

Curriculum Evaluation Tool

Choosing a curriculum for your church can be a daunting task. Whether you are searching for a program for a mid-week group, weekly Sunday school, adult study, or small group ministry, you will need to consider several factors. This can be an exciting and spiritually fulfilling time for the selection team, but with so many options to choose from and so many tools at hand, where do you begin?

Curriculum Selection Team

Deciding on the best (notice I don't use the word "right") curriculum for your needs begins with allowing a variety of voices to be part of the selection. Be sure to include a representative from

- the teaching team
- the oversight body (Faith Formation Committee of Church Board/Council/Session)
- staff team (your minister may wish to be part of the selection or simply have the opportunity to comment on some of the options)
- a parent (if the curriculum is for use with children)
- a learner

When evaluating curriculum, be sure to ask for recommendations from other congregations with similar needs and structure to your own. Their comments about what works and what doesn't, the adaptations they have made, and how it has been received will be invaluable.

It is also helpful to review the United Church's [New Creed](#) and [Song of Faith](#) to remind yourself of our faith stance. An outline of the United Church's core beliefs can be found on united-church.ca under [What We Believe](#). The resource "Who We Are" (a download on the [children and youth page](#)), designed to prepare camp counsellors for their role in faith formation, is also excellent fodder to prepare your team. [Mandate](#) and [Gathering](#) magazines can be useful United Church identity resources as well.

Be sure to review your own mission/vision statement to identify criteria you are looking for in a curriculum. For instance, if your church mission statement mentions justice, you will want to consider a curriculum that invites justice seeking.

Knowing the needs of your congregation is key to making the best choice. One helpful approach is the Know – Feel – Do model. When thinking about faith formation needs, ask yourself:

- What do you want the learner to *know*?
- What do you want the learner to *feel* after experiencing these lessons?
- What do you hope they will *do* or have accomplished by the end of the sessions?

You will need to do a bit of inventory before you begin. You'll need a list of the goals (hopes) for faith formation for the particular group you are considering. This could be a creative and engaging task that builds community among the selection team members as each member of the team identifies important elements of faith formation for them. You might consider sharing your personal faith formation stories, sharing a story or symbol that helped form your faith. Resources for doing this are available on the Christian Reformed Church's [Faith Storytelling Toolkit](#).

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Be sure to write down the items that are revealed in this task and to search for them in the content of the curriculum you are reviewing. Your list might look like this:

What are your congregation's faith formation goals?

- Make a list of your hopes (goals) for children, youth, and adults.
- What does your mission statement say about your goals? Keep this list of goals handy as you review the various curriculums.

What are your congregation's faith formation needs?

- Who are the learners in your community?
- What does your community look like?
- What is your setting like? (rural/urban/inner city/multi-racial/intercultural/First Nations)
- Who are the participants? (long-time church members, newcomers, interfaith)
- What age? What are the developmental needs of this age?
- What are the faith, relationship, and special needs/interests of your faith community?
- What broader community and global issues affect your community's daily living?

An evaluation worksheet and several online tools are included at the end of this resource. Many publishers offer free samples online for you to review. Sometimes your presbytery or Conference might host a curriculum review workshop. If they currently don't, you can always ask them to!

Choosing the best curriculum for your needs is a little like choosing the right outfit. You need to consider the criteria of fit, style, fabric, durability, cost, and appropriateness. And above all, you have to gauge how it makes you feel. Trust your gut—it could be the Spirit talking...

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Criteria

Fit

1. *Theological Stance:* Does the theology (how you think about God) in the resource agree with your own theology? with the theology of the United Church?
 - What does it say about God, Jesus, and the Spirit and what they are calling us to? Look for descriptive words and phrases and jot them down.
 - What does it say about the authority of the Bible?
 - How are the sacraments taught and shared? Is this approach consistent with your own thoughts? with the United Church's understanding? Who is allowed to participate? How are they included?
 - How does it portray the role of mission, justice, and stewardship?
 - How does the curriculum make you feel?

Style

1. Think about how faith formation happens in your community. How might your faith formation practices affect the kind of curriculum you choose? How are the following made known in the curriculum?
 - Spiritual disciplines: Bible study, Sunday school, meditation, prayer, play
 - Worship and sacraments
 - Music, media, arts, drama, creed, ritual, symbol, technology
 - Relationships
 - Discipleship – attention to the lived human story
 - Social justice action
 - Community outreach
 - Care for creation
2. Think about how the curriculum approaches faith formation.
 - Is the unique spirituality of each person affirmed?
 - Are individual questions, concerns, needs, insights, and experiences honoured?
 - Does the material address the whole person—their thoughts, feelings, pain, creativity, actions?
 - Are learners given the freedom to make decisions and choices for themselves, or are they told what to believe and how to live?
 - Do lessons connect to daily life relevant for 21st-century learners?
3. Think about the way the curriculum is offered. Which of the following are most helpful in your context?
 - One room
 - Rotation
 - Age divisions
 - Is it based on the Bible, lectionary passages, faith and life issues, or community? What are the advantages of this model? What are the drawbacks? Which model do you prefer? Why?

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4. Think about the language used in the curriculum.
 - Is it welcoming? (How formal is it? How does it address the learner? How does it make the learner feel? Are the images diverse and rich?)
 - Is it inclusive? (images, gender, culture)
 - Is it consistent with the type of language your congregation uses to speak and think about God?

5. Think about how the curriculum addresses the following.
 - How does it share the gospel messages? Is the teacher the one who instills knowledge? Is the teacher a co-learner? Does it value the wisdom and spirituality of the learners? Does it invite individual exploration?
 - *Prep Time*: What resources are offered to prepare the session leader? How much time is required to become familiar with the lesson and its activities? How much time is required to prepare materials ahead of time?
 - *Length of Lessons*: What is the assumed length of sessions? Is it fixed or can it be modified without losing the integrity of the lesson? Is it realistic for your setting?
 - *Learning Styles*: Does the curriculum provide a variety of ways of engaging the material? Is it the same session to session? Is there evidence of the following learning styles:
 - Visual: pictures, images, diagrams, colours, and mind maps
 - Physical: “learn by doing,” drawing diagrams, using physical objects, role playing
 - Aural: sound, rhythms, music, recordings, clever rhymes
 - Verbal: speech, writing, word-based techniques, scripting, reading aloud
 - Logical/mathematical: patterns, numbering, problem-solving, cause and effect
 - Social: group or partner work
 - Solitary: individual activities, reflection, journaling

Fabric

1. Image of student
 - How does the curriculum portray the learner?
 - Does the curriculum encourage the learner to become active in the congregation and community?
 - Does it connect worship and learning?
 - Does it encourage learners to examine their own faith? share stories of other people’s faith?
 - Does it help learners discover their gifts and develop their leadership skills?
2. Image of teacher
 - What is the role of the teacher?
 - Are there Bible and teaching background materials for the teacher?
3. Attractiveness of material
 - Is the material attractive, colourful, and easy to use?
 - Does it invite the user to engage their senses?
 - Does it include visual portrayals of people that are inclusive?

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- How easy are the materials to access? Is photocopying required? Do materials need to be created? Is the resource available online or only in print?
4. Is there take-home material? Is it for the individual learner or a family-based activity?
 - Are the activities engaging—do they invite deepening or broadening the learning experience?
 - What is the mode of delivery—paper, book, web-based, etc.?
 - How would you rate the benefits of the take-home materials?
 - Are there drawbacks/deterrents to use at home?

Durability

1. Is the curriculum tied to current events and modes of thinking? Will you be able to use it for more than the current session?
2. Is the curriculum suitable for multi-age groups?

Cost

1. There is more to consider than just the actual cost of the curriculum. Cheaper is not always better. The first criteria for selection is the suitability of the curriculum to your faith formation needs. However, the attractiveness of the material, ease of use, family materials, and other factors are also important.
 - Is your budget adequate to meet the faith formation needs of children, youth, and adults in your congregation?
 - How can you acquire the additional budget costs if needed?
 - Does your budget include additional materials such as supplies, children's books, music, audiovisual material, and technology required for or as an addition to the curriculum?
2. Curriculum costs
 - What is the overall cost per student? per lesson?
 - What is the cost in volunteer time? (prep, teaching, clean up, etc.)
 - What is the cost of additional resources required?

Appropriateness

- Is the theology offered a good fit for your context?
- Are the materials age-appropriate for your group?
- Can you afford the curriculum? Is it a one-time purchase or multi-year use?
- Is the material inclusive of a range of races, cultures, family structures, abilities, and economic and social patterns?

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An Evaluation Worksheet for Curriculum Choices

The following worksheet lists features and components that will help you to evaluate curriculum.

Name of curriculum reviewed: _____

Group and setting where used: _____

I. Curriculum Features	Strengths	Challenges
Theological fit		
Faith formation style and approach		
Organized around Bible stories, lectionary passages, or church year		
Connection to life, justice, and social context		
Leader/learning roles and methods		
Appearance, usability, durability		
Materials for leaders		
Hands-on material for learners		
Imagery and language		
Take-home material		
Cost		
Other: What I like best about this curriculum Challenges I see in using this curriculum		