

# Children's Faith Formation Visioning & Planning Process

What follows is a suggested process for brainstorming and evaluating effective ways to pass on the faith with the children (and youth) in your congregation. Please adapt it to fit the needs and culture of your particular church. This may be accomplished by program staff or with a Task Team that meets together a number of times.

 <p><i>Nurturing local church vitality and the covenant among our churches</i></p>	<p><b>Debbie Gline Allen</b> <i>Associate for Faith Formation and Youth Ministries</i> Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ 1 Badger Road Framingham, MA 01702-5517 508-603-6601 glineallend@macucc.org www.macucc.org/faithformation</p>
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## Step 1: Pray

- Adapt your regular prayer practice to include your discernment and visioning around the faith formation practices at your church. Spend time sitting with your challenges, your joys, your hopes, and your fears. Listen for how the Holy Spirit is speaking to you and your congregation.
  - ➔ How is God calling you to minister to the children in your congregation?
  - ➔ What sort of response to Jesus' call to make disciples is emerging from this prayer time?
- Be sure to continue this prayer practice throughout the following steps.

## Step 2: Review

- List all of the ways that your congregation ministers to and educates the children on 3"x3" sticky notes, one for each item. Include ways that may not necessarily be viewed as educational yet provide opportunities for growth within the Body of Christ.
- Make a copy of Appendix A (see the last pages of this document) for each sticky note and place one sticky note in the box provided on each page.
- Record your answers to the questions on the Appendix A sheets.

## Step 3: Find Your WHY

An exercise to get to the heart of your ministry

- Discovering "Your Why" will help you to focus your ministry on what is most important. This will also be helpful for weeding out practices and activities that may be detracting from your ministry. (After discovering your "why," you can then successfully move to the What, and the How.)
- Complete the exercise found at Appendix B.
- Then reflect on these questions (as well as your own) to help you create or revise your congregation's mission statement for faith formation.
  - What scripture or scriptures will ground your ministry of faith formation?
  - How are God, the Holy Spirit, and the teachings of Jesus infused in this ministry with children?
  - What will the children (and youth) receive by being a part of this church and how will it enhance their lives as disciples of Jesus?

- What will this congregation look like and how will it behave when this “why” is being lived into?
- What is critical to this “why”? (What factors can you not afford to throw away?)
- What is harming this “why”? (What factors are keeping you from achieving it?)
- Here’s a simple mission statement template if you need one:  
 “The {purpose, mission} of {your organization} is to {1-2 simple verb statements that represent your core values}, {to/for/with whom}.

#### **Step 4: Read/Research (if needed)**

- This is a good place to do any reading or research that will help you to move forward. Some abbreviated quotes from recognized faith formation theorists and researchers are provided in Appendix C.
- As you read, consider this question (and questions of your own):
  - ➔ What learnings from your reading do you believe would make the biggest positive impact on the children (and their families, and ultimately the congregation) based on your “Why”?
- Another research option would be to sit through your programs as if visiting for the first time. Take notes, from the moment the children walk into the church to the moment they leave with their parents. List the strengths, weakness, places of opportunity, and places to reconsider.

#### **Step 5: Dream**

- Brainstorm your dreams in response to the following question:
  - ➔ If you had an unlimited amount of money, enough willing people, and all of the time in the world, what would you choose to do for and with the children (and youth) of this congregation in light of what you have discerned so far?
- Write, draw, or paint images to show what the outcome of these dreams will look like.

#### **Step 6: Reflect: The What**

- Write down answers to the following questions for your dream outcome.
  - In what ways would this dream impact the children (and youth)? the families? the entire congregation?
  - Does this dream need to take place at a specific time(s) and/or location(s)? Where would be the best place(s) to offer this?
  - Would this dream require any curriculum resources or other materials? What sort of biblical teaching would be included, and what method(s) would be best to implement?
  - What sort of volunteers/teachers/leadership would be required to fulfill this dream? What sort of training or preparation would they need?
  - How would this dream make disciples?
  - How will each participant feel welcome and wanted?
  - How would your mission and goals be met by this dream? If they wouldn’t, what adaptations would allow them to?

#### **Step 7: Draft Your Proposal and Plan: The How**

- Look again at the dream outcomes and the answers to the reflection questions asked about them. From this list, select the intentional faith-forming ideas that follow your “Why”

and determine which one or ones offer the best faith formation plan for the children within your congregational culture.

- Jot down responses to these questions to assist in creating a draft of your proposal:
  - What is the plan? What will happen? What are the desired outcomes or goals? What will it accomplish? What might need to be let go in order for this plan to be successful?
  - Who will participate? Who will lead/teach? Who will coordinate? Who is expected to be involved behind the scenes? In what ways?
  - Why is this a critical part of the life of your congregation? Why should the children participate?
  - Where will it take place?
  - When will it happen and how often? Are you tied to one specific time and/or day of the week?
  - How will it happen? What are the details that need to be addressed to make it happen? How will it be advertised and promoted?

### **Step 8: Move Forward in Faith**

- Moving into a new or updated paradigm will require some changes. What work will need to be done to assist your congregation in moving forward with your new plan?
- List the necessary steps for moving your plan forward.
- Make plans for continual and effective communication about your progress with the congregation.
- Put your plan into action!

### **Step 9: Evaluate**

After a few months, evaluate how well your plan is functioning. Your “Why” should paint a picture for you of the end results you hope to achieve.

- How is your vision functioning in this new plan?
- Do any changes need to be made for continued success?
- What parts are not working as you had hoped? Do you need to tweak or rethink this model of faith formation for your particular congregation? (If so, go back and revisit the appropriate steps of this process.)
- What parts should be celebrated? *Celebrate them!*

### **Lather, Rinse, Repeat**

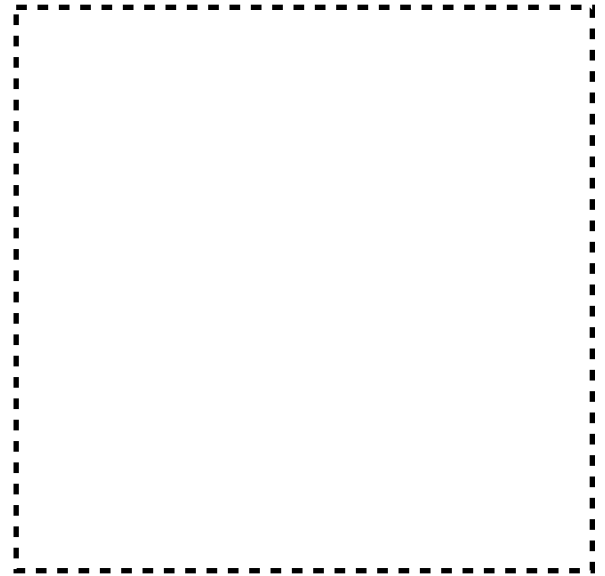
Revisit as many of the above steps and revise as often as needed to nurture and maintain the faith forming practices and subsequent relationships you’ve created.

*May this holy work be blessed into a vibrant ministry!*

# Appendix A

For this educational ministry...

1. ...what are the desired outcomes in terms of the children's growth in faith? (What do you hope the children will receive from being a part of this activity/event?)
2. ...what are the learnings that are most likely gleaned from the experience?
3. ...what are the types of relationships that are fostered between ages, genders, races/ethnicities, socio-economics, (dis)abilities, other differences? What are the positive outcomes of such relationships?
4. ...is this activity/event working well? (i.e. is enjoyed by the children, is supported by their parents &/or the congregation, is fostering Christian growth, etc.)
5. ...is this activity/event a struggle? (i.e. does not seem to have a clear purpose, is difficult for parents and volunteers to support with their time, has unclear results in terms of Christian growth, etc.)
6. From the responses to the previous questions, do you notice a pattern, and if so what is it? It is possible that there will not be a pattern. Either way, what do your responses say about what is currently happening at your church?



## Appendix B — Find Your WHY

Respond to the following five questions. While it initially may appear that your response to the fifth question will be your focus for the the faith formation ministries in your congregation, sometimes this process will provide your actual focus in one of the previous responses. Complete all five questions, then determine which response best guides your ministry.

1. Why are faith formational ministries important in the life of my congregation?

2. Why \_\_\_\_\_? (Create a question out of your answer to question 1)

3. Why \_\_\_\_\_? (Create a question out of your answer to question 2)

4. Why \_\_\_\_\_? (Create a question out of your answer to question 3)

5. Why \_\_\_\_\_? (Create a question out of your answer to question 4)

When it comes to the faith formation of children in my congregation, this is what frames and propels what I do as a faith formation leader (based on the most appropriate response above):

# Appendix C — Reading List & Quotes

## **Faith formation is...**

our participation in God's work of inviting persons into relationship with God, self, others, and creation...

The faith community's role in this process is to participate in God's work by creating an intentional process of developing identity and vocation\* within [the Christian] tradition.

\* I have defined Christian identity as coming to know oneself as a Christian, having assimilated the values, beliefs, and lifestyle of one who professes to be a follower of Jesus Christ... And Christian vocation is the response one makes to God's grace — the discipleship of loving God and all of God's creation, including our neighbors.

Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN, 2000), p. 22

## **Selected Christian Education Theorists**

### **Ivy Beckwith**

"There is no passing on of values without ritual."

- Formational Children's Ministry: Shaping Children Using Story, Ritual, and Relationship*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010

### **Charles Foster**

"Participation in congregational life engages people in the processes of building community, making meaning, and discerning hope. Any practices used to work toward these objectives should nurture Christian identity and resource Christian mission."

- Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education*, Nashville: Abingon Press, 1994

### **Thomas H. Groome**

Shared Praxis: "Intentional reflection in the form of dialogue among and between [Christians] upon their lived experience and actions in the light of the [Christian] Story and their [Christian] discipleship."

- Religious formation based on a series of questions
  - What mission calls us?
  - How does cultural movement affect the what and how?
  - Who are our students?
  - What are we really to learn? When?
  - What experience has the power to shape and transform us?
- Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2011

### **Maria Harris**

- Christian education is a lifelong endeavor.
- Christian education is grounded in the vocation of each and the ministry and mission of the church.
- The context for Christian education is pastoral, educational, and communal:

Leiturgia (worship), Diakonia (service), Koinonia (community), Didache (teaching), Kerygma (proclamation)

- Curriculum in 3 forms (built on the work of Elliott Eisner, Stanford University School of Education):
  - Explicit (intentional experiences and lessons to form basic understanding of concepts)
  - Implicit (lived experience, relationships, etc.)
  - Null (what is learned/assumed by what we don't teach, never talk about)
- *Fashion Me A People: Curriculum in the Church*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989

### **Marian R. Plant**

- No one's safety will be compromised.
- Meeting needs, not numbers, is first priority.
- More is not necessarily better; sometimes it's just more.
- Everything [we] do is educating and forming faith in some way, good or bad. Increase the good; work to decrease and maybe even eliminate the bad.
- [Our] work is a microcosm of the whole, not a piece of it.
- There *is* enough God, time, energy for what is needed.
- *Faith Formation In Vital Congregations*, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2009

### **John H. Westerhoff III**

- "I remain convinced that schooling, the instructional-training paradigm, is inadequate."
- Promotes a more lived learning experience — contexts and content beyond the schooling model.
  - Stages of Faith Development: Experienced, Affiliative, Searching, Owned
  - *Will Our Children Have Faith? (Third Revised Edition)*, Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2012

### **Online Reading List**

- Best Practices in Children's Faith Formation, Lifelong Faith Journal, Volume 1.3/4, John Roberto, ed. (<https://www.lifelongfaith.com/journal.html>], then scroll down to Volume 1.3/4, read pp. 39-46)
- Share This with All the Schools, Please, January 30, 2014, Glennon Doyle Melton (<http://momastery.com/blog/2014/01/30/share-schools/>)
- Something Great to Imitate, August 23, 2017, Christina Embree (<https://refocusministry.org/2017/08/>) (scroll down to this title)

### **The Critical Importance of Intentional Relationships**

"Nothing — *nothing* — has more impact in the life of a child than positive relationships."  
— Eugene Roehlkepartain et al., *Relationships First*

"It's not programs that change people, it's relationships."  
— Ken Pikel, Ed.D., *Getting Relationships Right*

### **Why Developmental Relationships Matter**

1. Young people who experience strong developmental relationships are more likely to report a wide range of social-emotional strengths and other indicators of well-being and thriving.





### **What's Different About Asset Building?**

from *Tapping the Potential: Retaining and Developing High-Quality New Teachers*, p. 7

<https://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/07/TappingThePotential.pdf>

### **Grocery encounter leads to unlikely friendship between 4-year-old and "old person"**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2d2vZV87YJM>

CBS This Morning

November, 18, 2016