



Faith Formation

Greetings I'm Barbara Stiers. Welcome to this presentation of what is faith formation? Well, you've begun this module by reflecting on your own experiences of faith formation.

Now you'll take the next step in discerning what your faith formation ministry might become. We'll do that by looking at definitions of faith formation and beginning to consider the role of teachers and leaders, John Roberto, a teacher writer, researcher consultant, and the founder of lifelong faith associates has described faith formation as a lifelong continuing process, which takes place in a community of believers.

He has written faith, formation, informs forms and transforms the person, whether child, youth, or adult into a robust, vital, and life-giving Christian faith that is holistic a way of the head, the heart and the hands and faith formation does the very same for the Christian community.

As it immerses people into the particular practices and particular way of life that identifies them as followers of Jesus. Since faith formation involves heart, mind, and soul, it can include every action experience or relationship that nurtures a transformative relationship of trust with God and shapes the way that we see and interact with God's world.

Craig Dykstra, a former seminary professor and senior vice president at the Lilly endowment has said the people of all ages grow in faith by practicing the faith together, practices are taught and encouraged in congregations practices that are repeated become habits and habits become a way of life over time, Christian practices, shape and form Christian communities and become their defining characteristics.

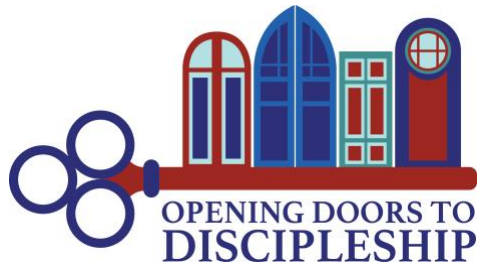
Perhaps practice makes perfect, but Dykstra reminds us that teaching and learning are not about mastery of the practices or of the subject matter, or even of ourselves Dykstra road.

The practices of faith are not ultimately our own practices, but are rather, um, habitations of the spirit in the midst, which we are invited to participate in the practices of God.

So to education and faith is not ultimately an ethical or spiritual striving, but rather participation. And the educating work of God's spirit among us and within us in this way, education and faith is itself a means of grace, uh, teaching faith and nurturing it through practices as well.

As words is not a new idea near the end of his life. Moses gave his farewell discourse to the people of Israel.

As narrated in Deuteronomy. God had given him the responsibility to teach the people how to keep the covenant and develop their relationship with God.



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So he gathered everyone, the whole community from the youngest to the oldest first Moses repeated the deck, a log, the 10 words or 10 commandments.

And he told the people to learn them and observe them diligently. Then he called this intergenerational group to attention saying, Israel, listen, our God is the Lord. Only the Lord love the Lord, your God with all your heart, all your being and all your strength. Then he charged them to keep the words on their minds and gave them practices designed to pass the teachings on and instill them in future generations.

Recite them to your children. Talk about them when you were sitting around your house and when you are out and about when you are lying down and when you are getting up, tie them on your hand as a sign, they should be on your forehead as a symbol, write them on your houses, doorframes and on your city's gates.

If we use this scripture as our model, we would not restrict our teaching to Sunday or to church only whether we are at home on the road or around town.

It would be a good place to talk about our faith and whatever time of day it was. It would be a good time.

We would not use words alone. We would also have rituals, but when we did use words, they would not always be in the form of didactic instruction.

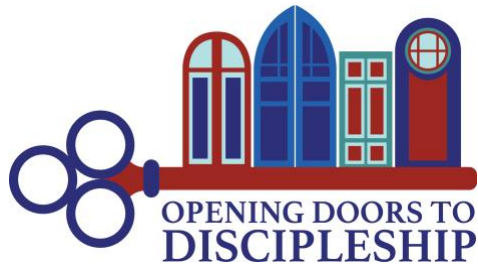
Moses anticipates that children will ask questions about the meaning of the laws and regulations. And when they do Israel is to tell them a story.

One that begins. We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand instructions.

Stories, practices all are valuable ways to transmit the Christian faith. They work together to shape our thoughts, our spaces, and our lives to focus on God.

Denominations have issued formal statements, explaining their beliefs about faith formation and their 2018 book of order. The Northern province of the Moravian church in America advocated a strong program of Christian education and every congregation designed to interpret the Christian message for all age groups, from infancy to old age, above and beyond what may be achieved through the conventional Sunday church services.

They referred to faith formation as Christian education, but they listed a wide array of examples besides classes for its part, the Southern province of the Moravian church in America, charged



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pastors and church boards with placing Christian education or faith formation within the total life of the church.

As an integral part of its teaching ministry. The mission of faith formation ministries of the Christian reform church in north America is to encourage and equip churches and individuals to shape lifelong faith formation in their work home school, church, or neighborhood.

So that all generations have an intentional and resilient faith. Perhaps you've noticed some of our recurring themes have popped up again in this mission statement.

Faith formation is for both congregations and for the individual. It covers all areas of life work, home school neighborhood, and it seeks to nurture faith in all generations, faith formation doesn't just happen.

It needs to be intentional to produce a thoughtful, relevant faith applicable to all aspects of life. The best faith formation practices result in a resilient faith that can weather new information, new experiences, struggles, and still find present.

In all circumstances, you may be wondering, well, what's the difference between faith formation and Christian education? Well, traditionally Christian education has been about imparting knowledge and facts to the next generation.

It has assumed that this takes place in a classroom environment and inside this classroom, the teacher is the resident expert.

While the students who are assumed to be children passively receive and consume the information, it has also been assumed that teaching happens only inside the church building finally, part of the agenda of the curriculum, whether explicit or not is about preserving the institution and its history when transitioning our understanding of our ministries from the education alone model toward faith formation.

We should remember that the call to form disciples encompasses many aspects of Christian education, as well as the whole purpose of the whole person of God.

And it includes life inside and outside the church. The Presbyterian church USA has adopted this new understanding in 2018, the 223rd general assembly adopted the recommendations of the special committee to study the reform perspective of Christian education.

The special committee recommended defining Christian education and faith formation as having as much to do with discipleship as learning doctrine.



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They said Christian education and faith formation is thus a lifelong ongoing iterative process in which we follow Jesus. And in doing so and in, so doing, we learn about him and get to know him and then offer our confession of faith.

The attrition of church membership and declining interest in denominations suggest that we need to reassess our education and formation ministries.

The committee wrote that Christian education should not just be knowing about God, but it should be about knowing God and not just knowing the doctrine of grace, but of knowing grace and experiencing it in one's own soul.

Since education, more than just class instruction, they advise using the term Christian education and faith formation. Thus, there is a role for knowledge of doctrine and for relationship saying it Gustin referred to faith, seeking understanding.

He said, unless you believe you will not understand Saint Anselm, a 12th century theologian expressed it this way. I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but rather I believe in order that I may understand.

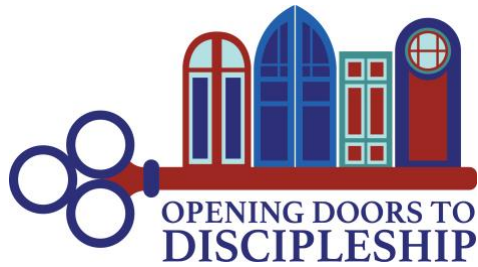
So where does that leave us with regard to faith formation? We can define faith formation by saying it is no longer about children.

Only all ages are growing as disciples and often they're growing together. It is no longer assumed that the teacher contributes everything and the student contributes nothing.

Teachers and students are learning together and both bring their own expertise. Formation is no longer for the Sunday school classroom.

Only. It happens anywhere and everywhere. Content is no longer strictly information-based practices that informed faith and practices that form and transform the person should be integrated into the ministry.

Plus there should be opportunities for reflection. And finally, the experiences are holistic, communal rather than individualistic and engaging all aspects of the person, not just the intellect. Well, let's take a few minutes to reflect on a story about how Jesus approached faith formation. By considering the story of the feeding of the 5,000, focusing on Matthew and Mark's versions, the crowds have anticipated Jesus's arrival and met him at a lonely place across the sea of Galilee.



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Jesus had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Mark said he began to teach them. And Matthew said he began to heal them when the hour grew late and the people were still there.

His disciples suggested that Jesus send them away to buy their own food. Instead Jesus tells the disciples, you give them something to eat.

When the disciples protest asking, shall we go and buy 200 denari worth of bread? Jesus calmly asked them to go and find out how many loaves they have.

There are only five loaves and two fish. They say, nevertheless, the crowds are told to sit down and after taking the loaves and fishes, blessing them and breaking the loaves.

Jesus gives the food to the disciples to distribute among the people and all ate and were satisfied. So what do we learn from this?

Well, Jesus met people where they were and accepted them. He understood and met the crowd's needs, even if they couldn't articulate what it was they needed.

The needs of the entire person are considered spiritual as well as physical. Not only were the people hungry for learning from Jesus, but they were also hungry for real food.

Jesus leads the disciples through a process of learning that more can and should be done for people than they thought possible.

He invites the disciples to participate in his ministry by empowering and equipping them to act.

Although mark counts only the 5,000 men, Matthew points out that women and children were in attendance too.

In other words, it was more than intergenerational. Everyone was together sharing the food and the experience. So what are the implications for faith, formation leaders and teachers?

Well, leaders need to take into consideration. The context of the learners. Leaders should also look for connections and networks in the congregation, the community, and perhaps even the denomination.

These might provide possible resources and synergistic alliances. And remember leaders don't have to, and shouldn't have to do it all themselves.



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Learn to engage others in teaching and providing leadership in this new model of faith formation, the teacher does more than impart intellectual knowledge.

The teacher now becomes someone who curates resources, experiences, and information. The teacher becomes a mentor who helps shape Christian disciples through Christian practices.

And the teacher now becomes a leader who sets the vision for the destination and leads the way. Nevertheless, the leader is still a fellow Pilgrim on the road and a traveler on the way.

So how will you define the faith formation ministry in your context?