

# CORPS RESOURCES



## SPIRITUAL FORMATION CYCLE

by Rebecca Walker

### MAKING DISCIPLES

It is the mission of the body of Christ to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). The process of making disciples is much like bringing up children, there is a process of maturation that is essential to the Christian life. This process begins with a believer’s justification, and will continue throughout the remainder of their lives. “Like many dimensions of our lives, faith seems to have a broadly recognisable pattern of development. This unfolding pattern can be characterised in terms of

developing emotional, cognitive, and moral interpretations and responses. Our ways of imagining and committing in faith correlate significantly with our ways of knowing and valuing more generally” [1].

Many models for spiritual maturation, faith development or discipleship have been proposed. The seminal work in this area is Fowler’s Faith Stages, which suggests seven stages of faith development:

- ▶ Undifferentiated Faith - a “pre-stage” of infancy. The pre-verbal interaction

between the parent and child provides “a foundation for faith in the emergence of basic trust vs. mistrust” [2].

- ▶ Stage 1: Intuitive-Projective Faith - “characterized by the abundant imagination of the pre-school child. This emotional and idiosyncratic faith involves powerful images and a fluidity of thought not bound by the logic of later cognitive structures” [2].
- ▶ Stage 2: Mythic-Literal Faith - “Maturation evokes a new way of knowing and engaging the world. The child acquires ...

	Faith Development Stages [2]	Faith Maturity Levels [4]	Four Fields (Mk 4:26-9) [5]
Experienced	<b>Stage 0</b> – Undifferentiated Faith <b>Stage 1</b> – Intuitive-Projective Faith <b>Stage 2</b> – Mythic-Literal Faith	<b>Level 1</b> – Accommodation to God’s law out of fear of punishment or hope for reward. Source of Authority: Self-centred	<b>Empty Field</b> – Little knowledge or understanding of faith
Socialised	<b>Stage 3</b> – Synthetic-Conventional Faith	<b>Level 2</b> – Imitation of godly exemplars with growing respect for and obedience to Christ. Source of Authority: Other-centred	<b>Sowing Field</b> – Initial instruction in the faith and taking on of the faith tradition of the disciple’s community
Searching	<b>Stage 4</b> – Individuative-Reflective Faith	<b>Level 3</b> – Personal, principle centred commitment to Christian worldview. Source of Authority: Principle-centred	<b>Growing Field</b> – Further development in faith understanding, involves questioning of faith tradition and coming to an individual deliberative theology
Integrative	<b>Stage 5</b> – Conjunctive Faith <b>Stage 6</b> – Universalizing Faith	<b>Level 4</b> – Movement beyond focus on individual piety to the active promotion of corporate piety and the redemption of creation’s sin-stained structures. Source of Authority: Kingdom-centred	<b>Harvest Field</b> – Faith formation reaches a maturity where there is a “lived congruency between our beliefs and how we live” [3], and the disciple is empowered to make more disciples.



# THE CHURCH IS TYPICALLY REALLY GOOD AT THE SOCIALISATION OF FAITH OR THE SYNTHETIC-CONVENTIONAL STAGE (IN FOWLER'S SCHEMATIC). THE REAL CHALLENGE WILL BE TO FIND WAYS IN WHICH TO SUPPORT CHRISTIANS WHO ARE WORKING THROUGH THE SEARCHING PART OF THE FAITH JOURNEY.



concrete operational thought ...allowing the child to infer intentions and to perceive continuity to actions; justice is concrete and reciprocal. These abilities, held together by means of a narrative, give rise to a faith in which the ultimate environment is inhabited by a cosmic judge ('God') who guarantees a kind of simple, reciprocal fairness" [2]

- ▶ Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional Faith - "In this stage, meaning-making and committing to values takes on a more interpersonal dimension not previously available. Self-identity and faith are closely tied to valued others, and though deeply felt, is unexamined. 'God' takes on the interpersonal qualities of a good friend" [2]
- ▶ Stage 4: Individuative-Reflective Faith - "This stage of faith is characterized by intentional reflection on one's faith and its influence on the self. This intense, critical reflection on one's faith (one's way of making meaning) requires that inconsistencies and paradoxes are vanquished, which may leave one estranged from previously valued faith groups" [2]
- ▶ Stage 5: Conjective Faith - "Mid-life sometimes brings a recognition that the consistencies of one's more reflective faith have come with a price; one may have dismissed other (unconscious) dimensions of knowing. A yearning for a way to bring together the seeming paradoxes of faith may emerge, along with a desire to enlarge the bounds of social inclusiveness. Although one

does not naively or uncritically accept contradictions, 'God' is seen to include mystery and paradox" [2]

- ▶ Stage 6: Universalizing Faith - "a movement toward a style of 'universalizing faith' that seeks inclusiveness while still maintaining firm and clear commitments to values of universal justice and love" [2]
- Fowler's model provides an in-depth analysis of the stages of spiritual formation. Other models include Gibson's Faith Maturity Levels and the Four Fields model based on Mark 4:26-9. The following table provides a mapping of the various spiritual formation models, and demonstrates that the spiritual formation process may be synthesised down to four steps; experienced faith, socialised faith, searching faith and integrative faith [3]:

## IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY

The primary implication for ministry of the spiritual formation cycle, is to understand the differing points in the spiritual journey that various members of our corps are at. It should not be the primary goal of the corps officer to "precipitate and encourage stage advancement. Rather, paying attention to stage and stage advancement is important in helping us shape our teaching and involvement with [corps] members ... Movement in stage development, properly understood, is a byproduct of teaching the substance and the practices of faith" [1].

This process of spiritual maturation may or may not correlate with a person's process of becoming an adult. That is to say, one may be in their forties but still in the socialisation phase of spiritual maturity, which would be more commonly associated with adolescence in terms of personal development. This has implications for age-based ministries in a culture that is becoming progressively less and less churched. We will not be able to target programs to age-groups in the way we have in the past, because fewer and fewer Christians will be growing up in the church in the years to come. We will not be able to assume that a Christian in their sixties has come to a place of integrative faith, because of a life-long walk with Christ.

The church is typically really good at the Socialisation of faith or the Synthetic-Conventional stage (in Fowler's schematic). The real challenge will be to find ways in which to support Christians who are working through the searching part of the faith journey. It is in this stage that we are probably losing people the most. Many churches do not allow room to ask questions. Questioning, apart from being a formative part of faith, is also a central tenet of postmodernism. Questioning, doubt and deconstruction forms the basis for postmodern thought. For both of these reasons, it will become increasingly important to find ways of journeying with those who are asking questions and seeking work through the implications of their faith. This is a challenge for contextualising faith to our postmodern culture.

## NOTES

- 1 Fowler JW. Faith Development at 30: Naming the Challenges of Faith in a New Millenium. *Religious Education*. Fall 2004;99(4):405-421.
- 2 Parker S. Measuring Faith Development. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*. 2006;34(4):337-348.
- 3 Lewis R. *Soul Growth: an introduction to spiritual formation (unpublished)*; 2009 August.
- 4 Gibson TS. Proposed Levels of Christian Spiritual Maturity. *Journal of Pyschology and Theology*. 2004;32(4):295-304.
- 5 Roennfeldt P. *Four Fields of Discipleship*. 2009 (unpublished interview).