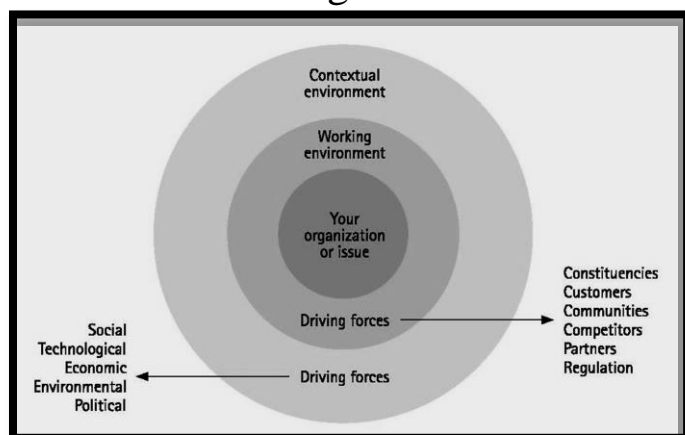


# Thirteen Trends and Forces Affecting the Future of Faith Formation in a Changing Church and World



We know that we are called to read the signs of the times, but so often these seem unclear or contradictory. We need a process and a framework to help us make sense of these seeming contradictions. To understand how our world is evolving, we need an *outside-in thinking process*. We need to explore the wider external world in considerable detail and with an open mind and spirit before coming to any firm conclusions.

## Outside-In Thinking



We cannot know what the future will hold beforehand. But we can see forces and trends in the present, which, continuing on their current course, will impact our focus: *What will Christian faith formation look like in 2020?* What are the “driving forces” of change that will shape future dynamics in predictable and unpredictable ways. They might include new technologies, political shifts, economic conditions or social dynamics. Driving forces can be either “predetermined elements”—forces that are highly likely to develop in a direction that is known and unchangeable; or “uncertainties”—forces that are important, but unpredictable in terms of how they may play out. All scenarios begin by discussing and analyzing these forces and trends.

Christian churches are up against a number of significant social, cultural, technological, and economic forces that make faith formation for all ages and generations quite difficult. We have identified thirteen “driving” trends and forces because they seem to be having a significant impact on faith formation today and we project that they will continue to do so over the next decade. Each of these trends and forces is summarized below and then documented with research and analysis in **Part Four** of this report.

The key question to consider as you review the driving trends and forces is this: ***Will these forces and trends continue on their present course or change direction, and what impact they will have on the future direction of faith formation in the decade from 2010-2020?***

## Trend 1. Declining Participation in Christian Churches

There has been a steady decline in the number of people attending worship and participating in church life. In 1990 about 20.6% of the U.S. population was in church on any given weekend, today only 17.3% are in worship. *If current trends continue, by 2020 the 17.3% figure will drop to 14.7 percent of Americans—meaning that more than 85% of Americans will be staying away from worshipping God at church.* Succeeding generations of Christians are less likely to be exposed to formation in the Christian faith because worship attendance is down, and therefore participation in church life, education, and activities is down. This means less exposure to the Christian tradition and teachings, reduced opportunities to experience the Christian way of life, and far less reinforcement of the Christian faith in church settings

## Trend 2. Growth in No Religious Affiliation

The 2009 *American Religious Identification Survey* (ARIS) reported that *the number of Americans who claim no religious affiliation has nearly doubled since 1990, rising from 8% to 15%*. The number of American adults identified as Christians dropped 10% from 86% in 1990 to 76% in 2008. The Pew Research study, *Faith in Flux*, confirms this trend—finding that the number of people who say they are unaffiliated with any particular faith doubled to 16%. Among Americans ages 18-29, *one-in-four* say they are not currently affiliated with any particular religion. *The challenge to Christianity in the U.S. does not come from other religions but rather from a rejection of all forms of organized religion*. This growing non-religious minority reduces the traditional societal role of congregations and places of worship in family celebrations of life-cycle events. *Forestalling of religious rites of passage, such as marriage, and the lowering expectations on religious funeral services, could have long lasting consequences for religious institutions*.

## Trend 3. Becoming More “Spiritual” and Less “Religious”

The vast majority of Americans—approximately 80 percent—describe themselves as both spiritual and religious. Still, a small but growing minority describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. If we define “spiritual but not religious” as people who say that they are at least moderately spiritual but not more than slightly religious, then 9 percent of respondents were spiritual but not religious in 1998, rising to 14 percent in 2008. *Today, 18 percent of 18-39 year olds say they are “spiritual but not religious,” compared to only 11 percent a decade ago*. What does the growth of this “spiritual but not religious” segment of the population mean for organized religion in the United States? If what people mean when they say they are spiritual but not religious is that they are generally concerned with spiritual matters (whatever that means) but they are not interested in organized religion, then this trend indicates a growing minority of the population whose spiritual inclinations do not lead them to become involved in churches, synagogues, or mosques.

## Trend 4. Influence of Individualism on Christian Identity and Community Life

Individualism is a pre-eminent American cultural code. It touches virtually every aspect of American life. For many Americans, the ultimate criterion of identity and lifestyle validity is individual choice. Privatized religiosity—which easily accommodates the utilitarian and expressive individualism of American culture—makes it difficult to articulate and sustain religious commitments. Specifically, religious individualism has been linked with autonomy in the moral realm; with the diminution or rejection of ecclesial authority; with more direct access to the sacred; with a higher priority for personal spiritual fulfillment; and with a privatized spirituality only loosely connected with established traditions.

It is not simply that (excessive) religious individualism means that religious identity is more autonomous and deliberate today; it is that this individualism signals a loss of how religion is anchored in a sense of belonging. The issue is the decline in connectedness; a weakening or severing of the *social* basis of religion in family, marriage, ethnicity, and community; a decline in the perceived *necessity of communal or institutional structures as constituent of religious identity*. Religious identity today is not only less bounded by doctrine or creed; it is also less nurtured and reinforced by community.

## Trend 5. Increasing Social, Cultural, and Religious Diversity in the U.S.

Americans are becoming more diverse in terms of race and ethnic origins, and as a result there has been a growth in the size of the minority population in terms of both numbers and percentage. The most significant change since 1990 both statistically and demographically has been the rapid growth of the Hispanic population and to a much lesser extent the Asian population.

2005 Profile	2050 Profile
White: 67%	White : 47%
Hispanic: 14%	Hispanic: 29%
Black: 13%	Black: 13%
Asian: 5%	Asian: 9%

There are fewer all white congregations in the United States today. More predominantly white congregations have at least some Latino, Asian, or African American presence.

The U.S. is becoming more religiously diverse every year. The current religious make-up of Americans today is:

Protestant: 51.3%	Jewish: 1.7%
Catholic: 23.9%	Buddhist: 0.7%
Mormon: 1.7%	Muslim: 0.6%
Jehovah's Witness: 0.7%	Hindu: 0.4%
Orthodox: 0.6%	Other Religions: 0.3%

## Trend 6. Growing Influence of Hispanic/Latino Religious Faith

Two defining characteristics—the prevalence of spirit-filled religious expressions and of ethnic-oriented worship—combined with the rapid growth of the Hispanic population demonstrate how Hispanics are transforming the nation's religious landscape today and will continue to do so in the coming decade. More than two-thirds of Hispanics (68%) identify themselves as Roman Catholics. The next largest category, at 15%, is made up of born-again or evangelical Protestants.

First, *renewalist Christianity*, which places special emphasis on God's ongoing, day-to-day intervention in human affairs through the person of the Holy Spirit, is having a major impact on Hispanic Christianity. Among Latino Protestants, renewalism is three times as prevalent as it is among their non-Latino counterparts. A majority (54%) of Hispanic Catholics describe themselves as charismatic Christians. Latino Catholics nevertheless remain very much Catholic. Indeed, renewalist practices seem to have been incorporated into Hispanic Catholicism without displacing Catholic identity. Similarly, the renewalist movement is a powerful presence among Latino Protestants.

Second, the houses of worship most frequented by Latinos have distinctly ethnic characteristics. Two-thirds of Latino worshipers attend churches with Latino clergy, services in Spanish and heavily Latino congregations. While most predominant among the foreign born and Spanish speakers, Hispanic-oriented worship is also prevalent among native-born and English-speaking Latinos. That strongly suggests that the phenomenon is not simply a

product of immigration or language but that it involves a broader and more lasting form of ethnic identification. Moreover, the growth of the Hispanic population is leading to the emergence of Latino-oriented churches across the country.

## Trend 7. Identifying a New Stage of Life: "Emerging Adulthood"

There is a new and important stage in life in American culture—what scholars call "emerging adulthood," young adults aged 18-30 years old. Studies agree that the transition to adulthood today is more complex, disjointed, and confusing than it was in past decades. The steps through and to schooling, first real job, marriage, and parenthood are simply less well organized and coherent today than they were in generations past.

At the same time, these years are marked by an historically unparalleled freedom to roam, experiment, learn (or not), move on, and try again. For most American youth, there is very long stretch of time in which to have to figure out life between high school graduation day and the eventual settling down with spouse, career, kids, and house. For many, it is marked by immense autonomy, freedom of choice, lack of obligations, and focus on the self. It is also normally marked by high instability, experimentation, and uncertainty. For many, emotions run high and low, as hopes and exhilaration recurrently run up against confusion and frustration. It is not clear how much emerging adults rely in this life stage on the religious faith and beliefs with which they were raised. In any case, this socially structured and culturally defined phase of life seems itself to foster an intense concern with what is new, different, exciting, alternative, possible, and hopeful. Commitments that would curtail the exploration of options are often avoided. Ties to the social institutions of civil society, including church, are often weak.

## Trend 8. The Rise of a Distinctive Post- Boomer Faith and Spirituality

What is emerging among Post-Boomers, currently those in their 20s through mid 40s, is a distinctive style of faith and spirituality. Robert Wuthnow

analyzes social and cultural trends and identifies “religious tinkering” as a guiding image for understanding Post-Boomer faith and spirituality. Richard Flory and Donald Miller analyze four emerging religious forms—Innovators,

Appropriators, Reclaimers, and Resisters—that exemplify the Post-Boomer spiritual quest, each a response to the challenges and opportunities they perceive to be represented in the larger cultural currents. From their analysis they identify a new form of spirituality, “expressive communalism,” which blends Post-Boomers’ desire and need for expressive/experiential activities with a close-knit, physical community.

“Religious Tinkering” (Robert Wuthnow)

The single word that best describes young adults’ approach to religion and spirituality—indeed life—is tinkering: putting together a life from whatever skills, ideas, and resources that are readily at hand. *Spiritual tinkering* is a reflection of the pluralistic religious society in which we live, the freedom we permit ourselves in making choices about faith, and the necessity of making those choices in the face of the uprootedness and change that most young adults experience. It involves piecing together ideas about spirituality from many sources, especially through conversations with one’s friends. Spiritual tinkering involves a large minority of young adults in church shopping and church hopping. It also takes the form of searching for answers to the perennial existential questions in venues that go beyond religious traditions, and in expressing spiritual interests through music and art as well as through prayer and devotional reading. Tinkering is evident among the large number of young adults who believe in God, life after death, and the divinity of Jesus, for instance, but who seldom attend religious services. Their beliefs blend continuity with the past—with the Bible stories they probably learned as children—and their behavior lets them adapt to the demands of the present. Tinkering is equally evident in the quest to update one’s beliefs about spirituality. The core holds steady, persuading one that the Bible is still a valuable source of moral insight, for example, but the core is amended almost continuously through conversations with friends, reflections about unusual experiences on vacation or at work, or from a popular song.

“Expressive Communalism” (Richard Flory and

Donald E. Miller)

Post-Boomers have embedded their lives in spiritual communities in which their desire and need for both expressive/experiential activities,

whether through art, music, or service-oriented activities, and for a close-knit, physical community and communion with others are met. They are seeking to develop a balance for individualism and rational asceticism through religious experience and spiritual meaning in an embodied faith. The dominant characteristic across our types is a desire for a theologically grounded belief that makes sense cognitively, combined with nonrational expressive tendencies—they want a faith that makes cognitive sense to them and that is also an expressive, embodied spiritual experience. Young Christians are searching for a more holistic faith than what a purely cognitive and rational approach can offer. Although Post-Boomers certainly pursue individual religious and spiritual experiences, they have not neglected the various communities within which they are active. Rather, the dominant trend among the four types shows an intentional pursuit of artistic expressions of various sorts, seeking and forming communities, and engaging in different forms of community outreach and involvement. This is not to suggest that they have somehow removed themselves from the individualism that pervades American society, rather that their individual spiritual quest is mediated through the communities in which they are active and in which they seek membership and belonging.

Four Emerging Forms of the Post-Boomer Spiritual Quest: Innovators, Appropriators, Resisters, Reclaimers (Richard Flory and Donald E. Miller)

■ **Innovators** are those who represent a constantly evolving, or innovating, approach to religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Many of these are newer, less established groups that are affiliated with the “emerging church” movement, while others are established churches and ministries that are innovating within their own traditions. Innovators demonstrate a desire for embracing the emerging postmodern culture, and within that context are engaging in a spiritual quest that by definition is one that must change and adapt—innovate—to meet the changing culture currents.

■ **Appropriators** refer to those churches and ministries that seek to provide a compelling and “relevant” experience for participants, both for those in the audience and for those who are performing in the service or event. In this, both churches and independent ministries seek to create these experiences through imitating, or *appropriating*, trends found in the larger culture and ultimately popularizing these through their networks

into a particular form of pop-Christianity primarily oriented toward an individual spiritual experience.

■ **Resisters** refer to what are primarily Boomer-initiated efforts intended to appeal to Post-Boomers by focusing on the “recovery of reason” and resisting postmodern culture within Christianity. They hoping to reestablish the place of the written text and rational belief as the dominant source for Post-Boomer spirituality and practice.

■ **Reclaimers** are seeking to renew their experiences of Christianity through the history, symbolism and practices of ancient forms of the faith, such as those still found in the liturgical traditions, thus reclaiming the ancient symbols, rituals and practices of these traditions for their own spiritual quest. Reclaimers demonstrate a quest that takes them on a journey to ancient Christian traditions in small, family-oriented congregations through which they pursue their desire for spiritual development.

## Trend 9. Changing Structures and Patterns of Family Life in the United States

**Delaying Marriage.** The average age of first marriage for men today is 27 years old and for women it is 25 years old. Married couples in their twenties were a majority—i.e., were typical—of their peers in the 1970s, but were atypical in 2000. For people in their twenties, it has become the norm to remain unmarried. For people in their thirties and early forties, there is a much more sizable minority (a third) who are now single or divorced. Because many other aspects of young adult life are affected by marital status—including children and the timing of children, housing needs, jobs and economic demands, and relationships with parents and friends—the importance of this shift in marital patterns can hardly be overstated. *Religious practice is*

*especially influence by marrying, settling down, having children and raising them. Since individuals who marry are more likely to attend religious services regularly than those who delay marriage, the postponement of marriage and childbearing has contributed to the decline in church attendance.*

**Having Fewer Children and Later in Life.** With the increase in the average age of marriage, married couples are having fewer children and having them later. The average number of births per woman is about 2, and 19% of women end their childbearing years with no children. The median age at which mothers give birth to their first child is about 24.5 years old, with the birth rate increasing for women age 35 to 39 and 40 to 44. A century ago, women in these age groups might have been raising teenagers while giving birth to their fourth or fifth child. Currently, it is more likely that they are giving birth to their first or second child.

**Decreasing Number of Children in Two-Parent Households.** In 2006, 67% of children were living with two parents (18% decline since 1968). In 2006, 28% were living with one parent (16% increase since 1968). In 2005, 30% of all households included children under 18 (a 20% decline since 1960).

**Increasing Number of Unmarried Couples Living Together.** In 1960, less than ½ million heterosexual unmarried couples were living together. In 1980, it was over 1 million. In 2006, 5.4 million unmarried couples were living together—an increase of over 500% since 1980.

**Increasing Time Caring for Children.** Parents are busier than were in the past, yet the amount of focused time parents spend caring for their children has increased over the past 40 years: 1) fathers: 6.5 hours/week (153% increase), 2) married mothers: 12.9 hours/week (21% increase), and 3) single mothers: 11.8 hours/week (57% increase). The time devoted to childcare and family activities has been taken from other family activities: time alone as a married couple, housework, sleeping and eating, civic and social activities. More time is spent multitasking: around 40% of fathers and around 70% of mothers report they are “multitasking most of the time.” Parents

report high levels of enjoyment and affection for children—with high percentages reporting that they daily praise, laugh with, and show affection like hugging and kissing their children. When asked to rate their enjoyment of the tasks of parenting on a scale of 1 to 10, virtually no parents rated any task below an “8” and the majority rated as a “10” tasks like taking care of children, playing with children, talking with children, even taking children places.

## Trend 10. Rediscovering the Impact of Parents and Families on Faith Practice

**Parental Influence.** Research from the National Study on Youth and Religion (as reported in *Soul Searching*) clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. Grandparents and other relatives, mentors, and youth workers can be very influential as well, but normally, parents are most important in forming their children’s religious and spiritual lives. The best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents *do* look like: “*We’ll get what we are.*” By normal processes of socialization, and unless other significant forces intervene, more than what parents might say they *want* as religious outcomes of their children, most parents most likely will end up getting religiously of their children what they themselves *are*. The best way to get most youth involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved in and serious about their faith communities.

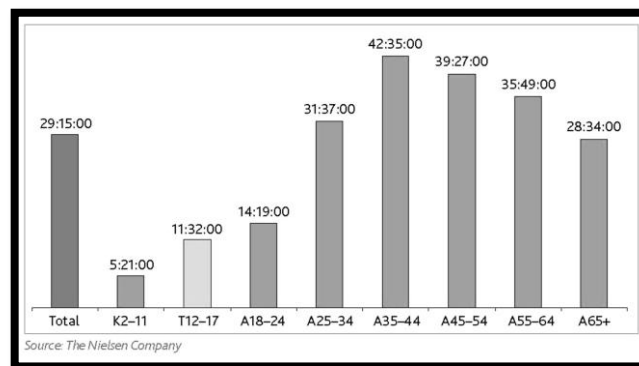
**Embedded Family Religious Practices.** Despite the dramatic changes in family life, research consistently shows that effective religious socialization comes about through embedded family religious practices; that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of having conversations, of adorning spaces in which people live, of celebrating the holidays, and of being part of a community. The daily household routine is marked by rituals of prayer, by conversations about God, and by sacred objects. Holidays provided special occasions for experiencing the warmth of family, friends, and fellow congregants. Compared with these practices, the formal teachings of religious leaders often pale in significance. Yet when such practices are present,

formal teachings also become more important

## Trend 11. Living in a Digital World

**Internet Usage Continues to Increase.**

Americans are online almost 30 hours per month. Teens averaged almost 25 hours per month using the Internet and applications in March 2009, but the 35-64 year olds averaged over 35 hours per month



**Wireless and Mobile Usage Continues to Increase.** 56% of Americans said they have at some point used wireless means for online access with laptop and mobile wireless access accounting for the vast majority of wireless usage. By April 2009, 32% of Americans said they had at some point used the internet on their mobile device. In 2009, 69% of all adult Americans said they had done at least one of the following ten different non-voice data activities on their cell phones: sending or receiving text messages, taking a picture, playing a game, checking email, accessing the internet, recording video, instant messaging, playing music, getting maps or directions, or watching video. In 2009, 44% of all adult Americans said they had done at least one of these non-voice data activities on a typical day.

**Increase in Social Networking.** In 2009, 35% of American adult internet users have a profile on an online social network site, four times as many as three years ago, but still much lower than the 65% of online American teens who use social networks. Among the adults, 75% of online adults 18-24 have a profile on a social network site. Online social network applications are mainly used for explaining and maintaining personal networks, and most adults, like teens, are using them to

connect with people they already know.

**Increase in Children (2-11) Online.** Children aged 2-11 comprised nearly 16 million, or 9.5 percent, of the active online universe according to Nielsen Online. Time spent online among children aged 2-11 increased 63 percent in the last five years, from nearly 7 hours in May 2004 to more than 11 hours online in May 2009.

**Growing Embrace of Technology by Churches.** One tremendous change in congregational life in the last decade has been the widespread adoption of computer technology. The use of visual projection equipment more than doubled in the last decade. Website development more than doubled in the last decade, while the use of email almost tripled. These figures imply that in each year since 1998, some 10,000 congregations created a website.

## Trend 12. Educating in New Ways

What kinds of education and teaching are likely to help people engage in meaningful learning that will allow them to manage the fast-changing, knowledge-based society of the twenty-first century? Here are eight key ideas influencing education today, and that will most likely strengthen in the coming decade:

1. Applying Howard Gardner's research on the eight *multiple intelligences* to education and providing a greater variety of ways to learn.
2. Applying research on *learning styles* to education by incorporating a diversity of learning activities and methods in a learning experience. ,
3. Engaging in *active, in-depth learning* through well-designed projects, problems, and design tasks that focus learner inquiry around central questions in the disciplines and engage learners in doing the work of writers, scientists, mathematicians, musicians, sculptors, and critics.
4. Incorporating *project-based learning* which involves completing complex tasks that typically result in a realistic product, event, or presentation.
5. Having learners engage in *collaborative learning*—working in small groups—to create, discuss, practice, and make presentations.
6. Engaging learners in *practicing and performing* what they are learning by incorporating real life application activities into the learning experience.
7. Developing *visual literacy* in all learners: learning to “read” or interpret visual images and

learning how to use visual images to communicate.

8. Utilizing *digital media* to exploit the potential of the learning opportunities available through online resources and networks. Digital media promotes engagement, self-directed learning, creativity, and empowerment by using the Internet, computers, cell phones, and many other digital tools to learn and communicate in ways that were not possible in previous generations.

Digital media allows learners to be active creators and producers who use a wide range of digital tools to express themselves, interpret the world around them, and deepen their understanding of academic content. Their products include original music, animation, video, stories, graphics, presentations, and Web sites. They can become actively engaged in their learning processes rather than passive recipients of knowledge passed down from adults.

## Trend 13. Increasing Numbers of Adults 65 and Older

Some 39 million Americans, or 13% of the U.S. population, are ages 65 and older. The increase in older adults has leveled off since 1990, but it will start rising again when the first wave of the nation's 76 million baby boomers turn 65 in 2011. By 2050, according to Pew Research projections, about one-in-five Americans will be over age 65, and about 5% will be ages 85 and older, up from 2% now. America is witnessing the emergence of a new stage of life between adult midlife and old age. This new stage of life spans several decades and is characterized by generally good health, relative financial stability, and an active, engaged lifestyle. These adults are seeking opportunities to explore options for the next stage of life, to retool skills, obtain new training, or pursue educational interests, to make meaningful connections with others their own age and in the community; and to find flexible work or service opportunities that use their skills and experience in meaningful ways.

