



USER'S GUIDE

TO THE THIRD THIRD OF LIFE

Toolkit

View the toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits



Christian Reformed Church
**Faith Formation
Ministries**

crcna.org/FaithFormation



Reformed Church in America
Christian Reformed Church

**Disability
Concerns**

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**“THE RIGHTEOUS WILL FLOURISH
LIKE A PALM TREE, THEY WILL GROW
LIKE A CEDAR OF LEBANON. . . . THEY
WILL STILL BEAR FRUIT IN OLD AGE,
THEY WILL STAY FRESH AND GREEN.”**

—PSALM 92:12-14





The brochure you're holding is a user's guide to our online Third Third of Life toolkit, which you can find at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

A collaboration between Faith Formation Ministries and Disability Concerns, this toolkit contains dozens of informative and practical ideas to help your church learn from and meet the needs of people ages 55 and above. And many of these ideas are from Christian Reformed churches like yours!

Before you read further, open the Third Third of Life toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

What's in This Toolkit

In the Third Third of Life toolkit you'll find all sorts of resources, including thought-provoking articles and books, tools, faith practices, and more that will help you and other ministry leaders

- * **develop** a biblical vision of healthy personhood in the third third of life.
- * **understand** the five main tasks facing people ages 55 and older.

- * **think** deeply about faith formation, the role of your church community, vocation and legacy, family relationships, emotional and mental health, and physical health in the third third of life.
- * **learn** how to provide opportunities for people in the third third of life to remain fully engaged in community life and ministry.
- * **and much more!**

About Our Toolkits

The Third Third of Life toolkit is one of several topical toolkits created by the Faith Formation Ministries team in collaboration with CRC church leaders for CRC church leaders. Our toolkit resources are gathered from real-life church practices, from online sources, and from published materials.

As new tools become available, we'll add them to the online toolkit. If there's a tool you need but can't find, or if you have an idea to contribute, let us know! You can contact us at faithformation@crcna.org.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP! For assistance with faith formation challenges in your church, contact one of our Regional Catalyzers at crcna.org/FaithFormation/coaching.



Visit the Third Third of Life Toolkit at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits

JESUS AND THE THIRD THIRD

BY SHAWN SIKKEMA

At age 57, I stepped down as the senior pastor of a church I had served for 26 years. Mine was a high-octane life. Coupling that with sleep and health issues left me burned out and depressed. There I was, close to 60, a 30-year career under my belt, the busy years of raising our five daughters done. I was still in recovery mode but basically healthy, gifts and faculties intact, trying to figure out a next chapter.

Some call the chapter I was stepping into “the third third of life.” The first third is for growing up and getting started. The second third is for going hard—having a career, raising a family, engaging church and community. But what about the third third? What is its purpose?

Generations ago that wasn’t a significant question—few people lived very long after age 75. But now many of us head toward 60 in good health, financially stable with a lot of life ahead of us. The time may or may not coincide with retirement, but retirement looms. How will we deal with those years?

The third third tempts us. Coming out of a season that has been demanding, we feel tired; now we need time for ourselves—rest, travel, play. First we grew up; then we gave ourselves away; now we reward ourselves—no doubt adding in family time and service. But nothing too strenuous.

Jesus had a different path for us. At a time when downshifting would have been easy, my wife, Diane, and I have found a beautiful, challenging, and invigorating new chapter. For us, the third third means more fully giving our lives away, putting a lifetime of experience to work in a new setting among the urban poor. Challenging as it is, we love the life we now have.

Interestingly, the most vital people I know in the third third are all giving their lives away in service. They exude life into their 70s and 80s. Conversely, others in the third third who are most focused on themselves seem a bit purposeless, even bored. What is true in the first two-thirds is also true in the third—it is in losing our life that we find it.

We in the third third are rich in skills, experience, and wisdom, sometimes also in money. But too often that abundance sits on a shelf, used only minimally. What might happen if we in the third third unleashed a lifetime of experience to do the work of Jesus? Who knows? We might change the world!

Of course, there is no one model for the third third—we each need to follow Jesus' lead, which includes having time for family and friends, time for rest and renewal, and more. All things to affirm. That said, this question haunts me: Will we surrender our third third to Jesus? If we won't, our broken world will lose; sadly, so will we.

The Third Third of Life toolkit is designed to help your church begin talking about the questions raised here and more. Open it at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits today.

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Shawn Sikkema is an urban missionary pastor at Colfax Ministries, a ministry he cofounded with his wife, Diane. He is an ordained pastor in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. This article has been adapted from an article originally published in *The Banner* (Feb. 2019).

FAITH FORMATION IN THE THIRD THIRD OF LIFE

Does your church provide a variety of robust experiences, programs, and resources for people in the third third of life? There are many ways for older adults to grow in faith. Here are some great ideas adapted from “Developing Faith Formation for the Baby Boom Generation” by John Roberto (*Lifelong Faith*, vol. 4.4, Winter 2010; lifelongfaith.com). Which of these ideas might your congregation invest in?

THIRD-THIRDERS CAN GROW IN FAITH . . .

On their own

At home

In small groups

In large groups

In the congregation

In the community and world

HOW MIGHT YOUR CONGREGATION ENCOURAGE ONGOING FAITH FORMATION IN ADULTS AGE 55 AND OLDER? LEARN MORE IN THE FREE ONLINE THIRD THIRD OF LIFE TOOLKIT (CRCNA.ORG/FAITHFORMATION/TOOLKITS).

Learning opportunities at universities, retreat centers, YMCAs, libraries, bookstores, regional church programs; engagement in community/political action, local and global service and justice projects

Sunday worship, church year events and celebrations, service/mission activities, ministry and leadership in the church and community

Courses, speaker series, workshops, film festivals, retreats, conferences, intergenerational programs

Bible and theology study groups, social issues study groups, faith sharing groups, service/mission action groups, support groups, special interest groups

Reading, online courses, audio and video programs, movies, television programs

Bible reading, storytelling and caring conversations, prayer and devotions, rituals and traditions, service

TEN WAYS TO ENCOURAGE THIRD-THIRDERS

- 1 Affirm each person's worth as a child of God.** In your church family, look for many different ways to draw on the strengths and wisdom of people in the third third of life (ages 55 and up).
- 2 Provide robust opportunities for spiritual growth.** Faith formation is a lifelong process! Explore creative ways to encourage third-thirders to grow in faith.
- 3 Invite third-thirders to discover new gifts.** Encourage older adults to complete a spiritual gifts survey, and find ways to use those gifts in your community.
- 4 Create opportunities for intergenerational interaction.** Older and younger members can learn a lot from each other about faithful living.
- 5 Connect third-thirders to each other.** Make space for small- and large-group conversations about the opportunities to grow in Christ at this time of life.
- 6 Cast a biblical vision for vocation.** Retirement can be a difficult transition. Share a biblical perspective on work and self-worth through a sermon series.
- 7 Invite third-thirders to mentor others.** Create opportunities for older adults to encourage and support teens and young adults in various life transitions. They need each other!
- 8 Support those who are facing change and loss.** In the third third of life, children move away, and people often lose beloved homes, jobs, spouses, and close friends. Be there for those who are grieving.
- 9 Care for caregivers.** Plan ways to give those who are caring for spouses or parents a regular break from their responsibilities.
- 10 Remove barriers to participation.** In all your church programs, make accommodations for persons with physical challenges. Consider hearing loss and a need for larger-print materials. Check the toolkit for an accessibility audit you can use.

Learn More in Our Online Third Third of Life Toolkit

The Third Third of Life toolkit is an online resource designed to help you support people age 55 and older. You can access this toolkit and others at crcna.org/FaithFormation/toolkits.

For help with faith formation in the third third of life, contact one of Faith Formation Ministries' Regional Catalyzers (crcna.org/FaithFormation/Coaching).

For help with questions about aging and disability, visit the website of Disability Concerns (crcna.org/Disability) or call 888-463-0272.



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Helping Churches Grow Faith for Life
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Reformed Church in America
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Everybody Belongs, Everybody Serves
crcna.org/Disability