Parenting FAITH

Faith Formation of Children in the Home

Rick Hiemstra & Lindsay Callaway

The Parenting Faith study is a partnership of the following organizations:

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Christian Reformed Church

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Rick Hiemstra
Lead Researcher
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Executive Summary

In October 2019, a consultation was held at Muskoka Bible Centre with denomination and ministry organization leaders on the needs of parents as they form the faith of their children. This led to the formation of a research partnership between seventeen organizations to answer the question, "How can evangelical parents be better supported as they form the faith of their children in the home?"

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's (EFC) Centre for Research on Church and Faith (CRCF) was commissioned to conduct phased, mixed methods research, reporting to the research partners at the end of each phase for feedback and direction.

Our primary research population was Canadian, evangelical parents with children under the age of eighteen in the home. Evangelical was defined as those connected with one of the EFC's affiliates. Samples for interviews and surveys were generated by quotes and by referral samples respectively. Because of our sampling methods, the parents in our samples tended to be more devout (defined in section 2.1.2) than what we might expect in a typical evangelical church.

Parents we interviewed commonly and intentionally conducted faith formation with their children differently than their parents did with them. Usually this meant providing their children with more explanation for the faith and giving them more freedom to accept, reject or question Christianity. Parents also emphasized the importance of giving their children religious choice and talked about exposing their children to other faiths to make that choice substantive.

Although most parents believed they should be leading their children to Christ, they did not want their children to feel undue pressure from them to do so, resulting, at least in the interviews, to a preference for role modelling over teaching because it is more suggestive than directive.

The consensus among ministry experts was that parents were ill equipped and rudderless in their approach to faith formation with their children. Parents by contrast, tended to say that given more time and resources they would not change anything in how they currently do faith formation with their children. Parental confidence that they were doing a good job with faith formation seemed to rise the less they objectively did.

There was a gender imbalance in faith formation of children, with moms more engaged than dads. Most of our parent survey sample identified as complementarian, believing in distinct roles for men and women in the home and in church life. However, we found that in many cases, their complementarianism was more nominal than functional. Since referral samples tend to attract respondents who are most interested in the subject, this indicates parents' interest in the faith formation of children tends to peak when their children are about nine or ten years of age.

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Parents expressed worry about many things, mostly what they saw as the negative influence of culture and state. In fact, sixty-four percent of parents surveyed, either moderately or strongly, agreed that they were concerned their children will experience religious persecution in Canada.

As mentioned above, parents told us they seek to do faith formation differently with their children than their parents did with them, and this is reflected in a small share of parents receiving faith-formation help from their parents. Most commonly, parents looked to their peers and podcasts for help forming the faith of their children, with very few finding help in parenting courses, offered by churches or ministry organizations. Where parents were helped by their local church was usually through its preaching that was not necessarily focused on parenting.

Parents saw the church as a partner in the faith formation of their children and also as an important source of Christian socialization and exposure to Christian teaching. However, parents tended not to defer to churches in teaching, reserving instead the role of final arbiter of doctrine for themselves.

COVID-19 (COVID) and the attendant restrictions on in-person public worship coincided with our research. Where online church did not engage children, families' worship service attendance tended to decline which left them less connected to church life even after restrictions on in-person worship were lifted. Just over half of parents surveyed reported that their churches provided children's content or home-based resources for parents to use during the COVID pandemic.

Faith formation is as much a function of our habits as of what we teach. We looked at several faith-formation activities practiced in the home by both children and parents. Activities supported by the family social context were most likely to occur. Literacy-dependent activities, such as Bible reading, rose with the onset of literacy before starting to decline in the later teen years. Only in Bible memorization did children outstrip their parents in faith-formation activity participation. In aggregate, and for most types of faith formation, children's participation did not rise to meet the level of their parents by the late-teen years, suggesting that religious transmission, expressed in faith-formation activity participation, is often not happening. Faith-formation activities are not just something that you do, they are habits grounded in the life of the family providing structure, place and ways for children to express their faith.

We found that the faith conversations parents have with their children have their own domestic calendars and geographies. Most often these conversations happen at the transition points in a child's day; when they are moving from one activity to another. These happen most often in transit (the car), in the bedroom or at the dinner table, although the place varies with age.

Extracurricular activities are typically directed and facilitated by parents and, insofar as they aim to develop a child's skills or socialize them, they are an extension of children's overall formation. Half of families surveyed have their children out of the home at an extracurricular

activity one or two days a week. Although activities related to faith were often cited as extracurricular activities, various sports, collectively, was the top activity.

Whereas extracurricular activities tend to have a weekly cadence, camping tends to have an annual one. Christian day camp (i.e., VBS) was more common among middle school-aged children whereas week-long, overnight children's camp became more common for teens.

Parents had a conflicted relationship with digital technology as it relates to the faith formation of their children. On the one hand, many were positive about the promise of technology as a work tool and as a conduit for quality Christian content. On the other hand, they were vexed by the additional content technology tended to pipe into their children's lives. Most of their discussion about the role of technology in the faith formation of their children was about their attempts to control, limit or manage their children's access to it. Most commonly, parents opted for giving their children age-appropriate, daily, digital technology time limits in lieu of evaluating the content their children were consuming.

This is a substantial document. We have tried to listen carefully to parents and those who support them, and faithfully summarize and reflect what we heard. We hope this report and the conversations following, form the foundation for creative, biblical responses that support parents as they form the faith of their children in partnership with churches and other ministries.

Introduction

Parenting is one of the most difficult, rewarding and confounding endeavours most of us will ever undertake. In addition to feeding, clothing and sheltering our children, as parents we have important responsibilities in educating, caring for their social development, and bringing them up in the faith. Especially in their younger years, we are their most constant companions and the attention we give them gives us influence.

"How do we help evangelical parents form the faith of (or disciple) their children in the home?" This was the working question for an October 2019 consultation with representatives of about thirty Canadian denominations and ministry organizations that met at Muskoka Bible Centre.

It is a question with urgency. Our own experience, along with studies such as *Hemorrhaging Faith, Renegotiating Faith,* and the EFC's 2019 Church and Faith Trends poll, tells us that many Canadian young adults leave the faith by the time they leave the parental home.[1] Studies also tell us that parents, especially when their children are young, have the greatest influence over the faith formation, or discipleship, of their children.[2]

Assuming Christian parents want to disciple their children into the Christian faith, what help do they need to do this more effectively? Are parents lacking resources? An exercise at the 2019 consultation had participants create a list of resources that they, or their organizations, made available to parents. The idea was that with a comprehensive list in front of a group attuned to children and youth ministry, together, gaps could be identified and subsequently filled.

As the list of resources grew, and grew, a realization began to settle over the group that Canadian ministries provide a lot of resources. Then, at one point, someone asked, "So, why don't [enough] parents use them?"

This was the start of a research partnership between seventeen denominations and ministry organizations ***to understand the needs of Canadian evangelical parents with children under the age of eighteen in the home as they form the faith of their children.***

The partnership commissioned The EFC's (EFC) Centre for Research on Church and Faith (CRCF) to conduct phased, mixed methods research between October 2019 and November 2022, where each successive phase built on the findings of the previous ones with input and direction provided by the ministry partner organizations. In order, the phases included a literature review, semi-structured interviews with ministry experts, semi-structured interviews with

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[1] James Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith: Why & When Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying & Returning to the Church" (Toronto, ON: The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada Youth & Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, September 7, 2012); Rick Hiemstra, Lorianne Dueck, and Matthew Blackaby, "Renegotiating Faith: The Delay in Young Adult Identity Formation and What It Means for the Church in Canada" (Faith Today Publications, July 2018), www.RenegotiatingFaith.ca; Rick Hiemstra, "Not Christian Anymore," *Faith Today Magazine*, February 2020.

[2] Sarah Holmes et al., "Do We Need a New Plan for Children's Ministry?: A Report Based on Research in Brazil, Canada, UK and US in Later-Pandemic Stages" (Liverpool Hope University, October 29, 2021), 14.

parents, and, finally, national surveys with parents and with pastors with family ministry responsibilities.[3] Interim phase reports were provided to the partners at the end of each phase.[4] It is important for the reader to understand that this report deals with the findings of four distinct datasets; two qualitative and two quantitative. The qualitative datasets are interviews with ministry experts[5] and interviews with parents. The quantitative datasets are national surveys, one with parents and another with pastors having family ministry responsibilities. Although we received a robust response to the parent survey, the pastor survey received only 209 qualified responses, limiting its usefulness, which is reflected in its relative absence from the analysis following.

It is also important to understand that the research plan was formulated pre-COVID and that the data was collected when the country was experiencing various kinds of health authority mandated restrictions on mobility and social interaction. This means the data does not reflect a pre-COVID "normal." At the time of writing, however, it is not clear what a new post-COVID normal will look like.

Our primary research population was *evangelical parents*. "Evangelical" is difficult to define.[6] Moreover, in the current cultural context, Evangelicalism is increasingly seen as a negative and even "damaging" movement.[7] Canadians who, in terms of beliefs and behaviours, could be considered evangelical are increasingly eschewing the label because of its culturally negative connotations, making it difficult to find representative samples through public opinion polling firms. For the purposes of this report, we defined evangelical as those connected with one of the EFC's affiliates.[8]

Although parents formed our primary research population, families are situated in contexts. Understanding local churches to be significant partners in parents' faith-formation endeavours, we also solicited insights from pastors with family ministry responsibilities, believing these are the ones most likely to resource parents and to have an external perspective on how parents are doing.

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[3] See appendix A for more on the research methodology.

[4] Interim reports provided to the research partners include: Lindsay Callaway, Rick Hiemstra, and Joel Murphy, "Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study Literature Review: Interim Report 1" (The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, November 16, 2020); Lindsay Callaway and Rick Hiemstra, "CEFFFS Ministry Expert Interviews Report: CEFFFS Interim Report 2" (CEFFFS Ministry Partnership, April 30, 2021); Rick Hiemstra and Lindsay Callaway, "Parent Interviews Report: CEFFFS Interim Report 3" (CEFFFS Ministry Partnership, February 24, 2022).

[5] Ministry experts, sometimes called key informants in other sociological studies, are those with expertise or a unique perspective on a research question. For this study they included pastors with family ministry responsibilities, denominational officials, academics, and subject matter experts.

[6] John G. Stackhouse Jr., "Defining 'Evangelical,'" *Church & Faith Trends* 1, no. 1 (October 2007): 1–5; John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Evangelicalism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022); Rick Hiemstra, "Counting Canadian Evangelicals," *Church & Faith Trends* 1, no. 1 (October 2007): 16.

[7] David Korzinski, "Canada Across the Religious Spectrum: A Portrait of the Nation's Inter-Faith Perspectives During Holy Week," *Angus Reid Institute* (blog), April 18, 2022, https://angusreid.org/canada-religion-interfaith-holy-week/.

[8] See https://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Affiliation/Our-affiliates for a list of the EFC's current affiliates.

We are interested in how parents pass their faith on to their children. The language used to describe how this happens varies within the evangelical movement. In this report, we variously use the terms "faith formation" and "discipleship," and we are aware that there are subtle differences in the theologies and traditions behind each. In our interview and survey phases we asked questions to get at respondents' preferred language, and the ways in which they understand the task of passing their faith on to their children.

This report is arranged topically drawing on findings from the qualitative and quantitative research phases. We begin by defining terms like "family" and "faith formation." We then move on to consider the roles of parents in faith formation and the role of churches in relation to what parents are doing in the home. We then focus on parent-directed activities that contribute to the faith formation of children before finishing up with a discussion on the role of digital technology in faith formation.

Survey data is usually presented at an aggregate level and sometimes broken out by respondent gender or tradition. We recognize there will be interest in how these data vary by tradition or schooling type. While we provide these analyses in places, unfortunately, this report cannot accommodate these analyses in a comprehensive way. Denominational data will be provided to participating denominations as aggregate custom tables and figures after this report is released. Resources permitting, a supplementary schooling choice report will be forthcoming.

We hope that we have fairly stewarded and represented what parents, pastors and other ministry experts told us, and that it will be helpful, to the extent that it is a faithful reflection of what they shared with us.

1. Definitions

1.2 What is Faith Formation?

One of the goals of Christian faith formation is for children to come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, and yet, that is not easily measured. At the outset of qualitative interviews with forty-one evangelical parents, we asked how they defined faith formation in order to understand their aim and approach in passing their faith on to their children. We also gave parents the option to provide an alternative term for faith formation, but only a handful of parents offered substitutes like "discipleship" or "spiritual formation." Many parents were caught off guard by the question; for example, one parent shared, "I never have [had] anybody ask this stuff … before." Most parents stepped up to the challenge and offered an answer despite hesitations and long pauses as they formulated a response, but answers were typically not overly articulated or well formed.

Definitions of faith formation from keen or devout adherents to the faith, those that regularly participated at church and had regular family and personal faith-formation practices, usually provided explicitly Christian definitions, even though the term "faith formation" could apply to other faith traditions. Those who did not have close affiliation with a church or tradition gave a general answer and appealed to "choice" and "exposure to religion" as the virtues they wanted to pass on to the next generation.

Parents mostly used metaphorical language to describe the task of faith formation. Some used a building metaphor, suggesting faith is something individuals construct from their experiences of the world. Other parents relied on gardening metaphors, using words like "developing" and "growing" to illustrate faith formation as something that is guided from the simple to more complex. Some parents suggested children possess an innate God-sense, and their role was to fill that out by showing their children the character and nature of God. For example, one parent said that faith formation is "an awakening [in children] to show them what … faith entails and to live my faith before them."

For most respondents, definitions of faith formation usually involved a "faith initiator," a person who sought to effect faith in someone else or themselves. This person was usually the parent, but the role was sometimes ascribed to the child, or the Holy Spirit. The faith initiator also used faith-forming means, like teaching or role modelling to communicate content about God or the Gospel with the goal of accomplishing a desired effect in a recipient, such as belief, changed behaviour or values.

Most parents framed their role in faith formation as the primary former of their children's faith, which likely explains the high number of respondents who defined faith formation as something that is initiated by another person (i.e., the parent). Only five parent interview respondents mentioned some form of communal belonging and participation as an effect of

faith formation. A low regard for the community of faith as a means and end to faith formation is a consistent theme in this report.

We hope churches and parents can learn to facilitate a meaningful partnership to uphold the next generation of faith, and this report will identify some of the barriers and opportunities to accomplishing that task. We trust there are tangible takeaways from this research that can foster better understanding between ministry leaders and parents and a better way forward for families in Canada.

1.3 What Is a Family?

Defining the family is important because it not only names reality but shapes it.[9] Eligible dependents for tax exemptions and next of kin in medical emergencies are just some examples of the social privileges granted to society's circumscribed definition of family. Similarly, a church's definition of family will shape the ministries it builds and the people it supports. Daddy-Daughter Dances, Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), Parents' Night Out or "Date Night" events all operate with a *structural* understanding of the family, that is, the ways people are related to one another biologically and legally.[10] Because structure does not define the quality of relationships in a family, some experts say a family ought to be described by its *functional* qualities, "the ways persons behave toward one another … in family-like ways."[11]

Parents and ministry experts interviewed for this study tended to incorporate structural and functional features as they described how they understood family, attesting to what family ministries scholar, Diana Garland, claims: "It takes both definitions [structural and functional] to understand the complexities of families."[12]

Strictly structural or functional definitions showcased a tension between family ideals and family realities. Respondents who leaned toward a structural definition of the family often appealed to their own family structures as their definitional source, and used words like, "typical," "biblical" or "ideal," but as one ministry expert observed, "That [ideal] doesn't happen all the time." Respondents who did not consider themselves within a structural ideal, but still wanted to maintain the legitimacy of their family life, favoured a functional definition of family. For example, a First Nations respondent raised by his grandmother said, "There's [sic] many constellations of families" and worked his definition around central caregivers, extended family, friends and the church community. A ministry expert who was single with no children also included the church in her definition: "I think it's important to identify family as the makings of the church, the people that come together because they are the family of God. That leaves room for the messiness that is humanity."

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[9] Diana R. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*, 2nd edition (IVP Academic, 2012), 50.
[10] Garland, 53.
[11] Garland, 55.
[12] Garland, 55.

In our interviews, the church as family was often overlooked by parents, suggesting the church is not a place where many Canadian evangelical families find support, purpose or intimate relationships. Understanding the church in terms of family does not mean the church should encourage individuals to be part of individual families but sees the church as an extended family organized for mutual support and purpose.

The apparent failure of parents in this study to see the church as a family could indicate a failure for families to understand their own purpose. Cultural commentator, David Brooks, says the traditional structural family (i.e., the nuclear family) promotes an "individualistic mindset"[13] that discourages self-sacrifice. Brooks' observations, and those of his critics, is the agreement that "the isolated nuclear family detached from all social support is simply not workable for most people."[14] What Brooks misses is an analysis of the conditions that lead to: (a) the atomization of family structure and (b) the loss of a shared life purpose, both of which do not reflect an inherent failure in the nuclear family itself, but in the understanding of what the family is for.

Families are indeed organized for mutual support, but they need to be more than that. They need to be organized for mutual purpose. This means that structure and function are not the only components to consider for families, but purpose as well. Christian family experts agree families are "divinely ordained," suggesting that families serve a broader purpose than mere reproduction and survival. God's purposes for the family have implications for asking "who is responsible?" for carrying out these divine purposes, and for understanding not only what a family *is* but what a family *does*.

Rapid changes in society have warranted concern about the welfare of Christian families and generated research and studies to understand the effects, both good and bad, on the wellbeing of children and adults. A main concern is the decrease in number and esteem for the *nuclear family*, which "describes a household consisting of a married heterosexual couple and their children."[15] The nuclear (or traditional) family integrates both structural and functional definitions of the family, whereby the persons who behave in family-like ways are also bound by a close biological and/or legal relationship.

The literature maintains there is concrete social, emotional and physical benefit of the nuclear family, and we want to affirm that in this study. However, thinking of the family in terms of structure, function *and* purpose, upholds the ideals of the nuclear family without having to disregard non-conforming families. This approach creates room for a vision of the ideal environment in which to raise children while acknowledging this does not always happen. The next series of sections will examine the arenas and stakeholders in faith formation: home, school, church and digital realm.

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[13] David Brooks, "The Nuclear Family Was a Mistake," *The Atlantic*, March 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-nuclear-family-was-a-mistake/605536/.

[14] Bradford Wilcox and Hal Boyd, "The Nuclear Family Is Still Indispensable," The Atlantic, February 21, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/02/nuclear-family-still-indispensable/606841/.

[15] Garland, *Family Ministry*, 25.

2. Parent Role

2.1 Parent Samples

Our primary respondents for this study were Canadian, evangelical parents or guardians (parents) with children under the age of eighteen in the home. Our parent data comes from two different samples, one qualitative (phone interviews) and the other quantitative (online survey).

In this section, we introduce the parents in these samples using demographic data highlighting differences between or within the samples that will be important in the interpretation to follow. We will look at respondents' personal demographic data, their religious affiliation and participation, and the structure of their households.

2.1.1 Respondent demographics

2.1.1.1 Gender

Although we set out to interview and survey an equal number of fathers and mothers, mothers were easier to recruit. The ratio of fathers to mothers in the interview sample was 2:3 and in the survey sample 1:3 (see table 2.1 below).

Table 2.1 Parent respondent gender, interviews and survey, counts and percent

Gender	Interviews		Survey	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Male	16	*39*	304	*25*
Female	25	*61*	913	*75*
Total	**41**	***100***	**1,217**	***100***

We believe these gender ratios speak to the relative interest mothers and fathers have in faith formation and we will return to this theme throughout this report.

2.1.1.2 Age

In this section, we present the age distribution of our parent samples in three ways. First, we look at the gender of parent survey respondents by age (see figure 2.1). Next, we compare both parent samples, by sociological generation (see table 2.2). Finally, we revisit the data in figure 2.1 by age ranges (see table 2.3).

The average age of male respondents in our parent survey sample was 42.1 compared to 41.0 for female respondents.

Figure 2.1 Parent respondent age, by gender, survey, counts

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.
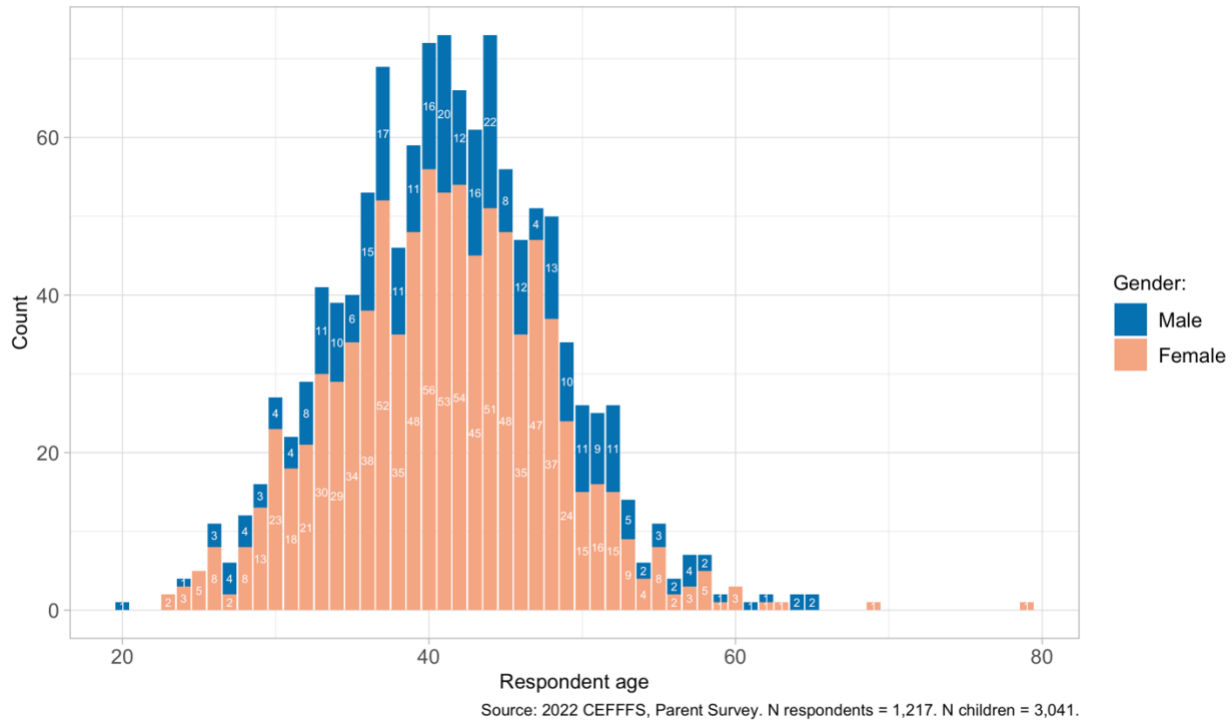
The idea of sociological generations was first proposed by Karl Mannheim as an attempt to create cohorts for sociological study that share a socio-historical environment.[16] The names of these generations and the birth-years that delineate them are debated. Our names and birth-year ranges are presented in the first column of table 2.2. These names are commonly used so we will present no further definition. Interview respondents' ages were only definitively categorized by sociological generation. Large majorities of each parent sample belonged to either Generation X (Gen-X) or Generation Y (Gen-Y, sometimes also referred to as Millennials) (see table 2.2 below).

Table 2.2 Parent respondent age, by sociological generation, interviews and survey, counts and percent[a]

Sociological generation	Interviews		Survey	
(years of birth)	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Gen-Z (1997-2004)	0	0	14	1
Gen-Y (1982-1996)	11	27	542	45
Gen-X (1965-1981)	27	66	630	52
Boomers (1946-1964)	1	2	21	2
Silent (1928-1945)	0	0	1	0
DK/PNTS	2	5	9	1
Total	41	100	1,217	101

[a] Percent columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

[16] Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. P. Kecskemeti (London: Routledge, 1952), 276–320, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315005058.

Table 2.3 below presents the same data as figure 2.1 by age range. Half of parents in our sample were between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four.

Table 2.3 Parent respondent age, by age range and gender, survey, counts and percent[a]

Sociological generation (years of birth)	Male		Female		All	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
< 18	0	0	2	0	2	0
18 to 24	2	1	5	1	7	1
25 to 34	51	17	157	17	208	17
35 to 44	146	48	466	51	612	50
45 to 54	85	28	250	27	335	28
55 to 64	16	5	24	3	40	3
65 +	2	1	2	0	4	0
DK/PNTS	2	1	7	1	9	1
Total	304	101	913	100	1,217	100

[a] Percent columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

2.1.1.3 Marital status

Large majorities of both our interview and survey sample respondents were married (see table 2.4 below).

Table 2.4 Parent respondent marital status, interviews and survey, counts and percent[a]

Marital status	Interviews		Survey	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Married	38	93	1,152	95
Separated	0	0	18	1
Divorced	0	0	18	1
Single	2	5	10	1
Common-law	1	2	10	1
Widowed	0	0	6	0
Civil partnership	0	0	2	0
PNTS	0	0	1	0
Total	41	100	1,217	99

[a] Percent columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

We expect that the prevalence of married respondents is due, in part, to the ways in which the samples were recruited and to the value Evangelicals place on marriage and the nuclear family.

2.1.1.4 Ethnicity and immigration status

We determined ethnicity differently for each parent sample. In the interviews we noted if an ethnicity naturally surfaced in the conversation, but we did not explicitly ask respondents. On the parent survey we asked respondents what ethnicities they belonged to and presented them with a list from which they could choose as many as applied.

In our interview sample, we had those who identified as Korean, Chinese, Indigenous, Polish, American, Congolese, French, Jamaican, Mexican and Dutch. Although we did not make an exhaustive count, we believe that a majority of the interview sample was made up of those from Caucasian ethnic backgrounds.

Parent survey respondents were presented with the list of ethnic categories found in column one of table 2.5 and asked to choose as many as they identified with. Column two in table 2.5 represents the number of respondents who chose that ethnic category. The last group of columns in table 2.5 under the heading "Number of ethnicities," shows the number of ethnic categories respondents chose. For example, twenty-six of thirty-seven respondents that indicated an Indigenous ethnicity also indicated a second ethnicity while three of the thirty-seven indicated two additional ethnicities. We recognize that these are broad ethnic categories and not individual ethnicities, and that respondents could identify with many ethnicities within one category. No respondent chose more than three ethnic categories.

Eighty percent of the survey sample claimed a Caucasian ethnicity, the most common response. However, only seventy-five percent were exclusively Caucasian. By comparison, the 2016 census reported that 22.2 percent of Canadians in private households were visible minorities, that are often understood to be non-Caucasian.[17]

Table 2.5 Parent respondent ethnicity, and number of ethnicities reported, survey, counts, percent

Ethnicity	Count	Percent of ethnic categories cited[b]	Percent of sample[c]	Number of ethnic categories cited[a]			
				Zero (DK/PNTS)	One	Two	Three
Caucasian	975	*75*	*80*	0	914	54	7
East Asian	62	*5*	*5*	0	57	4	1
Southeast Asian	44	*3*	*4*	0	37	4	3
Latin American	38	*3*	*3*	0	23	14	1
Indigenous	37	*3*	*3*	0	8	26	3
Other	32	*2*	*3*	0	21	8	3
African	26	*2*	*2*	0	22	4	0
Caribbean	26	*2*	*2*	0	18	7	1
DK / PNTS	16	*1*	*1*	16	0	0	0
African American / Black	14	*1*	*1*	0	5	8	1
South Asian	14	*1*	*1*	0	11	2	1
Arab / West Asian	10	*1*	*1*	0	5	4	1
Jewish	7	*1*	*1*	0	1	4	2
Oceania	3	*0*	*0*	0	0	3	0

[a] Parents could choose all ethnicities that applied.
[b] Calculated using base 1,304, the number of ethnicities cited by all parent respondents.
[c] Calculated using base 1,217, the number of parent respondents.

[17] "Census Profile, 2016 Census - Canada [Country] and Canada [Country]," February 8, 2017, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Geo2=PR&Code2=01&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0.

In 2016, 21.9 percent of Canadians were born outside of Canada, which is a smaller share than the twenty-nine of our interview sample, but more than the nineteen percent of our survey sample.[18]

Table 2.6 Immigration status, interviews and survey, counts and percent

Immigration status	Interviews		Survey	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Immigrant	12	*29*	236	*19*
Non-immigrant	29	*71*	981	*81*
Total	**41**	*100*	**1,217**	*100*

We also asked parent respondents if their local church regularly held worship services in a language other than the official language they used in their responses to the survey. Fifteen percent of respondents said their local church did regularly conduct worship services in a non-official language, as did thirty-three percent of immigrants and thirty-five percent of those who identified with a non-Caucasian ethnic category (see table 2.7 below).

Table 2.7 "Does your local church regularly hold worship services in a language other than English?" Parent respondents, by group, survey, counts and percent[a]

	Count				Percent[b]			
Group	Yes	No	DK	Total	Yes	No	DK	Total
All	176	1,000	41	1,217	*15*	*82*	*3*	*100*
English	164	933	37	1,134	*15*	*82*	*3*	*100*
French	12	67	4	83	*15*	*81*	*5*	*101*
Immigrant	79	151	6	236	*33*	*64*	*3*	*99*
Non-Immigrant	97	849	35	981	*10*	*87*	*4*	*101*
Caucasian	92	848	35	975	*9*	*87*	*4*	*100*
Non-Caucasian	84	152	6	242	*35*	*63*	*2*	*99*

[a] French respondents were asked if their local church regularly held worship services in a language other than French.
[b] Percent rows may not add to 100 because of rounding.

2.1.1.5 Education

We asked survey respondents to tell us their highest level of completed formal education (see table 2.8 below).

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[18] Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "The Daily — Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity: Key Results from the 2016 Census," October 25, 2017, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025b-eng.htm?indid=14428-1&indgeo=0.

Table 2.8 Highest level of completed formal education, parent respondents, survey, counts and percent

Education	Count	Percent[a]
Grade school	6	0
High school	112	9
College / Technical school	333	27
Undergraduate degree	483	40
Post-graduate degree	279	23
Prefer not to say	4	0
Total	1,217	99

[a] Percent column does not add to 100 because of rounding.

Sixty-three percent had either an undergraduate or graduate university degree, and ninety percent had college or technical school or more. By comparison, the 2016 census reported that nineteen percent of the Canadian population aged twenty-five to sixty-four in private households had earned a bachelor's degree and 28.5 percent had earned a university certificate, diploma or degree at the bachelor level or above.[19]

We also asked if respondents had taken a post-secondary theological education course (see table 2.9 below). In retrospect, we realize this question could have been interpreted as a single course (as was our intention) or as an entire degree or diploma. Keeping in mind this ambiguity, table 2.9 shows that thirty-nine percent of respondents had at least taken a single post-secondary theological course.

Table 2.9 Completed a post-secondary, theological education course such as a Bible college, seminary or correspondence Bible course, parent respondents, survey, counts and percent

Completed course?	Count	Percent
Yes	473	39
No	741	61
Don't know	2	0
Prefer not to say	1	0
Total	1,217	100

2.1.1.6 Region

It is difficult to know the geographic distribution of contemporary evangelical parents. We know from other public opinion polls that evangelicals are a smaller share of the population inside Quebec than in other regions of the country which is sometimes collectively referred to as the rest of Canada (ROC). Region was part of our sampling quota for the interviews, and we tried to match that quota to what we estimated the distribution of evangelicals to be (see appendix A for more on our sampling methodology). We asked survey respondents to tell us what province or territory they lived in. Table 2.10 presents the regional distribution for the interview and survey samples which is a reasonable match for our estimated distribution of evangelical Christians.

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[19] "Census Profile, 2016 Census - Canada [Country] and Canada [Country]."

Table 2.10 Parent respondents, by region, interviews and survey, counts and percent[a]

Region	Interviews		Survey	
	Counts	Percent	Counts	Percent
BC	4	10	130	11
AB	6	15	166	14
SK/MB	5	12	171	14
ON	19	46	567	47
QC	4	10	105	9
ATL	3	7	77	6
Terr.	0	0	0	0
PNTS	0	0	1	0
Total	41	100	1,217	101

[a] Percent columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

In order to have another way to describe respondents' settings, we asked survey respondents if they would describe where they live as urban or rural (see table 2.11 below). Sixty percent said their setting was urban, however, this varied by region. By comparison, the 2021 Canadian census found just eighteen percent of the population lived in rural settings.[20]

Table 2.11 Urban or rural setting, by region, survey, counts and percent[a]

Region	Urban		Rural		Percent rural
	Counts	Percent	Counts	Percent	
BC	91	13	39	8	30
AB	100	14	66	13	40
SK/MB	74	10	97	20	57
ON	354	49	213	43	38
QC	80	11	25	5	24
ATL	28	4	49	10	64
Terr.	0	0	0	0	–
PNTS	0	0	1	0	100
Total	727	101	490	99	40

[a] Percent columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

2.1.1.7 Response language

The EFC's Centre for Research on Church and Faith aims to conduct research in both official languages as resources allow. We set English and French interview quotas to reflect what we understood to be the distribution of evangelical families with children in the home across the country. The parent survey was promoted through our research partnership affiliate networks. Table 2.12 below shows the distribution of parent respondents by response language.

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[20] Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "Population Counts, Population Centre Size Groups and Rural Areas," February 9, 2022, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810000801.

Table 2.12 Parent respondent language, interviews and survey, counts and percent

Language	Interviews		Survey	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
English	37	*90*	1,134	*93*
French	4	*10*	83	*7*
Total	**41**	*100*	**1,217**	*100*

2.1.2 Religious affiliation and participation

Table 2.13 below presents the religious affiliation counts for interview and survey respondents sorted greatest to least. Respondents were asked for a specific denominational affiliation which we categorized into traditions. Readers should be aware that Baptist and Holiness traditions are overrepresented and Pentecostal and other traditions underrepresented.

Table 2.13 Parent respondent tradition, interviews and survey, counts and percent[a]

Tradition	Interviews		Survey	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Baptist	10	*24*	360	*30*
Non-denominational	0	*0*	176	*14*
Holiness	5	*12*	149	*12*
Pentecostal	8	*20*	132	*11*
Reformed	6	*15*	104	*9*
Anabaptist	2	*5*	98	*8*
Pietist/Free	0	*0*	54	*4*
Other	1	*2*	47	*4*
Unknown	2	*5*	39	*3*
Restorationist	1	*2*	31	*3*
Evangelical other	3	*7*	11	*1*
Anglican	0	*0*	10	*1*
Lutheran	0	*0*	5	*0*
Catholic	3	*7*	1	*0*
Total	**41**	*99*	**1,217**	*100*

[a] Percent columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

Our research fell during the COVID pandemic which complicated measuring religious participation. We had two measures of religious participation for parent respondents: worship service attendance, and, for survey respondents, participation in various kinds of small groups.

During the parent interviews, we asked a general question about religious participation and determined worship service attendance frequency from their responses. Survey respondents were asked, "Including virtual worship services but excluding weddings and funerals, in the last twelve months, how often did you personally attend religious worship services?" These responses are presented in table 2.14 below. Significantly, the parents in both these samples attend worship services far more frequently than the general population. A September 2021 Maru/EFC poll of 3,025 Canadians found that weekly worship service attendance – for all Canadians irrespective of religious affiliation – had fallen from eleven percent pre-COVID to just

nine percent during COVID.[21] By comparison, seventy-six percent of those we interviewed and seventy-nine percent of parents surveyed, attended worship services weekly or more.

Table 2.14 Parent respondent worship service attendance frequency, interviews and survey, counts and percent

Attendance	Interviews		Survey	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
More than once a week	9	22	187	15
Once a week or so	22	54	783	64
2-3 times a month	4	10	169	14
Once a month or so	0	0	36	3
Once or a few times a year	2	5	30	2
Never	3	7	6	0
Unknown / DK / PNTS	1	2	6	0
Total	41	100	1,217	98

At different points in the body of this report we will refer to the parent survey sample as more devout than the interview parent sample. This determination is made based on worship service attendance data as well as qualitative data from the interviews.

Our use of the term devout does not evaluate adherence to traditional Christian orthodoxy but describes respondents whose behaviours indicate high levels of religious engagement. By this, we mean most survey respondents display consistent worship service attendance (table 2.14 above), interaction with Scripture and prayer (see figure 4.5). Since prior research indicates a positive correlation between church attendance and other religious practices (like Bible engagement and evangelism)[22], frequency of attendance is used as a shorthand throughout this report to represent levels of devotion.

2.1.3 Household composition

Household composition affects who is available to do faith formation and how it can happen. Parents will likely need to take different approaches if they have a single child than if they have four.

We asked about household composition in both our parent interviews and on our parent survey. Specifically, we asked about the ages and genders of each child. Additionally, we asked about the ages and genders of each adult living in the household and their relationships with the respondent.

In this section, we begin by looking at the children in the household followed by the adults before looking at the households as wholes.

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[21] Rick Hiemstra, "COVID and Church" (Power Point, 2021 EFC Presidents Day, Virtual Meeting, October 28, 2021), Slide 4.

[22] Rick Hiemstra, "Confidence, Conversation and Community: Bible Engagement in Canada, 2013" (The Canadian Bible Forum and The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2014), http://www.bibleengagementstudy.ca/.

The households of the forty-one parents we interviewed had 104 children under the age of eighteen, and the 1,217 parent survey households had 3,041. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 plot the genders of the children in these samples by age. The average age of the children under eighteen in the interview sample was 10.5 and for the survey sample was 9.3.

The average number of children under eighteen in the interview sample households was 2.7 compared to 2.5 for the parent survey.

The shape of the distributions in figure 2.2 and, especially, in figure 2.3 rise toward the middle school years before falling in the late teens. In a representative population of parents, absent a unique demographic event like the one that caused the Baby Boom generation, we would expect this distribution to be flat (i.e., there would be equal numbers of children in each age range). Given the parent survey sample was a referral sample, the distribution of the children's ages can be understood as a proxy for the relative interest of their parents' interest in their faith formation at different ages (i.e., parents are most engaged with the question of faith formation of their children when those children are around ages nine or ten).

Figure 2.2 Gender of children, by age, parent respondents, interviews, counts
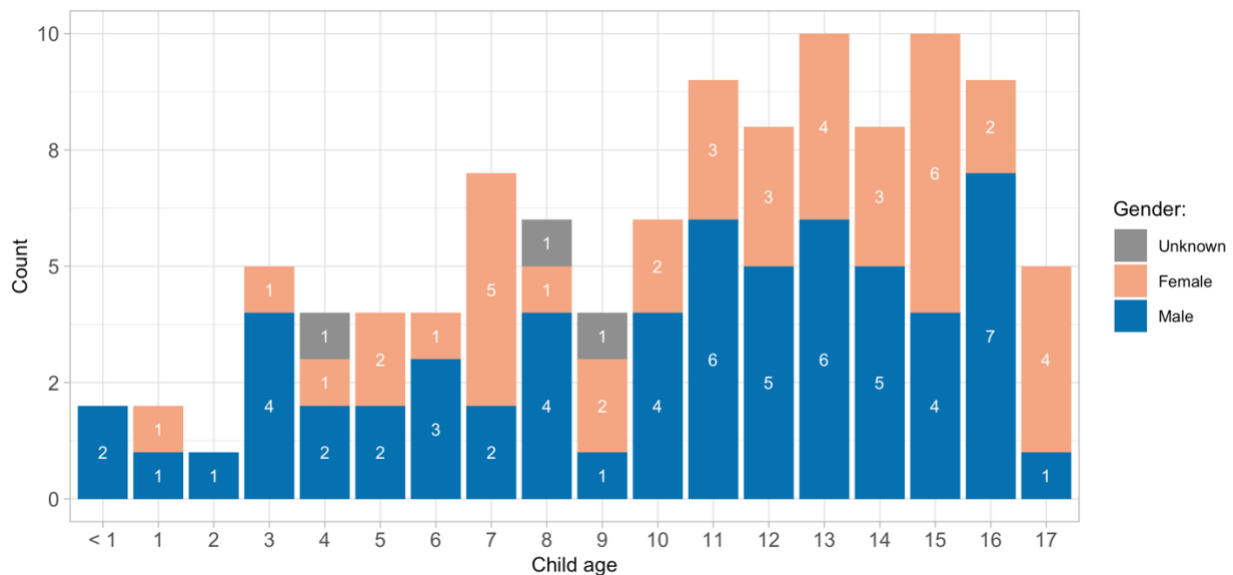
Figure 2.3 Gender of children, by age, parent respondents, survey, counts
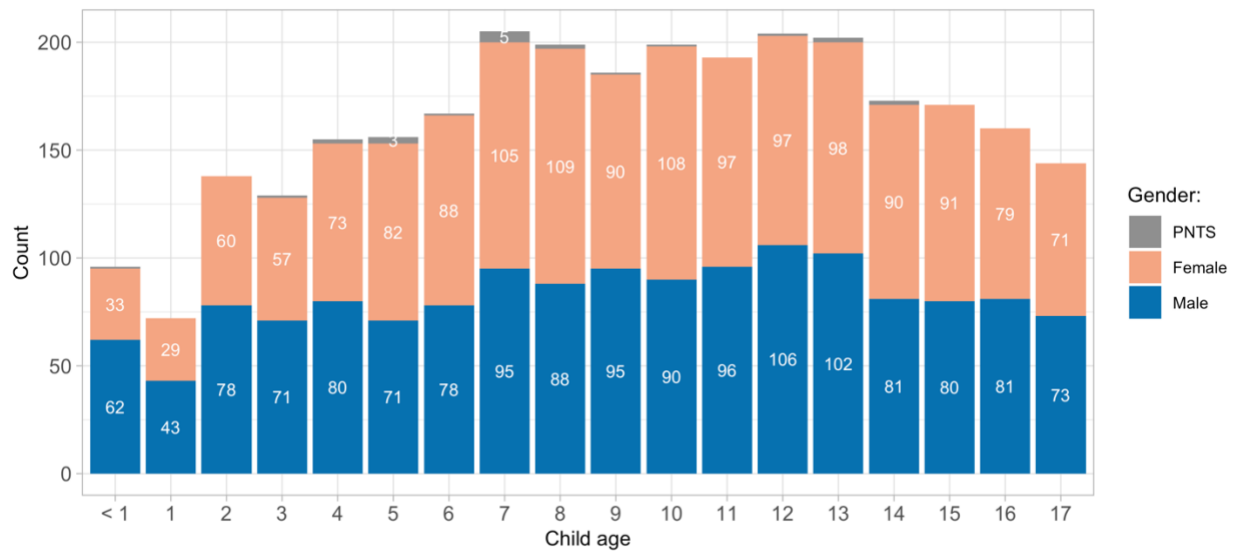
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N children = 3,041.

Four percent of parent survey respondents said at least one of their children under eighteen lived part-time in a household other than their own.

Seventy-nine percent of parent survey households (959) had two adults, four percent had one adult (forty, the respondent) and eighteen percent had three or more adults (218).

Thirty-eight parent survey respondents said they had their parents (their children's grandparents) living with them; twenty-seven had one parent living with them, and eleven had two parents living with them. One hundred and ninety-eight parent survey respondents (sixteen percent) said they had adult children living in the home.

Figure 2.4 below shows the distribution of household sizes (adults plus children) for the parent survey sample. The average household size for the interview sample was 4.6 compared to 4.7 for the parent survey sample. Although it is not an exact comparison, the 2016 Canadian census reported the average *census family* size was 2.9.[23]

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[23] Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "Census Profile, 2016 Census - Canada," February 8, 2017, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Geo2=PR&Code2=01&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=Families,%20households%20and%20marital%20status&TABID=1&type=0. Note, a census family is defined as "a married couple (with or without children of either and/or both spouses), a common-law couple (with or without children of either and/or both partners) or a lone parent of any marital status, with at least one child living in the same dwelling."

Figure 2.4 Parent respondent household size (adults and children), survey, counts

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.
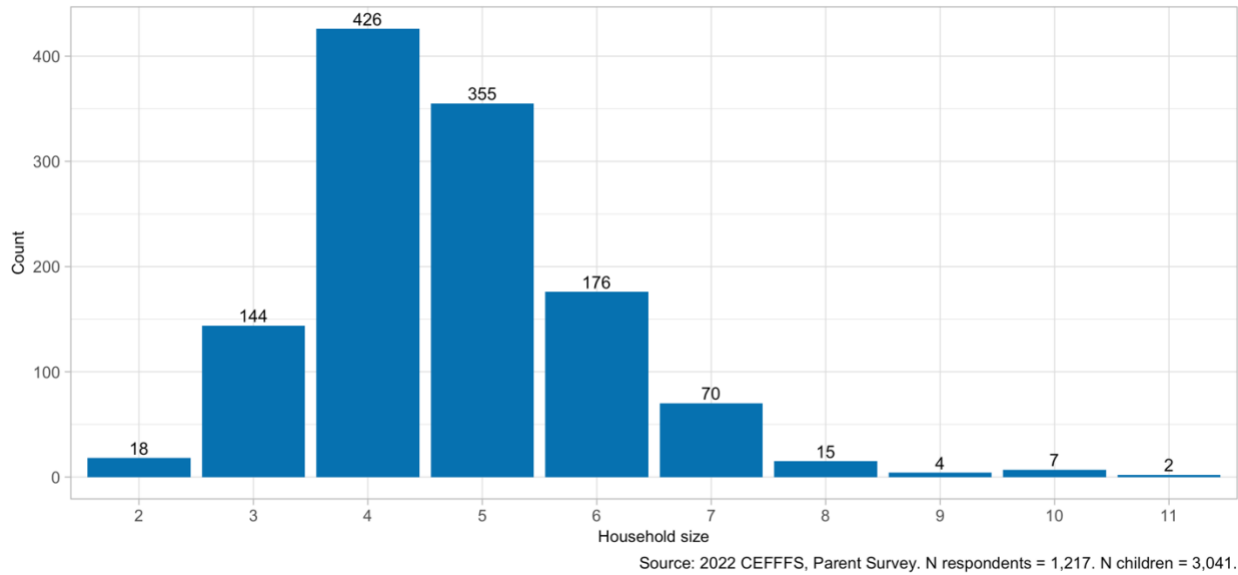
Table 2.15 presents the different household adult to children complements in the parent survey sample. The numbers of adults and children are represented as ranges.

Table 2.15 Number of children in household, by number of adults (including parent respondent), ranges, survey, counts and percent

	Children									
	Counts					Percent				
Adults	One	Two	Three	Four +	Total	One	Two	Three	Four +	Total
One	18	14	5	3	**40**	45	35	12	8	100
Two	130	372	280	177	**959**	14	39	29	18	100
Three +	75	79	39	25	**218**	34	36	18	11	99
All	**223**	**465**	**324**	**205**	**1,217**	18	38	27	17	100

Two-adult families (which are most likely to be nuclear families) have, on average, 2.6 children compared to just 1.9 for one-adult families, and 2.16 for families with three or more adults. Ninety-four percent of the children in the parent survey sample were biological children of respondents (see figure 2.5 below).

Figure 2.5 Relationship of child to parent respondent, survey, counts

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.
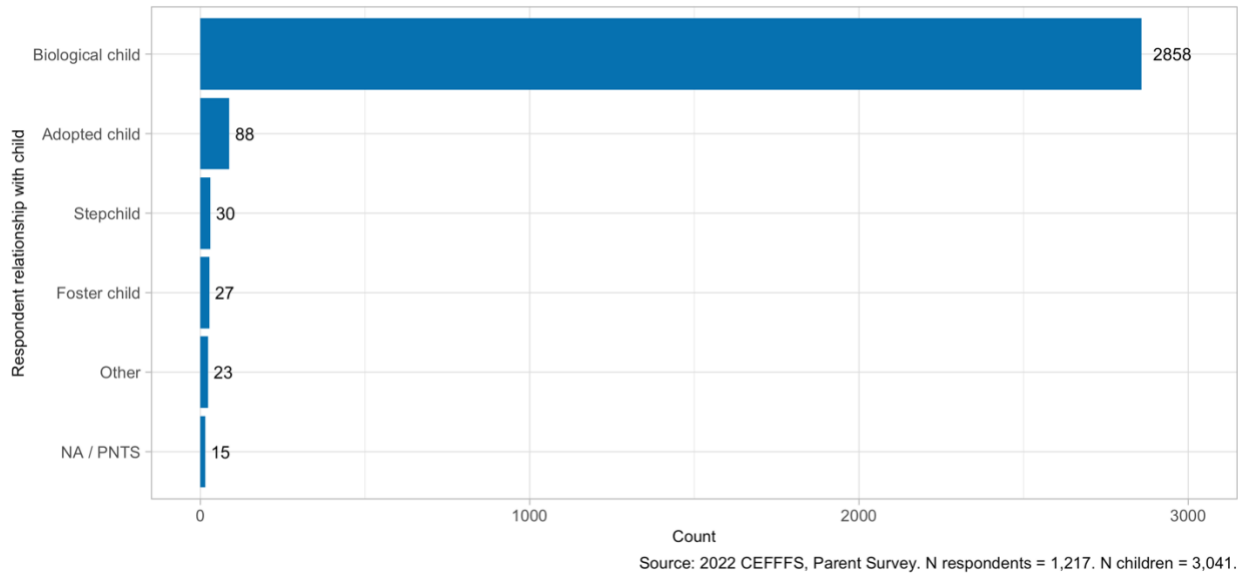
2.1.4 Schooling

Societies form children through education. Although schools have curricula for academic subjects, there are always social and moral dimensions to education. Because of these social and moral dimensions, the type of education parents choose for their children is an important part of their overall faith formation.

Table 2.16 below shows the schooling type choices parents in our survey sample made for their children. Note, that parents may have enrolled their children in more than one school type, for example, in a family of two; one child could be homeschooled and the other attend public school.

Table 2.16 Types of education children enrolled in, survey, counts[b] and percent

School type	Count	Percent
Public	575	*47*
Homeschool	247	*20*
Private Protestant	227	*19*
Public Catholic	113	*9*
NA/PNTS	95	*8*
Public Christian[a]	15	*1*
Christian n.o.s.[a]	14	*1*
Preschool / daycare	13	*1*
CÉGEP	13	*1*
Private Catholic	10	*1*
Private[a]	9	*1*
Online public[a]	7	*1*
Specialty[a]	6	*0*
Christian preschool / daycare[a]	5	*0*
Post-secondary[a]	4	*0*

[a] Write-in response.
[b] Respondents could choose as many responses as applied.
n.o.s. means not otherwise specified.
NA/PNTS is not applicable / prefer not to say

Although public education was the most common schooling type, significant minorities homeschooled (twenty percent) and sent their children to private Protestant Christian schools (nineteen percent).

The number of homeschooling families in Canada is difficult to establish. The Fraser Institute estimates that during 2014–2015, home-educated students ranged from a high of 1.5 percent of total student enrolment in Manitoba, to a low of 0.1 percent of total enrolment in Quebec.[24] Statistics Canada reported that homeschool enrolment in Canada for the 2020–2021 school year was up 1.6 percent from 0.6 percent in 2016–2017 and 0.4 percent in 2010–2011.

Statistics Canada data shows homeschool enrolment rose from 0.47 percent in the 2011–2012 academic year to 1.55 percent in 2020–2021 (see table 2.17 below).[25] Private/independent schools grew from 6.99 percent to 7.71 percent over the same period.

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[24] Angela MacLeod, "Homeschooling Has Grown Substantially in Canada over Past Five Years," Fraser Institute, January 9, 2018, https://www.fraserinstitute.org/blogs/homeschooling-has-grown-substantially-in-canada-over-past-five-years.

[25] "Elementary to Postsecondary Student Education Dashboard: Enrolments, Graduations and Tuition Fees," Statistics Canada, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2022019-eng.htm, Accessed October 13, 2022; Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "Number of Students in Elementary and Secondary Schools, by School Type and Program Type," https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710010901, Accessed October 13, 2022.

Table 2.17 Percent of students in elementary and secondary schools, by school type, youth

School type	Academic year									
	2011–2012	2012–2013	2013–2014	2014–2015	2015–2016	2016–2017	2017–2018	2018–2019	2019–2020	2020–2021
Public schools	92.54	92.33	92.18	91.97	91.87	91.79	91.63	91.49	91.41	90.74
Private/indep. schools	6.99	7.16	7.28	7.46	7.52	7.58	7.71	7.80	7.84	7.71
Homeschooling	0.47	0.51	0.54	0.57	0.60	0.63	0.66	0.71	0.75	1.55
All youth	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**	**100.00**

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0109-01. "Number of students in elementary and secondary schools, by school type and program type." https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710010901.

It is unlikely that a fifth of evangelical families homeschool or send their children to private Protestant Christian schools, as we found in our survey. Their shares of our referral sample indicate, if nothing else, they, as groups, care deeply about the subject of the faith formation of children in the home.

Table 2.18 below shows the percent of parents choosing each school type according to how many kinds of school types they had enrolled their children in. Rows representing school choices with a low number of observations have been highlighted in yellow to alert the reader to use caution interpreting those data. Overall, eleven percent of parents enrolled their children in more than one type of school. Only seventy-five percent of homeschoolers and seventy-eight percent of those sending their children to private Protestant Christian schools exclusively did so.

Table 2.18 For families with children enrolled in a school type, the percent who have their children in one, two, three or four different school types

School type (count)	Number of schooling types children enrolled in			
	One	Two	Three	Four
Public Christian[b] (15)	*93*	*7*	*0*	*0*
Public (575)	85	14	1	0
Christian preschool / daycare[b] (5)	*80*	*20*	*0*	*0*
Public Catholic (113)	80	18	3	0
Christian n.o.s. (14)	*79*	*21*	*0*	*0*
Private Protestant (227)	78	20	1	0
Private[b] (9)	*78*	*11*	*11*	*0*
Preschool / daycare[b] (13)	*77*	*23*	*0*	*0*
Homeschool (247)	75	23	2	0
Private Catholic (10)	*50*	*50*	*0*	*0*
Online public (7)	*29*	*29*	*43*	*0*
CÉGEP (13)	*8*	*77*	*8*	*8*
Post-secondary (4)	*0*	*75*	*0*	*25*
Specialty[b] (6)	*0*	*100*	*0*	*0*
All[a] (1,217)	**82**	**10**	**1**	**0**

[a] Eight percent of respondents indicated their children we not enrolled in any school type.
[b] Write-in response.
Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding.
Yellow shading indicates a small number of observations: Use data with caution.

We cannot accommodate a more detailed analysis of parent schooling choice in this report. Resources permitting, we will write a supplementary report on schooling choice in 2023.

Conclusion

Women were overrepresented in both our parent samples because of how the samples were formed, which likely indicates a greater interest in the faith of children on the part of moms than dads. Our survey respondents tended to be better educated than the general population and about two-fifths had some formal, post-secondary, theological education. Survey respondents were more likely to live in a rural context than Canadians generally. Respondents most often came from nuclear families and averaged between two and three children under eighteen in the home. The parent survey sample was more devout than the parent interview sample in that there were very few survey respondents that did not regularly participate in worship services. Homeschoolers were also a significant minority in both samples.

2.2 How Respondents' Parents Formed Their Faith

We asked parent interview respondents to tell us how they do faith formation *differently* than their parents did with them. As we will see, a few talked about similarities, but our question was about points of contrast. Commonly, respondents talked about parenting in reaction to their upbringing. Tables 2.19 and 2.20 give overviews of responses, and several of these themes are discussed in the following subsections.

Table 2.19 Ways parent respondents said the spiritual formation their parents did with them was different than what they do with their children, interviews, counts[b]

What respondents' parents did differently	Count
Less faith explanation / conversation	14
Less faith formation	12
Required unquestioning obedience or gave less religious choice	9
Raised in a non-Evangelical Christian tradition	8
Raised in a non-Christian household	6
Were detached from respondents in their faith formation[a]	6
More faith formation	4
Did not homeschool	3

[a] Five of the six respondents were raised in ministry families.
[b] Thirty-eight of forty-one respondents provided a response.

Table 2.20 Other characteristics of the homes parent respondents were raised in, interviews, counts

Other characteristics of homes respondents were raised in	Count
Ministry family (i.e., Pastor's or Missionary's kid)	6
Complementarian household[a]	4
Mother as the greater spiritual influence	2
Spouse raised in a non-Christian family	1
Spouse raised in a ministry family	1

[a] All four respondents also have complementarian families.

2.2.1 Parents expected to have unquestioning obedience and belief

The most common critiques respondents had of their own upbringings were what they described as their parents' uncompromising demands for obedience and acceptance of religious teaching without adequate explanation. This respondent's answer was typical:

> **Well, my parents are Christians, and they didn't answer a lot of questions, so it was, "This is what you do, and don't ask questions."** So, with me, I do try to talk more about why does God ask us to do this or that and [indistinct] behind it. I guess I'm trying to [sighs] **I guess I'm trying to build a deeper faith, one that will have roots and will be more guaranteed to last, I guess, although nothing's guaranteed.**

What this respondent experienced is significant for her children's faith formation because it directly shapes how she approached faith formation with her children. In fact, many of our respondents, in reaction to what they perceived as their own lack of religious choice growing up, adjusted their faith formation with their own children to provide the kind of religious choice they feel they were denied (see section 2.3 Choice). Note the comparative assertion that the conversational approach she took with her children will produce a "deeper," more "root[ed]" faith. The natural comparator would be her own faith, however, her participation in this study and her clear commitment to the Christian faith suggests she has a deep-rooted faith despite her upbringing.

This next respondent also objected to her upbringing which broached no religious questions.

> I think it hasn't been extremely different. **For me, there was a lot of the rules, there was a lot of "You can't do this. You cannot do that." No questions. It was just, "This is the way it has to be done." You follow the Bible. If it says you've got to do this, you have to do that. There is no, like, questioning it.** So, for me, I think that I'm giving my kids the option of thinking for themselves and questioning, and if they want to believe it that's fine, but I'm not going to force it on them.

Curiously, although she repeatedly and strenuously rejected Pentecostalism in the interview, she persisted in identifying herself as Pentecostal. Moreover, although she never attends Pentecostal worship services (or Catholic masses, the religious affiliation of her husband), nor emphasized faith formation in the home, she believes that Pentecostalism and Catholicism remain real choices for her children. The most important thing for her was that her religious identification was not forced on their children.

It is interesting that, for some, the experience of being forced to adopt religious beliefs as a child seemed to persist into adulthood and were talked about as present traumas.

Another respondent, when describing her strict religious upbringing, mentioned rules being set for the wrong reasons.

> I would say so, yes. Yeah. **And the other aspect there is ensuring that we're setting rules or expectations for our kids for the right reasons. So, it's – when you grew up in a certain faith tradition, there's a lot of rules, and then as I found God later it was a different way. So, yeah, trying to find a balance between living out our walk and setting rules and having rules for the right reasons.**

She was not against rules, but rules set for the wrong reasons. Like others who objected to their strict upbringing, there was a sense here that the wrongness of the reasons for rules her parents set for her should be obvious. In her case, having found God was clearly the key to her different reasons, but these were not elaborated on.

This father also talked about the experience of rigidity in his own upbringing as the reason he spends more time explaining "why we do things" and "why we don't do things."

> I would say the basic principles [my parents and I hold] are the same and it's just been methods may be different. Like, **when I was growing up, there was a lot more rigid "you do this, you can't do that" type of thing, whereas now it's more of the, you know, "What are the reasons why we do things? What are the reasons why we don't do things?"** And that is explained. But the end result is we – it's pretty much doing the same thing.

Although he provided more explanation, at the end of the day his family did certain things and did not do other things. There was not a sense that with his explanations, he provided his children with more choice. Indeed, he concluded with "But the end result is we – it's pretty much doing the same thing."

Clearly, respondents indicated they would have wanted greater explanation for the religious rules and teachings they had to follow as children. People come to faith for many different reasons, and it may be that many of those in our parent interview sample came to faith despite their upbringing, not because of it. No doubt there are many who were raised under similar circumstances (and a few in our sample) who left the faith. What is beyond doubt, is many of the respondents were determined to provide explanations to their children they felt they lacked.

This generation of parents is unlikely to have been the first to experience a strict religious upbringing without significant explanation. It is likely that the broader cultural experience of an emphasis on choice and authenticity, along with a more ready access to information in all areas of life, has created a corresponding expectation for faith formation.

2.2.2 Parents did less

Given current trends in inter-generational religious affiliation and participation[26], it was surprising to find that close to a third of parents interviewed said their parents did less with them, in terms of faith formation, than they do with their children (see table 2.19). If we group respondents who said they were raised in non-Christian households with those who described being raised in nominal Catholic or Mainline Protestant households, then half of respondents reported being more active and intentional in the faith formation of their children than their parents were with them.

- **My parents never – we were never encouraged to go to church at all. I didn't even know about God till I was a teenager.**

- **Well, my parents didn't do anything with me, so it's completely different because I do something.** So, everything is different from going to church on Sundays, to teaching Sunday school and serving in the church – which, you know, **my parents never did, I never did growing up – to reading the Bible with my kids, to doing devotionals with them. So, yeah, everything that I do is different than what my parents did because they didn't do anything.**

- **For me, it's very different. My parents had a very hands-off approach. They figured I would figure it out on my own.** And they brought us to church once or twice a month. And so, the experience of their involvement in my faith formation – and I have a more hands-on approach with my kids.

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[26] Hiemstra, "Not Christian Anymore."

- Well, I grew up in the United Church. That's the church that my parents attended. So, it was – we would go to church on Sunday, but we wouldn't really ever talk about the Bible or Jesus or faith, really. **It wasn't ever like, "You need to do this. You need to follow this." It was kind of a gentle, "This is what we do, and this is …" You know, it wasn't just a rigorous, rigid rules or anything like that. And as for, like, practicing in the house, I think we said grace maybe two or three times a year, like Easter or Thanksgiving when we had all the family around the table kind of thing.** I was baptized in the church. Yeah, but I think – yeah, it was just kind of a thing to do, I guess. I don't know how else to explain it. Yeah.

Clearly the respondents we talked with were more religiously engaged than parents from the general population.

2.2.3 Parents did more

Where interview respondents said their parents did more, church was usually a connection to family or culture.

A Polish Catholic respondent attended mass weekly until he was a teenager. He explained the significance of his Polish Catholic parish when he was a child.

> I mean, [his Polish Catholic parish is] more connected to my entire family, like my grandparents, my aunt and uncles, you know, being of Polish descent. … Like, we've had all, like, all the entire family and friends, all of the funerals have been there, you know, weddings, stuff like that.

Today his parish has a similar family significance. He explained they typically go to mass when his grandmother wants to go. By way of explaining his less frequent attendance, he pointed out that family and friends are less likely to be at church.

> I think just even with, you know, our friends and family that like, it's – religion is kind of – wouldn't say less important, but it was definitely, like, a lot stronger when we were child[ren] – or with my sister and her kids. **You know, now everyone is doing this and that and they don't have time – as much time**. And, you know, so, yeah, I just don't – definitely don't think there's such a strong bond as we had when we were kids.

Another respondent, who could not identify his Christian tradition beyond it being Protestant, spoke of the religiosity of his parents as overkill because his parents attended church "three times a week and stuff." Today, he and his children attend a few times a year when his mother visits.

Note, as with the previous respondent, family is the significant tie to the church. When the people representing those ties are not present, the respondents and their families tend to be correspondingly absent from church.

A mother who grew up in Jamaica going to church every Sunday with her grandmother said, "We loved it." Notice the communal nature of her response in saying "We loved it," not "I." She encapsulated the place of church in her childhood society by saying, "Back home, we went to church."

> I was born in Jamaica, and I remember going up every Sunday. Back home, we went to church. My grandmother would take us to church every Sunday, and we'd go, and we loved it. Because I remember going back once – I tell my son – literally, I knew the books, like, the books of the Bible. I could stay it out of my head. Like, I knew it out of my head because we had to study, and I knew that in my head. I try to instill values in my boys, right? Telling them, "You need to know the Lord and basics of faith. You need to know who you are as a person."

For her, faith told her "who [she was] as a person." "Back home" Jamaicans went to church. Now she exhorts her boys to go to church to know who they are as people, but her boys' people are not at church. As a child, she went to church every Sunday. Her boys attend church a couple of times a month. She loved learning the books of the Bible. Her sons love basketball and video games. Outside of worship services her sons are not involved in church. Note, it was the respondent's grandmother who took her to church, not her parents. Both she and her husband are busy working, and their jobs limit their ability to participate in church life. Although she did not say so, her parents may have similarly been too preoccupied with earning a living to be involved in church life. In the interview, she did not mention the presence of her own mother (her boys' grandmother) who could take on the role for her boys that her grandmother did for her.

2.2.4 Parents not Christians

Six of forty-one parent interview respondents said they were raised in non-Christian homes representing, within the sample, a fifteen percent generational gain for Christianity (although these gains would need to be offset against the losses in the sample as well). We cannot use percentages from our small interview sample of forty-one to make conclusive statements, however, gains of this magnitude run counter to religious trends observed elsewhere.[27] Some of our respondents became Christian between childhood and adulthood, and that conversion experience has now made faith formation a priority for their respective families.

Commonly, where respondents were raised in non-Christian homes, the comparison of theirs and their parents' faith formation with children was categorical.

- **Different. Totally different.**
- [chuckles] **One hundred percent different.**
- **Uh, very different because [my parents] aren't Christians.**

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[27] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith"; Hiemstra, "Not Christian Anymore."

Where respondents became Christians after having grown up in a non-Christian home, they usually exhibited high levels of religious participation such as frequent worship service attendance and "totally," "very" or "one hundred percent" different in their approach to faith formation with their children.

This New Canadian mother was sent to a Christian school in Asia by her non-Christian parents and became a Christian through that school.

> Oh, oh. **Very different because my parents are not – are nonbelievers. But my dad, he just believed God a few years ago, so that wasn't much influence when I was little. But I think God used them, and they sent me to a Christian school, so that's the biggest part that they influenced me. They sent me to a Christian school.** I got to learn about God when I was little, but that's – probably that's the biggest part they did.

This respondent grew up in what she described as a dysfunctional and nominally Christian home.

> **I definitely saw the difference and I wanted better for [my children].** … **Just language in the home. It was horrible. Pornography. Not that it was shown to us, but it was talked about. It was not a big deal, sex and drugs and alcohol. It was prevalent in our home. We knew about it before we knew about anything else.**

2.2.5 Parents detached

If respondents raised in non-Christian homes emphasized faith formation in reaction to missing Christian faith formation in their family of origin, we found another group that also reacted against what they saw as the detached parenting (religious and otherwise) of their upbringings – these were mostly pastor's kids or missionary kids.

> So, my family comes from, let's say, employment in the church [father was a pastor]. So, that meant, you know, being there all the time. [laughs] And being there on Sundays for, you know, six hours in the morning and then being there if there was Sunday evening service there, if there was a Saturday special service, if it was something like Easter and there – you would be there Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Easter Monday. [laughs] You know, that's where I spent a lot of my childhood. And there was no opening the door and learning about the world. It was that. And that's where I want, you know, my children to understand that it's important to have different perspectives and, you know, they can come to that conclusion on their own, but I think it's important that they're not, I would say, sheltered and, "This is the way you must be." I don't think that works so well for people.

Although this respondent did not come right out and say he was estranged from his parents, he did relate how they offered to pay for him to attend a Christian college which he interpreted as a payoff for adopting their faith.

A mother from a Reformed tradition was raised in a pastoral household and felt that for her parents, she and her siblings were secondary to the church.

> [My siblings and I] often felt that our parents spent more time with the church and working for the church than they did investing in us. We both very much felt that it was more – my dad was a pastor, my husband's dad was an elder all his life, and they gave their entire lives to the church in their service and left our moms to do a lot of the family raising. And that wasn't something that appealed to me. It actually turned me off of the whole idea of having kids.

Note, there is no sense that her parents were not good people, just not comparatively attentive to their children – an experience that made her question whether she wanted to have her own children.

This missionary kid explained that her father's ability to teach the faith "didn't transfer into the family to his children."

> And I want to take also in mind that my parents were missionaries in another country, and so my dad was a church planter, as you'd call it. **So, he was equipped to teach, but that didn't transfer into the family to his children.** So, and I'm pretty sure potentially that I think there's lots of situations like that – missionaries or pastors – where that doesn't transfer to the actual children. (Anabaptist, Female, Weekly Attendance)

Finally, one respondent's father worked outside of the country, and it would seem, he was absent for a significant portion of her childhood.

> **For example, my dad worked outside of the country and kind of not spending that time with us, or if there was school stuff or trips sometimes parents were not available to go with us because they had to work, or, you know.** So, to us – like, to me, when I went on a trip I would see, you know, other kids' parents there and unfortunately mine was not there, so that kind of made me sad. **So, I made a pact to myself that if there is a field trip or anything, any concert, anything at the school, I will show up for that to be there for my children. Right? So, or sometimes if we didn't have enough money or something – you wanted something and it was just, you know, other kids had something I didn't have and you want things. So, it's just kind of making sure that my kids have stuff, but obviously not everything, but it's just – there are kids wants, so it's like you want to make the best childhood for them as possible.**

In response (or in reaction) to her father's absence, she "made a pact with [herself]" to be as present for her children as her father was absent for her.

Whether respondents' parents were pastors, missionaries or worked internationally, these are stories of parental devotion to work that was experienced as detachment, if not abandonment, by their children. As in many of these respondents' stories, they are parenting today in reaction to what they experienced in their childhoods.

2.2.6 Similarities

The question being considered in this section probed differences in the faith formation respondents experienced from their parents and what they do with their children. Nevertheless, a few pointed to similarities.

For two respondents, traditional gender roles were the salient points of similarity.

- It's actually quite similar. Yeah, I would say it's very – **it's quite similar to how our parents raised us as well. It was our dads – both of our dads – that were the head and, yeah, I think probably it's a large part of why we do our structure. It's because both of our families were done very similar. … We branch out a little bit in some spots, but most of it comes right from what we've both seen.**

- Well, I would say it's very similar. I think we – there was only two of us – my sister and I [sic]. And we have four but shouldn't really change – doesn't change much. Maybe we were a little more spoiled [chuckles] because it was two instead of four. **But no, my parents, you know, Dad had the fatherly discipline role and Mother was, you know, the cooks the meals and does more of the kitchen, inside work, not to say that Dad didn't help with that at all. He did.**

A New Canadian respondent from an African background spoke about her efforts, frustrated as they were by the broader Canadian culture, to instill the respect for elders that her parents had taught her.

> *Donc je prends l'exemple, chez nous en en coupant la parole à la personne … quand la personne la plus grande peut parler tu n'as pas le droit de couper sa parole tant que la personne n'a pas fini. … Mais nous, dans nos, dans notre culture à nous, ça c'est faisait pas. Tu entendais et tu as entendais jusqu'à ce que la personne, la grande personne, la personne adulte fini de parler.*
>> **Translation:** So, I take the example, with us interrupting the person … when the oldest person can speak you do not have the right interrupt as long as that person has not finished. … But we, in our, in our culture, that didn't happen. You listened and you listened until the person, the grown-up person, the adult person finished talking.

A respondent from a Korean background also spoke about similarities, but quickly moved on to reflect on the relative influence of parents and church.

> I don't think that the way I'm doing it is much different than my parents. … [W]e learn from our parents as much as we do from the church, uh, depending on the size of the church and programs … so that could be a good or bad thing, depending on whether the parents have a good grasp of the Gospel or not …

The respondent quoted above comes from a Reformed tradition, but unlike the Reformed respondents from Caucasian backgrounds we interviewed, there is not the same emphasis on the independence of the family unit. Korean culture is more communal, and there was little sense that a sphere sovereignty framework influenced his outlook.[28] Rather than emphasizing the family's role in the faith formation of children, he said, "We learn as much from our parents as we do from the church." This response suggests the church normally has the primary role against which he must make an argument for the importance of the parental role.

2.2.7 Do faith formation differently from how they were raised

We asked parent survey respondents for their level of agreement with several statements about faith and how they were raised. Table 2.21 below shows respondents' agreement that they consciously try to do faith formation with their children differently than their parents did with them by several other questions about their upbringing and by tradition and worship service attendance.

A strong majority, sixty-five percent, of parent survey respondents said they consciously try to do faith formation differently with their children than their parents did with them.

Fifty-five percent who agreed they have maintained their childhood religious identity, agreed they try to do faith formation with their children differently compared to ninety percent of those have not maintained their childhood religious identity. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, a change in religious identity is correlated with efforts from respondents to do faith formation differently than their parents.

Eighty-two percent who agreed their parents did not allow them to question their religious teaching, also agreed they try to do faith formation with their children differently; compared to fifty-five percent of those who disagreed that their parents did not allow them to question their religious teaching.

Parent respondents, having had the freedom to make their own religious choices in childhood, were somewhat more likely to emulate their parents' faith-formation practices with their children. Nevertheless, even where religious choice was granted, and explanations given, half or more respondents said they now choose another way. There has clearly been a generational break in faith-formation practice.

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[28] Sphere sovereignty is a theological view that asserts God has ordained an ordered world in which each domain, or sphere, has its proper area of responsibility. Richard J Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapid, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011).

Table 2.21 Agreement with "I consciously try to do faith formation with my children differently than my parents or guardians did with me," parent respondents, by select groups, survey, counts and percent

| | | I consciously try to do faith formation with my children differently than my parents or guardians did with me. | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Counts | | | | | Percent | | | | |
Group	Sub-group	Str. agree	Mod. agree	Mod. disagree	Str. disagree	NA/PNTS[c]	Str. agree	Mod. agree	Mod. disagree	Str. disagree	NA/PNTS[c]
My current religious identity is the same as the one I was raised in.	Str. agree	80	172	155	125	11	15	32	29	23	2
	Mod. agree	65	154	62	14	12	21	50	20	5	4
	Mod. disagree	54	52	15	5	1	43	41	12	4	1
	Str. disagree	161	49	6	2	8	71	22	3	1	4
	NA/PNTS[c]	10	2	0	0	2	71	14	0	0	14
I feel I was allowed to make my own religious choices.[a]	Str. agree	106	68	35	37	10	41	27	14	14	4
	Mod. agree	104	157	106	63	11	24	36	24	14	2
	Mod. disagree	68	117	58	23	1	25	44	22	9	0
	Str. disagree	81	77	34	17	5	38	36	16	8	2
	NA/PNTS[c]	11	10	5	6	7	28	26	13	15	18
My parents did not allow me to question their religious teaching.[b]	Str. agree	72	45	11	5	2	53	33	8	4	1
	Mod. agree	79	123	35	11	4	31	49	14	4	2
	Mod. disagree	83	151	109	41	8	21	39	28	10	2
	Str. disagree	68	85	74	82	7	22	27	23	26	2
	NA/PNTS	68	25	9	7	13	56	20	7	6	11
All		370	429	238	146	34	30	35	20	12	3

[a] Growing up, I feel that I was allowed to make my own religious choices even if they were different from the ones my parents would make.
[b] Growing up, I feel my parents did not allow me to question their religious teaching.
[c] Small number of observations: Use data with caution.

Conclusion

Many of the respondents do faith formation with their children in reaction to what they experienced as children. It is likely that the discontinuities in parenting described here are reflections of broader discontinuities in the wider culture and in the church. Usually where there was continuity, there was continuity of community across generations. Where the community was not sustained, often faith, religious practice and faith formation with the next generation was similarly not sustained. The next section examines some of the broader cultural discontinuities that may have contributed to the generational changes in faith-formation foci, mainly as it pertains to the emphasis on choice.

2.3 Choice

2.3.1 Choice and the authentic self

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor in *The Malaise of Modernity* explains the Western turn away from religion in general, and Christianity in particular, as a quest for the authentic self.[29] According to Taylor, the quest for the authentic self has its roots in Romanticism that elevated feeling, our internal voice, as a source of truth.

> Rousseau [a romantic philosopher] frequently presents the issue of morality as that of our following a voice of nature within us. This voice is most often drowned out by the passions induced by our dependence on others, of which the key one is "amour propre" or pride. *Our moral salvation comes from recovering authentic moral contact with ourselves*.[30] (emphasis added)

To use a Christian frame, we could say that an ethic of authenticity understands salvation not as a question of restoring our relationship with God that was broken by sin, but of connecting with our authentic selves with whom we are separated by ignorance.

Connecting with our authentic selves is seen as a kind of liberation, not just from ignorance, but from external sources that tell me "who I really am." Significantly, Taylor writes that "[s]elf-determining freedom demands that I break the hold of all such external impositions, and decide for myself alone."[31] To the extent that parents adopt this philosophy, they will be reluctant to guide their children toward the Christian faith (or any faith) because to do so would be to take away their children's "[s]elf determining freedom;" it would be to enslave them. In the sections that follow, we see evidence of an ethic of authenticity in our interviews with parents.

To the extent that our culture understands religious beliefs to be part of "who we really are," that is, part of our authentic selves, the sameness of our beliefs is problematic. Christianity has content. For Evangelicals this is principally the Bible, but traditions within Evangelicalism also look to creeds, catechisms and other sources that articulate what they believe and hold in common. Taylor explains why originality is important for the idea of the authentic self:

> And then it greatly increases the importance of this self-contact by introducing the principle of originality: each of our voices has something of its own to say. Not only should I not fit my life to the demands of external conformity; I can't even find the model to live by outside myself. I can find it only within. **Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover.** In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of

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[29] Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord, Ont: Anansi, 2003).
[30] Taylor, 28.
[31] Taylor, 29.

authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment or self-realization in which it is usually couched.[32] (emphasis added)

If your authentic self looks like my authentic self, then they are not original, and this lack of originality is proof that we have not found our true authentic selves. Moreover, if what I find inside looks like a Christian tradition that is being promoted by churches, pastors or parents, then it has not been chosen in my "self-determining freedom."

An ethic of authenticity can be seen in contemporary language. People often exhort each other to "be yourself," "be true to yourself," "believe in yourself." Significantly, *we* become the object of belief in these exhortations. We also confirm feelings as the seat of truth with injunctions like, "trust your feelings," or with evaluations like "it feels right" or "it feels so right it can't be wrong." Whereas, even a decade ago, someone may have offered an opinion by saying, "I think that … ." Today, especially among younger people, you are more likely to hear, "I feel that … ," because feeling is now more persuasive than thinking and to question what one feels is to question them, and not an abstract idea or opinion. The stakes for disagreement are raised when something is felt because feelings identify the person with their expression.

An ethic of authenticity can also be seen in popular television series and movies. For example, the ABC/Disney television series *Once Upon a Time* gathers Disney's stable of characters, such as Snow White, Prince Charming and Rumpelstiltskin, into a fairy-tale world where everyone is unique and extraordinarily so.[33] The first episode introduces the "fall" when the witch/evil queen from the Snow White story places a curse on the characters in this fairy-tale world. They are all cursed with amnesia (a condition where they forget who they really are) and are forced to live in an ordinary, American town leading ordinary lives. The plot device that pushes the series forward is the main character's quest to help everyone rediscover their true authentic selves. The identities they've been cursed with are externally imposed and the ordinariness of these identities are an affront to their true or authentic ones.

Amnesia is also a common plot device in contemporary films. The 2002 *Bourne Identity* movie, for example, was the first in a series where the protagonist, Jason Bourne (whose alter ego and authentic self is David Webb) has suffered induced amnesia at the hands of his handlers in the nefarious Treadstone program.[34] When Treadstone handlers controlled his identity, he was an assassin. Now, having had an accident that caused a break in his handlers' control, he is on a mission to discover his authentic self. What is significant here, is that sin, in Jason's case the murders he committed as an assassin, is the outworking of being externally controlled through others who tell you who you are; that is, who shape your identity. Moral responsibility for evil, then, is the responsibility for those who impose identity from without, not those still separated from their authentic selves.

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[32] Taylor, 30.

[33] "Once Upon a Time (TV Series)," *Wikipedia*, January 24, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Once_Upon_a_Time_(TV_series)&oldid=1067650178.

[34] "The Bourne Identity (2002 Film)," *Wikipedia*, November 29, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Bourne_Identity_(2002_film)&oldid=1124626813.

Finally, Thor is a character loosely based on Norse mythology and a part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). In the 2017 movie *Thor Ragnarok,* Thor, the protagonist, finds himself in mortal jeopardy in a battle with his sister, the goddess, Hela.[35] Thor is saved when, in that moment, he more fully realizes his true self releasing strength and power he was unaware he had. Significantly, help did not ride over the hill as might have happened in a Western made several decades earlier. Salvation happened because he connected more deeply with his authentic self.

We also see the ascendency of an ethic of authenticity in Supreme Court decisions such as the 2015 *Carter v. Canada* decision where the principle of the sanctity of human life gave way to autonomy, an expression of the authentic self.[36]

We use examples in language, popular media and law to show how a context exists that makes the idea of the authentic self plausible in much the same way that Christendom made Christianity plausible. Ideas can seem self-evident and inevitable to those inside a culture, but the diversity of thought over time and space tells us this is not so. The Christian doctrine of revelation acknowledges, for example, that a saving knowledge of God cannot be had except through revelation, and it is within the church that Christian faith is nourished, and its plausibility confirmed. Similarly, an ethic of authenticity as Canadian Christianity's chief ideological competitor is not inevitable. Its current ascendency is due to the context that supports its plausibility, and the corresponding weakening of middle societies, like churches, that can offer it competition.[37]

Where an ethic of authenticity is held, religious persuasion (evangelism) is understood as coercion. By promoting one common faith to their children, parents are seen to at once violate the principle of self-determining freedom and provide a non-original (non-unique) identity to their children, thereby, obscuring and cutting their children off from the original, unique identity that is understood to be there. In reference to the television series and movies mentioned earlier, parents who promote a faith find themselves playing the roles of the witch, Treadstone and Thor's self-doubt.

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[35] "Thor: Ragnarok (2017 Film)," *Wikipedia*, November 26, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Thor:_Ragnarok&oldid=1123921319.

[36] Carter v. Canada, No. 35591 (Supreme Court of Canada February 6, 2015).

[37] For a sampling of works chronicling the withdraw from Christianity in Canada, see Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity: Changing Allegiances in Canada Since 1945*, Advancing Studies in Religion 2 (Montreal ; Kingston ; London ; Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017); Joel Thiessen, *The Meaning of Sunday: The Practice of Belief in a Secular Age* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015); Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, *Religion, Spirituality and Secularity among Millennials: The Generation Shaping American and Canadian Trends*, 1st edition (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2022); Hiemstra, "Not Christian Anymore."

2.3.2 The gift of choice

Many parents we interviewed talked about the importance of their children having religious choice, especially those parents who felt their parents did not give them religious choice (see section 2.2 on how parents were raised). For example:

- I guess I came to a conclusion that **it's their choice** if they choose to believe in a religion or some form of deity or godly figure. **So, I wanted to give them that choice. I don't believe I had a choice.** I believe I followed Pentecostal as a result of my mom, and therefore, I felt that if I was given the choice maybe I would not have been Pentecostal. So, I wanted them to have that choice of their own to say, "Well, Mom, I want to be a Christian," or "Mom, I want to practice Hinduism or Buddhism," or whatever they may want to practice because they have a strong conviction for that.

- So, **I definitely don't want anything to be forced on them**, and that's very important to me that they don't have that because that's something I had as a child.

- So, my faith formation is more in that sense, that **I don't force [it] on them. It is their choice. It is their life.** They have to make a decision in their life – **later on in their life to believe or not to believe, right?** But you try to, you know, bring them to the faith activities, right? You know, the church, all that. You socialize.

The parents quoted above talk about religious choice as a *gift*. Parents *give* religious choice to their children. Sociologist Joel Thiessen has made similar observations about parents and affording their children religious choice.[38]

It is important to understand the dynamics created by the language or rhetoric of choice.

First, if religious choice is a possession, then to restrict or guide it is to take a possession away from a child. The image created here is of a more powerful adult abusing their power by taking religious choice from a child. The offence is deepened in that religion is often seen as part of one's authentic self – "who you really are." So, taking away religious choice is not like taking away a toy, it is taking away their very selves.

Second, humans are *loss averse*, meaning we care more about the things we have than the things we do not have; an object is more valuable to us if we already own it than if we do not.[39] When we talk about religious choice as a possession, using the possessive language of "*having* religious choice," religious choice becomes inherently more valuable to us. Framing something in terms of possession is a rhetorical way to infuse something with value. You can see this in the COVID-19 vaccination campaigns of 2021. People did not *get* vaccinated; they got *their* vaccine.

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[38] Joel Thiessen, "Kids, You Make the Choice: Religious and Secular Socialization among Marginal Affiliates and Nonreligious Individuals," *Secularism and Nonreligion* 5, no. 1 (April 29, 2016), https://doi.org/10.5334/snr.60.
[39] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 1st pbk. ed (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), chap. 26. See discussion on prospect theory.

The idea of the vaccine was made more valuable because we talked about it as a person's possession. We infuse rights with value in a similar way by talking about *my* rights or *our* rights.

Significantly, more so in the past than today, Evangelicals talked about salvation as something to *get*. The language varied depending on theological commitments but phrases like, "He *got* saved" and "I *received* forgiveness" emphasized either the reception (possession) of salvation or the release from the burden of sin. Talking about religious *choice* instead of a salvation or grace to be received, changed the rhetorical direction of religious conversations.

Third, many respondents talked about their children's religious choice as something that will happen someday in the future after they leave home. There is no urgency to see their children make a religious choice now because now is not the time for choosing. If their children made a choice, it would, in a sense, change the parental role from providing choices to interacting, in some way, with the choice their child has made. This is significant because if the parental role in the faith formation of their children is one of *giving* choice and *exposing* their children to new religious choices, the parental role tends to become incoherent once the value of the choices parents offer is diminished by their child making a religious choice.

There was almost a sense in some of the parent interviews that making an earlier religious choice should be discouraged because it would cut their child off from valuable additional choices. *The Renegotiating Faith* study found this dynamic with respect to career choice.[40] It is a kind of FOMO (fear of missing out) on behalf of your children.

Fourth, some parents talked about providing religious choice to engender a stronger religious faith in their children:

> And faith formation wise, yeah, I mean, presenting what parents have chosen as a faith and allowing the children to explore that but not forcing them into it and saying, you know, "This is your choice to do, but here is what we have chosen." And, yeah, just presenting that and also modelling. … I would say that when people are forced to do something and there isn't a genuine commitment or understanding – it might appear to be – but I don't think their forcing of that creates a genuine faith. **So, presenting it and leaving it up as a choice I think is – has the opportunity to create a stronger and more genuine commitment.**

Significantly, although these parents self-identified as evangelicals to the polling company that recruited our sample, they have low rates of participation in regular worship services.

Fifth, paradoxically, the logic of choice in our cultural discourse also works against choosing. The state of having choices is the good. In making a choice, the chooser often must let go of many potential choices. So, in the way we talk about choice, to choose is to lose choices; it is to

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[40] Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, "Renegotiating Faith," 126–27.

become choice poor. This logic works to discourage people from making enduring religious choices.

Sixth, as children are exposed to more religions, they also expand their choices. So, the choices themselves are a kind of endowment that can be augmented through more exposure. Choices, in the way we talk about them, are unqualified goods. Some is good, more is better. In practice, there are religious choices parents would not approve of, but the rhetoric of religious choice and the principle of self-determining freedom discourages parents from indicating preferences. Significantly, not one parent we interviewed, who advocated for religious choice, articulated any criteria for when they thought their children would have enough exposure to be able to make a valid choice.

Finally, it is important to point out that parents who want to afford choice to their children in matters of faith do not necessarily afford them choice in other areas. For example, parents are far less likely to give their children educational choice. Children may be given choice, for example, about *what* to study at university, but not about *whether* they will go to university.[41] In part, this is about how we talk about education. You *get* an education. Education is not a pre-existing possession. If a child is not interested in post-secondary education, parents generally feel free to pressure their children to get it because education is deemed vital to securing their financial futures. Their parental guidance (or perhaps insistence) is seen as enriching their children, not taking something away.

2.3.3 Enduring religious decisions

In 2004, *Christianity Today* (CT) published an article titled "The 4-14 Window" in which George Barna was quoted saying, "What you believe at age 13 is pretty much what you're going to die believing."[42] The 4-14 Window thesis was presented as a target for child evangelism. This CT article echoed the findings of a 2003 Barna report, and Barna confirmed their findings in a 2009 report analyzing data from surveys taken in 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2008.[43]

In 2000, just before Barna and CT popularized the 4-14 Window thesis about when people make faith decisions, Jeffrey Arnett published the paper "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of

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[41] Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, 119–22.

[42] By John W. Kennedy, "The 4-14 Window," ChristianityToday.com, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/july/37.53.html, Accessed December 2, 2022.

[43] "Research Shows That Spiritual Maturity Process Should Start at a Young Age," Barna Group, November 17, 2003, https://www.barna.com/research/research-shows-that-spiritual-maturity-process-should-start-at-a-young-age/; "Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years," Barna Group, March 9, 2009, https://www.barna.com/research/barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years/.

Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties" which he developed in his 2015 book *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties.*[44]

Arnett's emerging adulthood has these characteristics:

1. **Identity exploration**: answering the question "Who am I?" and trying out various life options, especially in love and work.
2. **Instability**: in love, work, and place of residence.
3. **Self-focus**: as obligations to others reach a life-span low point.
4. **Feeling in-between**: in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.
5. **Possibilities/optimism**: when hopes flourish and people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives.

The identity exploration of emerging adulthood is understood to include a reconsideration of past religious commitments or a delay in making such commitments in the first place.[45] Significantly, the late teens and twenties of Arnett's emerging adulthood came after Barna's and CT's 4-14 Window. Barna and Arnett offer conflicting ideas about when *enduring* religious decisions are made.

Given that the early decision thesis was raised in our interviews, that parents sometimes seemed reluctant to pressure their children to make religious decisions, and that parents sometimes thought religious decisions would happen after their children moved out, we decided to test when parents thought their children would make enduring religious decisions.

We are aware that within Evangelicalism there are different understandings about the permanence of religious decisions with some believing it is not possible to fall away from a decision for Christ that is genuinely taken. Nevertheless, because of what we heard in the interviews, the competing 4-14 Window, and emerging adulthood theses, we used the language of endurance in our questions to allow for the emerging adulthood that children and emerging adults reconsider past religious commitments.

We hypothesized that if parents did not expect their children to make an enduring religious decision when they were at home then there would be less emphasis on encouraging their children to make a decision. Moreover, if parents believed that pressuring their children to consider Christianity was illegitimate or destructive, we hypothesized that they would tend to see their children's enduring religious choices happening after they moved out of the home away from their parental influence.

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[44] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, Second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 5 (2000): 469–80.
[45] Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, "Renegotiating Faith."

Figure 2.6 below shows the ages parents expect their children to make enduring religious choices. Only thirty-two percent expected this to happen before age thirteen, a range that is roughly in line with the 4-14 Window theses. Another thirty-six percent expected decisions to be taken in the high school teen years, and seventeen percent expected decisions to be made in the years commonly associated with emerging adulthood (ages eighteen to twenty-four, and age twenty-five or older). Sixteen percent said they did not know, which we take to be a response more in line with the uncertainty and identity exploration of the emerging adulthood thesis. So, parents, roughly speaking, were divided in thirds; one-third ascribing to the 4-14 Window thesis, one-third targeting the teen years, and one-third lining up with the emerging adulthood thesis.

Figure 2.6 Age parent respondents expect their children to make an enduring religious decision, survey, counts (percent)

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.
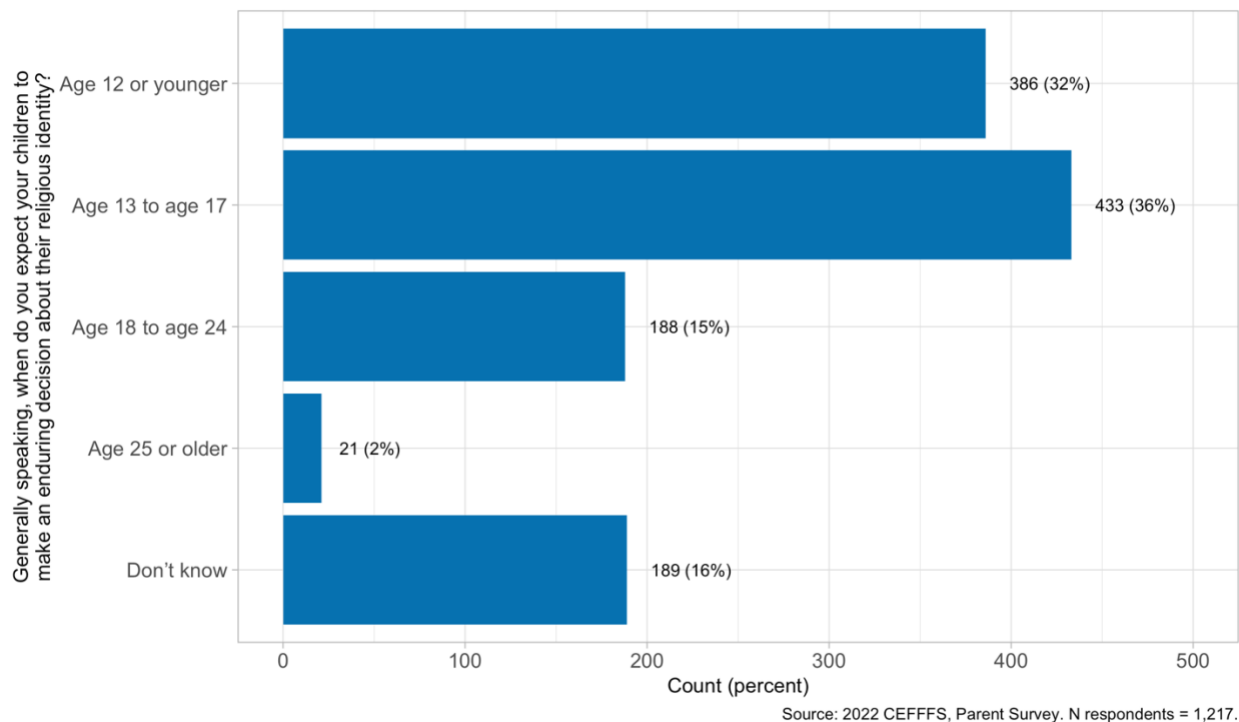
Figure 2.7 below breaks these data out by tradition allowing us to see differences in decision timing emphasis. For example, Pentecostal and Restorationist traditions are more likely to emphasize younger decision making whereas Reformed traditions are more likely to emphasize older decision making. We realize that milestones like the Reformed Profession of Faith which tends to happen in the early teen years can be understood as an enduring decision and that this timing has nothing to do with the 4-14 Window or emerging adulthood which we have set up as competing theses.

Figure 2.8 below shows parents strongly agree it is their responsibility to lead their children to faith in Jesus Christ if they expect their children to decide at an early age. A good rating scale should represent an even progression of opinion. Nevertheless, it is the author's experience

that with many religious opinion questions, the strongest opinions are the ones most likely to be correlated with behaviour.

We saw a weaker correlation between a desire for children to make their own religious choices without parental pressure and the age parents expected their children to make an enduring decision (see figure 2.9). Nevertheless, parents expecting early decisions were somewhat more likely to be willing to exert pressure and those expecting late decisions were somewhat less likely.

Figure 2.7 Age parent respondents expect their children to make an enduring religious decision, by tradition, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.
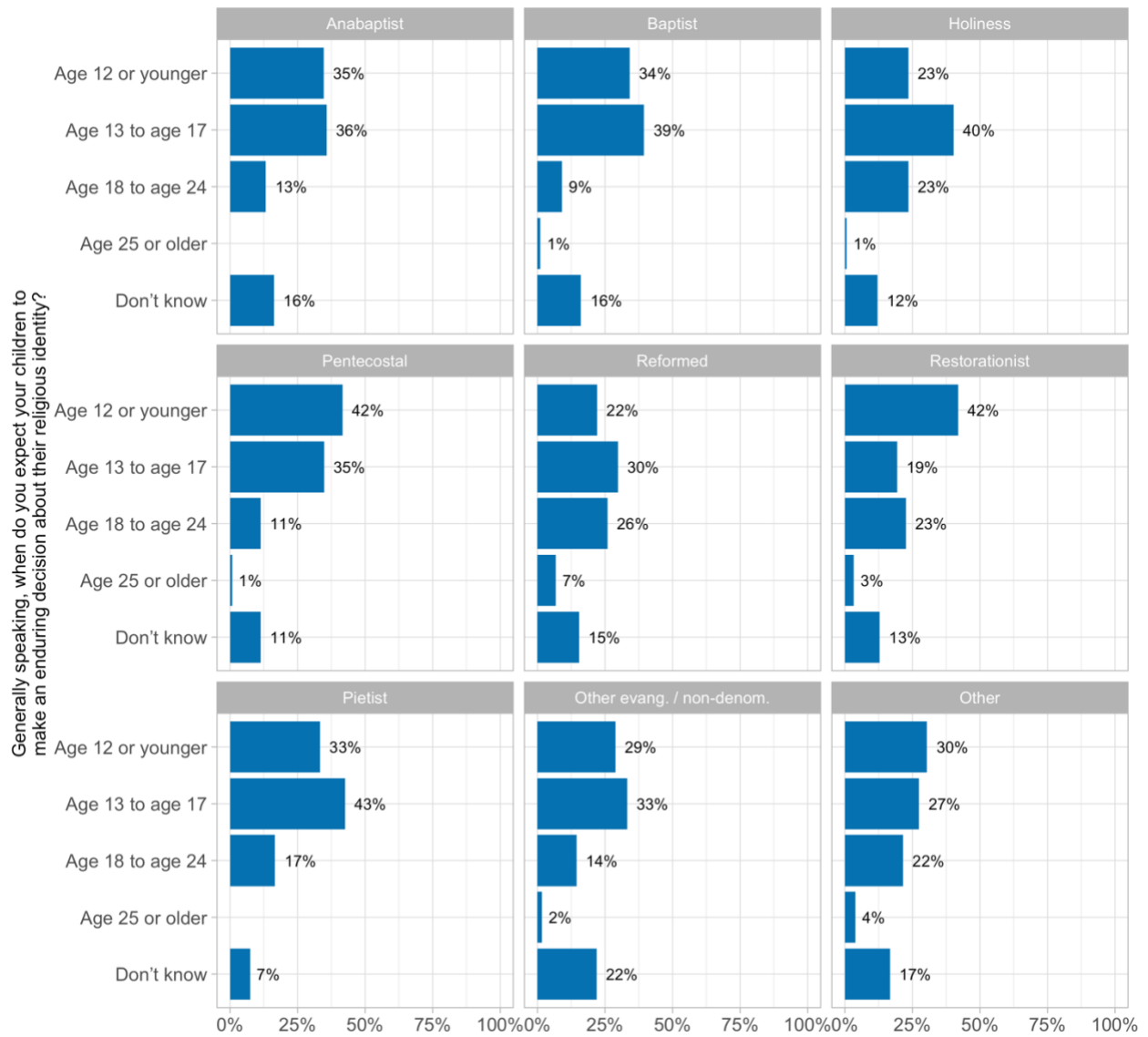
Figure 2.8 Agreement with "My responsibility as a parent is to lead my children to faith in Jesus Christ," by age parents expect their children to make an enduring religious decision, parent respondents, survey, percent
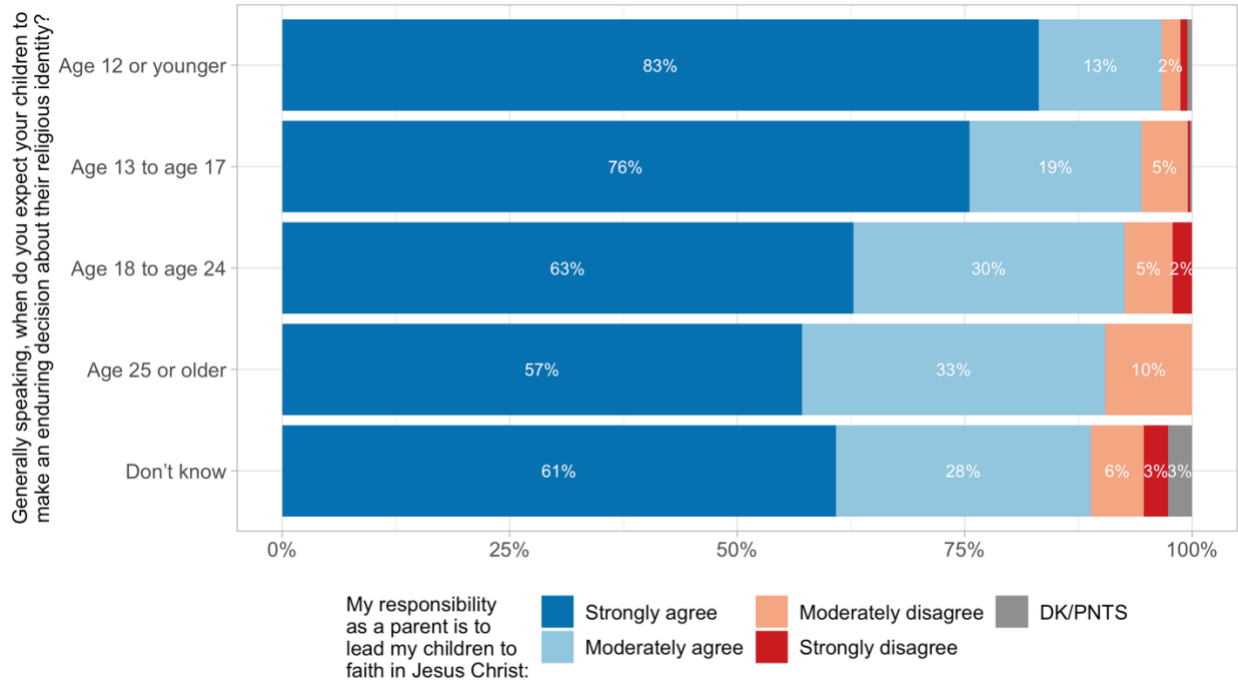
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.

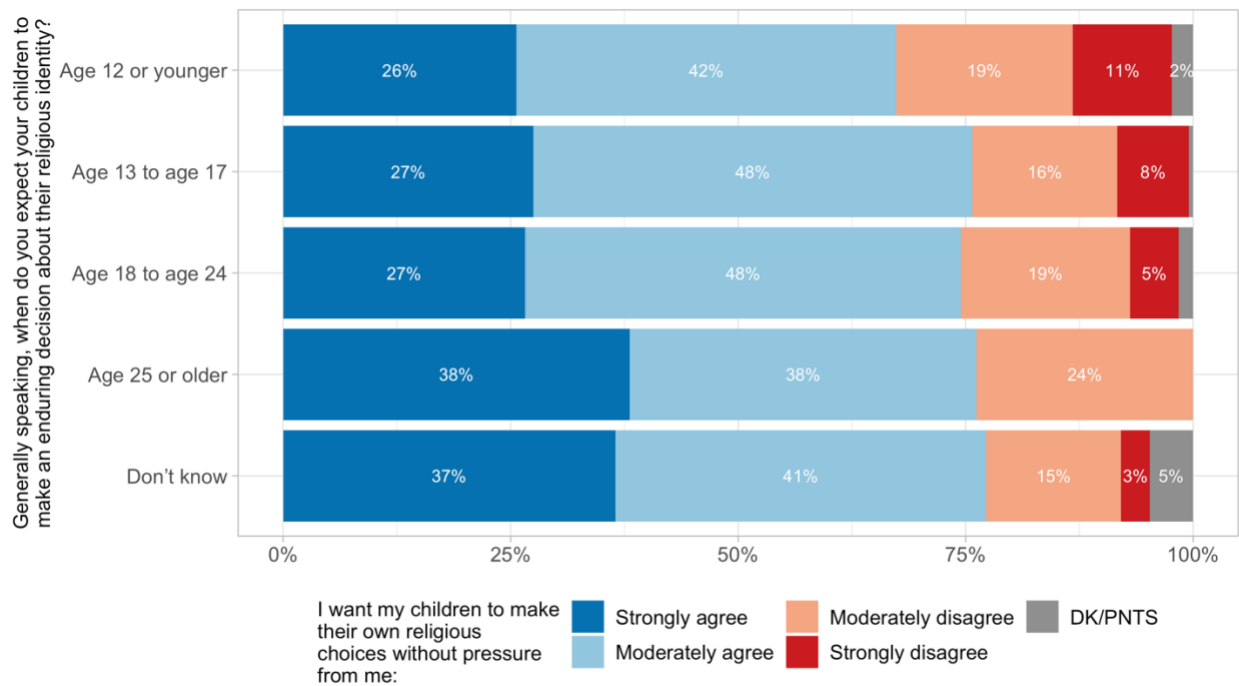**Figure 2.9 Agreement with "I want my children to make their own religious choices without pressure from me," by age parents expect their children to make an enduring religious decision, parent respondents, survey, percent**

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.

Expectation drives behaviour. The correlations we saw in the survey data between when parents expected their children to make enduring religious decisions and the roles parents saw for themselves, were weak. We think that desirability bias may have led some parents to overstate the degree of responsibility they felt to lead their children to Christ and their desire not to exert pressure on their children's religious choices.

Whether one subscribes to the 4-14 Window thesis or the emerging adulthood one, seems more likely to affect local church ministry approaches. Where the 4-14 Window thesis is dominant, you are more likely to see an emphasis on child evangelism. Where the emerging adulthood thesis is dominant, you're more likely to see an emphasis on journeying with young adults and helping them with faith exploration.

It is possible that parents could be relatively hands-off in faith formation at home and be happy to see a robust effort in their local church, believing that they are fulfilling their parental role by getting their kids to church where they will be *exposed* to Christianity.

2.3.4 Religious exposure and decision-making pressure

In the interviews, parents commonly talked about *exposing* their children to different religious faiths, including Christianity. The language of *exposure* is important because it is less directive or coercive than teaching or leading. Moreover, it comports well with parents' understanding of

their responsibility as role models (see section 2.4.1). Importantly, exposure was often described as being outsourced to local churches and schools, meaning parents were not necessarily directly exposing their children to religions but getting them to the places where they would be exposed.

Among several parents we interviewed there was a positive duty to expose children to different religious options. One father talked about how his family travels so their children are exposed to different religions.

> **… I want, you know, my children to understand that it's important to have different perspectives and, you know, they can come to that conclusion on their own, but I think it's important that they're not, I would say, sheltered and, "This is the way you must be." I don't think that works so well for people.**

A father from a Holiness tradition said, "Diversity is great" and explained the most important lesson for his children to learn about other religions is how to respect other people's religious choices.

> Like, diversity is great, I think. And so, it's not the same as it was like when I was growing up. It was a Christian community and that's everyone that was there. Like, there wasn't any variety. And now, **children certainly are exposed to a lot of different communities**. And so, what does that mean for us just to say that, you know, "I have Hindu friends," or, "I have Muslim friends," or different … ? **How can we be respectful of other people's faiths as well?** And so, that's just something that I think kids today certainly are coming to understand from a really young age. I didn't even think about it till I was an adult.

Note, what is being respected here is not people's religions, but their religious choices. Their family's Christian religious choice is an equivalent religious choice to those made by the other families his children encounter at their school.

A Pentecostal mother explained why she feels compelled to expose her children to different faiths.

> I have to expose them that **there are different versions of what faith is**. I was born and raised fairly Cath – like, my Catholic upbringing from the Quebec, like, heritage has influenced a little bit of it, but as an adult I became introduced to [indistinct]. I exposed my daughter to it. We went to a church together. It was a Pentecostal church in [city name]. … Because there is a lot of different opinions and different perspectives in our world. **Our view is not the only one, and it's not the right one. It's one.** You take everybody's views that you can have a whole picture. So, if you only take your biased version, then you're not getting the whole concept. **The concept is more important than which branch of faith you climb on.**

These parents feel that without broad exposure to other religions their children will either have a truncated or attenuated view of the concept of faith, or they will not know how to respect other people's faith choices. It is noteworthy that all three of the parents quoted above believe their children should be exposed, but not solely, to Christianity.

In some cases, parents took their children to church for the purpose of having them exposed to the Christian faith *in that setting* (see section 3 on the church role). Significantly, the home remains a place that is religiously neutral, or at least a place where their children do not feel pressure to make a particular religious choice.

We asked parent survey respondents for their level of agreement with: "I want my children to have a robust exposure to a variety of religious faiths, not just my own," (see figure 2.10 below). The survey parent sample was more devout than the interview sample (see section 2.1), and the parents in the survey sample seemed less willing to pursue broad religious exposure for their children than what we expected from the interviews. While forty-one percent of survey respondents agreed, only eight percent strongly agreed. Conversely, fifty-six percent disagreed and twenty-two percent strongly so. As mentioned earlier in this section, it is the stronger opinions that are more likely to be manifest in behaviour. It is likely desirability bias is affecting the results here with many "moderately" answers responding to the cultural expectation that good parenting is a matter of providing choice.

Figure 2.10 Agreement with "I want my children to have a robust exposure to a variety of religious faiths, not just my own," parent respondents, survey, counts (percent)
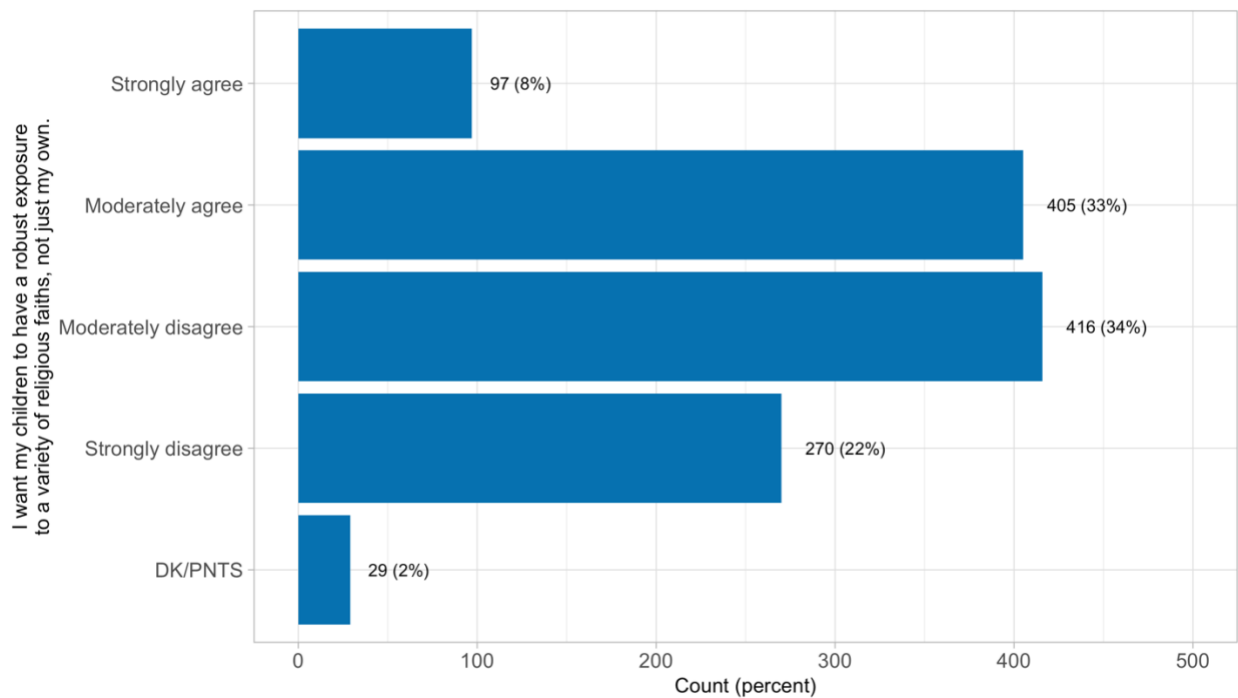
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.

Many parents we spoke with talked about not having religious choice as children, and about being pressured to accept religious teaching without explanation (see section 2.3). We asked parent survey respondents, who again, tended to be more devout than the interview sample, to tell us about their agreement with: "I want my children to make their own religious choices without pressure from me." Seventy-three percent agreed, and twenty-eight percent strongly so (see figure 2.11 below). As we have seen, an ethic of authenticity demands a self-determining freedom in defining elements of identity of which religious identity is seen to be a part.

Figure 2.11 Agreement with "I want my children to make their own religious choices without pressure from me," parent respondent, survey, count (percent)

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.
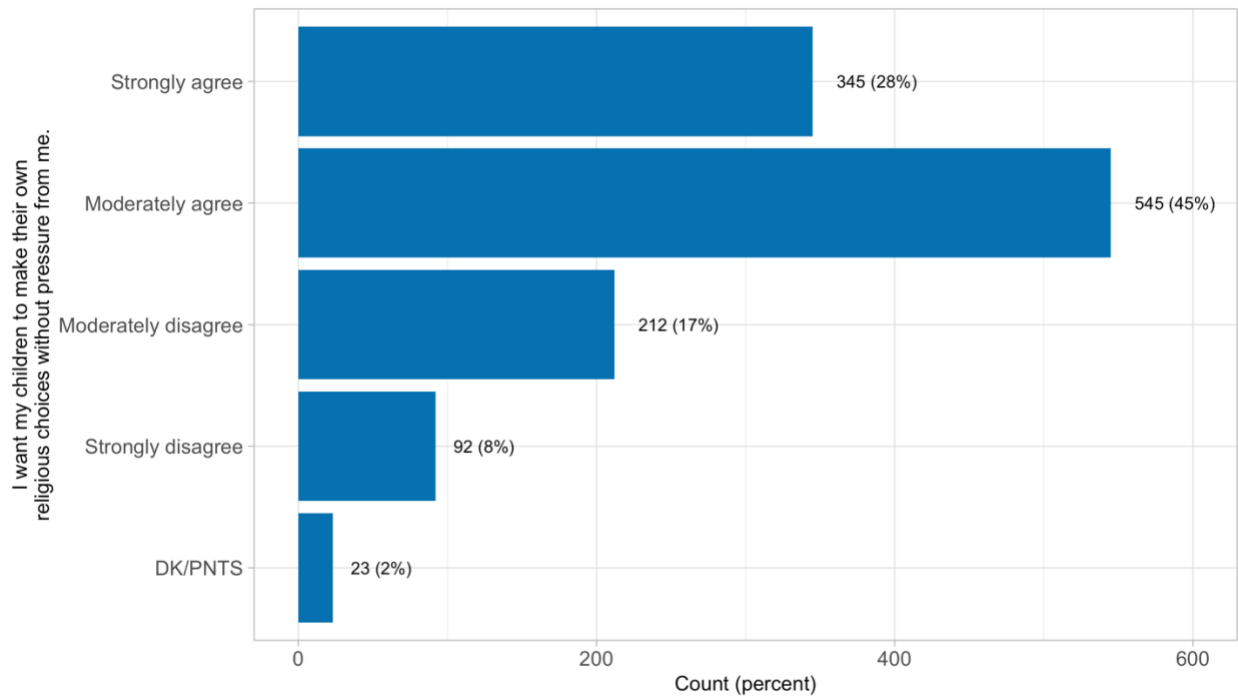
Whether parents are reacting to culture in their responses cannot be determined from these data. We did ask, however, whether parents still had the same religious identities that they were raised in. Forty-five percent strongly agreed they still had the same religious identity, and twenty-five percent moderately agreed. Thirty percent indicated they changed their religious identities or refused to answer the question. Our hypothesis was if parents felt they did not have religious choice as a child, that upon attaining independence they would have an opportunity to re-evaluate their religious upbringing and make a different choice.

Figure 2.12 below shows that the desire for children to make a pressure-free religious choice is essentially the same irrespective of whether parents changed their religious identities.

Figure 2.12 Agreement with "I want my children to make their own religious choices without pressure from me," by agreement with "my current religious identity is the same as the one I was raised in," parent respondent, survey, percent
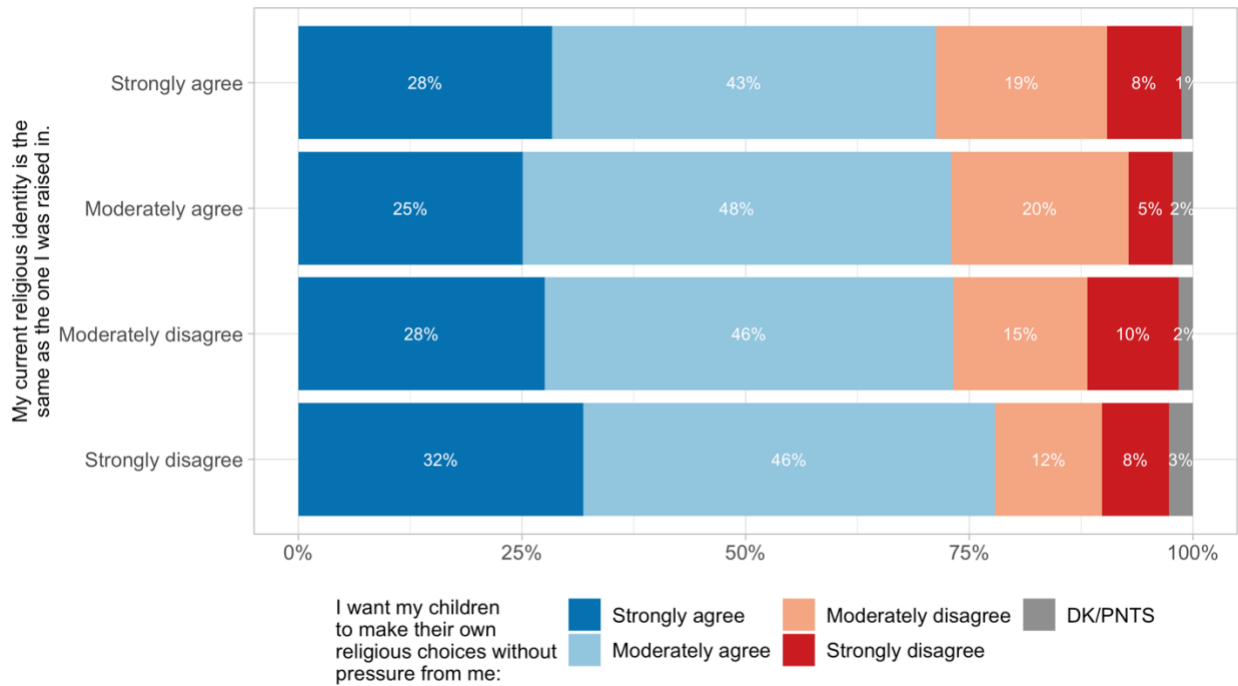
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.

We also asked parent survey respondents to tell us about their experience growing up and whether they had freedom to question what they were taught about religion (see figure 2.13 below).

Figure 2.13 Agreement with "growing up, I feel my parents or guardians did not allow me to question their religious teaching," by agreement with "my current religious identity is the same as the one I was raised in," parent respondent, survey, percent
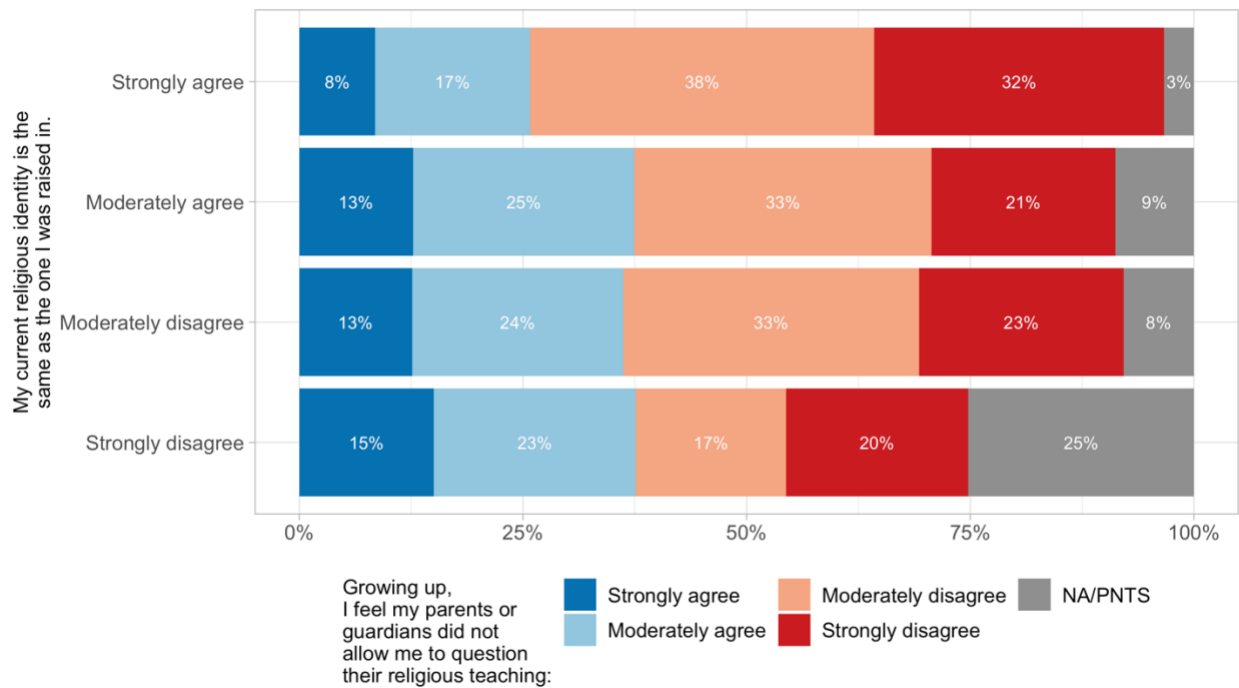
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.

Seventy percent of parents who strongly agreed they shared the same religious identity they were raised in, said they disagreed with this statement: "I feel my parents or guardians did not allow me to question their religious teaching." Over half of those who strongly disagreed they shared the same religious identity as the one in which they were raised, said they were not allowed to question their parents' religious teaching, or did not know. Sharing your parents' religious identity has a weak, positive correlation with being allowed to question religious teaching. This supports findings in other studies on successful religious transmission across generations that children tend to trust in God in home environments where they feel safe to ask about their parents' faith and have freedom to respond.[46] We suspect a less devout sample would have produced a stronger correlation.

We presented survey respondents with two questions to measure how directive they were inclined to be in their children's faith formation.

a) My role as a parent is to help my children discover their own religious identities.
b) My responsibility as a parent is to lead my children to faith in Jesus Christ.

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[46] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Zondervan, 2011); Vern L. Bengtson, Norella M. Putney, and Susan Harris, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Sixty-seven percent of parent respondents said their role was to help their children *discover* their *own* religious identities. This question was worded to try to capture the uniqueness requirement of Taylor's authentic self. Additionally, the question used the wording of *discovery* with respect to religion, meaning that religious identity is something that is *found* by the individual, not *received* through teaching or entered into by becoming part of a community.

A similar percentage, seventy-four percent, agreed "My responsibility as a parent is to lead my children to faith in Jesus Christ." Given the high level of agreement for both these role questions we will now look at how these responses intersect.

Figure 2.14 plots "My responsibility as a parent is to lead my children to faith in Jesus Christ" by "My role as a parent is to help my children discover their own religious identities." Irrespective of how strongly parents understand their role as facilitating discovery, strong majorities understand themselves to have a responsibility to lead their children to faith in Jesus Christ. When the axes for these same data are reversed in figure 2.15, we see a fairly consistent agreement pattern for parents' role as an aid to their children's religious discovery. These two plots suggest that for many evangelical parents leading their children to Christ and helping their children discover their own religious identities, are one and the same. It may be that in responding to the discovery question, many parents are interpreting this as leading their children to make their own commitment to Christ rather than supporting them in a discovery that might lead to other beliefs.

Figure 2.14 Agreement with "my responsibility as a parent is to lead my children to faith in Jesus Christ," by agreement with "my role as a parent is to help my children discover their own religious identities," parent respondent, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217. DK/PNTS x-axis category not shown.
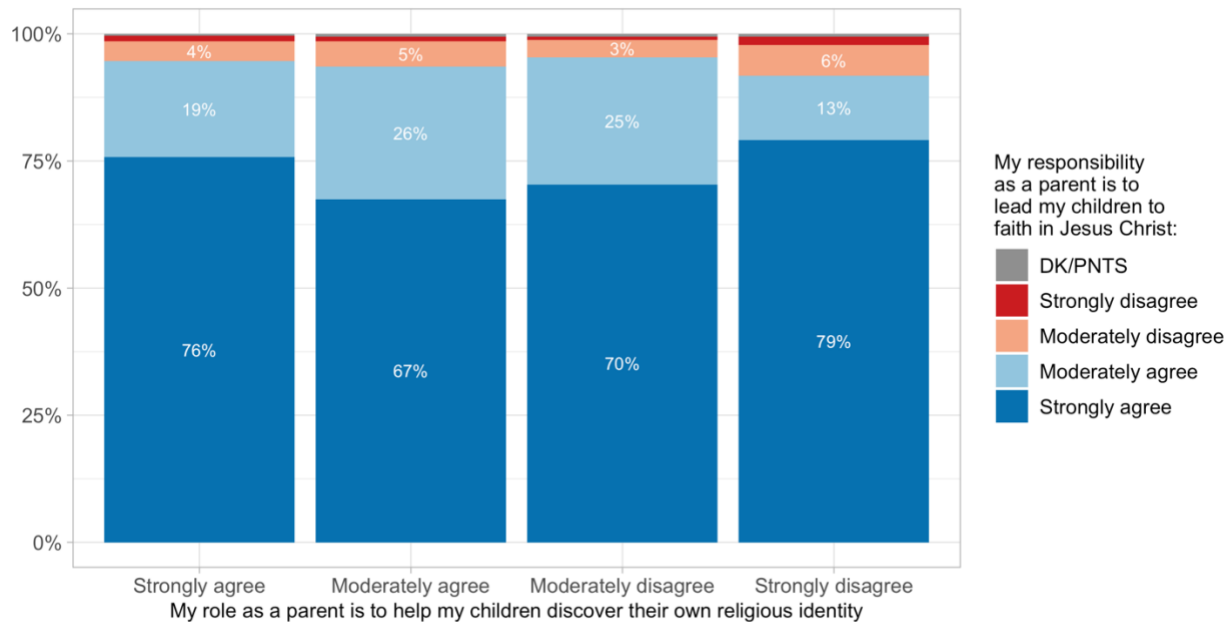
Figure 2.15 Agreement with "my role as a parent is to help my children discover their own religious identities," by "my responsibility as a parent is to lead my children to faith in Jesus Christ," parent respondent, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217. DK/PNTS x-axis category not shown.
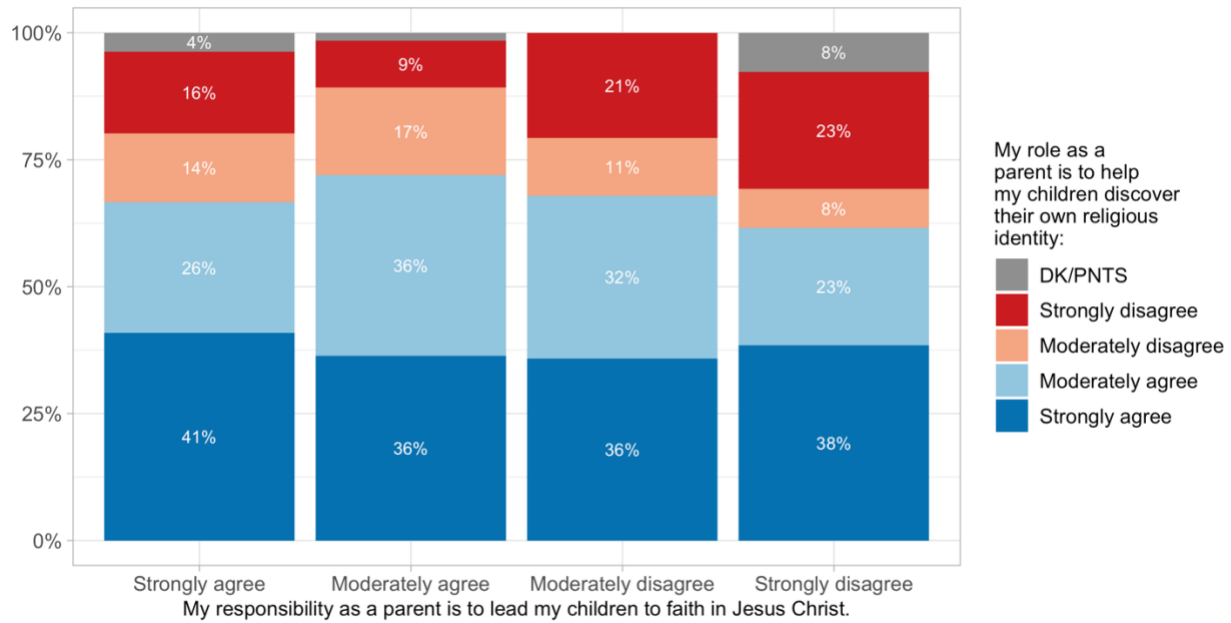
2.3.5 Community participation and choice

The way several parents talked about their children's religious choices suggests parents think of their children as *autonomous* religious choosers. There seemed to be an assumption that by withdrawing or limiting their parental influence, they would leave their children in a relatively uninfluenced place from which to make their autonomous religious choices. This is a fallacy.

We know, for example, that advertisers seek to persuade but so do movies, books, friends and social media communities. In fact, video games, social media, and other kind of digital media have very sophisticated ways to "hack" attention and influence behaviour.[47]

Abby Day, Professor of Race, Faith, and Culture at the University of London, in a recent online, public lecture said one of the significant reasons Baby Boomers turned from religion is they started living with people who did not share Christian beliefs rather than just learning about people who did not share Christian beliefs.[48] Her point was that Boomers were influenced by people, more than information about people.

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[47] Callaway, Hiemstra, and Murphy, "Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study Literature Review: Interim Report 1," 56–62.

[48] Abby Day, "Why Baby Boomers Turned From Religion" (Center for Studies in Religion and Society Thursday Public Lecture Series, Webinar, January 20, 2022).

Individual identity is not static but develops over a lifetime.[49] Psychologist Erik Erikson understood identity to be formed by negotiating roles within groups.[50] As people move through different developmental stages, they take on different roles within different groups. When teens begin the process of *differentiation*, for example, they may set out differentiation markers such as getting married, starting a family and finding a job. All these involve negotiating roles, taking on those roles and developing the skills that allow them to take on those roles.[51]

Education theorist Vanessa Rodriquez writes that people acquire "skills in order to participate in specific tasks within their context."[52] The acquisition of the language, behaviours, and beliefs that go along with assuming roles in religious communities, are all part of the skills acquisition that allow you to take on new religious roles and identities. We become like the people in the groups we want to be in. In this sense, beliefs are not just individual, but are held communally, and to the extent that they are held communally we are not autonomous religious choosers. The idea of religious identity development is at odds with the idea of religious identity being an innate, unchanging, expression of who you are.

Conclusion

Framing faith formation as religious choice sets up dynamics that shape the ways in which some parents are willing to engage their children. Moreover, the parental emphasis on religious choice is, in part, a reaction to how they experienced faith formation in their childhoods. The language of choice has pushed out other ways of talking about faith and limited the kinds of conversations we feel comfortable having and making Christianity seem less attractive.

Other research by Canadian sociologists Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme and Joel Thiessen suggests that experiencing "choice-based" faith formation is a "key factor" in some Millennials' religious disaffiliation.[53] Wilkins-Laflamme concludes that "this choice-based approach favored by non-religious parents often ends up leading to a more secular upbringing, often despite the best intentions of parents and even though not explicitly sought after by them as such."[54] We might add this study suggests that many religious parents also favour choice-based parenting.

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[49] James W Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and The Quest For Meaning*, Revised, 2010; Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1968).

[50] Erikson, *Identity*, 127 and 131.

[51] Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, "Renegotiating Faith," 31–42.

[52] Vanessa Rodriguez, "The Teaching Brain and the End of the Empty Vessel: The Teaching Brain," *Mind, Brain, and Education* 6, no. 4 (December 2012): 177–85, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-228X.2012.01155.x.

[53] Wilkins-Laflamme, *Religion, Spirituality and Secularity among Millennials*, 15.

[54] Wilkins-Laflamme, 175.

2.4 What Parents Do for Faith Formation

The research partners for this study gathered around the question, "What are parents doing at home to form the faith of their children?" This largely sprung from concerns that parents did not understand the primacy of their role in shaping what their children believe about God, themselves and the world. We found that parents tended to articulate an understanding about the primacy of their role in faith formation but the outworking of their faith-forming responsibilities differed.

Almost half of interview respondents indicated that, as parents, they had the primary or most important role in the faith formation of their children. We found that theology, cultural influence, and competence or circumstance often shaped parents' understanding of their faith formation roles.

Those with a sphere sovereignty understanding of the family, for example, saw parents as having the main, if not exclusive, responsibility for their children's faith formation. A homeschooling mother, without explicitly making a theological argument for her primary faith-forming role, clearly communicated that it is her "responsibility."

> [Y]ou can't keep farming [faith formation] out to this organization or that organization or this organization. There has to be some personal – what's the word I'm looking for – responsibility. **Like, it's my responsibility to make sure my children are exposed to the Gospel and are discipled properly.** … I have the right to – if I give the right to disciple my children to somebody else, I've given up my responsibility and my right, but if I take the right, I have the responsibility. And that's where it really, truly belongs. That we have to remember every time that we give up the duty to do something, we also give up our ability to say how it happens, …

This mother's convictions, which also inform her decisions to homeschool, are that her parental right and responsibility is to ensure proper discipleship of her children. While this right is given, presumably by God, it may be lost or squandered if not exercised or "farm[ed] out" to other organizations.

A New Canadian respondent indicated that she felt she was the "first influencer" of her children. The phrasing is unique and may simply be because English is her second language. First influencer, however, has echoes of the idea of parents as "first educators" that was popularized in Ontario by the organization Parents as First Educators in response to the province's proposed rewrite of the physical education curriculum.[55] It is possible that part of the emphasis on parents as first educators or first influencers has this legislation in view and is more about limiting the state's role in moral instruction than it is about making a positive theological claim for parents' role.

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[55] "Sex-Ed," Parents as First Educators, https://www.pafe.ca/sex_ed, Accessed January 19, 2022.

Several respondents, when referring to their parenting, used language like, "doing what they can," suggesting parental capacity or circumstance shaped parents' understanding of their roles. The rhetorical benefit of this language for parents is that it is unmeasurable while simultaneously communicating maximum effort.

All interview respondents were asked how they understood their parental role in the faith formation of their children. Table 2.22 below, shows how many respondents mentioned different faith-formation role descriptions.

Table 2.22 Elements of their parental role in discipleship of their children, parent respondents, interviews, total mentions, mentions by schooling type, mentions by description category

| | | Category totals | | |
Role description	Mentions	Mentions	Unique respondents	Category[a]
Teach doctrine, Bible, theology	22			
Teach complementarian roles	9			
Teach morals	7			
Teach from experience	4			
Homeschool	3	54	32	Didactic
Teach Christian / biblical worldview	3			
Teach responsibility / respect	3			
Teach how to pray	2			
Teach how to use the Bible	1			
Role model / example / presence	18	19	18	Exemplar
Acknowledge mistakes / apologize	1			
Principle / primary role	19	19	19	Primary
Give children choice	10	12	10	Choice
Provide religious exposure / socialization	2			
Discuss / dialogue	6			
Guide (general) / accompany	2	9	9	Journey
Help children discover their gifts / callings	1			
Bring to church	3	5	5	Community
Facilitate relationships with other Christian adults	2			
Point kids back to God	3			Exhort
Emphasize gratitude	2			
Care for physical needs	3	3	3	Physical
Not parents' role, but God's	2	2	2	Sphere
Help children succeed	2	2	2	Success
Pray for children	1	1	1	Prayer

[a] Reasonable people could come up with alternate categorizations.

These descriptions have been categorized with Exemplar (modelling) and Didactic (teaching) being among the most common. Respondents tended to lead their answers about their parental faith-formation roles with either something about being a role model or something

about teaching. Eighteen out of forty-one respondents included being a role model as part of their description of their parental role in the faith formation of their children, and thirty-two mentioned teaching (see table 2.22). Parents indicated similar priorities for didactic and exemplar approaches to faith formation on the survey (figure 2.16 below), but modelling took slight precedence over teaching.

Figure 2.16 Agreement with parental role questions, parent respondents, survey, percent
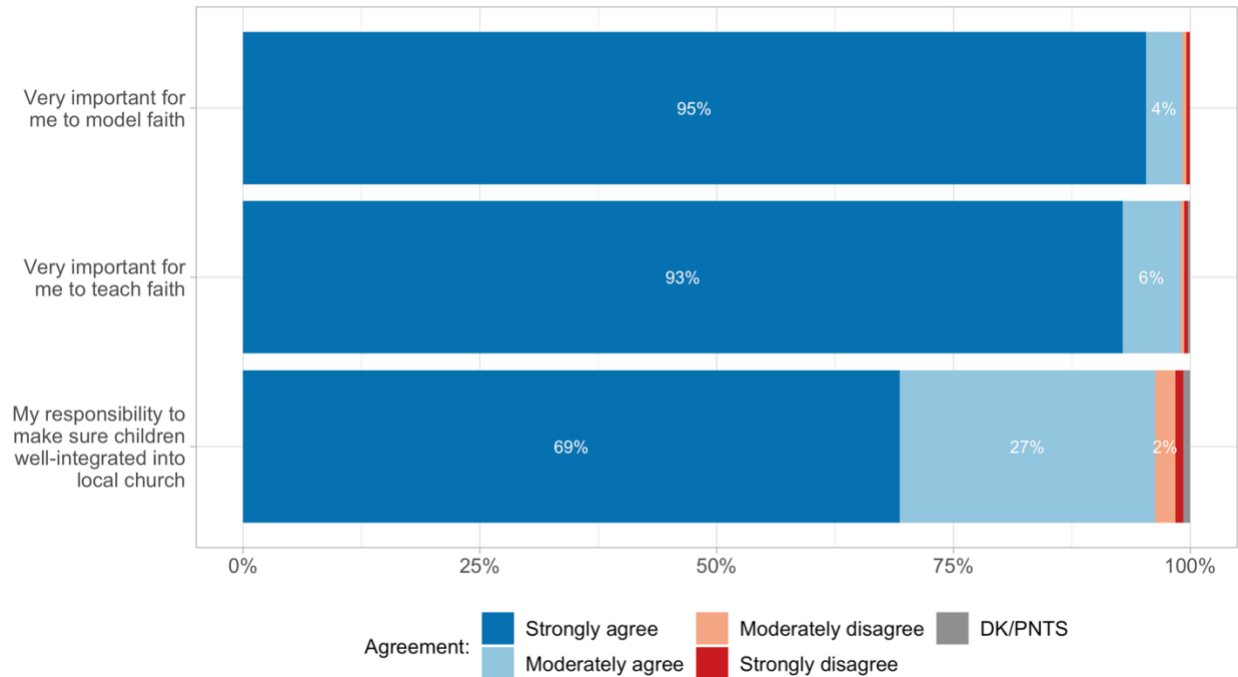
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.

We will look at these and other significant role categories in the following sections.

2.4.1 Role modelling

Parental role modelling has been found to positively correlate with faith transmission. Vern Bengtson *et al* conducted a longitudinal study (research that happens over time) on why some families successfully pass their faith on to their children while others do not. The study revealed parental modelling (substantiating religious convictions with action) was one of the key components of successful religious socialization.[56] Modelling is certainly a vigorous emphasis in our interviews and survey sample.

- Probably **the biggest one is role modelling**. So, having a presence that is positive and sets them up for the ability to see adults behave in a way that's, like, honourable and respectful. There's probably the biggest influence that I think I can have.

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[56] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 71–72.

- Yeah, so, I **guess, modelling to me is so big and in those discussions, whether planned or unplanned.**

- Well, for me definitely, you know, **being the best role model that I can be to them.**

- [I try] **to be the role model that I want my children to be so that they make good life choices as they get older**.

There is little debate in the literature about the importance of role modelling, not just of parents but from other Christian adults as well. There is, however, a tendency to rely heavily, if not exclusively, on modelling for faith formation, especially where respondents felt they were denied religious choice by their parents (see section 2.3 Choice).

Role modelling as a formation method does not impose an interpretation on what is being observed, and this can be attractive for parents who want to give their children religious choice or who see persuasion as coercion. The lessons children are meant to draw from parents' examples still need to be explained and interpreted. Relational misunderstanding, for example, is a common plot device for sitcoms, crime dramas and other stories. An example alone does not tell the observer *why* something was done, and at times it will even be unclear as to *what* was done. Moreover, it may be false for parents to assume that time spent in the same room with their children is, indeed, time they are influencing them through modelling (see section 5 Digital Media and Faith Formation).

When role modelling is advanced as a primary method of faith formation, it is often presented with the following unspoken assumptions:

a) Parents' examples are the most important.
b) Children draw their lessons equally from the examples of mom and dad.
c) Children only learn lessons from the behaviours parents intend to teach.

These assumptions were not always applicable, however. For example, a mother from our interviews took her children to church, homeschooled them, and was generally active in forming their faith. Her husband, however, having cooled to the faith after some conflict with their local church, is sometimes "sarcastic or negative" when overhearing her faith conversations with their children. Clearly, she could not rely on her example alone for her faith formation with her children, because, if she did, her children would be faced with two conflicting examples – a devout mother and a father who is sarcastic, negative and withdrawn from faith (see section 3.3.2 Impact of gender on church engagement and section 2.5 How Spouses Approach Faith Formation Differently).

According to Bengston's research, where parents' modelling is in conflict the child is more likely to follow the example of the parent with whom they feel closest.

2.4.2 Teaching

Teaching, or some kind of instruction, was most often mentioned as a parental role (see table 2.22). It is important to realize that "discipleship" is used most often to mean faith formation of the mind. As observed in our ministry expert interviews, many evangelicals understand faith formation as discipleship, and by discipleship they usually mean some sort of teaching or instruction.

Most often, teaching as faith formation centred on the Bible or theology, often in the form of catechetical instruction (see section 4 Activities). Less commonly, parents taught skills associated with faith formation such as how to use the Bible or how to pray (see table 2.22). It is significant to note religious instruction is seen as learning the content of faith, but religious skills development (learning how to pray, reading and interpreting the Bible, confessing sins, etc.) is largely left to role modelling.

It is significant to note religious instruction is seen as learning the content of faith, but religious skills development (learning how to pray, reading and interpreting the Bible, confessing sins, etc.) is largely left to role modelling.

One pastor said that one of his former titles had been "Children's *Education* and Youth Director" (emphasis added). Suggesting that the faith formation emphasis for children is first and foremost about education. An education expert speaking also as a father asserted that "... parents are the first *educators* of our children" (emphasis added).

Moral instruction, which also includes social graces such as respect and learning responsibility, was mentioned seven times compared to twenty-two times for biblical and theological instruction. Although morality and social graces are not strictly Christian or religious (atheists, for example, have morals and social graces), it is instructive that the teaching of morals as a parental responsibility surfaced by asking about faith formation. A homeschooling father from an independent tradition grouped a range of topics in his description of his faith-formation teaching role.

> So, as a parent it is my responsibility and my role to make sure they understand faith and stuff and school and, you know, all the other stuff that you've got to teach your kids. **Morals, honesty, how to make their bed, how to do laundry, all that kind of stuff.**

Faith formation, for this parent, is part of a package that includes religious instruction, moral instruction and chores. Religious instruction and moral instruction are often seen as a whole. This father, who attended worship services just a few times a year, talked exclusively about morals and ethics without mentioning anything specifically Christian, when asked about his parental role in the faith formation of his children.

> Well, I think that's **any parent's role is to instill good morals and ethical background for the children and set a good example**. I mean, I think that's common throughout history.

A mother, after leading with role modelling, moved on to "teaching [her children] … what is right, what is wrong."

> Well, for me definitely, you know, being the best role model that I can be to them. **Teaching them, you know, what is right, what is wrong**. Showing them different examples, showing them experiences, or if they make a mistake then we talk about it.

So, the natural interpretation of her response is that her role modelling, itself, is part of her moral instruction, any additional moral instruction notwithstanding.

Although moral training is an outworking of Christian religious training, Christian training is not necessarily an outworking of moral training. Parents can teach morality without communicating the content of the Christian faith beyond sensitizing them to what might be characterized as natural law common to many religions and societies.

Most respondents did not describe the primacy of their parental role in faith formation over, and against, the church. In fact, most parents said they saw the church as partner in faith formation (section 3.2.3). Only a few interview respondents said their role was to bring their children to church (table 2.22), but the responses graphed in figure 2.16 above, show ninety-six percent of surveyed parents believed part of their role as a faith former was to help integrate their children into church life.

Only a handful of parents, in interviews, included facilitating relationships with other Christians as part of their answer to the question about their parental role in the faith formation of their children. It is clear from their activities and their answers elsewhere that this is a priority for many parents (sections 3.1.1 and 3.2.2). Half of respondents spoke about the importance of having mature Christian adults, other than themselves or their spouse, involved in their children's lives. In what may be evidence of parents' awareness of developmental stages, this number rose to nearly two-thirds for those respondents with teens in the home; signaling just because one thinks these relationships are important, does not necessarily mean their children have them.

Many of the respondents also talked about prayer in their family life, whether it was table grace, prayer for help with difficult situations, prayer for wisdom or prayer for others (section 4.1 Faith Formation Activities in the Home). Perhaps surprisingly, only one out of forty-one parents interviewed specifically mentioned prayer for their children's salvation as part of their parental faith-forming role.

> So, that's kind of tough because if he becomes a Christian, he'll become a Christian. You can't force someone to become a Christian. But I would say that we wouldn't be too comfortable in that area of faith formation. If **we kept praying for him, praying with**

him, took him to church, kept taking him to church, kept telling him to come, leaving an open conversation about God and faith. **If he becomes a Christian, amazing. Then that's, like, ultimate.** And then, for him to grow up, you know, find a wife, have children, raise them in faith as well: Amazing. But as long as **we don't ever give up, no matter the outcome**.

Even still, there's an almost fatalistic tone in how this respondent talks about her child's salvation: "If he becomes a Christian, amazing. Then that's, like, ultimate." There are many shades of good, however, before you get to "ultimate."

2.5 How Spouses Approach Faith Formation Differently

We asked respondents to tell us how the faith formation they do with their children differs from their spouse's. Answers were commonly about gender roles even though the question was not necessarily about gender. Table 2.23 below presents the answers interview respondents gave to these questions and they bare striking gender differences.[57]

Table 2.23 Differences between respondent's and spouse's[a] approach to the faith formation of children in the home, parent respondent and by parent respondent gender,[b] interviews, counts

Difference mentioned	All resp.	Male resp.	Female resp.
Primary faith formation teacher is the father	9	4	5
Primary faith formation teacher is the mother	4	2	2
Most engaged in children's faith formation is the father	2	1	1
Most engaged in children's faith formation is the mother	8	1	7
Primary caregiver is the father	0	0	0
Primary caregiver is the mother	8	3	5
No difference, or slight difference	8	2	6
Complementarian roles	6	3	3
Other	4	2	2

[a] Or common-law partners. Thirty-eight of forty-one respondents were married; one was common-law and two were single. Both single respondents were female, and the common-law respondent was male.
[b] All sixteen male respondents had a spouse or common-law spouse while twenty-three of twenty-five female respondents had spouses or common-law spouses. Fourteen male respondents and twenty-two female respondents provided answers to this question.

We noticed a theme where fathers often held a representative role as the primary teachers in matters of faith formation, but mothers implemented the teaching due to their increased time with their children. For example, in the table above, no interview respondents said the father was the primary caregiver for children and women said they were more engaged in their

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[57] The representatives of the Parenting Faith study are privileged to represent a wide range of evangelical traditions and perspectives that, although agree on primary doctrines, often have differing views regarding gender roles and how that plays out in very practical and functional ways. We invite readers to interpret these findings and extract principles according to their biblical convictions.

children's faith formation. But, of the thirteen respondents who indicated one parent held the primary teaching role in the family, nine of these indicated it was the father.

Several of our interview respondents, especially homeschoolers, described holding to complementarian roles for parents in the faith formation of their children. Complementarian theology typically has the father in the primary spiritual teaching role within the family. Alternatively, egalitarian theology focuses on shared roles between husbands and wives. A complementarian, homeschooling mother described her husband as the head and herself as the hands in their household.

> I have more exposure time. So, it is my job to do the things that he has asked me to do – or that we have decided to do. He is ultimately responsible for how our family serves the Lord, but I am responsible to carry out the plan of what we have – the desires and the convictions that the Lord has placed on his heart and my heart. So, he's the head. I'm the hands and feet kind of thing. That's kind of how I view it. … I do the daily stuff that my husband asks me to do because he is the main, sole provider of our home and I'm the one at home. So, it makes sense that I do the actual, physical, day-to-day things that we've decided that are important.

Significantly, this means even though her husband is the titular head of the household, in a complementarian understanding, the teaching role, in practice, is most often exercised by her. Clearly, she does this in a delegated capacity, but it is her, as the mother, who does the most teaching, as it is in most homeschool families we interviewed.

On the parent survey, we tested how faith-formation roles were shared between spouses and if theological convictions about gender roles influenced what parents did. Survey respondents were presented with the following question about complementarian and egalitarian views about gender roles and asked to choose which position best represented their view.

> "Would you say you are more *complementarian*, believing that women and men have equal but different roles in the home and that the man should be the head of the household, OR *egalitarian,* believing household roles should not be prescribed by gender and that the leadership of the household should be shared between husband and wife?"

Responses are presented in table 2.24 below.

Table 2.24 Responses to question about gender role theology by gender, tradition, who takes faith-formation leadership in the household and respondent's worship service attendance frequency, parent respondents, survey, percent[a]

Group	Sub-group	Counts Complementarian	Egalitarian	DK / PNTS	Percent Complementarian	Egalitarian	DK / PNTS
Gender	**Male**	195	93	16	64	31	5
	Female	564	299	50	62	33	5
Tradition	**Restorationist[b]**	25	5	1	81	16	3
	Pietist	42	10	2	78	19	4
	Baptist	245	97	18	68	27	5
	Other evang. / non-denom.	125	43	19	67	23	10
	Anabaptist	56	38	4	57	39	4
	Pentecostal	74	54	4	56	41	3
	Reformed	57	45	2	55	43	2
	Holiness	81	61	7	54	41	5
	Other	54	39	9	53	38	9
In your household, who would be most likely to take leadership in teaching your children about matters of faith?	**Male: Myself**	137	58	9	67	28	4
	Male: My spouse[c]	51	27	6	61	32	7
	Male: Other/NA/PNTS[b]	7	8	1	44	50	6
	Female: Myself	389	243	34	58	36	5
	Female: My spouse[c]	156	39	11	76	19	5
	Female: Other/NA/PNTS[b]	19	17	5	46	41	12
In your household, who is the principal caregiver for your children?	**Male: Myself[b]**	13	8	0	62	38	0
	Male: My spouse[c]	89	37	9	66	27	7
	Male: Shared equally[d]	92	45	5	65	32	4
	Male: Other/NA/PNTS[b]	1	3	2	17	50	33
	Female: Myself	370	164	32	65	29	6
	Female: My spouse[bc]	13	3	1	76	18	6
	Female: Shared equally[d]	173	131	16	54	41	5
	Female: Other/NA/PNTS[b]	8	1	1	80	10	10
Respondent's worship service attendance frequency	**More than weekly**	148	32	7	79	17	4
	Weekly	495	248	40	63	32	5
	2-3 times per month	78	79	12	46	47	7
	Less often /Never/DK/PNTS	38	33	7	49	42	9
All		**759**	**392**	**66**	**62**	**32**	**5**

[a] Rows may not add to 100 because of rounding.
[b] Small number of observations: Use data with caution. These data are highlighted in yellow.
[c] Or partner.
[d] Shared equally with spouse or partner.

About two-thirds of survey respondents identified as complementarians and one-third as egalitarians. Responses from men and women were also two-thirds complementarian and one-third egalitarian, respectively. Like the interviews, women tended to shoulder most of the caregiving roles, even among egalitarians, though to a lesser degree.

Despite its prevalence in interviews, holding to complementarian theology was less of a predictor for how faith-formation teaching roles played out in the home. Seventy percent of

men who identified as complementarian said they took the leadership in teaching their children about matters of faith and a nearly identical (sixty-nine) percentage of complementarian women said they took the leadership in teaching their children. These results could be a consequence of the referral sample in that most of our respondents are women and most are engaged in the faith formation of their children.

The difference in survey results from interviews could also be an indication that complementarian views held in principle, tend to play out in different ways, in different homes. For instance, in the interviews, one father said pandemic restrictions forced him to work from home and the practical necessities of running a household under these restrictions reconfigured his and his wife's household roles. He maintained he had spiritual headship and was accountable to God for the spiritual vitality of his family but said he and his wife "take on [roles] as needed." So, he acts as a functional egalitarian while a convictional complementarian.

The prevalence of complementarian women who said they took "leadership in teaching [their] children about matters of faith," could also reflect a gendered interpretation of the survey question. Women may have interpreted the question to mean they are the most likely to have the functional teaching voice in the day-to-day outworking of their faith formation role; and men interpreted the question to mean they hold the primary, authoritative teaching as the head.

This was suggested in interviews from complementarian respondents who pointed to things like their husbands' work schedules or daily routines, as something that determined who was more engaged with teaching matters of faith to their children.

> **I am with them more than he is. But, so, I spend more actual time with them just because he works outside of the home.** But beyond that, we, like I said, if we try to have a Bible study or things, we'll do it as a family or as a small group. So, he would – **if he is home, he's more likely to, you know, take a bigger hand in it, but if he's not then I will.**

Although this father did not credit his wife with doing more faith formation, he pointed to her integration of faith formation in her homeschooling curriculum. Here, homeschooling served as a structured daily time for faith formation in contrast with his week-to-week instruction.

> **I think my wife is involved more in – she [in]corporates [faith formation] in her homeschooling curriculum … it is day-to-day. And then, my aim is to do family devotions at least a few times a week. So, where she may go through, say, catechism or memorization, with family devotions we'll pick Scripture and read it and talk about it, discuss it, break it down for the kids with the various age ranges, ask them questions, let them interact with it.**

This father explained gendered differences in how he and his wife incorporate faith formation into daily life.

An observation we made from interviews with ministry experts was how women and men tended to use different language and assume different roles for faith formation. Men preferred the language of teaching, discipleship and catechism, while women were more likely to use the language of formation, spirituality and talk about a "holistic approach." These language differences corresponded with different faith-formation activities (FFAs) adopted by men and women (section 4.3.7). Men tended to talk about FFAs that were episodic and didactic, whereas women were more likely to talk about FFAs that were integrative or holistic. The language use and activities shaped the profile of the faith-formation role spouses adopted: men had the primary teaching and spiritual care role over children, which usually played out in fixed, didactic contexts; and women nurtured children's faith more spontaneously and in integrative ways, or as we saw from examples above, as a teaching proxy in the absence of their spouse.

2.5.1 Other differences in spousal faith-formation roles

One-fifth of interview respondents said there was no difference between their and their spouse's approach to faith formation with their children. This usually meant they agreed on the approach to faith formation, not that they individually played the same roles. One respondent talked about how she and her husband take turns leading faith formation with their children depending on which is currently doing well spiritually. When spouses were described as less engaged in the faith formation of their children, it was always the husband who was less engaged. This is explained at more length in section 3.3.2.

Several respondents had non-Christian spouses. Each of them described some level of negotiation with their spouses over how they approach religious or moral issues. If one spouse was a dedicated Christian, there was more awareness that the incongruencies of their beliefs and actions would be better understood by their children as they age.

In cases where both spouses considered "faith [as] … secondary," the negotiated approach to faith formation was usually to "expose" their children to their respective faiths and allow them to decide.

2.5.2 Ministry implications

It is important to understand how spouses assume symbolic and functional roles in faith formation. Irrespective of theological persuasion, most women saw themselves as shouldering not only the main caregiving responsibilities for children, but also the main responsibility for teaching them about matters of faith. What will be of chief importance, is how churches and ministry organizations choose to support men and women in these *functional* roles.

Two ministry experts expressed concern that ministry efforts to support men and women in their faith-formation roles might "step[] on toes," but they had opposing views about the offended party. A woman who started a ministry to equip the deficit she saw in preparing women to step into spiritual leadership expressed:

> [S]ometimes women are afraid to share their faith with their kids because they're afraid they're going to step on their husband's toes. And that's actually the situation I was in for quite a while, that I felt like if I do [faith formation] then I was stepping on his toes, so then I would try and like, "Here, you read this or you play with the kids or you do this." And he was just like, "[sighs] Fine."

In this case, she was afraid to take the lead on FFAs with their children because she was afraid to tread on the territory for which her husband understood himself to be solely responsible. She thinks an overemphasis on men's roles as spiritual leaders in the home can paralyze women to take the lead because they're overly concerned with how the roles and responsibilities are distributed rather than what is getting done. This woman refrained from taking on spiritual oversight for many years because she did not want to step on her husband's toes by "stepping into his role," so to speak.

A New Canadian pastor used the same phrase but in a context that revealed he was comfortable "stepping on … women's toes" if it meant fathers *were* stepping into their role.

> I've never done a job as hard as being a parent, as a father, as a male. So, we acknowledge how difficult this challenge is, but we also say this is your greatest challenge, this is your most important task as a human being, as a father. So, I know it's sort of, like, you're fearing, like, well, what if – we don't want to step on any women's toes.

He acknowledged that women might take offence because his church emphasizes the role of fathers as "the most important task as a human being." This response is likely overstated to get fathers to engage, not to minimize the value of mothers, and he reassured the interviewer he never heard a complaint from a woman about her husband being overly spiritual at home. Other research suggests, husband's taking on a spiritual role is not the only kind of role that has an impact on children's faith formation, however.

The Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG), studying the conditions for successful religious socialization, showed that "when a child feels close to a parent, he or she is more likely to imitate or model that parent."[58] The researchers concluded that *emotional bonding* is more important for religious socialization than the actual passing on of religious information. One of the other distinctive findings from this study was that having a close bond with one's *father* was more positively correlated with religious socialization than a close relationship with one's mother;[59] this was true across all religious traditions, but most noteworthy among Evangelicals.[60] The trend we saw from our data, however, are that *mothers* have more religious consistency and emotional connection with their children.

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[58] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 74.
[59] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, 75.
[60] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, 77.

Churches and ministry organizations have an opportunity to evaluate their role in facilitating and encouraging emotional closeness among families, especially between fathers and their children. Churches might also assess how emotional closeness can be safely forged among children and adults who do not have parents, children or a nuclear family unit.

2.6 What the Goal Is in Faith Formation

We asked interview respondents how they would know if their parenting was successful, however we did not specifically ask about faith outcomes. Thirty-nine of forty-one respondents provided answers to this question, summarized categorically in table 2.25 below.

Parents play a significant, but partial role, in the development of their children. The purpose in posing this question was to get a sense of what parents are aiming at as they raise their children even though it could be argued the question is unfair because children's choices are largely out of parents' control.

We recruited respondents for interviews on the faith formation of children in the home (see appendix A), so we expect that desirability bias[61] would make answers having to do with faith, morals and character development more prominent. Further, we would also expect selection bias in our sample.[62]

Faith and character themes did, in fact, feature most prominently as measures of success which varies from the literature that points to economic and career success as prominent goals of parents.[63] It should be noted that the reasons parents gave for putting their children in extracurricular activities suggests career and strategic social connections are somewhat more important to them than their answers to this question suggest (section 4.4 Extracurricular Activities).

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[61] Desirability bias is the tendency for respondents to provide answers they believe will make them look more favourable to the interviewer or investigator.

[62] Selection bias is the tendency for those most interested in a topic to become respondents.

[63] Matthias Doepke and Fabrizio Zilibotti, *Love, Money & Parenting: How Economics Explains the Way We Raise Our Kids* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 66–68.

Table 2.25 Responses to "how would you know that your parenting had been 'successful,'" parent respondents, interviews, category counts

Success category	Mentions
Faith	34
Character	18
Family	13
Social	11
Success	9
Other	7
Happiness	5

2.6.1 Faith

Twenty-nine of thirty-nine interview respondents, who provided an answer to this question, said their success as a parent would, at least in part, be measured by whether or not their children became Christians or continued in the faith. Faith responses could be split into primary and secondary responses. Primary responses were first, or principal responses, and secondary ones were those that came further down a list of measures or appeared to be afterthoughts. Here are some examples of primary faith responses:

- That they've made a decision to have an independent relationship with God for themselves and they've chosen that relationship for themselves based on that formation that was established earlier on.

- I would just look for evidence that they love God and that they desire to seek Him in all aspects of their life.

- *[Q]u'ils soient des chrétiens engagés, dans l'église, dans le monde, soit des gens qui ont pas peur de parler de Dieu.*
  > Translation: [T]hat they are committed Christians, in the church, in the world, be people who are not afraid to talk about God.

Although parents often cited their children's faith as a measure of their own parenting success, parents seldom included ongoing church participation in their descriptions of the faith they hoped their children would have (just four of twenty-nine). Twenty-eight of the twenty-nine attended church at least weekly, so it is possible church participation is assumed, although faith was described as "an independent relationship with God," a "desire to seek [God]," or some other description of a non-corporate faith.

> *… parents seldom included ongoing church participation in their descriptions of the faith they hoped their children would have.*

These responses were coded as secondary faith responses because faith was cited after some other measure of parental success.

- **I would say that they are adults, in the sense of they are able to be fully functioning adults, able to positively contribute to the community, and that they demonstrate integrity and character and the gifts of the Spirit in what they do.**

- That's a good question. I don't know, I guess living, you know, **if they get married and have children, you know, I would say, and they follow the Lord – that would be my rating of success to me.** You know, having a family themselves, and being they're all girls, you know, a mother of children would be kind of – I would like to see that in my success, hopefully, possibly. And being in the faith, necessarily, believing in God and believing in the faith for sure.

Where faith was mentioned second it was usually after being a good person, having a family or perpetuating some family tradition. The ordering of success measures may have been incidental, but we think that often it can be understood as a priority ranking.

Sometimes parents hinted faith was an important measure but used vague language like, hoping their children would "feel a strong connection" in order to fill a "void" or that they wanted their children to be "grounded" so that they could "better themselves."

Several parents said faith would be a measure of their success as parents but qualified this by saying faith was their child's decision, signaling the outcome was out of their control.

- Hmm. **I find that a difficult question because, ultimately, they are responsible for their own path and their own choices.**

- So, **that's kind of tough because if he becomes a Christian, he'll become a Christian. You can't force someone to become a Christian**. … If he becomes a Christian, amazing. Then that's, like, ultimate. And then, for him to grow up, you know, find a wife, have children, raise them in faith as well.

2.6.2 Success and happiness

Only eleven of thirty-nine respondents answering this question said they would measure their own parental success against their children's financial or career success, or their children's happiness.

Immigrants often make enormous sacrifices to give their children an opportunity to make it in the new country. Although the quality of the interview recording was poor, a New Canadian respondent thought she would be successful as a parent if her children found work in their field with remuneration representing a good return on her financial investment toward their education.

This respondent pointed out that his children were "smart enough to know" they need an education to prepare themselves for a good job.

> **Have good jobs – or jobs, anyways. They have some understanding that they have a good [indistinct] – not necessarily good education, but they're smart enough to know what they're – oh, I don't know how to say that. That they are aware that they can have a good education if they want – if they choose not to – then they will provide – prepare themselves for a good job or career.**

Note, education is not an end but a means to getting a good job. This next respondent thought it "obvious[]" that a parent would want their children to be "successful in life."

> Yeah, good question. [pauses five seconds] I – obviously you want the best for your kids. You want them to be successful in life. You know, not be – I mean you want success for them in their jobs, in their relationships, in, like, not being homeless, for example. So, those are things about how you would define success, but how – are you asking specifically about faith formation?

Although "success in life" is framed in terms of financial and relational themes, the financial theme is dominant in his response. It is interesting he mentions "not being homeless" at a time when shelter costs have risen dramatically in Canada.[64] At the end of his reply he asked, "Are you asking specifically about faith formation?" showing that only then had he realized his response was not as obvious as he had first thought.

Other respondents pushed happiness to the front of their responses.

- **Her happiness would, first and foremost, be the number one thing. I would hope and pray that she would have a faith, like, the faith base of her faith of where her foundation would come from.**

- Ah, **I'd say that she's happy. She's happy with what, you know, the line of work she's chosen.** You know, she's just happy. She's a good person. And she, you know, she was successful, loves what she does – that would make me happy.

- **My children are happy, healthy, well adapted and resilient.** And they have a balanced life: balance with their family, friends, relationships.

- **And if they're happy and it's helping them better their life, then why would I interject or try to change that?** [65]

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[64] The shelter component of the Consumer Price Index rose 28% between December 2001 and December 2011, and 59% between December 2001 and December 2021. Statistics Canada Government of Canada, "Consumer Price Index, Monthly, Percentage Change, Not Seasonally Adjusted, Canada, Provinces, Whitehorse and Yellowknife — Shelter," June 19, 2007, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000404.

[65] A different respondent than the one cited immediately above.

The last response in the list above conceives of happiness as a permanent state that might be interrupted or derailed by parental interference. Whether we are talking about happiness or children's choices, religion, career or otherwise, some respondents seemed to be following a parental version of Star Trek's Prime Directive.

The Prime Directive prohibits Starfleet personnel and spacecraft from interfering in the normal development of any society, and mandates that any Starfleet vessel or crew member is expendable to prevent violation of this rule.[66]

Of course, in Star Trek, as sometimes in parenting, the stated ideal of non-interference is seldom well respected (in fact, with respect to Star Trek, violations of the Prime Directive are often the plot device that drives the series forward). That parents feel their input threatens their children's happiness is the flip side of the idea of the gift of choice (see section 2.3 Choice).

There are two significant implications of the priority of happiness for faith formation. First, faith is subordinated to an idea of what makes for happiness. Second, the things that happiness is said to be rooted in (i.e., success, career, family, money) are themselves variable. Very often these apparent anchors slip through adult hands taking their happiness with them.

2.6.3 Independence

Sometimes respondents bundled faith and independence in their descriptions of parental success.

- **Two things: that they love the Lord and that they are independent, in the sense that they are able to provide for themselves and their own family units, and that they're raising their – if they have children – they're raising their children also in the faith.**

- **I think if they are able to be independent from us, I would feel that they were successful. Be adults who can take care of themselves. As Christians, we would feel successful if we saw a life that was lived for Christ.** Some of my children have made declarations of faith, some have not, as they're smaller, and obviously we hope that they continue to live a Christian life from here on out.

This emphasis on independence is slightly different than merely placing an emphasis on financial success. A financially successful child may indeed be financially independent of their parents, but in emphasizing financial independence the parents are articulating an extended family structure ideal. The family is not, for example, an intergenerational, integrated household of households working jointly for their mutual benefit. Rather, their aim is to see their children form *self-sufficient*, nuclear families or households (see section 1 Definitions).

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[66] "Prime Directive," *Wikipedia*, January 27, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Prime_Directive&oldid=1068337968.

2.6.4 Character

The idea of character was closely related to faith. One respondent juxtaposed faith with character virtues in a way that suggests they are part of a whole: "Faith, honesty, trustworthiness, work – hard work ethic."

In this response, the general character virtues of love, kindness and care are presented as a kind of secular Fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23): "Love, kindness, caring, respect, which seems to be a big one these days. Um. Yeah. And then, I guess, you know, you sort of think of the fruits of the Spirit: Patience, humbleness, self-control."

In discussions about character and morals, it is common to use the language of values. For example, this respondent looked to see his son "reflecting his values, or my values."

> Well, it's hard to judge **if he's really reflecting his values or my values when I'm around, or I have ways to find out what he's been doing.** So, I still have some control. It's harder for him to hide things because he lives in the house. I see him a lot. Once he's out and the behaviour still continues, that's when I feel that probably something stuck through whatever we taught him.

This quote neatly illustrates the perspectival nature of values discourse. The respondent will either see his son reflecting his son's own values or reflecting his values. Although he clearly hopes these will be one and the same, the values change with the valuer.

Values as a kind of moral discourse was introduced by post-modern philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) and entered popular discourse as these philosophies were taught to more and more post-secondary students in the rapid expansion of post-secondary education following World War II.[67] Values displaced virtues as the principal vehicle for moral discourse. Virtues are true or good whether or not they are valued by an individual. The predominance of values discourse deprived our culture of a common way of assessing character.

Nevertheless, Christians have adopted values language and use it as a synonym for virtues, and, as the broader culture does, as a perspectival way to attribute value. This has led to a situation where our moral discourse is often incoherent leaving us open to the charge of "that's just your opinion (perspective)." Given we often use perspectival values language in our moral discourse, it is very difficult to argue otherwise.

For other parents, character was described simply as "being a good person," a phrase that communicates virtue without the risk of definition.

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[67] Rick Hiemstra, "Competition for Character Education: What Emerging Adulthood Means for Christian Higher Education in Canada" (Faith Today Publications, December 21, 2018), www.RenegotitingFaith.ca.

When character and faith are so often linked, it leads to them being treated as synonyms. This respondent starts by talking about wanting his children to "continue in their faith" before using "again" as the introduction to a moral description meant to reprise his earlier faith description.

> Well, I'd like them to continue in their faith and make my faith their faith. So, both kids are baptized. So, I feel that we got somewhere there. **Again**, you know, to be honest, to be hard workers, to do good things, I guess, not to party too much and not to end up in jail or things like that. That's definitely – we'd feel that we failed if that happens. Yeah. So, just in general, like, I'd like people to look at them and say, "Oh, these are good people."

We believe the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer will produce moral fruit, but moral behaviour can be present in an individual's life apart from being a Christian. Certainly, that Christians are empowered by the Holy Spirit to lead virtuous lives is an argument in favour of Christianity, but when Christianity and morality (being a good person) are presented as one and the same, Christian arguments lose credibility because people, including our children, are well acquainted with moral, non-Christians.

Often the list of moral behaviours cited by respondents were reflections of the societal moral consensus of a generation ago.

- Huh. Well, I think one is the type of partner that they choose and **whether or not they get into a drug, you know, like, overdoing in terms of alcohol, drugs, any kind of [indistinct] illegal substance or harmful substance. The choosing of the right life partner. Not cohabitating before marriage. Choosing a good circle of friends that aren't going to lead them down the wrong path.**

- **I think just living a lifestyle that is, like, crime or hurting themselves or hurting others, just not doing something that is helping themselves or helping others but actually is harming or hurting and it's not benefitting nobody because it's just destructive**.

- How else? **I mean, that they're in good relationship, treat other people well, treat their children well. And, I mean, obviously stay out of drugs and prison and all that stuff, but that's a pretty low bar**.

These are descriptions of good citizens, a lower bar than the upward call of Christ.

2.6.5 Won't know

Finally, two respondents, both from Reformed traditions, said they will not know if they were successful parents or not.

This respondent said success would be seen over generations and he will not be around to know.

Uh, I, yeah, so, **I honestly can't confidently say that my parenting has been successful. I don't think that I would be the judge of that.** Um, I think it's an ongoing um, it's an ongoing process between generation after generation. That's why I think the multi-generational aspect of our faith as well, as just life in general, is that experience, knowledge, faith, is all passed down from our parents down to our children and we're constantly learning and constantly making breakthroughs but also constantly making mistakes as well. So, how we, how we rely upon one another when a problem does arise or we stray off, I think that's why the – there is such a big emphasis on the importance of family and multi-generation and in our teaching and in our faith. (Reformed, Male, Weekly Plus)

This second respondent thought the question missed the point. For her, parenting is about obedience to God, not about effecting a particular outcome in their children's lives. She does allow that seeing her children in heaven would be an indicator of success but that is not something she will know in her earthly life.

I won't. My parenting is not successful. My parenting is full of failures. And the only success that ever will happen in my parenting is through the Holy Spirit. That's the only success that will happen. My parenting is – [indistinct] by the grace of God that any good will ever come out of this. I'm not – that's not my goal. **My goal is not to make wonderful citizens and successful people. The goal is to do whatever the Lord has called me to do to fulfil my requirements as a Christian parent so that their souls go to heaven. That's the only time I'll know that I was a successful parent, will be in heaven, when I see them there. I won't know until then.** (Reformed, Female, Weekly Plus)

Conclusion

We asked respondents about how they would know if they had been successful parents to see if their faith formation factored into their answers. For most parents it did, however, at times the distinction between being moral, being a good person, being a good citizen and being a Christian was unclear. Other times their children's happiness or financial success crowded in before faith. To reduce respondent burden, this question was not tested on the survey, but the themes from interviews remain important as we consider parents' goals in passing their faith on to their children.

2.7 How Faith Formation Is Going

Informed by our interviews with ministry experts, we expected to hear about how busy and overwhelmed parents were, and how they needed faith-formation resourcing and help. We asked parents if they would change anything about how they were doing faith formation to see if they identified any of the same, or other, barriers as ministry experts to optimizing their faith formation potential. Thirty-eight of forty-one parent interview respondents provided an answer

to the question: "If you had the time, energy and resources, would you do something differently with respect to faith formation with your children than you're doing now?" (see table 2.26 below). Surprisingly, most parents answered, "no." Some of these responses are examined in more detail below.

Table 2.26 Responses to "If you had the time, energy and resources, would you do something differently with respect to faith formation with your children than you're doing now?", parent respondents, interviews, counts[a]

What respondent would change	Count
Would not change anything	12
Spend more *time* doing family devotionals	9
Spend more *time* with children	8
Take children on a service / missions trip	6
Attend worship services	2
Take children on a pilgrimage	2
Be a better example to my children	1
Effect change in how local church does faith formation with children	1
Ensure children had more non-parent, Christian mentors	1
Seek out more help from local church	1
Send children to a Christian school	1
Send to children to Christian camps	1
Unclear	1

[a] Respondents may have given more than one response.

2.7.1 Would not change anything

The following handful of quotes shows how quickly – sometimes reflectively – parents said they would not change a thing about how they did faith formation. Some expressed satisfaction with what they were doing, while others, after a moment's reflection, could not identify any deficiencies. The following list of quotes is extensive to underline what we feel is a surprising finding.

- No, I don't think so.

- No, [I would not do anything differently].

- I don't know that I would make a different choice. I think we're pleased with what we're doing now.

- At this point I'd say, no. I think, yeah, I don't think so.

- No. I – at this point, there isn't anything different that I wish I were doing.

- Probably not. For me, I don't see that I'm lacking that.

- No, I wouldn't.

- I don't know that I think that we do anything particularly differently than we would have.

- Mm. No, I don't think I would. … I don't think I would.

There was no prevailing demographic attribute that distinguished this group from respondents who gave different answers to this question. Both the parents that are objectively engaging in intentional faith-formation activity and those that are not, said they would not do anything differently.

Both our ministry experts[68] report and a recent multi-national report on the state of children's ministry during COVID, found parents were inadequately prepared to form the faith of their children and lacked confidence to do so.[69] Only two of our forty-one parent respondents, however, expressed this sense of inadequacy. This is important because it suggests that parents and ministry leaders understand the state of family faith formation very differently, and it may be that ministry leaders are responding to what they believe is a felt need that is, for the most part, not there.

2.7.2 More time

After "nothing," the next most common response was that respondent's would devote more *time* either to family devotional activities or simply to spending time with their children. Common to these answers is the idea of a time deficit or that time is somehow out of their control. This was variously attributed to parents' priorities, demands of work and busyness in general.

Time was talked about as something that parents "spend." So, money can be a metaphor for time. Time, unlike money, has a supply constraint that budgets may not. Despite the way we talk about time, you cannot *make* more time. You can only (to extend the time-as-money metaphor) budget time. Perhaps in using money as a metaphor for time, we comfort ourselves with the illusion that if we try harder, we can, indeed, make more time.

On one level, budgeting is a matter of making choices. That these choices were seldom acknowledged suggests parents do not see their current time expenditures as negotiable; these other things have an inelastic demand.

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[68] Callaway and Hiemstra, "CEFFFS Ministry Expert Interviews Report: CEFFFS Interim Report 2."
[69] Callaway and Hiemstra, "CEFFFS Ministry Expert Interviews Report: CEFFFS Interim Report 2," 119–23; Holmes et al., "Do We Need a New Plan for Children's Ministry?: A Report Based on Research in Brazil, Canada, UK and US in Later-Pandemic Stages," 2.

- [long pause] *Oui, si, s'il y avait le temps, c'est sûr, que je passai plus de temps avec eux, eum, plus de temps avec eux pour parce que – ce que – c'est ce que j'ai* [indistinct] *plus parce que nous passons moins de temps avec nous, avec nos enfants, parce que la majorité est temps dehors avec* [indistinct] *puis moins de temps avec eux.*

  Translation: [long pause] Yeah, if, if there was time, for sure, I would spend more time with them, um, more time with them because – what – that's what I have [indistinct] more because we spend less time with us with our children, because the majority is outside time with [indistinct] then less time with them.

- I would try to be more consistent and diligent [in my faith formation of my children], that's for sure. And I don't know if it's a time or resource issue or just a willingness, sometimes, to make the time. Sometimes, I just want to go to bed. [sighs]

- Use of our time – using our time differently. Maybe watching less TV and spending more time just even going for a walk, like, other things outside of electronics.

This respondent spoke about time getting away on him, and faith formation almost slipping from view for years.

> Like, we'll do a little bit [of family devotion time] and we'll be good for a few months – and, like, from the time they were in the middle school. It's just – but then, you know, it might be three years and it's like we haven't done anything in a long time.

Note, this respondent, and all the respondents quoted to this point in this section, attend worship services at least weekly. Faith, consciousness of faith and, one presumes, exhortations to devotion are not absent from their lives.

There was a broad, nominal priority for faith formation that seemed to be eclipsed by a range of things that could loosely be characterized as busyness. This next respondent talked about the way the forced slowdown of COVID created a structure that allowed for faith formation.

> But the family time, it wasn't really there pre-pandemic, and [my] pre-pandemic [sic] [experience] has shown me that this is important, for us to have the family time instead of running here and there and not having that time together. **So, I would like more family time in prayer and more family time to talk about – even talk about anything because anything always comes back to our faith walk. So, even if it's just, "Let's have time to talk." And we do that spontaneously, but other than Sunday after church we're not really doing that.** So, yeah. I think there's definitely room for us to spend more time together.

Prior to COVID, there was an unconscious structuring of her calendar by the things that kept her "running here and there." Although COVID's slowdown gave her perspective to see this and to

appreciate having family time to talk, this respite from running here and there is as externally driven as her prior frenetic pace (see section 3.3.3 Impact of COVID-19 on church engagement).

In our ministry expert interviews, one expert talked about how the church programs scheduled on different nights of the week can "busy[] a family," a sentiment that is shared by this parent.

> I don't know. I guess – I saw Awana on the list [of CEFFFS partners]. My kids are all in Awana, and that was one of the programs that I helped with as well. It is great. It is a great program. But I think one of the major things is – not necessarily about Awana, but – more resources isn't – I don't know – isn't really what we need. **What we need is people slowing down, getting together, studying the Word together, and going together.** And how do you facilitate that? I don't know. But that's how I feel about it. **It's not more books and more Sunday school programs and – I don't think that's what we need.**

She explicitly rejected the idea that she, or parents generally, needed more resources. Rather they need "slowing down, getting together, studying the Word together, and going together." Note, she was not taking issue with the quality of resources like Awana, rather she talked about time as something provided. Specifically, she, and our other respondents, wanted time for family, for getting together with other Christians, and studying the Scripture with them.

A respondent, who is very involved in his church's ministries, talked about feeling "mentally … burnt out," and when asked what he would do with more resources he responded rhetorically, "Can we do more?"

> [pauses twelve seconds] Um, I don't know if it's about unlimited resources. Um, we, uh, as a couple, my wife and I we feel a little bit almost, um, I wouldn't say burnt out because we don't feel, I don't think it's – **I think mentally maybe burnt out, not physically because we've always been involved when so many ministries and responsibilities with the church that, can we do more?**

There is an incredulity at our question about doing more, even when our hypothetical question afforded him unlimited resources with which to do more. Clearly there is a fatigue that prevented him from even engaging with the question.

2.7.3 Missions trip

Several respondents said, if resources allowed, they would take their children on a missions trip or a service project. It is significant that missions trips and service projects are talked about here as a form of faith formation for their children. The priority is the faith formation of the team members, not necessarily the work they may be doing.[70]

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[70] Rick Hiemstra, "Canadian Evangelicals and Short-Term Missions: CEMES Series, Part 1" (The Canadian Missions Research Forum and The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, 2017).

- We had a time a few years ago – I was able to take my oldest child with me on a mission trip in Africa. If we had the time and the resources, I would like to do the same for all of the children, actually, the whole family every year because that – to me, **that type of service where you actually see the disparity between your life here and the lives of people elsewhere, it has such a big impact that, you know, it's a life changing thing.**

- I've had the opportunity to go on a missions trip to India, so **I'd like to take each of my children somewhere such as that – a developing nation – and see how, you know, we have so much materialistically in Canada and yet our faith is – could be richer compared to these people who have nothing by the worldly standards but seem so rich in their faith.**

- I think I would love to go, like, on a missions trip type thing and just – maybe when the kids are older, though. I'm not sure right now. But that's kind of my background and my dream to take them on a short-term or semi-long-term missions trip and just show them how we can, I mean, share – **physically share the Gospel with people but also just – I don't know – maybe grow in our faith too. I've always found that when I've gone on a trip that I've come home more changed than what I maybe set out to do.** Like, I wanted to go, you know, work in an orphanage or whatever, but you come home more changed than what you set out to leave behind.

- **I used to want to go on mission. For them to actually see the need,** … when I was there [on a previous missions trip], we will literally walk miles to villages in the middle of literally nowhere to bring them basic supplies like beans and rice and toilet paper and … I certainly would love to take the kids to Mexico or any other country that there is a huge need. … To go and give back … **And it would be helpful for my son. Genuinely helpful.** Like, but most of the missions trip or even missions here, like, we'd have to pay and it's kind of like, "Well, that's not an option for us, right?"

- I know a few years ago my husband took – went with my oldest on a service project. And we had talked about doing that together as a family at one point, but it's difficult with two of us working. But I think that would be something that we would love to have done and may have possibly done more of with them.

One respondent, disappointed that her church had not provided service projects for her teenage daughter, talked about her efforts to find those service projects. In this case, the faith-formation objectives included allowing her daughter to "feel … involved in the church."

> **Well, I think it's more coming along with the community part of outreach. That is not turning out the way I had wanted, and my daughter has expressed that too.** She said, "I'm quite disappointed." She says, "It looks like I'm going to be graduating grade 12 without having had the opportunity to really be involved – feel like I'm involved in the church." And she has asked to change churches because she felt like in another church, she might have more opportunities. I am trying to investigate – now, it's a COVID thing.

2.7.4 Openness to change and doing a good job

In the survey, we presented parents with three statements about faith formation to which they indicated their level of agreement. The statements were designed to understand parents' attitudes toward faith-formation resources, their openness to making changes to their faith-formation efforts, and if they thought they were doing a good job in forming their children's faith. Responses are presented in figure 2.17 below.

Figure 2.17 Agreement with statements about approaches to faith formation, parent respondents, survey, percent
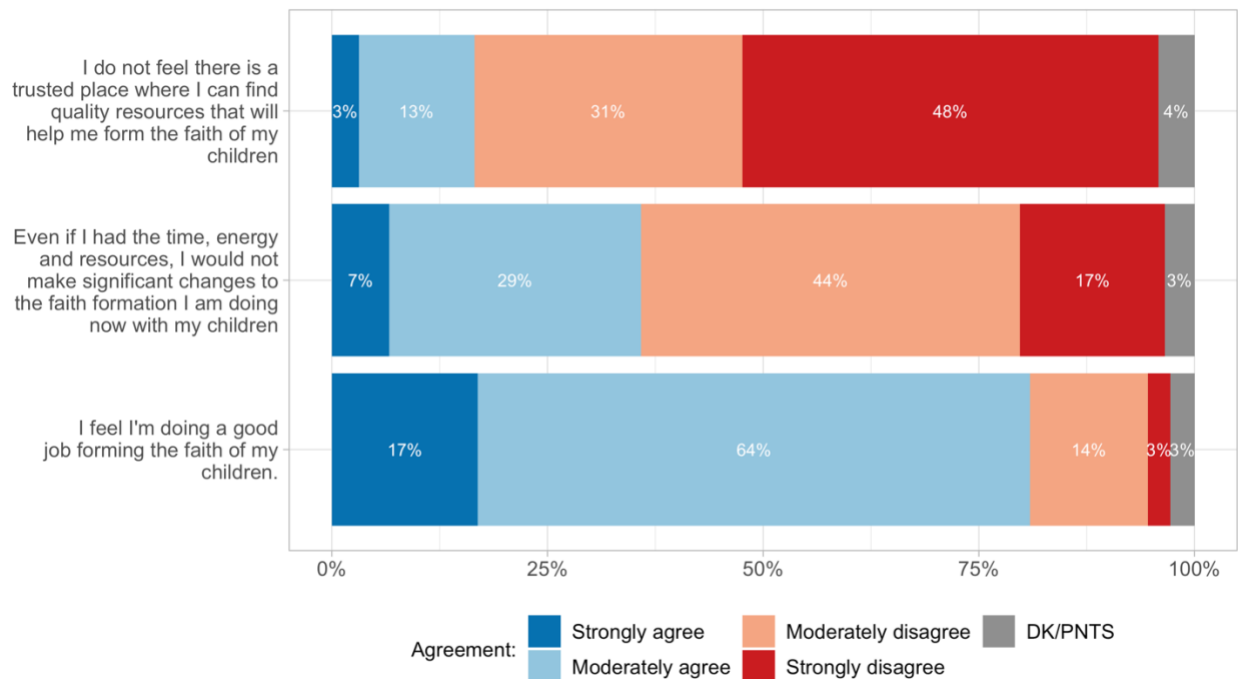
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217.

The first question addressed the incongruencies between ministry expert and parent interviews about need and access to faith-formation resources. According to the survey sample, only sixteen percent of parents said they did not have a trusted place to find quality faith-formation resources, and four percent said they did not know. Almost eighty percent disagreed, to varying degrees, that they did not have access to resources. There is an overwhelming sense among parents that they do not have a resource problem.

Responses to the next statement appeared to weakly contradict what we encountered in interviews. About one in three respondents said they would not make any significant changes if more time, energy or resources were available to them. And four in five parents moderately or strongly agreed to the statement about doing a good job at faith formation. These data suggest we have a confident sample when it comes to evaluating parental approach to faith formation, however our interpretation was significantly impacted when we cross-referenced the data to understand why parents answered so confidently.

We predicted parental openness to change would correspond with feeling like they were not doing a good job at forming the faith of their children. So, we cross-tabulated responses to these statements in figure 2.18 below.

Figure 2.18 Agreement with "I feel I am doing a good job forming the faith of my children" by agreement with "even if I had the time, energy and resources, I would not make significant changes to the faith formation I am doing now with my children," parent respondents, survey, percent

2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N parents = 1,217.
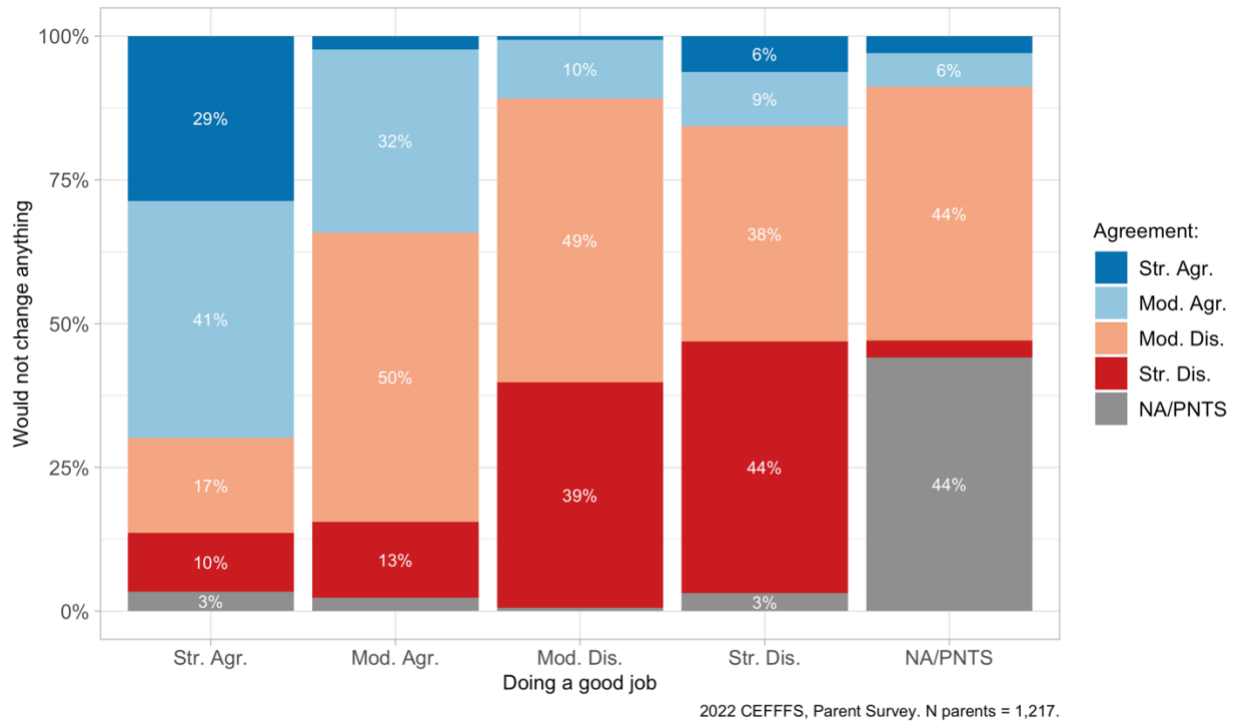
As suspected, those that strongly agreed they were doing a good job with respect to faith formation (leftmost columns), tended to agree they would not change what they were doing to form their children's faith (represented in shades of blue). And the more respondents disagreed they were doing a good job (rightmost columns), the more they disagreed they would not make significant changes to their faith-formation approach (represented in shades of peach and red).

However, as we looked at the attributes of respondents who said they were open to making significant changes, and those that felt they were doing a good job at faith formation, we realized they were *not* the same group of people. We understood this by breaking out the data by attendance, which is a common measure of religiosity because of its correlation with Bible engagement and evangelism.[71]

Figure 2.19 below breaks out the responses among the leftmost column of figure 2.18, those who strongly agreed they were doing a good job, by church attendance.

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[71] Hiemstra, "Confidence, Conversation and Community: Bible Engagement in Canada, 2013."

Figure 2.19 Parents respondents who strongly agree "I feel I am doing a good job forming the faith of my children" by worship service attendance frequency, and by agreement with "Even if I had the time, energy and resources, I would not make significant changes to the faith formation I am doing now with my children," survey, percent

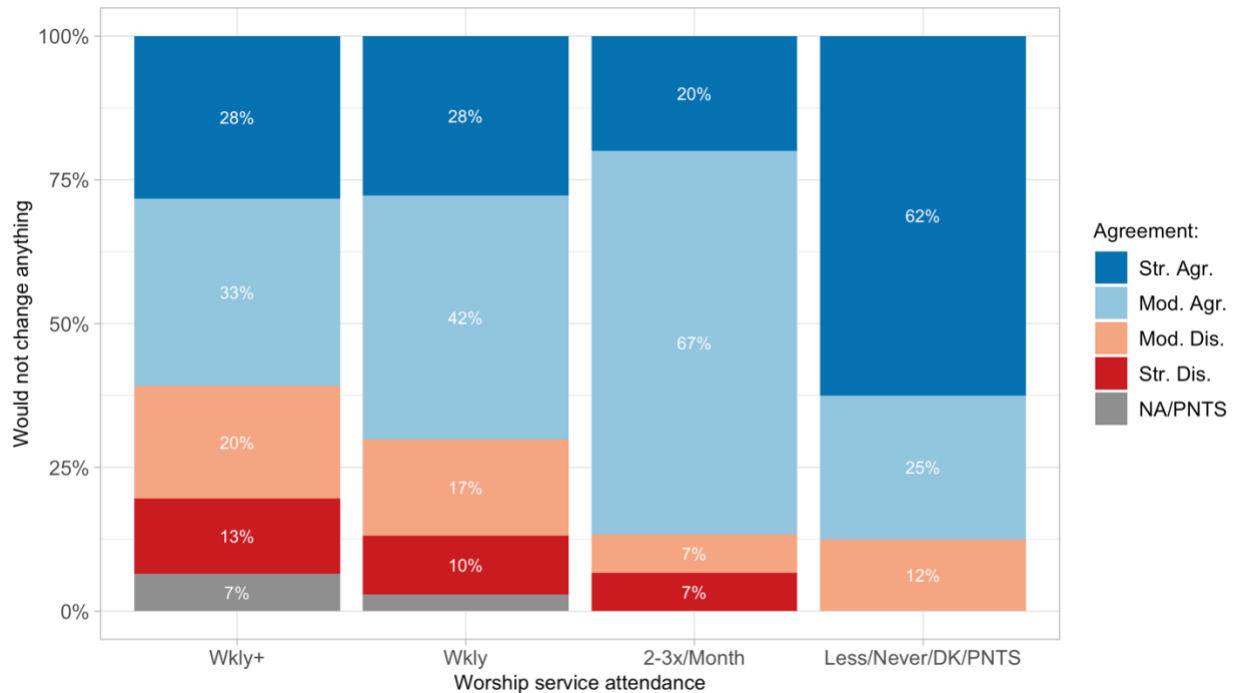2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N parent respondents who strongly agree they are doing a good job = 206.

Among parents who attend church more than weekly and who strongly agreed they were doing a good job in faith formation, roughly two-thirds (sixty-one percent) indicated they would not change what they were doing with respect to faith formation, and one-third (thirty-three percent) were open to change.

However, eighty-seven percent of parents who attend church a few times a month not only strongly agreed they were doing a good job at faith formation, but indicated they were *not* open to making significant changes to faith formation. Another eighty-seven of parents agreed even more strongly they were not open to change and attended church even less often. The apparent confidence shown by parents is represented by a large portion of less dedicated parents.

A psychological theory called the Dunning-Kruger effect was popularized through a seminal paper[72] that described the "tendency of people with low ability in a specific area to give overly positive assessments of this ability." This phenomenon likely explains why the less devout and less committed parents are to church, the more confident they were about the job they are

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[72] Justin Kruger and David Dunning, "Unskilled and Unaware of It: How Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-Assessments.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 77, no. 6 (1999): 1121–34, https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.6.1121.

doing and the less open they were to change their practices. Their positive assessments might also be an indication of some of the themes that have been explored in this section: they focus on modelling faith rather than theological interpretation and religious skills development, and they focus on religious exposure and offering their children choice. Faith formation in these terms is less dependent on the church or a community of accountability. It's unsurprising then, that church attendance is low, but confidence is high.

Dunning and Kruger also acknowledge the reverse effect: people who are more competent in a skill tend to underestimate themselves or provide a more negative assessment. In a devout sample, where most respondents report frequent worship service attendance and consistent devotional practices, we might interpret the openness to change despite confidence in their job performance in Christian humility and the ongoing pursuit of holiness.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, the respondents we spoke to were fairly happy with the faith formation they were doing with their children. Where they were dissatisfied was most often when they did not have the resources – usually expressed in terms of time – to carry out their formation. Significantly, most were not looking for external resources to augment what they were doing. Ministry experts see a parental desire for help in the faith formation of their children that the parents we spoke to did not express.

We were surprised to find that several parents who expressed a high degree of confidence in their faith-formation job had low attendance rates and low openness to changing their approach. Conversely, those who had high attendance rates, and high confidence in the job they were doing, were more open to changing the way they did faith formation with their children.

2.8 Worries and Stresses

2.8.1 Worries

We asked the parents we interviewed to tell us what worries them about their children's futures, for two reasons. First, we wanted to see if they worried about issues related to the faith formation of their children. Second, we wanted to know how they responded to the worries they articulated. Thirty-two of forty-one interview respondents provided answers which are summarized in table 2.27 below. The section following considers some of the more prominent worry themes.

Table 2.27 Worries about their children's futures, parent respondents, interviews, counts[a]

Worries about children's future	Count	Category count	Worry category
Persecution for faith originating with govt. or culture	16		
Sexuality issues	8		
Digital technology and social media	8	40	Culture and State
Peer influence	6		
Male children targeted because of gender	1		
Bullying	1		
May not become or remain Christian	5		
Apostasy in the church	2	8	Faith
May not be a moral or good person	1		
May not have a good job	3		
Mortgage or housing costs	2	6	Economy
Hardships (general)	1		
May not have a good family	3	3	Family
Mental health / health	2		
Climate change	2	8	Other
COVID or another pandemic	2		
Racism and other justice issues	2		
Not worried / out of parents' control	3	3	None

[a] Thirty-two of forty-one respondents provided an answer to this question.

2.8.1.1 Religious persecution

By far the most common worries respondents voiced for their children's futures were the influence of culture and state. In fact, half the parents (sixteen) who talked about their worries for their children, explicitly voiced concern that their children would face persecution or suffering for their Christian faith. The majority of those concerned about persecution did not have their children in public educations. Nine were homeschoolers and one sent their children to a private, Protestant Christian school. Many of the concerns expressed are as startling as they are stark. In this section, respondent attributes will be included with each block quote to provide context for interpretation.

In many cases, the worries expressed were not just about religion but a culmination of issues that are sometimes characterized as "woke" or politically left. This respondent juxtaposed COVID restrictions, pastors arrested for disobeying COVID restrictions, and the regimes of Russia and China.

I would also say seeing this COVID thing, you know. And it's real. I don't doubt it. I just – I think there's other factors behind it that are coming together – more of a world system possibly – and I could see that maybe, you know, maybe causing some persecution depending on, you know, different countries of course, but in Canada we're pretty free to, you know, freedom of religion and freedom of choice, but I see the choice and the freedom of – those freedoms challenged more in this day and age. Like, before you – well, where are you living? You're in Canada here, right? Like, you know, you see your pastors locked up. And like I said, not necessarily that they're doing the right thing, maybe, but you hear of these things, right? And that shouldn't – to me, that's a big warning flag. That's sort of a, you know, maybe you hear that in Russia or China, somebody getting locked up for something they believe or do. I mean, if it's crime and somebody kills somebody or does something, you know, abuse or whatever, fine. But, you know, that's kind of where I see – there is some worry there for sure for the future – for their future – my kids' future. Yeah. (Tradition Other, Male, Weekly Attendance)

Other respondents expressed similar worries adding "the homosexuality things," "Black Lives Matter," censorship, gay pride, the arrest of pastors, and what they saw as apostasy in the church into the mix.

Some concerns about religious freedom were more specifically focused on the "political climate" as a threat to freedom of religion. A New Canadian pastor voiced concern about state "oppression" in his response.

I would say oppression of the Christian faith. So, that will be one. Freedom to choose whatever religion you are in. Yeah, freedom of religion may be another one. And also, I – would be – yeah. Yeah, and also, I believe we have freedom to express ourselves. That is very important. (Baptist, Male, Weekly Attendance)

A homeschool father expressed his worry that the political climate had become "more and more aggressively anti-Christian."

I have a dichotomy on that because a part of me does worry after the flesh, whereas I know that God has prepared them for the time in which they live. **What worries me is the current political climate in Canada and how it is becoming more and more aggressively anti-Christian.** (Baptist, Male, Weekly Plus)

Others talked about "direct and very blatant attacks on Christianity" in Canada. One characterized what Christians are experiencing as a kind of tribulation expected in the book of Revelation.

Most of those who worried about the influence of culture did so within a western cultural frame. A New Canadian respondent from Africa reflected on the morals of the surrounding culture: "*Est-ce que le diable vit dans ce pays?*" ["Does the devil live in this country?"]

A New Canadian from an East Asian background saw a different kind of cultural threat.

> Especially in the western culture, when we teach – our society teach our son – our daughter or son, "Enjoy the freedom." Okay. So, but how incorporate the western ideology to our church culture? Yes, you can enjoy freedom, but doesn't mean the freedom is always good. So, we need to demonstrate to them. But a lot of second generation they say, "No, we like freedom to do anything." I say, "Yes, but there's a restriction." How you know I'm not [indistinct] balance, but at the same time I say how to make the balance between both sides. (Baptist, Male, Weekly Attendance)

In his case, he's trying to figure out how to balance eastern culture against what he sees as western culture in the way he does faith formation with his children. What is common to him, and the others, is the sense there are overwhelming cultural forces making it difficult for him to raise his children as he chooses.

Those who expressed concerns about religious freedom tended to see a circling array of anti-Christian forces choking off religious freedom. Many of these respondents have tried to insulate their children from what they see as hostile forces choosing alternatives to public education such as homeschooling or private Christian schools. Their postures vary from wary to defensive to somewhat combative.

We asked parent survey respondents for their level of agreement with: "I worry that my children will experience religious persecution in Canada." Table 2.28 below presents these data broken out by the parents' religious affiliation tradition, their residential setting (rural or urban), the parents' worship service attendance frequency and select schooling types parents chose to enrol their children in.

Most respondents, sixty-four percent, either moderately or strongly agreed that their children will face religious persecution. Stepping through the group types in table 2.28, the profiles of those who worried most about religious persecution tended to match what we encountered in the interviews: Baptists, those who lived in a rural setting, those who attend worship services most frequently, and homeschoolers.

Table 2.28 "I worry that my children will experience religious persecution in Canada," by tradition, setting, worship service attendance frequency, and select schooling types, agreement (fine and broad), parent respondents, survey, percent[a]

Group	Sub-group	Strongly agree	Moderately agree	Moderately disagree	Strongly disagree	DK / PNTS	Agree	Disagree
		Fine agreement					Broad agreement	
Tradition	Baptist	29	43	18	9	3	71	26
	Other	22	46	11	15	7	68	25
	Other evang. / non-denom.	26	39	20	12	4	64	32
	Pietist	22	41	26	9	2	63	35
	Restorationist	23	39	19	13	6	61	32
	Holiness	21	40	28	11	1	61	38
	Anabaptist	22	37	21	16	3	59	38
	Pentecostal	23	35	22	14	5	58	36
	Reformed	14	43	22	19	1	58	41
Setting	Rural	26	44	17	8	4	70	26
	Urban	23	38	22	15	2	61	37
Attendance	More than weekly	30	41	17	8	4	71	25
	Weekly	23	42	20	11	3	65	32
	2-3 times per month	21	38	25	12	4	59	37
	Less often/Never/DK/PNTS	19	31	14	33	3	50	47
Select schooling types	Homeschool	38	35	15	10	3	73	24
	Christian (excl. homeschool)	26	42	19	11	2	68	30
	Public school	19	41	22	15	4	60	37
All		24	40	20	12	3	64	32

[a] Fine agreement row sections may not add to 100 because of rounding. Broad agreement sections will not add to 100 because of rounding and the exclusion of the DK / PNTS category.

2.8.1.2 Gender and sexuality

Eight of thirty-two parents said they worried about their children being pressured through cultural, organizational or legal means to conform to changing cultural norms around gender and sexuality (see table 2.26 above). It is important to note that most of these parents feel they, or their children, will be targeted because of their Christian beliefs about gender and sexuality.

One respondent expressed worry about her daughter's religious freedom as an aspiring psychologist.

Well, my daughter wants to be a psychologist, so **she's going to have an awfully hard time standing up for sexual values and passing those on without being legally in trouble.** I guess that's the biggest one that stands out right now as she goes off to university. She kind of gets a lot of my mental and prayer – not just prayers, but I think about that stuff a lot. (Baptist, Female, Weekly Attendance)

These interviews took place during Canada's 43rd Parliament when bill C-6, legislation that sought to ban "conversion therapy," was making its way through the House of Commons and Senate. The forty-fourth General Election caused bill C-6 to die before it passed, however, it was reintroduced during the 44th Parliament as bill C-4 and passed in an amended (and somewhat stricter) form.[73] It is likely that C-6 was, at least partially, the cause for this mother's worries.

Other respondents simply saw changing cultural norms in moral or anthropological terms rather than as constituting legal jeopardy.

This father saw the "detach[ment]" of women from sex, by which we believe he means a tendency to see sex as merely a physical act, as the masculinization of women.

Well**, I just think, like – well, one of them is just the – especially since we have daughters – just then becoming more masculine in terms of – not just, like, masculine physically.** That's not what I mean. I just more so mean like even emotionally. And, like, an example is, like, you know, related to sex. **For men, you know, women get more – mostly attached with that, but now you're seeing more and more cases where women are getting detached with sex.** (Evangelical Other, Male, Monthly Attendance)

He went on to explain that he saw this trend as a threat to marriage. Presumably the "masculine" tendency to see sex as merely a physical act also threatens marriage when it is embraced by men – although he did not mention this.

This respondent saw changing sexual norms manifested in "seduct[ive] … types of dressing".

Mm. **The culture. It's very free. It seems that everything is acceptable, so it's just a buffet of anything is good, anything is acceptable. The seduction in terms of certain types of dressing.** (Baptist, Female, Weekly Attendance)

Opinions or views on sexuality and gender issues are often flags in the culture wars the western world is embroiled in. These issues were almost always grouped within a wider slate of issues. This is important to recognize because the wider slate becomes a platform that must be fully

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[73] "Government Bill (House of Commons) C-6 (43-2) - Third Reading - An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy) - Parliament of Canada," https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-6/third-reading, Accessed November 13, 2021; "Government Bill (House of Commons) C-4 (44-1) - Royal Assent - An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy) - Parliament of Canada," https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-4/royal-assent, Accessed February 14, 2022.

accepted or rejected. It makes dialogue (or evangelism) about particular points difficult, because the most important thing becomes one's colours.

2.8.1.3 Digital and social media

Eight of thirty-two parents worried about digital technology and social media as a conduit for negative peer, social or cultural influences (see table 2.26 above). The role of digital media and faith formation has fuller treatment in section 5.

The perceived threat was often talked about in vague terms, and yet there was a hesitancy to criticize technology and instead focus on the content it delivers. These respondents were concerned but did not categorically say the problem was technology.

- [pauses five seconds] Not specifically, in the sense of something specific, but I think I have worries. You know, **the rise of technology, and that can – doesn't have to be, but it can play a negative role.** Yeah. (Reformed, Female, Weekly Plus)
- **Yeah, technology is good; however, it exposes kids to everything at a younger age.** (Pentecostal, Female, Weekly Attendance)

Other respondents, like the one quoted below, named what they saw as the threats.

Well, I don't know. Like, some of the movies they have on now with all the sci-fi, the robots, and all the shooting and killing. And that's another thing – video games. Like, you know, every video game has somebody shooting at somebody or killing something or somebody or – it's just – and I just call it adultery – adultery that goes on. You know, guy's fooling around with another guy's wife. Like, the movies and things that in this day and age are – it's all about that, and I don't appreciate that as a Christian, but that's all out there, right? I mean, eventually they'll learn, but once they're based in – their faith is based on God, not, you know, the worldly influence. (Tradition Other, Male, Weekly Attendance)

Note, for this respondent, these threats are still "out there." He homeschools, which means fewer "worldly influences" have access to his children. In fact, another homeschooler talking about knowing what influences affected her children made just this point:

Obviously, [being aware of what her children are doing is] easier for me because my kids are homeschooled, and I know that most people don't have that luxury or the luxury of being a stay-at-home parent. (Baptist, Female, Weekly Attendance)

Media theorists like Marshal McLuhan and Neil Postman point out that changes in human relations or behaviours introduced by new technologies are more important than the content they deliver.[74] Respondents, however, were primarily focused on content.

- [chuckles] Oh, man. Everything. Just, you know, like, it doesn't take long if you turn on the news or social media or anything like that to just, yeah. I just – I'm not a fan. I don't like that this – immor – this – to me, this society and the immorality of it. (Evangelical Other, Male, Monthly Plus)

- The influence that is put on them, their friends, and the groups they follow, the internet influences. When they watch a video, the message of the videos could – that affects them. (Pentecostal, Female, Never Attends)

Interestingly, one respondent worried about how the content of his teenage son's posts might affect him later in life.

> **So, you know, you've got to worry at seventeen what you write online because it might come up at thirty-seven.** (Evangelical Other, Male, Weekly Attendance)

He focused on the content rather than the platform that might encourage his son to post content that may get him in trouble later in life. As McLuhan said, we are numb to the effects of our culture's dominant technologies.[75]

2.8.1.4 Peer influence

Parents also worried about their children's peer influences. In these responses, parents wrestle with the amount of control (or lack of control) they have over their children's peer influences.

A father with young children worries about the influences of other children in his neighbourhood.

> I know I tend to be more pessimistic. **I think like, "Other people will stamp out my kid's light." You know, it's sort of like they're going to send them out and they're going to be peaceful as doves and wise as serpents. I think they're just like lambs and they're surrounded by wolves right now. That's what it looks like. And so, just trying to participate and have some kids around that are on our street or whatever that are the same age as my oldest. They're not particularly good role models yet. And how**

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[74] Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, 2nd Edition (New York, London, Sydney and Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Revised (Penguin Books, 2005). McLuhan argues that "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs," and Postman, as if to illustrate McLuhan's point, argues that television changes everything it touches, including serious topics like news and religious broadcasts, into entertainment.

[75] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, chap. 4.

involved do I get? And it's my understanding that I can actually pick my kids' friends for a bit.

Thinking ahead to when his children are teenagers, he said:

I can't imagine doing this to teenagers right now with technology. So, I'm just talking about, like, local kids.

His neighbourhood may pick his children's playmates now, but he realizes that "technology" will pick his children's peers later.

Another respondent recognized that when her child goes to college or university, she will have "less control."

[M]y oldest is going to go to grade 12, so after that it's college, university. And so then, **you wonder what kind of group of friends he's going to make outside of the home when you have less control, which is fine.** I think he would be ready for that. But you don't see them, right, or don't hear about them on a regular basis per se. So, a group of friends.

A Catholic mom wondered if her children would have the ability to talk about religion when it was possible others would not respect their faith.

Being around other people and talking about religion, you know, sometimes might be difficult for people or because if you don't know if someone else kind of believes in what you believe. But just to kind of be open and, you know, share your views and opinions. And I don't think the kids had those issues yet because at school they, you know, all the kids are in the same program, in the same religion. But maybe when they grow up that, you know, if they have a conversation with someone else who has a different faith, to kind of not be ashamed and be like, "This is my God. This is who I believe in. I respect who you believe in as long as you respect who I believe in." And just to kind of be okay to talk about it, not to be ashamed to, you know, make a sign of the cross or share about God, right?

A mother of black, teenage males worries that her sons will "get[] caught up with the wrong … people."

The future, basically, fall – hanging out with the wrong people, getting caught up in stuff, like, the world outside. Especially being a young black man in this country, right? Just getting up – just getting caught up with the wrong person and just following people. Like, I will try to teach my boys, "Always be a leader and don't ever be a follower because this world is a dog-eat-dog world." So, it's a lot of stuff, especially living in this country, I mean, as a black young man, right? You just get caught up in so

much stuff, but I try to instill values and always tell them, "Just make sure you always follow – always be a leader and don't follow."

Note the way the world is framed as a dangerous place. It is "dog-eat-dog" and her children might get "caught," as if in a net. Her concern is compounded by what, presumably, she sees as the prejudice against young black men in "this country." The solution is for her sons to lead, almost as if they were pushing on through all these dangers with their peers behind them. The dangers and the solutions, however, are never described as having a nexus with church or faith.

Finally, several respondents, such as this one, worried about the influence of their children's spouses.

> *Donc, um, oui c'est ça, puis ben c'est évidemment on* [indistinct] *des bons conjoints, des conjoints puis qu'ils soient eux-mêmes des bons conjoints surtout euh qu'est-ce qui m'inquiète?*
> > **Translation:** So, um, yes that's it, then well it's obvious we [indistinct] good spouses, spouses then that they themselves are good spouses especially, uh, what makes me worry?

2.8.1.5 Christian faith

Only five of thirty-two respondents said they were worried about their children's ongoing Christian faith. If their fears about religious persecution is that it would result in their children abandoning their faith, then there is an unstated assumption that without persecution their children would remain Christians. Both research and experience suggest this is usually not the case.[76]

A New Canadian respondent, of East Asian background, worries about the "second generation" leaving the faith.

> So, I'm very happy that there's a study like this, and I think it's very important now. And I think here and there I read or heard that – what do I call those – **second generation of Christians, like, the parents are Christians, but the kids. Even though they try to grow up in a Christian family, as they grow older, they probably – the just – many of them, they leave church and then they just turned – they leave the faith behind or – and they just walk the wrong path. That's one of the things [that] really worries me.**

A father said he, even now, has candid conversations with his children about the faith choice ahead of them.

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[76] Penner et al., "Hemorrhaging Faith"; Beth Seversen, *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

> **That they'll fall away from the faith. Though we have candid conversations about that, that's my primary concern, that they'll fall away from the faith.** We have candid conversations about that in the sense of that I say to my children – they all profess faith, even the four-year-old – he'll be five soon – but I've talked, especially to the older ones, about how they will be challenged in their faith, and they need to make decisions at certain points in their lives. They will be called upon to make a decision. Do they really believe it or are they going to reject it for something else? And they have – one of their four grandparents is an atheist, so they know what other people believe. We've talked about other world religions also. So, yeah, that's my biggest fear, that they fall away from the faith. And so, we actively pray about them every day that they would be faithful all their life.

Note, although his children may be confessing Christians at this point in their lives, he believes the more permanent faith decision is in the future. This idea that religious choice is understood to be something that happens after children leave the home is explored further in section 2.3.3.

We were surprised that so few respondents worried about their children's continuing Christian faith given that three-quarters said their children's continuing faith would be a measure of their parental success (see section 2.6.1).

2.8.1.6 Not worried

A few parents said they were not worried about their children's futures for several reasons.

This parent did not worry because he did not see any reasons for imminent concern.

> You know, I haven't really thought of anything that would worry me. I mean, they're not showing any signs of things that I need to be worried about, so I guess it would be – I don't know – experiences that would lead them away from God, I guess. (Evangelical Other, Male, Weekly Attendance)

A Catholic father similarly did not see anything dark looming on the horizon for his sixteen-year-old daughter.

> Ah, I guess at this point – I don't – I wouldn't say anything really worries me. Just, you know, she's going to choose her path in life, and we'll support her any way we can. But yeah, I wouldn't I say she has many worries at this point. I mean, she's still only sixteen, so.

Finally, a New Canadian father from a Reformed background did not worry because his children's futures are "up to God."

Ultimately, um, uh, we cannot prepare our ch – we can prepare our children or all we, all we are physically capable of doing, uh, we can pour out all of our mentorship and our prayers and ultimately, um, it's our prayers that are the only true value of what are the – what our children can turn out to be successfully, um, in the context of the Gospel, as well as being um, uh, uh, great stewards in this world that God has entrusted us with. Um, but **ultimately, we cannot control them, that's only up to God. So, we really, truly can only pray for, um, uh, for their, uh, their spiritual guidance in their lives moving forward.**

2.8.1.7 Other worries

Very few parents mentioned issues like racism, climate change or another pandemic as a future worry for their children. One mother talked about all these things in a general way but did not seem particularly anxious about any of them.

Oh, there's various things and depending on what I read in the news: **Climate change, is there going to be another pandemic, all those different things.** But I try to focus on the now and there's no sense worrying about it. I try to give it – I know it's a saying – give it back to God, kind of thing. Like, He's got it in His plans. He knows what's on the radar. So, He's seen us through this pandemic. He'll see us through whatever else is coming down the line.

Another mother also talked about "global warming" and other issues in a general way. None of these issues seemed particularly pressing or salient, they were more like a basket of goods that her children would carry into the future with them.

I think that there are things like, um, just our global um – like **global warming and the environmental issues that we're facing** and um just all of that definitely – I mean that worries me – I just – that's something moving forward that you can see as the kids are growing up and how does that all work. Um, yeah and they just will have different – different things and the same things that we've had to deal with as a generation and really wrestle through like this last year, **of course we've seen so much, um, focus on justice and injustice and, um, in good and bad ways. So those are things that my kids I know will have to deal with, um, and work through and be a light in and then yeah, they will just face so much more than we do even with social media.**

Although two observations do not make a trend, both respondents who were concerned about wider justice issues were women.

Conclusion

While matters of faith are certainly intertwined with things like public policy and shifts in culture, it seems like those things that could be characterized as part of the culture wars are eclipsing matters of faith and justice as many respondents think about their children's futures. It is striking that as respondents talked about their children's futures, they saw their children sent out into the world alone. The student is alone in her classroom against the faculty that would silence her. The young adult is alone to make her decision about whether to stay in the faith. The social media user is alone in front of his screen exposed to all its influences. The young black man leads, alone at the head of the pack. Their child is going to be out there as a lamb – a single lamb – surrounded by a pack of wolves. It is almost as if it has been accepted that the church will not be part of their children's lives in the future. These parents are mostly worried their children will face all these threats alone, and this is likely to shape how they do faith formation today.

2.8.2 Financial security and illness

Participation in church life is, to some extent, a function of family stability and having the financial means to participate. Our parent interview sample had two single-parent families, both women.

One respondent, a single mother with a chronic illness, also experienced a great deal of financial insecurity. Her responses about faith formation were often evasive if not tinged with a bit of exasperation. At one point, she alluded to the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, where the servants are judged on their respective returns on the money they were given to invest.

> Yeah. So, I'm conscious that I'm preparing the next generation. They [indistinct] when they are [indistinct] about being church in the world and God help us if they are not properly trained with the tools [that] we give them. And when I get to meet Jesus, I wanted Him to say, "Good and faithful servant. You did what you could," rather than, "Oh, my gosh. Like, seriously?"

Her point is that she is working with little health and little money, so she should be commended for doing what she can, not measured against some external community standard.

Another single mother's household is regimented by the clock so that she can provide for her and her children and accomplish all her domestic tasks. She does not have a car. She relies on her friends and neighbours to fill gaps in childcare so she can get to work and provide for her family. At one point in her life, she attended a Pentecostal Church and speaks well of that experience and even continues to identify as Pentecostal although now she never attends.

> I think because I'm a single mom. I have my hands full. Sunday is usually when the church services would be a thing. Well, actually, I did an attempt, and I brought my kids to two church services that were – one of my co-worker's church. They were really welcoming, but it takes so much time. I think that's the problem. Why I'm not joining in is because of the time. I have very few hours with my kids in a week. We're busy. They're at school. And the weekend is our time to be just alone. And so, being that it takes a few hours, and you have to prepare – you get dressed nice. And that's really – it takes efforts and energy from my children and me. And the feeling that they have to behave. I feel like I got to kind of control them the whole time, and it's – that's taking a lot of energy.

These women's stories make clear that sometimes faith formation does not happen because families lack physical and financial resources to make it happen.

To test the prevalence of parents with stressed finances, we asked parent survey respondents to describe their household finances using the descriptors that appear across the first row of table 2.28 below. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said their finances were comfortable, thirty-eight percent said they were tight and only four percent described their finances as stressed.

Table 2.28 Household finances, by age range and gender, parent respondents, survey, percent[a]

Group (count)[b]	Comfortable	Tight, but we are managing	Stressed	PNTS
< 18 (2)	50	0	0	50
18 to 24 (7)	43	29	29	0
25 to 34 (208)	51	43	5	1
35 to 44 (612)	56	38	4	1
45 to 54 (335)	60	36	4	0
55 to 64 (40)	65	30	5	0
65 + (4)	50	0	0	50
PNTS (9)	44	22	0	33
Male (304)	53	45	2	0
Female (913)	58	35	5	2
All (1,217)	57	38	4	1

[a] Row totals may not add to 100 because of rounding.
[b] Caution: Data in shaded rows are based on a small number of observations.

A November 22, 2022 Maru poll of 1,528 Canadian adults found that "High inflation has pushed half (49%) of Canadians and/or their family to make drastic lifestyle changes, with another one-third (33%) who say rising interest rates are pushing themselves and/or their family to the brink of financial despair."[77] Although this poll comes after our study's data collection, it is significant in that the share of Canadians with finances that could reasonably be described as stressed is

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[77] "Pushed to the Brink," Maru Group, November 22, 2022, https://www.marugroup.net/public-opinion-polls/canada/pushed-to-the-brink.

much higher than the four percent in our parent survey. It may be that evangelical parents have better finances than the average Canadian or that those with stressed finances tend not to become evangelicals.

In order to see if chronic illness was a common inhibitor to church participation and faith formation, we asked parent survey respondents if they had a chronic illness that affected their ability to care for their families. Six percent of female respondents said that they did, compared to just three percent of males.

Table 2.29 Has chronic illness that limits ability to care for family, by gender, parent respondents, survey, counts and percent

Has chronic illness	Male		Female	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Yes	8	*3*	53	*6*
No	296	*97*	856	*94*
PNTS	0	*0*	4	*0*
Total	**304**	***100***	**913**	***100***

Comparing our survey results with the Maru poll cited above suggests that financially stressed families are underrepresented in evangelical families with children in the home. While it is possible that this is a sign of God's blessing, it is more likely that financially stressed families are taking a pass on evangelical church. We suspect in an analogous way that parents with chronic illness are also underrepresented in evangelical churches because of the challenges posed by their illnesses.

2.9 Where Parents Turn for Support

Parent interview respondents had relatively unarticulated ideas about the role the church plays in supporting parents as faith formers (sections 1.2 and 3.4). So, we asked parents in the survey where they received faith-formation help in the previous twelve months (see figure 2.20 below).

Figure 2.20 Where parents received faith formation help in the previous twelve months, parent respondents, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N = 1,217. Parents could choose all that apply.
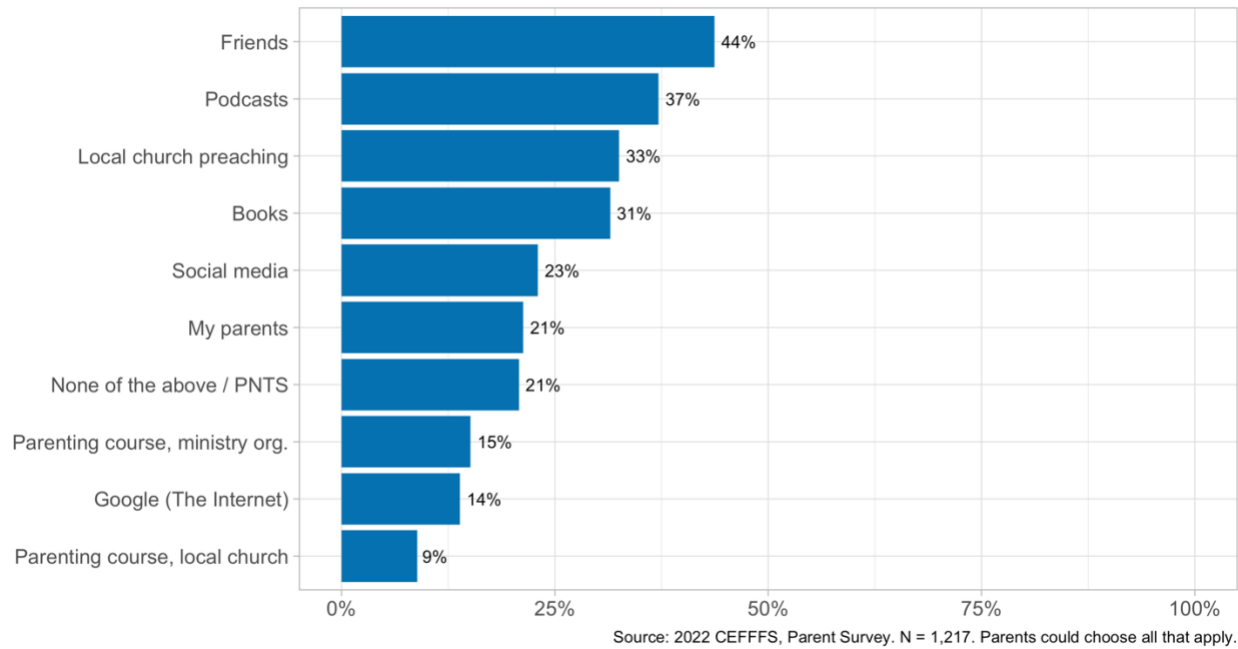
The prevalence of friends as the most popular resource for faith formation help is not surprising based on how highly parents value the church for its community (figure 3.1). In ministry expert interviews, respondents expressed the importance of communities in upholding families and located some kind of formative community outside of the family unit as having a role in supporting parents and reinforcing faith formation in children. Most attention from the ministry experts was given to grandparents and friends.

Parent survey respondents, however, were more than twice as likely to turn to friends over their parents in matters of faith formation. Parents reported they were even less likely to turn to a parenting course hosted by a ministry organization or their local church. The implications of this are discussed in the following sections.

2.9.1 Friends

In family studies literature we consulted for this study, the atomization of the nuclear family from supportive forms of community, such as extended family, was a thread of concern for families of the modern era. Diana Garland, for example, correlated a shrinking family definition with an increase in family privacy. She observed how conceptions of the family, as clans and households living in communal halls and sleeping lofts, shrank down to the nuclear family living in climate-controlled homes with attached garages where each member of the family has their own room. [78] A typical suburban family in Canada could go days without seeing a neighbour or engaging with their community in person. Russel Moore, editor-in-chief at *Christianity Today*,

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[78] Garland, *Family Ministry*, 36–37.

observes a similar trend in the community of faith as well: "In too many cases, [churches] have turned congregations into silos packed with countless minivans full of individual families, coming to receive instruction and then return to their own self-contained units."[79] Assuming these patterns are normative in church, families may view the church as the place where they express their faith publicly, and the home where faith is kept private from the world.

Friends, on the other hand, have rare access to the private family in a way the public does not. Interview respondents described friends, as a resource for faith formation, as providing a confirming presence and solidarity on the parenting journey. An organizational leader observed: "Having a community of believers around is important so that … you don't have this 'I'm alone' mentality. 'I'm the only one going through this.'" Similarly, C.S. Lewis said the expression of friendship is like saying, "… You too? I thought I was the only one." There is a degree of shared life and experience that is required between friends for them to be able to say, "You too?" So, friends often function as affinity groups, people who walk beside others in a similar stage of life, with similar interests and worldview.

One ministry expert identified a "chemistry" in his friend group that was based on affinity and being in the same stage in life, in his case: they were all newly married, with kids, and held the same worldview.

> [W]e all hung out as families, and as couples we enjoyed doing that. But even as the kids got older and that became more of a pain to try to line up babysitters, at least, like, the guys would go out and hang out, and the girls would go out and hang out, and it gave you the friendship and the camaraderie that we were looking for.

He described the enjoyment of "[hanging] out as families" but said that dwindled as doing so "became more of a pain." Instead, the group opted for segregated forms of "friendship and [] camaraderie." Affinity groups often meet the needs of individual members or couples, therefore, friends can forsake togetherness for convenience. Families, on the other hand, must push through even when doing so is "a pain." Additionally, for this respondent, it seemed the fact that they shared the same faith was incidental to the overall sharing of life.

Unlike some communities you're born into or are facilitated by a mutual affiliation, close-knit friendships require intentionality, they do not happen quickly, and they do not happen by mistake. One respondent said friendships take time to cultivate and vulnerability to maintain. Another ministry expert observed that a family is unique because "you can't fake it with your family," but friendships are privileged because you "allow[] each other to see your … not so pretty sides."

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[79] Russell D. Moore, *The Storm-Tossed Family: How the Cross Reshapes the Home* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Books, 2018), 256.

Friends, as it was described, were a carefully chosen community that enjoyed family-like privileges.

> [P]arents can also – you might have individuals in either the church or more friendship families that they've intentionally embraced as family-like people in their life that would have those types of influence in terms of formation of children. (Academic)

One respondent used the term "framily" to connote individuals who have a close, almost family-like bond and relationship. Another expert used the term "surrogate family" to describe his church small group, implying these friends met a need, or replaced a role, often reserved for extended family.

We noticed that friendships built on affinity might start out as a community of faith, but priorities can shift as life becomes more difficult because they lack permanence and formal commitment. Affinity groups can easily turn into casual friend groups or, as one New Canadian pastor observed, a cultural refuge, rather than an arena for Christian discipleship. Regular gatherings with like-minded people are not necessarily wrong, but "ease" and "chemistry" can become the currency of a "framily" community, rather than spiritual maturity and faith formation.

2.9.2 Grandparents

Despite a relatively low percentage of parent survey respondents who said they turned to their parents for faith formation help, ministry experts mentioned grandparents as valuable social and faith supports to parents and children. Grandparents were sometimes described as sharing the burden of raising children and passing on faith within a family by providing a faith legacy. Two experts mentioned their grandparents' examples of faith as formative in their own families.

- *Mon père … il était un missionnaire, un homme de Dieu, il était vraiment un modèle. Il a prié pour mes filles chaque jour de leur vie jusqu'à le temps qu'il est mort. … Et je sais que mes beaux-parents regardent la foi de nos filles, et nos filles parlent dans la vie de leurs grands-parents et aussi leurs parents et prie pour la foi de nos filles. Je pense qu'une chose que j'ai hâte vraiment d'avoir un rôle comme grands-parents sur la formation spirituelle de mes petits-enfants une journée dans l'avenir!*
  > **Translation**: My father … he was a missionary, a man of God, he was really a role model. He prayed for my daughters every day of their lives until he died. … And I know my in-laws look at the faith of our daughters, and our daughters speak in the lives of their grandparents and also their parents and pray for the faith of our daughters. I think one thing I really look forward to is having a role as grandparents in the spiritual formation of my grandchildren one day in the future! (Denominational Leader)

- My wife and I, all eight grandparents were Christians. None of them are alive anymore; they've passed away. **But their parents instilled Christian values into our parents, and we just feel like we're passing the torch onto the next generation.** (Education)

These ministry experts articulated a sense of reverence for passing the legacy they received on to their own children or grandchildren, similar to the way a precious heirloom might be handed down to the next generation. Grandparents, in this sense, affirm what the children learn from their parents and church, and model what it means to live a life of faith.

A First Nations respondent said his great-grandmother not only played a critical role in his faith formation, but she functioned as his primary caregiver. This arrangement was built into his culture so that the grandchild, in turn, could provide care for aging grandparents.

> My great-grandparents raised me on. Part of … the Cree tradition is the firstborn was usually given to the grandparents as a form of social security, if you'd say, because when the grandparent gets old then the person – the child – they're raising would be a teenager, young adult when they're in their sixties or seventies. Then, so, that person or that child would get wood or go hunting and trapping and fishing and help the grandparents out that way. So, that's the condition. I was given to my great-grandmother. She was fifty-eight when I was born.

This unique situation upholds the importance of grandparents, both in what they have to offer proceeding generations and in the societal concern for the welfare of elders as they age. This kind of arrangement does not reflect abdication on the part of parents as its assumed that this same arrangement happens for them. However, other respondents stressed the role of grandparents precisely because the parents they had in mind had abandoned their faith-formation role.

Children effectively stop the generative faith legacy when they lack or walk away from the faith their parents passed on to them. We identified this as a "continuity gap," a generational break in faith transmission. The role of grandparents was sometimes emphasized in these cases as a way to bridge the gap of parents' faith and shoulder the responsibility to influence their grandchildren's faith. One denominational leader said this trend has become more common in churches.

> I think that [grandparents are] very important too. It probably looks different depending on the reality of family life with other members. … **I think that grandparents have a very important role as well in terms of that passing on, that generational story, kind of, of faith. I think of families where the parents maybe don't have necessarily a faith commitment or a strong faith development.** Grandparents might play a critical role in that area of faith formation. I think of many of our churches where their own – we have many grandparents who grieve that their own kids have kind of walked away from church, but they're trying to influence their children – their grandchildren in faith. So, I think that that's it – that's an important kind of area. (Denominational Leader)

A French ministry expert mentioned the crucial role grandparents play in faith formation because of Quebec's recent history of disillusionment with religion.

> *C'est très important ici à Québec parce qu'on sait que la génération des parents a déjà quitté l'église. Je sais dans mon église, beaucoup des gens de mon génération, leurs enfants ne sont pas du tout impliquées dans l'église. Mais les parents, les grands-parents, ont une préoccupation à propos de leurs petits-enfants. Je connais plusieurs couples québécois qui on vraiment un fardeau pour leurs petits-enfants parce qu'ils ont grandi leurs enfants dans l'église, mais ça c'est la génération qui a quitté l'église. Ils ont décidé, bon, l'église n'est pas pour moi. Et maintenant la foi - les grands-parents portent ce fardeau: qui va enseigner mes petits enfants? Qui va partager la foi avec les petits enfants? Je fais ça avec mes enfants, les enfants ont décidé de quitter l'église, quitter la foi, j'ai maintenant un fardeau pour mes petits-enfants.*
>
> > **Translation**: **[I]t is very important here in Quebec because we know that the parent generation has already left the church.** I know in my church, a lot of people of my generation, their children are not involved in the church at all. But the parents, the grandparents, are concerned about their grandchildren. I know several Quebec couples who are really burdened for their grandchildren because they raised their children in church, but this is the generation that left the church. **They decided, "Well, the church is not for me." And now faith – grandparents bear this burden:** Who will teach my grandchildren? Who will share the faith with the grandchildren? I am doing this with my children, the children have decided to leave the church, leave the faith, I now have a burden for my grandchildren.

These experts describe a real burden that grandparents feel about passing their faith on to their grandchildren, mostly in cases where a parent has walked away from the faith or abdicated their role for some reason. When grandparents were mentioned in light of a continuity gap, they tended to step into the faith-formation responsibilities to bridge the generational break that occurred. Section 2.2 describes how parents expressed wanting to do faith formation differently than their parents, but the scope of this project did not include surveying for grandparents who functioned as the faith formers of their grandchildren.

2.9.3 Peers and mentors

Grandparents and "framily" tend to be built around biological and affinity ties; the people that parents might have on speed dial or feel comfortable calling in the middle of the night. But experts highlighted the value of having peer and mentor communities to offset the weaknesses of chemistry-based friendships, or grandparents who are absent or unbelievers. They advocated for intentional relationships fostered by the church community to walk beside parents as peers, and ahead of parents as mentors. A summary of the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of communities, we identified in interviews, is provided in table 2.30 below, peers and mentors will be discussed at greater length following.

Peer communities outside the realm of friendships were described as communities of solidarity that share the same life stage but typically do not find each other on their own. Experts usually talked about churches or organizations facilitating these peer community interactions through events, classes or small groups. In talking about the success of her ministry to parents, one leader said, "people need to live life with one another, and [this ministry] just gave them that forum to do so."

Another organizational leader touched on the challenges of facilitating this kind of community. "[I]s it an organization that creates a program? It's hard to say. Because it's got to be within that genuine faith community." He touches on the difficulties of forging these relationships at an organizational level because relationships happen somewhat organically. This suggests that ministries need not always think in terms of programs or instruction, but simply about providing the platforms for peer groups to find each other and connect.

Table 2.30 Different communities of support identified in parent respondent interviews, descriptions, strengths and weaknesses

Type of community	Description	Strengths	Weaknesses
Affinity groups (i.e., friends, "framily")	Chemistry-based relationships that are built around affinity ties and similar stages of life (can overlap with peer communities)	• Companionship • Fun / enjoyment • Solidarity in stage of life and perspective	• Often meet individual rather than family needs • Commitment changes when affinities or life stages change
Peer communities (i.e., small group, parenting class)	Relationships built on shared life stage and priorities for faith, mutual learning, encouragement and accountability (can overlap with affinity groups)	• Solidarity in stage of life and goals • Intentionality over convenience • Encounter different perspectives	• Sense of chemistry may be lacking • Potential for parent "policing"
Intergenerational mentors (i.e., grandparents, older couples)	Discipleship relationships with older couples who exhibit a life to which parents aspire	• Gain wisdom from experience • Encounter different perspectives	• Cultural / physical distance • Potential for parent "policing"

In speaking further about the impact of peer communities, an organizational leader expanded on the role of other parents on his family faith-formation journey.

> **I think the greatest impact was the community of other parents who were doing it well, who came along and were that encouragement to me to continue in that.** So again, I come back to the motivation of the community of believers … it's certainly the testimony of parents, the evidence that it works. (Organizational Leader)

For this respondent, seeing other parents' victories was analogous to hearing testimonies in church. The testimonies helped him process his own faith and ground the theological concepts and theory in his own life. He warned several times, however, that these communities could not function as "parenting police."

> [T]he last thing you want is for parents who are doing a good job to come along and tell other parents that they're not doing a good job. That will just cause conflict and not accomplish that motivation in the heart. … Parents discipling parents, you know, that coming alongside. Not that – they just have to tread so carefully here because you don't want parents to say, "You know what? I think you need some discipleship."

When a culture of discipleship is promoted, there is an awareness that some people are ahead of others on the same trajectory. The point of discipleship is to help others along a path that you've already travelled. So, discipleship can be harder to implement in a peer community than a multigenerational community because positions along the trajectory are not based on a life stage, but perceived maturities and successes, which according to this expert, can affect the way members receive and apply instruction.

This expert is promoting more of a multilateral model of discipleship, where members are strengthening each other through mutual encouragement and accountability. Peer communities, therefore, recognize they are all in a relatively similar place on their faith trajectory, and are cooperatively learning together rather than engaging in top-down instructional discipleship. But unlike affinity groups, the emphasis is on spiritual growth and community learning.

Ministry experts described mentorship as top-down instructional discipleship through intergenerational relationships. Mentors were usually older couples who exhibited a life to which parents aspired. Like the role of grandparents, these older Christians are meant to serve as legacy builders by casting a vision of faithfulness for younger believers to emulate.

> One of things that, like, one of the – is the bread and butter of our church, is life groups. So, like, seventy percent of our church is in a life group, of our Sunday attendance. **And [indistinct] used to be more affinity-based life groups, so if you're single you meet with singles, if you're a young family you meet with other young families. We're trying to increase the number of intergenerational life groups. So, you have singles, young couples, older couples, you know, and so on, and so on. Right? And that's been really amazing.** (Pastor)

This pastor is intentionally trying to steer his congregation into intergenerational life groups rather than affinity peer groups, presumably because he sees more significance in people learning from varied and more seasoned perspectives, than those that resemble their own. Compare this with some of the "framily" descriptions in the previous section where "friendship," "camaraderie" and "magic" were the mark and measure of the group's efficacy and meaning. One academic lamented the lack of appreciation for intergenerational communities in his response.

> In years past, I think there was a greater sense of, "This is the church that we belong to. This is where we attend." There's just a real sense of connectivity with that, like, the local church body, that family of Christ. And I don't – I think that's recent within, like, the faith journey of the family. I think there isn't necessarily that same value of connectivity with a particular church. … I think parents are trying to find the right program for their kids. And so, then they will – so, they'll sort of go to whatever local church suits whatever is in their mind as to what is best for their kids and the best program for their kids. (Academic)

She said she sees less loyalty to a church or denomination in favour of groups and services that suit individual tastes and perceived needs. There's a disconnect in calling the church "family" and then picking and choosing who and what that family is. Parent survey and interview responses supported the idea that parents tend to attend churches that offer what parents want for their children more than what they need as parents.

Cultural distance may be a barrier to discipleship between generations of parents. Parents of today, parent in a vastly different world than their predecessors and may feel, in the words of an expert quoted previously, mentors act as "parenting police." For an intergenerational model of discipleship to work, understanding and respect must be established between generations. With the rapid pace of change in Canadian society, intergenerational mentorship may resemble cross-cultural ministry, necessitating the work of contextualization to distinguish between parenting approaches that reflect culturally shaped convictions, rather than biblical ones.

2.9.4 Podcasts, preaching, books and social media

After friends as a faith-formation resource, figure 2.20 above shows parents turned to podcasts, preaching, books and social media to advise them on how they should form their children's faith. Parents themselves are being formed as faith formers through the resources they access,

and these resources are noticeably content driven, not relational. Lessons go deeper when they are learned in the context of relationship. In relational discipleship, as with children, there is accountability feedback, and a priority for mutual understanding. Books and podcasts may provide parents with a sense of solidarity but accessed in the privacy of the home or car, parents are not invited into a mutual exchange.

Podcasts, preaching, books and social media can also be affinity-based because they are curated by the parent users. Like patterns in choosing a church, parents may access what they want rather than what they need, and should they hear something they do not like or agree with, they can turn off a podcast or put a book down. In the context of community, parents must grapple with challenges amidst those that know and love them.

We advocate for moving faith-formation help into relational, discipleship contexts facilitated by the church community. In its simplest form, interviews with ministry experts revealed parents can be supported by having a facilitated way to access:

1. friends or peers who will intentionally walk beside parents in solidarity with a priority for matters of faith; and
2. mentors who will share their wisdom from experiences in instructive and guiding ways.

Some churches and organizations might wish to enter social media and podcast spaces because data shows they are frequently used by parents, but ministry institutions should make concerted efforts to call parents to engagement; encouraging them to process content in community.

Conclusion

Learning where parents turn for help is paramount to understanding what parents look for in faith-formation resources and how the church can step in to provide guidance. Parents said they valued friends for help in areas of faith formation and said in section 3.1.1 that they valued their churches for community. But we also know from other responses that many parents, like curating a playlist of their favourite songs, are in the habit of drawing on the resources they want and are perhaps missing the resources they need.

The ministry experts we interviewed for this study suggested churches can respond by promoting communities that intentionally work together to pursue Jesus and guide their children to walk in faith. This might mean providing forums for parents to access peers and mentors or reassessing the priorities of existing groups to gauge if these communities are striving for intentional, mutual edification or have become affinity groups that are based on ease and convenience. Affinity groups can provide important emotional and relational support to overwhelmed parents, but where the church is concerned, the priority is to ensure parents have constructive, spiritual discipleship.

3. Church Role

An important part of this study was learning how parents viewed and valued the church's role in the discipleship of their children. A key difference between qualitative interviews with family ministry experts and evangelical parents was the opinions about the quality of parental faith-formation efforts happening in the home. Family ministry experts and pastors tended to be pessimistic in their assessments of how parents were doing in faith formation and assumed a lack of faith-formation engagement was due to a lack of parental capacity or confidence. Section 2.7 revealed that parents were surprisingly confident, especially the less involved and integrated they were at church. This section explores the role of the church in faith formation and gives due attention to the differences between pastor and parent responses.

3.1 Church of Choice

3.1.1 Church is valued for social connections

To understand parents' valuation of the church, interview and survey respondents were asked why they attend their local church. Most interview respondents gave social reasons for attending their church, tabulated below.

Table 3.1 Reasons for attending church, parent respondents, interviews, counts[a]

Reason for attending	Count
Family / personal connection	12
Community ethos	9
Children / youth program	3
Needs met	3
Cultural alignment	2
Proximity	1
Theological alignment	1

[a] Thirty-one parents out of forty-one parent interviews provided reasons for attending their church.

Responses favouring social connections came from a range of traditions, rates of attendance, and equally from men and women. Those who attended church less than monthly, or identified as Catholic[80], usually chose their church based on family history: "all of the funerals have been there, you know, weddings, stuff like that," or, where a more devout family member attended: "I found [my church] through my brother and his wife."

Interviews with respondents who attended church more frequently revealed they valued connections with others in the same life and demographic stage as them. One mother said, "I'm not interested in programs, I'm interested in connections, relationships, that kind of thing." We learned parents value these relationships for parental peer support as well as peer and adult

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[80] Our target population was evangelical parents. Two Catholic respondents identified themselves as evangelical in response to our screening survey. Their Catholic religious affiliation was determined in the interview.

socialization opportunities for children. For example, one respondent said she chose her church because of the socialization potential for her homeschooled children.

> There's a lot of good people at the church, which is nice. There's [sic] some children. That was important to us, that we would be able to attend a church that had children. Unfortunately, there are plenty of churches in our area that they really have a very older population and because, again, homeschooling, we wanted to make sure they were able to find friends at church. It's – they hold the same beliefs that we do. I mean, I don't think any church is going to be exactly necessarily what you think, but we do hold the same doctrine.

Although she "hold[s] the same doctrine" as the church she attends, this seemed secondary to the necessity that the church offers a community with children and "a lot of good people." Another respondent said he changed denominational affiliation when he got married and as they looked for a church, they landed on the one in which they felt the most comfortable. Comfort, he explained, meant finding a smaller church and sharing the "the same mindset and thinking" as other families in attendance.

> [W]e had tried two or three churches and [were] comfortable being in one church. Not that big. … It just seems to be a – we have a good faith community – a good community of believers. You know, we're of the same mindset and thinking that – and the younger families. There's [sic] still some younger families. That makes a difference too. So, that's why we go to the church we do.

Some New Canadian and culturally diverse respondents found communities of fellowship that reinforced their cultural values as well.

> [T]he current church I'm with is also a cultural church. So, we are, you know, we're a church of similar culture and same denomination, of course. There's a strong community bond between our culture, so that helps a lot.

Even though theological agreement might contribute to the ease of forming relationships, these examples do not focus on it. Instead, demographic and cultural alignment were mentioned as being of chief importance to the parents in the interview sample.

About half of survey respondents placed a similarly high value on community (figure 3.1 below), especially female respondents. Since the survey represents a devout sample, it is consistent with the qualitative findings to see "community" rank higher than the more popular "Family / personal connection" in the interviews. This suggests the devout are more judicious about choosing the people they want to be with and expose their children to, in a church setting. The lack of import placed on family connections could reflect increased mobility and distance between extended families; however, it might also reflect how parents are diverging from their own upbringings (see section 2.2) or how grandparents rarely serve as faith-formation resources (see section 2.9.4).

Figure 3.1 Reasons for attending church, English-speaking parent respondents, survey, percent
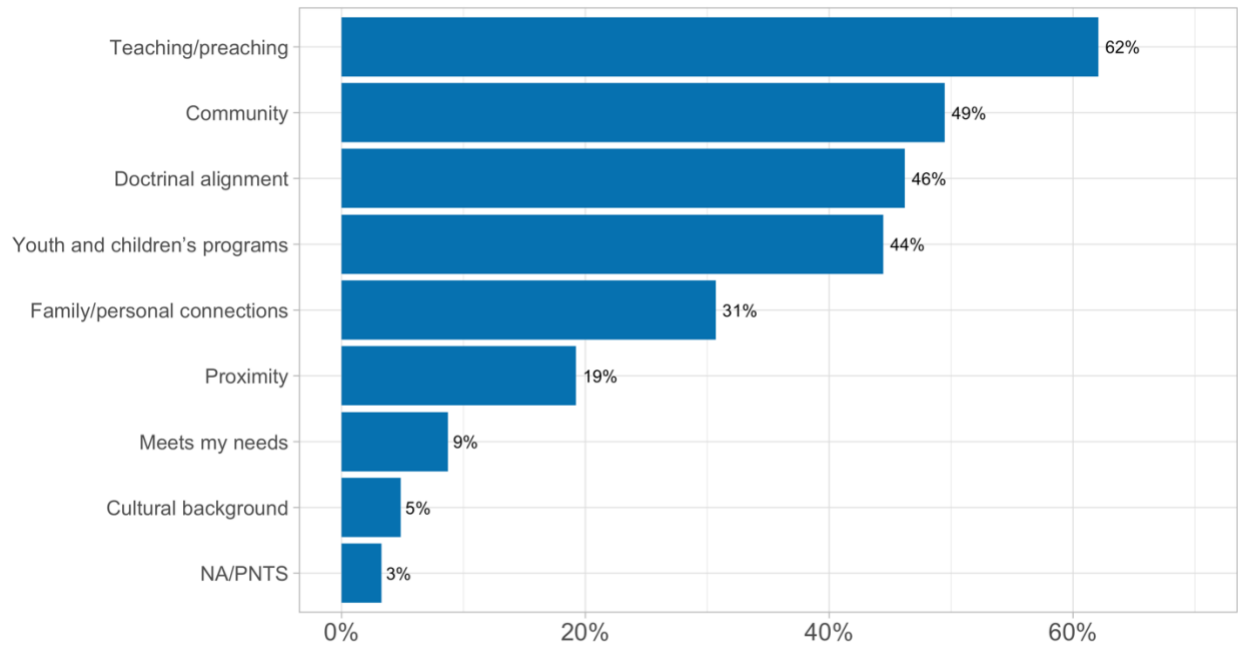
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N English respondents = 1,134. English respondents could choose up to three reasons from a list of eight. A programming error resulted in French respondents being able to choose up to eight reasons while English respondents were limited to three.

Church leaders should understand the value parents place on the existence of quality social connections at a church. For those who are less involved at church, this meant having a close connection who serves as an anchoring presence for them at the church. For more involved and dedicated attendees, a church is valued for meeting their needs for social interaction, peer relationships and like-minded community.

3.1.2 Church is valued for didactic teaching

One area in which the survey sample differed from the interviews, was that "Teaching / preaching" was the most popular reason respondents gave for attending their local church. Figure 3.1 above shows approximately two in three parents said they attended their church for the teaching and preaching it offered. Doctrinal alignment ranked noticeably lower, suggesting parents value the quality of preaching over the theological persuasion and the community ethos at a church. This resembles how doctrinal alignment was secondary to the quality of the community that interview respondents found in their church.

Parents' expectations that the church provide didactic teaching for children was a common theme in our interview responses. The prevalence of teaching and preaching as a reason parents attend their church could also be an indication of what they value for their children. This is expanded on in the following sections.
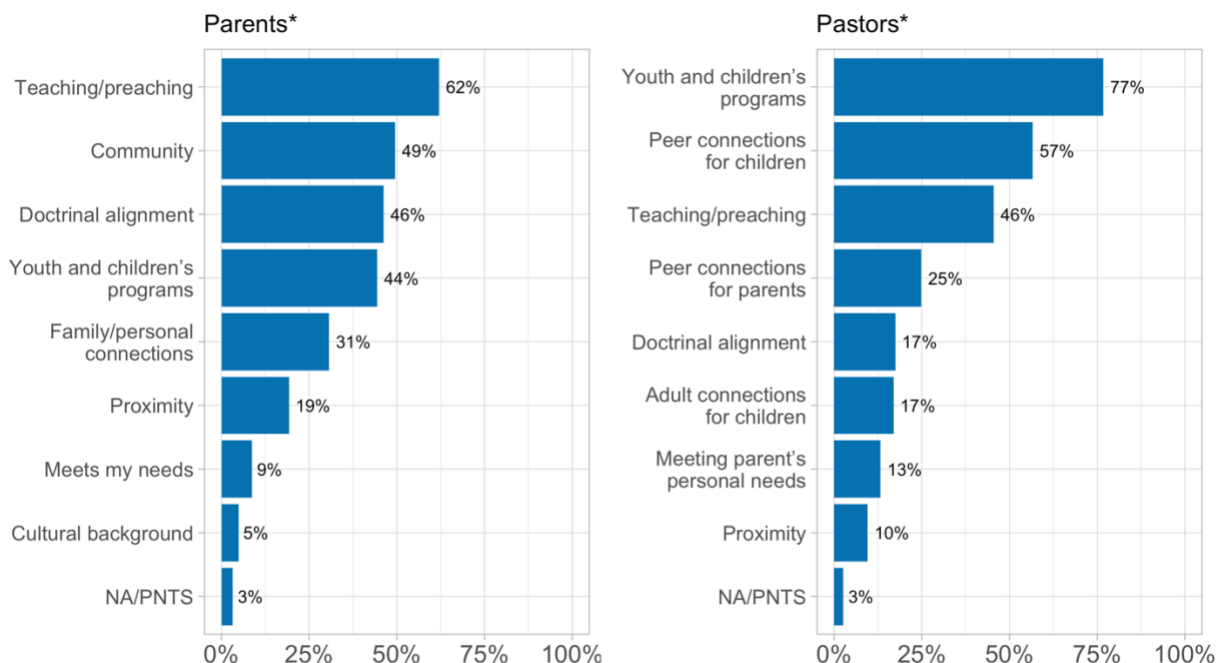
3.2 Pastor and Parent Perspectives on Faith Formation

Pastors who participated in the survey were recruited via referral sample and may or may not have served at churches that corresponded with parent survey participants. Pastors answered a series of parallel questions to those found on the parent survey so parent and pastor responses could be compared. Comparisons between the pastor sample and the parent sample simply represent general observations about the church and family faith formation, they do not provide mutual assessments.

We asked pastors on the survey what they thought parents typically valued from the church in support of their (the parents') faith formation efforts with their children. Seventy-seven percent of pastors said parents saw youth and children's programs as the church's primary value proposition with respect to supporting parents in the faith formation of their children. After programs, fifty-seven percent of pastors supposed parents saw peer connections as the most valuable support to their faith formations efforts.

Figure 3.2 below compares pastors' valuations of the church on behalf of parents with respect to faith formation and parents' valuations of the church in general.

Figure 3.2 What parent respondents value in the local church and what pastors said they thought parents valued in the local church, English-speaking parent respondents, English-speaking pastor respondents, survey, percent

Parents*

Teaching/preaching	62%
Community	49%
Doctrinal alignment	46%
Youth and children's programs	44%
Family/personal connections	31%
Proximity	19%
Meets my needs	9%
Cultural background	5%
NA/PNTS	3%

Pastors*

Youth and children's programs	77%
Peer connections for children	57%
Teaching/preaching	46%
Peer connections for parents	25%
Doctrinal alignment	17%
Adult connections for children	17%
Meeting parent's personal needs	13%
Proximity	10%
NA/PNTS	3%

2022 CEFFFS. N English-speaking parents = 1,134. N English-speaking pastors = 189. Respondents could choose up to three responses.
* Pastors asked what parents value for the faith formation of their children, and parents asked why they attend the local church.

There appears to be symmetry in the top two values pastors and parents identified. Assuming youth and children's programs are a form of teaching and preaching, and interpreting peer

connections as a form of community, pastors seem to home in on the same valuations parents listed, but as they apply to children.

According to interviews, tension arises when the value of what a church offers to parents is at odds with what it offers to children. One example from the interviews was the case where a church had a high-quality youth program, but the parent did not enjoy the preaching. We also saw in responses earlier, that parents have demographic preferences for their children when it comes to choosing churches: "That was important to us, that we would be able to attend a church that had children." Typically, we found parents tended to choose or stay in a church for what it offered their children, despite personally experiencing a lack of preference or spiritual benefit from the church.

3.2.1 What parents expect out of children and youth programs

Interview respondents described the nature of faith formation primarily in terms of teaching and didactic instruction. So, when detailing their expectations for the church's contribution to children's faith formation, it comes as no surprise that nearly half of interview respondents said they expected the church to provide doctrinal teaching and life application for their children.

This comes out in the parent survey through the high emphasis on teaching and preaching, and the lower valuation of youth and children's programming. Devout parents seem to be less concerned about engaging children and youth content delivery and more about the quality of that content. In agreement with the mother quoted earlier who said she wanted "connections" over "programs," "teaching" over "programs" seems to be another theme for the devout.

Expectations for the church to provide learning opportunities for children was shared equally between home and public schooling respondents. However, homeschoolers tended to view the church's teaching role as supplementary, rather than complementary, to the instruction children received at home.

> [M]yself or my wife will be teaching our children. And then, we view the role of the church, as corporate worship, as a supplement to that. So, not to say that we differ theologically, but we feel it is our role to be the primary educators and informers to pass on information, and the church is there to support us.

Half as many homeschooling parents as those who employ other kinds of schooling mentioned the need for age-appropriate and engaging content for their children, indicating homeschooling families might be less concerned with the church teaching children directly.

A limited role for the church in the faith formation of children may be an outworking of sphere sovereignty convictions, which assert that God has ordained an ordered world in which each domain, or sphere, has its proper area of responsibility.[81] In this case, faith formation of

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[81] Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper*.

children is assigned to the sphere of the family, and not the church. A few parent interview respondents said the church's duty was, instead, to equip and encourage *parents* to fulfill their faith-formation duties rather than have a role in instructing children.

3.2.2 The kind of relationships parents expect for their children

When describing their relationship expectations for the church's role in faith formation, parents usually described the church as filling a social gap for their children. They expected the church to provide opportunities for children to rub shoulders with other Christian children and Christian adults.

We did notice a disparity in the kind of community parents desired for their children based on their schooling type. In interviews, parents of publicly educated children valued the opportunities for peer relationships at church. Homeschool parents also mentioned peer socialization for their children, but, significantly, twelve out of fifteen homeschooling parents mentioned the importance of developing adult connections for their children. Many studies have confirmed a positive trend in non-familial, adult connections for nurturing a lasting faith in children and youth.[82]

The survey did not measure which kind of community was valued at church, but interviews suggested homeschoolers and public schoolers view the church's role in terms of filling the social deficits their children experience in their schooling contexts. Homeschoolers are more likely to connect with Christian peers through homeschooling cohorts or with their Christian siblings but may lack a diversity of non-relative adults speaking into their lives. Publicly educated children might lack Christian peers, but probably interact with more adults who serve as role models in school and extracurricular contexts.

Translating these desires to parental goals, we can surmise that parents who want more adults in their children's lives will prefer intergenerational settings over age-segregated activities. Parents looking for influential peer relationships for their children might be more focused on the behaviour of the children sitting in Sunday school, or resistant to efforts to bring unreached youth into youth group, rather than the quality of content being offered to their children.

There is also a story in what is missing from these responses. Expectations and valuations of the church were rarely framed in terms of establishing a sense of belonging or corporate identity for children. Very little was said about the importance of integrating children into the life and community of the body of Christ. Robert Keeley's thesis in *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith: How the Church Can Nurture the Spiritual Development of Kids* suggests authentic faith is developed when children meaningfully participate in the ministry of the church community.[83] Gordon T. Smith, president of Ambrose College, similarly observes: "Even though we are called

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[82] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*; Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, "Renegotiating Faith."

[83] Robert J. Keeley, *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith: How the Church Can Nurture the Spiritual Development of Kids* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2008), 14–15.

to have faith in Christ, the community fosters and encourages this faith in us, including the individual who is coming to faith in Christ."[84]
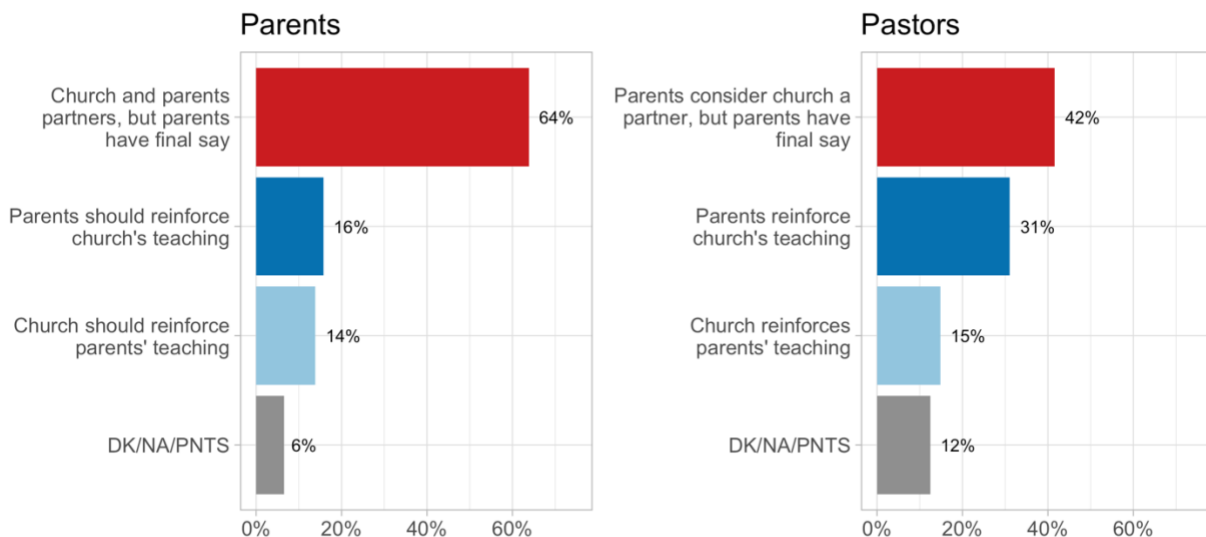
Interview responses reflected a notion that the church exists to serve children's individual social and intellectual needs rather than finding a place for children to serve and belong in significant ways. What was lacking across all categories of attendance, schooling and theological traditions, was a view of the church as a place to integrate and encourage children's faith as members of a community. We acknowledge there are different theological perspectives on the membership of children in communities of faith, usually as they pertain to views on baptism. We invite different traditions to interpret this observation in ways that suit their theological persuasion.

3.2.3 Partnering in faith formation

To understand what role parents wanted for the church in the faith formation of their children, we surveyed parents asking what a church-parent partnership looks like.

The question was posed to parents in the follow way: "Which of the following best represents how you partner with your local church to form the faith of your children?" Respondents chose from the responses charted in figure 3.3 below. Instead of estimating how parents would answer the question, pastors were asked to answer with the approach that best represented how they partner with the parents in their congregation to form the faith of their children.

Figure 3.3 Parent and pastor responses to how parents should partner with the church in the faith formation of children, percent

Parents

Church and parents partners, but parents have final say	64%
Parents should reinforce church's teaching	16%
Church should reinforce parents' teaching	14%
DK/NA/PNTS	6%

Pastors

Parents consider church a partner, but parents have final say	42%
Parents reinforce church's teaching	31%
Church reinforces parents' teaching	15%
DK/NA/PNTS	12%

2022 CEFFFS. N parent respondents = 1,217. N pastor respondents = 209.

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[84] Gordon T. Smith, *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion & Authentic Transformation* (InterVarsity Press, 2001), 36.

Almost two-thirds of parents said they partnered with the church in the faith formation of their children. In earlier drafts for this question, we wanted to push respondents to choose between the parents or the church as having the main faith-formation voice in children's lives, but we received encouragement from partners to include a middle-ground option. Survey responses confirm this was the right decision as most parents, and about two-fifths of pastors, believe they work in partnership. Parents who said the church should reinforce parents' teaching may hold to sphere sovereignty views of church and family like those who emphasized the supplementary role for the church in the interview sample.

Only forty-two percent of pastors said they worked in partnership with parents. Although the pastor sample was much smaller than the parent sample, there was a significant difference in how church leaders viewed the church-parent relationship when it came to children. Pastors were twice as likely than parents to say parents deferred to the church in matters of faith formation. This could mean two things:

1. Pastors tailor their ministry approach to those who need it most.
2. Pastors are mistaken about what parents are reinforcing for their children.

The difference could be a result of the parent sample representing a more devout and competent faith-forming population of families than a "typical family" that pastor respondents were asked to evaluate.

Surveys are limited in providing insight into the terms of a church-parent partnership. In addition to providing doctrinal instruction and meeting relational deficits for their children, parents supported them through the provision of safety, service opportunities and supplies. Happily, in most cases, respondents described their churches as already providing these supports and not as something they wished the church would undertake.

Safety

Five respondents mentioned the church as a safe place for children to explore their faith. For some, it was a spiritual and intellectual safety, free from judgement and ridicule.

- I think that we need to be real with one another instead of – being afraid that if I let people know what I'm struggling with that I won't look like I'm a good Christian. And that really, to create those safe places where people can – where people can be working these things out. And yeah, safe and honouring places. Unfortunately, church isn't always a safe place.

- [Church] gives them a place to ask questions in a space of, you know, similar-minded people and learn and grow in a safe setting.

One homeschooling mother shared her misgivings about the social environment in a public school, and painted the church as a trusted venue for safe socialization.

> [W]e can't just keep our child socializing with our children. That would be unhealthy. They need a group of friends and it needs to be done in a safe place – in a safe manner and respectful manner.

Another mother communicated the importance of physical safety stemming from a trauma she had suffered when she was a child.

> [Church is] always a safe haven for them. Lots of mentors there. If they ever need anything, we can reach out and there's always somebody there to help them and guide them … it has always been important to me that there's somewhere [my children] can go and they can – people they can trust – and be there.

Service

We saw an appreciation for service opportunities from many parents in the interview sample. Service opportunities were another way the church provided access to something that parents could not offer to their children (like certain kinds of relationships).

- [The church] also give[s] [the youth] service opportunities throughout local community, so ways to live out their faith. All exposure to the calling that God places on us to reach out to others, regardless of their faith background or the lifestyle they've chosen or their neediness or whatever. We're called to embrace all.

- Well, we're very missional focused in the community … [t]he premise of our church is to be in the community and serving the community and also as a church living in community together. So, that's what I'm hoping to pass on to them, that they need community, and they need to be reaching out to others around us.

- So, we're pouring into the church. The church is pouring into us. So, yes, I think it's equally – it is important in helping us develop our children's faith through some of the things I mentioned in terms of services for youth, the Sunday sermon, outreach to local communities – our children can be a part of that as well.

Five parents said service opportunities were ways the church could expose children to other walks of life or instill an ethos of "reaching out" and "living out their faith." Those that emphasized service opportunities tended to value it in terms of benefit to the children who participate rather than the work they were doing.

Supplies

A few parents mentioned how they appreciated that children were provided Bibles or activities for use at home. One respondent, whose husband had stopped attending church and no longer

supported her faith-formation efforts in the home, mentioned the church provided Bibles to her children, which she felt supported her while she was struggling to make faith a priority at home.

> They supplied the kids with new Bibles – Action Bible. They bought Bibles for all the kids. Yeah, and just all the kids programming that, well, hopefully it will start up again soon: VBS, kids club, the family Bible studies and then Sunday school too … I think it's good that it's not just coming from me, especially since my husband maybe isn't much on board anymore. So, I feel it's valuable for them to hear it from different sources and to also see it played out in different families at church and in different situations.

Other respondents mentioned the value in the church providing supplies, especially during COVID.

- [T]hroughout COVID [the church] … actually dropped by, brought us materials, some new children's Bibles, or crafts, things, like, that they would have done in Sunday school but they can't, and they'll, you know, give us all the information so we can teach the lessons. So, some of the Sunday school ladies from the church will come and leave things on our porch with, as I said, information or Bible studies or books.

- [P]*endant COVID, il y a eu une initiative que les enfants se réussit aussi autour de via Zoom pour écouter la parole de Dieu aussi. …*[M]*on pasteur parfois qu'il passait à la maison qui est laissé des brochures pour permettre aux enfants de lire à la maison.* (New Canadian)
  > **Translation**: During COVID, there was an initiative that children also get on via Zoom to listen to the Word of God too. … [M]y pastor sometimes he passed by the house and left brochures to allow the children to read at home.

No parents said outright they expected the church to provide them with materials or supplies, but these three parents mentioned the provision of supplies as a role the church employed to their benefit and thought to include these examples in their response. Some of the families described earlier, likely homeschoolers with a sphere sovereignty framework, may see this kind of church role as an overstep. However, some circumstances may demand such intervention, as was the case of the woman with an unsupportive husband, the New Canadian respondent, and the desperation for activities that came with COVID lockdowns.

3.3 Church Engagement

In interviews, we asked parents what church activities, if any, their children participated in regularly. Although this question was focused on children's activities, parents often mentioned the ways they were involved at church as well.

By far, the most popular activity that families participated in at church was the worship service. The four respondents who did not mention worship considered themselves never or yearly

attenders, suggesting worship service attendance is a baseline for considering oneself a participant at church. In most cases, the whole family attended church with the same frequency, even if they did not all participate in the same activities while there.

Families that attended church together and attended regularly, tended to have higher rates of participation in church activities, together and apart. Table 3.2 below tabulates the broad activities family members participated in, filtered through who attended church and how often.

Table 3.2 Church activity participation by worship service attendance frequency and attendees, parent respondents, interviews, counts

Activity	Weekly or more		Less often	
	Whole family	Part of family	Whole family	Part of family
Children / youth programs (with midweek component)	14	1	1	0
Children's Sunday school	7	0	3	0
Adult programs	11	0	2	0
Adult volunteers with children's programs	7	1	0	0
Faith-based summer camp	2	0	0	0
Nothing outside of worship service	2	3	1	0

We noticed from interviews that church participation was often impacted by parental priorities, gender, and other factors like employment and socio-economic status. The following sections examine some of these factors that impact church engagement.

3.3.1 Different priorities of family church engagement

Family and children's ministry practitioners navigate different, sometimes opposing, parental priorities for the church as it concerns their children. Parents who say to pastors, "Just let the kids have fun," and those who say, "Just teach the kids the Bible," are usually saying a lot more about themselves than the ministries they are trying to dictate.

In interviews, ministry practitioners described different tiers of parental engagement in faith formation that communicate the ways families prioritize and live out their faith. One academic put it this way:

> Some [parents] would probably say, "No, [faith formation is] essential to who we are as parents." And some may say, "It's important." And some may possibly have it there in the background but may be not sure necessarily what that looks like or how it's lived out.

Not all ministry experts used these categories, but tiers were consistently assigned based on parents' competence for faith formation, the regularity with which they reinforced the faith at home and the level of engagement parents had with the church. We labelled the tiers dedicated, dependent and delegated.

Dedicated

Dedicated parents were characterized as actively taking on the role as children's primary faith formers. They were described as exhibiting a high degree of knowledge and commitment in matters of faith as well as having an articulated sense for what role the church should play in their children's faith formation. Many parents represented in the survey exhibited the qualities of dedicated parents. Experts described dedicated parents as "engaged" and "committed," often mentioning how matters of faith were a priority for these parents and what little degree of help they needed from the church and other experts. For example:

- I can see some families, they do that without any sort of – they don't need any help from me, so to speak. (Pastor)

- I know – so there's the people that are like, they're going to do this anyway. They're going to go out. They're going to find the devotional books or the Bible. They're going to just leave the Bible on their table and they're going to read it every morning with their kids. (Subject Matter Expert)

Ministry experts often connected capacity for faith formation to whether parents had a Christian upbringing or not. Section 2.2 discussed how many parents raised in a Christian home wanted to change the approach to faith formation that their parents took with them. While there are elements they may seek to change in reaction to their upbringing, there remains an advantage to not building from scratch. Like a family recipe, these parents may change some of the ingredients or proportions to make it their own, but they already know what goes into raising children of faith.

Another mark of a dedicated parent was they possess a mature level of faith. Parents must first, have genuine faith, and second, know how to effectively pass it on to their children. To make faith a priority and to build a life of intentionality around that faith in the home, assumes parents value their faith personally but also have the capacity to express it in instructive and exemplifying ways. Once again, ministry experts we interviewed insisted that capacity is greatly increased if parents themselves were raised in a Christian home.

When it appears that parents do not make faith a priority or faith is one of many priorities, the qualities of dedication (priority, commitment, faith, intentionality) are called into question. The next set of categories for faith-formation engagement address the trend that our experts observed outside of what was considered ideal.

Dependent

The mark of dependent parents is the tendency to regularly reinforce *external* faith lessons from the church, or other ministries, rather than integrate faith in intentional or spontaneous ways at home. Ministry experts described "dependent" parents as those who:

1. frequently attend church;
2. are heavily interested in take-home resources; and
3. exhibit faith-formation capacity deficits.

A denominational leader with children's ministry experience described dependent parents in this way:

> It could be just a lack of – maybe they didn't experience that as a kid, maybe they grew up in the church, but church – the experience was very much based on the church program and not family life. Because that, I think, generationally, that was the emphasis, right? You more focused on what was happening in the church versus really what we're doing in our family at home, kind of thing. (Denominational Leader)

This leader mentioned two categories that were attributed to dedicated parents – priorities and Christian upbringing. For dependent parents, however, faith is considered one among many competing priorities, so the primacy of their faith is not communicated as strongly to children through how parents have organized their lives at home. Dependent families also seem to model a faith that is church- or program-centric rather than something that is relevant and integrated into all aspects of life. This leader suggests dedicated parents raise dedicated children and dependent parents raise dependent children.

A striking component to dependent parents in faith formation is that they may be difficult to distinguish from dedicated parents. Experts said these kinds of parents might reinforce memory verses at home, volunteer as a youth leader and use the language of an "insider," but the main idea is their interaction with their children is about making sure *external* lessons are applied. It is analogous to making sure they did their homework. When parents rely too heavily on the church to reach their children, they not only overlook the strength of their own presence and example in forming their children's faith at home, but they also show by their example that their children should similarly rely on someone else to drive their faith journey. Churches who experience this kind of reliance in their ministries may be giving parents proverbial fish for children to eat rather than teaching parents to fish so they can feed their children.

Ministry experts suggested parents at this level of engagement would say "faith is important" but struggle to implement its essentiality in their lives. The challenge for ministry leaders is to:

a) help parents grow into a level of independence and understanding by increasing parental capacity for faith formation, whether they are aware of that need or not; and
b) change systems that enable dependence, especially because it has a generative effect.

Church leaders we interviewed were convinced that dependent parents saw their role as faith formers as a work in progress. Survey data indicates the more willing parents are to admit they are not doing a good job at faith formation in the home, the more open they are to change. It was parents who *strongly agreed* they were doing a good job that were less open to change as

they rarely attended church. Many of these parents would likely fall into the delegated category of parental engagement; discussed next.

Delegated

Delegated faith formation is the lowest level of parental faith engagement short of having no faith engagement at all. Parents still find some value in faith but exhibit a disconnect between how that recognition impacts their priorities. This usually translates to lower frequency of church attendance. If dedicated parents are those who say faith is "essential," and dependent parents say, "faith is important," those with a delegated faith formation approach might say faith has value but is something that happens "in the background."

If dedicated parents are those who say faith is "essential," and dependent parents say, "faith is important," those with a delegated faith formation approach might say faith has value but is something that happens "in the background."

Ministry experts said regular reinforcement of the faith is almost nonexistent in the "delegated" home because parents understand their role in terms of *exposure* (previously explored in section 2.3.4). As a result, ministry experts said these kinds of parents exhibited a low capacity for faith formation. Even if they were correct in this appraisal, survey results showed the Dunning-Kruger effect at play in these kinds of parents (section 2.7).

According to the ministry experts we interviewed, many parents do not want to be equipped to do the work of faith formation in the home. They want church to be entertaining and engaging for their children to inform a faith choice, rather than form a true faith. A ministry expert shared about a survey she conducted in her church asking, "What do you want in regard to faith at home?" The responses she received were telling:

> [Parents] said, "We want a puppet show in the church service!" Or "We want this in the church service!" And so, their brains just aren't there for the most part. Like, "We just want you to do it. Please just do it." (Subject Matter Expert)

There are similarities to the previous category in the over-reliance on the church but, in this case, dependence erodes into a form of substitution. Where dependent parents might want church leadership and resources within arm's reach, parents in the delegated category willingly put their children into the arms of experts. Experts were all too familiar with this approach to faith formation in their respective ministry experiences.

- [Parents] look for us to teach their kids what they're supposed to know, whether that's through a children's ministry program or camp. "Okay, I'm going to send my child there, and they'll get to know what they need to know while they're there." (Pastor)

- [Parents think,] "We have to bring our kids to Sunday school, and they have to learn about God." And whereas my thinking is, "You know what? You need to teach them about God at home." (Pastor)

- I think there's a pervasive idea that – like a heavy reliance on external sources and teachers and organizations that parents have for relying on for their children's faith development. Whether that be sending them to Christian school and say, "Yup, I've done my part," or sending them to camp or, you know, trusting others. (Organizational Leader)

Notice how ministry experts said parents feel a sense of satisfaction in their delegated approach to faith formation. This confirms the number of survey responses among less frequent attenders who believed they were "doing a good job at faith formation." Parents acquiring and relying exclusively on "external sources and teachers and organizations" was precisely how they believed they were fulfilling their faith-formation responsibilities.

Experts described a mindset among some parents that they are content to pass off faith-forming activities to the church because church leaders are the perceived experts that are paid or set apart to do that work. Parents fulfill their faith-formation responsibilities by getting their children to the activities staffed by experts. Some ministry experts said this attitude of satisfied detachment in parents is promoted by a widespread culture of delegation.

- Parents are sending their kids everywhere to get everything. You know, we send them out for sports lessons, we send them out and we let the professionals do those things. (Denominational Leader)

- [W]hat ends up happening is, like, parents would drop their kids off and maybe sit in the back of the room during dance class or pick them up afterwards. That, I think that same rhythm can happen with church. (Academic)

- When I saw my child had certain skills and capacities and other things were not really of interest, I would follow her interest on. And I would give her the best teaching, I would expose her, I would do everything I could to find what matched her orientation, her disposition, even though it really – some of the things weren't normally done in our church. (Academic)

It seems that parents who delegate children's development of all kinds to professionals start to view their role as coordinators or facilitators to help their children access resources. Parents decentralize their formative role in children's lives by functioning more like agents who accumulate quality experiences for their children. In a largely delegated approach to life, faith formation becomes one more tool or experience for success rather than the foundation for it. And the notion that children need "agents" to purchase and coordinate resources on their behalf suggests parents are facing pressure to do so.

What is important for church leaders to understand, is experts largely understood this phenomenon as an outworking of parents' sense of inadequacy to form their children's faith. Our extensive conversations with parents suggest parents understand it as doing their job and doing it well.

If faith formation as delegation to the church is, indeed, as pervasive as ministry experts said, churches and ministries must navigate what parents want and what they need. The following ministry experts said this starts with the church, admitting many churches are structured to enable delegation.

- Families are only getting their faith on a Sunday morning … you show up at church, parents go one way, kids go one way, youth go another way, then you get back in the car … You ask kids, "What did you learn?" "I don't know." "Was it good?" "Yeah, I guess." And that's it. And that's the only conversation you have. And that's not helping parents at all, right? It's not giving them the power, the authority to lead better. And it's just – you're just shuffling off the responsibility to someone else. (Pastor)

- [Churches are] very ministry-focused, that, like I think of all the effort that goes into a Sunday morning Sunday school. … [I]f they were to put their resources into equipping parents whose influence on children is … you know, potentially hours per day … but maybe the church itself just believes that they are doing their job well by putting their efforts into a short program per week. (Organizational Leader)

A New Canadian pastor identified a slightly nuanced version of this kind of delegated approach to faith formation. The exception in her context was that members of the congregation possessed a high degree of theological knowledge, suggesting the capacity piece is there for parents. She observed that parents know God's Word but not how to apply it.

She rooted parents' theological knowledge and church participation in cultural preferences and idiosyncrasies. Parents attend church because they want to be around people who share their culture, and they possess biblical knowledge because that is what it means to belong. Her goal was to encourage parents to integrate their knowledge into their lives: "That's why I teach those parents not to see [faith] as a law … that you need to follow this, but you need to use … your knowledge of Christ in your daily life situation." When she tried to change the focus of children's ministry to equipping parents, many parents resisted the shift. This suggests a few things:

a) Parents and churches work in tandem to resist changes in children's ministry that seek to encourage parents to take on more responsibility as children's primary faith formers.
b) Churches are not generally structured in a way that incorporates parents as a priority in children's ministry (i.e., they are not structured to change).
c) Parents and churches do not want to lose quality Sunday school programming.

Ministry experts noticed that delegated parents prioritized their children's happiness before their faith. Consequently, their aims and expectations for children and youth ministry programs reflect the goals of happiness and security rather than the call to "deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow [Jesus]" (Luke 9:23b, NIV). One academic ministry expert said the content of Christianity is often lost when happiness and morality are parents' ultimate goals for their children.

> I think [parents] want their kids to be happy. Like, I think that's the base. And then, they want their kids to learn something from church. And they – I think there's a caveat of, "Well, it's church. So, they're going to learn something good that will make them a good person, a moral citizen."

The object of faith, knowing, following and becoming like Jesus Christ, is secondary to the moral lessons that accompany that call. Therefore, signs of belief or conversion for delegated faith formation are valued less than the good behaviour parents desire for their children to function well in society.

The barriers that prevent parents from fully engaging their children in faith formation are likely endless. These levels of engagement are neither exhaustive, nor rigid, but help outline how parents see themselves and the role of the church in working toward children's faith formation. But they assume that parents are operating from the same category of engagement. This is not always the case.

3.3.2 Impact of gender on church engagement

Our interviews revealed a trend of mothers being more religiously invested and engaged than fathers. Four, female, interview respondents said they attended church weekly but their whole family did not attend. In three of these cases, the husband was the one who did *not* accompany the family to church. Where husbands did not attend church; in two cases children did not participate in children's ministries and, in all cases, wives did *not* participate in any adult-oriented activities. Only one respondent with an absent husband had her children involved in children and youth programming. She mentioned volunteering with VBS, but her involvement never centered around her own spiritual edification.

Another woman said her husband attended church with the same frequency as her but said he was "neutral" when it came to investing in their children's faith: "[I]t was becoming evident that my husband wasn't going to take [spiritual formation] on. And so, and I'm not going to guilt it." The only activity she and her children were involved in was an annual summer camp. She did not participate in any activities with her peers, a pattern she said was driven by frequent moves.

These women's circumstances confirmed a theme in our discussions with family ministry expert interviews, who observed that many families have a mother who is keen in the faith, and a reluctant father.

- I run into this, for example, in running [parenting] courses – that the mother is very keen on coming and the father is reluctant or not interested at all. And unfortunately, that makes it all the more difficult because when a mother and father are not on the same page together. (Organizational Leader)

- [A] lot of women said, "I don't feel supported by my husband." So, a huge number of women feel that you know, we've been taught that the dad is the spiritual leader in the home. But they're actually the ones that are either doing the work or feel like they need to do the work. (Subject Matter Expert)

- [A] lot of times, it is the mother or the woman who is pushing for a deeper faith or a more realized faith in the home. And I've talked to a lot of moms who – where the parents are, the husbands are, maybe Christians, maybe not, maybe lukewarm or whatever. (Pastor)

- [I]f the whole family is not going to church, its usually mom bringing the kids. It's not the other way around, Dad's at home. That's typically what happens when only one parent is interested in going to church. It's usually the mom, not the dad. (Organizational Leader, Female)

Interestingly, gendered differences in attendance were not as prevalent in the parent survey. Figure 3.4 below charts the differences in worship service attendance by spouse, as reported by the respondent.

Figure 3.4. **Difference in respondent's spouse's worship service attendance frequency, by gender, parent respondents, survey, percent**

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N spouses = 1,182.
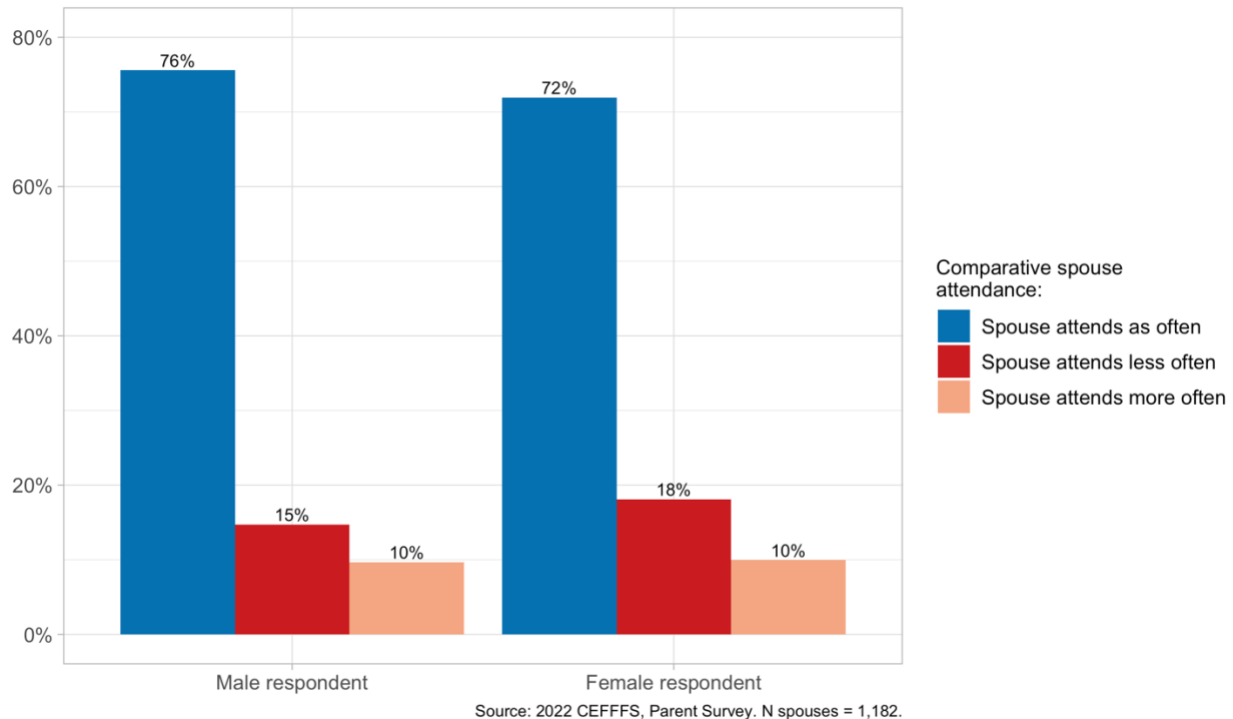
Approximately three-quarters of all respondents said their spouses had the same level of church attendance as they did, gender notwithstanding. Women reported only a slightly higher percentage of husbands (four percent) who attended less frequently than men who reported wives that attended less. Furthermore, the survey showed ninety-one percent of parent respondents shared their faith with their spouse and ninety-two percent of parent respondents said their spouse supported their approach to forming the faith of their children.

These survey findings suggest devout and dedicated families tend to have spouses who share the same levels of church engagement and faith formation priorities. This was not the case in interviews with less devout families or in ministry expert evaluations of "typical" evangelical families. Qualitative findings suggested a father's lack of church engagement is a negative predictor for the rest of the families' participation in church activities outside of the worship service, especially for the mother, and in many cases, for the children.

This trend is concerning because it affects the exposure and reinforcement that women and children can receive from other faith influences, like peers and adult mentors. In addition to having a close bond with one's father, having peer and adult social interactions were considered two of the most important ways the church contributes to children's faith formation.[85] When a father is absent or delinquent, children, who already lack one parent's

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[85] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*; Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*; Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, "Renegotiating Faith."

faith influence in the home, also lose out on opportunities to find and forge faith influences at church, due to lack of participation. We must think about fathers' participation, and supporting mothers in these situations, if we are concerned about children's faith formation.

Ministry expert respondents offered different approaches and emphases to address the imbalance of zeal between men and women. Although identifying the problem fell evenly between the genders, the solutions were gendered. Women focused on empowering women and men focused on calling men to step up.

Empowered women

One ministry expert wanted to see mothers empowered to take on spiritual leadership in the family. She called for churches to stop emphasizing a male-centred approach to faith formation in the home. She thought the emphasis on men had "done a disservice to our women. It's caused a lot of women to shrink back from their God-given calling to disciple their kids." She stressed that this solution, at least in terms of sharing faith with children, could be championed across the complementarian/egalitarian spectrum (see section 2.5 for definitions).

Another ministry expert, an educator, focused on empowering women by emphasizing the unique and privileged role of mothering. She did not mention gainful employment or feminism as a deterrent for women to pursue homemaking. She thought quite highly of, and benefited from, "all of the good things that happened with feminism over the last number of decades, where we had to reassert the quality of all people and the dignity that each person has … we needed that correction. And I'm thankful and I'm proud to be part of that correction." However, there remains her concern for "what …that [did] to our view of the home and of parenting and of raising children." She called for compelling narratives that invite young women into the role of mother and wanted to see a resurgence of biblical resources and embodied exemplars that were not "simplistic or didactic or moralistic."

If one parent was going to be described as delinquent, however, it was the father. Mothers were not cited specifically in any ministry expert interviews as contributing to the problem of faith transmission in the home apart from several mentions of general parental weaknesses and challenges. Failure on the part of women and mothers in the family was not a theme, and correctives aimed at women generally had to do with supplementing for deficits outside of themselves: disinterested fathers or lack of training. Conversely, there were many calls for dads to "step up," suggesting theirs is a barrier of the will.

Men who step up

Male ministry experts who shared concerns over the deficit of faith engagement in men wanted to see a continuing emphasis in the church on men taking spiritual initiative in the home.

- A lot of the time [churches don't engage in men's ministry] because it's hard. … But I feel like that could be – I feel like if you **found a church that is doing family very intentionally and doing men's ministry very intentionally, the rest of it will – not, 'take care of itself' sounds too simple – bu**t, like, it will – the rest, it will fall into place a lot easier. (Educator, Male)

- The only thing I have is the biblical answer, like, **the man is meant to be the head of the home as Christ is head of the church**. Then, it just – whether that is a spiritual directive or just the way that it works out practically, that if the father is not fully engaged then it dwindles from there. (Pastor, Male)

These responses reflect a view that the role of fathers is fundamental to the spiritual wellness of the family. There exists a type of spiritual hinge on fathers' engagement upon which everything will "fall into place" or everything "dwindles from there." Their views are backed by Bengtson's Longitudinal Study of Generations (LSOG) that found a close bond with one's father had more impact on religious socialization than a close relationship with the mother[86] (previously explored in sections 2.4.1 and 2.5.2). One pastor said:

> **Step up. Don't be Homer Simpson at home. That's not who you are. You are a spiritual leader.** And so, I think that would be the thing that our church is trying to emphasize, and I'm trying to emphasize as a pastor, to the men of our church as much as possible. (Pastor, Male)

We wonder if dads feel shamed by messages that portray them as Homer Simpson-type characters. Other religions seem to have greater male participation than Protestant Christianity,[87] so it may not be the religion that men reject, per se, but a particular kind. Two male experts we interviewed mentioned the need for the church to engage men physically. They believed men would be more engaged if they were called on to serve needs that require physical strength, almost as a way to restore the more masculine virtues. Interestingly, many of the regular needs in a church context that are physical and action-based, such as childcare, event planning and meal preparation, are generally seen as women's tasks.

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[86] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 75.

[87] Conrad Hackett, David McClendon, and Anne Fengyan Shi, "The Gender Gap in Religion Around the World: Women Are Generally More Religious than Men, Particularly among Christians," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), March 22, 2016, https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2016/03/Religion-and-Gender-Full-Report.pdf.

3.3.3 Impact of COVID-19 on church engagement

Interviews with parent respondents took place in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic between June 26, and September 3, 2021. Parents were cautiously optimistic that the worst of the pandemic was over, but the data remains unavoidably marked by the effects of COVID.

Extracurricular activities, family visits and other social contact outside the home were severely limited by COVID, and these limitations were generally talked about as having a negative impact. COVID's impact on faith formation in the home, however, was generally spoken of positively. Eleven of the thirty-six respondents that talked about the effects of COVID on their lives said COVID restrictions gave them more family time, and six families said it gave them more opportunity for faith formation with their families. COVID seemed to have lifted the veil of busyness, for a time, for several respondents' families providing space for, and creating an openness to, the development of new faith-formation habits and routines.

Parent survey respondents similarly reported COVID-19 restrictions had a positive impact on their family life (table 3.3 below). This was felt to a larger degree by women and parents of publicly schooled children.

Table 3.3 Agreement with "COVID-19 restrictions were good for our family because they allowed us to spend more time together," parent respondents, by gender, select schooling types, and worship service attendance frequency, survey, percent

| Agreement | All | Gender | | Schooling | | Worship service attendance | | | |
		Male	Female	Homeschool	Public school	Weekly+	Weekly	2-3x/ month	Less/Never/ DK/PNTS
Str. agr.	23	18	24	18	24	22	24	19	19
Mod. agr.	46	45	46	40	47	45	45	49	42
Mod. dis.	16	17	15	15	16	11	17	20	13
Str. dis.	12	16	11	19	10	16	11	11	17
NA/PNTS	4	3	4	8	3	6	3	2	9
Total	101	99	100	100	100	100	100	101	100

Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding.

By contrast, COVID-19 seemed to have a negative impact on church participation. Two families represented in parent interviews reported having stopped attending church altogether during the pandemic and one family reduced their church participation. Most interview respondents talked about how church life moved online at some point during the pandemic, and at least half of these talked about how online church was a poor experience, especially for their children. For quite a few interview respondents, COVID meant a *decrease* in faith formation for their children because many online ministries did not effectively engage children. Many churches tried to maintain a semblance of normalcy for the main service, but this was not always feasible

for children's ministries (see "Did your local church offer weekly, online children's content?" in table 3.4).

- [O]ur church has an online YouTube channel that – and we'd watch the service together. But it's not like when we went to – **we'd have Sunday school for them while the adults were upstairs in regular service, so they don't have that aspect.**

- [W]e have what's called missional groups. So, we – our Bible studies that we do … are supposed to include the kids as well. **Now, we have mostly been meeting online, so I'm not making my kids sit because it's pretty boring.**

- In my family, [COVID has had little effect on faith formation] because I think we talk more about God, **but when you talk about … the church or maybe meeting people, [the children] can only rely on … Zoom or online worship, and it's not very helpful at all.**

- [W]e had VBS going. We had a really strong Sunday school going. At one point, they had boys and girls club or they had – I don't know. I'm giving you the stuff that they used in church with the girls and – oh, yeah. They had Wee College. … **We used to have all that. And unfortunately, we have told our pastor that we are now looking at leaving because it has – and that's not the only reason, but it's tanked.** And we have a pastor who was – who did nothing for a year. And when I say nothing – and I'm not being a smart aleck or dramatic – **I mean literally nothing. He never followed up with our kids during COVID. He never contacted us during COVID. He never did anything for the kids during all these shutdowns. He's never once spoken to them. He didn't run any programs for them.**

Certainly, families spent more time together during COVID consuming (or trying to consume) online church ministries, but these quotes indicate that many children saw a decrease in their faith engagement because the content was rarely engaging or directed toward them. In surveyed families whose children had no COVID worship engagement, the family's online engagement was significantly impacted (see figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5 "Change in family worship service attendance during COVID" by "how engaged children were with online service content," parent respondents, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.
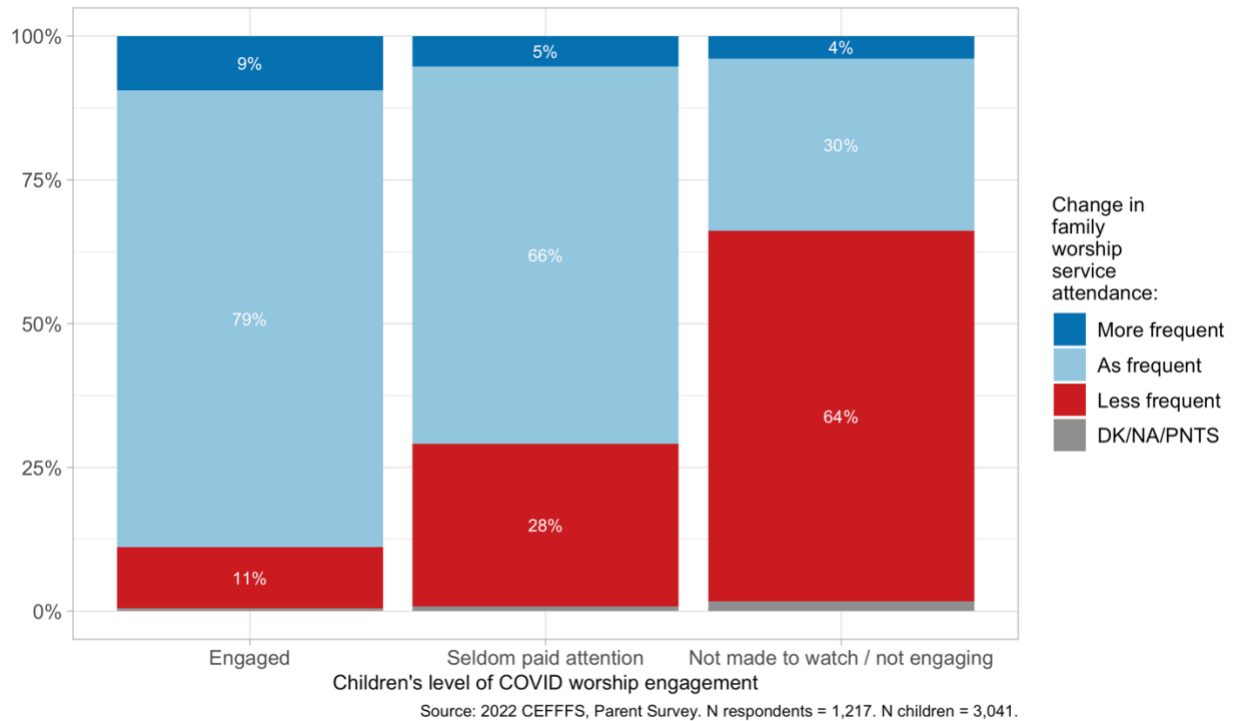
Whether children were engaged in online worship was a strong predictor of the rest of the family's worship service engagement. In cases where children were not engaged, two out of three families participated less frequently in online worship. Even when children seldom paid attention to the service, family engagement increased by roughly one-third. This suggests having children around during online worship, even if they were not fully engaged, was better for families' worship service engagement.

According to the parent survey, about two-thirds of churches offered online content directed toward children and just under one-third did not (table 3.4 below). Only half of parents reported that their church provided age-appropriate resources to use at home, with almost forty percent confirming their church did not provide this kind of resourcing. Knowing that churches provided resources is not an indication of their usefulness in the home, however.

Table 3.4 Local church resourcing to parents during COVID, parent respondents, survey, counts.

Response	Did your local church offer weekly, online children's content?		Did local your church provide age-appropriate, faith-based, teaching resources that you could use at home with your children?	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Yes	758	62	603	50
No	355	29	469	39
DK	61	5	81	7
NA/PTNS	43	3	64	5
Total	1,217	99	1,217	101

Percent columns do not add to 100 because of rounding.

Conclusion

Ministry expert respondents expressed concerns about the post-pandemic restriction period. One expert said, "I think there are some families who are going to be quite content with the rhythm of this season and not necessarily be rushing back to church." Another noticed that "the people on the periphery are gone. Those people have found something else to do or they're just not there anymore."

Pandemic restrictions alleviated the busyness that many families said was a barrier to faith formation at home, but also gave them a taste of what life looked like without active church engagement. For families who struggled to prioritize matters of faith to begin with, those on "the periphery" may struggle to add church participation back into their family calendars. This may have a good effect on internal family faith-formation dynamics, but the ultimate outcome may see families disengaging from church life.

3.3.4 Other factors impacting church engagement

Families who attend church weekly or more tended to be the most involved. A surprising group that stood out in interviews were families who attended church weekly but did not participate in church-related activities.

Looking closer at the family situations behind this trend, one respondent was a founding pastor of a small New Canadian church. He reported there were no opportunities for age-appropriate activities for his children: "We don't have a … peer group for my son[s]." We also interviewed a clergy spouse, but her children were involved in the children and youth programs, likely because her husband pastored at a larger, more established church.

We also interviewed two parent respondents who had grown up in clergy families, but they had diverging outcomes in their own family faith life: one actively followed and participated in a church, the other was disconnected and disillusioned with the church. The accounts from these respondents, however, both mirrored the circumstances of women with absent husbands

discussed in the previous section, and their respective approaches to faith formation were a reaction to that experience.

Job schedules were another factor that some families said restricted their or their children's involvement at church. One New Canadian respondent said her frequency of attendance was largely affected by her work schedule.

> I usually go, like, I try to every Sunday. But to be honest with you, maybe twice out of the month because sometimes I have to work on Sundays with my job. I can't take every Sunday off. But sometimes my husband brings the kids when I have to work.

Although her children were involved in one extracurricular sport, she said they were "not involved in any clubs and stuff like that" at church. At other points in the interview, she shared about not having childcare for her children when both parents are expected to work. Ministry leaders should acknowledge that church participation can be affected by socioeconomic status and regular church attendance requires relative financial freedom and flexibility. It assumes a consistent schedule, ease of transportation and availability of parents to bring their children.

A French, female respondent said that when her children started to work, their participation in youth group was less consistent: *"[I]l y a eu quelques exceptions ou les filles ont travaillé mais généralement, essayent d'être présente à cette activité-là [jeunesse]."* ["There have been a few exceptions where the girls have worked but generally [we] try to be present at this activity [youth]."] Children's jobs mostly affected family time and faith formation in the home as discussed in section 4.2.3, but in these instances, employment affected the extent of families' involvement at church.

Finally, one woman mentioned her family struggled participating beyond Sunday morning worship services because of some tensions with other congregants for being the only homeschooling family.

> We're pretty much the only homeschooling family. That [is] … a big deal. Everybody else sends their children to this private school. It is a big deal. It's definitely a trial. But to go to a church where everybody looks like me, acts like me, walks like me, talks like me is not the definition of being Christian. So, it has to be iron sharpens iron.

Because she had difficulty relating to other congregants in her church but was still committed to attending, she mentioned finding support from other local homeschooling families:

> [T]he main source of my mentoring and discipleship has been from my Christian homeschool moms support group. They're the ones that put your feet to the fire, encourage you, lift you up, build you up. And, yeah. Those are the people who have really challenged me and encouraged me to become a mother as God intended.

This was the second mention of a woman finding more support from a niche interest group rather than her church community.

3.4 Church Role in Supporting Parents

Up until this point, we have compared different parental values in a church, expectations for the church, and expressions of engagement with the church with children's faith formation in mind. But we also asked how the church supported and equipped parents *as* faith formers. Responses to this question were surprising as parents tended not to answer it directly, almost as if they did not understand the question. We pushed respondents to tell us two ways in which the church supported them as parents in a faith-formation role and many simply reiterated about:

1. the programs that the church offered for their children; or
2. how the church supported them generally, without faith formation in view.

While tabulating interview responses to the question of church support for parents, we noted a difference between what the church offered and what parents said they participated in. Table 3.5 below shows a participation column in addition to mentions so these differences would be highlighted where relevant.

Table 3.5 Ways the church supports parents in the faith formation of their children, parent respondents, interviews, counts by mentions and participation

Ways church supports parents	Mentions	Participation
Children / youth programs	10	10
Parenting workshops / seminars / series	10	5
Small group / Bible study	7	7
Resources to use at home	7	5
Relevant preaching	7	N/A
Adult community / friends	6	N/A
Moms group	5	2
Welcoming atmosphere for children	4	N/A
Encouragement / prayer	4	N/A
Mentors	3	3
Service opportunities	3	3
Logistical support	3	N/A
Promote a family culture	3	N/A
No support / outside support	3	N/A
Dads group	2	0
Regular check-ins	2	N/A
Counselling services	2	2

Respondents generally did not elaborate about why they did not participate in supportive services their churches offered for parents. One woman said she recalled a seminar being offered to mothers several years prior, but it was during a low point in her faith. Her lack of motivation to attend suggests spiritual health may play a role in participation rates.

I actually didn't attend it, but they've had um, they had seminars and conferences for … I can't remember what it's called but basically [for] mothers doing family ministry at home … that actually took place about seven to eight years ago when I wasn't really involved [laughs] or interested.

For families who are regular, committed church attendees, the extent of their involvement in other areas of the church may deter parents from adding more to their plate. Furthermore, since most parent events target couples, it is likely harder to find a regular time where both parents are free and have access to childcare.

One respondent mentioned a parenting group that was offered simultaneously during her child's youth group time:

[P]rior to COVID while my daughter went to Friday youth, I would go to the parent group of the parents whose children also went to the Friday youth group. So, it was really good because we had children in the same age and younger children, and we were also reviewing the sermon and discussing the sermon. It was a growth group. So, it was ideal because we had children in sort of the same age group.

She did not mention if there was explicit training for parents on faith formation with their children, but the timing of her group was strategic in targeting parents who care enough to get their kids to youth group to create a group for adults in a similar stage of life.

3.4.1 Children's programming

As stated above, parents often interpreted our question about investment in parents as investment in children. Indicated in table 3.5 above, children's programs were the most popular topic cited in a question about support for *parents'* faith-formation efforts:

- They offer programs within the church for age groups, like, you know, the youth group, for example, where the kids can come and they have a discussion about God, but then they watch a movie, or they'll do something fun or play flashlight tag or whatever.

- Well, I think one way is the programs. … It just reinforces the message that we try to teach at home, and it's the opportunity for the kids to rub shoulders with other adults that are not mom and dad and finding out that they say similar things, hopefully. And just, yeah, it just kind of makes, like, faith can be fun. You can have fun with your friends and still be in a church and learning about God and Jesus and the Bible.

- Well, they're offering Sunday school and Vacation Bible School. I think they teach, you know, reinforce lessons that we have and what we have told them. I don't know how that affects us.

Unlike the other supportive activities mentioned in the table above, children's programs require little to no participation from the parents themselves, likely freeing them for a time from the demands of parenting. It is possible that parents see these programs as a rare opportunity to receive a break from a trusted, faith-based provider. Some mothers mentioned the value of having a break in other contexts.

- The ladies in our church are wonderful. I lean on them at any time and ask them any advice. Even when you need a break they'll take [the children].

- I felt like other moms could hold her and give me a little break so I can recharge.

Perhaps providing opportunities for *rest* through children's programming plays an underlying role in supporting parents' faith-formation efforts.

One father, who talked about faith formation as the parents' responsibility, said children's ministry was a way the church "work[ed] with you [parents]" to reinforce what was taught at home. With this understanding, he receives support by letting the church give his children an opportunity to receive instruction and peer interaction that he cannot provide. This is another outworking of the church as a "gap filler," a theme that emerged from the question about parental expectations for the church discussed in the previous section. These responses suggest the church supports parents *by* providing programs to offer a period of rest for parents and meet children's social needs.

3.4.2 Spiritual and relational support for parents

Respondents who said their church supported parents usually referred to pulpit ministry or activities like small groups that edified and encouraged their spiritual life.

- They teach us to – it tells us to teach our children, so we're trying to teach our children. … I would say it was a mix between the pulpit and small group.

- [T]he biggest thing is teaching and encouraging us in knowing and loving Jesus. Helping us to understand what the Scriptures say and being grounded in what is the Gospel because the Gospel influences how we parent, how we love our kids, how we do everything. So, the greater we understand the Gospel, the better parents we'll be.

- The sound preaching is probably my personal main source of encouragement.

Again, the first interpretation of our question was how the church supported them as parents, not how it helped them to better form their children's faith. Some made the connection at other points in the interview that pulpit and fellowship ministries help them become stronger, more committed Christians which indirectly impacts the faith of their children.

Although small groups were a popular activity that had high participation rates from parents, not all groups focused on parenting or faith formation. One mother said her being a parent was incidental to the support she received from her small group.

Niche parenting groups were usually geared toward mothers or fathers separately, but respondents were not always clear if they participated in these ministries or not. Five respondents mentioned the existence of groups aimed toward supporting mothers, but only two women from our sample said they participated. Women in our sample tended to prefer one-on-one mentors with older women over a larger group gathering.

Two respondents mentioned groups geared toward dads, but no one claimed they participated. Referencing the support groups offered by her church, one woman described a group geared toward mothers while the other was for men.

> We have a mom's Bible study just for strengthening and encouraging there and sharing. Yeah, the men have one that they do in the mornings on Sunday for a men's group.

The survey showed participants were more likely to attend small groups geared toward their gender than their roles as moms or dads (table 3.6). Women attended a group for parents more often than men.

Table 3.6 Gendered small group participation, parent respondents with spouses, by gender, survey, counts (percent of parent respondents' spouses in a corresponding gendered small group of that type)

	Gendered small group type	
Respondent gender	Moms' or dads'	Women's or men's
Male	21 (*38*)	61 (*51*)
Female	90 (*14*)	216 (*35*)

N male respondents = 304. N female respondents = 913. N male respondents' spouses = 295. N female respondents' spouse = 861.

3.4.3 Parenting courses, workshops and seminars

Some respondents recalled parenting workshops, seminars or series offered by their churches but only half of parents said they participated in them. Respondents usually framed these events as scarce, irregular and having been offered in the past:

- There's also lots of just great workshops, speakers that are brought in. **A couple years ago, there was a speaker**.

- **[A] long time ago**, before I – as soon as I had children – I actually knew that spiritual teaching had to be intentional. I, in fact, led a small group with our – in our small church at that time … **I was trying to get the message across with having a speaker coming in** and such – that spiritual teaching needs to be as intentional as parents look at education or how they look at extracurricular activities.

- I wouldn't say they just invest because we're parents. But just Christians' faith, like, growing as a Christian, that's what they invested. **But for parents themself, I think they did have workshops before for parents, but not many**.

Parenting courses and workshops were the most intentional parent-related activities respondents listed, but the generally low participation rates suggest:

a) Parents are too busy to participate.

b) Parents don't have the practical supports in place to participate.

c) Parents don't want to participate.

Given the high participation rates in small groups and bible studies, and the lower attendance in more instructional courses or parent-oriented groups, we wonder if there is an unwillingness to receive unilateral parenting instruction from the church. Perhaps, too, since parenting styles can reflect different worldviews, church leaders may be hesitant to promote any one practice or stance. On the other hand, parent workshops might be offered so irregularly that parents who miss one event might wait years until another opportunity is offered to them.

3.4.4 Resource support

Some parents mentioned the church supports them in their faith-formation efforts by providing resources for use at home, but the value of these resources received mixed reviews from parent interview respondents. In response to the question about parental support, five out of seven respondents mentioned the church provided resources and they used them. In the cases where they were used, parents saw the resources as valuable additions to their faith-formation activities in the home, but these seemed to be resources aimed toward children, not families.

> They do have the kids' devotion and that's the one that my kids are reading right now, and my husband sometimes reads it, like, he reads with them. But not the family devotion. But I've never asked for it too.

In the case of this respondent, the church provided a devotional for the children that her husband read with them, but it was not a resource designed for family use. Children's devotionals might reinforce the child's developing faith, but they fail to invite children into something in which the whole family partakes. Like what we saw with the valuation of church participation, parents tend to focus on rounding out their children rather than inviting them into a community of faith.

Two other respondents accessed resource repositories provided by the church, mainly through RightNow Media or a church library.

- We as a church pay a subscription from the church budget so that all of our families can have access to RightNow Media for personal, for their family devotions, or whatever they need there.

- Well, our church subscribes for RightNow Media, so we have a free account through that. The church pays for it. And then, we – the kids mostly watch the animated Bible stories and stuff like that. I can't say that I personally have watched too much of the adult stuff, but. Anyway, it is free through the church, so that's – I really appreciate that.

Again, in both cases, the resources are available, but it is up to parents to make use of them. There is no specific intentionality in the provision of these resources to equip parents to better form the faith of their children, but it does provide parents with assumingly trusted, faith-based material for their children to use.

A few parents mentioned barriers to using resources. One woman was interested in providing her children a faith-based curriculum for home use during COVID, but she was deterred by finances. Another mother said it was time-consuming to find resources that were "suitable for [her] family." Her vetting process included looking at church statements of faith or browsing material "to check if they match what I have learned from the Bible … but that really takes a lot of time." For the most part, she said she defaults to the recommendations of friends, churches and email subscriptions she trusts, but she lacks the motivation to go seek out the material for herself because "[she doesn't] have time to sit and … spend an hour look[ing] for these things … the search takes too long to do."

A New Canadian father said the focus and language of many resources were unhelpful to a congregation like his.

> I would suggest [parents do not need resources containing] biblical knowledge but how to live out the faith. I think that is – a lot of time, I think, from the parachurch resources or even from the church we focus too much on the head knowledge. But how you do it? **Not many times they will be able to demonstrate well.** … Second, I think will be the language they are using because some people they can only speak certain language[s], not all different type[s] of language … **if you have the resource in different language then that will be able to help them.**

Respondents usually valued resources for the faith-based content they could give to their children, not for them to avail as parents *with* their children. This is consistent with the patterns we see in their participation at church too: a general willingness to be supported through children's programs or personal spiritual growth but not specifically to be equipped as parents to form their children's faith.

Parents' needs are also different. Some wanted better resource help but did not ask for it, others accessed resource repositories but only for children's content. Still, other parents said they did not want another thing pushed in front of them and others experienced barriers to access. Our main concern from responses to our question about church support for parents, is the reticence to receive instruction that might help them better form the faith of their children. Churches may not be explicit in their support of parents in their children's faith formation, or parents may lack a category for the church's role in equipping them in this way.

3.5 Barriers

3.5.1 Age segregation

Compulsory education, introduced into western societies in the late 1800s and early 1900s, separated students into learning cohorts by age which was a proxy for the developmental stage. Churches began to mirror this age stratification in their Sunday schools, creating classes for children organized by their age. In many cases, churches added Sunday school wings to their buildings mirroring the architectural patterns of public schools. Around the middle of the previous century, as high school became common, churches started youth groups, which was another age-defined ministry. Around the same time, churches also tried to replicate this pattern somewhat less successfully for young adults in their twenties. An academic explains:

> I would also say the factor of **segregation in our churches**. We have very individualized ministries, especially in our larger churches. **So, children's ministry, that's even subdivided into preschool and different age categories there. You have the youth ministry, you have the young adult ministry, singles ministry, young couple minis – and so, our church actually is segregated, and so we don't have that intergenerational faith formation.**

Age-segregated ministry is a structural prescription for how faith formation should take place. Churches and ministries tend to end age-segregated ministries coincident with the end of formal education, in the mid-twenties with young adult groups. By this time, young adults have had a lifetime of peer ministries. The respondent we heard from above explained some of the problems that come with this transition out of peer ministry.

> I think the way that we've done it has had negative impacts. I still think, as we've learned, there are still places for what we might say "peer ministries." But we've done it in such a way that relationships between the generations in our churches – **it's difficult for young people and older people to even hear or see the perspective of different generations and understanding them.**

She identified the following problems with age-segregated ministry:

a) Age-segregated ministry tends to make younger and older people unable to "even hear or see the perspective of different generations and understand[] them."

b) When age-segregated ministries end, young adults find they do not have a place in the church, which means they do not have a peer group.

The discussion in section 2.9.1 Friends, suggests adults continue to look for their peer groups, in this case, a peer group of young families, in the absence of having one formally organized by the church.

Age-segregated ministry also tends to inhibit "intergenerational Christian formation." A respondent citing Holly Allen[88] explains:

> Kids learn from adults, but adults and seniors actually need that learning experience from kids. **And so, that wider sense of community and sense of belonging to a wider community, I think, has probably changed some of the ways that families are doing faith formation. Sometimes, they feel isolated and alone. And it's hard.**

Programmatic, age-segregated ministry is sometimes described as a siloed ministry, something that turns a church community into many siloed communities. This expert describes intergenerational isolation that inhibits mentoring relationships from forming. So, to the list above we can add the following problems with age-segregated ministry:

c) Age-segregated ministry inhibits the natural formation of mentoring relationships.

d) Age-segregated ministry can leave families feeling isolated and alone within their church community.

A denominational leader observed that some churches tried to replicate age-segregated ministry online during COVID.

> I'm not necessarily confident this is the best direction, but I know that there are some churches who are maintaining the age-segregated ministry [during COVID]. So, they might have the online worship service that more or less reflects what they might have been doing pre-pandemic, so more adult focused. But they're having the Zoom Room Sunday schools and … are still maintaining a very segregated approach online.

These churches' efforts notwithstanding, COVID brought families into the same room (or Zoom Room) for worship services. As the saying goes, "Necessity is the mother of invention," and it

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[88] Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 1st edition (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012).

may be that the necessity of intergenerational worship during COVID has started churches thinking about how to do intergenerational worship.

For many New Canadian churches, intergenerational language barriers create their own ministry silos. First-generation immigrants tend to prefer to worship in their mother tongue, which is often not one of Canada's two official languages. Second- and third-generation immigrants, however, have a foot in their parents' culture of origin and a foot in Canadian mainstream culture that mostly inhabits either English or French languages. So, ministry in larger New Canadian churches is often segregated by language, in addition to being age segregated.

Age-segregated education, along with an understanding of faith formation as education, form the plausibility structures that support age-segregated ministries. Several of our respondents identified problems with age-segregated ministry and proposed some complementary forms of intergenerational ministry or worship as solutions.

3.5.2 Developmental sensitivity

The difficulty with committing to a wholesale, integrated approach to ministry is that children learn at different paces and levels that accord with their cognitive development. Influenced by James Fowler, a theologian who studied faith and human development, and her own years of experience in ministry, one pastor expressed:

> I personally feel that **there's a really decided pattern that we need to think of with respect to development of a child and their faith** – that just, that begins to grow as they grow as well. So, their understandings, what we need to include in their life, and when to start, sort of, shifting gears for them, when to help – helping them through certain questions that they may have, that sort of thing. … So, I've been really intrigued to see, "Well, **how do we meet the needs of children as they're growing in their faith by providing them with what they really need at each one of those stages**?"

Sensitivity to the pattern of faith development requires "thinking deeply" about what children need "in order to have an ongoing relationship with God." She claims that securing children in the faith later in life is significantly helped by tending to the earlier stages of faith development and anticipating the transitions between them. This pre-emptive approach to faith formation expects and addresses the struggles, doubts and questions that children will inevitably encounter as they begin to find their place in the community of faith (Fowler's synthetic-conventional stage of faith development) and reflect on what it means to belong (individual-reflective stage).[89]

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[89] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development*, Revised ed. edition (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1981).

Some of the ministry experts we interviewed saw these predictable patterns of faith in the children they ministered to but clarified that children experience the stages differently and progress through the stages at different rates.

> **[E]very child's different, even in siblings**. [First comes], a simpler faith. "I believe in Jesus, and I'm sorry about my sins, and He died on the cross." But then, sometimes we find that with the four-, five-, six-year-olds … they seem to lose a little bit of interest, and … maybe it's not on their heart for a few years. And then, we've noticed with some of our kids, not until they're fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, that they get a bit more dedicated again and then ask to be baptized or ask for prayer, that sort of thing. So, yeah, **there's different paths for different people, that's for sure.**

> So, I think you have to understand where [children] are at and understand it's not – and this is just a kid thing in general, not necessarily even faith-based – but understand that we like to think, like, "Oh, where should a nine-year-old be at this point in life?" Well, it depends on the nine-year-old. Right? **They're all different. You can't treat one like the other**.

Two pastors we interviewed said they take a stratified approach to their church-based, faith-formation initiatives based on the stages of development that correspond with school age. These pastors try to involve and resource parents to address the highly individual nature of faith development, as highlighted in the previous two quotes.

- I think, understanding that kids are developing and that they're growing and **there's certain characteristics that you can leverage in each of those specific phases**, but then also preparing them for, "Hey, you know what? **Your kid is about to go into grade 5, so these are some of the things that you should be prepared for or should look for or should keep in mind as they transition to that stage or stage and phase**."

- We're putting together learning materials that's geared towards parents at each significant phase in [children's] developmental journey, we're saying, "**Here's some things that you need to anticipate about what you'll probably see happening, developing in the life of your young person during this phase**. Here's some ways that we want to be here to partner with you in this process. Here's some resources that you can find online that would be helpful to you as a parent."

These strategies do not address all the weaknesses of age segregation, but these pastors try to address the problem of program homogeneity by keeping parents aware of what to expect in children's faith development and resourcing them to actively anticipate their children's needs. Nevertheless, this approach also depends on highly active and dedicated parents to work effectively.

Theories of development have valuable diagnostic power, but ministry application often assumes homogenous anthropology unless practitioners can address the problem of

individuality. A doctor may treat the same disease in a multitude of patients, but the dosage must differ based on everyone's medical history. This trend is even more acute when we consider faith formation for persons with disabilities.

3.5.3 Not including those with disabilities

Definitions of family and faith formation matter because they shape the ministries and supports churches offer to parents. Several respondents spoke to the need for churches to give more attention to supporting parents whose children have physical or developmental disabilities. In this section, we will focus on what we heard from one ministry expert who had given the topic due emphasis and a great deal of forethought.

Our interviews were about faith formation in the home, but when addressing the topic of disabilities, respondents usually spoke to the need for churches to do a better job of including these children and their families. Families are not resilient on their own, and this emphasis on inclusion underlines the need for these families to have the care and support of a local church.

Respondents mentioned two barriers to this inclusion or community integration.

1. Programs that are not designed to include children with physical or developmental disabilities.
2. Parental sense of shame over their children's disabilities.

Faith formation is commonly understood as an activity of the mind, which is just part of the whole person. With this working definition, church-based programs tend to focus on "neurotypical kid[s]." A denominational leader explained:

> **[A] lot of our focus in churches lends itself to assuming a neurotypical kid**. I think about families with kids with various needs that are not typical or – whether there's cognitive development, whether it's physical, like, various things that families are facing. I'm not sure that we really take into consideration the realities of what family life is like for them. And then what does that mean in terms of faith formation, and how are we supporting and resourcing as a church, or even understanding families in that.

> We do Sunday school, or we offer resources that fit a specific type of child. **But if your child is, for example, if your child is on the autism spectrum and the type of activity you send home – the faith-equipping resources – just would not work with that child, what does that mean, then?** Do you just not pay attention? Do not help that family figure out? Like, what does faith formation look like? Because those children are spiritual. **Those children are still responding to the work of the Holy Spirit, but it might look different.** And even as parents, parents might not even be aware of how God's working. But you can see if you can see some kids who are not very responsive. You know, I've heard stories from parents where – but certain worship songs come on and you can see a reaction or response, like there's a connection. They seem to really be

worshipping. But then another instance, they're not. They're totally disengaged. So there's lots of nuances that I don't think – so I don't think there's – I think that those are questions that are missing too. What does faith formation look like when the typical child is not – it doesn't fit what you're doing or offering or how you're equipping parents and families.

She went on to mention the tendency of churches to think of faith formation as a cognitive process, something she said "short-chang[es] the spirituality of children."

I think the other thing, too, is I think we often – maybe we don't want to say it out loud, but **we have a way of thinking that matters of faith are only for those who are cognitively able to process it in the way we offer it**. So, we even – this even plays into how we do things with children. **We assume children [are] at a certain level, and so this is what we do, not realizing that perhaps we're really short-changing [chuckles] the spirituality of children.**

Tragically, this respondent also pointed to a sense of shame and judgment that some parents feel in response to their child's disability. She explained that this inability to process the meaning of their child's disability within God's redemptive plan leads some to opt-out of church life altogether.

Well, just that **there's a struggle with the reality of "Is this [disability] a punishment [from God]? Or is this a judgment on my child?"** Like, are they – it's very – I don't know if I can voice it well because I would never have thought that. Like, would never think that. But it's actually a thinking, and I think that there are some scriptural evidence if you want to pluck it out, that seems to indicate, you know what I mean? So, I think that that's – and again, I think that comes down to a church culture that parents might be formed in. So, I think of the shame of, you know, you might not want to access or come out. I just think of some churches who started special needs ministries and they knew of families, and they personally invited them. **But families never came out to church or just kind of stopped being very involved because they felt like there was a shame attached to it.** And some of this could be a cultural basis.

The last sentence in the quote above alludes to some of the shame felt over disabilities being more common in some cultures than others. The gospel, for better or worse, is always enculturated, and we trust that our process of discipleship is always conforming our culture and those of our churches, more and more to Christ.

This respondent's reflections point to the need for the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2) both individually and corporately, especially when it comes to including those with disabilities. It also highlights the importance of carefully discerning what faith formation is, in the family and church, so that all can understand the Good News.

Regrettably, our surveys did not provide an opportunity for parents to account for their children with disabilities. While surveys are better suited for measuring norms rather than exceptions, as we read above, omissions like this disproportionality affect families and parents who care for children with exceptional needs. We encourage readers to avoid this error as they apply the findings of this report.

4. Activities

4.1 Faith-Formation Activities in the Home

We are formed by the habits that hold our attention. In this section we will look at seventeen faith-formation activities (FFAs). This section should be read alongside the sections on extracurricular activities and digital technology as all these activities are in competition for the elective portions of children's days.

From our interviews we created a list of seventeen, home-based, FFAs.[90] On our parent national survey we asked respondents to tell us which of these they did personally in the *last four weeks*, which their family did together as a family in *the last four weeks*, and which each of their children under the age of eighteen did in the *last four weeks*. Moreover, we presented a similar list of activities to pastor survey respondents and asked them which they thought a "typical" family in their congregation might do *weekly.*

We will make some comparisons between parent and pastor responses; however, the reader should be aware of two things. First, pastors were not necessarily the pastors of the families represented in the parent sample. Second, the time interval in question for the pastor survey was *weekly,* whereas the questions put to parent respondents had a *four-week* window.

We will examine these data in four ways. First, we will look at children's participation in FFAs *as reported by their parents*. Second, we will look at respondents' personal faith-formation activity participation before comparing the activity of respondents and their children. Finally, we will compare corporate, family, FFAs as reported by parents with what pastors believe typical families in their congregation practice weekly.

4.1.1 Children's faith-formation activities

The percent of children participating in our seventeen FFAs are presented in the composite figures 4.3 and 4.4 by child age. The colours on the vertical bars represent the children's frequency of worship service attendance.

Figure 4.1, immediately below, shows the worship service attendance frequency for the children in our sample using a more granular scale than figure 4.3. As noted in appendix A, our sample is quite devout, and this is evidenced here in the high rate of frequent worship service attendance for children. Seventy-six percent of children in our sample attended at least weekly, as did eighty percent of parent respondents. There is some attenuation of at least weekly worship service attendance between age seven (eighty-four percent) and seventeen (seventy

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[90] Abbreviated faith-formation activity descriptions will be used in figures and charts in this report. For full questions see "Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Parent Survey Questionnaire" (CEFFFS Ministry Partnership, April 26, 2022); "Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Pastor Survey Questionnaire" (CEFFFS Ministry Partnership, April 26, 2022).

percent) but notably over the same time, the percent attending more than once a week rose from sixteen percent to twenty-four percent. Given that the "more than once a week" frequency rose in the teen years, may be that parents are reporting youth group participation as a second worship service attendance.

The column shading in figure 4.3, representing the frequency of worship service attendance, suggests, on first glance, that it is primarily frequent worship service attenders who participate in FFAs. This may be the case, but it is important to realize that our sample is largely drawn from those families who regularly attend worship services. Nevertheless, it is instructive to see greater participation by less frequent worship service attenders in those FFAs which require less effort, such as saying table grace and listening to worship music, compared to lower levels of participation in activities requiring more effort or family coordination, such as studying a catechism or reading the Bible at a family meal.

Figure 4.1 Frequency of child worship service attendance in the last twelve months, by age, parent respondents, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N children = 3,041.
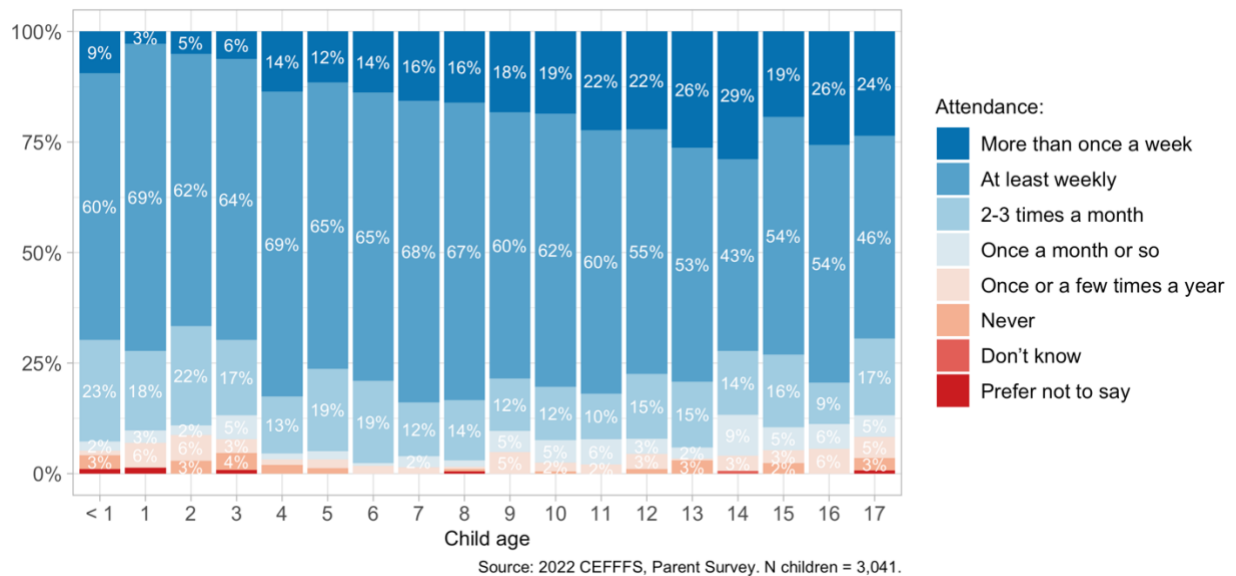
Figure 4.2 shows the average number of FFAs parents reported their children participated in during the previous four weeks, by child age. On average, the children in our sample participated in 3.3 activities, however, this number rises with literacy and from school age forward, levels out between five and six. By comparison, parent respondents and families, on average, participated in 9.5 and 6.6 activities, respectively. The average number of parental FFAs is essentially constant irrespective of their children's ages, however, the average number of family FFAs peaks for families with children aged five at 7.9 and falls steadily to 5.9 for families with seventeen-year-olds.

Figure 4.2. Average number of faith formation-activities, by child age, parent respondents, survey
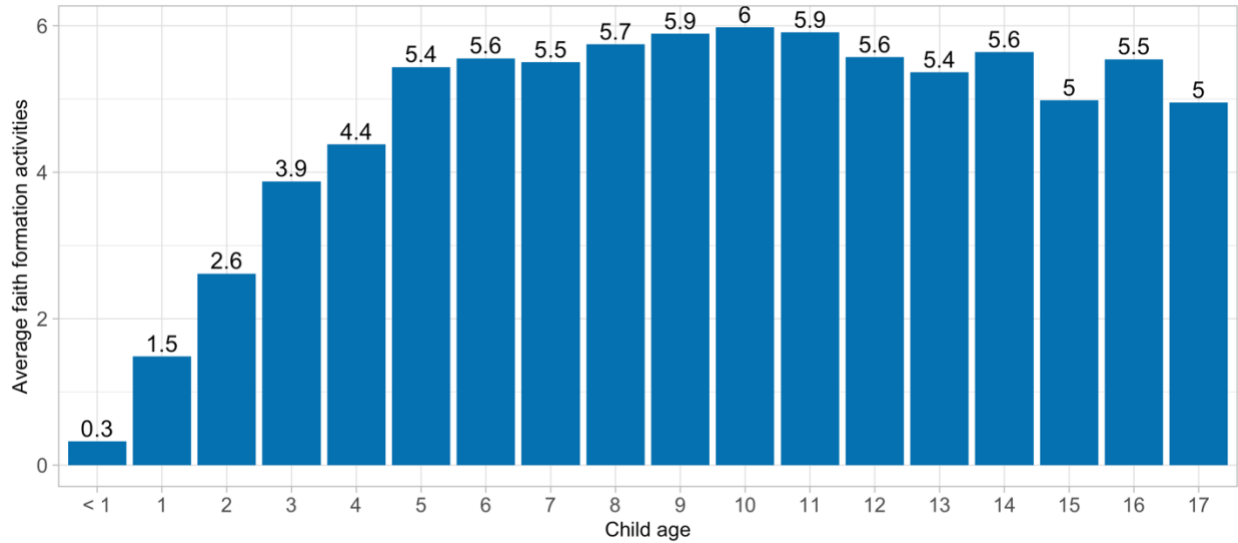
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N children = 3,041.

The Reformation was fueled by the printing press and many of the devotional practices of the Protestant traditions that grew out of the Reformation revolve around the printed word. Catechisms, Bible study, Bible reading and devotional reading are all literate activities. In our interviews, discipleship, which was sometimes used as a synonym for faith formation, often referred to teaching and instruction based in literature. Men were more likely than women to characterize discipleship as some kind of instruction involving literate competency.

Literacy involves competencies in reading, writing and speaking, and when adults acquire a second language, the competencies are usually acquired in that order. As children acquire the competencies of their first language, the order is usually speaking, reading and writing. The prevalence of many of the FFAs correspond to the order children acquire literate competencies. For example, journalling (writing) is less common than everyday faith conversations or prayer (speaking) (see figure 4.3). If FFA participation tracked tightly with the acquisition of literacy competencies we would expect growing FFA participation with child age as their literacy competencies improve. Although FFAs requiring advanced literacy competencies, such as journalling and studying a catechism, do increase with age, overall participation is modest, never rising above twenty percent. Scripture memorization stands out for its rise with middle school and subsequent fall in later teen years. It is likely that participation in programs with an emphasis on scripture memorization, such as Awana, Bible Quizzing and Sunday school, is shaping this curve.

The grid elements in figure 4.3 have been arranged by the shape and contour of their plots building roughly from the least practiced FFAs at the top-left corner to the most practiced FFAs toward the bottom. We have also sub-plots by their shape. For example, participation in the activities in row four of figure 4.4 rise with the onset of literacy and the start of elementary school before falling with the onset of teen years.

Figure 4.3 Child faith-formation activities in the previous four weeks, by child age and worship service attendance frequency, percent
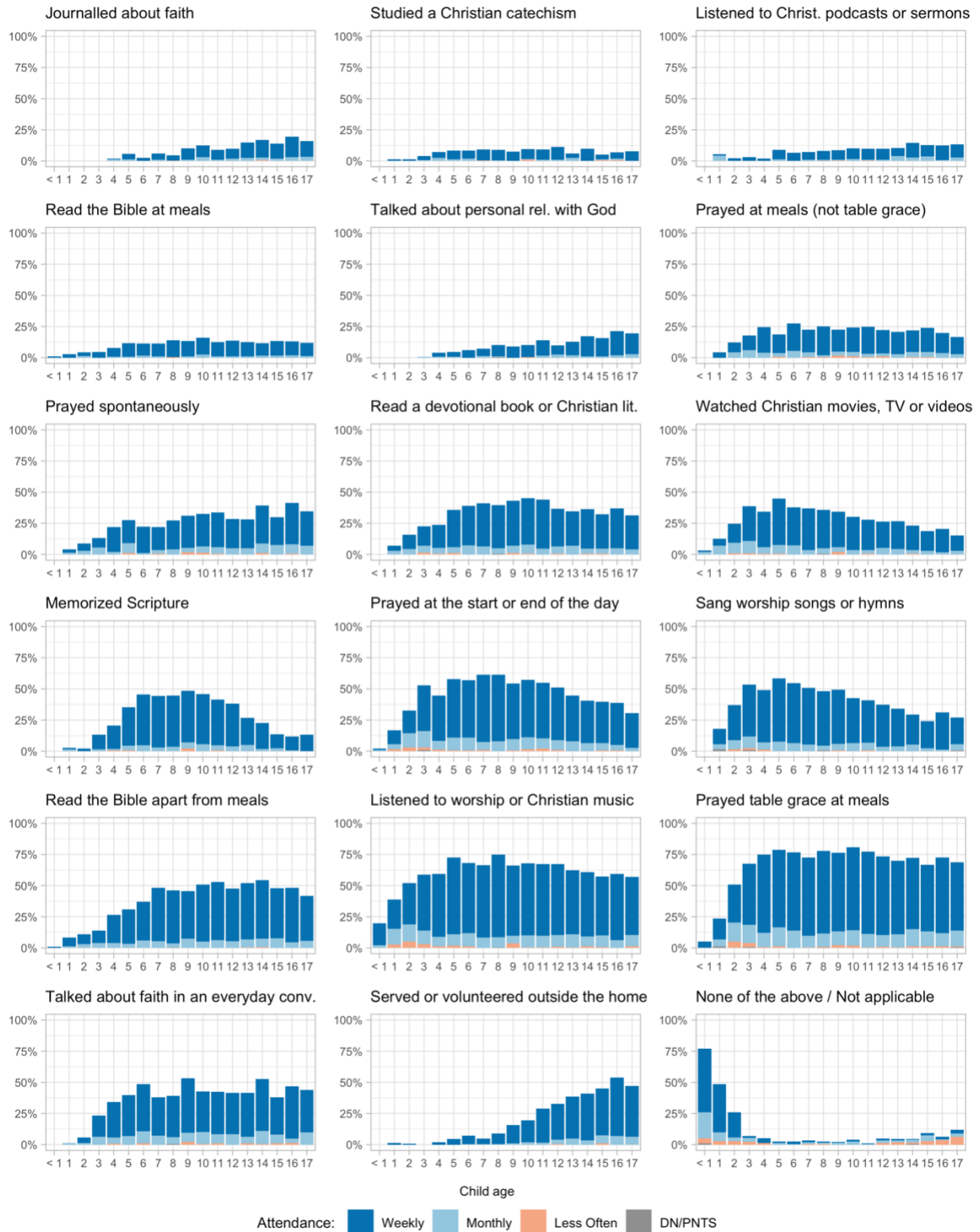
2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N children = 3,041. As reported by parents.

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Overall, the FFAs that require the most processing and intentionality, such as journalling, studying a catechism or talking about one's personal relationship with God, are the least likely to be done.

A second category of FFAs are those that involve consuming content. This includes listening to podcasts or sermons, listening to worship music (which is different that singing worship songs which we also tested, and which was less subscribed) or watching Christian content such as Christian movies, TV shows or videos.

In our interviews, four of the forty-one parents specifically mentioned Focus on the Family's audio program Adventures in Odyssey which is now often distributed as a podcast. Other children's programming included Keys for Kids, The Average Boy Podcast and Paws and Tales. The complete list of faith-formation resources cited in the parent interviews can be found in appendix B. For brevity's sake, the question about podcasts and sermons were bundled together because sermons are often distributed as podcasts and they both involve listening as opposed to interacting with the content in a dialogue. Given the frequency parents we interviewed said their children listened to Christian podcasts, we were surprised to see a very low participation rate on our national survey. Visual Christian media, such as television and videos, were more likely to be consumed, but even here, participation peaked at age five; at less than half before falling to about a tenth in later teen years. About two-thirds of children school aged or older listened to Christian music, but this was one of the activities most likely to be shared with their parents and its possible that in many cases parents are the ones populating the sound space in the home or car and their children are listening by virtue of proximity (see figure 4.4 below).

Serving or volunteering outside the home was an exception in a list of FFAs that otherwise took place in the home. It clearly rose as children gained the independence appropriate to their age that would allow them to serve outside the home without direct parental supervision. Some of this rise may be because of growing spiritual maturity, however, we note that many high schools require a certain amount of volunteering as a condition of graduation.

What is perhaps most striking about the plots in figure 4.3 is the whitespace representing the children in this sample that did not participate in these FFAs. Our list is not comprehensive, but it does reflect what we heard in our interviews. The none-of-the-above sub-plot in the bottom-right corner of figure 4.3 is sparse, so most children are doing something – as stated earlier the average is 3.3 activities. Many of these activities are done in the social context of the family such as table grace or talking about faith in an everyday conversation. There is clearly an attenuation of participation in the teen years as they enter the developmental stage of differentiation where there is less direction from parents in teens' daily activities.

Bengtson, Putney and Harris measure religious *transmission* from one generation to the next. According to their theory, parents can pass on a strong, weak or non-existent religiosity. Religious transmission is said to be "successful" when the children's religiosity closely matches

that of their parents.[91] There are different measures of religiosity; some behavioural, and some attitudinal or doctrinal. We would expect that as children approach adulthood, their level of participation in FFAs would begin to converge with that of their parents, if religious transmission was successful.

Figure 4.4 below reprises the FFAs presented in figure 4.3 with the sub-plots being organized in the same fashion. This time, however, the shading on the bars represents the participation of children by age, and that of the parent respondents for those children. There are four colours for each bar. Red represents children whose parent respondent participates in that FFA, but the child does not. The peach represents children who participate in that FFA whose parent respondent also does. Blue represents children who participate in that FFA, but whose parent respondent does not. Finally, grey indicates the share of children where neither they nor their parent respondent participates in that FFA.

Interpretively, moving from left to right (from younger children to older ones), we would expect the peach colour portion of the vertical bars (where both children and parents participate) to grow, if, for the entire sample children are adopting the FFAs of their parents indicating that religious transmission is successful. Non-successful religious transmission would be indicated where the red portion of the bars (indicating a parental practice, but not the child's) remained dominant into the later teen years. Blue would indicate a FFA taken on by the child that is not reflected in his or her parent respondent's life. As such, this would suggest the impetus for that FFA originated apart from the parent respondent.

FFAs that seem to be most successfully transmitted to their children (peach) include praying table grace, volunteering and listening to worship or other Christian music (see figure 4.4). In fact, singing worship songs or hymns, prayer at the ends of the day and scripture memorization are less likely to be a shared FFA as children age. Although shared volunteering grows in the later teen years this may, at least in part, represent high school requirements for students to volunteer rather than children adopting the practice of their parent respondent.

Journalling, listening to podcasts or sermons, talking about one's personal relationship with God (personal testimony), spontaneous prayer and devotional reading (red) are disciplines that do not seem to be successfully transmitted to children.

Scripture memorization, watching Christian movies, television and videos are the most likely FFAs for a child to adopt apart from his or her parent respondent's example (blue). As noted earlier, programs like Awana, Bible Quizzing and Sunday school are likely sources of encouragement for scripture memorization.

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[91] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 55.

Figure 4.4 Faith-formation activities in the previous four weeks, by child age, children and parent respondents, survey, percent

2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041. As reported by parents (respondents).
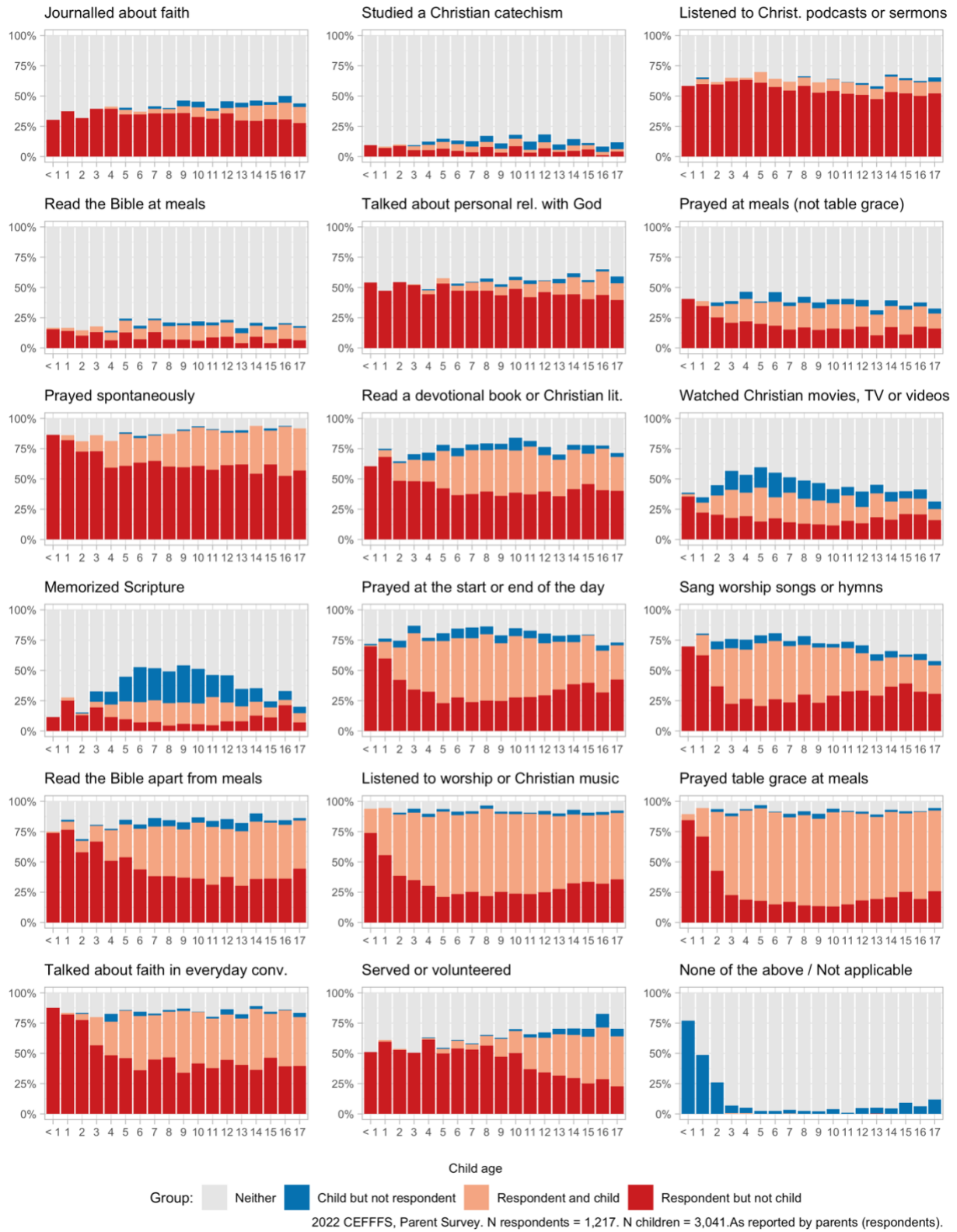
Figure 4.5 below presents data comparing parent respondents' participation rates in FFAs with those of children by age range. In this chart, the FFAs are arranged in descending order according to the frequency of parent respondent participation (red). Children have been broken out into ranges corresponding to pre-school (children under age three; green), elementary school (four to eleven; light blue) and high school (junior high and senior high, ages twelve to seventeen; dark blue). As children's participation in these FFAs are somewhat dependent on a developmental stage, these ranges provide useful comparisons with which to assess religious transmission.

Parent respondents participated less frequently than only one of the child age range groups in three cases: Elementary scripture memorization, elementary Christian video content consumption and elementary and high school catechism study (see figure 4.5). This distinction was substantial only in the case of scripture memorization.

In many cases, such as with listening to worship music, praying at the end of the day, singing worship songs or hymns or memorizing scripture, elementary school-aged children were more likely to participate in FFAs than either their younger or older counterparts.

The 2018 *Renegotiating Faith* study observed:

> In our interviews, we saw evidence that young adults are now using religion as a differentiating marker in absence of other available markers. Where parents have strong religious identity, religion may provide a clear and compelling point of differentiation for young adults.[92]

That FFA participation wanes in teen years within devout families, suggests we are seeing the same phenomenon in this data.

Two national surveys were conducted for this study: one with parents and the other with pastors and local church leaders with family ministry responsibilities. In our interviews, we noticed that pastors were far less sanguine about the faith-formation efforts and competencies of parents than parents were of their own faith-formation efforts. These two surveys were separate populations. For example, pastors represented in the pastor survey may not be the pastor of any of the parents represented in the parent survey. Nevertheless, both samples were recruited from the same evangelical population (see appendix A for more about the samples).

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[92] Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, "Renegotiating Faith," 31.

Figure 4.5 Faith-formation activities in the previous four weeks, parent respondents and children, by age range, survey, percent

| Activity	Parent respondents	Children under 3	Children 4 to 11	Children 12 to 17
Listened to worship or Christian music	89%	45%	68%	44%
Prayed table grace at meals	88%	41%	77%	51%
Prayed spontaneously	88%	7%	27%	24%
Talked about faith in everyday conv.	82%	9%	42%	32%
Read Bible apart from meals	78%	9%	43%	35%
Prayed at the start or end of the day	74%	29%	56%	30%
Read a devotional book or Christian lit.	69%	13%	39%	25%
Sang worship songs or hymns	64%	31%	49%	22%
Listened to podcasts or sermons	60%	3%	8%	9%
Served or volunteered	59%	0%	12%	31%
Testimony	53%	0%	8%	11%
Journalled about faith	39%		7%	11%
Watched Christian movies, TV or videos	34%	22%	35%	16%
Prayed at meals (not table grace)	32%	10%	24%	15%
Memorized Scripture	21%	5%	41%	16%
Read Bible at meals	15%	3%	12%	9%
Studied a Christian catechism	7%	2%	9%	6%
NA / PNTS	0%	35%	3%	5%

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent survey. N children under 3 = 435. N children 4 to 11 = 1,460, N children 12 to 17 = 1,054, N respondents = 1,217.

On the parent survey we asked parents about which FFAs their families did together within the previous four weeks. This list was the same as the one we saw earlier in this section, with the exception that journalling was replaced with a family conversation about faith. Pastors were also presented with this list on their survey, but rather than being asked what their families did in the previous four weeks, they were asked which FFAs they thought a typical family in their congregation engaged in on a weekly basis. Keeping in mind the incongruity of the time periods in question, figure 4.6 below shows the results of these two questions ordered in descending percent according to parent responses.

Pastors reported the typical family in their congregations more likely consumed Christian media and volunteered on a *weekly* basis than parents reported they had done so in the previous four weeks. Conversely, parents reported they had faith conversations, sang worship songs or hymns and prayed spontaneously in the previous four weeks, more frequently than pastors believed the typical family in their congregations might.

Figure 4.6 Family faith-formation activities pastor respondents said a typical family in their congregation does together on a *weekly* basis, and family faith-formation activities parent respondents said their families did together in the *previous four weeks*, survey, percent
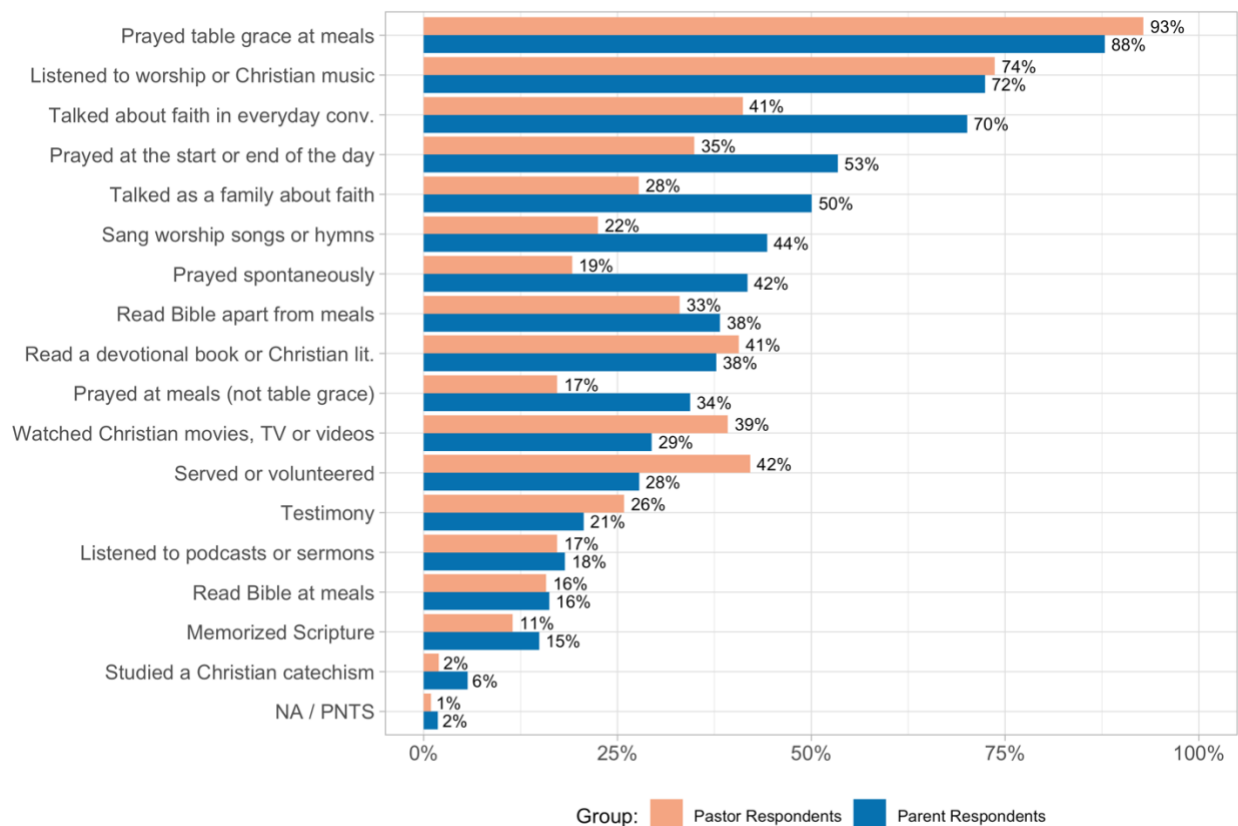
Source: 2022 CEFFFS. Parent survey, N = 1,217. Pastor survey, N = 209.

This suggests that families in our parent sample (see appendix A for more about the sample) engaged more frequently in FFAs than pastors from our pastor survey thought families in their congregations did. The discrepancy may be explained in part by the more devout sample of parent respondents being compared with a more general sampling pastors made of their respective congregations.

## 4.2 Faith-Formation Conversations by Time and Place

Faith conversations were the most cited faith-formation activities given by parents in response to our interview question about practices in the home. Conversations were an important piece of the faith-formation environment parents, especially mothers, established in the home.

- [H]aving those conversations around, yeah, around faith, actually, is very much, you know, the core of what we talk about. (Female)

- [R]egular talks, like, regular conversations that would involve God or involve teaching the Bible. Yeah, we do that regularly for at least once per week. I don't know. I don't count that. But that's part of the conversation. (Female)

- I think just the main thing we do is that it's very talked about, it's just part of the, it's just part of our reality. It's not forced. (Female)

From parent interviews and surveys, we identified a pattern in the times and places parents influence their children's faith through conversation. We referred to these as a domestic geography, which we defined as reference to rooms (i.e., kitchen, family room or bedroom), spaces (i.e., inside or outside) or objects (i.e., kitchen table, family computer); and a domestic calendar, referencing the days in the week (i.e., weekends, weekdays, Sundays) or to times within a day (i.e., suppertime, after school, bedtime). Graphing the faith-formation geography of our parent sample showed heavily trafficked areas for faith-formation conversations as the bedroom, the car, the family room and the dining room (figure 4.7 below).

Figure 4.7 Places parent respondents were most likely to have faith conversations with children, survey, counts
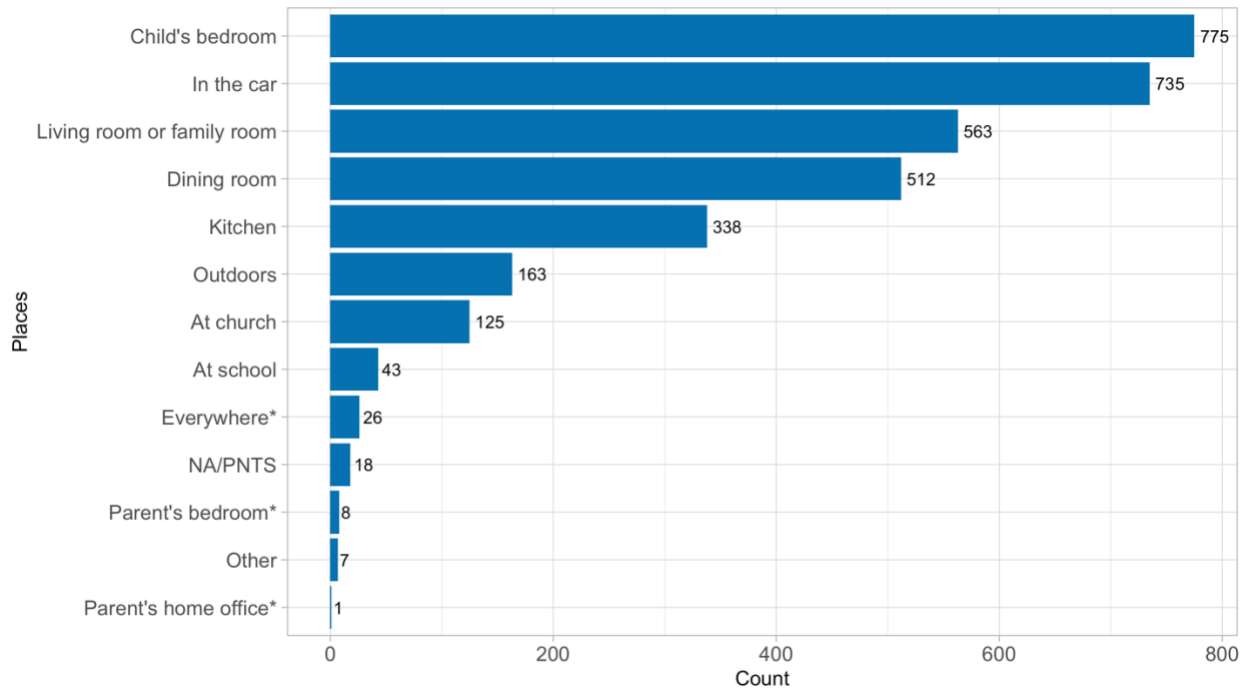
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N = 1,217. Respondents could choose up to 3. * indicates a write-in response.

Survey respondents indicated bedtimes, mealtimes and moments in transit as common times on their domestic calendars for faith-formation activities to occur (figure 4.8 below). In most cases, the popular faith-formation geographies corresponded with the calendars, which suggests parents not only look for the right place to engage in faith formation but the right time. The popular times and places also correspond with some of the times and places listed in Deuteronomy 6:6-9, where parents are given instructions on how to pass their faith on to their children "when you sit at home," "along the road," and "when you lie down."

Figure 4.8 Times parent respondents were most likely to have faith conversations with children, survey, counts
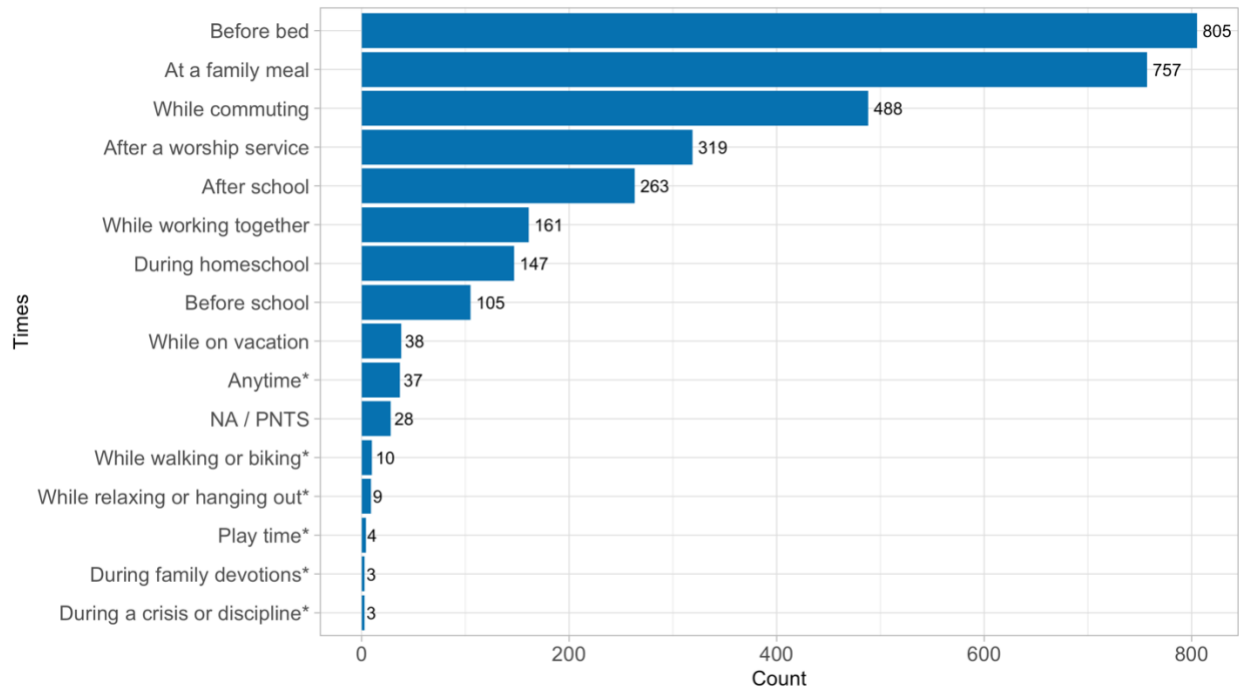

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N = 1,217. Respondents could choose up to 3. * indicates a write-in response.

Referencing figures 4.11 and 4.12 at the end of this section, the shape of each subplot will show general trends in where and when faith conversations occur over time. For instance, the dining room and living room (figure 4.11, middle-left and centre sublots) remain consistent over time, whereas faith conversations that happen outdoors tend to peak between ages three and five, reflecting when children are developmentally able to have conversations but are pre-school age. Bars that slope upward indicate that faith conversations increase as children age, as shown in figure 4.12 at the top- and middle-right subplots, while commuting and after the Sunday worship service.

In the survey, we did not ask about where and when parents had faith conversations with each of their children; however, we do know each child's age, and this allows us to consider each child age group and we know the parents of those age groups had conversations in those places or at those times with at least some of their children. For example, looking at figure 4. 11 at the top-left subplot (Child's bedroom) does not mean that approximately seventy percent of parents had faith conversations with infants in their bedrooms, rather that seventy percent of infants were part of families where the parents held faith conversations with at least one child in his or her bedroom. The following sections will discuss in more detail the trends in the common domestic geographies and calendars as they occur by child.

4.2.1 Bedroom / nighttime

Bedtimes usually have associated routines that are amenable to faith formation. In interviews, parents said bedtime was a time for reading, reflection and prayer, but it was also seen as an occasion to give individualized attention to each child.

- So, you know, each of the children would pray. We will – not all together. They each have their own rooms. But we will all do that, you know, each child with a parent right before bed.

- And during night before bedtime, like I said before, we [say] what we are grateful for every single time.

- Well, and we used to pray quite regularly in the evenings at bedtime, and that kind of helped the kids just give their worries back to God and start the day over again in the morning.

In figure 4.12, top-left subplot, about seventy-five percent of parents surveyed had regular faith-formation conversations with their children before bed, at the bedside (figure 4.11, top-left subplot) between ages three and nine. The downward slope of bars in the subplot indicates that opportunities for bedside faith conversations dwindled after age ten, likely as bedtime routines became more independent and the bedroom became a place of privacy.

4.2.2 Dining table / mealtime

Although mealtimes ranked second among survey respondents, parents in our interview sample almost universally described mealtime as a consistent and prioritized gathering place for the family, this applied to families of all attendance frequencies and spanned across theological traditions. Prioritizing mealtimes together does not guarantee faith-formation priorities. For example, a yearly attender said he prayed before meals but clarified this was the only faith-formation activity his family engaged in together; "We say grace before meals and stuff like that, but I think that's about it."

Some parents we interviewed leveraged mealtime for intentional FFAs, like intentional discussion, scripture reading or a family devotional.

- Well, during our meal we would share about our day, so I would say the devotions would be more focused on topics that it would bring up or things that we wanted to talk to our kids about … we've made suppertime, especially as the kids get older and school is the main part of their day, to make sure we have time in the evening – or around the supper table together.

- [I]n the morning they're all supposed to read our Bible with our breakfast. And then, at lunch is usually some sort of catechizing question and answers … [O]ur family meal [supper] is always – no matter what – together. And we open with prayer. We have our

meal together all sitting down at the table. We close the meal with Bible reading, and we all have a Bible and a Psalter, which is the songbook for our church. And we read around the table.

- Monday would be a devotion. I have a devotional little book here. I usually in the morning read something at breakfast, say, 8:00 or 7:30, 8:30, depending on when the children are up and what's happening. But devotion in the morning and a bit of a Bible passage, couple verses.

About sixty-two percent of surveyed parents (757 total responses) said they also used mealtimes for facilitating faith-formation discussions with their children (figure 4.8). And unlike bedtime faith conversations, mealtime conversations by age (figure 4.12, top, centre subplot) were consistent across age groups. According to the survey, mealtimes around the table remain a strategic time and space for faith-formation conversation to occur even as children get older, but some interview respondents said family mealtime dynamics changed as children got older.

4.2.3 Calendar disrupters

A few interview respondents mentioned their children's job schedules started to change established family time routines.

- So, before my kids started working on Friday nights, we would always have family night on Friday.
- [W]e eat together most days of the week unless my older son's got work.
- [T]his season in our life, my oldest son is working outside of the house. So, our days starts with, oftentimes, my husband and I having breakfast together, and then my husband leaving for work and me driving my son to work.

According to the parent survey sample, about sixty percent of families have children under the age of eighteen, with a paid, part-time job (figure 4.9 below). The percentage of children who had jobs more than doubled between ages fourteen and fifteen and grew by about ten percent over the next few years.

Figure 4.9 Children with paid, part-time or full-time jobs, by child age, parent respondents, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N children = 3,041.
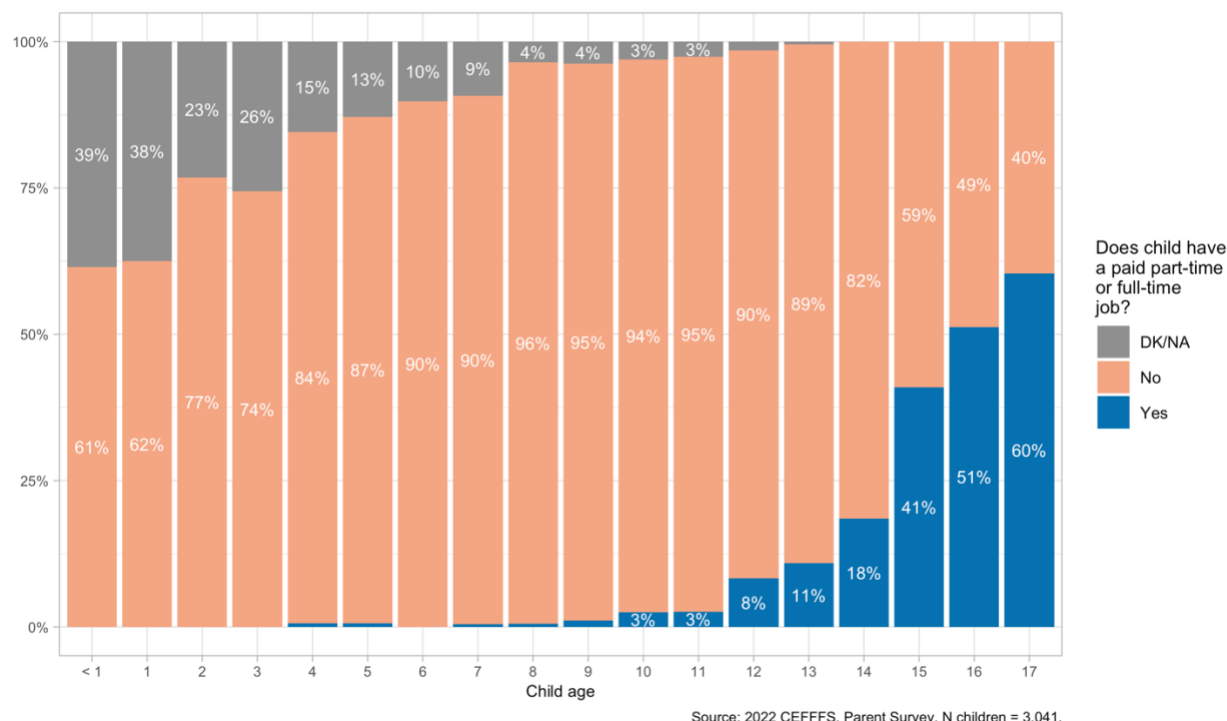
In interviews, parents tended to view their children's jobs as something that was allowed to replace family meals and devotional time. Teens are at an age where they are differentiating[93] themselves from their parents, the process in which they "[set] out identity markers between [themselves] and [their] family of origin."[94] In anticipation of this, some parents intentionally moved from family devotionals to encouraging individual devotions as their children aged. This transition likely reflects a desire for children to develop habits of faith on their own rather than relying on family rhythms to determine their faith practices:

- I was … on and off with how consistent we were with having devotional time with – as the threesome, me and my two children. And then, as my daughter got older, she wanted to do more of it on her own. So, then I ended up – probably two years ago, it was kind of where it was transitioning where she wanted to do more of it on her own.

- Currently we're not doing Bible studies as a family – each person does their own devotions – but historically while the children were younger, we would do, like, a family devotion every day.

- We always talk about [faith] as it goes. So, something that we've been doing over the summer is the kids each have gotten their own Bibles. So that's a new thing where instead of sharing kind of like a family one or whatever, they each have their own Bible.

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[93] Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, 3.
[94] Hiemstra, Dueck, and Blackaby, 31.

> Been teaching them how to, um, really, like, look up scripture, read scripture, talk about it. So, we've done a, like a family devotional where they each have to look up the verse on their own, so we're doing that daily. Whereas previously we would have done that just as a family and I would have read it or somebody would have read it, but I would have looked it up or – anyway, being more intentional about making it their own.

- It has helped us to have that Sunday time as a family. I would like, as our kids are getting a little bit older, it's – they are having their independent time. We always encourage them to read their Bible.

Transitions out of family devotionals usually occurred in families with preteen or teenage children. In one case, a respondent said her family reinstituted a corporate devotional time because her children were not engaging in FFAs on their own.

> [T]he reason why my husband decided to do this family Bible reading was because, you know, we would just talk about reading the Bible and having quiet time, but we know that [the children] just wouldn't do it. So, which is the reason we decided, "okay, let's just gather together and just read."

Presumably, as kids have later bedtimes and assume more independent routines, families have a harder time spending quality time together and eating together is no longer a given.

- [W]henever there is any opportunity as a family to attend the church gatherings, we try to do it as a family, we try to, uh, listen as a family, understand as a family, even if it's online we ensure that even if we have to be away from church that we're sitting in front of the YouTube screen together, watching the services, even though they may have their own services as well.

- [U]sually in the evening we find that that's the time that we can get everybody together. We'll just grab – we just finished – so we just grab the Bible, read the Gospel—a little section, usually a paragraph or two – and just have a discussion as to like, "Okay, this is what we read. What does it mean? What does it mean to you? What does it mean to us? What's going on?"

A study conducted by the Fuller Youth Institute on nurturing a faith that "sticks" as children transition away from the home, observed that college and university students often shelve their faith for a time as they are overwhelmed by "daily life management."[95] Families who are attentive to the inevitable disruptions to the family calendar as children age can be proactive in guiding their children to set up their own calendars and geographies that are conducive for faith formation. They can also be intentional about leveraging new times and places for faith conversations, as we saw some parents do with commuting time.

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[95] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 54.

4.2.4 Car / driving time

The car was one of the few places where opportunities for faith conversations increased with age (figure 4.11, top, centre subplot). As evidenced in the previous section, when children grow older, they start to develop their own calendars, and this usually has negative implications on the shared family calendar. However, children's dependence on their parents for transportation (at least until age seventeen or eighteen) seems to open opportunities for faith conversations to take place in the car in lieu of the bedside.

Not every parent who mentioned the car in interviews talked about seizing faith-formation opportunities, but for many parents, they leveraged the car as place for spiritual conversations. It is likely easier for parents to get their children's attention in the car because they cannot access Wi-Fi and they are proximally close; the car seats even enforce a common orientation.

- Because we drive our kids to work, I would say we have the time, like, **it's a nice way to talk to your kids about various things**.

- Like, **we'll turn [worship music] in the – on in the car and even though we're driving we sing them together and we worship together.**

- So, **when we [are] driving, we talk. We talk a lot about God.**

4.2.5 Sunday morning

Domestic geography, as we saw above, usually has a corresponding domestic calendar. In interviews with parents, we noticed that Sundays covered a more expansive geography than other calendar items. Sundays were often framed as a day when theological reflection and conversation could happen anywhere. Usually, parents were intentional about discussing the sermon with their children or inquiring about their Sunday school lesson.

- [T]ypically on Sundays we would have some discussion about, you know, what we've heard that day and what they think about it. And if they have any questions we try and answer them and have a family discussion about that.

- Church, definitely, is a – often as a conversation starter with our kids. So, "What was the sermon about? What did this make you think of?" Recently, they've been doing reflection questions after the sermon online, and what I'm really enjoying is how much my seventeen-year-old has already targeted something that he heard that he wants to talk more about.

- I would say discussing the sermon and the Sunday morning services or the – we used to go on Friday pre-COVID for my daughter to attend the youth service in person.

- Faith formation is also – so, the oldest one will sit in the sermon – discussing with him. "What did you understand? What questions do you have?" So, unpacking what they've learned at church.

Notice how conversation was prompted by the Sunday event, but the location for that conversation was incidental. For some parents, Sundays were an opportunity to have faith-forming discussions with their children that may not happen during the week. Alternatively, if families forego the Sunday morning service, it is likely that this additional faith formation opportunity is lost.

4.2.6 Transitions

We grouped geographies and calendars into whether faith conversations happened while families were in motion, stationary or in times of transition, in figure 4.10 below. About sixty to seventy-five percent of families consistently participated in stationary conversations (figure 4.10, centre subplot), but transitional and active conversations seemed to increase with age (figure 4.10, right and left subplots, respectively).

Figure 4.10 Times most likely to have faith conversations (recoded), by child age, parent respondent, survey, percent
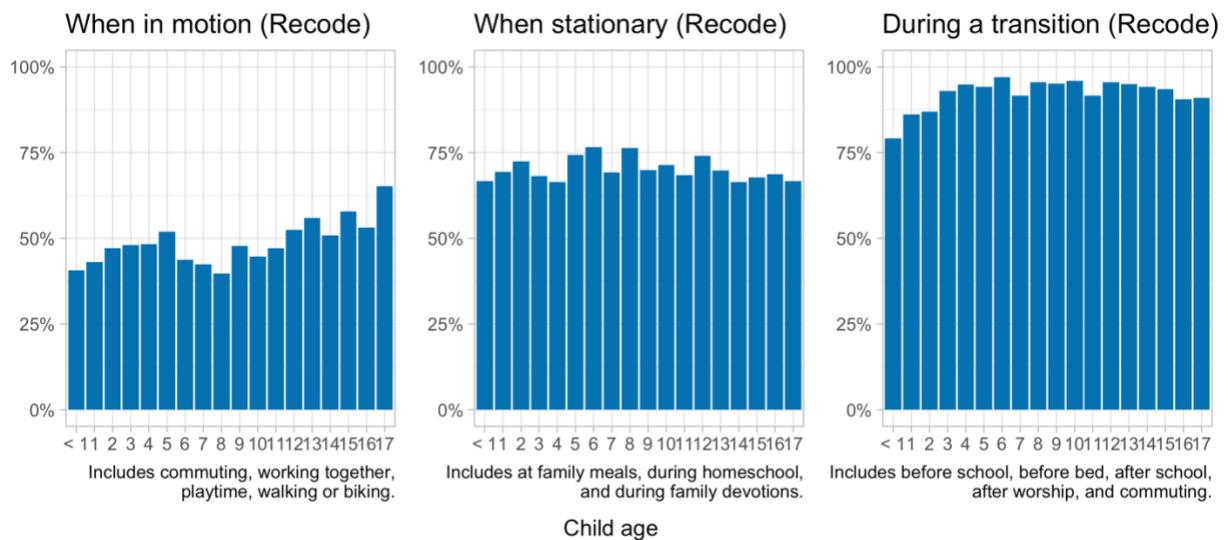
Stationary faith conversations seem to promote episodic faith formation – activities that have a clear start and stop time, didactic instruction and invited discussion. Stationary activities are also predictable. Meals, homeschooling or family devotions tend to happen at the same time and occur in the same place. Having a predictable place for conversations, usually the home, gives children a chance to process faith content in a comfortable and controlled environment. A safe environment like this was identified in the *Sticky Faith* study as an important place for children to wrestle with doubts and questions.

The advantages of processing faith through conversation, while in motion, is that parents can model responsive faith engagement in a changing environment. This requires parents to actively look for opportunities to incorporate faith into everyday activities rather than

communicating faith as something that is solely practiced at a certain place or time. To this effect, an academic we consulted in ministry expert interviews said:

> [Children] need … constant orientation to God and so forth. And then, explaining it on their terms at their level and being reminded on a regular daily basis of [how] either their behaviour or their thinking lines up with expectations and with Scripture and God and so forth.

Ministry experts said children need consistent and intentional engagement from their parents to promote and discuss matters of faith and all arenas of life. Faith conversations that happen in motion may move children out of the safe, controlled environment of the home, but give children the opportunity to process a shared experience with their parents through a biblical world view. This requires intentionality on the part of parents, however; one pastor said, "Children need their parents to be … intentional … faith development doesn't just happen."

Importantly, as was noted in bedtime routines in section 4.2.1, transitional times are likely to become more independent as children get older. This is not obvious in figure 4.12 (right subplot) because decreased conversations during bedtime routines are offset by the increase in conversations happening in the car or after Sunday worship. A sizeable percentage of survey respondents said they have faith conversations during times of transition (seventy-five to ninety-five percent over the span of a child's life at home). This indicates a great deal of parents are using transitional times to have discussions with their children, but it also speaks to the sizeable loss children experience when they start to take over these transitions independently, and away from the home.

See interpretive explanation for figures 4.11 and 4.12 on pages 166 to 168.

Figure 4.11 Places most likely to have faith conversation with children, by child age, parent respondent, survey, percent
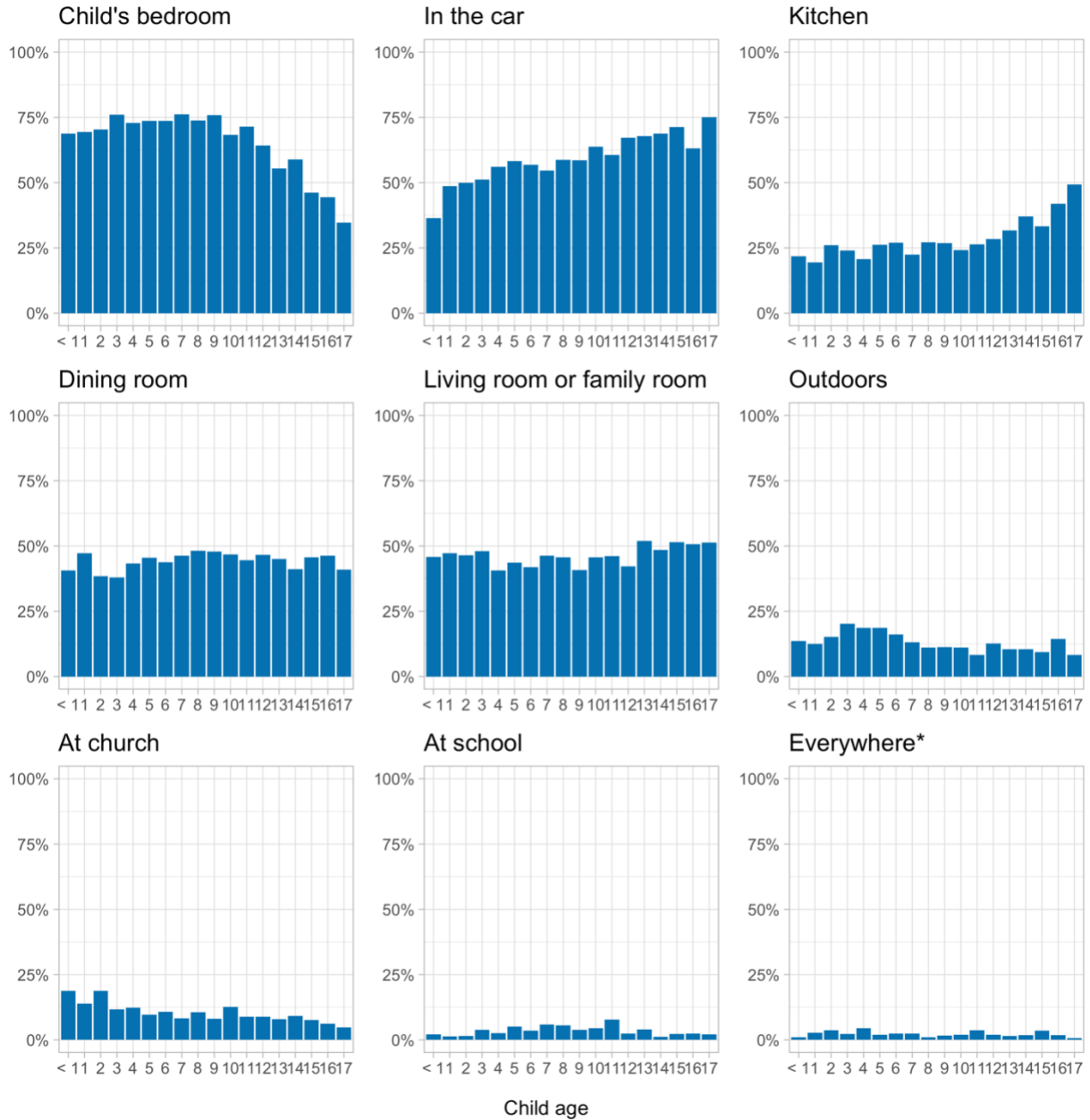
2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N children = 3,041. Respondents could choose up to 3.
* indicates a write-in response. Places with fewer than 20 observations not shown.

Figure 4.12 Times most likely to have faith conversations with children, by child age, parent respondent, survey, percent
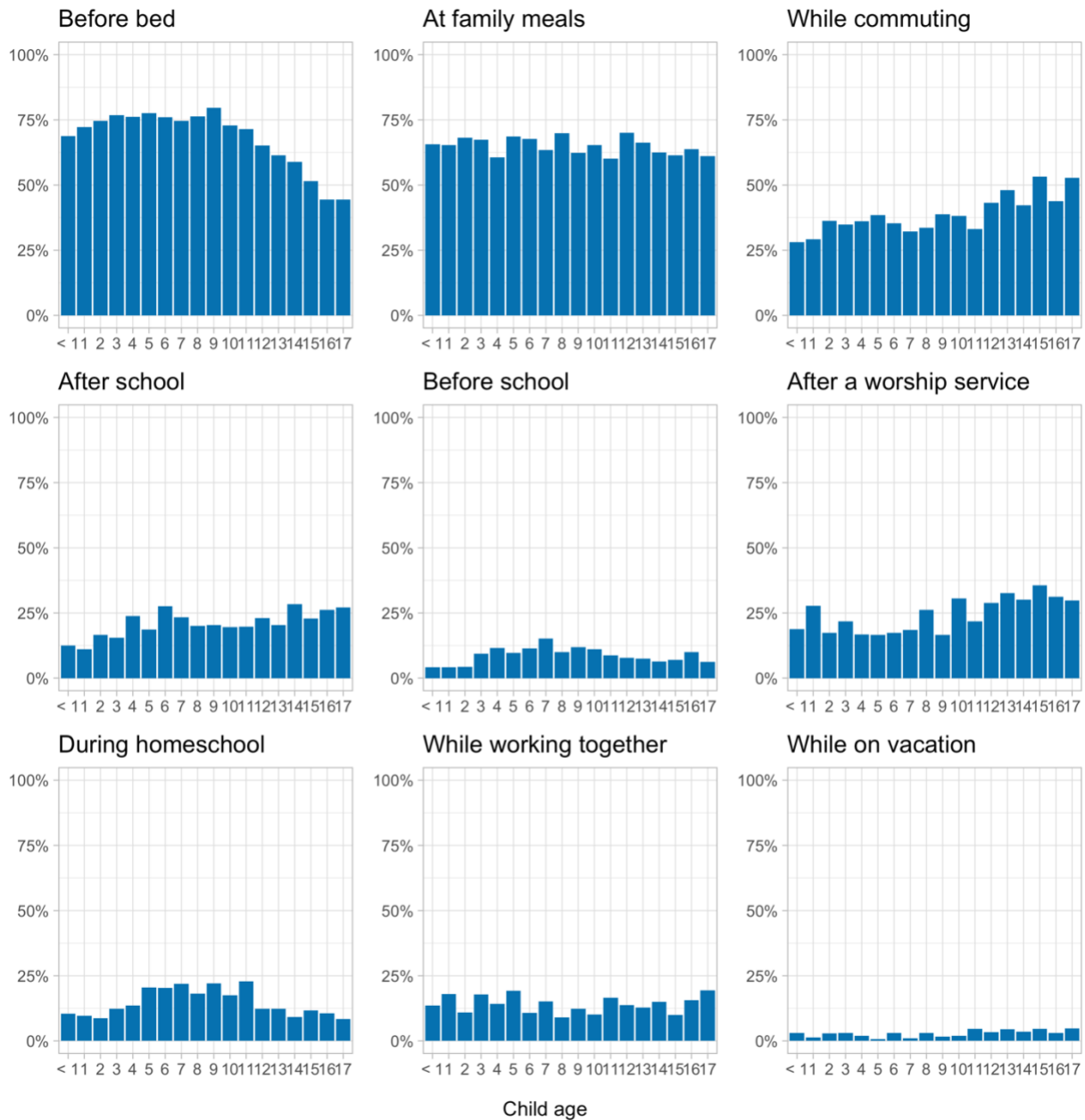
2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N children = 3,041. Respondents could choose up to 3. Conversation times with fewer than 20 observations not shown.

4.2.7 Calendars and geographies by gender

Individual family situations vary, but women tended to be more engaged with children's routines, rhythms and habits, whereas men's interaction with their children tended to be more episodic. Table 4.1 below lists the FFAs mentioned by more than one male or female ministry expert. Thirteen activities mentioned by women were centred in the home, two in the community (acts of service and community connections) and two in the church (worship service

attendance and Sunday school attendance). By contrast, only nine FFAs were mentioned more than once by male ministry experts. Of these, seven were centred in the home and two at church.

Leaving aside Bible reading and conversation, which were commonly cited by both male and female ministry experts, FFAs frequently cited by male experts tended to be episodic or scheduled activities such as family devotions, home catechism, table grace and worship service attendance (see tables 4.1 and 4.2). Although family devotions and home catechism may be led by any family member, the initiative for these tends to rest with parents, not the children. Moreover, the domestic geographical centre for these activities is likely the kitchen table, where meals and instruction naturally take place.

FFAs frequently cited by female informants also include those that are scheduled and episodic, but add to these integrative ones, like modelling, rhythms, rituals, habits and listening to worship music. Moreover, the domestic geography of these additional FFAs is broader – encompassing the bedroom (blessing at bedtime, and likely storytelling) and possibly the whole house (modelling and worship music listening). Although family worship could be held in almost any room of the home, the natural connection of worship with music would tend to locate it near an instrument, television or speaker which would typically be found in a living room or family room. So, the domestic geography for the list of FFAs cited by female experts is broader than the domestic geography of those cited by males.

In addition to a more expansive domestic geography, the FFAs frequently cited by female experts extend into the community beyond home and church. Acts of service and community connections (mentioned exclusively by female experts) extend the experience of faith into other places. Moreover, single references were made by female ministry experts to prayer on the way to school and to hospitality (inviting those from outside in).

Deuteronomy 6, a passage advocating for the integration of faith formation into all parts and places of life, was the most frequently referenced Scripture passage by both male and female ministry experts. Given this, parents and ministry experts alike should want to see as expansive a geography for FFAs as possible, and one that is as integrated into all aspects of a child's life as possible.

Other locations touched on by single references include school (Christian school), Bible camps and pilgrimages. These geographical extensions exist within a parallel Christian sphere that seldom interacts with the public school, the hockey arena, the local park, the dance studio, the hardware store or the public pool.

If the FFAs mentioned by female and male ministry experts tended to have different geographies, they also tended to have different calendars. As noted in section 2.5, mothers typically contribute more to childcare than fathers. Time is opportunity. In some cases, fathers have more opportunities to interact with and influence their children than they take. In other cases, fathers' time with their children is circumscribed by the hours claimed by their work, a

limitation increasingly shared by mothers who also work outside the home. Nevertheless, many of the FFAs cited by male experts are calendar events (worship service attendance, catechism, family devotions) whereas more of those cited by female experts are absent from calendars because they are scheduled by habit, rhythm and routine (hospitality, presence with children, thanksgiving, listening to worship music).

Table 4.1 Faith-formation activities mentioned by more than one female or male ministry expert,[ab] interviews, mentions

Faith-formation activity	Female experts	Male experts
Bible reading	11	9
Conversation / dialogue	8	5
Prayer / listening to God	8	3
Prayer – table grace	6	4
Worship – home/family	5	0
Worship service attendance	4	5
Devotions – family	4	3
Modelling	4	0
Reading / storytelling	4	0
Acts of service	4	0
Rhythms, rituals, habits	4	0
Prayer – bedtime	3	0
Sunday school attendance	3	0
Community connections	3	0
Blessing at bedtime	2	0
Scripture memorization	2	0
Worship music – listening	2	0
Catechism	0	5
Play	0	2

[a] Twelve female ministry experts were interviewed.
[b] Ten male ministry experts were interviewed.

We identified similar trends in FFAs by gender in the parent interview sample as well. Table 4.2 below lists the kinds of FFAs mentioned by more than one respondent.

The data suggests men tend to think of faith formation as activities that have a clear start and stop point. Note that men only outpace women in mentioning activities that are often considered episodic or with a clear goal in sight, like prayer time, memorization, or leading the family through a devotional book. Interestingly, in most cases, it was the women who mentioned overseeing the children in their Bible or catechism memory.

Table 4.2 Faith formation activities in the home mentioned by parent respondents, interviews, rank, mentions, mentions by gender[a]

Faith-formation activity	Rank	Parent mentions		
		All	Male	Female
Faith conversations	1	20	6	14
Corporate Bible reading	2	17	8	9
Prayer	3	15	8	7
Bedtime prayers	4	13	3	10
Mealtime prayer		10	3	7
Individual devotions / Bible reading	5	10	3	7
Christian books / stories		10	3	7
Family devotional book	6	7	4	3
Christian movies / shows		7	1	6
Christian schooling	7	6	1	5
Listening to worship music		5	1	4
Corporate singing	8	5	2	3
Christian podcasts / audio programs		5	2	3
Role modelling		4	1	3
Memory work	9	4	3	1
Communicate doctrines / teaching		4	2	2
Social media presence		3	1	2
Faith-based activities / games	10	3	2	1
Compassion ministry		3	2	1
Catechesis		3	1	2
Worship service at home		2	1	1
Christian décor / household symbols		2	0	2
Nightly reflection / examen	11	2	0	2
Faith skills (i.e., how to read Bible, pray, etc.)		2	0	2
Discipline		2	1	1

[a] Sixteen male and twenty-five female parents interviewed.

Women seemed more engaged with their children's routines and habits and integrated FFAs more organically into life rhythms. This could explain why women more commonly mentioned practices like mealtime prayer and bedtime prayer because they typically spend more time with children in these contexts. Women also cited conversations and role modelling as faith formation more than men did, which suggests women rely more heavily on example and dialogue than didactic instruction.

Women were also more likely to talk about creating an environment that promoted faith formation. Having a faith-forming environment included passive endeavours like Christian-themed décor or playing worship music in the home, but also included ensuring children had access to, and consumed, faith-based content for reading, watching or listening.

Conclusion

The concepts of space and time, as they pertain to faith formation, should be held together. Mealtimes, for instance, are not suited to faith formation if they occur in front of the TV rather than around the dinner table. Parents have opportunities to influence their children when they

inhabit the same space at the same time. However, it may be false to assume that time spent in the same room with children is, in fact, time spent influencing their faith. For opportunities to be influential, parents must ensure they have intention and attention.

Our ministry experts stressed the value of habits in supporting faith formation in the home. And they pointed to the relationship between habits and intentionality. A habit, by definition, is automatic, a codified intentionality. However, the move from intention to habit seemed to be one of the biggest barriers to parental engagement in faith formation among our more disengaged participants (section 4.3). As we saw with bedside faith conversations that decrease with age, and commuting conversations that increase, parents will also have to adjust their habits and intentions as their children age and develop.

4.3 Habit Formation

Ministry experts often identified parental needs by locating parents along a spectrum that ranged from disengaged to highly committed. Families that had ingrained practices and established habits for faith formation were ranked by ministry experts among the more engaged and committed, needing very little help. For those who were considered new believers or disengaged church attendees, ministry experts said they needed simple and easy systems to incorporate faith-formation activities onto their domestic calendars.

- What I focused a lot on and what I see some of our churches picking up on is that you really have to simplify what you require or give to parents. And it's really about, at the first level, kind of, how do you help them to start to just bring in an awareness or redirection in kind of the normal rhythm of their life, their family life.

- For parents who haven't done any of this, help them start small so that they're not overwhelmed.

- I think it's just reminding [parents] that they don't have to turn their lives upside down. They just need to see the value of it and look for where they can weave it into the rhythm of their life.

- For a lot of our families, this really boils down to a matter of simple things. A lot of it has to do with practices that they engage in. So, maybe they identify some simple practices that help to bring faith more out into the open within their home environment. And, you know, simple conversations that they're engaged in about faith.

Easing into habit forming was for parents who "were not on top of it," or "for parents who haven't done any of this." For these ministry experts, ease was seen as an on-ramp to start FFAs in the home, which means beginning is a barrier to faith formation. However, assuming that ease is an on-ramp to forming a habit, means discipline needs to be developed and maintained for the habit to keep.

Ministry experts described the value of habits to support faith formation in the home in a variety of ways.

1. Habits provide an unconsciously integrated faith environment

- I think habits are … what anchor us in our faith formation. They're what – **I think habits are really what cultivates that environment for faith formation.** It's the practices that you do whether you want to or not … habits develop that environment for faith formation to happen, for a depth of faith to take place.

- We don't often talk about habit. And that can also seem kind of legalistic, but I really believe that it's not legalistic. I think it's just, it's like putting a structure in place. It's like having the bones in your body so that your body can be healthy and grow strong … **whatever the habits are for your family, those are the things that grow your bones of faith.**

- The … thing I would say is critical is that rhythm of life. … **I got a rhythm in my life of reading Scripture, of engaging in conversation, of praying, of helping others, of just living out those things. That was a rhythm in my life.**

These experts talk about habits as a way to support a consistent life of faith. Some of our respondents used metaphors to explain how habits facilitate this kind of support for faith formation.

- Habits are like an anchor = providing stability to "develop [an] environment for … a depth of faith to take place."
- Habits are like bones = a supportive structure integral to life "so that your body can be healthy and grow strong."
- Habits are a rhythm = "living out faith" in consistent and regular patterns.

These respondents want people to be intentional so that habits can form. However, the move from intention to habit seems to be one of the biggest barriers to increased parental engagement in faith formation.

The move from intention to habit seems to be one of the biggest barriers to parental engagement in faith formation.

A New Canadian pastor mentioned the challenges that many newer immigrant churches face with having two working parents on different shifts. He said in his church especially, there is one parent who oversees all the childrearing during the day and then goes to work in the evenings when the other parent gets home.

> *C'est un gros défi. Vous savez que, on dit que l'habitudes c'est un* [indistinct] *donc si on ne prend pas l'habitude de le faire quand les enfants sont tous jeunes, c'est très difficile de faire de commencer, de continuer d'une façon solide avec ce ministère auprès des enfants. Ça aussi c'est un obstacle.*
>
>> **Translation** : It's a big challenge. You know that we say that a habit is a [indistinct], so if we don't get into the habit of doing it when the kids are all young, it's very difficult to start, to continue in a solid way with this ministry to children. This is also an obstacle.

He said this situation is difficult, not so much that one parent seems to be completely absent from the children, but that there is no solid habit established with ministry to children. Parents might have the will or desire to nurture their children's faith, but their socio-economic situation does not support sustained intentionality in this area (see section 2.8.2).

2. Habits contribute to communal identity and reinforce what it means to belong

- Like, church, I think, has become very, you know, church is very focused on what we get out of it, what we like. We move to churches that offer things, whatever. But that's not what our faith is about. That's not what worship is about, really. But when you have those habits, it's, you know, we pray before our meal because this is what we do.

- For some families, developing habits and rituals in their families: "This is what it means to be part of this family as Christ-followers, and so, because of that, our time together at church is non-negotiable, or our time in family home church is non-negotiable." Those kinds of rhythms. Serving together, finding ways to serve together. Building in those rhythms, again, as I refer back to earlier, if parents are living it out that's going to become a habit in the family.

- In the best scenarios, there's a consciousness of [intergenerational covenantal living] every day through some of just the regular practices and habits.

These ministry experts described habits as contributing to a collective sense of identity and belonging. To belong to the natural family, or the family of Christ, is to participate in these practices as a member. For example, phrases like:

- "This is what we do,"
- "This is what it means to be part of this family," or
- "[Having] a consciousness of [intergenerational covenantal living]."

These responses indicate that habits can also be established and sustained by a community. Communal habits are the corralling force of peer pressure and social desirability that invite children and adults alike into a shared identity. This understanding of a shared community identity was relatively absent for interviews with parents, however.

While worship and church attendance were mentioned as important habits to establish as a family, the formal role of the congregation in supporting faith habits tended to come up in conversations about child dedications and baptisms.

> [W]ithin the Reformed faith where children are baptized as infants, the covenantal awareness, the strong intergenerational sense of God calling out, choosing a child … and the practices like weekly church attendance is really reinforced in the Reformed community.

This respondent finds comfort in the Reformed paedo-baptist tradition because it has a category for children to be enfolded into the community of God in covenantal terms that directs how the family and wider community supports faith formation in children. Later, she used language like, "choosing to walk with the child," "mark the child," "the whole family is oriented towards helping the child … live into that covenant." Choosing, walking, marking, orienting, helping and living are marks of intentional faith-formation habits embodied by a community.

Credo-baptists articulated a similar opportunity for the congregational community to reinforce faith-formation efforts through child dedication ceremonies. One pastor described the process like this:

> When parents are standing before the congregation and they're affirming their commitment to invest into the life of their child, it's also an opportunity to remind other parents in the room that that's something that they're striving to be about. And, but then, we also are really intentional about framing it congregationally so that it's not just something that the parents are doing and that we're just providing a public platform for that in the congregation, but that there's an active role that the congregation plays in partnering with parents and supporting them and walking with families through that formational journey.

The presence of these liturgies with roles for the congregation suggests that the church has been and is aware of the need for the church community to contribute to the spiritual upbringing of children. However, it seems as though:

- o few people take it seriously,
- o few know what that would look like; and,
- o there is uncertainty if that kind of interest would be welcomed or allowed.

We wonder if congregations tend to lack intentionality because they see themselves as a band of individuals rather than a composite body, the Church, with Spirit-enabled capacity. We think there must be a deeper, possibly a covenantal, understanding about the church community if people are going to let it influence their life enough to form their wills and speak into their faith

habits. The church can also have a role in better articulating to congregations a clear minimum expectation for spiritual care and nurture of children.

3. Habits provide a way for children to express their spirituality

Two respondents mentioned that habits equip children with language to express "what might be happening spiritually inside of them."

- So, I think that once we get those little habits into our lives it's like the mustard seed that Jesus talked about, right? Like these tiny little habits are like the little mustard seeds and they grow, and they become something beautiful that our kids can take with them throughout their whole lives.

- [H]abits help [kids] … grow in their faith and start to give them language to explain what might be happening spiritually inside of them. It also helps to focus them on the outward focus of our faith: the caring for others, the love for neighbour, the serving, what that means, what that looks like, the sharing – knowing God's Word and sharing that.

In this sense, habits communicate to children what it means to be spiritual and have faith that lasts "throughout their whole lives." The nature of habits, which connect an intention with a practice, teaches children how to connect internal realities with those external to them and to relate to God and to others.

Many ministry experts argued that the primary responsibility for the faith formation of children should fall to parents because parents have more time with their children, and time is influence. Many contrasted the relative effectiveness of Sunday school, youth group and worship services with that of parents in the home, arguing that parents were more influential because of the time they have with their children.

- I've been a Sunday school teacher all my life … but it's struck me recently … that that is twenty minutes to forty-five minutes of the child's week. And to put that much effort into that – that resources are being put into that, whereas **if they were to put their resources into equipping parents whose influence on children is ... you know, potentially hours per day – depends on if they send them to daycare, and so forth**.

- A Sunday school teacher in our church has fifty minutes with kids every week. And so, if the family comes an average of two to three weeks every month, which is, I think, pretty average for families these days, you get less than three hours a month with that kid, whereas a family has three hours together in a single day. So, the family is where the deepest and most enduring faith formation happens, whether it's intentional or not.

- I don't think one can expect to just send your kids off the Sunday school or even in the main service for an hour, hour and a half each Sunday and necessarily expect a lot of that to sink in.

These quotes express confidence in the idea that time is influence. However, the structure of families' calendars not only diminish the influence churches once had, but often do not accommodate faith formation as a priority in the home. Parent interview respondents suggested the responsibility for the things in their calendars lay with some external, generalized force they passively experienced as "busyness."

One respondent, when asked about what makes having faith conversations with his children difficult, pointed to busyness: "Timing. Just timing. Opportunity. Busyness, right? Not setting aside the time, really."

Another respondent said during COVID she had more "family time in prayer and more family time to talk about – even talk about anything because anything always comes back to our faith walk." When asked what prevented her from having that family time pre-COVID, she replied:

> Yeah. **The busyness of dropping off and going to work and coming back home, feeling tired, and having to make dinner.** And, yeah. Yeah, the busyness of life, I think, took that away. And I think worldly pursuits, to be honest, like, just trying to go higher in your career or trying to pursue this and not coming back to the basics.

There are baseline tasks every family must do to run a household, and some have more resources than others to offset the stress and busyness.[96] Ministry experts saw more families drowning under the load of family life than was seen in our parent sample of interviews. This may be because of selection bias or because the parent interviews fell during a lull in COVID restrictions (the implications of COVID on faith formation are available in section 3.3.3)

Busyness was often talked about as an external force controlling families' calendars; however, parents indicated their busyness, especially as it related to extracurricular activities for their children, were neither random nor negotiable.

4.4 Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities are regular or semi-regular activities taking place outside the home. This is significant because these activities reduce the amount of time available to parents to nurture and form the faith of their children. Parents often turn to extracurricular activities (i.e., those that fall outside of, or in addition to the school curriculum) to give their children an edge.

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[96] In the book, *Families at the Center of Faith Formation,* the authors talk about support systems to meet family stress and busyness as commodities. When parents experience stress, they can buy help from a professional or purchase a program for their kids, like tutoring. The poorer the families, the more likely they are to seem dysfunctional because they can't afford to buy help. Leif Kehrwald et al., *Families at the Center of Faith Formation* (Lifelong Faith Associates, 2016), loc 407–8.

Matthias Doepke, Professor of Economics at Northwestern University, and Fabrizio Zilibotti, Professor of International and Development Economics at Yale University assert in *Love, Money & Parenting: How Economics Explains the Way We Raise Our Kids* that parents change their parenting style in response to their society's level of economic inequality. The more economically equal a society, the more likely parents will be permissive. The more unequal a society, the more likely parents are to choose either authoritarian or authoritative parenting styles. When a society is more equal in economic outcomes it matters less how your child is raised or what education level they attain. When a society is less equal, and education is seen as the principal way society confers economic rewards, then it matters more how a child is raised and what level of formal education they attain.[97] Parents prepare their children to succeed in the future they believe their children will face.

Parents prepare their children to succeed in the future they believe their children will face.

Doepke and Zilibotti present extensive economic data that demonstrate rising economic inequality across several developed nations since the 1980s. They then contrast the way contemporary parents raise their children with how parents would have in the 1970s or 1980s.

> *Our increased involvement as parents manifests itself in ways that middle-class parents today take for granted as the 'standard' way to raise children, even though it would have been far from standard a few decades ago. We sign our kids up for music classes and sports, we make sure (discretely) they do their homework, we arrange playdates, and we read books with them. In addition, we generally supervise them closely, with an eye not so much to reduce opportunities for misbehavior, but rather to offer our help and support to induce them to do the right thing by their own 'free will.' In contrast, our parents did none of these things, or at least not to a comparable extent. When we were children, we often roamed freely until sunset, we went to friends' houses at our own choosing, no one would check our homework, and there were no organized activities until a much older age.*[98]

What is clearly missing from the contemporary parenting regime Doepke and Zilibotti describe is religious instruction or religious participation. In their analysis, the parenting task is to make sure children fall on the right side of the economic divide. And so, you parent toward that goal ensuring they develop the skills and abilities that will allow them to get into the best schools, so they are positioned to be most handsomely rewarded.

It is important to recognize that, in most cases, children's participation in extracurricular activities is driven by parents. To some extent this is because the parents have the legal,

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[97] Doepke and Zilibotti, *Love, Money & Parenting*, 28.
[98] Doepke and Zilibotti, 9–10.

financial and administrative capacity to enroll their children in programs. However, this capacity also places them in a position to block extracurricular choices their children might otherwise make. Moreover, the design of our towns and cities means, in most cases, children are dependent on parents for transportation to and from extracurricular activities; so, in a very real sense, parents sign up for extracurricular activities along with their children. Whatever benefit children receive from these activities there is a corresponding cost of family time.

On our parent survey we asked, on average, how many days per week at least one child from the home was out of the house at an extracurricular activity (see table 4.3). On average, parent survey respondents told us they had a child out of the home at an extracurricular activity 2.3 days per week.[99]

Table 4.3 Average days per week at least one child in the household participated in an extracurricular activity outside the home, parent respondents, survey, counts, percent and cumulative percent

Days per week	Count	Percent	Cumulative percent
1 day	280	*23*	*23*
2 days	314	*26*	*49*
3 days	207	*17*	*66*
4 days	130	*11*	*77*
5 days	57	*5*	*81*
6 days	32	*3*	*84*
7 days	28	*2*	*86*
Not applicable	159	*13*	*99*
Don't know	4	*0*	*100*
Prefer not to say	6	*0*	*100*
Total	**1,217**	***100***	

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, parent survey. N = 1,217.

Our parent interviews fell during the COVID-19 pandemic with its associated public health restrictions that led to the cancellation of many extracurricular activities. The data in table 4.3 should be interpreted keeping in mind that although public health restrictions were beginning to be lifted this did not mean that all extracurricular activities available before the pandemic had restarted. Significantly, seventeen of forty-one parents we interviewed said that COVID public health restrictions had been good for their families because it gave them more family time, made them less busy, and, in some cases, gave them more space for intentional faith formation with their children.

Socialization was the most common reason parents gave for placing children in extracurricular activities. Parents influence who their children's peers will be by the neighbourhoods they choose to live in, the schools they send them to, the churches they choose, and the communities associated with the extracurricular activities they participate in. We saw in this study's literature review how Sunday school and youth group developed, in part, in response to

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[99] In this calculation 'not applicable' was scored as 0, and 'don't know' and 'prefer not to say' were excluded.

the rise of compulsory primary and secondary education, respectively.[100] In many ways, extracurricular activities form curated communities for children to socialize in. Parents may not choose their children's friends, but through extracurricular activities they can choose the communities in which their children are likely to make friends. It may also be that extracurricular activities are a strategy to exclude some of what parents perceive to be harmful digital content from their children's lives by crowding it out of their children's calendars with extracurricular activities.

This respondent clearly explained he is looking for a different social community than the one provided by his children's school.

> **So, we want them to be socializing with other people, not just people from their school, right, outside the school. And they've been doing that for – since they were kids.**

A homeschool father explained that he chooses extracurricular activities to provide their children with social connections that their homeschooling cannot provide.

> **Well, being homeschooled they don't get as much socializing with others, except, you know, Sundays and church events.** There's the odd, you know, time they get together with other friends they have, but it's an extra event outing.

This respondent very clearly said the extracurricular activities are about "creating bonds" with different people or communities.

> Well, catechism is required by our church to learn the doctrines and the creeds and to be able to understand fully the faith of our Reformed Christian beliefs. And then, the **youth is to create strong bonds among the youth in our church and to create lasting friendships.** The sports events, yeah, physical and also **to create more lasting bonds.** The sports that my oldest son is qualified to attend [indistinct] is multigenerational, so there's elders on the team, there's deacons, and, like, there's a wide range of men on there from fifty down to fifteen, which is a wonderful mentoring opportunity.

This respondent is looking for a "different group setting" for her children. The distinctiveness of the youth group, that presumably differentiates it from the other groups she has in mind, is Christian peers.

> Youth group is for the friends and the fellowship and also for the – just being in a community of kids their age and **learning about the Bible in a different group setting**.

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[100] Callaway, Hiemstra, and Murphy, "Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study Literature Review: Interim Report 1," 48–51.

Youth pastors often receive pushback from parents when they try to bring in youth from the community. Parents are sometimes looking to keep their children away from those youth and bringing them in may violate parents' unspoken understanding of what youth group should be.

Where parents facilitated extracurricular activities for social reasons, it was usually to foster particular kinds of friendships or relationships for their children.

The second most common extracurricular category cited in our parent interviews was sports, and often parents would give fitness as the reason for putting their children in sports alongside socialization or learning teamwork.

- We like them going to soccer **to get the exercise and get to know their community and the people in their community.**

- He really enjoyed [karate]. It was to, you know, **get exercise for him, to teach him to be a part of a team, to also work alone, to work on his people skills.**

- Okay. So, we have a homeschool skate once a week and/or parks get togethers for social. And, yeah, **I guess that's the main reason, for social. Other activities are for exercise and also being out in the world.** Since we're homeschooling, we surround it by [indistinct] in our group, lots of Christians, so. **Extracurriculars are a good way to be out in the world.**

- **My daughter participates in ballet. She is our only girl, so it's a good way for her to interact with other girls her age and get exercise.**

Of the thirty-eight sport extracurricular activities cited in the parent interviews, twenty were unaccompanied by a reason suggesting that parents often see the reason for putting their children in sports as self-evident.

The literature suggests skills development as the primary reason parents put their children in extracurricular activities. Only five parent respondents cited skills as the reason and four of these parents had the skill of swimming in mind (among other skills). Other skills included language learning, and more often acquiring some kind of musical ability, usually piano.

Table 4.4 Individual children's extracurricular activities[a] cited by parent respondents, interviews, counts

Extracurricular activity	Count	Category count	Category
Youth group	19		
Sunday school	16		
Christian camp	4		
Christian club	3	46	Faith
Bible study	2		
Vacation Bible School	1		
Midweek club	1		
Swim	10		
Soccer	7		
Sports (general)	6		
Karate	3		
Baseball	2		
Basketball	2	38	Sports
Skating	2		
Hockey	2		
Gymnastics	2		
Sailing	1		
Badminton	1		
Piano	10		
Violin	1	13	Music
Music (general)	1		
Orchestra	1		
Dance / Ballet	4		
Art (general)	1	6	Arts
Acting	1		
Girl Guides	2		
Other club	2	5	Clubs
Chess club	1		
Tutoring	4	5	Education
Language class	1		
Volunteering	2	2	Volunteering

[a] Activities organized by public or Catholic public schools not included. Thirty-seven of forty-one respondents talked about extracurricular activities their children participated in.

Just eight parent respondents cited faith development as the reason their children were in extracurricular activities. We included youth group and Sunday school in table 4.4 as an extracurricular activity, and it may be that many respondents did not consider these as optional, and, therefore, extracurricular. Nevertheless, only six of nineteen respondents who had their children in a youth group, and three of sixteen respondents who had their children in Sunday school, said their children participated in extracurricular activities for their faith development. Few of the activities outside of the faith category in table 4.4 had any obvious connection to faith development, and a link was only made where parents mentioned youth group, Sunday school, Midweek Club or Christian Clubs.

In a few cases, respondents said they enrolled their children in extracurricular activities for character development that was not necessarily related to the Christian faith.

- **So, it's basically for training. A lot of it is to make them responsible citizens so that they're not just concerned about their own lives.**

- Prior to COVID, a lot of my kids and my husband were also in karate. That's been – hasn't started again. And they did that because my husband has always been in martial arts and **it's just a way for him to try to get most of the boys out of the house for a little bit and, again, physical activity and discipline.**

Two respondents said they choose extracurricular activities they can do together as a family or that will not compromise their family life by making them too busy. This respondent, a homeschooler, reflected on why he does not have his children in more extracurricular activities.

> **Yeah, you know, on the flip side it would be why don't do more organized team sports? And the reason is just that we find that families that get the kids involved in lots of sports – we look at their lives and they don't eat together, they spend very little time together, and they're often out of the home.** Whereas we prefer to be in the home. Swimming lessons is a half hour commitment as opposed to several hours, and it's something that can be done during school as part of the school curriculum as well. I think that's probably a key thing with homeschooling. The biggest hurdle is often the physical education, and swimming facilitates that.

Similarly, this respondent, also a homeschooler, explained he and his wife choose extracurricular activities the family can do together.

> So, the recreational activities in terms of mountain biking and snowboarding, **we do those as a family because my wife and I were interested in it and they're activities that we can participate in as a whole family.** So, a good example would be if there were, say, team sports. One child, maybe two or three, would participate in it while the rest of us are not. Whereas we can all actively participate in the activity. With the midweek program, it's typically a family-oriented program that all of us would attend as a family. And that's where our church will be presenting on some aspect of the Gospel message from the Bible. Other activities – my oldest son does go to a youth group associated with our church. And then, depending on the season there may be volunteer activities that we participate in as a family.

Note, each of these respondents have four children, meaning that providing each child with equitable opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities can quickly busy a family, and drain its bank account.

Based on the parent interview responses summarized in table 4.4, we asked parent survey respondents to tell us which of the activities presented in figure 4.13 at least one of their children participated in, in the previous four weeks.

Figure 4.13 Extracurricular activities at least on child participated in, in the previous four weeks, parent respondents, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N = 1,217.
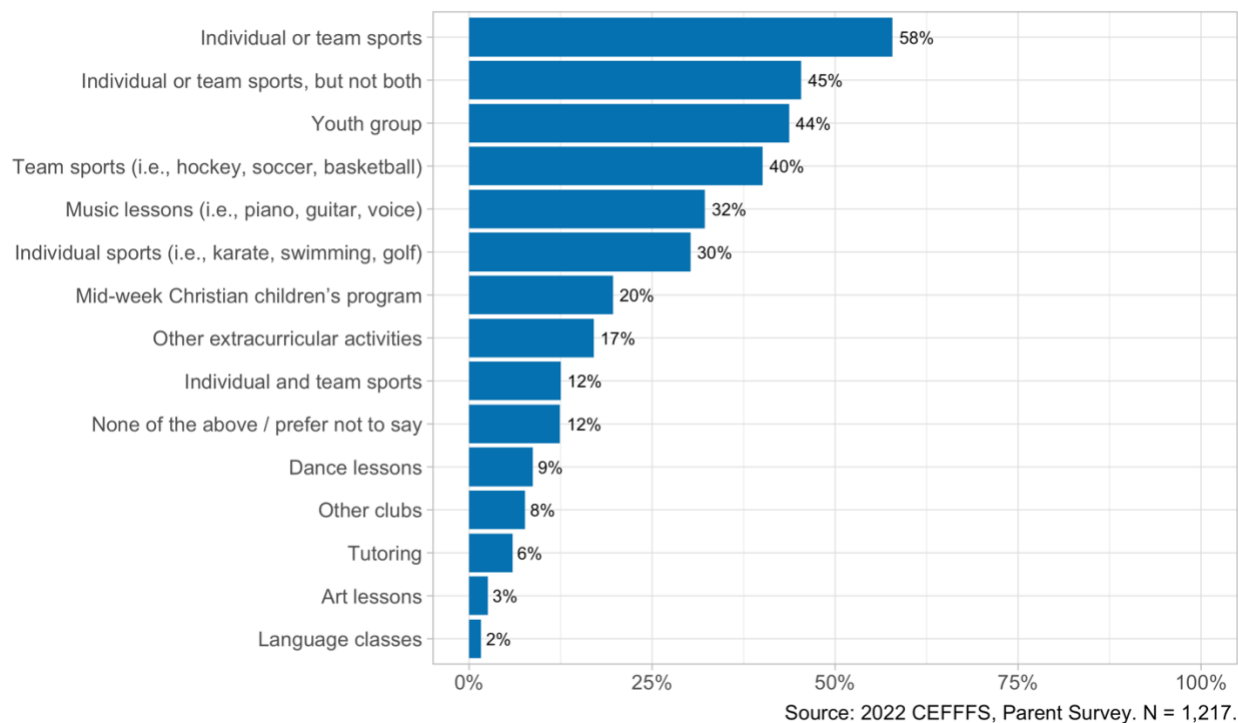
The reader should be aware of several things when interpreting figure 4.13.

First, this survey was screened between April 26, and June 12, 2022, when COVID public health restrictions sometimes directly affected the availability of extracurricular activity opportunities, or the diminution of institutional capacity brought about by COVID-19 restrictions reduced the available options.

Second, sports were broken into individual and team sports because we noticed homeschoolers enrolled their children in individual sports like swimming lessons mostly because of the scheduling flexibility that swimming lessons offered to families with many children of different ages and skill levels. Team sports, by contrast, are relatively inflexible in time. Because we were interested in the relationship between individual and team sports, we created several sports categories after the fact: individual *or* team sports; individual or team sports, *but not both*; and individual *and* team sports. These additional derived categories are included in figures 4.13 and 4.14, although they did not appear on the survey.

Sports as a composite category (individual or team sports) was the most common extracurricular activity for all families at fifty-eight percent compared to youth group at forty-

four percent, the most subscribed activity with an explicitly Christian focus. There does seem to be a family preference for either individual or team sports in that only twelve percent of families had children participate in both in the previous four weeks.

Although figure 4.13 gives us a sense of where the extracurricular burden is coming from for families, these data hide differences in family emphasis according to their children's ages. We did not ask about each child's individual participation in extracurricular activities; however, we do know the age of each child, and this allows us to consider each child age group and whether those age groups' families participate in the extracurricular activities we asked about.

In addition to the two interpretive cautions given for figure 4.13, we add this one for figure 4.14 using the "Youth group" sub-plot in the top-left corner as an example. Looking just at the bar for infants (<1), this does *not* mean that about twenty percent of infants attended youth group. Rather it means that twenty percent of infants in this sample had at least one sibling who did participate in youth group. Moreover, looking at the bar in the same sub-plot for seventeen-year-olds, this means that three-quarters of seventeen-year-olds were part of a family where at least one child participated in youth group in the previous four weeks.

We can then make educated deductions, for example, about youth group from this chart. Given that youth group usually corresponds with teen years, we can surmise that about three-quarters of families in our sample with teenagers also sent them to youth group in the previous four weeks. We can proceed in a similar way to interpret the data in the other sub-plots of figure 4.14, although few of these display the age variability of youth group.

We do see a decrease in participation of individual sports with age and a corresponding increase in team sport participation. Although fitness and fun were frequently cited as reasons for sport, we suspect the additional reasons of social contact and leadership development become more dominant in the later teen years making team sports more attractive.

Comparing the youth group sub-plot with those for sports, one could conclude that sports provide a social form that is at least as important, if not more, than youth group for evangelical families. Mid-week, Christian, children's programs are age specific like youth group, but we don't see a similar spike in participation.

Music lessons are the most common arts extracurricular activity but individual participation declines into the teen years as does participation in individual sports.

There are many reasons for participating in extracurricular activities, but these data make it clear that sports hold first position for evangelical parents ahead of activities with explicit Christian emphases. Sunday school was not included in this list because it usually occurs in conjunction with Sunday worship services and, as such, does not constitute a separate outing from the home. Had it been included, the picture may have been different. Nevertheless, the suspicion many youth pastors have had that they were competing with hockey or basketball for their teens' attention seems to be confirmed in these data.

Figure 4.14 Family participation in extracurricular activities according to child age, parent respondents, survey, percent
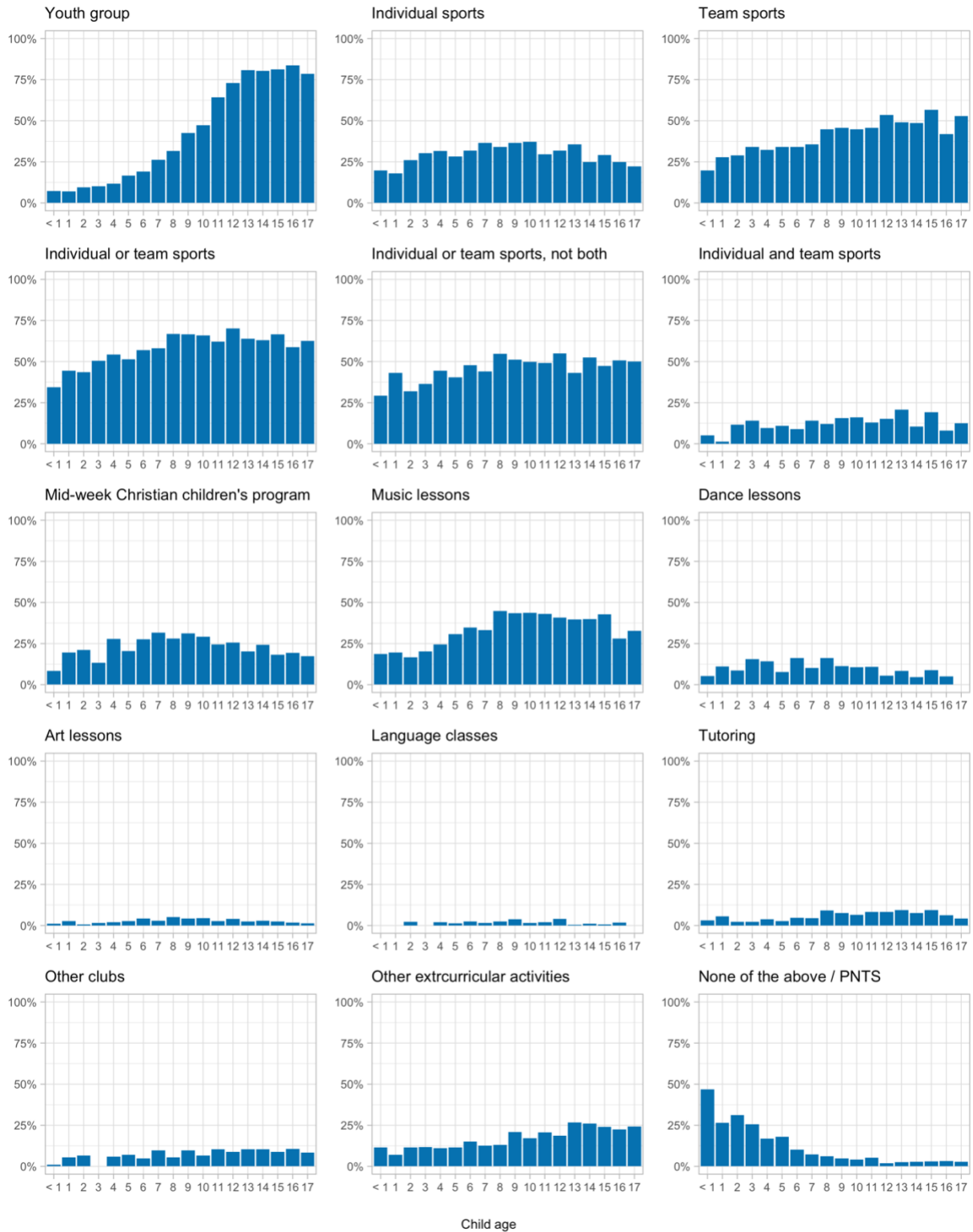
2022 CEFFFS, Parent survey. N respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.

4.5 Camping

Parents we interviewed talked about sending their children to different kinds of camps including overnight Christian camp, vacation Bible school (VBS; day camp), arts camp, sports camp and Creation science camp. All these camps will play a role in forming their campers and some have explicitly Christian content. We considered camps apart from extracurricular activities because of their different calendars. Whereas the extracurricular activities we asked parents about tend to occur weekly, camps tend to occur annually.

Figure 4.15 below shows the percent of parent respondents who said at least one of their children attended different kinds of camps during a twelve-month period. The twelve months in question occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and these data should be interpreted in that light.

Figure 4.15 Types of camps at least one member of the household participated in during the last twelve-month period, parent respondents, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey, N = 1,217. Respondents could choose more than one type of camp.
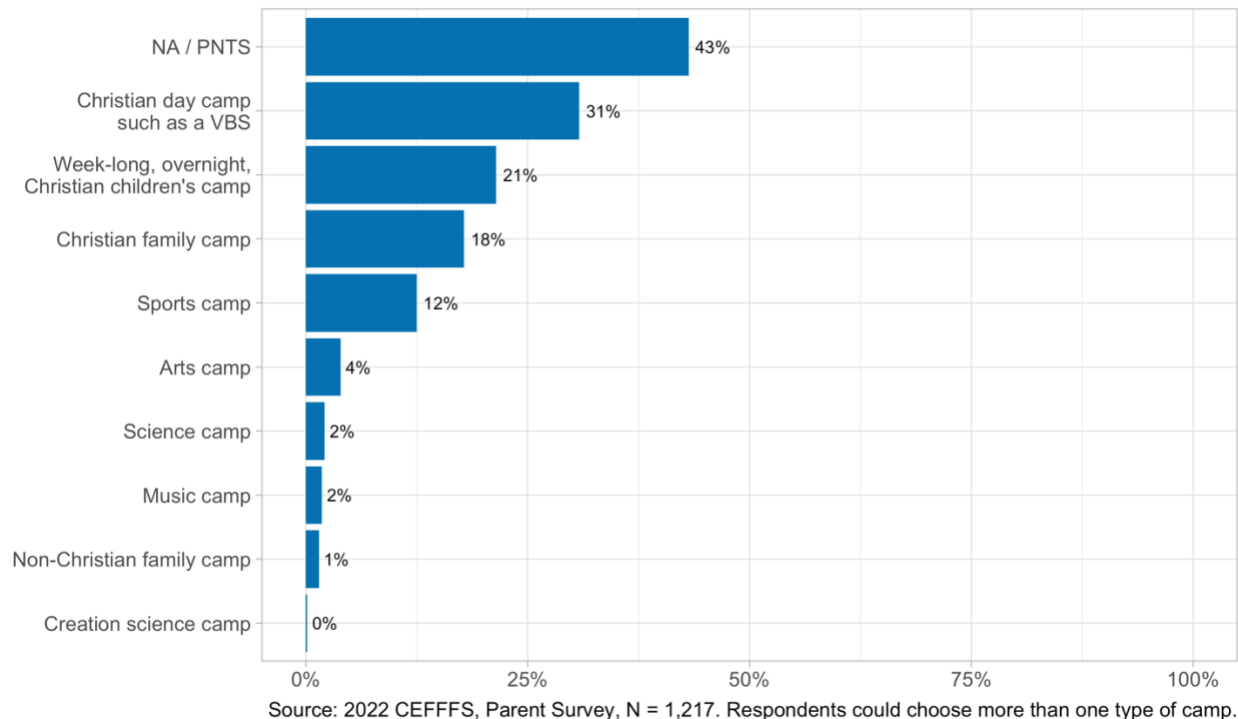
Although just twelve percent of parent survey respondents said none of their children participated in any extracurricular activities on our list (see figure 4.13), forty-three percent said none of their children participated in the camps we asked about (see figure 4.15 above).

Figure 4.16 Camps at least one child from the household participated in during the last twelve-month period, by child age, parent respondents, survey, percent
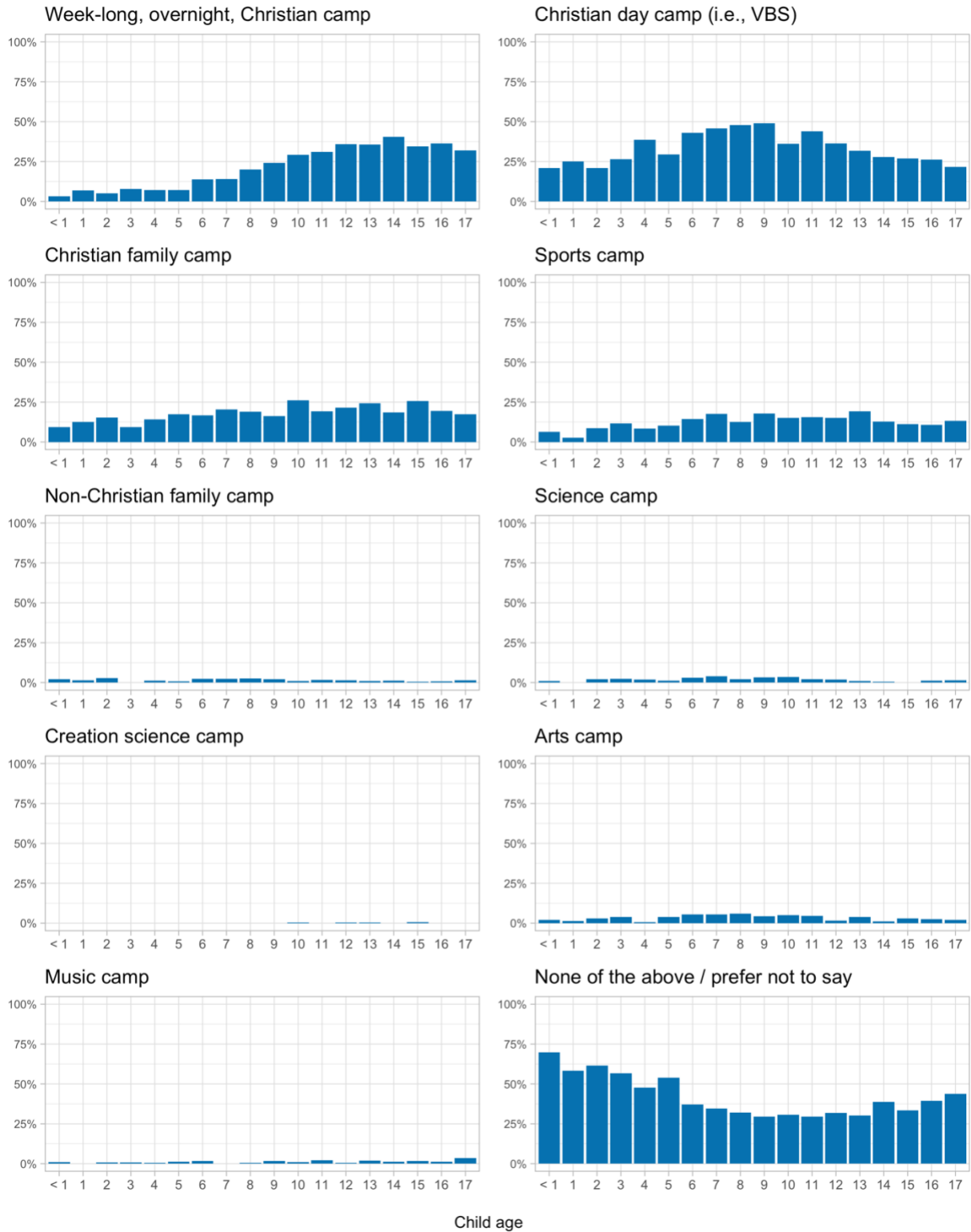
2022 CEFFFS, Parent survey. N respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.

Although we did not ask about the camp participation of individual children, we have graphed the percent of children, of each age, who are part of a household that had at least one child attend that camp (see figure 4.16). Interpretively, considering the top-right sub-plot in figure 4.16 (Christian day camp), this does not mean that two-fifths of infants attended VBS. Rather, it means two-fifths of infants belonged to a family where one of the children (likely a sibling) attended VBS. The shape of the plots in figure 4.16 can help us identify the rate of participation in each kind of camp while giving us some sense of the participation rate of children of different ages.

Considering the bottom-right plot in figure 4.16 (None of the above / prefer not to say), we can see camping experience is most prominent from the start of elementary school and begins to wane into the teen years.

The most heavily subscribed camp was VBS (top-right), and this was most common in the elementary years which roughly corresponds to the ages of most congregations' children's Sunday school programs. Significantly, the curricula for many VBS programs are similar in content and presentation to that of many Sunday schools, with VBS being, in many ways, extensions of church Sunday school programs accommodating additional activities because of the extra available time. Significantly, however, fewer than one-third of families said their children participated in VBS and even for children of the ages typically targeted by VBS, fewer than half were part of a family that participated.

Only a fifth of parent survey respondents said their children participated in week-long, overnight, Christian camp (see figure 4.15). However, about one-third of teens were part of a family that sent at least one of their children to overnight camp.

In our parent interviews we heard about science camp, Creation science camp, arts camp and music camp, but these seem to be seldom subscribed. Moreover, despite strong participation in sports as an extracurricular activity (fifty-eight percent) only twelve percent of parent survey respondents said they sent their children to a sports camp.

Figure 4.17 below graphs the frequency of worship service attendance and the most frequently subscribed camping types: VBS, Christian family camp or week-long, overnight Christian children's camp. Parent survey respondents attended worship services with the following frequency: Weekly (Wkly)+, fifteen percent; Wkly, sixty-four percent; 2-3x/Month, fourteen percent; Less/Never/DK/PNTS, six percent. Comparing this attendance distribution with the attendance distributions for the select camp types in figure 4.17, we see that VBS and Christian family camp are more likely to be subscribed by frequent church attenders, and week-long, overnight, Christian children's camp by less frequent church attenders. These camp-type variations are small, but they suggest there is greater openness by those less integrated into their local church to occasional camping experiences outside of the local church context.

Figure 4.17 Select Christian camp participation, by parent respondents' frequency of worship service attendance, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N = 1,217. Respondents could choose more than one type of camp.
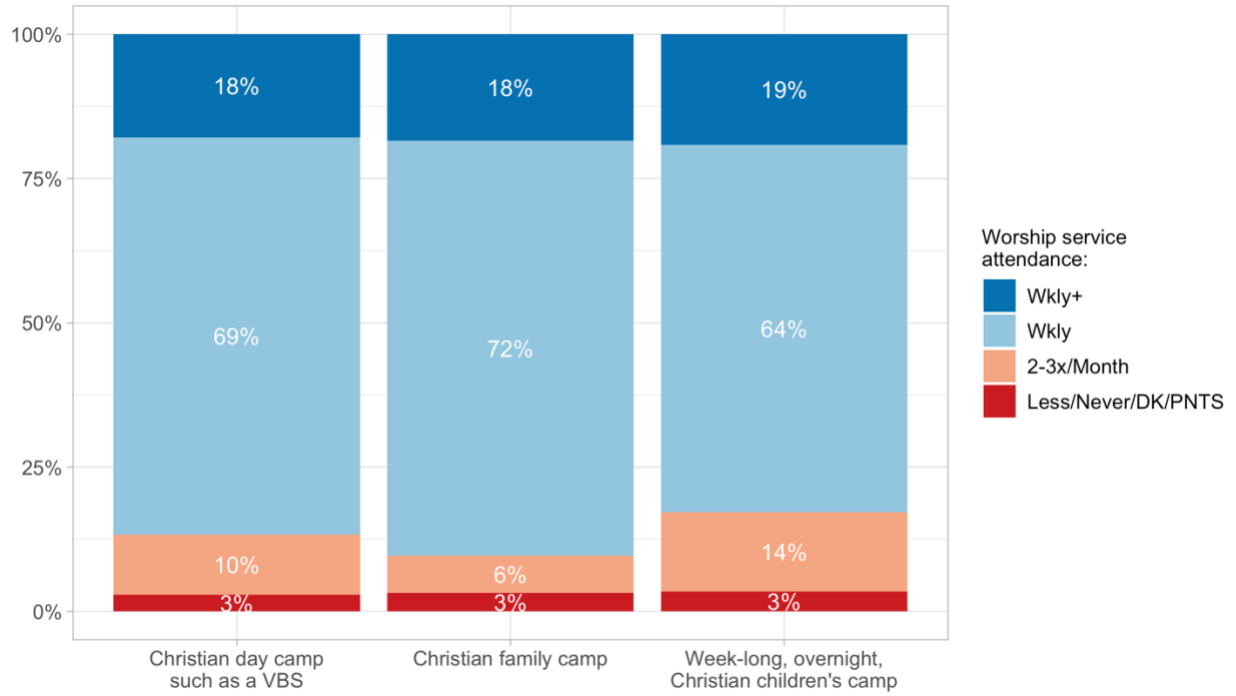
5. Digital Media and Faith Formation

> *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."* (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cites*)

Charles Dickens could have been writing this quote about our digital age. The parents interviewed certainly felt a similar tension in how they thought about the role of digital technology in the faith formation of their children. On the one hand, as a group, they saw digital technology as an indispensable tool providing access to premium Christian content and to premium job opportunities. On the other hand, they worried about the bad coming in with the good, and about their inability as parents to manage and curate the scale of that content.

As noted in section 2.8.1.3, when we think about digital technology, we tend to focus on the content, to the exclusion of the ways the devices work. However, media theorists caution that the effects of new technologies on human behaviour are more important than the content they deliver.[101]

Digital media changes immediate, proximate, interpersonal relationships in that once content has been digested into a digital format it is typically delivered through a personal device. We see this in its absurdity when two people sit side-by-side and text each other on their phones. They are proximate, but their attention is funneled through their devices which make their physical presence irrelevant.

This is important when we consider the faith formation of children in the home because it has been assumed that parents have their children's attention because they are constantly proximate. Digital media separates time and space from attention. Andrew Zirschky referencing the work of Craig Watkins says we now regularly experience presence-in-absence and absence-in-presence.[102] What Watkins and Zirschky mean is that the child in the same room on a device is present to the person on the other end of the device and absent to those in the same room (presence-in-absence), and conversely when those around you are on devices you can feel alone (absence-in-presence). What their presence-absence distinction gets at is that real presence in the digital age is about attention, not time and space.

Digital media separates time and space from attention.

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[101] Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man*, 2nd Edition (New York, London, Sydney and Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Revised (Penguin Books, 2005).

[102] Andrew Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen: Youth Ministry for the Connected but Alone Generation* (Nashville, TN: Youth Ministry Partners and Abingdon Press, 2015), 14.

Ben Myers and Scott Stephens, in their essay "The Discipline of the Eyes: Reflections on Visual Culture, Ancient and Modern," write about how the Church Fathers, anxious to dissuade Christians from attending the gladiator shows, extended the principle in Matthew 5:28 to teach that lusting for the death of a victim in the arena was akin to being a party to his murder.[103]

> The one who cheers for the death of a gladiator cannot obey Christ's command to love our enemies. The one called to a life of holiness cannot pursue purity while opening the gates of the eyes and ears to the polluting influence of the shows: 'the ears and eyes are servants of the spirit, and the spirit cannot be clean when its servants are filthy.' … Those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb cannot recline as guests at the devil's table, 'stuffing themselves' with the devil's sweets.[104]

The picture here is of the eyes and the ears as servants of the spirit bringing food for the spirit to eat resulting in a spirit that is either healthy or defiled.

Contemporary digital culture is experienced primarily through two sense organs, the eyes and the ears. These are our attentive senses, and as the Church Fathers taught, the spirit is formed by what the eyes and ears bring it for consumption. We are formed by what has our attention, and faith formation is a matter of paying attention to what has our attention.

We are formed by what has our attention, and faith formation is a matter of paying attention to what has our attention.

As discussed in section 2.4, many of the parents we spoke with, and surveyed, were confident that their example (their role modelling) would form the faith of their children. This is certainly true, but it is also true that parents as a group no longer hold their children's attention as they once did.

We asked parent interview respondents two questions about digital technology and faith formation:

1. Do you encourage or discourage digital technology use by your children? Why or why not?
2. What online or digital resources do you or your children find helpful for faith formation and why?

Thirty-four of forty-one respondents provided responses, and these are summarized topically in table 5.1 below.

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[103] Ben Myers and Scott Stephens, "The Discipline of the Eyes: Reflections on Visual Culture, Ancient and Modern," in *The HTML of Cruciform Love: Toward a Theology of the Internet*, ed. John Frederick and Eric Lewellen (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), 3, https://wipfandstock.com/the-html-of-cruciform-love.html.
[104] Myers and Stephens, 7.

Table 5.1 Digital technology and faith formation topics raised by parent respondents, interviews, counts

Topic	Count	Category count	Category
Disposition: discourage	9		
Disposition: encourage	5	16	Disposition[a]
Disposition: neutral	2		
Tech is a tool / tech is neutral	14		
Bible	7	23	Tool
Google / search engine	2		
Flirting / sexual content / pornography	4		
Social media dangerous / negative	4	13	Danger
Addictive / children "zoned out"	3		
Danger (general)	2		
Time limits	13		
No social media / social media forbidden	7		
Passwords / filters / ad blockers	7		
Content vetting	6		
Direct supervision / visual accountability	6		
Tech-free zones / no tech / restrict tech type	6		
Gaming limits	5	65	Parental control
Parents experiencing a loss of control	5		
Parents approve social media friends / follow	4		
Discuss how technology works	3		
Phone forbidden	1		
Taking phone as a punishment	1		
Time of day limits	1		
Child has smartphone	3	3	Phone
Child has social media	5	5	Social media
Virtual community	11	12	Virtual
Changed with COVID	1		

[a] Toward digital technology.

In the coming sub-sections, we will look at some of the broader themes parents gave in response to these questions.

Parents can directly and indirectly form the faith of their children. Directly forming the faith of their children typically happens in conversations. Parents can indirectly form the faith of their children when they curate who or what has access to their children's attention.

Parents seldom use digital technology in the direct faith formation of their children. This is because, as noted above, digital technology is typically consumed through a personal device which usually excludes the parent from the conversation. The conversation is between the child and the digital content being delivered.

When parents talked about using digital technology as part of their children's faith formation, it was usually indirect formation, involving the curating of the content their children consumed. There were two exceptions raised in the interviews where parents and children worked

together to produce Christian digital content; one family created content for a YouTube channel with Christian themes, and the other created content for their church's online COVID services.

Significantly, as we will see, parents often found the scale of the digital content outstripped their ability to curate it resulting in them falling back on time limits as a substitute for supervision.

5.1 Technology as a Tool

Two-fifths of parents we interviewed described technology as a tool.

One respondent, who was concerned about technology's overuse, wanted her children to "use [technology] as a tool," for example, using a smartphone as an e-reader. The problem, as she saw it, however, was that phones are "multipurpose." She concluded:

> So, yeah, I guess we try to encourage [our children] to see it as a tool but not to be on your phone or on a screen all day long.

This idea of the multipurpose nature of technology is important. As we will see in the section following, technology brings both good and bad, but parents struggled to be able to separate the two for their children.

Another respondent talked about how she encouraged the use of digital technology, not explicitly for faith formation but because it is necessary for education and work.

> I think, you know, with school and it's going to be part of their education, they will need [it] for online stuff, for doing their papers, for exams. Then for work, you need to know – a lot of the jobs are computer based. … So, I just think, like I said, it's just a part of our lives now.

She concluded, "The more technology they know, the better." Note, technology, here, is all of a kind: more is better. Respondents talked about technology differently, however, depending on the conversational frame. This same respondent quickly transitioned from more-is-better to "it's a mix" when technology was being used for social media.

> So, social media, it's a mix for me. My husband and I, you know, we have parental guidance for the kids. We watch, you know, we always see – we check what they do. **They spend some time playing games, but it's always, you know, they always ask how much they can play when they can go on. We tell them, you know, how much time they can play and spend on social media. And they're always supervised**. So, the little one has, obviously, less time and – but the older ones spend a little bit more time. And, but like I said, he's supervised, and it's always checked how much, you know, what he gets into and what he does.

In the abstract, technology is often an ideal, a tool. In practice, however, the picture is more mixed.

Two respondents talked about using technology as a tool for content creation. One family worked together to create Christian video content that they posted on various social media platforms. Another family produced video content for their church during COVID lockdowns.

> We would also produce YouTube videos of the kids actually telling – either telling a story or doing some activity that has a biblical or a Christian lesson to show. So, they're involved in that. And then, from their music training we, you know, we produce – **they sing songs from the hymnals and play instruments, and we video them, and then they would use them for our worship services – our virtual worship services** for whenever the church needs that.

Other respondents used technology for language learning and other educational purposes. Significantly, the principal faith-formation uses for technology were as a digital Bible or Bible search tool, for the delivery of Christian content or as a way of meeting virtually, especially during COVID.

5.1.1 Bible

Three respondents talked about using a Bible app, YouVersion specifically, for accessing the Bible and for the built-in Bible reading plans. One respondent explained that she, and her family, liked YouVersion because "we always have the Bible at our fingertips when we're not home." Much of the allure of the digital world is the *possibility* of accessing information, not necessarily actually accessing it. We asked respondents about faith formation in the home and at church. Only one respondent described actually using a Bible app outside of these two contexts and that was in the context of a women's Bible study, not for doing faith formation with her children.

A few respondents talked about accessing the Bible through Bible Gateway, an online Bible app, although this app is more likely to be used in a computer browser than on a phone. Other respondents used apps at home as part of their own personal devotions or personal study, not for faith formation with their children. Personal applications are to be expected because these are phone apps, and phones are personal devices.

Print Bibles in evangelical culture are also personal devices. However, unlike a smartphone, a print Bible is a single-purpose device. As has already been noted, multipurpose devices tend to pull people into the other activities they offer.

Before smartphones, it was common for pastors to ask congregants to turn off their cell phones at the beginning of a worship service. With the introduction of Bible apps, smartphones became a welcome part of many evangelical worship services. Significantly, social media and other apps

came into worship services along with the Bible apps fragmenting the attention of many worshippers.

5.1.2 Christian content

Other respondents talked about using digital media to access Christian content. These included podcasts, YouTube worship videos and devotional content.[105] This respondent talked about using the Lectio 365 app to teach her children to pray:

> Okay, so the one is definitely the Lectio 365 app. Um, I find that helpful because, um, well, they have a morning audio file and an evening audio file, I feel like it's helpful because yeah, it's exposing my kids to different ways to pray because it would include prayers of people all through the generations as well as Scripture. And that it's an audio file, so it's not just something that they're reading or watching, it's not another screen. It's just something they can listen to … and sit still so there's that.

She emphasizes the interactive nature of this resource; it is not just reading or watching. This is one of the few examples where parents and children interacted while using digital technology in a faith-formation exercise.

5.1.3 Online Christian community

Every communications medium has its strengths and weaknesses. Marshal McLuhan categorized media as *hot* or *cold* depending on how rich they were in sensory information. Media that provide a lot of data and detail discourage participation because there is little left for the recipients to fill in with their imaginations. According to McLuhan's theory, photographs and video are hot because of their detail, whereas cartoons and the telephone are cold because they have comparatively less information and our imaginations have to fill in the detail. Cold media requires more participation.[106] Hot media is often thought to be better in that it tends to require a greater technical expertise to produce.

During COVID, many churches turned to hot media such as livestreaming for their worship services which, according to McLuhan, would reduce participation.

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[105] See appendix B for a full list of Christian content cited in the parent interviews.
[106] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

A few respondents, such as this one, explained what they disliked about online community:

> [T]here's no replacement for eye-to-eye, face-to-face, you know, contact with a person. You don't actually know anybody until you've actually stood, you know, two feet from them and felt their presence as far as their facial expressions, their smiles, their tone of voice, their – just the way they carry themselves, the way they stand. There's so much that's communicated through body language that is completely missed – even just the tone of voice. You can't hear the tone in a text. You can do all the emojis you want, but everybody can fake that. It's just a fake world. And I try to communicate that to my children. And I try to put aside opportunities for them to have real life interactions as much as possible.

What he misses in online community is the participation or engagement that comes with in-person worship. Note the physicality of his description, "eye-to-eye," "face-to-face," "the way they carry themselves," and by extension the way he carries himself. This is a description of a high degree of participation.

Ironically, better production quality may have resulted in less participation and less engagement during COVID. We asked parent survey respondents how their family's worship service attendance changed during COVID and about how engaged their children were with the online worship services. Respondents were not asked to evaluate the quality of the online service production. Figure 5.1 below shows the change in family worship service by how engaged their children were with online services. Where children were engaged, families attending less frequently were offset by families attending more frequently. Where children's attention waned, so did overall family attendance at worship services.

Figure 5.1 "Change in family worship service attendance during COVID" by "children's level of engagement with online worship services," parent respondents, survey, percent

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.
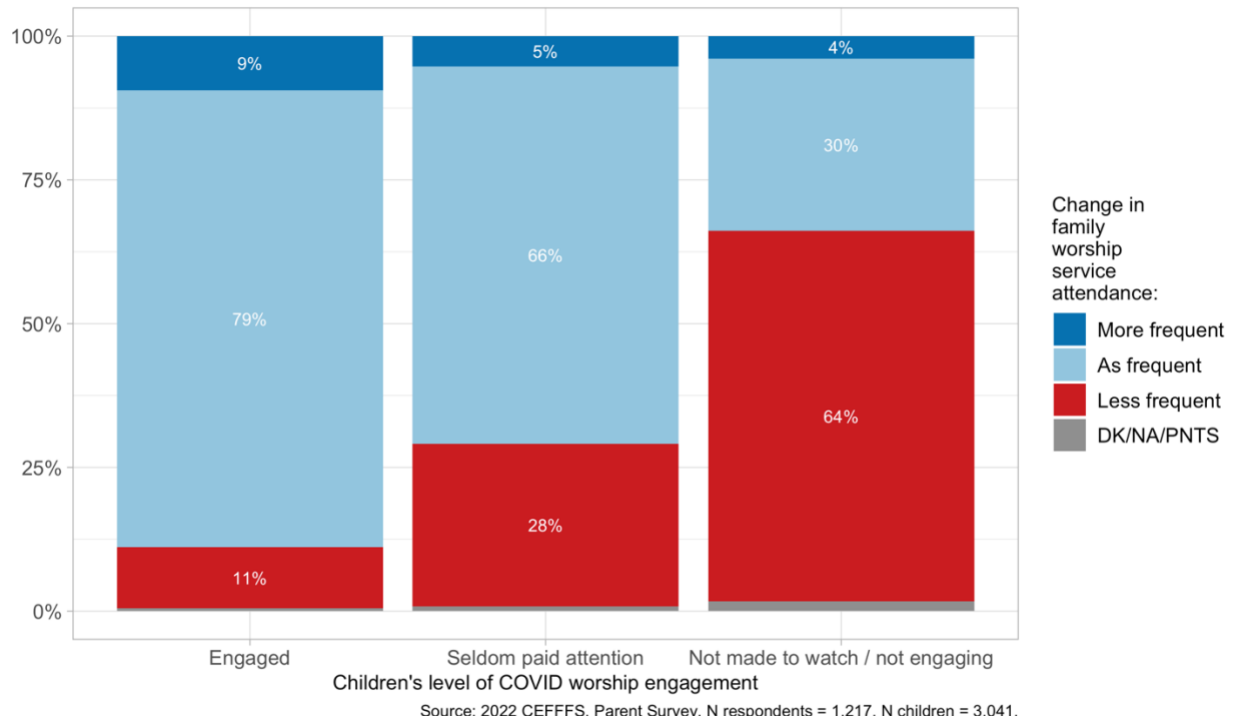
One of the most popular video games for children (and adults) is Minecraft. Minecraft is known for its low-resolution graphics. The information is low and according to McLuhan's theory, for a video game, it is cold which invites greater participation. Counterintuitively, in a small church study we ran concurrently with this one, some small church pastors talked about engaging their congregants by telephone, a cool, participatory medium, during COVID. We also see this in the near-constant use of chat platforms by youth. These short text messages are low in information, but they invite participation. COVID restrictions curtailed the cool, participatory Sunday gathering. What was likely needed was not high production value (or hot) content, but content that was cool, promoting participation.

Miller's law states that seven (plus or minus two) is the largest group where everyone can participate. Where groups are larger, those over the limit of seven will tend to become spectators.[107] Here again we see McLuhan's insight that high levels of information, or input, tend to produce passivity and disengagement. Miller's law is tacitly acknowledged in the sizes of our small groups which are kept small in order to encourage participation.

Several respondents, such as this mother, found the online youth group for her daughter helpful during COVID.

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[107] George A. Miller, "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two: Some Limits on Our Capacity For Processing Information," *The Psychological Review* 63, no. 2 (March 1956): 81–97.

> And then my daughter, like I said, she does youth groups sometimes online as well, right through Zoom and stuff, because with all the restrictions that they've had for COVID a lot of stuff has been moved to online platforms. I find that's helpful as well.

Another father thought an "ideal situation" going forward would be for churches to invest in online communities.

> Another ideal situation would be for churches to meaningfully connect with online communities. My older son follows Geekdom House – a community of gamers that is started and moderated by Christians.

Although we do not know for sure, it is likely that the online communities that worked well were small in numbers with their small size encouraging engagement. Online platforms have single audio and video channels and the complexity of large groups quickly makes these unwieldy. In-person, large, group events work despite their complexity because social interactions function on many channels in the many sub-conversations that organically form, break up and then reconstitute with different participants.

Although this study is about faith formation in the home, the church, with its children's and youth ministries, are partners along with parents. Conversation is the primary way information, including faith content, is processed and internalized. Families are typically a small group whose size, absent other dynamics, encourages participation and conversation. Parents need to be aware that as children age and differentiate from their families there needs to be other small groups in their children's lives where faith conversations can continue.

COVID was a testing ground for the effectiveness of different media both in communicating content and in creating and sustaining the kinds of conversations that underpin community.

5.2 Parental Control

There is a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon where Calvin is running through the house and his mother yells after him, "Calvin, stop running through the house!" Calvin stops, looks at directly at the reader and says, "The law is on the books, but it would take all their resources to enforce it," before continuing his running in the next frame. This nicely sums up the dilemma parents are faced with when trying to supervise their children's digital media. The scale of content and the vectors that deliver it simply overwhelm parents' ability to adequately vet or supervise it.

By far, the largest category of parent interview responses to our questions about digital technology and faith formation was parents' quest to exert control over or to supervise their children's digital media (see table 5.1 above). We gathered these digital content management strategies and asked parent survey respondents which they used for their families (see figure 5.2 below). This question was a per-family question; we did not ask which digital strategies parent respondents used for each child.

Figure 5.2 Strategies parent respondents used to manage their children's digital content, survey, percent
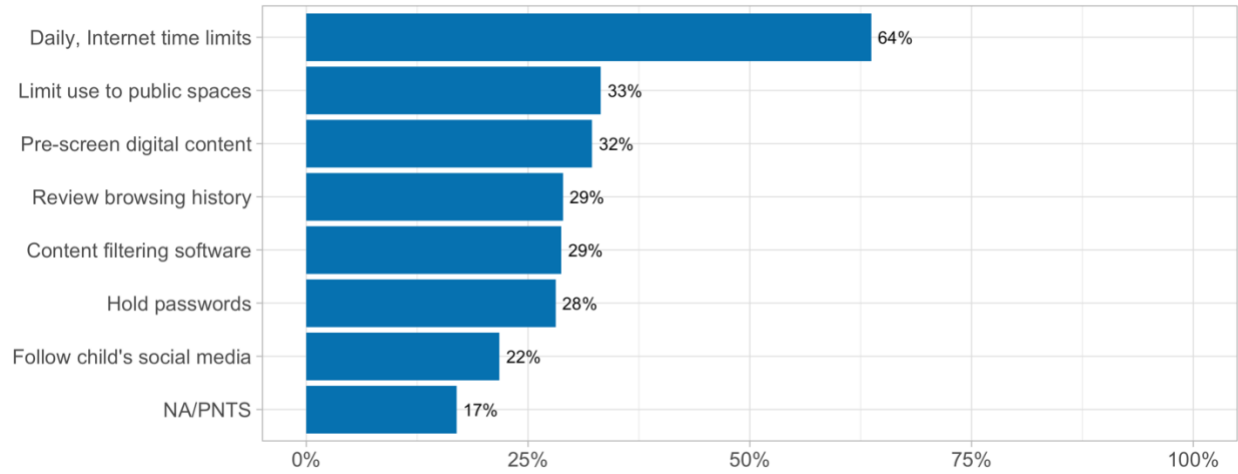
Source: 2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N = 1,217.

On average, parent survey respondents reported using 2.4 digital content management strategies, the most common of these being daily, age-appropriate, Internet time limits. Figure 5.3 below plots the percent of children in each age range whose parents employ each proposed management strategy.

Figure 5.3 Children in families where parent respondents used select strategies to manage their children's digital content, by child age, survey, percent
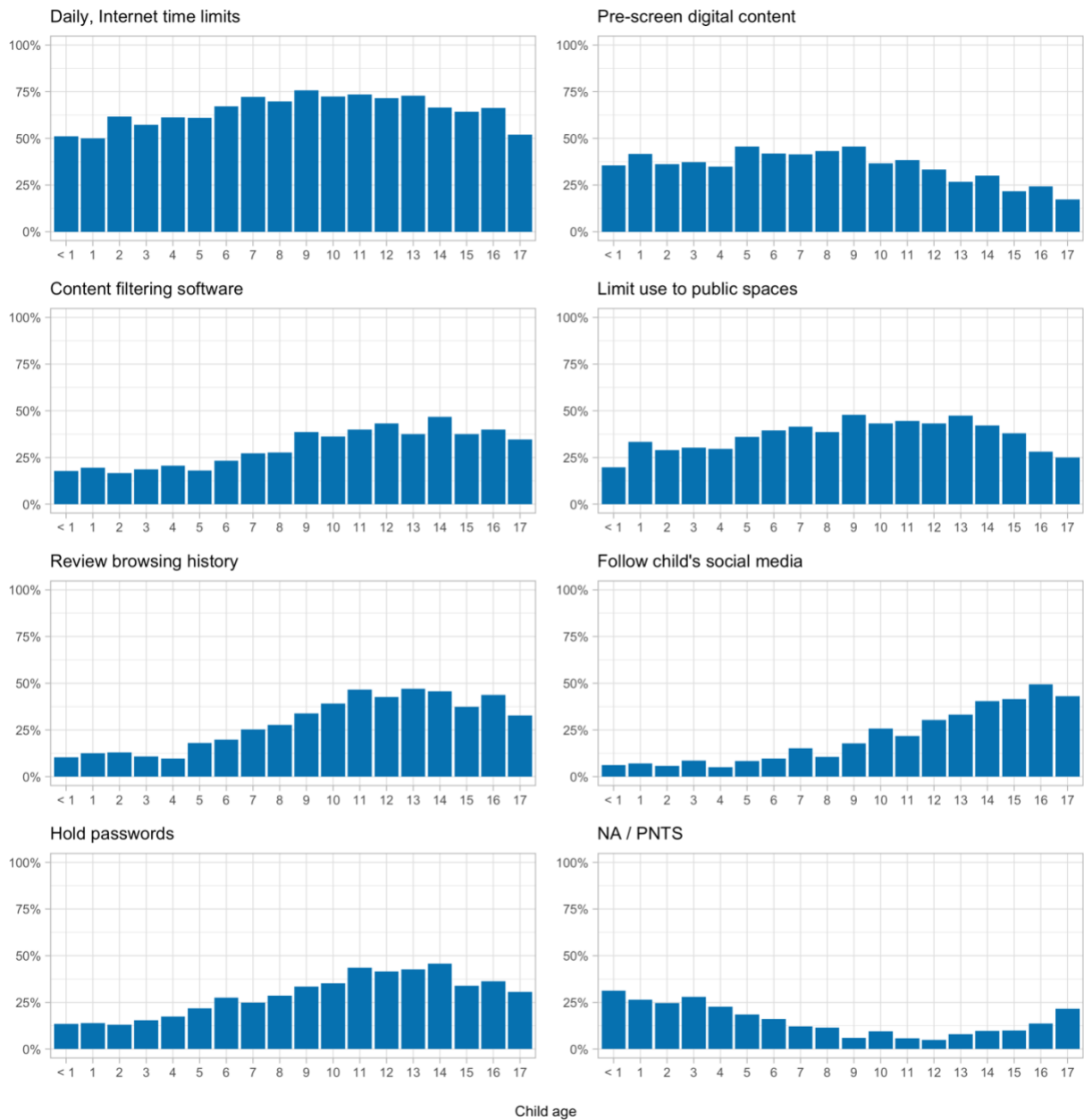
2022 CEFFFS, Parent survey. N children = 3,041.

Looking at the top-left sub-plot in figure 5.3 (Daily, Internet time limits), does not mean that half of infants had daily internet time limits, rather that half of infants were part of families where the parents used daily internet time limits as a digital content management strategy – these were likely time limits for their older siblings. Although figure 5.3 does not tell us what is happening for children of each age, it does tell us what is happening in households who have children of each age.

In the following subsections we will consider several of these digital content management strategies in more detail.

5.2.1 Time limits and content filtering software

Imposing daily, age-appropriate, Internet time limits was by far the most common digital content management strategy used by parents in this study. In the parent interviews, thirteen of the thirty-four respondents mentioned time limits, compared to just seven who used content filtering software, the next most common strategy (see table 5.1). On the parent survey, sixty-four percent of respondents used time limits which was almost twice as many as the third who reported limiting internet use to public spaces, the next most common strategy (see figure 5.2). Although two-thirds of parent survey respondents used internet time limits, this rose to almost three-quarters for those with elementary school-age children before falling gradually in the teen years to half for those with children aged seventeen.

Parents we interviewed tended to talk about discouraging the "overuse" of digital technology.

This respondent knows the negative effects of social media on himself. Nevertheless, he allows his children to have access in a limited amount:

> [I] discourage [social media]. Because I know what it does to me and I know what it does to my wife, and it's not good. And I can only imagine what it does to, like, children and their brains. And I know once they get a little bit older with teen girls and hear they're just not very nice to each other on social media with online bullying and stuff. **So, limit it as much as possible.**

Another respondent described social media as an "addiction." When asked by the interviewer what she meant, she replied, "**Just spending too much time on it and wasting your time.**"

This mother limited her son's video gaming with time.

> **I try to limit it, so they don't go on it that much.** My son is fifteen, but I guess he goes on it, but he doesn't really go on it a lot. They mostly play, like I said, the video game, but they do go on it a lot – but a little – but I don't encourage it. … **Like, sometimes for three hours. I'm like, "Get off the game and go outside and play some basketball."**

Another mother said her teenage sons' video game time had risen to two to three hours a day during COVID, something she plans to reduce when COVID quiets down:

> *Quand la tranquillement COVID ça prend son cours normal. Alors pour remettre l'ordre là-dedans la main. Sinon, ce c'est – désolée c'est le plus jeune, c'est non. C'est resté pareil mais les deux ados-là il y a un peu plus de temps, c'est peut-être deux, trois heures par jour, présentement, mais euh c'est pas excessif.*

> **Translation:** When COVID quiets down and it takes its normal course. So, to restore some order. Otherwise, it's – sorry it's the youngest, it's no. It stayed the same, but the two teenagers there, a little bit more time, it's maybe two, three hours a day now, but uh, it's not excessive.

So, parents variously described digital content – in large amounts – as a waste of time, addictive, harmful to development and disorderly.

Changes in scale produce qualitative changes along with the more obvious quantitative ones. For example, a glass of water (a relatively small quantity) on hot summer day is a welcome relief, a spring flood is not. We could measure both quantities in terms of glasses, but the scale of the flooding makes this absurd and impractical. So, we change our approach to water by erecting barriers (for example, sandbags), and we switch our measure from number of glasses to meters over the bank of the river. Similarly, electricity in the controlled, measured way that our hydro utilities deliver it to our homes is very useful; a lightning strike introduced into our same domestic power grid is not.

We meter both water and electricity in our domestic contexts because we have learned how to break each into standardized units (i.e., cubic meters and kilowatt hours). Digital content is similarly delivered as a metered substance by our internet service providers (i.e., gigabytes of data).

When we employ time limits as a digital content management strategy, we treat the internet as if it were water or electricity. Conceptually, however, digital content is more like money. Money is not goods, but money can be converted to, or transformed into goods. The measure of money (dollars), obscures what money is or could be. Forensic accountants, for example, try to ferret out the meaning of money by how it behaves. Digital content reconstitutes images, conversations, ideas and relationships on personal devices. It is measured in gigabytes, but gigabytes are not what digital content is.

Parents usually take an active interest in what their children spend their money on, and they can do this because their children's money and the transactions they might in engage in are limited. Parents also take an active interest in the digital content their children consume until there is so much, they cannot manage or process it. It is at this point that digital content becomes time.

For example, suppose a family had three children and each child consumes two hours of digital content per day on personal devices. For a parent to understand the content and process it with her children, she would need to consume six hours of content per day and find time to talk with her children about what they are viewing.

Of course, it is often argued that previous generations also consumed similar quantities of broadcast content. What this argument overlooks, however, is that the technological medium has changed. In the past, children may have watched two hours of television, but it was most

likely on the same device, in a public place, with a limited number of channels. Returning to our three-child example, the parent of yesteryear only had to review two hours of content, and she likely consumed this content with her children allowing for timely interpretive interjections and the possibility of just turning it off if the content became objectionable (which is, in itself, a formation lesson). Today, personal devices are, by their nature, oriented toward the viewer and closely held obscuring any visual accountability. Further, in many cases, children also use headphones removing audio accountability as well. The devices themselves, as *personal* devices, tend to exclude parents (and others) from the content consumed.

This parent we interviewed said she watches a lot of what her children watch, but this seems to be more a supervision of convenience than an attempt to comprehensively vet what her children see.

> *Euh ben, on les décourage pas, on leur juste faire attention à ce qu'ils regardent surtout on surveille beaucoup qu'est-ce qu'ils regardent on fait euh attention à ça là mais euh, c'est ça là.*
>> **Translation:** Well, we don't discourage them, we just pay attention to what they watch, above all, we watch a lot of what they watch, we pay attention to that, but uh, that's it.

Being less able to evaluate the scale of content, parents tend to fall back on time limits as a way to control the content. This is analogous to changing your measure of water from number of glasses to meters above the riverbank. To be clear, time limits as a digital content management strategy tends to mean parents are substantially removed from their children's interaction with that content. It treats digital content as if it were standard units like kilowatt hours or cubic meters, rather than like money, something that can be transformed into almost anything else. That parents use this strategy does not mean they are uninterested in the content their children are consuming. It means the scale of the content has outstripped them. This is one of the most urgent and important problems facing parents and the church as they consider the faith formation of children: How do you form their faith when you cannot even participate in or evaluate the conversations that are forming them?

There are many digital content filtering software solutions available to parents. These products algorithmically filter content based on its origin or metadata to block or limit access to content such as pornography, types of websites or specific websites. Examples include Disney's Circle, Norton Family, mSpy, or Pi-hole. Three-tenths of parents surveyed said they used digital content filtering software, and its use was more common in families with school-aged children (see figures 5.2 and 5.3).

A father we interviewed explained why he and his wife use "internet blockers":

> We have internet blockers on our main Wi-Fi to eliminate, like, pornographic sites or stuff like that. So, that's less likely for them to access.

Note that this father said that with "internet blocker" his children were "less likely" to encounter pornography online. This points to the limitations of these services, and it also highlights the ways in which choices about influences are surrendered to these companies. For example, in our own experience with Disney's Circle, explicitly Christian content tends to be blocked for children as Disney appears to have deemed it harmful.

We will now consider digital content management strategies requiring greater time commitments from parents.

5.2.2 Active digital content management strategies

Pre-screening digital content, reviewing children's browsing history and following children's social media accounts all require more parental resources than the non-supervisory strategies of time limits and content filtering software.

Figure 5.4 reprises the data from figure 5.3, but this time we are looking at digital content strategies by the number of children under the age of eighteen in the home and by child age range. We hypothesized that as the number of children increased, the supervisory burden would correspondingly increase causing parents to employ more of the digital content management strategies. This is, in fact, the case. On average, all parent survey respondents used 2.4 digital content management strategies, those with one, two, three or four or more children averaged 1.8, 2.3, 2.5 and 3.0 strategies respectively.

While parents with more children used more strategies this varied by the age of their children. Looking at the plots in figure 5.4, we can see that families with younger children (blue) were less likely to use these digital strategies than those with older children (red), the exception being pre-screening digital content. This suggests that when parents are more directly supervising infants and toddlers, technological aids to supervision are superfluous. When parents' capacity for supervision is stretched because they have more children or the children are physically absent because of the children's school or the parents work, parents tend to use one of these strategies for help.

We can see this basic pattern where the use of digital content management strategies increase with age by comparing the average age of children in families that use a digital content management strategy with those that do not (see table 5.2 below). With the exception of pre-screening content, the average age of children in families that use a digital content management strategy is higher than in families who do not.

Table 5.2 Average age of children[a] in families where parent respondents use and do not use select digital content management strategies, survey

Content management strategy	Uses strategy	Does not use strategy
Follows child's social media	12.2	8.4
Check browser history	11.0	8.5
Hold passwords	10.6	8.7
Use content filter	10.5	8.7
Internet in public spaces	9.5	9.1
Internet time limits	9.4	8.9
Pre-screen content	8.5	9.7

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, parent survey. N parent respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.
[a] Children under age eighteen only.

Digital content consumption tends to rise as children age and as they get their own personal digital devices such as a smartphone. We did not ask the parents we interviewed about smartphones, but several respondents talked about them in relation to our questions about digital technology and faith formation. Usually where children had smartphones, it was the parents, themselves, who provided them.

The gifting of a phone seemed to coincide with their children having greater independence outside of the home. The parents' intention in giving them a phone seemed to be to compensate for what they saw as a lack of security associated with their children being out of their direct supervision.

One respondent explained her intentions for her daughter's smartphone while recounting how her daughter had found other uses for it.

> So, it's like – I told her, I said, "**This phone was given to you as security for you** and it's a privilege, and privileges can be revoked. So, when you start treating it that it's more than a privilege, then you will no longer have it."

Although most of the discussion around smartphones (and digital technology in general) was about parents' attempts to control their children's use of it, it is important to remember that phones or other devices are usually given to children for reasons of security, or for the educational advantages they are perceived to offer.

It is ironic that smartphones provided to children to ensure their physical security, often create an entirely new situation of digital vulnerability for those same children. As media theorist McLuhan said, the changes a new technology introduce into the scale and structure of human relationships is usually more important than the content it carries.

Holding passwords, reviewing browsing history or following children's social media accounts, on the face of it, can indicate parents lack of trust in children. This certainly seems to be the case

for this parent we interviewed who talked about the lengths she went to exert control over her daughter's social media.

> I've got social media blocked. She only can contact the people who are in her contacts. She can't add a contact. [indistinct] but basically gone through her phone, like, you know, through – at the other church youth group that she attends, that pastor – the youth pastor – had sent to the parents a newsletter with all of the things, like Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and told us what [indistinct] breakdown was. It was a lot of information. But it actually is what kids can do, can't do, can they have private conversations, can they not have private conversations, can they talk in groups. And then, I took my daughter's phone and I changed all her settings. … And the other thing we have set up too – that if she's on it for an hour and she's allowed to have social media like Instagram or whatever, she has to be signed in on our phone. So, every message she sends we see.

Few parents went to these lengths to manage their children's digital lives. But the worries parents talked about were usually specific and almost always situated in the absence-in-presence cleavage that personal digital devices have cut in the parent-child relationship.

This parent described the online world as one of unpredictable "pop up" dangers.

> Well, my children are young. The oldest one's nine. And so, we discourage it at this point. We try not to let them sit in front of the computer, although we have a computer here, and the phones. My wife and I both have phones. But we discourage that. It's – to me, it's so dangerous if you go onto the wrong site or you go onto something and all of a sudden, you know, things pop up.

Significantly, the internet is dangerous because it is an environment where parents cannot easily be present to protect their children.

Two respondents, both Baptists from Atlantic Canada, talked about the phenomenon where teenage couples go to sleep together at night – in different houses – with FaceTime on:

- Um, I know I have a nephew who is nineteen and so he goes to bed every night FaceTiming his girlfriend, like, so that they are close to one another [sic]. And so that's just something I never had to deal with when I was dating. Um, so those things don't worry me except I just identify them as challenges that my kids will face that I didn't have to, necessarily.

- It was basically – well, it was basically through other people in the church who have grown daughters who are – like, their kids are sixteen, seventeen, and their kids are taking their phone to bed at night and being online FaceTiming a guy or a girl or whatever, but using their phone – it's, like, all night long.

Figure 5.4 Digital content management strategies, by number of children under eighteen in the home and child age range, parent respondents, survey, percent
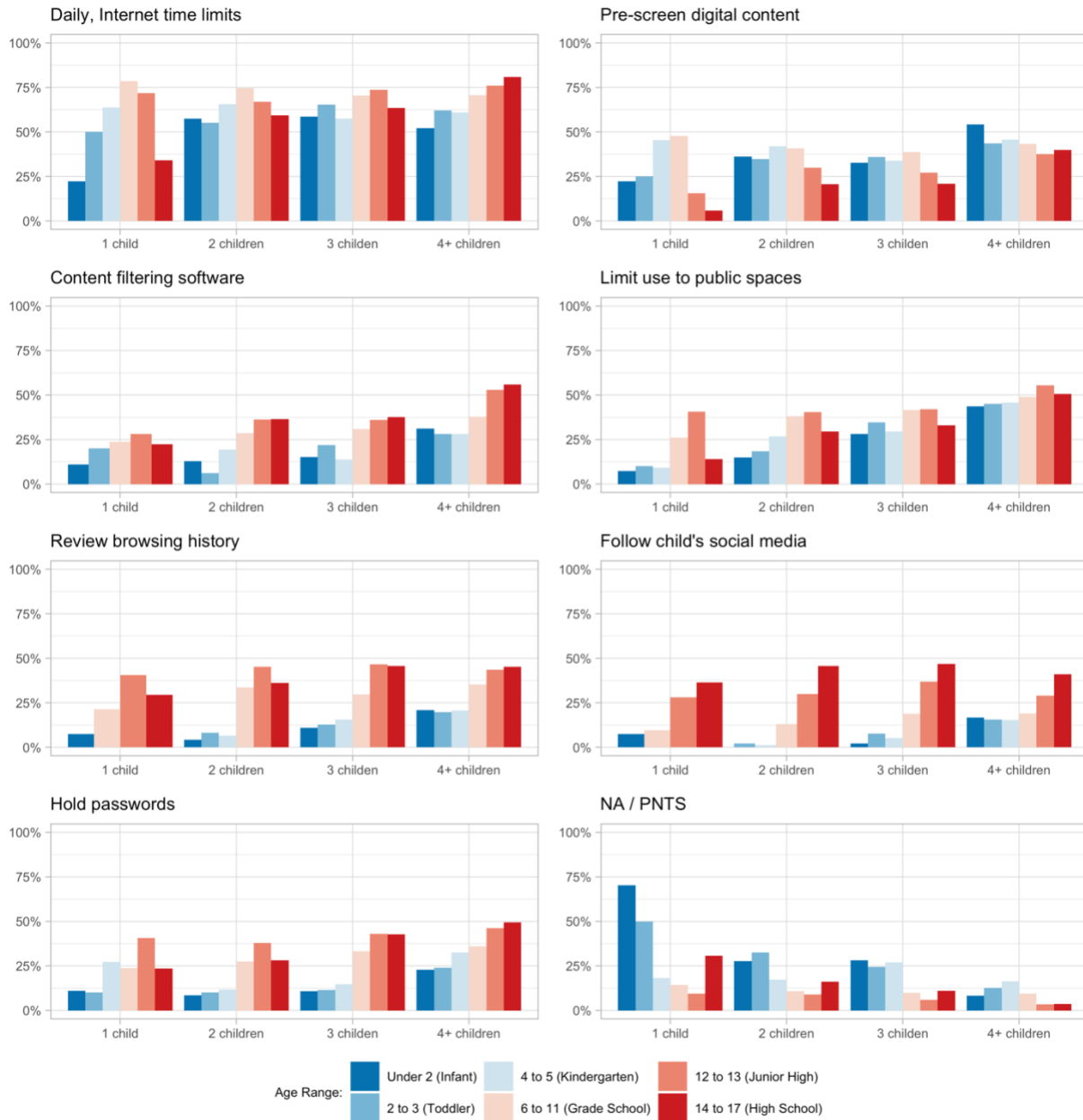
2022 CEFFFS, Parent survvey. N children = 3,041.

One respondent related a story where someone online posed as pop music star and asked her daughter and her daughter's friends to dance for him.

> And we were at a dance competition, as innocent as it is, and she had her phone [indistinct] in the hotel. And he had wanted – our daughters are wearing their costumes and stuff, and he wants to see them. And I'm like, "Well, if [the pop music star] wants to see you in your dance costumes, let him show his face." So, my husband took the phone and my husband said, you know, like, my husband turned his camera on so they could see my husband. Didn't take very long to hang up because I don't think it was anything to do with [the pop music star]. I think it was some guy pretending to be [the pop music star] to look at young girls. So, I just find there's too much – it's too risky. Like, you know, there's people being lured.

Significantly, this respondent's daughter was saved from this online predator when the father interposed himself between his daughter and her device, an opportunity parents don't often get.

Although pornography and sexual entrapment were common dangers, parents did talk about the desensitization to violence that comes from the aesthetic violence presented in some video games and movies.

What we did not often hear, however, was concern about the ways in which social media and other digital media form us through nudges, ads, the little rewards, like, bells and thumbs up that condition us to certain kinds of behaviour. One respondent recognized the "bombard[ment]" of advertising and took steps to avoid it, however, this was more about her own wellbeing rather than about how it was forming her children.

> I try to reduce my consumption. Like, I make efforts to reduce the consumption and it feels like an attack when I'm bombarded. Let's say I open my Facebook feed and I see one of my friend's posts and then an ad and then another friend's post and then an ad. I'm more likely to just shut the app off than continue scrolling because it's distracting. I need to have an update on my friends and talk to my friends through that platform, but I'm feeling bombarded, and it is distracting.

What our research did not test, and would be good to know, is whether the parents who have the capacity to check browsing history, control their children's accounts because they have passwords, or follow their children's social media feeds, actually take these measures. No doubt some parents have these tools at the ready and use them, but there will be others that will feel a sense of control just knowing they could closely monitor their children's behaviour if they needed to.

For example, I can read the Globe and Mail through my municipal library's online portal, but the interface is clumsy and unintuitive, so I almost never do. Reviewing browsing history is similarly time consuming. Browsers present browsing history as a list of links with brief descriptions. To

do any reasonable assessment of what you child has been viewing would require you to retrace their steps and view what they viewed. It's not quite like following them around, as if their internet breadcrumb is marshalled into a list for inspection, but it is a large job especially if you are doing it for several children. We expect that more often this capacity is used more to evaluate the scale of a problem that has been brought to light in some other way than to proactively serve as the curriculum for talking about life and faith with children. In making this hypothesis we are not critiquing parents, rather, we are making observations about the mismatch between digital and human scale.

5.2.3 Social media

Social media such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube are online digital networks where content is posted to and delivered through a feed. Users receive quantifiable feedback through likes, reposts or comments. The utility of social media is principally derived from their *network effect,* a phenomenon where the size of the networks and the sense that everyone is on there, is the attraction.

The content of social media feeds is experienced as ephemeral; being delivered through the screens of personal digital devices and disappearing from the user's immediate attentional field as soon as they scroll up. In delivering content through a scroll, social media platforms are afforded a high degree of control over what their users see. For example, revisiting an earlier post typically involves scrolling through all the intervening posts, meaning that accessing prior content is discouraged because of the difficulty involved.

Users "exist" on social media through the content they post, and they know that their posts have been seen through the various quantifications afforded by the platform. Each post has an attentional half-life fading from the network's consciousness as it falls further back in users' feeds. Significantly, as posts are connected to users, the network's consciousness of the user also fades as the time increases since the last post.

Presence, or indeed digital existence, on social media is a function of your share of the network's attention. This creates an attention-seeking dynamic on social media platforms. The network effect creates the sense that everyone is there, and the absence of attention measured in quantifications such as likes, reposts etc., creates the sense that you are not.

The ephemeral nature of posts and your attendant share of your network's attention mean that you must constantly post, and constantly create content that will earn you the quantifications to assure yourself (and others) that you are present on the network. Moreover, users are incentivized to grow their followings with rewards that, in turn, augment their ability to garner attention on the network.

Moreover, that the network effect is in effect on social media means that conversations or threads will be large. Miller's law[108] means that there are a small and limited number of people who can participate meaningfully in any online conversation and creates, on the platform, the dynamic of a theatre where there are a small number of actors and the rest become an audience. This stratification of the network, in turn, streams the ways in which people will gain attention on the network; the *actors* will gain attention through creating the content for the thread, whereas the *audience* will largely assume the role of theatre critics. Those who fail to find an attention-grabbing way to participate will disappear.

The competition for attention means posts, both content and critiques (responses), must find ever more creative and radical ways to stand out, which tends to drive content to the extremes in its distinctiveness.

The scale of the networks force attention-seeking users into smaller clusters where their voice (posts) can cut through and be recognized in quantifications. These "silos," which are also sometimes called "echo chambers," exist because they provide a forum where users can reliably gain the attention that validates their existence on the network. Following McLuhan's hot and cold medium distinctions, the hot, data-rich environment of the network expressed in users and posts fragments into smaller, cooler clusters until the "temperature" is cold enough to invite participation.

It is now well established that social media is addictive with its quantifications providing regular, periodic dopamine hits to users that keeps them coming back.[109]

One respondent talked about her struggle to limit her daughter's social media time.

> And it's been a struggle because ninety-nine percent of her friends are on electronics from the time they get up to the time they go to bed.

In the preceding quote we can see the network effect in action. All her daughter's friends ("ninety-nine percent") are on electronics (social media) all day long. So, if her daughter wants to be with her friends, she must be on social media. To be somewhere else (not on social media) is to be friendless.

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[108] Miller.

[109] Adam Alter, *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017); Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me - Revised and Updated: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled--and More Miserable Than Ever Before*, Revised, Updated ed. edition (New York: Atria Books, 2014); Jean M. Twenge, "The Mental Health Crisis Among America's Youth Is Real—and Staggering," Institute for Family Studies, March 18, 2019, https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-mental-health-crisis-among-americas-youth-is-realand-staggering.

Parents we interviewed generally talked about the negativity of social media while trying not to be categorical.

- Well, it's really been difficult because it's, like, you know, all these things like Snapchat and – what are some other ones that are out there? Instagram and TikTok. Like, I find a lot of them are very negative. And, I mean, I know there are some Christian artists with some stuff on some of these things, but it's, like, I find that the kids are so [indistinct] and how much they are loved and how many followers they have. And, like, that's not what I want my daughter's focus to be. I just find that's what all of her friends' focuses are.

- I don't know because those things honestly – well, so, we do follow, like, Facebook pages like Turning Point and In Touch Ministries and whatnot on social media, but the other one is, like a news source. I don't know if it's trying to be helpful or not. Like, all you ever see is bad news.

- I don't encourage. I mean, it depends. I mean, it could be bad and it could be good. But I don't encourage it because social media – there's a lot of stuff on social media that's not good.

Interestingly, several homeschooling parents told us their children were either not on social media or had limited interest in social media.

- I – our children don't use social media, not necessarily because it's discouraged, they just don't have a desire to. They [chuckles] – for some reason they would rather just – which is great – they'd rather just spend time with people personally than online, which I know is kind of weird. [chuckles] But I think it's good.

- My daughter is not much on social media. I'm not sure why.

- At this point, none of them have actually asked to go on. They're comfortable without it. My husband and I will show them things on our Facebook feeds if they ask or want, or if one of their friends is on, we'll call them up and say, "Hey, look what your friend's stuck on that you'd be interested in." And yeah, they just haven't seemed to take a big interest in it yet.

We suspect that the homeschool networks that homeschool families participate in, along with the tendency for homeschooling families to delay their children's acquisition of social media accounts (see figure 5.5), works against the network effect, because it provides their children with friends who are not only demonstrably not on social media but are also available to them in the real world.

We asked parent survey respondents whether each of their children had personal social media accounts. Table 5.3 below shows the average age of children with social media accounts for various groups. At the time of writing, the minimum age for TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook or Snapchat accounts was thirteen (roughly grade 8).

Table 5.3 Average age of children[a] using social media for select groups, parent respondents, survey

Children with personal social media accounts	Average age
All	14.6
Male	14.7
Female	14.6
Homeschool families	15.1
Public school families	14.6
Respondent attends more than weekly	14.8
Respondent attends weekly	14.7
Respondent attends 2-3 times per month	14.2
Respondent attends less often	13.7

Source: 2022 CEFFFS, parent survey. N parent respondents = 1,217. N children = 3,041.

[a] Children under age eighteen only.

Figure 5.5 below shows the percent of children with personal social media accounts for the same groups that appear in table 5.2. There is little variability in the average age of child social media users according to the groups considered. Comparing the schooling sub-plots in figure 5.5 (peach) it would appear that homeschooling parents are more scrupulous in respecting the minimum age limit for users on social media platforms than public school families, and, overall, a smaller share of their late-teen children are on social media. So, this seems to confirm what we heard in the interviews from homeschooling parents. The children of parents who attend worship services more frequently also seem to delay their participation in social media platforms (see figure 5.5, red sub-plots). There is also a slight suggestion that girls are earlier social media adopters than boys (see figure 5.5, compare light blue sub-plots).

Figure 5.5 Children with personal social media accounts, select groups, by child age, parent respondents, survey, percent
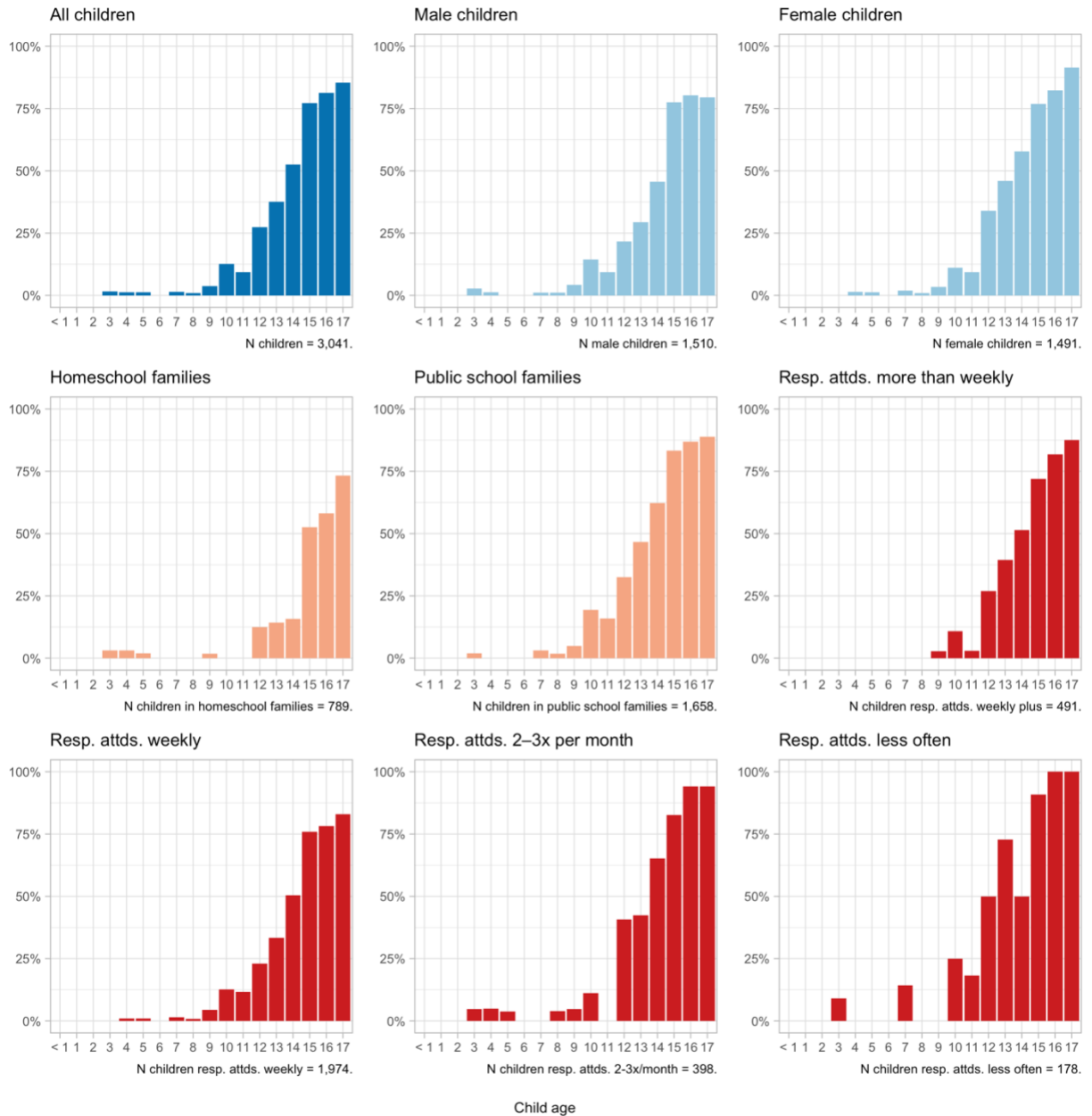
2022 CEFFFS, Parent Survey. N children = 3,041. As reported by parent respondents.

Figure 5.6 Children who have personal social media accounts, by child age and whether parents use select digital content management strategies, parent respondents, survey
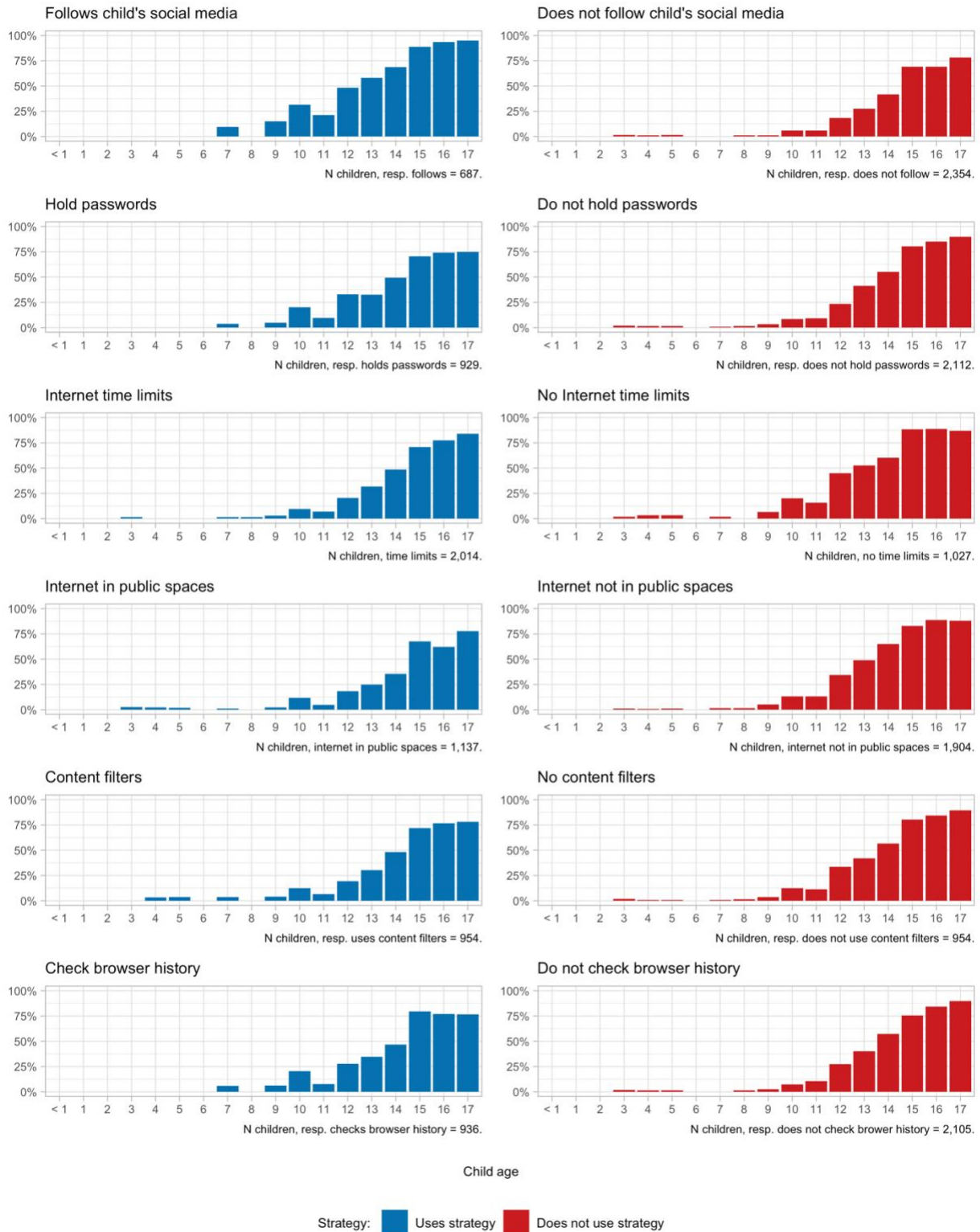
Given parents' generally negative assessment of social media and their efforts to assert some control over their children's digital content, we looked at the children of parents who used and did not use select digital content management strategies and whether this seemed to influence what age their children were when they started using social media (see figure 5.6).

The differences are slight, but it appears that where parents use management strategies, especially following their children's social media accounts, those children tend to adopt social media a little earlier.

Conclusion

Parents were conflicted about the role of digital technology in the lives of their children. While many saw it as a valuable tool opening up access to quality content and securing financial success to those who use it, they also worried about the effect of the content delivered through digital media such as social media.

Although Christian content was delivered to children using digital technology, the nature of the devices through which digital content is consumed tends to exclude parents. As personal digital devices take up a larger share of children's lives, parents' participation in the formative conversations about the content their children are consuming tends to shrink.

Parents use different digital content management strategies to compensate for the scale of the digital content their children are consuming, but their effectiveness seems modest at best, especially when considering the data on religious transmission found in section 4.1.

Conclusion

This report represents the dominant themes and ideas family ministry experts and parents raised in our interviews and is supplemented by findings from a referral survey sample of evangelical parents across Canada. The goal of this research study was to understand what families are doing or not doing to form children's faith at home, and what the church is doing in support. Our research was not designed to answer the "why" so much as the "what," though correlations and inferences were made throughout the body of this report.

Our findings indicate a significant generational change in approaches to faith formation. We learned that many families parent differently than how their parents raised them, even in cases where they shared the same religious identity as their parents. Today's parents may see church programs or resources as a relic of their previous generation as they tended to turn to their friends as faith-formation resources first, and then individually curated resources like podcasts, books and social media. Parents rarely referenced intergenerational relationships as a faith-formation support.

Ministry experts saw a parental desire for help in the faith formation of their children that the parents we spoke to did not express. Parents overwhelmingly suggested they do not have a faith-formation resource problem. A surprising number of parents said they would not change anything about their approach to faith formation. We found parents who were most open to change had frequent church attendance and had high levels of confidence about the job they were doing in faith formation. Those who were the most confident in their abilities, and the least open to change, were parents who attend church the least.

Most parents said they understood their role as the primary faith formers of their children and described faith formation in terms of role modelling and didactic teaching, often to the neglect of theological interpretation and religious skills development. Overall, the church's responsibility in helping parents understand and live out their calling or providing faith-formation training was absent from our interviews. Parents tended to value the church for the quality of teaching and relationships it offered to them and their children, but interviews suggested parents opted to choose or stay in churches primarily for what they offered to their children.

Convictions about gender roles notwithstanding, the data suggest traditional gender roles are playing out differently. Women reported having the main caregiving and faith-formation teaching responsibilities and often described taking faith-formation opportunities through regular conversations and in daily routines with their children. Most men reported they held the teaching authority in their home and described their faith-formation approaches in didactic terms.

Religious transmission is said to be "successful" when the children's religiosity closely matches that of their parents.[110] However, faith-formation activities like journalling, listening to podcasts or sermons, talking about one's personal relationship with God (personal testimony), spontaneous prayer and devotional reading were disciplines that do not seem to be successfully transmitted to children. Children's religiosity was also impacted by one-sided parental engagement in matters of faith. A father's lack of engagement at church was commonly a negative predictor for the rest of the family's engagement.

Faith-formation activities tended to have consistent times and spaces (calendars and geographies) for where they took place. We saw the calendars and geographies changing as children aged and developed, requiring parents to adapt the times and spaces they use for faith-formation activities or lose the opportunities altogether. Parents can influence their children when they inhabit the same spaces at the same time. However, with the rise of personal digital devices, it may be false to assume that sharing the same space as children is influencing their faith.

This report is long – we acknowledge that willingly, as a testament to the importance and urgency of the topic. We look forward to the myriad of strategic responses our partners and readers will bring to this research as they implement the findings. Thank you to our sixteen research partners who dedicated time and resources to making this project possible and to the EFC affiliates who gave us access to their networks because they saw the vision for what a project of this scale could mean for the good of families. We are also grateful to the evangelical parents in this study who gave us a rare glimpse into their home and family lives to help us understand how they propose to pass their faith on to their children.

We pray Canadian families will be blessed by this research and that they grow stronger because of it, to the glory of God.

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[110] Bengtson, Putney, and Harris, *Families and Faith*, 55.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Expansion
CBES	Canadian Bible Engagement Study
CEFFFS	Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study
CEMES	Canadian Evangelical Missions Engagement Study
CES	Christian Evangelical Scale
COVID-19, COVID	Coronavirus 19 disease
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic Acid, genetic material
EFC	Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
FFAs	Faith Formation Activities
FOMO	Fear Of Missing Out
GSS	General Social Survey
MCU	Marvel Cinematic Universe
NHS	National Household Survey
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PNTS / DK	Prefer Not To Say / Don't Know
ROC	Rest of Canada, regions outside of Quebec

Appendix A. Methodology

Parenting Faith is the final report of the Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study (CEFFFS), which is a multi-phase, mixed methods, ministry research study. The research was sponsored and guided by a ministry partnership between:

- Awana International Canada
- Be in Christ / The Meeting House
- Bible League Canada
- Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada
- Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec
- FamilyLife Canada
- Focus on the Family Canada
- Muskoka Bible Centre
- One Hope Canada
- Promise Keepers Canada
- The Christian & Missionary Alliance
- The Christian Reformed Church in North America
- The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
- The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada
- The Salvation Army of Canada and Bermuda
- Youth Worker Community (Truth Matters Ministries)
- One unnamed major donor

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's (EFC) Centre for Research on Church & Faith (CRCF) was commissioned to conduct the research.

The CEFFFS research project ran from October 2019 to January 2023. CEFFFS had seven phases outlined in table A1, several of which are described in more detail below.

Table A1. CEFFFS phases

Phase	Time Period
Consultation	2019-10-08 to 2019-10-09
Partnership Formation	2019-10-10 to 2020-05-29
Literature Review	2020-06-01 to 2020-11-16
Ministry Expert Interviews	2020-11-17 to 2021-04-30
Pastor Interviews	2021-05-01 to 2022-02-24
National Survey	2022-02-25 to 2023-04-10
Dissemination of Findings	2023-04-11 to 2024-04-11

Our primary research population consisted of Canadian, evangelical parents with children under the age of eighteen in the home. Our primary population sample was generated through a referral sample initiated by the CEFFFS ministry partners within their respective constituency networks.

A1. Literature Review

A literature review was conducted between June 1, 2020, and November 11, 2020, leading to the interim phase report "Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study Literature Review: Interim Report 1."[111] Partnership members recommended literature and resources to review, and other relevant literature were consulted at the discretion of the researchers.

A2. Ministry Expert Interviews

Ministry experts are those with expertise or a unique perspective on a research question. Working with the CEFFFS partnership committee, we first developed a set of ministry expert quotas for region, expertise type and gender to help ensure representativeness. Next, partnership committee members nominated potential ministry experts to the research team and then the research team drew from this nominated sample to fill the pre-established quotas.[112]

Rick Hiemstra, Lindsay Callaway and Stéphane Couture conducted twenty-two, semi-structured, ministry expert, telephone interviews (ranging from forty-five to sixty minutes each) between December 14, 2020, and February 22, 2021. Nineteen interviews were conducted in English and three in French.

Where consent was given by respondents, interviews were initially transcribed using the AWS Transcribe transcription service, and by research staff otherwise. Initial transcriptions were proofed by Melody Bellefeuille-Frost (English transcriptions) or Lorianne Dueck (French transcriptions).

Two coding and annotating passes were made for each interview, one by Rick Hiemstra and the other by Lindsay Callaway. Coding themes were generated from the interview content and from what was learned in previous phases of this research.

The interim phase report "CEFFFS Ministry Expert Interviews Report: CEFFFS Interim Report 2" was presented to the CEFFFS partnership committee on April 30, 2021.[113]

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[111] Callaway, Hiemstra, and Murphy, "Canadian Evangelical Family Faith Formation Study Literature Review: Interim Report 1."

[112] For quotas and how they were met see Callaway and Hiemstra, "CEFFFS Ministry Expert Interviews Report: CEFFFS Interim Report 2," 174.

[113] Callaway and Hiemstra, "CEFFFS Ministry Expert Interviews Report: CEFFFS Interim Report 2."

A3. Parent Interviews

The researchers set out to recruit a representative sample of forty evangelical parents with children under the age of eighteen in the home, according to quotas set in consultation with the CEFFFS partnership.[114]

Initially, we were going to recruit all our respondents through the polling company Maru (https://www.marugroup.net/polling). In June 2021, Maru pre-screened approximately 30,000 of their panelists to find evangelical parents with children under the age of eighteen in the home and identified only 126. Given that only twenty of the qualified Maru panelists were expected to become respondents, it was decided to recruit the second half of our sample through our partnership constituent networks. In the end, we recruited twenty-two respondents through Maru and nineteen through our partnership networks.

Rick Hiemstra, Lindsay Callaway and Stéphane Couture conducted forty-one, semi-structured, parent, telephone interviews (ranging from forty-five to sixty minutes each) between June 26, and September 3, 2021. Thirty-seven interviews were conducted in English and four in French. Significantly, this was in the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic but between major waves for most of the country. In fact, in most parts of the country restrictions were being lifted, the national vaccination campaign was in full gear and people were cautiously optimistic that the worst of the pandemic was over.

Where consent was given by respondents, interviews were initially transcribed using the AWS Transcribe transcription service, and by research staff otherwise. Initial transcriptions were proofed by Melody Bellefeuille-Frost (English transcriptions) or Bethany Brown (French transcriptions).

Two coding and annotating passes were made for each interview, one by Rick Hiemstra and the other by Lindsay Callaway. Coding themes were generated from the interview content and from what had been learned in previous phases of this research.

The interim report "Parent Interviews Report: CEFFFS Interim Report 3" was presented to the CEFFFS ministry partners on February 24, 2022.[115]

A4. National Surveys

A4.1 Parent sample

Our research plan called for a nationally representative sample of 1,000 Canadian, evangelical parents or guardians with children under the age of eighteen in the home, hereafter referred to

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[114] For quotas and how they were met see tables A2 to A6 in Hiemstra and Callaway, "Parent Interviews Report," 191–92.

[115] Hiemstra and Callaway, "Parent Interviews Report."

as "parents." For the purpose of this study, *evangelical* means those affiliated with one of The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's (EFC) affiliate denominations, ministry organizations, Christian higher education institutions or individual congregations at the time the data was collected.[116]

As noted in section A3 above, polling companies were unlikely to be able to provide the sample we were looking for, so we decided to work with our affiliate research partner organizations[117] to generate a referral sample for our national parent survey. Between April 26, and June 12, 2022, partner organizations invited their affiliate or constituent *parents*[118] to complete our national parent survey which was administered on SurveyMonkey.com. Partners used a variety of means to contact their affiliates or constituents including a media release, social media posts and direct emails. Template communications provided to affiliate research partners to assist with the referral sample are available from the researchers upon request.

The parent survey questionnaire was informed by the findings from earlier research phases and by consultations with our affiliate research partners.

The parent survey received 1,970 responses, and 1,217 were usable or qualified. Responses were deemed qualified if they were complete, originated from a Canadian IP address, indicated they had at least one child under the age of eighteen in the home and correctly answer a "bot" challenge question. Of the 1,970 responses received, 308 originated from outside Canada (mostly from the United States), 547 were incomplete and 90 failed the "bot" challenge question. Many of the 753 disqualified responses were excluded on more than one ground.

Parent survey data presented in this report represents only qualified survey responses unless stated otherwise.

A4.2 Pastor survey

To complement our parent sample, our research plan included a nationally representative survey of evangelical pastors or lay church leaders with family ministry responsibilities. Hereafter we will use *pastor* to refer to the data from this survey of both ordained, or professional, pastors with family ministry responsibilities and lay or volunteer ministers with responsibilities for the same. As with the parent sample, *evangelical* here means those affiliated with the EFC's affiliates. Unlike the parent sample, a referral sample conducted by the research partners was planned from the beginning. This pastor survey was conducted concurrent with the parent survey from April 26 to June 12, 2022, on the SurveyMonkey.com platform.

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[116] See https://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Affiliation/Our-affiliates for a list of the EFC's current affiliates.
[117] See Appendix C for a list of research partner organizations.
[118] Parents qualified for our survey population.

The pastor survey questionnaire was informed by the findings from earlier research phases and by consultations with our affiliate research partners.

Pastor responses fell far short of our 1,000-response goal, receiving 298 responses, with only 209 of these being qualified. Responses were deemed qualified if they were complete, originated from a Canadian IP address and correctly answer a "bot" challenge question. Of the 298 pastor responses received, twenty-two originated from IP addresses outside Canada, sixty-six were incomplete and four failed the "bot" challenge question. Many of the eighty-nine disqualified responses were excluded on more than one ground.

Pastor survey data presented in this report represents only qualified survey responses unless stated otherwise.

The pastor sample was a referral sample originating with the CEFFFS partnership that relied heavily on EFC affiliated denominational leaders to forward the survey invitation to their respective pastors and leaders with family ministry responsibilities.

A4.3 Representativeness of samples

A research sample should be representative of its target population if responsible extrapolations of findings are to be made from the sample to the broader population. Historically, representativeness has been synonymous with random sampling, but random sampling is only one way to find a representative sample. Online research panels, one of the alternatives to random telephone sampling, recruit standing pools of panelists who complete surveys for incentives. Onboarding surveys are used to create demographic profiles for panelists, and these are augmented with subsequent survey responses. These profile data are used to create samples matching clients' requirements as well as to match select demographics (i.e., gender, region and age) for a reference population much like the Canadian census. In this way, representative samples can be generated apart from random sampling. The industry move from random telephone sampling to research panels and other sampling methods has happened for a variety of reasons which Andrew Grenville discusses in his book *Insights Revolution.*[119]

Every sample, however, has problems that can usually be described as one or another kind of bias. Where the bias is small and the shape of the population is well known (because of the presence of a control such as a census) a sample can be corrected, or *weighted,* to bring certain characteristics back in line with what is true for the population. Weights are generally kept between 0.5 and 2 (i.e., cutting the weight of an observation in half or doubling it.) Where weights fall outside this range, there is often a systemic problem with the data and weighting will generally introduce as much distortion as it corrects.

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[119] Andrew Grenville, *Insights Revolution: Questioning Everything* (Lulu.com, 2018).

A4.3.1 Parent survey sample

We explored weighting the parent survey by region and gender. Table A2 below shows the unweighted sample distribution by region and gender.

Table A2. Unweighted distribution of parent respondents by region and gender, counts and percent

Region	Count			Percent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
BC	40	90	130	13.2	9.9	10.7
AB	30	136	166	9.9	14.9	13.6
SK/MB	43	128	171	14.1	14.0	14.1
ON	146	421	567	48.0	46.1	46.6
QC	26	79	105	8.6	8.7	8.6
ATL	19	58	77	6.3	6.4	6.3
Terr	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
PNTS[a]	0	1	1	0.0	0.1	0.1
Total	304	913	1,217	100.0	100.0	100.0

[a] PNTS is prefer not to say.

We compared our parent sample with the distribution of private dwellings in Canada and in the provinces and territories outside of Quebec, sometimes referred to as the Rest of Canada (ROC) (see table A3 below). These two population comparisons were used because it is known that the evangelical share of the population is smaller in Quebec than other parts of Canada. Comparing our parent survey sample to the distribution of private households in Canada as a whole, we see that British Columbia and Quebec are underrepresented, and Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario are overrepresented. Making a similar comparison for the parent survey sample with the ROC household distribution, we see that British Columbia, Alberta and the Atlantic provinces are underrepresented, and Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec are overrepresented.

Table A3. Distribution of private dwellings in Canada by region, 2021, Statistics Canada, counts and percent

Region	Counts		Percent	
	All	ROC	All	ROC
BC	2,211,694	2,211,694	13.6	18.1
AB	1,772,670	1,772,670	10.9	14.5
SK/MB	1,085,253	1,085,253	6.7	8.9
ON	5,929,250	5,929,250	36.4	48.5
QC	4,050,164	–	24.9	0.0
ATL	1,186,271	1,186,271	7.3	9.7
Terr	48,933	48,933	0.3	0.4
Total	16,284,235	12,234,071	100.0	100.0

Source: Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. "Population and Dwelling Counts: Canada, Provinces and Territories," 9 Feb. 2022, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810000101.
ROC is rest of Canada (i.e., excluding Quebec).

We created exploratory region and gender weights assuming a balanced male-female gender distribution and an estimated distribution of evangelical parents – and therein lies the problem.

There is no known, reasonably accurate distribution of Canadian, evangelicals much less evangelical Christian parents.[120] The estimated regional distribution is based solely on the lead investigator's experience. The weights generated are not too heavy (i.e., they fall between 0.5 and 2), however, they are generated against a merely estimated regional distribution (see table A4 below). We present them here solely to help the reader get a sense of the representativeness of our data. We decided to present this series of comparisons in lieu of weighting our dataset. Our conclusion is that the regional distribution of our parent sample is a reasonable approximation of a reasonable estimate of the distribution of evangelicals in Canada.

If we compare the gender distribution, our sample has three female respondents for every male, not the one-to-one ratio we expected. Again, we have chosen not to weight our data for gender. This finding suggests that mothers are more engaged in the faith formation of their children than fathers, or at least that they are more connected to the constituency networks of our research partners.

Table A4. Exploratory region and gender weighting for the parent survey sample

Region	Unweighted, qualified response counts			Estimated regional distribution of evangelical parents	Weights		
	Male	Female	All		Male	Female	All
BC	40	90	130	14%	1.06400000	1.41866667	1.30953846
AB	30	136	166	12%	1.21600000	0.80470588	0.87903614
SK/MB	43	128	171	10%	0.70697674	0.71250000	0.71111111
ON	146	421	567	44%	0.91616438	0.95315914	0.94363316
QC	26	79	105	10%	1.16923077	1.15443038	1.15809524
ATL	19	58	77	10%	1.60000000	1.57241379	1.57922078
Terr	0	0	0	–	–	–	–
PNTS	0	1	1	–	–	1.00000000	1.00000000

Notes: Only qualified responses are accounted for in this exploratory weighting.

Where appropriate, in our analysis we will consider differences according to respondent gender. For parent survey sample general statistics, the reader should be aware that three in four respondents are women.

A4.3.2 Pastor survey sample

The region and gender distribution of the pastor sample is presented in table A5 below. Regionally the sample is a reasonable approximation of the distribution of the Canadian population with the exception of the underrepresentation of Quebec. That being said, Quebec

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[120] See the following for some of the issues in defining evangelical populations in Canada. Hiemstra, "Counting Canadian Evangelicals"; Rick Hiemstra, "Evangelicals and the Canadian Census," *Church & Faith Trends* 1, no. 2 (February 2008): 13; Rick Hiemstra, "Evangelicals and the Dissemination of Canadian Census Data," *Church & Faith Trends* 2, no. 3 (August 2009): 19; Stackhouse Jr, "Defining 'Evangelical'"; Jr, *Evangelicalism*.

is likely well represented in our sample given that the percent of evangelical Christians in Quebec is known to be lower than in the ROC.

Table A5. Pastor respondents by region and gender, counts[a] and percent

Region	Count				Percent			
	Male	Female	PNTS[b]	All	Male	Female	PNTS	All
BC	23	12	0	**35**	15	22	0	17
AB	15	8	0	**23**	10	15	0	11
SK/MB	13	5	0	**18**	8	9	0	9
ON	71	20	1	**92**	46	37	100	44
QC	19	5	0	**24**	12	9	0	11
ATL	13	4	0	**17**	8	7	0	8
Total	**154**	**54**	**1**	**209**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

[a] Qualified responses only.
[b] PNTS is prefer not to say.

Although the survey allowed us to identify the denomination each pastor respondent belonged to, in the interest of brevity, we have summarized their affiliations according to theological traditions within evangelicalism in table A6 below.

Table A6. Pastor respondents by tradition and gender, counts[a]

Tradition	Male	Female	PNTS[b]	Total
Baptist	56	12	0	**68**
Reformed	29	16	0	**45**
Pentecostal	21	9	0	**30**
Pietist	14	5	0	**19**
Holiness	10	8	0	**18**
Anabaptist	14	2	1	**17**
Non-Denom.	5	1	0	**6**
Restorationist	3	0	0	**3**
Other Evang.	2	0	0	**2**
Lutheran	0	1	0	**1**
Total	**154**	**54**	**1**	**209**

[a] Qualified responses only.
[b] PNTS is prefer not to say.

Other characteristics of the pastor survey sample are explored in the body of this report.

A5. Where We Missed the Mark

There were several ways our research missed the mark.

First, our surveys did not account for children with special needs. In many cases, options provided to parents did not meaningfully address their contexts. We are sorry for this failing, and we will endeavour to correct this in future research.

Second, although we allowed for parent respondents to indicate if a grandparent was part of their household, we did not go further to explore the role of grandparents in the faith

formation of children. Our research question was principally about the role of parents and guardians, but in focusing on parents we failed to recognize the many cases where grandparents are the de facto guardians for their grandchildren and where they play important roles in the faith formation of their grandchildren.

We regret these omissions and are grateful to the people who contacted us to point them out.

Appendix B: Faith-Formation Resources Cited in Parent Interviews

Respondents were asked what resources they found helpful either for faith formation with their children in the home or as resources to help them be more effective in the faith formation of their children.

Parents who homeschooled their children, on average, cited 5.9 faith-formation resources compared to just 3.1 for parents who had their children in either public or Catholic public schools.

B1. Books Cited in Parent Interviews

DiMarco, Michael. *Devotions for the God Guy: A 365-Day Journey*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Revell, 2011.

Jonah, Francis. *Ignite Your Faith: Spiritual Keys to Boost Your Faith*. Bestsellers And New Free Releases Publishing, 2021.

Neufeld, Gordon, and Gabor Maté. *Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers*. Revised with new chapters edition. Toronto: Knopf Canadian Publishing, Vintage Canada, 2013.

Ware, Bruce A. *Big Truths for Young Hearts: Teaching and Learning the Greatness of God*. 1st edition. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2009.

B2. Resources Cited in Parent Interviews

Table B1. Resources cited in parent interviews as home faith-formation resources

Resource description	Mentions	Type[a]
Bible Gateway App	1	App
YouVersion Bible App	3	
Adventures in Odyssey	4	Audio
Alisa Childers Podcast	1	
Amir Tsarfati - Sermons	1	
Ask Pastor John	1	
Back to the Bible Canada	1	
Capitol Hill Baptist Church - Sermons	1	
Christian Radio Station	3	
Cooper Stuff Podcast	1	
Desiring God / John Piper	1	
Doxa Church - Sermons	1	
Frank Peretti Kids Books - audio	1	
Insight for Living Canada	1	
Jack Hibbs - Sermons	1	
John MacArthur - Sermons	1	
Keys for Kids	1	
Lectio 365 Podcast	1	
Paws and Tales	1	
Psalty	1	
Sean McDowell Podcast	1	
The Average Boy Podcast	1	
The Briefing - Albert Mohler	1	
Theology Mom Podcast	1	
Truth for Life - Alisair Begg	1	
Westside Church - Sermons	1	
Bible	12	Bible
Children's Bible	4	
Life Application Bible	1	
The Action Bible (Comic book)	1	
Bible Studies - general	1	Bible Study
Bible Study called "Quest"	1	
Our Daily Bread	1	
Plaire au Seigneur	1	
Samuel Bagster's Daily Light	1	
Big Truths for Young Hearts	1	Book
Books - Reformed Theology	1	
Chronicles of Narnia	1	
Devotions for the God Guy: A 365-Day Journey	1	
Hold On	1	
Ignite Your Faith	1	
Catechism - general	1	Catechism
New City Catechism	2	
Church workshop - general	1	Church seminar

Table B1 continued on the next page.

Table B1 continued (1). Resources cited in parent interviews as home faith-formation resources

Resource Description	Mentions	Type[a]
Big Truths for Young Hearts	1	
Books - Reformed Theology	1	
Chronicles of Narnia	1	Book
Devotions for the God Guy: A 365-Day Journey	1	
Hold On	1	
Ignite Your Faith	1	
Catechism - general	1	Catechism
New City Catechism	2	
Church workshop - general	1	Church seminar
Gather Round - Space	1	
Group Publishing	1	Curriculum
The Gospel Project	1	
Denominational resources	2	Denom.
Wee College	1	
Math-U-See	1	Edu. Other
Andrews University	1	Higher Ed.
Guide Magazine	1	
Just Between Us Magazine	1	
Magazines - general	1	Magazine
The Watchtower Magazine	1	
Acts & Facts Magazine	1	
Answers in Genesis	4	
Awana	1	
Creation Ministries International	1	
Dave Ramsey	1	
David Jeremiah	2	
Focus on the Family	6	
In Touch Ministries / Stanley	2	Ministry
Myles Munroe	1	
Orange	1	
Revelation Wellness	1	
Summit Ministries	1	
The Gospel Coalition	2	
The Mailbox Club	1	
Bible Reading Plan - general	1	
Hymnal	1	
Local Municipal Library	1	Other
Religious Icons	1	
The Rosary	1	
Bible Reading Plan - from Church	2	Reading Plan
Robert Murray M'Cheyne Reading Plan	1	
Adventist Book Center	1	
ChristianBooks.com	2	Retailer
Goodwill / Value Village	1	
Local Christian Bookstore	1	
Google	6	Search
The Internet	2	

Table B1 continued (2). Resources cited in parent interviews as home faith formation resources

Resource Description	Mentions	Type[a]
Focus on the Family - Parenting Course	1	Seminar
Lorne Shepherd	1	
Facebook	1	Social Media
Adventist Review TV	1	
Awanaym.org	1	
Buck Denver Asks … What's in the Bible?	1	
CBC Gem	1	
Christian Kids TV	1	
Christian TV - general	1	
DVDs - general	1	
Full House TV Series	1	
Hope Channel	1	
Loma Linda Broadcasting Network	1	
Minno Kids	1	
Netflix	1	Video
Passion of the Christ - Movie	1	
PureFlix	1	
RightNow Media	7	
Sons of God - Movie	1	
SuperBook	2	
The Bible Project	2	
The Chosen	2	
Three Angels Broadcasting Network	1	
Veggie Tales	4	
Watoto African Children's Choir	1	
YouTube - Christian Music	1	
YouTube - general	3	
Zoom - For Church Services	1	Video Conf.
Christian Video Games - general	1	Video Games
Bible Gateway	1	Website
Total	**168**	

[a] Reasonable people could proposal alternate categorizations for the resources in tables B1 and B2.

Table B2. Unique resource counts and mentions counts in parent interviews, by resource type[a]

Type	Unique resources	Mentions
Video	24	38
Audio	24	29
Ministry	13	24
Bible Study	5	5
Book	5	5
Magazine	5	5
Other	5	5
Bible	4	18
Retailer	4	5
Curriculum	3	3
Search Engine / Internet	2	8
App	2	4
Catechism	2	3
Denominational Resource	2	3
Reading Plan	2	3
Seminar (Parenting)	2	2
Education Other	1	1
Higher Education	1	1
Video Conferencing	1	1
Video Game	1	1
Website	1	1
Total	**112**	**168**

[a] Reasonable people could proposal alternate categorizations for the resources in tables B1 and B2.

Appendix C. Research Partner Organizations

- Awana International Canada
- Be in Christ / The Meeting House
- Bible League Canada
- Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada
- Canadian Baptists of Ontario and Quebec
- FamilyLife Canada
- Focus on the Family Canada
- Impactus | Promise Keepers Canada
- Muskoka Bible Centre
- One Hope Canada
- The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada
- The Christian Reformed Church in North America
- The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
- The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada
- The Salvation Army Canada and Bermuda Territory
- Youth Worker Community (Truth Matters Ministries)
- An unnamed funding partner

Partnership Chair: John Friesen, Muskoka Bible Centre.