Insights from Research & Theory

Practices for Forming Faith with Adolescents

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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.*

Part One. Insights from Research and Theory

Adolescence is the age period of intense ideological hunger, deep search for meaning and purpose, and near constant yearning for relationships and connectedness. Adolescence is also the age period when many young people make what turns out to be a lifetime commitment to faith and religious practice, while many others turn away from religion altogether (Hardy). What are the factors involved in adolescents going in one direction over the other? How can churches and their leaders position themselves to influence these factors for the overall good of young people themselves, their families, and the church community?

In this article we seek to respond to these four questions:

1. ***What about faith transmission is relevant to adolescents and adolescent faith formation?***
   The faith transmission process culminates when a young person or young adult makes a conscious choice to make their faith and religious practice an integral part of their identity and life. What happens in the life stages just prior to launch that sets them up well, or poorly? In the articles on family and children, we have placed great emphasis on the role of parents and family. That remains true for adolescents as well, but, as you might imagine, it gets more complicated.

2. ***What does the body of literature show are the most important contributors to effective faith formation with adolescents?*** Research on adolescent religious development is ongoing and prolific. We have reviewed more than a dozen recent studies. Together they form a skeletal outline of key factors that we, as religious leaders, should consider in our efforts with youth. Family and parents remain crucial, but that's alongside personal characteristics like age, gender, friends, and others. We also looked at interesting data on factors that drive young people away from religion, coined as "deidentification."

3. ***What does the literature show are the activities, tasks, and behaviors that bolster faith formation with adolescents?*** The research points to a host of specific actions for parents and families in the context of the notion of *Generative Devotion*, a term coined by Dollahite and his

colleagues that is akin to, but not the same as faith transmission. We also highlight how the data points to ways the church can position itself to best support adolescents religious development.

4. ***What are the implications for faith formation leaders, and the church community as a whole?*** There is a need for working partnerships between faith formation leaders and parents of adolescents to create a conducive culture for adolescent faith development. Even though parental influence is waning, they still take the lead. Church leaders, more now than ever, have a dual role of supporting parents and engaging young people directly.

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

1. What about faith transmission is relevant to adolescents and adolescent faith formation?

Faith transmission is passing on faith and religious practice to the next generation. It has succeeded when that generation takes their faith and religious practice with them as they become adults. Even though adolescents exhibit a great deal more independence and autonomy than children, they are not yet ready to enter adulthood. So, the fruits of our faith formation efforts with them may not be known for several years. How do we know if we are on the right track?

David Dollahite and Loren Marks have coined a term akin to faith transmission called *Generative Devotion*. They are referring to "a way of approaching religious and spiritual beliefs, practices, and communities that attends to the long-term wellbeing of family members" (Dollahite). Essentially, they are referring to the passing of faith from one generation to the next. With respect to adolescents, to achieve Generative Devotion faith formation efforts must be essentially other-oriented, respond to abiding needs of persons, respect the agency of others, and be consciously relational in nature. We will explore these characteristics later in this article.

Faith transmission for adolescents is more complicated than for children due to a host of factors, but the two most important are ***agency*** – as young people grow and mature, they must be allowed to have more autonomy and make some independent decisions, and ***purpose*** – their quest for meaning is relentless and is a matter of the whole person. It's not just head, but it's heart and hands, as well. These factors call for a full integration of life and faith. It cannot just be a separate subject or activity that they visit occasionally.

The journey of faith for an adolescent is anything but a straight path. It involves making false starts, exploring, trying on new ideas and activities, demonstrating some rebellion against the older generation, and working to synthesize faith and spirituality into the complex tapestry of their lives. Adolescents need a host of adult role models along this journey.

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

Researchers have an ongoing keen interest in adolescents and spirituality. Why? Adolescence is the life stage when most young people either leave faith behind or move toward making a commitment for a lifetime. What are the factors that lead to one choice over the other?

Faith development theory emerged with the work of James Fowler and his ground-breaking book *Stages of Faith* (1981). He applied cognitive development theory to faith and spirituality. While not to dismiss Fowler altogether, researchers and theorists today tell us that there is more to the process than cognitive meaning-making. And it has become evident that cognitive maturity in meaning-making can lead people away from organized religion just as effectively as leading them to it. (Hardy)

Point is, there are other dimensions of religiosity that need to be measured and studied, such as internal motivation, family influence, life transitions, and levels of religious activity. Sociological factors are every bit as much, or more influential in adolescent religious development as cognitive development. In addition to home and family, several personal characteristics play a key role.

1. Five Influential Personal Characteristics. In their analysis of a wide range of research data, Megan Gale and colleagues name a host of personal characteristics that influence religious and spiritual development among adolescents:

- ✦ *Age.* As mentioned, most changes in religious identification—joining or leaving—occur during adolescence and young adulthood.
- ✦ *Gender.* In general, girls value faith and religious practice more than boys. Adolescents who identify as non-heterosexual may fear rejection from religious communities since many are opposed to sexual identity that is not heterosexual.
- ✦ *Agency.* As adolescents gain more autonomy, they are better able to decide why, how, and when to be religious and spiritual. In-depth qualitative research has indicated that many adolescents feel strongly anchored to their religion (Layton et al. 2011)—and they are able to articulate and offer personal reasons for their willingness to make these sacrifices.
- ✦ *Friends.* When adolescents have religious friends, they also tend to be religious. When adolescents have friends who are against religion, they also tend to be against it.
- ✦ *Generational.* Unlike previous generations, contemporary adolescents are less likely to trust religious institutions, and more likely to withdraw from religious identity and involvement (Gale).

These five personal characteristics impact all aspects of a young person's life, including faith and religious practice.

2. Religious Exploration. Parents and youth leaders can expect and should support an active process of religious and spiritual exploration among the young people in their families and churches. Dollahite and colleagues found that adolescents explore faith and religious practice by:

- ✦ Asking questions and having conversations
- ✦ Pondering and self-reflection
- ✦ Having personal experiences
- ✦ Learning from experiences of others
- ✦ Appealing to authority for wisdom (Dollahite)

If they are denied these exploratory opportunities, adolescents are much more likely to leave it all behind as they move into adulthood.

3. Religious Commitment. While it is not crystal clear how adolescents make, experience, and maintain their commitments to religion, Emily Layton and her colleagues maintain that religious commitment for adolescents is not just behavioral or attitudinal, it is also *relational*. In this context, they have identified seven anchors of religious commitment (in order of commonality). When faith transmission is taking hold, look for indicators of these anchors:

- ✦ *Commitment to traditions, ritual, and laws*. These are the external, observable indicators that the young person holds a strong religious commitment.
- ✦ *Commitment to God* as not just an authority, but also an important relationship and source of trust, honor, respect, gratitude, counsel, and responsibility.
- ✦ *Commitment to faith tradition or denomination* as source of authority, and as a value/belief system.
- ✦ *Commitment to parents* and following their lead.
- ✦ *Commitment to Scripture*.
- ✦ *Commitment to religious leaders*. (Layton)

There is also connection between religious commitment and "life outcomes." Most research shows that adolescents committed to faith and religious practice are much less likely to engage in detrimental activities such as substance abuse, sexual risk taking, and the like. They are also much more likely to have strong psychological well-being, adequate coping skills, positive moral thinking, and higher academic outcomes. Overall, both their internal and external behavior is stronger. (Hardy)

4. Culture & Ethnicity. The U.S. population becomes more ethnically diverse with each decade. By 2043, racial and ethnic "minorities" will comprise the majority (Mendez). This means the classic questions of adolescent development take on a much broader and richer texture: Who am I? Where do I belong? Where is my place . . . in my family, my school, my community, and my church? Many adolescents experience tremendous tension between the expectations of the dominant culture and that of their heritage culture. If we listen to the experiences of diverse young people, you will often hear a sense of hurt, alienation, discrimination, and demeaning self-image (Mendez). The gospel of Jesus has some things to share about such experiences.

5. Parents & Family. Parents and families are crucial to faith transmission. This is as true for adolescents as it is for children. No need to repeat what we have stated in the "Practices for Forming Faith with Families" and "Practices for Forming Faith with Children" articles. However, the family dynamics are not the same with adolescents as they are with children, and so the behavior of parents and families must shift and change to support the faith development of adolescents. The next section of this article offers some specific behaviors that make a difference.

6. Religious "Deidentification." Sam Hardy and his colleagues looked at religious development from an alternative perspective. Instead of seeking to find out what calls young people into religious practice, they went in search of the factors that drive them away. While family is the most influential factor in faith transmission, family is also the most crucial influence for deidentification. An increasing number of adolescents are growing up without the potential benefits of being religiously affiliated, by parental choice. The researchers indicate that while there is much more to be known about the family context of religious deidentification, people who leave religion often have family members who left religion. On a lesser scale, the same can be said for peers. If the young person's friends leave, the young person is

likely to follow. Hardy and colleagues go on to say that the most salient personal reasons adolescents have for leaving religion pertain to feeling dissatisfied, disenfranchised, or in disagreement with their religious community. (Hardy)

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

The research points toward specific tasks and responsibilities for parents and families, and for church communities to bolster adolescent faith development.

Parents & Family

Family conversation continues to surface as a pivotal activity, "more than any other method" (Dollahite). When parents are open to tough conversations about life and faith, young people are more likely to stay in the church (Kiessling). Conversations about religious topics initiated by the young people themselves get more traction than those initiated by parents or when parents use conversation to "lecture" their children (Gale).

The conversations must be adolescent-centered with these elements:

- ✦ Young people talk more and parents listen.
- ✦ Young people seek and receive understanding from parents.
- ✦ Religion is related to the young person's life.
- ✦ Conversation is open.
- ✦ Parent-adolescent relationships are nurtured. (Dollahite)

Families participating in religious activities together, such as prayer and ritual at home, also has impact. Adolescents benefit from intimate family time, social support, and bonding, along with religious development.

It's important for parents to demonstrate belief-behavior congruence, authenticity, and consistency. In their attempts to teach religious values and the importance of religious identity, they must do so in a spirit of support and love (Gale). In one study, parents described what they believed they needed to *be*, what they needed to *provide*, and what they need to *teach*.

> *Be* . . . an example, authentic, and consistent.
> *Provide* . . . support, love, and help.
> *Teach* . . . religious values, faith tradition, and religious identity. (Dollahite)

The literature also explores the inherent tension between religious firmness and religious flexibility. It's important for parents to find balance between the two. The research suggests they should engage with their adolescents in ways that respect their agency, their interests, their changing circumstances, and their daily schedules (Dollahite). Parents who find this balance are also more likely to enjoy long-term parent-child relational well-being (Gale).

To sum up, parents and families bolster adolescent faith development through conversation; religious activities together; parental intention around being, providing, and teaching; and striking a balance between religious firmness and flexibility.

The church community and its leaders can be a catalyst to spark, support, and sustain each of these efforts. At appropriate times they can provide guidance, advocacy, counsel, and even commiseration to parents. At other times, or even simultaneously, they can provide encouragement, perspective, and "run interference" for young people.

Church and Church Leaders

***Generative Devotion*.** Earlier in this article we touched on David Dollahite's notion of *Generative Devotion*, a process of continually becoming a better family member, one who approaches one's religious beliefs, spiritual practices, and faith community in ways that establish and nurture enduring, devoted family relationships across generations. Dollahite and his colleagues go on to say that *Generative Devotion* is more likely when young people pursue their spiritual values, identities, and commitments by making meaningful sacrifices for God, for others, and for future generations. And this is more likely to occur when the following is true.

- ✦ Adults assist adolescents to learn how to hold to core religious commitments while seeking answers to religious questions.
- ✦ Adults encourage adolescents to stay connected with religious leaders while searching for resolutions to their religious doubts.
- ✦ Adults encourage adolescents to remain in positive relationships with family members while exploring their religious identity. (Dollahite)

From a relational standpoint, a clearer mandate for the church leader working with adolescents cannot be made.

***Sacrifice*.** Regarding meaningful sacrifices, the findings indicate that making religious sacrifices remains influential in the lives of many religious adolescents, and many do so in visible, public ways, e.g. avoiding parties and observing religious holy days. Parents and faith leaders can help young people more fully understand why they are willing to sacrifice for religious reasons (Dollahite).

***Cultural/Ethnic*.** In her writing on the unique needs of "minorities," Elizabeth Mendez calls for an expansive re-conceptualization of youth ministry shifting from retention strategies (keeping them in the fold) to developmental strategies (nurturing the individual). She identifies five core developmental needs, all with a focus on identity formation:

1. Spiritual modeling
2. Building stronger bonds
3. Serving their needs
4. Uplifting their cultural identity and strengths
5. Mobilizing active contributors

To the church leader Mendez offers this advice, "You can adopt simple ministerial techniques that do not require extensive training, tools, budgets, or planning, but enable us to help meet their core developmental needs. Then adolescents are free to open up to hear, embrace, and appropriate the spiritual life. You will be ready to accompany young people as they grow and live out their convictions" (Mendez).

Confirmation Project. The Confirmation Project, funded by the Lilly Endowment, sought to understand confirmation and equivalent practices in five mainline Protestant denominations. Some of the key findings from the study can be extrapolated beyond confirmation programs, and applied to adolescent faith formation in general. These include:

Program pillars. Faith formation programming for adolescents must consider the following elements:
1. *Design*. No two programs look like, and that is their strength. There is lots of room for innovation and adaptation.
2. *Leadership*. Every youth ministry needs a champion or a leader who is highly invested in the success of the program.
3. *Ecology*. Leaders explicitly seek ways to make faith formation deeply meaningful to young people at the same time they find ways of keeping young people connected to the church community.
4. *Curriculum*. There is an operating understanding that faith formation content accompanies young people in maturing in their faith.
5. *Relationships*. Good youth leaders know the importance of cultivating relationships within an environment that is trustworthy, enjoyable, and spiritually enriching. (Douglass)

How people learn the faith. Interviews with more than eighty adult adults showed that young people learn the faith:
✦ through relationships
✦ when spaces are created for questioning and doubt
✦ through "tapping" experiences when someone encourages them toward a leadership role for which they feel unprepared.
✦ through active experiences
✦ from the unique identity of the teacher(s) (Dean & Douglass)

Essential program components. Programs most likely to strengthen young people's faith had the following components:
✦ Engaged parents
✦ Mentoring relationships
✦ Exposure of young people to life-changing experiences like camp and service opportunities
✦ Addressing hard theological questions (Dean and Douglass)

Mentoring. Faith is not just what you think, but how you live. The best way to learn how to live is through example of others in the context of community. Mentoring is one of the most effective elements of adolescent faith formation. Students with mentors reported a significantly higher sense of belonging to their church community than those without mentors. Mentoring impacts both beliefs and behaviors. Four key dimensions to mentoring:
✦ Deep listening: It's the relationship, not the curriculum.
✦ Safety to risk: It's creating space to explore and question.
✦ Spiritual modeling: It's learning to live the faith through observational learning.
✦ Mentoring: It's mutual where both mentor and mentee gain from the experience. (Kimball and Siberine)

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

This article has presented many of the essential elements for adolescent faith formation:

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

All of these elements now need to be applied to a dramatically changed context. Springtide Research Institute has found that young people are not turning to religious leaders, communities, practices, or beliefs in times of uncertainty or difficulty, though the majority of young people nonetheless identify as religious or spiritual. Young people who identify as "religious" don't necessarily participate in religion in the traditional sense. The majority are not accepting the whole "bundle" of rituals, practices, and beliefs that religious institutions offer.

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

✦ Young people who identify with a particular religion but adopt few or none of its practices.
✦ Young people who attend religious services regularly but consider themselves agnostic, atheist, or nothing in particular.
✦ Young people who are more than twice as likely to practice the arts as a "religious or spiritual practice" than attend weekly faith groups.

Young people are turning to a wide range of traditions, practices, and belief when asking and answering important questions about their faith: What do I believe? Who am I?" What is my purpose in the world? What practices have value? Springtide Research uncovered four characteristics of young people's searching and exploration.

✦ They turn to many or various sources when making meaning and discerning what to believe about right and wrong, purpose and calling, salvation and suffering, and more. It looks like **curiosity**.
✦ They are unwilling to shed parts of themselves to fit into a prescribed narrative about who and how to be in the world. It looks like a commitment to **wholeness**.
✦ They show up where trusted personal relationships exist or new ones seem possible, young people who are willing to forgo participation in communities lacking these qualities, even if they have had long associations with these communities. It looks like **connection**.

- ✦ They blend and adapt various rituals and behaviors to suit and make sense of the current questions they're facing. It looks like **flexibility**.

It is important that the essential elements of adolescent faith formation described in this report be applied to guiding young people in developing their religious identity. To address the challenge of "faith unbundling" churches and their leaders need to ***provide safe spaces, a small community, trusted adults, discernment tools and experiences, and faith-building skills to guide young people in the process of constructing their religious identity.*** Adolescent faith formation needs to focus on the big questions in young people's lives and equip them with the skills for constructing a meaningful faith life by drawing upon the Scriptures and Christian tradition, and using approaches such as small groups, mentoring, workshops with practical faith life skills, and retreat experiences on discernment. (See more ideas in Part Two of this article.)

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Part Two. Strategies for Faith Formation with Adolescents

1. **Incorporate the ways that Generation Z (1997-2012) young people learn into all faith formation programming and experiences.** By incorporating these strategies into learning experiences, catechists can create engaging and effective learning opportunities that align with 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. **Provide a holistic curriculum for young people that provides a *rich menu of faith forming experiences* each year that includes *intergenerational, family, and youth programs and activities***.

   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 faith and practice of young people: 1) who have a vibrant faith and relationship with God and are engaged in a faith community, 2) who participate occasionally in the faith community and whose faith is less central to their daily lives, 3) who are uninvolved in a faith community and who value and live their spirituality outside of organized religion, and 4) who are unaffiliated and have left involvement in organized religion, and have little need for God or religion in their lives.

   A menu approach provides a way to structure learning with experiences, programs, and activities designed to promote growth in faith for young people 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 people could select from a menu of faith formation experiences to create their plan for the year or for a season of the year. The menu would include: 1) *intergenerational* faith-forming experiences, 2) *family* faith-forming experiences: and 3) *age group* faith forming experiences.

   Churches could establish participation guidelines for young people, so that each year or season they would select a certain number of intergenerational experiences, family at-home activities, and age-specific programs at church.

   The menu approach puts young people 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 approach by providing the opportunity for variety, choice, and personalization.

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

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

<table>
<tr><td>✦ Caring for Creation</td><td>✦ Honoring the Body</td></tr>
<tr><td>✦ Discernment</td><td>✦ Hospitality</td></tr>
<tr><td>✦ Doing Justice</td><td>✦ Keeping Sabbath</td></tr>
<tr><td>✦ Dying Well</td><td>✦ Praying</td></tr>
<tr><td>✦ Eating Well</td><td>✦ Peace and Reconciliation</td></tr>
<tr><td>✦ Embracing Diversity</td><td>✦ Reading the Bible</td></tr>
<tr><td>✦ Finding God in Everyday Life</td><td>✦ Serving the Poor and Vulnerable</td></tr>
<tr><td>✦ Forgiveness</td><td>✦ Stewardship and Generosity</td></tr>
<tr><td>✦ Healing</td><td>✦ Worship</td></tr>
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There are a variety of ways to immerse young people in learning and living Christian practices. Here are a two examples:

✦ *Christian practice apprenticeships*: Identify "practice mentors" in your church, who are living embodiments of a Christian practice, such as service or hospitality or prayer. Develop formation programs around these mentors in individualized and small group settings where mentors can apprentice young people who want to learn how to live the Christian practice. For example, if people wanted to learn how to serve people in need at the local homeless shelter, they can accompany the "practice mentor" when he or she works at the shelter and learn about homelessness and the practice of hospitality and serving others. If a young person wants to learn how to pray they can be mentored by an adult who has a vibrant prayer life. Each apprenticeship can include a study component to learn about the teachings and examples from the Bible and Christian tradition.

✦ *Christian practice learning programs*: Through courses, workshops, retreats, action projects, field trips, and practice-focused small groups, provide young people with learning experiences that include:

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

4. **Employ new hybrid models of faith formation with adolescents.** For example, a hybrid approach to confirmation preparation can address the busy lives of young people and uses digital approaches such as the ***flipped learning*** model. Flipped learning moves direct instruction from the group learning space to the individual learning space online, while transforming the group learning space into a dynamic interactive learning environment where the catechist guides young people as they creatively discuss, practice, and apply the content.

The flipped learning model is very helpful when it is difficult to gather people regularly. Young people can *prepare* online with the appropriate content (experiences, activities, video/audio, and resources); then *engage* in-person for the event or program; and *sustain and apply* the experience through online faith formation.

One example of a flipped learning model for confirmation is illustrated in this monthly format that can be developed into a yearlong program.

1. *On Your Own*: Engage young people with a monthly learning playlist—watching videos, reading short articles, praying, writing reflections in a journal—on the theme of the month.
2. *In a Small Group*: Have young people participate in one small group experience (online) with an adult facilitator (and young person who has been confirmed) to discuss the content in the playlist and what they are learning.
3. *In a Large Group*: Involve young people in a monthly meeting with all groups for community sharing, interactive activities, short presentations, and ideas for living faith.

5. **Provide interest-centered small groups on a variety of topics that integrate faith and life around the interests and gifts of young people.** Small group formats provide lots of flexibility in content, schedule, and location (in physical settings 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 people to participate. Interest-centered groups can draw upon a wide range of gifts and talents from the people of all ages – including young people. 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*: preparing for life after high school, life skills (communication, decision-making), relationships, dealing with loss, and more
   ✦ *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 the church and the community
   ✦ *Theological* – what does Jesus mean for our life today, how to live morally today, and more

6. **Implement parent formation and education** through programs, activities, resources, webinars, and more for parents of young people. (See the "Practices for Forming Faith with Families" report in the Insights and Practices Series for suggestions for parent formation and education.)