

Material offered at Intentional Faith Development Break Out Group.

Intentional Faith Development Assessment

In *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* Robert Schnase says that: “Churches that practice intentional faith development offer high quality learning experiences that help people understand Scripture, faith and life in the supportive nurture of caring relationships.”

How do we define high quality learning experiences? The Scriptures offer some examples – the Burning Bush in Exodus 3, parables like the sower in Luke 8, the Sermon on the Mount, and Luke 11:9 “ask and it will be given unto you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened.”

Faith development is based on seeking and asking so that we can be transformed to be as like Christ as we can be – it’s not a Road to Damascus kind of thing- it can take a lifetime. If we can’t talk about faith in the church where can we talk about it? If we can’t live our faith in the church how can we live it anywhere else?

The importance of community. Schnase says it is essential that we learn in community, to develop relationships, so we challenge and strengthen one another. But often these communities are only a few people, and usually the same people. Does that matter? Do we continue with a book study or prayer group if we have two or three people? When do we let go? Schnase says keep trying because relationships are key to developing faith “others help us interpret God’s Word for our lives.”

How do we know if it’s working? Schnase says churches that practice intentional faith development strive to have the number of people in small group ministries, classes, choir, teams, exceed half the number of people who attend worship. How does your church measure up to that? Should we try to measure up to that standard?

Beyond ourselves. Seeking out new members, visitors, people who don’t normally darken the door – special topics and interests – child care, financial planning, Neighborhood Watch, gardening, sports, film, books, dance, drama, music, cooking – all have spiritual elements and give the church a reputation as a spiritual community centre, where things happen, where people are changed. How can we promote these things – church leaders are the role models – if we are engaged others will be as well.

Process of visioning- go from simple safe ideas – an existing study plan such as Alpha or Disciple to more challenging ideas – a book study on Dawkins *The God Delusion* or provide small group chaplaincy at a summer camp to the big, scary ideas like congregational retreats, instilling a faith basis in every decision of the church, extending the faith story to issues in our own communities.

“Ideas change people and people change people; and God uses both together to work on our behalf and to shape our lives in the image of Christ. Transformation comes through learning in community.” - Robert Schnase.

Brainstorming: What are the middle doors that are locked or blocked?

What locks and blocks?

- use of language
- sitting by one person who isn't helpful
- images that are presented eg., hierarchical
- worship rituals, don't know what the code is (narthexian language)
- don't mess with my role – ownership, eg., usher
- over zealous to involve newcomers
- don't need the help, indispensable
- power structures
- personal fear, fear to participate, to self-disclose
- heavily used piece of furniture.
- misplaced love can block the door
- so familiar with one another that they don't know they are inhospitable.
- new wine in old wine skins
- no followup when some asks or offers their gifts.
- no guide into life and work of church
- insincerity
- lack of money and human resources
- lack of vision
- irrelevancy to the persons life and needs
- lack of communication about who we are

What are some programs/ideas that have worked?

recommended Intentional Faith Development/Formation Activity

- Jesus 24/7
- exploring faith questions
- living the questions
- praying in the midst of life, Ron deBaine
- lectionary based study
- tim scorer work with Marcus Borg and others
- Exploring the Heart of Christianity
- Reading the Bible Again for the First Time
- etc..
- pops (parents of pre schoolers)
- Godly Play
- theology goes to the movies
- faith formation that are not about study, experiential
- find ways to do this for families who have no time.