

On the Way

Principles, Patterns, and Processes
for Adult Faith Formation
in Catholic Education in Ontario



Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way”. I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities...The important thing is to not walk alone.

The Joy of the Gospel, 33

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The Institute for Catholic Education is pleased to present these insights from the
Provincial Symposium for Catholic Education held in May 2023.

Dr. Anne Jamieson

Executive Director

Introduction

In the year 2000, on the 160th anniversary of publicly funded Catholic Education in Ontario, the Institute for Catholic Education (ICE) published the document *Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul*. It was, according to Bishop James Doyle, then Bishop of Peterborough and Chair of Education Commission of the Ontario Catholic Bishops, “a reflection on, and response to, the pressing need for ongoing adult faith formation in order to remain true to our purpose and reason for existence.”

Almost 25 years later, we continue to recognize adult faith formation as essential to our Catholic identity and the mission of Catholic Education. In May 2023, the Catholic Education community gathered for a provincial symposium with the theme: *On the Way - Adult Faith Formation in Catholic Education*.

Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today’s world.

The Joy of the Gospel, 9

How and Why We Gathered

In *Renewing the Promise*, the Catholic Education community in Ontario is described as a community that accompanies, builds relationships, encourages engagement, and instills hope. In this way, we are a community that seeks to form joyful disciples – not only as a goal for our students, but for all who work in, contribute to, and support Catholic Education in Ontario. The letter concludes:

“The Catholic Education community is encouraged to support opportunities for faith formation for all members of the community in ways that are inviting, engaging, and purposeful.”¹

We see this focus on adult faith formation aligning with the priorities of the Catholic Church as stated in the *Directory for Catechesis*, which identifies the formation of adults as a major priority and focus for all evangelizing efforts.²

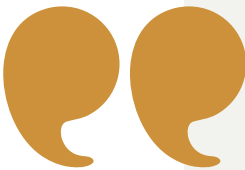
1 *Renewing the Promise*, Pastoral Letter of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, 2018, p. 24.

2 *Directory for Catechesis*, Dicastery for Evangelization, 2020, 77.

Finally, we took inspiration from the Synod on Synodality, called by Pope Francis, for which we are preparing as a global Church. This process of synodality, which is a walking together and listening with one another to the prompting of the Spirit, is a process Catholic Education in Ontario has attempted to mirror in the various symposia held over the last 35 years. Synodality affirms our relationship to and with one another. We see in the ongoing collaborations of school and Church throughout the province, in the pastoral guidance of the Bishops of Ontario for the Catholic Education system and the shared conversations of the symposium between bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay persons, the encounter with Jesus is with and through one another. We cannot go on alone without our community but all of us together on the journey - on the way!

The Symposium of May 2023 gathered over 450 participants from Catholic school boards across the province and representatives from the partners in Catholic Education in Ontario – both French and English - including representatives from the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, the Catholic Principal’s Council of Ontario, the Ontario Association of Parents for Catholic Education, the Ontario Catholic School Business Officials Association, the Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers’ Association, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees’ Association, the Ontario English Catholic School Teachers’ Association, along with students, chaplaincy leaders, instructors from Faculties of Education responsible for the formation of new teachers, leaders from the curriculum cooperatives, trustees from across Canada, priests, deacons and representatives from diocesan offices as well as representatives from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. This gathering was just such a process of a shared journey and discernment.

In his message of welcome, Bishop Miehm, Bishop of Peterborough and Chair of the Education Commission of the ACBO said:



We are indeed a Church “on the way,” seeking to deepen our commitment to the Lord Jesus, to understand more fully the teachings of our faith, and to live them authentically in ways that build up God’s Kingdom.

Knowing that the word “disciple” can also be equated to “student,” we acknowledge that in our faith journey we must constantly learn from the one who is our teacher, Saviour and Lord.

We are encouraged by the voice of student leaders:

*While everyone’s faith journey is unique and individual, focusing on adult faith formation in school communities creates a positive domino effect that inspires even the youngest generations. **#StudentVoice***

Current Practices

In *Ongoing Adult Faith Formation: The Key to Educating the Soul*, Bishop Doyle said “We rejoice in all that is already taking place.” True to that observation, there remains, nearly 25 years later, vibrant and inspirational work going on in every Catholic school board and in the associations representing the partners of Catholic Education throughout the province.

Through all the communities and associations in Catholic Education in Ontario, there is no lack of good work being done in the area of adult faith formation.

The Goal

With this variety of programs and approaches, the intent of the Symposium was to be of service to boards and associations as they continue to do the important work of adult faith formation in their own communities and contexts and through their own programming to name the principles, patterns, and processes that underpin meaningful and engaging formation.

What We Learned From Experts and Research

Faith formation in Catholic Education has both a personal and communal dimension. As Catholics, our faith formation takes place with and in the community which is the Body of Christ.

In Catholic Education, the formation of all members is essential for the strength and health of the Body. It is fundamental to the mission of Catholic Education.

Faith, in fact, is transmitted through interpersonal connection and is nourished within the circle of the community. It is expressed in liturgical prayer, witnessed in charity, founded on the word of God proclaimed by the Church with a Tradition that is alive and able to incorporate new generations of believers.

(Directory for Catechesis, Preface)

The following statements summarize some of the key elements of what our speakers and experts brought to us during the Symposium:

Faith formation is deeply tied to identity and mission for Catholic Education. It is neither a supplementary nor an optional activity.

Faith formation must be based on solid theological grounds.

Being formed in the Catholic faith is work that depends on the Holy Spirit.

We cannot necessarily measure faith formation but we can provide conditions that make it more likely for encounter and growth to flourish.


Formation opportunities must be vocationally relevant. Whereas any person might pursue faith formation, there needs to be faith formation particular to Catholic Education and to the variety of roles and responsibilities in Catholic Education.

Faith formation is like learning a second language in some respects; there is a vocabulary of gestures and actions, words and deeds. Formation leads towards a greater fluency. In part, this means learning the language of God's mercy.

Recontextualization of the Tradition is key to the new evangelization – this means helping people to see how the Tradition of the Church remains meaningful along with bringing new expression to it so it speaks to and with today's people.


We are a community that journeys together – more and more we are coming home.

Our faith formation is a constant process of conversion.



The essence of the mystery of the Christian faith is mercy, which is made visible in Jesus of Nazareth. Mercy, at the centre of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, reveals the very mystery of the Trinity. It is the ideal of evangelical life, the true criterion of the faith's credibility and the deepest storyline of the Church's story.

Directory for Catechesis, 51



Two Key Terms: Encounter and Conversion

Encounter

Throughout the Symposium, we heard and experienced the importance of encounter. It is essential that we provide and offer opportunities for concrete encounters, with real people, in the real circumstances of everyday life, meeting people where they are, and being mobile enough to go where we need to go.



Formation includes a practical know-how but there is also a need for “knowing-how to be with.” *Directory for Catechesis*, 136



Conversion

We reflected on the relationship of conversion to faith formation and named the importance of seeing conversion as an ongoing process and part of a life-long journey of faith. The image offered by Dr. Anne Walsh at the Symposium of the sunflower growing in a field best summarizes this insight.

The sunflower, turning with every passing hour of the day to follow the sun, can be a powerful image of our own lifelong process of conversion. As the sun impels the movement of the sunflower. God invites each human heart into an ongoing process of conversion, aimed at ever more fully and completely taking on the mind and heart of Jesus Christ, learning to see as God sees, and to love as God loves.

As adults in Catholic Education, no matter our role, we can see ourselves as planted in particular soil, growing at different rates in relation to what is provided in the environment, part of a vast ecosystem, and growing alongside many others. Like sunflowers, we are made to seek the Son. We are constantly turning our faces ever more fully towards the Son, so that our lives - our journey - may be illumined by the light of the world, Jesus Christ. The fruits of our conversion are seen as we become confident witnesses to joy and hope and purpose.



Listening to the Voices of the Careful Listeners

What We Heard

Following the Symposium, thirty-seven Careful Listeners representing school boards along with partners in Catholic Education including Trustees, Senior Administrators, Principals, Teachers, Chaplaincy Leaders, Religion and Family Life Consultants, parents, and more were led by Dr. Anne Walsh in a debrief of the layered listening throughout the Symposium.

Here is what we heard shared regarding adult faith formation:

“There is a joy in being together.”

“What is being offered is gift – but do we receive it as gift?”

“We need to keep working on the relationships.”

“We are trying to pull people together, ensure no one feels alone in the work.”

“We need to speak to people’s desire; we need to fan the flames of faith.”

“It’s a journey and journeys take time. It’s important we’re moving forward together.”

“There are gaps. An in-between-ness in the reality of where people are at.”

“We bring each other along.”

“We need to *be* reconciliation. This spoke to me.”

“We need opportunities to rekindle our passion for the faith.”

“We need to pull back and ask, ‘Does this pastoral plan really meet the needs?’”

“There needs to be intentionality from those in leadership for faith formation as well as commitment and support.”

“Host and guest makes us think about hospitality. It also means it’s not all one person’s job. It means gradual release of responsibility.”

“There is a deep longing for God’s love. And a deep longing for relationship with God.”

“It takes theology – the language of our faith – but what are the words for today?”

“We need poetry – language that is wide and whole – not narrow.”

“Listening can be freeing. I don’t have to have all the answers.”

“Being allowed to debrief is key.”

“We are all meant to be careful listeners.”

Significantly, we did not hear that adult faith formation is the responsibility of some particular group or of interest to only some or necessary for only some. There was a definite sense that this is and rightly should be a response of all persons in the system to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

We heard this in terms of the many comments that faith formation is “everyone’s job”.

We heard this in terms of people not naming positional leadership alone from the community. Most often, when positional leadership was mentioned, it was in terms of a desire from leaders to create ever-more meaningful and effective pastoral plans for their communities.

We heard this in the invocation of subsidiarity. Many spoke of the need to allow for local planning and input.

We hear in all of this the deep sense of the Catholic Education community in Ontario that faith formation is, above all, a response to our baptismal call rather than merely a responsibility as part of any job description. It is made all the more fruitful and all the more beautiful when it grows and is shared in the Catholic Education community. It affects the growing and living bonds between and among all members of the community. It improves student learning, as the students themselves made so clear in their feedback.

When school leaders grow in their own faith- their passion and love for Catholicism and Christ’s teachings are evident and inspire students. #StudentVoice

Our Shared Hope

As we named both the joys of faith formation in Catholic Education, such as the wonder at the creativity of the many offerings around the Province, and the challenges expressed as the challenge of meeting the reality of varied faith experiences and stances among us, there was overwhelming agreement that hope is our shared faith stance.

We find hope in the fundamental truth that the human heart desires God. The human heart desires a ‘welcome home’. And God, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, in his mercy and by the power of the Holy Spirit is constantly calling us home, awaiting us with open arms.

In Catholic Education in Ontario, we recognize we are on a journey together. And even where we seem to be on different paths or different points along the path, the Lord is always among us, listening and teaching, opening the Scriptures to us, and revealing God’s love for us in the Eucharist. And when we experience that conversion, that turning back to the Son, regardless of whether we are tired from walking, we run to be with our community to share the good news. This is the essence of joyful discipleship.

Principles

The principles of adult faith formation in Catholic Education are the foundations on which formation offerings are built. Dr. Gowdie brought these principles to us clearly from the solid international research in this area.

Faith formation in Catholic Education must be personally meaningful, ecclesially faithful, and strategically effective. *(see Appendix A)*

Personally Meaningful

Personally meaningful faith formation has two key elements. First, it means that the faith formation experiences speak to a person's particular role in the Catholic Education system and to their own personal meaning-making. It is when this meaning making space is engaged that transformation can happen. Because we are talking about formation for mission, the work context for each person is a critical consideration.

Faith formation for someone who works directly with young students will have certain foci that may differ from someone who has a more supervisory role or for parents and guardians. Faith formation opportunities that include reflection on how the experience or the learning will improve or enhance current practice and outcomes for students is essential. As Dr. Gowdie put it, formation is about the 'who' and the 'why' of Catholic Education. Naming, knowing, growing and stretching the 'who' and the 'why' will then properly drive the 'what' and the 'how'.

Second, it means that the faith formation activity needs to allow the individual to engage in dialogue, share thoughts, and reflect on their own experiences. This aspect of formation leans heavily on encounter – where the individual feels seen and heard – and accompaniment – where the individual is given opportunity to see the connection between their own story, the story of others, and the story of our faith, especially in terms of Sacred Scripture.

*When adults reflect on their own faith journeys,
they can better help youth who are on their own pathways. #StudentVoice*

Ecclesially Faithful

Ecclesially faithful formation in Catholic Education must be authentically linked to the rich tradition of the Catholic faith and the life of the Catholic Church – both global and local. It should seek to help participants reflect on the mission of Catholic Education in the context of the participants’ particular role, in order to strengthen Catholic identity and give authentic witness.

Ecclesial faithfulness requires a solid foundation in Catholic theology, an awareness of the life of the Church, and a sensitivity to the seasons of the Church. Faith formation in Catholic Education must have a serious understanding of the theological underpinnings and current dialogue in the Church. While not every adult will have an academic foundation in theology, we must be aware of the need for this expertise and value growing proficiency in the same way as we rely on expertise in best practices for mathematical pedagogy, for example. **As in all subject areas, growth in proficiency for adults leads to improved student learning.**

To be aware of the life of the Church means to know what the global Church is working towards and engaged in at any given moment. This includes an awareness of and reflection on special celebrations (eg. Year of Mercy or Jubilee years), important documents (eg. *Laudato Si'*, etc.), or initiatives of the Holy See (such as the Pope’s penitential pilgrimage to Canada). It also includes an appreciation of and participation in the sacramental life of the Church. As we hear in *Renewing the Promise*, “It is in the Eucharist that we find the most perfect ‘faith formation program,’ and we are evangelized, catechized and made holy as we are drawn into the mystery of our salvation.”³

Sensitivity to the season means that faith formation offerings sit within the wider understanding of time that is the Liturgical Calendar. Working through the Liturgical Calendar is a journey through all Salvation History and is the basis of all adult faith formation in the Church.

Close contact with the local diocese and the local bishop at the system level is an important way to stay informed and engaged. A strong relationship between the school and the local parish is likewise essential. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is another important touchpoint for relevant resources. The Office for Evangelization and Catechesis, in particular, has responsibility for and resources for adult faith formation.

³ *Renewing the Promise*, Pastoral Letter of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, 2018, p. 23.

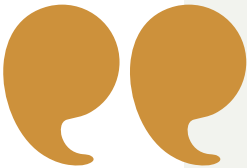
Strategically Effective

Adult faith formation in Catholic Education must be *strategically effective*. We must offer specific ongoing formation to specific target groups. In doing so, we must be intentional, developmental, and incremental. Measuring the strategic effectiveness of faith formation is challenging and yet essential.

Adult faith formation in Catholic Education is particularly interested in the important link between individual faith formation and the strengthening of the identity and mission of Catholic Education. As with all initiatives in Education, faith formation is most effective when you look at individual offerings or initiatives in the context of the larger, long-range plans.

Strategically effective faith formation includes an understanding of subsidiarity. This means there must be enough autonomy to facilitate nimble pastoral responses to situations that arise at the local level.

Strategically effective formation demonstrates an understanding of faith formation as a cultural value. It is clearly valued by those in positional leadership, who seek it out for themselves as well as support it for those they serve. It affirms that we are all in this together and recognizes that each of us is a fellow traveler on the way.



This is the essence of what the formative process is about – a turning to the deep down, an understanding of being in the world that is compelling, sustaining, enlivening. And in our tradition, it happens only in and through each other ‘on the way’.⁴

⁴ Jill Gowdie. *Stirring the Soul of Catholic Education: Formation for Mission*, 2017, p. 6.

Questions for Reflection on the Principles of Adult Faith Formation

When planning and evaluating adult faith formation opportunities in your context, consider the following questions for reflection regarding the foundational principles:

What element of personal choice is embedded?

What opportunities for telling our own stories are offered? How do we embed skills for deep listening to self, to each other, and to the Spirit in our midst?

How do we ensure the establishment of a circle/culture of trust for encounter, companionship and dialogue when we engage in formation?

Who can we rely on for theological expertise in planning and delivery and when do we need that expertise? How do we support growing theological competency for key roles in the system?

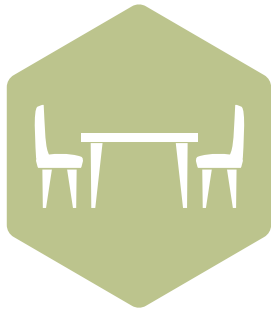
Do we include documents and insights from the Church in our planning? How will we stay connected to the activities, initiatives and life of the global Church and our local parish?

Can people in all roles and at all levels of the organization be seen in their participation in the offerings? How do we support a culture of participation?

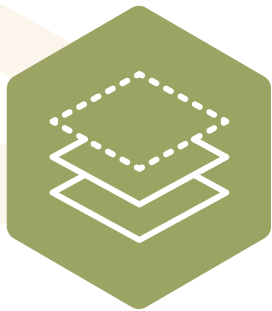
How will we measure effectiveness? What data, if any, do we collect? For what purpose? What research in the area of faith formation in Catholic Education can we access for planning?

Patterns

Patterns are what give intelligibility to our planning. They are the recurring forms. We identified five patterns that ideally occur in some combination of a number of the following rather than individually.



The host and guest pattern: During the Symposium, this pattern was explored through the story of the journey to Emmaus (Luke 24: 12 – 28). This is a rich image for reflection and the central image of *Renewing the Promise*. In every formation opportunity, attention must be given to two aspects of this pattern. First, there needs to be a balance between the commitment and responsibilities of both the host and the guest in formation opportunities. Second, there needs to be opportunities for all participants to take on the role of host at some point in their ongoing formation.



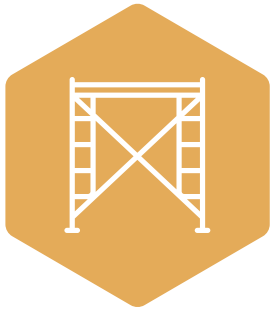
The layered pattern: We know there are varieties of learning styles. There are also a variety of spiritualities, which come at formation through a variety of pathways. A multi-layered faith formation opportunity allows for meaning to come through a variety of activities. Some will prefer doing works of mercy in community, others will gravitate towards traditional forms of prayer such as Christian meditation, Taizé, and devotions such as the rosary or novenas. Rather than seeing this variety as a list of isolated ‘types’ of formation from which to choose, allow for multi-layered opportunities in faith formation. This encourages growth in understanding of the many ways God calls us and forms us through both contemplation and action, liturgy and learning, silence and dialogue.



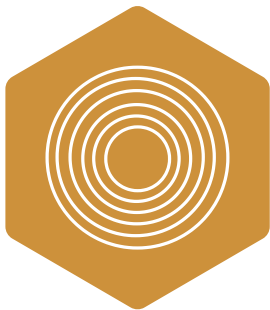
The pattern of beauty: Formation goes beyond gaining knowledge. Conversion, transformation, being conformed to Christ, are processes difficult to express and experience through the intellect alone. Attention must be given to the affective aspects of formation. Beauty, as seen in nature and in the arts, in liturgy and literature, in the Word of God and in one another, is a vital pathway to formation. Experiences of beauty can be profoundly transformative.

Proclaiming Christ means showing that to believe in and to follow him is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful, capable of filling life with new splendour and profound joy, even in the midst of difficulties ...[It is] the proclamation of the beauty of God.

Directory for Catechesis, 175



The pattern of scaffolding: Scaffolding is an essential strategy in education that supports growth and encourages proficiency. In Catholic Education, faith formation opportunities must use the strategy of scaffolding. In the post-Symposium reflection, we heard the importance of a growing familiarity with and reflection on the Gospels – the life and teaching of Jesus. The Beatitudes, as signposts for holiness, were also seen as essential foundations along with Catholic social teaching as a guide for action towards justice and peace in the world.



The pattern of the expanding circles: This final pattern points to the need to find new ways to reach out to an ever-expanding community. It ties back to the pattern of host and guest. It encourages a welcoming stance of the host. The host is looking to create an environment where the emphasis rests on the shared journey, the shared story, and the shared insights. It calls for a reflection on the importance of hospitality in faith formation. It also encourages guests to exercise their own hospitality among one another and to others not present. It names the hope that participants and hosts alike will, by witness of word and deed, offer testimony as confident witnesses that spreads the fervor of and for formation beyond the initial grouping.

Questions for Reflection on the Patterns for Adult Faith Formation

When planning and evaluating adult faith formation opportunities in your context, consider the following questions for reflection:

Are the opportunities multi-layered or do participants need to access multiple opportunities for layering?

In what ways are the individual stories put into contact with the story? How do we encourage increasing familiarity with the Gospels?

Who is host and guest in this opportunity? Do we allow for each person to assume both roles at some point?

Where are the opportunities to engage with beauty? How is nature, music (secular, contemporary, ancient, religious), poetry, literature, and art incorporated? Is there beauty embedded in liturgical celebrations?

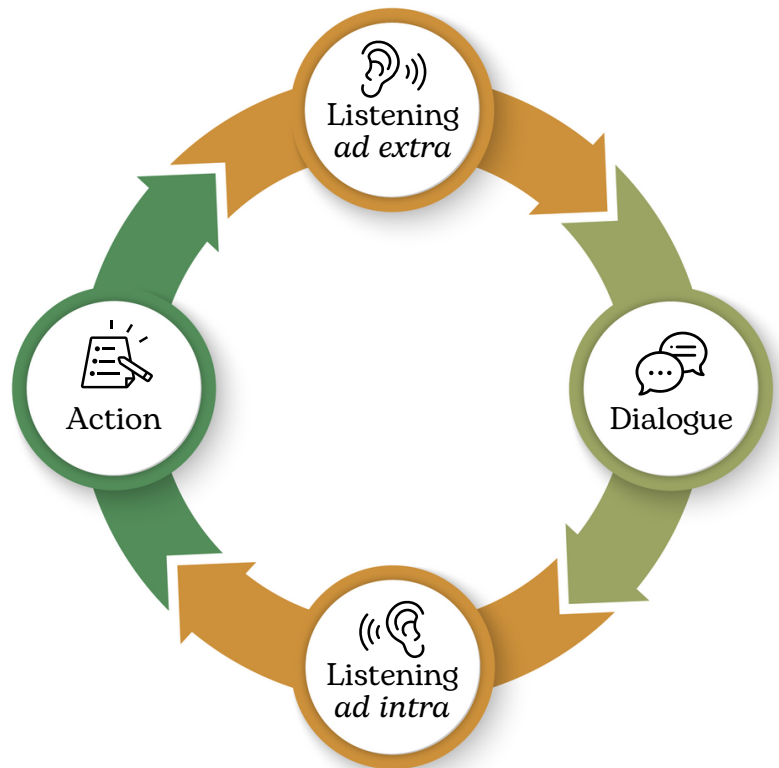
Is there beauty in the environment of the faith formation? Have we honoured a wide variety of expressions of beauty including a wide cultural variety?

How are we inviting or trying to engage even more people? What is new in our outreach? Do current participants play a role in inviting/hosting new participants?

Processes

Processes are the steps taken to achieve a goal. While many steps will be taken in planning and implementing adult faith formation, there are three key steps identified that recur in the cyclical processes of adult faith formation.

The three steps required are Listening – both *ad extra* and *ad intra*, Dialogue, and Action. We recognize these steps in the Church’s journey to become more synodal. Synodality is a process that can benefit Catholic Education in Ontario as well. There is a nuanced understanding of all three steps identified and they are best understood in their interaction within a recurring cycle. The steps remain valid at every stage of the process of formation: planning, implementation and reflection.



Planning for Adult Faith Formation

The processes of planning are Listening *ad extra*, Dialogue, Listening *ad intra*, and Action.

Planning begins with listening *ad extra*, which means listening to voices outside of our immediate circle or outside of the group responsible for the planning. This includes listening to the needs and desires expressed by members of the community invited by way of consultation. It includes listening to the Church’s concerns of the moment – both in terms of the global Church and the local diocese or parish. It also takes into account the needs of the local situation – the concerns and joys, hopes, challenges and questions of the local and particular group.

In the consultation and gathering of ideas, there is a natural dialogue that occurs where there will no doubt be a variety of priorities and possibilities named. Dialogue allows for questions and wonderings among the many voices and consultors to gain clarity.

Listening *ad intra* employs the skill of discernment. It is internal (*ad intra*) in the sense that it is a listening within the actual planning group and the individuals within it. It is not undertaken as a private or individual task. It is the group – the decision makers – listening to the many priorities in light of the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It is prayerful.

Action is the creation of the plan. The plan takes into account and responds to the principles and patterns that have been identified here.

Implementation of the Formation Opportunity

The same processes apply to the implementation stage of adult faith formation.

At the implementation stage, that is during the faith formation event or activity, listening *ad extra* and dialogue often co-exist in a process that may build from the personal to the communal or vice versa; there is a natural flow of sharing and receiving. Both processes contribute to an anticipated rhythm of movement and may occur spontaneously as well as in planned activity.

Listening *ad extra* in this context is twofold. On the one hand, it is listening to what participants have brought in terms of questions, wonderings, hopes, and challenges. It requires a vulnerability of all in leadership or facilitation to likewise participate in the sharing. The dialogue that flows from personal sharing requires skilled facilitation and trust in the various relationships among the group. Divergent views, which can be anticipated, need not be received as conflict. Tensions between ideas need not be tensions between individuals. As Dr. Gowdie reminds us, we need to look with “gentle eyes” as we dialogue with each other.

On the other hand, Listening *ad extra* also invites the wisdom of the Tradition of the Church into the dialogue to see where there is resonance or challenge, deeper understanding or further questions. It includes listening to voices outside of our own including Sacred Scripture, artists, the writings of theologians and Saints, Church documents, etc. It draws participants into a dialogue with the whole community of the Church and helps the individual and the group to see themselves as members of the one Body.

As the flow of dialogue continues to build, adult faith formation should always return to listening *ad intra*. Once again, this is the prayerful listening of the individuals and the group to the Holy Spirit. All faith formation is rooted in discernment and prayer. This is how listening and dialogue lead to action.

It is important that action not be considered the measurable outcome of faith formation. We do not move to action in order to demonstrate outwardly what our learning has been. We do

not assess the action of others in order to evaluate the success of the faith formation. Action may be entirely interior and personal. The action most desired in faith formation is conversion and, as we know, takes place at the deepest and most personal level. It is enabled by the Holy Spirit alive in each of us. This is the ongoing action of God and our response to it in the life of all believers.


The action that can be observed is best described as witness. Faith formation should lead to such questions as: What ought I to do now? What response is required of me? What am I being called to? Adult faith formation that has assisted in bringing participants to deep listening – *ad extra* and *ad intra* - and to dialogue ideally leads to a reflection on how one, as an individual, in a particular role in Catholic Education, is called to act. When a person responds to that prompting of the Spirit, they become a joyful witness in and to the community.

There is also the communal dimension of Action where, through our formation opportunities, we are able to reflect collectively on the question of what our new learning means for the community, the system, and our shared practice. This is made more effective when the group gathered shares a common role – that is that the faith formation intends to be vocationally relevant, as Dr. Gowdie suggests, so that a shared response can be contemplated. In this case, the questions posed above take on a communal dimension: What ought we to do now? What response is required of us, of this community? To what are we being called?


Upon Reflection

Action in both planning and implementation lead back to Listening as an act of reflection. The question of what data is listened to and is most helpful for assessing strategic effectiveness arises. While there may be a variety of data gathered, the Listening will gather the voices of participants in Dialogue with relevant research on best practices. Allowing participants to reflect following a time of action or response will contribute to an understanding of effectiveness. Effective faith formation supports people in becoming joyful disciples and authentic witnesses to the faith. It encourages them or makes them more confident in their daily praxis.

We heard throughout our sessions about the importance of witnesses who had had significant impact on people in their faith formation journey. There was an emphasis on the dual nature of witness as both a contributing cause and an outcome of faith formation. **Effective faith formation requires the leadership of witnesses and also should lead participants themselves to become witnesses to the faith.**



“[People today] listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if we do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.”⁵ - Pope Paul VI



As Pope Paul VI said almost fifty years ago, “[People today] listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if we do listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” In Catholic Education in Ontario, effective faith formation leads participants to ask themselves, “How does this change my/our practice, stance, understanding, and/or perspective? How does this deepen my/our witness?”

⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41.

Questions for Reflection on the Processes of Adult Faith Formation

When planning, implementing, and evaluating adult faith formation opportunities in your context, consider the following questions for reflection regarding your processes:

Have we invited many voices into the planning process – even those who may seem disinterested or disengaged?

Do we hold high expectations for ourselves and gentle eyes for others?

How do we make space for dialogue at every stage of the process?

In what ways do we allow our dialogue to widen to include voices from Sacred Scripture, theologians, others?

Are there specific skills we need to practice to improve our Listening – either *ad extra* or *ad intra*?

As faith formation can be likened to learning a second language in some respects, have we provided for ‘vocabulary’ building? How can we become more fluent in the language of mercy?

What voices can we include in our reflection upon the process to improve the strategic effectiveness of our faith formation offerings?

In what ways do we make explicit the link between faith formation and praxis? Are participants given opportunity for personal reflection regarding personal praxis as well as opportunities to allow for wider reflection on a shared witness at the system or communal level?

In what ways do we name and celebrate effective witness in our communities?

Personally Meaningful	Ecclesially Faithful	Strategically Effective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet people where they are • Welcome and invite the story and the spirituality with which each person comes • Engage an holistic approach • Ensure Chronos time in order to best facilitate Kairos time • Contemporise elements and practices of the tradition • Customise formation with vocational contexting so there is a clear line of sight to professional relevance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craft a solid theological underpinning with a line of sight to Vatican II theological settings • Engage a Christo-centric approach where the symbol and story of the tradition is centred on Jesus – the starting point for a Catholic Christian spiritual formation. • Develop an explicit connection to the community of faithful... including the grace, and the challenges, in being Church today. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership must be engaged in their own journey and in the staff journey. • This requires intentionality in the development of spiritual capital across the school and system community. • It is critical to implement integration into renewal, goal setting and planning at personal and system levels. • Leadership formation begins with graduate induction – not when a leadership appointment is made

Dr Jill Gowdie 2023

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