

Executive Summary

For years, attendance at churches has been declining, especially among those under 30. Recent Canadian research projects such as *Hemorrhaging Faith* and *Renegotiating Faith*, show that children and youth “drop out” of church communities during transitions.

One Stage to the Next provides an overview of how those shifts from one stage of life to another can be done effectively as a church community to minimize the dropout rate through the identified roles of parents, mentors, ministry leaders and church leaders and understanding the interconnectedness and the responsibilities of each role. Together, these strategies provide a more comprehensive framework to developing faith in children and youth, which helps them feel more connected and more likely to stay.

- First, a holistic understanding of discipleship must be agreed upon as a church community. This definition is then managed by the church leadership in conjunction with all the other ministry leaders.
- Secondly, the concept of “sharing life,” its practical applications and its beneficial implications set a scalable and customizable approach as a key influence those shifts.

With that concept in mind and the four roles (parents, mentors, ministry leaders and church leaders) identified, the exploration of how these roles interact with one another is crucial. By understanding both the expectations of and from each role to one another, a church can better complement and integrate its overall influence in faith formation.

Taking all those building blocks, a church can formulate intentional ways to bridge children and youth from one stage to the next. Having the agreed-upon definition of discipleship as its consistent foundation for all ministries, children and youth ministries can appropriately move children and youth to their next phase and maintain a more consistent, cohesive development in faith.

The adage, “It takes a village to raise a child” applies to faith formation. All the influences within a church family must work together to provide the most fertile space for faith to develop in a child.