



Foundations, Findings, and Futures

Christian Faith Formation and
Education in the
United Church of Christ

September 2012

Submitted By:

Rev. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, Ph.D.

Minister for Christian Faith Formation Research

Congregational Vitality and Discipleship, Local Church Ministries

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Introduction and Overview

What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. – Ecclesiastes 1:9

Like other ministries, the ministry of Christian Faith Formation and Education in the United Church of Christ has changed over the course of the denomination's 55 years of history. In its present form, faith formation is encompassed within many different areas and ministries across the life of the church including, but not limited to:

- Local churches
- Associations
- Conferences
- Covenanted Ministries of the National Offices (Office of General Ministries, Local Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, and Wider Church Ministries)
- Institutions of higher and theological education
- Resource Centers
- UCC education-focused organizations and entities (including Association of United Church Educators and UCC Outdoor Association)
- Other non-profit religious organizations, both UCC-related and ecumenical (including the Center for Progressive Renewal, Pension Boards, CHHSM)
- Historically Underrepresented Groups (United Black Christians, Council for Hispanic Ministries, Council for American Indian Ministry, Pacific Islander Asian American Ministries, Disabilities Ministries, Coalition for LGBT Concerns, and Ministers for Racial, Social, and Economic Justice)

Because faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ is carried out in each of these settings, in diverse and context-specific ways, it is important to begin to think more deeply and strategize about this ministry as a whole, with the hopes of creating a unifying vision, framework, and collaborative network that supports and guides the formation of faith in the UCC.

In addition, as outlined in the proposed description for the Christian Faith Formation Research Study:

Churches are caught, today, in the practices of the modern world, struggling with radical shifts in culture, church, and technology of the post-modern world. This struggle includes the changing nature and practice of Christian Faith Formation in the church.

The current challenge is an opportunity for the United Church of Christ during a time of transformation in the life of the church. This time of change calls for a significant study of how Christian Faith Formation can best be practiced and shaped to address the spiritual and cultural challenges that the church faces.

Therefore, the purposes of this study were to:

- Report on the current status of Christian Faith Formation
- Identify where there is energy, insight, and fruits in Christian Faith Formation
- List best practices for Christian Faith Formation
- Articulate a vision for the future of Christian Faith Formation in the UCC
- Develop a strategy for futuring Christian Faith Formation in the UCC, including recommendations on:
 - The development of resource material in the UCC
 - The role and description of any national ministry staff position(s)

The report is divided into three major sections. After an explanation of the research methodology, the first section entitled “Foundations” offers an overview of the major changes in both church and society that directly impact faith formation and education, along with a brief history of this ministry in the UCC and an introduction of relevant conceptual frameworks to aid the process of contextualizing the research. The second section, “Findings,” highlights specific surveys and topics of relevance for faith formation and education in the UCC, including the National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation, Conference Ministers’ Partners in Education survey, summary of interviews with ecumenical national staff regarding denominational structures, and a section on best practices in various sub-topics of faith formation. The final section, “Futures,” offers a vision and recommendations for futuring faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ, with attention to staffing, support structures, and resource development.

Research Methodology

First and foremost, this study was approached as an act of “*pastoral listening and care in the work of prophetic leadership*” [1]. In her book *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice*, Mary Clark Moschella articulated that deep listening to the narratives of a community, with the goal of lifting up those narratives, can significantly increase understanding and insight into the life of an institution, ministry, or sets of beliefs and practices that inform current structures. This approach is both **ethnographic** (involving the immersion and study of people and groups) and **phenomenological** (involving the immersion and study of events and experiences) in nature and scope.

In addition to listening to individuals and groups, other processes involved in this type of research include:

- Reading local theology through research;
- Rigorous analysis;
- Composing shared stories that begin the work of pastoral-theological interpretation;
- Sharing these narratives and entering into dialogue and conversation;
- Weaving and reweaving new theological insights and practices into the ministry and community; and
- Honoring creativity through the process. [1]

These processes “form and inform religious leaders in the art of co-authoring the future,” with the ultimate goal of transformation. Re-interpreting the past and the present provides the groundwork to move into new ways of doing and being and creates freedom to prophetically engage visions for the future.

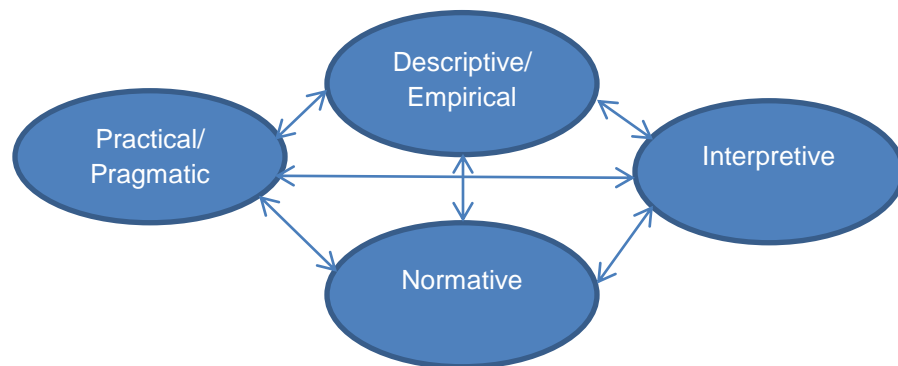
In a broader framework, this particular methodology is encompassed within the field of **practical theology**. Practical theology seeks to “reflect on the nexus of divine and human action, and look for the agency of God in both the lives of human beings and in social movements” [2]. A practical theological approach in studying formation and education is especially important as it informs understandings of the whole of Christian life with regard to the practices of faith—worship, service, learning, etc. As Dorothy Bass articulated, “Practices address fundamental human needs and conditions through concrete human acts” [3].

Richard Osmer developed what he termed a “consensus equilibrium” model to more appropriately define the tasks of practical theology [4]. This model best describes the research process utilized for this study and asks four central questions:

1. What is happening? (*the descriptive/empirical task*)
2. Why is it happening? (*the interpretive task*)
3. How does scripture/tradition/experience/theory/culture speak to what is happening? (*the normative task*)
4. How to...? / So what? (*the pragmatic task*)

These questions form the basis of this, and any, research study in the context of practical theology (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Equilibrium Consensus Model



Finally, and most concretely, a **mixed methods research approach** was applied to this study. Mixed methods utilize both quantitative (numbers-based) and qualitative (text-based) data. Numbers create an overall sense of trends; and words in the form of stories, comments, opinions, and other feedback offer a deeper understanding of those trends and experiences. Below is a listing and description of the specific types of data collected for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The research project included the following specific data collection methods:

- Large-scale survey
- Targeted group surveys

- One-on-one interviews with key stakeholders and constituents
- Focus groups
- Site visits/meeting attendance
- Descriptive data
- Educational resources and documents
- Pertinent written reports
- Internet/scholarly research

Large-Scale Survey

In the fall of 2011, a large-scale survey was crafted entitled the “UCC National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation and Education” and was distributed across all settings of the denomination. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative information about the current status of Christian faith formation and education and was conducted from October 1 to December 16. A total of 1,130 individuals responded to the survey.

In summary, the survey contained several demographically self-identifying components so that similarities and differences across groups were determined. In addition, congregational demographics were collected to determine whether similarities and differences existed across various churches and included: church size (scaled by average worship attendance), specific church designations (Open and Affirming, Accessible to All, Just Peace, Whole Earth), geographical location (urban, suburban, rural), and multiracial/multicultural diversity.

This survey explored various issues regarding education/faith formation such as:

- Most salient formational experiences for individuals and congregations
- Methods, media, and resources utilized by individuals and congregations for faith formation
- Use and feedback on specific curricular resources (*Faith Practices, Gather ‘Round, Seasons of the Spirit, Our Whole Lives*, etc.)
- Reflections on the most and least successful formation/education programs that individuals encountered and why they were/were not successful
- Experience with/use of modes of communication

- Personal and congregational vocabulary preferences with regard to “education,” “faith formation,” “spiritual formation,” and “discipleship”
- Knowledge, use, and impact of various educational trainings/resources (people and print) from the conference/national setting (to include: Partners in Education, Education Consultants, AUCE, and brochures/literature from LCM, JWM, WCM, and OGM) and their impact
- How teacher/leader training/development is carried out within congregations and its overall effectiveness
- The need/desire for national staff and a certification program in faith formation
- Current budgets/staffing/programs for faith formation in congregations

Questions contained multiple-choice, matrix/Likert scale, and open-ended options. The survey was distributed online by SurveyMonkey; however, individuals also completed paper copies of the survey that were later converted to online responses.

Targeted Constituent Surveys

One additional survey was conducted with Conference Ministers in April 2012 in order to assess the function and effectiveness of the Partners in Education program in various conferences. This survey was distributed in person to Conference Ministers through paper copies, and almost 2/3 of ministers (65.8%) completed the survey.

This ten-question survey included multiple-choice and open-ended queries and addressed issues regarding the status and effectiveness of their Partners in Education program, desires for the future of the program, and support needs from the national setting (see Appendix A).

Reflection questions regarding visioning for the future of faith formation and education in the UCC were distributed to UCC Education Consultants in October 2011 (see Appendix B). Questions about future structures and the measuring of success in these structures were asked. This small survey served as a follow-up to the Fall Annual Gathering in which the group spent several days reviewing and providing insights about the interview

responses they collected from various constituencies both within and outside the denomination.

Additionally, in the spring of 2012, a thorough evaluation of the UCC's congregational resource *Faith Practices* was completed. While this was a separate assessment, insights gathered from that evaluation were incorporated into the overall findings and recommendations of this report.

Interviews with Key Stakeholders and Constituents

These interviews enhanced the overall research study and supplemented the data gathered from the large-scale survey. Questions varied depending upon the constituency group; but they sought to gather information regarding the current status of faith formation in the UCC and other denominations, best practices, and areas and resources where there may be cutting-edge energies and fruits across the country (see Appendix B).

These interviews took place by email, phone, Skype, and in person depending on the context and were conducted from July 2011 through July 2012. A total of 114 semi-structured interviews were conducted in total (including interviews collected by UCC Education Consultants for analysis at the Consultants' annual meeting in September 2011).

Since several individuals agreed to be interviewed only with anonymity, a complete list of names is unavailable. However, some of the individuals and groups interviewed included:

- UCC national staff (current and former), including members of the Collegium
- Conference Ministers
- Partners in Education/Education Consultants
- Association of United Church Educators members
- Individuals and congregational leaders related with historically underrepresented groups (CHM, CAIM, UBC, PAAM, MRSEJ, UCC Disabilities Ministries, Coalition for LGBT Concerns)
- UCC-related seminary presidents and religious education faculty
- Staff in congregations engaged in vital faith formation ministries (both UCC and ecumenical)
- Youth/young adult leaders
- Resource Center directors

- Individuals from faith-based research and leadership organizations (Center for Progressive Renewal, Vibrant Faith Ministries)
- Writers/editors of *Faith Practices*
- Conference staff directly charged with education/faith formation
- Ecumenical partners and publishers of faith formation/education resources (including PCUSA, United Methodist, ELCA, Episcopal, UUA, and National Council of Churches)

This is not an exhaustive list; however, individuals from each of these groups and beyond were interviewed.

In terms of data gathering techniques, extensive typed notes were gathered in the course of phone, Skype, and in person conversations; and responses were also received by email. All notes were input into NVivo 9, a qualitative data analysis software program, and were then coded in order to obtain statistics on the data and to determine themes.

Finally, it is important to note that many informal conversations and meetings also took place in the last year with regard to faith formation and education in the UCC. While notes from these discussions were not formally captured, they were also important in shaping the findings and recommendations of the report.

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted during National Youth Event 2012 at Purdue University in July 2012. Specifically, two groups of youth (ages 13-17) and two groups of youth leaders were organized and facilitated. Five questions from the National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation and Education were asked of each group; and individuals responded in a number of formats (conversation, writing, art, online survey, and texting). About 25 youth and 25 youth leaders participated in the focus groups.

In addition, a focus group was conducted in September 2011 in Cleveland, OH with the Council for Hispanic Ministries. About 15 individuals were part of this focused conversation, and notes were typed as individuals responded to the questions. The data captured through all focus groups were included in overall analyses.

Site Visits

Site visits and attendance at key gatherings were also conducted in order to gain information on best practices, resources, and areas of vitality in faith formation and education. Sites and meetings attended included the following:

- UCC Council for Theological Education Annual Meeting, Cleveland, OH
- Western Christian Educators Conference, Lake Tahoe, NV
- Religious Research Association Annual Meeting, Milwaukee, WI
- Open Hearts Gathering, Gastonia, NC
- Mission House/New Harvest Ministry, Salisbury, NC
- UCC Leaders in Koinonia Event: Young Adult Ministries, Cleveland, OH
- Washington Park UCC, Denver, CO
- Education and Leadership Ministries Commission, National Council of Churches, Olive Branch, MS
- Children Welcome! Conference, Kansas City, MO
- Connecticut Conference, Hartford, CT
- Kensington Congregational Church, Kensington, CT
- UCC Annual Consultation, Chicago, IL
- Mid-Atlantic AUCE Annual Gathering, Alburtis, PA
- Children, Youth, and a New Kind of Christianity Conference, Washington, D.C.
- First Congregational UCC, Washington, D.C.
- UCC National Youth Event, West Lafayette, IN

Efforts were made to attend a diversity of congregations, including multiracial/multicultural, youth/young adult, urban, and rural churches. At least one visit to each of these types of congregations was completed.

Research conducted at sites and meetings/conferences included: Interviews with key stakeholders such as ministers, and laypersons regarding programs, pedagogies, and approaches; review of any formation materials utilized or created; and attendance at worship services, trainings, and other events central to the formational life of the organization or pertinent to best practices and research.

Input on and approval of site visits and meetings/conferences were made when possible; and specific questions were crafted for each site depending

on context. Extensive interview and observation notes were typed and input into NVivo 9 software program for analysis and coding of themes.

Educational Resources and Documents

Two types of specific resources were gathered: UCC-published content and ecumenical (non-UCC) content. UCC published content included any curricula and print materials created by the UCC/Pilgrim Press for the purposes of education and faith formation, which was broadly defined. Understanding and familiarity with the resources themselves helped to inform the research and recommendations included later on in the research report and assisted with better comprehension of interviewees' reflections on these resources.

In addition, gathering and review of curricula and resources produced by other denominations and faith traditions was also conducted and included a diversity of materials. Familiarity with these materials also aided in the process of increased understanding of interviewees' reflections regarding the positive and negative aspects of each resource.

Pertinent Reports and Historical Documents

In the course of preliminary interviews, some specific reports regarding the history of education and faith formation in the UCC were referenced. These reports included:

- "Toward A Vision of Education in the United Church of Christ" (see Appendix D)
- UCC Education Consultants Year-End Reports
- UCC "Plan of Work" completed in the early 1990s

In the course of gathering these reports from previous years, other reports (both UCC-related and ecumenical) were uncovered. In the past several years, other denominations have considered the future of faith formation ministries as well and have created reports documenting their findings and best practices and resources to guide congregations through creating vibrant ministries. Such reports and resources from the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Canada, United Methodist Church, and the Unitarian Universalist Association were gathered.

Other Internet / Scholarly Research

In order to gain a full understanding of best practices for formation and a sense of cutting-edge discipleship, emerging church, and secular formation models that can inform the future of faith formation and education in the UCC, thorough internet and scholarly research was undertaken. This research assisted in identifying new technologies and tools to inform and promote faith formation and education in the UCC and to craft a vision for the future.

This research included the following:

- Review of current scholarly articles, books, and other sources on the emerging church and models of discipleship/faith formation that are utilized in those settings
- In-depth internet searches and analyses of websites, blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and other media that effectively promote faith formation and discipleship
- Review of scholarship and internet-related information that addresses cutting-edge secular formation models
- Review of reports from major research studies undertaken in the last 5-10 years on religious life including the U.S. Congregational Life Survey, FACT 2010 Survey, several studies from the Pew Forum, and many others

As stated, this particular methodology was a key component in offering recommendations for “futuring” Christian faith formation in the UCC.

Validity Considerations

There were three types of validity that the study attempted to achieve:

1. *Descriptive validity* (whether the data accurately and comprehensively portrayed the actual events observed, the reported experiences and perceptions of interviewees, and the content of documents reviewed)
2. *Interpretive validity* (whether the interpretations adequately represented the events and were unwarranted by the data)
3. *Evaluative validity* (whether evaluative judgments were warranted and appropriate) [5]

A number of methods were employed to ensure these three types of validity and included the following:

- *Triangulation*: This study made reference to multiple sources, multiple theories, multiple methods, multiple observers, and was conducted across multiple moments of time, thus confirming and disconfirming facts and interpretations.
- *Member checking* (also known as respondent validation): For several of the interviews conducted, individuals received a transcript of the notes recorded from the sessions and were asked to check and edit for accuracy and proper intent.
- *Meta-evaluation and peer review*: Reviews of the overall evaluation methods, sources, and findings were conducted throughout the course of the study by national staff colleagues and consultants. [5]

Projected Timeline

The projected timeline below was crafted in July 2011 as a guide to the research project and was subject to change given varying contextual issues. However, this provided a frame from which to implement and complete the final report.

October 1 - December 16, 2011 Fall 2011	National Listening Campaign Site Visits and Interviews
January 15 - February 15, 2012 Spring 2012	<i>Faith Practices</i> Survey/Evaluation Site Visits and Interviews
July 15, 2012	Deadline for All Data Collection
July 16 - August 31, 2012	Analysis of Data/Report Writing
September 1, 2012	Report Completed
September - October 2012	Summary and Presentation to Local Church Ministries Board of Directors, LCM Staff, and education partners

Limitations of the Study

In any study, there are limitations to the research and analysis. For this particular project, it would have been helpful to gather more feedback from historically underrepresented groups. In addition, the role of the researcher for this study was responsible for supporting the faith formation and

educational ministries of the national UCC setting; and in this regard, a dual role was played of both supporter and evaluator. This dual role offered insights into the inner workings of this ministry that would have been unavailable for an outside researcher; however, it may have also hindered possibilities for a level of objectivity that would have been achieved with an outside researcher.

At this point, it is also important to outline both the purpose and limits of the research itself in a broader context. Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, in their book *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*, offered six assumptions and six realities to the strategic planning process that are also helpful for understanding the assumptions and realities of this research process and report. Realities included the following statements:

1. While the newest thinking is energizing to consider, the process must be appropriate to the needs, abilities, and situation of the [context].
2. A good [research] process will result in clarity of purpose that compels the [organization] to move ahead, but might not give everyone what he or she wants.
3. [Research] gives people a safe and structured place to explore what is important to them and their vision for their [organization].
4. There is a limit to the people and energy available to devote to [research], in any organization.
5. A [research] process provides direction and structure for conversation (and does not always end with the presentation of a final written report).
6. Focusing on a preset program can limit the [organization's] opportunity to use space and time for the intrusion of the hand of God or the movement of the Spirit that might operate on a different timetable. [6]

These realities of the research process are helpful to keep in mind, particularly when reflecting on the following three sections of this report.

Foundations

This section provides an overview of the cultural, religious/ecclesial, and pedagogical shifts that have taken place in the U.S. over the last several decades that have specifically affected Christian faith formation and education in the church. Then, a narrative of the historical highlights of this ministry in the United Church of Christ is offered in order to provide a background and summary of defining themes for faith formation throughout the denomination's existence. Finally, several theoretical frameworks are described that will assist in shaping an understanding of current cultural, religious, and Christian formational trends and will ultimately inform this report's findings and recommendations for the future.

This section is not meant to be an exhaustive account of events or histories; rather, it seeks to highlight various frameworks, themes, and changes that have occurred over time within the United Church of Christ, Christianity as a whole, and the broader society and that may be beneficial to thinking about this ministry in creative ways.

Shifts and Trends Affecting Christian Faith Formation and Education

The shift from modernism to postmodernism is the single most influential movement that has taken place over the last several decades and affects all aspects of church and society. There are many leading theologians who have recounted with detail this phenomenon and its effects on church life and faith formation in particular. This section will serve to briefly explain and discuss this overarching cultural shift. Then, five major cultural, religious/ecclesial, and pedagogical shifts that directly impact faith formation and education ministries will be described.

Summarizing the Postmodern Shift

First, in brief summary of this phenomenon, Brian McLaren most appropriately described postmodernism as “a reaction to the modernism that the world has passed through and by which it has been affected”[7]. In this sense, he framed postmodernism as not anti-modernism, but as after-modernism. McLaren contended that the “old modern paradigm, with its absolute scientific laws, consumerist individualism, and rational certainty,

[is] giving way to a new postmodern paradigm of pluralism, relativism, globalism, and uncertainty” [8].

In a similar manner, Phyllis Tickle contended that about every 500 years the church has undergone a significant change. She labeled the current period of transition “The Great Emergence,” a time in which Christianity is moving from the inherited church of modernism to the emergent church of postmodernism [9].

Some scholars have critiqued the field of Christian education and stated that “with few exceptions, Christian educators have arguably adopted the categories of modernity and assumed the necessity (and superiority) of those categories for interpreting both the world and the church. Included in these assumptions are Western scientific appeals to objectivity, the idea that the individual (versus the community) is the locus of reality, and the notion of ‘rights’ as the hallmark of freedom and justice” [10].

In recent years, however, it can be equally argued that Christian education has begun to take seriously this postmodern shift. David Csinos offered the following statements in his constructions of a postmodern faith formation:

1. Faith formation in the postmodern matrix is communal.
2. Faith formation in the postmodern matrix affirms and encourages diversity.
3. Faith formation in the postmodern matrix raises questions about how different realities coexist.
4. Faith formation in the postmodern matrix focuses on faith.
5. Faith formation in the postmodern matrix is about the active production of meaning.
6. Faith formation in the postmodern matrix is hopeful.
7. Faith formation in the postmodern matrix holds fast to the narrative of God. [7]

Several other scholars and practitioners have written about this shift and its effects on faith formation and have offered practical steps on areas such as worship and formation, youth ministry, and mission. This will be discussed in a later section.

Five Major Shifts and Trends

It is important to note that the following major shifts are not the *only* ones that affect faith formation; however, they were the most salient themes that were uncovered. While many of these specific themes are directly related to larger religious and cultural trends, every attempt has been made to be as direct as possible with regard to the nature of these shifts within the mainline church and, specifically, the United Church of Christ.

Generational Changes. As a result of the shifting role of institutional religion in American life, there are profound generational changes that have impacted faith formation in the church as a whole. In addition, with new generations come different ways of doing and being in the world that, in many ways, are not congruent with traditional structures and pedagogies familiar to church life.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 28% of Americans overall have changed their religious affiliation since childhood; and, when including interdenominational changes within Protestantism, this figure rises to 44%. These figures are higher for younger adults. Also, 16% of Americans are religiously unaffiliated, and that figure is also higher for young adults ages 18 to 29 [11]. If current trends continue:

- 32% of young people raised as Roman Catholics will leave the denomination;
- 54% of young people raised as Evangelicals will leave that faith tradition; and
- 55% of young people raised as Mainline Protestants will leave their faith tradition. [12]

The Faith Communities Today (FACT) 2010 study on congregations further revealed that:

- Over 52% of oldline Protestant churches report that one-third of individuals in their congregations are 65 and older.
- The UCC was the second highest (only behind the UPUSA) in percentage of congregations with 33% or more members older than 65.
- 75% of oldline Protestant churches have less than 10% of their participants between the ages of 18 to 34. [13]

Younger generations are seeking to transform hierarchical, intellectual, specialized structures and programs into collaborative, experiential, organic, and fluid models of faithful living. However, many younger individuals are becoming increasingly frustrated with their inability to do this within the structure of the church and are looking outside the church for nurture and faith.

In interviews conducted with seminary presidents, scholars, researchers, and national staff, they articulated some insightful comments regarding this phenomenon:

“There is a powerful generational force operative within congregations today. Putnam and Campbell discuss this effectively in their book *American Grace*. Essentially two generations of churchgoers have been lost. If the church is to be effective in reengaging a rising generation of members, it will need to be responsive to new moral interests and spiritual longings.”

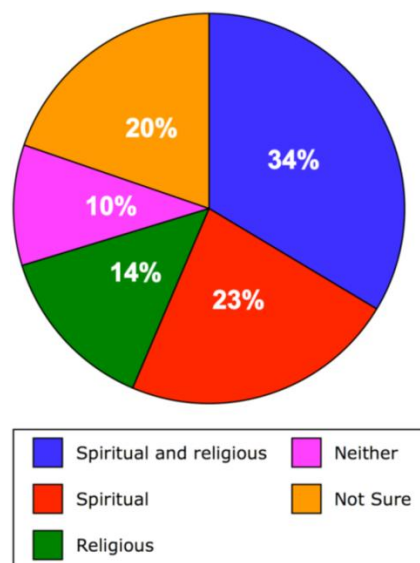
“Demographic trends today are confusing. Younger generations show a clear affinity with progressive values; but because they have limited exposure to church settings, they are more likely to seek alternative spiritual experiences.”

“‘Spirituality’ has become a normative word in the broader culture, sometimes having nothing to do with a relationship with God. Some understand it very narcissistically, focusing only on their spirituality and what helps them. But there are many others who understand spirituality being strongly rooting in small non-church communities (friends who meet and share regularly over coffee). These are both the un-churched and those who are members of churches, but find their ‘spiritual needs’ met outside of congregational life.”

The language of “spiritual” versus “religious” is a common theme in religious research and has been studied in youth and young adults. From 2006 through 2008, the Search Institute’s Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence captured data on over 7,000 young people’s perspectives on their own spiritual development. Participants in the study were between the ages of 12 and 25 and lived in 17 countries on 6 continents [14].

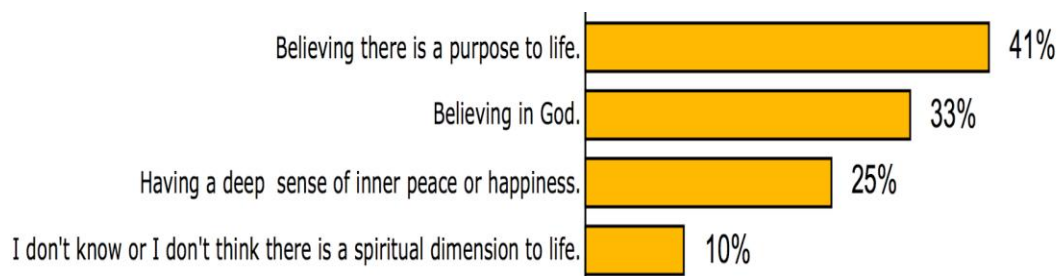
When asked about whether they were “spiritual” or “religious,” over a third (34%) of young people stated that they were “both spiritual and religious;” 23% were “spiritual;” 20% were “not sure;” 14% were “religious;” and 10% were “neither” (see Figure 2) .

Figure 2: Spiritual/Religious Identifications



When asked to identify what it meant to be spiritual, youth and young adults in the United States indicated the top three items below (out of nine choices), with 10% not sure or not believing in a spiritual dimension to life (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Meanings of Being “Spiritual”



While the use of “spiritual” over “religious” is not always tied to specific generations, the implications of the use of this language among younger groups, both within and beyond the church, is an important trend that affects faith formation. UCC youth/young adult leaders overwhelmingly

indicated that the young people they work with were “both religious and spiritual and want to experience God.”

With regard to the other specific characteristics that more broadly define younger generations, UCC youth/young adult leaders articulated a number of qualities:

- They are action-oriented; self-starters; non-passive; collaborative.
- They are “book smart” but are hungry to know how to be “street smart” and integrate their knowledge into everyday life.
- They have short attention spans—it’s not bad, just different. Their brains work and process information differently due to technology.
- They have a number of opportunities and commitments that compete for their time.
- They have a need for hands-on, interactive learning, not lecture-based learning.
- They are engaged about social justice issues and care about the global community.
- They are exposed to an increasing amount of violence in their daily lives.

When asked what young people seek from a faith community, UCC youth/young adult leaders indicated the following:

- A sense of meaning/meaningful experiences
- “What youth and young adults are seeking is something real. All this tech-based interaction leaves people feeling a lack of authentic and meaningful interaction.”
- Intergenerational opportunities for engagement; not separate activities
- “Support and guidance for their choices and direction for their lives. Youth and young adults are looking for acceptance and are checking to see how the faith community responds.”
- Safe spaces to practice “being community” with other peers—the church needs to be providing guidelines for the whole congregation around this in support of young people; many youth and young adults may not have a faith community
- Shared church leadership (don’t just give them their own programs to run—that can be overwhelming and place burdens on them)

There also exist a number of relevant studies, particularly focused on young adult formation and spirituality, which have been conducted in recent years (for a complete list and summary, see Appendix C). These studies seek to dispel myths about young adults and church, as well as attempt to account for some of the reasons why young adults are not attending church at similar rates as their grandparents or parents.

Technological Changes. Technology has deeply impacted the way in which relationships are formed and navigated in our culture and has many implications for the church and how we carry out the work of faith formation. The broad use of social networking sites and a constant sense of being in communication with increasingly diverse peoples and ideas are just a few specific phenomena within this major shift.

In the Faith Communities Today (FACT) 2010 report on technology use in congregations, the following statistics were reported:

- Email use by religious groups from 2000 to 2010 more than doubled, rising from 35% to 90% of congregations.
- Congregational websites plateaued, then declined.
- Over 40% of all congregations say they use Facebook (35% of UCC congregations).
- Visual projection and database software tracking of members were by far the most frequently used new technology, over two-thirds of all congregations (53% of UCC congregations use visual projection in worship).
- Over half of small congregations are technologically lagging, while almost half those over 250 attenders are major technology users.
- UCC is in lowest third of traditions on percentage (10%) of congregations that use technology in a major way.
- UCC is in the upper middle third of traditions on percentage (36%) of congregations that use technology in a marginal way. [15]

Furthermore, according to the report, “Faith communities that embrace greater use of technology are also perceived as being more spiritually vital. Roughly 50% of faith communities with major technology use said a lot of their members are involved in bringing others into the congregation. Increased technology use by the smallest and largest sized faith communities significantly generates greater per capita giving” [15].

The topic of internet-based pedagogical tools and social networking was a major theme found in various types of data in this study. In the course of interviews with individuals, the following sentiments were captured:

- What we do needs to be online: “I think if there isn’t video from an event posted online, it might as well not have happened.”
- Resources must become interactive (i.e. online, self-taught confirmation, new member courses).
- “[People] will Google information that is being discussed and bring their findings into the discussion right on the spot. This makes learning more collaborative. It changes the role of the teacher to more of a guide rather than the only expert in the room.”
- “Older generations are intimidated by online learning but not opposed to it. Once they are comfortable with the technology, they excel in the courses.”
- “People of all generations still crave synchronous connection in the midst of asynchronous learning. This can be as simple as a conference call 2-3 times throughout the course of an [online] class.”

More specifically, when youth/young adult leaders were interviewed about how the use of technology needs to inform work in the coming decade, their responses were varied:

- “It is important to learn how to reach youth and young adults where they are. Jesus modeled going to the people. It may not be physically going to the people, but meeting them by using familiar technologies to them. Resources need to be created that meet them where they are at.”
- We need to help young people be responsible in their use of technology.
- “The response of the user has to shape the core curriculum in order to be seen as authentic, as opposed to curriculum that appears to have ‘all the answers.’ This will be a difficult balancing act as we are trying to transmit ‘timeless’ truths in a postmodern era that no longer believes in ‘timeless’ anything.”

Lastly, a 2012 study conducted by the Pew Research Center stated that Millennials with benefit *and* suffer due to their hyperconnected lives.” While experts believe that the connection young people have to the internet makes them “nimble, quick-acting multitaskers who will do well in key respects,” the experts also have predicted that being constantly networked

“will drive them to thirst for instant gratification, settle for quick choices, and lack patience” [16].

Family Changes. There are several shifts with regard to the notion and activity of the family in both church and society. The major themes can be summarized in the following statements and themes.

“Families have become less stable, more mobile and more influenced by culture than by institution” [17]. This statement from a recent report on faith formation in the Episcopal Church speaks to a variety of shifts. Families can no longer be identified (and could never actually be identified) as strictly heterosexual and two-parent, and they cannot be assumed to have children. The notion of family includes singles, non-childbearing couples, grandparents, single parents, adoptive families, step-families, and a number of other configurations. In addition, with an increasingly globalized and economically unstable world, families make geographical relocations more frequently now than at any other time in recent history.

Families are smaller and more domestically isolated. A 1957 study found that “80% of those surveyed believed that people who preferred being unmarried were ‘sick,’ ‘immoral,’ or ‘neurotic.’ At a time when more than 70% of adults were married, it’s not surprising that people would express a preference for wedded life.” Today, things are different. According to a recent study, “Americans are now within mere percentage points of being a majority single nation: Only 51% of adults today are married, according to census data. And 28% of all households now consist of just one person—the highest level in U.S. history” [18].

Competing demands on families’ time has caused them to consider church as just one of many options for development and growth. As one seminary professor articulated, “The number of narratives and sources of those narratives have exploded due to TV, internet, etc. Christian stories become one of thousands that people draw on to make meaning and therefore shape how the Christian stories function in people’s lives.” Many people are just as happy to spend Sunday mornings at home relaxing or engaging in family time in other settings, as church increasingly becomes just “one more thing to do.”

The role of women within the family unit has changed drastically in the last 50 years. Families used to be able to survive and thrive with one income,

and this enabled many women to stay at home and to also focus on the religious education of children and youth in the local church. Today, most women work, possess careers, and handle multiple household and professional responsibilities. This shift has also impacted the ministry of Christian education in the church with increased professionalization and visibility of this ministry, but also with the loss of a generation of women who invested in church formation as (un-paid) Sunday School teachers.

As Christian education/Sunday School became a defining feature of spiritual formation in the church, faith formation in the home diminished. As public education was further systematized within the U.S., basic learning came to be understood a good that could be obtained in order to further one's intellectual development. Similarly, Sunday School was viewed in this manner, except that it was a good to be obtained in order to further one's spiritual and moral development. Today, much of the work of educators and faith formation leaders entails equipping parents and grandparents with tools and skills to reintegrate faith back into daily life.

Vocabulary/Language Changes. Several major shifts in this regard should be noted.

First, "church language" is no longer understood by a majority of people in the U.S. With increasing religious and ethnic/racial diversities in this country, the once common language shared by Christians is not understood (or misunderstood) within a changed context. Geoffrey Black, General Minister and President, commented, "Because of the real diversification of the U.S. population, and the influx of people from around the world, all of that has had its impact on our understanding of Christian faith and has expanded our view to have much more engagement in an interfaith way."

The language of "Christian Education" now connotes more traditional models of teaching and learning and is often understood as and relegated to the confines of children and Sunday School. The data from this study overwhelmingly indicated that this vocabulary implies specificity in this manner. For those who do continue to utilize this term and find it relevant to their context, definitions from the United Church of Canada may be helpful. They have asserted that Christian Education:

- Signals a desire to have a more defined focus in terms of learning about faith and developing skills for living faithfully;
- May be understood as a large process in which learners are teachers and teachers are learners; and
- Can utilize new developments in educational theory. [19]

Newer models promote the language of “Faith Formation” or “Spiritual Formation” which signifies a more holistic and engaged process of learning and practice throughout all aspects of congregational and daily life. The United Church of Canada faith formation resource for congregations stated that Faith Formation:

- Signals a desire to differentiate from a school model and a view that faith is limited to ideas, doctrines or practices to be learned; and
- Promotes an understanding that faith is being shaped and actively shaping our lives in terms of a total environment of church, home, family, and world. [19]

According to one UCC national staff person, Faith Formation also implies “an intentional communication of the tradition and story so that people can articulate it for themselves, providing a sense of ‘grounding.’”

Additionally, Spiritual Formation, as understood from this research study:

- More specifically relates to “practices of individual and group devotion—these practices ‘launch’ people somewhere;”
- Appeals to those of younger generations and people in the “spiritual and/or religious” category and signifies less association with traditional Christian education models of learning; and
- Is also associated with a renewal of ancient and contemplative prayer and practices in the church (ancient-future spirituality) and emerging/emergence Christianity.

This new vocabulary and language for how formation is understood and discussed is changing the conversation on this ministry in the church and is opening up possibilities for increased collaboration in the areas of worship, preaching, and other ministries.

Economic/Financial Changes. The final major shift that has occurred in the last several decades concerns a loss of financial stability and prosperity for U.S. mainline denominations. In part, because of the overall decline in membership numbers, and the economic hardships that existing members

have faced in recent years, local churches, Associations, Conferences, and the national offices of the United Church of Christ have experienced losses in terms of funding, staff, programming, and resources. As many expressed in the course of interviews for this study, Christian education and faith formation is often one of the main casualties when financial losses are experienced. Specifically, decreased income affects:

- Paid church staff positions in faith formation/Christian education
- Conference support staff for faith formation ministries
- Available resources for congregations and regions
- Programs and resources in the national setting
- Morale and church vitality
- Creativity (both positively and negatively)

Fewer resources offer both a challenge and an opportunity to envision new ways of doing the work of faith formation and education in the UCC. Without a reliance on funding to build programs and resources that may or may not have their intended effect, opportunities to practice more authentic, creative, contextually-based faith formation and networking may be possible at this moment in the life of the church.

Historical Highlights in the United Church of Christ

With the formation of the United Church of Christ in 1957, a group of individuals across the life of the denomination came together with the “job of making large-scale plans to help thousands of churches, summer camps, and youth conferences [in] the planning of the United Church Curriculum” [20]. This was the first curriculum of the denomination; and a separate book, *The Educational Mission of Our Church* by Roger Shinn, served as the companion piece that explained the philosophical background for the curriculum and, in essence, the whole denomination at the time.

In the foundational paper for the book, “The Theological and Educational Principles Basic to the United Church Curriculum,” it is articulated that:

The church has always recognized teaching as one form of proclamation and witness, and has regarded it as one of its ministries. Teaching that fulfills Christian mission can help to provide conditions suitable for fostering the development of trust in God and outgoing concerns for fellowmen. Such

teaching takes place wherever the Christian fellowship is functioning effectively. Relationships within the home, the planned educational program of the local church, the work and worship of the total congregation, the activity of the Christian fellowship in the local and world community—all are potential locales for Christian teaching.

The task of Christian education, therefore, is to draw individuals into the reality of the Christian fellowship and to nurture them in the Christian faith and mission so that, by accepting with gratitude and obedience God's forgiveness and power for new life, they will be enabled to mature as Christian persons and will become faithful participants in the mission of the church. [20]

From that foundation, the current structures for the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the denomination were formulated. These ministries possess a deep history and mission, as summarized below.

Partners in Education. The original idea for the Partners in Education program was developed in 1974 by the conferences of the Middle Atlantic Region, in partnership with the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries and Lancaster Theological Seminary “to enable local congregations to become effective learning communities” [21]. At that time, all offices related with the national setting of the UCC were new entities; and there was an urgent need to formulate a plan as a result of the “dramatic decline in church school enrollment, with losses ranging from 35% to 49% in the conferences of the region over the period from 1964-1973.”

Therefore, the Partners in Educational Ministries Program in the Middle Atlantic Region aimed to: “Develop clusters, provide money, deliver resources, share models, exchange staff services, communicate intentionally, provide Partners with a liaison person, use and keep ‘logs’ of events and services, and engage in mutual evaluation” [21]. Eventually, this model was adapted and expanded by the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries; and Partners in Education programs were initiated in each conference.

In the past 15-20 years, the Partners program has been structured to include a biennial national gathering and training event. As part of these

gatherings, Partners were introduced to new curricula and resources for dissemination throughout conferences and local churches.

UCC Education Consultants. The following historical account of this ministry group summarizes the creation and function of the overall program.

“In 1995, the Division of Education and Publication recruited a group of 10 persons to be United Church Press Education Consultants and held the first meeting of the group in December of that year. At that time, there was a need to have a trained group who could respond to requests for support and workshops for *The Inviting Word* curriculum from United Church of Christ conferences and from persons from other denominations using the curriculum. The group consisted of six United Church of Christ consultants deployed regionally, and four colleagues from denominations which had congregations using the resources.”

“Because there was a need to place UCC curricula resources in the context of the many resources which are used for education in the church, consultants were enabled to offer United Church of Christ Resource Fairs. In preparing to do that, consultants interviewed staff from each of the instrumentalities and divisions which produced resources so that they could be familiar with the broad range of resources produced in the denomination. Consultants also focused work on how to offer workshops on the role of pastor as teacher and learned to introduce the new faith formation resources for youth, *Affirming Faith*” [22].

In following years, the role of Education Consultant was refined and became a part of Local Church Ministries when the denominational offices were restructured in 2000. In that time, while also offering resource support for varying conferences, consultants were tasked with providing support to Partners in Education in their respective conference settings. Currently, there are 14 Education Consultants whose role and function is encompassed in the following statement:

“United Church of Christ Consultants enrich the faith formation and education ministries of the local church in all its settings. They offer workshops on planning educational ministries and on how to select resources for these ministries. Workshops are designed to connect faith formation and education ministries to the life of the whole church. They

assist persons to become familiar with and select resources from the United Church of Christ, arrange resource fairs for association, conference and other settings of ministry, and they support the work of Partners In Education in the conferences in their region” [23].

Association of United Church Educators. The history of the formation of AUCE is well documented [24]; but for the purposes of this report, some of the highlights of that history will be lifted up here.

AUCE was officially formed in 1972, and the original Statement of Purpose from the Articles of Incorporation is as follows: “The Association of United Church Educators (AUCE) is to be a community of people who recognize that church education is a vital ministry in the life of the church, and that the continued growth toward greater competency of persons engaged in church education is essential to that ministry. Therefore, AUCE is organized as a support community of church educators to broaden the scope and depth of their educational ministry through personal and professional development” [24].

The current purpose statement of AUCE remains largely unchanged from this original statement. In addition, this organization, from its inception, was structured to be separate from, but related to, the national setting of the UCC.

In its current form, there are six regional bodies of AUCE; and a number of education and training events occur within these regions each year. Members pay annual dues to the organization and receive information and updates regarding the ministry of faith formation in both the UCC and beyond.

National Setting. Over the course of its 55-year history, the national setting of the United Church of Christ has undergone several changes in structure and staffing. Overall, from the 1960s through the 1980s, the national setting spent much time building educational ministries and staffing within its offices, both in publishing settings (United Church Press/Pilgrim Press) and in traditional denominational settings (United Church Board for Homeland Ministries/Local Church Ministries).

According to historical documents, “In 1985, the Board of Directors of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries adopted a mission

statement, calling for profound and creative reforms in the educational ministries of the church” [25]. The mission statement, “Toward a Vision of Educational Ministries in the United Church of Christ,” articulated the following:

The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries lifts up a vision of education in the United Church of Christ in which everyone is engaged in learning throughout life in a variety of settings. That vision requires the reclaiming and reforming of the church's educational mission, the minister's historic office as teacher, and the committed partnership of the laity and clergy in the teaching ministries of the church. (See Appendix D for the complete vision statement.)

Furthermore, “In the fall of 1986, the Division of Education and Publication began its assigned task: ‘To develop an educational concept, a program, and adequate resources’ for educational ministries in the United Church of Christ.” That program developed for church-wise use was called the *Plan of Work*, and its purpose was “to assist in developing a plan for education in a local setting, based on several principles. First, education can happen intentionally in many places beyond a classroom. Second, topics and formats for education are effective when based on the questions and issues of persons in that local setting. Third, the role of the church in that setting is to help identify those questions and concerns, to help provide a context of inquiry and to provide biblical and theological reflection” [26].

Videos, pamphlets, and other resources were developed for the *Plan of Work* and were disseminated across the life of the church in the early 1990s in five main settings: the local church, the parish community, higher education, the family, and the outdoors. These resources, combined with the formalization of the Education Consultants and Partners in Education programs in the 1990s, formed what is often known and remembered as a high point in educational ministries in the UCC.

Unfortunately, however, issues of denominational decline in terms of funding and ministry specialization began to be evident during this period as well, and were fully actualized in the new millennium. Even with an educational vision that perhaps brought “a decade of reform and renewal of the church's educational ministries” in the 1990s, a number of cultural changes affecting Christianity as a whole over the last several years led to loss of funding, staff eliminations, and programmatic downsizing in the

national setting. Combined with the geographical move and overall restructuring of the national offices in 2000, these losses became more apparent. Since that time, production of curricula and other resources has declined due to decreased sales, staff positions have been eliminated due to funding shortages and refocusing of ministry needs, and related educational programs and organizations have experienced smaller numbers and have struggled to understand and meet the challenges of younger generations.

Conceptual Frameworks

In the course of this research project, three main conceptual/historical frameworks were identified with regard to Christian faith formation and education that were particularly helpful in understanding the overarching nature of these shifts. These frameworks serve to provide a foundational lens through which the Findings and Futures sections of this report can be considered.

Framework 1: Four Ages of the Church (Doug Pagitt)

In *Community in the Inventive Age*, Doug Pagitt described four “ages” in the life of the Christian church in the United States: (a) Agrarian Age, (b) Industrial Age, (c) Information Age, and (d) Inventive Age [27]. The nature of the characteristics of each age, and the adaptations that the church made within each of these ages, can best be illustrated below:

Figure 4: Four Ages of the Church [27]

	Agrarian	Industrial	Information	Inventive
Location	Rural	Urban	Suburban	Global
Outlook	Dependence	Dominance	Dissection	Discovery
Success	Survival	Repeatability	Expertise	Creativity
Relationships	Single Culture	Side-By-Side	Ubiquitous	Pluralistic
Church	Parish	Denominations	Learning Center	Co-Op
Church Leader	Shepherd	Preacher	Teacher	Facilitator

In each of the four periods of culture change in the U.S., there were distinct ways that the church adapted to be relevant within that new or transitioning context. With regard to the ministry of faith formation, the Information Age gave rise to the golden age of Christian education in the church, with the extensive development of Sunday School curricula, the construction of education wings and classrooms as attachments to sanctuaries, and the training and development of Christian educators who were taught the latest pedagogical methods for various age groups. This was mirrored after the secular schooling system, in a period in U.S. history after World War II in which individuals began to be economically valued not for what they *did*, but what they *knew*.

According to Pagitt, the view of the Information Age “is organized around the idea that knowledge is power, that if we give people the information needed to accomplish something, they will do it. The church has co-opted this model and used it as a basis for spiritual formation which such veracity that it is hard for many to imagine a church forming belief through any other means.”

In the current Inventive Age, Pagitt argued that “it’s become clear that information is rarely sufficient to create belief: it needs a partner with other aspects of our lives—specifically hopes, experiences, ideas, and thoughts.” He proffered that churches in each of the “ages” can still be found to exist today because there are still rural, urban, and suburban churches in existence. However, Pagitt “had a deep sense that [he] needed to move into a Christianity that somehow fit better with the world and not an expression reconstituted from another time.”

As a result, he offered ten characteristics of the church in the Inventive Age, modeled after his own church community, Solomon’s Porch in Minnesota. These characteristics speak to a postmodern understanding of faith formation and education in the church in new and exciting ways.

1. Meaning making.
2. Community formation.
3. Relational authority.
4. Participation.
5. Collaboration through dialogue.
6. Abundance.
7. Open-source belief.

8. Creativity and beauty.
9. Integration.
10. Ownership and responsibility. [27]

While each of the above characteristics is too detailed to offer explanation here, they collectively signal a conceptual framework that can help congregations to envision faith formation in a different, more integrative manner.

Framework 2: The Great Reversal (Diana Butler Bass)

In her book *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of A New Spiritual Awakening*, Bass articulated that Western Christianity has historically ordered the path of faith in a particular way—“*believe, behave, belong*” [28]. Churches have subsequently turned this trajectory into rituals of catechism, character formation, and confirmation. A specific path of education regarding “belief” and then enacting those beliefs in ritualized “behavior”—beginning sometimes at birth with baptism, then continuing through Sunday School, and ending with confirmation and the rite of communion—was/is the way in which individuals gained a formal “belonging” to the faith.

Instead, Bass argued, the church is moving into a time in which individuals crave a reversal of the traditional path in order to “*belong, behave, believe.*” Vital faith begins with desire, disposition, and the forming of relationships, which more closely mirror Jesus’ actions and ministry as found in the gospels. This type of experiential faith involves four important actions: “prepare, practice, play, and participate.” Bass, however, is adamant that the actions themselves do not increase spiritual depth or maturity; rather, “To be spiritual and religious when it comes to behavior means to be deliberate in choosing what we do, to do those things that imitate Jesus, and to act justly in the world. It is intentional Christian practice.”

Finally, “belief” becomes something beyond knowledge, “to call for a new wholeness of experience and reason, to restitch experience with human wisdom, and to renew reason through an experience of awe.” The end goal is “awakening,” an authentic sense of personhood for each individual that responds to who they are in God, rather than what they do or what function they play within a church.

Obviously, there are great implications for this understanding of the faith on the ministry of faith formation, both in terms of the kinds of resources that will have the most impact on individuals and churches, as well as a re-consideration of the programs that churches currently use to engage people in their faith.

Framework 3: Learning Processes (John Westerhoff)

In John Westerhoff's revised (2000) edition of his classic work *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, he offered three main ways to understand the learning process in people: Categorical age, developmental stage, and characteristics of life [29]. Westerhoff refined those ideas most recently in a lecture he presented in May 2012 at the Children, Youth, and A New Kind of Christianity Conference in Washington, D.C.

1. **Categorical Age (Conservative Model).** The learner is a valuable piece of raw material, and the teacher is the expert who molds children. "We do things *to* people so as to aid their growth into adulthood."
2. **Developmental Stage (Liberal Model).** This model identifies people with their category, but the same kind of manipulation is at work as in the conservative model. The child or learner is a seed, the teacher or parent is a gardener, and the process is to care for the seeds until they grow up naturally. "Now we do things *for* people."
3. **Characteristics of Life (Integrative Model).** This model is not about events but processes and brings people together by interest. The learner is a pilgrim, the teacher is a co-pilgrim, and the process is a shared journey together over time. "We do things *with* people." [30]

Three "pathways" are connected with the Characteristics of Life model: the experiential way, the reflective way, and the integrative way (which holds in tension the first two ways). These pathways allow different "truths" to be shared in community [29]. For the ministry of faith formation, it is important to consider all three models of learning; but it is particularly crucial to examine and engage the Characteristics of Life model for new visions of formation and education in the United Church of Christ.

Findings

This section highlights specific surveys and topics of relevance for faith formation and education in the UCC, including the National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation, Conference Ministers' Partners in Education survey, information on the Education Consultants program, summary of interviews with ecumenical national staff regarding denominational structures, and a section on best practices in various sub-topics of faith formation. These findings were gathered from all of the data collection methods and were organized into as cohesively a manner as possible based on topic and relevance to the study's central purposes.

National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation and Education

Demographic Information. A total of 1,130 individuals responded to the survey. The response rate for the survey (i.e. those who completed the entire survey) was 76.4%. This is a robust response rate and is fairly comparable to the National Listening Campaign on Women's Ministries (1,034 responses with an 85.5% response rate).

In the overall results of the survey, the following demographic statistics were reported:

- 40.7% of individuals were authorized ministers (ordained, commissioned, or licensed) in the United Church of Christ, and 59.3% identified as lay persons.
- Respondents most identified as church education/faith formation staff at 45.7% (23.6% paid staff and 22.1% volunteer staff). Other significant identifiers included local church ministers (30.7%), local church educators/teachers (29.7%), parents of a current child or youth (21.0%), and none of these (21.3%) (see Figure 5).
- Most Conferences were represented in the survey, with the greatest response numbers coming from Minnesota (9.4%) and Pacific Northwest (8.2%). Most likely, this is due to the promotion of the survey by staff in those respective Conferences.
- 66.0% of those surveyed identified as female, 32.7% identified as male, and 1.3% identified in other ways.

- The overwhelming majority of respondents identified as Euro-American (83.2%), 3.6% identified as African-American, 2.3% identified as bi-racial/multi-racial, 1.5% identified as Asian-American or Pacific Islander, 1.0% identified as Latino/Spanish, and 0.5% identified as Native American.
- In terms of age, the greatest number of respondents was 50-59 years old (30.7%). The second greatest number was 60-69 years old (25.4%) (see Figure 6).

Figure 5: Self-Identification

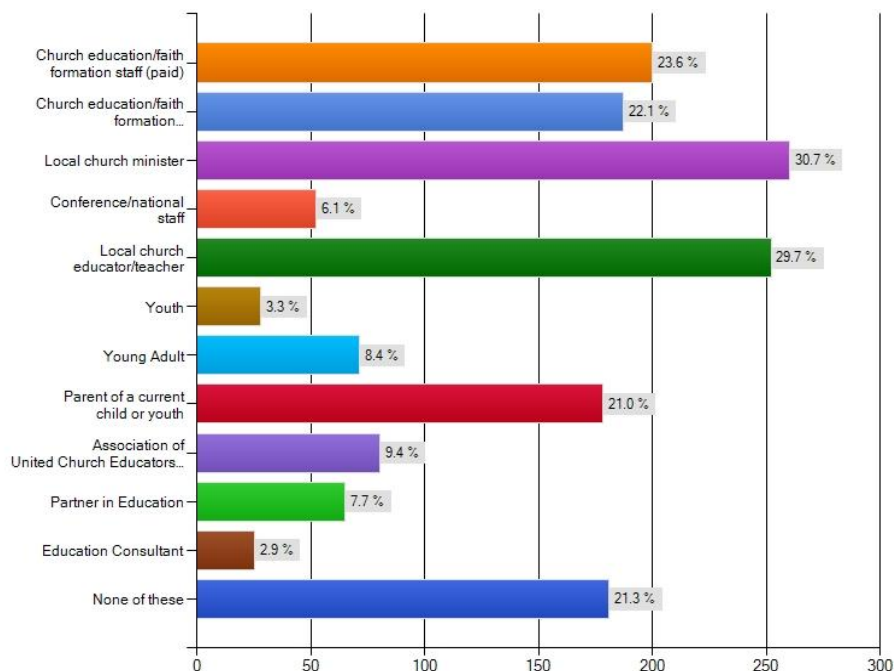
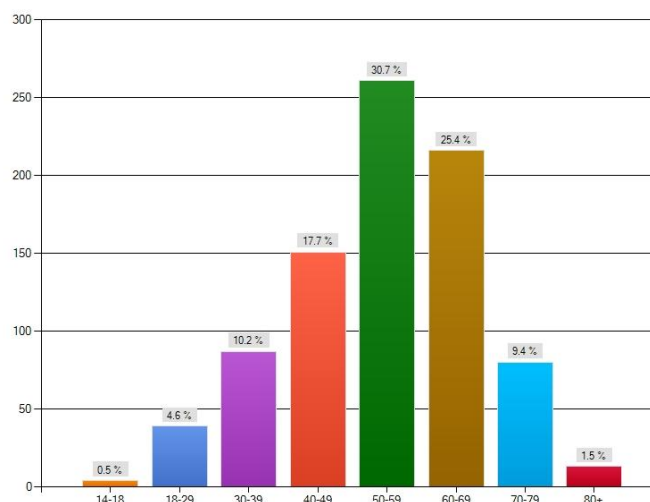


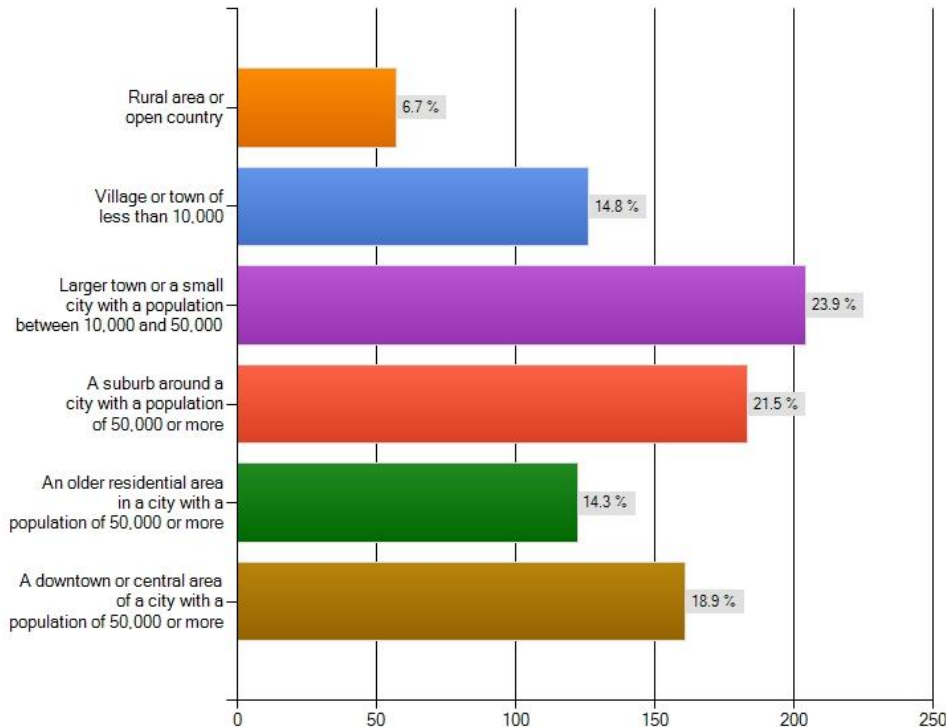
Figure 6: Age Range



Regarding survey respondents' congregational demographics, the following were reported:

- In terms of the theological outlook of the majority of a congregation's active participants, 60.2% of individuals stated they attend a "very liberal" or "somewhat liberal" congregation, 23.5% attend a "moderate" congregation, and 14.6% attend a "somewhat conservative" or "very conservative" congregation.
- A majority of survey respondents attended a church in which the average worship attendance is either 100-299 (38.1%) or 50-99 (32.4%). This is fairly comparable to overall UCC church statistics (41.7% and 22.1%, respectively).
- Geographic location of individuals' congregations varied (see Figure 7).
- 532 individuals indicated that they attended an Open and Affirming congregation, 483 attended an Accessible to All congregation, and 299 attended a Multiracial/Multicultural congregation.

Figure 7: Church Geographic Location



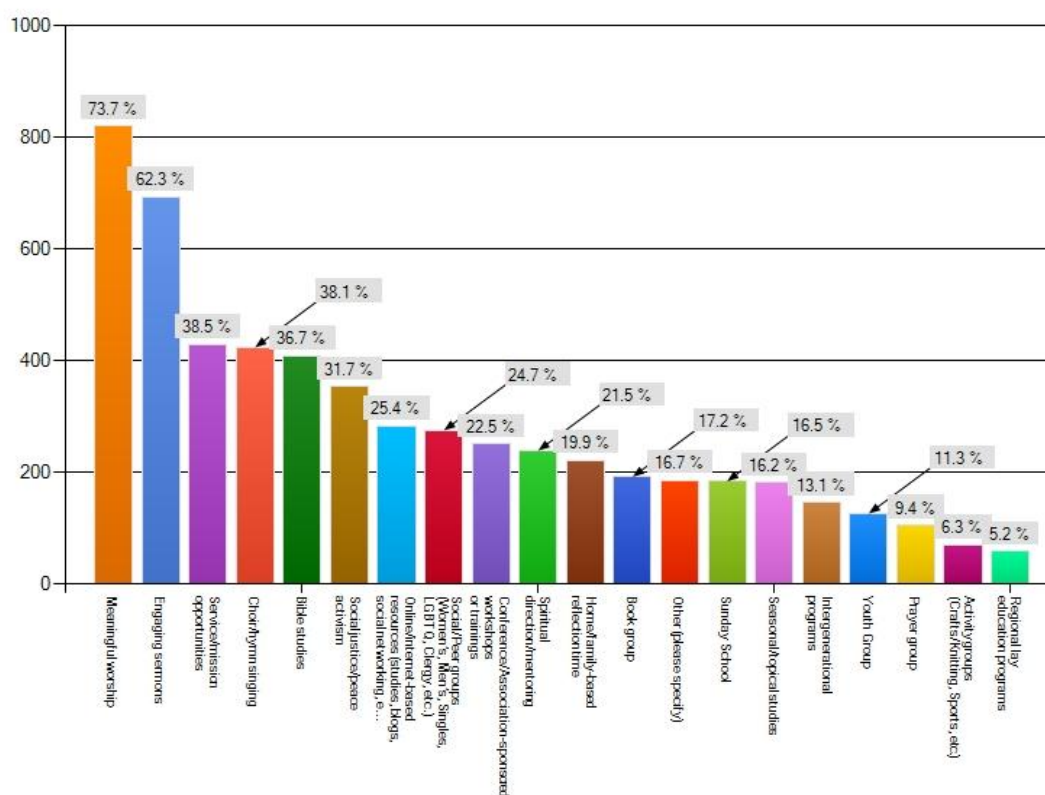
Faith Formational Experiences

When asked what was most formational for individuals' faith in the last year (checking all that apply), respondents selected "meaningful worship" and "engaging sermons" most frequently (73.7% and 62.3%, respectively). Also rated highly were "service/mission opportunities" at 38.5%, "choir/hymn singing" at 38.1%, and "Bible studies" at 36.7% (see Figure 8).

Several individuals articulated additional items in responding to the "other" option such as camps, retreats, specific resources, individual reading, national setting participation/events, seminary courses, and community and interfaith events.

In the survey, there were no significant differences in these results based on age range; however, when combining information gathered from the focus groups conducted at National Youth Event 2012 with youth ages 13-17, this population overwhelmingly articulated that camps, hymn singing and retreats were most formational for their faith in the last year.

Figure 8: Formational Experiences



In two open-ended questions, participants were asked to describe one of the most significant experiences/programs/events that impacted their faith formation to date and to articulate why it was so powerful. With over 800 responses, individuals talked about a variety of things. Most frequently articulated included: Specific trainings, formational and education programs, retreats, service/mission projects, and life events in their own families. Opportunities described were conducted through local church, association, conference, regional, national, and non-UCC settings. Many individuals mentioned programs that they participated in when they were youth and young adults, such as church camps and retreats and college or seminary-related experiences. Some articulated very personal stories in the midst of difficult times that impacted their faith.

In answering the question of why these experiences were so powerful, individuals offered meaningful, inspiring responses. They can be broadly categorized into three different areas:

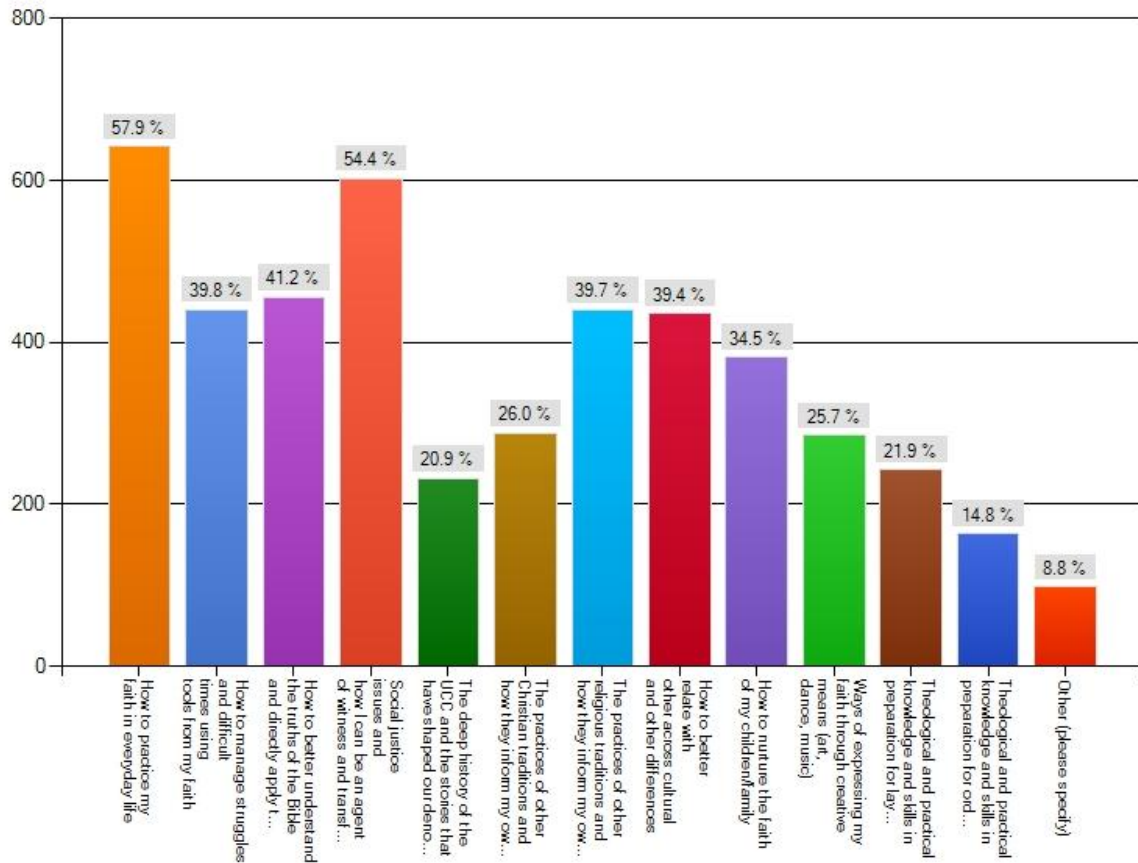
- Creation of a sense of community in which people feel safe to share with one another/forming of relationships;
- Creation of meaning/making a difference in the world/having purpose; and
- Experiencing a sense of God's presence in one's life.

Learning

Learning Desires. When asked what survey participants most desired to learn about, “how to practice my faith in everyday life” (57.9%) and “social justice issues and how I can be an agent of witness and transformation in the world” (54.4%) were the two most frequently chosen responses (see Figure 9).

While the top two responses were also true for youth and young adults (14-29), they rated learning about “the deep history of the UCC and the stories that have shaped our denominational identity” equally as high as a desire to learn about social justice issues (both at 48.8%). Individuals over 50 articulated the top two responses as well, but learning about “how to better relate with others across cultural and other differences” was the third most frequent response (45.0%).

Figure 9: Learning Desires



Learning Formats. “Discussion groups” were the single most appealing formats for learning (80.1%), with “retreats” (57.8%) and “workshops/trainings” (57.2%) as the next most appealing formats (see Figure 10).

For ages 14-29, “discussion groups” were also the single most appealing formats; however, “retreats” were more highly rated (76.7%) than “workshops/trainings” (39.5%). For this age group, “sensory experiences (art, dance, music, meditation)” were very appealing (58.1%), as were “social/support groups” (53.5%) (see Figure 11).

On the specific response choice of “internet/social media” as a learning format, there were significant differences based on age range:

- 14-29 year olds: 41.9%
- 30-49 year olds: 34.0%
- 50+ year olds: 23.1%

Figure 10: Learning Formats (All Ages)

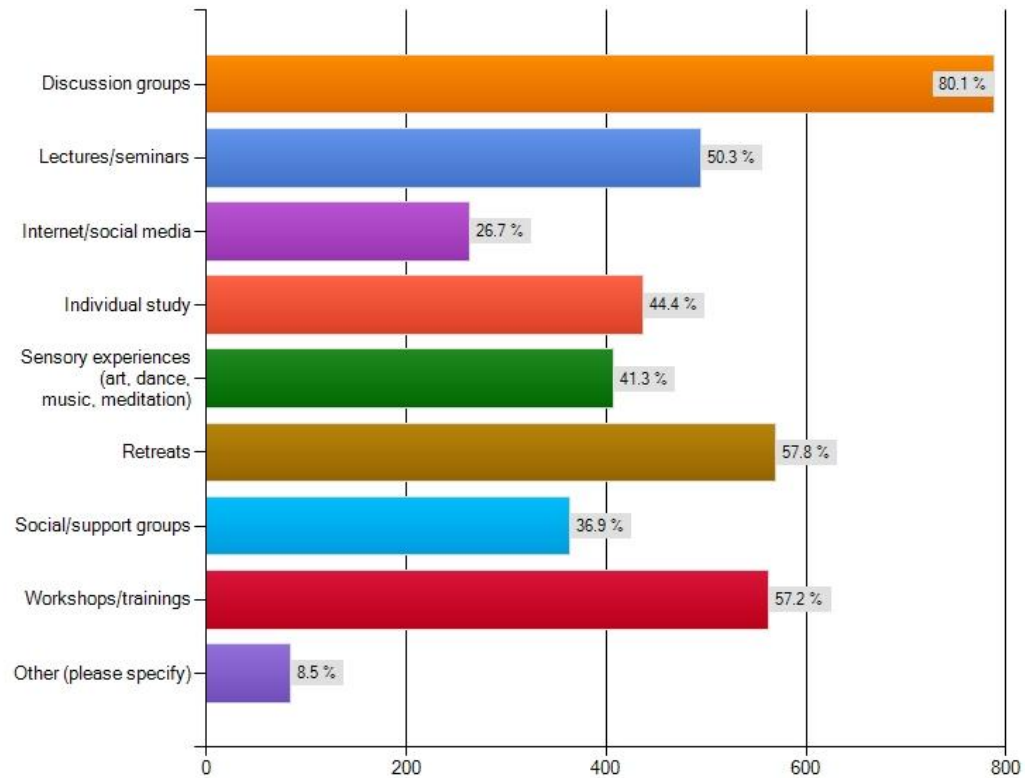
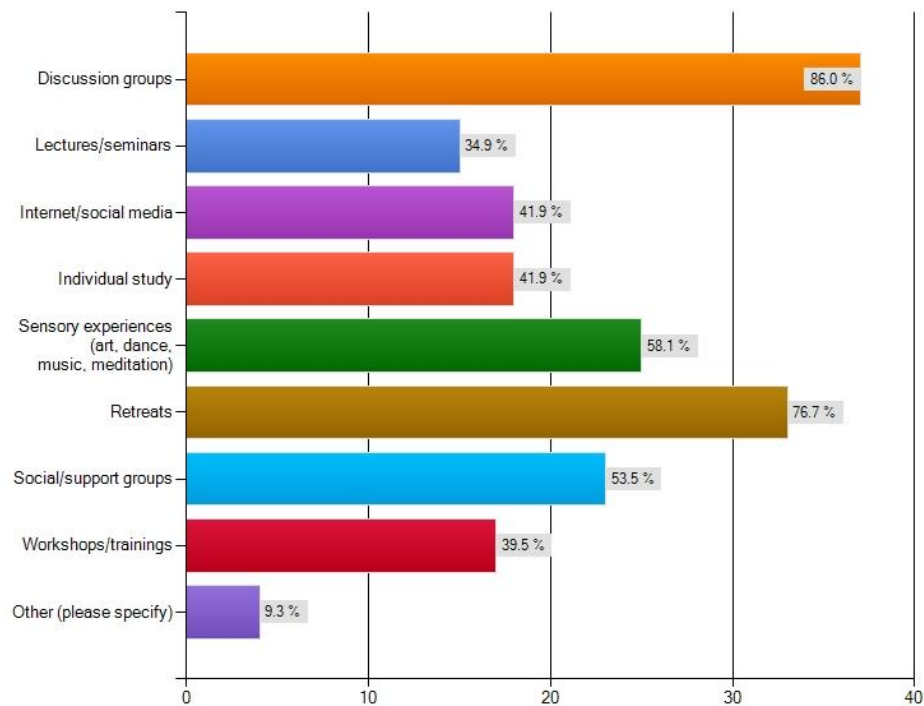


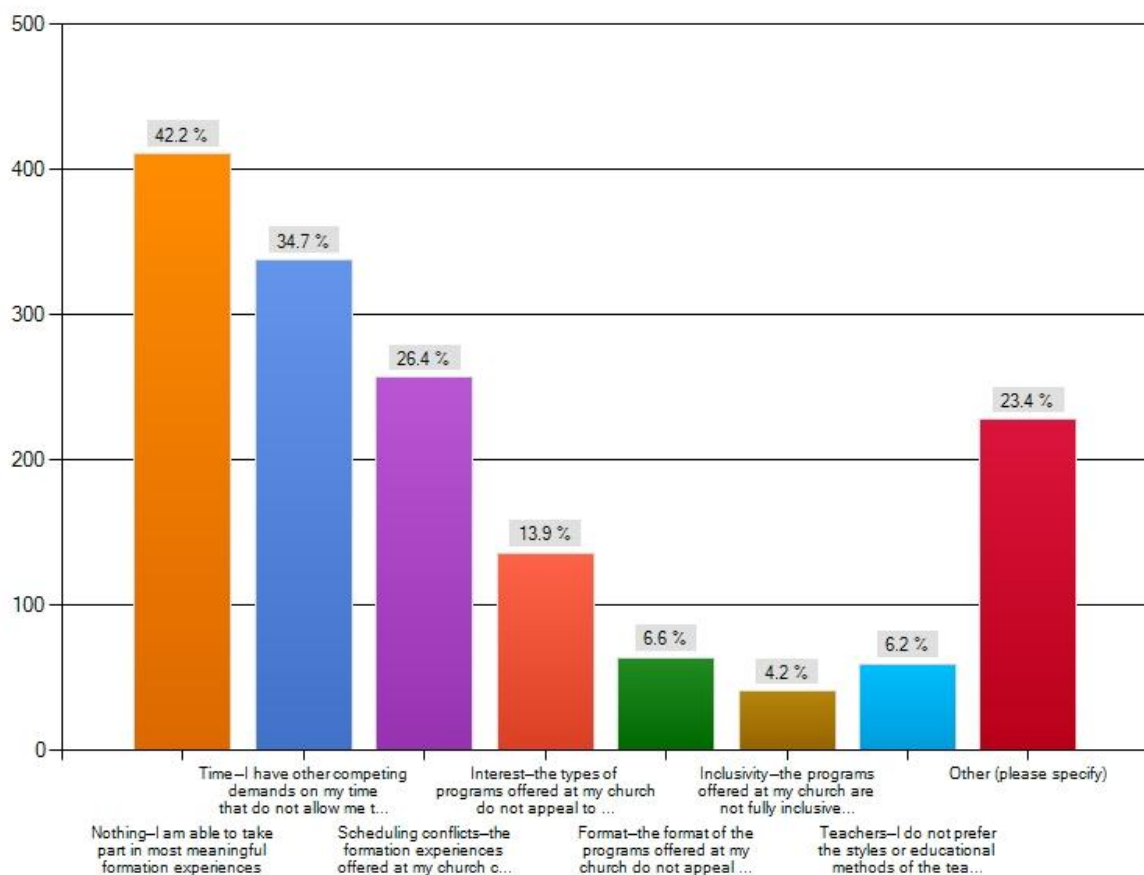
Figure 11: Learning Formats (Ages 14-29)



Reasons for Non-Participation. When asked what prevents individuals from taking part in meaningful formation experiences in their local church, 42.2% indicated “nothing—I am able to take part in most meaningful formation experiences” (see Figure 12). This response may be indicative of the large number of older adults who took the survey, combined with the number of authorized ministers and education/faith formation staff who not only have different work schedules, but also lead many of the faith formation programs at their churches. Several responses in the “other” category indicated that individuals could not *fully* participate because they were often leading the formational experiences and programs.

The second most frequent response was “time—I have other competing demands on my time that do not allow me to participate in education and formation” (34.7%).

Figure 12: Reasons for Non-Participation in Formation Experiences

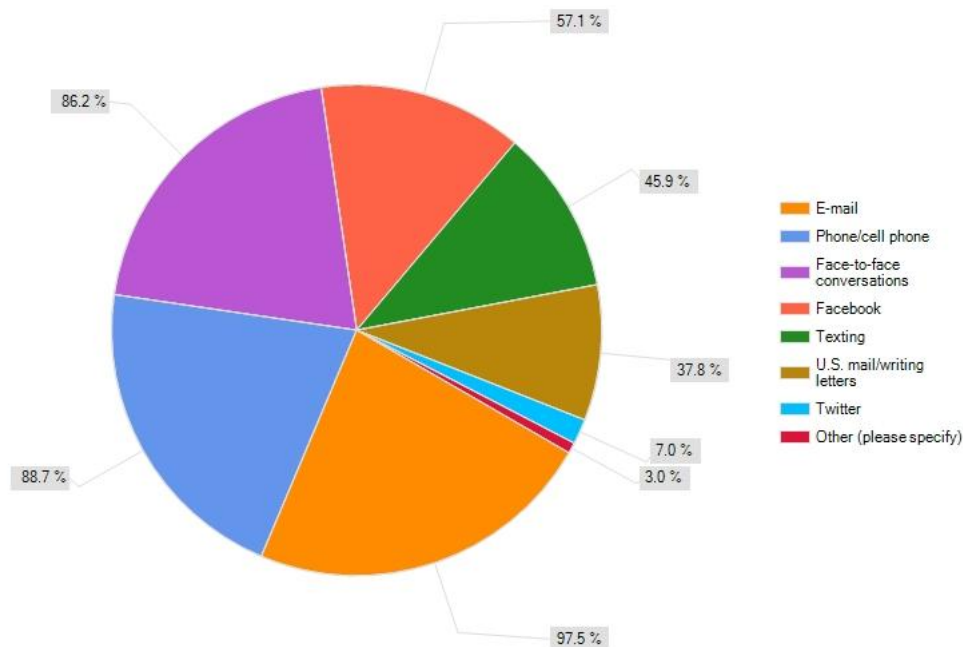


Predictably, for participants ages 14-29, “time” (55.8%) and “scheduling conflicts” (44.2%) were the two largest factors for non-participation.

Communication

When asked about methods of communication, individuals most frequently use email (97.5%), phone/cell phone (88.7%), and face-to-face conversations (86.2%) (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Communication (All Ages)

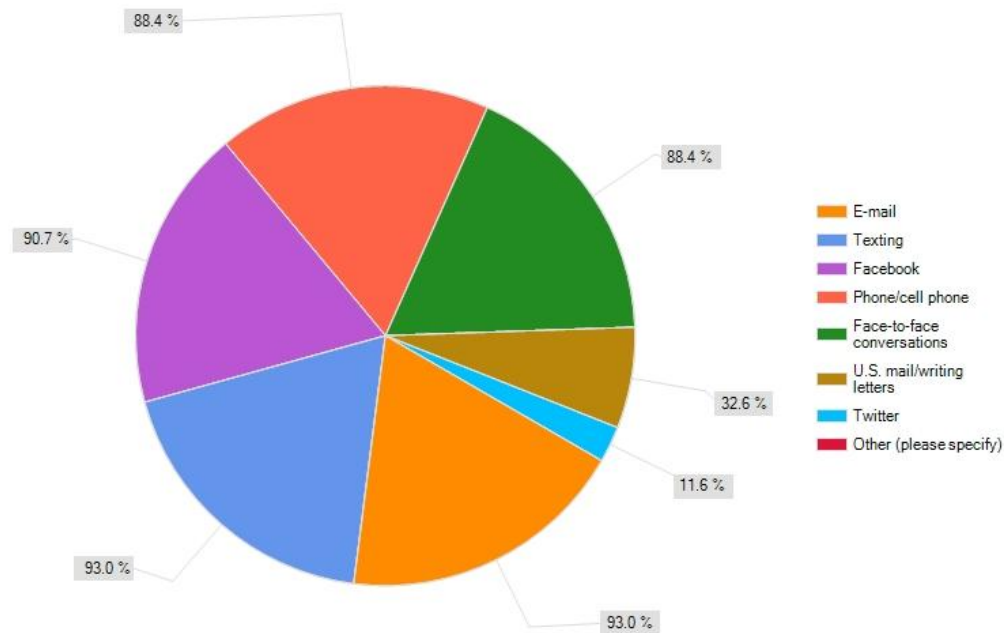


With regard to age, there are significant differences in terms of use of various communication methods. Survey respondents ages 14 to 29 indicated that they highly utilize a diversity of methods when communicating with others (from email and texting at 93.0% to face-to-face conversations and phone/cell phone at 88.4%); but they use U.S. mail (32.6%) and Twitter (11.6%) less frequently than other methods (see Figure 14).

Additionally, individuals ages 50 and over utilize texting (36.6%) and Facebook (48.6%) significantly less frequently than others. It is also interesting to note that authorized ministers utilize texting (51.0%) and Facebook (64.4%) at slightly higher rates than the total sample. Those who identified themselves as doing educational/faith formational work or were

part of an educational organization utilized these two methods at similar rates to the overall sample.

Figure 14: Communication (Ages 14-29)



Vocabulary/Language

Individual Use. In describing this ministry, individuals most often use Christian Education (42.9%), Faith Formation (40.4%), and Spiritual Formation (39.1%) (see Figure 15). When asked why they prefer the terms they selected, respondents offered comments similar to the following articulations:

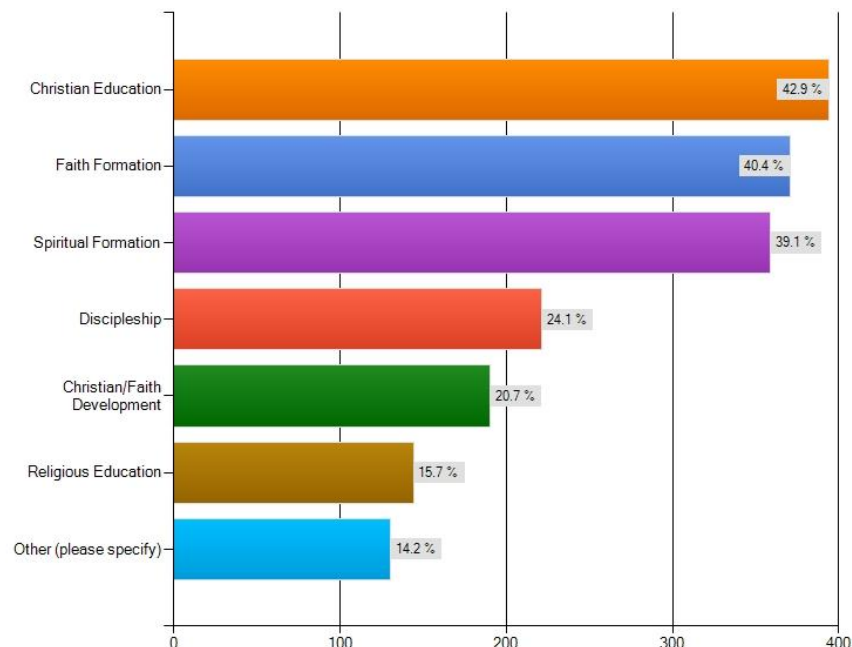
- This is the term I am most comfortable with or that I grew up with.
- I use this term because my pastor/church/Conference/other colleagues use it.
- I use this term because it is more inclusive of my understanding of this ministry.

There were several specific comments regarding the connotation that Christian/Religious Education has “a sense of learning from a teacher who dispenses the knowledge” and that Faith/Spiritual Formation is “more

inclusive/less dogmatic.” One individual summarized these sentiments particularly well: “This work is soul work, and words like ‘spirit’ and ‘disciple’ include that sense. I think of ‘Christian/Religious Education’ as something that is specifically institutional. While I love the institutional church, I find it to be the starting place for my intellectual understanding of God—not the place where I usually experience the holy.”

Several others discussed the notion that each term possesses different meanings, and they subsequently utilize them depending on context. One respondent stated: “I think there are nuances to each term, and each is appropriate to a slightly different context...To me, Christian education is specifically educating people (of all ages) about our faith, and religious education implies a broader context that may include learning about other faiths, or may be used when talking in a multi-faith environment about education. Faith formation includes education, but includes many more experiences than classes—worship participation and intergenerational activities help form faith. To me, spiritual formation is very similar, but may focus on practicing various spiritual disciplines (prayer, meditation, etc.).”

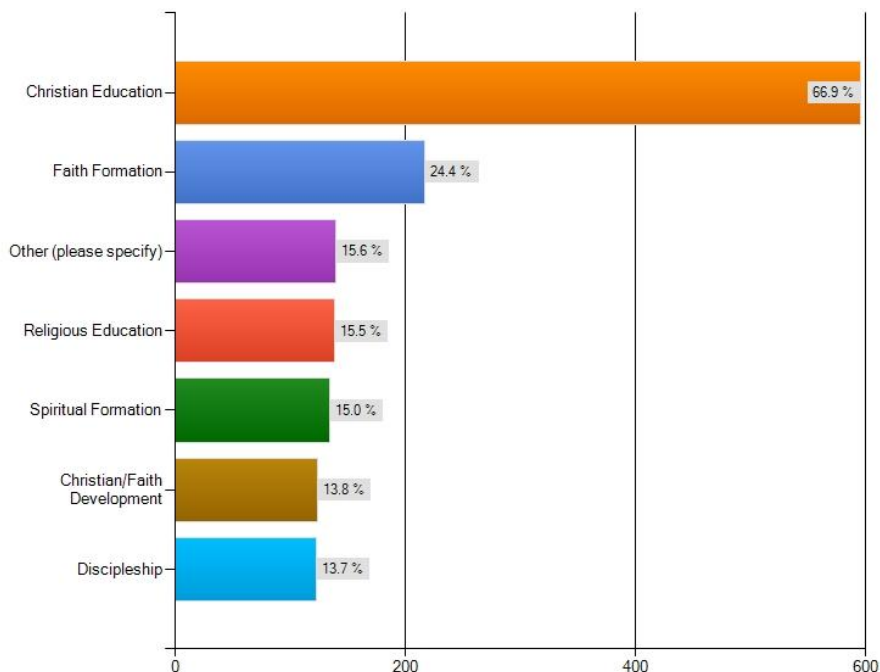
Figure 15: Individual Vocabulary Use



Congregational Use. Overwhelmingly, congregations utilize the vocabulary of Christian Education to describe this ministry (66.9%) (see

Figure 16). Almost a quarter (24.4%) of congregations use the term Faith Formation.

Figure 16: Congregational Vocabulary Use



Individuals were asked whether they felt there was a difference between all of the above terms. 62.5% said “Yes,” 19.4% said “I Don’t Know,” and 18.1% said “No.” A majority of comments discussed individuals’ understandings of the differences between the terms.

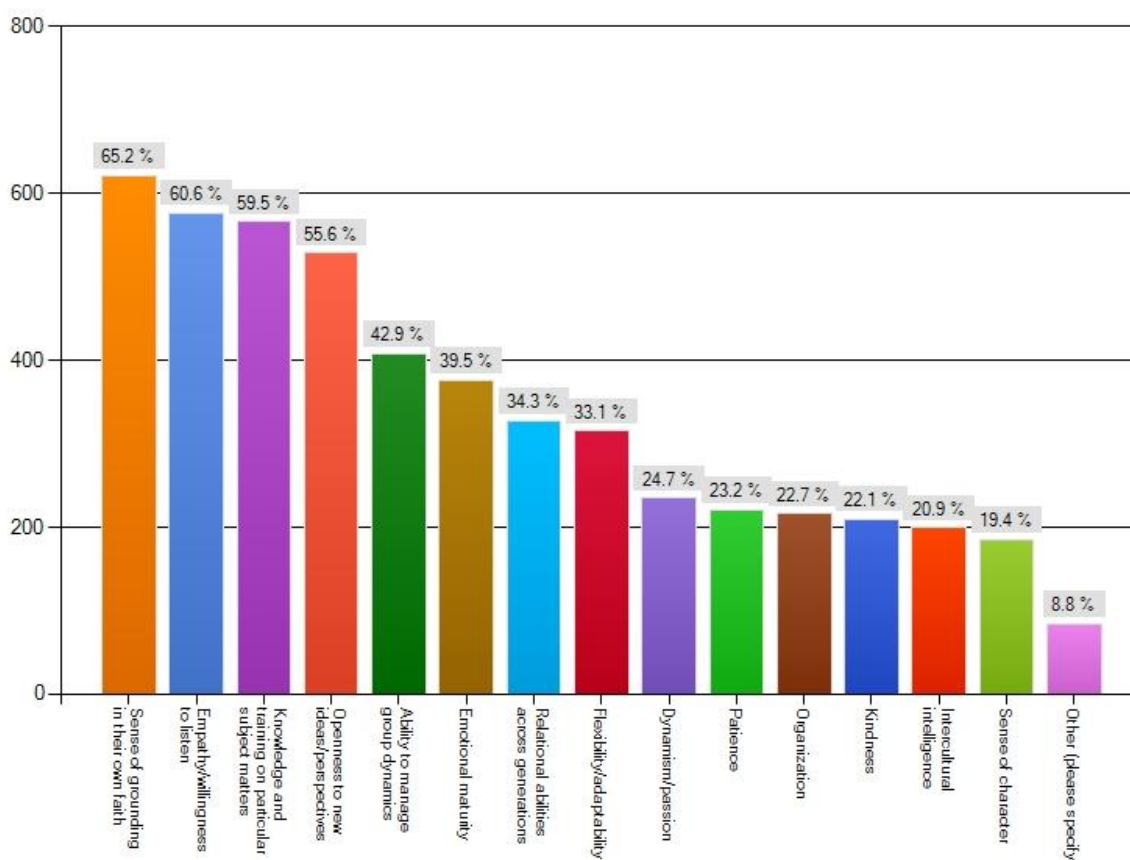
Most comments included statements such as:

- “Christian” refers to learning about one religion, but I prefer “religious” and “spiritual” because it expands the learning to include all faiths.
- “Christian Education” applies to children and youth understanding the stories of the Bible and their moral development.
- “Faith/Spiritual Formation” is a more inclusive way to describe “Christian Education” and has more positive connotations.
- “Discipleship” is a broader term for how we follow Christ but includes formation.
- Basically, the terms hold the same meanings but carry different connotations.

Preparation and Training

Educator Qualities. Respondents reported that the qualities they most look for in a faith formation educator/teacher/leader are a “sense of grounding in their own faith” (65.2%), “empathy/willingness to listen” (60.6%), “knowledge and training on particular subject matters (59.5%), and “openness to new ideas/ perspectives” (55.6%) (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Qualities of an Educator/Teacher/Leader

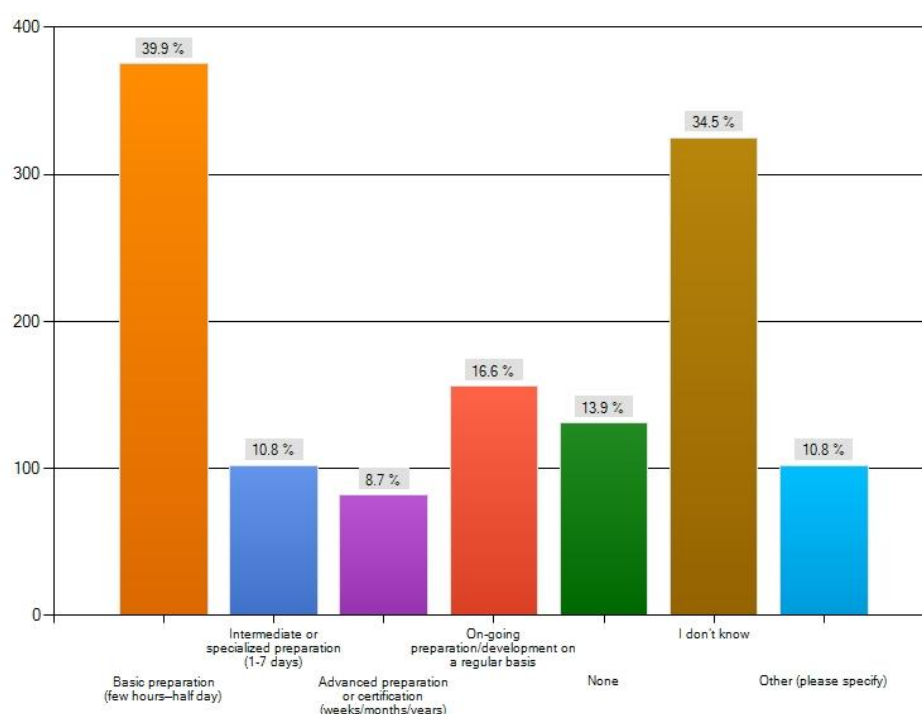


There were no significant differences between authorized minister and layperson responses, or educator and non-educator responses. However, for 14-19 year olds, both “empathy/willingness to listen” (74.4%) and “openness to new ideas/ perspectives” (58.1%) were rated more highly than in the general sample. In addition, for this age group, an “ability to manage group dynamics” (48.8%) ranked third above qualities having to do with knowledge and sense of grounding in faith.

In the “Other” section, some frequent qualities expressed had to do with the ability of the leader/facilitator to “be authentic” in their approach, not having a sense of “knowing it all,” and be willing to “quit having to lead everything themselves and help others develop their own gifts and give them a place to be used.” Other qualities expressed included “curiosity,” “creativity,” “novelty,” and “spiritual/theological maturity.”

Levels of Preparation. When asked what levels of training and preparation educators in their congregations received, respondents stated that most either had “basic preparation (few hours—half day)” (39.9%) or they didn’t know (34.5%) (see Figure 18). For those individuals who identified in some way as a church educator or related with an educational group, over one-fifth (22.5%) said they did not know the type of training that educators received in their local church; and this response was similar for clergy (23.2%).

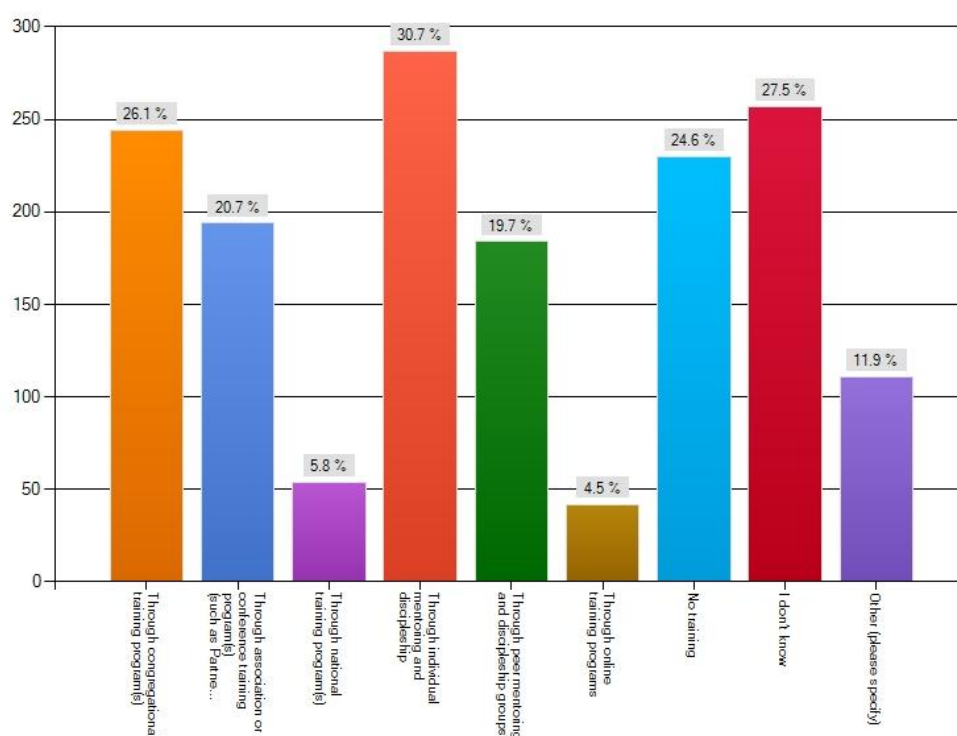
Figure 18: Levels of Educator/Teacher/Leader Preparation



Comments in the “Other” section generally included statements like “the clergy/staff of our church are trained, but not the laypersons” and “basic training for our children; advanced preparation for the adults – rarely does a layperson lead an adult class.”

Methods of Preparation. Survey participants were then asked about the various ways that educators were developed in their congregation. Almost one-third were developed “through individual mentoring and discipleship” (30.7%) and over one-fourth were developed “through congregational training program(s)” (26.1%). 24.6% received “no training,” and 20.7% were trained “through association or conference training program(s) (such as Partners in Education).” 27.5% said “I don’t know” (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: Methods of Educator/Teacher/Leader Preparation



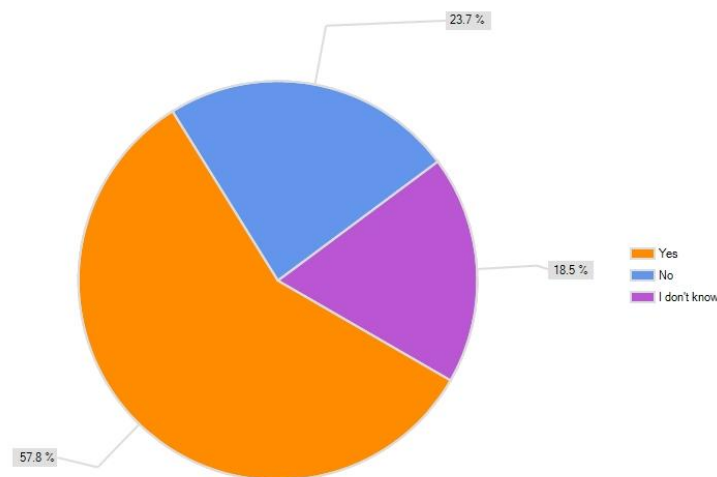
In written responses, some individuals mentioned seminary programs, in preparation for both ordained and lay leadership positions. Some also mentioned the specialized training they received through the Our Whole Lives program. Many comments focused on a presence of apathy and disinterest in their congregations regarding leadership training and preparation.

When questioned about whether individuals believed that educators/teachers were considered leaders of their congregations, overall, 57.8% responded “yes,” 23.7% responded “no,” and 18.5% said “I don’t know” (see Figure 20). Across all subgroups, 14-29 year olds responded the most positively, with 69.0% indicating “yes.”

Many comments articulated differences in leadership perceptions between teachers of children and youth and overall congregational leaders (i.e. adults). Since educators may not be as visible (perhaps teaching Sunday School during worship), they are not often perceived as “leaders.”

One individual articulated a common sentiment that educators were leaders “in the sense that our teachers tend to be involved in other aspects of church work as well, particularly [for] smaller congregations.”

Figure 20: Educators/Teachers As Congregational Leaders

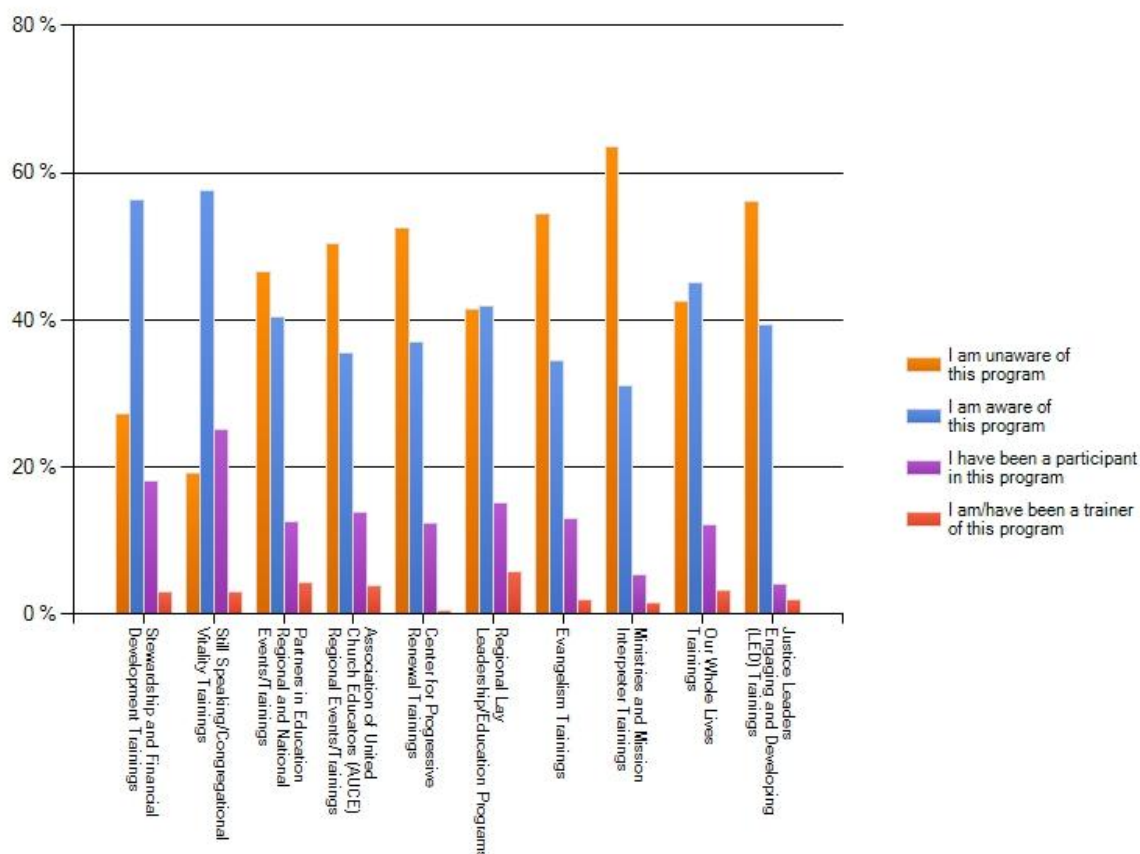


Regional/National Preparation Programs. Respondents reported that they were most aware of/most participated in Still Speaking/Congregational Vitality Trainings (57.7% / 25.0%) and Stewardship and Financial Development Trainings (56.3% / 18.1%). To a lesser extent but still noteworthy, respondents were also most aware of *Our Whole Lives* Trainings (45.0%) and most aware of/most participated in Regional Lay Leadership/Education Programs (41.8% / 15.1%) (see Figure 21).

Not surprisingly, those who identified as church educators or related with an educational group also were most aware of/most participated in Partners in Education Regional/National Training Events (42.2% / 19.3%), although their awareness/participation still ranked lower than the four trainings mentioned above.

Authorized ministers were most aware of *every single* training program listed, and a high percentage had participated in these programs. Overall, there was little variance by age with regard to individuals' familiarity with these programs, except for 14-19 year olds' awareness of Stewardship and Financial Development Trainings (51.2% unaware).

Figure 21: Regional/National Preparation Programs (Percentages)



When asked about the overall impact of the programs that individuals participated or were trained in, results were mixed. 46.3% indicated that they helped to nurture their own, their church's, and/or their region's faith life; and 45.5% indicated that the effectiveness of the programs varied. Only 8.2% indicated that these programs did not speak to their own, their church's, and/or their region's current faith formation needs.

Comments included favorable sentiments regarding some trainings such as Justice LED, Partners in Education, and AUCE events and spoke of the ways that the programs impacted their own faith and the ministries of their churches and regions. Other comments spoke to issues with the presenter,

the presentation being “too cookie cutter,” and the overall mismatch between the material being offered and the context of the participants (i.e. small churches, geographical issues, and conference/association structures and politics).

Individuals also took the opportunity to express their appreciation for/ frustration with regional and national programs in general. Some wished that they could participate in more of these programs, and others desired to see the “relative impact” of these programs so that money and resources would not be “wasted” on ineffective ones.

Resources

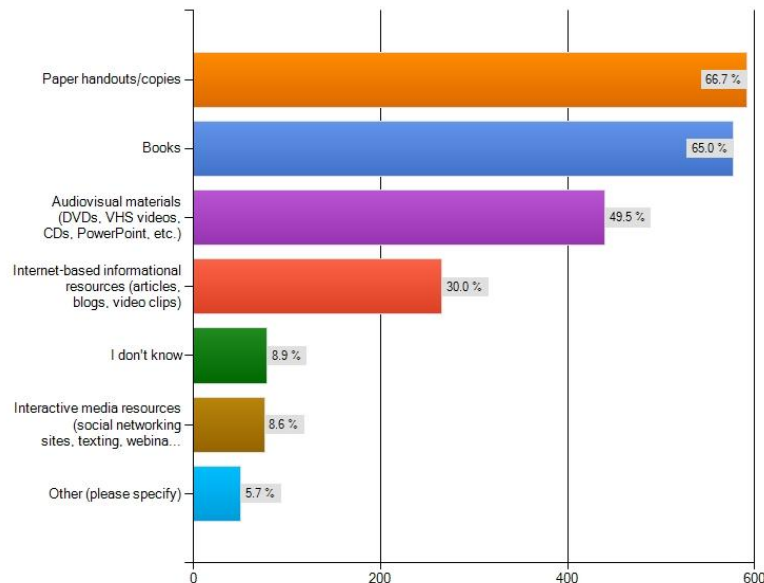
Materials and Media. When asked what types of materials were most used by one’s congregation, survey participants reported that “UCC-related materials” (39.6%) were most frequently utilized. “Other denominational materials” were reported by 20.2% of individuals, and 16.1% did not know. 8.9% reported using “non-church resources.”

Comments included specific descriptions of each of the above, including names of curricula and other resource materials. There were many comments regarding the utilization of a variety of resources across the spectrum of the Christian publishing world and “mixing and matching” to create programs for all ages, and depending upon the church’s context. A few comments even mentioned the creation of curricula and other content.

Survey participants were then asked to select the media (communication methods) that were most often used in their congregation’s faith formation programs. Paper handouts/copies (66.7%), books (65.0%), and audiovisual materials such as DVDs, VHS videos, CDs, and PowerPoint (49.5%) were the top options selected (see Figure 22).

Several responses in the “other” section also spoke to the use of art and craft supplies, as well as talk/discussion. Differences were not statistically significant based on church size or geographic location.

Figure 22: Media Use

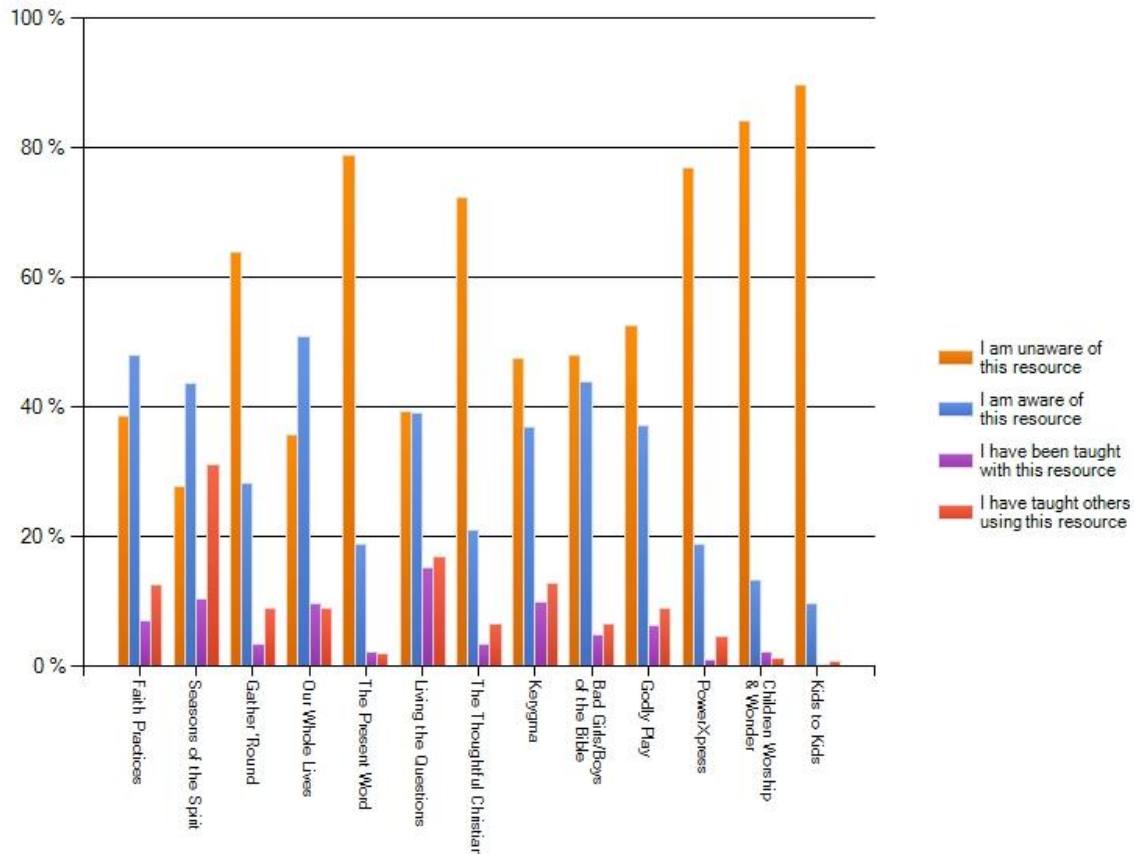


Curricula. Overall, individuals were most aware of the following curricula: *Our Whole Lives* (51.0%), *Faith Practices* (47.9%), and *Seasons of the Spirit* (43.6%). With all of the other curricula mentioned (both UCC- and non-UCC-related), the majority of individuals were unaware of these resources, although a large number were highly aware of *Bad Girls/Boys of the Bible* resources (43.9%) (see Figure 23).

In addition, 39.1% were aware of the adult curriculum *Living the Questions*; and those individuals demonstrated the highest rate in being taught with this resource (15.3%), and the second-highest rate in teaching others using this resource (16.9%). Other noteworthy curricula in the comments section included *Children Worship and Wonder*, *Spark*, *re:form* from sparkhouse, and *Feasting on the Word*.

People from theologically conservative churches were not as aware of *Our Whole Lives* (39.5%) or *Living the Questions* (35.3%). Individuals from theologically moderate churches were less aware of *Living the Questions* (36.7%) and more aware of *Bad Girls/Boys of the Bible* (50.6%) than the total sample. People from theologically liberal churches were also highly aware of *Godly Play* (41.0%), in addition to the other resources mentioned. Individuals in smaller churches were most aware of *Whole People of God* (48.0%), in addition to *Faith Practices* and *Seasons of the Spirit*.

Figure 23: Curricula (Percentages)



When questioned about the overall effectiveness of the resources respondents were familiar with, 50.3% indicated that effectiveness varied, 43.2% responded that the resources helped to nurture their/their congregation's faith life, and 6.4% indicated that the resources did not speak to their/their church's needs.

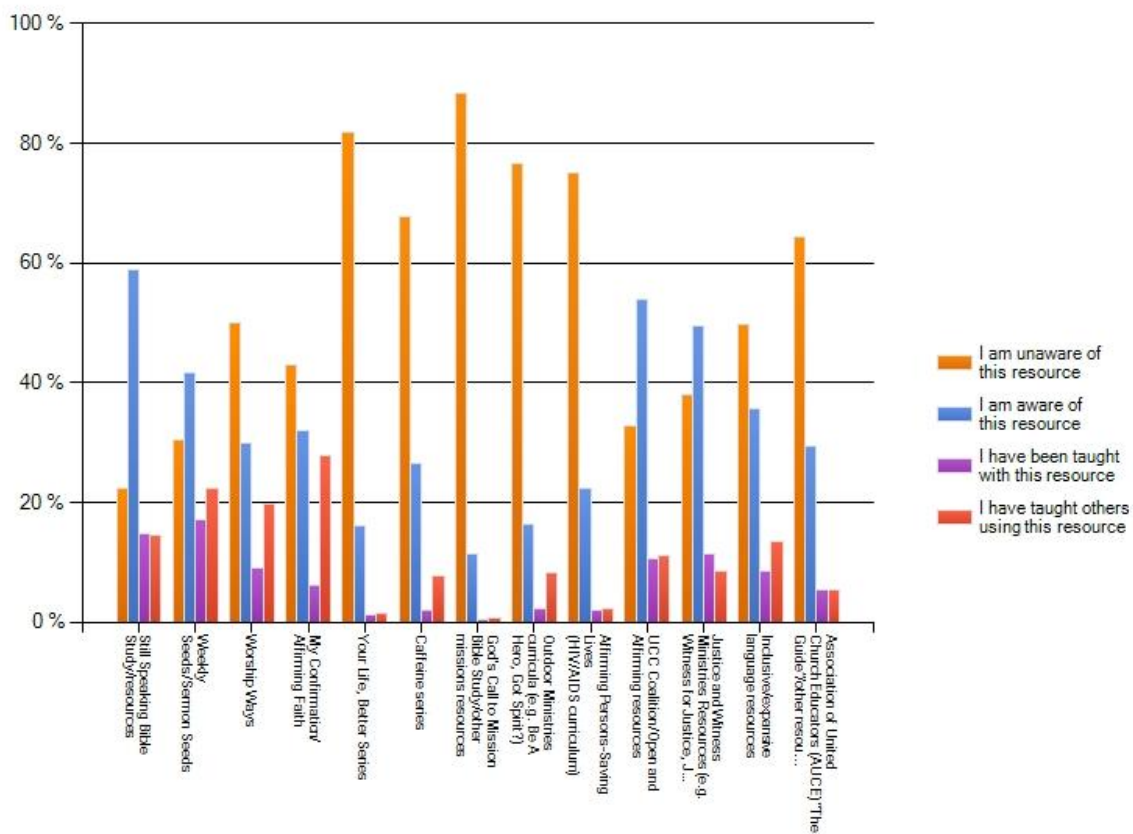
Comments included sentiments about some resources not fitting the theology of the congregation or its membership size. Other comments gave praise to some resources (most frequently *Living the Questions* and *Our Whole Lives*) and named their dislike of others. In describing *Living the Questions* in particular, one person noted it as "a life-giving experience for the participants and brought almost half of the worshipping adults to our gatherings over 12 weeks." Another individual stated, "*LtQ* has transformed my church."

Other Resources. Among the list of resources provided in this section, respondents were most aware of Still Speaking Bible studies/resources

(58.8%), UCC Coalition/Open and Affirming resources (53.9%), Justice and Witness Ministries resources (49.4%), and *Weekly Seeds/Sermon Seeds* (41.6%) (see Figure 24). It is interesting to note that individuals from ONA congregations did not possess greater awareness of UCC Coalition/Open and Affirming resources at statistically significantly higher rates than individuals from non-ONA churches. The same can be said of clergy not possessing greater awareness or use of *Weekly Seeds/Sermon Seeds* than the total population with any statistical significance.

Although a majority of respondents were not aware of the confirmation materials *Affirming Faith* or *My Confirmation*, 87.1% of those who expressed awareness of those materials had taught others using either/both of these resources. This same trend was true for *Worship Ways*— 66.3% of individuals who expressed awareness of this resource also used it for worship.

Figure 24: Other UCC Resources (Percentages)



Overall, individuals from theologically conservative churches were less aware of UCC-related resources, except in the case of Still Speaking Bible studies/resources, in which they reported *greater* awareness than the total sample (60.7%).

On the effectiveness of the resources respondents were familiar with, results were similar to their articulations about curricula. 50.9% stated that the effectiveness of the resources varied, 43.3% articulated that they helped to nurture their/their congregation's faith life, and 5.8% said that the resources did not speak to their/their church's faith formation needs.

Comments included praise for *Weekly Seeds/Sermon Seeds*, Still Speaking materials, and Justice and Witness Ministries resources. Some individuals expressed both praise and frustration with specific resources such as Open and Affirming resources, *Affirming Faith/My Confirmation*, and the *Caffeine* series. Many expressed their unfamiliarity with any of the listed resources.

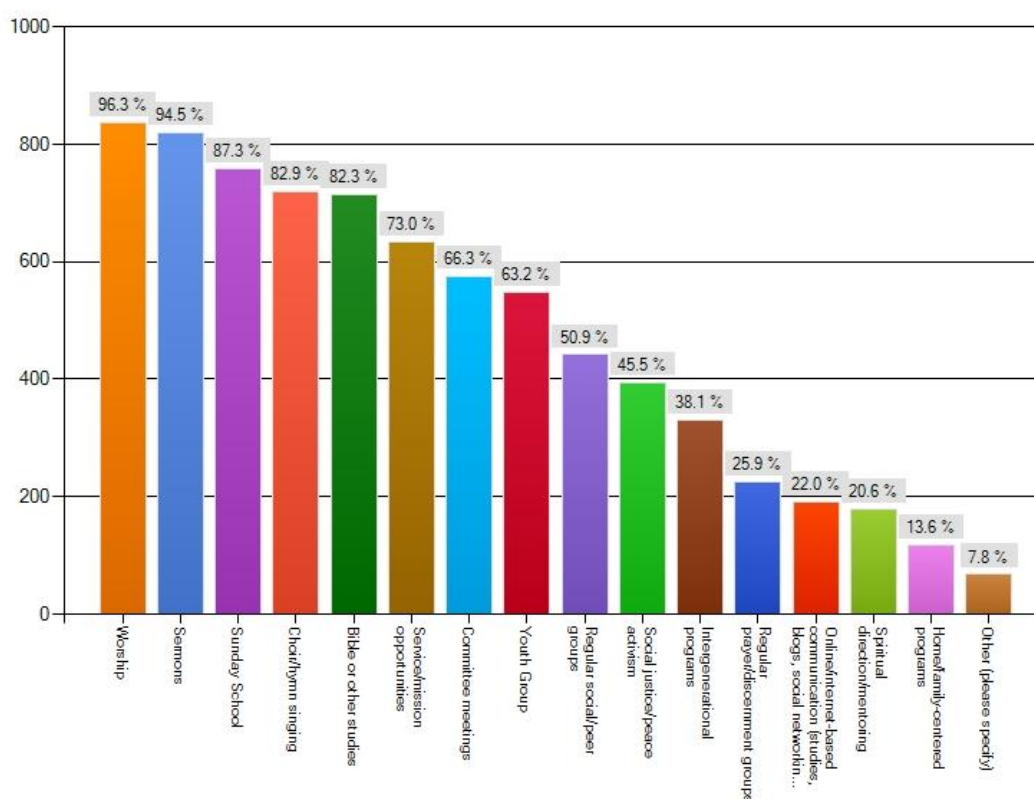
Lastly, when asked what resources or support would enhance the faith life of their congregations, over one-third (34.4%) of survey participants responded to this question. Common themes (in random order) included:

- Intergenerational resources
- Resources for practicing faith at home/helping parents nurture formation of their children
- Small group/peer group resources
- Resources for spiritual practices/personal spiritual formation
- Resources on spiritual direction/mentoring
- "Solid" theological and Bible study materials for adults
- Short-term adult studies (4-8 sessions)
- Audiovisual/multimedia materials
- Internet-based materials and communication (YouTube videos, seminars, etc.)
- Free materials
- Multicultural resources specifically for African American, Latino/a, Asian American, and Native churches
- Bilingual (Spanish/English) resources
- Resources for becoming more culturally competent/inclusive/social justice based
- Leadership and teacher development materials

Congregational Faith Formation Opportunities, Staffing, and Budgets

Opportunities/Activities. When questioned about the ways that their congregations currently provided faith formation opportunities for members/participants, “worship” and “sermons” were the top two responses (96.3% and 94.5%, respectively). Other frequently-chosen opportunities included “Sunday School” (87.3%), “choir/hymn singing” (82.9%), “Bible or other studies” (82.3%), and “service/mission opportunities” (73.0%) (see Figure 25).

Figure 25: Congregational Faith Formation Opportunities



As might be predicted, individuals from smaller congregations (1-99 average worshipers) reported fewer frequencies of programs and activities overall; and respondents from larger churches (over 300 average worshipers) reported greater frequencies of programs and activities. For example, 93.6% of individuals from larger congregations reported the presence of “service/mission opportunities;” whereas 65.2% of individuals from smaller congregations reported the presence of this same ministry (but for all church size groupings, “service/mission opportunities” were

reported at statistically significant rates than several other opportunities listed).

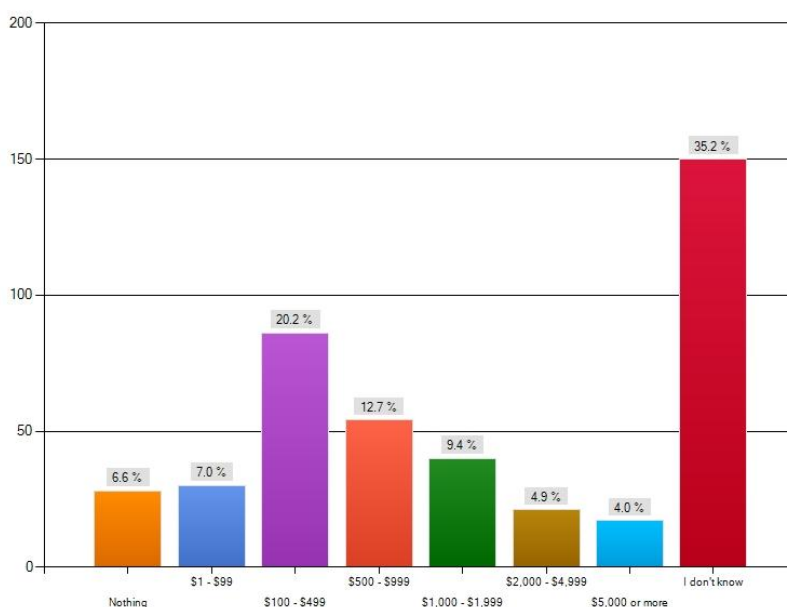
Activities/programs mentioned more than once in the “comments” section included retreats, labyrinths, and Stephen’s Ministries.

Staffing. 48.7% of congregations have a paid staff person dedicated to Christian Education and Faith Formation, and 46.2% of churches do not (5.1% were unsure). For smaller churches (1-99 average worshipers), the percentage of churches with a paid staff person decreased to 28.3%. 83.1% of larger churches (over 300 average worshipers) have a paid staff person for this ministry.

Budgets. When asked how much one’s congregation currently budgeted on faith formation/education resources, 39.0% of respondents were unsure. The range most frequently reported was \$100 - \$499 (12.8%).

For smaller congregations (1-99 average worshipers), a range of responses were reported (see Figure 26). It should be noted that because no definitions were given for what might be included in such a budget, there were no specific details offered in this regard.

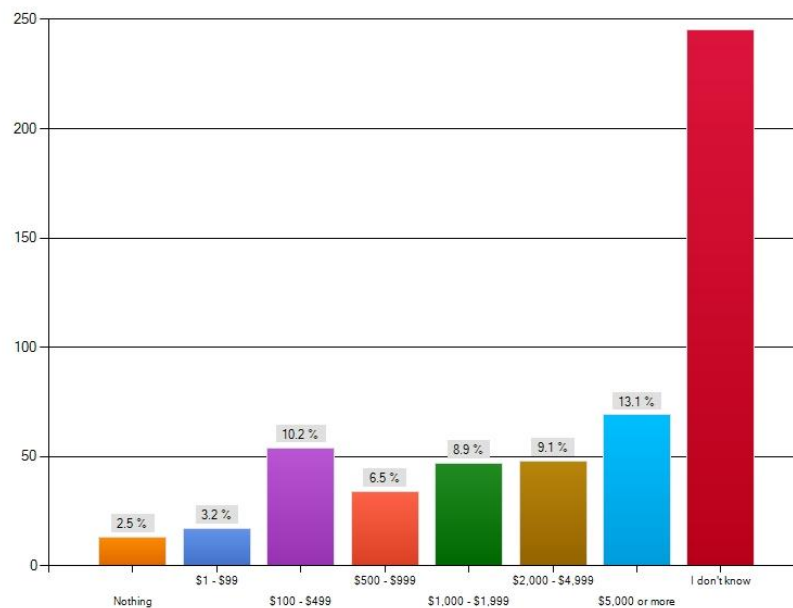
Figure 26: Faith Formation Budgets for Smaller Congregations



Individuals from larger congregations (over 300 average worshipers) responded in some similar ways, with the second most frequent budget

range reported as \$100 - \$499 (10.2%). In contrast to smaller churches, the most frequent budget range was \$5,000 or more (13.1%). Overall, percentage totals for individuals from larger congregations were lower than the total sample because more respondents from this group were unsure of their churches' budgets (46.5%) (see Figure 27).

Figure 27: Faith Formation Budgets for Larger Congregations



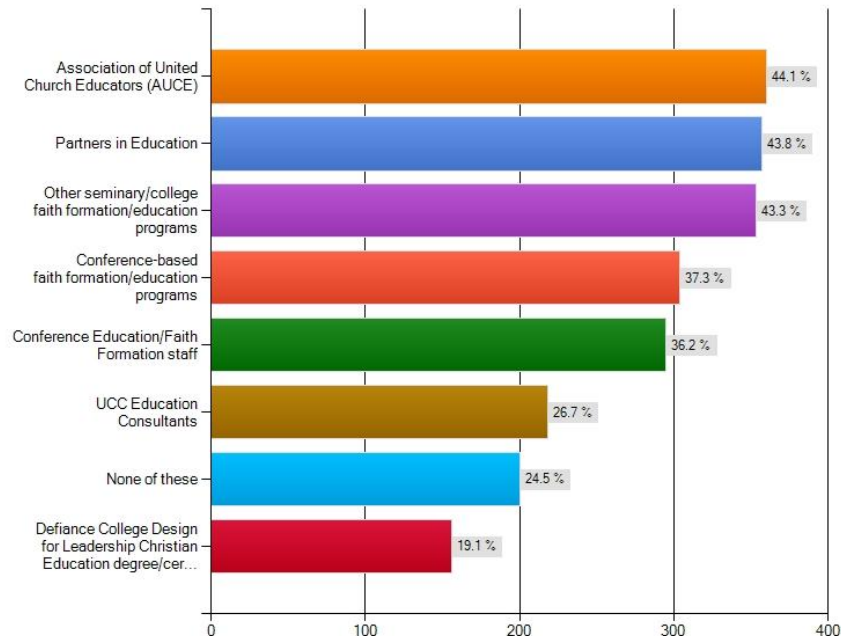
Conference/Regional/National Settings

Educational Organizations/Programs. When surveyed about individuals' awareness of wider church educational organizations and resources, the Association of United Church Educators (AUCE) (44.1%), Partners in Education (43.8%), and other seminary /college faith formation/education programs (43.3%) ranked as the most familiar programs/organizations. In total, 24.5% of respondents were not aware of any of the listed items. Over one-third of respondents were aware of both conference staff and conference-based programs (see Figure 28).

There were no significant differences in responses between authorized ministers and laypersons, or between educators/individuals related with educational organizations and the rest of the survey sample. There were, however, significant differences reported for 14-29 year olds, with awareness of other seminary/college faith formation/education programs at 50.0% and conference-based faith formation/education programs at 47.5%.

35.0% of individuals in this age group were not aware of any of the listed items.

Figure 28: Educational Organizations/Programs



National Staff. 71.3% of survey respondents indicated that there is a need for a staff person in the national setting who is dedicated to faith formation and education. 25.4% were unsure, and 3.4% indicated that there was no need for a staff person.

Comments on this subject varied greatly and included sentiments like:

- A staff person is needed to support and advocate for faith formation in all settings of the church.
- A staff position should depend on available funding.
- A staff person in this ministry area should focus on communication and creation of online educational content (similar to the approach of the Pension Boards).
- This position should focus on gathering wisdom and expertise, not be the expert.
- Such a position could help coordinate formation efforts happening across all ministries in the national setting.
- Such a staff position needs to not be concerned with creating more resources and curriculum.

- This position should help to create “good,” necessary programs and resources.
- Faith formation should be planned and executed at the local congregational level, so there is little need for a staff position.
- A person in this position needs to be “current and cutting edge” with “fresh, creative, and inspiring” ideas, not someone looking to the “same old models.”
- How can the UCC be faithful if there is not such a position? It tells local churches that faith formation is not an essential part of our identity or purpose.
- There is no need for a position in the national setting—there are already a number of ways faith formation is taking place in other national ministries, and such a person cannot adequately address needs of local churches.
- Such a position could be regionally or nationally based.

Certification. When asked whether participants believed there is a need for a certification or credentialing program for Ministers of Christian Faith Formation/Education in the UCC, 53.4% said “yes,” 33.2% said “I don’t know,” and 13.4% said “no.” Comments in favor of such a program included sentiments like:

- It demonstrates that the UCC takes faith formation and the equipping of local church educators seriously.
- This could allow more laypersons to move into leadership/ministerial roles in their congregations.
- “There is very little offered at seminaries in the way of ‘spiritual formation’ either as information or as practice.”
- Educators who are not qualified can inflict harm on those whom they are influencing.
- Well-trained people are needed to generate creative, fresh ideas for the future of this ministry.
- “Too many people seem to be winging it as it is.”
- “It should be offered online, and it could be done through a seminary partnership or with the Center for Progressive Renewal.” / “I’m not sure this needs to happen through the national offices; perhaps AUCE could have something similar.”

Respondents opposed to or unsure of a certification program included sentiments like:

- Does the UCC need another program with a series of “hoops” for people to go through?
- Not sure certification is the solution to the problem of untrained local educators.
- “When churches cannot pay their pastors for full-time work, it will be hard to require faith formation certified educators.”
- “Experience and education are sufficient without the credentials.”
- It depends on the depth and breadth of such a program.
- The commissioning process meets this need, as well as regional education programs.
- “Many churches are small and are lucky to find anyone to lead any kind of education. They're not likely to have the time, inclination, or funding to become certified.”

Summary

Overall, there are several statements that can be made in summary of the results of the National Listening Campaign:

- Worship and sermons are the most formational church-related experiences for individuals, with service/mission opportunities, choir/hymn singing, Bible and other studies, and justice/peace work also highly formational.
- How to connect faith with everyday life and how to be an agent of transformation in the world are the two most important faith learning desires of UCCers.
- Group-based activities (discussions, retreats, small groups) in which a sense of community and meaning is created are the most preferred formats for individuals’ faith formation.
- The vocabulary of “Christian Education” continues to be the primary term used in congregational settings; but individuals’ vocabulary is more expansive and varied and includes “Faith Formation” and “Spiritual Formation” at similarly frequent rates.
- People most desire teachers/facilitators/leaders who have a sense of grounding in their own faith and who are empathic/willing to listen. While knowledge is also a high desire, it is not as important as these other qualities.
- Overall, teachers/facilitators/leaders in churches receive basic training (if they receive any training at all) and are usually mentored individually.

- Training programs that individuals are most aware of are Still Speaking/Congregational Vitality and Stewardship trainings, with slightly less awareness of *Our Whole Lives*, regional lay education programs, and Partners in Education programs.
- Curricula that individuals in the UCC are most aware of are *Our Whole Lives*, *Faith Practices*, and *Seasons of the Spirit*.
- UCC resources that individuals are most aware of are *Bad Girls/Boys of the Bible*, Still Speaking resources and studies, Open and Affirming resources, and Justice and Witness Ministries resources.
- Paper handouts and books continue to be the most utilized formats for faith formation programs, with audiovisual resources also highly used.
- About half of all congregations employ Christian education/faith formation staff.
- In terms of support resources, individuals are not nearly as aware of Education Consultants as they are of AUCE and Partners in Education. They are as equally familiar with seminary/college faith formation/education programs, however, as the two programs above and are also highly familiar with conference-based education/faith formation programs and staff.
- Individuals overwhelmingly expressed a need for a national staff position to support faith formation, but opinions were mixed regarding the need for a certification program for educators.
- Notable differences based on age were present in several areas, including increased use of the internet as a learning format and Facebook and texting for communication among younger groups.

Conference Ministers' Partners in Education Survey

In summary, 25 Conference Ministers completed the survey (2/3 of the total number). When asked whether their conference currently had an active Partners in Education (PIE) program, ministers gave the following responses:

- 12 (48.0%) = Yes
- 9 (36.0%) = No
- 2 (8.0%) = Other (somewhere between "Yes" and "No")
- 1 (4.0%) = I Don't Know
- 1 (4.0%) = No response

For those who responded “Yes/I Don’t Know/Other” to the above question, 7 (50.0%) indicated that conference staff served as the main organizer/facilitator of the program, 8 (57.1%) indicated that a designated Partner in Education was the main facilitator, and 2 (14.3%) indicated “Other.” (It is important to note that 2 respondents indicated that conference staff and a designated Partner in Education both served as the main facilitators/organizers of their programs, thus the overrepresentation in percentages.)

When ministers were questioned about the effectiveness/success of the Partners in Education ministry in their conference over the last 5 years, the following responses were reported:

- 9 (36.0%) = Not effective/successful
- 8 (32.0%) = Somewhat effective/successful
- 5 (20.0%) = No response
- 3 (12.0%) = Very effective/successful

Respondents expressed a number of varying sentiments (positive, negative, and neutral) regarding the factors that led to the level of effectiveness/success that they indicated, such as:

- “I suspect that out PIE consultants are not well known and do not assist in promoting their services and/or are not viewed as having effective/relevant impact.”
- “The more recent curriculum [*Faith Practices*] was ungainly and difficult to move into local church contexts.”
- “Commitment of PIEs/willingness of PIEs to do workshops”
- “Lack of people with passion for the program/lack of good, passionate leadership”
- “Lack of energy/inconsistent volunteer effort by over-committed, dedicated folks”
- “This died a natural death in our conference some years ago.”
- “Lack of vision in the area/loss of focus/not clear of their role”
- “Significant intentional staff-driven effort/good connectional energy from the conference staff coordinator”
- Excellent leadership/expert educators in churches who work well together with a strong/long tradition”
- “We do not have an active [conference faith formation] committee to organize and keep the issues before us – this is because we have not claimed this as a priority.”

- “Relational issues/lack of communication from PIEs”

When Conference Ministers were questioned about whether the Partners program was meeting the current formational and educational needs of the churches in their conference, they responded in the following way:

- 11 (44.0%) = No
- 5 (20.0%) = Yes
- 5 (20.0%) = No response
- 4 (16.0%) = I Don't Know

In responding to why or why not, ministers indicated a number of factors (positive, negative, and neutral), including the following comments:

- “The needs are profound—the challenges are demographic (declining, aging population) and attitudinal (to what extent do our churches really care about formation?). Even when there is desire, do we have something to offer that makes a difference?”
- “Support of conference staff and continual expansion of our Resource Center”
- “Their system of networking”
- “It's helping. Not a silver bullet—we need more.”
- “My sense is it continues to function in an old structure. Current formation in our setting is unfolding from energized networking among CE and Youth Leaders.”
- “I think we need to find new ways to do faith formation.”
- “This is a dead body that has been in the grave a very long time and wasn't vital for our congregations when it was alive.”
- “No one involved at present moment/inactivity/inattention/not well developed”
- “No real presence/there is little knowledge of their existence/they were not effective in communicating who they were and what they offered”
- “Needs to integrate youth/young adults”
- “Choice of Partners was not good, and they stayed on too long.”

With regard to what ministers envisioned for the future of the Partners in Education programs in their conferences, the responses were once again varied:

- “Ecumenical partnerships in our region”
- “It will need to become volunteer-initiated, due to declining staff.”

- "A more visible role in associations, conference collaboration, seminars, workshops/to be active participants in the life of the conference"
- "I would be open [to a future for this program] but need a motivated, committed Partner."
- "Developing a curriculum for small and rural churches"
- "Not sure/not sure that PIE is the means for doing Christian/spiritual formation/not sure of the point of PIE"
- "Continue strong team and decide how to 'staff' this going forward"
- "Have them become part of a vibrant network of educators with non-conference staff leadership"
- "Continued expansion now that we have full-time conference staff for this ministry"
- "No future"
- "If we continue to have PIEs, they need a very different kind of training to become regional facilitators of learning rather than program-focused 'trainers.'"
- "If the program is to continue, our [Education] Consultant must be willing to partner in promotion and be a winsome person whose work proves compelling."

Finally, when asked in what ways the national setting could most support and uplift the ministry of faith formation and education in their conference, ministers offered a number of thoughts:

- "There is a quickly evolving need for online (webinar, etc.) resources."
- "Use webinar and other distance learning opportunities."
- "Continue to develop online resources."
- "Share information online."
- "Thorough training of consultants whose quality of work builds a compelling reputation (i.e. don't accept anyone and exercise real quality control)"
- "Help with the recruitment of a good rep/group"
- "Think in radically new ways."
- "Provide different curriculum resources and workshops about faith formation/provide quality resources"
- "New resources if possible to help us develop 21st century approaches"
- "Maybe a regional summit around faith formation would work?"
- "Put energies into something else."
- "Share more information with the conference."

- “Strengthen a national coalition/network of educators”
- “Connection with PIEs, database management”
- “Not a great need for national support in this area/we’re not sure of the conference’s or national’s role in supporting and uplifting faith formation”
- “Whatever the support, one size does not fit all.”
- “Strategies for empowering youth/young adults”

Summary

Overall, there are several statements that can be made in summary of the results the Partners in Education Survey completed by Conference Ministers:

- About half of conferences have an active Partners in Education program; and for those conferences, either a conference staff person or a designated Partner organizes the program.
- A majority of PIE programs are not, or are only somewhat, effective/successful. Reasons for this include lack of self-promotion, energy, focus, and vision.
- For the most part, PIE programs that are effective/successful are largely supported by conference/association staff who have leadership skills, expertise in faith formation, and resources.
- In general, the program is not meeting the current faith formational and educational needs of churches in conferences, for similar reasons to why they are not generally very effective.
- Some ministers envisioned changes to the program that would enhance the ministry in the conference and that included ideas for both staff and non-staff support in the future. Others were not sure of or did not envision a future for this program in their conference.
- Ways that the national setting could support faith formation and education in conferences included online education/training, maintaining of networks, and development of resources and creative ideas. Some were unsure of whether the national setting should provide support in this area.

Education Consultants

The purpose and function of UCC Education Consultants, as previously stated, is to “enrich the faith formation and education ministries of the local

church in all its settings; assist persons to become familiar with and select resources from the United Church of Christ; arrange resource fairs for association, conference and other settings of ministry; and support the work of Partners In Education in the conferences in their region.” There are currently 14 Education Consultants, and they can generally demographically be described in the following ways:

- 6 currently serve as Conference staff responsible for Christian education/faith formation ministries.
- 6 serve or have served as local church pastors and are ordained ministers.
- 8 are Licensed or Commissioned Ministers of Christian Education/ Faith Formation and serve or have served in local church settings.
- One individual currently serves as Christian education faculty in a college setting, and one individual formerly served in the national setting in Christian education.
- In terms of race/ethnicity, the current group is primarily Euro-American, with one person who is African American.
- As a whole, many of the Consultants are in their final years of ministry before retirement and have served in the consultant role for the full 17 years of the program’s existence.

The following summary chart (Figure 29) demonstrates the number of events in which Consultants have provided presence, education, and resource support from 1996 through 2009 (for a complete chart by conference and denomination, see Appendix E).

Figure 29: UCC Education Consultant Events (1996-2009)

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
55	50	41	47	71	71	135	96	78	49	67	62	46	61	929

As evidenced, the number of events has varied from year to year. Events have included conference annual meetings, Partners in Education gatherings and events, regional and national events, and ecumenical education and other types of gatherings and conferences.

Targeted Survey/Reflection

Following the fall 2011 annual meeting of the Education Consultants in which the group reviewed data from interviews collected from relevant constituencies across the life of the denomination, individuals were invited to respond to five reflection questions about visioning the future of faith formation and education in the denomination. In total, 6 of the 14 (42.9%) Consultants responded to the questions; and while the response rate was not ideal, it constituted a representative response from the sample and produced passionate, thoughtful feedback from respondents.

When asked what images, statements, metaphors, symbols, narratives, or scriptures might be included in an overall vision for faith formation/ education in the United Church of Christ (i.e. what would unite people and ignite passion and action for this ministry), Consultants offered a number of insights and thoughts including:

- “I believe **all generations worshiping with energy, engaged together in the sacraments** with new or renewed joy and reverence, a reverence formed in true access and engagement, not in a perceived piety will unite and ignite us. The engagement might and should look different (even very different) than it does today. The church would reclaim worship in many contexts/settings as the primary spiritual practice of Christians. Stories shared, prayers lifted, sacraments shared with renewed use of ancient symbols re-created for a new time hold the potential to form us.”
- “Guidance for helping people to **slow down their lives, while remembering God**”
- “My first thoughts are the primary importance of the symbols/ **metaphors of extravagant welcome and inclusive God**. And as we move into progressive Christianity we need to examine ALL the images we have before us.”
- “Develop a **multi-faith curriculum that is about faith literacy**. We understand our own faith by understanding others’ faith. How are we similar and different?”
- “Passion develops around putting our **faith into action**/I see generations working together to live out their faith within their communities engaged in service—the way service would be in true egalitarian partnership, the needs of all are being met in engagement, even if those needs are diverse.”

- “Narratives should be the **narratives of the people**, a cacophony of voices raised in sharing stories, such that we have developed a **new language of faith for our time**.”
- “We have long known that we have to meet people where they are. I think, for the future, we will have to **continue to meet them where they are**. Concretely, we will have to continue to produce resources that meet all the various needs of our clientele.”
- Scriptures:
 - **Ezekiel 37:1-14**: “The image of a valley of dry bones may seem extreme in describing the state of faith formation/education in the United Church of Christ. This passage also portrays a partnership between God and God's people in renewing what seems to be lifeless. It is important to name the need and breathe new life into the remnants of what has gone before.”
 - **Revelation 21:1**: “The metaphor of a new heaven and new earth seems appropriate to visioning faith formation/education in the United Church of Christ. The shifts and changes occurring in both current culture and the church call for fresh, innovative images.”
 - **Matthew 9:17**: “As new wine is put into fresh wineskins, new understandings of faith formation will be supported by new structures. The transformation from previous structures will be an active, effervescent process.”
 - **“Behold I make all things new.”** We need to keep the metaphors around openness, moving forward, change, exploring new ways and new technology usages, new language to tell the old, old stories, reforming stories that will immediately relate to a new generation not familiar to the traditional ways. Telling our own stories of how we have been impacted seems to make the hearers more responsive today.”

In order to live faithfully into such visions, Consultants then offered a variety of verbs that would be descriptive of faith formation/education ministries:

- Practice
- Love
- Mentor/Guide
- Journey
- Be present; be still
- Know
- Move/Act/Faithful Action

- “The actions need to be authentic and any reflection on those actions needs to be intentional, no matter the action. Intentional is not always formal, if we learn to live reflective lives.”
- “It is the same as for all time, both faith and works. Yet today’s vision must be more electronic, more visual and more concrete. People are really looking for ways to act on their faith and know what their faith is.”
- Generous/Purposeful Giving
- Multi-Tasking
- “Inclusive words such as ‘gatherings,’ ‘groups, and ‘exploring together’ will facilitate movement toward more holistic faith formation experiences.”

When asked how the actions of this vision might be carried out organizationally, including ways a new structure/network might be actualized, how information, resources, and best practices might be communicated, and who would be included in this structure/network, individuals offered some of the following articulations:

- “I believe this effort will need to be a **multi-faceted approach**, creating new opportunities to interact with the vision, as well as utilizing some existing structures. As I noted above, I imagine that this vision for faith formation will best be served by providing **multiple paths of access**.”
- “Given the reduction of persons in staff positions in faith formation, I believe it will be critical to have components which are specific to **engage local church pastors**.”
- “**Some existing structures that have achieved certain levels of trust** are Partners in Education and the Association of United Church Educators. It would seem to me that many of these folk are equipped with facilitation skills to enable ‘creative bubbling.’”
- “It would also seem that persons familiar with the emergent church have the ability to point us to **more fluid organizational models**.”
- “I’m intrigued by the ‘Centers of Excellence’ model and wonder about certain congregations becoming **mentor centers** as one way of moving the vision forward. These centers may be a way to invite others to experience the ‘sparkle’ of a proven model which may be adapted and reproduced in other settings.
- “Given the geographic mixture of the denomination, it may be helpful to think about **certain areas gathering in clusters** rather than by Association or Conference to facilitate better participation.”

- **Better communication:** “We want to have porous walls so that ministries are always talking and brainstorming with each other rather than standing alone.”
- **“Study opportunities, witness opportunities in a variety of settings** such as those newly discovered now and an increasing number of flexible contexts in the future. The context may be a social network, a local community center, a local apple orchard where folk are gleaned, etc.”
- **Online/web-based formats/communication:**
 - “Web-based formats that are more easily accessible will continue to connect us and we’ll develop greater clarity and ease of use with its potential for sharing information and making connections in ‘real time.’”
 - “The deepening of the network and to moving beyond structural barriers will be based in local engagement however, yet each will be informed by the other.
 - “Lively promotional pieces via YouTube video which catch the imagination and invite persons into further exploration. I could envision a series similar to ‘Changing Lives’ accessible through the Faith Formation/Education UCC web page with transformational messages.”
 - “I’d like to see folk texting or Tweeting a meaningful word or two to a friend or family member to share the feeling they have after an opportunity to serve or engage with another.”
- “Folk who serve will be equipped well and regularly will inform that movement. The image of a **well-trained, passionate, and engaged general practitioner** comes to mind. A specialty will serve the generalist; the generalist will not serve the specialist.”

Consultants then responded to the question of how “success” might be measured in this new vision and organization by articulating the following sentiments and/or asking the following queries:

- “A greater, more relevant **ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and engagement** /is our faith bringing us together with other faith communities or making us separate?”
- “A ‘smaller but mightier’ community of Christians who are actively **engaged in their community** on God’s behalf”
- “The authentic use of the language of faith by all generations across generational divides/**intergenerational** ministry”

- “The participation of the seeker and the sage in **formation of all types**, in many ways too numerous to confine to the contexts or settings, etc. that we articulate/**when persons are able to name and claim experiences of faith formation** which occur in home settings, at the coffee shop, and during a shopping trip to the mall”
- “Are **youth** returning to church?”
- “Is the church more fluid? Is **music** uniting people or pulling them apart?”
- “In bits and bites; in anecdotal **stories** of successes here and there”
- “Many of the signs of transformation and ‘success’ for this new vision and organization will be told through stories.”

Finally, Consultants were asked how Christian faith formation and education might look and feel ten/twenty years from now. They responded:

- “I would envision that faith formation is more actively **a personal quest that leads us into action** every day of our life/ will be more **fully integrated into the daily lives** of individuals, families and faith communities.”
- “We are also on the precipice of **embracing Christian spiritual practices** as a transformative experience for forming Christians.”
- “I think **it won’t feel much different** than it does now. People will still be gazing into crystal balls, trying to figure out how to do it better.”
- “Our churches will be **more diverse**, people will more openly talk about their faith, and I would expect a much higher percentage of interfaith collaboration.”
- “**Intergenerationally focused**/learning together as we adapt and respond to biblical/Christian illiteracy and misunderstandings (provided by the Christian right)”
- “The structure will not be as important as the **real product**.”
- Resources will be available for access from **a variety of technology-based formats**. There will be an ‘app’ for that (or whatever the future version of applications might be called)!
- “Tools similar to the ‘Stillspeaking Devotional’ will be widely used.”
- “Those in UCC leadership positions will **more effectively model educational practices** for churches.”
- “I believe we will see a **powerful shift in people of all ages acknowledging what makes meaning for them**, where they find it and where they don’t. Some of that is beginning to happen now with the youngest cohort groups.”

Association of United Church Educators (AUCE)

As previously articulated, “AUCE is organized as a support community of church educators to broaden the scope and depth of their educational ministry through personal and professional development” [24]. As of April 2012, AUCE’s membership roster totaled 200 individuals. A national coordinating committee comprised of representatives from each of the regions functions as the governing body of the organization.

Annual gatherings for support and continuing education are held in four of the six regional areas of AUCE and are open to non-members as well. In the last year, keynote speakers/presenters at these gatherings have included well-known theologians, seminary presidents and faculty engaging in faith formation research, national staff, and practitioners in the areas of youth ministry, social media, and the changing role of church educators.

In 2006, results of a survey entitled “God Is Still Teaching,” conducted by the Worship and Education Team of Local Church Ministries, were compiled to offer a summary of the characteristics and needs of Christian educators in the UCC, with 416 employed church educators completing the evaluation. While the results are now six years old, the findings regarding AUCE are worth noting:

“AUCE continues as a strongly recognized program across the denomination. Again, roughly 82% of those asked had heard of it. Based on our findings, more individuals identify as belonging to national AUCE as opposed to its regional iterations. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that a handful of people registered their membership with individual Conference AUCE programs, including Connecticut, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. These are all Conferences where there has been staff with substantial responsibility for Christian Education in their portfolios” [31].

Roles, Functions, and Activities

In gathering information about AUCE, Debbie Gline Allen (current AUCE Chairperson) offered the following list in July 2012 regarding the roles, functions, and activities that the organization had undertaken in recent years:

- Provides faith formation resource suggestions and links on its website (book reviews, bibliographies, compensation guidelines, calling guidelines, children and families, Christian Education Sunday, Church Educator's Code, commissioned ministry, communion and children, curriculum resources, learning disabilities, Safe Church, youth ministry, adult education)
- Maintains contact information for UCC resource centers on its database
- Maintains a database of AUCE members (UCC educators, pastors, and some ecumenical friends) and friends of AUCE (resource center directors, conference ministers, national staff related to education, higher education professors of religious education, and ecumenical colleagues)
- Promotes UCC resources and curriculum
- Provides information about continuing education in faith formation leadership on its website
- Provides the most complete information about commissioned ministry in the UCC on its website
- Promotes high quality resources through ads on its website
- Sends monthly (10 times/year) e-news mailings to its members and friends to highlight information on its website, along with an article written by a leader in Christian education/formation
- Provides discounts to its members on ordering from selected publishers
- Informs its members and friends of national and regional Christian education/formation events held by our regions and ecumenical partners
- Lists Christian education/formation job opportunities on its website
- Offers Certificates of Attendance to AUCE members who desire verification of their attendance at continuing education events
- Provides networking opportunities for its members through regional events and participation in the AUCE E-group idea exchange
- Advocates for equipping, educating, compensating, calling, and recognizing those called to educational and formational ministries with a presence at General Synod, the UCC Consultants annual meeting, and other national/regional gatherings
- Authors, distributes, and maintains *Called to Educational and Formational Ministries: A Guide for Local Churches, Educators, and Youth Workers*, accessible by all at no cost on the AUCE website
- Serves as a voice for faith formation in the 21st century (our motto)

Denominational/Ecumenical Structures and Trends

In recent years, several other denominations have taken to the task of assessing the ministry of Christian faith formation and education within their respective organizational bodies. As a result, many of these bodies have produced reports, guides, and other resources for the purposes of educating churches about cultural trends affecting this ministry and offering new visions and approaches for faith formation and education. Namely, the following actions have occurred for the UCC's ecumenical partners:

- The **United Church of Canada** engaged in a consultation process with congregations throughout the denomination in 2002. As a result, changes to the 2004 version of *The Manual* (the denomination's book of bylaws and governance) were made at the 38th General Council meeting in 2003 to reflect the new wording of "faith formation" and to articulate a more relevant approach to the ministry. Subsequently, in 2005, a resource was created for all United Church of Canada congregations called *Seeds of Change: Exploring a New Approach for Faith Formation and Christian Education* to assist churches in transitioning their ministries [19].
- Members of the General Board of Education (GBOD) Christian Education staff of the **United Methodist Church**, the largest mainline denomination in the U.S., recently undertook the project of creating a resource to address "the emerging issues related to how churches can connect to the wide diversity of generations they find in their congregations" [32]. This booklet, entitled *Gen2Gen: Sharing Jesus Across the Denominations*, was published in 2011 and provided a number of articles based on current research trends that addressed the characteristics and needs of different generations, technology and the church, multi-ethnic/multi-cultural ministry trends, and multi-generational families. In addition, GBOD Christian Education staff also published a 2011 booklet entitled *Intentional Faith Development throughout the Lifespan* [33] that articulated a system for intentional faith development for congregations, offered guidelines and best practices for educators, and defined developmental markers and characteristics for all ages.
- **The Episcopal Church** has actively engaged in a process of re-visioning Christian formation and education in their denomination, and a number of recent documents reflect this. *The Charter for*

Lifelong Christian Formation was approved by General Convention 2009 (Resolution A082) and stated that “Christian faith formation in The Episcopal Church is lifelong growth in the knowledge, service and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by Scripture, Tradition, and Reason” [34]. In addition, Resolution A047, entitled “Develop an Electronic Learning Community,” resolved that “The Episcopal Church develop an electronic learning community with delivery systems to support faith formation, collaboration, and networking with interactive capabilities for cross-conversations on the web” [35].

In November 2011, individuals engaged in a denomination-wide Summit on Faith Formation to help envision the future of the ministry in the church using the focusing question, “How might Christian lifelong faith formation over the next ten years affect the renewal and transformation of the Episcopal Church in a 21st century world?” [36]. In the document generated from that gathering, four different future scenarios for the church were articulated, each with varying outcomes and results.

At General Convention 2012, proposed budgetary cuts to Christian formation ministries by 90% were protested, and all funds were ultimately retained and approved for the near future.

- In 2003, the Christian Education Team of the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America** produced a document entitled *Toward A Vision of Christian Education: A Study Tool for Congregational Education* [37]. This resource engaged in an exploration of the ELCA’s Vision Statement for Christian Education and articulated implications of the statement for engaging this ministry in congregations.
- In 1999 and 2000, educators in the **Unitarian Universalist Association** gathered together to discuss vital questions regarding religious education in the 21st century. From these gatherings, a book of essays entitled *Essex Conversations: Visions for Lifespan Religious Education* was published. In 2004, a Teacher Development Survey was conducted by the denomination in order to assess needs for educators and their congregations. Results from the survey determined that “congregations use a variety of innovative methods to support and sustain teachers in their ministry to children, youth, and adults” [38].

Each of the documents and resources mentioned above were reviewed; and their contents were incorporated into the sections regarding best

practices and vision, as they provided helpful frameworks for envisioning faith formation ministries for the UCC.

Interviews with Ecumenical Staff

Several interviews were conducted with staff in partner denominations in the areas of faith formation, Christian education, publishing, and spiritual formation from the United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Episcopal Church, Unitarian Universalist Church, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (former staff). One interview was also conducted with a staff member of the Education and Leadership Ministries Commission of the National Council of Churches. Below is a summary reporting of responses based on the seven questions that these individuals were asked.

Denominational structures/roles: Some denominational bodies have multiple staff devoted to faith formation, such as the United Methodist Church and the Unitarian Universalist Association. Other denominations have fewer staff, or staff are subsumed under other areas (such as publishing, youth and young adult ministries, etc.). For these denominations (PCUSA and Episcopal Church), downsizing of Christian education offices and staffing in recent years produced their current configurations. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) currently has a vacancy for the position of Director of Christian Education, and the ELCA completely eliminated all Christian education positions.

In both the PCUSA and ELCA, the roles and functions of traditional Christian education positions were moved to the publishing divisions of those denominations. The individual interviewed from the Episcopal Church is actually employed by the publishing division of her denomination.

Vocabulary/language: When asked what vocabulary denominations are using to describe this ministry, terms included the following:

- Faith formation
- Christian formation
- Discipleship
- Spiritual formation
- Religious education

Individuals also stressed that while this vocabulary was used in national settings, many congregations continued to use more traditional language (which varied depending on the tradition).

Structural challenges within denominational settings: These included financial challenges, downsizing and restructuring as a result of these financial challenges, communication between various offices within national settings (as well as to regional and local church settings), and leadership. One individual quipped, “It all depends on leadership. Who your boss is, and their boss is. Sometimes decisions are made without a clear understanding of our role with this ministry.”

Cultural changes:

- “We are in the post-denominational/post-Christian era—membership is meaningless.”
- “People are spiritual not religious.”
- “Competing commitments for time and energy; decreasing participation”
- “Christian formation understood as ‘program’ or ‘activity’”
- “Lack of vision or unclear vision”
- The internet/technology

Regarding the shifts in spiritual formation, one individual articulated that “the popularization of spirituality in the 1990’s really generated a lot of interest in this area, but also a certain amount of competition and co-opting of the language of spiritual formation (for example, seminaries co-opting the language but not doing this work completely).”

Congregational changes:

- “I think Christian educators now don’t know what it is like to do this ministry without the internet. Since the internet is so readily available, they don’t go to the denomination as a first stop. They used to, but not anymore. There is no denominational loyalty to resources or products that the denomination creates.”
- “One of the cultural trends is just how much more need there is for safe places for people to connect with God and just be. Congregations are much less nourishing places than they used to be—communities can be very demanding on its citizens, and so can congregations.”

- “Our whole model of how churches operate based on volunteers is severely threatened in general. People don’t have time to volunteer nor the cultural expectation to volunteer as in our parents’ generation.”
- Faith formation/Sunday School declining on Sunday mornings
- Economics (congregations cannot pay decent salaries or provide benefits for staff beyond a pastor)
- Economics (congregations needing inexpensive curriculum resources)

Resources having an impact on congregations:

- Resources that help people experience the presence of God
- Resources that integrate the lectionary into the whole life of the church and beyond, asking good theological questions
- “Resources are not really where it’s at, and that’s hard when you’re in the publishing division. People are finding it online today.”
- Resources that build a sense of community; small group resources
- Easy, user-friendly resources
- Time-specific resources (6-, 8-, or 12-week studies)
- “MP3s and DVDs have become very popular because people have asked for it. We started producing this now, and these sell very well.”

Visions of the future of faith formation:

- “I think we will swing away from education, then swing back. Because of the economy and denominational and cultural trends, a lot of the blame for losing members is placed on education. Churches are about worship and practice—the new churches are now—but it will swing back because education is central to Christian maturity and creating roots in faith.”
- Focus on the “practice” of Christian discipleship; connections continually being made between faith and life
- Laity equipped for theological reflection, leading to ability to live effectively in pluralistic society, relating to people of other faiths or people with no articulated faith commitment
- “Denominations will have to work together a whole lot more in the future;” sharing of resources, best practices across denominations
- “Every period of reform in the church is preceded by a time of deep spiritual longing. Contemplative spirituality is the best hope for our

future, I believe. These things are not sexy, and they're not great money makers. So, sustaining them is a challenge."

Faith Formation in the United Church of Christ's National Setting

Currently, there are four separate, but interrelated, bodies that carry out the work of the United Church of Christ in the national setting. These bodies, called Covenanted Ministries, are as follows:

- Office of General Ministries (OGM)
- Local Church Ministries (LCM)
- Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM)
- Wider Church Ministries (WCM)

In each of these Covenanted Ministries—as well as in other UCC-related groups and organizations such as the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns, UCC Disabilities Ministries, Center for Progressive Renewal, etc.—resources and programs for faith formation have been created which directly address the specific goals and needs of these particular ministries.

In addition, staff members in each of these settings have been charged with the work of faith formation and education within their respective bodies. Interviews were conducted with several national staff in each of the four Covenanted Ministries, and a number of resources and programs were identified that relate with the ministry of faith formation.

In particular, three national staff persons engaged in in-depth interviews regarding a few specific faith formation resources and programs that they created and/or currently coordinate:

- Kelly Burd, Minister for Leadership Development, JWM, coordinator of *Justice Leaders Engaging and Developing (LED)* Program
- James Deming, Minister for Environmental Justice, JWM, developer and coordinator of Environmental Justice curriculum
- Jan Aerie, Executive for Mission Education and Interpretation, WCM, developer and/or coordinator of *Mission and Ministry Interpreters (MMI)* Program, *Kids to Kids* curriculum, Global VBS curricula (Congo, Colombia, and India)

These specific interviews were conducted in order to gain a greater understanding of the types of programs and resources related to faith formation that other Covenanted Ministries were utilizing. While these interviews do not comprise a complete sampling of the national staff who create resources, coordinate programs, and train individuals, the information gathered was helpful in gaining a better understanding of where fruits and energies lie with regard to the ministry of faith formation and education within the whole of the national setting.

Questions regarding the development of these resources, strengths and challenges of the resources and programs, evaluation and editing processes, areas/conferences where there is energy for the resource, and the future of the programs were asked of the national staff. Overall, several key statements and themes emerged out of these interviews that were noteworthy:

- Each of the resources and training programs are a continual “work in progress”—evaluation is built into the models for making improvements, editing, and possible expansion.
- For the most part, these resources and trainings developed out of a need for greater awareness and skill building, in order to impact ministry in the local church.
- Each of the programs are meant to be replicable, yet contextualized to fit one’s own local community and context.
- Hybrid models of training and information sharing are utilized (in-person meetings, site visits, Skype/webinar gatherings/recordings, online/USB drive availability of resources, and DVD use)
- Resources were created in-house (within one’s Covenanted Ministry) or with the help of outside education and production consultants (i.e. UCC-related publishing staff and resources were not used).
- Resources themselves are not products that are sold through the United Church of Christ—the resources are free and available to all who want to engage in their use for formation purposes.
- The resources and trainings provide an opportunity for networking and collaboration among participants/trainers to occur.
- For the most part, the focus is on hands-on learning and equipping participants/trainers with practical skills and ideas.

Best Practices

With the variety of data gathered throughout this study—interviews, journal and online articles, resource materials, research studies, books, surveys, site visits, etc.—a number of best practices were identified that impact the ministry of faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ. While some of these best practices have been previously mentioned and identified in this report, a more succinct, yet comprehensive, listing of these practices is offered below in several major areas. Additionally, where applicable and available, specific congregations and resources are lifted up and offered as models that most exemplify the respective best practices.

General Approaches/Pedagogies

There are a few “giants” in the field of faith formation and education, and the individual making perhaps the greatest contribution currently is John Roberto. He has offered several helpful frameworks for practicing and visioning faith formation for the 21st century. While not all of these ideas are his alone, Roberto has offered some specific contributions in which to understand and actualize these ideas. Some of these ideas are summarized below.

1. Faith formation is a lifelong endeavor. This idea has been around for a long time, and almost every ecumenical body/denomination has emphasized this notion within their vision statements (including the UCC). Faith formation is not solely a ministry for children and youth, and lifelong formation is essential to one’s nurture and growth for all ages and stages of learning and development.

There are many, many UCC congregations that practice and engage in lifelong learning; but two specific ministries that can be lifted up in this regard are Wayzata Community Church (UCC), Wayzata, MN (<http://wayzatacommunitychurch.org>) and First Congregational UCC, Washington, DC (www.firstuccdc.org).

2. Faith formation in the 21st century requires a spirit of adaptation to new challenges. According to Roberto, “For the past thirty years or so, leaders have been trying to apply technical fixes to the older models of faith formation, usually with little long-term success. *Adaptive challenges* require new learning, innovation, and new patterns of behavior. Adaptive

challenges require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments. Without learning new ways—changing attitudes, values, and deep-seated behaviors—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment” [39].

Congregations that exemplify the spirit of adaptation with regard to faith formation include: *Praxis UCC, Atlanta, GA* (www.praxisucc.org), a new church start that engages in formation in a variety of public (coffee shop) and private (home) spaces; *Beneficent Congregational Church, Providence, RI* (www.beneficentchurch.org), a renewing church that has become intentional about naming its identity and cultivating a learning and serving community that reinforces that identity; and *Solomon’s Porch, Minneapolis, MN*, a “holistic, missional Christian community” (www.solomonsporch.com), that recently opened a cutting-edge formational space called the Faith, Health & Wellness Center, which “brings together a variety of integrative healing practices” including yoga and fitness, massage, life coaching, conflict resolution, acupuncture, and guidance on healthy living practices.

3. Faith formation addresses the diversity of people’s spiritual and religious needs. These needs are based on each individual’s particular backgrounds and contexts. Roberto highlights three specific types of diversity present within churches today that affect the types of spiritual and religious needs individuals possess: (a) Generational diversity, (b) life cycle diversity, and (c) family diversity [39]. Race, ethnicity, geography, gender, sex, sexual identity and orientation, socioeconomic background, and immigration status are other factors that affect individuals’ varying needs and can impact the ways in which faith formation is carried out in a particular setting.

Many UCC and other congregations do exemplary work in addressing the diversity of people’s spiritual and religious needs, both within and outside the scope of the church, through the availability of various programs and resources for different age groups and generations. Some churches, however, are making intentional efforts to engage young adults in their ministries, an often absent generation within churches. *United Church of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC* (www.unitedchurch.org) and *Plymouth Church UCC, Seattle, WA* (<http://plymouthchurchseattle.org>) are two ministries engaging this best practice with regard to generational diversity.

Another form of diversity with rising importance is interfaith diversity. In an increasingly “spiritual but not religious” society, many individuals do not identify themselves as exclusively Christian (see Diana Butler Bass’ book *Christianity after Religion*). As a result, individuals may not feel comfortable participating in a church community. Some churches are beginning to address these previously unaddressed religious and spiritual needs. One example is Cathedral of Hope, Dallas, TX (<https://www2.cathedralofhope.com>) with the creation of their Interfaith Peace Chapel (www.interfaithpeacechapel.org) on the church’s campus. A smaller community that is being birthed as an interfaith church—yet is denominationally related to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)—is *Open Hearts Gathering, Gastonia, NC* (<http://openheartsgathering.org>). They are “committed to following the way of Jesus Christ and the kin(g)dom of God that he proclaimed, especially as outlined in the Love commandments of the Christian Scriptures...by being open to people of all faith traditions, not just Christianity.” During site view interviews at Open Hearts Gathering, individuals expressed themselves as Jewish, Wiccan, former Catholics, and a number of other less specific designations; yet the scriptures, ritual, and liturgy were from a Christian context.

4. Faith formation takes place in a diversity of settings in order for faith to be fully integrated into individuals’ lives and contexts. This includes within churches, homes, and virtual online settings, as well as in other spaces of daily life such as coffee houses, work environments (if appropriate), and during special occasions.

Comunidad Liberation (Liberation Community), Denver, CO, a new UCC church plant based in the practices of liberation theology (<http://liberationcommunity.org>), engages church participants, community workers, and justice seekers in a number of venues and contexts depending on people’s needs, including monthly vigils at the immigrant detention center, meal gatherings in homes or justice centers, worship and conversation at a local justice center, and an interactive blog conversation on the previous week’s worship for those individuals who work on Sundays or are non-physical members of the community. Comunidad is just one of many examples in this regard.

5. Faith formation utilizes a variety of formats and technologies for learning and growing in faith. In particular, UCC-related seminary

presidents and education professors offered some helpful comments in this regard that translates into the church context as well:

- “There is no doubt that technology has played a significant role in the learning styles of seminarians. Composing written materials, reading articles, even books are now very much shaped by electronic formats.”
- “Today, students are shaped by global relationships. That means they both travel to other contexts, but also regularly have students from other cultures and countries in the classroom.”
- “Students range from their 20’s to 60’s. Given that age diversity, we have students who appreciate peer learning being as valid as professor-generated materials and presentations. Yet we have students who have clearly been shaped by the No Child Left Behind approach (e.g., needed to know the correct answer and how the assignment needs to be done ‘correctly’).”
- “Many younger students have experienced the impact of Multiple Intelligences and expect that approach in courses.”
- “They expect much more interactive forms of learning and engage in them more enthusiastically than students in bygone days.”

One congregation that possesses a unique, ongoing program for interactive, experiential learning is Kensington Congregational Church, Kensington, CT (www.kensingtoncong.org). The minister engages individuals in a lay preaching class—there are 7-10 people each year; and the course involves learning about exegesis, sermon structure, etc. Then, each student writes a sermon, the class gives feedback, and the sermon is re-written and critiqued again. The third time, the student has the opportunity to deliver it in worship—once a month is lay preacher Sunday. This program has existed for three years in this congregation, and it is one of the primary sources of adult spiritual growth and vitality in the church. While it may not speak to all of the formats listed above for formation, it is one experience that meets a need for spiritual growth in its particular setting.

Darkwood Brew, Omaha, NE (www.darkwoodbrew.org) is a UCC church community that broadcasts a weekly webcast from a coffee house. In this regard, faith formation occurs through small groups that are formed in various spaces in cities around the world and that are focused on particular topics. Darkwood Brew created a series of DVDs, which contain past sessions on conversation with prominent faith leaders; and small group

discussion and facilitator guides are available for free on the website. Technology is used in unique and accessible ways in this particular ministry.

6. A network approach is crucial for lifelong faith formation. Roberto articulated that “faith formation will look and feel and operate as a network and an ecosystem. It will no longer resemble the linear, one-size fits all model of the industrial age.” These networks assume that “learning is a process of active inquiry with the initiative residing within the individual” [39]. Therefore, a variety of content, programs, activities, and resources should be offered to individuals and groups who desire to engage in faith formation. Because people’s own faith paths and needs are diverse (Roberto himself identified four groups of people with distinct spiritual and religious needs), a number of ways to engage are necessary. A network offers the opportunity for individuals to create their own personal learning pathways.

According to Roberto, a network for a particular group could contain any combination of the following formats, in both face-to-face and virtual settings:

- On your own
- With a mentor
- At home
- Small group
- Large group
- Church
- Community and world

For example, the *United Church of Christ in North Hampton, NH* (www.uccnorthhampton.org), in addition to Sunday School classes for all ages, has created a Wiki page specifically designed to share information and resources with parents “to help continue the growth in faith of your children at home.” Emails announcing new resources, activities, and information are sent to parents as well, highlighting what’s become available on the Wiki; and there are specific pages with resources on baptism, family devotions, talking with kids about death, and websites for families. This type of format, combined with in-person engagement, allows parents and children to create customized experiences to meet their respective needs.

During worship services at *Trinity UCC, Chicago, IL* (www.tucc.org), participants are encouraged to post thoughts, comments, and insights to Twitter; so dialogue and interaction is occurring online in the midst of the in-person gathering as well.

7. Faith formation is both a formal and informal, an intentional and an unexpected, process. Roberto highlighted some specific ways formation occurs along these categories (see Figure 30).

Figure 30: Lifelong Faith Formation Learning [39]

Formal Learning	
Classes Speaker series Workshops Online courses Small group Bible study	Self-study Bible study Social media/networking Faith-sharing groups
Intentional	Unexpected
Reading Mentoring Service/mission activity Program at the library or local bookstore	Playing Watching a movie Internet surfing TV show Shopping at a home improvement store
Informal Learning	

Churches incorporate a number of formal, informal, intentional, and unexpected ways for lifelong learning to occur, whether they realize it or not. One more formal way of learning that is popular in UCC churches is the speaker series. *Irvine UCC, Irvine, CA* (www.iucc.org) hosts an annual speaker series in which leaders in the Christian faith are invited to speak and share their insights and stories. These events are open to the wider community as well. On the whole, while UCC churches excel at offering intentional learning opportunities, greater thought and energy might be focused in the future on helping to make meaning from the more unexpected learning opportunities.

8. Faith formation requires intentional intergenerational activity through communities of practice. Communities of practice are “groups of people who have a shared interest who come together to learn from each other. Communities of practice have three dimensions: the domain (what it’s about; the topic (the issues that they are facing; and the community (the

people who are involved)” [39]. This model is similar to John Westerhoff’s Characteristics of Life/Integrative Model described earlier in the study [30] and will be further discussed below.

9. The role of the Christian educator is not primarily to be a teacher, but rather, a curator. Roberto wrote that “a faith formation curator is someone who continually finds, groups, organizes, and shares the best and most relevant content on a specific subject to address the needs of a specific group of people” [39]. This role is similar to the traditional role that resource center directors have maintained but has been expanded beyond that particular realm to include online resources and the creation of faith formation networks. Because of the vast amounts of information that are available, in both print and digital formats, the educator as content creator is no longer a necessary or viable role. Roberto argued, “Faith formation leaders will become less focused on providing ‘one size fits all’ curriculum *for* people, and become more focused on addressing people’s spiritual and religious growth by offering a wide variety of religious content and experiences.”

The role of content curator was one that was developed in the secular world and was first utilized in a web-based context. Another helpful definition of this role from a secular perspective is that “curation is the act of individuals with a passion for a content area to find, contextualize, and organize information. Curators provide a consistent update regarding what’s interesting, happening, and cool in their focus. Curators tend to have a unique and consistent point of view—providing a reliable context for the content that they discover and organize” [40].

Faith formation curators may curate many different types of information and resources including:

- Congregational programs and activities
- Community-based programs
- People resources in a congregation, community, and region
- Print resources in all forms from books to articles
- Audio and video programs
- Art, drama, and music
- Websites
- Online courses and faith formation activities
- Apps and other forms of digital content [39]

Many church, association, and conference faith formation staff already function in this role. For example, according to one-on-one interviews and results from the National Listening Campaign, individuals draw from a number of sources when putting together programs and experiences for confirmation, small group studies, youth groups, and children's faith formation, not relying on a one-size-fits-all model or curriculum. This implies knowledge of the types of resources available and extensive internet research, in many cases. However, a more intentional understanding of the faith former's role as curator will assist in offering clarity and purpose to the ministry overall.

Worship, Mission, Discipleship

The Ecumenical Study of Lifelong Faith Formation, funded by the Louisville Institute and conducted by the Center for Ministry Development, best articulated the first three statements/findings for this particular section.

1. There is a strong connection between a congregation's faith formation and its worship. One church leader in the study stated, "As the heart of our community life, worship should never be overlooked as the primary vehicle of faith formation" [41]. There is a clear link between liturgy, ritual, and formation. In addition, worship brings learners of all ages together and is/can be a truly intergenerational endeavor.

In Debra Dean Murphy's book *Teaching that Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education*, she argued that liturgy fulfills its catechetical function "not as exposition apart from faith, but as a performative act of faith" [42]. In this regard, worship and education should not be understood as separate functions. In addition, in Christopher Rodkey's book *The Synaptic Gospel: Teaching the Brain to Worship*, he asserted that "worship and religious education should converge to include a shared goal of teaching individuals to 'live liturgically'...[and] that living and thinking liturgically is learned behavior that may be promoted through pan-generational worship" [43].

At Zion "Goshert's" UCC, Lebanon, PA (www.ziongosherts.org), Rev. Christopher Rodkey incorporates this theory into practice by designing worship as a ritualized learning experience for all participants. With this pan-generational approach to religious education, "Children are active participants in baptisms, confirmations, and other rituals, and learn to take

ownership of the ritual life of the congregation in meaningful and gentle ways.” In other words, worship is just as much about the discipleship of adults as it is for children, youth, and young adults and is an intentional learning space that draws from our scientific knowledge about how the brain forms memory and incorporates different learning styles and intelligences.

2. The use of drama, art, and music in faith formation has a profound impact on individuals and congregations. Within this theme, emerging practices noted included:

- Storytelling (an old practice which emerged as a “new” practice) through both the sharing of personal stories and biblical stories, particularly in intergenerational settings
- Use of technology (distance learning opportunities, using DVDs and podcasts, engaging people through chat rooms, Facebook, and other interactive experiences online)
- Involving the entire community in ritual and sacramental preparation (baptism, confirmation, reconciliation)
- Independent learning opportunities through the use of learning centers
- Retreats
- The use of imagination and incorporating the act of imagining into faith formation
- Music; hymns; singing (this connection between music and faith formation was salient in the results of the National Listening Campaign as well)

While many, many UCC congregations employ these best practices in the space of worship and faith formation, there are some cutting-edge ministries occurring in the emerging church movement that are particularly noteworthy. For example, *Trinity’s Place, Raleigh, NC* (<http://trinitys-place.org>) calls itself a “Spirit collective...a collaboration of diverse organizations and peoples in Raleigh in a way that is positively transformative to ourselves and to the city. We hope to partner with local non-profits, artists, musicians, food coops, storytellers, poets, social activists and community organizers.” They formerly gathered in an art studio as a way to engage their creativity in the midst of worship; and they combine a mixture of sacred and secular music into their worship. Another emerging church community affiliated with the ELCA, *House for All Sinners and Saints, Denver, CO* (www.houseforall.org), has created an “open

space” time for poetry, prose, and other creative expression in each worship gathering.

3. Service and mission provide profound opportunities for conversation and on-going faith formation. The Ecumenical Study found that “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...[not] limited to any particular age group.” In addition, “Congregations in the study also noted the importance of the prepare-engage-reflect process in involving their members in mission trips and service projects” [41]. Interviews with different UCC constituency groups, as well as the results of the National Listening Campaign, also highlighted the impact of mission, service, and justice work on faith formation.

4. Faith formation and education, when understood within the broader context of discipleship, creates a more holistic understanding of the task of this ministry. Several other mainline Christian denominations have moved toward incorporating the ministry of faith formation into discipleship ministries, and intentional links have been created with the ministry of evangelism as well. One denominational staff leader articulated, “We coupled Christian Education with Evangelism, and we became one team because of the whole idea of discipleship: reach to teach, teach to reach. They complement one another. Also, discipleship was not in my vocabulary before that; but it is a natural direction to move in. We fine-tuned our relationships, and then we really began to move with creating resources on calling and leading, moving outside the church with families and children, etc.”

Another denominational leader stated, “Discipleship is being substituted for Christian education in some places in our denomination, [with a] focus on the ‘practice’ of Christian discipleship through connections continually being made between faith and life.”

Children, Youth, Young Adults, and Families

1. 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. This is another key finding of the Ecumenical Study, as well as other studies like those conducted by the Fuller Youth Institute; and it reinforces the idea of one community learning together.

Specifically, “Intergenerational is generally understood as members of two or more different generations having some degree of mutual, influential relationship developed through cooperative interaction to achieve common goals, as opposed to multigenerational settings where several generations are in proximity with each other, but not necessarily engaged in meaningful relationships” [44]. One individual in the study noted, “Intergenerational faith formation is valuable not just because of what happens to the kids, but what happens to the adults. Because you’re all out of your element...you’re all kind of put on the same level” [41].

At *Rocky Hill Congregational Church, Rocky Hill, CT* (www.rhccucc.org), a small group of at least three generations gathers together each month to plan worship for the following communion Sunday. It’s a simple meeting of 1 ½ hours in which the group learns a bit about what worship is, engages in a study on the scripture, and then asks, “How could we make this come alive?” Some of the most creative ideas for worship have arisen from these intergenerational sessions in which individuals from age 8 to 80 have participated, such as reading the scripture in echo style and setting the communion table during worship.

2. Congregations in which children, youth, and young adults are active participants and leaders in the whole life of the church are communities of vital faith formation. While intergenerational ministry may be implied in this particular practice, this statement invites a deeper commitment on the part of the learning community to utilize the gifts of the congregation’s young people for the good of the whole body. Ivy Beckwith asserted that “the church has only offered children and youth flashy programs and fun – [helping them] nurture the imagination through worship and art for all ages will revive the church” [45].

Because traditional models of Christian education have focused on the external, behavioral aspect of children’s formation, the church has not often recognized the internal, spiritual gifts and critical thinking skills of younger people in their midst [46]. As one UCC youth leader articulated, “Shared church leadership with youth [and children] is key. Don’t just give them their

own programs to run—that can be overwhelming and place performance burdens on leaders.”

Mountain Rise UCC, Fairport, NY (www.mtriseucc.org) and *First Congregational UCC, Naperville, IL* (www.loveandjustice.org) are just two places in which the formation of children, youth, and families is a whole church endeavor; and all individuals are an active part of the life of the community.

3. The role of the home is critical to faith formation. The vital role of parents in the formation of their children is a central component to the spiritual and religious growth of all family members. At the height of the Sunday School era, faith formation became a series of weekly lessons imparted in an age-based classroom setting; and an unintended consequence of this system became the inactive role that parents played in nurturing their children’s faith formation. As a result, the formation of adult parents also suffered and was less integrated into the whole life of the family.

Churches must balance “the need to challenge parents as the first faith formers of their children with the need to promise those same parents that the church is there to help them do it” [41]. Two specific examples for carrying out this ministry in churches included hosting programs and networks in the church in which parents and children learn together and offering resources for families to continue their learning at home throughout the week.

One organization that is providing cutting edge technology and resources in the area of ministry with families at home is *Vibrant Faith Ministries* (related with the work of John Roberto). The group has created a specific website of resources called “Vibrant Faith @ Home” (www.vibrantfaithathome.org) in which activities for individual across the lifespan are available for use. The site even hosts options for discussion and interaction among individuals who utilized activities in order to share learnings and best practices. This website can also be downloaded as an app onto any smartphone, which is particularly helpful for individuals and families with busy schedules.

4. Vital formational children’s ministry is about story, ritual, and relationship. Ivy Beckwith’s model as outlined in numerous books and articles offers a foundational approach to ministry with children that takes

into account their imaginative spirits and developmental characteristics [47]. Connecting children with their own stories and the stories of faith; facilitating their participation in worship, ritual, and spiritual practices; and nurturing spiritual formation through family, community, and peer relationships invites children to explore and articulate a faith that is their own. Beckwith articulated, “We can do so much more for children when we see their spiritual formation not as something that ends with what they learn in our classrooms, but something that is only just beginning” [47].

One interesting example of engaging children in story is found in the emerging church movement. Melvin Bray is the founder of *Kid Cultivators, Atlanta, GA* (<http://findourselves.kidcultivators.org>), a missional children and youth development non-profit, which engages in the re-telling of biblical stories in ways that are most formational for today’s young people. He states the following on his website:

“Here's the question that motivates me: How do we tell the stories of our faith in such a way that others—particularly our children—don't have to re-traverse the same valley of shadows we've come through to retain faith? Many parents in the Emergent friendship have realized that if we share the stories of scripture with our children the way they were told to us, our kids could grow up as miseducated as we ourselves often feel. Why not equip them to chart new territory?”

5. Vital youth faith formation makes connections between a personal God, youths’ communal concerns, and their role and agency in their own lives and in world. According to research conducted by Christian Smith, the majority of today’s youth espouse a kind of moralistic therapeutic deism (e.g. God is a personal God that makes us feel good) [48]. Almeda Wright articulated that formation of youth should nurture: (a) a sense of cooperation with God, that God calls us and requires something of us too, and that salvation is on-going; and (b) an understanding and commitment to a public theology that help youth connect the personal and the public, and that involves asking questions about suffering and dialoguing with others to achieve a common good [49]. Youth should also be encouraged to explore their own sense of vocation and meaning, not simply replicate the theologies and models of the adults in the community.

6. Faith formation for young adults is different than faith formation for older adults. Young adults, typically ranging in age from 18 to 29, have different spiritual and religious needs as highlighted earlier in the report

(see Appendix C for a summary of research studies on young adult formation and spirituality). John Roberto has offered six suggestions for faith formation with young adults based on current research:

- a. Create environments in the congregation and in the community for the development of community and friendships.
 - b. Engage emerging adults in short-term and long-term service and social justice projects—locally and globally—that connect faith and action, and promote engagement in the faith community.
 - c. Support emerging adults in addressing the career, work, and economic issues in their lives, while connecting faith to these issues.
 - d. Use Web 2.0 technologies and digital media to connect with emerging adults and engage them in faith formation experiences.
[Web 2.0 connotes a website that is built for interaction and information creation and sharing among individuals, as opposed to a Web 1.0 website in which users can only passively view content.]
 - e. Develop a multi-dimensional formation process for marriage [and relationships] that deepens the faith of the couple, prepares them for [partnered] life, provides mentoring and support, and continues formation and support in the early years of [partnership].
 - f. Provide pastoral care—educational programs and support groups—that promote positive development and address the mental health concerns and issues of emerging adults and, when needed, connect them to mental health services in the community.
- [50]

7. Vital faith formation for children, youth, and young adults occurs when adults engage their own faith in meaningful ways and serve as models for them. Faith formation, as previously articulated, should not be relegated to children and youth. Formation is a lifelong process, and the primary way in which children and young people engage in faith formation is through being part of a community in which all individuals are learning, exploring, and acting together in deepening faith. As the common phrase articulates, “Faith is caught, not taught.”

Curricula and Resources

The section entitled “Resources” in the results of the National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation and Education offers a helpful summary of the trends and best practices of what UCC congregations are utilizing in terms of curricula and other resources. The best practices offered in this section reinforce those results, as well as name additional specific resources that are having an impact on UCC congregations and beyond. Information for this section was gathered from a variety of sources: Individual interviews, internet research, survey data, and media resources directly from publishing houses.

General suggestions. The topics/types, characteristics, and formats for resources that have had the most impact for congregations varied by context; however, there were some common characteristics across constituency groups that can be lifted up as “best practices” for resource creation and utilization.

Resource topics/types:

- Intergenerational resources
- Resources for practicing faith at home/helping parents nurture formation of their children
- Small group/peer group resources
- Resources that connect real life issues with faith
- Resources for spiritual practices/personal spiritual formation
- Resources on spiritual direction/mentoring
- Short-term adult studies (4-8 sessions)
- Multicultural resources specifically for African American, Latino/a, Asian American, and Native churches
- Bilingual (Spanish/English) resources
- Resources for becoming more culturally competent/inclusive/social justice based
- Resources that help congregations enter into conversations about generational differences
- Lay leadership and teacher/facilitator development materials

Resource characteristics:

- Resources that are easy to navigate and utilize
- Resources that demonstrate flexibility for different settings
- Resources that demonstrate flexibility for different learning styles

- Resources that demonstrate flexibility for generational differences
- Resources that promote progressive/UCC theology
- Resources that don't require a lot of preparation for facilitators
- Resources that promote hands-on, experiential learning (particularly for confirmation materials)

Resource formats:

- Audiovisual/multimedia resources (DVDs, CDs, MP3s, PowerPoint, podcasts, etc.)
- Internet-based resources and communication (YouTube videos, online seminars, etc.)
- Print books, manuals, etc.
- E-books and e-resources (for e-readers and apps)

Specific suggestions. In the course of the research study, a few specific curricula and resources emerged as examples of products that either contained a significant number of the above characteristics or specialized in one of the areas above. These resources were considered by individuals and congregations to be “cutting-edge” and progressive in their theology, approach, content, and/or format and are grouped by age below. (There are many other solid, helpful, and even progressive curricula available; and these few suggestions represent only some of the latest trends regarding resources.)

Children:

- *Godly Play*, Godly Play Foundation (www.godlyplayfoundation.org)
- *A Joyful Path: Spiritual Curriculum for Young Hearts and Minds* (Ages 6-10), Center for Progressive Christianity (www.progressivechristianity.org)

Youth:

- *re:form*, sparkhouse (www.wearesparkhouse.org)
- *Which Way to God? A Christian Look at World Religions*, Faith Alive Resources (www.faithaliveresources.org)

Adults:

- *Embracing... Series*, Church Publishing Incorporated (www.churchpublishing.org)
 - o *Embracing an Adult Faith* with Marcus Borg
 - o *Embracing Emergence Christianity* with Phyllis Tickle

- *Embracing the Prophets in Contemporary Culture* with Walter Brueggemann
- *animate.Faith*, sparkhouse (www.wearesparkhouse.org)
- *Nooma* (short films), Nooma (www.nooma.com) (also used for youth confirmation programs)

Overall, products from sparkhouse publishers (for all ages) represent curricula that offers flexible formats, little facilitator preparation, and adaptability to a variety of contexts and formats. This includes their curricula for children and pre-teens. Other publishing houses with curricula for all ages that are worth reviewing include:

- Wood Lake Publishing (<http://woodlakebooks.com>) (sells UCC items)
- Cokesbury (www.cokesbury.com)
- Augsburg Fortress (www.augsburgfortress.org)
- Congregational Ministries Publishing (<http://pcusa.org/curriculum>)
- Vibrant Faith Ministries (www.vibrantfaith.org)
- The Thoughtful Christian (www.thethoughtfulchristian.com)

In addition, it must be mentioned that *Faith Practices*, the UCC's congregational resource, offers much in the way of engaging individuals and churches in a new approach to faith formation. A significant amount of the content is highly usable, experiential/practical/hands-on, and adaptable to a variety of contexts. While the results of an evaluation and review of *Faith Practices* were outlined in a separate report, it is important to mention that this resource may also be included as a potential "cutting-edge" resource.

Original/organic curricula and resources. Throughout the course of interviews and surveys, several individuals indicated that they created their own curricula and resources to fit their particular settings. This was a common theme, regardless of church size. Some specific examples discovered in the research included:

- *United Church of Santa Fe, Santa Fe, NM* (www.unitedchurchofsantafe.org) develops a lot of its own resources like the series "Do You Really Have to Believe That?" using Biblical scholarship to explore questions such as the virgin birth. They have also developed their own children's curriculum.
- *Edwards Congregational Church, Davenport, IA* (www.edwards-ucc.org) "writes all curriculum and programming used with children,

from preschool through fifth grade. It is a variation of the rotation model and uses themes rather than specific stories (sometimes using two or more stories within a theme). There is a constant reflecting back to what has been learned, making connections between story, faith, and life.”

- First Congregational Church, Colorado Springs, CO (www.fcucc.org) has created its own curricula at various point in their faith formation ministries for its 3rd Grade Bible Workshop and confirmation.
- Three years ago, Honeoye UCC, Honeoye, NY (<http://honeoyeucc.org>) moved to a “one room school house” approach. The Sunday School coordinator worked with the pastor to develop their own curriculum that focused on Old Testament characters and stories.
- As previously mentioned, Darkwood Brew, Omaha, NE (www.darkwoodbrew.org) creates their own small group discussion DVDs and accompanying materials. Brookside Community Church (UCC), Brookside, NJ (<http://brooksidechurch.org>) developed a “Worship Lab” series for Grades 6-7 based on Eric Elnes’ (pastor of Darkwood Brew) idea of the World’s Most Dangerous Bible Study.
- There were many churches that developed or adapted their own confirmation curricula, mostly by drawing from some UCC and other resources and then adding their own content, themes, and resources into the overall program. A couple of specific churches doing this included First Congregational Church, Brainerd, MN (www.uccbrainerd.org) and Parkview Congregational Church, Aurora, CO (www.parkviewucc.org).
- It was also noted that many multiracial and multicultural congregations develop and adapt their own curricula and resources due to the fact that there are few theologically progressive resources for these congregations that are particular to their context (or are available in their language), as was noted in focus groups and interviews with several leaders of African American and Latino/a congregations.

Futures

This section outlines possibilities for “futuring” the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ and includes the beginnings of a vision, framework and definitions, and strategies. More specific options and recommendations are offered around staffing roles and functions, programs and support, and resource development. The Futures section is based on research and findings from the first two sections of this report; but other factors (financial, political, and logistical) were also taken into consideration.

Vision for Faith Formation in the United Church of Christ

Over the last couple of years, the Collegium of Officers has been in conversation with various settings across the life of the denomination regarding the creation and refinement of a Vision Plan for the United Church of Christ. The Vision Plan was solidified in Spring 2012, and it possesses critical implications for the ministry of faith formation and education.

The Vision Plan contains four central Bold, Inspirational Goals (BIGs), which are as follows:

1. The UCC is a bold, widely-known and respected public voice of Christianity in service of God’s ever-unfolding mission.
2. There is a welcoming UCC community of faith that is accessible to all—no matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey.
3. **Every UCC person is well-equipped to be growing in faith, be theologically conversant, and be active in the global mission of the church.**
4. *The UCC has a wealth of prepared, excellent leaders that reflect the diversity of God’s beloved community.*

Goal #3 speaks directly to the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the UCC and encompasses all three aspects of that particular endeavor. Approaches, resources, and educators/faith formation curators are needed in order to equip people to be growing in their faith. These same things are needed in assisting individuals to become theologically conversant in their faith. Lastly, as the research in this report demonstrated,

acts of service and mission are themselves faith formational, as they provide opportunities for the practice of Christian discipleship.

Goal #4 also speaks to the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the UCC by setting forth a call to both authorized and lay leadership development. Leadership training and development is intertwined with faith formation and education, as there are opportunities for both initial and on-going professional development of which this ministry is related.

Given the centrality that Christian faith formation and education has been granted within the Bold, Inspirational Goals of the Vision Plan, it is only fitting that they serve as an initial guide to the vision of this ministry for the near future (10-30 years, knowing that the goals may perhaps change in that timeframe as well).

Vision Statement

That being said, an overall vision statement for the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ is crucial in order for the relevant goals of the Vision Plan to be actualized. Rather than re-create an entirely new vision that excludes the faithful, and still relevant, visions of a previous time, these can be adapted for a new time and place. The document entitled “Toward a Vision of Education in the United Church of Christ” (1985) possesses important elements in the reformulation of a new vision; and when combined with the UCC’s Core Values of Continuing Testament, Extravagant Welcome, and Changing Lives, the beginnings of a new vision can be found. The (draft version of this) statement is below.

Toward A New Vision of Faith Formation and Education in the United Church of Christ

There is great desire within people to (re)discover meaning and purpose for their lives and to experience a sense of God. The United Church of Christ recognizes the immense societal shifts that have taken place over the last several decades that have affected all people, as well as the values and practices of a church that finds itself situated in the postmodern age.

In this context, the United Church of Christ calls for renewed commitment to faith formation and education that will equip all God’s people for the work

of ministry (Ephesians 4:12) and will address the urgent need for the spiritual and societal transformation of persons and of our common life.

The United Church of Christ lifts up a vision of faith formation and education that actively engages the UCC's Core Values by affirming these fundamental principles.

Continuing Testament

- *The scriptures and histories of the Christian tradition, and of the United Church of Christ, possess continual wisdom and meaning for our collective life and faith.*
- *In each new age, the church must respond creatively to the spiritual and formational needs that it encounters among people.*

Extravagant Welcome

- *Persons of all ages are nurtured by continual inquiry into Christian faith and experience, as well as by the general search for wisdom, justice, and beauty in creation.*
- *Faith formation and education in the UCC is informed and strengthened by the diversity of its members who offer different approaches, resources, and ways of being for the transformation and learning of all.*

Changing Lives

- *God transforms us through formal and informal, expected and unexpected sources and encourages us to be open to all seekers and servers of truth, justice, and love.*
- *The formation and transformation of followers of Jesus Christ are processes through which lives are empowered to engage in service and mission in a global society, thereby sustaining discipleship and enriching life in all of its dimensions.*

Specifically, visions of vital faith formation and education in this time and place may perhaps (but not definitively) look and feel something like this:

- *All generations intentionally worshipping together, engaging in ritual and sacrament with joy and reverence;*
- *People sharing their stories with one another, discovering meaning together and connecting them with God's stories;*

- *Individuals and groups practicing their faith through embracing spiritual practices or through intentionally integrating faith into everyday lived experiences;*
- *Generations engaging in acts of service and mission within communities and with purposeful reflection;*
- *Faith experiences and learning taking place in a variety of customized formats and settings based on shared interests;*
- *Facilitators, practitioners, educators, and other leaders engaging in continuing learning and dialogue through a number of formats, both physical and virtual;*
- *A decrease in the need for “experts” and an increase in the need for co-nurturers within groups in which all possess equal wisdom;*
- *Individuals and groups utilizing resources based on ease of access, user-friendliness of content, and appeal to different styles of learning.*

Again, this is only a beginning draft of a vision statement and guidelines; but it assists in offering a broader base from which to articulate more specific recommendations and approaches.

Framework and Definitions

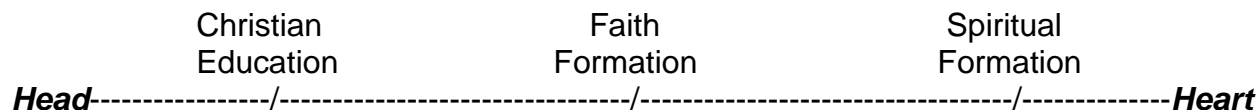
Based on the research study, it is also important to articulate a basic framework and some definitions for the ministry of faith formation and education itself, in order to move forward with clarity regarding the nature and scope of the vision. Again, these frameworks and definitions are only suggestions and are subject to revision.

Faith Formation and Education

The vocabulary of “Faith Formation and Education” has been used throughout this report, as it seems to offer the most inclusive and accessible language to describe this ministry. While recognizing that the use of Christian Education cannot be eliminated completely due to its continued prevalence within congregations, it is recommended that Faith Formation be the primary term used to describe this ministry in the national setting. Spiritual Formation is also a helpful term, although the connotation of this term is a bit different than the other words used to describe this ministry.

All in all, however, the relationship between these concepts is one worth explicating; and a preliminary diagram is offered below (see Figure 31).

Figure 31: Vocabulary Framework



As articulated at the beginning of this report, the language of Christian Education connotes more traditional models of teaching and learning, patterned after the secular schooling system in the United States. The association for this term, whether perceived or real, is with an attainment of “head” knowledge and facts. On the other end, there is the vocabulary of Spiritual Formation, which usually relates to practices of devotion and a focus on the inner work of the soul. The association for this term, whether perceived or real, is with an occurrence of an experience/encounter, or “heart” knowledge.

With this in mind, Faith Formation can then be understood and defined as *“an engaged process of learning and practice integrated throughout all aspects of congregational and daily life.”* This definition allows for the combining of “head” and “heart” knowledge into a more holistic understanding and embodiment, rather than creating a dichotomy between the two concepts.

Now that a definition has been proposed, a framework for what the ministry of Faith Formation includes is presented (see Figure 32). Faith formation occurs in and through some of the following ways: worship, where rituals such as baptism and confirmation are conducted; mission, service, and social justice action and advocacy; spiritual practices/disciplines such as prayer, fasting, giving witness, and honoring the body; programs, activities, and structured group experiences such as new member classes, confirmation classes, retreats, committee meetings, adult Bible studies and discussion groups, Sunday School, choir, women’s and men’s groups, youth group, regional lay education programs, theological education programs, and clergy professional development; in the midst of daily life and in the home; and in the public community and global realms. While there are many other settings and spaces for faith formation, this provides

a basic framework to envision all action, both within and beyond the church setting, as faith formation.

Figure 32: Faith Formation Framework



It is important to note that other ministries such as stewardship and evangelism are subsumed under many of these categories. Additionally, as the research has suggested, faith formation occurs through a variety of formats that are both virtual and face-to-face including: individually, with a peer/mentor, in a small or large group, or within the larger communal context in informal and formal, expected and unexpected ways. In this manner, John Roberto's approach to faith formation as a network is most fitting.

When putting together any particular program or experience for an interest group, this framework is essential to keep in mind in ensuring that a network of complementing options are open and available for individuals and families to engage in. For example, when coordinating a preparation program for families who desire to baptize their children, there could be several options for engagement of these families including the following: a Wiki page, an online course or mentoring blog, an in-person monthly meeting with mentors, a hybrid format group Bible study, group excursions to local bodies of water or fountains, engagement with a non-profit that

works to provide water to local or global communities, and so on. Creativity and an adaptation of content and format to meet the needs within one's context are crucial in this new model of networked faith formation.

Strategy for the National Setting

The following recommendations provide a foundational strategy to assist in carrying out the vision for the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the national setting of the United Church of Christ. This strategy has implications for all settings of the church, including local congregations, associations, conferences, related organizations and groups, resource centers, seminaries, and so on.

Therefore, based on the research presented in this report, it is recommended that:

1. The national setting of the UCC **re-commit** itself to proclaiming the ministry of Christian faith formation and education as vital to the life and mission of the church in this age, by considering its place in both current and future budgets and structures.
2. The national setting of the UCC **share** in the ministry of faith formation with all other settings across the life of the church, serving as a partner in content curation and relational networking, not necessarily as a content generator and trainer of specialists (which is already occurring in many other settings of the church).
3. The national setting of the UCC work to **identify and lift up** "Centers of Excellence" with regard to Christian faith formation and education, to serve as models for the whole denomination, congregations and settings in which best practices and strategies are being successfully implemented.
4. The national setting of the UCC **partner** with related centers, seminaries and theological schools, organizations, regional education/training programs, resource centers, and judicatory bodies to coordinate and/or promote online platforms that allow pastors, educators, youth workers, and other leaders to share best practices and resources, as well as coordinate and/or promote online capabilities for learning.

5. The national setting of the UCC **coordinate** communication and organization among national staff engaging in the development and administration of faith formational and educational resources, trainings, and programs of the various Covenanted Ministries, as well as other related ministries.

6. The national setting of the UCC **develop** resources for faith formation and education that are simple in format, yet contain theological depth, allowing individuals and groups to explore questions and grow in their faith. It is especially helpful if some of these resources promote intergenerational formation and engagement with other faiths in relation to the Christian faith.

Staff Roles and Functions

It is recommended that any future staffing configurations in the national setting work to implement the above strategies, as it would be best if some of these tasks be identified within the scope of specific job descriptions and overall expectations.

Based upon the research, there are a variety of configurations that are possible for how the ministry of faith formation and education can be carried out in the United Church of Christ. The following three models are offered as the best possible configurations for the stated needs and recommendations; but all decisions regarding staffing are dependent upon current funding and the availability of resources.

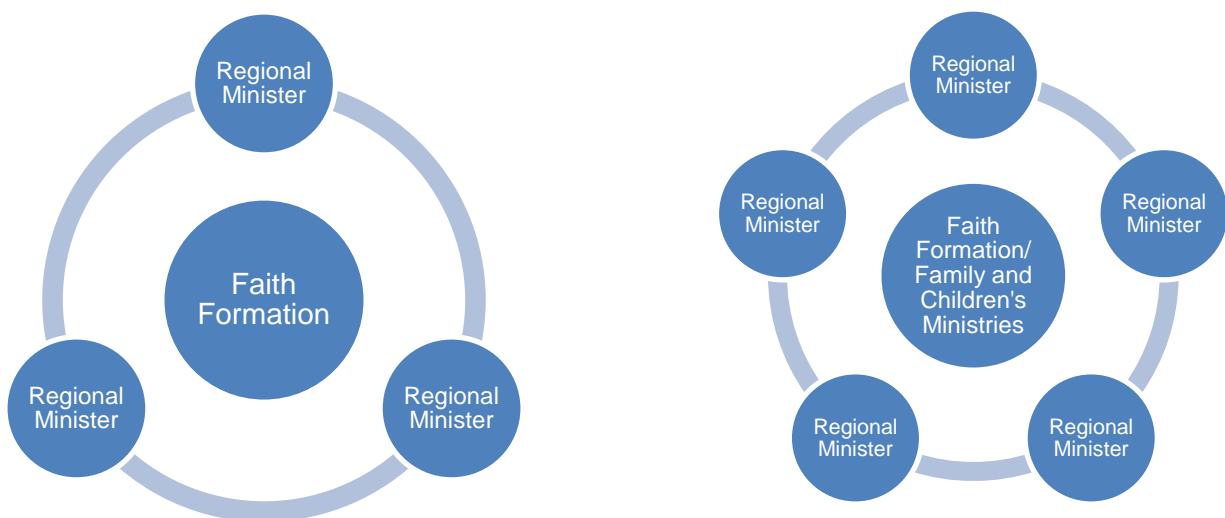
Model 1: Regionally-Based Ministry Team. This model involves the hiring of several regional ministers who would carry out the above recommendations, not within the actual offices of the national setting in Cleveland, but from various regions around the country. The logistics of these positions can vary (part-time, full-time, salaried, or contracted); but the tasks and duties of the team would be divided depending on each individual's particular strengths (e.g. someone able to develop web-based platforms and resources vs. someone able to content curate and network to identify Centers of Excellence).

Positive aspects of this particular model are that it allows for a broader applicant pool, as individuals would not need to relocate in order for their gifts to be utilized. Additionally, the possibilities for individuals already engaged in the work of faith formation in their local and regional contexts in

order to lift up best practices and simultaneously maintain connections in that particular setting would enrich the depth and scope of possibilities for creative partnerships and collaborations.

It is important to note that this model is already being implemented within the national setting of the UCC with regard to Family and Children's Ministries. In the next year, three part-time regional ministers will be hired to serve as part of a regionally-based ministry team; and these positions will be shared positions with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination. As the work of faith formation and education is so closely related to ministry with families and children (as the research in this report has suggested), a similar model, or an expansion of the model to incorporate faith formation into the newly developing team, might be an appropriate course of action for the future (see Figure 33).

Figure 33: Regionally-Based Ministry Team Configurations



These regionally-based faith formation positions might also be shared with a denomination such as the Christian Church (DOC) and would promote increased collaboration and development of resources. Overall, this model, while less centrally situated within the traditional roles of previous denominational staffing structures, offers possibilities for a network approach to faith formation that allows increased creativity and new ideas to emerge from contextualized settings.

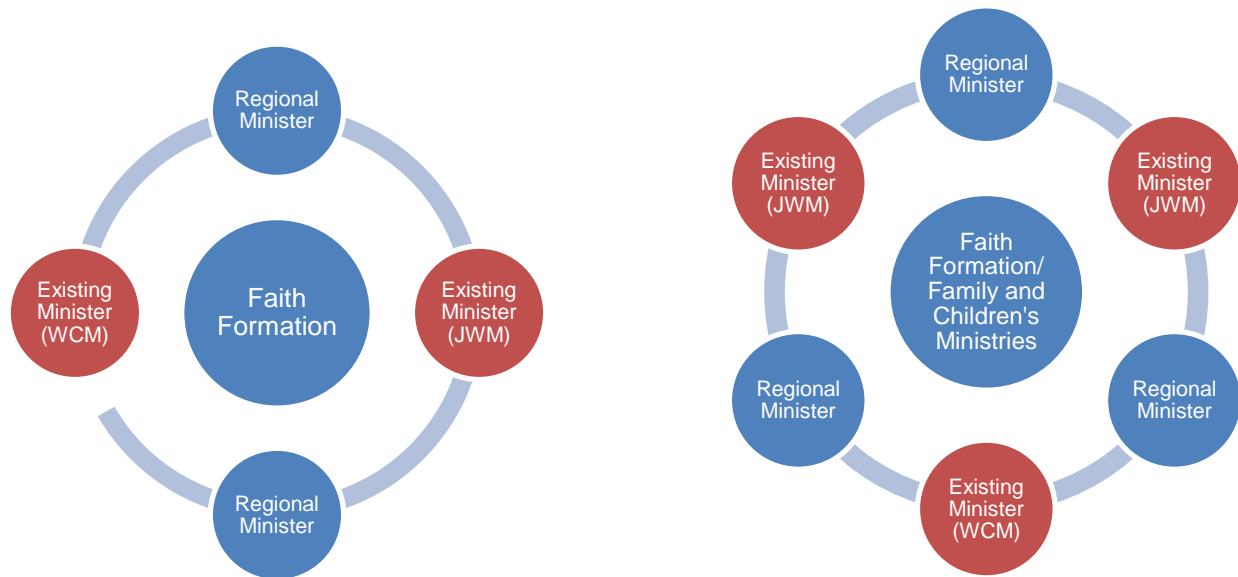
Model 2: Minister of Faith Formation and Education. A more conventional staffing approach is the creation of a single staff position in the national UCC setting. There are several benefits to this model, including: the ability of one individual's efforts to be solely focused on the ministry of faith formation, the ability to (perhaps) better coordinate faith formation efforts across all of the Covenanted Ministries and partner bodies, and the presence of a "go to" person for all things related to this ministry. Many denominations currently function with staffing structures such as these; however, these individuals are largely employed within the publishing divisions of their respective organizations.

If this particular staffing model were implemented, it is crucial to note that the individual would need to possess a wide range of gifts and strengths to undertake the tasks previously outlined, including technological, content curating, communication, networking, and resource development skills.

Model 3: Hybrid/Integrated Ministry Team. This model combines the approach offered in the regionally-based ministry team model with existing staff in the national setting whose work is already focused on faith formation and specific curricula and training programs. As was articulated in this report, there are several national staff among the four Covenanted Ministries who have been charged with the work of faith formation and education within their respective bodies and have both developed and coordinated highly successful curricula and training programs for the denomination and beyond (for example, the Justice LED curriculum program is staffed by a full-time individual and currently has 300 trained facilitators). Other curricula and training programs are equally successful across other Covenanted Ministries.

Therefore, in full acknowledgement and support that the ministry of faith formation and education is thriving in areas throughout the national setting, in varying ways, this "third way" model is offered in the hopes that a more integrated system can emerge. Below are some possible configurations for such a model (see Figure 34).

Figure 34: Hybrid/Integrated Ministry Team Configurations



All of the above models offer strengths and challenges, and they all have the potential to be successful. ***With any approach, it is recommended that the staff person(s)/ministry team report to their own respective team within their particular Covenanted Ministry, as well as the current publishing and communications team.*** It is important to ensure greater communication within the ministry of faith formation and education as a whole by recommending multiple reporting structures, particularly for the coordination of marketing and resource production. This also serves to prompt increased collaboration and network building as a result of shared interests.

Programs and Support

The following recommendations on programming and support structures for faith formation and education are offered below and are based on the research in this study.

1. It is recommended that the UCC Education Consultants program come to a close at the end of 2012. For the past 17 years, the Consultants have faithfully served in this ministry, promoting UCC resources and curricula, training educators, and supporting Partners in Education. Unfortunately, as the needs and priorities of churches, associations, and conferences have shifted, their work level has largely

decreased in most areas. In addition, with a large portion of UCC resource sales occurring online, face-to-face promotion of curricula and resources have not garnered the same results as in previous years.

2. It is recommended that national support for the conference-based Partners in Education program also come to a close at the end of 2012. While Partners in Education programs in several Conferences within the United Church of Christ are thriving, this is due in large part to the energies of Conference staff and dedicated regionally-based volunteer educators who have sustained those efforts. (In this manner, Conferences are free to continue these programs if there are energies and successes occurring as a result.) For the most part, however, this program is not currently meeting the needs of congregations, due to the cultural and ecclesial shifts highlighted earlier in this report. There are many highly gifted Partners in Education in the United Church of Christ; but their gifts can be lifted up in more effective ways, as many are either under-utilized in their current roles or are committed to faith formation positions and responsibilities in their own congregations.

Some of the ways in which the gifts and talents of Partners in Education can be better utilized may include: creation and editing of resources, consulting on resource development, creation and editing/consulting on current curricula and training programs (Justice LED, MMI, etc.) for improved effectiveness, identification and resource creation regarding Centers of Excellence for faith formation and education; and development of online platforms and programs for education and training.

3. It is recommended that the Association of United Church Educators (AUCE) be granted additional support to continue building a network of educators, pastors, faith formation curators, families and children's ministers, youth and young adults leaders, and outdoor ministries coordinators. Because of AUCE's history and legacy as a networking organization for faith formation ministries, it is fitting that AUCE continue this work with more formal support from the national setting, in the forms of designated funding, resource use, and overall promotion. As staffing and funds continued to decrease over the years in the national offices, AUCE carried forward much of the work that was discontinued. The regional structures that AUCE currently has in place, as well as the annual conferences and retreats for professional development that occur each year through the organization, serve to support faith formation leaders.

These activities and events can be energized through these resources, in order that AUCE can become a more visible and central part of the network of faith formation ministries in the UCC, as well as continue to be a separate, but collaborative partner with the national setting.

4. It is recommended that, within the next year, a national faith formation event take place at an identified Center of Excellence, in order to gather together individuals engaged in the ministry of Christian faith formation to reflect on the research study and the vision and to engage in learning, networking, and sharing of best practices. Through this research, two congregations have been identified as possible locations for such an event: First Congregational UCC, Washington, DC, and United Church of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC. With technological capabilities, sessions can be recorded and broadcast so that learning and sharing occurs across the life of the denomination. In essence, this effort will serve to “launch” a new vision for faith formation and lift up this ministry in new ways for both seasoned practitioners and individuals who are not as familiar with this ministry.

Resource Development

It was recommended above that the national setting of the UCC develop resources for faith formation and education that are simple in format, yet contain theological depth, allowing individuals and groups to explore questions and grow in their faith. It is especially helpful if some of these resources promote intergenerational formation and engagement with other faiths in relation to the Christian faith.

In addition, it was also stated that any future position(s) possess a direct reporting line to the publishing and communications team of the national setting, so that recommendations regarding the creation of future resources and curricula can be succinctly received, vetted, and then developed.

With those things in mind, there are a few additional recommendations that pertain to the development and promotion of resources.

1. It is recommended that no new undertakings for the development of large-scale curricula be executed within the next few years. Current sales and survey trends (as reported in the study) indicate that congregations can no longer afford these types of resources and are

drawing from a number of cost-effective, internet-based materials, as well as adapting and creating their own curricula and programs.

2. It is recommended that current curricula being sold through the UCC website continue, but that an exploration regarding the sales of other curricula and resources occur in order to ensure that the denomination is promoting the most relevant, theologically-progressive materials. A listing of some possibilities of other curricula and resources is highlighted within this report.

3. It is recommended that a broader approach to and understanding of “curricula” be embraced within the UCC, to include such resources as Still Speaking Bible studies, the *Caffeine* series for youth, and other short-term, small group resources. Local congregations are looking to purchase these smaller, more affordable resources as opposed to larger curricula, as these are the types of materials that appeal to individuals in churches given hectic schedules and multiple priorities.

It is important to note that with the possibilities of a regionally-based team for faith formation ministries that might also be related with another denomination, the creation of future larger curricula may be possible and more cost-effective, allowing sales to increase.

4. It is recommended that the national setting become more aggressive in identifying and insourcing locally-developed (or locally-developing) faith formation curricula, approaches, and resources that are already being successfully, even professionally, conceived, produced and implemented in UCC churches or by para-church organizations. Types of resources can include confirmation materials, Sunday School or mid-week modules, or small group methods and resources (such as *Living the Questions* or studies from Darkwood Brew). These and other resources could be supported financially by the national setting (perhaps at a much more modest investment) and then (re)published, (re)branded and marketed for/to a much larger national UCC audience. Such an approach would be consistent with the emerging Centers of Excellence model that encourages innovative and effective churches to lead in teaching/modeling best practices for other congregations.

5. It is recommended that the intentional, scheduled promotion of UCC resources and curricula to educators and pastors continue through both print and virtual formats. This year, with the creation of the UCC Education and Faith Formation Catalog (available online and in print) and the “edUCCators epistle” (bi-weekly e-blast to church educators and pastors), increased communication and awareness of the availability of resources for congregations is occurring. These efforts should not be halted and will hopefully assist in increasing sales overall.

In conclusion, the above vision, framework, definitions, and strategies/ recommendations are only preliminary offerings based on the research in this report. Decisions regarding these “futuring” ideas will be made in the coming months and years.

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Appendix A

UCC Partners in Education Survey

Council of Conference Ministers Meeting – April 18, 2012

1. Do you currently have an active Partners in Education program in your Conference?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I Don't Know
2. If Yes, who serves as the main organizer/facilitator of this program?
 - a. Conference Staff
 - b. A designated Partner in Education
 - c. Education Consultant
 - d. Other (please specify)
3. How effective/successful do you believe the Partners in Education ministry has been in your Conference over the last 5 years?
 - a. Very effective/successful
 - b. Somewhat effective/successful
 - c. Not effective/successful
4. What factors have led to this level of effectiveness/success?
5. Is the Partners in Education program meeting the current formational and educational needs of the churches in your Conference?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I Don't Know
6. Why or why not?
7. What do you envision for the future of the Partners in Education program in your Conference?
8. In what ways might the national setting most support and uplift the ministry of faith formation and education in your Conference?
9. Name:
10. Conference:

Appendix B

Interview Questions

UCC-Related Seminary Presidents and Professors:

1. How are seminarians learning differently now than 10 years ago? What changes are likely to continue?
2. What learning/teaching/information sharing methods are students now using or trying to master that will likely shape programs within congregations as we move into the future?
3. What are the important forces or cultural influences that will affect how people are initiated into the church and challenged and deepened in their faith?
4. Will these changes be driven by seminaries, by outside culture and media, by younger generations of leaders, through experimentation within individual congregations, and/or from the ideas, programs or developments offered by a national ministry of the church?
5. What do you believe are the most effective models or methods for equipping local church lay leaders?
6. What do you believe are the most effective models or methods for equipping local church pastors?
7. What types of resources can the national setting of the UCC create that will assist seminaries in equipping ministers?

Faith-Based Research/Best Practices Organizations:

1. What personal life (faith) issues are you currently analyzing? How has the nature of these issues changed over the last decade, and are these trends likely to continue?
2. What learning/teaching/information sharing methods or systems do you utilize that are most effective for faith formation? Why are they effective?
3. What resources/curricula have you discovered that are most successful for faith formation? Why are they successful?
4. What cultural influences or changes in the public realm have affected faith formation?
5. What trends and challenges within congregations do you believe have affected faith formation?
6. What impact do the internet, social networking, and other media have on faith formation?

Members of AUCE:

1. How has the wider church influenced the practice of faith formation within congregations in the past 10 years?
2. What resources/curricula have you discovered that are most successful for faith formation? Why are they successful?

3. What learning/teaching/information sharing methods or systems do you utilize that are most successful for faith formation? Why are they effective?
4. How do the UCC's faith formation priorities or styles differ from those of other denominations?
5. What are the trends in congregational (and conference) staff leadership that we are facing in the next few years?
6. Do you believe that church needs a staff person in Local Church Ministries responsible for Faith Formation? If so, what should that staff person's responsibilities entail?

Youth and Young Adult Ministries Leaders:

1. What are characteristics unique to this current generation of youth and young adults that could potentially impact how we do faith formation?
2. How are youth and young adults experiencing community? What do they seek or need from a faith community?
3. What attracts youth and young adults to learning and growing in the UCC?
4. How have the internet, social networking, and other media affected the way youth and young adults are learning new ideas? How might that inform our work for the coming decade?
5. What impact has the generational emphasis on service to one's community had on youth faith formation, for both church and non-church attendees?

UCC Congregations:

1. What resources/curricula have you discovered that are most successful for faith formation in your congregation? Why are they successful?
2. What learning/teaching/information sharing methods or systems do you utilize that are most effective for different populations in your church? Why are they effective?
3. How have the methods, calendars, programs and facilities for faith formation changed in your congregation over the past 10 years? Are you in the midst of a major change right now? What does that look like, and where do you hope it will lead?
4. How has the culture of your church community affected your mission of education and faith formation (positively, negatively, or both)?
5. What do you predict will be the most challenging aspect of change that educators will face in the next few years?
6. If you could have one new resource, what would it be? How much would you pay?
7. How much do you currently budget for the purchase of resources?
7. Is denominational identity important in your congregation's faith formation goals?
8. What is the most valuable lesson for living the Christian faith that you feel the church needs to be teaching? If we fail to teach that lesson/idea/value, how might we find ourselves less faithfully formed?

Partners in Education:

1. What resources are you currently using to teach people, “Who/what is the UCC?” and “What are our religious values?”
2. What are you currently using to train and equip lay leaders to help build thriving congregations? Why do you like this resource?
3. What learning/teaching/information sharing methods or systems do you utilize that are most effective for the different populations that you work with?
4. What cultural influences or changes in the public realm have affected faith formation over the last 10 years?
5. What trends and challenges within congregations and conferences have affected faith formation work?
6. If you could have one new resource, what would it be? Who would it be geared toward?

Education Consultants:

1. Knowing what we now know, if we were to construct an overall vision for faith formation/education in the United Church of Christ, what images, statements, metaphors, symbols, narratives, or scriptures might that include? What would unite people and ignite passion and action for this ministry?
2. In order to live faithfully into such a vision, what verbs or actions would be necessary?
3. Organizationally, how would the actions of this vision be carried out? (Note: It may—or may not—be helpful to think of the current structure and various levels from which we presently function. So given what we now know, how might we best organize ourselves to create a flourishing, vibrant ministry of faith formation?)
 - a. In what ways will this structure/network be actualized (i.e. technologically, programmatically, inter-personally, etc.)?
 - b. How will information, resources, best practices be communicated?
 - c. Who will be included in this structure/network?
4. How will we measure “success” in this new vision and organization?
5. Ten years from now, how might Christian faith formation and education look and feel? Twenty years?

Resource Centers:

1. What resources/curricula are most widely utilized for faith formation in congregations? Why are they so popular/successful?
2. What learning/teaching/information sharing methods or systems do you most observe or promote in your work with churches?
3. What cultural influences or changes in the public realm have affected faith formation over the last 10 years?
4. What trends and challenges within congregations and regional bodies have affected utilization of your resources?
5. What do you predict will be the most challenging aspect of change that educators will face in the next few years?

6. If you could have one new resource, what would it be? How much would you pay? What would this resource look like?
7. What is the most valuable lesson for living the Christian faith that you feel congregations need to be teaching? Do you believe they are able to teach this lesson/value/idea with the current range of available resources?

Collegium/Key National Staff Questions:

1. In what ways does the UCC currently see faith formation as the very essence of the identity, culture and program life of congregations and other related ministries? (Some examples from our past: We founded colleges and graduate seminaries; we had a strong curriculum development arm when we were united in 1957; we once had an educational program staff in every conference; and we approach faith formation from intellectual content.)
2. What cultural influences or changes in the public realm have affected faith formation in the past 10-20 years?
3. What trends and challenges within congregations and conferences have affected faith formation work at the national level?
4. What lessons have we learned from our successes and failures?
5. What conversations are taking place about the reorganization of national staff that might have an impact on faith formation for congregations in the next 10 years?
6. What are the 5 most valuable lessons for living the Christian faith that you feel the church needs to be teaching? If we fail to teach those lessons/ideas/values, how might we find ourselves less faithfully formed?
7. How might national UCC staff address the shift in terminology and practice from “Christian Education” to “Christian Faith Formation”?
8. How can progress in theories of how people learn and change be more effectively utilized within systems of training leadership for the church?
9. What directions/paths do you envision the future of Christian education and faith formation to take in the next 10-20 years? 50 years?
10. What questions did I not ask that I should have? What do I need to know about faith formation that you have not yet told me?

Emerging Church Leader Questions:

1. Can you tell me some of the ways in which the emerging movement “does church” that are different from more traditional or conventional ways in which it is done?
2. What, do you believe, are the emerging church’s overall approaches to/philosophy of education/faith formation? How are these different than mainline denominational or strictly evangelical approaches?
3. How are these approaches lived out/actualized in these settings (i.e. programs, studies, group activities, etc.)? Who creates/facilitates these experiences?
4. What changes in your church do you see/experience as a result of these approaches and methods?
5. What language do you use to talk about “education” or “faith formation”? Why?
6. How is faith formation for children and youth carried out?

7. What role does technology and the internet play in faith formation life?
8. What other cultural influences shape the ways in which education occurs at your church?
9. What challenges do you face (or have you faced in the past) with regard to education/faith formation in your church, and how might/did you deal with those challenges?
10. What can the UCC and other mainline denominations learn from the ways in which faith formation is carried out in emerging churches?
11. What directions/paths do you envision the future of Christian education and faith formation to take in the next 10-20 years? 50 years?
12. What questions did I not ask that I should have? What do I need to know about faith formation that you have not yet told me?

Ecumenical National Faith Formation Staff:

1. How is the ministry of faith/spiritual formation and education structured within your denomination? What is your role in this structure?
2. What vocabulary or language do you use to describe this ministry in your denomination?
3. What are the structural challenges that you face with regard to this ministry? What would alleviate some of those challenges?
4. What cultural influences or changes in the public realm have affected this ministry in the last 10-20 years?
5. What trends and challenges within congregations in the last 10-20 years have affected your work?
6. What types of resources are having the most impact for people in your denomination?
7. What do you envision for the future of faith formation/education ministry in your denomination in the next 10-20 years?

Appendix C

Research Summaries on Young Adult Formation and Spirituality

Millennials Will Benefit *and* Suffer Due to Their Hyperconnected Lives

Pew Research Center Internet & American Life Project

February 29, 2012

<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Hyperconnected-lives.aspx>

- Technology experts and stakeholders were fairly evenly split as to whether the younger generation's always-on connection to people and information will turn out to be a net positive or a net negative by 2020.
- Many of the young people growing up hyperconnected to each other and the mobile Web and counting on the internet as their external brain will be nimble, quick-acting multitaskers who will do well in key respects.
- At the same time, these experts predicted that the impact of networked living on today's young will drive them to thirst for instant gratification, settle for quick choices, and lack patience.

Five Myths About Young Adult Church Dropouts

The Barna Group

November 16, 2011

<http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts>

Results of the entire research project are found in the book *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* by David Kinnaman

- *Myth 1: Most people lose their faith when they leave high school.* Reality: More commonly, young Christians wander away from the institutional church—a pattern the researchers labeled nomads. They still call themselves Christians but they are far less active in church than they were during high school. Nomads have become 'lost' to church participation.
- *Myth 2: Dropping out of church is just a natural part of young adults' maturation.* Reality: The significant spiritual and technological changes over the last 50 years make the dropout problem more urgent. Young people are dropping out earlier, staying away longer, and if they come back are less likely to see the church as a long-term part of their life. Today's young adults who drop out of faith are continuing something the Boomers began as a generation of spiritual free agents.
- *Myth 3: College experiences are the key factors that cause people to drop out.* Reality: College certainly plays a role in young Christians' spiritual journeys, but it is not necessarily the 'faith killer' many assume. However, it is too simplistic to blame college for today's young church dropouts. As evidence, many young Christians dissociate from their church upbringing well before they reach a college environment; in fact, many are emotionally disconnected from church before their

16th birthday. The problem arises from the inadequacy of preparing young Christians for life beyond youth group.

- *Myth 4: This generation of young Christians is increasingly "biblically illiterate."* Reality: When comparing the faith of young practicing Christians (ages 18 to 29) to those of older practicing Christians (ages 30-plus), surprisingly few differences emerged between what the two groups believe. Many younger Christians are cognizant that their peers are increasingly unfriendly or indifferent toward Christian beliefs and commitment. As a consequence, young Christians recognize that the nature of sharing one's faith is changing. For example, many young Christians believe they have to be more culturally engaged in order to communicate Christianity to their peers. For younger Christians, matters of orthodoxy are deeply interconnected with questions of how and why the Gospel advances among a post-Christian generation.
- *Myth 5: Young people will come back to church like they always do.* Reality: Some faith leaders minimize the church dropout problem by assuming that young adults will come back to the church when they get older, especially when they have children. However, previous research conducted by Barna Group raises doubts about this conclusion. Furthermore, the social changes since 1960 make this generation much less likely to follow the conventional path to having children: Mosaics (often called Millennials or Gen Y) are getting married roughly six years later than did the Boomers; they are having their first child much later in life; and they are eight times more likely than were the youth of the 1960s to come from homes where their own biological parents were never married.

Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church

The Barna Group

September 28, 2011

<http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>

- *Reason #1 – Churches seem overprotective.* A few of the defining characteristics of today's teens and young adults are their unprecedented access to ideas and worldviews as well as their prodigious consumption of popular culture. As Christians, they express the desire for their faith in Christ to connect to the world they live in. However, much of their experience of Christianity feels stifling, fear-based and risk-averse.
- *Reason #2 – Teens' and twentysomethings' experience of Christianity is shallow.* A second reason that young people depart church as young adults is that something is lacking in their experience of church. One-third said "church is boring" (31%). One-quarter of these young adults said that "faith is not relevant to my career or interests" (24%) or that "the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough" (23%). Sadly, one-fifth of these young adults who attended a church as a teenager said that "God seems missing from my experience of church" (20%).
- *Reason #3 – Churches come across as antagonistic to science.* One of the reasons young adults feel disconnected from church or from faith is the tension they feel between Christianity and science. The most common of the perceptions in this arena

is “Christians are too confident they know all the answers” (35%). Three out of ten young adults with a Christian background feel that “churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in” (29%).

- *Reason #4 – Young Christians’ church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic, judgmental.* With unfettered access to digital pornography and immersed in a culture that values hyper-sexuality over wholeness, teen and twenty-something Christians are struggling with how to live meaningful lives in terms of sex and sexuality. Research indicates that most young Christians are as sexually active as their non-Christian peers.
- *Reason #5 – They wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity.* Younger Americans have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance and acceptance. Today’s youth and young adults also are the most eclectic generation in American history in terms of race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, technological tools and sources of authority. Three out of ten young Christians (29%) said “churches are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths” and an identical proportion felt they are “forced to choose between my faith and my friends.”
- *Reason #6 – The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt.* Young adults with Christian experience say the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. They do not feel safe admitting that sometimes Christianity does not make sense. In addition, many feel that the church’s response to doubt is trivial. Some of the perceptions in this regard include not being able “to ask my most pressing life questions in church” (36%) and having “significant intellectual doubts about my faith” (23%).

Five Cultural Shifts That Should Affect the Way We Do Church

Carol Howard Merritt

Duke Divinity School Faith and Leadership Blog

September 22, 2011

<http://www.faithandleadership.com/blog/09-22-2011/carol-howard-merritt-five-cultural-shifts-should-affect-the-way-we-do-church>

- *Finances.* Younger generations are not faring well in this economy. They didn’t do so well when the rest of the country was booming either. Why? Younger generations face high student loan debt, high housing costs and stagnant wages (if they’re even able to get a job). The shame they bear matches our debt load, and they feel like they need to get their life together before they go to church.
- *Work Hours.* People who go to mainline churches are wealthier. Or wealthier people go to mainline churches. It’s a chicken-and-egg thing. We don’t know what comes first. But young workers know one thing: many people in their 20s and 30s work retail or in the service industry. The blue laws faded long ago, and you don’t get Sunday mornings off unless you’re management.
- *Families.* People marry and have children later in life. Some people say that adults in their 20s and 30s are just extending adolescence, having fun in their odyssey years, or they’re too commitment-phobic to settle down. Yet, we’re a society that expects financial stability before a couple gets married, and many younger adults can’t manage financial stability.

- *The Internet.* Church leaders have a lot on their plate. Many don't think they have any time for Facebook or Twitter. They may still be working with the misconception that the only things people are blogging about are what sort of breakfast they had on Tuesday (although if you're reading this, you probably realize that blogs are good for more than personal over-sharing). But there's no way to ignore it any longer. Even if a church leader shies away from the web, people may be talking about you on Google Map reviews or Yelp.
- *Politics.* A new generation is exhausted from the culture wars. Many people growing up in the last few decades had a difficult time keeping "Christian" and "Republican" in two separate boxes. Emerging generations look at poverty, the environment and war as complex issues, and many younger evangelicals are less likely to vote on pro-life credentials alone. Many young Christians who grew up evangelical are trying out mainline congregations.

Social Media Use among Young Clergy Persons

New Media Project at Union Theological Seminary

May 2011

<http://www.newmediaprojectatunion.org/pages/TiM-Young-Clergy-Survey/default.aspx>

- Of the 55 people who answered the question, "What networks—particularly clergy networks—do you participate in that use social media," 34 (62%) provided information about more than one network for a total of 72 networks named. It is significant that almost two-thirds of the young clergy who answered this question participate in more than one network that uses social media. Of the 72 networks, 48 (67%) use *Facebook as the primary platform*.
- Not surprisingly, when asked about their use of social media in their personal lives (beyond just networks), 97% of the 66 young clergy persons who answered the question named Facebook as one of the platforms they use overall. And what was the one purpose for personal use of social media identified by all respondents? *Staying in touch, friendship, keeping connected (100%)*.
- When it comes to using social media in ministry, however, the purposes for using particular tools are much more varied—*communicating with various groups, 78%; publicizing events, 48%; connecting keeping in touch, 27%*. The number one platform for social media tools used in ministry—Facebook (83%).
- When the pastors were asked to think first about an area of ministry in which they use social media instead of the application of particular social media tool in ministry, the pastors named 21 different areas of ministry. *The number one area—pastoral care (50%)*.

With Their Own Voices: A Global Exploration of How Today's Young People Experience and Think about Spiritual Development (youth and young adult survey of 12-25 year olds)

Search Institute

2008

<http://www.search-institute.org/csd/major-projects/with-their-own-voices>

- Most youth surveyed believe there is a spiritual dimension to life, and about one-third of youth surveyed see themselves as “very” or “pretty” spiritual.
- Youth see religion and spirituality as related, but different. Both religion and spirituality are viewed positively by a majority of youth.
- Young people say family and friends help them spiritually, but one in five youth (18%) say that no one helps them.
- Young people say that everyday experiences—“being in nature, listening to or performing music, being alone”—and relationships with friends and family as helping them the most in growing spiritually.

The Changing Spirituality of Emerging Adults Project (Changing SEA Project)

Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies

A group of faculty from several religious and secular universities who provide thoughtful research and essays on emerging adults and spirituality in answering two main questions:

1. Who are emerging adults?
2. What kind of churches do they like?

<http://www.changingsea.org/index.shtm>

There are a number of excellent, insightful articles on this website, two of which include:

- “Faith and Spirituality Among Emerging Adults” by Penny Edgell, University of Minnesota
- “Emerging Adult Participation in Congregations” by Conrad Hackett, UT Austin

Appendix D

Toward a Vision of Education in the United Church of Christ (1985)

The church as the body of Christ is a sign of healing and hope in a broken world. As members of that body we have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation, and made stewards of the mysteries of God.

— 2 Corinthians 5:19 and 1 Corinthians 4:1

There is great hunger in the human heart and among the peoples of the earth for meaning and purpose for their lives and for liberating truth and power. The church is looked to by many for vision, direction, and courage. People, both within and outside of the church today, long to know the scriptures, to become articulate about faith, and to see more clearly the relationship between the gospel and the realities of the world.

The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, recognizing the radical and rapid changes occurring in the social and natural order, the absence of vision in society at large, and the too frequent silence of the faithful within the church, calls for renewed commitment to education that will equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12) and will address the urgent need for the transformation of persons and of our common life.

The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries lifts up a vision of education in the United Church of Christ in which everyone is engaged in learning throughout life in a variety of settings.

That vision requires the reclaiming and reforming of the church's educational mission, the minister's historic office as teacher, and the committed partnership of the laity and clergy in the teaching ministries of the church.

We seek to clarify this vision through discussion, reflection, and action involving the whole United Church of Christ, its congregations and parishes, Conferences and Associations, agencies and institutions, ministries and mission.

In doing that, we affirm these fundamental principles:

- The mission of the church begins with God who creates, sustains, and redeems the whole world and all life.
- Persons of all ages and conditions are nurtured by continual inquiry into Christian faith and experience, as well as by the general search for wisdom, justice, and beauty in human society.
- The foundations for the United Church of Christ's educational mission are found in:
 - o The biblical record of God's covenant with Israel and of the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ;
 - o The nature, purpose, and faith of the church;

- The informing presence of the Holy Spirit;
- The history and traditions of the United Church of Christ;
- The Christian understanding of human beings and society; and,
- The social and cultural milieu of the world in which we live.
- In each new age the church must struggle for educational models and methods that respond to need and lead to change.
- God teaches us through unexpected sources. Christians therefore must be continually open to all seekers and servers of truth.
- Education in the United Church of Christ is informed and strengthened by racial, ethnic, cultural, and geographic diversity of its members. That diversity reflects the world in which we live.
- Education in the United Church of Christ must be rooted in biblical and historic Christian faith, in the call to be disciples of Christ in the world, and in the fresh and transforming revelation of God in our time.

In the light of this vision and these principles, the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries is persuaded that reform and renewal of educational ministries is needed, and that education for Christian life, faith, and discipleship, will emerge from attention to a variety of settings and the lifelong issues.

The Settings Where Learning Occurs

Learning takes place in a variety of settings.

We invite the United Church of Christ to study with fresh energy all the settings where education may address the needs of our time and the hopes and possibilities for the future. We call upon the church to see the promise inherent in the congregation as a school of faith and to maintain and support its vital energies. Other settings may include homes, parishes, and schools, as well as places of work, of natural and artistic beauty, and of communal social action. New times and places, familiar and unfamiliar, can provide unexpected opportunities for teaching and learning the Christian faith.

In extending this invitation, we affirm that:

- There are many contexts for the education of the whole person, and varied opportunities for the Spirit of God to move and transform.
- Attention to the diversity of educational settings takes seriously the variety of ways by which persons and communities live, teach, and learn.
- Urgent and perennial questions about human existence may arise and be addressed in surprising ways and in varied settings.
- New configurations of settings for teaching and learning call for creative educational responses.

Learning Throughout Life

Learning is important throughout the human life.

We invite the United Church of Christ to join us in making fresh assessments of the kinds of education needed to enable persons to live in the love of Christ and to discern the shape of discipleship throughout the changing course of their lives.

In doing this, we affirm that:

- The education of followers of Jesus Christ is a process through which lives are empowered to become open to the present and coming dominion of God, sustaining and promoting discipleship and enriching life in all of its personal and social dimensions.
- Learning occurs throughout the span of human life as we ask about, and live with, the fundamental questions of existence, both of which open opportunities and occasions for education.
- Learning occurs in a variety of ways: in study and reflection, in action and contemplation, in practice and discipline, in worship and sacraments, in prayer and celebration.
- All the realities and needs of life are occasions for learning—e.g., dealing with personal and social crises of life; wrestling with issues of ethics; exploring the meaning of Christian vocation; assessing the impact of science, technology, economics, and politics upon individuals and nations; and recognizing and opposing injustice in every form.

A Call for Dialogue

This emerging vision and continuing reform of educational mission of the United Church of Christ requires the imagination and creativity of all the people of the United Church of Christ and its partners in education. There can be reform if it comes from a shared sense of need and possibility. We therefore call for dialogue as we seek that vision.

Appendix E

UCC Education Consultant Events

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Total Events by Year	55	50	41	47	71	71	135	96	78	49	67	62	46	61	929
New England Region	4	4	5	2	2			2	1	2	2	2	1	2	29
Connecticut	2			2	2	1	1			2	2		1		13
Maine	3	1		4	4	6	3	1	2			1		1	26
Massachusetts	1	4	3	3	3				7	6	8	2	1		38
New Hampshire		1					1	2	2			2	2	2	12
Rhode Island	1					5	5	2	3	3	9				28
Vermont	1				2	2	1	2	2				2	2	14
<i>Total</i>	12	10	8	11	13	14	11	9	17	13	21	7	7	7	160
Middle Atlantic Region			2	1	2	1		1	5	3	4	5	5	5	34
Central Atlantic		4	1	4	4	7	6	7	4	4	4			1	46
New York	1	4	1	3	6	12	6	11	11	12	7	11	8	14	107
Penn Northeast	1		1	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	4	2	5	2	32
Pennsylvania Southeast	1	1			1		2		2			1		1	9
Penn Central	1	1									2	1	1		6
Penn West	1	1			3		2	2	2			1			12
Puerto Rico						4		5							9
<i>Total</i>	5	11	5	10	19	26	18	28	27	22	21	21	19	23	255
Great Lakes Region		1	2	1	1	1	1	1	4	1	2	2	1	1	19
Illinois	1	1			1	1	2	2	2			1	1		12
Illinois South	1	1				1									3
Indiana-Kentucky					1				1			1		1	4
Michigan	4				1		1				2		1		9
Ohio	1		4	2	6	5	8	9	2		4	8	4	5	58
Wisconsin			1	1	1	1	1				1	2			8
<i>Total</i>	7	3	7	4	11	9	13	12	9	1	9	14	7	7	113
Southern Region			1								1				2
Florida	1		1	2	4	1	1		1						11
South Central			2		1	2	7	5	5	7					29
Southeast		1		1	2		2			0		1			7
Southern	1				1		4	2	1		2	2	4	4	21
<i>Total</i>	2	1	4	3	8	3	14	7	7	7	3	3	4	4	70
West Central Region		1	1	2	2										6
Iowa	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	2			2				13
Kansas-Oklahoma			1			1	2							1	5
Minnesota		1	1	1	1	2		1	1		2	1	1	1	13
Missouri	2	4	1	5	4	4	6	6	2					1	35

Nebraska	2		1	1			2	1	1		1		1		10
Northern Plains	1		1								1	1			4
South Dakota	2		1		1				1		1		1	7	14
<i>Total</i>	9	7	8	10	9	9	11	10	5	0	7	2	3	10	100
Western Region			2								1	1	1	1	6
Northern California Nevada	2	2			1				1			1	1	2	10
Southern California Nevada	1	1		1	1	1	1								6
Central Pacific			2	1					1			1		1	6
Hawaii	1	3		1	1	6	5	3	1			3			24
Montana-Northern Wyoming	1			1			1			2		1			6
Rocky Mountain	2	1	1	2	5	1	5	3	3		3	1	2	3	32
Southwest	1	2		1	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	20
Pacific Northwest	1	1		1		1		1	1			1	1		8
<i>Total</i>	9	10	5	8	9	10	14	9	8	4	6	11	6	9	118
Non-Geographic															0
Calvin Synod							1								1
UCC National Events/Meetings		1	1	1			2		1	1		4		1	12
Ecumenical								3	1						4
American Baptist		1						1							2
Disciples of Christ	2	1			2		1	1							7
Episcopal	2	4	2				1								9
Presbyterian	3		1				1	1		1					7
United Methodist	4	1					2		1						8
Seasons of the Spirit							46	15	2						63
<i>Total</i>	11	7	3	0	2	0	51	21	4	1	0	0	0	0	100