

WHY does The Episcopal Church need The Charter on Lifelong Christian Formation?

Episcopal Christian Educators

(NAECED, January 2008)

- 30% desire more Christian formation resources be made available for the local church
- 50% desire their diocese to be a support to local Christian formation (not clergy formation) by providing a staff person and/or better communication and networking opportunities

Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations

(Search Institute, 1993)

- Effective Christian education involves people of mature faith nurturing others who are growing in faith. Christian education is more than learning Bible stories, doctrine, and all else that contributes to one's faith heritage.
- Values in educational strategies from the past must be reclaimed. Sharing a story, involving parents in the Christian nurture of their children; expressing ideas and feelings about one's faith; asking questions; participating in mission projects to serve others – these strategies are as valid today as they ever were.
- Christian education must be viewed holistically, not as a separate entity. Every aspect of a church's ministry contains educational implications. Basic principals of teaching and learning include: involving everyone in the process, being sensitive to needs of the participants, having a clear focus on what is to be communicated and accomplished, enabling participants to make connections between the subject matter and their own lives, providing opportunities to give expression to what they think and believe, and motivating them to put into practice what they believe.
- 32% of adults have a mature faith; 64% of youth have an undeveloped faith.
- Christian education is the most important vehicle within congregational life for helping people grow in faith.
- The average congregation has in place only 46% of the factors that make its educational ministries effective.
- Our current models of Christian education were essentially developed in the 1700s and 1800s, a time when the entire nation was essentially Protestant.
- 60% of children participate in Christian education; 52% Middle School; 35% High School; 28% adults. By leaving Christian education programs during adolescence, we risk not growing beyond a thirteen-year-old's understanding of God, the world and faith – hardly an adequate basis for a life-shaping adult faith.
- 34% of teachers for youth and 44% of teachers for adults know educational theory and practice for their age group. Only 53% of churches provide instruction in effective teaching methods at least once a year.
- No longer can we assume that people – even adults who grew up in the church – are biblically or theologically literate.

With Their Own Voices

(Search Institute, 2008)

- Young people in middle school who describe spirituality as important, and who participate in religious community, are better off on a variety of risk and thriving indicators several years later in high school. Unfortunately, the same longitudinal data also show that young people get less and less religiously active and spiritual from middle school to high school. For example, 75% of 7th graders are religiously active, but only 60% of the same youth are still participating an hour a week or more three years later when they are in the 10th grade (an even bigger drop is seen as 8th graders grow into 11th graders). Similarly, 54% of those 7th graders say being spiritual is very important to them, but only 45% attach that importance to being spiritual three years later when they are in the 10th grade. These trend data show that the level of importance placed on being spiritual is less at every grade level, and in each year, than the level of religious activity reported. However, the decline in considering spirituality to be important is also less than the decline seen in religious participation. For example, 71% of 8th graders were religiously active in 1998, but only 53% of those same youth were, by 11th grade. But 56% of 8th graders in 1998 considered being spiritual to be important, a percentage that dropped, but only to 49%, by the time they were in 11th grade. (2007)
- Young people say family and friends help them spiritually, but one in five youth (18%) say that no one helps them. Young people say that everyday experiences—being in nature, listening to or performing music,

being alone—and relationships with friends and family as helping them the most in growing spiritually.

FACTs – Faith Communities Today

(Hartford Institute for Religion Research)

- Congregations can grow if they are characterized by high intentionality, regular use of contemporary worship, and a strong emphasis on personal and family spiritual practices. (2000)
- Essential to the mission of any religious congregation is to create a community where people encounter God. There is a strong relationship between growth and the sense that the congregation is “spiritually vital and alive.” (2005)
- Congregations that involved children in worship were more likely to experience significant growth, and congregations that did not were much more likely to experience decline. Among congregations that never or seldom involve children in worship, 32% declined in worship attendance, as compared to only 5% of congregations that always included children. (FACTs on Growth, 2005)

Other Studies on Congregational Growth in relation to Christian Formation:

- Adult education can help to reduce racism, increase civic participation and voting, and improve healthy living. (*Adult Education and Attitude Change*, J. Preston and L. Feinstein, 2004).
- Classes specifically aimed at parents and children may have positive effects on family communication and functioning. (*Parental Perspectives on Family Learning*, A. Brassett-Grundy, 2002)
- According to Stephen Prothero, author of *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn't*, the United States is one of the most religious countries on earth, but Americans know nothing about religion – their own or the religions of others.
- Men are significantly more likely than women to claim no religious affiliation. Nearly one-in-five men say they have no formal religious affiliation, compared with roughly 13% of women. (*Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, 2007)
- Sociologists of religion have found a correlation between church growth and youth involvement that is consistent across different types of churches, liberal moderate and conservative. In all these churches, the greater the youth involvement, the greater the church's growth. Specifically, 58 percent of growing churches said the level of youth involvement was high. Researchers weren't sure what came first, youth involvement or church growth. (*Youth Involvement and Growth*, David Rosen, FACT2000)
- Congregations remain, for many, a vital resource for helping to manage work and family, for teaching children about faith and morality, and for strengthening family relationships despite a great deal of social change. We found that successful family ministries are those that are authentic to their congregation's religious tradition and beliefs. At the same time they must operate out of accurate understanding of how rapidly changing work and family contexts affect individuals' commitment to the congregation. (*The Religion and Family Project*, Penny Edgell Becker, 2000)

The Need before us¹:

- To engage all generations in more active participation in church life.
- To equip and support families, especially parents, to practice the Christian way of life at home and in their daily lives.
- To transform the church community into a community of lifelong learners.
- To utilize the whole life of the church as the faith formation curriculum through church year feasts and seasons, sacraments and liturgy, justice and service, prayer and spirituality, and community life.
- There has been a cultural shift in faith formation over the last few decades. Faith formation has become the “job” of the church instead of the family. Today's parents feel ill equipped to teach their children about religion, faith and spirituality. Due to this, as well as a time-pressured society and fewer “stay at home moms/dads” fewer parents and other adults are willing to volunteer their time for teaching in the church. The job of the Christian educator has also become parent education as well as helping to “form” children and youth
- Worship and religious education are the core activities of religious congregations.

¹ Roehlkepartain, Eugene C. *The Teaching Church: Moving Christian Education to Center Stage* (Search Institute, 1993). Based on the groundbreaking research uncovered in *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*.