

# The Centre for Religious Education and Catechesis

## **FIVE PROMISING PRACTICES** *and Other Practical Wisdom*

*A Resource for All Who Accompany Adult Faith*

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## AN INVITATION TO JOIN US ON THIS JOURNEY

### The invitation

Our project towards bridging the gap between faith and life in adult faith education<sup>1</sup> in Canada is underway and we invite you to join us. Adding to recent initiatives in Canada to support adult faith education,<sup>2</sup> we hope you will gather your leaders, teams and committees –those who accompany adult faith where you are – to engage with this resource and continue this journey with us. Welcome!

### The reason for our project

The essential insight captured at the time of the Second Vatican Council - that the gap between faith and life is one of the most serious problems of our time<sup>3</sup>- has only increased in both urgency and complexity moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some say it has probably never been more difficult to educate in faith and life than in our time.<sup>4</sup> Still, we who accompany adult faith across our country know that the extraordinary depth, generosity, and inclusivity of God’s hope-filled, life-giving words, “Everyone who thirsts, come to the water” (Is. 55:1), remain as real and meaningful an invitation now as it was when this ancient love was first captured in words. We know that we share a deep concern to find innovative, generative practice in adult faith education that bridges the gap and opens the way for Jesus’ deep desire for every person to be fulfilled: “I came that they might have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Certainly, we can say that this is the reason we educate in faith: to open the way for each person to experience that they are deeply beloved of God, and to learn and to grow in intimacy with Christ and in communion with all it means to be a mature, adult person of faith. This journey is part of the wonder and challenge of the complex gift of life in this ever-expanding universe of God’s creation.

### Action Research: Innovation to help us move forward

We who accompany adult faith realize that the context in which we do our work is complex and challenging. Empirical research that draws on our observations and experience is greatly needed to help us better understand the faith-life gap in our current context and to discover innovative ways to bridge it. This is the reason we launched an Action Research Project in adult faith education in Canada one year ago. We are very eager to share some of our key findings with you in the form of this resource. It is a direct response to two clear messages from practitioners across the country: first, that we who accompany adult faith recognize the need to move from *program* to *process* as the key

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<sup>1</sup> *Faith Education* has a broad meaning in this resource that includes *catechesis, formation, development and accompaniment*. Note that, in the Canadian context, these terms are frequently used interchangeably in relation to adult faith.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, The Office of Evangelization and Catechesis (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops), *Best Practices and Resources for Evangelization and Catechesis with Adults*, 2018. Accessed July 2019 at [www.cccb.ca](http://www.cccb.ca). This document draws on a survey conducted in 2018 and key content from Anne Walsh and Joanne Chafe in *On Good Soil: Pastoral Planning for Evangelization and Catechesis with Adults* (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011) to present eight best practices.

<sup>3</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, #43.

<sup>4</sup> M. Myrtle Power, “Religious Education and Vatican II,” *Theoform*, 41, 2010.

approach to adult faith education, but we are struggling to achieve this;<sup>5</sup> second, that we who accompany adult faith need resources to support this work.

Action Research is the methodology we chose for our project, because it is designed to unleash rich, practical wisdom to help address real, concrete challenges, and this is what we need. A study of this kind doesn't propose to make final statements or draw definitive conclusions. Rather, it generates fresh insights and captures *promising practices* that can enrich and strengthen our work.<sup>5</sup>

### **Phase I: Our focus group and hopeful findings**

Six passionate, experienced adult faith educators from across Canada came together as a focus group for Phase I of this Action Research Project. This resource is the fruit of their work and all with whom they consulted, discussed, engaged, learned and observed over a ten-month period. Our findings point to some hopeful, practical wisdom for transforming practice in adult faith education that – we believe – can enrich and support our work and open the way for further helpful, innovative research and resources. These findings will be further nourished by your thoughts and experiences. It is our hope that you will partner with us for conversation and continued study in the days ahead.

As we conclude Phase I by sharing this resource with you, we feel encouraged and hopeful that, together, we who accompany adult faith in Canada can deepen our wisdom and widen our understanding of process-based, transforming practice that closes the faith-life gap and supports adults in the journey towards the fullness of life to which Jesus invites each and all. Welcome to this journey with us!

#### **Here's what you will find in this resource:**

- *New insight into the faith-life gap;*
  - *When the Gap Closes: A description of how we came to our findings;*
  - *Five Promising Practices for a process-based approach to adult faith education;*
  - *A template for a process-approach to adult faith education that can be adapted to various learning contexts.*
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#### **NEW INSIGHT INTO THE FAITH-LIFE GAP**

As mentioned, the gap between faith and life identified during the Second Vatican Council has only increased during the last six decades. Some would suggest the faith-life gap has grown exponentially even while work goes on in many ways to address it. To speak to that gap more effectively, it is helpful to explore some of the ways in which adults currently experience it in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, moving from a program-based to a process-based approach was the topic of the May 2018 conference of the Association of Canadian Catholic Adult Formation

<sup>6</sup> The term, "Promising Practices," can be found at this link: <https://www.cpha.ca/promising-practices-canada>. We think it is an excellent descriptor for our findings.

What has emerged from our study are some explicit ways in which participants spoke about the distance between their life of faith experienced in the Church and their ongoing experiences in the joys and challenges of their everyday lives. We have identified four significant expressions describing life in the gap: *compartmentalization*, *lack of meaning and relevance*, *loss of trust*, and *marginalization*. We consider them briefly as we reflect more generally on what we heard regarding the faith-life gap today.

### **Compartmentalization**

Participants described their experience of their church lives as separate from the rest of their living. Their church life seems either to be quite disconnected from everyday life, or, in other cases, aspects of their life collide with aspects of their faith. We noted a disconnection or an incongruence that occurs when a person who actively participates in Sunday worship lives the rest of her/his life as if there is no connection to their decisions and actions during other times of the week. Compartmentalization that occurs when faith and life collide is clearly recognizable when participants identify Church solely with the institutional Church, and they experience themselves as being outside of it, even voiceless. These experiences contribute to difficulties as persons try to make faith sense of their lives.

### **Lack of meaning and relevance**

Seeking meaning in our lives and trying to make sense of our life experience comprise a lifelong adult integration process. In this study, we observed that people desire to bring together everyday living and its relevance to their faith practices. When a gap between these is experienced, a lack of meaning results. Participants articulated this experience: Sunday after Sunday, they listened to homilies that failed to speak to their life experiences and their desire to grow in a faith that is adult and discerning. Parents of teenagers identified the great gap between their children's lives and their experience of Church as continuing to contribute to living a divided life, and they echoed this lack of relevance. With lack of meaning and relevance, people struggle to build relationships of trust and to experience the profound coherence between faith and life.

### **Loss of trust**

The gap between faith and life was underlined many times with references to trust broken by the sexual abuse scandals in the Church. The loss of trust has echoed throughout the whole Church. This lack of trust is compounded by other examples of abusive behaviour and by feelings that Church is the place where ordinary people are "done unto" and remain voiceless subjects. The gap remains where meaningful relationships are not engendered among the church community and spaces are not opened for real dialogue.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The need for reconciliation with our indigenous peoples, for example, figures prominently here.

## **Marginalization**

The gap between the experience of faith and life is deepened when people feel excluded or in some way disconnected from the church community. When a person or their loved ones are not welcomed as a part of that community, the desire to live a good moral life within the framework<sup>8</sup> the Church offers is strained. Some parents have experienced marginalization as they actively live the tension between the Church's teaching and their own support for a son or daughter who belongs to the LGBTQ community and may be in a relationship with a loving partner. Many have known marginalization from the Church when facing the realities of same-sex marriages, divorce, and remarriage outside the Church. Tensions and disconnection may also occur when people of faith try to discover roles and processes to open the way for women to equally share in leadership, ministry, and decision-making for the Christian community. All of these can lead to a sense of not belonging and of painful separation. The continued experience of not finding the space for real conversation and lacking a "safe" place to search and question with these challenging situations creates a sense of alienation and marginalization.

There are many ways adults experience and live within these expressions of the faith-life gap. We have offered a summary of what our study revealed, and we hope these insights may enrich your understanding. As six experienced adult faith educators, we found that the identification of these four current expressions of the faith-life gap clarifies the context in which we are working and sheds light on the challenges that need to be addressed. Perhaps your personal experience, as well as your experience within your faith community, reflect these new insights. Or maybe your experience of the faith-life gap is quite different. We encourage you to consider what the expressions of the gap look like as you observe and experience them within your community of faith and to help generate concrete responses to address them.

- **Does your experience reflect these new insights?**
  - **How is your experience of the faith-life gap different?**
  - **We hope we will have the opportunity to discuss your experiences and together deepen our understanding.**
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<sup>8</sup> A *framework* is the basic structure of a system, concept or text (*Oxford Dictionary*). Like a picture frame, it gives shape, boundaries and structure which allow us to see and understand something from a particular perspective and how its parts fit together.



## WHEN THE GAP CLOSSES: A DESCRIPTION OF OUR RESEARCH PROJECT

### **Five Promising Practices for a Process-based Approach to Adult Faith Education**

As previously mentioned, Action Research provides an empirical, qualitative research framework designed to generate practical wisdom in response to current problems. It bears mentioning that we used a new and innovative approach called *Awareness-based Action Research*, because it is uniquely geared toward leading to transformative change.<sup>9</sup> You will, no doubt, recognize how well this objective aligns with our goals in adult faith education. In particular, the fact that adult *faith* development depends on adult *human* development remained clearly in our sights as we experienced, first-hand, how working with the levels of listening that are central to this methodology (promoting an open mind, open heart, and open will) opened us to fresh perspectives and enabled our own growth as practitioners. Using Awareness-based Action Research in our project allowed our focus group to surface **Five Promising Practices** which help bridge the faith-life gap by moving from a *program-based* to a *process-based* approach to adult faith education. We believe these practices hold practical wisdom for adult faith education that will move us toward transforming practice. We are eager to discuss these with you and to find out how they fit with your experiences accompanying adult faith. Allow us to share more about our findings.

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<sup>9</sup> Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, "Awareness-Based Action Research: Catching Social Reality Creation in Flight," in Hilary Bradbury, ed., *The Sage Handbook of Action Research*, Sage Reference, 2015.



## How we arrived at the Five Promising Practices

We adopted a three-fold process in keeping with Awareness-based Action Research: 1. First, we engaged intentional levels of listening, with a focus on generative discussion and outcomes,<sup>10</sup> to help us identify our experiences of adult faith education when we could clearly see that the gap between faith and life was closed. We engaged in extensive generative discussions of these experiences to capture some of the principles and practices at work. One principle became clear very quickly: *There is an ethical responsibility to provide competent frameworks and leadership for adult faith education.* We listed this as the first Promising Practice and will discuss it further as we unpack each of the five practices. Four other principles began to take shape as we continued our levels of listening and generative conversation with an aim toward accessing a deep common understanding of practices that bridge the faith-life gap as well as reasons why the gap exists.

Next, over many months, we listened to others – leaders and colleagues in the field, people fully engaged, and those who (for many reasons) have become distant from the life of the Christian community. They spoke of experiences – often transformative – when no gap between faith and life exists; they shared their experiences – often painful - and observations about the faith-life gap in their own lives and in the lives of others around them. To continue our intentional listening, analysis, and generative discussion, our focus group met frequently to share what we were hearing, observing, and grappling with. This allowed two things to happen: for our understanding of the faith-life gap to expand and for the emerging principles to gradually take on a clearer shape.

Finally, we took the emerging principles and observed/studied them further in our various places of practice by integrating them into our Lenten projects. What more could we learn about these emerging principles when we intentionally integrated them into our practice and observed the results? Then we brought these experiences back to the focus group for further generative discussion, exploration, and analysis.

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**We feel excited when we consider how these Promising Practices can enrich how we accompany adult faith. We hope you will feel the same.**

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Perhaps you are already engaging some of these principles; perhaps others offer new perspectives and invitations for your practice. Our hope is to open new opportunities to share and continue to build our wisdom towards transforming practice in this vital work of accompanying adult faith.

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<sup>10</sup> These are specific to the theory and practice underlying Awareness-Based Action Research.

## THE FIVE PROMISING PRACTICES IN ADULT FAITH EDUCATION



1. **THERE IS AN ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE COMPETENT FRAMEWORKS AND LEADERSHIP FOR ADULT FAITH EDUCATION.**
2. **ADULT FAITH EDUCATION IS AT THE SERVICE OF HUMAN FREEDOM AND AGENCY.**
3. **SUCCESSFUL ADULT FAITH EDUCATION DEPENDS UPON THE QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS CREATED.**
4. **ADULT FAITH EDUCATION MUST HOLD TOGETHER MIND, BODY, SPIRIT AND WILL; FAITH DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ARE INEXTRICABLY CONNECTED.**
5. **ADULT FAITH EDUCATORS ARE TRANSFORMATIVE LEAD LEARNERS ABLE TO DESIGN AND HOLD SPACES WHERE ADULTS CAN MAKE MEANING OF THEIR FAITH AND LIFE.**

Notice that, while each of these five practices focuses on a specific dimension of adult faith education, they are all connected to each other. We will explore each of them.

### THE FIVE PROMISING PRACTICES

1. **There is an ethical responsibility to provide competent frameworks<sup>11</sup> and leadership for adult faith education.**

Our focus group quickly realized that there is no future for effective adult faith education that can move from a program- to a process-approach without a commitment to meet the ethical responsibility of providing both the frameworks and leadership for adult faith education.<sup>12</sup> There is an *ethical duty* to provide faith education that meets the needs of adults.<sup>13</sup> In other words, adults have a right to find in their Christian communities a faith education that equips them to navigate the waters of their lives – through the joys and the sorrows – as mature, responsive Christian believers. While this seems a simple statement, it is a complex task. Even though there is much more to consider about this first practice than our research project has explored to date, our findings point to some essential dimensions that are valuable to share here.

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<sup>11</sup> As mentioned in #8, *Framework* is used frequently in this resource. A *framework* is the basic structure of a system, concept or text (*Oxford Dictionary*). Like a picture frame it gives shape, boundaries and structure which allow us to see and understand something from a particular perspective and how its parts fit together.

<sup>12</sup> The National Office of Evangelization and Catechesis (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops) document, *Best Practices and Resources for Evangelization and Catechesis with Adults*, 2018, emphasizes the need for leaders to support adult faith education as well as the need to provide formation for adult faith educators.

<sup>13</sup> *The General Directory for Catechesis*, #172, is one place where this duty is clearly described.

*“Meeting people where they are”*

Our focus group members, as well as those with whom we discussed and consulted, frequently used this expression to describe what it means to engage in practice that bridges the faith-life gap. As our research unfolded, we began to realize that our ethical duty is, in fact, to “meet people where they are.” This is concretely expressed as engagement in a process-based (rather than program-based) approach to adult faith education that allows people to bring their faith and life together. Yet, we seem to struggle to clearly understand and articulate exactly what it means to “meet people where they are.” Others have recognized this as well. One of our focus group members recalls a well-recognized leader in faith education referring to the statement as “off-putting,” because of its frequent use but lack of comprehensibility. Our study addresses this and has helped to clarify some important dimensions of “meeting people where they are.” For example, adults ought to find the Christian community to be a place where the real context/experiences of their lives are recognized as sacred and unique places of God’s presence and activity. Spaces must be created where adults are invited into processes that allow them to reflect on and respond to God’s presence and activity in their lives. This is an important part of “meeting people where they are.” More will be said about this as we unpack the Five Promising Practices.

A second dimension of “meeting people where they are” surfaced in our study: its application to the actual physical spaces in which we gather. It has long been noted that our church communities need to become more creative about how to *literally* meet people where they are: in sports arenas, social projects, shopping centres, schools, homes, and places of business.<sup>11 14</sup> One of our focus group members described a diocese that has intentionally moved away from holding faith education meetings in parish or diocesan centres. They arrange sessions and meetings closer to where people live and work, and schedule them at times that are convenient for participants. This diocese demonstrates a shift in perspective about the organizing framework that works for adults and exercises a strong ethical commitment to providing what adults need. Their experiments – new ways of meeting people where they are – are producing some hopeful results and wisdom from which we can all learn. Much more can be said about “meeting people where they are,” and further study is required.

*Adult faith education is not an optional activity*

Our consultations and observations suggest that, quite often, providing competent leadership and frameworks for adult faith education seems to be treated as an optional activity rather than an essential responsibility. Members of our focus group and those with whom they consulted represent a wide variety of experiences. We observed that some dioceses have faith-education (catechetical

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<sup>14</sup> For example: Richard Coté, OMI, emphasized this in a presentation to the Canadian Association of Ministries Programs in 2002 when he called upon the church to build better “go structures.” In a recent publication (*Called by Name, Sent in His Name*, Novalis, 2019), Archbishop Paul-André emphasized the need for an “out-bound church.”

commissions/advisory committees)<sup>15</sup> allocate funding and provide formation for adult faith education for qualified diocesan personnel, while many others do not. A similar pattern was observed across some Catholic school boards.

One of our focus group members described her diocese's consistent commitment to funding, personnel, and the leadership of a faith education commission – even when budgets are tight. Those in leadership roles in her diocese recognize that the complex needs of our time require this ethical commitment and innovation: “We realized that it was our responsibility to find ways to engage adults that would meet their needs. And we knew we had to think outside of the box to do it.” They are experimenting with creative and encouraging new ways to “meet people where they are.”

Another of our focus group members described a meeting with mature women who have been connected with the Christian community their whole lives. When she spoke to them about *the People of God as the Church*, they had no idea what she meant. For these women, “the Church” is equated with clergy and the hierarchy. We wondered if they've had the faith education to help them form their identity and mature response as “the Church.”

*Sound frameworks and competent leadership are two essential dimensions*

With respect to sound frameworks, we know that there is an ever-growing foundation of adult development (and specifically faith-development) frameworks for education and growth that draw on expertise from the fields of transformative education, religious education/practical theology, psychology, and leadership/organizational development. Among other things, this expertise points to the need for adults to engage in process-based learning that allows them to reflect on practical implications and to consider concrete responses within the context of their own unique personalities and life experiences. Learning unfolds in its own unique way and at its own pace for each person, and meaningful adult learning does not happen without this process.<sup>16</sup> Part of meeting the ethical responsibility to provide competent adult faith education is to ensure that the best possible frameworks are used and that faith educators who are skilled in these frameworks are in place to plan and lead.

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<sup>15</sup> Diocesan commissions and committees devoted exclusively to faith education (catechesis) were strongly recommended at the Vatican's “Synod on Catechesis in Our Time,” 1977. John Paul II expressed this in his post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Trandendae* (1979). This guideline has been captured in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), the Church's current normative document on faith education. It is also echoed in a Canadian Pastoral Planning Resource for Adult Catechesis, *On Good Soil* (2011). It is worth noting that it is in keeping with the perspective, expressed in each of these documents, that adult catechesis is, in fact, the principal form of catechesis. A recent survey conducted by the National Office for Catechesis and Evangelization, CCCB (2018), identified the need for competent leadership as a best practice.

<sup>16</sup> More will be said about how adults learn and make meaning as we unpack the Promising Practices. See especially Promising Practice 4.

### *The most fundamental Promising Practice*

As our focus group continued to study, observe, and discuss, we came to recognize our ethical responsibility as the most fundamental of the Promising Practices, because the duty and commitment are so essential. Yet, our findings suggest that this frequently is *not* practiced. Few of us, and few of those with whom we consulted, have participated in planning conversations for adult faith education that carefully considered the ethical responsibility to provide effective adult faith education and how to accomplish it. We feel excited to consider how adult faith education might be transformed if more conversations around leadership tables in our Christian communities are grounded in a clear sense of ethical responsibility to provide competent frameworks and leadership for adult faith education. Perhaps you are already accompanying adult faith in an environment that practices this principle. We are eager to learn from your experience and to share it with others. Or like so many who lead in this field, it may be that you are not in a setting where this principle is practiced. If so, we hope that together we will find ways to increasingly engage this Promising Practice.

What are your experiences and ideas for how the first Promising Practice might be accomplished?

## **2. Adult faith education is at the service of human freedom and agency<sup>17</sup>**

During our consultations, a colleague provided a rich example of this Promising Practice at work. A scripture scholar was invited to give a diocesan Advent session on John the Baptist “preparing the way” for Jesus. Our colleague noticed that, rather than being exclusively engaged in his own ideas and insights, the presenter clearly focused on the participants. From the start of his presentation, the scholar’s approach was to invite the participants to notice that John the Baptist’s activity took place within the concrete context and real-life experience in which John found himself. As he explored John the Baptist’s actions, he invited participants to connect with their own contexts and experiences, to imagine where they might see the call within their own lives to prepare the way for Christ’s coming, and to grapple with how they might respond. Our colleague watched the responses of the participants, particularly one who had expressed uncertainty about his decision to attend because he was very busy. She described how the participant’s expression changed as he became engaged and realized that the session was about his life and relationship with God and his responses and choices as a mature Christian. He approached our colleague after the session to tell her how happy he was that he had decided to attend, because it was so meaningful for him. “There was no faith-life gap in that experience,” she commented.

Our sense is that recognizing that adult faith education is in the service of human freedom and agency holds great promise for a process-based approach that bridges the faith-life gap. Our study

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<sup>17</sup> Human agency is directly related to our fundamental Christian understanding of the human person (see more in reference #18) that we are created with free will. Exercising our power to make choices and acting on those choices is human agency at work.

has surfaced several aspects of this Promising Practice we would like to share with you.

*God is already present and at work in every person*

It seems to us that this Promising Practice rests on the strong foundation of our Judaeo-Christian understanding of *Imago Dei*; God is already very much present and at work in every person long before any faith educators arrive on the scene.<sup>18</sup> Every person is God's beloved, invited to come to the water to quench their thirst. Jesus desired that everyone have life and have it abundantly. What each person brings to any faith education gathering is their own unique relationship with God and their sacred story of faith. When our understanding of God's relationship with us is framed in this way, we can readily see that, while we may accompany one another in faith, we certainly do not impart it. Our scripture scholar in the example above was neither focused on presenting information in the form of abstract ideas, nor seeking recognition for his expertise. Rather, he was an adult faith educator who created a space of exploration, reflection, and response that honoured God's presence already active in the lives of people and that supported human freedom and agency.

*For human freedom and agency*

Our sense is that when we approach adult faith education with the assumption that we impart or disseminate faith to others, we move into what our focus group began to call a "do-unto" approach that diminishes human freedom and agency and undermines the process that closes the faith-life gap. Jean Vanier's insight, "It is in loving someone that we help them become themselves," resonated for us here.<sup>19</sup> A focus group member described how she has noticed that one of the most transformative experiences she can offer to adults is helping them see their value as members of the Christian community and the richness they bring to any gathering. Conversely, she noted that in her conversations with some adults she could clearly see how they undervalue what they bring to the life of the Christian community when, for example, they do not realize that they *are* the Church; their freedom, dignity and agency has not been affirmed and supported.

*Invitation and hospitality*

We discussed many practices that support invitation and hospitality, from providing comfortable, welcoming environments, food and refreshment, to thoughtfully arranged learning spaces designed to support adult learning.<sup>20</sup> The importance of these things was affirmed throughout our research.

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<sup>18</sup> Our fundamental Judaeo-Christian understanding of *Imago Dei* is that human beings are created in God's image and likeness. It conveys the divine life that exists in each person, their closeness to God, and their dignity, freedom, and agency. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* summarizes this teaching in #'s 1701-1709.

<sup>19</sup> Jean Vanier, video, A Message to Boston College, Part 2, March 2019, accessed September 2019 at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-28U-3Dqek](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-28U-3Dqek)

<sup>20</sup> Note that the National Office of Evangelization and Catechesis (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops) document, *Best Practices and Resources for Evangelization and Catechesis with Adults*, 2018, p. 4, provides some helpful insights and resources for the practice of hospitality.

One member of our focus group heard a young faith educator describe how she has noticed that Jesus' interactions were always invitational, respectful of people's freedom, and intended to empower their agency. "I, too, have to *invite* families into the church rather than dictating what they need to do," she commented. "If they see me as a leader in the church who is respectful of their freedom to choose to be agents of their own faith, I believe I will help them embrace their faith authentically."

Our focus group had the chance to reflect on the fact that, even when adults may be obliged to attend a faith education session (e.g., marriage preparation for a couple, sacramental preparation for the baptism of a child, or a catechumenate process to enter into the Christian Community), faith educators can shape the learning spaces in an invitational and hospitable way that affirms freedom and agency. In keeping with this observation, one of our focus group members noted that, when her team adopted a more invitational approach about faith development events, attendance began to increase, and the experience seemed much more meaningful for participants. "It is *their* faith we are supporting," she commented. We found ourselves wondering if a fear of diminishing attendance at Sunday Masses contributes to a sense of urgency in many places to "get people into the pews" and encourages the perception that it is the purpose of adult faith education to accomplish this. We noted that, in keeping with the inherent dignity, freedom, and agency of every person, people are never a means to *any* end.

*Another hopeful dimension of "meeting people where they are"*

Moving away from a "doing-unto" approach of adult faith education towards a practice in the service of human freedom and agency seems hopeful to us. Each of our focus group members deeply related to the shift in practice that happens when adult faith educators change their focus from trying to "do something" to/for participants to becoming aware of God's presence already very alive and active in everyone who gathers, and to understanding that adult faith education is at the service of this freedom and agency. It is another aspect of "meeting people where they are" in their unique, sacred unfolding as God's beloved.

We hope to have the opportunity to hear about your own experience. Perhaps you are already engaging this Promising Practice. On the other hand, "doing unto" may best describe what is happening in your context. How might adult faith education be enriched and the gap between faith and life bridged if adult faith education in the service of human freedom and agency was engaged more fully? We look forward to the opportunity to further develop this Promising Practice together.

### **3. Successful adult faith education depends upon the quality of relationships created**

One focus group member captured this Promising Practice very meaningfully while recalling numerous discussions with three different groups of people: those who consider themselves inside the Christian community, those who have disengaged from the Christian community, and those who are

on the margins. “In all of the conversations I had, when we discussed moments when faith and life came together for people, it was never about a program or an idea, or a concept or event. It was always about the people, the relationships.” That successful adult faith education depends upon the quality of the relationships created is the insight our focus group returned to most often during the ten months of our study. Since a relationship with a person, Jesus Christ, is the centre of mature Christian life,<sup>21</sup> along with all the relationships with self and others that flow from it, it seems fitting that relationships play such a key role in the faith education process. While we recognize that there is so much more to discover about this Promising Practice, here are some key insights we would like to share.

#### *Relationship with the adult faith educator*

More will be said about adult faith educators in Promising Practice 5, but it bears mentioning here that adult faith educators are in a particular relationship with (not separated from) those whom we accompany.<sup>22</sup> This relationship is rich and multifaceted. Certainly, it is about having the skills and competency for the role. As one of our focus group members commented, “I’ve observed that trust in the one who is accompanying adult faith and their ability to create a safe space for learning is essential.” It is also about modeling the life of a mature Christian finding their way. This impacts relationships in two ways. First, we’ve noticed that adult faith educators play a *mentoring role* for those they accompany. A focus group member captured this well in her observation, “So often, when I was listening to people describe a meaningful experience of learning to pray or of solving an important problem by engaging in faith-life reflection, I noticed that they then found themselves wanting to be for others what these meaningful faith educators had been for them.” Second, adult faith educators are in a relationship of *true partnership* with those whom they accompany, because they also are adults learning and growing in faith and modelling the faith journey. More will be discussed about the adult faith educator as a “Lead Learner”<sup>23</sup> further on in this document.

#### *Relationship for adult faith educators as a community of practice-based learning*

A key insight that surfaced in this research was the essential role of a community of practice. As a focus group, we found ourselves able to capture and name things we couldn’t capture and name before. This was made possible by the group’s engaging the awareness-based action research process of “reflecting on what we were doing as we were doing it,” which generated the wisdom among us. No one of us could have arrived at this learning on their own. We would like to engage in further documents about faith education ever since.

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<sup>21</sup> Pope John Paul II made this statement in *Catechesi Tradendae* (#5) in 1979, and it has been used as a key focus in documents about faith education ever since.

<sup>22</sup> #156 of the *General Directory for Catechesis* highlights the importance of this relationship: “No methodology, no matter how well tested, can dispense with person of the catechist.... The charism given by the Spirit, a solid spirituality and transparent witness of life constitute the soul of every method.”

<sup>23</sup> *Lead Learner* is a term used to indicate that educators are learners themselves and are not outside or separate from the circle of learning. See the bottom of p. 20 for more.



research about the kinds of communities of practice that can support adult faith educators and help them grow.

#### *Relationships for adult Christians as a community of practice-based learning*

There is a very real sense in which adults who seek to live a mature, responsive Christian life are also in relationship with one another as a community of practice, as the People of God. No matter what the reason or subject/topic of any adult faith event/gathering, it is an opportunity to honour those relationships by integrating processes (listening to the stories of our life and faith experiences, reflecting on what they mean in the context of our life and faith, grappling to find meaning and insight, and making decisions about how to respond in our lives) that generate the wisdom none of us has on our own. For instance, one focus group member noticed what happened when she became more attentive to her relationship with parents as they gathered for sacramental preparation. When she invited them to interact with her and one another by sharing their experiences and stories of faith, the gathering took on a very different energy and level of engagement than when she simply presented information. What would our adult faith education events look like if we were always attentive to engaging the relationship as a community of practice in adult Christian life?

#### *Restoring and strengthening relationships*

A focus group member had a meaningful conversation with a parent who found herself disengaged from her parish community. The woman, who was the mother of challenging teenagers, described how, during a Sunday Mass, the presider presented a homily about parenting that did not connect or seem relevant to what she was living in her difficult experiences with her children. It left her feeling disconnected, even angry, and not wanting to participate on Sundays. Another focus group member spoke about her conversation with a woman in her eighties, who had a graduate degree in theology and had been an active leader in adult faith education for many years. This woman described how the current leader of adult faith initiatives in her parish spoke to the people who gathered as if they knew nothing about living a life of faith, as if they had nothing to contribute to the learning process. The presenter simply instructed the people about what they needed to do to live their Christian lives. This woman found it particularly worrisome that most of the participants simply sat and took notes. "That's no way to teach God's people," she commented. There are many ways that relationships can become strained, distanced, or even broken. We feel very hopeful that adult faith education that understands and attends to the quality of relationships can restore and strengthen relationships.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Reconciliation and restoring and building relationships obviously have vital considerations and implications that extend far beyond the scope of the experiences of Phase I of this study – for example, implications for our relationships with our indigenous peoples in Canada and with victims of sexual abuse.

One of our focus group members described the experience of a small group of parishioners who shared a deep concern about the sexual abuse crisis in the Church. Members of this group were not experiencing meaningful responses to the crisis in their parishes, and they felt at risk of disengaging from participation in Sunday Mass as a result. They took their agency as mature Christians very seriously and decided to try to create meeting places for people to address the crisis. Their diocesan bishop was open to what they wanted to do and encouraged it. There were initiatives already underway in the diocese that they had not known about, and the bishop shared this information with them. They began to partner more. Working with community social workers, they facilitated a process where people could share, discuss, heal, and recommend a way forward. Since then, several town-hall meetings have taken place in parishes in their diocese, and the results have been encouraging. A report and follow-up are underway.

Our focus group member spoke of how this learning process, which engaged all participants, was helping to restore and strengthen many relationships for the people who attended the meetings, the facilitators and group leaders, the community, parish clergy, and the bishop. Practicing partnership as mature Christian believers and coming together to address pressing issues of life and faith are keys to strengthening and restoring relationships that support adult faith education that bridges the faith-life gap.

A crucial understanding here is that *being* the People of God is not an abstract idea. In the example above, the learning process itself engaged all participants (the social workers, the community and the bishop) as the People of God in relationship, observing, reflecting, discussing, deciding, and responding together. Such engagement bridges the faith-life gap. We wonder how our adult faith events and sessions might be designed and led differently if we met as people in a relationship of true partnership/communion with one another?

*Another hopeful dimension of “meeting people where they are”*

Another focus group member shared how, after a meaningful consultation with colleagues about their insight into adult faith accompaniment that bridges the faith-life gap, her team left the room and chanced upon a distraught member of the community who had come into their reception area. That person was able to join the team for lunch so they could listen to that individual’s story and provide a supportive place to reflect on the way forward. “Our team members turned to one another and said, ‘Now, *that* was a transformative moment when faith and life came together.’” This experience illustrates the fact that another hopeful dimension of “meeting people where they are” means attending to the centrality of relationships and shows how meaning-making unfolds in the context of relationships of trust, communion, and partnership with one another as the People of God. As adult faith educators, we may not always be in a position to offer personal accompaniment “on the spot” like this. Yet, as our focus group member commented, “We were simply able to be human, be leaders and meet this person where they were.” What does attention to relationships look like in your practice of accompanying adult faith? It would be wonderful to learn from your experience. We hope to be able to explore more together and strengthen our engagement of this Promising Practice.

#### **4. Adult faith education must hold together mind, body, spirit, and will; faith development and human development are inextricably connected.**

Many of our observations and generative discussions were about *how* adults learn and grow and the frameworks that support it. As mentioned earlier, the ever-growing foundation in adult development – and adult *faith* development – offers a rich foundation for our Promising Practices. We found that adult faith education that closes the faith-life gap holds together all aspects of the person – mind, body, spirit, and will – and recognizes that human and faith development are intertwined. Here are a few of the insights that surfaced in our research that we would like to share with you.

##### *Mind, body, spirit, and will*

One focus group member noticed how meeting in a comfortable home and agreeing on the time of day and length of sessions respected the physical energy and comfort of the participants, helping them to feel safe and engaged. This led us to discussions about how, as adults, we may be at different stages of life and have different energy levels/stamina; perhaps some among us have physical restrictions or are coping with an illness. Physical well-being is intertwined with intellectual, emotional, and spiritual health. As one of our focus group members commented, “Mind, body, spirit, and will evolve and change throughout adult life. Faith accompaniment needs to provide the perspectives and processes needed to discern meaningful responses as whole people and mature believers at whatever stages of life we, as adults, find ourselves.” We recognized a tendency to split off the mind from the rest of the person and, in so doing, to neglect attending to body, spirit, and will as integral dimensions of adult faith education.

##### *Human development and faith development in meaning-making*

Current adult faith development research notes that adults need to be able to reflect, to grapple with practical implications, and to consider concrete responses within the context of their own unique personalities and life experiences in order to mature and grow. This is how the process of meaning-making that characterizes adult learning unfolds.<sup>25</sup> This understanding resonated with the experience of each of our focus group members. As one member observed, “It was my attention to engaging participants in reflection on their own experiences of prayer that allowed them to meaningfully reflect on other forms of prayer that were unfamiliar and integrate them into their own practice.”

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<sup>25</sup> Melissa Ann Brandes is one scholar who is building on the seminal faith development theory of James Fowler and the work of Sharon Parks to demonstrate the essential place reflection plays in adult faith development. (See, for example, her article, “Integrated Spiritual Development: A New Approach to Nurturing Adolescent Spirituality and Faith,” in *Religious Education*, 113, 2018, p. 202.)

Human and faith development seem to meet most closely in the great desire and need of the human person to make meaning. In the fields of transformative education, psychology, and organizational/leadership development, much is known about how we come to learn, grow, and change. These insights have been integrated into adult faith development frameworks that show us how adults must have places to reflect on experience, to grapple, interpret, consider, and engage new perspectives in order to grow and change.<sup>26</sup> As we observed, consulted, reflected, and discussed, we recognized that effective adult faith education that closes the faith-life gap recognizes the inextricable connection between human and faith development. Good processes open the way for exploring the rich treasury of Christian faith as a source of wisdom and insight for making meaning and maturing in the concrete context and experiences of life. As we move through life, and especially in times of crises, we search for the wisdom to make sense of what we are living and to find our way forward. As Melissa Ann Brandes points out, “As we continue to develop and grow, new experiences, understanding, and insight may ‘require changing a particular set of beliefs’ and inspire us to make new meaning, thus creating ‘a more adequate faith.’”<sup>27</sup>

Our project’s research methodology highlights the key role that levels of listening play in allowing us to develop an open mind, an open heart, and an open will in order to be able to learn, change, and grow. It also focuses on the importance of letting go of fear and engaging courage to allow transformative change to emerge in ourselves and our communities.<sup>28</sup> We found ourselves grappling with how to more fully integrate these processes into adult faith education, and we realized that we still have much to discover about how to do this.

*Another hopeful dimension of “meeting people where they are”*

Our sense is that engaging the whole person in the meaning-making that comes with integral human and faith development is another way of “meeting people where they are.” As our focus group came to a deeper understanding of how to more fully integrate these processes into adult faith education, we could see that opening the way for human maturing and meaning-making in faith is essential for helping adults realize the life in abundance that Jesus came to offer. It is a way to embrace our Christian tradition as the place to quench the thirst of us all, who are invited to come to the water in the concrete context and experiences of our lives. Perhaps you are already engaging this Promising Practice. It would be wonderful to hear about your experience and to learn from you. It’s possible that, like many of us, you’re continuing to look for ways to employ this practice more fully. We look forward to enriching our practice together.

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<sup>26</sup> Melissa Ann Brandes, “Integrated Spiritual Development: A New Approach to Nurturing Adolescent Spirituality and Faith,” p. 202

<sup>27</sup> Melissa Ann Brandes, p. 193.

<sup>28</sup> Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, “Awareness-Based Action Research.”

## **5. Adult faith educators are Transformative Lead Learners, able to design and hold spaces where adults can make meaning of their faith and life.**

This Promising Practice was articulated throughout the research and emerged more specifically as we reflected together on our collective experiences of the gap closing.

### *Transformative Lead Learners<sup>29</sup>*

We saw in our research that adult faith educators are people who are aware of their own experiences of growth in faith and who recognize their need for life and faith to be lived and grown together. They are then able to identify the shifts in transformative experience of others and create spaces to support them. As Lead Learners, we can see the possibilities for growth that come with conflict and tensions and can encourage other learners to trust their own struggles in the process of meaning-making. We spoke about this role as being “bridge people” or people who help build relationships that bridge the gap between faith and life.

### *Creating space*

The study described a central aspect of the ministry of the faith educator: creating spaces. This was strongly affirmed by one of our focus group members. Following our focus group discussion about the way each of us recognized “creating spaces” as a key dimension of our work, she consulted with a close colleague in her place of practice. The colleague began to describe her own role as an adult faith educator by saying, “All I can do is create a space....” The learning spaces in our research were named as relational spaces for people to grow in their faith and life. The faith educators spoke of holding spaces to wrestle with significant questions, to make space for new understandings, and to leave room for an encounter with God. The aspect of relational space was expressed in several ways: being present and modelling relationships; being attentive and actively seeking interactions that speak to the hearts of people desiring to grow in understanding of life and faith; providing frameworks for reflection, discussion, and grappling that invite the connections.

One of our focus group members described how her practice was transformed when she made the shift from a primary focus on presenting content to an adult process-based approach: I have tended to approach formation sessions as my opportunity to tell others what I know. Since I’ve become more aware of the importance of listening and relationship, I’m stopping to listen give space to others. I was (recently) very surprised when a woman I had assumed would have nothing significant to say had some very wise and insightful things to share with the group. I

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<sup>29</sup> The term, “Lead Learner,” is often accredited to American educator Roland S. Barth, who began writing about educators as learners in the 1990s. The term has developed common-place usage to indicate that educators are themselves learners and are not outside or separate from the circle of learning. Parker Palmer is another educator and author who has written extensively about the place of the educator *inside* the learning circle. Miriam Martin, co-researcher in this project, has been instrumental in introducing the language and notion of “Lead Learner” into the field of faith education. We feel that this is an essential aspect of the identity of adult faith educators and of the faith education process.

would not have made that space for her before. And, our formation session was greatly enriched.

### *Sparking the space*

Adult faith educators also stimulate ideas and intentionally introduce a significant aspect of faith with relevance and meaning for today. The study offered examples suggesting ways to open the learning space with a video, a scripture passage, or a dynamic witness to faith lived. The conversation led from the learning space as interactive dialogue would result in connections with the life and faith of participants. These adult faith educators are resourceful and prepared, grounded in the living faith tradition of the Church that is important for today.

### *Surprising spaces*

We saw that effective adult faith educators are also conscious of the spontaneous learning opportunities that can occur outside a structured encounter or program. In closing the gap, they are attentive to the moments of the search for meaning, moments of openness and desire for learning that occur unexpectedly. This might be as unanticipated as the meeting that happened in the doorway of a church hall when people were actually leaving. According to a focus group member, people stayed at the door in deep conversation. This space was both challenging and rewarding. From various experiences of this kind, focus group members have recognized what we came to call “threshold energy.” Occasionally, these spaces are recognized as resulting from tensions that have the potential to create opportunities when they are held responsively and responsibly as we accompany other seekers in those moments. How to create spaces for “threshold energy” *during* sessions, as well, is an important question for ongoing research.

### *Another hopeful dimension of “meeting people where they are”*

We believe that practicing as Transformative Lead Learners, who intentionally create and hold spaces for learning and growing together as mature Christian believers, is another important dimension of “meeting people where they are.” How is this practiced in the places of leadership in adult faith education where you find yourself? How might we, together, learn more about how to engage in this Promising Practice?

## FROM PROGRAM TO PROCESS

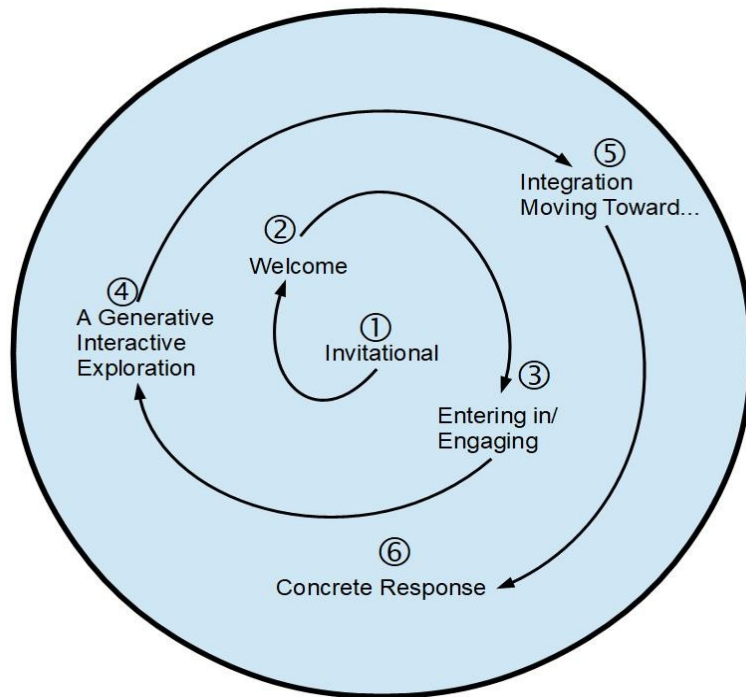
### **Practicing the Promising Practices: A template for an adult faith education process that bridges faith and life**

We've noticed that, no matter the topic, subject, or goal for any adult faith education session, there is a general pattern to a process-based approach that allows us to create and hold a learning space that bridges faith and life. Not only do we want to present it to you, we would like to share an interesting exercise our focus group used to generate this template. We imagined ourselves meeting with you to share what we learned in our research project. How could we invite you into a learning space that would engage the Promising Practices that have surfaced in our study? How could it be an experience of the process-based adult faith education we seek to understand and practice more fully? It invited some of the best of our wisdom and experience to rise to the surface. And the generative process allowed us to articulate aspects of process we hadn't identified before.


We hope this will be helpful to all of us who are seeking to move from program-based to process-based approaches in adult faith education. We are eager to hear how this process fits with your accompaniment of adult faith. And we look forward to continuing to build on our wisdom together as we move forward. We have so much to explore and learn together. We present this process-based approach in the form of a graphic in the following template and explore it further on the following pages.

## The Template:

### An Adult Faith Education Process that Bridges Faith and Life



*Figure 1: A Process-Based Template for Adult Faith Education, Kuzmochka and Martin, 2019*

 *Invitational:* As we explored in our Promising Practices, process-based adult faith education that bridges the faith-life gap is invitational. While this begins literally, with an invitation to engage in an adult faith education event, it is a way of engaging with adults *throughout* the learning process that respects their dignity, freedom, and agency, and understands that our role is to accompany a relationship with God, who is already present and active. This is concretely expressed when we give people choices, establish and respect boundaries, and are gracious in how we invite people to engage in the learning space and relationships.

Here are a few examples of what this might look like. Invitations sent to couples for marriage preparation could begin, “We are privileged to have this opportunity to be with you at this exciting time of your life as you are preparing for your marriage. Looking forward to meeting you and exploring the rich faith dimensions of all you are living...” The leader of a faith education session might use language like, “I’d like to invite you to...” When preparing participants in an advent reflection session, the leader encourages, “We are eager to listen carefully to one another. You are not obliged, but please feel free to share whatever is meaningful for you about...”





*Welcome:* This not only pertains to the physical comforts and intentional set-up of a learner-centered gathering space, as well as to hospitality in the form of food, drink, etc., but also refers to how people are greeted, giving opportunities for people to introduce themselves and to get to know each other.<sup>30</sup> (In large groups, this can be done in simple ways, such as inviting people to introduce themselves to a few people, perhaps gradually over the course of an event, or inviting people into different conversation/discussion groups so relationships can form, etc.) Welcome is also accomplished in preparation work for an event: What do we know about the participants before they arrive? Is the session such that participants might give some input into the event, and help shape the goals, objective, and agenda beforehand? Are there any special needs or considerations to prepare for? What might be the learning goals of participants, and how can the event be best shaped to help them connect their faith and life?

Welcome is also conveyed throughout gatherings by an awareness of Promising Practice #1: Adults have the right to a faith education that helps them navigate their faith and life with a mature and growing Christian response. They have a right to be there.

Welcome continues throughout the event as we find ways to attend to the relationships. Beginning a session by telling people your hopes and why you are glad they're there is a wonderful way to establish that they are important and that you see yourself as part of (not separate from) the learning circle, as we discussed in the Promising Practices. It is also welcoming to let people know how you have prepared the session for *them*, so that they can engage and make the faith-life connections. Inviting participants to express their hopes and objectives, why they came, etc., is also part of welcome. (In large groups, this also can be done in simpler ways.) Welcome is also expressed when the leader indicates that the session is about learning in the context of participants' real faith and lives, and is designed in an interactive manner.



*Entering-in/Engaging:* Whatever the event or subject of the gathering, "entering-in/engaging" invites people to make the faith-life connection in a creative, concrete way to begin the session. This helps to ground and open the learning circle. We offer a few examples. (1.) If the session is preparing parents for the baptism of their children, they might be invited to reflect on their hopes for their child and why they've chosen to baptize them. (This can also be a wonderful opportunity for the faith educator to affirm the parents' love, which is also God's love, for their children.) We might also invite a few people to tell about the most meaningful baptism celebration they've participated in and to describe what touched them. (2.) If the gathering is to explore a current issue of concern – the ecological crisis and our Christian response, for example – the "entering-in" might invite participants to identify one thing they are most concerned about and another that expresses what they are hopeful

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<sup>30</sup> Again, note that the National Office of Evangelization and Catechesis (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops) document, *Best Practices and Resources for Evangelization and Catechesis with Adults*, 2018, p. 4, provides some helpful insights and resources for the practice of hospitality.

for. Prayer is an important aspect of the “entering-in.” There are many creative ways to choose scripture, prayers, music, poetry, and art to capture, open, and enrich the theme. People could be asked to identify what strikes them, what is new, meaningful, or challenging. Using these resources well and inviting people to connect them with their own experience illustrate, from the very beginning of the session, the profound coherence between faith and life.



*A generative, interactive exploration:* Whatever the subject of the gathering and whatever content is being shared, our sense is that a generative, interactive exploration is the process-approach that holds faith and life together. You’ll notice that all five of our Promising Practices are very much at work in this process step.

*Generative exploration.* In keeping with the relationship between the faith educator and the participants (see especially Promising Practices #2, 3, and 5), we believe that one of the most important aspects of this process step is the ability of the presenter to be a partner in learning and a passionate witness to the importance of the topic/subject. Why is it important? Why should we care about this? How is this important in my life? What life-giving/authentic perspectives can the presenter share? How can our leadership open the way for exploration that invites participants to connect with new, life-giving insights, allowing faith and life to come together? We chose the word “generative,” because the goal is to share life-giving ideas and insights related to the topic/subject and to create a learning space where faith and life come together in a way that generates new insights for participants. The presenter opens a space on helping participants to connect faith and life in relation to the topic, to consider new possibilities, and to consider their stories and experiences in a new way.

*Interactive exploration.* At each step in the exploration (in keeping with all our Promising Practices), participants need to be invited to consider what everything they hear and experience during the gathering means for their own faith and lives by listening, reflecting, considering, questioning, and grappling. They are not observers, nor are they an audience for the presenter, but interactive partners. When presenting, a faith educator has many ways to open this interactive space. Educators may begin with an invitation like, “As I share with you about this topic, I invite you to listen for the things that are important for you: affirming ideas, new insights, things that challenge and invite. Our goal is for you to meaningfully explore this theme/topic/teaching, etc. Then we’ll have a chance to discuss it.” During their presentation, the faith educator continues the interactive process by asking questions such as, “Have you had a similar experience?” or, “I’ve shared what this means to me and why I find it important. What do you hear that’s meaningful for you?” “Why do you think this is significant?” “How do you struggle with these things?” The educator may integrate moments of reflection for participants to write some responses, and time for participants to share a few insights aloud or in dyads or triads. There are many educational processes that can facilitate the interactive aspect of the presentation.



*Integration, moving towards...* The generative, interactive exploration concludes with a clear process turn toward what is happening within the participants. What is meaningful, challenging, new, unsettling, hopeful, joyful? Time for reflection can be given, and perhaps a small group exercise could support this process step. Some useful orientations for integration questions include, “Where do I sense a call to move forward?” “Where is the life and newness in what I’m experiencing?” “What are my concerns and hopes?” “Where do I feel moved, feel energy and life?” “Where do I feel a desire/need to respond?” The language of Christian faith can be very helpful for shaping integration questions. Becoming, loving, opening, life, death, resurrection, newness, needs, response, vocation/call, obstacles, freedom, hope, hunger, thirst, response: these are all evocative words in our rich vocabulary. You will recognize our Five Promising Practices in this step, with an emphasis on #'s 1, 2, 4 and 5.



*...Concrete response.* This last process step allows participants to name a concrete action they will engage to respond to their learnings and growth. The language of action, agency, call, emerging future, transformative change, embracing, loving, and response is very helpful. We know from adult development and learning theory that, as part of the meaning-making process, a concrete decision to respond is an important aspect of learning and growth (Promising Practice 4). It is also closely intertwined with our Christian call to respond (Promising Practices 2, 3, 4) and helps us move toward change.

## CONCLUSION

We hope you have found this resource helpful. We are eager to engage with you, your leaders, committees, and teams about your insights and experiences of what we have shared from Phase I of our research. Phase II of our Action Research Project is getting underway, and we are planning gatherings to meet and further our transforming practice in adult faith education in Canada. For ways to reach us, please see our page on Saint Paul University’s website at [https://ustpaul.ca/en/centre-for-religious-education-and-catechesis-home\\_1438\\_788.htm](https://ustpaul.ca/en/centre-for-religious-education-and-catechesis-home_1438_788.htm). And please like our Facebook page named Centre for Religious Education and Catechesis - SPU to stay connected.

It is our hope that together we can recognize God’s loving invitation to come to the water and drink deeply, tasting the abundant life Jesus offers to all. To that end, we will continue to deepen our understanding of these five Promising Practices, to engage in further study of key themes that have emerged during this Phase I of our Awareness Based Action Research Project, and to open ourselves to the yet unknown practical wisdom that will emerge as we move forward with our work.

Please join us and be part of this continuing journey to engage in adult faith education that brings faith and life together.



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