# Goals for Maturing in Faith for a Lifetime

*What’s your vision for maturing in faith? What does a vital Christian faith look like at each stage of the life span? What are the characteristics of a committed, maturing Christian who is growing in faith and discipleship? How does your vision guide the development of faith formation at each stage of life?*

The shift to a lifelong faith formation paradigm in churches begins with a vision of maturing in Christian faith. A church needs a lifelong vision of faith maturing that can guide its practice of faith formation. This vision be expressed through goals for maturing in faith that apply to the whole life span. Faith formation in each stage or season of life would be guided by one vision of faith maturing expressed through specific goals and life stage appropriate faith formation.

Researchers have been studying the characteristics of committed, maturing Christians for decades. The Search Institute’s *Effective Christian Education* study of the late 1980s and the *Exemplary Youth Ministry* study of the early 2000s were developed around widely accepted, tested, and easily understood beliefs and practices of committed Christians. The *Effective Christian Education* study proposed eight marks of faith maturing: trusting and believing in God, experiencing the fruits of faith, integrating faith and life, seeking spiritual growth, nurturing faith in community, holding life-affirming values, advocating social change, and acting and serving.

Drawn from the Christian faith tradition and from research studies on what makes a difference in forming faith in people’s lives across the life span, here are ten characteristics (goals) of faith maturing. They incorporate knowing and believing, relating and belonging, practicing and living. When taken together, these characteristics describe a person maturing in faith. They form the basis of helping people discern their faith journey and needs, and accompanying them in growing

1. To develop and sustain a personal relationship and commitment to Jesus Christ.
2. To live as a disciple of Jesus Christ and make the Christian faith a way of life.
3. To read and study the Bible and apply its message and meaning to living as a Christian today.
4. To learn the Christian story and the foundational teachings of one’s particular faith tradition and integrate its meaning into one’s life.
5. To worship God with the community weekly, in ritual celebrations, and through the seasons of the church year.
6. To pray, together and alone, and seek spiritual growth through spiritual practices and disciplines.
7. To live with moral integrity guided by Christian ethics and apply Christian moral values to decision-making.
8. To live the Christian mission in the world by serving those in need, caring for God’s creation, and acting and advocating for justice and peace—locally and globally.
9. To be actively engaged in the life, ministries, and activities of the Christian community.
10. To practice faith in Jesus Christ by using one’s gifts and talents within the Christian community and in the world.

Guided by the ten goals, churches can ask what they can do to help faith and discipleship flourish in the lives of people from childhood through older adulthood. The ten goals can be thought of as a framework for designing developmentally appropriate experiences, programs, activities, and resources for each stage of life: children, adolescents, young adults (20s–30s), midlife adults (40s–50s), mature adults (60s–70s), and older adults (80+). The goals provide a seamless process of fostering faith growth from birth through older adulthood because everyone shares a common vision of maturing in faith. Churches (and individuals) can visualize how faith can mature from childhood through older adults. Everything is in service to people growing in faith and discipleship.

At each stage of life, people experience faith-forming experiences with the whole community (intergenerational), with the whole family, and with their life stage (peer) groups. Faith formation at each stage of life blends intergenerational, family, and age group settings into a holistic approach, centered around the ten characteristics of maturing in faith. This reflects a significant shift from the age-segregated or siloed approach where faith formation with children, adolescents, and adults is primarily age-group-only without significant intergenerational and family faith-forming experiences.

In this approach, congregations build faith forming experiences around the ten goals and ask how can they can guide people in. . . .

* Knowing and understanding more fully the Christian faith (informing)
* Developing and deepening their relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community (forming)
* Living the Christian faith in every aspect of their lives (transforming)

Becoming goal-centered means that there are multiple approaches, programs, activities, and media to help people grow in faith—one goal, multiple ways to grow. No longer will faith formation be limited by the one-program, one-textbook/resource, one fixed-time and place approach. The focus will be on the person growing in faith and discipleship guided by the ten goals and a multiplicity of ways to form faith.

### Activity: Your Church’s Vision of Maturing in Faith

* What are your church’s goals (vision) for lifelong maturing in faith and discipleship for all ages and generations?
* What would you change/revise/add to your church’s goals for lifelong maturing in faith ?

### Reflection & Application

* How do your goals for maturing in faith inform or guide faith formation with all ages and generations? How do you see these goals reflected in your practice of lifelong faith formation?
  + How can your vision of maturing in faith inform what you are trying to accomplish in the lives of people at each stage of life from childhood through older adulthood?