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Faith Formation for Families in a Post-Programmatic Era

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FAITH FORMATION FOR FAMILIES
IN A POST-PROGRAMMATIC ERA

by

SUSAN MEGRUND

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Luther Seminary
In Partial Fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

*Faith Formation for Families in a Post-Programmatic Era*

by

Susan Megrund

This thesis project sought to answer the question: What are effective ways for congregations to engage in ways of faith formation that encourage spiritual growth and Christian identity in over-programmed families, so they may see God as an active subject in their daily lives? The research in this thesis included case studies from the current congregation I am serving in, and other selected congregations.

While implementing my research, I discovered that we struggle to find the right language around how to address the issue of busy families. When asking colleagues for input, the responses went back to the implementation of programs, and technical changes. The question still remains how we make adaptive changes, so we can address this challenge of faith formation in our churches today.

Throughout my research, I uncovered another area that was unexpected, and shaped a lot of my thinking when it comes to moving forward in ministry. This was the rise of anxiety and depression in our young people. I address this in my conclusions, and as options for future research.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In 2014 I was enjoying a beer with Elizabeth Schoenknecht and Kris Bjorke at The ELCA Network Extravaganza in Kansas City, MO. While sitting at this small high-top table, I learned about an opportunity to go back to school and receive a doctorate degree. After hearing Elizabeth share thoughts about the program, I became very interested, so I told her I would pursue it. She said “great! You have two weeks before the application deadline. Oh, and the beer is on me!” That is when my DMin journey began. Thankfully, my colleague and good friend Kris Bjorke, embarked on this same journey and I could not have done it without her. Our friendship, working relationship, and similar study habits kept me going over our four years together.

I also could not have done it without the friendships and encouragement from my cohort, Brian, Scott, John, Greg, Chris, Sarah, and William. There were a couple of people from our initial cohort who also encouraged me along the way. Kari and Timm, your gifts and friendships have been a blessing.

Thank you to those who have taught me so much along the way over these years: Craig Van Gelder, Scott Fredrickson, Dwight Zscheile, Michael Binder, Terri Elton, Alvin Luedke, and Dan Anderson. I have been lucky to have you as faculty and leadership role models. In particular, without Dan Anderson, I would have given up a long time ago! Finally, Terri Elton, you brought me to the finish line. Thanks for your commitment even during your sabbatical!
To my husband Todd, thank you for your love, support, encouragement, and your willingness to get out of my way when I needed the space to finish this thesis. You are my rock and the foundation I needed for the growth that took place over the past four years.

Finally, to my family and friends who cheered me on. Thank you for your words of encouragement and the fact you believed in me enough that you thought I could get this done.
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<tr>
<td>ELCA</td>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church in America</td>
</tr>
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<td>NRSV</td>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple of decades, our communities have experienced a shift in programming that has moved from “extra-curricular” to being at the center of our busy lives. Because of this, the church has experienced a shift. At one time, holding regular programming like weekly youth group gatherings, Sunday school, and confirmation classes were central to the weekly lives of many families. Now, our congregations struggle with attendance and participation and the response heard from families is shrouded in a culture of busyness. Yet, there is still a desire for some kind of spiritual engagement by both parents and children.

Over the past several years, congregations have tried to manipulate the programs they are doing and tweak them in a way that seems more attractive for families. Examples include: moving Sunday school to Wednesday evenings, holding confirmation classes between worship services on Sunday morning, and implementing the newest curriculum that is supposed to transform your ministry.

These are all technical changes, and no curriculum or tweaked outdated program is going to transform your ministry. Ministry is transformed when people of all ages see God as an active subject in their everyday life. Many congregations are asking the wrong question. I often hear colleagues, and myself, say things like “What program can we do
that will bring people to church?” People do not have the time for another social engagement on their calendar, and we are guilty of adding more and saying things like “People should make this a priority, because it is church!”

Baptism is an important sacrament in the Lutheran church and it was an umbrella for my research. When a parent brings a child forward for baptism, they are making promises to faithfully raise their son or daughter, place in their hands the Scriptures, pray with them, and guide them in their faith and learning. Martin Luther wrote the Small Catechism as a way to teach the ways of the church to our children. The Small Catechism is a guidebook for those of us living out an active faith. Luther asks and answers questions, so we understand our faith better. He asks about baptism: What gifts or benefits does baptism grant? And then answers by saying: “It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare.”¹

For this thesis, I studied the engagement of parents and teens and what this means for faith formation in what many are now calling a “post-program era.” Today, regular weekly faith formation programs have been struggling, from participation to the understanding of the teachings. Yet parents in our church communities still want their kids to experience faith milestones, like Affirmation of Baptism. However, expecting their attendance for a weekly program no longer works in the lives of busy families.

¹ Martin Luther, Luther’s Small Catechism (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016), 28
I performed some of my research at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church² in a suburb of Minneapolis. St. Peter’s is a middle- to upper-class congregation that formed in 1987 during the beginning stages of the community’s development. St. Peter’s provides all the typical faith formation practices, such as adult Bible studies, children’s education, confirmation, and worship.

Over the past two years, St. Peter’s has seen a sharp drop off in their confirmation attendance. This is a change, as confirmation generally had a good attendance rate for St. Peter’s. Previously, about 80-85% of the confirmation age youth attended weekly confirmation classes. Over the past five years, this attendance has dropped to 40-50%. Many do not attend any classes, and still plan on being confirmed.

This has led me to wonder why parents want their kids to experience church, and why is it important to them. I have wondered if there are ways in which we can think about church and Christianity as a lifestyle instead of a destination on Wednesday evening or Sunday morning.

I also sought out other congregations who were trying new opportunities to address this culture of busyness as other exploratory case studies. I had a difficult time finding congregations that were actually figuring this out without implementing a program and adding something new to already busy calendars. I will discuss this more in my research findings chapter.

Many Christians attend church on some type of regular basis. Outside of the church walls, Christianity seems hard for people to articulate in their own lives, and

² All names of churches and people in this thesis are pseudonyms, in order to protect the identities of those quoted.
within their daily walk in life. In the book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, the author Christian Smith identifies in his research a term called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, which is a common understanding of God among today’s young people. The author describes it as:

The creed of this religion, as codified from what emerged from our interviews, sounds something like this:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one’s life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.³

Smith’s definition of how young people view God is a helpful consideration when exploring effective ways of faith formation.

In this thesis, I studied ways that may help people think about how God is active in their everyday lives, and their capacity to see God as the subject in their lives instead of an object at their church on Sunday mornings. I studied how we can help people see God in the world and in everyday life. Here is my research question: *What are effective ways for congregations to engage in ways of faith formation that encourage spiritual*

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growth and Christian identity in over-programmed families, so they may see God as an active subject in their daily life?

As someone who has served in ministry since 1990, I am passionate about figuring out how we can make faith more valuable for people. The church has an opportunity that is far greater than any other organization out there, yet many mainline denominational churches are struggling with the drop in their attendance and lack of participation. However, a variety of studies which I address in this thesis, show that the majority of our country believes in God. There is a gap between what people believe and how the church may be helpful for people as they live out a life of faith. This gap seems to be partly because we have not figured out how to move out of an outdated model of faith formation, that, in most places, does not work anymore. We have tweaked the model with some technical changes, only to eventually have similar results of low energy and participation.

There are some big adaptive changes that need to happen in our churches when it comes to faith formation. One of the biggest is to see faith formation as a lifelong endeavor where we continue to mature in our faith. We never fully mature, we are always on a journey. No matter what we know, or what we study, our faith journey continues. Yet it will only continue if we see God as actively engaging in our everyday life.

Our faith grounds our life. God changes us and helps us see the world differently. It guides our life in ways we may not always understand. It provides a place of hope and security when life has its challenges, and a fountain of praise and thanksgiving when good things come our way. Faith is an experience that goes beyond anything else we can
experience in our world. For this reason, I believe God is calling the church to a new reformation that engages people and their faith in new ways. This may mean we need to collapse the previous models for faith formation in order for new ways to emerge and grow.

**Variables in My Research**

**Independent Variables**

One of the independent variables in my research included the confirmation program at St. Peter’s, which was two parts: One was the online component which allowed youth to spend time learning about the doctrines of the Lutheran faith on their own time. The other part was the Wednesday programming which focused on faith experiences and relationships. Additional independent variables were the various programs and ministries in congregations where they had been addressing faith formation effectively in the busy lives of families.

**Dependent Variables**

The dependent variables in this study include the importance of exploring the effects the independent variables have on faith formation that help families see God as an active subject in their daily life. This variable is included in both the internal and external case studies.

**Intervening Variables**

There were several intervening variables in this research. One is around parental influence. Parents needed to be proactive in encouraging their son or daughter to go
online and complete the assigned lessons. If parents did not encourage their kids, this impacted the outcome.

Another intervening variable includes regular attendance at St. Peter’s. What is now considered regular attendance in our faith communities means something different than it did in the past. For some families, regular church attendance has been only once per month. This may impact how they see their faith in daily life. This leads into another intervening variable, which is busyness. This impacted how well the ministry worked for families and for the participation in the focus groups.

Finally, an additional intervening variable includes the gender of young people. Boys and girls have different phases of life development, which changes how they perceive this ministry in the exploratory case studies. This may impact the learning that is designed to be part of the ministry.

**Importance of My Research**

This research question is important for me because the church needs to examine ways that faith formation might work better than the current way it is being implemented. We have young people being confirmed who still do not understand what it means to be baptized, or the importance of Scripture in their lives, or even a basic biblical literacy. Although confirmation instruction generally includes these areas, these concepts are not sticking in their own faith formation.

This area of study is important for the larger church, as we need to find new ways of learning what young people find meaningful. For some, faith is often seen as a destination on Wednesday or Sunday, instead of being part of everyday life.
The church is also facing a decline. The importance of gathering together for worship and learning seems to be a low priority for many American homes. Congregations need to find ways to think differently about encouraging God as an active subject in people’s daily lives.

Parents often hope their kids will “get” something, or the church will rub off on them and they will be good people in life. But the reality we are seeing is kids are not growing up and sticking with the church. Church attendance has dwindled, and more and more people are no longer affiliating with churches or denominations.4

In addition, it was important to explore the busyness of our communities. This has created a competition for time in which our churches struggle to compete. Lives are being tugged in many directions, and parents know the church will always be there, but a current opportunity they are given may not. With the Christian church on the decline, faith formation is a small piece of a bigger picture our congregations are facing. But this is an essential piece for discovering how people stay engaged in faithful living and see God as active in their everyday life.

Background

In previous years, congregations including St. Peter’s and others used in my research held weekly opportunities for faith formation. There have been Bible studies,

youth group meetings, pastor classes, confirmation classes, and more. People of all ages gather to learn more about their faith, to grow in relationship with one another, and to learn ways to live out a life of faith. This was routine for many people, and weekly programming was provided by the church. Regular attendance generally meant you participated weekly.

In recent years, families are increasingly over-programmed with commitments in community and school events. One example of being over-programmed is a high school sophomore who was a member of a previous congregation where I served. He played hockey, and he was on the ice practicing seven days a week. He was also part of the National Honor Society and had to earn a certain number of volunteer hours. He also took piano lessons, which included an hour per day of practicing and a weekly lesson. This was on top of all his other normal schoolwork and about two hours of homework each night. Where does the church fit in? Yet as a church, we want to support our families and the faith of our youth.

This culture is spreading beyond just families with children. Singles and couples are also experiencing a form of “busyness” that is present in our society and lifestyle. My husband and I do not have kids, yet our schedules are packed every day with other obligations. Something has shifted in our culture to create this climate of busyness that has often left the church alone in the woods wondering what to do. We are on a journey to figure this out, which is why I chose this topic.
I have heard parents speak negatively about being “over-programmed” with their children, yet they do not know how to change their lifestyle pattern. There are pressures from the community that also exist, which revolve around ideas of success.

One example of what an over-programmed family of four may experience during their week includes the busy work schedules of two working parents, after school activities for the kids, other community engagements such as sports, theater, scouting, music lessons, and school homework that takes several hours each night. Then throw in the mix birthday parties, hanging out with friends, and other social opportunities where families and kids want to participate. Weave throughout all of this busyness the impact of technology such as texting and social media engagement, and schedules are insanely full. There is not a lot of room for the church to find an opening in these busy lives.

Meet Ian

Once on a Wednesday evening at St. Peter’s, Ian, one of the kids who participates in our confirmation ministry, shared with me that he had piano lessons right after school, then he came to church and then was heading out to lacrosse practice later that evening at 9:00 PM. Then he still had a couple of hours of homework. He has to wake up at 6:30 AM to get ready for school. This young person is only twelve years old. I spoke with his mom about why it is important they participate at St. Peter’s on Wednesdays and she said Ian asked her the same question. Her response was: “I promised God.” If it was not for his parents’ intentionality of carrying out their baptismal promises and being involved in the church community, I do not think Ian would be participating either.
How do we honor what is happening in the community, meaning, how do we accept the fact that families are busy, while at the same time provide education and resources for faith development they will use for the rest of their lives? This goes beyond just learning and into a place where individuals, both youth and adults, see God as an active subject in their everyday life.

**Theoretical Lenses**

This thesis drew upon four theoretical lenses to help shape the research and study. These were spiritual formation, rituals, postmodernism, and technology. These four areas have significant impact on how we help people engage God as the subject of their everyday life.

**Spiritual Formation**

The lens of spiritual formation reflects on the history and importance of faith formation and spiritual development. There is a rich history that has impacted how the modern church implements faith formation today and this will be reflected upon throughout my research.

**Rituals**

Rituals have been especially important in the role of faith formation. Rituals have shaped our Christian practices both in the home and at our churches. This lens was used to explore ways these rituals have nurtured faith development and spiritual formation throughout our lives.
Postmodernism

Postmodernism has been a term thrown around a lot when it comes to thinking about the modern-day church. In this thesis I defined what this term means for the church and reflected on this lens throughout my research. Postmodernism in this thesis is defined as the past 25 years of our culture and history and the impact on our world today.

Technology

A technology lens is important to examine throughout all of my research. It has shaped our churches, communities, families, and our young people in profound ways. It has a significant impact on our daily lives and provided great insight to my research and understanding of how it has impacted our daily lives.

Biblical Lenses

I used two biblical lenses as a foundation for my research. I chose an Old Testament text and a New Testament text. The first passage is found in Deuteronomy. This text tells us how we are to honor God while we live out our daily lives. The New Testament text is taken from Matthew as a reminder of how we let our light shine before others, so it may give glory to God. Shining our light is active participation with a God who loves and cares deeply for us.

Deuteronomy

This is a significant biblical lens as my research addressed honoring God in our daily life. Deuteronomy 6:5-9 states:
5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (NRSV)

This text provides a framework for viewing God as an active subject in our life. It explains to God’s people how to love and honor God when they lie down, when they wake up, by teaching their children, and how to keep their homes as a reminder of this loving God.

Matthew

The New Testament text I chose is Matthew 5:15-16 which says:

15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (NRSV)

This text calls upon us to shine our light in the world before others. This is a call to living in an active relationship with God, as we live out our gifts for the world. This lens was used to shape my research, especially my internal research at St. Peter’s. It provided a framework for why we did certain things to help our young people experience God in new ways. This text helps shape how we are engaged in an active, living faith, and see God as the subject in our lives, each and every day.

Theological Lenses

The following four theological lenses were used in my research: baptism, faith of our teens, faith of our parents, and the mission and purpose of faith education. These are
important areas to review as we uncover how we think about faith formation in the era we are now living. How parents live out their faith will impact how teens live out their faith. Reflecting on historical and modern views about the mission and purpose of faith formation impacts where the church is at today. This lens provided some grounding for examining why we do what we do when it comes to the implementation of faith education and other faith forming opportunities.

Baptism

Baptism is an important sacrament in our church. Not only does baptism welcome persons into this beautiful and messy family of God, parents, sponsors, relatives, and the congregation are called into service by actively participating in the faith life of the person being baptized. In Luther’s Small Catechism, he asks this question for us so we can learn and grow in understanding of baptism: How can water do such great things? Luther’s response is:

Clearly the water does not do it, but the word of God, which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit," as St. Paul says to Titus in chapter 3, "through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is sure."\(^5\)

This is a beautiful way of understanding God’s interaction in our life. It is not a one-time deal. It is there for us each and every day.

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\(^5\) Martin Luther, *Luther’s Small Catechism* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016), 29
Faith of Our Teens

This theological lens is important in my research as young people are the primary focus for my study. It helps glean an understanding of what kids believe and why they believe it. It has impacted my research in great ways as we learn how we can help young people navigate a world where God is active and present. It helps bring focus and clarity to how we can help teens see that God is an active subject in their life.

Faith of Our Parents

Parents have the most impact on their children. For this research it was important to use this lens to discover how faith formation in teens is impacted by faith formation in their parents. If parents are living out a life that reflects a God who is active in their everyday life, this modeling will have an impact on the life of their teens.

Mission and Purpose of Faith Education

The final theological lens I used in my research was the mission and purpose of faith education. I explored the history of faith education and how the mission and purpose has been shaped over the years. This shaping has led us to how we implement faith education today in our churches.

Methodology

Overall Research

My research method for this thesis was qualitative research, using exploratory case studies in conversation with qualitative questionnaires. I conducted the qualitative research using observations, interviews, and questionnaires. I utilized the research to
uncover what it is individuals, families, and parents find important about faith, and why adults feel young people are not engaging in the church. I used questionnaires and implemented paragraph-by-paragraph coding, looking for key ideas that were coming out of these answers. My methodology included three different areas: internal research, which was at the congregation where I serve, external research, which was conducted at other congregations, and questionnaires, which were implemented at four different congregations.

Internal Case Study at St. Peter’s

This internal case study was researching a newly implemented confirmation program at St. Peter’s. The design of the program was to provide options for busy families. An online component was designed for teaching and a weekly program was developed and designed to build relationships and provide experiences that help young people engage their faith in new ways.

External Case Studies

The external case study for my research involved reaching out to other congregations who felt they were engaging new ideas for faith formation with busy families. I struggled with this area of my research, as my cases were limited. I will reflect more on this in the coming chapters.

A Questionnaire for Four Congregations

My final piece of research involved a questionnaire that was administered at four other congregations. In addition to working at St. Peter’s, I also serve as the co-director at
an organization\textsuperscript{6} that helps congregations during transitions in staffing with children, youth, and family ministry. These congregations were places where the organization was currently engaged and working. I used a question as part of a larger questionnaire that went out to adult members of the congregations. This question provided a space for adults to reflect upon why they feel young people are not engaged in their congregation. The results provided insight in my overall research and supported some conclusions in my research.

**Instruments**

My thesis included qualitative research. The qualitative research tools included observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The observations and interviews happened at St. Peter’s, the congregation I currently serve, and other outside congregations. An online questionnaire was administered at four different congregations that had not been involved in other parts of the research. Interview participants signed consent forms and implied consent was used in the online questionnaires.

**Data Analysis**

The interpretation of the research data included paragraph-by-paragraph coding. I coded these answers by pulling out the key ideas of each individual response. I went back to these key ideas and grouped them into one of eight concepts. I compiled the answers under these eight areas and then compiled the numbers for each area.

\textsuperscript{6} InterServe Ministries is the organization in which I serve as a co-director.
I removed from my research answers that were not relevant. Those were mostly people who said, “I don’t know.” I also removed four answers where it was clear the respondents did not understand the question or chose to talk about something else unrelated.

Other Matters

Ethical Concerns

I adhered to IRB standards of Luther Seminary by receiving appropriate consents from anyone involved in a survey, interview, or focus group. There were two ethical concerns that I was sensitive to in my research. The first is that I am both on staff in this congregation and the researcher. The other ethical concern includes research with those under eighteen. Although I did not do any direct questioning of those under eighteen, my subjects of study were under that age and I was engaging in ministry with them for the case study. To address these ethical concerns, I had parents of the youth under the age of eighteen sign an informed consent, providing permission for their son or daughter to participate in this ministry.

Other research I performed included a questionnaire for adults. I used implied consent for the questionnaires used for my qualitative research with these adults.

I will keep all of my data either on my personal computer under password protection, or in a locked file in my home office. I will destroy all the data three years after the completion of my degree.
Definition of Key Terms

Faith Formation

Faith formation in this research is the educational programs that are currently and historically have been implemented in congregations. They generally include Sunday school, confirmation, and Bible studies. They have been utilized in a way that is designed to help form or shape our faith and the understanding of a personal faith.

Confirmation

The term confirmation in this study is used to describe educational programs that teach youth the doctrine and teachings of the Lutheran tradition. It is generally implemented in grades six through nine, and includes ages eleven to fourteen.

Parents

Parents in this research will refer to parents of youth under the age of eighteen, and active in current ministries at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church.

Youth

Youth in this research will refer to young people ages eleven through seventeen, and grades six through twelve. These young people are active participants at St. Peter’s.

Significance of this Study

Challenging the rich church history of providing programs such as confirmation and faith education in hopes people will learn to live out their faith, raises an uncomfortable conversation. But it is necessary, as the church is changing and being
reformed into something new. I hope my research will be a starting point for me professionally as I continue to work in children, youth, and family ministry. I also hope it will engage others into dialogue about how to engage people in relationship with a Triune God that is an active part of their everyday life.

Some of our previous methods of implantation of faith formation have proven to be ineffective, which is reflective of what we are seeing in the declining church. We need to try creative new ideas, be accepting of failure, and allow our successes to grow into new ways we help people see God in their life.

God is up to something in our churches today. I believe God is calling us into a creative opportunity to experiment, grapple with, make mistakes, and build up new ideas that will help others learn and grow in their everyday faith.

Summary

This thesis attempts to get at the answer to this question: What are effective ways for congregations to engage in ways of faith formation that encourages spiritual growth and Christian identity in over-programmed families, so they may see God as an active subject in their daily life? My research included three different types of case studies: internal research, which included a case study at the congregation I serve, external research, which included case studies at other congregations, and a questionnaire at four other congregations, which reflected on why young people are not engaged at their congregation.
In the next chapter of this thesis, I will reflect on the historical background of faith formation, and some of the themes in my research. I will also reflect further on the theoretical lenses and how they impacted my study.
CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL LENSES

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide insight on the background and history of St. Peter’s, and how it fits into this research. I explore the background of faith formation and its historical importance. I also explore and define the theoretical lenses which I used to frame this research. These lenses include: spiritual formation, ritual, postmodernism, and technology.

Historical Background

In one way or another, faith formation has been and still is part of the lives of individuals who claim to believe in God. Over time, faith formation has transitioned into this idea of Christian education, which has been the primary responsibility of the church. Traditional Sunday school began in the 1780s in England, to provide education for orphans or children whose parents were both working. It was more than just Sunday school; it was also a place to teach children reading, writing, and understanding of the Bible. It had a purpose for its time and was adapted to meeting the needs of the community during this era. However, this outdated version of education has carried over into today.
Sunday school has a rich history, and students in a course at Indiana Wesleyan University compiled a document called “The Short History of the Sunday school.” Below is an excerpt that tells the story of how our most popular form of faith education, known as Sunday school, began:

**Robert Raikes, Glochester, England—1780s**

At the dawning of the industrial era in the late 1700’s (about the time of the United States Revolutionary war) England had a large underclass of poor people who had moved from the countryside to the city to work in “factories.” There was at least one factory in Glochester that manufactured pins. Children as young as eight years old worked six days a week in gruesome surroundings for a pittance. When their tiny hands (which helped them as workers) got caught in the machinery and got cut off, the children were simply dumped on the streets and new workers were hired. There was no free schooling at this time. Education was considered a family (not a communal) purchase—if you had enough money, you sent your children to school. If you were poor, your children did not learn to read and write, and were probably destined to a life of poverty so they couldn’t even read. In the growing factory society, the poor never seemed able to rise out of their abject poverty.

Sunday was the one day these children got off. Many blew off steam wandering around the town breaking windows and robbing homes while the upscale parishioners attended church. The street urchins of the day survived miserable conditions at work and learned how to be pickpockets and thieves at a young age. There was no way out of the poverty cycle for these children.

These “gangs” of street urchins sparked a vision and burden in Robert Raikes. He saw their lack of education, their dead-end life of poverty, and their turning to crime as something Christian folk should be concerned about so he got an idea. His idea was simple: why not start a school on Sundays for these poor children where good Christian people would teach them to read and write, teach them the Ten Commandments, and instruct them in moral living? Maybe with a basic education they might be able to escape their dreadful life.

So Raikes started a “Sunday school” for these poor children. Their parents could not pay for school like other better-off people could so Raikes paid for the first school himself—and recruited others to contribute. He became obsessed with reforming the morals of the poor children and the “lower class.” In 1780 (or maybe 1781) he started this first Sunday school and paid the teacher himself. She quit soon after but he hired others. Since he was a printer, Raikes published large sheets with the Ten Commandments and other Scripture verses on them, so the
children could use them for his double-duty aim of learning to read and write—and at the same time learning moral principles to live by. These printed sheets were in a sense the first “Sunday school curriculum.” Raikes was a devout member of the Church of England.¹

This historical understanding of Sunday school is important to know about as it demonstrates why it began in the first place. We need to ask ourselves why we are still doing Sunday school. It is an outdated form of faith education that is no longer working in a lot of our churches. What is it that would be needed for our time today in our world? What do we as the church need to adapt in order to address the needs of our community as families live out these busy and over-programmed lives?

Another way to understand our current situation is by looking at congregations. St. Peter’s is a suburban congregation, so Alan Roxburgh’s understanding of Euro-Tribal congregations is helpful.² This historical concept is an important understanding, as we learn how and why our suburban congregations began. Roxburgh defines Euro-Tribal as:

In our story, what is coming undone is the long, cherished tradition of the “Euro-tribal churches” across North America. I use this term with great intention, and I’ll take a moment to explain. The churches with which I have worked most closely and the ones with which this book deals most directly are those that trace to the great migrations from the United Kingdom and Europe over the past four to five hundred years, the churches that form the primary Christian groups in the United States and Canada. They created denominations shaped largely by ethnic and religious identities coming out of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century reformations: Lutherans (Germany and Scandinavia), Episcopalians (England), Presbyterians (Scotland), United Church of Canada (Great Britain), Methodists

¹ Keith Drury, “The Short History of the Sunday School” (Local Church Education course at Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN, 1996-2010).

and Baptists (England), Mennonites (the Netherlands and Germany), and so forth.³

Understanding the development of churches, especially in the suburbs of larger cities in America, provides a foundation and understanding of how the church has evolved and unraveled into who the church is today. Roxburgh also states:

Good News in Unlikely Places. Ultimately, it is my strong contention that the Spirit has been at work in this long unraveling. The Spirit is inviting these churches to embrace a new imagination, but the other one had to unravel for us to see it for what it was. In this sense the malaise of our churches has been the work of God. Allow me to spell out several implications for this proposal:
FIRST: If the Spirit has been at work in this long unraveling, then God is not done with the Euro-tribal, Protestant churches. In Scripture places of unraveling were preludes to God shaping a new future for God’s people. For instance, the persecutions of Acts 8 precipitated a profoundly different church from the one the disciples imagined after Pentecost.
SECOND: We are not in a contemporary or temporary “exile.” Such language made sense to a generation that came to leadership in the 1970s, but for the generations that followed, this is not some strange exilic land. Exile language is tinged with the eventuality that there’s a way back. In truth, there is no returning, no going back. We are in a new location, a land many people call home, and so the churches must ask very different questions. Exile questions about how to fix and make the church work again won’t help us to discern the Spirit.
THIRD: This space of unraveling is a space of hope. We are witnessing the Spirit preparing us for a new chapter in the story of God’s mission. Our churches are at the end of a way of being God’s people and at the beginning of something significantly different. It involves our awakening to an invitation that is not about fixing the church but a journey of exploration.
FOURTH: In this journey we are experiencing dislocation. More than adjustment, major change is required. The Spirit’s invitation requires risk-taking, as we try on practices that will seem strange and awkward at first. It will ask us to change our basic sense of where God is at work. It will change our ideas about the location of God’s actions.
FIFTH: We are embarking on a shared journey to discern what the Spirit is up to ahead of us in our neighborhoods and to join God in these places. How do we discern together? How do we join with God? How will this joining require us to be changed as a gathered people?

³ Ibid., Kindle Edition Locations 306-312.
SIXTH: Like all new journeys we will need new ways of traveling. For Christians these ways are called practices.\textsuperscript{4}

Faith formation is part of these practices, and an important piece in reshaping the church today and for the future.

However, our current models of faith formation have collapsed and are not effective as they once were. I personally have served in over fifteen different congregations during my ministry career, eleven of those being interim. During my time in these congregations, there was constant conversation and struggle around when to hold Sunday school. The big question for Sunday morning is if you hold it during worship, or between, before, or after worship. None of these options are great. Parents have said they do not like having their kids in worship with them, because parents do not get anything out of the service. But if education is held at other times, attendance drops.

At some of the congregations where I have served, I witnessed parents just dropping their kids off for Sunday school and coming back an hour later after they ran their morning errands. Their church is a place where kids are dropped, and they are taught morals and values on Sunday morning which will hopefully sink in during the week. The overall model does not fit our society anymore, yet we are struggling to discover ways to still make it work.

Theoretical Lenses

The theoretical lenses I identified in my research were: spiritual formation, ritual, postmodernism, and technology. These were helpful for examining and discovering the concepts of this thesis. Each of these lenses are explained in more detail below.

Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is the key to understanding God as an active subject in an individual’s daily life. We are constantly forming in our faith and maturing on our spiritual journey. How an individual is actively involved in their own individual spiritual formation is important. How individuals view and live out their relationship with God will impact their daily spiritual journey. Mark Stenberg, in the book 51% Christian: Finding Faith after Certainty, examines our relationship with God as a life of trust and living out daily practices. Stenberg states:

Do You Love Me? Allow me to make this even clearer by leaning on an analogy penned by Gerhard Forde in the introduction to his classic Theology Is for Proclamation. Forde asks the reader to picture a conversation between two lovers. They reach a critical moment in which the lover asks the beloved, “Do you love me?” The beloved answers, “Well, that is an interesting question. What is love after all?” and so launches into a discussion about the essence of love. After patient waiting, the lover finally gets another chance. “Yes, that’s all interesting, but do you love me?” Then the beloved takes another diversionary tack and says, “Well, yes, of course, I love everybody!” (A universalist!) The lover protests, “That’s not what I mean! You haven’t answered the question! Do you love me?” So it goes. In spite of all the helpful things it does, secondary discourse makes the would-be lover look ridiculous when it is substituted for primary discourse. For Forde, in the face of that ultimate question “Do you love me?” there is only one kind of discourse that will do the job. That is “primary discourse, the proclamation, the self-disclosure in present tense, first to second person address, the ‘I love you,’ and the subsequent confession, ‘I love you too!’” “Do you love me? It just might be the ultimate question of human existence. I’ve tried to make clear, throughout these chapters, that theology is not the source of this divine love. God’s “I love you” to the world is the stuff of revelation, of address, of prayer and
meditation and word and sacrament. Theology must always go back to its starting point: reflecting upon, contemplating, seeking to understand and clarify this encounter of God’s unshakeable and sure “I love you” to the world. Thus, in the end, theology, too, ought to be about love, about the loving relationship emptied out into all of creation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the risen victim who confronts us in our violence and shows us a new way to live. Theology must always defer to the first-order encounter with the living God.5

Spiritual formation wrestles with theology and the existence of how God interweaves with our daily life. This impacts how someone lives out their daily walk in their faith.

Rituals

I studied the importance of rituals in our Christian faith and expression. I explored how and if rituals help people live out an active faith. I explored more about the meaning of ritual and the impact it may have on the church and families. I studied the book Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice by Catherine Bell. After her extensive research of rituals, one of her outcomes states:

What I have attempted to do is forge a framework for reanalyzing the types of activities usually understood as ritual. At a fundamental level, this framework attempts to return such ritual activities to the context of human action in general. Ritual is not assumed to exist as a natural category of human practice. Within this interpretive framework some activities are performed in culturally relevant ways to generate the perception that these activities are both intrinsically different from other acts and privileged in their significance and ramifications.6

Rituals find their ways into many areas of our lives. I focused primarily on the rituals of the church and on living out a life of faith.

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Postmodernism

Postmodernism is another lens I used for my research. I looked into some of the elements of postmodernism that have led to a postmodern turn in participation in a Christ-centered, worshipping community. In the book *Post-Modernism 101: A First Course for The Curious Christian*, the author Heath White describes postmodernism as this:

The word “post-modernism” first surfaced in architecture and the fine arts, perhaps in the 1950s, referring to a new style. Later it acquired a meaning in the world of literature as well. Thus, if an architect, an artist, or an English professor had written this book, it would have a somewhat different emphasis. Sometimes the term is used specifically for the philosophies of a few French thinkers, and if those thinkers had heavily influenced this book’s author, its emphasis would be different yet again. As it stands, I will be using “post-modernism” throughout this book in the broadest possible sense, to name a mind-set, a worldview, or a family of similar worldviews, a set of perspectives shared by many people who have come of age rather recently. Post-modernism is not a theory or a creed: it is more like an attitude or a way of looking at things.7

In my research, postmodernism is viewed as an attitude or a way of looking at ideas that have changed and evolved over time; particularly over the past twenty-five years.

Within the postmodern lens, there are also some sub-lenses I used. These include: over programming of our youth, suburban development, community values, and the anxiety of successfulness.

Our youth have many opportunities, and parents seem to encourage involvement to the point where kids have very little free time. This has grown out of “suburban

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development,” where suburbs have longed for an identity.\textsuperscript{8} The current identity has been created through opportunity, especially with the competitiveness of suburban school districts. Education and opportunity are values that are lifted up in the suburbs, and this is often carried out through the schools. This has led to anxiety and depression with both kids and parents. I have heard from parents how they want to find more balance in their life, but they do not know how to implement it. I explored more about what this means, and how it impacts the church’s role in programs and ministries.

Technology

The final lens I used is the use of technology today and how it shapes our faith experiences. I looked at virtual relationships, the impact of social media, and the opportunities we have to utilize technology in helpful ways.

In our world today, many of our relationships are formed online. How will this impact our faith, and what does this mean for Christian relationships? One of my interventions in my research included an online confirmation format. I examined what it meant for students to engage in virtual learning and relationships.

Virtual relationships can be authentic relationships, but they are different than sitting down face-to-face with a small group of people. How can virtual relationships help with faith formation, and how might it hinder it? In the book \textit{The Oxford Handbook of}

Internet Psychology, it discusses how online relationships have challenged psychological theories around relationships, and how they require physical presence with one another.\(^9\)

My research explored the impact of theories around relationships, technology, and faith formation. I dug into social media in particular, as this is an active part of the life of a young person. I found wonderful and relevant information from Jean M. Twenge’s book: *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. The youth that were involved in my research were actively part of what she is referring to as “iGen.” Here are three passages from the book that are helpful in defining this lens:

Born in 1995 and later, they grew up with cell phones, had an Instagram page before they started high school, and do not remember a time before the Internet.\(^10\)

The average teen checks her phone more than eighty times a day.\(^11\)

They are obsessed with safety and fearful of their economic futures, and they have no patience for inequality based on gender, race, or sexual orientation. They are at the forefront of the worst mental health crisis in decades, with rates of teen depression and suicide skyrocketing since 2011. Contrary to the prevalent idea that children are growing up faster than previous generations did, iGen’ers are growing up more slowly: 18-year-olds now act like 15-year-olds used to, and 13-year-olds like 10-year-olds. Teens are physically safer than ever, yet they are more mentally vulnerable.\(^12\)

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\(^11\) Ibid., Kindle Edition Locations 72-73.

\(^12\) Ibid., Kindle Edition Locations 62-63.
Summary

In this chapter, I explored the background at St. Peter’s, the historical background of faith formation, and theoretical lenses I used in this research. I reflected on the theological lenses of: spiritual formation, ritual, postmodernism, and technology. In the next chapter, I focused on the biblical and theological lenses I used and how they shaped my research.
CHAPTER 3
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LENSES

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the background and history at St. Peter’s, the congregation where I serve. I also explored the historical background of faith formation and how it has impacted faith formation today in our congregations.

In this chapter, I will present the biblical and theological lenses that shaped my research. The biblical lenses are taken from Deuteronomy and Matthew. They help to shape how we view faith formation, and the role it plays in our congregations today. The theological lenses I used included: baptism, faith of our teens, the faith of parents, and the mission and purpose of faith education. These lenses all had an important role in my research as they are key to understanding how God is a participant in the daily lives of those in our church communities.

Biblical Lenses

For my biblical lenses, I chose one Old Testament text and one New Testament text as lenses for reflection in this thesis. The Old Testament text has significance around the idea of ritual and how we pass the faith on to our children. The New Testament text focuses on how we engage as an active participant in God’s world.
Deuteronomy

The text I explored is Deuteronomy 6:5-9 (NRSV):

5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. 7 Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. 8 Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, 9 and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

I chose this text because of its wisdom and historical significance in the idea of ritual. The ritual is not a Christian ritual, but a Jewish one. The beginning part of this text is often referred to as the Shema, and in Judaism, these words sit inside a mezuzah which is placed on the entryway of their homes. As they walk by, they touch the mezuzah and are reminded of those words: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.”¹ This is a wonderful symbol and understanding of an active faith. God is the subject in the lives of those this scripture touches.

This verse also tells how we are to teach our children. The primary focus of our faith journey is in our everyday life, and in our home. For this reason, some of my research involved parents, and what they feel is important for the child to learn about the faith.

Matthew

The second biblical lens is a New Testament text. I have chosen to reflect on:

Matthew 5:15-16 (NRSV).

15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

I chose this text because it refers to how we let our faith shine in our own daily lives. It is an active understanding of letting our light shine in a way that gives glory to God, not only in our homes, but in our world around us. To fully give glory to God, we must see God as an active subject in our lives.

In her book *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* Dorothy Bass says:

Baptism and communion, prayer and Bible study, worship and Christian friendship: these are integral to life with God and to the faithfulness of the church. In a Christian congregation, all of these are interwoven with the practices in this book. But none of these exists for the good of the church alone. The love and mercy Christians receive through these gifts from God are meant to be poured out for the sake of the world. The finite, fragile practices we do together, over time, responding to creation’s needs and God’s great love, are vessels through which the love and mercy shown to us will flow to others.²

The sacraments of baptism and communion, along with worship, and Christian relationships, provide amazing opportunities for the church and God’s people. This is the foundation of our faith, as God works through our gifts, so we may be a reflection of this Matthew text by shining a light in our broken world.

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Theological Lenses

The theological lenses I used include baptism, faith of our teens, the faith of parents and the mission and purpose of faith education. I will use these lenses when reflecting on the research and how it impacts faith formation in our congregations.

Baptism

Baptism is an important sacrament in our church, and an umbrella in my research. Not only does baptism welcome persons into this beautiful and messy family of God, parents, sponsors, relatives, and the congregation are called into service by actively participating in the faith life of the person being baptized. This is a beautiful way of understanding God’s interaction in our life. It is not a one-time deal. It is there for us each and every day. Baptismal promises that parents, sponsors, and the congregation make at the time of a person’s baptism are important to lift up and encourage as we raise young people in a life of faith.

Faith of Our Teens

This lens was utilized to study an understanding of where teens are at in their individual spiritual formation. I studied ways in which teens reflect upon God and spirituality, and how this intersects with their daily life.

For this lens I explored the works from The National Study of Youth and Religion, out of Notre Dame. Christian Smith chaired the study, and their results are important to understand the shift in faith and teens. Specifically, I utilized the report *Religion and Spirituality on the Path Through Adolescence*, which is a research report on
the study.³ In June of 2005, this study found that 78% of teenage youth between the ages of thirteen and seventeen stated the have a belief in God, 18% were unsure, and 5% said “no.”⁴ There are several other important questions that were asked of teens in this study, but what is important is that we know 78% of our teens believe in God.

Kenda Creasy Dean picked up on their research in her book, Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church.⁵ She writes:

American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith—but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school. One more thing: we’re responsible. If the American church responds, quickly and decisively, to issues raised by studies like the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR)—the massive 2003–05 study on adolescent spirituality in the United States that served as the original impetus for this book—then tending the faith of young people may just be the ticket to reclaiming our own.⁶

Baptism provides a way for us to tend to the faith of young people. When a young person is baptized, parents, sponsors, and the community make baptismal promises to help raise this person in the faith. This needs to go beyond just dropping them off for classes where the church tries to teach the faith. Faith needs to be lived out daily, knowing God is actively working in beautiful ways.

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⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Kenda Creasy Dean, Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church. 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶ Ibid., Kindle Edition Locations 88-93.
The Faith of Parents

Faith of our parents is important in this study because of the connection to the faith of their children. What parents value is often modeled in the home. I explored parents’ understanding of faith, what is important to them, and why faith education is important for their son or daughter. I searched for a clearer understanding of where both parents and kids are at in their faith journey.

Kenda Creasy Dean also addresses the impact of parents’ religious beliefs and actions. She says:

As the following pages attest, the religiosity of American teenagers must be read primarily as a reflection of their parents’ religious devotion (or lack thereof) and, by extension, that of their congregations. Teenagers themselves consistently demonstrate an openness to religion, but few of them are deeply committed to one. As sociologists like Robert Wuthnow blame young adults’ absence from American religious life, not on congregational practices but on demographic patterns like the postponement of marriage, the chance of churches becoming places that young people call their own seems like a distant, maybe even delusional, hope. I want to suggest another way to read this research, including the NSYR and the spate of smaller studies that largely echo its findings: they are not just about youth. Youth, after all, “tell ourselves,” which means that the significance of the NSYR does not lie in what it revealed about young people (very few of its findings surprise anyone working with teenagers). It is significant because it reframes the issues of youth ministry as issues facing the twenty-first-century church as a whole. Since the religious and spiritual choices of American teenager’s echo, with astonishing clarity, the religious and spiritual choices of the adults who love them, lackadaisical faith is not young people’s issue, but ours.7

These are convicting words for parents and other adults in our congregations. Adults are just as responsible for what is happening in the faith lives of teenagers. At baptism, parents, sponsors, and the congregation made a promise to help raise the child in the faith. If parents or other adults do not see God as an active subject in their daily life, it

will be difficult for them to raise a child in a faith that sees God as an active subject in
their daily life.

There are a couple of other resources I used, including Barbara Brown Taylor’s

*An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith.*

In the paragraphs below, she reflects on how many adults view God’s world:

Still, some of us were not satisfied with our weekly or biweekly encounters with
God. We wanted more than set worship services or church work could offer us.
We wanted more than planning scavenger hunts for the youth group, more than
polishing silver with the altar guild, more than serving on the outreach committee
or rehearsing anthems with the choir. We wanted more. We wanted a deeper
sense of purpose. We wanted a stronger sense of God’s presence. We wanted
more reliable ways both to seek and to stay in that presence—not for an hour on
Sunday morning or Wednesday afternoon but for as much time as we could stand.
And yet the only way most of us knew to get that was to spend more time in
church. So we volunteered more, dreamed up more programs, invited more people
to more classes where we could read more books. The minute we walked back out
to our cars, many of us could feel the same old gnawing inside. Once we left
church, we were not sure what to do anymore. We knew some things we could do
to feel close to God inside the church, but after we stepped into the parking lot we
lost that intimacy. The boundaries were not so clear out there. Community was
not so easy to find. Without Tiffany windows tinting them blue, people looked
pretty much the same. From the parking lot, they looked as ordinary as everything
else. The only more out there was more of the same. That, at least, is how it
looked to those of us who had forgotten that the whole world is the House of God.
Somewhere along the line we bought—or were sold—the idea that God is chiefly
interested in religion. We believed that God’s home was the church, that God’s
people knew who they were, and that the world was a barren place full of lost
souls in need of all the help they could get. Plenty of us seized on those ideas
because they offered us meaning. Believing them gave us purpose and worth.
They gave us something noble to do in the midst of lives that might otherwise be
invisible. Plus, there really are large swaths of the world filled with people in deep
need of saving.

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Her narratives and storytelling provide definition to a subject that many have wrestled with, when it comes to how adults view God in the world and the church.

I also looked at the Pew Research in the *Religious Landscape Study*.10 This research provides wonderful insight on the faith of our families and parents today. The study surveyed more than 35,000 Americans from all 50 states about their religious affiliations, beliefs, and practices. In a Pew publication from November 2015, it says:

> Is the American public becoming less religious? Yes, at least by some key measures of what it means to be a religious person. An extensive new survey of more than 35,000 U.S. adults finds that the percentages who say they believe in God, pray daily and regularly go to church or other religious services all have declined modestly in recent years.11

It goes on to define some of the research that came out of the *Religious Landscape Study*:

The share of U.S. adults who say they believe in God, while still remarkably high by comparison with other advanced industrial countries, has declined modestly, from approximately 92% to 89%, since Pew Research Center conducted its first Landscape Study in 2007. The share of Americans who say they are “absolutely certain” God exists has dropped more sharply, from 71% in 2007 to 63% in 2014. And the percentages who say they pray every day, attend religious services regularly and consider religion to be very important in their lives also have ticked down by small but statistically significant margins.12

This research provides some insight to the drop off in religious beliefs among Americans.

When it comes to thinking about how to implement faith formation in busy families, we also need to recognize the reasons why people are not making church and faith a priority in their life.

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12 Ibid.
Mission and Purpose of Faith Education

The final theological lens I used is an understanding of the mission and purpose of faith education. I have many questions, such as: Why do we have faith education in our churches? Why is it important for families? Why is it important for churches to provide this education? How might we learn from the history and experiences of faith education to provide insight for today? Insight through this lens helped provide some information for future educational practices at St. Peter’s.

I mentioned in my historical background in chapter two of this thesis about the history of Sunday school. The purpose of why Sunday school began is not realistic for today in America. Our definition and purpose of faith education has changed over the years, and although it is no longer for street orphans in England, it has some type of purpose for today.

In a journal article by John Roberto titled, “The Importance of Family Faith for Lifelong Faith Formation,” he says this:

For the good of families and the whole Christian community, congregations can provide opportunities to equip homes as centers of faith formation at every stage of life. Congregations and age group ministries can make family faith formation a focus of everything they do as a church community, using an array of approaches and strategies to nurture faith at every stage of the family life cycle and in all the diverse forms and structures of the contemporary family. They can educate and enrich parents and the whole family to embed foundational religious practices—faith conversations, family devotions and prayer, Bible reading, service, and rituals and traditions—into the daily experience of family life. Congregations and youth ministries can strengthen the partnership between home and congregation.

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by focusing on empowering, resourcing, and supporting the development of the family as the center of faith formation.\textsuperscript{14}

Roberto draws upon several studies in this article that all support and promote the importance of family and faith practices. The church has big shoes to fill when it comes to helping parents and our families to build faith in the home.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed my biblical and theological lenses. The biblical lenses are verses taken from Deuteronomy and Matthew. The theological lenses are baptism, faith of our teens, faith of our parents, and the mission of faith education. Chapter four will explore the methodology for my research and how I implemented it.

\footnote{John Roberto, “The Importance of Family Faith for Lifelong Faith Formation,” \textit{Lifelong Faith} (Spring 2012): 49-61.}
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The research methodology for this project was exploratory case studies, utilizing interviews, observations, and qualitative questionnaires. This research was implemented at St. Peter’s, which is the congregation I serve, and at other congregations. The internal outcomes in my research are those that happened at St. Peter’s. I had more control over the outcomes because I was also implementing the program. I analyzed the implemented ministry at St. Peter’s by taking notes and observing trends that were happening throughout the year. Those will be reflected upon in my next chapter.

The external research was conducted at congregations other than St. Peter’s. I utilized my network of colleagues to discover congregations that fit the profile for my research.

In addition to internal and external congregational research, I administered an online questionnaire that involved one question for adults to answer. This was distributed to four other congregations that had not been involved in the current research: St. Paul’s, St. John’s, St. Mark’s, and St. Matthew’s. This online research was conducted from October 2017 through March of 2018.
Busyness in families has led to decreased participation in confirmation at St. Peter’s. We had several families whose children were not attending our weekly confirmation classes, but they still wanted their son or daughter to be confirmed. St. Peter’s and many other congregations have struggled over the years on how to handle these families, and often the term “grace” is thrown around and young people are still confirmed with little understanding or instruction. Confirmation was often seen as a class that one goes through, survives, and then graduates. This is an object view of God with a reward for completing work. In some families, it is a rite of passage. Grandma and grandpa did it, mom and dad did it, so now my teenager must do it too. There is a sense of a “get to heaven” insurance policy too, where we believe in God, but we do not have time right now to really deal with our faith. After all, it will always be there.

In order to try and overcome this issue, we tried a new approach to our three-year confirmation program. St. Peter’s was my first case study. In the fall of 2016, St. Peter’s launched a new confirmation ministry that involved three key components. These three components of the ministry include:

- An online curriculum on the academics of confirmation instruction such as teachings of the Catechism, Old Testament Lessons, and New Testament Lessons.

- A Wednesday evening ministry that was held at St. Peter’s that worked in conjunction with the online lessons but was more experiential and relational in nature.

- A family covenant where parents covenant together with their children about their participation at St. Peter’s and request tools from St. Peter’s to fulfill their covenants effectively.
We put together a rationale for parents to help them understand the purpose of confirmation, which is included in appendix B of this thesis. This rationale helped explain the promises parents make at baptism, and the promises young people make at their affirmation of baptism. We explained that our hope was young people would have the following outcomes from our confirmation ministry:

- They are lifelong participants in worship.
- They know the content of the Christian faith.
- They can express this faith to others.

This rationale launched us into new ways of implementing our confirmation ministry.

With our tech savvy youth, and the fact that many of them are online in the evening, we decided to have academics online. This would especially benefit those families that are unable to attend on Wednesday evenings. The first year, beginning in October of 2016, our academics included the study of the catechism. There were ten lessons, and each lesson focused on a different part of the catechism. The hope was that families who were too busy to come on Wednesdays, would find the time to at least learn some academic religious understanding. It also gave us something to use besides just grace. If a young person came to us and wanted to be confirmed without attending any instruction, we could point them to the website and have them complete the online lessons.

This did not replace our Wednesday evening programs. Instead, our Wednesday evening programs coincided with the lessons, and became a place of experience and relationship building. For example, the online lesson focused on the Lord’s Prayer from the catechism. Our Wednesday evenings focused on experiencing different forms of
prayer such as coloring in prayer, and a prayer labyrinth. Our Wednesday evenings also
focused on Christian relationships. The young people who participated were encouraged
to share things they were happy about and ask for prayers where they needed some
guidance.

However, if young people were not able to make it on Wednesday evenings, they
still had a chance to learn some of the basic teachings and theology of the Lutheran
church. This was designed as an alternative way to learn the teachings that are important
to know when you are affirming your baptism through the rite of confirmation.

As the year began in October of 2016, we created a covenant that families were to fill out. A copy of this covenant is included in appendix A of this thesis. We put
confirmation back in the hands of the parents to decide what they wanted their son or
daughter to experience, as they prepared to affirm their baptism. The covenant has them make commitments to their child’s confirmation experience, and there is a place where they can ask for the support they need from St. Peter’s in order to fulfill this covenant. We provided ideas such as various books, apps, websites, and more to help parents as their child was on their confirmation journey.
During the implementation of this new ministry for St. Peter’s, we raised up the baptismal promises parents made at the font when their son or daughter was baptized. When a child is baptized, parents make a commitment to bring their child to worship, teach them the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and place a Bible in their hands for study and growth. We reminded parents of these words, and placed this responsibility back on them, but with a commitment that we will guide and provide the tools they need to be a successful, Christian parent. Parents were even encouraged to complete the online lessons as well.

We utilized Weebly\(^2\) for our online lessons, along with Survey Monkey\(^3\) for answering some reflection questions related to the lesson. The website was password

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1 Photo of baptismal font used with permission from GraphicStock.

2 www.weebly.com, website builder.

3 www.surveymonkey.com, pro version.
protected so only the participants were able to access the content. We also had parents provide permission to use the online content.⁴

At the beginning of the year, students were provided with a “ditty bag” which contained all the essential items they would need in order to successfully complete the work. St. Peter’s uses a nautical theme for all of their education and that is where we found the idea of a ditty bag. In nautical terms, a ditty bag holds all of a sailor’s essential items when they go out to sea. There might be a compass, some matches, and some useful personal items in their ditty bag.

The ditty bags at St. Peter’s contained all the essential items for faith growth. There was a Bible, a journal, a pen, a candle, and a small altar cloth. At the beginning of each online lesson, students were encouraged to lay out their altar cloth and light their candle. Each lesson guided them through turning off their cell phones, eliminating other distractions, a brief breathing exercise, and then an opening prayer. There were ten lessons for the year and the lesson titles were:

- Martin Luther Part 1
- Martin Luther Part 2
- Prayer
- The Lord’s Prayer
- The Ten Commandments 1-4
- The Ten Commandments 5-10
- Apostles’ Creed 1

⁴ See appendix C.
Each lesson ended with three questions about the lesson and then a place for them to fill in their name, so we know they completed the lesson.

St Peter’s has programming for all ages on Wednesday evenings. Participants gather for a family dinner and then an opening worship. After the opening worship, everyone breaks into their own age appropriate groups.

The sixth through eighth grade confirmation age youth met as a large group together (weekly average of 14-16 youth). We opened with everyone sharing their highs and lows, which is a celebration and a frustration of something that happened over the past week. We allowed for silliness that was appropriate and fun for this age. Then the content for the evening paralleled with the online lesson, but it was more experiential in nature. We also implemented a couple of service projects throughout the year. At the end of the evening, we allowed for ten to fifteen minutes for a quiet closing. Kids would lay out their altar cloth, light their candle, and follow the provided instructions. Often they were asked to reflect in their journal either by writing, drawing, or doodling. This provided some artistic expression at whatever level they were able to complete it. Quiet music was played while the kids participated. At the very end, we joined hands in a circle for a closing prayer. Each week, a young person led the prayer.
At the end of the program year, a questionnaire\(^5\) was sent out to parents of participants. The only parents who responded were those whose child attended the weekly programming regularly. Overall, parents felt their child built meaningful relationships with the other kids and the lessons were meaningful for them. However, less than half of them engaged in the online lessons. One parent responded saying:

> We were not able to keep up with the online lessons - it is one more thing added to our already full plates. We brought our child to church every Wednesday night and hope that the two hours spent there would suffice for confirmation requirements.

The staff at St. Peter’s all felt that being engaged on Wednesday evenings was far more important than completing the online lessons. We began to communicate this with parents, so they did not feel the pressure to do both if they did not find it valuable.

> We had a limited response to the questionnaire at St. Peter’s, having only nine parents complete it. However, in conversations with parents and in other observations, there were not very many complaints or concerns about the ministry.

**External Research**

In addition to the confirmation program at St. Peter’s, I looked at other congregations that were doing some creative work around addressing the issue of busyness in our families today. I was seeking out churches to continue my observations to see what other churches were doing to engage their youth and families in ways that helps them see God as a subject in their everyday life, but not necessarily adding another event to the calendar.

\(^5\) See appendix G.
I asked for a brief description of their ministry and what they were actively doing to try to engage young people to see God as a subject in their everyday life. I utilized local networks, national networks, other colleagues, and Facebook.

I did a brief survey on Facebook in a group that is all ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) youth workers. Here is the question I posted:

Are you or do you know of anyone who is doing some really cool and creative ministries? I am looking for congregations/leaders who are trying some new ideas for ministry that are creatively engaging faith in people’s lives. I am working on some case studies for a doctoral program I am in at Luther Seminary. My research question is around how we can move God from an object to an active subject in daily life. Do you know anyone who might be willing to share about their ministry? Please let me know or send me a message for more details!

I received several comments, some of which will be shared in my results chapter. My goal was to find and interview these leaders for my case study and learn more about what they were doing, and how effective it was in their setting.

A Question for Four Congregations

My final piece of research was with four different congregations that our organization was working with and who were in transition. These were St. John’s, St. Paul’s, St. Mark’s, and St. Matthew’s. I used a questionnaire to get at reasons why adults believed young people were not actively engaged in their congregation. Our organization uses a broader questionnaire that is used specifically for the needs of the congregation, but one of the questions was used for my research. That question is in appendix D at the end of this thesis. The questionnaire went out through Survey Monkey and implied consent was used when beginning the survey. A copy of the implied consent language
from the survey is in appendix E at the end of this thesis. The question asked was: *What keeps young people actively engaged in your church?*

The methodology I used to code these answers included reading paragraph-by-paragraph and pulling out the key ideas of what the individual was saying. I then went back to these key ideas and realized that most of them fell into one of eight key concepts. I compiled the answers under these eight areas and then compiled the numbers for each area. There were only four responses that did not fit under one of these key concepts, and they went into an “other” category. If there was more than one key idea in the paragraph, I considered it another response.

I removed from my research answers that were not relevant. Those were mostly people who said, “I don’t know.” I also removed four answers where it was clear the respondents did not understand the question or chose to talk about something else unrelated. When the research was narrowed down to the eight key concepts and then an “other” category, the concepts included:

- Busyness of families
- Not relevant for their life
- Lack of communication
- No invitation
- Staffing issues
- Lack of significant relationships
- Lack of parent involvement
- Not enough service opportunities
- Other

Further explanation and the discovery of these key concepts will be discussed in my results chapter.
Summary

This chapter reflected upon the methodology I used in my research and how it was implemented. My focus was observations from a ministry I implemented at St. Peter’s, the congregation where I serve. I also looked for other congregations to research who were addressing creative ways of faith formation in a way that helps people see God as an active subject in their everyday life. I was specifically looking for places that were doing this without adding another program or commitment to a calendar.

The final piece of research reflected on a questionnaire for parents and adults. This questionnaire was administered at four congregations and sought to find answers to why they believed young people were not engaged or participating in their congregation.

In chapter five, I will provide information on the results of my research. I will break down the three different areas of my research and provide insights on my findings.
CHAPTER 5
RESULTS OF STUDY AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Chapter four provided a detailed description of the methodology used for this research project. Chapter five provides the results of the study, and interpretation of the research from the various congregations.

This research project was exploratory case studies using qualitative interviews, observations, and questionnaires. One of the research sites was at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, which is the congregation I serve. I refer to this as “internal research.” The other congregations that are part of this research were not at congregations where I served so I referred to them as “external research.” I separated these out because I had more control over the research at St. Peter’s since I was implementing the program. The outcomes of the external research were those that I did not have any influence on, as they were implemented and encouraged by another leader in a particular congregation.

In addition to the observation and interviews, a questionnaire was administered to four other congregations about why they felt young people were not engaged at their church. This entire study was conducted over a period of eight months, from October of 2016 to May of 2017.
Study Results

Internal Outcomes at St. Peter’s

Confirmation at St. Peter’s was my first area of research. In the fall of 2016, St. Peter’s launched a new confirmation ministry that involved three key components. These three components of the ministry include:

- An online curriculum on the academics of confirmation instruction such as teachings of the Catechism, Old Testament Lessons, and New Testament Lessons.

- A Wednesday evening ministry that was held at St. Peter’s that worked in conjunction with the online lessons but was more experiential and relational in nature.

- A family covenant where parents covenant together with their children about their participation at St. Peter’s and request tools from St. Peter’s to fulfill their covenant.

The past few years at St. Peter’s, Wednesday evening confirmation attendance had dropped to less than 40% of eligible kids in grades six through eight. There were about ten out of twenty-five possible youth participating. In 2016, the attendance went up to 80% and has maintained an average attendance of about 70% over the past two years. However, we only had seven kids complete the online lessons. Of those, five participated regularly on Wednesdays and two participated on Wednesdays a few times during the year. None of the families that said they could not come on Wednesdays completed any of the online lessons. It is important to note that the families that were most excited about the online lessons were the ones who said they were unable to attend on Wednesday evenings. I will discuss this further in my conclusions chapter.
Our Wednesday evening program was where we saw some significant changes. We had a seventh grader come because his Mom forced him to come and try it out. He had not participated at St. Peter’s over the past few years. He was vocal about letting us know his Mom was forcing him to be there. He has returned almost every week since that night, on his own will. We have increased attendance on Wednesday evenings compared to previous years. What we started is not perfect, but I felt like we were on to something.

There was also a yearning from our young people to experience a space for quiet. This is not something teens experience in their life, so our closing time was cherished by several of the kids. They quickly quieted down when it was time for our closing and actively engaged in the experience. Ten years ago it was difficult to get kids to sit quietly and appreciate moments of reflection and calm. Lives of young people now are often so busy, I do not believe they have an opportunity to find this small space for peace and calm. This is a great opportunity for our churches to help kids find quiet moments where they can reflect on their life and faith.

At the beginning of the year, we encouraged kids to close us in prayer at the end of the evening. They were standoffish and had no interest in leading. By the end of the year, they began to call us out if there was a thought we might miss the prayer time. Kids also were volunteering to pray without prompting, instead of us needing to ask for a volunteer to pray.

As for the parental covenants that were signed at the beginning of the year, we left a blank space for parents to write out what they needed from us as the church. The most requested area they needed help with was in navigating the world of social media with
their kids. In the past, parents were supposed to teach children about life. But they now fear that social media is teaching their kids about life, and parents do not have the resources to navigate the world of social media. This and other aspects of technology is a critical and societal shift. Children are learning it as a standard part of their life, where adults have needed to adapt to this cultural change.

Even though this is a critical piece to help parents navigate, it really does not have anything to do with raising a child in their faith. It certainly impacts a child’s growing up, but it does not directly impact our goal of helping people see God as a subject versus an object in their everyday life. It has left me wondering why parents do not want more help and tools for raising their child in the faith.

As a response to the request for more help navigating social media, St. Peter’s decided to provide a screening of the documentary “Screenagers,”¹ and open it up to the community. The event was well attended, and parents are asking for similar opportunities.

We are unsure how well the covenants with the families worked because we did not hold families accountable. That was on purpose, as we really wanted to keep the accountability in the home, and on the parents.

One piece of feedback that we received from parents was a yearning for their kids to be involved in more service projects. Service was not a focus during the first year of this ministry, but it became a focus during the second year and it has been well received by both parents and the youth.

In conclusion of the research at St. Peter’s, we learned the following through observation and conversations with parents:

- Having lessons available online did not increase participation in learning the confirmation content for busy families. It seems if they are too busy to participate on Wednesday evenings, they did not participate in the online opportunity either.

- Relationships and experience were engaging our kids in new ways on Wednesday evenings. They seemed interested in participating more often and they were more likely to also do the online lessons.

- Kids desire to serve in the world and learn about ways to help others.

- Youth are hungry for quiet time. Their lives are so full, they do not take time to pray and reflect. This is a growth area for our churches when thinking about reaching a need in young people’s lives.

- The covenants felt helpful, but we were unsure how they worked for the families as we could not successfully measure if they were holding themselves accountable. Families did not need to turn in the covenants to us.

- One of my intervening variables was gender and how boys and girls have different phases of life development. This did not impact the learning or the outcomes of the research at St. Peter’s.

- Finally, a surprise piece came out of our case study. Anxiety and depression is at an all-time high for our young people.² This was seen at St. Peter’s this year because we had youth not participate in the Affirmation of Baptism service along with other confirmation related activities. I had conversations with parents about the anxiety and depression they were struggling with in their daily lives. This made it difficult for these teens to fulfill the obligations of being confirmed. This leaves room for churches to address anxiety and depression in ways that might be helpful for parents and youth. I will reflect more on this idea in my conclusions chapter.

External Outcomes

In order to find some congregations that I could study, I put a question on Facebook in three different children, youth, and family ministry network groups in which I am a member. Here was the question I asked:

Are you or do you know of anyone who is doing some really cool and creative ministries? I am looking for congregations/leaders who are trying some new ideas for ministry that are creatively engaging faith in people’s lives. I am working on some exploratory case studies for a doctoral program I am in at Luther Seminary. My research question is around how we can move God from an object to an active subject in daily life. Do you know anyone who might be willing to share about their ministry? Please let me know or send me a message for more details!

I received several ideas from other youth workers in the trenches. Here were some of the answers I received from other youth workers in the field:

Lisa wrote: “While this may be a great goal when I've tried to make steps toward this it's hard to get families to commit. Without something to attend at church, there's no follow-through. Even when we ask for something to show us what they've talked about or done together as a family in service, it's clear they haven't really done it. How do we get parents to understand their role in this kind of new system?”

Shelly wrote: “I think that complete disruption of our traditional view of church is necessary. We ARE the church, so it will not cease to exist. The way our congregations function needs to be different. It's becoming clearer to me all the time that just because an individual (or a family) doesn't come to worship, that doesn't mean they don't want to be part of our congregation/community. To answer your question, we have been having greater success with family ministry one day events instead of year-long programming. We still have Wednesday night confirmation, but also have several "specials" throughout the year (including alternative worships on Wednesdays) for those students and families who can't participate in the traditional way.”

I received several other comments, but the rest of them were a specific programmatic ministry they were implementing. Examples included a family dinner once a week, a

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3 www.facebook.com. A social media website for individuals and groups.
particular new curriculum they were beginning to implement, a weekend retreat, mission projects, and small group ministries. I heard the expression “Rethinking Sunday Morning” and how moving programs to Wednesday helps.

All of these are good programs, but they are an actual program that busy families have a difficult time attending. These do not answer the question I have raised about how we find ways of faith formation for busy families.

What I realized is people did not even understand the question. It was often answered as ministries that were innovative, but they were actual programs that required a significant amount of time for the participants involved. I felt this was not a solution for busy, overbooked families.

All these ideas just seemed like a technical shift versus an adaptive change that we need to figure out for our families. I was unable to really research these congregations because it was not the kind of information I was looking for.

At this point in my research I was very disappointed, and unsure how I was going to move forward. I was disappointed with the outcomes of my attempt to find congregations that were figuring out some creative ways of faith formation that helped people see God as an active subject in their daily life, and not just a program they attended.

My hope was to gather these ideas and practices and compile them in a way that would be helpful for the greater church. But then I realized I still learned something. I learned quickly that it appears we are still spinning our wheels and not knowing how to even understand the question, let alone answer it.
I had two potential leads from individuals and as I began my study with them, one decided she did not have enough time in her own life to be involved in this kind of study and did not want me to interview or survey anyone in her congregation. The other one lost his position on short notice due to budgetary constraints. The two potentially helpful congregations were not ones I could follow through with in my research.

There are some ministries out there that are teaching home discipleship, which is about the closest program I found to what I was looking for in my research. Discipleship is an area for further discovery for me beyond my thesis, as I think there are some good ministries happening in this area.

Input from Four Other Congregations

My final piece of research was with four different congregations that our organization was working with and who were in transition. There was an assumption that because we were brought in to help with their ministry, they were looking for guidance on how to engage kids into the life of their congregation. That is part of the professional work we do at the organization where I also work. These congregations were St. John’s, St. Paul’s, St. Mark’s, and St. Matthew’s.

Our organization uses a broader questionnaire that is administered specifically for the needs of that particular congregation, but one of the questions at the end of the

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5 In addition to St. Peter’s, I also work with an organization which is a non-profit that works with congregations when they are in transition with their children, youth, and family ministry programs. Our ministry provides guidance on future staffing and implementing innovative programs.
questionnaire was used for my research. The questionnaire went out through Survey Monkey and implied consent was used when beginning the survey.\(^6\)

The goal of this question was designed to get at reasons why adults believed young people were not actively engaged in their congregation. Here is the question: *What keeps young people actively engaged in your church?* The hope was the answers would not only support my theory about busyness, but also hear other ways the church might address this culture that has led to a lack of participation and why God may not be recognized as an active subject in the daily lives of young people. Here are a few of the responses provided by adults in these congregations and the category it fell under:

**Busyness of families:**

- Time and priorities. How do we get parents to say it's not OK to use Sunday morning for school work or sleeping in or sports?
- Dual working families makes it hard to find extra time-we commit to Sundays and enjoy other things too, but day to day, things are packed at home with kids and school.
- Time! Young families are spread thin with work and their children are involved in so many activities outside the church.
- Life. Soccer practice, etc.

**Not Relevant for their life:**

- A sense that the programming is not valuable in the same way that soccer practice is.
- There isn't an effective program that kids want to be involved with.
- I am not feeling that anyone is getting much out of it or enjoying it. Don't want to force the kids to participate.

\(^6\) See appendix E.
Lack of Communication

Not clear picture of what is needed, skills needed, time commitment.

It's hard to know what is going on. I don't like inconsistency.

Being asked, we also need to practice effective recognition of people's contributions and improve our communication.

No invitation

Lack of relationships with people and programs. No one asks them to participate.

People have not yet established relationships within the community. No one has asked them to participate. They don't have a role or responsibility.

Not much available for kids in grades 7 to 12. No strong invitation to participate in the Sunday worship service.

Staffing issues

High rates of turnover, unengaged leadership, seeming indifference from the congregation, and programs with no clear focus or indication of existence.

Lack of consistent leadership. The youth don't have a chance to get comfortable with the youth directors due to frequent turnover.

Lack of communication, consistency, and passion on the part of the Church staff.

Lack of significant relationships

In the Bible Jesus plays with children and teaches adults. The modern-day church in America has reversed this and I believe this to have a direct relationship to the increase in children that become disconnected from the church in high-school and college. If the youth program is nothing more than an extension of school for our children I believe we are missing a great opportunity to introduce Christ and the Christian life to the youngest members of our church community.

The most important thing in working with our youth is developing genuine, caring relationships with them. The biblical teachings will come along eventually in the form of not just reading texts, but in watching role models. It is not possible to teach genuine biblical principles until you have developed those relationships. Youth do not care what you know until they know that you care.
Lack of parent involvement

Too many other commitments, perhaps combined with a lack of commitment to church. It's hard to get youth involved when their parents aren't.

Parents unwilling to commit the time involved.

Other activities and parents not involved.

Not enough service opportunities

I attended the youth group's Sunday morning presentation about their recent trip to Detroit and was very impressed by the level of spiritual and social-emotional growth and deep reflection evident among the youth who shared at this event. Based on this I would love to see similar opportunities for mission trips for them going into the future.

Need more service projects... in the summer too.

The process I used to code these answers included reading paragraph-by-paragraph and pulling out the key ideas of what the individual was saying. I then went back to these key ideas and realized that most of them fell into one of eight key concepts. I compiled the answers under these eight areas and then compiled the numbers for each area. There were only four responses that did not fit under one of these key concepts, and they went into an “other” category. If there was more than one key idea in the paragraph, I considered it another response. I had 148 participants who answered the question and I received 177 responses.

I removed from my research answers that were not relevant. Those were mostly people who said, “I don’t know.” I also removed four answers where it was clear respondents did not understand the question or chose to talk about something unrelated. Then the research was narrowed down to the eight key concepts. Below is a table of the eight concepts, with the ninth being the other category, and the number of responses.
Table 1. Key Concept Responses for Why Youth Are Not Engaged at Church.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key concept</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Busyness of families</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Relevant for their life</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Communication</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No invitation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing issues</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of significant relationships</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parent involvement</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough service opportunities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “other” concept contained four different responses and they included:

- Transportation
- Youth kept separate from rest of church
- Health
- Winter
Breaking It All Down

The key concepts were not surprising to me, and as I started to look closer, I realized they are all threaded together. The overwhelming response of *busyness* certainly supports the theory of over programmed families and the lack of time they have to participate in church activities. That ties into *relevance*. If the ministry was something that parents or teens felt was relevant in their life, they would more than likely find a way to fit it into their schedules. If a family feels piano lessons are relevant, they fit them into their schedule.

*Communication* has been an issue for many organizations, including churches. I was not surprised this was on the list. The church newsletter often is put in the “read later” pile. Sometimes, though, communication might be unfairly blamed. If something is relevant, a person will seek out the needed information. Communication is always an area to review and improve upon.

*Invitation* is always important. To know you are invited to be part of something, is important. *Staffing* issues such as job performance and transitions can impact programs and consistency for a church. However, if the next one, *relationships*, was healthy, there would be less of an impact when there was a staff transition. People would continue to participate because of relationships with other people in the congregation.
The lack of parent involvement is not a surprise either. Kids model what they see their parents do. Christopher D. Bader and Scott A. Desmond have some key research findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. In an article titled, “Do as I Say and as I Do: The Effects of Consistent Parental Beliefs and Behaviors Upon Religious Transmission,” Bader and Desmond state:

When parents send a consistent message to children regarding religion, by teaching them that religion is important and by attending church frequently, religious transmission should be more likely to occur. When parents send mixed messages to their children, i.e. when their religious behaviors are incongruent with their attitudes about religion, the extent of religious transmission should be diminished.\(^8\)

The final key concept was not enough service opportunities for young people. In my conversations with young people, they do enjoy service projects, as it helps them feel relevant in the world. Parents also asked for more service projects at St. Peter’s. This

\(^7\) Photo used with permission from GraphicStock.

\(^8\) Christopher Bader and Scott Desmond, “Do as I Say and as I Do: The Effects of Consistent Parental Beliefs and Behaviors upon Religious Transmission,” *Sociology of Religion*, 67, Number 3 (October 1, 2006): 313–329.
may even help combat some of the anxiety and depression our young people struggle with as well. Most importantly, youth are engaging with God’s people in the world. This could be a step in helping young people see God as an active subject in their lives.

Figure 3. Youth engaging in service

Triangulation of Data

All of these concepts may help with further research and possible ideas for creative ministries in the future. They can provide a framework for innovation, as we glean information from these concepts. I believe they are important to think about as we journey into the future. They are not all of the possible concepts we can be looking at, but they are a start.

A Surprise Outcome from my Research

Something has happened over the past couple of years during my research that could not go unnoticed. It had to do with a part of my question around busyness. Over the

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9 Photo used from a paid membership from GraphicStock.
past couple of years, I have an increasing number of young people and adults come and talk to me about anxiety and depression in their children. I have youth in my congregation that have been part of day treatment programs. Most recently, I had youth choose to not be confirmed because of the amount of anxiety it was creating in their life.

Here I was pushing the question around faith formation when we have another roadblock in the way of any kind of faith formation. I realized that our busy culture has created an increased amount of anxiety and depression in our young people, and I wonder how the church can be a light in their life. I address this more in my conclusion chapter.

**Summary**

Chapter five provided the results of my research at St. Peter’s, external research in other congregations, and the results of a questionnaire that was administered to four other congregations. Chapter six will focus on conclusions from my research and other questions that have been raised as a result of my research.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I presented the methodology and results of my research that looked at how we can help busy families and youth see God as an active subject in their daily life. With the over-programmed community I serve, there is no time to come to additional programs at church that traditionally served as ways of faith formation. My research was interesting as I had some learnings I did not expect. This chapter will discuss those learnings and outcomes from the research.

The internal outcomes in my conclusions are those that happened at St. Peter’s. I had more control over how those outcomes went, as I was also implementing the program. The external outcomes were those that I did not have any influence on; they were implemented and encouraged by someone else at another congregations.

Initial Findings

My initial findings in my exploratory case studies were divided between St. Peter’s, the congregation I work in, and other external congregations. Staff at the external congregations were asked how they were creatively addressing faith formation for busy families.
Internal Outcomes

At St. Peter’s, maybe our congregation has the same standards of excellence that our society does that are creating some of this anxiety and depression in lives of people. No one would actually say this is the case, but there is an underlying sense in a lot of the ministry at St. Peter’s. Music is one of those areas. If you do not excel at music, you are not allowed to share your musical gifts easily. This is not said: however, the only people who do have a chance to share their musical gifts are those who excel in music.

For our confirmation program, we have a set number of things a student needs to do in order to complete the program, and then we ask them to get up in front of a crowd of people they do not know and talk about something they are uncomfortable talking about in the first place. Most adults would be uncomfortable getting up in front of a crowd on Sunday morning and professing their faith. Why do we expect young people to get up and do it too? For anyone who is shy to begin with, this form of excellence and standard adds to the same anxiety and depression our society is already creating.

I had teens not want to be confirmed this past year because of anxiety. There was disappointment among the staff that they would not fulfill this obligation in the church since they had participated along the way. The last thing we want to do though is create more anxiety, so a young person now associates their faith with anxiety. We want young people to have a positive experience with their faith. This has left me questioning how we move forward and rethink our expectations for this rite of passage.

As I mentioned in my results chapter, those who said they were happy about the availability of the online lessons never engaged in them and participated in the online
format. This leaves one wondering how these parents really value the confirmation
instruction their son or daughter might receive. It seems somewhat obvious that if it was
important to parents, they would make it a priority to figure out how to have their child
participate in the life of the congregation. So even though we gave them an option
because they said they had too many commitments on Wednesdays, these parents and
youth did not make working though the online lessons a priority.

This begs the questions of how we as a church community create a place that is
different than anything else our young people (and adults) experience in their day-to-day
life? How can we be a place where people can come and let go of their daily fears and
anxieties and find peace and hope? I believe the church currently believes this is
happening, but I think we need to take a closer look at what our church communities are
creating. Building caring and trusting relationships along with providing unique,
participatory experiences focused on their faith proved to be a good start for us at St.
Peter’s.

External Outcomes

Although I was disappointed I was unable to find effective case studies to explore,
that was still a learning point in my research. I recognize there still may be congregations
out there who are experimenting with new ideas for faith formation in busy families and I
did not find them. However, in the net I cast of colleagues and networks, there were not
any case studies that seemed to fit the practices that answered my original research
question: What are effective ways for congregations to engage in ways of faith formation
that encourage spiritual growth and Christian identity in over-programmed families, so they may see God as an active subject in their daily life?

My discovery is we, as the church, need to explore creative and innovative ways to help people connect God into their daily life. Other religions such as Judaism have rituals and practices that help to make God a subject in their everyday life.

My brother married into a Jewish family, and my nephew is being raised Jewish. God is an active subject in their everyday life. They are reminded of the daily prayer from the Shema every time they walk into a room, as Mezuzahs hang on the door frames. They say these words: Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

Every Friday night, their family celebrates Shabbat, and they come together for a meal and fellowship for several hours. They do not go out on dates or to movies on Fridays. Shabbat is more important. Their meal planning and kitchen are kept kosher. They intentionally think about what they are eating and which plate they should use; the dairy plates or the meat plates. Holy days and celebrations are taken very seriously with fasting, certain rituals, and prayers.

All of these above practices take place in the home. The synagogue is a place to gather for community worship, fellowship, and learning. But the majority of the faith is carried out with God as the active subject in their everyday life. I believe we can live out the Christian faith in ways that God is an active participant in our everyday life. The church has some exciting days ahead as we try to figure this out.
Input from Four Congregations

As we look at the data from the questionnaire sent to adults in four different congregations, it supports the main theory in this thesis. Families are busy. This busyness is at an all-time high as life activities demand more and more time from our teens. Busyness was the number one reason adults said youth are not engaged in their church. This busyness impacts how we implement faith formation. We no longer can decide that we have a great idea for a program and add it to their already busy calendars.

The number two reason adults felt young people were not engaging was around relevance. This supports the idea of helping families and young people to see God as an active subject in their daily life. Church is not relevant because people do not see it as relevant. If people understood how God was active in their life around them every single day, the relevance may not be an issue anymore.

The other key concepts that came out of their answers were not surprising. However, they do not seem to have that big of an impact on why young people are not engaging in the life of the church. Between the concept of relevance and communication, the numbers drop substantially. There are some major adaptive changes that need to happen in our churches in order to be more relevant, and to help people see God as an active subject in their everyday life.

A Surprise that Came Out of My Research

When I viewed my research through the lens of technology, I was surprised with my findings. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I was surprised when I began to stumble into the increase of depression and anxiety in our young people. It has always
been a topic of conversation professionally as it certainly has been part of my ministry as we seek to recognize young people who might be struggling with these conditions. However, I was surprised to realize the substantial increase it has on the current ministry in our congregations. In her book *iGen*, Jean Twenge states:

> Just as with the rise in loneliness, girls have borne the brunt of the rise in depressive symptoms. Although teen girls and boys were once about equally likely to experience the symptoms of depression, girls now report markedly higher levels. Boys’ depression increased by 21% between 2012 and 2015, and the girls’ increased by 50%—more than twice as much. And girls spend more time on social media than boys do.¹

The figure below is taken from the same book and shows the increase of depression.²

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2 Ibid.
I knew there were issues with social media, but until I started to read some literature about it, I did not understand the depth of what we are dealing with when it comes to navigating the lives of young people. In a recent *New York Times* article titled: “Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering from Severe Anxiety?” the author Benoit Denizet-Lewis spoke to teachers, parents, and therapists to learn more about the topic. He spoke with Stephanie Eken, who is a psychiatrist and the regional medical director for Rogers Behavioral Health, which runs several teenage-anxiety outpatient programs across the country. This was one of his discoveries:

When I asked Eken about other common sources of worry among highly anxious kids, she didn’t hesitate: social media. Anxious teenagers from all backgrounds are relentlessly comparing themselves with their peers, she said, and the results are almost uniformly distressing.

Anxious kids certainly existed before Instagram, but many of the parents I spoke to worried that their kids’ digital habits — round-the-clock responding to texts, posting to social media, obsessively following the filtered exploits of peers — were partly to blame for their children’s struggles. To my surprise, anxious teenagers tended to agree.³

I personally asked a couple of teenagers I know well and seem to be happy and successful teens; how they would feel if their Snapchat and Instagram accounts were taken away from them. Their responses were surprising as they said it would be devastating for them. So much of their daily lives are carried out through these social media platforms. This is another area of discovery for my own personal and professional growth for ministry. This is everyday life for our youth and families. It is a big need in

our communities, just as the early days of Sunday school was a way they addressed the needs of youth in that day. How do we as the church adapt our ministry to reach out and address this need?

**Results Viewed Through the Theoretical, Biblical, and Theological Lenses**

The lenses I used in my research were helpful to look through as I worked through my studies. Some proved to be more important than others, but they were a guide as I gathered my research.

**Biblical Lenses**

The biblical lens from Deuteronomy teaches us the importance of faith in the home. The Scripture supports the active presence of God in the life of those who live out the Jewish faith. Somewhere along the line Christians lost this important identity in our faith. We need to find ways to implement rituals and faith practices that help us see God as an active participant in our daily life.

The Matthew text is all about us living our life of faith actively in the world. As we let our light shine before others, we are sharing God in helpful ways to our friends, family, and communities. We see God in other people, as their lights shine before us as well. Our lights are ways that God is active and alive in our everyday life.

**Theological Lenses**

Baptism, faith of our teens, and faith of our parents were reflected upon throughout my research. Through various studies and research that was reflected upon in this thesis, we learn that the faith of parents is the number one impact on the faith
development of their teenagers. Children and teens model the faith of their parents. That puts a lot of weight on parents, but the church has an opportunity to make this easier. We have an opportunity to help families see that God is an active part of their everyday life. From breakfast to sports practice, God is present and active. There are some creative opportunities for the church to figure out ways of helping families live this out.

All of this leads to the lens of the mission and purpose of faith education. We need to re-define why we do faith education, and how we implement it in today’s busy communities. Many of the models out there are not working well anymore, as we saw at St. Peter’s. Attendance had dropped off substantially over the years in both confirmation and education programs for kids. A defined mission and purpose of helping children and teens see God as an active subject in their everyday life may help turn the ship to sail in a direction that provides new ways of implementing faith education. What works in one church may not work the same in others. We have an opportunity to try new things and explore ways where people can shine their lights in God’s world.

Theoretical Lenses

Spiritual formation is similar to faith formation; however, it is a broader lens in this thesis. Faith formation often refers to Sunday school, confirmation, and other ways we teach the faith. Spiritual formation includes faith formation, but it goes beyond and encompasses all ways our faith is formed. In this thesis, spiritual formation includes the impact of the church teachings as well as the impact of how faith is carried out in our life experiences. From faith practices in the home to how we let our light shine in the world,
spiritual formation leads us to understanding that God is an active subject versus an object in our everyday life.

Rituals was one of the lenses I did not reflect upon as much in my research, but it is still important. Affirmation of Baptism is a ritual, and how we help teens discover the importance of what they are doing when they affirm their baptism is important. This ritual is an effective way in which we honor that God is an active subject in our everyday life. By helping teens see God as the subject versus an object is an important part of our work in the church. Rituals are also helpful in our everyday experience. The laws written in Deuteronomy provide examples of rituals that could help us participate in an active faith, recognizing God is present every waking moment.

Postmodernism and technology were my last two theoretical lenses. They tie together, as technology is part of a postmodern society. I did not focus on postmodernism as much, other than it defines where we are at today. It is living beyond the year 1950, and the term has presented new ways of thinking. Postmodernism has shaped who we are as God’s people today and it will continue to shape who are in the future.

Technology has a bigger impact in my research. It has shaped our young people significantly as we have crossed the threshold of teens not knowing what life was like without the technology we have today. Adults have learned technology and adapted it into their lives. Teens, however, have never known anything different. Technology contributes to how we engage with one another. Virtual relationships are real relationships with a different definition than physical, face-to-face relationships. These
relationships have brought on new issues for our teens, such as anxiety and depression, which I discussed earlier in this thesis.

Final Thoughts

Color Coded Busy Lives

If you have ever played piano, all the keys look similar in black and white colors. If the colors were all white or all black, it would be difficult for the player to find their place on a piano. The pattern of black and white provides a way for the player to figure out where they are going next on the keyboard. The player can easily find the right notes and create a beautiful piece of music that flows together.

![Figure 5. Black and White Key Pattern](image)

Now imagine sitting down to a piano that has all different colors of keys. When there are too many colors, the player will feel scattered, and unable to find their place on the keyboard in the piece of music they are trying to play. There is no rhyme or reason to the pattern, and it looks very confusing. It even starts blending together.

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4 Figures 5, 6, and 7 were created by Susan Megrunt.
Figure 6. Confusing Colored Key Pattern

People color code their life so they can figure out a system that works for their busy lives. But when families are so busy, it makes life more difficult to focus and almost impossible to find harmony. Pianos can create a range of beautiful music, but without some kind of organization, it is very difficult to create music. Somehow, it seems many of our families have learned to function this way, which has created many issues for the church. What if the church could even become the black keys on a colored piano? It might help families find something that creates harmony for them in their busy lives, and possibly would make it a little easier to navigate.

Figure 7. Colored Key Pattern with Black Keys
Virtual Relationship Development

This thesis exploration has also made me wonder if any kind of online confirmation will be sustainable for the future of our churches. It seems like something we should be doing for families, especially in the connected age we live in. However, there is a different connection that happens at church that does not happen anywhere else in our world. These thoughts will need to be wrestled with as we think of the church engaging in virtual relationships.

Outside of my research, I also work with the digital ministry at St. Peter’s. In this ministry, we have struggled to make it engaging for people in the same way we make in-person engagements relevant and valuable. I believe it can be done, but we need to be aware of the faith connection that takes place with real, grounded-in-the-spirit relationships.

When it comes to kids and their development, many of their relationships are virtual. It is this virtual world that has created a different place for our young people to engage in relationship with other people.

Limits of this Research and Generalizations

When I first began this research project, I was excited to explore ways that are working, where congregations were helping people see God as a subject versus an object in their everyday life. I had an opportunity to try some new things in our confirmation program at the church where I work, but I was limited in finding other congregations that fit my research. I was disappointed to learn that I was not finding case studies that fit into my research parameters. I recognize however the net I cast to try and find congregations
was not as widespread as it could have been. I reached out into my immediate networks and communities where I am involved. These networks did encompass a broad scope and were not limited geographically, but were somewhat limited denominationally. I sought congregations that were primarily connected to the ELCA.

After processing through all this, I realized there was something to learn from the lack of these case studies. Many churches are struggling with how to do ministry effectively, and my lack of responses potentially highlights this issue. For those of us in congregational ministry, there are a lot of growth opportunities that lie ahead of us in our communities.

The question I asked in four other congregations brought some structure to how we might think about the implementation and innovation of ministries. I believe these answers were real and honest as adults reflected on why youth do not engage in the life of their congregation. However, they are limited based on their experience, and their own personal faith journey. In the end, the answers supported the busyness theory in this thesis, even though busyness is a generalization of why young people are not engaged in their church community.

Questions for Future Research

Many questions and thoughts came out of my research that leads my thinking for future research. My research question was not effectively answered either, so that question still remains and needs to be expanded. How do we as the church figure out what are effective ways for congregations to engage in ways of faith formation that
encourage spiritual growth and Christian identity in over-programmed families, so they may see God as an active subject in their daily life?

My research showed there is a need for us to figure it out, but because my case studies were limited, I did not find good examples to share in this thesis.

St. Peter’s did provide some good research outcomes with our new confirmation ministry. Focusing on building relationships that are centered around their faith strengthened the group’s trust with one another. In addition, the faith-centered learning experiences also provided unique ways for young people to engage in faith practices.

Some other questions that came out of my research related to virtual versus face-to-face relationships. Here are my questions:

- Can we create relevant relationships that are virtual?
- If so, how do we model and teach healthy virtual, Christ-centered relationships?
- How do we help young people build face-to-face relationships with each other, so that it defines their online relationships in healthier ways?

Those of us who grew up without virtual reality learned how to build relationships with one another. The way we built these relationships has now defined and shaped how we build our online and virtual relationships. But our young people have built online virtual relationships at a very young age. They did not have that first step of a physical presence with one another to help shape these virtual relationships.

These questions have also led me to another question about how this online technology has impacted our young people. Social media and other forms of technology have increased the levels of anxiety and depression in our youth today. Research has
shown that these virtual relationships have created an anxiety that is at an all-time high in our young people. In Jean Twenge’s book, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—And Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, she states:

With our brains—perhaps especially teen brains—so attuned to social rejection, texting and social media are fertile grounds for negative emotions. Even when things go well, the cadence of electronic communication can be problematic. Unlike in face-to-face interaction, electronic communication often involves a delay between your side of the conversation and your friend’s reply. Think about what happens when you send a text. If the other person doesn’t write back right away, you might wonder why. Is she mad? Did he not like what I said? The same happens when you post something on social media—everyone wants to see the likes, and if they take too long to come or don’t come at all, anxiety can follow.\(^5\)

Over the past two years at St. Peter’s we had three young people not participate in confirmation activities and the rite of confirmation because of anxiety. These young people struggled with anxiety in their daily life, and our programming was too much because it created more anxiety for them. Two of them had a fear of being up in front of people for the Affirmation of Baptism service. That relational piece in this rite of passage was too anxiety producing for them to participate.

**Conclusion**

With all of these questions that have come out of my research, I believe we have a lot to do as a church. We are called to discover new ways of ministry that help people see God as the active subject instead of an object in their daily lives. If I had to ask another question again for further research, I may instead ask: How can the church be a positive

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presence in the life of our young people where our culture of busyness has created high levels of depression and anxiety in their life? I do want to address this question in my own personal ministry, and I encourage congregations and communities to explore together how we can be a different presence in the lives of our young people.
EPILOGUE

The Church and God’s People. Shining a Light in God’s World.

In one of our first DMin classes together as a cohort, Dwight Zscheile put up on the chalkboard this quote: “The hallmark of the spirit is energy.” This program has given me a renewed sense of energy that I have not felt in a while. It has taught me to be open to the Spirit and the energy the Spirit is creating in our congregations. I have recently made decisions based on this quote, knowing that the Spirit is either moving something forward, or it might be time to let something go.

Coming together as a cohort has been hopeful and encouraging. I feel like we all have an openness to experimenting as we try to figure out what it means to be the church today. Never once did we criticize another classmate for an idea or thought. We instead expanded on each other’s ideas and created a healthy place to dream, say strange things, and wonder about where God is calling each of us in our ministry.

This opportunity has been life changing for me personally and professionally. I am discerning how to use what I have learned over these past four years in the public ministry leadership where I am called. I wish others to see through the same lens this experience has provided me. I wrestle because others do not see through this lens, and it makes it difficult to implement what we have experienced and explored together in our classes. I find myself unable to articulate the broad depth of what I have learned over
these few years, but I know each small step I take in ministry has been transformed by this experience.

I appreciate all the professors who have led our seminars. They have been open to discovery as they too are trying to figure out what it means to be the church today. Their wisdom has drawn out of us creative ways to discover how God is working through each other and our church communities. We are all God’s people, shining lights in the world. That is how we know God active each and every day.

Figure 8. The Church, God and God’s People Shining a Light in the World.¹

¹ Figure 8 used with permission by GraphicStock.
Family Covenant for St. Peter’s Confirmation Ministry

Navigator Covenant 2016-17

Navigator’s Name: ____________________________

In response to God’s promise made to each of us in baptism, we covenant with each other
to nurture our faith together in these specific ways as part of Navigator confirmation
ministry at St. Peter’s Lutheran Church:

To live among God’s faithful people, we will ________________________________

To hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper, we will ____________________

To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, we will ________________
To serve all people, following the example of Jesus, we will ____________________________

To strive for justice and peace in all the earth, we will ____________________________

Signed:

______________________________ Date: _______________
(Navigator)

______________________________
(Parent/Guardian)
At *baptism* and at *affirmation of baptism* (also called confirmation), Christians make five promises in response to the promise of new and eternal life God makes to us through the waters of baptism.

These five promises outline the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ, and so they also provide a helpful framework for learning and growing in faith throughout Navigator ministry at St. Peter’s.

At *baptism*, parents of young children are asked:

“As you bring your children to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:

To live with them among God’s faithful people,
To bring them to the word of God and the holy supper, to teach them the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,
To place in their hands the holy scriptures, and to nurture them in faith and prayer…

Do you promise to help your children grow in the Christian faith and life?”
At affirmation of baptism, candidates are asked:
“Do you intend to continue in the covenant God
made with you in holy baptism:
To live among God’s faithful people,
To hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper,
To proclaim the good news of God in
Christ through word and deed,
To serve all people, following the
example of Jesus, and to strive for
justice and peace in all the earth?”

The Marks of Discipleship
- Daily prayer
- Weekly worship
- Bible reading
- Service in and beyond the congregation
- Spiritual friendships
- Giving time, talents, and resources

St. Peter’s’ goal for the faith development of its members is that they will be so well-rooted in the gospel that:
- they are life-long participants in worship,
- they know the content of the Christian faith, and
- they can express this faith to others.
APPENDIX C

St. Peter’s Family Information Sheet

I plan on attending Wednesday nights:

_____ Regularly (most weeks)
_____ Monthly (1x per month)
_____ Occasionally (Less than once per month)
_____ Not planning on attending on Wednesdays

If you plan to attend on Wednesday, please fill out the question below:

_____ I plan to eat supper on Wednesdays at St. Barnabas (Info. for our meal planners)

_____ # in family who will be eating meal

Please list any dietary concerns: ______________________________________________________

On Wednesdays, I would be more interested in:

_____ Small groups (usually tying life into faith and learning)
_____ Helping with younger ages
_____ Various service projects
_____ I would like to rotate between small groups and serving

Parent Involvement

_____ As a parent, I am willing to help occasionally with Navigator events.

_____ Please send me “Faith on the Go” texts: These are texts that will be sent a couple
of times per week to your cell phone with a very brief devotional. If yes, please provide
your cell number and provider.

Cell: (______)_________________________ Provider (Verizon, Sprint etc …)

I give permission for my child to participate in Navigators confirmation online at
http://stbarnabasnavigators.weebly.com I also understand that by signing this form, I give
my child permission to access to all online media St. Barnabas will be using for the
educational purposes of Navigator confirmation. I also give permission for my child to
participate in all activities at St. Barnabas and I understand we will be collecting data
from this ministry for research. Names will not be used.

Parent Name ________________________________ Phone _______________________

Email(s)

__________________________________________________

Child(s) Name

__________________________________________________

Parent(s) Signature

__________________________________________________

Please let us know any tools or resources you need in order to fulfill your covenant: (i.e. paper copies of the small catechism, smartphone app suggestions …)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D

Case Study Questionnaire for Church Staff and/or Ministry Leaders

Informed Consent: All information will be anonymous and your name, the name of the congregation and names of participants will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used instead. Do you allow me to use any of the information you provide during this interview for my thesis and research at Luther Seminary? Yes_____ No ______

Name of Congregation:
Name of interviewee:
Role in the ministry:

1. Please tell me about your ministry (describe what it is, what you do, how people engage)

2. What led you or your congregation to try this ministry?

3. Was the congregation actively involved in the beginning or was it led by staff/key volunteers?

4. How did you initially plan this ministry? Was there a team that worked on it?

5. Was there any pushback from other staff, volunteers or the congregation?

6. Is it the same now as you originally planned it out?

7. What are its strengths?

8. What are its weaknesses?

9. In what ways are you planning to grow this ministry?
APPENDIX E

Online Questionnaire

The following question was used at four different congregations as a single question from a broader survey. The broader survey was used internally for the purpose of our time serving in that congregation. However, I included this question in that survey and used the answers to this question in my research. Here is that question:

What keeps young people from being actively engaged in your church?

(Implied consent was used for this research. See appendix F.)
APPENDIX F

Online Implied Consent

Used at St. Peter’s, St. John’s, St. Paul’s, St. Mark’s, and St. Matthew’s.

At the beginning of each survey at www.surveymonkey.com, I provided an implied consent. Here is what it stated:

Thank you for participating in this survey. Your feedback is helpful as we begin to think about ministry possibilities at (church name). By taking this survey, you agree to have your information shared with those on the task force at (church name) and for other research outside of this congregation. You will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used.
APPENDIX G

Online Questionnaire for St. Peters

1. Did this year’s Lighthouse meeting time work for you?
2. Did your son or daughter participate in Navigators either online and/or on Wednesday evenings?
3. How often did your family take advantage of the community meal?
4. Do you feel the content in the lessons was important for your son or daughter to learn?
5. Do you feel like your son or daughter grew in their faith over the past year?
6. Did you have conversations with your kids about the topic of the evening?
7. Do you feel your son or daughter built relationships with other kids?
8. Was there adequate communication throughout the year about schedules, content and upcoming events?
9. Did your Son or Daughter engage in the online teaching?
10. If yes, did you find the lesson format easy to follow?
11. Was the “ditty bag” (The backpack with their Bible and journal) meaningful for your son or daughter?
12. Did you as a parent participate in the online teaching?
13. If your son or daughter attended Wednesday evenings, do you feel they found value in the programming?
14. Do you worship regularly?
15. How often are you in worship?
16. Do you have any other thoughts or comments?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


InterServe Ministries. www.ismteam.org, Minneapolis, MN.


