

Introduction

The paradigm of faith formation in the Catholic Church in the United States is changing. The era in which parish faith formation was dominated by a classroom, schooling paradigm is ending. A new paradigm better suited to today's people and issues is emerging. It is an ancient-new paradigm with roots in the early Church. The new paradigm is lifelong, ecclesial faith formation, centered in the events of Church life, engaging people of all generations in parish intergenerational learning, and nurturing faith at home throughout the life cycle. It is a complete system of faith formation, not a new program. Only a comprehensive approach will be able to address the urgent needs of faith formation in the Catholic Church.

Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners presents the research, vision, and practices that provide a foundation for lifelong faith formation. The first chapter analyzes the social-cultural context and identifies important trends having an impact on faith formation today. It explores current research on the religious beliefs and practices of American Catholics and the implications of this research on the future of faith formation. Chapter Two presents the vision of lifelong faith formation, grounded in the catechetical vision of the Catholic Church and the writings of leaders in religious education. Lifelong faith formation is proposed as a new paradigm for the Church. Chapters Three through Six present the four essential practices that make lifelong faith formation a reality in parish life:

1. events-centered systematic curriculum for the whole parish community,
2. events-centered intergenerational learning,
3. household faith formation, and
4. collaborative and empowering leadership.

While this book is written from a Roman Catholic perspective, I believe the vision and practices can be adapted for other Christian churches, especially the more liturgically-oriented mainline churches.

Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners: The Generations of Faith Sourcebook has developed from ten years of research, development, and direct work with parishes across North America by the Center for Ministry Development. Generations of Faith is not a program. It is an approach to creating lifelong, intergenerational, events-centered faith formation. Parishes of all sizes and cultures—from small town parishes, to city parishes and large suburban parishes—have found the Generations approach works in their parish community.

The key to the Generations approach is that it builds on the strengths of a parish's current catechetical programming, while creating a lifelong faith formation plan and intergenerational learning programs that gather all the generations to learn together. Parishes customize the Generations approach to their parish community: to the mission of the parish, the needs of their people, the cultures in the parish, and the resources and facilities of the parish.

In 2001 the Center for Ministry Development received a multi-year grant from the Lilly Endowment to work with parishes across North America to implement a lifelong, intergenerational, events-centered approach to faith formation. Through the Generations of Faith project the Center has created workshops, online resources, and publications to support parishes in their work. The project's Web site, www.generationsoffaith.org, is a primary resource for helping parishes plan, implement, and conduct lifelong faith formation. As of January 2006, over 1200 parishes across the United States and Canada are working to incorporate lifelong, intergenerational, events-centered learning into their parish community.

Becoming a Church of Lifelong Learners is one of two publications from the Generations of Faith project. The second publication, *Generations of Faith Resource Manual: Lifelong Faith Formation for the Whole Parish Community*, is designed as a planning guide and workbook to help the parish community embrace the vision and practices of lifelong faith formation. *Generations of Faith Resource Manual* provides detailed processes and tools to move from vision to reality: fashioning a lifelong curriculum, implementing a lifelong curriculum plan, developing leaders for lifelong faith formation, and designing an events-centered learning plan (intergenerational learning and household faith formation).