



# Lifelong Faith

the theory and practice of lifelong faith formation

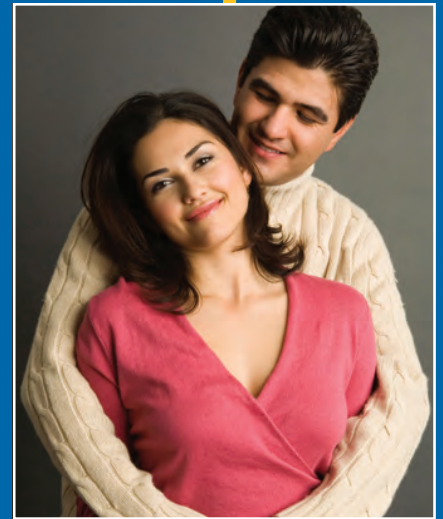
Volume 8.1

[www.lifelongfaith.com](http://www.lifelongfaith.com)

Fall 2014



Faith Formation  
Practices &  
Approaches for  
All Ages &  
Generations



# Lifelong Faith

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## ***Fall 2014 – Volume 8.1*** ***Faith Formation Practices & Approaches***

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## Building Blocks of Faith

Laura Keeley & Robert J. Keeley

**W**e were standing in the fellowship room at church one Sunday after morning worship when we heard a scream. It was Sondra. She was engaged in a full-blown tantrum. She was not happy with her mother and didn't care who knew it. Sondra is eleven years old and has had many things to overcome in her life. Sondra and her mom have been coming to our church fairly regularly for a couple of years. Sondra lives with Katie and Paul, parents of a family from our church, because her mother, who was raising her alone, wasn't really able to take care of her. Sondra stays with her mom on Sundays and this Sunday she was being difficult so her mom told her she needed to go home with Katie and Paul for the rest of the day. Sondra didn't like that one bit. Perhaps she thought that if she made enough of a scene either her mom or Katie or Paul would give in but that didn't happen.

On a day like this one wonders if there is much hope for Sondra. She's already been through a lot and she hasn't even hit the teenage years yet. But we have seen Sondra's faith develop over the time she has been with us. She professed her faith and asked to be baptized. Sondra, like all of us, is a work in progress. God is working in her and we, her church family, have offered ourselves to God to work in her life. So, what do we do to help Sondra grow in faith? What is needed for Sondra's faith to continue to grow?

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Much of the recent writing about faith describes faith and how it changes or develops as a person ages. The faith stages developed by James Fowler and John Westerhoff are helpful in understanding what faith is like for people of different ages but they are *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. That is, they tell us what people are like, not what to do to create change or growth. These theories are used as a starting point and the writers quickly move on to application. They do not usually give a clear set of marching orders for people designing programs for faith formation in churches. The answer to the simple question “What do people need in order to grow in faith?” is often not addressed.

Professionals who work with faith development theories often specialize in one of the age groups such as children, teens, or adults. What is recommended often doesn’t relate to people working with other age groups. In addition, the vocabulary for different age groups is different. People working with adults use words such as “spiritual transformation” and “discipleship” while people working with children use the terms “faith nurture” and “spiritual development.” Some authors who focus only on adults seem to do their work without regard to the developmental work done in the area of faith formation. Some of adult faith stages are such that any “good” thirty-year-old Christian could expect to be either at the top step (often demonstrating a significant level of commitment to church ministries) or else very close. This begs the question of whether the rest of their lives are merely maintenance of this step. This left us dissatisfied with many of these systems and wishing for a more holistic view of ministry.

Another reason for the reluctance to answer this question “What do we need to help grow faith?” is that we can’t give people faith. Faith is mysterious and only God gives us faith. At the same time we also believe that faith formation happens everyday. The Israelites’ faith was being formed as they saw the 10 plagues, as they packed up and left Egypt, as they walked through the Red Sea and

as they heard the law at Mt. Sinai. The question isn’t “Are we being formed?” The question is “How are we being formed?”<sup>1</sup>

In the New Testament, Paul writes to Timothy “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also” (2 Timothy 1:5). Timothy learned about faith from the people around him. In the same way, we, too, are being formed by the things we see, do and hear and by important people in our lives. Therefore it makes good sense to be thoughtful and deliberate in what we do to support faith formation at all ages.

In *Real Kids, Real Faith*, Karen Marie Yust distinguishes between faith and faithfulness. Faith, she suggests, is a gift from God. Our part is to develop faithfulness in ourselves and in those around us. This shows up in scripture when God made a covenant with Abraham. He blessed Abraham and his descendants so that through them all the people of the earth would be blessed. Similarly, God has given us a role in the faith formation and the nurture of the people in our lives. God uses people, imperfect people like us, to play an important role in the life of faith for those around us.

Since our faith continues to be formed throughout our whole life, faith formation is not just for children and teens. It is for Christians from cradle to grave. This was in our minds when we were asked, “What do people need?” We began our work, as have many others, by merely looking at one age group, in our case, children. Then we noticed themes in the literature on faith development repeated for many ages. We believe that our identities as people of faith of all ages are shaped by building on the framework of these four themes that we call ***Building Blocks of Faith***: 1) I belong; 2) I understand; 3) I have hope; and 4) I am called and equipped.<sup>2</sup>

Kenda Creasy Dean, in *Almost Christian*, points to four theological accents that teens who belong to faith communities have: a creed to believe (God’s story), a community to belong to, a call to live out, and a hope to hold onto (42). Yust presents six themes related to



children's spirituality: belonging, thanksgiving, giftedness, hospitality, understanding and hope (19). While Yust wrote about children and Dean's research is focused on teens, we suggest that our four building blocks are not restricted to any one age or faith stage but that, while different ages and stages will manifest these needs in different ways, the needs are, nonetheless, universal. We believe that these four building blocks of faith are things that everyone, in every age, needs for their faith to grow.

These four building blocks can help us as we think about Sondra but they can also help us as we think about her caretakers, Katie and Paul as well as Sondra's mom. We can think about how these building blocks relate to retirees and teens, parents of young children and their children, to single people and the newly married. Addressing these four things for Sondra will likely look different from the ministry to a grandparent but these building blocks of faith give us a framework to look at how we are meeting ministry needs for all ages.

## I Belong.

The Heidelberg Catechism begins with the question: "What is your only comfort in life and death?" The response is "That I am not my own but belong body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> In many Reformed churches this question and answer are memorized by teens in catechism and Sunday school classes. It has become dear to many who studied and learned it, using it in funerals as a source of comfort or weddings as a source of joy and reassurance. One man in our church has a tattoo of the question and answer on his arm, stating that it is the one statement he wants engraved on his body. Having these words tattooed on his arm brings the confession into everyday conversation. One day he visited with an elderly member of our church who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. She touched his arm as he began to recite the question and answer and,

much to his surprise, she started saying it along with him. She had internalized it to the point where, while she was unable to say much, this answer remained in her heart and on her lips.

This notion of belonging, body and soul, in life and in death to Jesus is at the heart of what we want as people. Abraham Maslov places belonging as one of the basics in his Hierarchy of Needs.<sup>4</sup> When we think about the development of a child one of the first things a child needs is to feel safe and loved. Erikson's first stage of psychosocial development is trust vs. mistrust<sup>5</sup>, a statement of feeling safe and of belonging. Belonging takes on many different forms and has many layers. In our walk of faith knowing that we belong to God is important. But, as people, we are also hardwired for connections to other people.<sup>6</sup> These connections can be as close as spouse, parents and children and as broad as friendships with colleagues and co-workers and our church community.

As our church was making plans for a new building project we gathered input from as many members as we could. One woman in her late sixties, Lisa, spoke about the senior citizens, stating "everything" in our church was for children and teens. Lisa asked, "When are we going to start doing things for the old people?" At the time, we thought her comment to be rather selfish. She and her husband and many of their friends were perfectly capable of running events for the seniors such as bus trips or Sunday evening fellowship. Children can't take care of themselves but these old people certainly can. Why was she making such a fuss about this?

What we now think is that perhaps this really wasn't about Lisa not being able to do the work but that this was about her not feeling like she belonged. By focusing so much of our attention on children, Lisa felt left out. That basic sense of belonging was not there like it ought to have been. It was a mistake to allow our ministries to leave her, and perhaps others of her age, feeling that way.

Congregations should consider how they help the all the people in their community feel

like they belong. Baptism, for example, whether you belong to a tradition that practices infant or believer baptism, is a wonderful sign of belonging to God. Our identity is found in our baptism. It tells us that we belong to God and belong to the church. Remembering our baptism in worship is one way to reinforce that sense of belonging. It is important to preach the gospel of belonging from our pulpits but we also need to make it concrete.

It is not enough to be told that we belong. We need to feel it. The meeting at which Lisa spoke eventually turned into a building project for our church. We have some wonderful new classrooms, new office space and a remodeling of our former space. The rooms are beautiful. However, after a year of construction, when we were finally able to occupy the space, the children couldn't figure out where their space was. They felt that the new rooms were all for adults. One way a few boys tried to make the place theirs was by bringing flashlights to church so that after worship they could explore the basement in the dark. While that wasn't something that we were excited about allowing (liability issues made that a bit tricky) these boys needed to know that they belonged. They didn't have a sense that this church was still theirs. They weren't sure they belonged. We brought out four Jenga games and a checkerboard and placed them on the beautiful coffee tables in our fellowship hall. The kids stopped trying to explore the basement and began playing checkers and building towers with the Jenga blocks. Our new space had become their space. They had a place to belong. It was a simple solution that meant a lot to them and to their parents.

## I Understand/Know.

Judges 2 serves as an introduction to much of what happens throughout the entire book. We read about how God's people had forgotten about God. They had been rescued from Egypt. They had crossed of the Red Sea and the Jordan River, they had seen when the walls of

Jericho fall and when the people took the land of Canaan. Yet, when Joshua died, the people didn't tell the story to their children.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. (Judges 2:10-12)

The story of God's faithfulness to his people is one we need to know. Our faith cannot be merely based on a warm feeling that God loves us (which he does) or that God wants us to live upright lives (which he also does.) Our faith is fairly simple; the Creator of the Universe wants to restore the fellowship that we lost when we sinned. But it is also much more than that. The relationships that are most important to us (spouse, sibling, parent/child or close friend) are all based on knowing the other person. It is through that personal knowledge that our commitment to that person gets deepened. Our son recently got married and our commitment and love for our new daughter-in-law, Melissa, is there simply because our son chose her. However, as we get to know her, as we get to find out more about her and about what makes her laugh and what she enjoys doing, as we learn more and more about who she is that commitment and love are strengthened. Our initial commitment was to the *idea* of a daughter-in-law. As we spent time with Melissa that commitment became to her *as a person*.

Without the content of the stories of God and his people we end up with a weak and incomplete picture of our faith. Christian Smith and Melinda Denton introduced the idea of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to describe the faith that many teens express. They suggest that many young people have the following idea of what their faith is like:

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. (Smith and Denton, 162-163)

We need to know actual content so that our faith is not just based on emotions. God is not primarily interested in us feeling good. Our faith is not just about learning to be good. Faith and behavior are both important but they are not the same.<sup>7</sup> By concentrating on our behavior, by serving a steady diet of “current issues” to teens and adults, we reinforce the notion that God primarily cares about how we behave. We don't actually build a closer relationship with him. It would be like if all our interactions with our daughter-in-law were simply hearing songs about how much our son loves her.

We need to know God, not just how we should behave. We need to hear the stories of the Old and New Testaments. We need to poetry of the Psalms and the wisdom of Job. We need the guidance and theological instruction of the epistles and the rich, multifaceted history of God's people from the books of Acts and I and II Kings. We also need to know the stories of people like us who have failed and been forgiven, who have succeeded and rejoiced, and who have walked faithfully with God. Our faith is built on a solid rock and we, as God's people, need to be able to recognize that rock. If we don't know the story of God's people found in God's word then we will be just like the people in the book of Judges, the ones who know neither the Lord nor what he did for us.

The Moralistic Therapeutic Deism that Smith and Denton found and that is so rampant in teens (and, frankly, in many

adults) could be the result of a distinct lack of knowledge of scripture, or at least a lack of a well-grounded understanding of how to study scripture. For many teens and even many adults, scripture is taken in small doses. Bible verses are doled out in snippets to encourage us or to chastise us. Bible verses are used as hammers to smack down people who don't agree with us without considering the context of the verses. The Bible becomes little more than platitudes and rules. The people we read about become heroes or villains, someone to act like or someone to avoid.

The Bible is a rich and wonderful story of how God's people continue to reject him and how God chases after them, much like Hosea chased after Gomer. It is a story of exile and restoration, of how God brought his people back from Egypt and back from Babylon and back from their exile from the Garden of Eden through his Son, Jesus. It is in studying the richness of these texts that we begin to get a glimpse of the fullness of God's grace. Our adults and our children need a robust knowledge of scripture, not so that we know how to behave but to know who we are and who the God is whom we love and serve.

## I Have Hope.

It was two days after Jesus had been crucified. As the two travelers on the Road to Emmaus began their journey they were in a dark place. They had been in Jerusalem when Jesus was killed and they were shocked and stunned. Jesus was their hope to redeem Israel. They had been suffering under Roman rule for their entire lives and Jesus, who they thought was the promised Messiah, had arrived and rekindled the dormant hope that was in all of God's people, the promise that one would come to restore the kingdom of Israel. But now, Jesus was dead and their hope died along with him.

So they found themselves heading back to their home on the road to Emmaus. Then Jesus, who they did not recognize, came and walked beside them. This was not one or two

minutes. They walked together for seven miles. Jesus explained all that the scriptures had said about him. They listened and were amazed at his teaching. When they arrived at their home they urged him to share a meal with them and it wasn't until Jesus broke bread that the travelers recognized him as their Lord. Then he disappeared from their sight. As they looked back at what had happened to them that day it began to make sense. They realized that their hearts were burning as he taught them about the scriptures and about his place in them. Their hope had returned. They immediately got up and returned to Jerusalem—another seven-mile walk—to tell the disciples what had happened.

Hope is a difficult concept in our modern era. Society defines hope in casual terms. It is something that we desire but have no real assurance of it. I hope my team wins. I hope they get here soon. I hope I get the job offer. It is the slightly more adult version of “wish.” Contemporary ideas of hope have no confidence, much like we have no confidence in the outcome of the roll of a die. Christian hope, though, is much more than that. It is an expectation that is strong and confident (Keathley). This is no random wish or shallow desire. This is the hope that lives in knowing that our expectation is based in the promises of the Creator of the Universe. Our hope is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

The book of Psalms demonstrates this assurance of hope, even in the midst of troubles. One third of the Psalms are laments, expressions of sadness, disappointment and grief. In all but one of the laments, though, the writer makes an interesting turn from expressions of despair to a place of hope. The Psalmist is not afraid to express his feelings and fears. He is also not afraid to express his trust in the Lord, his confidence that God continues to care for him and his sense of hope.

Psalm 13 is a short but powerful example of this. The writer begins with “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” (vs. 1) He then goes on to catalog his woes and demand

that God answer him. “Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death.” (vs. 3) But, even in his sadness he remembers that he belongs to the Lord. “But I trust in your unfailing love,” he writes. “My heart rejoices in your salvation.” (vs. 5) He does not merely express a wish that God will listen to him. He does not question whether God will continue to love him. He is sure of it. That is hope.

Psalm 71:4-5 gives us another insight into biblical hope: “Deliver me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of those who are evil and cruel. For you have been my hope, Sovereign Lord, my confidence since my youth.” Hope is the “confident expectation that what God has promised in the Word is true.” (Keathley)

Just like the travelers on the road to Emmaus, there are times when we only see a small part of the big picture. In the daily-ness of life people get involved in their own struggles, disappointments, joys and celebrations. We end up looking at only our own situation without opening ourselves up to the promises of God. Our hope is not just about us. It is much bigger than that. God has said that he will make *all* things new. He is at work in the world and we are his agents. Our hope gives our lives meaning because he has enlisted us in this great work that he is doing. Our sin makes us part of the problem but our willingness to be used by God makes us part of the solution.

God told Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” (Genesis 12:2-3) Abraham was blessed in order to be a blessing to the other nations. As it was with Abraham it is also with us. God has blessed us to be a blessing to the world. We not only have confidence that God will make all things new but we have confidence that he is using us to do it.

Our hope is manifested by listening to others tell the story of God's work in their lives



and by serving others. We do not have to experience a miracle in order to see God's renewing work in the world. We can see it in the work of God's people. Fred Rogers, creator of children's television programming and also ordained as a Presbyterian pastor, saw this in times of sadness. He used this notion to comfort children who were scared by events in the news. He often told a story about when he was a boy and would see scary things on the news: "My mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.'"<sup>8</sup> Rogers knew that God's people were doing their work in the world bringing hope and blessing others. By God's grace, those who don't know God can also be helpers. But make no mistake, they are doing God's work, whether they realize it or not.

Whether our work in building God's kingdom is part of our vocation, volunteer work, or a special project, we see God's hand at work in the world when we, and others, are his hands. Being part of one small change in the world helps us see that God will make all things new. Our actions show and reinforce the hope we have.

## I Am Called and Equipped.

Like many parents, we saved some of the artifacts of our children's lives. We have programs from concerts or plays that they were in, pictures of soccer teams and orchestras, pages that our children colored at various ages, stories that they have written and lots of art. All of these are stored in books and boxes. A particular favorite is a picture drawn by our oldest daughter when she was about six years old and her favorite Bible story was Esther. In this particular drawing Esther's arm is outstretched, pointing at Haman with the words "That vile Haman!" in a word bubble above her. Haman is so shocked at the accusation that he drops the apple he is holding and there is a "bonk" next to the apple as it hits the floor to make sure we got the point. Aside from the picture we, as a family, have referenced the story of Esther quite often,

using another line from this story. When Esther is deciding whether to help her people or not, Mordacai says, "perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14). It turns out that this is a handy line for parents to use in a variety of circumstances. If a child does not want to bring out the garbage or cut the grass or pick up toys you can say, "perhaps you have come to this royal position for such a time as this."

We have fun with that but that line is also a great reminder: God has a special call for each of us. God has placed us in a particular place at a particular time with particular gifts for a purpose. We have been called to that purpose. But more than that, we have also been equipped for that purpose. The Bible offers multiple examples. God called Moses. God talked to him through a burning bush and told him to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses had been equipped to meet the Pharaoh. He had been raised as a member of the royal family. He knew Egypt. He knew the Pharaoh. He knew how the Pharaoh lived and what was important to him. Moses was not only called to do this work, he was uniquely positioned to do it in a way that others could not.

Our call (or calls – we are seldom called to only one thing in our lives) may not be as dramatic as in the stories of Esther or Moses, but they are calls nonetheless. Because *we belong*, because *we know* who God is and who we are in relationship to him, and because *we have hope* that we are part of God's plan for renewing all things, we believe that we have a particular call. To go with this call, God has equipped us in particular ways. Esther pleased the king and developed a relationship with him so that, when she was called to speak to him with regard to the king's plan to kill the Jews, she was able to do so with some authority and was able to speak in a voice that the king was willing to hear.

Discerning exactly what our call is can sometimes be a long process but it is not necessarily a mysterious one. God does not hide our calls from us, at least not long term. Moses heard his call directly from God at the burning bush. Most of us don't hear our call

from God's mouth so directly. Esther's call became clear when Mordacai spoke with her. He nudged her to accept her call. Sometimes our call comes in the voice of others.

Bob first heard about a position at a local seminary when someone working there contacted him about it. He thought that he didn't have the time to do that work on top of his other work. A day later, though, another person from the seminary contacted him about the same position. At that point, Bob thought that he should consider the position more carefully. Perhaps God is using these people in his life to nudge him to treat this opportunity more seriously.

Sometimes the call comes from a combination of our heart's desire and our equipping. We have the opportunity to talk with a number of college students, some of whom seem to have a clear vision of where they are called. They have always, for example, loved math and they have loved teaching math to others. They feel that God is calling them to a career as a math teacher. No one told them to do that, although occasionally they have had adults tell them that they see that they have gifts in certain areas. This very clear sense of call came from listening to their heart and being open to God's guidance.

Sometimes our call comes to us through doors being closed to us. Hearing "no" about certain opportunities drives us to seek other avenues to serve or to earn a living. Bethany was a college junior who had lots of gifts and a couple of avenues that she was exploring for her career. One possible area was heading to seminary and to parish ministry. So she applied for a fellowship at her Christian college that was designed for people who were considering ministry. She got turned down for fellowship and, although she was disappointed, she used that opportunity to apply for a fellowship to work with a Communication professor doing research. She got that fellowship and now, ten years later, is herself a communication professor at a Christian college feeling very much that she has been called to that particular place and to those particular students, at this point in her

life. Being turned down for the ministry fellowship was a nudge that put her on a different path, one that she feels, on reflection, fits her gifts much better than parish ministry would have.

So, this final building block takes the global aspect of hope and makes it personal. God has a task for us as a community but also as individuals. My call is not your call. My gifts are not your gifts. My equipping is not your equipping. But we are all called, gifted and equipped and God has given us this unique combination to serve in his kingdom.

## Using Building Blocks to Assess and Develop Church Ministries

By using these four building blocks, congregations can support people in each of these four areas. The chart (at the end of the article) shows a row for each of the four building blocks and columns representing age groups of the people in a typical congregation. We have divided a congregation into five age groups: Children, Teens, Young Adults, Middle Adults and Senior Adults. "Children" refers to infancy through Grade 6, about 12 years old. Notice that the differences within this group can be almost as great as those between groups. A four-year-old and a twelve-year-old are quite different. The same is true in other groups. We could easily have made ten or fifteen age groups but that would quickly get unwieldy so, for the purpose of evaluation, we will only use five groups.

The second group is Teens, which, for our purposes, includes all students in middle and high school. We split the adults into three groups, Young, Middle and Senior. Much has been written about extended adolescence and the age group that many twenty-somethings find themselves in. This is our Young Adult group. This group represents those who are either in college, have joined the workforce but have not yet left home, married, had children, finished school, and found a career.<sup>9</sup>

Middle Adults are people thirty to sixty years old who find themselves in mid-career or in the middle of raising a family. Finally, we recognize the people in Senior Adulthood, people who are sixty years old or older. All five groups need to feel like they belong, they need to know and understand their faith, they need to have hope and they need to experience their sense of call and of being equipped.

Fill in the chart (at the end of the article) with your congregation's ministries. Reflect on questions such as:

- ◆ How does an adult experience belonging in church?
- ◆ What programs are there for helping older adults continue to learn about their faith?
- ◆ How do teens know that they have hope in Christ?
- ◆ How do children know that they are called?

After you have filled in the chart, look at the boxes that are filled. Some of the boxes may have many things in them. Rejoice and celebrate how the Lord has blessed this ministry. These are the ministries that you do well or are particularly important to your congregation. Think about why they are so important to you or why they are so well represented in this table.

Then look at the boxes that are less full or empty. These are areas that perhaps need some attention. Are there ways that you can build on your strengths to focus on these needs in your congregation?

When filling in the chart for our church we noticed a couple of things. First of all, we placed worship in the "hope" row for all the age groups. That caused us to ask if that was really true. Does our worship services really communicate hope? Does it communicate hope for all ages? If that is, indeed, an important part of what we do in worship, then we have a renewed need to make sure our worship is accessible to children as well as teens and adults. Second, a nearly empty cell in the "belong" row for young adults forced us

to ask hard questions about what we are doing to make sure that this age group is included in the life of the church.

This chart is particularly helpful for churches at two levels. First of all, it can be used to evaluate programs. When you are considering the different programs that your church offers it might be helpful to think about where that program fits in this table. Service projects, for example, not only help those outside of your congregation but they also bring hope to those who go on the project and serve members as they see that they are called and equipped to certain types of work. If you see a cell of the table that is blank you should be asking if that, indeed, represents a gap in your ministries or if there are people in your congregation who are being systematically excluded.

This table can also be used to consider ministry to individuals. In our congregation, the members are divided into six household groups and an elder is assigned to each household to care specifically for those people. Elders can write the names of people in their household on the horizontal axis instead of age groups. Then they could fill in the table and ask, "How are the people in my care served by our church programs?" If the only program in your church that helps a person feel like they belong, for example, is one that they are not connected to, ask why they aren't. Is there something in the way the program is structured that makes it difficult for them to participate? Does your congregation need additional ways to bring that sense of belonging to all members? Do you need to change the way your programs are run to serve more people?

As you look at your church, don't forget the informal programs that might serve many of these purposes. In our church, a small prayer group meets very early in the morning each week. This is an important program in our church but it, like most informal programs, can leave some people out. Because it is not a formal program of the church, the meetings are not announced to the congregation. Since it meets at the home of

one of the members, some people might be reluctant to attend. This may be an opportunity to build a similar group that would meet in such a way as to include those who might be disenfranchised with the way the other group is set up.

The building blocks can also be used by other leaders in the church. A Sunday school teacher can look at her students and evaluate if all four building block needs are being met for the students in her class. Does everyone feel welcome and like they belong? Does the time spent in class actually increase our knowledge of God and of the scriptures? How is hope made manifest in our classroom? Are my students hearing God's call? Do they feel equipped to answer that call?

Looking at our church ministries through the lens of faith building blocks enables us to consider the needs of all the members of our congregation and design opportunities to meet their needs so that faith flourishes. Building blocks also recognize that people of all ages have similar needs and that people in different places in their life journey have their needs met in different ways. Building faith is the foundation for all the ministries in our church and by examining what we need to grow faith we equip ourselves and all those in our church to better serve God, our local community, and the world.

## Works Cited

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> James K. A. Smith develops this idea in *Desiring the Kingdom*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009. He and David I. Smith also write about this in Smith, David I., and James K. A. Smith, eds. *Teaching and Christian Practice*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011.
- <sup>2</sup> We found *Real Kids, Real Faith* by Karen-Marie Yust and *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* by Kenda Creasy Dean, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010 to be especially helpful in our reading.
- <sup>3</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism can be found at <http://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/heidelberg-catechism>
- <sup>4</sup> Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs can be found in a number of resources, including *Educational Psychology* 12<sup>th</sup> edition by Anita Woolfolk, Boston: Pearson, 2013, 434-35.
- <sup>5</sup> Erikson's theory can also be found on page 88 in Woolfolk's *Educational Psychology*.
- <sup>6</sup> Commission for Children at Risk. *Hardwired to Connect: the New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*. New York: Institute for American Values, 2003.
- <sup>7</sup> This idea is expanded in Chapter 6 of *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith: How the Church Can Nurture the Spiritual Development of Kids* by Robert J. Keeley, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.
- <sup>8</sup> "Helping Children With Scary News." *PBS Parents*. PBS, 2005. Web. 6 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.pbs.org/parents/rogers/special/scarynews-thoughts.html>>
- <sup>9</sup> These five milestones are noted in *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* by Michael S. Kimmel, New York: Harper, 2008 as markers that indicate the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

# Building Blocks of Faith

	Children	Teens	Young Adults	Middle Adults	Elders Seniors
<b>I Belong</b>					
<b>I Know / Understand</b>					
<b>I Have Hope</b>					
<b>I Am Called and Equipped</b>					