



Handing Down the

Faith



Font & Faith



Three major studies

- Search Institute
- Vern Bengston
- Christian Smith

Asking three major questions



1

What common denominators contribute to mature life-long faith that changes our very being so that it changes the way we think and act?

2

To what extent are parents passing on their faith in today's rapidly changing society?

3

Why are some parents successful at passing on their faith, while other parents are not?



Multi-decade Study

Vern Bengtson

- 35 years 1970 - 2005
- Four-generations of families
- 3500 grandparents, parents, grandchildren & great grandchildren

Findings

- Degree of intergenerational similarity did not change
 - 1970 (7/10)
 - 2005 (6/10)
- Success of religious families to pass on their faith to the next generation remained stable
- Retained the faith, values, and beliefs of parents while adapting



Six denominations

Search Institute

- Disciples of Christ
- Evangelical Lutheran
- Episcopal
- Presbyterian (USA)
- United Church of Christ
- Southern Baptist

Findings

- 2 key factors in mature faith
 - Life-long participation in worship with their families
 - Life-long participation in intentional Christian Education/Faith Formation
- The single most important factors in mature faith



Handing Down the Faith

Christian Smith & Amy Adamczyk

- 215 personal, in-depth interviews with parents who belong to churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples
- Protestant – mainline, conservative, and Black
- Catholic – White and Latino
- Conservative Jews
- Mormon
- Muslim
- Hindu
- Buddhist
- + 20 sample nonreligious parents

Findings

“The single most powerful causal influence on the religious lives of American teenagers and young adults is the religious lives of the parents. Not their peers, not the media, not their youth group leaders or clergy, not the religious school teachers.”

- Warm, affirming relationship
- Quality of conversations
 - How
 - Child-centered
 - Integrated
- Religiously similar parents
- Parental consistency
- Role of fathers
- Two-parent households
- Grandparents
- Balance (too much or too little)
- Parent child reciprocity
- Long-lasting effects of
 - Psychological adjustment
 - Romantic lives
 - Future family functioning as adults

Findings

CONSTELLATION OF INFLUENCES



- 1
Purpose of Life
 Successful & happy life
 Doing what is morally right
- 2
Life as a Journey
 Internal grounding through opportunities & challenges
- 3
Value of Religion
 Fosters meaning-making, right values, seeing bigger picture, and being a good person
- 4
Nature of Children
 Each has a "best self" to grow into through positive experiences that progress towards maturity.
- 5
Task of Parenting
 Central job is to prepare & equip children to enjoy, navigate, endure, & overcome life's experiences



- Family Solidarity**
 A sense of family cohesion nurtures sustained & healthy relationships between parents & adult children
- Why Parents Hand Down Faith**
 Provides a foundation, anchor, and grounding for a child's life journey
- Role of Congregations**
 Equip & support parents in their role as faith educators, create places of welcome, belonging, & and community, provide enriching experiences that reinforce what parents are teaching
- How Parents Hand Down Faith**
 Practice, invest in, and model their own faith



PURPOSE OF LIFE

Characteristics

- Quality of life
- Self-motivated
- Live ethically
- Individual within community
- Work hard
- Enjoy friends & family
- Help other people
- Live a good life true to their unique self

...for Parents

- Understand what their own purpose in life is
- Wrestle with & determine values for themselves and their family
- Model ethical living
- Equip children with learning & competencies to discover their own authentic identity & way of life

Implications

...for Congregations

- Foster understanding of God's purpose for our lives
- Inviting people to the way of Jesus, a community of practice



Characteristics

- In the world
- Opportunities to flourish
- Challenges that trip
- Cultural messages
- Building foundations
- Grounded

Implications

...for Parents

- Walk with children in the world
- Recognize both opportunities & challenges
- Navigational skills
- Counter messaging
- Foster solid & grounded identity

...for Congregations

- Build relationships
- Meet families where they are. Life beyond Sunday mornings
- Listen and be responsive to families
- Move away from "one-size fits all" programs



VALUE OF RELIGION

Characteristics

- Normal, valuable, meaningful, worthy part of life
- Provides
 - Guidance
 - Something greater
- Teaches
 - Greater picture/something bigger
 - Right values
 - Be a good person
 - Build healthy relationships
- Produces
 - Pragmatic
 - Humanistic social results
 - Morals

Implications

...for Parents

- Value, find meaning, and worth in religion/faith
- Express it in both word and deed
- Prioritize, integrate, and normalize faith within family life
- Live congruently

...for Congregations

- Equipping parents for Christian practices, integrating faith in everyday life



NATURE OF CHILDREN

Characteristics

- Each child has within themselves a unique and wonderfully made person
- Their best inalienable selves exist internally and with potential
- Only realized by navigating life's journey
- Each child has a God given purpose
- Grow into the fullness for which God created them

Implications

...for Parents

- Help children learn personal independence while maintaining interdependence
- Determine when and how to ease children into life's journey
- Prepared but not overwhelmed
- Foster
 - Resilience
 - Flexibility
 - Perseverance
 - Inner strength

...for Congregations

- Not about "bringing God" to them, it's about helping them recognize and respond to God already within them



PARENTING TASKS

Characteristics

- Prepare & equip their children to
 - Enjoy all that is good in life
 - Overcome difficulties
- Provide
 - Grounding
 - Learning
 - Resources
 - Needed for strength
- Navigate between lax and overbearing parenting

Implications

...for Parents

- Recognize & point out the joy of life
- In difficult times
 - Asking clarifying questions to model thought process in making hard decisions
 - Walking through options, possibilities, and consequences
 - Creating space for age-appropriate decisions to be made by children
 - Be present in the decision making and in the consequences
- With younger children give choices within your boundaries

...for Congregations

- Experience joy together as a community of faith
- Create a culture that struggles together, welcoming questions and doubt



Characteristics

- Parents desire to have warm close relationships with and among their grown children in the future
- Fostering
 - Cohesion as a family
 - Close connections with children in the present
- Families that agree on religious beliefs, practices and ways of talking have a stronger foundation for family solidarity
- Families often see religion as one among many

Implications

...for Parents

- Find and participate in activities and practices that everyone in the family enjoys and can do together
- Integrate faith into & around
- Early in family life, establish
 - Norms,
 - Priorities,
 - Values*early in family life*
- Including children in negotiating these as they grow.
- Finding the "third way"

...for Congregations

- Honoring time
- Creating community and connection around faith (practice at church, do at home)
- Helping families create faith rituals early in family life



WHY PARENTS Should...

Characteristics

- Religious faith and practice can help growing children successfully navigate life's journey.
- Offers
 - Foundation
 - Grounding/roots
 - Valuable and practical help
 - Guidance
 - Comfort
 - Renewal
 - A place to belong
 - A home base to return to

Implications

...for Parents

- Find a community of faith that
 - Is inviting and welcoming
 - Nurtures and sustains
 - Equips and supports
 - A home where belonging is experienced

...for Congregations

- Be that welcoming, supportive community
- Equip and support
- Mentor



CONGREGATION'S ROLE

Characteristics

- Parents are the primary faith educators
- Congregations are secondary
- Provide
 - Community
 - Support
 - Equip
 - Resources
 - Positive experiences for both parents and children/youth

Implications

...for Parents

- Request resources for nurturing faith in families
- Practice integrating faith conversations into everyday life
- Seek out intergenerational opportunities that create space for family solidarity
- Develop conversation partners with parents and with children

...for Congregations

- Partner with parents
- Provide resources for nurturing faith in families
- Provide opportunities for parents to gain confidence and skills in integrating faith conversations into everyday life
- Plan intergenerational opportunities that encourage family solidarity and model faith practices



HOW PARENTS...

Characteristics

- "Parents have only one good and hopefully effective way to raise children to understand and carry on their family's religion...**simply to practice their own personal religious faith for their own sake and as role models for their children.**"
- Understand it is gradual, natural, and intuitive process.
- Look to church for assistance for more formal faith formation

Implications

...for Parents

- Seek out opportunities to invest in, practice, and grow in your own faith
- Request resources and help with translating complex theological concepts and vocabulary into everyday accessible language that relates to parents' and children's lives
- Expect encouragement, support, and sustaining relationships for your role as faith educators

...for Congregations

- Prioritize the faith life of parents
- Provide help with translating complex theological concepts into every day accessible language that relates to parents' and children's lives
- Encourage, support, and sustain parents' role as faith educators