

# **PASSING ON THE FAITH: A COMMUNITY WORK A SPIRITUAL FORMATION FRAMEWORK**

## **AN OVERVIEW**

As a part of GPS 2012, the collaborative strategic plan for Christopher Dock Mennonite High School, Penn View Christian School, and Quakertown Christian School, the three schools have initiated development of a preK-12 framework for spiritual formation. While this document is useful to the schools, its purpose is to be informing and transforming for families and congregations as well.

### **DIAGRAM**

It is the hope that this document will be a living, interactive conversation that will create reflection on and action toward how we help our children and youth become radical followers of Jesus Christ. In doing so, church, home, and school work at the same goal and many of the roles and experiences in each setting repeat and reinforce what happens in the other two settings.

While this overlap is true, there are some opportunities most likely to occur in one of the three settings. What do home, church and school uniquely offer a child in terms of faith development? Suggestions of some of these items are listed in the non-overlapping sections of the circles.

The sections where two circles overlap indicate some areas of shared experiences for the child, or experiences that both of the settings provide, with the goal of children and youth becoming radical followers of Christ in the middle of the three overlapping circles.

It is in the best interest of our children and youth that home, church, and school communicate about what is occurring in each of these places regarding faith formation, that home, church and school acknowledge the strengths of all three settings, and that each supports the other in every way possible. This framework begins that dialogue.

The overlay over the school circle is an Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and lens through which faith formation is shared, taught, and experienced. This lens includes an understanding of a God of love who sent Jesus to be an example for us to follow in daily living, with a focus on peace-making, social justice, servant-hood, community, and grace.

## SCHOOL

In 2001, Christopher Dock Mennonite High School, Penn View Christian School, and Quakertown Christian School adopted a joint Graduate Profile that describes graduates of the schools from academic, spiritual, and lifestyle perspectives (See attached.)

Stated in bold are the seven spiritual characteristics of the graduate profile with specific experiences from each school's curriculum that contribute to these areas of spiritual formation listed below, with number references indicating grade levels.

A graduate of this educational system is a person who:

### **Embraces a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.**

- Students are encouraged in their faith development through relationships with faculty and the campus pastor (CD, 9-12).
- Worship and Bible study are available for students via regular chapels, Monday Night Worship, Meet me at the Pillars, small group study, and in other settings (CD, 9-12).
- Daily devotions with students, chapel experiences, Bible study, journaling, adult role models (PV)
- Outdoor Classroom experience for grades 6 – 7 (PV).
- Daily devotions and personal evangelism of the teachers and staff (QCS)

### **Exhibits a growing life of discipleship.**

- Service Projects are integrated into curriculum (CD, 9-12).
- Conflict resolution, peace, justice and restitution are key to the disciplinary process (CD, 9-12).
- Daily devotions, service projects, service club (PV)
- Participation and leadership during devotions and chapel, integration of spirituality into all subject areas, student/teacher relationships (PV)
- Daily prayer for each other and the world (QCS)

### **Practices spiritual disciplines**

- Spiritual Disciplines are included in the four-year chapel curriculum (CD, 9-12).
- The Prayer Room in Rosenberger Academic Center is set aside for prayer and Bible Study (CD, 9-12).
- Faith Walk class is an elective for grades 11 and 12 that studies the disciplines via Richard Forster's *Celebration of Disciplines* (CD).
- Memorization of scripture (PV)
- Daily prayer, singing, Bible study, journaling, writing one's own personal faith journey (PV)
- Support in giving to missions (MAMA project and others); daily prayer and devotionals (QCS)
- Reward system for displaying Christian Character called 'Character Bears' (QCS)

**Discovers, defines and develops her/his God-given gifts.**

- Students are given opportunities in many elective areas (CD, all departments have electives, 9-12).
- Students are given opportunities in co-curricular activities including music, art, drama, sports, writing, photography, Dockunet, chapel participation, leadership groups, activity groups, etc. (CD, 9-12).
- Opportunities in music, drama, art, all subject areas, science fair, speeches and presentations, worship team (PV)
- Chapels, middle school retreats, classroom studies/projects (QCS)

**Cultivates a Christian worldview informed by Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and tradition.**

- Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and tradition are taught throughout curriculum but especially in grade 11 and 12 Bible courses (CD).
- The Mennonite Confession of Faith is used in the development of the Chapel Curriculum (CD).
- Integration of faith into all subject areas, study of cultures in Social Studies (PV)
- 7th grade Anabaptist History class (PV)
- Missions Festivals (QCS, preschool-8)
- Mennonite Bible curriculum (QCS)

**Articulates his/her beliefs, values and convictions clearly.**

- Student presentations are used in assessment for all departments (CD, 9-12).
- Senior Presentations at the end of grade 12 include articulation of academic, spiritual and lifestyle development (CD).
- Students write about their faith journey, lead in devotions and chapel, express themselves during class discussions, and analyze characters in fiction and nonfiction stories (PV)
- Written testimony in grades 5 and 8 (QCS)

**Accepts the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life.**

- Bible classes are centered on reading and understanding the Biblical story from the Old Testament to the New Testament with a “Christocentric” focus (CD, 9-12).
- The scriptures are used in chapels through readings, scripture songs, sermons, reflections, and other activities (CD, 9-12).
- Mentoring and modeling of teachers, devotions, Bible class, integration of scripture into all subject areas, attitude that scripture is relevant to today (PV)
- Bible Memory; the Bible as a required Text for several classes (QCS)
- Bible is used in the disciplinary process as a standard of thought and behavior (QCS)

## **Graduate Profile**

As schools providing an Anabaptist-Mennonite education<sup>1</sup>, Penn View Christian School, Quakertown Christian School and Christopher Dock Mennonite High School recognize that their graduates are in transition. The education process seeks to honor and develop the uniqueness of each student and his/her role within the community where their gifts, talents and learning are applied. To this end, a graduate of this educational system is a person who:

### **Academic**

- values and demonstrates life-long learning including skills of problem solving, problem posing, critical thinking and cooperation.
- exhibits competency in the basic skills and knowledge of the academic disciplines.
- communicates effectively through speaking and writing.
- uses, recognizes and appreciates creativity and artistic expression.
- incorporates available technology appropriately.

### **Spiritual**

- embraces a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- exhibits a growing life of discipleship.
- practices spiritual disciplines.
- discovers, defines and develops her/his God-given gifts.
- cultivates a Christian worldview informed by Anabaptist-Mennonite theology and tradition.
- articulates his/her beliefs, values and convictions clearly.
- accepts the Scriptures as the Word of God and as the fully reliable and trustworthy standard for Christian faith and life.

### **Lifestyle**

- practices stewardship of all that God has entrusted to her/him.
- thinks and operates with a global perspective.
- promotes forgiveness, understanding, reconciliation and non-violent resolution of conflict.
- participates in congregational/church life.
- respects diversity.
- models servanthood by participating in service opportunities.
- practices wellness of mind and body.
- value God's Word, people and creation

<sup>1</sup>Framed within the context of the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.

Adopted by the Joint Boards of the Penn View Christian School, Quakertown Christian School and Christopher Dock Mennonite High School. September 13, 2001

## CHURCH

The congregation provides an important perspective in the faith development of children. Here, children have an organized broader faith community within which to participate, believe, and belong. Children and youth want to feel included; they want their faith, questions, and doubts taken seriously, whatever their age. They seek a community in which they are involved in worship and other church ministries from early ages on up. They desire interaction with other believers of all ages and appreciate intergenerational opportunities to learn from and with adults.

One tangible way to strengthen the relationships between children/youth and congregations is for a congregation to routinely acknowledge rites of passage in their lives, celebrating and creating rituals for the poignant moments in their lives and thereby shifting the foundational perspective away from the individual youth and family toward including God and God's family.

### Resources

1. [http://www.cyfm.net/article.php?article=Through\\_the\\_Zone.html](http://www.cyfm.net/article.php?article=Through_the_Zone.html)  
This article gives excellent examples of how to infuse further meaning into the rites of passage (for example graduating from high school) that you may already be marking and celebrating as a church.
2. [http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item\\_id=13242&loc\\_id=9,42](http://www.gbod.org/worship/default.asp?act=reader&item_id=13242&loc_id=9,42)  
This article gives specific ideas for a worship service including a blessing for the occasion of youth getting their driver's license.
3. *Thank You For Asking: Conversing With Young Adults About the Future Church* – Sara Wenger Shenk  
This book is a compilation of conversations with twenty-somethings about what they want the future church to look like as well as what was meaningful in their spiritual formation journey growing up.
4. Faith Markers – A new resource for churches on rituals from Mennonite Publishing Network, May 2008
5. <http://www.faithandliferesources.org/pdf/YouthGuide.pdf>  
This recent guide from Mennonite Publishing Network gives guidance for spiritual formation development in the context of high school Sunday School classes and youth group activities. It includes a four-year plan to teach the Biblical story and themes.

## Ritual Suggestions for Worship

Event	Worship Ritual	Gift/Marker	Resources
Birth/adoption	Dedication, congregational pledge	Prayer shawl	<a href="http://www.shawlministry.com">www.shawlministry.com</a>
Starting 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	Presentation	Bible	
Age 12	Blessing of mentor/mentee relationships		
Public decision to follow Jesus	Faith story, baptism, congregational welcome	Candle	See page 10 of Resource #6 listed on Home page
Obtaining driver's license	Celebration, blessing	Key chain w/ scripture verse or rear view mirror tag	See Resource #2 listed above
Graduating from high school	Presentation	Bible, hymnal, <i>Let Your Life Speak</i> by Parker J. Palmer	See page 1 of Resource #1 listed above; also attached
Beginning a service/mission assignment	Commissioning/ Blessing	Prayer cards for congregation	
Ages 18-25	Acknowledgement as part of church family	Yearly Care Packages	
Engagement	Prayer of blessing		
Getting married	Wedding Ceremony	Marriage Certificate	

The ideas in this chart suggest possible rituals to celebrate children/youth and their faith journey with the congregation. While symbolic gifts can be powerful, again and again young adults say that what was most significant to them in their faith development was meaningful rituals, acknowledgements, and relationships within their congregation. There are many Anabaptist/Mennonite and other resources for any of these events. Rather than try to list them, we included resources you might not be aware of. We invite you to contact us with events, rituals, gifts or resources that you have found and use.

## Through the Zone: Creating Rites of Passage in Your Church

By [Brad Griffin](#)

Emily is part of a good church. By typical standards, the church's youth ministry is well-run and Christ-focused, the worship proves engaging and even transformational for the congregation, and the pastoral leadership understands that kids need extra support, so the church budget reflects an investment in student ministry. When Emily graduated from high school this year, the church recognized Emily and other seniors in a worship service as they do every spring. The students walked up front to say their names and disclose their post-high-school plans, after which a youth ministry leader handed out Bibles and a pastor prayed a brief prayer for the group. The next day, life went on as usual for Emily, and she began to prepare for the move to college.

A few blocks down the street is Maria's church. On the Sunday before her graduation, Maria took part in a ceremony as well. Like the other seniors, she stood in front of the congregation with her family and peers. The pastor handed her mother a plate containing a loaf of bread, from which she took a piece and held it to Maria's mouth. Maria bit into the bread and her mother spoke these words:

"Maria, it is I, your mother, feeding you today. I represent the generations of your family and of the extended human family ... When you were a child, we fed you. We clothed you. We took care of you. We brought you to Jesus. Now you are a woman. You will feed yourself, clothe yourself, take care of yourself, and grow in your own relationship to Jesus. This does not mean that we have abandoned you. We will support and nourish you in time of need... We feed you today, entrusting you to the grace of God who will supply your every need. In the name of Jesus we feed you. In the power of the Holy Spirit of God we feed you."

After the people responded, "In the name of Jesus, Amen," Maria then tied a knot in a length of cord, repeating a litany before God and the community of faith committing to "follow in the way of Jesus" and asking God to guide her. Other family members tied a knot on top of her knot, voicing their commitment to continue supporting her and helping her discern her calling. After several other affirmations, commitments, and prayers, the service ended.[\[1\]](#)

Everything changes for Maria after this. The expectations within that church now shift for Maria. She is considered an adult, and the older generations within the church treat her as such. Her own sense of identity has been transformed in ways that not even she fully comprehends. Though still very much a late adolescent by our culture's standards, this ritual has given this young woman a new place and calling: the place of adulthood.[\[2\]](#)

While these ceremonies may or may not sound familiar to you, their implications give us cause for reflection as youth and family workers. What constitutes a rite of passage, and what doesn't? What is the place of rites of passage within our culture, and specifically within the Christian church? How can the celebration of such rites empower adolescents to transition more effectively into adulthood? Finally, do our youth ministries have a responsibility to help kids and families cross these life-passage thresholds together? We think these questions deserve our careful attention, drawing on research insights from the disciplines of anthropology, psychology, and theology.

[http://www.cyfm.net/article.php?article=Through\\_the\\_Zone.html](http://www.cyfm.net/article.php?article=Through_the_Zone.html), April, 08.

## HOME

The following is a list of resources to support and encourage parents in taking responsibility for their children's spiritual formation.

1. *When Your Child Is 6 To 12* by John Drescher  
This book describes the moral and emotional development of children ages 6-12, and focuses on what children need from their parents to develop a strong inner life.
2. *Gather 'Round Handbook*, Mennonite Publishing Network  
Useful for parents as well as churches, chapter 3 describes characteristics of faith formation of preschoolers, primary age, middlers, junior youth and youth. In addition, it gives specific suggestions for how to honor and encourage faith development at each of these ages. Chapter 9 includes a chart of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual development at each age.
3. *Taking The Child's Faith Seriously* by Richard C. Detweiler  
In a short essay, pastor and first principal of Christopher Dock Richard Detweiler explains faith in children from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective. He identifies three developmental stages: The Age of Innocence (birth to age 5), The Age of Awareness (ages 6-11), and The Age of Awakening (ages 12-18).
4. *Freedom Fences: How to Set Limits That Free You to Enjoy Your Marriage and Family* by Marlene L. Kaufman (Author), Anne Kaufman Weaver (Author), Nina Kaufman Harnish (Author), Gerald W. Kaufman (Editor)  
This book describes how creating boundaries for individual and family produces new freedoms – pruning results in growth. It explains how less is really more on a daily basis.
5. Barna parenting article - attached
6. <http://www.elca.org/evangelism/individuals/faithathome.html> --This article is a great reference for parents looking for ways to nurture faith in their home and family life. It suggests creative, natural ways to bring God to mind during ordinary moments, routines, rituals and special occasions, including baptisms, beginning and end of school year, vacations, birthdays, etc.
7. *Parents ~ Passing the Torch of Faith* by John Drescher  
This book gives practical ideas for managing family time, priorities, prayer, electronic media and more to pass on the torch of faith.
8. *Parent trek* by Jeremy Zimmerly Jantzi  
“The authors and contributors set out to provide a resource for adults interested in helping children develop the capacity to live creative, generous, joyful lives in a world of limits and great disparities.” (from preface) Topics include self-esteem, managing money, caring for creation, shopping, television, traditions, and creative play

## Parenting – from the Barna Group of Ventura, CA ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org))

You have opened the research archive about values. The statistics and analysis in this archive come from national surveys conducted by Barna Research. For more information about Parenting, be sure to check out the related resources and news releases featured on this page. Also, watch for new information to be added to this archive in the months to come.

### **Responsibility**

- Nine out of ten parents of children under age 13 (85%) believe they have the primary responsibility for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters, while 11% said their church is primarily responsible. (2003)
- Nearly all parents of children under the age of 13 - 96% - contend that they have the primary responsibility for teaching their children values. (2003)
- About two out of three parents of children 12 or younger attend religious services at least once a month and generally take their children with them. (2003)
- One out of every five parents of children under 13 (19%) has ever been personally contacted or spoken to by a church leader to discuss the parents' involvement in the spiritual life and development of their children. (2003)

### **Research Shows That Spiritual Maturity Process Should Start at a Young Age (The Barna Update, November 17, 2003)**

(Ventura, CA)-Three years of research regarding ministry to children has revealed many surprising outcomes, according to a new book by researcher George Barna. In discussing that volume, entitled *Transforming Your Children Into Spiritual Champions*, Barna indicated that the wealth of research not only changed his personal perspective on the importance of ministering to young children, but also clarified why churches struggle to have significance in our culture.

"Adults essentially carry out the beliefs they embraced when they were young," he explained. "The reason why Christians are so similar in their attitudes, values and lifestyles to non-Christians is that they were not sufficiently challenged to think and behave differently -radically differently, based on core spiritual perspectives - when they were children. Simply getting people to go to church regularly is not the key to becoming a mature Christian. Spiritual transformation requires a more extensive investment in one's ability to interpret all life situations in spiritual terms."

### **Reaching People When They're Young**

Barna's research discovered that a person's lifelong behaviors and views are generally developed when they are young - particularly before they reach the teenage years. As evidence of this, Barna provided research that showed four critical outcomes.

First, a person's moral foundations are generally in place by the time they reach age nine. While those foundations are refined and the application of those foundations may shift to some extent as the individual ages, their fundamental perspectives on truth, integrity, meaning, justice, morality, and ethics are formed quite early in life. After their first decade, most people simply refine their views as they age without a wholesale change in those leanings.

Second, a person's response to the meaning and personal value of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection is usually determined before a person reaches eighteen. In fact, a majority of

Americans make a lasting determination about the personal significance of Christ's death and resurrection by age 12.

Third, Barna showed data indicating that in most cases people's spiritual beliefs are irrevocably formed when they are pre-teens. Upon comparing data from a national survey of 13-year-olds with an identical survey among adults, Barna found that the belief profile related to a dozen central spiritual principles was identical between the two groups. Those beliefs included perceptions of the nature of God, the existence of Satan, the reliability of the Bible, perceptions regarding the after-life, the holiness of Jesus Christ, the means of gaining God's favor, and the influence of spiritual forces in a person's life.

"In essence," the researcher noted, "what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing. Of course, there are many individuals who go through life-changing experiences in which their beliefs are altered, or instances in which a concentrated body of religious teaching changes one or more core beliefs. However, most people's minds are made up and they believe they know what they need to know spiritually by age 13. Their focus in absorbing religious teaching after that age is to gain reassurance and confirmation of their existing beliefs rather than to glean new insights that will redefine their foundations."

Finally, the research revealed that adult church leaders usually have serious involvement in church life and training when they are young. The statistics gathered by Barna's firm among a national sample of pastors, church staff and lay leaders showed that more than four out of five of those leaders had consistently been involved in the ministry to children for an extended period of years prior to age 13. One implication is that the individuals who will become the church's leaders two decades from now are probably active in church programs today.

### **Families and Churches Working Together**

Citing research showing that a large proportion of church-going people dropout of church between the ages of 18 and 24, Barna stated that the research underscored the importance of families, not churches, taking the lead in the spiritual development of children. "In situations where children became mature Christians we usually found a symbiotic partnership between their parents and their church," he pointed out. "The church encouraged parents to prioritize the spiritual development of their children and worked hard to equip them for that challenge. Parents, for their part, raised their children in the context of a faith-based community that provided security, belonging, spiritual and moral education, and accountability. Neither the parents nor the church could have done it alone."

The studies conducted by Barna's firm concluded that churches experiencing great influence in children's lives were motivated by the realization that children are of special significance to God. Consequently, those churches employed a long-term, multi-pronged strategy that they tirelessly executed to facilitate the spiritual growth of children.

The research showed that at a typical Protestant church, more than four out of every ten people ministered to during the week are children, yet seven out of every eight ministry dollars are spent on adults. Barna was quick to point out, though, that simply spending money on children does not produce great results. "The most important resource, we believe, was the amazing amount of prayer for children and parents that was evident at the most effective ministries to children. Some money is required to see serious life change happen, but the more important resource is the commitment of adults to the spiritual wholeness of the children - which means sacrificing some of the emphasis upon the ministry to adults."

## **Book Challenges Prevailing Notions**

Barna has presented the results of the research in more than 25 cities around the country so far this year and has been pleasantly surprised by the positive reception the message has received. "Most churches are doing the best they can based on what they know. A lot of our findings represent the first 'hard data' that these church leaders have seen showing the relative impact of focusing upon children - and have been shocked at the revelations regarding the importance of getting to people when they are young. I have been encouraged that so many churches have been willing to reconsider how they allocate their limited ministry resources in order to maximize their ministry impact."

The researcher admitted that the outcome of his studies produced a significant turnabout in his own views about ministry. "Since I became a Christian two decades ago, I have always accepted the dominant notion: the most important ministry is that conducted among adults. But the overwhelming evidence we have seen of the huge impact in the lives of kids and the relatively limited changes in the lives of adults has completely revolutionized my view of ministry. I have concluded that children are the single most important population group for the Church to focus upon. Many churches may not go that far, but I do hope that they will at least consider the research findings and place a greater emphasis upon children. Such a shift in priorities could well bring about the spiritual renaissance that many church leaders have long been praying for."

## **Research Source and Methodology**

The data described in this release are detailed in *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions*, written by George Barna. The research was conducted from 2001-2003, and included nationwide surveys among adults, among young people, and among church leaders and pastors. The research also included in-depth studies of Protestant congregations that have an enviable track record of producing children who would be considered "spiritual champions."

The Barna Research Group, Ltd. is an independent marketing research company located in southern California. Since 1984, it has been studying cultural trends related to values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. If you would like to receive regular e-mailings of a brief overview of each new bi-weekly update on the latest research findings from the Barna Research Group, you may subscribe to this free service at the Barna Research web site ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)).

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=153>; April, 2008.

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=Topic&TopicID=44>; April, 2008.