

# forming faith on the go

by Larry Hovis, CBFNC Executive Coordinator

I was blessed to grow up in a time and place in which my life centered on three things: family (and family business), school, and church. When it came to church, we attended at least three times a week. Sunday morning was for Sunday School (Bible study) and worship. Sunday night was for Training Union (later called Church Training, then Discipleship Training) and evening worship. Wednesday night was for supper (of course!), children's choir, and missions education (Royal Ambassadors for me and Girls in Action for my sister). When I became a teenager, youth choir was held on Sunday evening and we often sang during the evening service (and of course, we ate another meal!). All of that time spent at the church house, in church activities with church people, formed my faith and shaped me as a person and as a Christian.

By the time I became a pastor in 1987, that paradigm had begun breaking down. I pastored four churches, none of which had a Sunday evening worship service. In some of them, we had some programming on Sunday nights. In most of them, we had significant programming on Wednesday nights. But attendance patterns were shifting in major ways, and we simply never had enough people enough of the time to shape their life and faith in the same way I experienced growing up.

Today, the situation is even more challenging. Whereas we used to define an active church member as attending three times per week, we now consider someone as being very active if they attend three times per month.

Jesus's call to make disciples hasn't changed, but the context in which we seek to make them is drastically different. What are we to do? How can we form faith and make disciples in our time? Here are a few ideas. I hope you'll let me know of others.

- **Church-based programs** – For some people, Sundays and Wednesdays in the church house are still a good way to reach people and teach them. This approach needn't be abandoned just because we offer other options.
- **More times, more places** – For some people, Sundays and Wednesdays in the church house every week just doesn't fit their schedule. Many churches are meeting the needs of time-starved members by offering opportunities for faith formation at various times and places throughout the week. I participated in a small group on Tuesday mornings at 6:45 a.m. at Panera Bread for several years.
- **Virtual-formation communities** – Many people are finding community, and even receiving college degrees, online. Why not offer Bible study and other opportunities for spiritual formation through Facebook and other platforms?
- **Missional formation** – Many Christians testify that they feel closer to God on a mission trip than at any other time of the year. Through extended preparation before the trip, thoughtful experiences on the trip, and intentional reflection and application after returning home, that trip can have a year-round impact on one's spiritual growth. The CBF community has produced some great resources to help with this approach, including *Pivot* ([www.cbf.net/pivot](http://www.cbf.net/pivot)) and *PilgriMission* ([www.nurturingfaith.net/product/pilgrimission](http://www.nurturingfaith.net/product/pilgrimission)).
- **Faith Coaching** – Coaching has proved to be an effective way for people to improve life, health, work, and leadership responsibilities. Coaching has also become a valuable way for people to grow spiritually. CBFNC offers coach training ([www.cbfnc.org/christiancoaching](http://www.cbfnc.org/christiancoaching)) for church leaders, who in turn can coach church members, one-on-one, to develop an individualized faith-formation plan.

There is still a need for God's people to gather together in God's house for worship, study, and fellowship, as much as possible. But if we are going to be effective in responding to God's call to make disciples and form faith in our time, we must expand our delivery system. Let's find ways to meet people where they are, as they go about their lives, not only on Sundays and Wednesdays but every day of the week.