

2020 Fall Faith Formation Toolkit

FAITH FORMATION IN A COVID WORLD

Plunged into the waters of the digital world out of necessity, our eyes have been opened to the realities of living in a digital world. Digital ministry is here to stay. Digital ministry is more than adopting new tools that deliver existing programs, but rather a reorientation of life itself in a shift that is decades in the making. Technology has changed culture. If we are to tell God's story, our story, and the story of us in a way that engages people, we must tell the story in a new way.

We invite you to consider how a tech-shaped culture can shape faith formation. In a recent online course on [Ministry in the Digital Age](#), Ryan Panzer, author of [Grace and Gigabytes](#) (forthcoming) outlined four values of a tech-shaped culture. They can be summarized in four words: questions, connections, collaborations, and creativity. In a tech-shaped culture, people learn by asking questions; they seek constant and meaningful connection; they are open to greater collaboration; and they are motivated to create. When planning your fall formation programming consider how offerings will:

1. Invite open-ended questions with opportunities for reflection.
2. Build relationships.
3. Encourage collaboration with opportunities for learners to create.
4. Ignite contributions to congregational life.

The work of faith formation leaders is to create experiences in which learners gather to build faithful relationships, collaborate to understand God and life together, and are equipped and empowered to live faithfully as Christians in the world.

Congregational life has been forever changed. We have been challenged to consider new and fruitful ways to shape the faith lives of our communities in a digital age. We invite you to consider these two questions as you plan:

1. How will you integrate technology with your fall faith formation programming?
2. How might you use technology to empower learners to create and contribute to the life of the community?

We hope the following set of ideas and resources are helpful as you plan formation offerings for the fall.

START OR STRENGTHEN SMALL GROUPS

Congregations are finding a renewed interest in connecting in small groups by Zoom. Be on the lookout for a *Small Group Toolkit* to be released by The Episcopal Church in mid-August. For a sneak peek, watch [Building an Intentional Small Group Ministry](#). Small groups are nothing new and resources abound. Two video-based series that focus on Christian practices are [Revive](#) by Forward Movement and [The Walk](#) by Adam Hamilton. Or consider building your community's capacity for evangelism with the new [Embracing Evangelism](#) series or (re)commit to being an anti-racist community by studying [How To Be an Anti-Racist](#). Have a parent group? Or seeking to begin one? A parent group could read [Bless This Mess](#) or [Parenting Forward](#), both written for progressive Christians.

PLAN ONLINE OR HYBRID FAMILY FAITH FORMATION

Publishers are increasingly developing faith formation resources for Zoom and other digital platforms. For a detailed list of curricula, consult this [comprehensive review](#) by Sharon Pearson with questions that will guide a selection that is right for your context.

For children, *Love First* offers a limited set of [google slides and other resources](#) for a Zoom-based formation experience. *StorymakersNYC* offers weekly [storytelling on YouTube](#) that sparks creativity. CokesburyKids also offers [Sunday Morning programming](#) online as part of their [Deep Blue](#) curriculum. Illustrated Children's Ministry is offering a [curriculum based on the beatitudes](#) designed to be led virtually.



Many Godly Play storytellers are finding Zoom storytelling to be fruitful. Here's an article from Building Faith on [why Godly Play works well on Zoom](#) with practical suggestions. If you don't have the story materials, consider watching the stories together on the [Godly Play Foundation Youtube Channel](#) together and follow up with wondering questions and work time together. When planning formation formation for youth, learn from practitioners in this [conversation on BuildFaith](#), which includes links to resources.

For youth, Fuller Youth Institute is offering a four-week curriculum, [Faith in an Anxious World](#), which includes videos, presentation slides, and a podcast for parents. Yale Institute for Youth offers this [set of spiritual practices](#) to engage with your youth. Working through Living Compass's [Teen Wellness Circle Workbook](#) can empower your youth to find balance in this challenging time. The [Episcopal Church's Curriculum for Youth](#) continues to provide sound lesson plans for any time. Consider playing [games with youth online](#) to build community.

To offset digital fatigue, consider “old-fashioned” technologies such as calling parishioners on by phone, sending hand-written notes, and delivering faith at home boxes. Faith-at-home boxes are small cardboard boxes filled with a few objects such as a small wooden cross, basic art supplies, and other items with directions to engage in simple faith practices . [This google folder](#) offers ideas. Such physical touches can go a long way.

According to Christian educator [Sarah Allred](#), hybrid formation works best with relational anchors. A relational anchor provides a touchpoint with peers for support and accountability. An anchor might be a Sunday morning Zoom gathering followed up with a physical group activity done separately. One congregation followed up a Godly Play session on Julian Norwich, who loved cats, with a station outside the church doors where children and their families could paint a prayer rock for a deceased pet. Many left their rocks around the church perimeter. Another anchor could be a regular parent group.



BUILD FAITH FORMATION PLAYLISTS

A faith formation playlist is a set of carefully curated digital resources and face-to-face gatherings that invites individuals to engage multiple senses and multiple intelligences around a specific theme or topic. They offer formation in bite sizes on a menu of options that take a person on a journey to grow in faith and can be delivered on websites and emails. Draw on [existing playlists](#) or create your own by following tips in [Designing Faith Formation Playlists](#). Even worship can be a playlist like this [Family Worship at Home](#) playlist.

BLESS THE BACKPACKS AND DEVICES

Blessing the Backpacks and Devices has become a meaningful event in the life of a congregation. Continue this ministry by mailing a Illustrated Ministry backpack tag in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) or a sticker, also in [English](#) and [Spanish](#), to your families and blessing them online or in-person. If you are offering an in-person blessing, invite students to bring a backpack to church. To maintain safe distancing, have households remain in their pews and ask parents to place their hands on their children's backpacks when the priest says the blessing.

If you aren't gathering in person, send a packet home with a note that you are praying for the recipient along with the tag and/or sticker and a [guide for a home blessing of backpacks](#). BuildFaith has a [blessing of devices](#) along with other resources. Lastly, if your community worships online, consider inviting households to send photos of children and adults with their backpacks, tablets, and computers to display during your online service at the blessing. This resource lists [many other possibilities](#).

KICK OFF FALL MINISTRIES

Congregations often build communities and launch the fall with ministry fairs and rally days. Many are considering creative alternatives given their regathering plans. For instance, rather than holding a single-day ministry fair, highlight a ministry each week in the fall during online worship. [St. Paul's in Fayetteville, Arkansas](#) is hosting a parking-lot parade where members drive through to pick up informational material about fall online offerings, activity packs and a tasty treat. Consider hosting a creative sculpture competition with time to show-and-tell on Zoom or gathering for games by



household on the lawn or parking-lot, continuing to abide by your congregation's regathering plan.

EQUIP HOUSEHOLDS

Households have always been the primary engine for growing faith for children. This is true even more so at this time. Offer your families tools to engage in faith practices as a family. [DoFaithatHome.org](https://www.dofaithathome.org) provides weekly playlists for families. [Praying in Color](#) is a helpful resource as are these [activities for households](#) offered by Vibrant Faith Ministries. Consider sharing a few of these [playlists](#) that offer a mix of activities for families or these [playlists for children, youth, and parents](#). This [Parenting Forward podcast](#) is a listening option for progressive parents.

WORK COLLABORATIVELY TO CREATE ONLINE CONTENT

Digital ministry unhooks us from our physical spaces and facilitates greater collaboration with fellow leaders. Consider teaming with another congregation to divide up the work, each taking different segments of a fall program, and share what you've created with other congregations. Some congregations are meeting together for formation events. Zero commuting time!

REMEMBER SAFE CHURCH POLICIES

Remember, safeguarding our congregations is essential whether in person or online. Don't forget to continue doing background checks, training your leaders in [Safeguarding God's Children](#), and following [safe church guidelines for online gatherings](#).

CONTINUE INVITING, WELCOMING, AND CONNECTING MINISTRIES

Even if your community is meeting entirely online, we can continue to invite our neighbors to join us for worship, small group gatherings, or ministry opportunities. Faith formation offerings are an opportunity to invite guests to your community. The Episcopal Church offers a [Toolkit for Evangelism](#), [Evangelism through Social Media](#), and a new video series, [Embracing Evangelism](#). For digital evangelism tools, go to



[Invite.Welcome.Connect](#) and sign up for their newsletter to receive an invitation to a September Roundtable discussion of welcoming ministries.

FOR FURTHER GUIDANCE...

Join the [Forma: Network for Christian Formation Facebook Group](#) to build relationships and share resources with Christian educators across the Episcopal Church.

Watch [Re-Imagining Faith Formation, Part 1](#) for an overview about planning for fall faith formation and the follow up, [Re-Imagining Faith Formation, Part 2](#), for practical next steps.

Read this [Guide to Transformation Faith Formation for a Changed World](#), this list of [must-haves](#) for online ministry tools, and this guide for [Making Programing Decisions for 2020-21](#) by John Roberto.

Equip yourself with fresh ideas with this [Offscreen Ministry Ideas](#) webinar hosted by VTS's Lifelong Learning Center on August 20th, 3-4 pm.

Connect with a formation expert at VTS's Lifelong Learning Center's [Online Christian Formation Office Hours](#) Thursdays 1:15-2:45 pm.

Have Questions? Contact the [Rev. Jenifer Gamber](#) for questions about this toolkit and the School for Christian Faith and Leadership and [Mildred Reyes](#) for questions about youth and family ministries.

