, one of the plenary speakers, Meredith Gould, asked “Who is your target audience?” Her answer: the people sitting in the pews, not some unrepresented demographic. As with St. Paul’s, those attending many of our churches are nearing or over age 65.

St. Paul’s came to us with a basic question, “What does ministry to older people look like?” There are no blueprints for such a ministry. Changes in the worship space there are already underway, including a new surround sound system for people with hearing impairments and new cameras to broadcast the primary Sunday worship service in high definition via cable television.

Many questions remain: Will St. Paul’s no longer have intergenerational worship and community events? How will it welcome families and younger individuals who are attracted by their ministry? Because the area is a magnet for retirees,



there is a strong base for both a vital church and ministry to older people. Maybe more churches should ask, “Who is our target audience?”

SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

The key component churches can provide to older populations is in the realm of the spiritual. In 1977, the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging, which had representatives from the major Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish religious bodies, developed this definition of spiritual well-being:

Spiritual well-being is the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and the environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness (Thorson).

We cannot separate our spiritual lives from the wholeness of life. While it is helpful to distinguish among ministry for the body, mind and soul, we must weave those disparate parts into a whole cloth. The ensuing discussion will examine

practices and approaches to ministry in each of three areas—physical, mental, and spiritual—with the understanding that each is only a part of the whole person.

Programming that touches all three areas should also reflect the needs and contexts of each congregation. Activities should be created for “us” by “us;” those that are created solely by staff or well-meaning people for “them” are doomed to fail. The ministries suggested below reflect earlier observations made about the developmental, generational and spiritual characteristics of the Builder Generation.

BODY

Physical changes include not only the body, but also how those changes affect volunteer activities, the places people live, and those who are caregivers.

HONORING PAST WORK

The Builder Generation has provided leaders and workers that are still the backbone of many civic and religious organizations. Many mission and outreach initiatives began with the efforts of people who are now over 75. This group also provided the hospitality that made church communities so inviting, from luncheons for older members to receptions at funerals.

Many of those people are weary and ready to move on to other pursuits. Younger generations, however, seem to have limited time and little interest in hosting receptions or continuing traditional events, so this may be a time to assess which activities are no longer feasible. Instead of letting traditional events die a quick or lingering death, which results in resentment and hurt, congregations should celebrate—with more than just a line in a worship bulletin—the role the events played in the life of the church and the people who made them possible. The Builder Generation laid the foundation that allows the current congregation to change and grow.

CHANGES IN THE BODY

Changes in the body are often seen and described as losses: a loss of hearing, a loss of vision, a loss of dexterity, among others. These changes often turn sidewalks, entrances, and aisles into barriers.

To test the accessibility of church buildings and grounds, enlist the youth group to conduct an accessibility survey. Not only will the congregation learn about their facilities, the youth will also gain a new understanding of older people. Several groups have published simulations of aging; begin with one from the Texas AgriLife Extension Service (available for free download).

AGING IN PLACE

Most older people prefer to “age in place,” growing old in their own homes. Successful aging in place, however, demands that homes not only provide continued enjoyment and stimulation, but also support declining functional limitations. Churches have an opportunity to partner with local and community agencies to help older people make more informed decisions about their future living arrangements.

A team of architects and construction experts from the church and community could advise older residents about the feasibility of adding chair lifts to staircases, making bathrooms handicapped-accessible, and widening doorways. Expert advice can be offered about other issues, such as transportation. Older residents also need to consider transportation options for caregivers who may rely on public transportation.

The pairing of people in their 50s and 60s who are beginning to think about future living arrangements with people in their 80s who are aging in place could create beneficial bonds. The Builders could help the Boomers with the realities of independent living arrangements, while the Boomers might be able to resolve some of the challenges the Builders had not anticipated.

CAREGIVERS

Every church should reach out to caregivers who are working with older people. In his first monograph, *I’m Old*, written when he was in his late 80s, Milton Crum argues that more time and effort is spent dealing with caregivers than old people themselves. However, in his later work, *I’m Frail*, he relates his experience of having primary responsibility for the care of his wife. Many mature adults with health issues of their own assume caregiving responsibilities for a spouse, partner or friend.

Caregivers of all ages need more support than governmental agencies and care facilities offer. Churches can support caregivers through support groups and short-term palliative breaks.

MIND

The second element that informs ministry to older adults is related to the mind. Too often when the terms mental and older adults are paired, thoughts quickly move to dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, even though half of those in their late 80s and 90s will maintain their mental faculties. Nevertheless, adults over 75 have already begun to live with issues of loss in every facet of their lives.



Perhaps by spending more time with older people in our churches and personal lives, listening to their stories, or just being in their presence, we can benefit from their wisdom.

DEALING WITH LOSS AND LONELINESS

A reality for people over 75 is the loss of spouses, friends and other family members. Women are especially hard hit: 64 percent of men over 75 are married, while only 18 percent of women are married. Women continue to be more likely to outlive their male spouses.

Along with this loss is another reality that feeds feelings of loneliness. In a major study of women over age 65, women were asked how their congregations perceived them. They said they were invisible. Several practices can increase the visibility of the group, including storytelling, tending to relationships, and advocating for economic and other issues that are applicable to all older adults.

Jane Sigloh suggests that loneliness can be a positive experience that leads people to fulfillment. Loneliness is “a place where, in the ultimate depths of each individual soul, we can meet God. And where we can hear the voice of God, the way Elijah did, in the sound of sheer silence” (104).

KEEPING CLOSE TO FAMILY

Contrary to societal beliefs about relationships between mature adults and other family members, research shows that while generations are less likely to live under one roof, older adults report close relationships with children and grandchildren.

Churches can provide settings to help generations spend time

together as families. Week-long Vacation Bible Schools are a good place for grandchildren who are spending time with grandparents. While children are involved in the program, grandparents can share their skills and talents as volunteers, doing tasks from storytelling to making creative snacks to teaching a craft.

Many churches also design weekend retreats to include extended family members. Other intergenerational activities, such as mission and outreach opportunities, embrace family members of all ages.

TECHNOLOGY

According to the Pew Research Center, people over 75 are more tech savvy than ever before. They are very likely to communicate by email, to use Internet search engines, to engage in some format of social media and to own smart phones and tablets. Often they are frustrated with the lack of detailed instructions about using new software and their own fears of “breaking” an application or losing data.

As churches turn to digital technology and online communication, they can assist older members in using new technology for faith formation and general communications. Boomers will soon be moving into the over-75 age group, and they will be bringing their interests and skills with them.

Millennials, who create most of the available software applications, or apps, assume users share their trial-and-error method of learning new tools. Older people prefer written guidelines or one-on-one instruction. Pairing Millennials with older people for “App Sundays,” is one way to bridge the

knowledge gap between generations, with younger people listening to needs, suggesting appropriate apps, and teaching their use, and older people sharing their related experiences and humor. A learning and teaching atmosphere is conducive to building relationships that go far beyond random apps.

Using online spiritual and worship resources is not difficult, but finding them is challenging. By simply bookmarking resources, churches can open up a new way of thinking about God. The brothers at the Society of Saint John the Evangelist, for example, provide online daily meditations, audio clips of prayers and chants, and seasonal reflections. With social media, people can form online communities to share their thoughts and activities. A Facebook page with limited accessibility would allow a group of older women, to support each other, sharing joys and sorrows, and facing loneliness.

THOUGHTFUL PROGRAMMING CONTENT

Content that is intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking is often missing in programs targeted to older people. While lighter community-building functions are enjoyed by many, some would gravitate to events with more substance. Older adults interested in this kind of programming can provide the leadership to start and sustain it. In addition to denominational resources, content is available for no or low cost from such sites as TED Talks.

Several new Bible studies are also available to help groups go beyond a basic discussion. The Covenant Bible Study, uses video segments of scholars who take a contemporary approach to ancient texts. The format provides a new way to think about biblical texts—a new lens for seeing how the texts interact across the millennia.

MEMORY IMPAIRMENT

For elders with dementia, memories can still provide feelings of safety and contentment. Unlocking those memories from brains with twisted neurons may require only a few simple prompts. A story that takes a person back to childhood often brings a smile; occasionally the older person picks up the strands of the story and retells it in a slightly new way.

Providing a safe place where people can face and name their fears, especially for those over 75 who may be reluctant to do so, is an important ministry of the church. One way to do this is creating personal memory boxes to help people recall favorite memories.

Memory boxes can be explored through a series of gatherings and scheduled over several weeks or during a retreat. People who might hesitate to share an intimate story about God’s presence in their lives are more open to talking about music that touches their hearts and their memories of a story or family photograph.

Spiritual autobiographies focus on the way people, events

and experiences have formed a person or shaped the course of his or her life. Through the writing of spiritual biographies people begin to identify tangible objects that reflect their deepest memories. The objects chosen not only have the power to evoke a pleasant memory, but also to reflect God’s presence in the events of a person’s life.

SPIRIT

The third element that informs ministry to older adults is related to the spirit. Spiritual wholeness can be elusive, especially among those who have resisted doubt and uncertainty in their faith. Its importance can be overlooked or shoved aside in the busy-ness of everyday life.

Those from the Builder Generation may find it difficult to move beyond a faith defined only by community mores. Beliefs forged and strengthened during times of doubt are more difficult to embrace. Ministries that help mature adults fashion their faith include holy listening, mentorships, knowing God, and facing death—both their own and those they love.

HOLY LISTENING

As congregations age, there is an increasing need for those who can provide the grace of listening. “Explaining ourselves,” says Thorson, “and finding that we are pretty good people after all is like forgiveness of sin; acceptance as we are—warts and all—is what we strive for and is what I think gives meaning to life.” He believes that just sitting still to listen to older people talk about their lives is grace (Thorson, xvi).

Thorson says that those who are in listening roles don’t have to correct historical misinterpretations that they catch, and they have the power to give absolution.

Initially, a holy listening ministry may be a team of people who visit church members in retirement communities or nursing homes. People who offer a listening ministry often report that they receive the same grace that they grant.

KNOWING GOD

“Spiritual well-being is being on friendly terms with God,” says Thorson (xvii). That means spending time with God, in silence, through conversation, and in prayer. Older people who are accustomed to prayer books or more formal prayers during worship may find it difficult to be in conversation with God. They sometimes revert to language of the King James Version of the Bible, which makes conversation stilted and unnatural, or they simply feel inadequate to address God in more familiar language.

Short courses on different ways to pray and other spiritual practices could be offered at retirement residences, at church gatherings, and in homes. Courses can also be targeted to people of all ages as intergenerational programming.

Researchers have discovered that older people in general

are happier than younger adults (National Opinion Research Center). While older people experience significant losses, they report less anxiety and fewer difficulties with financial and interpersonal problems.

Younger adults could benefit from the serenity and calm that is sometimes more evident in older people's lives. Churches might explore prayer and silence with an intentional pairing of younger and older adults. A mixture of active and passive activities would benefit young and old alike. Both could learn how to be "on friendly terms with God."

FACING DEATH

Older people often say that it is the "dying process" that they fear, even though death itself may be a friend. Most people live with the hope that they will remain active to the very end, and then die quietly in their sleep. Regretfully, this is not the end most will experience.

Sherwin Nuland suggests that there were two options for facing death: "One is to battle death using all the weapons of 'high-tech biomedicine.' The other option is conscious acquiescence to death's power" (10). Richard Rohr in *Falling Upward* agrees with Nuland that our churches, medical profession, and even families focus more on surviving rather than thriving (xvii).

Churches can help individuals and families first to articulate the options they prefer, and secondly to prepare living wills and other documentation to make their wishes known and legally binding. A beginning point might be reading and discussing Nuland's *How We Die* in small groups. A second step might be the preparation of living wills with the help of community social agencies or knowledgeable church members.

CONCLUSION

In describing the human condition, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:

"But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure."

Many people over 75 have lived these words, through the losses they have faced, through illness and disease, and in the uncertainties of simple survival. And yet many are more likely to express contentment than younger, more active people in the prime of health.

Perhaps by spending more time with older people in our churches and personal lives, listening to their stories, or just being in their presence, we can benefit from their wisdom.

At the same time while the "outer nature is wasting away" for many older adults, their inner nature is being renewed daily. All who walk with them in this journey can glimpse the "eternal weight of glory" that awaits us all.

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Future of Adult Faith Formation

By John Roberto

The 2015 National Symposium on the Future of Adult Faith engaged more than 100 Christian faith formation leaders in analyzing the forces affecting the lives of adults and faith communities today, envisioning potential futures for adult faith based on current realities and future possibilities, and developing strategies for more faith communities toward more effective and comprehensive adult faith formation. The Symposium addressed three central questions:

- What could adult faith formation in faith communities look like in five years?
- How can faith communities provide vibrant faith formation to address the four seasons of adulthood— young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults—over the next five years?
- How can congregations envision the future shape of adult faith formation and design initiatives to respond proactively to the challenges and opportunities in faith formation with adults?

about the present and the future. The four adult faith formation scenarios frame key issues and developments that will shape what the future may hold for congregations—as well as denominations—and help leaders prepare more effectively.

INTRODUCING SCENARIO PLANNING

Scenarios are "narratives of alternative environments in which today's decisions may be played out. They are not predictions. Nor are they strategies. Instead they are more like hypotheses of different futures specifically designed to highlight the risks and opportunities involved in specific strategic issues" (Jay Ogilvy and Peter Schwartz, *Global Business Network*). The scenarios are an attempt to provoke a realization that the future need not simply be more of the same. They are intended to begin a stimulating discussion about the future of adult faith formation—not to propose readymade answers or solutions.

uncertainties.

Scenarios are designed to stretch our thinking about emerging changes and the opportunities and threats that the future might hold. They allow us to weigh our choices more carefully when making short-term and long-term strategic decisions.

At its most basic, scenarios help people and organizations order and frame their thinking about the long-term while providing them with the tools and confidence to take action soon. At its most powerful, scenarios help people and organizations find strength of purpose and strategic direction in the face of daunting, chaotic and even frightening circumstances.

No one can definitively map the future of adult faith formation in congregations. However, developing alternate futures can contribute to good decision-making processes that will determine the direction of faith formation.

The four adult faith formation scenarios frame key issues and developments that will shape what the future may hold for congregations—as well as denominations—and help leaders prepare more effectively.

The symposium created four scenarios for envisioning the future of adult faith formation. The four scenarios are stories that address significant forces affecting adult faith formation and stimulate new ways of thinking

The point is not to gather evidence for some "most probable" future. Rather the point is rather to entertain a number of different possibilities in order to make better choices about the future of faith formation in the face of inevitable

DRIVING FORCES

What are the driving forces that will most directly impact the future of adult faith formation in faith communities over the next five years (2016-2020), and more specifically, the ability of faith communities to provide vibrant adult faith formation over the next five years?

We know that faith communities are confronted by a number of significant social, cultural, technological, and generational forces that make faith formation for adults of all ages and generations quite challenging. There are driving forces that we can be reasonably certain will shape the worlds we are describing—these are predetermined elements such as the increase in adults over 60 years old and the fact that 10,000 Americans turn 65 years old each day—and that will continue for the next decade.

Predetermined elements are important to any scenario story, but they are not the foundation on which these stories are built. Rather, scenarios are

formed around critical uncertainties—driving forces that are considered both highly important to our central questions and highly uncertain in terms of their future resolution. Whereas predetermined elements are predictable driving forces, uncertainties are by their nature unpredictable. While any single uncertainty could challenge our thinking, the future will be shaped by multiple forces playing out over time.

Participants at the Future of Adult Faith Formation Symposium identified forces that were “global”—affecting all adults in society, and forces that were specific to the four seasons of adults— young adults (20s-30s), midlife adults (40s-50s), mature adults (mid 50s-mid 70s, and older adults (75+).

CRITICAL UNCERTAINTIES

A number of critical uncertainties—forces that are considered both highly important to the central questions and highly uncertain—were identified by

Symposium participants. After careful consideration two uncertainties were selected to form a matrix that define a set of four scenarios for the future of adult faith formation in churches. Each of the two uncertainties is expressed as an axis that represents a continuum of possibilities ranging between two endpoints.

UNCERTAINTY #1

The response of faith communities to the increasing diversity in society (economic, ethnic/cultural, households/families, sexual/gender, spiritual, religious). The opposite sides of this uncertainty are resisting diversity and embracing diversity

UNCERTAINTY #2

The desire and interest of adults today in developing their spiritual life. The opposite sides of this uncertainty are decreasing desire and interest and increasing desire and interest.

FOUR SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION

When the two critical uncertainties are connected in a 2x2 matrix, a set of four stories—or scenarios—are created to describe how the future of adult faith formation could evolve. The scenarios express a range of possible futures and explain why the “main story” of adult faith formation will be framed by the response to these two significant uncertainties. The scenarios are not meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive—rather they are designed to be both plausible and challenging, to engage the imagination while also raising new questions about what the future of adult faith formation might look and feel like.

No one can definitively map the future. We do not know which of the scenarios will rise in ascendancy over the next five years. Will adults desire and interest in growing spiritually increase or decrease over the next five years? Will faith communities move toward embracing or resisting the increasing diversity in society and the adult population? The “world” of each scenario can be described in terms of these two uncertainties.

SCENARIO 1

The first scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are developing approaches, strategies, and programming that respond to diversity and engage adults in growing spiritually.

SCENARIO 2

The second scenario describes a world in which adults have a desire and interest in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not

embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more).

In this world faith communities may recognize the desire and interest of adults in the spiritual life, but provide little or no adult faith formation for any adults or provide faith formation that is focused on a particular adult population, such as active adult members of the faith community or parents or older adults. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood— young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

SCENARIO 3

The third scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are not embracing the diversity in the adult population (ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, religiosity, and more). In this world adults experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are typically not affiliated with organized religion and not members of established churches.

Many of these faith communities have “given-up” on adult faith formation. They provide little or no adult faith formation, besides occasional opportunities directed to the active adult members of the faith community or parents with children in educational programming. There is little recognition of the diversity of the adult population or of the uniqueness of each season of adulthood— young adults, midlife adults, mature adults, and older adults.

SCENARIO 4

The fourth scenario describes a world in which adults are uninterested in developing their spiritual life and faith communities are embracing the diversity in the adult population—including ethnic/cultural, sexual/gender, socio-economic, family styles, and religiosity. In this world faith communities are

working to develop approaches, strategies, and programming that address diversity and respond to lives of adults who are uninterested in faith and spirituality and uninvolved in the faith community.

STRATEGIES FOR THE ADULT FORMATION SCENARIOS

The scenarios are meant to stimulate discussion about what choices faith communities can make today in order to thrive over the next five years.

/ Imagine what adult faith formation could look and feel like in your faith community if you are responding to the challenges and opportunities in each scenario. What could happen in the lives of adults in your faith community and wider community if you develop strategies, approaches and programming that engages a diversity of adults in personal, spiritual and religious growth.

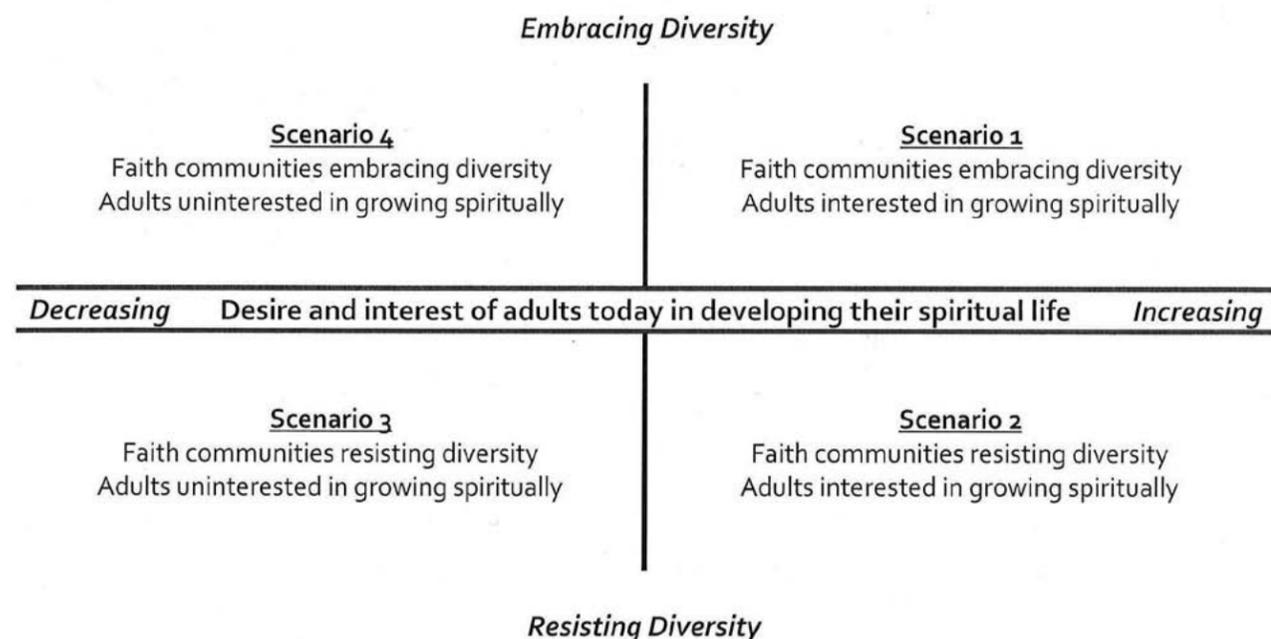
For more ideas to use in designing programming, consult the complete Guide to Envisioning the Future of Adult Faith Formation: www.seasonsofadultfaith.com/future.html.

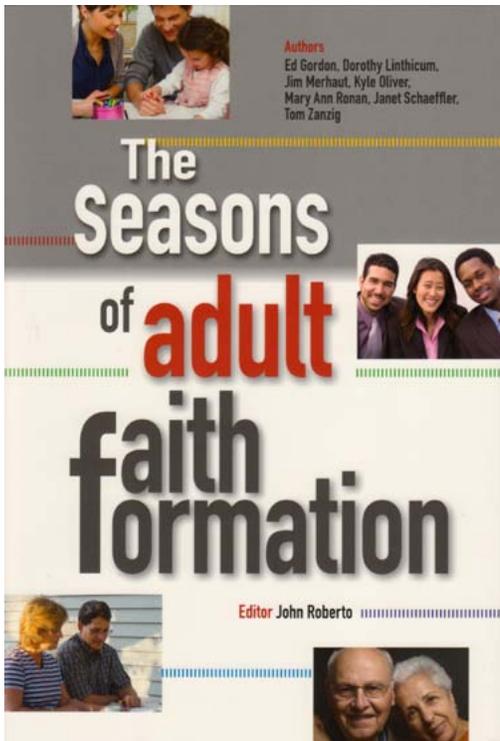
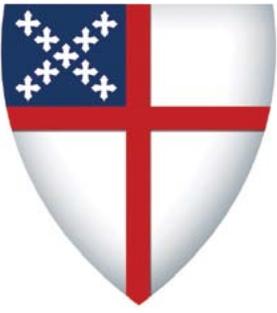
Other resources:

- Models, approaches, and programming ideas for each season of adulthood: www.SeasonsofAdultFaith.com.
- For adult programming for the four seasons of adulthood download Practices & Approaches for the Seasons of Adult Faith Formation: www.LifelongFaith.com.
- Missional programming: www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com/missional.html.
- Intergenerational programming, case studies, and resources: www.intergenerationalfaith.com.

The Future of Adult Formation Scenario Matrix

Response of faith communities to the increasing diversity in society





EMBRACING THE SEASONS OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION

The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation book and website (seasonsofadultfaith.com) provide leaders with a deeper understanding of adulthood today, a vision of twenty-first century adult faith formation, and the tools and processes for designing faith formation for all the seasons of adulthood. Kyle Oliver and Dorothy Linthicum of the Center for the Ministry of Teaching, along with John Roberto, Ed Gordon, Jim Merhaut, Mary Ann Ronan, Janet Schaeffler, and Tom Zanzig explore characteristics of different age groups and paradigms for teaching and learning. A special issue of the *LifeLong Faith Journal*, available at lifelongfaith.com, explores effective practices for each stage of adulthood.