

Stages on the Journey of Faith





Elsie Hannah Ruth Rempel
Formation Consultant, Mennonite Church Canada.



Essentials for effective faith shaping

Be

- Authentic
- Available
- Affirming



Nurturing Our own Spirituality

- Letting go and letting God
- Naming God's presence
- Responding in faith



Faith and Belief

- Faith precedes and outlasts belief



Faith is...

Relationship with
God. It is a tender
mystery, ineffable
reality, gift of
grace, sturdy,
saving embrace,
freedom to change
and partner with
God.



Belief is :

- What we believe about God
- Our ideas about how God wants us to live



Guiding Faith Growth



- Dangers of damaging young faith
- Blessings of affirming young faith



Children: members of God's family

- Engel oder Bengel?
- Learning about God
- Pilgrims on a spiritual journey
- Saved and covered by grace until the age of discernment



Response time 1

- What expressions of faith and wonder by a child have added sparkle and vitality to your faith community?
 - What has distressed you?
 - What questions do you have about children and faith?
- 
- What keeps us from taking their faith seriously?



Understanding faith development



- How do children grow in faith?
- Faith development guidelines offer us a direction of growth toward spiritual maturity.
- The dance between development and conversion.



- Response 2: What do you remember about your faith as a child?

- What activities helped you feel close to God?
- What places felt sacred?

- What do you remember about ‘thinking as a child?’
- What Bible stories appealed to you?



Stages of Faith

All of us are on a **journey of faith formation** and are at **different stages**.

Infants

“Before we are conscious of God, we are known by God who loves us and invites us into relationship.” – Shine: Living in God’s Light



Infant and Toddler Faith

Intuitive

They meet our need to
give care and love

Learning to love and
trust.



Response: Infant and Toddler faith

- Describe and share experiences with children at this stage that came to mind.
- If the blending of fantasy and reality in young troubles you, what are some constructive ways of encouraging children's faith that honour their way of engaging with life?
- How have children blessed and encouraged you through their expressions of primal faith?



Early childhood: intuitive, trusting, relational consciousness of the divine



Response: Early Childhood faith

- Describe and share experiences with preschool children that came to mind.
- When preschool children make statements that do not match our understanding of God or otherwise ring true, how can we bless their present level of insight and still encourage their growth?
- What opportunities do the young people in your lives have to learn and practice Christian vocabulary and practices? Are there some grace filled ways you can increase those opportunities?
- How have the gifts of children at this stage blessed and encouraged you?



Primary: helpers, learners, playful friends



Response: Primary school age faith

- What stories of children in primary school can add to your understanding of faith at this age?
- How do you understand the difference between faith that expresses, identifies with, and projects the faith of their community; and more mature faith?
- In your school and community, what opportunities exist for teachers and primary age children to talk about faith and belief? Can you imagine and promote some new ways of encouraging this dialogue?
- How have the gifts of children at this stage blessed and encouraged you?



Upper Elementary school aged faith: growing awareness, fairness, beliefs



Upper Elementary school aged faith:

- What stories of preadolescent children can you share to add to understanding of faith and belief at this age?
- How can you help children in this phase of life respond to Jesus' instructions to care for the underprivileged as an expression of faith?
- Critical thinking is so necessary for preadolescent growth toward an owned faith. How can you help children you know deal with the challenges that will arise as they engage in critical thinking?
- How have the gifts of children at this stage blessed and encouraged you?



Adolescence: Toward owned faith: critiquing, testing, belonging or leaving, insights, skills



Adolescence: toward owned faith

- What stories of youth in this critically testing stage can you share with each other to increase your understanding of this part of the faith journey?
- If you shared your own faith journey with youth in your community, how might the process start conversations that would build trust and help them share their faith with you?
- What stories of apparent or real rejection by dear people of this age do you need to offer to God in a lament?
- How is your life blessed by people at this age and stage of the journey of faith?



So, how can teachers guide students on their faith journey?

- being authentic, available, affirming people of faith
- responding to our students stages of faith
- sharing appropriate personal faith stories
- teaching traditions and Bible stories
- praying for and with them.
- blessing



A Prayer for Teachers

God, we are Christian Teachers who love
the young;

May you bless our relating, speaking and
listening,

So that our words, thoughts and actions
bless our students and the church's
children.



May we and those we love be sheltered
and nourished
by a deep awareness that we are all
part of God's big story;
that we are loved, treasured, and gifted
By God the Father, the Son, and the
Holy Spirit.



May your love and truth be ever
In our hearts and minds
To help us walk in your ways and know
your peace, healing and hope,
So that God's blessings can keep flowing
through us to our students
As long as we serve as teachers. Amen.

