



Special Research Report: Ecumenical Study of Lifelong Faith Formation

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In the early Christian community, people of all ages came together to learn about their faith, and did so throughout their lives. Twenty centuries later, congregations are re-discovering the power and potential of having the whole community learn and grow in faith understanding and practice. What is the experience of these communities? What factors contribute to effectiveness? What helps and what hinders the learning process?

Seeking the answers to these questions carries a special urgency in the twenty-first century. Many parishes and congregations offer little or no faith formation for adults. Some only focus on children. But the most vibrant faith communities realize that faith formation is a lifelong task, not something which ends with the reception of a particular sacrament or graduation from grade school or high school. They understand that conversion is a journey more than it is a moment. As more and more congregations embrace lifelong faith formation, the need to identify and share effective practices from congregations which already offer rich faith experiences and learning for all ages becomes increasingly important.

To explore lifelong faith formation in mainline Christian, Orthodox, and Catholic congregations, the Center for Ministry Development received a grant from the Louisville Institute. *The Ecumenical Study of Lifelong Faith Formation* project was designed to discover effective practices, new insights and key challenges in lifelong faith formation across denominations. To research these goals, the research team utilized a qualitative research method. In their book, *Beginning Qualitative Research*, the consultants for this project, Pam Maykut and Richard Morehouse, describe qualitative research as a “research model that is primarily exploratory and descriptive, and for which people’s words and actions are the main sources of data.”

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To accomplish the aims of the project, the research was focused upon faith formation across the lifespan in Christian congregations and parishes. The three goals of the project were to:

1. Understand more about the experiences and needs of congregations which are implementing specific efforts aimed at forming faith across the lifespan in order to identify the common elements of effective Christian education.
2. Learn about what congregations are doing to provide Christian education in the intergenerational or whole community setting, the age-specific setting, and the family setting.
3. Review effective models for lifelong faith formation which are being implemented in parishes and congregations.

To listen to lifelong practices in congregations and parishes, the research team conducted fifteen online surveys, three conference calls with national or regional leaders in lifelong faith formation, and five on-site interviews. Within each site, we interviewed the congregation's pastor and key leaders in faith formation. Denominations represented in the study included Evangelical Covenant, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran (ELCA), Non-Denominational Christian, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist.

Key Findings

The following findings were strongly identified by all three groups in the study: 1) national and regional leaders in lifelong faith formation; 2) church practitioners; and 3) pastors and church staffs. The first seven, the Primary Findings, were specifically named in the key findings for each group. The last three were key findings which emerged from our conference calls with the national and regional leaders and with the pastoral staffs during our on-site interviews. Although they were not identified as key findings in the online survey of congregational practitioners, we included them as Secondary Findings because of the significant number of examples of each which were shared in the surveys.

Primary Findings

1. A shared, compelling vision for lifelong faith formation is essential for long-term effectiveness and sustainability.

The churches that “get it” are finding that they and their people are being transformed by the vision of lifelong faith formation. (national leader)

Without a shared belief that this is necessary and good, and a commitment to stick it out, we never would have lasted these five years. (congregational leader)

Participants in the project echoed over and over how vital it is for congregations to have a vision for lifelong faith formation. It is the “big picture,” as one person stated. The religious education goals must be defined and always up front—in the minds of leaders as they plan faith formation, in the hearts of the people in the pew as they experience it. And the goals must be lofty enough—nothing short of discipleship in Jesus Christ—to capture the spiritual imaginations of the learners. When the vision grabs the people, amazing results follow. One leader shared that a key to success is when people are excited about the formation program in the congregation and keep asking, “What’s our next topic?”

Participants also noted the importance of the vision being shared and then owned—by the pastor, the staff, the volunteer leaders, and the people in the pews. Without a vision for faith formation which is owned by all, the long-term outlook is weakened. Then, if things get tough, people are likely to give up or go on to the next fad on the faith formation scene. So it is vital, as one local congregational leader put it, that “*Lifelong learning is an integral part of the life of the parish... not peripheral.*”

Communicating the vision to everyone is particularly critical in congregations seeking to evolve from limited faith formation (e.g., just for children or for children and adolescents) to a vision which says that faith formation is lifelong—and consequently for all ages. And the communication needs to be frequent. One national leader put it this way: “*It’s going to have to be preached. The ones who are coming to church are going to have to hear it over and over. Not hit-you-over-the-head frontal assault, necessarily. But the value of lifelong formation is going to have to be imbued somehow over time in the preaching and other ways that they experience it at Sunday Mass.*”

Many of the people interviewed talked about having everyone—from the pastor to the janitor—understanding and embracing the faith community’s vision. Leaders also addressed the importance of helping people understand that conversion itself is a lifelong process. Not only must the vision be communicated well, but it must also permeate all of the congregation or parish. As a local Church leader reported, “*It goes throughout the generations and so it quickly became the language and focus of the whole church and not just one area of ministry or specific to one age group.*”

Participants noted that part of the vision is bringing people out of their old way of thinking of “religious education” or “catechesis” or “Sunday school” alone to embracing a philosophy of education which says learning happens everywhere—not just in the classroom. Leaders recognize how vital it is for their members to see God’s presence and providence in everyday life. Effective faith formation helps them make those connections. But leaders were quick to add that the faith formation efforts of the congregation must be *intentional*, particularly in today’s world where Church competes with so many other activities in people’s lives.

One other key to holding up and sustaining a vision shared by leaders was the role of Christian practices in living out the vision for faith formation. The practices are seen as the place where the “rubber hits the road,” where the vision becomes tangible and real. Leaders stated that Christian practices help connect faith with life. They bridge the gap that religious education alone could not. Helping people of today become skilled in the traditional practices of our faith (e.g., examen, lectio divina, hospitality) puts them in touch with their faith in new and vibrant ways. The more we form and inform our people in the practices of Christianity, the more the vision becomes a living, breathing reality in their lives. As one national leader put it, “*How do we shift the mindset so that it (ongoing faith formation) does become a way of life? Practices point us toward a way of life that has integrity and that people, I think, are yearning for.*”

2. Having the right leadership in place is critical to developing and sustaining lifelong faith formation in a faith community.

I would say it has to be absolutely something that the pastor of the parish is sold on. He understands that a

parish is, in addition to being a worshipping community, a community of concern, et cetera, that it needs to be a learning community. Some are more active than others, some have the gifts and talents to actually lead things, and others just allow it to happen in their midst because they are in a sense believers in the reality that we’re all learning and growing together, and that’s critical. (national leader)

You’re just seeing people come forward who are feeling called by God to share in different ministries. (congregational leader)

Different factors entered into leaders’ descriptions of the right leadership, but there was consensus on the importance of having the “right people on the bus.” Among the key ingredients which participants described were seeking a diversity of ages and gifts and seeking passionate, committed people (who were in it for the long haul) to be on the leadership team. One pastor spoke of seeking out those who had gifts which she didn’t possess in order to fully minister to her congregation. Other leaders spoke of the critical role of the pastor. Having him or her on board was seen as vital to the implementation and success of lifelong faith formation.

Another key leadership element which emerged from the data was the importance of training and nurturing leaders, both paid and volunteer. One participant called it “investing” in leadership.

Helping people discover their gifts was essential to effective faith formation efforts. Offering gifts discernment tools to parishioners who might not see themselves as leaders turned out to be a win-win for the congregation (getting more talent involved in faith formation) and the individual.

3. Community is essential to effective lifelong faith formation.

God does the forming and the community creates the space, a space conducive to God’s forming. It’s God through community but we shape the community. (national leader)

The more a sense of community and unity can be instilled, the more “time” people seem to find for faith issues. (local congregational leader)

Leaders were fairly united in saying that an experience of community was necessary to faith formation. One participant described quality faith

formation as *being relational*. As one leader described it, faith formation is about people's relationship with God, with each other, and with creation.

It was fascinating to hear leaders remark that experiencing community leads people *into* a desire for more faith formation, and being committed to community emerges *from* good faith formation. When members feel connected, they are more likely to participate in faith formation programs and activities. And one of the special benefits of intergenerational faith formation is that it has created relationships across the ages which probably would not have happened in other ways.

Some of the leaders addressed the importance of community for groups who may not have been part of traditional faith formation programs in the past. Young adults were a group most often identified as needing the communal aspect of faith formation to get them to come—and to stay!

4. There is a strong connection between a congregation's faith formation and its worship.

As the heart of our community life, worship should never be overlooked as the primary vehicle of faith formation. (congregational leader)

What many young people are seeking out of the church is an authentic experience of worship. (national leader)

Liturgical catechesis is not a new concept, but the participants in our study were very excited about the link between liturgy and faith formation. They spoke of how much people learn about their identity as Christian disciples in *good* worship. There was a recognition that liturgy brings us to the source of our identity as followers of Jesus Christ—in both breaking open the Word and in sharing in the Bread of Life (Eucharist).

Leaders described how liturgy also brings learners of all ages together. It is interesting to note that some congregations are just beginning to bring children into Sunday worship experiences to embody the lifelong process of conversion and faith formation.

We were inspired by a congregation which has homebound parishioners proclaim one of the Sunday readings via Skype or a video so that they feel part of the community and the community understands and sees its connection to them.

5. Congregations are discovering that intergenerational faith formation—bringing all age groups together to learn about their faith—is an effective way to accomplish the goals of lifelong faith formation.

Intergenerational faith formation is valuable not just because of what happens to the kids, but what happens to the adults. They really have a sense that “We are all one church.” One of our high school kids said, “You know, it’s not like we’re just kids and adults here. We’re all one group; we’re all doing this.” Because you’re all out of your element,... So you’re kind of all put on the same level. (national leader)

The faith formation...what it means to me is seeing the different ages coming together, learning from each other, and having these opportunities to interact, especially in a society where we seem so segmented and children never see grandparents anymore, and knowing that there’s so much to learn from each other, and also so that older adults know that they have so much to learn from children. (congregational leader)

There was a strong sense among leaders who do intergenerational faith formation that bringing all ages together works. People truly can learn from each other—adults from children, youth from young adults, children from elders, et al. For some denominations, this was a challenge because their history was one of focusing on childhood and adolescent faith formation. They had to “woo” adults into coming. But participants agreed that seniors and adults of all ages benefit from intergenerational faith formation.

Bringing all ages together to learn more about their faith has the benefit of helping the whole congregation see itself as a community of learners. As one local congregational leader put it, “*We are becoming a learning community and that is really coloring how our whole parish functions.*”

Intergenerational faith formation also provides an opportunity for families to learn side-by-side about their faith. When families are given the chance to experience faith formation together in the congregation, they seem more likely to continue that learning at home.

Some Lutheran and Catholic congregations identified intergenerational sessions as the central

part of their faith formation endeavors. Others talked about weaving intergenerational opportunities into traditionally age-based programs. One example of that is Vacation Bible School. One congregation involves middle and high school students in working with the children, and engages adults in the experience as well.

6. Congregations seek to offer faith formation opportunities for young adults.

There has to be some careful thinking about how to not only retain young adults in communities of faith but in fact how to really nourish them, how to nurture them and form them in faith. (national leader)

We offer programs aimed towards introducing faith practices to young adults (e.g., a discernment group given to help young adults make vocational, relationship or other big decisions, a “faith in action” group that involves young adults in service projects, an upcoming Lenten group about fasting, a young parents group for parents of infants and toddlers, and a financial planning/stewardship group for young adults). (congregational leader)

Of all the conclusions from the Study, this one was perhaps most surprising. Young adults are often the most neglected part of the congregation’s age groups. Yet in all three major groups of the Study, faith formation for young couples and singles emerged as crucial.

Words like “intentional” and “diverse” in methodology and setting were used to describe effective faith formation for young adults. The majority of those who spoke about young adult faith formation agreed that it is only effective when it connects faith with their everyday lives.

Theology on Tap, a faith formation process which was developed by the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, was mentioned by more than one denomination as a particularly effective method of reaching young adults. Other key practices include inviting young adults into leadership. One faith community has young adults on the Elder Board, and the young adults are called “under-elders.” Another congregation offered a series on Benedictine spirituality. For the application, young adults wrote their own rule of life and explored hospitality in the church.

A very appropriate and effective practice we heard was offering young adults a short-term series on contemporary issues. The young adults receive a five-minute article/chapter to read when they arrive, and the rest of the time is spent discussing the content.

Service and mission trips were also mentioned as great strategies for the formation of young adults.

7. The role of the home church is critical to lifelong faith formation.

I believe we need to make building the “foundations of faith” in the first decade of life the top priority of faith formation, and this will mean an emphasis on the whole family (and parents). The only way to address this is to engage parents and children together in learning—at church and at home. (national leader)

Faith is a partnership between the ministry of the church and the ministry of the home and if the home is church it really becomes foundational for everything we do. (congregation leader)

The vital role of parents in the faith formation of their children was noted by many of the leaders we interviewed. They spoke of balancing the need to challenge parents as the first faith formators of their children with the need to promise those same parents that the church is there to help them do it. They described two particular ways they supported the domestic church: 1) programs in the congregation in which parents and children learn together; and 2) resources for families to continue their learning at home.

An effective practice, which was offered by several congregations, is having parents and children learn together in intergenerational faith formation so that they get used to the interaction and hopefully continue the learning at home. Including a home kit in the intergenerational session extends the learning from the gathered session in the home. One leader commented that the power of intergenerational learning lies in the fact that all members of the family—parents, teens, children—learn the same subject at the same time.

The work of Lutheran churches in offering families resources for faith formation around the milestone moments in family life was noted across denominations as an effective faith formation tool. The *Stepping Stones* program was particularly praised (Faith Inkubators, www.faithink.com).

One leader shared the practice of offering materials for families on the parish website. Another spoke of the importance of giving families something to take home so they remember to do the faith formation exercise. Encouraging families to create a home altar or prayer space was a successful practice for many.

Secondary Findings

1. Breaking open the Word of God in Scripture is an essential part of lifelong faith formation.

...the stories from our Scripture and our church tradition don't remain disconnected from our day-to-day lives. A fertile Biblical imagination can help people see, "Oh, this was a loaves and fishes kind of moment. We came to a potluck and people didn't think they had enough, and lo and behold, somehow we had more than enough food." And name it as a loaves and fishes kind of moment. Or to know a Good Samaritan story in context and not just by the way it's often thought.
(national leader)

Right now, they [elders] are described as being the last Biblically literate generation in our country. So in this congregation, we have a strong commitment to helping all of our generations become Biblically literate.
(congregational leader)

Leaders noted the opportunity for using the Sunday Gospel as a launching point for lifelong faith formation. They also shared some of the best practices, such as a program which engages children in staying with one Scripture passage in-depth for a longer period of time rather than covering many passages but not going in-depth on any of them. The "Question of the Week" which connects the Sunday Gospel to the everyday lives of parishioners was another practice described by different leaders.

One leader spoke about the effectiveness of asking young people, "How does your world today lead you to these old stories?" rather than starting with the stories themselves. Another leader talked about studying Scripture topically (e.g., covering selected passages relating to justice) instead of reading a whole book. Developing a "fertile Biblical imagination" in people by helping them make connections between Scripture and their ordinary lives was also highlighted.

2. Service and mission provide profound opportunities for conversion and ongoing faith formation.

For this formation to really happen in a potent way, people need to get the sense that we are a community both congregating and being sent, and that that is a regular rhythm of the Church: being drawn together and also being sent out into the world, and that the mission is part of God's own sending mission that's consistent with God's character throughout history, so that all the time the Church is being sent. Mission trips are not some kind of exceptional thing in that regard.
(national leader)

...my experience has been that as we do our numerous trips that the whole congregation feels a part of it, too...as they learn and hear the stories and see the photos and the powerful testimonies of faith in another country... (congregational leader)

Participants were very passionate about the effect of service and mission trips on those who experienced them. Different leaders spoke of conversion, generations learning from each other, and a deepening sense of the Gospel call to justice and service from their members participating in mission. And it wasn't limited to any particular age group. One person shared that taking youth on what had always been an adult international service trip changed everyone so profoundly that she concluded she would never do a trip without young people again.

A pastor shared the effectiveness and power of a "Mountain Top" trip which gives participants a God-experience. He added that members of the faith community who go on these trips are invited to share their experience with the whole congregation through photos, testimonies, etc.

Involving families in service was a very positive experience for congregations which provided the opportunity.

Congregations noted the importance of the prepare-engage-reflect process in involving their members in mission trips and service projects. Effective experiences include: intense time for reflection and learning; building relationships with other participants and with the victims of injustice they are serving; opportunities for worship during the experience; studying issues in the context of real life; experiencing an intergenerational program; having the whole congregation involved when they hear the

stories, see the pictures, and are inspired by the testimonies.

3. Adult faith formation requires variety and respect for each individual's learning needs.

...(T)here is a continuing conversation of conversion that goes on throughout one's life. It completely turns on its head the idea that there is a single shining moment in time when a person is transformed.
(national leader)

All of our adults are invited and encouraged to be part of a small group. (congregational leader)

Participants described the importance of offering a variety of methods for engaging adults in faith formation. And several leaders noted that they offer different programs for different age groups within adulthood. One congregational leader talked about needs-based senior formation. Others addressed the needs of young adults in contrast to middle-aged and senior adults.

Many of the adult faith formation opportunities revolve around Biblical studies. One congregation holds adult forums, which are a blend of information and formation. The leaders try to include experiential, spiritual discipline-based learning experiences around current topics. *Theology Uncorked* is a faith formation program for those who are 40 and older. One congregation chose to bring in speakers in the weeks leading up to the presidential election to help congregation members get the tools they needed to vote from a faith perspective.

Other effective practices for adults include: adult forum topics conducted as a series (rather than a string of disparate topics); small groups to which all are invited; weekly series devoted to topics like faith practices, church history and theological topics; Bible study which includes active listening and pushing people beyond what they think they are "supposed" to believe into stating how things really look to them; weaving in the arts and contemporary events to show that great teachings aren't dead ideas but always present truths waiting to be re-learned; and a weekly midday book group. One strategy came from a pastor who invites anyone interested to join him in studying and discussing the upcoming Sunday Scripture readings. A diocesan-wide program for adults, the Bishop's Annual Cathedral Series on Catechesis,

brings in national speakers several times a year to engage adults in learning more about their faith.

Leaders addressed the need to provide a trusting atmosphere in order for faith sharing to take place, especially with adults who aren't used to sharing with others. We heard phrases like "explore" and "not afraid to ask questions" and "vulnerability" and "no pressure to speak." All of these were seen as contributing to that safe place in which people can do the "collective grappling and collective groping" for the work which God has planned for them. A very effective practice which surfaced is having leaders who themselves model vulnerability and authenticity, sharing their own struggles and letting the community know that it is just fine to come as they are in all the messiness of their lives today.

Emerging or Innovative Findings for the Future

There were other findings which we found interesting or exciting. Although they didn't make the "top ten" list, they had a profound impact on the congregations which shared them.

One of these was the use of drama, art and music in faith formation. We found that congregations which recognize that engaging the total person—not just the mind—helped their people develop greater intimacy with God.

An old practice which emerged as a "new" practice was storytelling. We heard many congregations describe the power of having their members share their own personal stories and encounters with Jesus Christ—across generations and within small faith-sharing groups. We also heard the effectiveness of storytelling as a method in intergenerational settings. With children, storytelling around Scripture was described as particularly effective (e.g., *Godly Play* and *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*).

The use of technology, while not widespread, was really effective for those congregations which have utilized it. Leaders spoke of distance learning opportunities, using DVDs and podcasts, engaging people through chat rooms, Facebook, and other interactive experiences on the Internet. But they were quick to point out the importance of combining technology and presence. One congregation has created online learning accompanied by small group sharing. Another community, recognizing that they are both a community gathered and a community

scattered, attempts to utilize technology to invite young adults into the faith community.

An effective practice we heard several times was involving the entire community in sacramental preparation. In one congregation, when a baby is being baptized, all the children of the community are asked if they will play with the baby and teach him or her stories of Jesus as he grows up. There was a genuine sense of everyone taking responsibility for new members. Other leaders talked about children celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation with their parents or within the context of an all-parish reconciliation service so the children would see all ages experiencing the sacrament. Confirmation sponsors and mentors were also identified, as were Confirmation preparation programs which involve the whole family.

Independent learning opportunities, while not widespread, have been very effective for congregations which have implemented them in creative ways. *Expanding Horizons* is the name of a dynamic independent learning program which a Minnesota parish has created. It is a series of learning centers which are open for nine days, including two weekends. Members of the parish can come anytime between 9 am and 9 pm to explore the current topic. There is also a room for younger children. Learning centers are varied—from listening to a CD composed by young adults in one center to participating in the Stations of the Cross at another center.

Many congregations do retreats as part of their faith formation plan. Some of the more innovative practices we heard included retreats for parents and children together; an annual fall retreat for adults; and ministry-based retreats, which include an adult onsite retreat.

One exciting insight we gained from the Study was the importance of engaging people's imaginations in faith formation. Congregations spoke of getting their members to imagine what God is doing in the world, to notice where God is, and to imagine where God is going. This led to deep conversations about both personal and communal faith—and to actions to build God's kingdom on earth.

We also heard many leaders speak of the need for being intentional about inviting people to faith formation. The best practice for getting parishioners to attend faith formation sessions is personal invitation. Other practices include advertising the session and communicating what it involves numerous times and in numerous places (bulletin, website, photo displays in gathering area of the

church, etc.). Leaders also spoke about continuing to invite beyond the initial outreach, and always looking for those who don't traditionally come, such as young adults, and sharing the benefits of coming for their particular age group.

Congregations which make good use of their space and resources invite people in. One powerful practice which surfaced in an on-site interview was the way a congregation makes plant and building decisions based on how well they will serve lifelong learning and worship. The campus has become a tool for learning for all ages, and for all ages to interact with each other. As an example, the day school is centered in such a way that children see and interact with adults who come for Bible study or to use the library. The whole campus shows the intentionality of the congregation's belief in lifelong learning.

Conclusions

At the conclusion of the study, we felt there were many reasons for rejoicing. While embracing lifelong faith formation requires much more time and labor than focusing on just one particular group within the community, the rewards are worth it! Leaders in congregations which embrace lifelong learning have created a space in which members of the faith community develop and deepen a living relationship with God in Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. They see discipleship as ongoing, and firmly believe that it happens in community.

We learned that congregations which are moving from limited faith formation to lifelong are wise to take the time to get the whole community on board before launching their new endeavors. It takes a whole community to make the vision a reality. Moving too quickly can create insurmountable resistance because people tend to have an innate resistance to change. Creating a compelling vision and then sharing that vision across all age groups is vital to success and sustainability.

We learned that one of the biggest challenges to lifelong faith formation is the busy lives which people lead in the twenty-first century. Congregations are competing against numerous other things which occupy people's time and thoughts. The more faith formation efforts are intentional, the better chance congregations have of the formation taking root in their members.

Leaders yearn to awaken people's hunger for further knowledge of their faith with intentional

efforts. The best way to do that is to always make the connection between what is being learned and the everyday lives of those who are learning.

Appendix: Research Method

The Center for Ministry Development chose a qualitative research methodology to do its study of lifelong faith formation in congregations. Qualitative research is a methodology which involves profound listening, treasuring each unit of information received, organizing these units into groups, and letting the insights emerge from the synthesizing of common themes and ideas.

We chose this method over quantitative research because we wanted the richness of face-to-face interviews and dialogue, the opportunity to let the discoveries come directly from the words and experiences of practitioners, and the use of a genuine team approach in identifying our findings.

The staff for the Study of Lifelong Faith Formation included:

- Tom East, Director of the Center for Ministry Development, who acted as our qualitative research consultant and analysis leader
- Leif Kehrwald, Project Coordinator for Lifelong Faith Formation at CMD, who was an interviewer and analysis team member
- Mariette Martineau, Project Coordinator for Lifelong Faith Formation at CMD, who was an interviewer and analysis team member
- Joan Weber, Project Coordinator for Lifelong Faith Formation at CMD, who served as coordinator of the study, interviewer, and analysis team member

Major Steps of the Study

The Center for Ministry Development Lifelong Faith Formation Team created the instruments for surveying the field. Our objective was to mine as much information as possible to fulfill the goals of the Study. We used open-ended questions as much as possible to provide church leaders the opportunity to share what they believed to be the most important insights about lifelong faith formation as they experienced it.

We contacted national and regional leaders in faith formation across Christian denominations, asking them to participate in one of three conference calls. These calls, which were conducted in the spring

of 2008, provided the team with insights about the vision and practice of lifelong faith formation in congregations and parishes. Each of the calls was recorded and transcribed.

The conference call questions included:

1. What does “lifelong” faith formation mean to you?
2. Name three best practices which you have seen practiced in lifelong faith formation across the country. Be as specific as possible. These can be big (a whole curriculum) or small (a great take-home strategy).
3. What do you believe to be the necessary “ingredients” for success in lifelong faith formation? In other words, what needs to be true for effective lifelong faith formation to happen in a faith community?
4. What is the biggest challenge you see parishes/congregations facing in implementing lifelong faith formation? Why?
5. What insights have you gained from supporting faith communities in implementing *lifelong* faith formation?
6. What are the most effective practices you are seeing in religious education for each of the following age groups?
 - Seniors/Retired
 - Adults
 - Young adults (18-39)
 - Youth (14-18)
 - Middle schoolers
 - Children
7. What intergenerational faith formation experiences are you training parishes/congregations to do?
8. What are you doing to promote family faith formation?
 - In the parish/congregation?
 - In the home?
9. Have you seen any ecumenical faith formation being done by congregations and parishes in partnership with each other? If so, what are you seeing?

Concurrently, we sent an email request to 20 leaders/representatives of Christian denominations across the country, asking them to recommend congregations doing effective faith formation. We conducted an email survey in late spring of 2008 of the recommended congregations, inviting them to share their vision, best practices, and struggles in implementing lifelong faith formation. We received

responses from 15 congregations and parishes to questions similar to the conference call questions.

Following the email survey, we chose five congregations which emerged as exemplary practitioners of lifelong faith formation and made on-site visits to them in the fall of 2008. The sites were geographically diverse, including one in each of the following states: California, Minnesota, Illinois, Tennessee, and North Carolina. We interviewed the pastoral staff and members of the faith formation team(s). The interviews were conducted by the research team and ranged from 90 to 120 minutes in length. Each interview was tape-recorded.

The interview questions included:

1. What does “lifelong” faith formation mean to you?
2. What are the practices you are doing in lifelong faith formation which are most life-giving and innovative? Be as specific as possible. These can be big (a whole curriculum) or small (one take-home idea).
3. What would you say are the necessary “ingredients” for success in lifelong faith formation? In other words, what do you think has to be true for effective lifelong faith formation to happen in a faith community?
4. What is the biggest challenge you have faced in implementing lifelong faith formation? Why?
5. What insights have you gained from pursuing lifelong faith formation in your parish or congregation?
6. What changes have you seen in your congregation/parish as a result of your faith formation efforts?
7. What are you doing in religious education and faith growth for each of the following age groups?
 - Seniors
 - Adults
 - Young adults
 - Youth
 - Middle schoolers
 - Children
 - Pre-schoolers
8. Are you providing any intergenerational faith formation experiences? If so, what are they?
9. What are you doing to promote family faith formation?
 - In the parish or congregation
 - Through home resources

10. Are you doing any ecumenical faith formation with other congregations? If so, what are you doing?

The transcribed materials and the email surveys were divided into four groups. The staff unitized the findings, taking every new idea or discovery, “cutting it out,” and pasting it on its own index card with a hand-written note from the team member as to its salient theme. Each card was also coded to track whether it came from a survey, a conference call, or an on-site interview.

In December of 2008, the team met in Portland for a two-day analysis of the research. We analyzed the data from the national and regional leaders and the data from the surveys and the on-site interviews of local congregations and parishes. Our purpose was to 1) explore each unit of data, 2) match the data on each index card with others reflecting the same theme, and 3) create findings when there were enough cards on the same theme to warrant it.

The transcriber created a report of the raw data for each individual finding which included all of the direct quotes from the index cards. The report was analyzed and the key findings were compared from the three groups to determine overall findings which emerged from all three sets of data. One or two-paragraph summaries were developed for each key finding.

Anyone interested in reading the entire transcript for a particular finding can get it by contacting joanweber@cmdnet.org.