

2-1-2019

Children's Faith Formation As Mutually Transforming Opportunity: Leading Systemic Change

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Recommended Citation

Turner, Robin Michelle, "Children's Faith Formation As Mutually Transforming Opportunity: Leading Systemic Change" (2019). *Doctor of Ministry*. 300.
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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

CHILDREN'S FAITH FORMATION AS
MUTUALLY TRANSFORMING OPPORTUNITY:
LEADING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2019

Portland Seminary
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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DEDICATION

To the generations who valued my place in God's family:

Don and Ruth, "Grammy and Grampy," Grimm, who show our family that life with Jesus is the greatest joy at every age.

Carol McColl, who led countless morning and evening prayer times, kitchen-table devotionals, and evening read-alouds, challenging us to be part of the church and know Jesus as our Cornerstone.

Sam Rice Turner, who I'm privileged to partner with in loving the Church.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'm deeply grateful to Dr. MaryKate Morse and Dr. Shawna Lafreniere for their guidance, support, prayers, and friendship throughout the research and dissertation process.

MaryKate, your leadership of our cohort guided it from a space for colleagues to a community of friends. Thank you for modeling servant leadership and sharing your gifts of wisdom and thoughtful listening. Your teaching continues to shape how I listen to Christ as to those around me.

Shawna, you embody a wonderful combination of expertise and encouragement, and your enthusiastic support was an integral part of my experience in this program. Thank you for championing both me and my research every step of the way. I'm grateful for the ways you use your unique gifting to build the Kingdom of God.

Let these children alone. Don't get between them and me. These children are the kingdom's pride and joy. Mark this: Unless you accept God's kingdom in the simplicity of a child, you'll never get in.

—Jesus

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ABSTRACT

Training congregational leaders in the theological foundations and practical resources of children's spiritual formation helps them lead congregations to value and nurture the entire communities' spiritual formation.

An exploration of the role and nature of children from both biblical and theological perspectives reveals they are welcomed and valued members of the faith community and the Kingdom of God. Attempts to welcome and value children in faith communities have focused on their acquisition of religious knowledge rather than their holistic formation. Learning to value their presence, worship, and holistic formation in community requires a shift in vision and methodology.

Children's sense of belonging in their faith community matters for their long-term faith efficacy and overall congregational health, and their presence benefits the whole church family. In intentionally integrated churches, the whole congregation invites children to grow and belong, while people from every generation are encouraged toward child-like wonder, authenticity, and flexibility when they involve children in communal activities like worship, prayer, service and celebration.

Unfortunately, many church leaders are ill-equipped to value children's presence in their broader community. In order for systemic change to take place in congregations, senior leadership and lay leaders- people outside of traditional children's ministry- must share and adopt a vision for formation-focused children's ministry as well as intergenerational ministry. A guided process to lead systemic change equips churches with a stronger and more thoughtful framework for understanding children's spiritual formation, a clear vision for the role of children in the community, and a process that

helps the congregation's culture adapt to value children's presence and participation in congregational life. By valuing children as full participants in the life of faith, the whole church family grows together in Christ.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introduction

Alex entered her first full-time position directing children's ministries with a resume full of internships that equipped her with valuable experience leading children's faith formation, but she treasured and referred to her formal training even more than these early job opportunities. Throughout college and graduate school, professors and ministry leaders guided her to examine the theology and philosophy of education underpinning a ministry, looking to theory and belief to shape ministry goals and methods. Within weeks of beginning the Director of Children's Ministries position at her new congregation, she realized leadership in this church would require a paradigm shift for both herself and the congregation.

Looking through the weekly program elements as well as yearly traditions, she felt overwhelmed by many red-flags. For the past decade, the ministry had grown to incorporate numerous fun and 'Jesus-centered' activities in children's ministry which actually seemed to distract children from growing in faith, worship, or understanding. For example, the Christmas season had grown to include a children's choir for Lessons & Carols, a Christmas pageant complete with costumes and sets, a birthday party for Jesus (including a visit from Santa!), and numerous outreach events, alongside the typical elements of Sunday lessons for children of all ages during both the worship service and the education hour. Alex struggled to recruit volunteer leaders for each event, hearing consistently how busy, tired, and disconnected families felt with church commitments. While some people interpreted the busyness of the ministry as thriving, she saw the

fatigue and stress of the leaders and children with very little spiritual fruit or formational content.

Distressed by the situation, she sought guidance from various church leaders, but as she tried to explain her predicament, she began to realize that the ministry realities she described fit their expectation of what should happen in healthy children's ministries. Children's ministry, in their view, was a place for faith-based activities so children could enjoy church and learn about God while their parents engaged in worship, fellowship, and learning. One mom of two young boys, a committed church leader and seminary graduate, shared that she preferred to work with high-school students because they were old enough to have a real relationship with God. A pastor invited Alex into his office and suggested that if she began each week's Sunday School with donuts and games, children would have more fun and the class size would grow. Around the same, time, another mom came in tears to Alex's office, relating that her children had no friends at church despite being involved in many of the church's ministries. Could Alex throw more parties and special events? This might foster friendships, the mom reasoned.

As she continued to struggle in her role, Alex began to articulate that the programs she inherited with the ministry position lacked opportunities for children to engage in spiritual formation, and the feedback from volunteers, parents, and clergy showed her that the church lacked a coherent vision and philosophy of ministry. While she felt competent and confident to evaluate a children's ministry program for undergirding theology and philosophy of ministry, and she thoroughly enjoyed the creativity of lesson planning and teaching, she was beginning to realize that successfully leading this program would mean guiding systemic change, an overwhelming task.

When Alex outlined the discrepancies between the theology and educational methodology the congregation practiced, compared with what they believed, the pastors of the church generally agreed with her concerns. However, the pressing needs of planning worship services, writing sermons, and responding to pastoral crises often occupied the pastors' time and energy before children's ministries. Before Alex began in her leadership role, children and parents generally enjoyed the children's ministry opportunities. Was Alex creating problems? Did the coherence of theology, vision and methodology really matter as much as Alex seemed to think? Many of the suggestions Alex offered for change involved redefining the purpose and activities of programs or creating opportunities for involving children in the worship activities with the larger congregation. This would take a new form of collaboration and effort between worship, pastoral, and children's ministry teams. Moreover, it meant children and families would need to understand the opportunities and benefits from a new way of welcoming children into the church community.

1.2 Foundations of Children in Christian Communities

1.2.1 Biblical Foundations

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament provide both historical documentation of the practices and theological foundations of religious education of children. The nation of Israel originated from a covenantal promise between the Lord and Abraham, extending to all generations of Abraham's family. Embedded into the nature of this generational promise was the imperative to pass faith to children "when God set His people Israel in order, he placed each individual within a family, each family within a

tribe, and each tribe within the nation. No generation was excluded, no child left out, no older person put aside.”¹

When the nation of Israel received the law, it included specific directions to teach this law to children² in order for them to know the Lord God.³ Biblical histories record the presence of children in gatherings to hear and observe the religious law.⁴ Additionally, the Old Testament provides examples of faith-nurturing cross-generational relationships in the stories of Eli and Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, and Naomi and Ruth. In each of these relationships, an older person nurtured the faith of a younger person outside his or her own nuclear family. Numerous times, the psalms praise God’s generational covenant with the Israelites, declaring the Israelite’s passionate commitment to pass down knowledge of God and observance of God’s commands to the next generation.⁵ When prophets rebuked rebellious generations, they called upon the people of Israel to return to the Lord, pass their knowledge of God on to future generations, and break their cyclic, generational sin.⁶ In many senses, passing faith down to children stood as a central tenet of the Israelites’ faith because the Lord planned to work in the world through this specific nation and family. The promised Messiah was to come through a future

¹ Daphne Kirk, *Heirs Together: Establishing Intergenerational Church*, rev. ed. (Suffolk, UK: Keven Mayhew, 2003): 17.

² Deut. 6:6-9.

³ Deut. 31:12-13.

⁴ 2 Chron. 20:13.

⁵ Twenty-eight Psalms reference “generation” or “generations” in the NIV translation.

⁶ References to God’s generational covenant are made by the prophets in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah, and Malachi.

generation of Israelites, elevating the importance of the faith commitment among children, especially after the Israelites were exiled for their disobedience.

In the New Testament, concern for the spiritual formation of children expanded beyond the idea of maintaining a religiously committed remnant to recognizing the role of children in exemplifying the definition of the Kingdom of God and considering the role of the Holy Spirit who works through the lives of all believers regardless of their age, intellectual, social, gender, financial, or ethnic privilege. Three of the four gospel writers recount an event, or repeated event, where Jesus admonishes those who seek to turn children away from him, blesses the children, and then teaches that children exemplify the type of people who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven.⁷ The only gospel that does not record this event, the book of John, records multiple teachings where Jesus calls those who believe “children of God.”⁸ Despite Jesus’ limited earthly ministry and the gospel writers’ limited scope of recorded stories, the acknowledgement and commendation of children remains consistent through each book. The presence and role of children were not peripheral to the ministry of Jesus. Furthermore, this prominent inclusion of children stood in contrast to cultural norms in first-century the Roman Empire, where children were overlooked and largely unvalued.⁹

After Jesus’ ascension, the early church sought to spread Jesus’ teachings throughout the world, creating new communities based on the redemptive work of Christ

⁷ Matt. 19:13-15, Mark 10: 13-16, and Luke 18:15-17.

⁸ John 1:12-13, John 3:1-8, John 11:52, John 13:33-35.

⁹ David M Csinos, “‘Come Follow Me’: Apprenticeship in Jesus’ Approach to Education,” *Religious Education* 105, no. 1 (January 2010): 59, accessed October 18, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/urea20#.VjFJHrerSM9>.

and God's continued work in the world through the Holy Spirit. The New Testament epistles acknowledge the presence of children in the faith community and seek to nurture the future generations of the church. In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul delights in Jesus' work throughout all future generations, expanding God's covenantal, generational relationship from the Israelite people in the Old Testament to the church community of the New Testament.¹⁰ In Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Thessalonians, Paul refers to believers as children of God, emphasizing that even adult believers fill the familial role of children in the spiritual family. Although this refers more to the believers' status' as co-heirs with Christ and legitimate heirs of God's family in contrast to household servants, it also emphasizes the dependent nature of Christian believers on God for provision, direction and discipline, much like that of children in a family.

Paul also directly addresses children in his letters to the church, admonishing them to obey their parents and instructing fathers not to provoke them.¹¹ Paul himself led a cross-generational mentorship with his protégé, Timothy, paralleling John-Mark's mentorship of Barnabas. While the presence of children is not directly noted in the family of the Philippian jailer, the author states that the jailer's whole household believed and was baptized.¹² Through the importance of children in sustaining the faith, the elevation of children as examples of true faith, Jesus' and Paul's use of the term "children" or "children of God" as a title for believers, and their direct address in the epistles, the

¹⁰ Eph. 3:20-21.

¹¹ Col. 3:20-2.

¹² Acts 16:31-34. The term household in this context may include children, servants or slaves, and multiple generations or branches of family.

Scriptures continually value the presence and inclusion of children as active participants in the faith community.

1.2.2 Theological Foundations

In addition to the concrete examples and admonitions for nurturing children's faith noted in the bible, the Christian concepts of the Trinity, Incarnation, and the Kingdom of God provide a foundational framework for understanding the role of children and intergenerational relationships in church communities today from a theological perspective.

In the Trinity, as laid out in the Nicene Creed and clarified at the Council of Constantinople, the Being of God is comprised of three-persons in constant, communal, mutual relationship with one another. The language used by the Scriptures and the church for two of the persons is that of a generational relationship: God the Father and God the Son. While this language and implied parallels have their limits, the relational language used by the Scriptures and church to denote the relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father is that of a familial relationship. God the Son is eternally begotten of God the Father, this language clarifies role and function within the Godhead. God the Son became incarnate, participated in the work of the Father during his earthly ministry, became a redemptive sacrifice and resurrected promise, and ultimately ascended to the Father where he rules today.

Within this familial, eternal relationship, the son became incarnate as a human baby,¹³ experiencing all stages of human development. Jesus' birth is recorded or referenced in each of the four gospels, and his development in size, relationship, and wisdom is noted in Luke.¹⁴ While ancient Jewish culture recognized Jesus as a man at age twelve when his parents found him teaching in the temple, modern psychology recognizes the physiological and psychological development of a twelve-year-old as early adolescence.¹⁵ In his incarnation, God himself experienced the developmental stages of a child. Jesus' experience of childhood gives weight to the recognition of children as fully-formed human beings who undergo various stages of human development and at every age are able to be in relationship with God.

Finally, the Kingdom of God, as taught by Jesus and the epistles, places weight on the presence of children as examples of faith. In the Old Testament prophecies regarding the coming Messiah and the eventual Kingdom of God, the presence of a child in leadership symbolizes peace.¹⁶ Jesus reiterates this peaceful, childlike presence in the Kingdom of God when he welcomes children into his presence and makes them examples of true members of the Kingdom of God.¹⁷ In a separate instance, Jesus seeks out a child while teaching to exemplify the type of welcoming, hospitable presence he seeks from his

¹³ Phil. 2:7.

¹⁴ Luke 2:40, 52.

¹⁵ Luke 2:41-51.

¹⁶ Isa. 11:6.

¹⁷ Mark 10:13-16.

followers.¹⁸ In this, Christ himself clearly welcomes children into the Kingdom of God, and their lack of social, intellectual, and financial power displays the ways that this Kingdom measures power and belonging differently than earthly kingdoms.

1.3 A Brief History of Children in Christian Education

1.3.1 18th and 19th Century: Religious Education as Social Reform

On the heels of the eighteenth century rise of Methodism and the Protestant Awakening came a significant shift in children's religious education, for industrialism swept through western Europe and the United States of America, making education more widely accessible. Concerned about "vice and moral denigration," and with the primary purpose of promoting literacy, Robert Raikes founded a Sunday School in Gloucester, England in 1780 for children in poverty.¹⁹ In this Sunday School, children learned literacy and moral conduct through reading the bible, memorizing catechisms, and attending church worship. Raikes's model spread quickly and internationally, and by 1824, the American Sunday School Union was formed, planting thousands of Sunday Schools along the Mississippi Valley.²⁰ By the mid-nineteenth century, the focus of these Sunday Schools shifted to primarily moral and religious instruction, sometimes with an emphasis

¹⁸ Mark 9:35-37.

¹⁹ Mark W Cannister, "Back to the Future: A Historical Perspective on Youth Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (1999): 18, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI FZK171030003371&scope=site>.

²⁰ Cannister, "Back to the Future," 19.

on conversion.²¹ From their earliest conception, then, Sunday Schools focused on inculcating morals, teaching biblical literacy, and increasing religious knowledge of the participants. While local churches may have held a more robust understanding of the life of faith for the adult believer, education specifically tailored to children was largely dedicated to securing religious conversion, accumulating religious knowledge and shaping behavior.

1.3.2 20th Century: Christian Education in the Academy and Church

By the twentieth century, Christian Education had grown into both a respected academic field for research and theory as well as a department of the local church, often particularly focused on teaching children and adolescents.²² The Southern Baptist Convention began hosting teacher certification processes, and local evangelistic opportunities like Vacation Bible School began.²³ The National Sunday School Association, with its own Research Commission, was founded in the 1940s,²⁴ the same decade that the evangelistic Youth for Christ program began its attractional-model,

²¹ Cannister, "Back to the Future," 20.

²² Cannister, "Back to the Future," 18.

²³ Kevin E Lawson, "Evangelical Christian Education in the Early 20th Century: Marginalization and New Beginnings," *Christian Education Journal* 1, no. 1 (September 2003): 10, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001584374&scope=site>.

²⁴ David Setran and James Wilhoit, "Turning Points in Christian Education: Some Initial Perspectives," *Christian Education Journal* 2, no. 2 (September 2005): 353, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001615806&scope=site>.

evangelistic rallies, featuring the preaching of Billy Graham.²⁵ At the same time, local YWCA and YMCA organizations focused on bible studies and character formation as the core to their work in local communities.²⁶

In the academic field of Christian Education, the 1960s and 1970s saw the rising influence of social sciences as well as modern psychological and educational theories of both curriculum and formats for Christian Education at the local level. James Fowler, a professor at Emory University and ordained pastor in the United Methodist Church, adapted Jean Piaget's four developmental stages of human cognition to a system for measuring faith development—to mixed reviews of the academy.²⁷ In one study interviewing professors of Christian Education regarding this shift in focus from information-centered to learner-centered teaching, respondents noted, “the rise of the social sciences produced a simultaneous decline in attention to biblical theology.”²⁸ The increased focus on helping children learn according to their developmental proclivities detracted from attention to the theological content and doctrinal soundness of the lessons. However, within this trend toward social sciences, a few scholars, such as Lois LeBar, sought to hold to “both word-centered and methodologically progressive” forms of Christian Education.²⁹ LeBar, whose academic career spanned 1951-1976, noted and

²⁵ Cannister, “Back to the Future,” 26.

²⁶ Cannister, “Back to the Future,” 27.

²⁷ Setran and Wilhoit, “Turning Points in Christian Education,” 355.

²⁸ Setran and Wilhoit, “Turning Points in Christian Education,” 355.

²⁹ David Setran, “Lois LeBar: Progressive Conservative,” *Christian Education Journal* 1, no. 1 (September 2003): 129, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001584474&scope=site>.

respected the influence of the social sciences, yet also held a high view of the Holy Spirit in engaging the learner³⁰ and looked to the methods of Jesus to guide her students' engagement with their ministry.³¹ The incorporation of psychology and educational theories in Christian Education brought teaching techniques rooted in a more mature understanding of child development, providing an infrastructure for teaching sound Biblical doctrine in developmentally appropriate ways.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the Baby Boomers become parents themselves, coinciding with a decreased involvement of parents in leading weekly Sunday Schools and outsourcing of Christian Education to a professional Children's Ministries Director.³² The 1970s also brought the advent of Willow Creek Community Church with its revolutionary PromiseLand children's format as well as Group Publishing and its *Hands-On Bible Curriculum* designed to incorporate kinesthetic learning.³³ These active, creative, small group approaches to learning departed from typical church-school models by seeking to make children's time at church fun and entertaining as well as educational. Some of these developments responded to the influence of the social sciences on curriculum, while others were established to work more efficiently with volunteer needs or attract families to the church.

Educational researchers David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith posit that the modern era is characterized by churches and adults who believe "children's programs exist to serve

³⁰ Setran, "Lois LeBar," 127.

³¹ Setran, "Lois LeBar," 125.

³² David M Csinos and Ivy Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 31.

³³ Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 32.

the needs of adults in the congregation” by “[eliminating] noisy young children from worship services and [providing] a respite from the constant care that infants and children require.”³⁴ These new forms of children’s ministry in the 1970s and 1980s continued to grow and provide the foundation and format for many of the current approaches toward children’s faith formation in curriculum implemented at the level of the local church.

1.3.3 1990s and 2000s

Many church congregations as well as the broader Christian culture view children’s ministry as primarily a form of respite care for parents, attractional element for church visitors, evangelistic moment for children, or place of learning about the bible and Christian faith. In a research project surveying Protestant curricula and their implementation in mainstream congregations, Dr. Karen-Marie Yust observes twelve trends regarding religious anthropology, pedagogy, spirituality, and ecclesiology. These trends are: emphases on moralizing, printed materials, uncritical adoption of experiential learning approaches, technology as teacher, space for wonder and silence (a counter-emphasis to other approaches), rotational workshops, guided or eliminated prayer, paraphrased bible stories instead of scripture, “substitution of contemporary cultural icons for traditional liturgical symbols,”³⁵ a desire for productivity to prove children’s learning, a highly scripted teacher’s guide designed to eliminate anxiety, and a “failure to educate teachers about the theologies and educational philosophies” underpinning the

³⁴ Csinos and Beckwith, *Children’s Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 29.

³⁵ Karen-Marie Yust, “Theology, Educational Theory, and Children’s Faith Formation: Findings from the Faith Formation in Children’s Ministries Project,” Faith Formation Learning Exchange, (2002): 5, http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/children_faith_formation_research_project_-_yust.pdf.

curriculum.³⁶ Yust made multiple site-visits to eleven churches of various denominations, sizes, socio-cultural backgrounds, and budgets over the course of three-and-a-half years affirmed these findings. No doubt these curricula trends respond in part to the “growth of the seeker church, changes in family life, the rise of post-modern thought, and the growth and expansion of educational and media technology.”³⁷

Yust observed that the role of the children’s ministries professional, which began in the 1950s and became increasingly popular in the 1970s and 1980s, had largely become the only source of “vision, energy and creativity” for the children’s ministry.³⁸ Results from a survey of scholars in the field of Christian Education note that the struggle of the local Christian Education director began with the advent of the position in the 1950s when the director “had to respond to real world changes rather than seeking to provide leadership and prophetic vision.”³⁹ As children’s ministries became professionalized, the goal of children’s religious education shifted to include entertainment and attraction. Ironically, as parents increasingly sought to outsource religious instruction to the local church, the very professionals placed in charge shifted their focus to responding to fluctuating cultural values, forms of families, and social concerns instead of pressing further into proactively guiding faith formation. Simultaneously, the volunteer base that most local congregations relied upon became increasingly sporadic.

³⁶ Yust, “Theology, Educational Theory, and Children’s Faith Formation,” 3-4.

³⁷ Setran and Wilhoit, “Turning Points in Christian Education,” 356.

³⁸ Yust, “Theology, Educational Theory, and Children’s Faith Formation,” 5.

³⁹ Setran and Wilhoit, “Turning Points in Christian Education 355.

Curricular approaches began to shift to ease volunteer recruitment and provide a structured set of goals for the professional children's ministry leader. The advent of Willow Creek Community Church's *PromiseLand* curriculum popularized a small group approach with volunteers rotating with a small tribe of children to various learning stations designed to teach a main bible or character point.⁴⁰ *PromiseLand* soon became both a widely used curriculum sold to other churches as well as a model for a children's ministry that had moved beyond a traditional classroom format, one that other publishing companies copied.⁴¹ The stations incorporate various senses with a focus on learning the bible experientially.⁴² This experiential, multi-sensory approach reflects the research trend throughout the 1960s and 1970s toward using psychology and child development as a framework for understanding children's faith formation. By the early 2000s, curriculum companies began to re-emphasize biblical literacy, and combined with these more experiential approaches from movements like *PromiseLand* in the 1970s, published curriculum which Christian Education scholars consider "better biblical work, more scripturally grounded theology" than perhaps ever before.⁴³

However, alongside this better theological content, application and practice must also develop to reflect a robust understanding of the nature of God's work in, through, and with children and the church. While some research and methodological shifts have

⁴⁰ Linda Cannell and Scottie May, "Kids' Community: Children's Ministry for Today's Child," *Christian Education Journal* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 42, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001361611&scope=site>.

⁴¹ Cannell and May, "Kids' Community," 42.

⁴² Cannell and May, "Kids' Community," 42.

⁴³ Setran and Wilhoit, "Turning Points in Christian Education," 355.

immediate effect, oftentimes research and study only influence ministry as information disseminates through more recently trained practitioners or new curriculum. Because of this delay in adopting new practices, the curriculum widely used in congregations often still reflects the psychological approach that the academy focused on in the 1970s even with a stronger biblical focus.

1.4 Intergenerational Ministry

1.4.1 Complications with Age Segregation

Some scholars in the 1990s began noting the shortcomings of developmental theories to address the holistic faith formation of children and communities.⁴⁴ One study of American youth observed that despite “clear evidence that young people benefit from multiple, sustained relationships” with adults outside of their family, “just 22% of the youth surveyed reported having strong relationship with five or more adults other than their parents.”⁴⁵

Among philosophical and cultural influences separating generations, one researcher points out that the very architecture of contemporary communities and neighborhoods separates children and adults from each other at unprecedented levels

⁴⁴ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 48.

⁴⁵ John Roberto, “Our Future Is Intergenerational,” *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 108, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001895787&scope=site>.

through work, education, and activities.⁴⁶ In a 1999 article published in *USA Weekend*, psychologist Mary Pipher explains, “A great deal of America’s social sickness comes from age segregation.... For our own mental and societal health, we need to reconnect the age groups.”⁴⁷ The ill-effects of age separation on community life, culture, and relational health exist in both secular and religious communities, and some church congregations have begun responding to these theories through weekly practice.

1.4.2 Recent Approaches to Intergenerational Ministry

While most church congregations encompass a breadth of generations, an intentional intergenerational⁴⁸ approach to ministry entails recognizing, valuing, and embracing the interaction of multiple generations through the life of the church community. Scriptural accounts of the early church point toward a community of all ages, but an age-graded approach to formal religious education from the eighteenth century to the present largely influences congregations toward life-stage specific ministry today.

In 1976, John H. Westerhoff III, an ordained Episcopal priest who taught for two decades at Duke Divinity School, published the first edition of his seminal book *Will Our Children Have Faith?*. In it, he argued that religious enculturation, the process of passing down religious beliefs in the faith community, primarily grows from interactive

⁴⁶ Roberto, "Our Future is Intergenerational," 109.

⁴⁷ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 37.

⁴⁸ Rather than merely recognizing the presence of multiple ages, “some practitioners began to use ‘intentional intergenerational ministry.’ The term intentional indicated a commitment to a philosophy of ministry that purposefully brought various generations together meaningful dialogue. Currently intergenerational most often describes a church that intentionally cultivates meaningful interaction between generations.” Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 19.

experiences in relationships, not just environment or isolated experiences.⁴⁹ By the 1980s, religious education professors Charles Foster and James White promoted Intergenerational Religious Education (IGRE) focused on equipping congregations for educational opportunities that engaged two or more age groups.⁵⁰ Then, in the 1990s, Australian researcher Alan Harkness built on these ideas in his dissertation with a framework for Intergenerational Christian Education (IGCE) where “intentional intergenerational strategies are those in which an integral part of the process of faith communities encourages interpersonal interactions across generational boundaries, and in which a sense of mutuality and equality is encouraged between participants.”⁵¹ By the early 2000s, these ideologies began to focus on holistic faith formation, particularly in Roman Catholic communities.⁵² While many church congregations across America wholeheartedly adopted age-graded programming, often characterized by entertainment, fact-based learning, and attention to developmental needs, a small group of educators and ministry professionals actively favored and promoted faith-based interactions that intentionally involved all ages in the church family.

In an observational survey of twenty-five congregations across America in the early 2000s, Scottie May, children’s researcher and professor of Christian Formation and Ministry at Wheaton College, observed a handful of intentionally integrated congregations. One congregation’s weekly worship included a shared family meal,

⁴⁹ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 66.

⁵⁰ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 69.

⁵¹ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 70.

⁵² Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 72.

worship service, and small prayer groups, each of which included at least one child.⁵³ Another congregation allowed for small play areas in the main sanctuary so children could play quietly during the worship service or sermon. In reflection, May reflects on how nuclear families take precedent over extended families: “only in North America do we see family as mom, dad, and the kids. ... our idea of faith family is overridden by the idea of nuclear family.”⁵⁴ Of the twenty-five congregations May and her team observed in their study of innovative churches’ approaches to children’s ministry, twelve emphasized some form of intergenerational ministry.⁵⁵ While intergenerational ministry remains far from mainstream in many American congregations, this research points toward a noticeable shift in philosophy and implementation of church programming, specifically in regards to faith formation with children in the community.

1.4.3 Adoption of Intergenerational Practices

In the early 2000s, *Leadership Journal* ran a five-page spread asking five church leaders⁵⁶ to answer the question, “How do you integrate the generations and life stages at

⁵³ Phil Vischer, “Scottie May is Back,” *The Phil Vischer Podcast*, Podcast audio, June 25, 2013, <https://philvischer.com/the-phil-vischer-podcast/episode-57-scottie-may-is-back/>.

⁵⁴ Vischer, “Scottie May is Back.”

⁵⁵ Scottie May, Katie Stemp, and Grant Burns, “Children’s Place in the New Forms of Church: An Exploratory Survey of Their Ministry with Children and Families,” *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (2011): 295-301, go.galegroup.com/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=newb64238&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA269028177&asid=de9ec48a7b182cf112e2c95e82787505.

⁵⁶ The respondents included congregations in four different states, three community or non-denominational congregations, one Baptist congregation, and one Quaker congregation. Two congregations also addressed life-stage according to marital status rather alongside age separation.

your church?”⁵⁷ A follow-up article in 2009 included four more congregational approaches from three more denominational backgrounds.⁵⁸ As a publication designed specifically for equipping pastors, *Leadership Journal* directly addressed church influencers with regards to their church structure and culture. By addressing this topic twice, *Leadership Journal* acknowledged the curiosity of many leaders for a ministry approach different from generational separation and provided nine examples of intentional integration.

Among proponents for intergenerational community, many have maintained that age-specific and intergenerational faith formation activities work best in complement to each other.⁵⁹ One approach for this type of complementary structure includes creating connection points for two or more age-specific groups such as teens and empty-nesters, or toddlers and teenagers. By completing service projects together, entering into worship together, or forming mentoring relationships, friendships can naturally form through structured church activities.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Helen Lee, “The Age-Old Divide: How Do You Integrate the Generations and Life Stages at Your Church?” *Leadership Journal* 27, no. 4 (2006): 43, <http://go.galegroup.com/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=newb64238&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA155926573&asid=e2940507f6b39ab33569550b84f642a3>.

⁵⁸ Angie Ward, “Let the Little Children Come,” *Leadership Journal* 30, no. 3 (2009): 53, <http://go.galegroup.com/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&sw=w&u=newb64238&v=2.1&it=r&id=GALE%7CA205506597&asid=2d5d02367b99adc20f107b757469663a>.

⁵⁹ Roberto, “Our Future Is Intergenerational,” 110.

⁶⁰ Roberto, “Our Future Is Intergenerational,” 111.

1.5 Pastoral Preparation

In her interview with *Leadership Journal*, consultant Caroline Fairless recalled, “the hardest part [of the intergenerational model] is doing the developmental work with an entire congregation, to form a congregation that really takes seriously the idea of the priesthood of all believers.”⁶¹ In an intergenerational community, the children’s ministry programming differs from the traditional twenty-first century American evangelical model, but the rest of the congregation’s worship must adjust as well. Intergenerational ministry extends beyond the presence of children in an adult context to include the intentional mutual transformation of both children and adults in relationship with one another.

This greater depth and frequency of interaction entails more significant contact between children and ordained clergy. One researcher argues that pastors must understand the extent and weight of their spiritual influence and power-distance to prevent abuse.⁶² While pastors or congregation leaders may speak one way to a room full of adults, pastoring children entails respecting and shepherding them in relation to their developmental maturity, recognizing that their perspective and age are both a gift to the congregation and a particularity that demands intentionality. As the leaders of the community, pastors hold the responsibility to guide the congregation in the process of welcoming children into the community of worship, integrating generations, leading the

⁶¹ Ward, “Let the Little Children Come,” 57.

⁶² Machteld Reynaert, “Pastoral Power in Nurturing the Spiritual Life of the Child,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 19, no. 3-4 (2014): 179, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2014.960915>.

way on forging cross-generational friendships, and seeking the mutual transformation that occurs when children worship with adults.

1.5.1 Survey of Congregational Leaders

In a survey and interview of eighteen congregational leaders from six denominations, two received formal training in children's ministry, one received formal training in family ministry, and thirteen claimed no formal academic training regarding children or families. Five of the eighteen respondents identified as a senior pastor or priest, and twelve respondents identify as ministry directors specifically hired to work with children or families. When asked to describe their personal formal or informal training in regard to children's spirituality, some cited experience raising children, serving as a Sunday School volunteer, or attending conferences. One respondent who completed a single children's ministry course and self-educated by reading extensively on children's ministry claims her research "helped me understand what we wanted for our children's ministry but did not prepare me to start a children's ministry."

Conversely, when asked to rate on a scale of one to five how equipped they felt to care for the spiritual formation of children, five respondents indicated they felt under-equipped (two or below), five respondents felt adequately equipped (three), and eight indicated that they felt very equipped (four or above). The juxtaposition seems to relate that pastors, children's ministry directors, and other congregational leaders see their equipping for shaping children's spiritual formation as an informal process divorced from seminary training or other forms of ministry preparation. In fact, the amount of formal

training regarding children's faith formation inversely correlates with the perceived competence in nurturing children's faith formation.

In a review of seven evangelical and Anglican seminaries' course requirements for pastoral track students, no seminaries included requirements specifically regarding children or family ministries.⁶³ One seminary offered a Children's Ministries emphasis within their Th.M. program, one of thirty possible emphases for students.⁶⁴ Three seminaries⁶⁵ did not offer any courses specifically regarding children or families, even as electives, and one only offered courses in conjunction with their counseling program for children or families in therapy or significant trauma settings.⁶⁶

In most congregations, the pastor provides spiritual guidance for the congregation regarding the organization and philosophy of ministry programs. Even if a senior or associate pastor is not directly involved with the children's or family ministry, they influence hiring and programming for these ministries. For some congregations, like the Anglican or Episcopal traditions, pastors or priests hold a role as a formal spiritual guide, an authority outside the scope or training of a children's ministry professional. In these congregations, a pastor or priest functions as a spiritual leader for the whole

⁶³ Seminaries reviewed include Dallas Theological Seminary, Fuller Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Nashotah House, Reformed Episcopal Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Trinity School for Ministry.

⁶⁴ "Academic Departments: Courses in Educational Ministries and Leadership," Dallas Theological Seminary, accessed April 19, 2017, <http://www.dts.edu/departments/academic/eml/coursesoffered/>.

⁶⁵ Nashotah House, Reformed Episcopal Seminary, and Trinity School for Ministry course catalogues in 2017 contained no courses specifically focused on children's faith formation, children's spirituality, family ministry, or pastoring multiple generations.

⁶⁶ "Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary: Course Descriptions," Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, accessed April 19, 2017, <http://www.gordonconwell.edu/hamilton/current/Course-Descriptions.cfm#Educational-Ministries>.

congregation, including children, through leading in confession, pronouncing absolution, celebrating the Eucharist, and blessing the congregation. Multi-generational congregations, which naturally include children, would be more fully served by pastors and priests who know how to consider the unique ways that children grow in spiritual formation.

In *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, Westerhoff recognizes that seminaries have “vacillated between three concerns: knowledge, persons, and society”⁶⁷ and acknowledges that each of these foci must be affirmed and integrated with the others. For Westerhoff, this integration means that children’s religious education must include an invitation into the rituals of the congregation giving them a holistic understanding of the meaning and significance of ritual in their own lives, community, and society.⁶⁸ In order for pastors to undertake this role with authority and knowledge, their education should include resourcing for this unique, albeit common, demographic of church congregations.

1.5.2 A Survey of Resources for Children’s Spirituality

With so many ministry leader respondents citing personal study, on the job training, and continuing education through conferences as sources of their education regarding children’s faith formation, family ministry, and integrated worship, Christian publishing plays a significant role in educating current ministry leaders in respect to generational ministry. Three books written to equip ministry leaders with a framework

⁶⁷ John H. III Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith*, 2d ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2000), 65.

⁶⁸ Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith*, 66.

for understanding and bridging generation gaps in local congregations display the progression of thought and available resources since the 1990s.

In 1995, Talbot professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership Gary L. McIntosh published the first edition of *One Church, Three Generations*, updated in 2002⁶⁹ to include a fourth generation, Bridgers.⁷⁰ A respected ministry professional and academic, McIntosh trains pastors through his writing. Here, he directly addresses generational gaps in evangelical congregations in America. Throughout the entirety of *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in your Church*, McIntosh explains the typical needs of each generation and how congregational leaders can minister to them most appropriately. However, McIntosh fails ever to address the presence of children in intergenerational ministry, relationships, or integrated worship. Even in the penultimate chapter of *Four Generations*, “Linking Generations”, McIntosh focuses on blending worship styles in a single service focused on adult congregants.⁷¹ Although McIntosh writes after Westerhoff and the framework of Intergenerational Religious Education, he focuses on catering to the perceived needs of each generation present within a church family yet ignores children. McIntosh recognizes that a healthy church engages multiple generations but does not address how those generations might mutually transform one another.

⁶⁹ Gary McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2002), 163.

⁷⁰ McIntosh uses the term Bridger to encompass Generation Y, born between 1984 and 1994, and Millennials, born between 1994 and 2002. These terms encompass varying birth years across sources.

⁷¹ McIntosh, *One Church, Four Generations*, 210-223.

Similarly, Joseph H. Hellerman, also a faculty member of Talbot School of Theology, published *When the Church Was a Family* in 2009, addressing the reality that “spiritual formation occurs primarily in the context of community” and “long-term interpersonal relationships are the crucible of genuine progress in Christian life.”⁷² After addressing American individualism and New Testament family contexts, Hellerman re-envision the modern American church from a place of spiritual guidance to a community of formational spiritual growth particularly, in the context of daily life, decision-making, and community leadership. Although he writes passionately about strong relationships within nuclear families,⁷³ shares his personal story of integrating a single woman into the life of his nuclear family,⁷⁴ and advocates for practical implementation of this theology in Sunday morning worship,⁷⁵ Hellerman never addresses the presence of children in congregational contexts. In a book using the Greco-Roman family context as a primary metaphor and model for modern church relationships, Hellerman’s glaring oversight of children in congregational contexts stands out. By the time of his publication in 2009, both researchers and practitioners in Christian church ministries generally recognized the existence of intergenerational ministry and worship, even if most congregations had not adopted intergenerational practices.

Both Hellerman and McIntosh published their work from contexts of pastoral and professional leadership through major publishing houses to critical acclaim. Both authors

⁷² Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2009): 1.

⁷³ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 53-75.

⁷⁴ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 156-162.

⁷⁵ Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 182-204.

included keywords in their book titles pointing toward informing and equipping leaders toward thoughtful ministry regarding families and generations. Neither book offered insight regarding the presence or spiritual formation of children or children's gifts to congregational contexts.

In contrast, in 2011, David Kinnaman, president of the non-partisan research and resource company the Barna Group, published *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church... and the Faith*, addressing the statistical realities of the millennial generation reconsidering their presence in church contexts.⁷⁶ In it, Kinnaman addresses the undeniable trend millennials raised in the church, the generation raised in the contexts addressed by McIntosh's first publication fifteen years prior. He cites six perceived characteristics of churches that further the disconnection between generations: overprotective, shallow, anti-science, repressive, exclusive, and doubtless.⁷⁷ Millennials' experiences of religion and faith communities prior to adulthood color their understanding of the adequacy, veracity, and authority of the local church for their independent, adult lives. While research shows that children and teenagers remain largely engaged in church congregations, 59% of twenty-something adults with a faith background have stopped attending church regularly.⁷⁸ After examining statistics and case studies regarding each of these characteristics, Kinnaman suggests intergenerational relationships as a key element of reconnection with generations, a solution rooted both in

⁷⁶ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2011).

⁷⁷ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 92-93.

⁷⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23.

statistics and theology.⁷⁹ He exhorts faith leaders to “prioritize intergenerational relationships,” arguing that they will need to be “[catalyzed] in your community and [modeled],”⁸⁰ which he follows with fifty ideas for reconnecting generations, collected from ministry leaders and researchers.⁸¹

These relationships must be prioritized prior to emerging adulthood when generations make choices to leave faith communities. Unfortunately, congregations seeking to adopt these intergenerational models likely implement them with little training. Since Kinnaman’s book focuses primarily on trends in congregations and not theological foundations, some congregations may view intergenerational worship as simply a technique to counteract losing future generations in the church and overlook the underlying theological framework.

Similarly, in Fuller Youth Institute’s study of the relationships of American youth from Christian faith backgrounds with church as emerging adults, youth reported adults’ interest in their lives as the primary way they felt welcomed and valued in their congregation.⁸² Additionally, the researchers found that “for high school and college students, there is a relationship between attendance at church-wide worship services and Sticky Faith.”⁸³⁸⁴ While Powell and Clark also cited close parental relationships as key

⁷⁹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23.

⁸⁰ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 205.

⁸¹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 213-242.

⁸² Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 99.

⁸³ “Sticky Faith” is the term used by the *Fuller Youth Institute* to refer to emerging adults who remain involved with churches after their teenage years.

⁸⁴ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 97.

influencers on individual children's long-term faith, a child's interaction with their congregation during their teenage years serves as the top predictor of long-term faith efficacy.⁸⁵ While youth programs serve an important role within the congregational context, they function best in tandem with congregational involvement. Additionally, Powell and Clark argue that these intergenerational worship experiences and friendships may begin in childhood instead of waiting until the teenage years.⁸⁶

1.6 Conclusion of the Ministry Problem

Intergenerational ministry and intentional spiritual formation for children run counter-cultural to the norms in many evangelical American churches. Although biblical and theological foundations of the Christian faith instruct leaders to value and learn from children's spiritual formation, the approach of many churches has actually devalued the presence and spiritual capabilities of children. In fact, many church leaders lack substantial preparation for leading the children in their congregation. For leaders seeking to reform their church culture and worship patterns to nurture intentionally the spiritual formation of children in intergenerational contexts, deliberate and informed leadership proves invaluable. Although seminaries do not necessarily include training regarding children's faith formation in their educational requirements, an increasing number of resources are available to thoughtful pastoral and lay leader through informed research, printed material, and conferences. While intentionally nurturing the spiritual formation of children may take various forms across denominations, all congregants have the

⁸⁵ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 99.

⁸⁶ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 78.

opportunity to practice healthy leadership by coming alongside the youngest brothers and sisters of their congregation with wisdom, compassion, and nurturing guidance.

SECTION 2: CURRENT APPROACHES TO CHILDREN’S MINISTRY

2.1 21st Century: Contemporary Approaches to Children’s Ministry

While each era from the 1950s to present include certain distinctions regarding Christian Education in the local church, the contemporary church landscape actually includes approaches from each of these eras. In part because of the largely unregulated and unstandardized nature of children’s ministries, some congregations may still approach children’s faith formation with a mindset often prevalent in the 1960s, stressing the accumulation of religious knowledge, while others form their ministry around 1980s ideals of a learner-centered lesson. In a 2018 lecture to the Children’s Spirituality Summit, professor-emeritus Scottie May noted that each era includes essential elements, and she exhorted practitioners and academics to “critically retrieve” elements from each era and “help leaders integrate [the beneficial parts of eras] rather than program them separately.”⁸⁷

Since the early 2000s, many churches have responded to the call to nurture and guide children in religious instruction by implementing one of two radically different approaches to children’s faith formation: media-guided lessons and Montessori-based lessons. Understanding the values, needs and vision that provide the impetus for each of these approaches to children’s faith formation allows the examination of their strengths and shortcomings.

⁸⁷ Scottie May, “75 Years of Evangelical Children’s Formation,” (lecture, The Children’s Spirituality Summit, Nashville, June 27, 2018).

2.2 Media and Technology in Church Life

Media and digital technology pervade the lives of American families, and for many American Christians, screens guide the Sunday morning church experience from the child check-in process until the closing song. In some congregations, children spend more time watching digital media than engaging with adult volunteers or staff members over the course of the morning. Sunday School packages offer high-energy music with dance videos, animated or live-action story times, and on-going narratives of children or tweens demonstrating potential life-application settings.⁸⁸ One perceived, obvious benefit for churches is that digital storytellers never call-in sick or forget to prepare the lesson, and anyone who can press “play” can lead music time. In the larger congregational setting, technology may be used to project words for songs, play background videos or create choreographed light shows, all while individuals use smartphones to read the scripture text. Certainly not every congregation chooses to adopt and integrate each of these technologies, but many explore the potential benefits for their congregation’s worship and learning.

Thoughtful congregations must carefully evaluate how the mediums used at church relate to the message of the church and the process of spiritual formation by considering the role of technology and media in daily life, weighing the promises and compromises of digital media at church, and evaluating the role of entertainment in shaping personal and communal desires.

⁸⁸ Examples of these types of curriculum include Orange “252Basics,” Hillsong Kids “Big,” a variety of Willow Creek’s “Promiseland” options, Group’s “Dig In,” and Sparkhouse’s “Holy Moly” and “Connect.”

2.2.1 Community Culture and Culture-Making

The question of the role of media, technology and entertainment in the culture of a local church, and specifically in children's ministry, necessitates an understanding of their function and influence in the wider world. Innumerable small decisions everyday combine to create a specific culture, such as a particular congregation's church culture, and that culture shapes the desires and loves of its creators and participants.⁸⁹ While communities may share common cultural realities, "there is no such thing as 'the culture,' and any attempt to talk about 'the culture,' ... is misled and misleading."⁹⁰ Referring to one, monolithic culture can lead to a misidentification of goals, values, problems, and resources within varying communities.

Instead, cultures form through both intentional and unintentional decisions; culture-making "begins with a decision about which cultural world—or, better, worlds—we will attempt to make something of."⁹¹ In any community culture, these creating and transforming decisions may grow from vision statements, values, and formal communal commitments, or these decisions may be rooted in convenience, necessity, or base-desires. In a church, the culture may be shaped as much by the intentional beliefs and programs as by the habits and expectations of the congregants. The older generations of the church pass this culture down to the children; true progress in culture-making comes

⁸⁹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 19.

⁹⁰ Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 48.

⁹¹ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 48.

when this passed down culture “is more whole, more faithful to the world of which it is making something.”⁹²

If people create culture through decisions passed down through communities, the “only way to change culture is to create more of it,” building the environment and space to set new cultural patterns and shape community decisions.⁹³ Postman examines how the role of media technology shapes these cultural shifts claiming that “the information environment gives specific direction to the kinds of ideas, social attitudes, definitions of knowledge, and intellectual capacities that will emerge.”⁹⁴ The way a community encourages its members to access information shapes the culture that emerges including the conversations, relationships, and values of the environment. “When there occurs a radical shift in the structure of that [information] environment”, it “must be followed by changes in social organization, intellectual predispositions, and a sense of what is real and valuable.”⁹⁵ The method of communication of information shapes the culture of that community; the means by which information disseminates and people learn carries its own impact into culture-making, not just the intended content.

Given these realities regarding culture-making and information environments, church congregations must consider how and why they choose to use media technology

⁹² Crouch, *Culture Making*, 54.

⁹³ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 67.

⁹⁴ Neil Postman, “The Information Environment,” *ETC: A Review of General Semantics* 70, no. 4 (October 2013): 468, https://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_proquest1519296993&context=PC&vid=GFOX&search_scope=primo_central&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US

⁹⁵ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 469.

as a tool for ministry, carefully accounting for potential collateral costs as the technology carries its own inherent meaning alongside the intended or desired message.

2.2.2 Media, Children's Ministry, and Childhood

Widely available technology offers equal access to the same clear and interesting teaching and child-friendly music to churches with differing resources in the skills and commitments of adult leaders. While only some churches have the budget and personnel resources to offer a live, dynamic, entertaining children's program each week, many more congregations can afford a digitally-delivered, carefully crafted, child-centered experience teaching a bible lesson or even leading an entire Sunday morning service through the 'magic' of a pre-recorded DVD. For congregations choosing an attractional approach to children's ministry, or for churches struggling to recruit committed, skilled, and well-prepared volunteers, digitally-based children's ministry curricula offer a 'magic bullet' to solve the problem of disinterested children and volunteer shortages in one step.⁹⁶ With consistently dynamic teaching, fun interactions, and high-quality entertainment, church congregations determine that these twin tools of teaching and fun will combine to equip children with the knowledge and desire to follow Jesus and anticipate seeing incredible results. One researcher in technology and the church found

⁹⁶ Heather Nicole Ingersoll, "Making Room: A Place for Children's Spirituality in the Christian Church," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 19, no. 3–4 (2014): 169, accessed October 14, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2014.979774>.

that in this type of programming, “successful Christian formation is guaranteed by using the right communications technology.”⁹⁷

And yet, Andy Crouch, writer and leader in the cultural conversation regarding Christians’ interactions with technology and media, observes the reality that Christians, quick to “celebrate the arrival of the new Christian band,” curricula or ministry model, hoping it will prove the conduit needed for cultural transformation, are continually disappointed “when the device fails to deliver at the scale that we had hoped.”⁹⁸ These carefully-crafted digital resources deliver on their promise of engaging children with scripture through fun and yet fall short of the overarching goals of life-change in children. The complex nature of children’s spiritual formation necessitates consideration of the realities beyond clear and winsome teaching, entertaining lessons, and adequate numbers of volunteers. Holistic spiritual formation happens in the context of engaging with the person of God often through the use of particular spiritual disciplines, a kind of quiet, deep engagement that cannot be diminished to recalling information or outsourced to watching a screen.

Even with the presence of committed relationships and tempered understandings of the effectiveness of digitally-produced curriculum, the use of media technologies might have inherently negative consequences. In 1982, media ecologist Neil Postman published his concerns about the effects of home televisions and the increased presence of media in his book *The Disappearance of Childhood*. He argues that digital technology merges the world of the child with the world of the adult by allowing access to

⁹⁷ D. Brent Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play: Theological Engagements with Entertainment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 21.

⁹⁸ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 59.

information through the combined audio-visual format previously inaccessible to a child-level intellect.⁹⁹ When children enter too far into the adult world, he argues, they lose their sense of wonder because they cease to work through questions by their own reasoning; “as the tension created by secrets to be unraveled is diminished, the calculus of wonderment changes.”¹⁰⁰ Although children are unlikely to encounter overtly inappropriate information in church curriculum, the effect may still cause harm. By receiving answers to questions before they begin to ask them, children may lose their sense of wonder and internal curiosity about who God is and what God has done.¹⁰¹ Children remain disengaged from their own spiritual formation as they over-engage with content and delivery style. Church becomes increasingly focused on either acquiring information or consuming entertainment rather than worship, holistic learning, or building relationships with others in the church community.

2.2.3 *Convergence*

The term *convergence* encompasses the confluence of “digital technologies, media industries, and entertainment audiences” which “all increasingly support a seamless ‘flow of content’ and migration of attention across the entire spectrum of everyday life.”¹⁰² With globalization, scientific advancement, and affluent entertainment

⁹⁹ Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982), 90.

¹⁰⁰ Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, 90.

¹⁰¹ Jerome Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, Revised ed. (Denver: Morehouse Educational Resources, 2009), 22.

¹⁰² Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 65.

companies, convergence encompasses a powerful and highly prevalent span of what Postman termed the ‘information environment’ in everyday life.

In children’s ministry, the new curriculum innovations capitalize on this powerful stream of influence and utilize the convergence of digital technology, media, and entertainment to share children’s lessons and build programs. The prevalence of convergence in culture “*normalizes* [sic] the near-total permeation of life by entertainments,”¹⁰³ which increases demand for distraction and constant amusement. The technologies present in convergence cater to the natural human desire for entertainment and studies confirm this desire increases to a demand.¹⁰⁴ In children’s ministry contexts, entertainment-based models of ministry both connect with a child’s desire for amusement and foster an increased demand for passive entertainment through media and digital technologies. In order to correctly evaluate the role of these methods, churches need a working understanding of the nature of technology and its potential benefits and detriments.

2.2.4 Technology as a Double-Edged Sword

The term ‘technology’ encompasses every advancement from the advent of the wheel to the mass-adoption of the smartphone. It progresses under the guise of constant and unwavering improvement, offering easier, faster, and more complex options for confronting inconveniences and problems in life. Neil Postman writes in his 1993 book

¹⁰³ Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 65.

¹⁰⁴ Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 119.

Technopoly, “every technology is a both a burden and a blessing,”¹⁰⁵ and a Technopoly exists when people “are largely unaware of both the origins and effects of their technologies.”¹⁰⁶ The complexity and pervasiveness of technology, a subject even philosopher Jacques Ellul admitted in a speech to The Technological Society as “so little understood,” requires intentional thought for wise engagement.¹⁰⁷

While medical technology provides incredible life-saving resources, computer technology facilitates access to information, and transportation technology facilitates relationships around the globe, each technological advancement must also be considered for its potential negative consequences; framing technological advancement as “improvement can be dangerous and misleading when applied to many of the most important features of culture.”¹⁰⁸ Technology pervades so many aspects of daily life that new technologies are now used to gauge and manage the pervasiveness of other technologies such as apps that manage the alerts on smartphones which offer “a nudge, a gentle reminder that just a tap away are countless rewards of information, entertainment, and distraction.”¹⁰⁹ While companies and systems tout the benefits and resources available in technology, “technology is not neutral... [it] is value laden,” for “although

¹⁰⁵ Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993): 5.

¹⁰⁶ Postman, *Technopoly*, 138.

¹⁰⁷ Read Mercer Schuchardt, “Analog Church: New Communications Technology Lets Us Preach to Millions. It’s Time to Unplug Most of It,” *Christianity Today* 60, no. 8 (October 2016): 42.

¹⁰⁸ Crouch, *Culture Making*, 52.

¹⁰⁹ Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), loc. 286-288.

we shape our tools, our tools always shape us.”¹¹⁰ The technology in pockets, homes, classrooms, and communities shape the daily life of individuals and cultural development of whole generations.

In church congregations, these technological tools may enable greater child safety, sound quality, access to better preaching, or ease at navigating to scripture passages. However, the tools also cost the church through encouraging acceptance of disincarnation, instant gratification, narcissism, passivity, and mental lethargy.¹¹¹ Some forms of positive technological advancement include an increase in easily accessible theological education for people around the globe, communication with people who are home-bound, amplification of sound so everyone in a congregation can hear, church-wide mid-week communication through email, or even the incorporation of art through images of films carefully chosen to guide a congregation into deeper reflection or worship. Even the use of a microphone enables an ease of listening that can discourage a congregation from sitting close to the preacher or to each other, allowing a disconnect between the people who are worshiping and learning together.

2.2.5 Entertainment

When church gatherings become places primarily of entertainment, they become a leisure activity produced at the expense of others, “a kind of rest that doesn’t really

¹¹⁰ Derek Schuurman, “The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place,” review of *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*, by Andy Crouch, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 69, no. 4 (2017): 251, https://alliance-primo.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/primo-explore/fulldisplay?docid=TN_gale_ofa518901320&context=PC&vid=GFOX&search_scope=primo_central&tab=default_tab&lang=en_US.

¹¹¹ Read Mercer Schuchardt, “Taming the Image,” *Leadership Journal* (2011): 36.

restore our souls, doesn't restore our relationships with others or God . . . doesn't give others the chance to rest."¹¹² In this case, the church staff or volunteers become the purveyors of entertainment while others take a consumer approach, spending more time evaluating than worshiping, learning, or connecting with others.

This entertainment approach pervades many children's ministries; congregations reason that if children have a pleasurable experience and attend church with enthusiasm, their families are likely to attend church more regularly.¹¹³ When churches adopt this attraction-based philosophy of ministry and build their congregational gathering upon its premise, they teach children through their methodology to commoditize their church experience. While the lesson might focus on a parable, healing, or patriarchal narrative, the method through which the lesson is taught primes children to evaluate each week's experience based on their personal pleasure. As Postman evaluated the influence of entertainment mindsets on religious education, he reflected, "I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether."¹¹⁴

While learning comprises part of the church focus, congregations also gather to worship, participate in spiritually forming practices, and build relationships with one another. Adopting entertainment as a means to facilitate any of these practices will alter and potentially compromise the true goal. Entertainment focuses on a person receiving

¹¹² Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, loc. 798-801. Kindle.

¹¹³ Mary Petersen, "Responsibility for Spiritual Development: What Are the Churches Doing?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 8, no. 1 (2010): 72, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13644360304643>.

¹¹⁴ Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 121.

pleasure or amusement, often passively through watching or listening rather than participating. In contrast, worship focuses on rendering praise to God,¹¹⁵ and participating in spiritually formative practices often involves reflection, intentional contemplation, and deep thinking. Friendships may grow through sharing common entertainment, but entertainment alone cannot facilitate the exchange of thoughts, ideas, and mutual support that form friendships. Sharing entertainment involves mutual consumption of cultural artifacts while transformation comes through culture-making. For example, two families may connect because they both enjoy the music style of their church, but a true friendship would be formed between the families through working to create music together or even sharing a meal and conversation together. Engaging in the same parallel activities or entertainments differs from engaging in those same activities in partnership or conversation.

As time at church begins to compete with other activities like youth sports or relaxing weekend mornings at home, the entertainment mindset may influence a family to choose the option that brings the most personal pleasure. A relaxing Sunday morning fundamentally differs from congregational worship. However, when a congregation's time together is presented largely as a point for personal enjoyment and social interaction, church members may rightly consider other enjoyable options for their Sunday morning. Furthermore, if a congregation chooses to entertain children, they must consider that in relation to the budget and technological resources available to others creating sources of entertainment, such as the movie and video game industries, even the most technologically advanced children's ministry will fall short in terms of production value.

¹¹⁵ Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 69.

Eventually, the church will either need to become more entertaining to counteract other attractions, or it will need to consider what membership in a church family offers children and adults beyond entertainment and knowledge-acquisition.

The church family is the context where God chooses to shape and form believers.¹¹⁶ By focusing on worship, the gift of relationship with God rather than knowing about God, and on the gift of the community of believers,¹¹⁷ congregations can utilize technology as a means to working toward their church's intended purposes rather than using it to connect to the truncated desires of entertainment or information-collecting.

2.2.6 Idolatry and Commoditization

When functioning in a destructive rather than constructive way, the convergence triumvirate- technology, media, and entertainment- potentially lead people toward idolatry and commoditization rather than worship and deeper spiritual formation.

Believing that creating a technology-laden ministry will necessarily lead to deeper and better spiritual formation signals a form of media idolatry, the "belief that the latest

¹¹⁶ "19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." (Eph. 2:19-22 NIV)

¹¹⁷ "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." (Col. 3:16 NIV)

media can solve practically all of our social and individual problems.”¹¹⁸ Certainly media might be a useful tool for growth, allowing people access to high-quality teaching, but that same teaching through media can also serve as an opportunity to outsource necessary pastoral care or leadership to a person on a screen instead of a relationship. True transformation in spiritual formation comes from the work of the Spirit who works through the lives of believers. With the “technological optimism”¹¹⁹ pervading in society, excitement and enthusiasm can shape a belief that cutting-edge technology or a media-based program will enable transformation that actually comes from God.

Commoditization, the transformation of goods into products to purchase and consume, creeps into congregational mindsets when ease or entertainment-value becomes central to congregants’ decisions of whether or not to engage in worship. Worship glorifies someone or something while entertainment focuses on amusement, and leisure “is purchased from other people who have to work to provide us our experiences of entertainment and rejuvenation.”¹²⁰ While worship may include personal joy or pleasure, or take place in an aesthetically pleasing environment, the point of worship cannot become the pursuit of this. Conversely, entertainment and leisure may be moral and fun, but they do not necessarily lead to worship.

Worship in church includes far more than music, but music may be the place most susceptible to engaging people with entertainment rather than worship, and it provides a helpful example of how an entertainment-seeking mindset can pervade a congregation’s

¹¹⁸ Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 20.

¹¹⁹ Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 20.

¹²⁰ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, loc. 796. Kindle.

understanding of their time together in corporate worship. Over the last century, music more generally shifted from a largely communal, corporate experience to personal commodity with the advent of personal music players and access to an immeasurable library of music genres and styles.¹²¹ When congregants take a posture of evaluating worship music based on their own emotional response or enjoyment of the music style, they may place their personal gratification at the center of a time intended for worship.

Musical style which connects with personal preferences and music crafted with artistry and expertise may lead a person into worship, but personal enjoyment cannot be the primary mark of whether a person chooses to focus on God with thanksgiving or joy. As a form of evaluation, communications professor Read Schuchardt encourages congregations to consider whether the awe created by modern technology truly leads to deeper adoration of God or just a greater spectacle.¹²² In contrast, the voice of often God comes in scripture in a still small voice.¹²³

In *Techwise*, a book to equip families to engage wisely with technology, Andy Crouch observes that some churches “remain places in American life where you can hear amazing singing welling up from an entire gathered community,” but these gatherings are becoming increasingly rare.¹²⁴ When a congregation sings together, they participate in a creative act, forming their culture. Although some music may be presented to guide

¹²¹ Laytham, *iPod, YouTube, Wii Play*, 44.

¹²² Schuchardt, “Analog Church,” 43.

¹²³ “The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.”; 1 Kings 19:11-12 (NIV).

¹²⁴ Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, loc. 1759-1761. Kindle.

meditation and help a person worship through reflection, churches may forego both of these options to craft a music show that neither engages the congregation in culture-making nor guides in personal reflection. Traditional and modern musical styles may both be used for participative, communal culture-making just like both are at risk for becoming entertainment-focused.

2.3 Formation Focused Approaches

A formal call to formation-focused children's ministries began with the methodology entitled *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, created by Sofia Cavalletti, a second-generation interpreter of the Montessori approach to children's faith formation in the 1930s¹²⁵ and the decisive call to formation in community by Westerhoff in *Will Our Children Have Faith?*. In 1990, researcher Robert Coles, published *The Spiritual Life of Children*, showing "the potential children have for an inspiring level of depth in their ability to grasp and wrestle with spiritual issues"¹²⁶ after completing an in-depth study of the spiritual lives of children from around the world.¹²⁷ Rather than centering on learning about the bible or character of God, a formational approach to children's ministries creates frameworks for the children to respond to the present work of the Holy Spirit in their own lives and in community.

Jerome Berryman, a fourth generation adapter of the Montessori method for children's faith formation developed his *Godly Play* curriculum in the 1970s,

¹²⁵ Jerome Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, Revised ed. (Denver: Morehouse Educational Resources, 2009), 153. Kindle.

¹²⁶ Ingersoll, "Making Room," 175.

¹²⁷ Ingersoll, "Making Room," 165.

simultaneous with Christian Education methodologies beginning to focus on human psychological development.¹²⁸ This curriculum, founded on the idea that, “children have equal access to relationship with God,” builds its framework on the belief that “all children are especially attuned to story and play.”¹²⁹ Emphasizing theological and philosophical frameworks rather than focusing primarily on the psychological approach of many of his contemporaries, Berryman created a curriculum model focused on story, classroom community, and the development of a faith vocabulary for children to express the work that Berryman trusted God was already working in their lives.¹³⁰ *Godly Play* curriculum emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a child and allows for more self-directed response to stories shared by a storyteller.

2.3.1 *Godly Play*

Godly Play curriculum follows a classroom liturgy which structures a community of children ages three to twelve, a storyteller, and a door person as the children actively listen to God through story and meditation. First, each child is invited to “cross the threshold,” a boundary holding symbolic power to help children recognize that the *Godly Play* classroom as a sacred space and ready themselves for listening to God’s voice.¹³¹ The door person greets each child, invites the child to slow down, and permits the child to enter the classroom when ready. Later, the storyteller may invite a child to return to the

¹²⁸ Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play*, 24.

¹²⁹ “*Godly Play* Commuter Core Training: Building Holy Rituals & Spaces: Liturgical Action & Creating Sacred Environments,” (Fort Worth: The *Godly Play* Foundation, 2016), 15.

¹³⁰ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 53.

¹³¹ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 27.

threshold if the child needs to continue preparing to participate in the classroom community. After children cross the threshold, the storyteller greets them and invites them to sit in specific places in the circle community. The storyteller and the door person both remain seated, so they are approximately the same size as the children in the classroom community. *Godly Play*'s developer, Jerome Berryman posits that this community is strengthened by an "invisible ceiling" created by the shared height of small bodies and intentional classroom designed to be accessible to small people, both of which help the children form a safe community.¹³² The classroom layout, design, and rituals combine to create a sacred space where children can worship and listen to God.

Within the circle of children, the storyteller shares a lesson from a biblical story, parable,¹³³ or liturgical action.¹³⁴ After the storyteller shares a lesson using prepared materials, the children wonder silently or aloud in the community. Berryman stresses that *Godly Play*, "invites the children to make the journey of discovery for their personal theological meaning rather than memorizing concepts that others have discovered at their own arrival point."¹³⁵ With this in mind, the storyteller refrains from prompting specific responses, but invites the children to share their own thoughts, feelings, and questions in response to the materials presented, nurturing children's curiosity.

¹³² Berryman, *Godly Play*, 31.

¹³³ While parables are found in the Bible, Berryman makes a point of teaching and storing these lessons separately from historical bible stories because they are fictional stories that Jesus told to teach a specific lesson. Their different genre is evident in their *Godly Play* presentation.

¹³⁴ Liturgical actions might include any part of the church's worship liturgy including baptism, the Eucharist, the church calendar, or arranging and caring for the altar.

¹³⁵ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 41.

After a time of wondering together, children respond to the lesson through their own work, either individually or in a small community. The children may use the materials for the story presented that day or materials from a lesson they have already been presented by a storyteller on a different occasion. Alternatively, children may choose to use art materials to create a personal expression. These lessons and supplies are stored in the classroom on open shelves, carefully arranged by genre, content, and biblical sequence (*Figure 1*).¹³⁶ After the work period, children return to their circle community to celebrate a feast. While this is not communion or the Eucharist, the practice stems from the belief in the importance of shared meals in community and lays the foundation for enjoying Holy Communion in the greater church community in the future.¹³⁷ The class enjoys a small snack and drink, giving thanks in prayer before eating. It is from this time of sharing and fellowship that the children are invited to complete their time in the classroom. Before leaving, each child thanks the storyteller, receives a personal blessing, and crosses the classroom threshold again, re-entering the wider world to rejoin his or her family.

¹³⁶ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 123.

¹³⁷ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 93.



Figure 1: Godly Play Classroom, All Saints Episcopal Church, Fort Worth, Texas. Photograph by Robin Turner, 2016.

Each element of a *Godly Play* session is carefully crafted to support the children as a community of learners, create a safe and reflective space, and acknowledge the work of God in each child. The role of the adults in this faith community is important, but the methodology specifies that only two adults may be present in any *Godly Play* community in order to preserve a community of children.¹³⁸ Instead, the *Godly Play* training reminds adults that the Holy Spirit teaches and guides the children's reflection, and the carefully designed classroom, stories, and class rhythms provide the structure to invite children to

¹³⁸ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 155.

listen to God. Furthermore, parents are not permitted to enter the classroom except on special open-house days, and Berryman includes specific protocols for addressing parents who want to enter the classroom at pick-up, drop-off, or to check on their children.¹³⁹ While *Godly Play* is not the only model for formation-focused children's ministry, as a leader in its field, the physical elements of a *Godly Play* classroom,¹⁴⁰ values of its practitioners, and rhythm of each *Godly Play* session provide a basic overview of some of the most popular methods used by formation-focused practitioners.

2.4 The Role of Community: A Call to Consider Intergenerational Worship

Both media-guided and Montessori-based children's ministry seek to engage children with a child-accessible understanding of and participation in the Christian faith, and both claim to place the needs and particularities of children first, catering to their developmental stages. In *Will our Children Have Faith*, Westerhoff, describes the two main approaches to nurturing children's faith using the metaphors of a production line and a greenhouse. He first alludes to a production line where, "the child is valuable raw material and adults are expected to know what the child should become and how."¹⁴¹ This method focuses on helping children learn information and adopt specific actions. Media-based children's ministry often includes brilliant pneumatic devices, engaging songs and excellent bible teachers; together, these elements create a state-of-the-art approach to

¹³⁹ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 33.

¹⁴⁰ Other formation-based approaches include *Godly Play*'s predecessor, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, created by Sofia Cavalletti, and Young Children and Worship, created for Reformed communities by Sonja Stewart in partnership with Jerome Berryman.

¹⁴¹ Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May, *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 22.

teach the children about Christian faith and living. The second metaphor, the greenhouse, refers to Christian Formation approaches that focus on creating a nurturing place for children to grow and learn according to their natural tendencies.¹⁴² Montessori-based approaches seek to create liturgically-guided, formational greenhouses for the Holy Spirit to move in children's lives.

In contrast to both of these metaphors, Westerhoff advocates for viewing the nurture of children's faith as a pilgrimage throughout life and in conjunction with the whole of their faith family.¹⁴³ While there may be places within a church congregation where children can learn alongside other children or with carefully prepared lessons, churches that practice intergenerational worship and ministry recognize that children are vital, contributing members of the faith community who learn alongside adults. Neither the production-line nor the greenhouse approach to children's faith formation inherently values the role of children in the broader faith community; at best, the child-specific programming is seen as the ideal place for young faith to grow, at worst, it is cobbled together as babysitting.

Some congregations have participated in intergenerational worship as part of their theological convictions or sociological norms for decades. Over the past twenty years, however, a resurgence in studying intergenerational contexts has emerged in the academy while a simultaneous renaissance occurred among local congregations interested in integrating their children into various portions of church ministry. The revival of interest in this topic brings with it questions about the importance of traditional children's

¹⁴² Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children*, 22.

¹⁴³ Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 19.

programming, methods for building relationships, equipping for pastors and other congregational leaders previously disconnected from church activities involving children, and creative ways of engaging all ages in worship.

SECTION 3: LEADING CONGREGATIONAL CHANGE

As stated in Section One, training key leaders in the theological foundations and practical resources of children's spiritual formation allows them to guide their congregations in allocating time, energy, relational bandwidth and financial resources toward investing in their entire community's spiritual formation. When congregations embrace children's spiritual formation as an integral part of their congregational life and formation, adults welcome children into the worship and activity of the church family and children lead the adults in embracing Jesus' admonition to become like a child to enter the Kingdom of God. Using an adaptation of John Kotter's framework for leading change (Figure 2), congregations can spend time in guided study and collaboration to build a strong foundation for their understanding of children's spiritual formation, cast a clear vision for the future, and begin to implement integrative change within their congregation's culture.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ John P Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2012), 23.

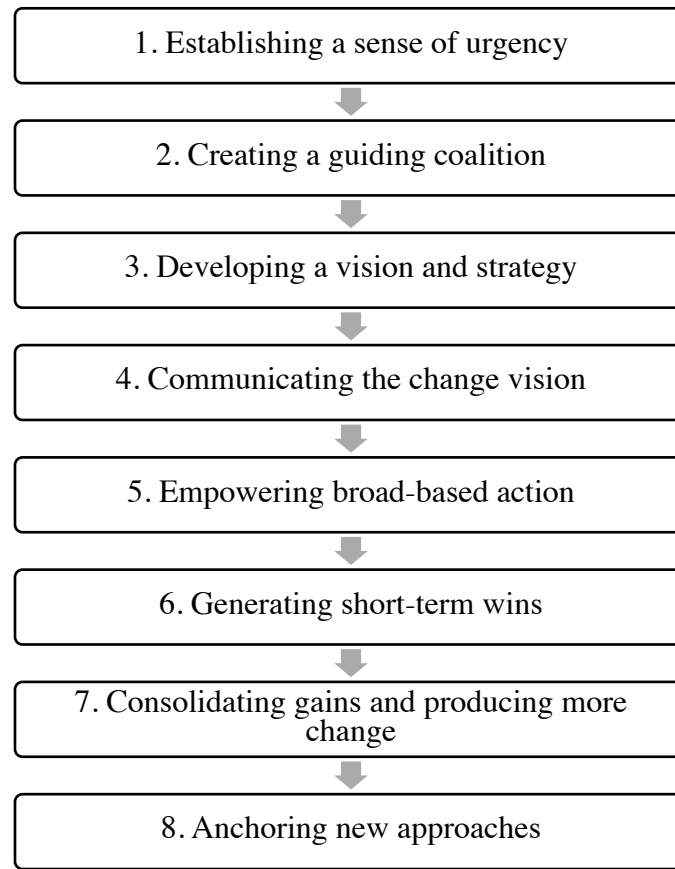


Figure 2: “The eight-step process of creating major change” from Kotter, *Leading Change*, 2012, 23.

3.1 Building a Foundation

3.1.1 Business and Church Comparisons

Although the local church operates differently than a business, best practices for organizational and systemic change in business settings may be thoughtfully adapted for leading change in churches if church leaders account for key differences. In corporate contexts, change involves all levels of employees from the president to low-level administrative staff. These leaders work to create and support a product or service distributed to consumers. In church contexts, those included in creating change include staff members, lay leaders such as an elder board or vestry, and committed volunteers.

Congregants may function as both creators and consumers of church ministries. Church congregations are groups of people unified by the Holy Spirit and bound by their common baptism in Christ;¹⁴⁵ church members share responsibility to serve Christ with their spiritual gifts for the strengthening of the body of Christ and its witness to the world.¹⁴⁶

Churches participate in common experiences such as worship, the Eucharist, Scriptural teaching, and service or outreach in the local community rather than creating products or services in the traditional business sense. Unfortunately, some people approach the activities of the church's worship, learning, and fellowship with a consumer-based mindset. To begin implementing change, church leaders must gauge the prevalence of a consumer mindset. When making changes regarding children's programming, leaders should recognize that some children's programs create unintentional by-products like childcare or entertainment, anticipated commodities many churches only implicitly promise. Acknowledging these implicit expectations from church-goers allows leaders to more fully anticipate resistance to change and identify its roots.

Individual congregations may differ widely in their level of implied personal and relational commitments and purpose, but in order to effect change, they must arrive at a common vision within their congregation. For example, while some churches seek to facilitate spiritual formation, "the work of the Holy Spirit as persons teach and learn," others argue that holistic Christian education "seeks to share information, to nurture

¹⁴⁵ Eph. 4:3-6.

¹⁴⁶ Eph. 4:16.

formation, and to explore the transformation that God seeks to bestow upon Christian faith communities.”¹⁴⁷ For most churches, a mission statement communicates the overarching intended outcome of the church, and unintended products that result from tradition, convenience, or sentimentalism should be discarded in the process of pursuing transformational change.

Finally, those initiating change must understand the differences between management and leadership, so staff members and volunteers have a better appreciation for the breadth of tasks and skills necessary to pursue change. According to Kotter, management includes “planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem-solving,” all necessary parts of church leadership, but merely the pieces needed to keep congregational life running smoothly at a status-quo level.¹⁴⁸ Leadership that results in change “defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite obstacles.”¹⁴⁹ Church staffs and committees that preoccupy themselves with management tasks cannot transition into initiating cultural change because they lack some combination of vision, time, energy, or teamwork necessary for implementation.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Pazmiño, “Christian Education Is More Than Formation,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 356, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001811288&scope=site>.

¹⁴⁸ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 28.

¹⁴⁹ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 28.

Congregations should consider the historically “dichotomous relationship between leadership and management roles and competencies,”¹⁵⁰ and recognize that systemic change will take a combination of management and leadership tasks both from specific individuals as well as within teams. A pastoral leader skilled in vision-casting but not management may leave a church with a realistic vision without guidance for implementation; a children’s ministries director with scheduling and coordination competencies but no clear vision of the spiritual formation of children will keep an ineffective ministry running long-term. Churches need people who can manage daily operations and facilitate executing plans, but this should not be confused with the equally important task of envisioning and facilitating change.

3.2 Establish a Sense of Urgency

In John Kotter’s eight-step transformation process, change begins after leaders cooperate to establish a sense of urgency for systemic change.¹⁵¹ In churches, this means convincing key leaders in the congregation that complacency toward children’s spiritual formation will negatively affect the whole congregation, both children and adults. Change-leaders can undertake this task of establishing urgency by “identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities”¹⁵² as explored by the research

¹⁵⁰ Doug Powell, “Skilled and Satisfied: Research Findings Regarding Executive Pastors,” *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (2009): 230, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001753082&scope=site>.

¹⁵¹ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 37.

¹⁵² Kotter, *Leading Change*, 23.

of the Fuller Youth Institute¹⁵³ or The Barna Group¹⁵⁴ and gaining a better understanding of the spiritual potential of children through the writings of leaders like Scottie May, Catherine Stonehill,¹⁵⁵ Dave Csinos and Ivy Beckwith,¹⁵⁶ and Jerome Berryman.¹⁵⁷ Each of these institutions and scholars have identified often widely-accepted shortcomings of current approaches to children's place in the church and examined the negative repercussions of this displacement while offering thoughtful alternative approaches to children's spiritual formation.

By looking beyond curriculum choices, ease of use, and general appeal of children's programming, leaders can begin to discern opportunities for greater depth in their ministry. Using recent research regarding long-term faith efficacy among children raised in church, leaders can present ideas with clear data rather than anecdotal evidence or personal preference. Additionally, Kotter recommends that this stage includes "examining the market and competitive realities" which may include considering ministry offerings at other churches in the local community or those from similar traditions or demographics.¹⁵⁸ By examining the ministries and realities of congregational life at other churches, leaders can consider the advantages and innovations of other approaches to ministry, expand and strengthen their convictions and vision, and lay the

¹⁵³ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*.

¹⁵⁴ "Millennials & Generations Archives - Barna Group," Barna Group, accessed December 7, 2018, www.barna.com/category/millennials-generations.

¹⁵⁵ Stonehouse and May, *Listening to Children*.

¹⁵⁶ Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*.

¹⁵⁷ Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play*.

¹⁵⁸ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 22.

framework for making fully-informed, judicious decisions in developing their own vision. For example, church leaders might think families are too busy for mid-week ministries but find out that a similar church in their town holds a thriving mid-week ministry. In this community, the mid-week time-frame works, so the obstacle lies elsewhere.

Finally, when preparing to lead change, leaders must anticipate the expectations and criticism from those affected by the adjustments. Abrupt change beginning without an established sense of urgency, may prompt parishioners to move to a different congregation with a more familiar approach to children's ministry because the losses associated with switching churches seem less severe than the loss of a particular type of programming. Alternatively, if leaders consider other options and communicate deficiencies in the current model, congregants may be more likely to accept and participate in change. In a congregation where key leaders already recognize the basic need for transformation, a triad of leaders committed to learning and growing together can work together to work through each step of Kotter's transformational leadership process.

3.3 Gather a Guiding Coalition

3.3.1 A Guided Triad and a Vision Team

In order to undertake this task of leading systemic change, congregational leaders need to dedicate themselves to an ongoing dialogue, guided by the Holy Spirit, to examine their theological convictions, assess their current situation, and create a cohesive and dynamic vision of children's spiritual formation within their congregation.

In my adaptation of John Kotter's methods, in order to account for some the church context, this guiding coalition is a triad team comprised of a children's ministry leader, pastoral team member, and lay volunteer can work together in partnership to lead change. The children's ministry leader provides personal investment, focus, and clarity across the contexts where children are involved. The pastoral team member offers visible leadership, church-wide vision, and an authoritative or guiding voice. The lay volunteer bridges the divide between the church staff and the congregation to ease communication and may also provide the gift of continuity with a long history within or future commitment to the congregation.

Kotter's second step, "Build a Guiding Coalition," instructs leaders to gather a broad and varied team to collaboratively discern and guide change. The triad, together with a broader vision team, comprise this guiding coalition. The vision team can include a larger breadth of voices such as committed volunteers, parents of children who participate in congregational life, empty-nesters who can provide relational support and credibility,¹⁵⁹ and potentially children themselves.¹⁶⁰ In contexts where a separate board of leaders, such as a vestry, oversees the business and financial affairs of the congregation, the guiding coalition should include one member from this group as well.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Joseph Grenny et al., *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013): 186.

¹⁶⁰ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 265.

¹⁶¹ In Anglican contexts, the vestry oversees the financial decisions of the church. They traditionally do not offer spiritual oversight, though they are elected from within the congregation based on their character, Christian commitment, and skills. They operate similarly to more common elder boards, but they do not necessarily hold governing power.

First, this primary triad must come to consensus regarding the role of children in the church and the Kingdom of God through study, observation, and listening. Then, they may dialogue with the larger vision team to nuance beliefs, implementation, and adaptation for the specific congregation. For example, to shift toward a formation-focused children's ministry or an intergenerational ministry approach, the triad team must hold common convictions that programmatic, entertainment-based, and isolated children's ministry programs fall short of meeting the church's mission and vision for congregational life. The broader vision team, however, might offer insights regarding how to maintain benefits of existing ministry approaches while envisioning together a new form of ministry. Together, they can undertake a transformational change process that will affect and involve the whole church family.

Because change will affect the congregation as a whole, the team must represent a breadth of congregants encompassing a variety of life-stages and skills. Placing sole responsibility for change on one person, even a person hired with expertise in the area of change such as a children's ministries director, presents an unfair burden.¹⁶² Similarly, the guiding coalition should include adults without children in their home because the changes will affect the congregation beyond current parents of children. As members in the church family, empty-nesters, single people, young adults, and couples without children will also be affected by change in approaches to valuing children, and true mutual transformation comes when church families recognize and value these connections.

¹⁶² Kotter, *Leading Change*, 53.

Kotter directs businesses to ensure that some members of the guiding coalition hold social and relational power to initiate and lead change.¹⁶³ Leaders must recognize that the team offers more than guidance; they will be responsible for working together to implement ideas, providing the support and guidance to address problems that arise.¹⁶⁴ Not every member of the team must work directly with children, but every member must consider how their involvement in the life of the church can champion the envisioned change. For instance, a vestry member with skills in financial management might commit to advocating for adequate monetary resources to implement the change, helping the congregation value children in their stewardship of finances.

The guiding coalition must include people with both leadership and management skills, recognizing that leaders foster vision, align people and inspire others while managers execute this vision through specific plans.¹⁶⁵ Both tasks serve important functions, but in recent history, children's ministries in churches have emphasized managing volunteers and programs, outsourcing visionary leadership to curriculum companies and purchased programs.

Furthermore, this team serves as the locus of change that helps transform the congregation as a whole; the transformations must extend beyond the people on the team. For congregations that historically outsourced children's ministry to an individual or a small group of volunteers, there may be a temptation to outsource to this team. By

¹⁶³ MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space, and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 125.

¹⁶⁴ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 23.

¹⁶⁵ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 29.

contrast, the guiding coalition begins the transformational activity and invites the congregation as a whole to participate in change.

As they begin this task of articulating a vision, members of the guiding coalition may find it helpful to share their personal tendencies and desires when initiating change or building programs. In one leadership study, researchers found that managers “tended to be either pragmatic, seeking validation in their own experience, or moralistic, seeking validation in a general philosophy, moral system, or tradition.”¹⁶⁶ Tendencies like these could contribute to tension within a guiding coalition as some members trend toward pragmatic understandings while others trend toward philosophical understandings of the same topics. In reality, the vision must integrate philosophy and theology with the weekly operations and limitations of the church.

3.4 Envisioning the Future

Having established a sense of urgency, the guiding coalition must develop a clear vision and strategy that takes into account realities of their congregation’s physical, relational, and spiritual resources. Building the framework for the vision includes studying biblical and theological beliefs, learning the history and philosophy of the ministry area, assessing congregational life, creating a system of evaluation, and crafting a clear vision. This multi-step process fulfills Kotter’s third step, “Developing a vision and strategy”.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Edgar H Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 2010): 145.

¹⁶⁷ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 70.

3.4.1 Scriptural and Theological Convictions

For a guiding coalition to discern and articulate their theological convictions regarding children, they must consider: How does God relate to the children of our church? Do we believe the Holy Spirit is interested in engaging and forming children? Do the children considered contributing members to our church family, or do they have to wait to join our church family as adults? By answering these questions and others like them, they will begin to build a theological framework through which they may filter their decisions and processes moving forward. Answers may come through studying scripture or consulting denominational resources or guidelines. While few denominations directly address the role of children in guiding beliefs, convictions about the nature of humans, and particular beliefs regarding salvation, baptism, the church, and the work of the Holy Spirit may all influence a congregation's convictions.¹⁶⁸ The guiding coalition may move forward in other stages while nuancing particulars of their understanding of children's role in the church, but they need to agree to a basic general set of beliefs.

3.4.2 Historical and Philosophical Background

The history of children's role in a particular congregation, as well as their role in the congregations that influence a church through regional proximity or theological tradition, shape the expectations and values leaders and families bring to their understanding of children in the church. Through these influences, many congregations create an unspoken philosophical framework of the best way to welcome children into the

¹⁶⁸ *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism* (Ambridge, PA: n.p., 2015): https://s3.amazonaws.com/acna/Anglican_Catechism.pdf.

church. Reassessing this framework means considering the influences on a particular congregation, articulating the current philosophies at play, and intentionally articulating the philosophical framework that will guide future decisions.¹⁶⁹ For instance, a congregation that focuses time and energy on competitions and prizes for bible memory work operates from a belief that children benefit from knowing scripture and one of the best ways to encourage this value comes through incentivizing children to memorize. The guiding coalition may discern that they still believe children benefit from knowing scripture, but the memorization challenges work against their beliefs that children will attend to the things that they value deeply and that scripture should be learned primarily through meditation and study.

3.4.3 Congregational Assessment

After considering the outside influences on a congregation, the guiding coalition should attend directly to the congregation. Studying the history and philosophy of a congregation as a whole provides a general framework, but the congregational assessment allows the guiding coalition to discern both spaces and people hospitable to change as well as potential obstacles. Business professor Edward Schein encourages those seeking to foster change within a community to examine the cultural assumptions about the nature of reality or “how truth is ultimately to be determined”,¹⁷⁰ time,¹⁷¹ and

¹⁶⁹ David Setran and Nathan Ramler, “Reimagining Frankena: Toward a Holistic Model for Philosophy of Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 21, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001895761&scope=site>.

¹⁷⁰ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 138.

the allocation of space¹⁷² in their context. For church congregations, these concepts relate both to available physical resources as well as personal beliefs. In the congregational assessment, the guiding coalition may choose to conduct a congregation-wide survey, interview key leaders, or observe various ministry areas. For instance, a team member observing the church service from the back of the congregation may see multiple families guiding their children in worship, as well as children struggling to see the front or read the words on the screen. Observation in the children's ministry area may reveal that the space is too large for the children to focus well or ill-equipped to accommodate child-size bodies using mostly adult-size furniture. An interview with a family new to the congregation may reveal that some families new to the Christian faith lack the resources as a family unit to know where to begin leading their children in faith. Other interviews might lead the guiding coalition to note people interested and skilled in helping lead formational change.

3.4.4 The Frankena Model: A Framework for Evaluation

Finally, the guiding coalition can utilize the Frankena model, a philosophical framework for education adapted by Christian educators for ministry contexts,¹⁷³ which provides a compelling method “to provide a framework within which theological, philosophical, and empirical convictions can be identified, integrated together, and then

¹⁷¹ Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 138.

¹⁷² Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 138.

¹⁷³ Setran and Ramler, “Reimagining Frankena,” 8.

extrapolated as concrete practices (Figure 3).¹⁷⁴ The Frankena model includes a diagram with five boxes that show the how the ultimate goals of a church or ministry and nature of that church's reality shape learning goals, which when combined with best practices, leads to an action plan. This diagram helps leaders examine how resources, limitations, and best practices can all be considered when moving from abstract goals to practical ministry settings.

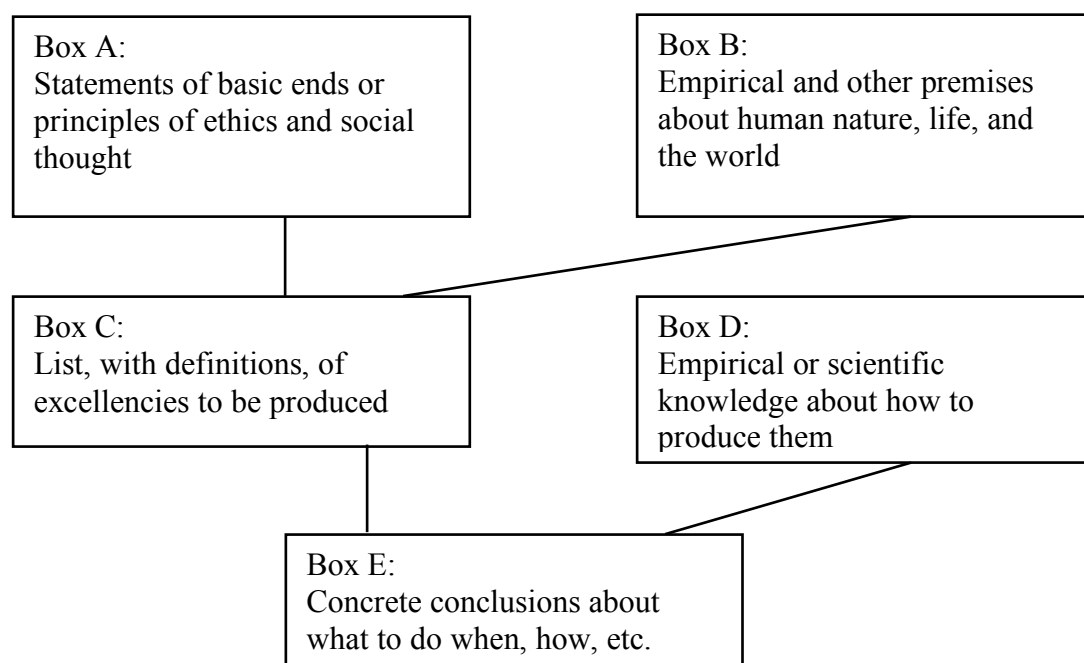


Figure 3: Frankena Model

As a professor of the history and philosophy of Christian Education, David Setran re-frames the Frankena model to create a more “holistic plan for action” by engaging the ultimate desire, realities, aims, and practices for each of four foci: communities, leaders, systems, and learners (Figure 3).¹⁷⁵ The original Frankena Model guides individual ministries, but Setran’s approach recognizes the complexities of organizations with many

¹⁷⁴ Setran and Ramler, "Reimagining Frankena," 7.

¹⁷⁵ Setran and Ramler, "Reimagining Frankena," 14.

influences and facets, such as church congregations. Additionally, the guiding coalition must take into account their theological convictions including their understanding of the nature of the church and the Holy Spirit in leading individuals. For the Christian context, these theological realities hold as much importance as physical, concrete realities because they acknowledge the supernatural work of ministry and inform the spiritual language and action of ministry.

With the ultimate goal and the three levels of the four foci in mind from Setran's reimagined Frankena Model, the team can collaborate to develop a set of four focused vision statements, joining them together to create a singular, balanced, overarching vision. Vision statements can drift toward restating values or ideologies, but by developing a clear shared picture for the congregation "with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future,"¹⁷⁶ everyone can consider their role in realizing their shared goals and guard against drifting toward stating values without future, forward thinking. In other words, a vision statement shares "what the world would look like if everything we did was wildly successful."¹⁷⁷ Kotter encourages organizations to seek simplicity and feasibility in creating their role in realizing their shared goals and guard against drifting toward stating values without future, forward thinking. In other words, a vision statement shares "what the world would look like if everything we did was wildly successful."¹⁷⁸ Kotter encourages organizations to seek

¹⁷⁶ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 71.

¹⁷⁷ Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't* (New York: Portfolio / Penguin, 2014), 42.

¹⁷⁸ Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 42.

simplicity and feasibility in creating a vision statement “grounded in a clear and rational understanding of the organization.”¹⁷⁹

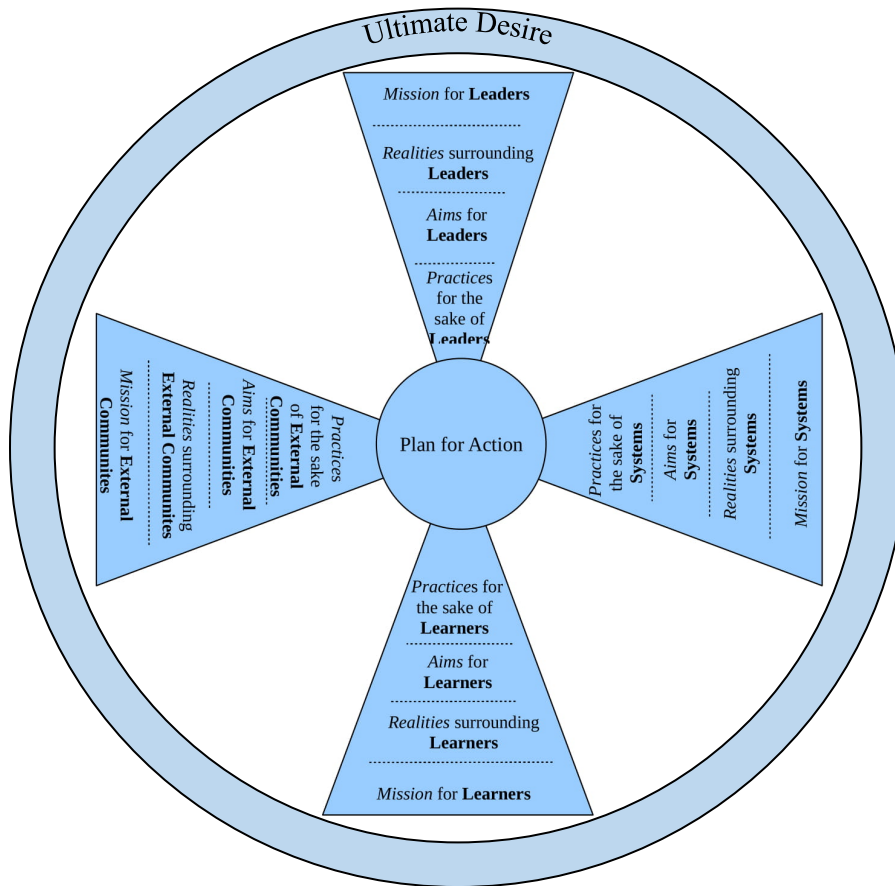


Figure 4: Adapted Frankena Model from “Reimagining Frankena: Toward a Holistic Model for Philosophy of Ministry,” 14.

3.5 Communicating the Vision

With the vision carefully discerned and clearly articulated, the guiding coalition can begin to turn their energy toward the task of using available resources to Kotter’s fourth step, holistically communicating the vision through both word and action

¹⁷⁹ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 78.

throughout the community. If the congregations “[finds] that vision inspiring and worthy of [their] time and energy,”¹⁸⁰ they will begin to creatively invest in it themselves.

Ideally, a vision for children’s place in their church family shares a clear, compelling picture of the future, accounting for gifts, resources, and restrictions apparent in the congregational context, permits enough flexibility to “allow for individual initiative and changing conditions.”¹⁸¹ While many congregations carry a mission or vision for their church as a whole, the vision statement particular to change must be created apart from these pre-existing statements and developed over time.¹⁸² Furthermore, a mission statement as defines the purpose of a church using scripture, but a vision statement “is a descriptive picture of the future for that congregation.”¹⁸³ By settling on a singular vision too early, some congregations may foreclose on good ideas in an effort to implement change quickly.

While Kotter recommends “using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate” the vision, Setran notes that for the Christian community, instating a vision necessitates an intentional spiritual humility marked by praying for the Lord to search “present reality, [bring] falsehoods and inconsistencies to light, and provide wisdom for the development of aims and practices.”¹⁸⁴ Churches undertake a unique task

¹⁸⁰ Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last*, 43.

¹⁸¹ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 79.

¹⁸² Kotter, *Leading Change*, 84.

¹⁸³ Tim Nichols, “The Pastor’s Role in Vision-Based Leadership,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 2, no. 1 (2007): 20, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLA0001819071&scope=site>.

¹⁸⁴ Setran and Ramler, “Reimagining Frankena,” 21.

when considering how to combine decisive communication and Christ-like humility, and leaders must seek to communicate the vision in part by modeling the same sensitivity to the Holy Spirit that they hope to cultivate within their community. If spiritual formation “contends that there is a need for both informational teaching... and formational teaching”, then the casting a vision for new understandings of spiritual formation in the context of a church community must both inform the congregation of the change through traditional means of verbal and visual communication as well as form the congregation to seek this vision through demonstrating a high view of the spiritual lives of children.¹⁸⁵ Even in a secular setting, Kotter agrees that communication needs to “addresses [congregants] anxieties, ... accepts their anger, ... evokes faith in the vision.”¹⁸⁶

3.6 Implementing Action and Change

Within the process of discerning a vision for the community, the guiding coalition likely identifies several important steps for implementing change including both actions to begin as well as behavior patterns and community habits to eliminate. According to Kotter’s structure, the fifth stage of “empowering broad-based action”¹⁸⁷ includes navigating obstacles, “changing systems or structures that undermine” the vision, and “encouraging risk-taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions.”¹⁸⁸ While a corporate setting may change systems or structures based on incentivizing finances or

¹⁸⁵ Pazmiño, “Christian Education Is More Than Formation,” 361.

¹⁸⁶ John P Kotter, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 84.

¹⁸⁷ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 105.

¹⁸⁸ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 70.

time, church congregations may face nostalgic attachments to perceived traditions or pushback based on anecdotal evidence of success. Instead, the congregation should be encouraged to reinvent “recreate, reconceive, redesign, or refashion” rather than merely adopt new practices.¹⁸⁹ By defining the vision and relating the actions steps to it, leaders can gently guide the congregations’ understanding of the changes to clarify the importance of the changes for holistic success beyond emotional validation. With understanding and vision, congregants can initiate and enact their own responses, discerning their role in achieving the vision, taking responsibility for responding according to their own life stages, skills, and personalities.

3.7 Short-Term Wins

Once the congregation initially engages in the vision and initial empowerment, the guiding coalition should initiate the sixth step, “generating short-term wins.”¹⁹⁰ In Kotter’s context, companies are encouraged to discern and celebrate short-term, visible goals that can provide encouragement for future change and tangible effects to reassure people that change can be positive. By framing these goals as important steps toward a long-term vision, they feed energy rather than detract from urgency.¹⁹¹ While allusions to competition through terms like “wins” may be antithetical to the spirit congregations seek to foster in regards to intergenerational spiritual formation, positive short-term wins for congregations implementing change can include changes in the structure of worship

¹⁸⁹ Robert E Quinn, *The Positive Organization* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2015), 108.

¹⁹⁰ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 121.

¹⁹¹ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 129.

services, new language surrounding children in congregational contexts, or resources available for multi-sensory engagement in worship. Additionally, short-term wins can include one-time experiences like a first fully-integrated worship service. When considering initial short-term wins, the guiding coalition should note that “the more visible victories are, the more they help the change process.”¹⁹² While these practices may be part of the long-term vision and goals, celebrating them as distinct steps and recognizing the people who helped facilitate these important changes boosts morale and expands the power of the long-term vision.¹⁹³

3.8 Sustaining Change

As observable changes appear, the initial guiding coalition as well as other leaders in the community with social capital need to use their personal power and authority within the community to undertake the seventh step of “consolidating gains and producing more change” through streamlining approaches, developing new leaders, and introducing new creative ideas.¹⁹⁴ While early recognition and short-term wins build confidence and optimism for the early implementation of the vision, this step focuses on strengthening the organization for long-term success by re-embodiment the vision through streamlined approaches, new leaders, and creative ideas. The initial guiding coalition creates a specific vision for the long-term success of the organization, but the vision must also offer the opportunity for creativity and flexibility to engage people at every level. In

¹⁹² Kotter, *The Heart of Change*, 128.

¹⁹³ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 70.

¹⁹⁴ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 150.

congregations seeking to create intergenerational spiritual formation opportunities, this may mean transitioning away from the tools initially used to implement change to improved systems that include sustainable habits such as a blessing of children, welcoming and equipping new volunteers, and allowing congregants to envision and enact intergenerational moments in corporate worship.

To build ownership among the congregation, the guiding coalition should focus on the benefits of the changes inherent in the long-term vision and strive to create an environments that “[internalizes] the desire for a positive culture and [learns] to relate in more positive ways.”¹⁹⁵ Business leader Robert E. Quinn champions the idea of a “positive mental map” that encourages group to “learn and adapt, eventually producing a new level of understanding and order”¹⁹⁶ as they encounter the change process. Psychologist Daniel Kahneman observes that people react to situations based on loss aversion, but by focusing on what a congregation gains through change, leaders can allay anxieties about change.¹⁹⁷

This positive outlook particularly helps if necessary structures such as good communication, and adequate space and resources assist people. Change will require both the support anticipated ahead of time by the guiding coalition as well as provisions requested by parents, volunteers, and ministry leaders after the changes are initiated. For instance, if children are now expected to engage in the corporate worship service with

¹⁹⁵ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 93.

¹⁹⁶ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 94.

¹⁹⁷ Erik Johnson, “Book Summary: Thinking Fast and Slow (Daniel Kahneman),” April 2014, last modified 2015, <https://erikreads.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/thinking-fast-and-slow-book-summary.pdf>, 10.

their families, their parents should have clear instructions for a variety of ways to help their child worship with them. The leaders of the service should plan the service to engage all of the demographics of people present, and the space should be adjusted to recognize the different body types of the people participating. If the words for songs are projected on screens, but children are too short to see the screens, stools should be provided or children should be invited to stand on their chairs or in the aisles. Tactile resources like paper and crayons, prayer beads, or a service-outline may help adults guide a child through the service. Writing a social story explaining what to expect in corporate worship and how to engage with it may help both parents and children understand the vision in practical terms for their family.

3.9 Anchoring Change

Finally, the guiding coalition should work closely with those in places of social and structural power so that visible leaders, “Often the single biggest obstacle” to change, encourage the congregation and model healthy adaptation.¹⁹⁸ The tone of visible leaders toward the vision through their actions or attitudes will serve as a powerful guide to those beginning to adapt to the vision themselves. The final step to Kotter’s approach includes anchoring new approaches in cultural context for long-term success. While corporate settings link this with productivity, management, and changed behaviors, congregations can see these take root with a broader adoption of the overarching vision, an increased ability of congregants and lay leaders to discern the suitability of ministry programs or philosophies for the congregation, and the ability for new church members to adopt the

¹⁹⁸ Kotter, *The Heart of Change*, 102.

vision even if they did not attend during the initial vision-casting. While spiritual formation is process-oriented instead of product-oriented, the guiding coalition can still evaluate how the vision and initiated behaviors shape and influence ministry in each of the four foci areas: leaders, learners, systems, and communities.¹⁹⁹

3.10 Conclusion

For churches undertaking cultural shifts in a ministry as far-reaching as children's ministry or corporate, congregational worship this process-based, eight-stage approach offers the structural support for significant systemic change, including casting vision, navigating obstacles, and helping changes endure as part of a new cultural landscape. While the business aspects of the framework need to be adapted for the structure, goals, and theology of a church setting, the scaffolding Kotter provides offers easily contextualized guidelines and principles. In church culture, where change is often reactionary or non-existent, a clear outline of how changes will be considered, implemented, and adapted for a specific context may be necessary to even propose significant cultural change and begin the transformation process. Additionally, Kotter's team-based approach for initiating and establishing change works well with the Christian theological understanding that churches are comprised of people who work together to learn, grow, and worship.

¹⁹⁹ Setran and Ramler, "Reimagining Frankena," 4.

SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

4.1 A Curriculum for Churches Initiating Change

The Worship With Children nine-module plan, adapted from John Kotter's eight-step process for leading change, guides triads of church leaders through a process of examining their beliefs, establishing goals, evaluating programs, and implementing long-term systemic change that influences the whole congregation. It teaches leaders how to value the mutually transforming role of children's spiritual formation, considering the breadth of available resources for children's spiritual formation in order to slowly adapt and lead their congregation through theologically and philosophically rooted changes to achieve an intentionally crafted vision.

Elements of the nine modules include scripture and theological study regarding the role of children in the local church and the Kingdom of God; examination of approaches in similar congregations and consideration of the congregation's past approaches to children's spiritual formation; interviews and observations of families, evaluation of current programs, creation of a vision statement and its dynamic implementation in both a short-term soft-launch and a long-term sustainable plan.

4.2 Who Can Use the Curriculum?

The Worship With Children²⁰⁰ curriculum equips a triad comprised of a pastoral leader, children's ministries leader, and lay leader to work together, in partnership with a larger vision team, to lead and implement change within their congregation. Ideally, a triad will begin this work with the encouragement of the church leadership and broader community, who anticipate positive change. The curriculum accounts for self-assessment, allowing for differences in congregation-size, denominational convictions, and socio-economic and cultural demographics. Churches desiring to build a stronger foundation and more intentional vision for children's spiritual formation within their community will benefit from the curriculum. Designed to be self-contained, the curriculum can be initiated at any time without formal supervision or guidance, though some congregations might seek further guidance through coaching or suggested readings.

4.3 Time Investment

The year-long curriculum provides incremental steps so small investments of time and energy can accrue to create a depth of understanding and breadth of involvement while catalyzing creative efforts in the congregation. On average, the children's ministry director will need to commit five hours each week, the lay leader will commit three hours each week, and the pastoral leader will need to commit ninety-minutes each week to complete steps of the curriculum including readings, short written reflections or

²⁰⁰ The curriculum will be hosted on my website, www.worshipwithchildren.com, alongside other resources for church families.

statements, meetings with the triad or other leaders, or time in observation of children, interviews with families and volunteers, or planning and executing ministry events.

4.4 Curriculum Format

While based on John Kotter’s 8-steps for leading systemic change, the curriculum adapts the steps in order to better serve the needs of churches. For instance, the curriculum wraps step one, “Establishing a Sense of Urgency” and step 2, “Creating a Guiding Coalition” into the first module, assuming that a church embarking on the curriculum desires change and has already appointed leaders to help guide the change process. Additionally, Kotter’s third step, “Developing a vision and strategy,” extends over five modules in the Worship With Children curriculum which guide the team in exploring and establishing the congregation’s theological convictions and examining the realities of the congregation.

4.4.1 Phase 1: Learning

Triad participants will learn theological, philosophical, historical and psychological foundations for children’s Christian education and spiritual formation. Learning also includes gathering information about the convictions and history of their own context, approaches to children’s faith formation in similar congregations, expectations within their church community, and available resources.

Module 1: Gathering a Team

Module 2: Forming a Biblical Theology of Children in the Kingdom of God

Module 3: A History of Christian Education: Where Is Our Congregation Now?

4.4.2 Phase 2: Adapting

The adaptation stage includes critically retrieving elements from Christian education and spiritual formation from history and other contexts to fit the particular congregational convictions and context. In adaptation phases, triads work to understand their congregation's response to potential change, evaluate their current programs, and establish a vision statement particular to the convictions, needs, and gifting of their own congregation. The adaptation phase places the information gathered in modules one through three in context with the local congregation to begin establishing a plan for the future. This phase also includes a soft-launch of a new approach to ministry to gauge congregational responses.

Module 4: Taking the Congregational Pulse

Module 5: Assessing Foundations and Philosophies of Programs

Module 6: Crafting a Vision

4.4.3 Phase 3: Establishing

During the final three modules, the triad begins implementing changes while making a plan for long-term success. This phase is outward and forward focused, involving new people in plans and considering how to implement systemic change long-term.

Module 7: Enlisting Volunteers and Enabling Action

Module 8: Instituting Change

Module 9: Planning for Long-Term Success

Upon completion of the program, the congregation should have a vision and momentum for continued transformational change, a dynamic vision allowing for real growth that comes from deep roots. As the congregation changes and shifts to include new families, demographics, or leaders, the solid foundation and clear vision crafted during this year-long process will provide an adaptable structure without sacrificing purpose or intentionality.

SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

5.1 Goals

- Equip congregations to embrace spirit-guided, mutually transforming relationships with children so whole congregations can grow together in Christ
- Guide triad to...
 - grow in understanding of children's spiritual formation;
 - develop a cohesive vision for children's role in their congregation grounded in a theological and philosophical framework;
 - implement practical applications for their church family.

5.2 Strategies:

- Beta-test the triad model with training the children's ministry team in my own congregation and with a nearby congregation, seeking to implement formational change within their congregation.
- A successful curriculum will equip congregations in foundational knowledge, self-assessment, and creative adaptation as they seek formation and relationships within their congregation. Congregations will finish the artifact with similar values, knowledge, and general goals, but site-specific implementation of those values.

- The finished artifact will live indefinitely on the Worship with Children website, www.worshipwithchildren.com, where I can adapt it as-needed while keeping it accessible to local churches.

5.3 Audience:

- This curriculum is crafted for congregations who desire a formation-based, relationship-rich approach to children's spiritual formation yet feel under-equipped in knowing what, how, and why to establish these practices.
- When the triad finishes the curriculum, they will hold foundational knowledge for understanding children's spiritual formation and know how to evaluate the foundation and implementation of various ministry programs. A clear vision allows that adaptation to take place because the end goal always hovers ahead of the level of current achievement

5.4 Artifact Scope and Content:

- The curriculum takes nine to twelve months to complete and must be completed in the context of a local church. All curriculum documents will be stored online, though some recommended readings or videos may need to be accessed separately.
- On the Worship with Children website, each module will have its own page where activities are explained through separate downloads/links. Participants will need access to a computer with internet and a printer or .pdf program.

5.5 Budget:

- www.worshipwithchildren.com is created on Wix and hosted by GoDaddy. It costs approximately \$160/year to maintain. No website work is currently outsourced.
- During the beta-phase, the material will be accessible for free. I will begin charging for website access at some point.

5.6 Promotion:

- My website, Worship with Children, already has a following through social media as well as my work as a board member of The Children's Spirituality Summit. Additionally, I have been nominated to host The Children's Spirituality Summit's podcast launching in 2019 as part of our book contract with Zondervan, a Christian publishing house. These roles allow me to network broadly, beyond my denomination.
- I currently direct the children's ministry at St. Stephen's Church. This 150-year-old congregation is the largest congregation in The Anglican Church of North America's Diocese of Pittsburgh. The region also hosts the denominational headquarters and the largest evangelical Anglican seminary in the United States, where I will be lecturing this spring in the catechesis program. This position allows me to network within my denomination.

5.7 Standards of Publication:

- Each element of the curriculum will be uploaded as a .pdf or web link to the Worship with Children site, making it easily accessible to download.

5.8 Action Plan:

- Create a web-page within Worship with Children to host the curriculum
- Create and upload each guided activity for Modules 1-9.
- Work with Leslie Thyberg, Ed.D., professor of Catechesis and Formation at Trinity School for Ministry and catechetical adviser for The Anglican Church of North America, to determine the curriculum's relevance and comprehensiveness in regard to local church congregations.
- Beta-test the curriculum with St. Stephen's Church, and potentially with All Saints-Cranberry.
- Launch the curriculum in Fall 2019.

SECTION 6: POST-SCRIPT

This written statement and the creation of the *Worship with Children* curriculum represent one approach to equipping congregations for more thoughtful and formation-focused ministry within congregations. Other options for equipping congregations include formal education through a seminary curriculum, supplemental education such as a conference, or intentional coaching through a consultation service. While this curriculum might be used in conjunction with any of these approaches, the downloadable format makes it more financially accessible to congregations.

The triad format invites collaboration which leads to broader understanding of the church community as well as diverse perspectives on problem-solving and vision-casting. Additionally, it allows for shared power and responsibility within the community. The children's ministries director will spend the most time completing the curriculum, but the pastoral leader can affect change beyond the typical scope of the children's ministries leader. Similarly, the lay leader offers a valuable perspective and insight into the needs and desires of the congregation. By educating and resourcing a triad rather than just one leader, the responsibility for change is shared, and the congregation can sustain the vision even if one triad member leaves the community.

Because the curriculum is self-directed, churches that complete it may arrive at vastly different visions or widely varying best approaches to children's spiritual formation. The goal of the curriculum is that congregations would build a foundation based on theology, best practices, and intentional goals, which may differ according to contexts. A congregation may also benefit from reworking portions of the curriculum if it undergoes significant change.

Further studies might include creating additional resources for the triad beyond the curriculum, as well as curricula for other church contexts such as a multi-generational small group seeking to value and nurture children's spiritual formation. Collaboration may also extend beyond an individual congregation to a diocese, denomination, or neighboring churches seeking greater partnership with one another. For example, non-denominational churches in the same city might embark on the study together, benefitting from each other's ideas and strengthening a shift within a city to more intentional formation-focused approaches to children's ministries.

APPENDIX A: Artifact Website

The complete curriculum may be accessed at the Worship With Children website under the “Church Toolkit” heading using the password “Artifact”.²⁰¹ The following images share the “Church Toolkit” portion of the website including the main navigation page and a sample of module landing pages.

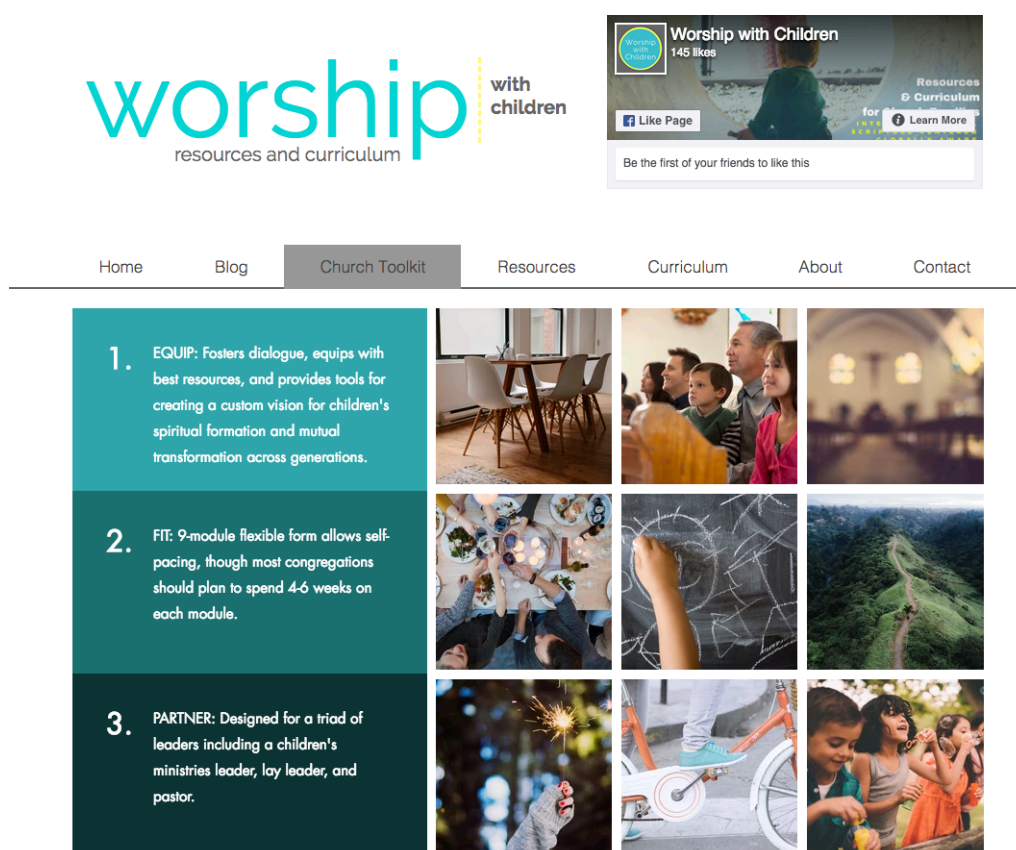


Image 1: "Church Toolkit" page on www.worshipwithchildren.com. Each of the nine square images links to a module landing page.

²⁰¹ www.worshipwithchildren.com/church-toolkit

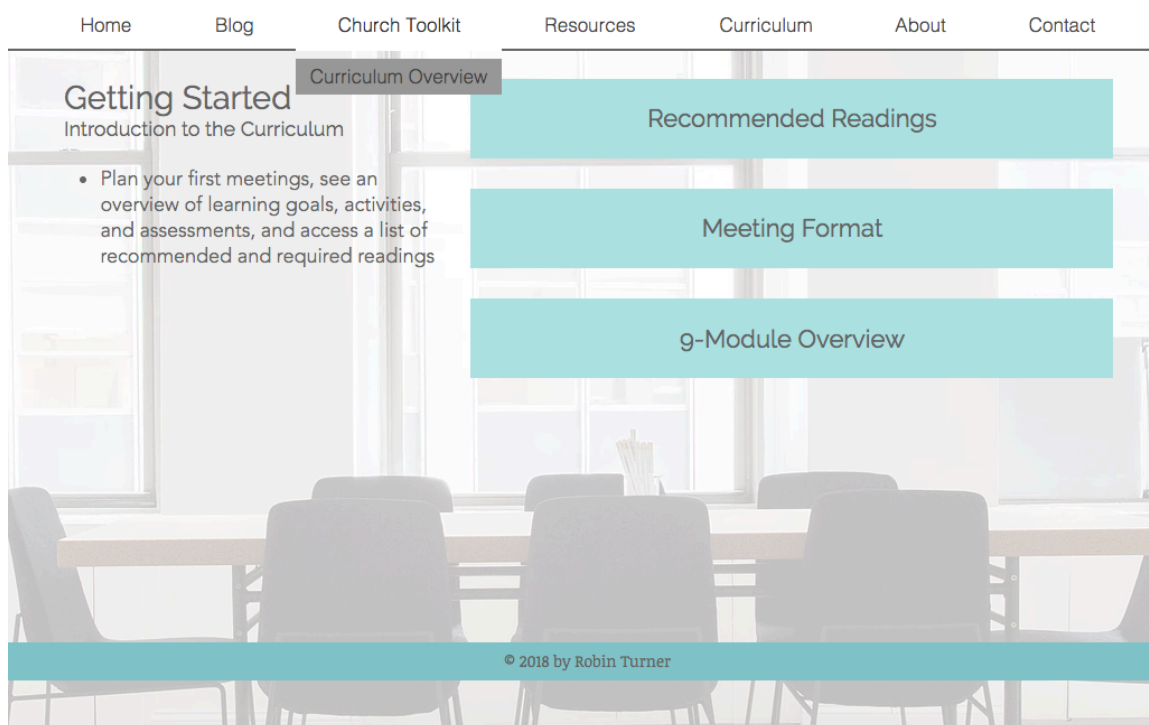


Image 2: Introduction page with links to overview of materials. This page is accessible to anyone on the website.

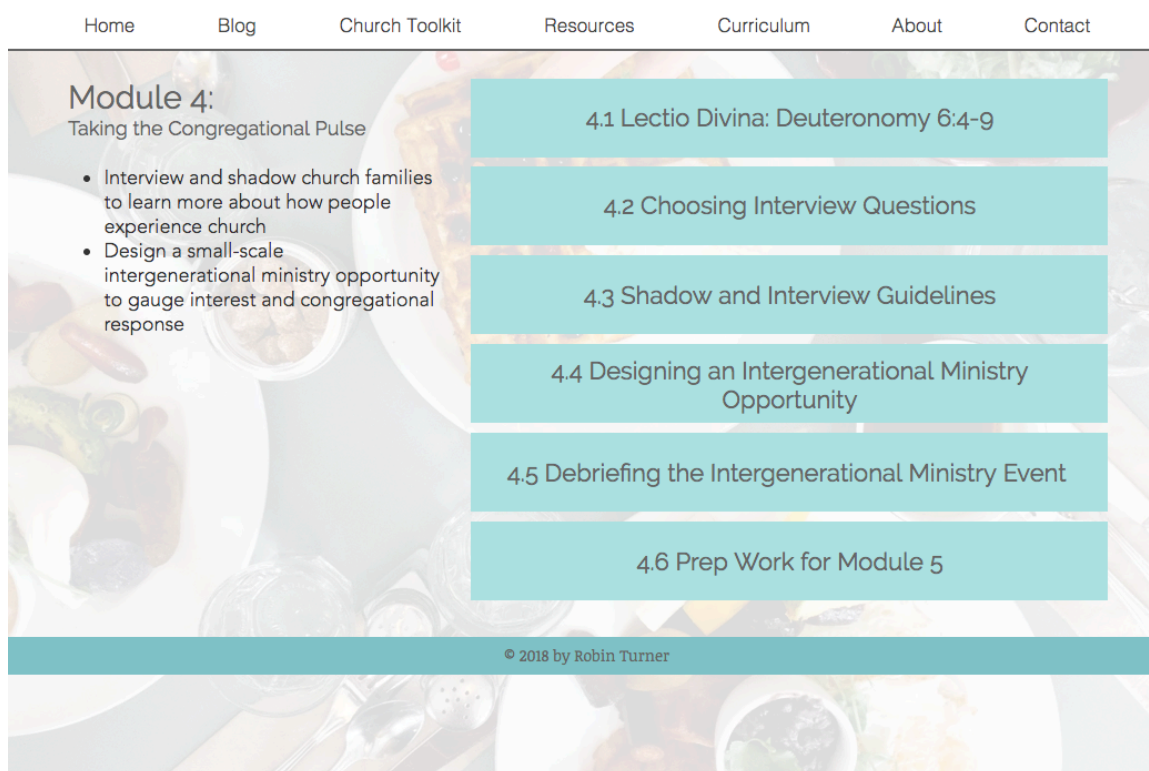


Image 3: Module 4 landing page. Each blue box is hyperlinked to a .pdf instruction sheet.

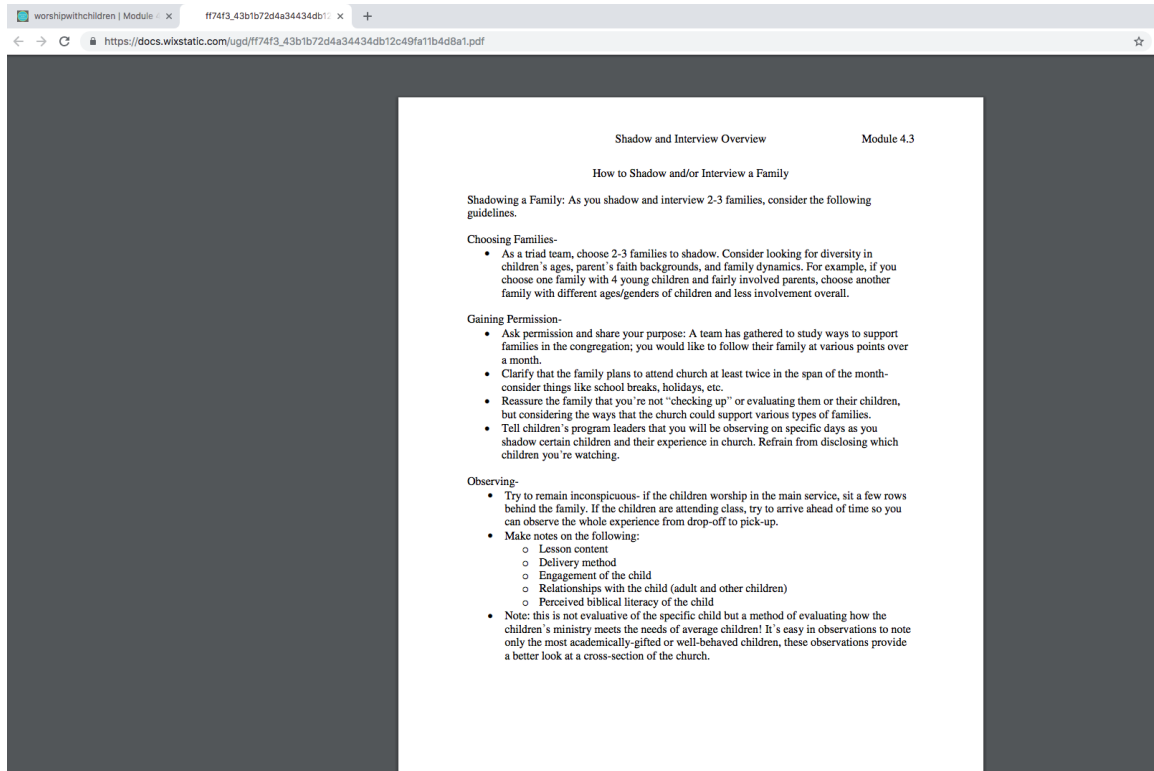


Image 4: Instruction page 4.3, downloadable as a .pdf file.

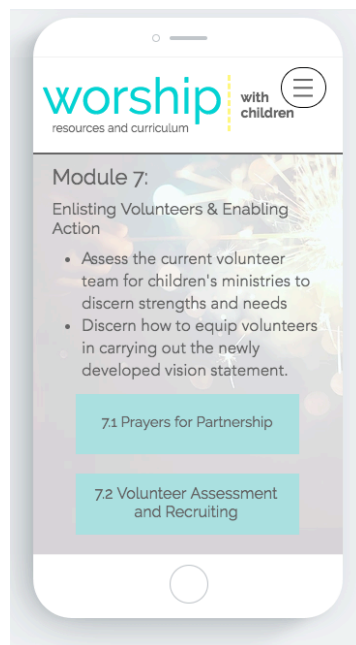


Image 5: Mobile landing page. All web pages and .pdf downloads are accessible by phone and tablet.

APPENDIX B: Curriculum Index

Introduction

- 0.1 Books for Required and Recommended Reading
- 0.2 Meeting Overview
- 0.3 Module Overview: Learning Goals, Learning Activities, and Forms of Assessment

Module 1: Forming a Team

- 1.1 Lectio Divina on Matthew 19:13-15
- 1.2 Building a Team Worksheet
- 1.3 Curriculum Overview: 9-Module Process
- 1.4 Follow-Up and Prep work for Module 2
- 1.5 Scripture Study of Children and the Kingdom of God

Module 2: Forming a Biblical Theology of Children in the Kingdom of God

- 2.1 – Opening Prayer and Debrief of Scripture Study
- 2.2 – Denominational Assessment on Theology of Children (completed by pastoral leader)
- 2.3 – Craft a 1-page Statement Summarizing Theology of Children
- 2.4 – Follow-Up and Prep work for Module 3

Module 3: A History of Christian Education/Where Are We Now?

- 3.1 – Guided Prayer
- 3.2 – Children's Ministries Assessment: What Type of Ministry are we Running?
- 3.3 – Responses to the History of Christian Education
- 3.4 – Triad Check-In

3.5 – Follow-Up and Prep work for Module 4

Module 4: Taking the Congregational Pulse

4.1 Lectio Divina: Deuteronomy 6:4-9

4.2 Interview Questions & Guidelines

4.3 Outline for how to shadow and interview a family

4.4 Designing an Intergenerational Ministry Opportunity

4.5 Set of scaled questions for debriefing Intergenerational ministry opportunity

4.6 Follow-Up and Prep work for Module 5

Module 5: Assessing Foundations and Philosophies of Programs

5.1 Guided Meditation on Leading with Love

5.2 Introduction to The Frankena Model for Ministry

5.3 Follow-Up and Prep work for Module 6

Module 6: Crafting a Vision

6.1 Meditation on Psalm 33

6.2 Vision Statement Guidelines- 1-sentence, 1 page, 1 document

6.3 Rubric for Successful Vision Statements

6.4 Creative sharing of Vision Statement

6.5 Follow-Up and Prep Work for Module 7

Module 7: Enlisting Volunteers & Enabling Action

7.1 Prayers for Partnership, taken from the Book of Common Prayer

7.2 Volunteer Assessment and Recruiting

7.3 Commitments to using Power and Presence

7.4 Triad Check-In

7.5 Follow-up and Prep Work for Module 8

Module 8: Instituting Change

8.1 Scripture Readings on Unity in the Church

8.2 Collaborative Communication and Implementation

8.3 A Systemic Change Case Study

8.4 Follow-Up and Prep Work for Module 9

Module 9: Our Plan for Long-Term Success

9.1 Psalm 100 and a prayer of Thanksgiving

9.2 Develop and adopt a Yearly Assessment Plan

9.3 Identify and Plan for areas of Continued Growth

APPENDIX C: Sample Module Outlines

Each learning activity is guided by a separate .pdf download available on the Worship With Children Website. The content of the first three modules is included below labeled with the module and activity number as noted in the curriculum index. The content is identical, but the spacing, page breaks, chart-size, and some other formatting differs from the formal curriculum.

Module 1

1.1 Opening

Brief devotional exercises are provided for you to begin each meeting with prayer and Scripture-reading. Use this time to prepare to listen to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you lead.

Lectio Divina or "Divine Reading" is a guided meditative reading of a Scripture text that incorporates prayer and silence for reflection and application. Use the following instructions to pray and meditate on Matthew 19:13-15 to begin your first meeting.

Matthew 19:13-15

¹³ Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

¹⁴ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."¹⁵ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

1. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your reading of Scripture
2. Have one person slowly read the Scripture aloud. Listen for a word or phrase of particular interest or importance. Wait 90-120 seconds of silence.
3. Listen to the Scripture read aloud again. Silence.

4. Speak the word or phrase aloud as you feel led.
5. Close in prayer.

1.2 Building a Team

Position	Strengths & Resources	Commitment
Children's Ministry Leader		
Pastoral Leader		
Lay Leader		

1. Spend 5-minutes in personal reflection- what are you bringing to this team?

Consider the following

- a. Skills or knowledge (with children, communication, administration, etc.)
 - b. Connections within or outside your congregation
 - c. Attitude
 - d. Resources of time or energy
2. Share your reflections as a team, making notes on the chart above so everyone has a copy. Don't be shy here, share your sense of purpose and giftedness. Feel free to add to these for each other, calling out the giftings you see in each other.
 3. Are there any personal concerns any of you have regarding leading in the triad?
These could include pressing concerns in other areas of life, busyness, apprehension about a skill or ability, etc.
 4. Begin to gather a **Vision Team** if you don't already have a children's ministries leadership team. Consider the balance of skills your triad represents, and add leaders who balance out the giftings of your team, such as a parents of specific-age children, veteran parents, etc.

Triad Team: The triad consists of 3 leaders- the children’s ministry leader, a pastoral leader, and a lay volunteer. This team will do the bulk of the research, decision-making, and attend regular module-meetings. The triad commits to meet together for the duration of the curriculum approximately one year).

Vision Team: The children’s ministry Vision Team consists of 5-10 volunteers committed to children’s ministry chosen to offer feedback, insight, prayer, and support for the ministry. They should meet at least quarterly and plan to serve more than one year.

1.3 Curriculum Overview: 9-Module Process

Implementing a vision involves leading change within an established system. One reputable framework for leading systemic change in a community and organization comes from business leader John Kotter and his book *Leading Change*. The 9-modules in this curriculum adapt steps in *Leading Change* for congregational formation as outlined in the framework below.

	Title	Overview
Mod 1	Forming a Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign team roles • Program overview • Introduction of Scripture Study
Mod 2	Biblical & Theological Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debrief Scripture Study • Denominational/doctrinal assessment • Crafting 1-page summary of beliefs
Mod 3	History & Philosophy of Christian Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing congregational approach to children’s spiritual formation • Historical overview of 20th/21st century children’s ministry • Begin discerning areas for growth

Mod 4	Assessment of Congregational Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview and Shadow church families • Small-scale intergenerational ministry opportunity • Debrief of interviews and event
Mod 5	Assessing the Foundations and Philosophies of Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn the Frankena Model of Evaluation • Use Frankena model to assess each ministry area for congruence between beliefs and methods
Mod 6	Crafting the Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft a 1-sentence, 1-page, and 1-document vision statement for children's programming in your congregation • Decide on effective method of sharing the vision initially and over time
Mod 7	Enlist Volunteers & Enable Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess current volunteer resources, skills, and areas of need • Determine and enlist people of power and influence in the community
Mod 8	Instituting Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design a plan for implementing change over time in a way that is winsome, effective, and accessible
Mod 9	Creating a Long-Term Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and commit to a yearly assessment and continuing education plan

1.4 Follow-up work before Module 2

Everyone:

- Schedule meeting for Module 2
- Scripture Study of Children in the Kingdom of God
- Read Chapter 5, "Feasts, Jehoshaphat, and House Churches," (pg. 77-84) in *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship* by Holly Allen, published by IVP Academic, 2012.

Children's Ministry Leader:

- Identify 2-3 families (preferably within your congregation) who seem to be shepherding their children well- what are they doing? Characteristics? Rituals?
- Reflect on your own ministry:
 - In what ways might the children of your congregation be examples of the Kingdom of God? Can you give any specific examples?

- In what ways might the actions of your congregation reveal a high view of children from a biblical and theological perspective?
- In what ways might your congregation reveal a low view of children?

Pastoral Leader:

- Investigate denominational or theological convictions regarding children for your congregation. (Use worksheet 2.2)

Lay Leader:

- Identify 2-3 families (preferably within your congregation) who seem to be shepherding their children well- what are they doing? Characteristics? Rituals?

1.5 Scripture Study

Children throughout Scripture

1. Before your second meeting, read the following Scriptures and note your observations. Pay attention to instructions given to children or the community regarding children, examples of how children were treated or incorporated into community, or times when children were used as a metaphor for Christian living.

	Scripture	Observations
Law	Deuteronomy 4:40	
	Deuteronomy 6:1-9	
	Deuteronomy 11:19	
History	Exodus 12:20	
	I Samuel 3	
Poetry & Wisdom	Psalms 8:2	
	Psalms 127:3	
	Proverbs 17:6	
	Proverbs 22:6	
	Isaiah 38:19	
ospel	Matthew 18:2-6	

	Matthew 19:14	
	Mark 10:13-26	
	Luke 6:35	
	Luke 18:15-17	
	John 12:36	
Epistle	Romans 8:14-20	
	Ephesians 5-6	
	Colossians 3:20	
	2 Timothy 3:14-15	
	I Peter 2:2	
	1 John 2:12-14	

2. Look back over your observations regarding children. What themes or commonalities arise? Use the following themes to collect your thoughts:
 - Instructions regarding Children:
 - Place of Children in Community:
 - Positive Characteristics of Children:
 - Negative Characteristics of Children:
3. Meditate and pray over these Scriptures. Is the Holy Spirit bringing any of them to mind in particular? Are there ways you and your community can hear an affirming “well done” regarding the way children live in your community? Are there ways you sense the Holy Spirit guiding you already in regards to how to love the children in your congregation well?

Module 2

2.1 Scripture Study Debrief

Open your time together by each reading aloud a Scripture passage from the study. Close your devotional time in prayer, asking God to guide your study and conversation.

1. Compare the themes your triad observed in your Scripture study:
 - a. What commonalities do you see?
 - b. Are there any contrasts to what stood out to each of you?
 - c. Any Scriptures that particularly stood out to you?
 - d. Did you have any questions the others in the group might be able to help you discern?
 - e. Were there any Scriptures that came to mind that were not included in the study?
2. Do biblical foundations in understanding the role of children show...
 - a. In the way your Sunday services are designed?
 - b. In your small groups, community groups, or other church-wide fellowship?
 - c. In your children's ministry curricula?
 - d. In the way your families approach church?
3. Cultural contexts frame both the writing of Scripture and modern day application. Are there any Scriptures or themes that you sense you need to know more about the cultural context of the writing in order to know how to apply to your context?
4. Looking over your study and your discussion today, consider 2-3 things you can affirm in your congregation's approach to children's formation or role in the community and 3-5 ways you would like to grow in your understanding or action. List the Scripture references alongside these responses.

Ways we are doing well:

1. .
2. .
3. .

Ways we would like to grow:

1. .
2. .
3. .
4. .
5. .

2.2 Denominational Assessment

For the pastoral leader: This document is designed to help you reflect on the theological convictions regarding children in your denomination. While few denominations offer explicit teaching on the place and education of children, the implicit

teachings and typical approaches in churches of your tradition may influence congregational expectations and/or connect you with resources for children's spiritual formation. Knowing your tradition's theological teachings and normative experiences will help you make intentional decisions moving forward.

Theological Convictions

Briefly summarize the church's theological position on the following topics-

- Baptism
- Original Sin
- Salvation
- Work of the Holy Spirit
- Church Membership
- Communion Participation (who, when, how?)

What did I expect?

For each Triad member: Complete the following questions to gauge what is considered normal to you and your community. Identifying what feels normal can help the team discern which norms to keep and which to consider adapting. If you're in a non-denomination context, consider other churches with similar convictions, sizes, and demographics. If you're in a large and diverse congregation, consider noting both the approaches of congregations similar to yours as well as congregations that vary widely even with the same denominational umbrella.

In our tradition, the environments where children generally receive religious education include...

In our tradition, the role of the church and the role of the family can be described by...

In our tradition, children's involvement in congregational life generally looks like...

In our tradition, family's expectations regarding congregational worship and children can be described as...

2.3 Developing a Statement: Children and the Kingdom of God

Using your Scripture study, reading, denominational assessment, and observations, develop a 1-page summary of your theology of Children in the Kingdom of God. By clarifying and articulating your beliefs about children, you can begin to consider how the rhythms of your church community can honor them. By limiting your document to 1-page, you make it accessible for future use. Note the Scripture references related to each statement, so they will be easily accessible in the future.

Make sure you consider the following areas:

- Children's roles in the Old Testament
- Children's roles in the Gospels and New Testament
- Specific instructions regarding raising or teaching children
- Ways children serve as leaders or examples

2.4 Follow-Up and Prep Work for Module 3

Everyone:

Read *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* chapters 1 and 2, paying particular attention to the history of Christian Education

- Spend 15-20 minutes reflecting on your own background in Christian Education.
 - What was normative in your childhood experience?
 - What did you like or dislike?
 - What fruit, good or bad, did you reap from your experiences?

Children's Ministry Leader:

- Finish drafting 1-page statement summarizing your theology of children, give it to the pastoral member of your team for final edits and theological nuances.
- Reflect on the history of children's ministry in your own congregation. If you're part of a church plant, consider the churches people on the plant-team are coming from.
 - What influences have shaped the content?
 - Publishing houses (Group, GospelLight, denominational)
 - Person or Leader (i.e. a pastoral leader or children's ministry leader with a particular vision)
 - Cultural trends (series based on a movie or trend)
 - What influences have shaped the format?
 - Length of lesson time
 - Space
 - Convictions
 - Particular desires/needs
 - See the bottom of this page for a sample reflection
- Make a list of every program your church is running for children including each classroom setting and teacher (or teacher team)
- Meet with lay team member before the next meeting to talk through and adjust your responses. If the lay leader does not have significant history at the church, consider bringing someone else from the church into the meeting, too.

Pastoral Leader:

- Finish editing or nuancing 1-page document after your children's ministry leader gives it to you. Bring a copy for each team member to your next meeting.

Lay Leader:

- Meet with the children's ministry leader to talk through the influences in the various programs. The more nuanced this list is, the more helpful it will be at your next meeting!

Fictional Sample Reflection for Children's Ministry Leader

Setting: New Hope, a suburban church established in the mid 2000s from an Episcopal background.

Content Influences:

- Church planted with children's ministry at start in 2003
 - Most on church-plant team have elementary-age children or are empty-nesters
 - Most coming from evangelical or non-denominational background
 - Emphasis for children seems to be helping them know Bible stories
- Mostly focused on elementary-programs early on- didn't add preschool lesson until 2007
- Used various all-in-the-box lesson packages from 2003-2009. Hired various leaders 10 hrs/week to run programs.
- 2007- Tried Narnia-based curriculum to use Narnia live-action movies. No one seems to remember much about it except that we did it.
- Sally Johnson served as leader 10hr/wk (but really served more like 20...) 2009-2011 creating stories and teaching with her husband or 2-3 volunteers each week. Moved out of state in 2011.
 - Creative story-telling with dressing up
 - Lots of games and prizes
 - Children seemed happy in children's ministry, but no particular church growth
 - Launch VBS
- Went back to all-in-the-box 2011-2014, hired Janet 15 hrs/week for coordination
 - 2 levels- one for preschool, one for elementary
 - Lots easier for set-up and clean-up
 - Difficult recruiting
 - Less engaging for kids- families leaving or coming less often because kids seem bored
 - Difficult volunteer recruitment
- Hired Janet 20 hrs/week in 2014
 - Began using a denominational publishing house curriculum with commitment to stick with it for 2+ years- some digital resources for first time
 - Invested in screen technology for children's rooms- video projector, laptop, and iPad
 - Children's ministry growing! Lots of children born into the church are reaching elementary school
 - Bring back summer VBS after 3-year hiatus
- 2017- realizing that after 3+ years with denominational curriculum, children still have low biblical-literacy and don't seem to engage in corporate worship.
 - Most parents don't seem to care because their children are happy and well cared for
 - Janet is getting restless and trying to figure out how effective her ministry really is.
 - Church has 60+ children on a weekly basis and is ready to focus on children's ministry

Format Influences:

2003: Church plant!

- Single service
- 1 adult, 2 youth helpers for lesson
- 10-12 children/Sunday PreK-5th grade
- Lesson in side room at community center used as a temporary worship space- tables and chairs not moveable
- Children in service for beginning and end, released for sermon (45-minutes)

2007:

- Move to different location- local school
- Church meets in a school auditorium, nursery and elementary programs meet in the cafeteria
- Children begin in service and then leave; are picked up by parents.

2009-2011:

- Still at elementary school. Nursery moved to local classroom, elementary still in cafeteria
- Sally's husband, Don, constructs small stage for her drama-based program
- Church building campaign! Children's ministry will be in large multi-use space that doubles as a fellowship hall. Permanent nursery space.

2011-2014:

- Church building!
- Invest in technology as final part of building campaign (2014)
- Children begin returning to service again after the lesson to emphasize corporate worship (pastor-led change)

2014-2017:

- Children's area is permanent (sometimes multi-use mid-week, but designated children's)
- Classrooms are table-and-chair format (no desks) with curriculum-provided posters on the walls
- Children in rooms for 30-40 minutes/week
- Difficulty finding enough teachers to meet safety standards, so sometimes we combine classes which makes the rooms crowded

Programs:

- 2 services- during each we have...
 - Nursery (rotating team of volunteers, need 3/service)
 - PreK-K (Lois P., Allens, Dave P., and Lopez' rotate)
 - 1st-5th (Britney F., Chos, Sam R., Caleb E., O'Malleys, Maxwells rotate)
- Lent Program (6-weeks, looking for new leader)
- Advent Program (4-weeks, Maxwells lead)
- VBS each summer (Janet w/team)

Module 3

3.1 Opening Guided Prayer

This module will lead your triad to consider history of your congregation and the presence of various historical influences in your children's programming. Begin your meeting with an extended time of prayer, considering the following categories.

- Love
 - Knowing the love of the Lord
 - Extending the love of Christ to others
 - Particular prayer for loving children and receiving the love of children well
- Insight and Wisdom
 - Knowing how to come alongside children in your community
 - Listening to and discerning well with the adults in the community
 - Asking for guidance from the Holy Spirit
- Action
 - Patience and courage regarding how to implement any potential changes
 - Partnership with the broader church community
 - Joy in collaboration and implementation of plans

3.2 Children's Ministries Assessment

Use the following questions to assess approaches to children's ministries in your congregation. Note any discrepancies, such as variations between programs, age groups, or teachers, on the right side of the margin. The goal of this activity is to assess what is already happening within your congregation, not what you aspire to become like.

This assessment is largely based on "75 Years of Evangelical Children's Formation", a keynote lecture given by Scottie May at The Children's Spirituality Summit in Nashville, Tennessee, June 2018.

1. After a Bible story is shared with children, they are commonly asked to...
 - a. Recall what happened in it.
 - b. Relate the story back to the class through art or drama.
 - c. Ask their own questions of the story.
2. The teacher in our classes can best be described as...
 - a. The Boss or Expert
 - b. The Planner or Coordinator
 - c. The Shepherd or Co-Learner
3. On a Sunday morning, children generally
 - a. Sit and listen, filling in worksheets or reading from the text
 - b. Play active games or create art correlated with the story
 - c. Spend time in listening, reflection, and discussion.
4. In order to motivate children to participate in learning, we generally...
 - a. Offer rewards like candy, tickets, or other prizes.
 - b. Tailor each lesson to multiple learning styles and try to engage children in what they like most.
 - c. Focus on relationships and invitations, waiting for children to respond in their own time.
5. Our chief goal in children's ministry is that...
 - a. Children understand the Bible and how to navigate it and apply it.
 - b. Children feel loved and accepted, knowing Jesus' love through their relationships and experiences at church.
 - c. Engage in prayer and worship, knowing God through our forms of worship and learning.
6. The metaphor that fits our children's ministry best:
 - a. A Training Camp- children are learning how to do things, what to do, and how to grow!
 - b. A Playground- Children are learning through engaging in fun activities and building relationships.
 - c. A Journey- Children are exploring faith alongside the teacher, engaging in a set learning process that allows open-ended responses.
7. Children come to church to...
 - a. Learn what to believe and why.
 - b. Have fun while learning and gaining a positive view of the church.
 - c. Worship and learn.
8. In the larger congregation, children...
 - a. Are expected to engage in listening, worship, and prayer just like most of the rest of the congregation.
 - b. Rarely attend the larger congregational contexts. It's not fun, and we want to create something special for them. Also, it frustrates the adults when they attend.

- c. Engage in listening, worship, and prayer, but we adapt our expectations to invite their developmentally-appropriate participation.
- 9. Children can be described as...
 - a. “Wet Cement”- they’re so impressionable at this age!
 - b. “Explorers”- they want to adventure into everything!
 - c. “Plants”- God’s making them grow, and we’re helping guide them.
- 10. In planning, we focus our attention on...
 - a. Content. What do the children know, and what do they need to know?
 - b. Students. Do we have a relationship with each one? Do they feel loved? How do we make learning fun for them?
 - c. Processes. How do children learn best? What systems can we put in place to facilitate this learning?

Count the times you chose A, B, and C; each letter corresponds with a different type of learning and children’s ministry. All three forms of children’s ministry are useful and sometimes necessary, but most churches lean in one direction. If you lean heavily in one direction, look at alternative answers to some of these questions to consider alternative approaches to achieving similar goals.

Mostly As: Content-Centered, Ministry To Children

Content-centered children’s ministry focuses on helping children learn about God and the Bible. Children in churches that focus on content often have a strong understanding of how the Bible fits together, how to look up Scripture verses, and they are able to recall doctrinal truths. Unfortunately, children raised in content-focused ministries sometimes know more about God without having a relationship with God, focusing on learning rather than worship. Children with learning disabilities often struggle in these environments because they have difficulty mastering the subjects at the same rate as their peers. Children who can achieve the learning goals easily sometimes grow more in pride than relationship with God. Giving children opportunities to ask questions or respond to open-ended questions can help them engage in deeper thinking.

Mostly Bs: Student-Centered, Ministry For Children

Student-Centered children's ministry recognizes the unique gifts and learning styles of children, seeking to make an environment where they feel welcomed and loved. Oftentimes leaders of these ministries create engaging, exciting activities to make the Bible lessons interesting to children. Sometimes, however, the activities eclipse the lessons or worship itself. Children may begin thinking that the goal of church is to have fun, and if the children's ministry fails to entertain them, they can become disengaged or misbehave. This type of ministry puts intense pressure on leaders to keep children from being bored and to cater to each learning style every week. Keeping the focus on worship and learning rather than entertainment can help these creative leaders continue to create a church environment hospitable to children but focused on God.

Mostly Cs: Process-Centered, Ministry With Children

Process-centered children's ministry allows children to learn at their own pace and recognizes the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in guiding children. Leaders in these ministries are often good at inviting children into various aspects of worship in the church, engaging them in meaningful activities that many may not consider child-friendly such as meditative prayer. Sometimes children in process-centered ministries lack a cohesive understanding of how the stories of Scripture or the doctrine of the church fits together. When leaders focus intently on serving as co-learners, children are sometimes confused as to who is actually guiding them on their faith journey. These ministries sometimes focus on integrating truths into life without actually sharing the truths directly with the children. Process-centered ministries can grow by considering what children

have been directly taught and helping them see the overarching stories of Scripture and doctrinal truths.

3.3 Responses to the History of Christian Education

Having completed the assessment (3.2) and your own personal reflection (after Module 2), use the following questions to guide your conversation regarding your direction in methods of children's spiritual formation in your congregation:

1. In what ways do we fall into each of the 3 categories (content-centered, student-centered, and process-centered). Do we integrate the categories? Are there easy opportunities we see for integrating the categories?
2. In our congregational context, does one approach seem most appropriate or most effective? Are there families or key volunteers in our congregation who lean strongly toward one approach?
3. Given our theological convictions established in Module 2, are there ways we need to adjust our methods to better reflect our beliefs about how children learn, their role in our community, or our responsibility to children in our congregation?

3.4 Triad Check-In

One-third of the way through the program, consider the following questions and check-in as a team.

- Pace:
 - Is the pace of working through the modules working?
 - Is there too much prep work needed between modules? Do you need more time?
 - Are there life or ministry circumstances that are making it difficult to be a part of this team?
- Meeting Length, Productivity, and Participation:
 - Are there ways that our meetings could be more productive?
 - Are we able to accomplish the tasks in a reasonable amount of time?
 - Are there any people we need to ask to join our meetings to make the most of our time together?
 - Does each participant feel listened to and valued as a team member?
- Spiritual Guidance
 - Is our work guided by Lord and the Scriptures?

- Have we been faithful in prayer?
- Do we have the support and prayers of anyone outside of our triad?

3.5 Follow-Up and Prep Work for Module 4

Everyone:

- Read 2-3 chapters from Part Four of *Intergenerational Christian Formation* by Holly Allen (Chapters 13-20) which examines different forms of intergenerational ministry. Choose chapters based on your ministry areas and congregation's needs.
- Journal 2-3 times reflecting on your results from Module 3 and the intergenerational ministry ideas from *Intergenerational Christian Formation*.
 - Are there any ministry areas* where you see a good integration of approaches to learning and worship? Areas where you already see intergenerational formation happening?
 - Do you sense any clear opportunities for change, either ministries that are struggling and ready for change or ministries that could easily incorporate multiple generations?
 - Are there any ministry areas you feel strongly should not incorporate any significant changes?

*For the purpose of these questions, consider a “ministry area” any church-related ministry such as the main worship service, special events, education-hour classes, missions or outreach opportunities, hospitality teams (greeters, ushers, flower guild), or mid-week ministries.

Children's Ministry Leader:

- In light of your last 3 modules, reflect on what changes seem most pressing for your congregation. Begin by brainstorming a list of all possible places you would like to see growth (perhaps with the lay leader) and then discerning general trends or categories between the changes. Use this module as a “catch up” for reflection and conversation.

Pastoral Leader:

- None.

Lay Leader:

Meet with the children's ministry leader to talk through reflections on the first three modules. Do you sense the same needs for change? Are these needs widely felt among families in your congregation?

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