



Insights from Research & Theory

Practices for Forming Faith with Young Adults

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The Insights & Practices from Research and Theory Series explores the latest research and thinking on forming faith with families and age groups, and suggests practical strategies for forming faith that reflect the current research and thinking.

The young adult stage of life encompasses the decades of the 20s and 30s and has a great deal of lifestyle diversity including singles (never married and divorced), couples (married and living together), new parents, and parents of children. Much of the research in this article focuses more specifically on young adults in their 20s.

Part One. Insights from Research and Theory

Young adults have reached a life stage that calls for a lot of sorting. They have had twenty plus years of rules, roles, and responsibilities provided by parents, teachers, friends, media, pastors, and other key influencers. As they launch into adulthood, they must sort through all of that and decide what to take with them and what to leave behind, what to keep just as it is and what to reshape to suit their individual identities. Our key question is this: *Where does faith and religious practice fit in the sorting process? What factors lead to them integrate a religious faith into their identify and life, and what factors prompt them to leave religious faith and practice behind?*

Specifically, in this article we seek to respond to these four questions:

- 1. What about faith transmission is relevant to young adults and young adult faith formation?**
Faith transmission is culminated in the choice young adults make to integrate their faith and religious practice into their lives as adults. In effect, this *entire article* is an effort to answer this question. The research is clear. Fewer young adults make faith part of their adult identity, and the numbers who disconnect from a religious faith continue to increase. However, this is not the whole picture. The Spirit moves among young adults, and churches can take specific actions to support that movement.
- 2. What does the body of literature show are the most important contributors to effective faith formation with young adults?** It's a mistake to think that once they become young adults, there's no telling how they will engage, or not, with faith and religious practice. In general, the research shows that many will continue religiously much as they were as teenagers, while many others will become less religious. Only a small group will become more religious (Smith). The research also shows us the factors that tend to support their spirituality and those that drive them away from

religious practice. Key factors include individual creativity, social interconnectedness, and authentic (not gimmicky) faith practice.

- 3. *What does the literature show are the activities, tasks, and behaviors that bolster faith formation with young adults?*** Churches that do well with young adults are intentional about seven ministry factors: worship, innovation/communication, hospitality, outreach, investment, leadership, and church particulars. Through these seven factors they build a framework for ministry that invites the young adult into stronger faith and religious practice.
- 4. *What are the implications for faith formation leaders, and church communities as a whole?*** Ministry and faith formation with young adults is hard work, and requires a strong commitment, shared leadership, collaboration, and open-mindedness. It calls for a church community with authenticity and a clear identity, and that encourages young adults to *explore* their beliefs and spirituality in safe, non-judgmental spaces. It means taking on a posture of innovation and experimentation, recognizing that some efforts will fail while others succeed. Churches learn from the failures and keep moving forward.

With cogent responses to these four questions, we hope to offer you an overall picture of young adult faith development and give you insights that can lead to innovative and effective approaches and strategies for young adult ministry that assist faith transmission. From that work, we are confident, will emerge best practices for the future of faith formation in churches.

1. What about faith transmission is relevant to young adults and young adult faith formation?

All the formation that a person has received—for good or ill—in childhood and adolescence brings them to a decision-point as to whether to retain their faith and religious practice as a young adult. In essence, that’s what we mean by “faith transmission.” Therefore, the entirety of this article, not just this section, seeks to address the connection between young adults and faith transmission.

Unfortunately, the percentage of young adults in their 20s who choose to leave their faith and religious practice is high. In their book, *The Twentysomething Soul*, Clydesdale and Garces-Foley put it quite succinctly, “As Americans move through their 20s, many who are uncertain about religion choose to ‘fish or cut bait.’ And cutting bait is the most frequent choice.”

Why is this so? There are a myriad of reasons stemming from the effectiveness of their religious upbringing as children and adolescents, to the apparent disconnect between their young adult lifestyle and the patterns and routines of typical church life. Many young adults simply do not view religion as important in this period of their lives, and their desire for independence and flexibility conflicts with participation in most church communities.

However, if we dig into their experiences and assumptions, it just might be possible to find ways that the Gospel can be shared more effectively and appropriately. In the words of Ryan Panzer “The central challenge of this work will be to emphasize individual creativity and social interconnectedness without jettisoning core Christian doctrine” (Panzer).

If the person has been well-formed in faith as a child and as an adolescent, they are much more likely to retain it as a young adult, but that is by no means guaranteed. Let's see what the research shows about their religiosity, and how religious leaders can respond effectively.

2. What does the body of literature show are the most important contributors to effective faith formation with young adults?

We have compiled, read, and analyzed dozens of research studies and scholarly articles seeking to understand the landscape of faith, spirituality, and religious practice of the American young adult. In brief, we offer these statements:

1. The spirituality of the young adult can be characterized by such words as exploratory, individualistic, personal, consequential (or not), meaningful (or not).
2. The teen years are predictive of their faith and religious practice.
3. There are a host of reasons why participation in religious communities declines at this stage.
4. Will they still go to church? If so, where?
5. There are many reasons why young adults disidentify with religion; a study of former Catholics helps us understand why.

Young Adult Spirituality

While not the same for all young adults, there are several spiritual characteristics common among many young adults that also reflect the broader culture in which they live. In their book, *Back Pocket God*, Flory and Denton name the cultural spirituality of young adults in these seven tenets: *Karma is real. Everybody goes to heaven. It's all good. Religion is easy. Just do good. Morals are self-evident. No regrets* (Flory).

These "tenets," according to the authors, stem from the general posture and attitude toward religious and spiritual beliefs:

- ◆ There is a lack of knowledge about religion in general and their own religious traditions in particular.
- ◆ Religion just isn't all that important.
- ◆ Religious knowledge is simply a part of their consciousness that doesn't really need to be explained. They "just know." They see no need to develop well-articulated beliefs because they are just an intuitive part of the world in which they have always lived (Flory).

A strength of this spiritual posture is its full integration within their lives. The weakness is its overall lack of import and impact on their lives.

It would be inaccurate and unjust to characterize the spirituality of all young adults with the same broad brush. With that in mind, Thomas Bergler offers six separate profiles, or in his word "Tribes."

1. *Transitioning Believers*: taking it with them.
2. *Wavering Believers*: faith is unstable and fragile.
3. *Seekers*: exploring something different from how they were raised.
4. *Unreached*: have little or no experience with church.
5. *Indifferent*: don't see the relevance or feel the need.
6. *Alienated*: suspicious of church and skeptical of Christian beliefs (Bergler).

From this material, one might be tempted to conclude that the spiritual path of the young adult is completely unpredictable. Not entirely so. Their teen years provide a glimpse.

Teen Years Matter

Teenage religion strongly predicts young adult religion. Many continue religiously much as they were as teenagers, while many others become less religious. Only a small group becomes more religious. The group of the *least religious* teenagers (age 13-17) is also extremely likely to remain in the least religious group of young adults (age 18-23). (Smith)

Christian Smith and his colleagues have identified five factors measured during the teen years that are consistently very important for young adult religion. If you had these practices as a teen, you will most likely retain them as a young adult:

1. Frequent personal prayer and Bible reading
2. Parental commitment and participation in religion
3. High importance of religious faith in daily life
4. Few religious doubts
5. Religious experiences and personal religious commitment (Smith)

Smith and his colleagues have also concluded that the vast majority of those who have made a strong personal commitment to God by age 23 do so before age 14. The religious commitments and orientations of most people are made early in life and follow a consistent trajectory into the adult years. Going to college no longer seems to corrode the religious faith and practice of students. (Smith)

In summary: little drastic change occurs for most young people in their religious trajectory from adolescence to the early young adult years. The religious environment in which a teen is raised remains the most powerful predictor, and having highly religious parents who are active in the life of their teen is clearly associated with religious stability moving into adulthood (Flory).

Participation

Every Christian denomination finds itself wondering: “Where have all the young adults gone? Why don’t they come to church?” (Janssen). Perry Chang speculates that marrying later, having children later, the increasing anti-institutionalism, the lack of theological literacy, and not finding peers at church are all contributing factors (Chang). Also, lifestyle choices and experiences often do not align with typical church practice and religious teaching, e.g. cohabitation and other sexual matters, expectation of a weekly worship commitment, and more.

In the United States today, young adults comprise about 23% of the total population, yet only one in ten American churches reflects this level of representation (Lizardi-Hajbi). That said, several researchers and authors agree with Denise Janssen’s statement, “Faith is still important to young adults . . . they just don’t attend church regularly.”

Thomas Bergler offers a compelling list of causes for their lack of participation:

- ◆ Ineffective religious socialization during adolescence
- ◆ Not well prepared spiritually (or practically) for the transition to college

- ◆ Not well formed in key life skills such as moral reasoning, higher life purpose, sexuality, and civic engagement
- ◆ Patterns of sexual activity
- ◆ Life disruptions and distractions that discourage faith involvement or render it irrelevant
- ◆ Lack of trust of adult-led institutions
- ◆ Lack of understanding and experience of the Gospel

Bergler concludes, “Sociologically speaking, it is surprising that any Americans in their early twenties attend church regularly because their life stage is perfectly structured to discourage religious involvement.”

But Will They Go?

It depends. Young adults who are married, college educated, close to their parents, satisfied with life, and politically conservative are more likely to stay religious (Flory). And they are more likely to participate in larger, urban churches in growing population areas. And that church likely has one or more leaders designated to young adult ministry and utilizes technology and social media well (Lizardi-Hajbi).

Young adults are more likely to attend churches that have made them a priority, and dedicated resources, programs, and personnel to them. Attending worship is the most frequent way they participate, but other programming efforts seem to better succeed off-campus (Lizardi-Hajbi). They’ll come to church for worship, but not to the church hall for class or programs.

Several researchers echo Ryan Panzer’s opinion that millennials and subsequent generations remain spiritually curious, imaginative, even inventive. They prefer to define, test, and reshape their own beliefs from a plurality of sources (Panzer). Don’t expect long term, exclusive commitment to your church, nor frequent attendance. Participation there is probably only part of their spiritual practice.

Findings from Former Catholics

It’s important to understand what leads young adults to disidentify from faith and religious practice. The conclusions by Manglos-Weber and Smith in their article “Understanding Former Catholics: Findings from a National Study of American Emerging Adults” point toward factors that should be considered by all denominations. We believe these conclusions can be extrapolated to varying degrees to other denominations.

Recognizing that roughly half of Catholic teenagers lose their Catholic identity by their late 20’s, the authors articulate these findings. Former Catholics. . .

- ◆ Still (mostly) believe in and interact with (some version of) God. They may be open to discussion about the nature of God.
- ◆ Tend to be uncomfortable with firm statements about who or what God is. They wish to keep such matters open-ended.
- ◆ Live in religiously diverse family and friendship networks. They need to be shown how they can simultaneously seriously believe, practice, and profess their own faith while appropriately respecting and honoring the faith of others who are different.
- ◆ Tend to describe religious faith as illogical or unscientific, and therefore struggle with or dismiss teachings that cannot stand up to scientific proof and logic.

- ◆ Tend to come from households where parents were less consistent, less committed, less vocal, and less sophisticated about their faith.
- ◆ Tend to have had less emotionally close relationships with their parents (Manglos-Weber).

An intentional pastoral response to each of these factors needs to be part of the church's efforts to be in relationship with young adults.

3. What does the literature show are the activities, tasks, and behaviors that bolster faith formation with young adults?

Put simply, the church needs a framework that changes minds, tries new things, and changes course when inevitable mistakes are made. For the approximately 25 million unchurched millennials, if they are viewed as objects, there is no hope for their return to a church community. If they are viewed as partners, the opportunities for change are limitless. (Panzer)

In the "FACT Case Studies of Congregations Engaging Young Adults—Best Practices for Congregations," Perry Chang offers a helpful, comprehensive framework of actions and characteristics common among churches that do well with young adults. Many of these best practices are echoed and nuanced by other studies and authors. The framework consists of:

1. Worship
2. Innovation/Communication
3. Hospitality
4. Outreach
5. Investment
6. Leadership
7. Congregational Particulars

Let's take a brief look at each factor.

1. Worship. Chang emphasized the value of high-quality worship that is informal, innovative, or experimental. Many of the large case-study churches use state-of-the-art video and projection technology and top-notch musicians and vocalists on their worship teams. But contemporary worship is apparently not an absolute requirement for young adult participation. Catholic and Orthodox case-study churches have more traditional worship, but young adults still find it appealing (Chang). Churches that reported their worship style had "changed a lot" in the previous five years were more likely to have significant young adult participation (Sahlin).

However, Denise Janssen in her article "Coming Back Home," offers some helpful, nuanced cautions:

Well-meaning congregations renovate their nurseries and remove the pews from their sanctuaries. They hope to attract young adults with 'contemporary worship' – ostensibly the traditional worship service re-packaged with praise and worship music from the 70s played on guitars and keyboards. Some try contemplative services with 'smells and bells' because the literature says, 'it's what the young people today are looking for.' Coffee shops and casual dress, as well projected lyrics and 'relevant' preaching attempt to draw young adults. Parenting programs, including 'mother's day out' style programs seek to do the same. Worship services at alternative times and in alternative locations were a popular strategy for a while. These strategies mostly missed the mark, sometimes drawing

older Baby Boomers, but not the current young adult generation. Each of these strategies – and dozens more like them – has failed far more often than they succeeded.”

The constitutive worship elements of Word and Sacrament must remain paramount (Panzer), and the overall worship must communicate a message of authenticity. Young adults want a church that is not pretending to be something it is not. They aren’t looking for perfection, but they do want honesty (Earls).

2. Innovation/Communication. Moving beyond worship, up-to-date use of technology is key to effective communication (Chang). Easy to say, but admittedly not easy to do. Ministry to/with young adults has to be innovative, personal, and diverse because young adults themselves are diverse. One size fits . . . *one*. This ministry is transitional because young adults are transitional in their life stages, and often, their actual location (YAI). Churches that reported major usage of technology were more than twice as likely to have a significant percentage of young adults than those who reported only marginal use (Sahlin).

LiErin Probasco writes, “Successful innovation is attentive to a congregation’s core identity and the dynamic social contexts in which that congregation is embedded. Thus, a program founded in one congregational setting may be inappropriate or require adaptation for another. Innovate through linking the social and the spiritual, informal networks, rethinking social media, and extra-congregational ventures.”

3. Hospitality. The church must create inclusive and hospitable space recognizing the organic and adaptive nature of the entire body of Christ (Janssen). For young adults, the philosophy that this is a place to ‘come as you are’ with no need to dress up gives young adults a place with a “Starbucks-like” feel where they know they will be accepted and find a place to belong (Chang). Further, young adults respond well to creative hospitality that beckons them into holy mystery, and a sense of personal spirituality (Chrostek).

In his article, “How to Reach Young Adults,” Anthony Robinson offers these seven suggestions: 1) Make it spiritual. 2) Make it about God. 3) Make it personal. 4) Make it real, authentic. 5) Value the power of cross-generational community and relationships. 6) Make it work for busy lives. 7) Get over the idea that every member must be on a committee.

Quite simply, young adults want to know they’ll be welcomed and cared for by their church family (Earls).

4. Outreach. Effective young adult ministry requires authentic and intentional outreach to people ages 18-30. The key is authenticity. If the church appears to be “selling” something, that’s a sure way to fail (Chang). Church members must be seen as sincere, and the church community, as a whole, must be free of hypocrisy. Young adults put a lot of stock in being honest about beliefs and working to live up to those standards. They want a church that is not pretending to be something it is not, while striving to faithfully follow their convictions (Earls).

In an environment of spiritual tinkering, religious pluralism, and the declining significance of denominations, more attention to a church’s identity, not less, is necessary. Churches that emphasize basic spiritual practices are generally more likely to attract young adults (Sahlin). Articulating a clear identity is one thing; communicating it is another. Effective marketing may not only attract newcomers but energize a church around a coherent vision of ministry (Probasco).

Young adults also resonate with *networked community*: a loosely connected set of relationships that is easy to leave and join, yet inspire participation, presence, and authenticity. This contrasts with

relationships that are static, controlled, and hierarchical (Panzer). In this way seminars and mentoring programs aimed at helping young adults through various life transitions and key decisions can be an effective way to begin relationships that could lead to disciple making (Bergler).

5. Investment. Ministry with young adults requires a significant investment of priority, time, energy, and money, the fruits of which may not be seen in the short term. One of the key challenges for young adult ministry identified by the Young Adult Initiative was “fostering a parish culture that leads to integration of young adults in the parish.” Their study showed that the movement from being welcoming to instilling a sense of belonging had to be intentional, with the pastor’s support and engagement for this ministry, as well as the buy-in of the entire community (YAI). It all takes time and a long-term commitment.

The investment in young adult ministry goes beyond church leadership to the members themselves. In his article “10 Characteristics of Churches That Keep Young Adults,” Aaron Earls writes, “The next generation wants to know they have support from those older than them when it comes to life decisions. There is a need for older members who will invest the time needed to be able to speak into the lives of younger Christians without them feeling harshly judged.”

6. Leadership. Churches with strong young adult attendance have young adults themselves in leadership (Chang). The Young Adult Initiative study states the importance of finding the right and consistent leadership, but there is no one identifiable way to recruit and retain leadership, aside from empowering a collaborative team for the ministry. A lone ranger approach is not usually effective (YAI).

7. Church Particulars. Churches in high-density urban areas generally do better with young adults (Chang). Churches that attract young adults are more likely to be urban, ethnically diverse, founded more recently, and have more children in attendance. They are more likely to be large churches with typical attendance of 500 or more. Churches with rapid growth are significantly more likely to report young adult participation (Probasco). The more programs reported by a church the more likely it was that the church was among those reporting a significant number of young adults. Churches reporting many programs were nearly twice as likely to have significant young adult participation as those reporting few or some programs (Sahlin).

To sum up, churches that appeal to young adults make a concerted effort to meet them where they are on their spiritual journey, embody diversity in response to the diversity of young adults in their midst, and beckon them into leadership. Add these characteristics - dynamic, participatory, and emotionally engaging worship; authentically invested clergy and pastoral leaders; and opportunities for the young adults to serve in meaningful ways – and the church will be well-positioned for effective young adult ministry (Probasco).

4. What are the implications for faith formation leaders, and churches as a whole?

Today’s young adults are sorting through all the rules, roles, responsibilities, and expectations for life that have been given to them throughout childhood and adolescence. At this stage, with at least some level of adult independence, they are deciding what to keep and what to leave behind. When it comes to faith and religious practice, too many are leaving it behind. Yet, hope is not lost. The research yields a host of factors, ideas, strategies, and tactics that churches can implement to effectively reach young adults. It’s a big challenge. It’s hard work, and it requires a genuine collective commitment for the long haul.

It is our hope that this survey and summary of the research will provide you with a host of ways to think about how your church can work effectively with young adults. We are confident that you, and others like you, can build a body of “best practices” that set the norm for young adult ministry. With this in mind, we conclude with these broad-brush bits of advice from the Young Adult Initiative:

- ◆ Build a community, not a program.
- ◆ Get your pastor, pastoral leaders, and church community on board.
- ◆ Remember that young adult ministry is not one-size-fits-all.
- ◆ Set a vision and decide your measure of success.
- ◆ Empower young adults to be leaders in their own ministry.
- ◆ Be a leadership team rooted in prayer (YAI).

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Part Two. Strategies for Faith Formation with Young Adults

1. **Incorporate the ways that young adults in Generation Z (born 1997-2012) learn into all faith formation programming and experiences.** (As of 2024, Gen Z represents young adults from 18-27.) By incorporating these strategies into learning experiences, leaders can create engaging and effective learning opportunities that align with Gen Z's preferences and learning styles, fostering a positive and productive learning environment.

- ◆ *Personalized learning*: Tailor learning experiences to individual interests and abilities. This could involve allowing them to choose topics for projects, giving them autonomy over their learning path, and using personalized learning tools.
- ◆ *Flexibility and autonomy*: Offer flexibility in learning schedules and pathways. Gen Z appreciates the ability to learn at their own pace and on their own terms.
- ◆ *Digital and interactive learning*: Gen Z is highly comfortable with technology and often prefers digital learning environments. Utilize online platforms, educational apps, interactive online modules, and virtual simulations to engage them effectively.
- ◆ *Microlearning (short and engaging content)*: Gen Z has a shorter attention span due to the rapid information consumption they're accustomed to. Break down content into bite-sized, easily digestible, shorter, and engaging segments using videos, quizzes, and interactive elements. Provide concise and visually appealing content, such as videos, infographics, and animations, to maintain their engagement.
- ◆ *Visual and multimedia learning*: Incorporate visual aids, infographics, videos, and other multimedia content. Visuals can help convey complex information quickly and effectively.
- ◆ *Mobile-friendly learning*: Ensure that learning materials are accessible on mobile devices, as Gen Z is accustomed to learning on their smartphones and tablets.
- ◆ *Collaborative and social learning*: Gen Z values social interactions and learning from their peers. Encourage group activities, online forums, and virtual collaboration to foster a sense of community and knowledge sharing. Encourage group projects, online discussions, and peer-to-peer learning to foster interaction and teamwork.
- ◆ *Hands-on experiential learning*: Gen Z tends to learn better through practical and experiential learning opportunities. Provide practical, real-world applications of concepts through projects, simulations, and hands-on experiences. Gen Z learns best when they can apply knowledge in real-world scenarios.
- ◆ *Feedback and recognition*: Provide regular feedback and recognition for their efforts. Gen Z responds well to immediate feedback and appreciates acknowledgment of their achievements.

- ◆ *Purpose-driven learning*: Highlight the real-world significance and impact of the learning material. Gen Z is motivated when they understand how their learning can contribute to a better future.
- ◆ *Creativity and self-expression*: Provide opportunities for Gen Z to express themselves creatively, whether through multimedia projects, storytelling, or other forms of self-expression.
- ◆ *Critical thinking and problem-solving*: Gen Z values the ability to think critically and solve problems. Include activities that challenge them to analyze information and develop problem-solving skills. Encourage critical thinking by presenting open-ended questions and real-world problems.
- ◆ *Sustainability and social responsibility*: Gen Z is particularly concerned about environmental and social issues. Integrate themes of sustainability and social responsibility into the learning content.

2. **Incorporate the ways that young adults in the Millennial Generation (born 1980-1996) learn into all faith formation programming and experiences.** (As of 2024, Millennials aged 28-39 were included in the young adult years.) By incorporating these strategies into learning experiences, leaders can create engaging and effective learning opportunities that align with Millennials' preferences and learning styles, fostering a positive and productive learning environment. Many of the characteristics of Gen Z learning strategies apply to Millennials.

- ◆ *Active participation*: Millennials learn best when they actively engage with the learning material rather than passively receiving information. This can include hands-on activities, discussions, problem-solving exercises, and interactive learning experiences.
- ◆ *Relevant and meaningful content*: Millennials are motivated when they can see the immediate relevance and practical applications of what they are learning. Content that aligns with their personal goals and addresses real-life challenges is more likely to resonate with them.
- ◆ *Technology integration*: Millennials were the first generation to grow up with the internet, and they tend to embrace technology in their learning. They often prefer online courses, digital resources, and interactive learning platforms.
- ◆ *Collaboration and social learning*: Millennials value collaboration and social interaction in their learning experiences. Group projects, discussion forums, and peer-to-peer learning are often well-received.
- ◆ *Flexible learning environments*: Many Millennials appreciate the flexibility of learning on their own terms. They often prefer blended learning approaches that combine in-person and online instruction or self-paced courses.
- ◆ *Visual and multimedia learning*: Visual elements and multimedia, such as videos, infographics, and interactive simulations, are often effective in engaging Millennial learners.
- ◆ *Experiential learning*: Hands-on experiences, real-world applications, and learning by doing are valued by Millennials. They tend to learn best when they can see the practical relevance of the knowledge or skills they are acquiring.
- ◆ *Personalization*: Millennials prefer tailored learning experiences that cater to their individual needs and interests. They may respond positively to adaptive learning technologies that adjust content based on their performance and preferences. Offering flexible learning options and personalized pathways accommodates different learning styles and individual schedules.
- ◆ *Self-directed learning*: Millennials value autonomy and prefer to take control of their learning process. Allowing them to set their own learning goals, choose learning activities, and take responsibility for their progress fosters a sense of ownership and motivation.
- ◆ *Purpose-driven learning*: Many Millennials seek meaning and purpose in their education. They are often drawn to courses and programs that align with their personal values and career goals.

- ◆ *Informal learning:* Millennials often engage in informal learning through online communities, blogs, podcasts, and other self-directed resources. They value self-guided learning and may be active participants in online forums and social media groups related to their interests.
- ◆ *Diversity and inclusion:* Millennials tend to value diversity and inclusion in their learning environments. They appreciate exposure to a wide range of perspectives and backgrounds.
- ◆ *Reflection and feedback:* Providing opportunities for Millennials to reflect on what they've learned and receive timely feedback on their performance helps reinforce learning and identify areas for improvement.
- ◆ *Practical application:* Millennials benefit from opportunities to apply their newly acquired knowledge or skills in real-life situations. Practical application enhances retention and transfer of learning to their personal or professional contexts.

3. **Guide young adults in discerning where they are in their faith journey, charting a path for faith growth, and providing programming and experiences for four spiritual-religious profiles of adults.** Young adult faith formation can guide adults in discerning where they are in their faith journey and charting a path for faith growth that helps them get from where they are in their faith journey to a deeper relationship with Jesus and practice of the faith. People should be able to clearly understand where they are in their faith journey and their next steps in faith growth.

Faith formation can provide programming and experiences for young adults specifically designed for:

- a) *Young adults who have a vibrant faith and relationship with God and are engaged in a faith community:* nourishing their faith through a variety of faith forming experiences to promote their deeper growth, such as engaging in Bible study, study of theology, or spiritual formation; equipping adults to share and witness their faith; and offering a variety of activities that help them grow deeper in their faith.
- b) *Young adults who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is less central to their daily lives:* inviting them into a supportive community where they can build relationships with other adults and experience a sense of belonging to the church community; inviting them into experiences that refresh their faith (study of Jesus, the Gospels, prayer); exploring how to make a relationship with Jesus Christ more central to their daily life; and offering a variety of activities that help them to engage in the community and live their faith.
- c) *Young adults who are uninvolved in a faith community and who value and live their spirituality outside of organized religion:* seeking out the uninvolved and inviting them into safe spaces and small groups to explore a new relationships with Jesus Christ and what following him could mean for their life; hearing the Good News (again, for the first time) and what it means for life today; inviting them into experiences of faith in action in the church community—serving those in need, praying, working for justice, worshipping; offering a variety activities to encounter Jesus Christ and his community in new and fresh ways.
- d) *Young adults who are unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion, and have little need for God in their lives –* connecting with the unaffiliated in the wider community and inviting into safe spaces to explore how one lives with meaning and purpose today; to discern how religion might provide support for living a meaningful life; to uncover the wisdom in the Christian tradition that could guide their life; to test out a relationship with Jesus Christ; to see how the Good News might be good news for them.

4. **Provide a catechetical plan for young adults with a *rich menu of faith forming experiences each year*.** A menu approach has 1) a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources; 2) a variety of formats—on your own, mentored, small groups, and large groups; 3) a variety of times to participate and scheduling options (synchronous and asynchronous); and 4) hybrid, online, and gathered modes of programming.

A menu of faith forming experiences can be tailored to the four profiles of young adult faith and practice (see #3 above). A menu approach provides a way to structure learning with experiences, programs, and activities designed to promote growth in faith for adults who want to grow deeper in the faith, for those who are inquiring or aren't sure the Christian faith is for them, and for those who don't need God or religion in their lives.

Young adults could select from a menu of faith forming experiences that would include *intergenerational* relationships and faith forming experiences, and *life stage* appropriate formation around their unique life tasks, needs, interests, and spiritual and faith journeys.

The menu approach puts adults at the center of faith formation and gives them choice over what and when and where they will learn. It moves away from one-size-fits-all faith formation for adults. It provides the opportunity for variety, choice, and personalization.

The movement from one-size-fits-all faith formation to a variety of faith formation offerings for each season of adulthood is made possible by the abundance of religious content and programming—print, audio, video, online, and digital—that is now available. And this abundance can now be made accessible to people by the creation of online platforms (websites and social media) and digital playlists that integrate, deliver, and communicate the content and programming with a variety of ways to learn that is easily available, anytime and anywhere.

Example: A Menu of Programming

Catechetical Themes	Faith Forming Activities
Developing and sustaining a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ	
Living as a disciple of Jesus Christ and making the Christian faith a way of life	
Studying and interpreting the Bible and applying its message and meaning to living as a Catholic today	
Learning the Catholic tradition and teachings, and integrating its meaning into one's life.	
Worshipping God with the community weekly, in ritual celebrations, and through the seasons of the church year	
Praying and seeking spiritual growth through spiritual practices and disciplines	
Living with moral integrity guided by Catholic morality and applying Catholic moral values to decision-making	
Living the Christian mission in the world by serving those in need, caring for God's creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace—locally and globally	
Being actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the Catholic community	
Practicing faith in Jesus Christ by using one's gifts and talents within the Catholic community and in the world	

5. **Expand the opportunities to engage more young adults in faith formation with “on your own” learning activities.** Expanding *On Your Own Formats* provides maximum flexibility for the learner—when to learn, how to learn, where to learn, and what to learn. With the increasing number and variety of books and printed resources, audio podcasts, video presentations, video programs, online courses, and online resource centers, independent learning offers a 24/7 approach to faith growth and learning. Churches can serve as guide to help people find the best learning format and content to address their learning needs.

Churches can develop fully online programming (asynchronous) by offering independent (on your own) faith formation using the abundance of online programs and resources for adults. Leaders can curate courses and resources to organize playlists or webpages with self-directed learning topics like Scripture, topics in Catholic theology, prayer and spiritual formation, social justice issues, morality and ethics, and much more.

Here are two examples of programming that is primarily online with interactive features.

Online Only

- ◆ Week 1: Livestream (or video recording) of the class, program, or presentation. (Synchronous)
- ◆ Weeks#2–3: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the content/activities on a website. (Asynchronous)
- ◆ Week 4: Facebook Group (or online learning platform) for engaging people in discussion and presenting projects. (Synchronous or asynchronous)

Online with Interaction

- ◆ Week 1: Livestream of the class, program, or presentation. (Synchronous)
- ◆ Week 2: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the content/activities on a website. (Asynchronous)
- ◆ Week 3: Zoom meetings for small groups or family groupings. (Synchronous)
- ◆ Week 4: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the activities/content. (Asynchronous)
- ◆ Add an interactive feature by using a Facebook group (or online learning platform) to engage people in discussion, sharing learning, and presenting projects.

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

- ◆ *Life-centered*: times of transition, life issues in each season of adulthood
- ◆ *Creative*: art, music, drama, and more
- ◆ *Spiritual*: how to pray, spiritual practices, spiritual direction, and more
- ◆ *Biblical*: what’s in the Bible, how to read and interpret the Bible, big questions in the Bible, and more
- ◆ *Action* – serving people in need, responding to justice issues, caring for creation
- ◆ *Leadership* – involvement in leadership roles in church and the community

- ◆ *Theological* – what does Jesus mean for our life today, living as a disciple, living morally, and more

7. **Provide multiple ways to experience one program.** With multiple ways to design programming in physical, online, and hybrid spaces, one program or experience can be designed in all three spaces, increasing the availability to a wider audience of people. The choice is no longer whether to participate or not, but which option best suits a person’s time, schedule, and learning preferences. Here is an example of a large group program that is redesigned for multiple formats – same program, multiple ways to experience it.

1. *Large group physical gathering:* Young adults gather at church or other location for a live presentation or for watching a video presentation with leader(s) to facilitate the program— providing time for people to read and reflect, guiding small groups in discussing the content, etc. The live presentation is video recorded for use in other settings.
2. *Small group physical gathering:* Young adults gather in small groups in homes or coffee shops or other conducive setting, watch the video, read and reflect on the content, and discuss the content.
3. *Small group hybrid:* Young adults view the video on their own, and then gather online in a small group (Zoom or other video conferencing platform) to reflect and discuss the content,.
4. *Online with interaction:* Young adults complete the sessions on their own and share reflections in a Facebook group (asynchronous) or meet on Zoom to discuss the program (synchronous).
5. *Online independent:* Young adults complete the learning program on their own.

The “one program, multiple models” approach can dramatically increase catechetical offerings and give control to adults so they can choose what and when and how and where they will learn.

8. **Fashion formation around the transitions of young adulthood.** Young adulthood is filled with multiple transitions. In times of transition, most people experience feelings of disorientation and tend to question personal priorities; they may seek to “finish unfinished business” or develop new dimensions of their lives. Young adults seek to acquire new meaning perspectives and frameworks that can help them regain “order and stability” in their lives.

Addressing the needs of people in transition provides important opportunities for young adult faith formation by bringing a faith perspective to the transitions adults are experiencing. Recognize that these transitions may prompt a hunger for learning and provide learning opportunities that are responsive to immediate concerns. Their new learning may lead them to new questioning and unanticipated changes in the views of self and world.

Faith formation can target young adults who are experiencing transition and change, and offer to help them chart a course of learning that can help them find meaning in their lives. Fashion faith formation around the times of transitions and change in the lives of adults with learning, ritual, prayer, and community support. Here are just a few examples of transition times: leaving home for college or the military or work, graduating college, going into the military (and returning home from military service), launching a career, establishing a new home, starting a new job or losing a job, getting married, surviving a major illness/accident, experiencing loss of a loved one, and much more.

9. **Engage young adults in exploring their Christian vocation and how God calls people throughout the seasons of life.** Vocation is a central part of the Christian life, encompassing: *who we are called to be, how we are called to live, what we are called to do.* Vocation relates to our whole life and

encompasses a multiplicity of callings. Vocation is not limited to one part of life or one kind of work or one lifestyle. It is a dynamic reality that changes throughout our life, not something determined at the outset. Vocation is a lifelong reality. Young adulthood brings new challenges and possibilities: How do our callings change as we grow? What does it mean that God calls us in relationship to the whole of our lives (including our work, relationships, and identity) all life long?

We are called by God, who is the source of our callings. We are called to follow the way shown by Jesus and taken up by his disciples; this calling we share with each other. We are called as unique persons with a particular history and circumstance. We are called from the losses and grief we suffer over time, so that we can embrace life again. We are called to give our lives for others, not simply for our self-improvement or fulfillment. We are even called in our deepest suffering to carry out God's purposes in mysterious ways. We are called through the people in our lives because vocation takes root in community. And, finally, we are called together to live within God's loving embrace, both now and in the life to come.

Develop vocation and calling programs around the major adult life transitions – entering adulthood, starting a career/job, getting married, etc. Engage young adults in discerning their calling at this time in their life and how to live their calling more fully in life. Offer a variety of programming options, such as a small group experience for people at the same stage of life, or as a mentored (1-1), as a course (in-person or hybrid) variety of weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly; as a retreat experience, and more.

10. **Guide young adults in developing a life of faith by exploring and experiencing the practices that constitute a Christian way of life, helping young adults create their own “rule of life.”** People come to faith and grow in faith and in the life of faith by participating in the practices of the Christian community. They learn the Christian way of life and its practices through experience, and through guidance, mentoring, and teaching of other Christians who live these practices. Developing a Christian way of life and the practices that constitute that life is a process of developing skills, performing, thinking, and practicing over and over again.

At the heart of Christian practice is Jesus—in his presence and example, a way to live comes into focus. We experience this model of living whenever we celebrate the blessings of life, serve the poor and vulnerable, offer our lives in prayer, forgive others, keep the Sabbath holy, discern God's will for us, or try to transform the world. Christian practices, like the ones suggested below, emerge repeatedly in the Bible and Christian tradition and have demonstrated their importance in forming a distinctively Christian way of life.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ◆ Caring for Creation | ◆ Honoring the Body |
| ◆ Discernment | ◆ Hospitality |
| ◆ Doing Justice | ◆ Keeping Sabbath |
| ◆ Dying Well | ◆ Praying |
| ◆ Eating Well | ◆ Peace and Reconciliation |
| ◆ Embracing Diversity | ◆ Reading the Bible |
| ◆ Finding God in Everyday Life | ◆ Serving the Poor and Vulnerable |
| ◆ Forgiveness | ◆ Stewardship and Generosity |
| ◆ Healing | ◆ Worship |

Engage young adults in Christian practice learning programs through courses, workshops, retreats, action projects, and practice-focused small groups using a learning process that includes:

1. Preparing adults with the Scriptural and theological understanding of the practice
2. Engaging them in hands-on experience of the practice (with peers or intergenerationally)
3. Reflecting on the experience and its meaning for them
4. Integrating the practice into their daily lives

11. Expand the locations for young adult programming and experiences into community spaces.

What if churches focused on “bringing the church to people” in new spaces and locations with programs and experiences that expand the scope and reach of the church into the lives of people in the neighborhood and community? What if churches made a special effort to reach and engage people who are not involved or have given up on church or were never affiliated with any church or religion?

One approach is to move some of the at-church programs and activities into community settings, such as Bible study offered in community spaces like homes, coffee shops, or senior living centers. Changing the location of a program opens up the possibility of inviting people to join in a “neutral” setting.

A second approach is open-up programs currently sponsored by the church to the whole community, such as life-centered adult programs, service projects, or a speaker series.

A third approach is to offer activities directed to the needs and interests of people sponsored by the church in a variety of community settings and spaces so that everyone feels comfortable participating. There have been examples of this type of outreach in the variety of “theology on tap” or “God on tap” programs. A church can offer a variety of programs and initiatives targeted to adults, in general, at for adults at particular stages in adulthood. Here are a few examples.

- ◆ Workshops, resources, and support groups targeted to different the life tasks, transitions, and needs of each season of adulthood.
- ◆ *Dinner Church* or *Brunch Church* experiences that bring people together over a meal to share stories, build relationships, find mutual support in life’s struggles, and engage with each other spiritually.
- ◆ Art and music workshops and courses, art exhibition, music concerts, and drama performances
- ◆ Programs and activities designed for older adults at the senior center or adult living center or nursing home.
- ◆ Career and life mentoring or coaching, especially for young adults
- ◆ Community-wide service days, service projects, and mission trips
- ◆ Organizing initiatives around social justice issues, local and global
- ◆ Leadership training and engagement in leadership roles in the community