

Faith Formation with Older Adults, APCE 2021

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Big-picture principles for older adult ministry:

1. *Older adults' understandings of the Christian faith vary significantly.*
Expect a great variety of beliefs about God, who Jesus was and/or is, the purpose of the church, how faith might affect one's life, the aim of prayer, and what death brings, amongst others.
2. *Older adults enter our congregations with a variety of religious-spiritual identities and needs.*
"[T]hose who are religiously/spiritually committed and engaged in the faith community; [and] those who are less religiously committed and participate occasionally in the faith community." Our congregants will also encounter in their circles of connection, "[T]hose who have left established churches and religion, but are still spiritual and spiritually committed, [and] those who are unaffiliated, uninvolved, and claim no religious identity."¹
3. *Faith formation is concerned with all of one's life.*
This includes one's physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual realities.
4. *Relationship and community are key to adult faith formation.*
Older adults find community in family, friends, "neighborhoods," church, small groups, social gatherings.
5. *Diversity of programming provides the depth to engage a breadth of situations and circumstances.*
Living situations (examples only): single home/condo/apartment/multi-generational living, adult housing/facility with care/communal living.
Circumstances (examples only): lives alone, with a partner/friend/companions; driving/not driving; family near and engaged; passion for doing for others; feels isolated and alone; cares for parent/grandchildren.
6. *Older adults have a variety of preferred ways of learning; but will try new ways to engage.*
Things to remember: Make choices available; intentionally plan for accommodations for eyesight, hearing, mobility, cognitive challenges, social challenges, other situations unique to your participants.
7. *Many highly significant life transitions occur in the last third of life.*
These are key opportunities for fostering spiritual exploration, inviting growth, empowering resilience, developing coping strategies, providing special care, connecting to a small group with similar changes or needs.
8. *Multi-generational contact for learning and relationships are highly valued by many older adults.*
These contacts are beneficial to all ages and stages for: life-story telling, sharing experiences, learning to be sensitive to others' needs, learning to love and care, working together on a task, experiencing joy and delight.

¹ "Twenty-First Century Adult Faith Formation," John Roberto, page 2.

9. *Helping others is a deep desire of older adults.*

When searching for or creating opportunities to help, consider: accessibility for many abilities, meeting needs for contribution and caring, creating relationship with others that can be life-giving, finding situations where continuing partnership is both possible and desirable, mutual benefits are optimal.

10. *Older adults show increasing openness to the online, digital world for faith formation.* Advantages:

Personalizing exploration and learning; offering a variety of entry points into learning; connecting isolated individuals through common interests; delivering content about every subject imaginable; guiding physical exercise, spiritual practices, worship, and training for particular ministries.

Resources for planning ministry with older adults:

1. "Elders Rising" – Webinar "Ministry with Older Adults" with Dr. Roland Martinson (April 23, 2020)

https://vibrant-faith-catalyst.mn.co/posts/6015153?utm_source=email

Also, his book by the same name: *Elders Rising: The Promise and Peril of Aging*

"In this inspiring book, Roland D. Martinson draws on the folk wisdom and experience of over fifty persons between the ages of sixty-two and ninety-seven. He puts this wisdom in conversation with scriptural and theological understandings of elders in the last third of life and sets forth perspectives on aging for individuals, groups, civic organizations, and congregations to utilize in developing a vital, resilient, and productive quality of life for elders."

2. *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*, Editor: John Roberto, LifelongFaith Associates, 2015.

3. 2020 Older Adult Ministry Planning Guide, Presbyterian Older Adult Ministry Network (PCUSA), which contains an annual Worship Outline for Older Adult Sunday (May 3rd in 2020). Free download on POAMN site: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/mywt5-files/wp-content/uploads/sites/128/2020/02/21153551/20-Planning-Guide.pdf>

4. **Free downloads:** Lifelong Faith Journal at <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/journal.html>

Of special interest: Fall 2015 The Future of Adult Faith Formation –

https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_aff_-_journal_special_issue.pdf

Winter 2016 Special Issues on Adult Faith Formation

https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/guide_to_the_future_of_adult_faith_formation_winter_2016_lifelong_faith_journal.pdf

From Lifelong Faith Journal, Spring 2007: "Shaping a New Vision of Faith Formation for Maturing Adults:

Sixteen Fundamental Tasks." [https://media2-](https://media2-production.mightynetworks.com/asset/10178860/Faith_Formation_for_Maturing_Adults_-_Johnson.pdf)

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5. *On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity and Getting Old*, Parker J. Palmer, Berrett-Koehler Publications, Inc., 2018.