

Handout 7 - Faith Formation Formats

A variety of formats can be utilized in programming, providing a way to offer a diversity of programs in different formats and to offer one program or experience in multiple formats, expanding the scope of program offerings and providing people with more options to participate.

1. On your own
2. Mentoring
3. Small group learning
4. Large group learning
5. Community-based learning
6. Hybrid (online and in-person)
7. Online
8. One program, multiple formats

1. On Your Own

On your own learning gives people choice about when, how, where, and what to learn, for example:

- Reading or listening to books and online recommended reading lists
- Websites for learning, prayer and spiritual formation, action for service and justice
- Online courses: Bible, theology, parenting
- Online retreat
- Podcasts
- Videos and video-based programs
- Online prayer websites
- Daily activities online and through apps: prayer, Bible reading, devotions, and much more

2. Mentoring

Mentoring incorporates one-to-one relationships in faith formation, for example:

- Mentors or guides for new parents
- Spiritual direction
- Apprenticeships
- Gifts discernment
- Vocational or calling discernment and formation
- Strengths discernment

3. Small Group

Small group formats provide lots of flexibility in content, schedule, and location (online, home, coffee shops, at church, and more) and create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed, for example:

- Discipleship, faith sharing, or study groups such as Bible study groups, theological study groups, thematic or issue-oriented study groups, Sunday lectionary-based faith-sharing groups, seasonal small groups such as Lenten study groups
- Spiritual direction and formation: prayer and spiritual growth groups
- Book or video study groups
- Practice-focused groups such as service/faith in action groups
- Support groups
- Parent support groups for different stages of family life

4. Large Group

Large group formats provide a way to engage a wider audience, for example:

- Presentations and single-session programs
- Multisession program such as a speaker series or video series
- Seasonal celebrations and presentations through the church year
- Roundtable discussions after Sunday worship to explore the scripture readings and sermon
- Workshops focused on practical knowledge and skills for age groups or families or all ages
- Field trips such as visiting a museum
- Retreat experiences such as an evening, one-day, or weekend program
- Church-wide action projects for service, justice, or care for creation
- Music, art, film, drama or dance programs, performances, and festivals
- Family catechesis programs
- Intergenerational programs for all ages

5. Community

Community-based formats offer a way for churches to utilize programs, courses, clinics, workshops, and presentations sponsored by other churches, community organizations (libraries, the Y, museums), regional and national church agencies, retreat centers, Christian camps, and colleges.

Digital Formats & Approaches

The digital transformation has created more options for programming. Catechetical programming can now be designed in three modes (or spaces): 1) *gathered physical settings* (churches, homes, camps, retreat centers, community places, colleges or seminaries); 2) *online settings* (websites, social media, online communities, online classrooms, and more); and 3) *hybrid settings* that combine physical gathering with online content and experiences.

One Program in Three Modes

With multiple ways to program in physical, online, and hybrid spaces, one program or experience can be designed in all three spaces, increasing the availability to a wider audience of people while not increasing the number of unique programs a parish creates. The choice is no longer whether to participate or not, but which option best suits a person's time, schedule, and learning preferences. Here is an example of a program that is conducted in multiple formats – same program, multiple ways to experience it.

1. *Large group physical gathering:* People gather at church and a leader facilitates the program—making a presentation (or having a guest presenter) or showing a video, providing time for people to read and reflect, and guiding small groups in discussing the content.
2. *Small group physical gathering:* People gather in small groups in homes or coffee shops or other conducive setting, watch the video, read and reflect on the content, and discuss the content.
3. *Small group hybrid:* People watch the video on their own, then gather online in a small group (Zoom or other video conferencing platform) to reflect and discuss the content.
4. *Online with interaction:* People complete the sessions on their own and share reflections in a Facebook group (asynchronous) or meet on Zoom to discuss the program (synchronous).
5. *Online independent:* People complete the learning program on their own.

Hybrid Formats and Approaches

Hybrid models of catechesis hold together two important values in faith formation: 1) the importance of in-person relationships and faith-forming experiences and 2) the importance of being responsive to the complexity of people's lives and their religious-spiritual needs. Hybrid models expand faith formation opportunities for everyone. Parishes can become much more intentional about when, where, how, and why we gather because we can now integrate online with in-person faith forming. The key to hybrid catechesis is the integration of in-person faith forming with online faith forming in one holistic integrated experience.

One way to develop a hybrid model is by beginning with in-person catechesis and then deepen it with online catechesis.

Worship & Online Formation

- Participate in weekly worship (in-person or live streamed).
- Engage in faith forming activities using an online playlist on Sunday's theme: prayers, readings, video, podcast, art, music, creative activities, conversations, action ideas, etc.

In-Person & Online Formation

- Meet in-person once per month (or every other week).
- Engage in online faith formation for the other weeks using a playlist on the theme.

In-Person & Online & Video Meetings

- Week #1: Meet in-person for the program.
- Week #2: Engage in online faith forming experiences using a playlist on the theme.
- Week #3: Continue with the playlist learning on the theme.
- Week #4: Conduct a video meeting (Zoom) for small groups or age groups or families to discuss and apply the online learning.

In-Person & Live Streamed or Video & Online

- Week #1: Meet in-person for the program.
- Week #2: Engage in online faith forming experiences using a playlist on the theme.
- Week #3: Conduct a livestream presentation or demonstration or prerecorded video (using Zoom, Facebook Live, or YouTube Live) on the theme of the month's program.
- Week #4: Continue with the playlist learning on the theme.

A second way to develop a hybrid model is to begin with online catechesis, leading to in-person experiences. This approach is known as *Flipped Learning* in which direct instruction moves from the group learning space to the individual learning space online, and the group space is transformed into a dynamic interactive learning environment where the leader/teacher guides participants as they creatively discuss, practice, and apply the content. Here is a basic outline of a 4-week model that can be applied to children and youth programs, as well as adult Bible studies and short courses.

Online & Small Group Gatherings

- Week #1: Engage in online learning using Playlist #1 on the theme.
- Week #2: Participate in a small group gathering to discuss and apply the learning (in-person or through video conferencing)
- Week #3: Engage in online learning using Playlist #2 on the theme.
- Week #4: Participate in a small group gathering to discuss and apply the learning (in-person or through video conferencing)

The Flipped Learning Model is very helpful when it is difficult to gather people, such as preparation for a sacrament. We can *prepare* people online with the appropriate content (experiences, activities, video/audio, and resources); then *engage* them in-person for the event or program; and *sustain and apply* the experience through online formation.

A good example of this is an adolescent confirmation program. Here is a flipped model illustrated in a monthly format for young people that can be woven into a yearlong program.

- **On Your Own:** Engage young people with a monthly learning playlist—watching videos, reading short articles, praying, writing reflections in a journal—on the theme.
- **In a Small Group:** Have young people participate in one small group experience (online) to discuss the content in the playlist and what they are learning.
- **In a Large Group:** Involve young people in a monthly meeting with all groups for community sharing, interactive activities, short presentations, and ideas for living faith.

Online-Only Learning

Parishes can develop fully online catechetical programming (asynchronous) by offering independent (on your own) faith formation using the abundance of online programs and resources for all ages, especially adults. Leaders can curate courses and resources to organize playlists or webpages with self-directed learning topics like Scripture, prayer and spiritual formation, social justice issues, theological themes, morality and ethics, and much more.

Churches can develop a complete online faith formation experience with content and experiences, such as an online Advent or Lent curriculum that connects the seasonal events at church with online content for experiencing the season in daily and home life. The online experiences can include prayer activities, daily Bible readings, daily devotions, study resources, videos, and service activities.

Churches can use video conferencing to create webinars, such as a monthly theology presentation for adults or a monthly one-hour parent formation. A parent webinar series can be designed around the knowledge, skills, and practices for faith forming and effective parenting, and use guest presenters to conduct the webinars. A church could blend the monthly webinars with one or two parent dinners (childcare or parallel children’s programming provided) during the year for parents to gather in-person to meet each other and discuss what they are learning through webinars. Here are two examples of programming that are primarily online with interactive features:

Online Only

- Week 1: Livestream (or video recording) of the class, program, or presentation. (Synchronous)
- Weeks#2–3: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the content/activities (Asynchronous)
- Week 4: Facebook Group (or online learning platform) for engaging people in discussion and presenting projects. (Synchronous or asynchronous)

Online with Interaction

- Week 1: Livestream of the class, program, or presentation (Synchronous)
- Week 2: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the content/activities (Asynchronous)
- Week 3: Zoom meetings for small groups or family groupings (Synchronous)
- Week 4: Online learning experiences using a playlist for the activities/content (Asynchronous)