



# Faith Formation 2020 National Initiative

Envisioning Dynamic, Engaging and Inspiring Faith Formation for the 21st Century

A Project of LifelongFaith Associates

## "Working Paper: Faith Formation 2020 Version 1.0"

### 1. Key Trends and Forces

#### **Trend 1. Declining Participation in Christian Churches**

- If current trends continue, by 2020 14.7% of Americans will be attending worship; 85% of Americans will be staying away from worshipping God at church.

#### **Trend 2. Growth in No Religious Affiliation**

- 15% of all Americans claim no religious affiliation. The challenge to Christianity in the U.S. does not come from other religions but from a rejection of all forms of organized religion.

#### **Trend 3. Becoming More "Spiritual" and Less "Religious"**

- Today, 18% of 18-39 year olds say that are "spiritual, but not religious" compared to only 11% a decade ago.

#### **Trend 4. Influence of Individualism on Christian Identity and Community Life**

- Religious identity is more autonomous and deliberate today.
- Decline in the perceived necessity of communal or institutional structures as constituent of religious identity.

#### **Trend 5. Increasing Social, Cultural, and Religious Diversity in the U.S.**

- By 2050, the white population will be no longer by the majority (47%). Minority ethnic groups will be the majority: Hispanics (29%), Black (13%), and Asian (9%).
- Protestants will lose majority status (51.3% in 2008) as the U.S. becomes more religiously diverse.

#### **Trend 6. Growing Influence of Hispanic/Latino Religious Faith**

- Prevalence of spirit-filled religious expressions (*renewalist Christianity*): emphasis on God's ongoing, day-to-day intervention in human affairs through the Holy Spirit
- Ethnic-oriented worship with services in Spanish

#### **Trend 7. Identifying a New Stage of Life: "Emerging Adulthood" (18-30 year olds)**

- Characteristics: immense autonomy, freedom of choices, lack of obligations, focus on self, high instability, experimentation, and uncertainty

#### **Trend 8. The Rise of a Distinctive Post-Boomer Faith and Spirituality**

- "Religious Tinkering": piecing together ideas about spirituality from many sources
- "Expressive Communalism": need for expressive/experiential activities and physical community with others; a faith that makes cognitive sense to them and that is also an expressive, embodied spiritual experience.

#### **Trend 9. Changing Structures and Patterns of Family Life in the United States**

- Delaying marriage + Having fewer children and later in life + Decreasing number of children in two-parent households + Increasing number of unmarried couples living together + Increasing time caring for children

#### **Trend 10. Rediscovering the Impact of Parents and Families on Faith Practice**

- Parent Influence: The single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.
- Embedded Family Religious Practices: Effective religious socialization comes about through specific religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family life.

#### **Trend 11. Living in a Digital World**

- Internet usage continues to increase + Wireless and mobile usage continues to increase + Social networking is dramatically increasing + Increase of children (2-11) online + Growing embrace of technology by churches. In each year since 1998, some 10,000 congregations created a website.

## Trend 12. Educating in New Ways

- Multiple intelligences + Diversity of learning styles + Active, in-depth learning + Project-based learning
- Collaborative learning + Practice and performative learning + Visual literacy + Digital media

## Trend 13. Increasing Numbers of Adults 65 and Older

- By 2050, about one-in-five Americans will be over age 65.
- Emergence of a new stage of life between midlife and old age.

## 2. Four Scenarios for the Future of Faith Formation 2010-2020

### Two critical uncertainties that will affect the future of faith formation from 2010-2020:

- Will trends in U.S. culture lead people to become more *receptive* to organized religion, and in particular Christianity or will trends lead people to become more *resistant* to organized religion and Christianity?
- Will people's searching and hunger for God and the spiritual life *increase* over the next decade or will people's need for God and the spiritual life *decrease*.

### Scenario #1. Vibrant Faith and Active Engagement in the Church Community

*The first scenario describes a world in which people of all ages and generations are actively engaged in a Christian church, are spiritually committed, and growing in their faith. People have found their spiritual home within an established Christian tradition and a local faith community that provides a variety of ways for them to grow in faith and live their faith in the world.*

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Creates a community of lifelong learners, utilizing the whole church as a community of formation and transformation for lifelong faith formation for all ages and generations.</li><li>2. Offers people of all ages a compelling vision of a Christian way of life that is worth living and guides them in developing that way of life.</li><li>3. Is intentionally intergenerational.</li><li>4. Is personalized and customized.</li><li>5. Is fashioned around the significant milestones and life transitions across the life span.</li><li>6. Engages all ages in mission and service.</li><li>7. Promotes spiritual formation and transformation throughout life.</li><li>8. Is inclusive of a diversity of ethnic cultures and their religious traditions and expressions.</li><li>9. Fosters the capacity for people to engage in the public arena as people of faith in constructive</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>10. Provides learning that is experiential, image-rich, multi-sensory, interactive, engaging, and varied in learning style.</li><li>11. Is making a massive investment of time, resources, and energy in family faith formation at home and at church.</li><li>12. Is 24x7 through the dynamic use of new digital media technologies.</li><li>13. Creates a multi-dimensional platform for faith formation with <i>face-to-face</i> interaction/experience at the core leading to continuing learning and faith growth <u>or</u> <i>virtual</i> interaction leading to face-to-face interactions and experiences.</li><li>14. Engages the distinctive style of faith and spirituality of the Post-Boomer generations through innovative approaches and models.</li></ol> |
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### Scenario #2. Spiritual, but Not Religious

*The second scenario describes a world in which people are spiritually hungry and searching for God and the spiritual life, but not usually involved with organized religion and established Christian churches. Churches recognize that they need to establish a presence in the world of people who are spiritually hungry but not attracted to an established Christian church. While not all people in Scenario #2 are in the Post-Boomer generations, a large majority are.*

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Establishes a "Third Place" gathering space, planted in the midst of the community, that offers hospitality, builds relationships, provides a variety of programs and activities, and nourishes the spiritual life of people.</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. Offers a guided process for spiritually hungry people to become spiritually committed and actively engaged in the church community.</li><li>3. Offers an apprenticeship process for spiritually hungry people to experience the transformative power of God and the Gospel.</li></ol> |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Assists and supports spiritually-hungry people in establishing “House Churches” for spiritual growth, faith formation, worship and prayer, and service to the community.</li> <li>5. Creates a virtual spiritual formation center where people can diagnose their spiritual health and find online classes and resources for developing their relationship with Christ.</li> <li>6. Establishes a virtual “church campus” to connect with the everyday life of spiritually hungry people, offer them online ways to gather and grow in faith, and support face-to-face programs and activities.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Sponsors local and global “transforming the world” projects—serving the poor and vulnerable, working for justice and peace, and caring for creation—to engage people in action projects with the church and in the wider community.</li> <li>8. Offers people of all ages a variety of Christian practice immersion experiences that give people a firsthand experience of a Christian practice, and guide them in living the practice in their daily lives.</li> <li>9. Offers a variety of spiritual formation experiences in diverse settings, focusing on spiritual disciplines and practices.</li> </ol> |
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**Scenario #3. Unaffiliated and Uninterested**

*The third scenario describes a world in which people experience little need for God and the spiritual life and are not affiliated with organized religion and established Christian churches. The task of the church is to be incarnational—placing itself in the midst of the culture and the gathering places of people—and be a witness to the Christian faith in the world today.*

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Third Place (2.1)</li> <li>2. Process for Spiritually Hungry People (2.2)</li> <li>3. Apprenticeship Process (2.3)</li> <li>4. Establishes an online presence by being actively engaged in social networking sites and in working with websites that reach the unaffiliated and uninterested.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Establishes a virtual “church campus” to connect with the everyday life of spiritually hungry people, offer them online ways to gather and grow in faith, and support face-to-face programs and activities.</li> <li>6. Local and global service (2.7)</li> <li>7. Sponsors festivals, conferences, and events with a spiritual/faith perspective for the whole community.</li> </ol> |
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**Scenario #4. Participating in Church Activities, but Faith and the Spiritual Life Are Not Significant**

*The fourth scenario describes a world in which people attend church activities, but are not actively engaged in their church community. They may participate in significant church events such as Christmas and Easter and sacramental celebrations involving their families. Some may even attend worship regularly. But they do not have a strong connection to the congregation; their connections are more social than spiritual. Faith and the spiritual life are not a significant part of their life. Many are looking for an opportunity to become engaged and to develop their spiritual lives. Churches recognize that belonging (engagement) leads to believing (commitment) and a more vibrant faith, and seek ways to increase engagement with the community and the religious tradition to develop more spiritually committed members.*

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increases active engagement by connecting faith formation programming to participation in church.</li> <li>2. Creates expectations for family participation in learning and church life by providing a yearly faith growth plan with a variety options for experiencing the Christian faith through community life.</li> <li>3. Offers people of all ages a variety of Christian practices immersion experiences that give people a firsthand experience of a Christian practice and guides them in living the practice in their daily lives.</li> <li>4. Utilizes the naturally-occurring milestones and life transitions in people’s lives to deepen their faith, engagement in church life, and family faith practices.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Begins faith formation early in life.</li> <li>6. Utilizes the new digital media technologies to deliver faith formation opportunities and experiences in virtual spaces that connect people to church even if their participation in church life and faith formation programming is occasional.</li> <li>7. Is inclusive of a people from a diversity of ethnic cultures providing a hospitable and welcoming community, and programs and resources that are culturally appropriate and in the language of the people.</li> <li>8. Guides people in renewing their faith as a foundation for deeper growth in faith.</li> </ol> |
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