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**SP531**

**Beyond the Book Study: Adult Christian Formation for Mind, Heart, and Action**  
**Summer School 2026**  
**July 20 – July 24, 2026**

**PURPOSE:**

Organized and thoughtful approaches to adult formation can bring vitality and renewal to a parish or congregation. Many places have both lay and ordained leaders with gifts and passion for teaching ministry and this course will provide a time and place to activate and develop those gifts.

**PREREQUISITES:** none

**COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:**

- Learn different models of intentional Christian formation for adults in the congregation
- Begin applying one or more models to a plan for formation over a season in the Christian calendar or identified learning need in the congregation
- Identify the needs and characteristics of the adult learner across different contexts
- Grow in self-awareness of one's strengths as a teacher and experiment with active learning strategies
- Explore the relationship between intentional Christian formation and church growth

**FORMAT AND CONTENT:** Each morning we will identify and describe experiences of effective and memorable learning, learn a model for developing holistic Christian formation in the congregation/parish, and begin analysing and applying the model in our own contexts. We will also survey adult learning theory and practice active learning strategies to increase our strengths as teachers. Finally, we will explore some of the research that examines the links between organized, intentional processes of formation/discipleship and church vitality.

**TEXTS:**

Roberto, John, ed. *The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation*. Lifelong Faith Publications, 2015.  
[https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons\\_of\\_adult\\_faith\\_formation.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/seasons_of_adult_faith_formation.pdf)

--- "Faith Formation for Every Adult in Your Church—It's Possible Today!" *Lifelong Faith* 3:3 (Fall 2009): 27-55.

[https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/lifelong\\_faith\\_journal\\_3.3.pdf](https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/lifelong_faith_journal_3.3.pdf)

Westerhoff, John. *Will Our Children Have Faith*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Revised Edition. Morehouse, 2012.

*The first two texts can be downloaded for free online. The third text can be purchased online.*

**RESERVE:**

McAlpine, Bill, Joel Thiessen, Keith Walker, and Arch Chee Keen Wong. *Signs of Life: Catholic, Mainline, and Conservative Protestant Congregations in Canada*. Tyndale, 2021: 96-116.

*Chapter available through Populi for the course.*

**COURSE POLICIES:**

**1. Attendance** For a weekly course, VST requires at least 80% attendance. For an intensive course, VST requires 100% attendance.

**2. Reading and assignments** Students are expected to read all required assignments before class and to complete all assignments as outlined in the syllabus within the specified dates of the course and term.

**3. Academic honesty** Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.

**4. Inclusive language** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.

**5. Assignment and Course Evaluation**

- Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is "Not Approved") including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.

- Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write.
- For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.

**6. Late assignments**

Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment. Repeated failure to submit assignments on time may affect the final grade for the course.

**7. Limitation on use of social media** Ordinarily, the use of electronic devices in the contexts of classrooms or meetings will be to support the learning, formation, or agenda at hand.

**8. Limitation on use of class material and images**

No material from Zoom classes, including screen capture pictures of their fellow students, professors, and CTAs cannot be posted to Facebook or any other social media without the express consent of the affected individuals.

**9. VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment.**

If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

**CALENDAR:**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading/Assignment</u>
July 20	John Westerhoff's Enculturation of Faith Model	John Westerhoff's <i>Will Our Children Have Faith</i> . 3 <sup>rd</sup> Revised Edition. Morehouse, 2012.

July 21	John Roberto's Adult Faith Formation Learning System	John Roberto's, "Faith Formation for Every Adult in Your Church—It's Possible Today!" <i>Lifelong Faith</i> 3:3 (Fall 2009): 27-37
July 22	Lisa Kimball's Mico and Macro Formation and Research on Faith Formation and Church Vitality	McAlpine, Bill, Joel Thiessen, Keith Walker, and Arch Chee Keen Wong. <i>Signs of Life: Catholic, Mainline, and Conservative Protestant Congregations in Canada</i> . Tyndale, 2021: 96-116.
July 23	Adult Learning Theory and Active Learning Strategies	Chapters 3-6 of John Roberto, ed. <i>The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation</i> . Lifelong Faith Publications, 2015.
July 24	The Soul of the Teacher and Templates for Planning	Research denominational resources for faith formation

**EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA:**

The evaluation for this course will be offered as Approved/Not Approved. The expectations of this class will be completion of readings, participation in class, and a design for an adult Christian formation plan for a season in the church calendar or identified formation need in the church that makes reference to one or more models for adult Christian formation, demonstrates understanding of adult learning theory, includes active learning strategies, and an evaluation process.

Certificate students: the adult Christian formation plan can be described in one to two pages and address one specific learning event. Discuss how learner's minds, hearts, and actions will be engaged.

Basic degree students: the plan should be multi component, articulate the models (and aspects of models) used to create the plan, identify the season or formation need, describe rationale for selection referring to church context and description of target audience, and use a design template to be handed out in class.

Due date: July 31

**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

Brown, Peter, Henry L Roediger and Mark A. McDaniel. *Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*. Belknap Press, 2014.

Foltz, Nancy. Ed. *Handbook of Adult Religious Education*. Religious Education Press, 1986.

Groome, Thomas. *Will there be Faith?* HarperOne, 2011.

Leadership Education at Duke University. "Practicing our Faith." Accessed February 19, 2026. <https://practicingourfaith.org/>

Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998.

Renner, Peter. *The Art of Teaching Adults: how to become an exceptional instructor and facilitator*. Training Associates, 2005.

Roberto, John. "Lifelong Faith". Accessed February 19, 2026. <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/>.

Seymour, Jack L. and Donald E. Miller. *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*. Abingdon, 1990.

Smith, James K.A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Brazos Press, 2016.