



# Adult Faith Formation: A Catholic Vision

Edmund Gordon

**T**hese are interesting times for Christians in the United States, and for Catholics in particular. Sociologists have been studying believers for many years, and over the last twenty-five years or so, a group has been paying close attention to Catholics. Since they have been asking the same questions over a period of years, they can see trends emerging. Here are a few implications of their findings.

- *Catholic parishes will have fewer liturgies every Sunday.* More important than the looming priest shortage, all of the studies show that those who are under 40 are much less likely to participate in liturgy on a weekly basis than those over forty (CARA, 2002, 4).
- *Catholic parishes will have fewer financial resources.* Not only will there be fewer people who attend liturgy on a weekly basis, but younger Catholics give a smaller percent of their income to the Church than do older Catholics.
- *There will be a smaller percentage of Catholic children in Catholic schools.* Despite the fact that there is a correlation between attending Catholic schools and commitment to the Church, our present schools are often located in areas where there is a declining Catholic population. The parents of school-age children are less likely to have attended Catholic schools themselves than those of previous generations (CARA 2002, 3). And the relatively high cost of Catholic schools means parents may need to sacrifice to send their children there, a choice they may not be willing to make. In all probability there will be fewer Catholic schools in the near future.
- *There will be fewer marriages performed in the Church.* Despite the growth in the number of Catholics in the United States, the number of marriages has declined from 348,999 in 1985 to 207,112 in 2005. Catholics under forty are marrying later, and are more likely to marry someone not of the Catholic faith and marry outside of the Church (D'Antonio, et al., 144).

The Pew Religious Landscape Survey of 2008 said, "Approximately one-third of the survey respondents who say they were raised Catholic no longer describe themselves as Catholic. This means that roughly 10% of all Americans are former Catholics." Studies of American Catholic teens (Smith) and generations of adults (D'Antonio et al.) indicate continuing diminishment in commitment to the Church. "Young adult Catholics are less likely than their elders to say that their faith is 'the most important part' or 'among the most important parts' of their lives" (CARA, 2002, 4).

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And yet, the future is not inevitable. It is only inevitable if the institutional Catholic Church does not change its way of being church in this country and this culture. Someone once said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

It is my firm belief that we need to change our focus and priorities to place more of our resources and efforts into forming adults. Numerous catechetical documents published since the 1970s have articulated a vision of catechesis with adult faith formation at its center. Yet, in practice this appears more a hope and dream rather than an operational imperative. We are still doing what we did for the last one hundred years and expecting different results.

If the current trends in the Catholic Church are to be reversed or stemmed, the Church must increasingly direct its efforts to invigorating its adults, and move them from membership to discipleship (*National Directory of Catechesis*, 47, A3). We will need a different culture in the Catholic Church, one that takes seriously the importance of lifelong learning, and puts more emphasis on and resources into creating a Church of adult disciples. The creation of this culture must be purposeful and intentional.

Dr. Thomas Walters of St. Meinrad Seminary says that all discussions of catechesis—and in fact, education—focus on four areas: the learner, the teacher, the content, and the methods. This article will use these categories as a guide for reflecting on the topic of teaching adults, and the role this plays in creating a new church culture.

## The Adult Learner

There is no “generic” adult. Adulthood encompasses the longest part of life and can be divided in a number of different ways. One such classification parses it this way: young adulthood (20-45), mid-life (46-65) and old age (65+). Yet even these categories are elastic. At one time, one could fairly well describe the various life tasks associated with the ages of adulthood. This is no longer the case. For instance, today we find persons in mid-life with younger children, seniors who have the vitality and life force of those much younger, and those in their mid- to late-thirties just beginning their families.

In other words, some of the developmental tasks assigned to each of these groups are sliding back and forth among the age groups. Younger adulthood is lengthening, extending from the early twenties to the mid-forties, as a result of people living longer and taking longer to accomplish many of the development tasks of early adult life (Wuthnow, xvi). Despite the

challenges of categorization, it is helpful to look at the adults in a congregation to see what programs might be most helpful to persons in various stages of life. Each of these age groups has a different set of needs for the development of their spiritual lives.

Another way to perceive American adults is to think of the generations of adults. This is an approach favored by many sociologists who study American Catholics (see D’Antonio, et al.). One such study states, “Our previous studies have shown that Catholics who are born at different points of history learn to approach the faith and the Church in different ways” (D’Antonio, et al., 11).

The general breakdown of these historical cohorts is:

- *Pre-Vatican II Catholics*, whose central values and spiritual life were shaped in the period before the Second Vatican Council, are the adults born before 1945. This group makes up about seventeen percent of adult Catholics. Some describe them as “Catechism Catholics” because a catechism was the principal tool used in their faith formation. These Catholics “respect civil and religious authorities; they were taught to do what their elders asked them to do. The Church is very important part of their lives; they believe in it and know they have to support it. They are most likely to emphasize the Church authority and the importance of participating in Church” (D’Antonio, et al., 70). They have a strong Catholic identity (defined by how important the Catholic Church is to one’s life, whether one would ever think of leaving the church, and attendance at the Eucharist).
- *Vatican II Catholics*, born between 1946 and 1964, are formed in the Catholic Church of Vatican II. They comprise about thirty-three percent of adult church members. They are the generation of seekers (Roof) who have “mixed feelings about authority (versus making up their own minds) and institutional commitment (versus personal spirituality)” (D’Antonio, et al., 70). Various studies have shown that commitment to the Catholic Church and a sense of Catholic identity are less strong among this generation than among their parent’s cohort. At the same time, one still finds that much of the Catholic identity of this generation has been inherited from the pre-Vatican II Catholics, and the residue of an ethnic Catholic culture persists, especially among the oldest members of the cohort. One

can see, however, a loosening of institutional ties among these Baby Boomer Catholics.

- *Post-Vatican II Catholics* fall into the group of people born between 1964 and 1980, which has been labeled Generation X. They are sometimes called “Christian Catholics” to emphasize their lack of a strong Catholic identity. These adults comprise about forty percent of adult membership and are much more loosely connected to the institutional Catholic Church. Scott Appleby, professor at the University of Notre Dame, said, “Previous generations had their Catholic identity given to them. This generation has had to create their own.” One often finds they don’t create their identity out of a whole cloth but rather out of bits and pieces they find helpful and meaningful. As such, their Catholic identity is more like a quilt (see Wuthnow).
- *Millennials* are the emerging adult generation, born in the 1980s and ‘90s, who are coming of age and being formed by the culture of the late 1990s and the beginning of the new century. At this time they make up less than ten percent of the Catholic adult population. However, it appears that the Millennials have an even more tenuous relationship to the Catholic Church than the Gen-Xers. Catholic identity for this group is similar to the post-Vatican II group, that is, loosely connected and weakly committed. Yet this generation seems to emphasize many devotional aspects that puzzle their elders, especially the Vatican II Catholics, who hold most of the leadership positions in church ministry (except for youth ministry).

These four generations gather at the same Eucharistic table as sons and daughters of God. Each of these generations brings a different set of experiences to the faith, and looks at faith through a different lens. Is this diversity a blessing or a burden? Adult faith formation programs need to honor these differences and keep them in mind when designing educational programs.

## Reaching the Young Adult Population

Almost every conference or symposium in Catholic circles has at least one workshop about reaching young adults. Everyone has the same concern: “How can we reach out to the members of this age group,

who are nearly invisible in many of our parishes, and draw them into the life of the church?” Several creative efforts initiated in recent years include the highly successful “Theology on Tap” (Archdiocese of Chicago), “Beer, Bots and Benedict” (Archdiocese of Detroit), and “Catholics On Call” (Catholic Theological Union).

Most church ministers and educators want to know why so many young adults are unconnected to the Catholic Church. In their book, *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice*, the authors conclude, “Many young adult Catholics today, however, are not angry at the Church. They are simply distanced from it. Their knowledge, understanding, and familiarity with the tradition are limited and hallow. They are less interested in the institutional Church and its rules” (Hoge, et al., 220). The authors go on to say that pluralism, not secularism, is the issue. Many don’t see a Catholicism that captures their imagination or is worth belonging to in any sacrificial way.

In his book, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*, Robert Wuthnow explains the current situation in a different way. He indicates that almost every Christian denomination is struggling to maintain its young adults. He explains that, “Family and work, where one lives, whether one has children, and who one socializes with have powerful influences on religious behavior” (Wuthnow, xvi).

Young adults are postponing marriage until much later in life. Marrying later means having children later. If one is not married, one doesn’t often set down roots in a community, and one tends to move more often and change jobs more frequently. These factors, according to Wuthnow, are the principal reasons young adults aren’t present in our churches. He describes religious young adults as “tinkerers” (Wuthnow, 13ff), who create what they need from whatever is at hand. The young adults of today, with a wide range of experiences, friends, knowledge, and acquaintances, piece together a spirituality and a religion that is similar to the major faith traditions and denominations but has a unique, individualistic twist. They create their religious identity out of bits and pieces.

Neither Wuthnow nor the authors of *Young Adult Catholics* are pessimistic about the potential for churches to attract young adult members, but the old paradigm will not do. We must pour new wine into new wineskins. Among other things, we need a faith formation that is challenging and edifying, and captures the imaginations of young adults. It needs to be action-oriented.

Young adults also need mentors to coach them in the basics of how to be a Catholic: from the use of

language, to prayer, to the application of moral teaching, to reading the Bible and other religious texts (Muldoon, 22). In the words of the theologian Robert Barron, we can have “no more beige Catholicism.” Wuthnow emphasizes that churches “will have to invent evangelistic strategies capable of reaching busy adults who are no longer in high school or college. They will probably need to initiate programs less focused on the nuclear family and more appealing to single adults in their late twenties and thirties” (231).

## Implications for Adult Faith Formation

1. Examine your adult faith formation offerings to identify which ones will have appeal to each generation. It may not even mean that the subject matter is different, but more applicable delivery methods may be needed for the different generations.
2. Make a grid and look at which of your programs will appeal most to each generation. Is there enough diversity among your programs for the various segments of the adult community? Are you using methods that appeal more to one generation than another? What media speak most to each generation?

## The Teacher of Adults

What types of teachers do we need to provide effective learning experiences for today’s adults? Catholicism is a tradition that places great emphasis on revelation. It teaches what it has received. Thus it emphasizes the magisterium’s role in preserving revelation in its entirety. One result of this emphasis suggests a model of the teacher as someone who has more knowledge than the learners and “teaches” them what they do not know. In some ways, it is what Paulo Freire called the “banking concept of education,” focused on making deposits. In her work, *Toward an Adult Church*, Jane Regan describes it this way: “the teacher has the information and the student’s engagement extends only as far as receiving and filing the deposits” (Regan, 101).

There is another model of teacher that also depends on the magisterium, yet in a different way. According to Catholic teaching, the magisterium depends on the guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who ensures the unity of the Church and confirms the truth of her message. This same Spirit is present in all of the faithful. So in this model, everyone in the Church is called to be a teacher and a learner. The Holy Spirit teaches all.

The teacher is the one who facilitates the dialogue, the conversation, who helps the community become a learning community (Regan, 160).

Regan believes that learning should be transformative, and that the single best way for this to take place is through a sustained critical conversation about that which is of consequence (Regan, 162). In this type of learning, listening is as important as speaking; asking important questions is as important as giving answers. There is a certain equality between the teacher and the learner.

## Implications for Adult Faith Formation

1. If a church is dedicated to lifelong learning it will have more teachers for the adults than for the children. The reality is, however, that in any given congregation there are always more teachers for children and youth, even though these make up only a small percentage of the community.
2. We need to identify and train a whole new generation of religious educators because the diverse modes of adult faith formation necessary today call for a different kind of teacher, one whose skills include facilitating groups for faith sharing, for critical reflection, and for service/action.

## The Content of Adult Faith Formation

Evangelization forms the cornerstone of adult faith formation. It is part and parcel of our mission as Christian disciples. Unfortunately, evangelization is not a priority in most parishes, and in a recent article, Fr. Frank DeSiano outlined two reasons for this.

Whatever homage the Catholic Church pays to the idea of evangelization, inertia makes it tend to concentrate on those who come to church, forgetting those who do not. The Catholic Church, second, seems to have an inability to develop simple strategies of evangelization and to stick with these strategies. When it comes to evangelization, Catholics appear like children with attention deficit disorder, taking interest in something for a moment, dropping that interest for something else, and wondering why it all seems boring. (DeSiano, 11)

For the last few decades, the Catholic Church in this country has turned inward. Religious liberals and conservatives have been engaged in intramural

battles, often over insignificant issues, while the sex abuse scandal has preoccupied many in the Church. If we focus on the mission of the Catholic Church, so beautifully articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican II) and later documents, then many issues will be placed in proper perspective. Our mission as Christians is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ, proclaiming the mystery of the kingdom of God and witnessing to its presence in our midst.

The community needs a clearly articulated vision and mission that is relevant, big enough, and worthy of the commitment of every member of the Church. Fr. Ronald Rolheiser writes about the Christian mission today: "What is lacking is fire, romance, aesthetics, as these pertain to our faith and ecclesial life" (Rolheiser, 13). If we are clear about our mission, it will bring passion back to living our faith.

In one of his short stories, titled *Smorgasbord*, Tobias Wolff has the narrator reflect on an earlier period in his life and on his passions. He thinks,

We're suppose to smile at the passions of the young, and at what we recall of our own passions, as if they were no more than a series of sweet frauds we'd fooled ourselves with and then wised up to. Not only the passion of boys and girls for each other but the others too—passion for justice, for doing right, for turning the world around. All these come in their time under our wintry smiles. Yet there was nothing foolish about what we felt. Nothing merely young. I just wasn't up to it. I let the light go out. (Wolff, 225)

We need a church whose members have a passion for the mission, who will keep the light shining brightly.

Jesus came proclaiming that the kingdom of God was at hand. He taught his disciples to pray, "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...." The Gospels are filled with parables about the kingdom of God. Theologians tell us that the kingdom is at the center of Jesus' message and his person. Yet, many of our adults would be hard-pressed to speak about the mysteries of the kingdom or point out its presence among us—or more importantly, to become part of the mission of building the kingdom.

N. T. Wright, the Anglican Scripture scholar and bishop, has written quite a bit about the centrality of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus and his death, resurrection and ascension.

It is the story of God's kingdom being launched on earth as in heaven, generating a new state of affairs in which the power of evil has been decisively defeated, the new creation has been

decisively launched, and Jesus' followers have been commissioned and equipped to put that victory and that inaugurated new world into practice. (Wright, 204)

Yet what does that new world look like? How many of our adults would be able to describe it or know it if they saw it?

The more one truly understands the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, the more one fully enters into, comprehends and is captured by worship and liturgy. The more one experiences the challenge of attempting to bring about the kingdom of God here on earth, the more one enters into prayer and a spirit of dependence on the Holy Spirit. The more one captures glimpses of the kingdom of God, the more one lives a life of gratitude. The more one appreciates that bringing about the kingdom is God's work, the more we can allow the power of God to flow through us, and the more we will live as sons and daughters of God, as true disciples.

## Implications for Adult Faith Formation

1. **Focus on the essentials.** Tertullian offered this theological description of the early Christian community: "See how they love one another." To some extent, love *is* all you need. The church must be known for what it does and who it is. A church geared for mission needs to travel lightly, ready for the journey.
2. **Teach for discipleship, not membership.** The church is a community of disciples called together and formed for the mission. It is not a club built solely upon membership. The church constantly calls its members to "come and follow," to be disciples. But how do we form disciples? The same way Jesus did. "Jesus instructed his disciples (in the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven); he prayed with them; he showed them how to live; and he gave them his mission" (NDC, 20, 20).
3. **Focus on Scripture.** Scripture needs to be at the heart of our teaching and the kingdom of God at the center of our Scripture studies. This calls for an understanding of both the Old and the New Testaments, especially the Gospels.
4. **Focus on what disciples do.** There are actions and ways of living that are indicative of discipleship, and others that are not. Too much of our formation begins in a classroom with the hope it will move out into the world. Jesus taught while on the road, stopping every now and then

to reflect on what the disciples were seeing, what they were doing. The disciples of Jesus continue this work-in action, seeing learning as a continuous process, part of our lives 24/7.

5. **Focus on prayer and spirituality.** Almost everyone in church ministry has met someone who said, “I am spiritual but not religious.” This can mean any number of things—and I don’t want to simplify all the subtexts—but I think it often means, “religion is about rules and stuffy theology and not related to my life.” Ouch! We know that among the Millennials and the Gen-Xers there is a real hunger for a deeper spiritual life. So why don’t they come to our churches for their spiritual needs? Most adult education programs based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* adopt a linear approach: creed, sacraments, morality, and prayer. I would suggest we begin with prayer. Through prayer we grasp the Spirit, or should I say, *are grasped* by the Spirit. In this Spirit, the other parts of the *Catechism* make sense and give life.
6. **Focus on companionship.** Jesus sent the disciples out two by two. One reason for this was cultural, so they could testify and back each other up. Another reason was so they could support each other and correct each other. Disciples are not lone rangers. They are rooted in a community of companions. We often forget that the word “companion” derives from two words, *bread* and *with*. As such, a companion is someone with whom we break bread. In a culture of excessive individualism, teaching community may be one of the greatest challenges to religious educators.

## Methods for Adult Faith Formation

It should be obvious at this point that a wide variety of methods are needed for the faith formation of adults. Small groups, faith sharing groups, intergenerational sessions, action groups, discussion groups, and base communities are just a few of the models in place to foster an adult Church. We need to remember that, essentially, the parish is the curriculum, so adult educators need to pay much attention to the “system” that supports the programs. In this regard, there are two methods that have not received much attention, but which can add much to our efforts to change the culture.

## The Experience Economy

A few years ago, I received an invitation to conduct a workshop for adult religious educators based on the book, *The Experience Economy* by Joseph Pine and James Gilmore. The authors begin by describing the development of the modern economy. The first level of an economy deals primarily in “commodities,” such as coffee beans. The second level takes the commodity and does something with it so it becomes a “good.” Roast the beans, grind them, and you have a “good” that you can sell for much more than the commodity. The third level is the “service” economy. Take the pound of coffee, brew it, and sell the cup of coffee (service).

The authors go on to say that we are now in a new economy, one that goes beyond service; the “experience” economy. To continue our example, take the cup of coffee, add in an experience that provides lots of choices for the consumer (skim milk, sugar, chocolate flavor), friendly baristas, a nice environment (music, soft chairs), and charge a premium price: welcome to the experience economy.

The greater part of the book shows the steps necessary to take a product or service and shape it for the experience economy. “Companies stage an experience whenever they engage customers, connecting with them in a personal, memorable way” (Pine and Gilmore, 4). This is exactly what we want to happen in the adult learning event.

Many of the ideas in the book can be applied directly to adult faith formation. Here are several questions and suggestions for teaching adults posed by the *Experience Economy*:

1. **What do we want adults to experience when they come to one of our events, or when they enter our websites or participate in a learning event?** Most often we plan our events based on the content, which we define as information.
2. **What do they want to experience?** There needs to be constant interaction with the persons who are attending or who might potentially attend one of our events.
3. **What is the theme of the event?** The theme allows us to “script” the event so that every aspect of it contributes to deepening the experience and creating indelible impressions. This would lead us to ask questions such as, what do the participants experience when they first arrive? How many of their senses can be engaged in the process? Are they passive or active? How actively can

we engage the participants in the process?  
Are they helping to create the process?

4. **What indelible impressions do we want to leave with the participants?** Impressions are the “take-aways” from the experience. “If no intention exists other than to be done with the work...then the work will lack the potential to engage” (Pine and Gilmore, 118).
5. **Do we plan thoroughly enough that our events will be so memorable that people would want something to remember them?** Every event today that attempts to include memorable experiences also sells many items that help people remember the experience, such as the T-shirts, coffee mugs, posters, stuffed animals, etc., sold at concerts, plays, and sporting event.
6. **How would our event be different if persons were paying a premium to attend?** At the end of it, would they be able to say it was “worth it”?

While we are not selling religion or faith, we *are* competing today for a person’s time and commitment. Indeed, there is much we can learn from those in the marketplace.

## Cultural Discernment

We all live in a culture. We form culture and culture forms us. There is a growing awareness of the power of culture to support or distort faith, and the relationship between faith and culture has been a concern for at least two generations. In his classic work, *Christ and Culture*, Richard Neibhur described five models of this relationship. *Gaudium et Spes* attempted to articulate a new relationship between the Catholic Church and the dominant culture. (In recent years some have said the vision of Vatican II regarding culture may have been naïve and overly simplistic in its embrace of the world’s culture.)

Michael Paul Gallagher has written an important work on the relationship between faith and culture, where he writes, “Evangelization, echoing the Incarnation itself, demands the insertion of ‘the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures’” (Gallagher, 104). In Gallagher’s image we should have neither an open hand nor a closed fist as we engage the culture. We should help our adults “identify the dehumanizing factors present in lifestyles and assumptions of the culture” (Gallagher, 114). At the same time we need to identify those

elements of the culture that are life enhancing, life-giving. This is the discernment that is called for.

Gallagher further argues for a process that begins with a positive attitude toward the culture, not based in a naïve understanding, but rather in the Incarnation and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. “In fact it involves a double expectation: there will be conflict, ambiguity, anti values enthroned, but there will also be signs of hope and of real hunger, fruits of the Spirit” (Gallagher, 123). Adult faith formation needs to teach adults the process of cultural discernment.

Because the dominant culture in the U.S. today is incredibly powerful and formative, every adult faith formation effort should begin with attention to the culture. Unless we this, our efforts will be in vain. In developing our catechetical methods, we might well echo the words of Bernard Lonergan, the great Jesuit theologian, who advised, “be attentive.”

## Conclusion

A Church focused on mission, a church of disciples, engaged with the culture and proclaiming the kingdom of God, has the potential to reverse the trends cited at the beginning of this paper. A Church focused on mission can attract the young adults who are looking for something and someone to believe in. Adult faith formation will play an essential part in forming adult disciples for the mission. It will take a reprioritizing of resources to bring about a different culture in the church, but it will be worth it. Let us begin now.

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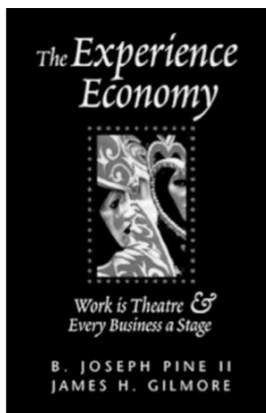
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## Resources on the Experience Economy



### The Experience Economy: Work is Theater and Every Business a Stage

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999) [\$24.95]

There is much that can be applied to learning in the church from Pine and Gilmore's groundbreaking work on the experience economy. Pine and Gilmore see a new economic era in which all businesses must orchestrate memorable events for their customers, scripting and staging experiences that will transform the value of what they produce. Pine and Gilmore see experiences and transformations as the basis for future economic growth. The strategies and processes described in the book for creating experiences and transformations can easily be applied to a church setting. Chapters include: Setting the Stage, The Show Must Go On, Get Your Act Together, Work is Theater, Performing to Form, Now Act Your Part, and Finding Your Role in the World.



### Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2007) [\$26.95]

Pine and Gilmore's second book describes how businesses must grasp, manage, and excel at rendering authenticity. They explain that today's consumers seek the authentic where and when they buy. Satisfy consumers' demand for authenticity and you'll capture their hearts and minds. Through examples from a wide array of industries as well as government, nonprofit, education, and religious sectors, the authors show how to appeal to the five different genres of authenticity.



# Practice Ideas

## Ways to Strengthen Adult Religious Education

*The Fall/Winter 2007 issue of Lifelong Faith reported on research into best practices in faith formation. Use the following strategies and planning questions, in conjunction with the article, "Best Practices in Adult Faith Formation," to assess your current efforts and plan for strengthening and expanding faith formation with adults in your congregation. (For the entire article go to [www.lifelongfaith.com](http://www.lifelongfaith.com). or order the entire back issue.)*

### Best Practice 1. Adult faith formation pays attention to what is going on in the lives of adults and listens very carefully to what adults are talking about.

- What are the needs and interests of adults that your congregation is addressing through your current adult faith formation programming?
- How does your congregation systematically listen to the needs and interests of adults using a variety of methods, such as surveys, interest finders, focus groups, and interviews?

### Best Practice 2. Adult faith formation targets the times of transitions and change in the lives of adults.

- What transitions and changes in the lives of adults does your congregation currently address in adult faith formation (e.g., family changes, loss of a loved one, unanticipated illness, career transitions)?
- What are several transitions and changes in the lives of adults in your congregation that can be addressed through adult faith formation? How will your church address these transitions?

### Best Practice 3. Adult faith formation is centered on spiritual growth processes in the lives of adults.

- What types of retreats and spiritual formation experiences does your congregation currently offer adults?
  - Online spiritual formation
  - Mentoring with a spiritual director
  - Prayer group or prayer breakfast
  - Church-based retreats: evenings, one-day, weekend, Advent, Lent
  - Retreat programs at local retreat houses
- How can your congregation strengthen the spiritual formation opportunities for adults? What are one or two new retreat or spiritual formation experiences that you can offer?

### Best Practice 4. Adult faith formation connects with the motivations and interests of adults.

- How does your congregation's adult faith formation programming connect with the motivation of adults (e.g., input into the program design, enjoyable and enriching programs, ability to do something, relationship-building, time constraints)?
- How can your congregation more effectively build on the motivations of adult learners in adult faith formation programming?

### Best Practice 5. Adult faith formation programs are guided by learning goals and measure the outcomes of programs.

- What are the outcomes your congregation has established for adult faith formation? What are the expectations and criteria for success?
- Does your congregation develop learning outcomes (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) for each adult faith formation program? How is each program evaluated?

### Best Practice 6. Adult faith formation utilizes a variety of program models to address the diversity of adult backgrounds, faith maturity, interests, and learning needs.

- Which of the following learning models is your congregation currently using in adult faith formation? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your current models? What new models can you introduce?
  - Independent Learning Opportunities** (e.g., reading, magazines, podcasts and audio learning, video podcasts and video-based learning, online courses, online learning centers)

- ❑ **Small Group Learning Opportunities** (e.g., discipleship or faith sharing groups, Bible study groups, topical study groups, practice-focused groups, special interest groups, ministry groups)
- ❑ **Large Group Learning Opportunities** (e.g., multi-session courses, one-session program, speaker series, round table discussions, parent parallel learning, field trips, intergenerational programs, workshops, film festivals, conferences)
- ❑ **Study-Action Projects** (e.g., justice and service projects, church ministry/leadership group)
- ❑ **Online Learning / Church Web Site**
  - Does your church have a web site with a special section targeted to adults?
  - What features does your congregation incorporate on the web site?
    - ❑ adult programs and opportunities in the church and in other churches
    - ❑ online learning courses and activities
    - ❑ online small groups, courses, and reading groups
    - ❑ formation resources for adults on a wide variety of topics and interests
    - ❑ social networking among other adults who are taking courses or participating in small groups
    - ❑ daily Bible study (on the web or e-mailed to young adults)
    - ❑ audio and video podcasts of sermons and guest speakers, and link to other sources such as iTunes
    - ❑ question and answer box
  - Does your church web site provide podcasts directed at adults (e.g., Sunday worship service, sermons, and presentations by guest speakers)?
  - Does your congregation utilize e-mail to communicate and stay in-touch with adults? Does your congregation send an e-newsletter to adults?

### **Best Practice 7. Adult faith formation is designed using a variety of learning methods that respect the diversity of learning styles of adults.**

- Examine each of your congregation's adult faith formation programs and resources for adults to determine how well they utilize the characteristics of adult learning.

- ❑ Utilize adults' experience and prior knowledge in a learning program.
- ❑ Respecting the variety of learning styles among adults by incorporating a diversity of learning activities and methods in a learning experience.
- ❑ Incorporating activities that teach to the different intelligences of adults.
  - verbal-linguistic
  - logical-mathematical
  - visual-spatial
  - bodily-kinesthetic
  - musical-rhythmic
  - naturalist
  - interpersonal
  - intrapersonal
- ❑ Incorporate learning activities that are realistic and that involve, stimulate thinking, and challenge the adults.
- ❑ Incorporate real-life application of learning. Providing ways for adults to practice what they are learning promotes the transfer of learning from the session to their daily lives.
- ❑ Incorporate a variety of features into the learning experience. Adults enjoy learning experiences that combine eating, praying, sharing, discussion, and receiving new information about their faith. They like sessions that allow them to physically move and even change rooms.
- How can adult programs and resources be strengthened and/or re-designed to more effectively address the characteristics of adult learning?

### **Best Practice 8. Adult faith formation programs create hospitable learning environments and build relationships among adults.**

- How do adult faith formation programs create a safe and comfortable environment for adults, characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences?
- How do adult faith formation programs create opportunities for adults to build relationships with one another in a caring community of learners?
- How can your congregation's adult faith formation programs strengthen the community and relational dimensions of adult learning?

# Practice Ideas

## Adult Learning Methods

From: *The Art of Great Training Delivery: Strategies, Tools, and Tactics* by Jean Barbazette.  
(San Francisco: Pfeiffer, 2006, pages 6-7 © Jean Barbazette)

Technique	Description (Written from the learners' perspective)	Best Use		
		K	S	A
Behavior Modeling	See a model or ideal enactment of desired behavior demonstrated by instructor or video	X		
Case Study or Scenario	Analyze and solve a problem, a case situation, or a scenario, alone and/or in a small group	X	X	X
Demonstration	Hear the instructor verbally explain and see the instructor perform a procedure or process	X		
Discussion	Discuss problems or issues, share ideas and opinions in a group		X	X
Field Trip or Observation	Experience or view actual situations for first-hand observation and study	X		
Film, Video, or Skit	View a one-way organized presentation	X		
Games, Exercises, Structured Experiences	Participate in planned activities, then discuss feelings, reactions, and application to real life	X	X	X
In-Basket Exercises	Review typical paperwork to sort, delay, discard, or act on immediately	X	X	X
Information Search	Search for information in source materials alone or in a group	X		
Inquiry-Oriented Discussion	Participate in a discussion during which the facilitator asks planned questions to encourage discovery learning	X		X
Interview	Question a resource person on behalf of the audience	X	X	
Jigsaw Learning or Teaching Learning Team	Concentrate on different information in study groups, where members re-form in groups to teach each other	X	X	X
Learning Tournament	Review material, then compete against other study groups in self-scoring test	X		
Lecture	Listen to a one-way presentation of information	X		
Practice or Return Demonstration	Repeat performance of a skill under supervision of instructor, and then again without supervision		X	
Printed Resources	Use charts, posters, laminated job aids, cards, and handouts for reference or as a resource	X		X
Role Playing or Skill Practice	Dramatize a problem or situation, then follow with discussion		X	X
Self-Assessment or Inventory	Examine own values, skills, style, etc., through experiences, surveys, and activities	X		X
Simulations	Experience a situation as nearly real as possible, followed by discussion		X	X
Study Groups	Read material individually, then clarify content in small groups	X		X
Task Force Project	Generate plans in groups that can be used in the actual work situation to solve a real problem	X	X	X
Teaching Project to one another	Teach new information or skills	X	X	
Tests	Answer questions or complete activities that test comprehension, recall, application, etc., of the learning material	X	X	
Writing Tasks	Reflects on own understanding of and response to training, usually descriptive—either planning to use skills or describing an event.	X	X	X

Best Use: K = knowledge, S = skills, A = attitudes