



PROVIDED BY:



INSTITUTE FOR  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

*An Institute of Concordia Nebraska*

[cune.edu/ire](http://cune.edu/ire)

LEADER GUIDE

# Developing Maturing Disciples

Written by Rev. Dr. Peter Jurchen

A study to assist congregational leaders in identifying the characteristics of a maturing disciple – to assist with planning for educational ministries

# A few words from the Director of the IRE

Congratulations on being a congregation that seeks to be intentional about its educational ministries!

Congregations work to deliver educational offerings for their members, but the vast majority of them are not intentional in determining the hoped-for outcomes of these offerings. In almost every other educational experience, stating the hoped-for outcomes for learners is an expectation, but this seldom happens in the church.

This resource intends to give congregational leaders a way to define these outcomes for their church. Scripture is clear that maturation should be a goal for believers

**In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still and infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14)**

Paul also demonstrates that leaders should be able to purposely plan their educational programming to accommodate those they are leading

**Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly, mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. (I Corinthians 3:1-2)**

This study is designed to assist church leaders in their review of the guidance that Scripture provides and the process of translating that guidance into a specific plan for their congregation. Through the use of these three studies, congregational leaders will study Scripture allowing them to better define what they see as the priorities for a maturing disciple. The Bible provides us with many things that should be priorities for disciples of Christ, but each congregation

will be able to reflect on the Word and define the characteristics that they will promote among the body of believers at each church.

Once the leadership has a better understanding of what members should know, feel, and do as maturing disciples, the leadership will work to assist the members in understanding these priorities. When the hoped-for outcomes of a maturing disciple are known, it allows studies to be chosen or designed in order to promote those outcomes. Research on adult education is clear; people participate in educational opportunities when they are motivated by relevant and applicable outcomes. Providing members with clarity about the purpose and outcomes is the first step in developing a rich learning environment.

May God bless your efforts,

MARK BLANKE, Ed.D

Founder/Director – Institute for Religious Education

Concordia University, Nebraska

**The mission of the IRE is to “enhance the intentionality and effectiveness of Christian education in the church.”**

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

# Developing Maturing Disciples Study

### WELCOME

Welcome to the “Developing Maturing Disciples” study. This three-session, flexible study provides a guide for leaders to help their congregations facilitate meaningful discussion and action around a key goal of Christian education: maturing discipleship. In the end, those who participate in this study will have not only a better understanding of maturing adult discipleship, but also a way to measure and analyze meaningful input from your congregation and a starting plan for achieving your goals.

All congregational and institutional leaders know that when adult disciples are taking their various God-given roles seriously all aspects of congregational life benefit. In fact, one could argue that when adults take their faith seriously, all other aspects of Christian education in a congregation become either easier or unnecessary. So why aren’t adult disciples “stepping up” so to speak? Why do we struggle with getting more adult disciples engaged in taking their faith journey more seriously?

Aside from the many temptations that the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh lay out to our adults, we also face the problems of complexity and lack of clarity. First, adult life is complex. With schedules, expectations, deadlines, bills, and other burdens, most adult feel they have little “margin” for taking time to learn anything new. Thus, most do not take the initiative to engage in additional learning opportunities provided by a congregation. In addition, the overwhelming amount of content provided in Scripture about the Christian life often unfortunately leads to a lack of clarity for congregations or organizations in simply defining the Christian life. Where do we begin, and how do we create and work to achieve these goals?

This is where this study comes in. Hopefully, by the end of this three-session study, your congregational will have a clear and simple vision for what maturing adult discipleship looks like in your context as well as some ideas for how to facilitate their plans.

### **WHAT IS IN THIS STUDY?**

This study contains various materials for you to use in your context. The three sessions (each approximately 90 minutes long) included in this study are:

- 1. Exploring Maturing Adult Discipleship** – in this study your group will take a serious look into key Scriptural principles surrounding maturing discipleship. At the end of this session, your group will be challenged to pray and reflect upon their study.
- 2. Contemplating Maturing Adult Discipleship** – in this second session, your group will gather their thoughts from Scripture and contemplate what that means in your context. You will reflect upon your specific areas of strength and opportunity and make a plan for how to gather meaningful data from your congregation.
- 3. Planning for Maturing Adult Discipleship** – in this third session your group will take the results of your data-gathering plan and consider how to put it into practice. This evaluation of the needs assessment will serve as both a starting point and a springboard for future endeavors within your context to develop maturing adult discipleship.

## HOW CAN I USE THIS STUDY?

Each of the three sessions of this study is divided into a Leader Guide and a Learner Guide. The Leader Guide contains the key information from the Learner Guide, as well as an introduction, objectives, and extra considerations. In addition, the Leader Guide includes interwoven procedures, tips, and talking points in italics to help leaders get the most out of their facilitation. To properly run this study, one copy of the Learner Guide should be copied and distributed to each member of the study group before each session. Your leader should have the Leader Guide. To get the most out of the study the leader should thoroughly prep and review the Leader Guide beforehand, focusing on Leader Guide text in italics. Within this document you will find the three Leader Guide documents followed by three accompanying Learner Guide documents.

The author of this study realizes that each context is different, and each group will consider different factors when putting this study into practice.

1. If you are doing this study in monthly Elders' meetings or Church Council Meetings, you could conduct this study in three successive meetings, with the needs assessment put into action between the second and third meetings. If you do so, however, you will need to keep your regular business time short as these are intense sessions. If time is a factor, you could also stretch out each of the first two sessions over multiple meetings.
2. This study could also be conducted during a leadership retreat, though you would only be able to tackle the first two sessions as the third one is designed to be completed after the congregational survey.
3. Also note that this study does not necessarily look like a more traditional Bible study. Most of the time is not spent in study of Scripture (only the first of the three sessions includes explicit Bible study). Instead, the study focuses on group brainstorming and planning centered around key biblical themes. If you desire to add more Bible study to your sessions, take time to review Scripture from the first session at the beginning of your second and third sessions.

4. Finally, realize that the three sessions of this study are divided thematically rather than by length. Different groups will take different amount of time to cover and/or consider the presented material. In addition, questions posed for group discussion in this study may be covered at different paces depending on the group. Do not feel confined to cover all the material for each session at once sitting. Use the materials in this study as you deem best for your context and group.

## SESSION 1

# Exploring Maturing Adult Discipleship

### INTRODUCTION

In this session your group will take a serious look into key Scriptural principles surrounding maturing discipleship. At the end of this session, your group will be challenged to pray and reflect upon their study in your congregational context.

#### **Specific Session Objective**

- By the end of the session, the learners will be able to identify and describe key characteristics of lifelong, maturing adult discipleship.
- By the end of the session, the learners will value the importance of maturing adult disciples in their congregational context.

## Session Plan

### OPENING ACTIVITY

*Leader, open with prayer. Then read the below text out loud with your group and give them a few moments to write down their observations before leading discussion.*

Take a moment and consider all the different programs and/or activities that you provide for all your different age groups in your congregation. Don't worry about missing anything; just think of all the different ways your congregation provides opportunities for learning or community together. On your own, in the space below, take a moment to write down as many programs or activities as you can.



## EXPLORING THE TOPIC

*Leader, read the text below out loud with your group.*

### **What About the Goal?**

Regardless of what your congregation provides for children, youth, or adults, we need to keep one thing in mind: programs or activities are not ends unto themselves. They all have different purposes. Some are social, some educational, and others service-oriented.

It is important, however, to consider why we do what we do. Why expend energy, time, talents, and treasures? What's the end goal? The purpose of this study is to help you consider a major overall goal of all that we do in our education, service, and community-building endeavors:

### **The cultivation and nurture of lifelong, maturing, adult discipleship.**

Think of it this way: when starting a major project, you want to keep the end goal in mind. When you start building a house, the goal is the completion of the house. The goal is not to hammer some boards together or lay a foundation. These are important steps to building a house, but they are not the end goal.

The same goes for getting a college degree. The goal is to learn what needs to be learned in order to complete the degree requirements and graduate. The goal is not to simply write some papers or attend some classes. These are important steps but not the end goal.

So it is with our educational programs and activities in our congregations. We attend the Divine Service to receive God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. This is the heart and center of our identity as God's people – it's all about receiving the gifts that Christ gives to us. Congregational programs and activities, then, extend to further developing and fostering that identity as God's people.

Yet, in the day-to-day operations of children's ministry, youth groups, board meetings, service events, and coffee hours, the simple end goal of cultivating and nurturing lifelong, maturing adult disciples is often lost. It's time to regain that end goal and reignite our desire to focus on lifelong discipleship.

Now consider, what would change in your congregation if more adults took more initiative in taking their identity as disciples of Jesus seriously? What sorts of changes might that bring, to you as a congregation and to your programs and activities?

*Leader, you can discuss these final questions here as a large group or in pairs. The point is not to foster negative thinking or to criticize what is not going well in your setting. Instead, the point of this activity is to get your group considering the possibilities and opportunities that a more intentional, focused, adult education and nurture plan might have on your congregation. Possible talking points include:*

- Adults who take their discipleship seriously would take more initiative in teaching the faith at home which would likely lead to less work in creating and managing programs.*
- Adults who take their discipleship seriously would take more initiative in evangelism, taking some of the pressure off of professional church workers and evangelism committees in outreach.*
- Adults who take their discipleship seriously would be more intentional in building and maintaining Christian connections and community, leading to fewer people feeling isolated.*

*When you are done discussing, move to the below section.*

### **But What is Maturing Adult Discipleship?**

Though it's easy to talk about in the abstract, if maturing adult discipleship is to be our overall end goal to educational program and activities, we need more clarity. How do we define this thing called maturing adult discipleship? Let's let Scripture show us the way.

Look up and read the below ten Scriptures, for each quickly summarize how this Scripture passage helps us understand lifelong maturing adult discipleship.

*Leader, you have some options for how to approach this part of the study. Pick the right option for Scripture exploration based on your group. Options include:*

- Assigning each of your group members one or more of the Scriptures to read, summarize, and then report back to the overall group.*
- Dividing your larger group into pairs or small groups. Each group could then look up the Scripture passages on their own. When the time is up, select groups could report on each of the Scripture passages back to the larger group.*

- *Go through the Scripture passages one-by-one as a large group. The caution in this section would be against you as the leader dominating the discussion. Remember that this study is built around helping people take more initiative in embracing their role as maturing adult disciples of Christ.*

*Also, in this leader guide, you have some additional text included to help you discuss and unpack these Scriptures with your group. The Learner Guide for Session 1 only has the Scripture references provided.*

#### **John 8:31–33:**

*This passage is a foundational text for understanding maturing adult discipleship. Mature disciples abide, or remain, in God's Word. This is both passive (they receive God's gifts in corporate worship) and active (they take the initiative to engage in Bible reading, meditation, and prayer in their daily life). As they remain in God's Word, the Spirit will open their eyes to the truth and they will be freed – both from the guilt of sin and freed to love and serve their neighbor.*

#### **Matthew 28:19-20:**

*This passage is another foundational text for discipleship, outlining the call to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey Jesus' commands. It emphasizes the importance of Baptism as the way God brings people into His Kingdom and on the daily life of faith.*

#### **Matthew 16:24:**

*This verse challenges believers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus. Following Jesus involves daily commitment and dedication. It emphasizes the need for self-sacrifice and following Jesus' example. Our culture often sees religion as a way to self-help. Picking up one's cross instead means self-denial for the sake of the Gospel and service to our neighbor.*

#### **Hebrews 5:12-14:**

*This passage uses a metaphor of growing in faith, moving from basic teachings to more mature understanding and discernment. A maturing adult disciple is never finished with learning and growing. This is not like formal education in school where you "graduate." This passage emphasizes the need for continuous learning and growth in the Christian life across the lifespan.*

### **Colossians 1:28-29:**

*This passage highlights the goal of discipleship as presenting believers mature in Christ, emphasizing the importance of teaching and warning with wisdom. It underscores the purpose of discipleship, which is to see believers grow and mature in their faith.*

### **John 13:34-35:**

*This passage emphasizes the importance of disciples loving as Christ has loved them. Love, and a life of love, is not optional for maturing adult disciples. In the Lutheran tradition, we understand that love is most often manifested as God's people serve their neighbors in their various callings, or vocations, in life. This is seen most clearly in loving family members, coworkers, and immediate neighbors.*

### **John 15:1-6:**

*This longer section emphasizes how disciples bear fruit. As they abide in Christ, that is, receive God's gifts through Word and Sacrament both corporately and individually, their lives will produce good works. Maturing adult disciples take initiative to stay connected to the Means of Grace and look for ways to do good for others in Jesus' name.*

### **Titus 3:14:**

*We tend to think that "devotion" only ever means personal prayer and Bible reading. Here Paul expands this concept to being devoted to good works. Maturing adult disciples intentionally commit themselves to core teachings of the Bible and devote themselves to lifelong learning of those things. This often is seen in the ways maturing adult disciples commit themselves to a certain aspect of congregational life, like leadership, service, or a particular committee's work.*

### **2 Timothy 2:1-2:**

*Though Paul wrote this letter to Timothy the pastor, this section highlights how disciples should be able to pass along the truth of God's Word to others. All may not be pastors or professional teachers of the faith, but as God's people live and serve others in the world they should be equipped to communicate God's Word to others in various situations. This most prominently is seen in heads of households teaching the faith at home.*

### **2 Peter 3:14-18:**

*This section highlights two things about maturing adult discipleship. First, maturing disciples should be able to discern truth from error. This*

*requires a firm knowledge of Scripture as well as the skill to apply it to interpreting the world around them. Second, it shows how God's people never cease growing in knowledge and understanding of their Christian identity. This is a lifelong process, worked by the Spirit through the delivered, implanted, and active Word of God.*

**Putting Topic Into Action**

*Leader, read the below section out loud with your group.*

Now that you've taken a brief look at a Scriptural view of maturing adult discipleship, it's time to put even more definition to maturing adult discipleship. You do not have to have all this figured out now. The next two sessions will help you think about how this applies to your congregation. For now, let's think about what this end goal of parish education and activity looks like in the life of a maturing adult disciple.

Below is a simple chart with three columns, each with its own category. Looking back over what you've considered and read in this session, write down different understandings, attitudes, and behaviors a maturing adult disciple would have in his or her own life. For the rest of this study we will refer to these as characteristics of maturing adult discipleship. For each of the categories, try to come up with a variety of examples.

A maturing adult disciple should:

Understand / have a growing knowledge of...	Value / have an attitude of...	Be able to / know how to...

*Leader, you may need to do a little more explanation of the three categories. These are based on some common understandings in learning theory that, holistically, human learning has more to it than just cognitive knowledge. If we want to cultivate and nurture maturing adult disciples, we need to focus on the whole person.*

*The first column “Understand / have a growing knowledge of...” focuses on the knowledge that a maturing adult disciple should possess. These can include:*

- Have a knowledge of the content of the Bible*
- Understand the principles of Biblical interpretation*
- Understand the key doctrines of the Christian faith*

*The second column, “Value / have an attitude of...” focuses on the attitudes/ values/beliefs of a maturing adult disciple. These can include:*

- Value how God works through His Word*
- Value personal Bible reading and prayer as a way that God forms faith*
- Have an attitude of love and care for the Christian community*

*The third column, “Be able to / know how to...” focuses on the skills, habits, and abilities of a maturing adult disciple. These can include:*

- Be able to share their faith with others*
- Know how to lead a prayer with their family*
- Be able to identify ways they can use their talents to serve the congregation*

*You may want to run this activity as a large group, going around your space and allowing different people to share their insights one-by-one. Alternatively, you can have individuals or small groups fill in their charts first and then share with the larger group. If you do this, keep a record of what the different groups came up with. It is important that you work on writing down everyone’s thoughts and keeping them in one place. Do not get too hung up on the categories – in the end there is a lot of overlap. Instead, see the categories on the chart as a way to further organize and define maturing adult discipleship practically in your group.*

*Leader, make sure that you keep a copy of this group reflection for the second session. If you have one member taking notes, keep a copy of those notes. If they are written on a whiteboard as people share, make sure to take a good picture of that whiteboard for the second session. If you write these down on a large sticky note or poster board, keep these for the next session.*

## CLOSING OUT THE SESSION

What you've thought about in today's session only scratches the surface of a deep biblical understanding of maturing adult discipleship. However, it should provide you with a foundation for the future. In the next session you'll really start to dig into what those aspects of maturing adult discipleship would look like in your context. Until then, commit yourself to doing three things.

**Read over the Scripture texts provided in this session. Reread them and recall them frequently. Trust that the Spirit uses God's Word to create and sustain faith as well as grow your understanding of discipleship.**

**Identify and describe at least two other selections from the Bible that you did not look at in this session that help define maturing adult discipleship. Write them down and come to the next session ready to share.**

**Pray. Pray that God would use the efforts of your group to help steer your congregation to focus more on what matters most for you. Pray that more adults would take their roles seriously and that your programs and activities would help equip them to do so.**

*Leader, challenge your group to take these three calls to action seriously. The second session of this series will involve a lot of brainstorming and collaboration. The more you can help your learners invest in this process, especially before the next session meets, the better prepared they will be to take up the challenge.*

### **Extra Considerations**

*You may want to have a printout of the different Scripture passages, in full text, for each member of your group. This would help your learners with keeping track of the particular passages between sessions. Alternatively, put a reference to these and other Scripture passages in a prominent place in your space throughout your study.*

*If your group is struggling with using precise, attainable characteristics of maturing discipleship, consider looking up and having available some educational objective verbs for them to reference. These can be easily found with a web search, and may help add some clarity to how to properly define clear goals. The danger with these goals is, unfortunately, that we make them too broad to be useful or attainable. Specific and clear goals are often most useful*

## SESSION 2

# Contemplating Maturing Adult Discipleship

## INTRODUCTION

In this second session, your group will gather their thoughts from Scripture and contemplate what that means in your congregational context. You will reflect upon your specific areas of strength and opportunity and make a plan for how to gather meaningful data from your congregation.

### **Specific Session Objective**

- By the end of the session, the learners will be able to consider the unique characteristics of their congregations that factor into maturing adult discipleship.
- By the end of the session, the learners will be able to identify a small set of discipleship characteristics they will focus on in their congregational context.
- By the end of the session, the learners will be able to brainstorm questions that could be used to create a congregational survey that will assist in future adult discipleship plans.

## Session Plan

### OPENING ACTIVITY

*Leader, open with prayer, then read the below text out loud with your group.*

In the last session, you considered a major goal of education in the parish: the cultivate and nurture lifelong, maturing adult discipleship. You read Scripture and summarized key takeaways from Scripture on understandings, values, and abilities of maturing adult disciples. You finished with this challenge: to meditate on the Scriptures,



identify two other selections from the Bible that help define maturing adult discipleship, and then pray.

Let's start this session by sharing your further reflections. In the space below, write down your biggest takeaway from your ongoing reflection on maturing adult discipleship since your last session. When your time for writing is done, be prepared to share your reflection with your group.

*Leader, give your learners a minute or two to write down their takeaway, then have them share. If your group is not too large, have each learner share around the circle of your room with the whole group. If your group is large, have them do this in small groups. This whole activity should not take long – you have a lot to do in this session as a group.*

*The point of this activity is to get them thinking about what they learned. If you have time, and/or there are participants in your session who did not attend the first one, lead a quick overview of what you talked about in the previous session. Then, move on to the next session.*

## EXPLORING THE TOPIC

### Reviewing Maturing Adult Discipleship

*Leader, take out your notes from the first session, and find a way to display this for your group. You should have some version of a compiled list of or chart of the characteristics of "Maturing adult disciples should:" from the last session. If you do not have a record of this, take some time to try to recall what you came up with from last time. Ideally, though, you still have a record (notes, picture from a white board, sticky note, etc.). When you have this, read the below to your group.*

During the first session, you individually and as a group brainstormed a list of the different characteristics a maturing adult disciple should understand, value, and be able to do. As we reflect on this list, take a moment to consider what you would add, subtract, or modify after your reflections.

*Leader, give them a few minutes to share as a large group. If there is little or no suggested change from your group, that's okay. When the list is considered, move on to reading the next section.*

## Consider Your Congregation Context

It's likely that, currently, you are a little overwhelmed. After all, the Bible lists many different characteristics of maturing adult disciples. You also know that many adults in your congregation are busy.

They have many responsibilities in life and can feel overwhelmed if asked to do one more thing.

The truth remains, though, that God has called you and has called them to lives of love and service to their neighbor. Though there are some core defining characteristics of lifelong, maturing disciples (like remaining in God's Word), each Christian has different vocations. God has given different responsibilities to different people. This manifests itself in different ways in different communities.

We also know that each congregation is different. Some are in the city, some in smaller towns, some are in the country. Some have many members, others have fewer. Some have an abundance of young families, others have none. Some have members that live close by and others have commuters. You get the picture.

Consider YOUR congregation. Think of things like the average attendance, average age, and cultural makeup of your group. Take five minutes. In the below box, mark down bullet points that describe what your congregation is like. Who are you? What are your opportunities? What are your challenges? There are no right or wrong answers to this. Just describe your congregation.

My Congregation Is:

*Leader, have your group members do this activity individually. The point of having a box for them to record their thoughts in is to put some constraints to their reflection. This can be overwhelming. However, it is good to have them think about their context, especially the challenges and opportunities. It also helps them think realistically about what your congregation is able to actually do with its resources.*

*When each person has finished, ask for volunteers to take turns sharing points. Avoid temptations to use this as a complaining session. Instead, paint a picture of your congregation. If able, as the leader, take notes on a whiteboard, or have a volunteer write down the thoughts. Identify similarities between different speakers, highlighting the themes that emerge. This is important as your group will begin to identify for itself what sort of congregational context you're working in.*

**Narrowing Things Down**

In order to avoid being overwhelmed, it's helpful to think of ways you can narrow down a working definition of maturing adult discipleship for your congregational context. Instead of trying everything, focus on a few things your congregation can focus on.

Recall the overall list of characteristics that mature disciples should understand, value, and be able to do. With your context in mind, on your own, narrow each one of these down to two or three that are workable and achievable in your congregation. You may not be able to go on long and involved mission trips, but you may be able to serve your neighbor in your community. Referencing the overall list your group previously made, in the chart below, write down the two or three objectives for each category that YOU believe would best help cultivate and nurture maturing adult discipleship in your congregation.

Understand / have a growing knowledge of...	Value / have an attitude of...	Be able to / know how to...

*Leader, like before, have each member of your group write down the two or three they see as achievable and most pertinent to your congregational context. When each member is finished, debrief as a large group. Have each member share their two or three characteristics for each category. Look for common themes and objectives, and facilitate a process whereby you identify the main two or three*

*overall characteristics for each category that you want to focus on as a congregation.*

*There doesn't need to be complete consent with your group, but know that doing this as a community can build buy-in and consensus. When you are done facilitating this discussion, write down your top two or three characteristics for each category for the whole group to see, ideally on a whiteboard or large sticky note.*

*Then, move to the below section.*

## **Putting Topic Into Action**

Congratulations! You now have a first working draft of some simple yet concrete characteristics of maturing adult discipleship that you can focus on in your congregational context. Like you previously read in the first session of this study, this is a critical goal of any congregation.

The next step is to consider HOW you will develop an educational and cultural plan in your congregation that will help you build these characteristics. Before you jump to this, though, it is important that you first gather feedback from your adult congregation members. This feedback will be instrumental for your group as you consider how to put these things into action. After all, you can have the best ideas, but if people are unable to try them, they will just remain ideas.

The next step, before your third session, is to create a simple yet informative survey for your adult members of your congregation. You will use data collected from this survey to help you plan out how.

## **Things to Look For In This Survey**

There are no hard and fast rules for putting together a survey like this. Below, however, are some considerations you should use when building this out.

**This survey should be short. This is something that could be put on half a page or a page, handed out, and completed in just a few minutes.**

**The survey should help you gather data that will be informative for you in nurturing your key characteristics of mature adult discipleship in your congregation. So keep your list in mind as you put together your survey.**

At least one question should focus on the times and dates the adults in your congregation are most open to/likely to attend educational opportunities.

At least one question should ask your adults what resources or types of gatherings they would find most useful in fostering their daily life of faith.

At least one question should ask your adults what their greatest challenges are in engaging their faith in their daily lives.

At least one question should ask your adults about what topics they would be most interested in studying or learning about together.

At least one question should ask your adults about how well they feel connected to the overall community of the congregation. Adults will be much less likely to take the initiative to learn something new if they feel disconnected from others.

On your own, write down five questions you think would be useful to ask adult members of your congregation, using the above prompts as guides. Remember, these questions are here to help you gather important data you can use to implement practical strategies.

*Leader, this is a big task and a big ask. Many in your group will be unfamiliar with the process of writing survey questions. These can be open-ended or fixed-answer questions. The nice thing is that each member of your group does not need to come up with a survey. Only one person does. Consider the below options for putting this survey together.*

- *Identify one person in your group who will be the point person for this survey (this may be you, it may be someone else). If you have time in your session, have each group member share a question or two that they would like answered from the congregation. If your time is short (which is likely based on the length of this session), instead have each member write down their five questions on a separate piece of paper and hand those in to your point person who can then do work between this session and the next session to create this survey.*
- *If you are unfamiliar with how to put together a survey like this, use an internet search for examples. There's nothing wrong in looking at others' work as a best-practice guide for your own survey. Remember, you want data and feedback from your adult members that will be helpful for you as you go into the next session.*

## CLOSING OUT THE SESSION

You've considered a lot of things in this session, including your congregational context, what you can focus on to foster maturing adult discipleship in your context, and questions that your group could ask your congregation that would help you start to think about how this is done. Before the next session, here's what you are challenged to do.

**Create your survey and consider how to distribute it to as many adults in the congregation as possible. Have your point person (or leader) use your data to create a short survey. This can be done using an web-based survey tool or paper.**

**Find a way to distribute and gather data from your survey. Email may or may not be the best way to do this. An electronic survey via email may have a wide reach, but it likely won't yield a broad range of results (it will likely be a small number of the same people who normally give feedback). A better option may be to have a paper survey, available for a few weeks, that you encourage members to fill out after the Divine Service. Use whatever distribution methods you have to encourage members to fill out this survey. As a member of this group, it's your responsibility to encourage as many adults to take this survey as possible.**

**Collect the data. Before your next session, have your point person collect and compile the data. Ideally, your point person will have this data available for you to consider PRIOR to your next session.**

**Pray. Continue to pray for the process. Pray that adults in your congregation would step up and take the initiative for their own discipleship so that they may be lifelong learners of God's Word. Pray they would help raise up future generations in the faith. Pray that God would give them peace in Jesus Christ and a future hope of the new creation.**

*Leader, unlike the previous session, this session ends with a substantial amount of work before the next session gathers. In the next session, you will take a look at the survey data, revisit your chosen characteristics of maturing adult discipleship for your context, and make some plans for action in the future.*

*Depending on your group, you may want to delay the next meeting until you have your survey responses. If you meet monthly (like for a Congregational or Elder's meeting), you may have enough time to create and implement your congregational survey before your next meeting. It usually takes a few weeks to gather sufficient data to use. If you only have a handful of responses, know that though that data may be useful, it's not an accurate sample size for your congregation.*

### **Extra Considerations**

*This session involves several steps, each which may lead to a desire for greater discussion. This may be a good thing. If your group wants to discuss in greater detail, or the collection of ideas from various group members leads to helpful discussion, consider that a blessing. Don't feel the need to complete this session in one sitting if you do not need to.*

*As was mentioned above, the creation of a survey may not be something your group is comfortable with. However, there are likely people in your congregation that have experience with this and would be glad to help you put together a paper or online survey tool. Identify them and use them as a resource, even if they are not part of this group. Who knows, their work on this survey may increase their overall interest on this topic.*

## SESSION 3

# Planning For Maturing Adult Discipleship

## INTRODUCTION

In this third session your group will take the results of your data-gathering plan and consider how to put it into practice. This evaluation of the needs assessment will serve as both a starting point and a springboard for future endeavors within your context to develop maturing adult discipleship.

### Specific Session Objective

- By the end of this session, your learners will be able to connect themes from congregational characteristics and data from your congregational survey.
- By the end of this session, your learners will be able to brainstorm a simple plan for cultivating some simple characteristics of maturing adult discipleship in your congregational context.

## Session Plan

### OPENING ACTIVITY

*Leader before your session begins, make sure each member of your group has been able to see the survey results you gathered from your congregation. As you begin this session, check that each member of your group has a copy of the survey results (however your leader chose to present them). Then, open with prayer, then read the below text out loud with your group.*

Since the last session, your group conducted a survey of your adult congregants. You were likely not able to get an abundance of responses, but whatever data you collected will serve as a useful tool for your group moving forward.



Take a few minutes, and review the results of this survey again. In the space provided below, write down one or two key takeaways from this survey. After you're done, you will share your reflections in the group.

*Leader, give your learners a minute or two to write down their take-away, then have them share. Consider the below points.*

- *Regardless of how well you prepare and distribute information, it is still possible that one or more of your group members did not review the survey data before this session. Giving them a moment now to review may be useful for the overall group.*
- *If your group is not too large, have each learner share around the circle of your room with the whole group. If your group is large, have them do this in small groups. This whole activity should not take long – you have a lot to do in this session as a group.*
- *Don't worry about covering all the material of the survey here. The next part of this study will help you think through the survey results in more detail.*

## EXPLORING THE TOPIC

### Taking a Step Back

*Leader, once again take out your notes from the first two sessions and find a way to display this for your group (print outs, on a screen for all to see, on a whiteboard, etc.). You should have some version of a compiled list of or chart of the "Maturing adult disciples should:" characteristics for your congregational context. Make sure that your group has access to this list AND the survey results from your congregational survey. Then read the below.*

By the end of this session, your group will have a basic plan for how you can create educational activities and/or an environment that is more intentionally focused on cultivating and nurturing maturing adult disciples. Before then, though, it is important to take a step back at your group's brainstorming and the data you collected from your congregation and look for connections.

Why do this? First, you want to be intentional in what you do. As adults, you know this – adult life is busy! Adding more to anyone's schedule can be a challenge. Secondly, you want to be focused. Plans that you make for your adult learners in your context should be based on the actual needs and interests of your learners. Maturing adult discipleship is not a subjective thing, it's based on God's Word.

It is, however, informed by your context.

So, how do you do this? Take a moment and review your list of congregational characteristics for maturing adult disciples that you've considered over the last two sessions. Then, look at the survey data.

Take a few minutes with both items in front of you. Work to identify connections, similarities, and common themes that emerge between the two sets.

For example, if in your list of discipleship characteristics your group stated that adult disciples should value getting together as a community, and if in your survey your congregation members noted that they like to learn in group gatherings, then see that as a connection. Your connection statement could be "The value and need for community gatherings and getting together."

By contrast, if in your list of discipleship characteristics your group indicated that adult disciples should be highly engaged in multiple small group Bible studies throughout the week, and if in your survey your congregation members noted that they are so busy they can't add anything to their family schedules, your connection statement could be "There's a bit of a disconnect between what the group thinks members should be involved in and what members think they are able to do."

In the box below, looking at both sets of information, mark down at least three or four connection statements that you may find useful when working to set up a simple plan for being more intentional in cultivating maturing adult discipleship in your congregation.

Connection Statements:

*Leader, give them a few minutes to write down connection statements. The point of this is to get your group thinking in realistic terms about your upcoming plans. If there's a desire for more connection between families, then use that data in your plans. If there's a feel like the topics covered in Bible study are not relevant to the lives of adult members, use that data.*

*If you have a larger group, allow your group to split up into smaller groups and then share with a larger group. You do NOT need to come up with a definitive list of connections. Instead, this is meant to “prime the pump” to get your group thinking about appropriate planning. When your group has had a little time to reflect, move on to the next section. This requires some reading, and not much reflection, but will help you better prepare for the action step of this session.*

### **Consider What Motivates Adult Learners**

You’ve thought through some connections and brainstormed some realities. Hopefully in this you’ve been able to identify some opportunities as well as challenges to planning for the future of maturing adult discipleship in your congregation.

Before you move on to the next step, though, just read through and consider the principles below that are true for many adult learners. These are based on an adult learning theory called andragogy, of the art and science of teaching adults. Generally speaking, these are principles that can help any adult plan for making the most out of adult learning.

As you read through the below sections, circle, highlight, or underline any words, phrases, or ideas that stick out to you.

#### **Need To Know:**

Generally speaking, adults need to understand why they need to learn something before they’ll take the initiative to learn it. This is true for youth and children as well. However, as most adults are not in formal schooling anymore, they have more flexibility to not undertake any new learning. Assume that adults will be more motivated to learn something new when they see the relevance and benefits of the learning.

#### **Self-concept:**

Overall, adults tend to see themselves as responsible for their own learning and lives. After all, the adult world requires a lot of learning on the fly and problem solving. If they feel like they aren’t in control of their own learning or treated as children in an educational setting, they’ll often be put off. Adults generally value some autonomy and control over their learning process.

#### **Role Of Experience:**

Remember that all adults bring valuable life and work experiences to the learning environment. These experiences should be acknowledged and used as a foundation for new learning. So one-

size-fits-all may not be true for all programs. In addition, assume that many adult learners are going to at least want to have the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences with others in a learning situation.

### **Readiness to Learn:**

Most adults feel ready to learn when they have a need to learn something. They are more likely to engage with learning that addresses a current challenge or problem. So, make sure that when you are planning new programs, initiatives, or experiences for adults that you are speaking to their particular needs and roles in life.

### **Orientation to Learn:**

Assume that adults are more likely to learn when the learning is practical and relevant to their lives. They want to see how new knowledge and skills can be applied to solve real-world problems. This does not mean that you abandon solid, Biblical content in your teaching. Instead, it means that as you go through the content with your adult learners, they will see value in taking time to think through real-world problems and practical implications.

### **Motivation to Learn:**

More often than not, adults are internally motivated. Their motivation is often tied to their personal goals and values. In other words, grades and rewards may work in formal education for children, but less so for adults who either have to learn for work (professional development or certification) or must take the initiative to learn on their own. Though external motivators, such as rewards or incentives, may be helpful, try to tap into internal values, loves, and “visions of the good life” of your adult learners when seeking to motivate them to try something new.

*Leader, after reading through this list, encourage your group members to share their top take-aways. This need not take much time, but hopefully it will get them thinking about how to plan for their adult learning plans. Then, read the next section.*

### **Putting Topic into Action**

Now it is time to put all these thoughts together into a simple, introductory, concrete plan. By now you have a customized list of maturing discipleship characteristics for your congregation and some connection statements. To keep things reasonable, simple, and attainable, your action plan should be...well...reasonable, simple, and attainable. To do so, start small. As a group, work through the

below points one-by-one. Make sure you have one member of your group at least who is taking notes.

*Leader, the below points are based on a concept called a learning contract. This is a kind of “reverse syllabus” for adult learning. This activity is intended to help you put some concrete actions, dates, and criteria for success to your plan to more intentionally cultivate lifelong, maturing adult discipleship in your congregation. These questions are only meant to be guides for your group. Feel free to adapt or deviate from them as you see fit. Know, however, that these steps are intentionally designed to help keep your group on track and focused on the main thing. Deviating from them too much may lead your group to lose sight of the overall goal of this study.*

*Below each of the questions, in the Leader Guide, you have some bulleted suggestions for the leader. If these were included in the Learner Guide, they may come across as cumbersome or wordy. You may want to read the below bulleted points for each of the questions out loud to your group as you work through these questions together.*

**Looking over your characteristics and connections, pick the top one to three characteristics that are most attainable right now.**

- *Both of your lists, in their entirety, are critical in the long term. For now, however, pick characteristics (understandings, values, abilities) of mature discipleship that you can start nurturing in your adult disciples right now.*
- *Pick one to three. If there are several that overlap or could be worked on at the same time, that’s great. One may be plenty to work on (like getting people to read the Bible on their own).*

**For each of the characteristics, define what tangible “success” would look like for your adult disciples. Then, for “success” to happen, define what specific criteria you would use.**

- *Remember, the Holy Spirit alone creates and sustains faith. That is a given, so we are not aiming to measure faith or growth in faith. Instead, “success” here means measurable and observable changes in understanding, values, and abilities.*
- *Flesh out what “success” would look like in the lives of maturing adult disciples if they grew in these desired characteristics. What would change about how they lived their lives, what they knew, and what they valued?*
- *Add some simple, observable criteria. If helpful, add some numbers or concrete examples. For example, if you desire for*

*adults to read the Bible on their own, why not specify that you desire adults to read the Bible for 15 min a day 3 days a week for a month? Or, if you desire for adults to know the books of the Bible in order, why not specify that they are able to write down these books of the Bible and self-assess their progress?*

**What methods would you use to work towards these goals as a congregation? What mode, program, or adaptation to your life together would work best?**

- With characteristics and some measure of success in mind, now it's time to think about the methods. How will your congregation best equip, resource, and support your adult disciples to achieve these goals? Will you start a new class, have individual meetings, lead a sermon series, etc?*
- As a rule of thumb, it is almost always best to use existing structures to achieve these goals than it is to start something new. You are adults yourselves – you know how busy life can get. Sometimes starting something new, like a new class or a workshop, can excite adult learners. Overall, though, it is best to consider how you can use the time you already have. So, is it redirecting a Bible class to focus on this goal? Is it including something in the announcements in worship each week or in the bulletin? Is it elders individually reaching out to each household and sharing the goal?*
- Come up with your mode or method that you feel works best for your congregation. Look back to your congregational survey to make the most data-informed decision you can. Remember that your group may come up with a great program, but if people are not able to attend because of schedules or perceived conflicts, then you will burn out quickly.*

**What will your timeline be, both as an end goal and in intermediate steps?**

- Thinking practically, put a timeline into place for this plan. When would you like to see meaningful results in your adult discipleship plan? Set a reasonable end date for your plan. It may be useful to think in terms of six months or a year out.*
- Once you have a date in mind, think backwards. What would good benchmarks be along the way to help implement your plan? Set some dates, taking into consideration the schedules of your adult learners (spring break, summer break, other hectic times of a school year). Write down these dates to put your plan into concrete context.*

### **How will you evaluate success at the end of the timeline?**

- *Consider how you will implement and evaluate your success strategy. Will there be an event? Will people be recognized by the congregation? Will participants fill out a self-evaluation of their growth over time? Having some way for the adult learners to reflect upon and/or celebrate their formation over the course of your plan is beneficial to increasing motivation to learn.*

### **What will you do next?**

- *At the end of your plan, consider what you will do next. It's always good to be thinking ahead. Will you continue the current plan and/or re-launch a program with a different group? Will you build this new strategy into your culture?*
- *Also, consider the other adult discipleship characteristics you outlined in the first two sessions. How will you work to plan for cultivating these characteristics in future plans, programs, or initiatives? What can you work on next?*

## **CLOSING OUT THE SESSION**

*Leader, finish by reading the below out loud with your group. You likely are running short on time, so the section is not long. Hopefully, it will help wrap up the study with your group.*

The three sessions of this study covered a lot of ground. You likely feel overwhelmed by everything. Do not get discouraged. Instead, remember that what you are working on and studying is a great opportunity for the Church.

As we investigated in earlier sessions, cultivating maturing adult discipleship is a key not only to the spiritual health of a congregation, it also makes everything else in children and youth ministry easier. When adults take the initiative for their faith seriously and embrace their vocations as disciples of Christ, the Spirit uses them to build up the Body of Christ. This is an exciting opportunity, and you get to be part of putting that into practice in your congregation.

So, prayerfully act upon your plan. Take the initiative and step up with your group to assist your pastor and other leaders in your congregation to focus on this critical aspect of the life of God's people. In all things, rejoice that Christ has made you His own, and He sends the Spirit to work through His Word to strengthen and guide you in this process.

## **Extra Considerations**

*You likely have noticed by now that this section does not involve Bible study. The main purpose of this session is to dig into planning. That said, it is strongly encouraged that you post different Bible passages from your first session somewhere in your space. Review them as you gather. At the same time, encourage members of your group to constantly look back to the first session, where you all participated in the study of Scripture on maturing adult discipleship. Review these as you make your plans to remind your group as to the purpose of this overall study.*

*The plan in the final section of this study may feel overwhelming. It is likely that at least one member of your group is a naturally organized person. Enlist this point person to help keep a record of the notes you take. If you cannot formulate a complete plan in your available time, that is okay. Instead, have the person take notes and distribute them to the group for consideration after the session. As the leader, you may be the one who has to take their notes and put them into action. Regardless of when the plan is made and put in place, the point is to have a plan, with concrete steps and desired outcomes that you can measure and reflect upon.*



You can find more copies of this resource available for free on **[cune.edu/ire](https://cune.edu/ire)**.



This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across the entire width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting or typing. The background is a clean, off-white color.



CONCORDIA  
UNIVERSITY  
N E B R A S K A  
INSTITUTES

To learn more about Concordia's Institutes  
visit **[cune.edu/institutes](https://cune.edu/institutes)**.

