



# Lifelong Faith Associates

## July 2009 Newsletter

### Practical Strategies for Educating for Christian Practices

One of the best ways to become intentional about faith formation in Christian practices is to make it a focus of your church's faith formation curriculum and programming. In *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*, we have developed a learning-living resource around twelve Christian practices, which can serve as the basis of a curriculum plan or individual programming.

1. Caring for the Body
2. Celebrating Life
3. Discernment
4. Dying Well
5. Eating Well
6. Forgiving
7. Keeping Sabbath
8. Managing Household Life
9. Participating in Community
10. Praying
11. Reading the Bible
12. Transforming the World

It is important that the curriculum makes intentional connections for a holistic formation in Christian practices, i.e., what is learned in educational settings is reinforced and deepened through worship and engagement in the community's practice, and lived-out in daily life: home, work, and school. The four elements of an integrated curriculum model include: 1) learning, 2) worship, 3) engagement in community practice, and 4) living the practices in daily life.

Take a moment to review your current efforts in educating for Christian practices by reflecting on the following questions:

1. Are Christian practices being intentionally taught in your faith formation curriculum and programming?
2. How well does your church prepare children, youth, adults, and families to live Christian practices at home, in the world, and within the church community?
3. Are children, youth, adults, and families engaged in the church's practices as an integral element of your faith formation curriculum and programs?
4. How can you strengthen the connection between faith formation and the church's practices?

### Curriculum Strategies

Here are several strategies for incorporating Christian practices curriculum into your church's faith formation curriculum.

**Strategy #1. Make a Christian practice the focus for a season of the year through all education programs, worship, preaching, service/action, etc.**

**Example:** During the Lenten Season focus on the practice that is in keeping with the theology, liturgies, and Scripture readings of the season, such as Forgiving or Discernment or Praying or Transforming the World

**Strategy #2. Make a Christian practice a focus for the whole year through all education programs, worship, preaching, service/action, etc.**

**Example:** Here are several Christian practices that could serve as a focus for the whole community for a year: Reading the Bible, Praying, Hospitality, and Transforming the World.

**Strategy #3. Focus on a Christian practice each month for a whole year or more in family-intergenerational programming, aligned with Sunday worship and preaching, action projects, etc.**

**Example:** If the family-intergenerational program focused on Ritual-Celebration-Worship the following practices could become the focus of learning programs:

1. Celebrating Life
2. Eating Well
3. Keeping Sabbath
4. Praying
5. Reading the Bible

**Example:** *How Shall We Live? – A Year of Living Well*

1. How to Care for Your Body
2. How to Celebrate Life
3. How to Make Tough Choices (Discernment)
4. How to Eat Well
5. How to Forgive Yourself and Others
6. How to Keep a Sabbath Day of Rest
7. How to Manage Household Life
8. How to Pray Well
9. How to Read the Bible and Enjoy It!
10. How to Serve Others

**Strategy #4. Re-structure the existing curriculum to incorporate a session on Christian practices (family or intergenerational) and a direct experience of that practice in the life of the church community, followed by reflection.**

**Example 1: Curriculum Theme: Sacraments**

1. Christian practices sessions: Eating Well, Keeping Sabbath, Forgiving, Dying Well
2. Experience of sacraments in the church community
3. Reflection on the experience

**Example 2: Curriculum Theme: Justice and Service**

1. Christian practices session: Transforming the World
2. Action projects: with the church, in the community, or in the world
3. Reflection

**Strategy #5. Incorporate Christian practices, using the 12 practices in *Living Well*, in the RCIA as part of catechumenal formation by connecting them to theological themes or as the heart of a mystagogy formation program focused on living one's faith.**

- |                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Caring for the Body | 7. Keeping Sabbath            |
| 2. Celebrating Life    | 8. Managing Household Life    |
| 3. Discernment         | 9. Participating in Community |
| 4. Dying Well          | 10. Praying                   |
| 5. Eating Well         | 11. Reading the Bible         |
| 6. Forgiving           | 12. Transforming the World    |

**Strategy 6. Incorporate education for Christian practices in sacramental preparation, connecting a practice with the “content” of the sacrament.**

**Examples:**

1. Marriage: Managing Household Life
2. Baptism: Caring for the Body, Celebrating Life
3. Eucharist: Keeping Sabbath, Eating Well
4. Reconciliation: Forgiving
5. Confirmation: Transforming the World, Discernment, Praying

**Strategy 7. Connect the Sunday lectionary readings (and preaching) to Christian practices and offer educational programs on Christian practices to prepare for or follow-upon the particular Sunday.**

**Example: Fall 2009 Lectionary (Cycle B)**

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. 23 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday (B): Mark 7:31-37  | Healing, Caring for Body |
| 2. 24 <sup>th</sup> Sunday (B): Mark 8:27-35  | Testimony                |
| 3. 28 <sup>th</sup> Sunday (B): Mark 10:17-30 | Discernment              |
| 4. 29 <sup>th</sup> Sunday (B): Mark 10:35-45 | Transforming the World   |
| 5. 30 <sup>th</sup> Sunday (B): Mark 8:27-35  | Healing, Caring for Body |

**Strategy 8. Connect Christian practices to milestones and life transitions.** Milestones are significant moments in life's journey that provide the opportunity for children and their families to experience God's love, and grow in faith through sacred and ordinary events both in the life of the congregation and in daily life. Milestones faith formation uses four elements to shape a vital partnership between the congregation and the home.

- *Naming* the sacred and ordinary events that are recognized in the life of a congregation and those that take place in our daily lives—our beginnings, endings, transitions, achievements, failures, and rites of passage—creates rituals and traditions that shape our identities and give us a sense of belonging to the family of Jesus Christ.
- *Equipping* brings the generations together, builds community, invites conversation, encourages storytelling, and provides information. Opportunities are provided here to model faith practices for the home.
- *Blessing* the individual, and marking the occasion in a worship service and in the home, says that it is *all* about faith. God is present in all of daily life, making the ordinary sacred.
- *Gifting* offers a tangible, visible item that serves as a reminder or symbol of the occasion being marked, as well as a resource for the ongoing nurture of faith in daily life.  
(Anderson and Staats, *Milestones Ministry Manual for Home and Congregation*)

Every milestone presents an opportunity to teach a Christian practice that directly connects to what is happening in the life of the individual or family. For example the many life decisions of the youth and young adult years provide an opportunity for teaching “Discernment.” The beginning of a new life together as a new couple is an opportunity for teaching “Managing Household Life.”

Milestone / Stage of Life	Christian Practices Suggestions
Birth / Baptism	Caring for the Body; Celebrating Life
Young Children	Celebrating Life; Praying, Reading the Bible
Welcoming Young Children to Worship	Keeping Sabbath
Starting School	Participating in Community
First Communion	Eating Well; Keeping Sabbath
Receiving a first Bible	Reading the Bible
Confirmation	Transforming the World; Discernment, Praying
Graduations	Discernment
A New Home / Apartment	Managing Household Life; Hospitality
Career / First Job	Discernment
Marriage	Managing Household Life; Participating in Community
Retirement or AARP Card Older Adult Transitions	Transforming the World; Discernment; Participating in Community; Caring the Body, Dying Well

## Program Ideas

1. **Create specific projects, programs, and activities that teach Christian Practices.** Christian practices can be explored and experienced in a variety of program models. Here are just a few to consider as part of your curriculum.

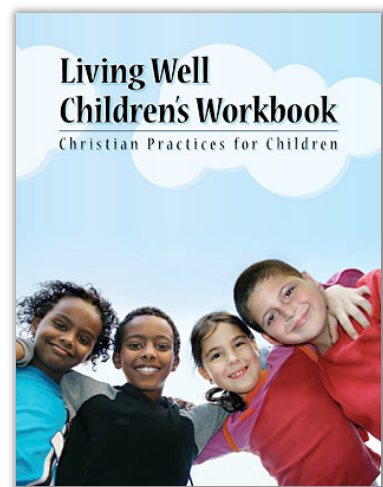
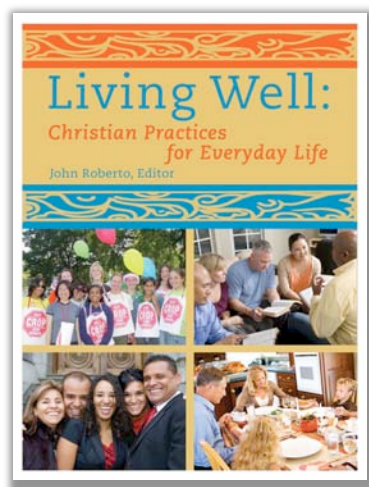
- **Family and Intergenerational** programs provide an excellent format for exploring and learning Christian practices. The witness of the different age groups, especially older adults, makes for a rich learning environment.
- **Weeklong** extended programs such as “Vacation Bible School” and summer camps can focus on several practices, combining study and hands-on experience.
- Multi-session **courses, workshops, or speaker series** can focus on one or more Christian practices with opportunities for people to experience the practice between sessions.
- Youth **meetings**, weekly or monthly, provide a setting for teaching Christian practices. *Way to Live* includes 16 practices for youth and has session plans for each practice that can be downloaded from [www.waytolive.com](http://www.waytolive.com).
- **Retreats** provide an intensive setting for the development of practices such as “Prayer,” “Discernment,” and “Reading the Bible.”
- Round table **discussions** after Sunday worship provide a setting for exploring the implications of the Scripture readings for practicing faith.
- A **film festival** provides a unique setting to explore Christian practices through the lives and events portrayed in feature films, e.g., exploring “Transforming the World” in the film *Romero* or *Entertaining Angels* (Dorothy Day).

- A **field trip** provides an opportunity to see and experience Christian practices in action, e.g., “Dying Well” at a hospice center, “Transforming the World” at a soup kitchen, “Healing” at a clinic.
- A **service** project teaches the practice of Transforming the World or Hospitality.
- Lectionary faith sharing groups and Children’s Liturgy of the Word teach the practice of reading the Bible, as well as specific practices connected to the Scripture readings.

**2. Develop Christian practice apprenticeships.** Every church has “Practice Mentors” who are living embodiments of a Christian practice, such as service or hospitality or prayer. Churches can structure learning programs around these teachers in individualized and small group settings where mentors can apprentice people who want to learn how to live the Christian practice. For example, if people wanted to learn how to serve people in need at the local homeless shelter, they can accompany the “practice mentor” when he or she works at the shelter, and learn about homelessness and the practice of hospitality and serving others. Each apprenticeship can include a study component with independent reading from the Bible and descriptions of service. This model of mentoring could be applied across the entire church and become integral to all learning programs in the curriculum.

**3. Develop Christian practices small group learning settings.** Small group learning provides a supportive setting for learning about a Christian practice, then moving into practice of what has been learned, and concluding with reflection on lived experience. Small groups can be organized around a single practice or multiple practices. Practice learning groups can be offered on a variety of practices and at different lengths, times, and places that best fit their lives, such as homes, a local restaurant or coffee shops. A church can publish, in print and online, a whole menu of practice groups, times, and places.

Each chapter in the *Living Well* book has a small group learning program; most of the resources created in *The Practices of Faith Series* have study guides that can be downloaded from the Practicing Our Faith web site: [www.practicingourfaith.com](http://www.practicingourfaith.com). In addition, *Living the Good Life Together: A Study of Christian Character in Community* (Abingdon Press) is a new series of five, 6-12 week video-and-book small group studies on Christian practices (see [www.livingthegoodlifetogether.com](http://www.livingthegoodlifetogether.com) for more information).



**Go to [www.lifelongfaith.com](http://www.lifelongfaith.com) to order your *Living Well* books and to download free learning activities and study guides for each Christian practice in *Living Well*.**