

Introduction

Background and History

The *Generations of Faith Resource Manual: Lifelong Faith Formation for the Whole Parish Community* has grown out of ten years of research, development, and direct work with parishes across North America by the Center for Ministry Development. The Generations of Faith Project seeks to translate the catechetical vision of the Catholic Church into reality in parish life. The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) calls for a lifelong approach to faith formation with the parish community at the center of catechesis. Generations of Faith provides this by developing an events-centered approach to faith formation, focusing on the events of Church life: Church year feasts and seasons, sacraments and Church rituals, justice and service, prayer and spirituality, and community life.

The Generations of Faith approach includes intergenerational catechetical programs for all ages and resources for home faith-sharing and learning. Generations of Faith is not a program; rather, it is an approach to creating lifelong, intergenerational, events-centered faith formation. Parishes of all sizes and cultures have found the Generations approach works in their parish community. The key to the Generations approach is that it builds on the strengths of a parish's current catechetical programming, while creating a lifelong faith formation plan and intergenerational learning programs that gather people of all ages and stages of life to learn together. Parishes customize the Generations approach to their parish community—to the mission of the parish, the needs of their people, the cultures in the parish, and the resources and facilities of the parish.

In 2001, the Center for Ministry Development received a multi-year grant from the Lilly Endowment to work with parishes across North America in implementing a lifelong, intergenerational, events-centered approach to faith formation. Through the Generations of Faith Project, the Center has created workshops, online resources, and publications to support parishes in their work. As of January 2005, over 1000 parishes across the United States and Canada are working to incorporate lifelong, intergenerational, events-centered learning into their parish catechetical curriculum.

About the Resource Manual

This manual is the first of two publications from the Generations of Faith Project. Research and development for both books has been funded by the Lilly Endowment. The second publication, the Sourcebook, will be published in 2006. It will contain

expanded coverage of the foundations of the Generations of Faith vision and practices and results of the research from parishes that have been participating in the Generations of Faith Project since 2001.

The manual is designed as a planning guide and workbook to help the parish community embrace the vision and practices of Generations of Faith. *The Resource Manual* provides detailed processes and tools to move from vision to reality and is supported by the practical tools, resources, and parish examples available through Generations of Faith Online (www.generationsoffaith.org). Throughout the book you will find suggestions to go online to find more information and download practical tools for your work.

Here is a brief overview of the manual:

- Chapter 1: Vision and Practice is an essay describing the vision and seven practices of the Generations approach.
- Chapter 2: Fashioning a Lifelong Curriculum provides the rationale, process, instructions, and tools for creating a six-year curriculum plan for your parish.
- Chapter 3: Implementing the Curriculum provides practical advice and tools for scheduling, determining budgets and fees, and developing promotional and registration materials.
- Chapter 4: Developing Leadership provides the rationale for developing an empowerment mindset, as well as the processes, suggestions, and tools for inviting people into leadership, preparing and training leaders, and supporting them.
- Chapter 5: Designing a Learning Plan guides you through the process of developing a learning plan for an event:
 1. creating alignment of learning for all ages
 2. designing parish learning programs, in particular, intergenerational learning
 3. designing home activities
 4. designing reflection activities.
- Chapter 6: Planning and Facilitating Meetings is designed for the team leader who is facilitating the planning meetings. It provides strategies and tools for facilitating meetings, as well as detailed meeting outlines for the work of Chapters 1-5.

Before You Begin

The most important task in facilitating the Generations of Faith approach is to gather a core team. You cannot plan and implement this approach without a team and the support of key parish leadership, especially the pastor. A core team broadens the base of input into the planning process and increases support for the plan. The team approach emphasizes collaboration and shared decision-making, which builds a strong sense of *ownership* among team members. This ownership extends the responsibility for the faith formation beyond the director of religious education to the parish leadership, and eventually to the parish community.

The core team guides the process of fashioning, implementing, and evaluating a curriculum for Generations of Faith. As such, their major tasks include:

- fashioning the lifelong faith formation curriculum;
- developing the implementation procedures for the curriculum—scheduling, promotion, budgeting, and so on;
- developing leadership—recruiting, training, and providing support—for learning programs and other important areas of the curriculum;

- coordinating the work of the design team—who designs learning programs and home resources—and the implementation team—who conducts learning programs;
- monitoring the progress of the curriculum throughout the year;
- evaluating the curriculum at the end of the year and planning for the next year.

The core team is drawn from the parish staff, parish leadership, and faith formation leaders, both paid and volunteer, in your parish community. These may include:

- pastor
- director of religious education
- school principal
- youth minister
- adult educator
- family minister
- liturgical minister
- music minister
- RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) and sacramental preparation leaders
- justice and service leaders
- small Christian community leaders
- evangelization leaders
- key faith formation leaders, such as catechists and religious board members

Change Takes Time

When you begin the process of creating a lifelong, intergenerational, events-centered faith formation plan, you are embarking on a journey of change. And change takes time! One of the most difficult realities for parish teams to accept is that a new approach to faith formation will take years to become anchored in the life of the parish. It will take years for families and individuals to embrace household faith formation. But it *will* happen!

John Kotter, a Harvard University professor and international consultant on change, says that producing change requires leadership—establishing direction, aligning, motivating, and inspiring people—as well as management—planning, budgeting, organizing, and problem-solving. From his work with profit and non-profit organizations of all sizes, he has identified eight steps in the process of initiating change:

1. establishing a sense of urgency
2. creating a guiding coalition
3. developing a vision and strategy
4. communicating the vision
5. empowering others to act on the vision
6. planning for and creating short-term wins
7. consolidating improvements and producing new change
8. anchoring new approaches in the culture.

Kotter says that the first four steps in the transformation process help an organization defrost a hardened status quo. Steps five to seven then introduce new practices. The last step grounds the change in the organizational culture and helps make it stick. Successful change of any magnitude goes through all eight stages, usually in the

sequence given above. Although it is not unusual to work in multiple steps at the same time, skipping even a single step and getting too far ahead without a solid base almost always creates problems.

This manual is designed to guide you from step 1 through step 7. As for step 8, over time the changes to faith formation will become anchored in the life of the parish community and people will say: “We’ve always done it this way.” Here are several signs that the Generations approach is becoming anchored in your parish community:

- There is a lot of “buzz” among participants who are now bringing new individuals and families to the intergenerational learning program. People who were once marginal to faith formation and parish life are starting to get involved.
- The curriculum plan moves into its third or fourth year and is now fully implemented.
- New learning models (intergenerational learning, alignment of learning across the whole parish) gain wider acceptance and participation.
- There is a wider use of home activities as evidenced through stories and evaluation.
- The job descriptions of parish staff and key leaders are modified to embrace the work of a Generations of Faith curriculum.
- Parish catechetical policies and handbooks are revised to incorporate the Generations of Faith vision and practices, as well as new learning models.
- The orientation program for new staff members includes an orientation to the Generations of Faith vision and practices.

Adopting an Innovation

The hard reality is that the adoption of change by the parish community takes time; nobody knows exactly how long it will take. Yet there are some patterns of involvement in a change that can be instructive as you begin to implement a new approach to faith formation and learning.

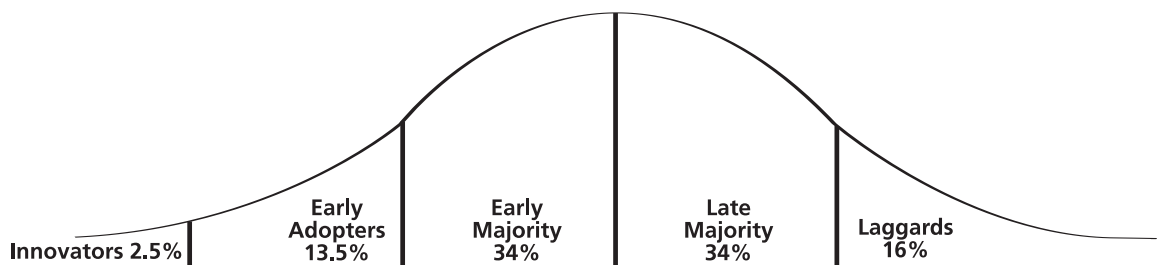
Everett Rogers and his colleagues have studied the process of adoption for all kinds of products, across a wide diversity of populations. Through their studies, some common patterns have emerged. First, perceptions concerning an innovation are crucial to the process of diffusing it. Characteristics that influence the adoption or rejection of an innovation include:

1. *Relative advantage*, the degree to which the innovation is perceived as being better than the idea it supersedes. (How do the benefits of the innovation outweigh the current approach and its problems?)
2. *Compatibility*, or the perception that the innovation is consistent with existing values, past experiences, and the needs of potential adopters: “Being able to connect it to a previous tradition or way of doing things is important and provides an anchor to people’s meanings.” (How does the innovation connect to the parish mission statement, values, etc.?)
3. *Complexity*, or the degree to which it is perceived as difficult to understand and use. (How is the innovation simpler to understand and more user-friendly?)
4. *Trialability*, or the degree to which it may be experimented with on a limited basis: “Think of the trial as a way to gradually internalize the innovation.” (How do we provide people with the opportunity to experience it before they make a commitment?)

5. *Observability*, that is, the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. (How do we make sure that we don't just talk about the innovation, but actually implement it so that people can see it and experience it?)

Second, it takes time for an innovation to reach critical mass, the point at which enough individuals have adopted it so that its further rate of adoption is self-sustaining. Reaching critical mass usually takes more time than most parishes are willing to commit to. Resistance may be strongest right before critical mass is achieved. Innovation, to be diffused, takes time and resources; it demands commitment from parish leadership to stay with an innovation long enough. The wise investment of resources requires an emphasis on the journey to achieve critical mass.

Third, people differ markedly in their readiness to try new ideas, concepts, and programs. People can be classified into adopter categories (see below). The adoption process is represented as a normal distribution when plotted over time. After a slow start, an increasing number of people adopt the innovation, the number reaches a peak, and then it diminishes as fewer non-adopters remain. Innovators are defined as the first 2.5% of the people to adopt a new idea; the early adopters are the next 13.5% who adopt the new idea; early majority constitute 34% of the total population. Eventually the late majority (34%) adopt the innovation. The laggards represent 16% and may or may not adopt the innovation.



Rogers sees the five adopted groups as differing in their value orientations. *Innovators* are venturesome; they are willing to try new ideas at some risk. *Early adopters* are guided by respect; they are opinion leaders in their community and adopt new ideas early but carefully. The *early majority* are deliberate; they adopt new ideas before the average person, although they rarely are leaders. The *late majority* are skeptical; they adopt an innovation only after a majority of people have tried it. Finally *laggards* are tradition-bound; they are suspicious of changes, mix with other tradition-bound people, and adopt the innovation only when it takes on a measure of tradition itself.

It is very important that leaders focus their time and energy appropriately with each particular group of people. It is also important to note that adoption (and therefore change) moves from left to right: from innovators to early adopters to the majority. One group “evangelizes” the next group.

As more members of the parish community adopt the innovation (participate in intergenerational learning and Church life, engage in household faith-sharing), the innovation becomes anchored in the parish community. Adoption moves deliberately through these audiences over time.

A New Beginning

We are at the beginning of a widespread transformation of faith formation in the Catholic Church. To this end, the Generations of Faith approach is taking hold in parishes across the United States and Canada. Parishes large and small, urban and suburban, big city and small town, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual are embracing and implementing lifelong, intergenerational, events-centered faith formation. The Generations of Faith vision, solidly grounded in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, holds great promise for the future of parish and home faith formation. This manual will guide you in your journey toward making this vision a reality in your parish.