

# WALKING EACH OTHER HOME

## A STRUCTURED PROCESS FOR COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW AND COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION PRACTICES

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# **APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: A STRUCTURED PROCESS FOR COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW AND COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION PRACTICES**

## **Introduction**

Within the context of Catholic school boards, the design and delivery of adult faith formation programming is often the shared responsibility of educators, whose primary expertise and formal training is in instructional practice, and chaplaincy leaders or faith animators whose core expertise and formal training is in ministry and pastoral care. Both distinct and complementary disciplines rely upon familiar practices that are rich in potential application and can contribute crucially to a re-imagining of adult faith formation practices through a structured process of appreciative inquiry.

Instructional leaders are routinely engaged in thorough and on-going examination of instructional programs as part of a collaborative process of critical review. Highly structured models for the review of school effectiveness encourage educators to engage in school improvement planning through collaborative inquiry, articulate challenges of practice, and question the status quo, all as part of a shared commitment to find common ground and chart a path forward to improve student outcomes. Such approaches, that are grounded in research, evidence-based, and results-oriented, are familiar and accepted as best practice.

Chaplaincy leaders and faith animators approach their work within a framework informed by a Catholic world-view that values the search for truth, the pursuit of wisdom, and communal practice committed to discernment. The current process of engagement and consultation initiated by Pope Francis as preparation for the Synod on Synodality, encouraging dialogue, listening, and discernment as the foundation for movement to concrete action is an expression of what is a long standing and exceptionally important part of the Catholic faith tradition. The practice of our faith calls upon Catholics to come together, listen to God's word, experience God's presence in this world, and make deliberate choices because we believe God's voice is heard through the experience of Christian community and living Catholic tradition.

Those responsible for today's work of adult faith formation must move towards a greater understanding of what it means to be led by God's spirit and a willingness to live with the feeling of vulnerability or uncertainty that sometimes results. At the same time, we must ensure that our efforts are sensitive to the lived experiences and responsive to the expressed needs of those whom we accompany, which requires approaches that are grounded in research, and committed to best practice. The process of appreciative inquiry proposes a pathway for a comprehensive and systematic examination of current adult faith formation programs that draws implicitly upon both the structured review found in effective instructional practice and the spirit-enabled experience of communal discernment moving to action that is found in our faith practice. It is essential that these elements be woven seamlessly together in order to create an effective approach to adult faith formation that is mission focused, spirit-inspired and data informed.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FAITH FORMATION

Ongoing work undertaken by the Catholic educational partnership in Hamilton diocese led to the identification of seven guiding principles that are predictive of effective and impactful programs for adult faith formation. These principles are consistent with the insights and understanding that have emerged in formal academic research, current thinking and the literature on contemporary adult faith formation (*Walking Each Other Home: Strengthening the Soul of Leadership in Catholic Education #4*). Effective faith formation for adults is:

1. **Invitational** – Good faith formation provides an inviting and safe space, characterized by trust and the creation of a culture of belonging for all participants.
2. **Responsive** – Good faith formation pays attention to the stories of people’s lives and is responsive to those experiences and needs through a process of accompaniment.
3. **Contemplative** – Good faith formation provides a variety of opportunities for personal reflection, a diversity of experiences of ritual and a wide range of contemplative practices that lead to deeper engagement in formation.
4. **Experiential** – Good faith formation promotes a call to service.
5. **Sacramental** – Good faith formation draws participants into deeper relationship with God and the faith community. It is an expression of the baptismal call to live a spiritual life in the present time.
6. **Incremental** – Good faith formation is incremental and requires a commitment of dedicated time, over a period of time.
7. **Transformational** – Good faith formation recognizes that personal growth and transformation are distinct from the transfer of information.

Catholic school systems must be prepared to assess initiatives and programs for adult faith formation against these principles that predict efficacy because clear understanding and honest appraisal of efforts is essential to support effective practice. In *Renewing the Promise* (2018), the Bishops of Ontario expressed their hopes for Catholic school boards to wholeheartedly embrace the work of adult faith formation to support mission. School boards need to articulate clear outcomes for formation experiences and initiatives. Programs must also be carefully considered and assessed for alignment.

Gaps in practice are best addressed through the development of thorough plans, and the implementation of

innovative practices should be supported appropriately with both committed time and resources. A systematic approach to program review and participant engagement ultimately supports decision making that is evidence based and grounded in practical field experience. Current educational practice attempts to quantify and use metrics as a routine part of inquiry. While a comprehensive approach to appreciative inquiry of faith formation programs has merit, it is important to always recognize that the goal is not to assess an individual’s faith but rather the effectiveness of the programs, as measured against the intended outcomes.

Those who serve in Catholic education must cultivate both the religious and academic mission of the Catholic school. To assist in providing structure for the comprehensive review and assessment of faith formation program efficacy, a suite of tools has been developed to support Catholic educators and leaders with this important work.

## OVERVIEW OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Catholic educators are called to accompany one another in the on-going and intentional process of adult faith formation, and through the shared commitment to one another, strengthen the soul of Catholic leadership. Experiences of collaboration and community are not always easy — both at times might seem inefficient or inherently messy, but ultimately presence, vulnerability and courage enable honest conversation and genuine insight. Collaboration is not merely a strategy to improve effectiveness but a demonstration of a commitment to community which is an integral expression of the Catholic faith.

One approach forward on the pathway for faith formation and leadership is to use appreciative inquiry to craft a new narrative that might move Catholic school boards towards a clearer sense of identity and heightened capacity for mission in a post-pandemic world. Dr. Jill Gowdie proposes such an approach as a means to navigate the wilderness, noting “... we have a fresh opportunity to examine our lives, assess our spiritual strengths and weaknesses, and develop a spiritual growth plan...”<sup>i</sup> Appreciative inquiry is one approach that is utilized in the context of organizational visioning and strategic planning, and a variety of models, setting out specific process steps, are frequently referenced in literature about process facilitation.

Appreciative inquiry is particularly well-suited to work within the context of faith-based communities. In the Christian faith tradition, stories are at the core of scripture, our identity and that of our faith community, as well as our religious practices. Appreciative inquiry is an

approach that encourages storytelling as a point of departure for imagining a preferred future and invites the Spirit into the appreciative process. It can lead the community into a quiet place of mission-centred prayerful listening that ensures the question "What is God and the community calling us to be and do?" remains at the core of the process.<sup>ii</sup>

The model presented within the Walking Each Other Home series presents a practical framework built around five key concepts: **Discover, Discern, Dream, Design, and Deliver**, and is adapted from a 5-D Appreciative Inquiry Cycle for Adult Faith Formation.<sup>iii</sup>

## APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: A MODEL FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION





## DISCOVER

The core task of the **discover phase** is to undertake a review of a system-wide approach and individual initiatives. Part of the inquiry focuses on 'what gives life' and reveals 'who we are when we are at our very best'. Just as importantly, a part of what is uncovered is the recognition that not all efforts achieve the intended outcomes. The opportunity to isolate and learn is encompassed in both successes and failures.

Appreciating the 'best of what is,' coupled with an awareness of 'where have we fallen short,' provides an honest, fulsome baseline for the community to deliberate upon aspects of their history that may require additional attention or letting go of, along with what they most value and want to enhance for the future. It is a process that entails seeing with new eyes and an opening of the heart that leads to greater insight and wisdom.



## DISCERN

Discernment literally means to determine, to decide or to distinguish between two things. Spiritual discernment is the capacity to distinguish or discriminate between that which is of God and draws us closer to God and that which is not of God and draws us away from God.

The commitment to discernment and doing the will of God through the help of the Holy Spirit distinguishes spiritual leadership from other kinds of leadership. Those responsible for faith formation must differentiate their leadership by manifesting their commitment to discern important matters together so they can affirm a shared sense of God's desire for the community, and move forward on that basis. This approach requires movement to a place of deep listening and response to the spirit of God within and among us as a basis for decision making.

In the **discern phase**, people challenge the status quo by prayerfully considering, 'what are we being called to be and do' to create a vital and preferred future? This phase is both practical, in that it is grounded in understanding the community's history, and generative, in that it seeks to expand potential.

Participants seek to understand the unique conditions that made the high points possible and consider areas for growth against the backdrop of the local context, research, data, and the guiding principles for adult faith formation.



## DREAM

Appreciative inquiry is different from other planning methods because the images for the future emerge from grounded examples of both the positive past as well as areas for growth.

This approach to envisioning the future with hope and a desire for change is reflected well in the words of Pope John XXIII: "Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do."<sup>iv</sup>

A necessary step for creating positive change is unleashing imagination and the capacity to free the dreams within people. Imagination and dreams are often constrained by a preoccupation with fear, negativity, criticism and limited ways of thinking and believing in the status quo. Inspired by the insights from the Discover and Discern phases, people are empowered to use their imagination and share their dreams and possibilities for the future.

In the **dream phase** participants envision a portrait of potential. They think aspirational thoughts, generate possibilities for their community and turn those thoughts into provocative propositions for themselves.

The dream captures possibilities, but the possibilities are intricately connected to a specific goal or outcomes; in other words, knowing your why. The overarching guiding question is, 'What does our preferred future for adult faith formation look like in our board?'



## DESIGN

In the design phase a strategy is created to achieve the dreams for adult faith formation, one that might include redefined approaches and participation. Concrete strategies to achieve the goals are articulated and the guiding principles are incorporated to enhance the plan.

Once the shared dream or strategic focus is expressed, teams work collaboratively to co-construct elements of the ideal or aspirational vision for adult faith formation. Inspiring practices of the past and research-based practices, namely, the Guiding Principles, become the foundation for designing creative proposals for what is possible. These proposals connect the best of 'what is' with the collective aspiration of 'what might be' while ambitiously reaching towards 'what is the ideal?' As work proceeds in the **design phase**, innovative propositions are gradually given structure to become concrete plans to bring the vision to reality. Moving too quickly to practical planning and concrete thinking can limit creativity and impose limits on possibility, but practical planning is necessary, and must be grounded in a sense of what is realistic and manageable. The design phase breathes life into the shared mission, growing both impact and influence. It is anchored in 'knowing your why' and compels the action necessary to take on the challenges with a contagious energy.



## DELIVER

The final phase involves the delivery of new formation programs and initiatives for the future and is sustained by nurturing a collective sense of destiny, that is **walking each other home**.

The plans developed in the design phase become the framework for new levels of organizational engagement, programs and initiatives. An emphasis is given to sustaining an appreciative organizational culture that fosters ongoing innovation. Facilitators of adult faith formation programs are intentional about how to empower, co-create, innovate and engage participants in initiatives.

Appreciative inquiry is a continual cycle. It is a time of continuous learning, adjustment, and improvisation in the service of the ideal, rooted in core values and the **why** we do what we do. The **deliver phase** leads naturally to new discoveries of strengths and opportunities for continued growth, before beginning the process anew.

Assessing impact and effectiveness of programs and experiences offered against intended outcomes must be sustained over time. On-going evidence-based decision making and discernment of why we are doing what we are doing is guided by multiple data sources. Boards can access board researchers, or other community partners to support the collection and analysis of data to inform the school board efforts with respect to adult faith formation



Appreciative Inquiry (AI) doesn't, however, mean wearing rose tinted glasses. While identifying strengths, and 'what works,' AI is a rigorous approach that doesn't gloss over problems, but uses them as learning opportunities. AI is not about positive thinking — although positivity is important. It accepts that there are problems, but looks at them from a different viewpoint. – Appreciating People, Experts in Positive Organizational Development"

## I. DISCOVER – EXAMINATION OF PRACTICE



### Know Your Why

Asserting the importance of adult faith formation begins with the fundamental, core question, 'Why is adult faith formation integral to our mission? and as a result, What are the outcomes to be accomplished?' Catholic school boards routinely offer varied faith-related opportunities for learning and growth to their community members for a variety of purposes. Such opportunities include, but are not limited to, personal faith formation. The experiences have value and an appropriate place within the context of Ontario's publicly funded Catholic school system to the extent that they build the core capacity of community members, individually and collectively. Ultimately, personal movement and growth towards transformation is essential to support the distinctive character of Catholic schools as envisioned in *Renewing the Promise*.

I(a).

### ✝ DISCOVER – Know Your WHY

• Why is adult faith formation integral to our mission?

• What are the outcomes to be accomplished?

**The Why guides everything that we do. Only once there is a clear and shared understanding of the Why does it make sense to look at Who, How and What.**

### **Understanding Who**

The commitment to offer appropriate opportunities for learning, growth and personal formation necessarily returns to the questions, 'Who are we walking with?' and 'What do they need?' Support for the varied needs and aspirations of a Catholic educational community requires awareness and sensitivity to the full breadth and diversity of individuals who comprise the community, including:

- Understanding the lived experiences and varied needs of multiple generations, and diverse cultures and faith traditions
- Recognizing the unique experience and life story of individuals and committing to accompanying them wherever they find themselves in their personal spiritual journey
- Responding to the needs of individuals serving in a variety of roles and responsibilities and at various points along a vocational continuum from induction to leadership

Spiritual growth happens in a way that is unique to each individual.

### **Understanding How**

Effective faith formation is intentional, ongoing, personalized, and occurs within community. In both direct experience and in academic literature, programs which reflect the seven guiding principles of practice predictably lead to transformational outcomes for participants including:

- Enhanced ability to express faith
- Opportunity and process to grow in clarity about personal thought and belief
- A context for seeing the connection between faith and life

Learning is a continual process of discovery, understanding, meaning making and integration.

### **Understanding What**

Faith formation of Catholic school community members is Christ-centred and focuses on the growth of individuals and communities. Grounded in the lived experiences of the individual, formation includes elements of:

- Spiritual awareness
- Theological understanding
- Vocational appreciation and motivation
- Capacity for mission and service in the Church and in the world

Individual faith is strengthened in learning about the faith of others.



**If we want to feel an undying passion for our work, if we want to feel we are contributing to something bigger than ourselves, we all need to know our why."**

**– Simon Sinek**

# DISCOVER

## Mapping a System-Wide Approach: The BIG Picture

The purpose of a comprehensive review of a system-wide adult faith formation program is not primarily to find fault or expose weakness. The process of appreciative inquiry is an opportunity to understand what gives life to the mission, affirm, and celebrate the best of what is, and also serves to identify what can be done better. The centrality and importance of this work compels school boards to reflect on the efficacy of current efforts critically and honestly and to move beyond complacency, discomfort, or defensiveness to embrace these conversations in the spirit of a collaborative commitment to continuous improvement.

In mapping a system-wide approach, the big picture is made evident. The most important dimension of the gap analysis is the core experience for participants. The focus becomes more evaluative through a process of completing a comprehensive, clear-eyed, authentic, honest assessment, based on information and data gathered and what we know from research.

**I(b). DISCOVER – Mapping a System-Wide Approach: The BIG Picture**

Initiative	Year Established	Intended Audience	Purpose/ Outcomes	Cost/Budget Source	Schedule	Facilitators	Partner(s)

Initiative	Year Established	Intended Audience	Purpose/ Outcomes	Cost/Budget Source	Schedule	Facilitators	Partner(s)



The WHY can help set a vision to inspire people. The WHY can guide us to act with purpose, on purpose.” – Simon Sinek

## DISCOVER – REVIEWING INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVES: THE DETAILED PICTURE OF WHO? HOW? AND WHAT?

I(c).

### DISCOVER – Reviewing Individual Initiatives: The Detailed Picture of Who? How? and What?

Program offering: \_\_\_\_\_

Year established: \_\_\_\_\_

Intended audience/profile of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description of initiative, purpose and intended outcome(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Number of sessions: \_\_\_\_\_

Duration: \_\_\_\_\_

Schedule: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitator(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Partner(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Approximate cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Budget source: \_\_\_\_\_



What we see depends mainly on what we look for.”  
– John Lubbock

1. Identify elements and practices that reflect that this program/initiative is **invitational**. How is a safe space established and a community of trust cultivated?
  
2. Identify elements and practices that reflect that this program/initiative is **responsive**. Who is being formed? How are the stories of people's lives and diversity of participants honoured?
  
3. Identify elements and practices that reflect that this program/initiative is **contemplative**. What practices or tools are used to develop a deeper self awareness? How is an interior life nurtured in participants?
  
4. Identify elements and practices that reflect that this program/initiative is **experiential**. How are participants encouraged or provided opportunities to be the heart and hands of Christ in the world?
  
5. Identify elements and practices that reflect that this program/initiative is **sacramental**. How are participants supported to reflect on the meaning of their baptismal call and the link to social justice?
  
6. Identify elements and practices that reflect that this program/initiative is **incremental**. What is the schedule of the initiative? Are there follow-up or scaffolded program offerings associated with the initiative?
  
7. Identify elements and practices that reflect that this program/initiative is **transformational**. How are individuals inspired and supported to make a commitment to their on-going journey of faith formation?
  
8. **Other Considerations**. How is the effectiveness of the initiative reviewed, assessed and communicated?

I(d).

## DISCOVER – Guiding Principles, Indicators, Evidence

“In the context of professional learning communities, educators are accustomed to the goal of continuous improvement. Catholic schools, and Catholic educators routinely engage in professional conversation searching out answers to questions like ‘how do we improve our schools?’ and ‘how do we improve student learning?’ We ask ourselves hard questions, confront difficult truths, appropriately challenge assumptions, and engage in conversations that are sometimes uncomfortable because we believe that the work of instructional improvement is so important that we owe it our very best efforts. Do we approach the work of adult faith formation with an equal degree of rigour and discipline?”<sup>v</sup>

Modelled after the School Effectiveness Framework, and in consideration of completion of the templates I(b) and I(c), assess the degree to which the Guiding Principles and the corresponding indicators are in evidence, using the following metric.

The indicators and evidence help to inform the development of intentional, strategic plans for adult faith formation, determine the allocation of resources and identify areas of focus for the faith community.

### Guiding Principles are...

- 1 always in evidence.
- 2 often in evidence.
- 3 occasionally in evidence.
- 4 isolated evidence, or infrequent.
- 5 no evidence/an area that may require attention and action.

## 1. INVITATIONAL

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
1.1 Our Board understands that adult faith formation is both a personal responsibility of those who choose to pursue the vocation of Catholic educator and the Catholic schools and school systems that employ them.					
1.2 Our Board communicates high expectations for staff to be engaged with their personal faith journey and is committed to support and accompaniment.					
1.3 All community members are invited and encouraged to explore faith formation opportunities throughout their years of association with the organization.					
1.4 Candidates choose to participate in programs of their choice.					
1.5 Facilitators are provided appropriate training and support to establish safe spaces for participants.					
1.6 Group norms are explicitly established to create an environment of trust in which sharing is encouraged and personal experiences and perceptions are listened to.					
1.7 Participants feel free from judgement and able to name their struggles and pose their questions.					



**In order to see, you have to stop being in the middle of the picture.”**  
– Sri Aurobindo

## 2. RESPONSIVE

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
2.1 Adult faith formation experiences are tailored to the generational and cultural diversity of our current employee group and community.					
2.2 Differentiated formation experiences and learning opportunities are offered to all staff appropriate to their roles.					
2.3 Differentiated formation experiences and learning opportunities are offered to all staff appropriate to their professional path and vocational journey, from induction to leadership.					
2.4 Our Board has a comprehensive pastoral plan that clearly articulates the expectation, purpose, and goals of life-long faith formation.					
2.5 Our pastoral plan is aligned with, and included as part of the Board's multi-year strategic plan.					
2.6 Formation experiences and learning opportunities are designed to support not only professional and pedagogical purpose but to provide a pathway for personal faith exploration and growth towards a deeper relationship with Jesus.					
2.7 Programs and experiences are available to invite and support participants at every stage of their personal faith journey.					
2.8 Structured opportunities are in place to provide accompaniment and spiritual companionship to all interested staff.					
2.9 Our Board encourages our leaders to embrace the role of spiritual companion.					
2.10 Our Board trains and supports our leaders to be spiritual companions.					

## 3. CONTEMPLATIVE

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
3.1 Meetings, learning opportunities and faith formation experiences intentionally teach, model and utilize a variety of traditional and non-traditional prayer.					
3.2 Meetings, learning opportunities and faith formation experiences intentionally teach, model and utilize a variety of contemplative practices.					
3.3 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences intentionally draw upon and introduce a variety of traditional Catholic approaches to spirituality (e.g., Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, Ignatian) and encourage participants to explore the path that fits best with their individual personality, temperament, and overall outlook in life.					
3.4 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences intentionally include structured times for quiet reflection.					
3.5 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences intentionally include structured times for dialogue and discussion.					
3.6 All community members are offered opportunities to participate in a variety of retreat experiences appropriate to their interests, personal readiness and available time commitments.					

#### 4. EXPERIENTIAL

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
4.1 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences intentionally explore the connection between belief and action and encourage a call to service.					
4.2 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences focus on social justice, the common good and community as a means of integrating prayer and action.					
4.3 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences and programs intentionally incorporate specific faithful acts of service and witness as a community.					
4.4. Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences intentionally encourage ongoing faithful acts of service and witness as individuals within and beyond the community of the school.					
4.5 Service experiences are used to be a point of entry to engage with teachings of the church, inviting participants to deeper understanding of accompaniment and the covenantal relationship with God, the community and the world.					
4.6 Our Board actively recognizes, supports and celebrates individual acts of service.					

#### 5. SACRAMENTAL

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
5.1 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences recognize and emphasize the importance of encounter and accompaniment.					
5.2 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences are structured to encourage the development of supportive and engaged communities .					
5.3 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences recognize the presence of God in very ordinary settings, and intentionally provide opportunities for participants to build this understanding.					
5.4 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences emphasize and encourage a deeper personal relationship with God.					
5.5 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences introduce, reinforce or re-introduce participation in the practices and rituals of the faith community.					
5.6 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences create opportunities to worship and receive sacraments together.					
5.7 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences encourage connection or reconnection with local parish and church.					



May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed.”(Psalm 20:4)

## 6. INCREMENTAL

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
6.1 Our Board understands that living out the baptismal call is a life-long journey and is committed to encouraging and supporting all staff in their personal journeys.					
6.2 Our faith formation programs make the same assumptions about continuous growth and on-going support as the foundation for the design of all serious efforts of professional learning.					
6.3 Learning experiences and faith formation experiences are scaffolded and sustained over time, so they are not a 'one and done.'					
6.4 Our Board offers a continuum of programming and opportunities for adult faith formation to provide a pathway to facilitate life-long learning, movement towards mature discipleship and spiritual growth.					
6.5 Staff are encouraged to include faith formation experiences as part of their growth plan over time to match their personal formation needs and desires.					

## 7. TRANSFORMATIONAL

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
7.1 Learning opportunities and faith formation experiences recognize that growth and transformation are distinct from the transfer of information.					
7.2 Programs and offerings involve clear teaching about the nature of Christian life, including concrete practices that help to internalize truth in a way that changes our response to the world.					
7.3 Programs and offerings are shaped to develop full knowledge at a deep level that impacts an individual's inner orientations and how people live their learning.					
7.4 Programs and offerings inspire individuals to take responsibility for their formation and seek out new opportunities beyond those offered by the Board.					

## 8. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Indicators	1	2	3	4	5
8.1 Our Board's commitment to adult faith formation is reflected in budget decisions that provide adequate, consistent funding to support both system priorities and individual interest, aspirations and needs.					
8.2 An assessment component is embedded as part of all program offerings.					
8.3 Staff routinely assess and report on faith formation programs and experiences to the Board and to the community.					
8.4 Assessment and reporting include not only inputs (what we do, how much we spend, how many participate) but reports holistically on the impact of faith formation experiences.					
8.5 Do we actively build partnerships with others (i.e., Boards, Diocese, parishes, Catholic community and provincial organizations) to enhance faith formation and leadership opportunities?					
8.6 Are faith formation and leadership pathways clearly articulated and communicated to all stakeholders on an annual basis?					



## II. DISCERN

### Identifying Gaps and Recognizing Opportunities

What is the world/our context calling for? What are we being called to be and do?

Tensions are inherent in the process of identifying gaps and recognizing opportunities.

Tensions need to be held in balance so that with time and experience they can be harmonized. On this journey we need to deal with all types of tensions that can both hinder our progress or enrich it as we move forward. Listed below are some possible tensions:

- Balancing learning from the best practices of the education world while remaining authentic and genuine to our Catholic tradition and to Christian values.
- Balancing theoretical inputs and instructional learning (seeking to learn by increasing our knowledge) with practical implementation and experiential dynamics (learning by doing and practicing).
- Balancing times for contemplation and reflection with the pressures of getting things done and moving forward through action.
- Balancing simplicity and striving for the Magis.
- Balancing our need to structure and plan our learning journey while remaining fluid, adaptive to what is arising and leaving spaces for God to work.
- Balancing the focus on individual needs and the growth and development of the person with the attention to group needs and collective progress.
- Balancing our focus on tasks versus our focus on people and relationships.
- Balancing keeping in mind the end goal while appreciating what surrounds us and the richness of each of the steps taken. For it is not walking many kilometres, but realising and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul.<sup>vi</sup>

II(a).

### DISCERN – Identifying Gaps and Recognizing Opportunities

The following guiding questions are intended for reflection and a tool to support the process of engaging in dialogue and discernment.

- How are we being called by God to a deeper freedom from whatever holds us back from being deployed in the service of our mission, love for the Church, and the world in which we are situated?

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- Where is the Holy Spirit leading us to inspiration, to see the places where we are called to act creatively rather than reactively?

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## Invitational

- Who are we inviting to adult faith formation experiences from induction through to leadership? Who are we missing?
- How do we create an environment of trust?

## Responsive

- Are our adult faith formation experiences tailored to the diversity of participants and our current context? How do we know?
- Do we have a well-articulated formation plan that helps everyone understand the expectation, purpose, and goals of lifelong faith formation and how are we implementing and supporting them? Do they appear in a Pastoral Plan, a Strategic Plan, or Board Plan?
- Do we clearly communicate faith formation pathways for our staff to chart a path for faith growth toward a deeper relationship with Jesus and the life and practices of the Christian community?
- What structures exist for spiritual companionship and accompaniment?
- What investment is made in the training of leaders to be spiritual companions?

## Contemplative

- Do we understand and intentionally teach, model, and provide a wide range of contemplative practices?
- What opportunities are there to interpret together the Scriptures and history of the church's experience, particularly in relation to their meaning, for our own lives, our community and world?

## Experiential

- What experiential opportunities do we engage in as a community to carry out specific faithful acts of service and witness together?

## Sacramental

- How do we cultivate supportive, engaged communities?
- What opportunities do we create for worshipping together and receiving the sacraments?

## Incremental

- How do we scaffold and sustain adult faith formation opportunities over time, so they are not a 'one and done' event?
- How might we guide people in creating a faith growth plan over time with the experiences, programs, activities and resources that best match their faith formation needs?

## Transformational

- How do we measure the impact of our faith formation experiences?
- What opportunities exist to enhance current offerings or to innovate and create new initiatives that lead to growth and transformation?



Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." (Romans 12:2)





### III. DREAM

#### What Might Be? The Vision for the Future?

Dreaming together, captures a shared image for a preferred future. The dreaming phase will generate an outcome that is specific and unique to each board's context and the group to be accompanied.

What does the preferred future for adult faith formation look like, sound like, and feel like?

What is your dream, vision, and deep desire for adult faith formation in your context? How aligned is this desire with your strategy and daily activities?

You are invited to dream your own journey, based on knowing your why and what you have discovered and discerned, rather than simply duplicating other's experiences. Comparison is seldom beneficial. What we desire and dream can however be inspired by others' example and their learning.

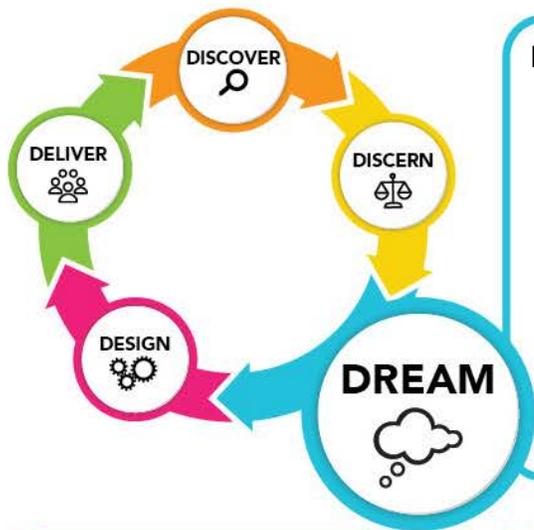
How can we build on our history and successes to address any areas where we see opportunities for greater focus or attention?

How do we disrupt the status quo — what needs to be different?

How does our dream connect with faith, missional identity, and knowing our WHY?



**Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change.” – Brené Brown**



Initiative/Innovation: We will...

**Why** are we doing it?

**How** does it build on the best of our history/tradition?

**How** does it challenge/disrupt/expand our prior and current practice?

**Who** specifically will be served?

**What** data tells us this is required/desired?



## IV. DESIGN

### Aligning Structures and Mission with the ideal and Why?

The design and structure of programs/initiatives is in service of our higher purpose and knowing our **Why** in order to fulfill the mission entrusted to those who serve in Catholic education. Innovating what will be requires revisiting **Who? What? How?** and subsequently adding **Where?** and **When?** In consideration of adult faith formation, to whom and what will we devote our time, energy and resources?

Outcomes of the program/initiative, shape the content and all of the learning activities. They respond to such questions as, 'Who are our learners/participants?' 'What do we want them to know, understand, be, and to do?' and 'How do we design our program initiatives to ensure that participants achieve the outcomes we have established?' Outcomes may be identified as specific attributes, traits or key indicators. Program outcomes should be connected to knowing your Why, purpose and the mission.

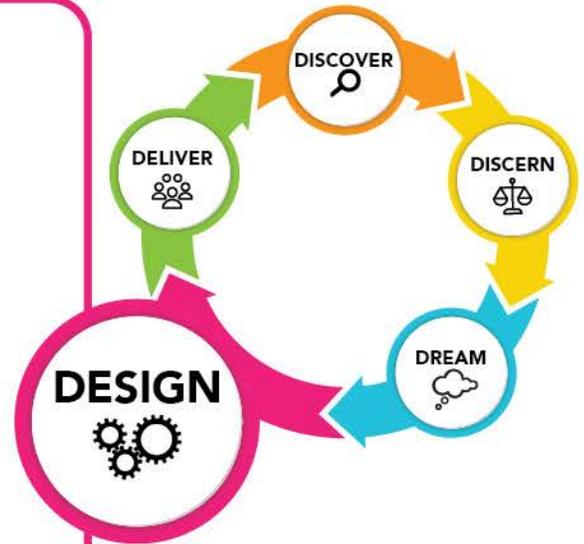
Each formation program initiative or aspect thereof, builds on the previous and has a context of desired outcomes. In other words, initiatives and/or sessions are scaffolded one onto the next, over time. This reflective, developmental process enables participants to apply the experience to their everyday life, their vocation, and the mission of Catholic education.



Faith is a place of mystery, where we find the courage to believe in what we cannot see and the strength to let go of our fear of uncertainty." – Brené Brown

**Initiative/Program:**

**Outcomes:**



**Format:**

**Number of sessions:**

**Duration:**

**Schedule:**

**Facilitators:**

**Partners:**

**Budget:**

**Invitational:**

**Responsive:**

Contemplative:

Experiential:

Sacramental:

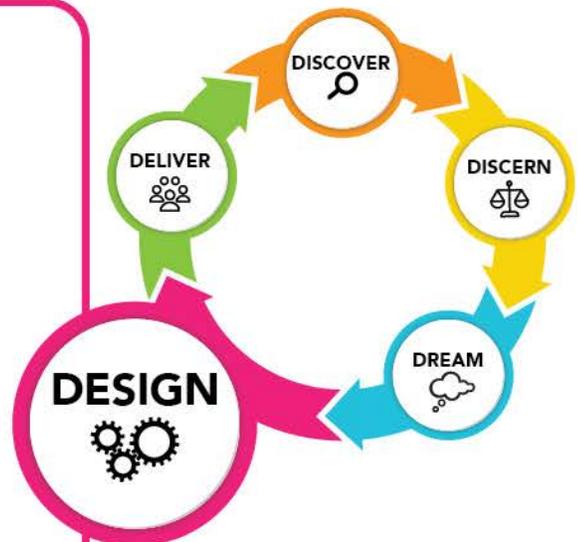
Incremental:

Transformational:

Communication:

Assessment:

Reporting:





## V. DELIVER

### Implementation, Communication, Assessment and Reflection

The last step in the cycle of Appreciative Inquiry for Adult Faith Formation involves the delivery of new formation programs and initiatives for the future. It involves distinct elements of implementation, communication, assessment, and reflection. In education, the cyclical model of plan, act, assess, reflect, repeat, guides school improvement efforts and is equally valid and helpful when delivering adult faith formation programs and initiatives. Through this process we discover ways to accompany staff most effectively on their journeys of becoming fully human persons and rejuvenating to mission. Communicating program plans well in advance encourages engagement and brings clarity to the vision.

The overarching value of good assessment and evaluation is the careful process of thinking critically about the program initiative as a whole. As such, the work of monitoring and assessment is central to effective and on-going faith formation. Comprehensive program assessment does not aim to assess an individual's faith but attempts to assess the effectiveness of the experiences offered and programs delivered against the intended and stated outcomes. Faith formation program evaluations should involve a variety of ways to gather information including observations and conversations with participants and facilitators. It is important to invite staff to share honestly their expectations and experience.

Program assessment includes the effective collection, analysis, and use of a variety of data to determine and evaluate outcomes. Data sources may include such things as: the type and number of programs offerings; system-wide events and opportunities for spiritual and theological formation; participant metrics including targeted audiences and number of participants; resources and personnel to enrich and animate staff formation; self-evaluation; interviews; and Board and School Improvement Plan or Pastoral Plan faith formation goals.

Artifacts are another means to gather data that can be used to demonstrate that individuals have met the learning outcomes. Good assessment results from having more than one source of information and from engaging multiple perspectives. The basic idea is to demonstrate effectiveness through measurable outcomes. As life-long learners, it is important to learn to pay attention to the data, interpret the findings and develop reflective understanding beyond self-interest, in order to determine the necessary steps for effective formation.

Finally, analyze and annotate the findings. What does the information tell you about the impact of the programs and initiatives? Where does the information suggest areas that need improvement? Where does the information demonstrate that programs/initiatives are making a difference and impacting change/formation?

### DELIVER – Process and Outcome Evaluation

Program assessment aimed at collecting feedback about the implementation of the initiative, as well as determining how well the program achieved to intended outcomes is best facilitated through incorporating process and outcome evaluation approaches. What follows are guiding questions to assist boards in developing their assessment and evaluation of program initiatives which has the added benefit of documenting your discoveries and forming the basis of a summary report.

#### Process Evaluation: Program Participation and Implementations

- Was the program relevant and implemented as intended?
- Who were the program participants and how many attended each session?
- Were participants satisfied with the sessions? What aspects of the sessions/program are working well or could be changed?
- Were participants satisfied with program experience overall?

#### Outcome Evaluation: Meeting Program Objectives and Impact

- Do participants feel that the Guiding Principles were achieved?
- Did the program have a positive impact on the participants (i.e., improvements in knowledge and skills)?
- Do participants have a deepened awareness and integration of faith in all that they do?
- Will the program have a positive impact on the board, in terms of anticipated changes to participants' professional/ leadership practice/behaviours?
- Did participants find the program valuable/beneficial for them overall?

Move forward intentionally, knowing your why, acknowledge your purpose and be attuned to the whispers of the Spirit, to design a better future together with God.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Gowdie, *Stirring the Soul*, 2017
- <sup>ii</sup> Crusoe, *Appreciative Inquiry Process for Faith-Based Organizations*, 2014
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>iv</sup> Quote attributed to Pope John Paul XXIII
- <sup>v</sup> Nugent and Pautler, *Walking Each Other Home #4*, 2022
- <sup>vi</sup> *Introduction to Ignatian Leadership Resources*, 2022



We're all just walking each other home." – Ram Dass

Visit [catholicpartners.ca](https://catholicpartners.ca) for more information about Adult Faith Formation and Leadership Development programs, resources, and to inquire about facilitators.