

**How can the church empower and equip people  
for a more impactful children's ministry?**

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# How can the church empower and equip people for a more impactful children's ministry?

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Ba Hons - Practical theology with children's and families work

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# Abstract

This paper explores the question 'How can the church empower and equip people for a more impactful children's ministry?'. The project includes a literature review exploring the history of children's ministry, specifically Sunday school, in the UK, and the impact that children's ministry is currently having whilst diagnosing some of the problems with the structure and content. The literature review also includes research into an alternative or addition to children's ministry in 'intergenerational ministry' and its development. A mixed method approach was used for research, with three children's ministry leaders being interviewed in-depth with qualitative questions, nine children taking part in two single-gender focus groups answering qualitative questions and thirty-four people completing a questionnaire answering primarily quantitative questions with a few qualitative ones included as well. My research analysis shows that children's ministry is making an impact in the UK. Furthermore, most people involved see the value of children's ministry, which has impacted people in a variety of ways including encounters with Jesus, the kindness of leaders, the community created plus much more. The findings also showed that people see the importance of faith development at home with families, not necessarily as part of intergenerational ministry within a Sunday morning context. The results of the research show that the church can create a greater impact on children by empowering and equipping families to be able to develop faith at home, whilst also maintaining a high-quality children's ministry which teaches well, provides space for encounters and develops a great community for children to make friends in.

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## Introduction

My research project is exploring the question 'How can the church empower and equip people for a more impactful children's ministry?'. This research is one part of my degree "Practical Theology with Children's and Families work". The Impact of something such as children's ministry is subjective and can be measured in different ways such as through statistical analysis, storytelling which includes seeing transformation in children and observations short and long term. For the purpose of this project, I will be analysing the impact of a variety of these factors rather than one rigid definition. This also allows me to explore different ways in which people are impacted instead of setting a frame in which people must be impacted. Children's ministry in the context of this essay refers to the work that churches do with children aged 0-11 and their families, this includes internal children's work where the family is an active part of the church and outreach-focussed children's ministry where people are from alternate or no faith backgrounds. As part of this project, I will be conducting a literature review analysing existing literature on the theology and history of children's ministry as well as the current impact it is having in addition to alternatives to children's ministry such as 'intergenerational ministry'. I will use my literature review as a base for my own research to explore more information about different people's perspectives on the impact of children's ministry, what is working well and what can be improved. As well as identifying how the church can empower and equip people for this. I will be using a mixed-method approach of both quantitative and qualitative data collection to achieve my goal. Furthermore, I will conduct research with a variety of different people who interact with children's ministry to enable me to understand different perspectives. I will then analyse the data to understand people's opinions on children's ministry and the impact it is having which will enable me to draw some conclusions to answer the question 'How can the church empower and equip people for a more impactful children's ministry'. The purpose is to give a general idea of what the church should focus on to empower and equip people to help children develop in faith rather than specific strategies or processes in empowering people for a specific task.

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# Literature review

## Introduction

I am conducting a literature review to explore more information to answer my question: 'How can the Church empower and equip people for a more impactful children's ministry?'. As part of my literature review I will be exploring the history of children in Church, the current state of children's ministry and what alternatives there are to children's ministry through ideas such as 'intergenerational ministry'.

## History of children in church

Throughout history, children have often been overlooked when discussing theology and how we should minister to children. There is often research talking about doctrine to children and teaching but what is lacking in research is addressing the theological basis for children's ministry. (Beckwith, 2013). In the modern Western world, children are valued as members of society, they are prioritised and they are important. However, this is not always how children have been regarded; as seen in Matthew 19:13-15 when the disciples rebuke people for bringing children to Jesus but Jesus' response is radical when he says 'Let the children come to me', as children were of little importance in Jewish society, they were to be cared for not looked up to. (France, 2015)

Marcia Bunge is at the forefront of theologies of childhood and has categorised the many theologies throughout history into six views, going from one extreme view to the other. For example, children are gifts of God, sources of joy, a prevalent Old Testament view taken from passages like Psalm 127:3-5; 128:1-4, and on the other end of the scale children are sinful creatures, more agents, Calvin and Edwards, among other theologians, focused on children as inheritors of original sin which needs to be purged through the instruction of the right way to live. (Beckwith, 2013)

The concept of 'Sunday school' dates back to the 16th Century, but began in England in 1780 with Robert Raikes. It began as a school for the poor, who had no formal education. Therefore, they could go and earn money for their family in the week and then come to Sunday school to learn to read and write, with the Bible and attendance at church being the

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primary focus of learning. (Francis, 2002, p.36). Many centuries later, the Western church still adopts this model of Sunday School, however, it no longer serves the purpose of teaching children to read and write but instead is primarily focused on teaching the Bible and Christian beliefs. A recent study has shown that the experience of parents, pastors and young people who have attended Sunday school, know very little about their faith, whilst also finding it hard to connect the relationship between their faith and daily life. (Bunge, 2008). Furthermore, there seems to be a rift between children's spirituality and the chance to express it through traditional religious practices, which Hay suggests is why people are choosing to leave religious institutions. This difference means that traditional methods are no longer sustaining their spiritual roots. (Hay, 2006, p.36). Spirituality is a difficult concept to define, some recent studies have favoured it as an individual's experience with concepts such as personal transcendence, supra-conscious sensitivity and meaningfulness (Ghane, 2022). An alternative definition from Nye talks about the way a human interfaces with and embraces the meanings at the depth of our experience. (1998). Research has suggested that the child's spirituality is neglected, not allowing it to grow and flourish which could be problematic as Halstead writes without any input a child's innate spirituality declines from the age of twelve or thirteen, completely disappearing in adulthood. (2001).

The literature so far suggests that 'Sunday School' was created to fulfil a specific need in the sixteenth century, and as it was part of the Church it naturally incorporated Bible teaching within it. However, with accessible education in the Western world, the same kind of model could be viewed as outdated, particularly as so many young people lack spirituality or knowledge of the Christian faith. This could be further shown by UK church membership declining from 30% of the population in 1930 to 10.3% in 2013 (Faith Survey, 2024), showcasing that if the model was successful Churches may be fuller. In the next section, I will be further analysing the impact of modern children's ministry.

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## **Impact of children's ministry**

The impact of children's ministry is complicated to measure, there are several different factors, including the success of programs, the spiritual growth of young people, and the effective teaching of Christian principles are just a few of the metrics that could be used. In this section of the literature review, I am going to be analysing what current literature is suggesting about the current impact of children's Ministry.

## **The structure of children's ministry**

Westerhoff writes that children's work in churches, whilst having some modern success is plagued with disease, quoting Life magazine in 1957 saying Sunday school is the most wasted hour of the week, which was a report originally written in the 1970s, showing that in the following fifty years the Church is still facing the same problems. (Westerhoff, 2012, p.11). Meanwhile, The book titled Rethinking Children's Work in Churches, Published in 2019, suggests that this problem still has not been dealt with and needs further adaptation. (Edwards, 2019). This could be due to the continued focus on Sunday school-style ministry which no longer serves the purpose it was originally intended. Dewey suggests that all of life is an education and that school or in this context 'Sunday school' is just a small part of this. The Church, which has mirrored the culture, has failed to progress education systems that are heavily reliant on being in an institution in a uniform way. (Westerhoff, 2012, p.17-18). Dewey is suggesting that children can engage with faith in more than just a Sunday morning setting, which is not common within Church institutions. Vygotsky proposed that children learn within 'sociocultural contexts' and that they learn alongside other peers, learning is a joint experience that is shared. (MacDougal, 2019, p.26). This also fits in with 'Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory' which demonstrates how different layers of society influence children. Within the 'microsystem', are both peers and religious affiliations which suggests that these are two of the most impactful aspects of a child's growth (Macdougal, 2019, p.27). Both of these theories suggest that if churches create resources or opportunities for children to engage with faith outside of a Sunday morning teaching session, then children would learn more and develop further spiritually. This



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creates a culture of growth in faith for children rather than creating session plans that teach children in the small window that Sunday school happens. This holistic approach withdraws pressure from Sunday school being the only source of a child's religious development and widens the perspective for growth.

### **The content of children's ministry**

The above section suggests we should be creating a culture of spiritual growth wider than teaching but some writers suggest that doing that could lose some of the content of our faith. Jesus used creative pedagogy to get his point across to his audience using a variety of teaching methods which consisted of parables, questions and metaphors to stimulate interest. This should be followed by the church, however, children's ministry could be guilty of over-emphasising this, leading to an underemphasis on Biblical content. (Long, 2018) By focusing on learner-based approaches that are primarily "fun" "creative" and "easy to use/prepare" the main point of scripture has been lost and an imbalance has occurred. (Long, 2018). This could be linked to a large number of young people leaving the church due to the disconnect between their experience in church programs and their religious beliefs are the thoughts of some scholars. This suggests that Christian education programs are restricting children's growth due to the reliance on a schooling-based model for religious education rather than allowing space for theological reflection from the child. (Ingersoll, 2020). The reliance on school-based learning could be due to the roots of Sunday school as discussed in the history of children's ministry. Beckwith argues that if given opportunities, children can be theologians as their imaginations allow them to experience God in unique ways as their experiences are less likely to be constricted by learnt adult conceptions. Instead what they experience can be more raw and uncensored. (Beckwith, 2013). This challenges the school-based learning approach but instead offers an opportunity for children to reflect and develop inter-personally.

In summary, a wide array of the literature suggests Sunday school is not a modern success for the ministry of children, this could be due to the structure being based on serving a need that is no longer required, and also down to the content not reciprocating the spiritual development of children. Instead, there is literature that suggests all of life is learning, so the ministry of children could be much wider than the Sunday morning context.

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## **A response to Sunday school**

A wide consensus is that there needs to be a broader focus on children, rather than just from the children's pastors, Beaver writes that the priest needs to see the church, in a Christ-like way, as his adopted family, this includes the children. (2013). Bronfenbrenner could be used as a framework for the formation of children's spirituality which broadens the view that children are only shaped by programmes which have been made for them, instead, it encompasses larger social settings in which children are situated, such as the church community and culture which we have influenced them. (Ingersoll, 2014). This could be done through intergenerational ministry activities such as 'messy church'. When Jesus invited the little children to come to him (Matthew 19:13-15), he invited them to engage with him and welcomed them as part of the whole community, in essence, intergenerational ministry is accepting and engaging with children as part of the church family (Grothe, 2003) rather than as their own segregated community. By denying the opportunity for intergenerational relations to form, it is difficult to see the fruit of the whole body of Christ in action. (Glassford, 2011). Intergenerational ministry enables the opportunity for children to minister to and with their parents and other adults, these cross-generational experiences are a hothouse for spiritual growth for all involved, children and adults (Allen 2020). However, some risks must be avoided when attempting intergenerational ministry, two of these key risks are "dumbing it down" to make it accessible for all ages, and turning the service into something which is entertainment-orientated. (Glassford, 2011).

An alternative approach is to change the content within children's ministry, rather than the structure, through models such as 'Godly play' which is a Montessori approach to Christian education, where children are allowed to reflect in a safe environment to come up with their own experiences of God rather than it being teacher taught, which reduces the adults dominances allowing children to engage theologically in a way that feels natural to them. (Berryman, 2009, p.198-199).

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## **Conclusion**

By conducting this literature review, I have been able to withdraw some key learning points. Firstly, children were not highly regarded in culture during the time Jesus lived which is why it was so revolutionary when he invited them to engage with the wider community. Sunday school was developed in the UK to serve a specific purpose which is no longer required, meaning that the impact of children's ministry in this format has declined. This led my investigations to research more information about alternative theories including a wider, more holistic approach to a child's growth through methods such as intergenerational ministry. As my research has led me to intergenerational ministry, I will include it as part of my research on 'How the church can empower and equip people for a more impactful children's ministry'.

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# Methodology

## Identification and analysis of suitable research methods

### Introduction

In this section of the dissertation, I will be discussing the research methods which I have identified as being appropriate for the question 'How can the church empower and equip people for an impactful children's ministry?'. I will be exploring the philosophical foundations that underpin my research methods as this will help guide my research. Furthermore, the literature review which I have conducted has led me to ask specific questions regarding the content and purpose of Sunday school, including children within the wider church culture and intergenerational ministry. The literature that I have discussed has informed me of the concerns regarding this which is why there will be questions specifically targeting the level of impact of children's ministry and intergenerational ministry within my research.

### Philosophical foundations

My research will be based on a constructionist ontology which suggests that the social world is something which is created by society and culture. It states that this reality is formed through people's perceptions and further enforced in their interactions with others. This view acknowledges that different cultures and different groups interpret the social world as multiple realities based on their views and beliefs. (Denscombe, 2010, p.119). The epistemology of my research will be based on interpretivism which links closely with a constructionist ontology. This theory states that knowledge is produced rather than discovered, by interpreting the world we begin to learn more about it. (Denscombe, 2010, p.119). I will be undertaking a mixed-method paradigm for my research, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to achieve the overarching goal. (Pickard, 2018, p.18-19). The mixed methods approach will consist of questionnaires sent to people who have interacted with children's ministry in any way, which could be people who grew up in children's ministry, parents/carers of children, church leaders and staff who interact with children's ministry, as well as other people deemed appropriate, this research method will be primarily quantitative. Whilst the questionnaire will be primarily quantitative, there will also be a few qualitative questions which allow me to understand

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more context to people's opinions. This will also be accompanied by focus groups with children talking about what is important to them in church and what impacts them, which will be qualitative questions with scope for a discussion to be had. Finally, I will be interviewing different children's ministry leaders discussing the impact of children's ministry as well as putting forward questions regarding some of the information I have found out in my literature review, for example, the problems of traditional Sunday school. By having different research methods I am able to achieve triangulation within my social research which means that I can view children's ministry, its impact, strength and weaknesses from more than one angle. (Denscombe, 2007, p.134-135). The benefit of this is that there will be more accuracy in my research and the research will provide a fuller picture of what is going on. (Denscombe, 2007, p.138).

## **Research methods**

I will distribute an appropriate amount of questionnaires to a variety of people who interact with children's ministry in different ways in an attempt to remove a likelihood of bias, for example, if it was all parents filling out the questionnaire it would only give a view of children's ministry from one angle. This allows me to have a stratified sampling technique ensuring a credible variety of answers. (Walliman, 2017, p.108). For example, it'd be helpful to hear from people who serve weekly and from those who serve less frequently to see if perspectives differ. Equally, it'd be helpful to gather the opinions of those who have recently started serving in children's ministry, those who have grown up in it and those who are watching their kids take part in children's ministry. The questionnaire will consist of primarily closed-format questions as this will enable me to easily gather quantitative information for statistical analysis which is one of the elements I can interpret the impact that children's ministry is having and allow me to cover a wide variety of topics within my research question. (Walliman, 2017, p.108). While my questionnaires are being completed by different people, I will be doing a focus group with children from our different church sites. The focus groups that I run with children will be between four to six children of a variety of ages between five and eleven years old, where there are enough children to split into single-sex groups, research has found that this works better for children's focus (Hennessy, 2012, p.241). Furthermore, I will ensure that the focus groups are under forty-five minutes as Vaughn argues that this is the maximum time for a child under ten to focus (Hennessy, 2012, p.241), however, I will be aiming to have my focus group finished

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within fifteen minutes as this is how long I feel the kids that I work with will be able to stay focused for. I will use an icebreaker activity with the children before asking the actual questions as this will help the children feel more settled, the activity isn't necessary for them to get to know each other as they will already know each other, however, it will allow them to ease into the group ready to explore some of the questions asked. An example ice breaker could be allowing them to hear what they sound like on the recording. (Hennessy, 2012, p.246-247). For my focus group, I will use a variety of activities to help children engage, for example, rather than simply asking "What does church mean to you?" I could ask children to draw what the Church means to them. I can then use these pictures to springboard a conversation between the children. This technique could help to hold children's focus better and could even prompt a more in-depth conversation between the group, as well as helping all participants to be involved. (Hennessy, 2012, p.241) A focus group with children in a child focussed study has many advantages as a research method because it allows for more conversation and opinions than a one-to-one interview, however, one of the drawbacks is the possibility of 'groupthink' and dominant voices in the room swaying other children to agree and conform to the opinions of others. (O'Reilly, 2013) To capture the data from the focus groups I will record the audio as it is taking place, and I will transcribe it at a later date as I believe it will be difficult to focus on cultivating a good group discussion as well as type answers whilst children are answering.

My final research method will be to do interviews with the children's ministry leaders. I think it will be interesting to see if they have similar thoughts on children's ministry or different ones to others associated with children's ministry and also the children. I believe that doing interviews is an appropriate research method for my dissertation as it allows me to find out the opinions and experiences of ministry leaders which is hard to achieve in quantitative research. This is particularly important as it is with 'key players' within this field so by being able to go into depth by interviewing these people I can gather insightful information about children's ministry. (Denscombe, 2007, p.175). I will be using a semi-structured interview style, to allow me to address all the topics I feel are important, but also allow the conversation to flow to dig into areas that I may not have considered before conducting the interview. (Denscombe, 2007, p.176). Once the interviews have happened I will transcribe them and pull out some of the key themes that come through in

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the interviews. One of the drawbacks of interviewing three children's ministry leaders is that it is a very small sample size and also they may not see the impact of long-term transformation in children whilst they are interacting with them every day. I will try to present all of the data I have collected from the questionnaires, focus groups and interviews in a way that is easy to interpret and understand by using graphs for the quantitative data. I will also present the transcribed interviews and focus groups in a way that is easy to follow along and compare with other answers. For the purpose of confidentiality, all names will be changed in the transcribing process to ensure all participants remain anonymous.

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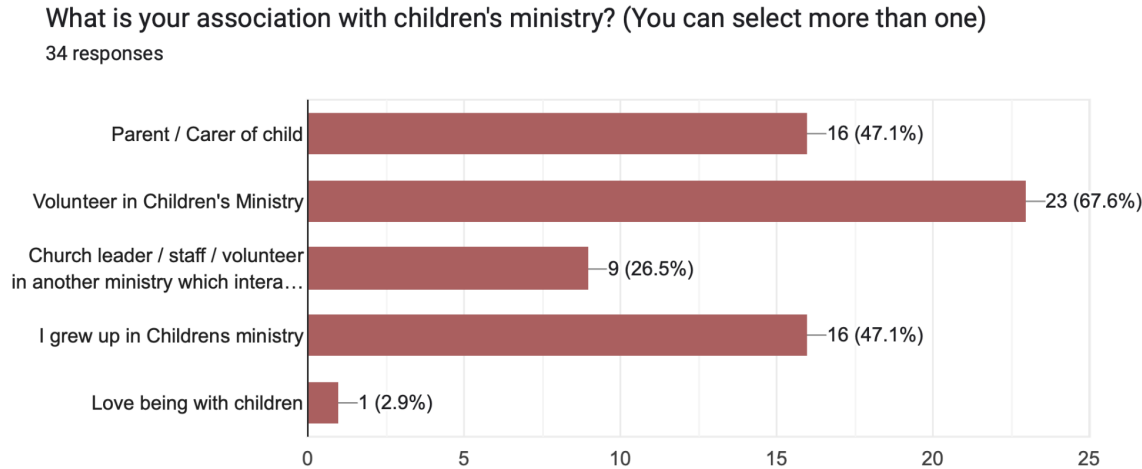
## Presentation of research findings

In this section I will be presenting the key data from the research that I conducted through interviews with children’s ministry heads, questionnaires with people associated with children’s ministry and focus groups of children that attend church. My mixed method approach was used in research to help answer the question ‘How can the church empower and equip people for a more impactful children’s ministry?’. From my literature review, I identified some key areas for research as; what is impacting people in children’s ministry and also the possibility of a greater focus on intergenerational ministry. Once I have presented the data, I will be analysing it in the next section of my report.

### Questionnaire

My questionnaire was distributed to different group chats of people associated with children’s ministry in our church but also sent to a few other churches to be sent out so I could attain a wider perspective beyond those of the church which I attend. The questionnaire consisted of primarily quantitative questions, with a few qualitative ones as well, allowing people to expand on their answers if they wanted. In total, thirty-four people filled out the survey and here is a presentation of the results.

**Figure 1A - what is your association with children’s ministry?**



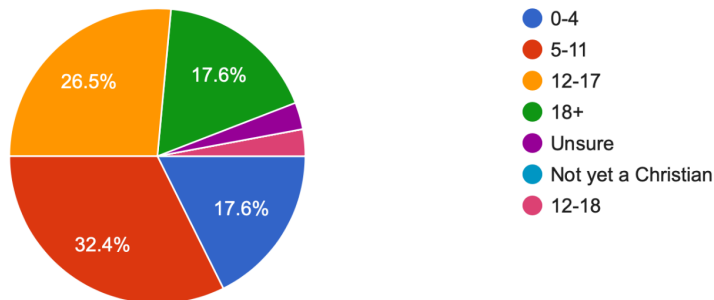


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### Figure 1B - How old were you when you became a Christian?

How old were you when you became a Christian?

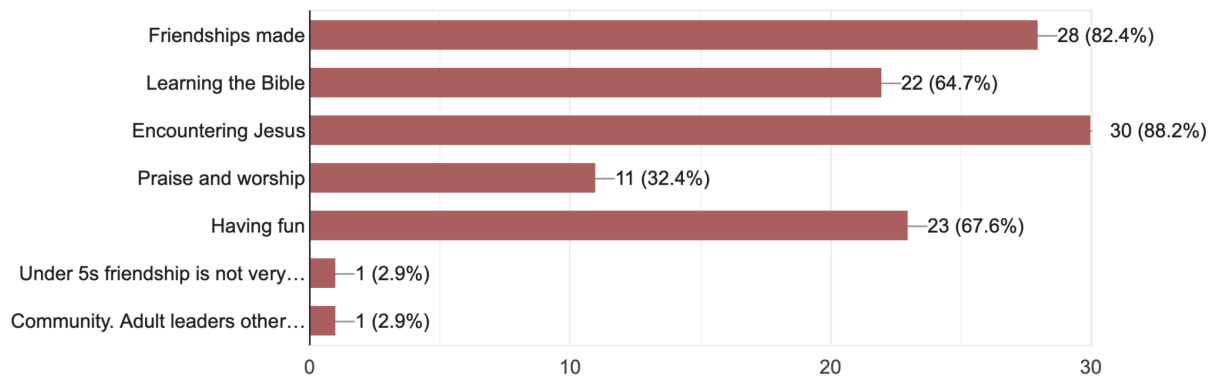
34 responses



### Figure 1C - What do you believe are the most important elements of children's ministry?

What do you believe are the most important elements of children's ministry? (You can select more than one)

34 responses

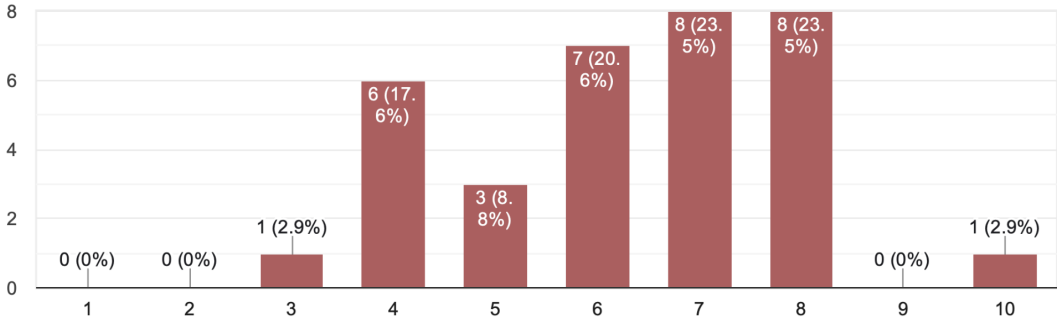


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### Figure 1D - How effective is the Church in the UK at children's ministry?

How effective is the Church in the UK at children's Ministry? (Based on your knowledge /experience)

34 responses



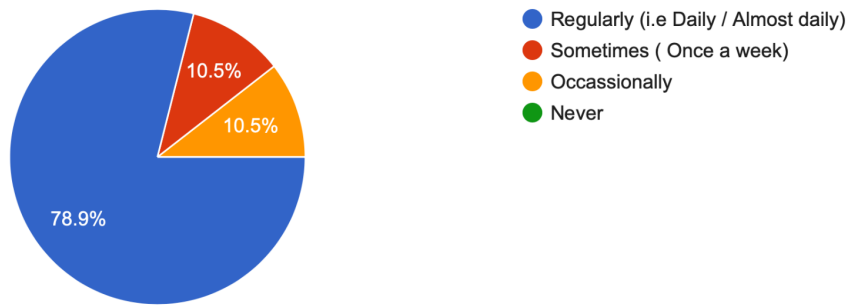
I wanted to understand why people gave the score they did, so I asked a follow-up question to give an explanation of their answer, a summary of the responses is as follows:

- Two people referred to children's ministry as being good at engaging but not retaining.
- Sixteen people gave the score they did due to the wide variety of Churches in the UK.
- There were also conflicting views on whether the Church should be more or less focused on teaching knowledge about the Bible.

**Figure 1E - How often do you talk about faith at home with your children?  
(specifically for parents/carers)**

Please answer the following if you are a parent / carer. How often do you talk about faith at home with your children?

19 responses

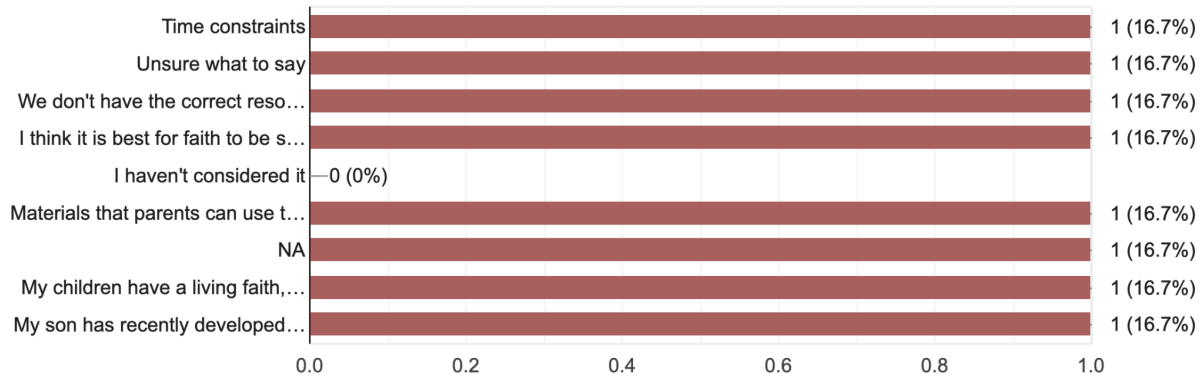


I wanted to understand the reasons why people didn't speak about faith, so I asked a follow-up question for anybody who did not answer "regularly".

**Figure 1F - If you answered anything other than regularly, why is that?**

If you answered B/C/D, why is that? (You can select more than one)

6 responses



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### Figure - 1G

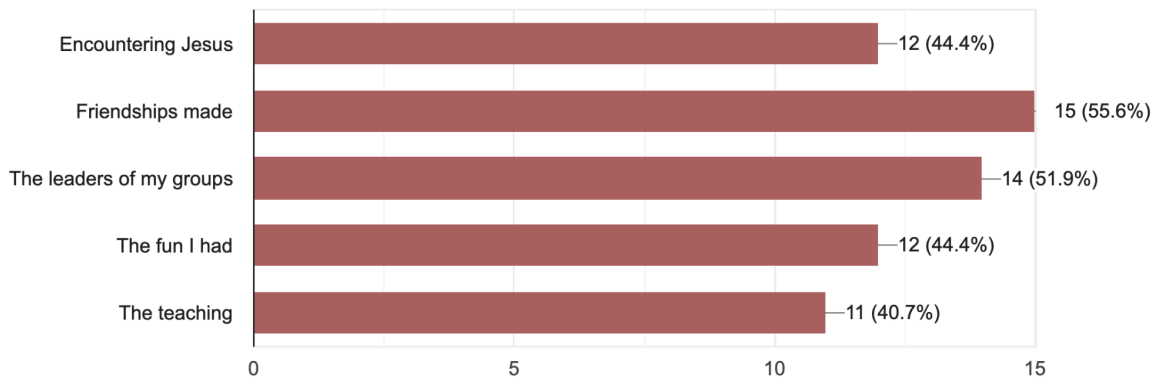
The next question was a qualitative one asking “If you grew up in children’s ministry, what is one of your favourite memories?”

- Ten people referred to going away with their church on camps, festivals and weekends away.
- Three people spoke about their friendships.
- Four people talked about worship and singing songs.
- Some other favourite memories included midweek groups, being able to participate in the wider church, the kindness of leaders, interactive talks, big events such as Christingles, dramas and puppets.

### Figure 1H - If you grew up in children’s ministry, what elements impacted you the most?

If you grew up in Children's Ministry, what elements impacted you the most?

27 responses

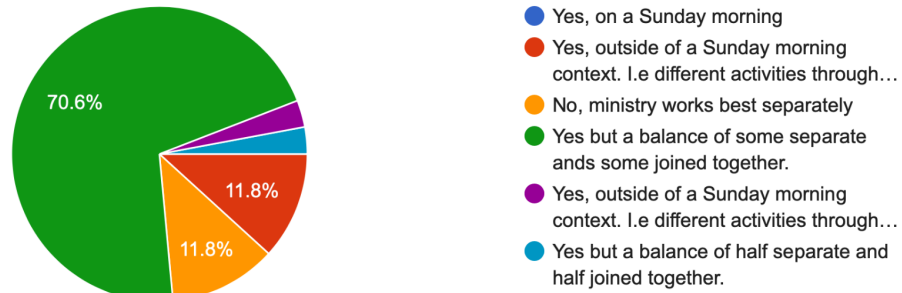


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## Figure 11 - A question about intergenerational ministry

Do you think Children's Ministry should include more of other generations within its experience. For example joint sessions, with carers / older siblings / the wide church

34 responses



Finally, I asked for any other comments or thoughts, here are some of the key summaries:

- Age-appropriate teaching being accessible is important.
- Making children feel valued and welcome beyond the children's work.
- Children's ministry should include more focus on empowering and equipping families to explore faith together.
- Faith through friendship is important, via camps, family life groups, and midweek groups.
- Leaders make a big difference.
- Cultivating a culture of fun means children will want to be there.

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## **Interview with children's ministry leaders**

The next phase of my investigation was to interview three children's ministry heads from different churches to gain some more in-depth, qualitative information about children's ministry. The three interviews were with Ashley, Leslie and Taylor.

### **Question one - What do you feel the purpose of children's ministry is?**

- Ashley believes it is to equip them to be disciples and have a relationship with Jesus which they carry on for the rest of their lives.
- Leslie says the purpose of children's ministry is to build on what parents are already doing at home. To teach children Jesus loves them, has a plan for them and wants a relationship with him. She wants to see them become disciples, not converts, and in it for the long haul.
- Taylor said he believes the purpose of children's ministry is to fulfil what Jesus said 'Let the little children come to me'. So do all we can to introduce children to Jesus, and let them have their own encounter. So giving children the chance to meet, not just hear about Jesus.

### **Question two - What do you think are the most important factors or elements of children's ministry?**

- Ashley says it is for kids to know they are loved, belong and valued by the church. To know who God is so they can interact with stories and have meaning in their lives. They need to have a relationship with him for themselves, to hear from him and act differently. Also to tell others about Jesus.
- Leslie believes in making it a safe, fun environment for children to just come and be. Allowing children who do make a decision to just come and be with like-minded people. She thinks it is a place where they hear teaching from different people, children and adults other than their parents. Also creating a community that builds faith, has fun and plays games.
- Taylor thinks unconditional love is one of the predominant feelings that Jesus has towards children. Pride towards who they are, who they've been, who they've been

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made to be. Family care for children and modelling what it means to follow Jesus is so important, in being good role models. Over the top extravagance to share Jesus with children. A great welcome for new children. Biblically-based teaching and allowing space for the Holy Spirit is important.

### **Question three - What would a successful children's ministry look like?**

- Ashley states that it is where you can track through and see they are continuing faith through teenage years and adulthood. He has seen people follow through from being born to being adults who follow Jesus and do amazing things.
- Leslie thinks it is where children meet with God, have a personal encounter with him and have a place where they have friends. Create a real sense of togetherness within the group, ensuring the team is well equipped and trained, and ensuring it is a place where children have all they need to live with Jesus.
- If it is a more internally focussed children's ministry Taylor thinks it is that there is a group to cater for the children within a local Church, a good proportion of engagement, children being transformed. Healthy things grow, and so numerical growth and growth of individuals involved. If it was a more outward-focused group, Taylor believes it would be reaching children in the locality they're in, being able to meet the needs that are presented in front of them. If kids love something they will talk about it, so hearing children talk about groups they engage with.

### **Question four - How do you think we can gauge or know if children's ministry is having a positive impact?**

- Ashley thinks a longitudinal study is important, to see if children are continuing in faith. Children's ministry isn't the only part of this, it is also down to parents playing amazing roles as well as friends. Also, kids are engaging with God.
- Leslie says you can measure it with a conversation with parents and what feedback you get about home lifestyle. You can tell which children are connecting and growing in God because they contribute more and share their faith more confidently. Furthermore seeing children saved, baptised, a change in their behaviour, and bringing their friends along because it's a fun place they want to be.

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- Taylor believes seeing children transformed is a great sign, arriving with a question and leaving with an answer. Transformation with Jesus is a good gauge, then also seeing families change as well. Children engage in community and making friends, being their true authentic selves.

**Follow-up question with Leslie: How many of your families do you think talk about faith outside of a Sunday morning context?**

- It's hard to gauge but currently, she thinks around 50%

**Question five - How can the church empower and equip others for further ministry of children?**

- Ashley believes parents need to know they are the primary influences. That children will make a decision not just on what their parents say but on how they act. Evaluating whether parents have a real active faith is a significant factor.
- Leslie thinks it's employing somebody at least part-time to have a role that is specifically for children's ministry and also accepting that they are part of the leadership team so that when conversations happen they are in the loop from the start. Also, it is a place where children can pray and hear God together, resourcing them financially and providing spaces to meet practical needs as well. Also equipping parents is fundamental, such as parenting faith courses. She believes in creating a conversation culture which is why she does a podcast. Also seeing children spur on other children.
- Taylor says creating something that people feel they can replicate outside of the church, empowers families to reach their world and their home. We need to equip parents for the other six and a half days. However, we need to also equip children to nurture their own faith in a house where faith is not discussed or belittled.



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**Question Six - Research shows that a traditional Sunday school model does not have an impact on children. What alternatives or extra activities could the church do to further impact children?**

- Ashley was intrigued by the research because he believes God is still doing great things. He then went on to say that the church needs to encourage parents to be more involved, informing them exactly what they are teaching. Empowering parenting faith classes, also giving kids of different ages opportunities to mix. Encouraging friendships with Christian peers. Overall a high parent involvement.
- Leslie said it's about not doing for but doing with. In a culture where people send their children to specialists, for example sending my child to Sunday school to get saved, this shouldn't happen! The Bible teaches us that we should equip family, so in our church, we should continue what parents are already doing at home.
- Taylor believes that Sunday school has always been fairly surface level anyway, in the past, it was something we did culturally in the UK like going to school. So we need to continue to go and meet people where they are, through events such as stay and play groups. Continuing to impact local schools in what ways we can, offering love and support to them.

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## Focus Groups

My third research method was two different focus groups with children in our church, here is a summary of their answers.

### 1) Draw a picture of what you think of when someone says church:

Focus group 1

- Ryan drew the cross because it reminded him of Jesus
- Jay drew people going into a church building
- Mike drew a church building
- Mark drew a church building and a book
- Josh drew Taylor who is our children's pastor

Focus group 2

- Rachel drew a cross, God and Jesus because when we go to Church we learn a lot about them
- Anna drew a rainbow and a happy face because we are happy when we go to church, she also drew a Bible
- Sarah drew an old-fashioned church with a bell on top
- Zena drew God / Jesus

### 2) What do you enjoy most about going to church?

Focus group 1

- Ryan: playing in the sports hall
- Jay: The snacks
- Mark: Hide and seek
- Josh: playing with my friends
- Mike: game

Focus group 2

- Zena: Praying to the Lord
- Rachel: Doing fun activities whilst learning about Jesus, in kid's clubs

- 
- Anna: When my mum does kids' work because we have fun things like Turkish delight and fake snow
  - Sarah: Playing with friends

### **3) What is your favourite memory from church?**

#### Focus group 1

- Ryan: going to Twinlakes
- Jay: Narnia Christmas party
- Mark: Fireworks
- Josh: The weekend way in the big house
- Mike: pancake day

#### Focus group 2

- Zena: when my mum gave birth to Israel, the whole church prayed for her
- Sarah: The fireworks in the old building
- Anna: In Little Stars when I would dress up as a princess, eat biscuits and read the Bible.
- Rachel: I'm not sure

### **4) Is there anything you remember learning in church?**

#### Focus group 1

- Ryan: Somebody got blinded by a light and then he turned good
- Jay: Learning about the amazing things God can do
- Mike: God can do miracles and help us
- Mark: When Jesus healed a blind man
- Josh: Same as Ryan

#### Focus group 2

- Rachel: The second toilet from the end is the best one
- Anna: I remember we were praying and Charlie farted
- Sarah: In Young Sheldon, the pastor says 'Love your neighbours'

- 
- Zena: God is always there, even when you don't think it, God is always looking after you
  - Rachel: I remember the Esther series we did

**5) If you could change anything about church what would you change?**

- Jay: More snacks on a Sunday
- Ryan: No singing, the noise is too loud
- Josh: I'd change the seats to massage chairs
- Mark: Also massage chairs
- Mike: To watch a bit of a movie at the end
- Ryan: Massage seats as well
- Jay: No band practice just the real thing

Focus group 2

- Zena: I would make the church bigger with extra rooms like a prayer room
- Anna: To have way more leaders, to help children with one to ones
- Rachel: I don't think I would change anything because the church is a church, it is a family
- Sarah: I'd make it more fun for kids

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## Discussion of Findings

Key:

IQ = Interview Question

FG\*, Q\* = Focus group "\*", question:

### Introduction

In my literature review, I discovered that Sunday School within children's ministry was not having as much of an impact as it has historically, however, my research led me to some interesting developments in intergenerational ministry. This has informed my research being conducted with people of all ages from the church and also being focused on the different elements of children's ministry with some questions about developments in intergenerational ministry. In this section, I will be discussing some of the key themes within my findings.

### Background information

Interestingly 50.2% of people who filled out the questionnaire became Christians before the age of eleven (Fig 1B), which showcases the importance of an impactful children's ministry, not only for people becoming followers of Jesus but also for learning the culture of becoming disciples, which Ashley believes is one of the indicators of a successful children's ministry (IQ3). The impact of children growing up and becoming disciples can be shown by 67.6% of people filling out the questionnaire being volunteers in children's ministry (Fig 1A), which indicates people have seen the value and choose to reinvest in the ministry. Overall, the consensus of the questionnaire showed people believe that children's ministry in the UK is in a good position with 47% of people rating it either seven or eight out of ten (Fig 1D). When giving a reason for their score sixteen people said it was due to the wide variety of churches throughout the country. However, the literature which I have read suggests that the children's ministry is struggling to retain children which suggests it is not as impactful as the questionnaire suggests. A critique of my research gathering technique is that it was with people who are active members of a church which would give a less balanced view. In contrast to statistics found in my literature review, Leslie believes an indicator of a successful children's ministry having an impact is where children can meet

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with God, and build togetherness within the group. Taylor also believes that children being transformed is a good indicator, however, believes that numerical growth is also a sign of a healthy children's ministry (IQ3).

### **An impactful children's ministry**

In all areas of my research, I asked about what people believed were impactful elements of children's ministry, as in my literature review, it was suggested that children's ministry was no longer impacting children on a spiritual level particularly, therefore I wanted to investigate what is impacting children. Firstly Ashley believes that the purpose of children's ministry is to equip people to be disciples and have a relationship with Jesus for the rest of their lives, Taylor quoted Matthew 19:13-15, suggesting the role of children's ministry is to create opportunities for children to come to Jesus and encounter him for themselves. Whereas Leslie believes it is to build on what parents are already doing at home, but similarly to Ashley, to see children become disciples and follow him for the long haul (IQ1).

When asked what elements of children's ministry impacted people most, there was a wide array of answers with the highest answer being friendships made, with 55.6% of people selecting that. This aligns with six children from the focus group talking about activities that include other people such as games, kids clubs and just playing with friends being what they enjoy most about being in Church. (FG, Q2). A close second to this was the leaders of the groups they were a part of (Fig 1H), this is an interesting observation as when asked to draw what church meant to them in the children's focus group, one of the children drew a picture of Taylor, our Church's children's pastor. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model which suggests that different people in a child's world have influences on them and their behaviours (Macdougall, 2019, p.27). Moreover, this suggests that the leaders of the group not only impact children whilst they are part of the group but also when people look back retrospectively. An interesting area for further study would be investigating the difference between children's relationships with leaders who serve weekly and those who serve monthly on a rota. The joint third for what impacted people most was encountering Jesus and the fun they had whilst in children's ministry (Fig 1H), this challenges the argument within my literature review that stated that children's spirituality is not being nurtured whilst in children's ministry, however, it is difficult to gauge the degree

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to which spirituality is nurtured beyond an encounter. The research suggests that children's ministry is having a successful impact as all three ministry leaders felt that the purpose of children's ministry is to create an environment and lead children into an encounter with Jesus (IQ1). The research therefore suggests that children's ministry leaders are focussing on the correct elements that they deem to be the most important as they said that kids knowing they are loved extravagantly, creating a community of friends and being great models are some of the most important factors (IQ2). This aligns with what people said were the elements of children's ministry that impacted them most growing up. (Fig 1H). However, one area which the children's ministry leaders identified as important was teaching about the Bible, but this had the lowest impact on people who grew up in children's ministry (Fig 1H), plus the children in the focus groups struggled to recall what they have learnt in church (FG, Q4). The girls found it particularly hard to recall anything that they had learnt and an element of groupthink was displayed in the boy's focus group on this question. This could mean that one key area to improve within children's ministry is the teaching element, which could be done in a variety of ways, one could be an alternative teaching method 'Godly play' which was discussed in the literature review section.

## **Further ministry for children**

One of the key themes drawn from my literature review was the idea of intergenerational ministry being the answer to the struggles that children's ministry is facing in making an impact. Therefore I included some questions about intergenerational ministry and involving a wider pool of people, in my research. One of the key discoveries of this was not necessarily the desire for intergenerational ministry, but the need to equip families to talk about faith at home and outside of a church group, this was an area of research which I missed within my literature review.

Leslie believes that the purpose of children's ministry is to build on what parents are already doing at home (IQ 1), which is a great ethos for families that are talking about faith at home. 78.9% of families have said that they talk about faith at home regularly (Fig 1E) which means that children's ministry has a substantial platform to build on in their time with children. However, this model is difficult to use within children's ministry when

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working with children and families that are not from church backgrounds, as there is less of an opportunity for faith to be nurtured when they go home. There were also a wide variety of reasons as to why faith is not discussed at home by the people who filled out the questionnaire which included time constraints, lacking the knowledge or resources and believing it is children's ministry responsibility to teach children about faith (Fig 1F). There was also a desire for more intergenerational ministry that is joined together, however, whilst still retaining some separate children's ministry with 70.65% of people selecting this answer in the questionnaire (Fig 1I). When I asked the children's leaders how they thought the people in the church could be equipped and empowered for ministry with children all three of them referenced equipping parents to be influences of faith at home. Ashley said empowering them to know they are the primary influences, and that they have the opportunity to display faith in action, Leslie suggested parenting faith courses and creating a conversational culture between ministry and families, and Taylor said creating something that people feel they can replicate outside of church, equipping families for the other six and a half days of the week. (IQ5) Furthermore, when asked about Sunday school no longer being as impactful and what alternative approaches could the church use Ashley talked about encouraging parents to be more involved and aware of what is being taught, Leslie stated that children's ministry should be done with, not for families (IQ6). This was also the consensus from some of the questionnaire responses; that the church should have a higher focus on equipping families to explore faith together (Fig 1I) and that some people feel unresourced to explore faith at home with their children (Fig 1F). From the questionnaires and the interviews, one of the key conclusions is that the church feels there is a need for more input from families but there is still a place for separate children's ministry. 11.8% of people said that they believed that children's ministry should be completely separate from adults. Furthermore, when discussing what people's favourite memories were from children's ministry ten people wrote about going away to church camps which is a time when they are separated from their grown-ups and exploring faith for themselves (Questionnaire Q6). This also aligns with children talking about their favourite memories from church in the focus groups with seven out of the nine children referencing fun adventures they have been a part of from Weekends away to firework nights (FG, Q3), by creating fun memories for children and allowing space for them to develop their own community of friends and their own spirituality, children can look back



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fondly at children's ministry and remember all the positive elements that have impacted them.

### **Conclusion from the discussion of findings**

My research has shown that people believe the church is in a relatively healthy place with its ministry with children, with it being rated a fair score by people filling out the questionnaire, however, I am aware of the bias in this answer as it was filled out by people who are currently attending a church. Contrary to the literature review, it seems that children's spirituality is being nurtured as children's leaders are prioritising it, and people are stating that they did encounter Jesus whilst in children's ministry. It is difficult to gauge how much their spirituality is nurtured beyond an initial coming to faith. One of the key findings from the research I conducted was that there is a need for the church to empower and equip people to be able to discuss faith outside of the church, particularly in the family home. In my literature review, I had a greater focus on intergenerational ministry rather than equipping families outside of church, therefore in the next section, I will be discussing how the church can develop the ministry of children beyond weekly church groups. My research also showed that some of the greatest impact children's ministry has had is creating communities for children where they can make lifelong friends and have memories to look back on to create a positive association with children's ministry. In conclusion, the research has shown that the children's ministry is having a positive impact, there needs to be continued opportunities for children to engage separately from their families and a greater focus on equipping families to develop faith outside of church.

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## Equipping families for faith at home

In my discussion of findings, I discovered that there needed to be a greater focus on empowering and equipping families to develop faith outside of a Sunday morning. This is something that I had not included in my literature review, therefore I will be writing a short piece exploring faith at home, the resources available and how the church can help with this.

Holmen writes that whilst the local church has a level of influence in the growth of children, the key significant factor in raising Godly children is what takes place in the home (Holmen, 2010). This highlights the importance that children's ministry can play in empowering and equipping parents to raise children to have a strong, active faith. This is a Biblical principle as Proverbs 22:6 says 'Start children off in the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it'. This could create cycles of generations who continue developing and nurturing faith in their children and being a major influence. However, faith can still be developed in children who engage with churches that are not from a Christian background, this is something Taylor mentioned in the interview (IQ3), that the church needs to continue developing strategies to help children explore faith in a home that does not consider it to be important.

Nurturing faith at home not only benefits the children involved, but it continues to spiritually form the adults involved, Bruner writes that you can learn about Jesus by reading the Bible but you become like Jesus when you give your life to the people living in your home. (2010, p.28) However, families are facing increasing schedules of busyness, which makes it harder to prioritise time for faith formation, also parents feel ill-prepared for sharing religious traditions with their families (Roberto, 2007). However, the evidence has suggested that it is vitally important that families engage in faith at home, so the church needs to focus on helping families do this. The church is not required to be the only influence in helping parents to explore and nurture faith at home, parents need to have the desire to develop faith at home and there are also some resources available to equip families. Parenting for Faith is an organisation which helps to nurture faith at home, they provide a variety of different resources including courses which are for parents and those for churches to then go out and equip parents as well as books, podcasts and videos for people to engage in. (Bible Reading Fellowship, 2024) Another resource which could be

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helpful for families trying to nurture faith at home could be the kitchen table project who specialise in helping families to develop faith at home by intentionally incorporating it into normal life, for example through games, by pointing to God in situations and praying at bedtimes. (Care for the Family, N.D)

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## Conclusions and recommendations

### Summary of process

For this project, I set out to unpack the question 'How can the church empower and equip people for a more impactful children's ministry?'. To do this I conducted a literature review to understand what existing information that was already available. As part of this literature review, I discovered the history of children's ministry in the UK and that it was created to fulfil a purpose for poor children (Francis, 2002, p.36). As the needs of people changed through generations, Sunday school developed with a primary focus on developing children's faith. However, the literature suggests that Sunday school was no longer making an impact on children, which could have been down to a variety of reasons. The two reasons I focussed on were the structure of children's ministry and the content of children's ministry. I discovered that there were problems with both elements. As there seemed to be issues with children's ministry content and structure, I researched an alternative, intergenerational ministry, which many authors believed would have a greater impact on children. I took this new knowledge into my research for the project.

I chose to use a variety of methods for research, including quantitative and qualitative data collection, sending questionnaires to people who have interacted with children's ministry, interviewing children's ministry leaders and conducting focus groups with children who attend church. This method allowed me to hear a wide variety of voices who all see children's ministry from different perspectives. If I were to do this project again, or on a bigger scale, I would include more perspectives, for example from people who have been associated with children's ministry but no longer attend church as I believe this would give a more balanced view on the impact of children's ministry. Furthermore, to gain a better perspective, I would use a bigger sample numerically, I included just under fifty people which is a very small percentage of people who have been associated with children's ministry. In addition, I would use a broader sample, as the sample I used was from three churches across Leicestershire. Therefore, to have more accurate results I would involve more people from across the country and also those who are not active Christians or part of a church. By doing this I would have been able to more conclusively discuss the impact of children's ministry and the best way to empower and equip people for it. As a children's

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worker in a local church, I am aware that my bias has had an effect on my research, to have a more balanced research project I could have included questions gathering people's thoughts on the importance and relevancy of children's ministry in the modern church whereas I conducted the project from the starting point of believing children's ministry is important.

## **Conclusions of research**

The first conclusion found in my literature review was that children's ministry is not making as much of an impact as the church would want. However, the main conclusion which was found in my research process was that there is a need and desire for people to be equipped and empowered to nurture children's faith outside of the church. My research contradicted my literature review about intergenerational ministry but instead suggested that children's ministry still plays a vital role in children's faith development, particularly the leaders' care for children, the community built with other children with the same beliefs and the landmark events such as trips away and encounters with Jesus. A criticism of my research could be that people do not always recognise what has impacted them or are unable to articulate how they've been impacted. The research suggested that children's ministry is just one part of a child's faith and that an element of intergenerational ministry is helpful but the main focus should be empowering families to nurture faith at home. This finding led to an extra piece of writing discussing faith at home as it was not something I had considered earlier in the project.

## **Future recommendations**

To further develop the research I have done, I would explore in depth how children's ministry can have an impact on families' lives, equipping them to continue to develop faith at home. It would be interesting to discover how much of this relies on the families being proactive in developing faith, and how much is dependent on the church empowering, equipping and motivating families to do this. I would also enquire how in this model of empowering families, faith can still be developed in homes of children where faith is not encouraged or discussed as if there is a higher focus from children's ministry leaders on families who are willing to nurture faith, then it leads to disparity in children's faith development for those who have no influence outside of church groups. In addition, I

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would continue to work on ensuring that children's ministry is developing so that it can become more impactful in a child's life, this could be through continued development in teaching methods but also by creating a culture of community allowing children to make friends and enjoy the landmark moments together.

Word count: 9324

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# Appendix one - Certificate of research ethics approval

## CERTIFICATE OF RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

How can the Church empower and equip  
people for an impactful children's ministry

**Student Number: 2105527**

Module: CYM701

This is to certify that this project has received approval from the  
Research Ethics Committee of Birmingham Newman University



**Birmingham  
Newman  
University**

*L. A. Woodfield*

Chair of the Research Ethics Committee

Date: October 31, 2023

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## Appendix two - Interview transcript: Leslie

Matt

Go. Hello, what is your name and your job role?

Leslie

My name is Leslie Graves. I'm a children and families ministry coordinator.

Matt

How long have you been doing it?

Leslie

I've been serving for 20 plus years, but I've been paid part time for seven.

Matt

Have you been in the same church for a long time?

Leslie

I've been at Living rock Church for the whole time. Yes.

Matt

And when did you come to know Jesus?

Leslie

When I was a five year five

Matt

So you came to Jesus in children's ministry?

Leslie

With my parents, yes.

Matt

What do you feel the purpose of children's ministry is?

Leslie

believe it's to build on what parents are already doing in their home. And so obviously, safe parents, but to teach children that Jesus loves them, that he has a plan for them. And that he wants a relationship with them and see them become disciples, not just converts to one for the long haul following Jesus,

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Matt

What do you think are the most important factors of children's ministry?

Leslie

So many in lots of different ways. I think it's making a safe, fun environment for children to just come and be, I think, especially in the world as it is having a safe place where children who do make a decision, can you explore that in a safe place and feel there are other like minded people? I think it's a place where they hear teaching from different people, children, adults other than their parents. Just create a part of the community that builds faith in them and just happened to grow in their faith. And have fun and play games.

Matt

What would a successful children's ministry look like?

Leslie

A big question.

For me it's where children meet with God, ideally on a Sunday that they have an actual personal encounter with Him in their sessions, and a place where they have friends. There's a real sense of togetherness within the group and where the team is equipped and trained well, and where the children have all they need to live with Jesus really.

Matt

How would we measure that? How do we know if children's ministry is having a positive impact?

Leslie

Yeah, I think I'd measure it by conversation with parents and seeing what they feed back as what their lifestyle looks like at home. I think sometimes you can tell the children who are connecting and growing and Gods because they're the ones who contribute more and share their faith more because they're more confident in their faith. I think it's also seeing practically seeing children saved and baptised, if children are getting baptised and that's a tangible way of seeing the fruit. You often see a change in behaviour if they're growing in their faith, but also if they're bringing friends along because it's somewhere that they want to be when they feel it's fun place to tell others about

Matt

How many of your families do you think talk about faith outside of Sunday morning context?

Leslie

really hard question because it's hard gauge. But currently 50% Maybe we've got a lot of visitors at the moment. Yeah. It's really hard to tell where they're at.

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Matt

Do you feel that the wider church engages with children well?

Leslie

Yeah becoming more so. An ongoing development and I think my role is very key in helping create that platform and create that environment where children are kept in the centre of everything. So yeah, becoming so I'd say because I'm present in the church building they remember to do more often. Yeah, that definitely creates a profile

Matt

how can the Church equip and empower others for further Ministry of Children.

Leslie

I think it's employing somebody at least part time to have a role that is specifically for children's ministry. I think it's accepting that they're part of the leadership team. And when we do leadership input, that they're in the loop in all conversations from the get go, not just in hindsight. I think we can also grow them in praying together, having regular meetings where we pray and hear God together so we share a shared vision. And I think it's resourcing financially, even down to that, and investing money in them, and providing spaces where they can meet the practical needs.

Matt

How would you think that we can so that's talking about basically employee children's ministry? Yeah. How should we can use parents, the church community, other children for further ministry of children.

Leslie

I think equipping parents is fundamental. And so I, from my experience, we've done different things we've done different parenting courses for under fives or for primary aged parents. And just to have time where we invest in them, I spend time alongside parents quite often, hearing where they're at and suggesting things that they might find helpful. We're doing a podcast and so creating a conversational culture, where parents feel they can ask for support when they need it, but also where parents help other parents. So creating that environment. I love how children can spur one another on. So I think the group's getting children to share their testimonies of what God's doing in my life. We've just launched parents who WhatsApp groups for all our groups, so the parents can then share we share what we've done on a Sunday so parents can build on it but equally, then hear testimony about what they're doing with their kids. And that's, that's what we're working on. So then the parents are sharing what works in the home.

Matt

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Research shows that the traditional Sunday school model does not impact on children, what alternatives or extra activities could the church do to further impact children.

Leslie

So I think it's about not doing for but doing with. That's my new mantra. I've probably developed in the last year or two that I think sometimes we people in culture will send people to the specialists, and they send the children to the Sunday school and you will get my children saved. Whereas I'm saying actually, now that doesn't happen. Because that's not what we're for. In the Bible. It teaches us that we should equip the family. So our focus as a church now is much more on equipping the family, even in our language from the front. We talked about how the children are released to groups to continue what you're doing in your ministry at home. And it's just changing the language of the whole church. To say actually, Sunday school is not the Sunday it's the whole ministry. And anytime I get to speak or other parents get to speak, it's to sort of train the church in saying that, it's not just a Sunday ministry its lifetime, everyday.

Matt

And if you could change one thing about the Ministry of Children or Sunday school , what would you change? If teams, resources, finances wasn't a factor? If you could really do it one thing, what would you do?

Leslie

I think I just want to see children encounter the Holy Spirit and move out in gifting of the Holy Spirit. So for me if everybody was growing strong in God, I want there to be a team who was so on fire. And parents are so on fire for Jesus that children are ministering the power of the Holy Spirit to their friends and to adults, that it's the other way up. Through the way. I think we're still challenging norms of adult to child whereas I want to see children praying and bringing words more freely. So that's what I would change, if I could. Thank you.

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## Appendix three - Interview transcript: Taylor

Matt

What is your name your and your job role?

Taylor

Taylor. I'm a children's pastor.

Matt

How long have you been a children's pastor for?

Taylor

11 and a half years.

Matt

Wow. And have you been in ministry longer unpaid but involved in ministry?

Taylor

Yeah, I've been involved in ministry in terms of voluntary or as a leader since I was 11. So but properly since I was 13 is when I started leading a small group on a Sunday morning.

Matt

And did you grow up in children's ministry? Yes. And how old were you when you gave your life to Jesus?

Taylor

Yeah, around five years old, prayed with my parents and then went up at the front of my church make a commitment.

Matt

What do you feel the purpose of children's ministry is?



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Taylor

to to fulfil what Jesus said. Jesus said, Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them. Our role in children's ministry always must be to bring little children to Jesus and not stop them. So to do all we can to introduce children to Jesus, and then let them have their own encounter. So it's giving every child the chance to meet not just hear about Jesus but to meet with him for themselves.

Matt

What do you think are the most important factors in children's ministry?

Taylor

unconditional love. I think that's the one of the predominant feelings that Jesus has towards children is just loving and pride towards them about who they are and who they've been, who they've been made, as by God, characteristics and what makes them them. So loving children as they are and caring for them. I think yeah, good. Good care. A motherly fatherly and friendly love is important. So being like spiritual parents to children, but also like a wider spiritual family brothers, sisters, cousins, nice uncle, etc. So, yeah, always, always good to do that kind of level. of care. I think. Modelling what it means to follow Jesus is important. What was your phrasing?

Matt

What is the most important factors? Yeah,

Taylor

so a great factor of children's ministry is making sure you have leaders who are examples and show show kids the way so lead leading the way. So if we're going to make little disciples then we have to have people who are modelling what it looks like to follow Jesus, what it means to be devoted to Jesus, what it means to live life as a Christian in the world today. So every kid needs, role models and every children's ministry needs great role models, not just leaders and helpers, that people who are going to be examples in that. Generosity and I believe an over the top extravagance, in the way you share good news and share love with children goes a long way. I think that children are so used to seeing the world around them do outlandish things to grab their attention. And we should aim to do

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this even more because we have even better news than the world. So using media, illustrations, colour, surprise, laughter and all of it just to try and portray how great Jesus is. I think great children's ministry always begins with a good welcome. So it's a great hallmark of all children's ministry. Within those first few seconds that you agreed to child you set the tone for everything that that group is going to be everything that grab him is going to be so soon as you welcome someone in. You look him in the eye, we look him in the eye. We find out their name, we talk to them about their life and straightaway what that child is going to understand is if this is church churches, a place where people who love Jesus, they care about me as well. And so they made that association. Okay, well, Jesus cares about me too. fun is an important factor of great children's ministry, keeping things fun and engaging for good old hyperactive child's mind and making sure that that level of fun is enough to engage like the youngest, slightly with young boy with slight attention deficit and also a year six girl who is already very socially and emotionally mature, but how do you make something and and laughter and fun break down barriers for children of all ages. So keeping things fun is very important. And and then in terms of the content of what makes what's the factor of a great children's ministry, having great, solid biblical teaching, that is rooted in the Bible, so that a child can go away from a group and not just think that leader said, but they can go away knowing that the Bible says so that in the future, when they remember something, they're not just remembering what they were told in a building or by a person. They're remembering what was told to them from the Bible. So you know, biblically based, and, and always having an element of encounter. So anything we do, it's giving children a chance to respond for themselves. So to enter into it, not just to hear it, or think about it, or ponder it, but actually to then enter into it themselves. So to be changed on the back of it receivable or give receive prayer or give out prayer to another to encounter the Holy Spirit and themselves and to have that moment where they enter into the story. There's a few things

Matt

what would a successful ministry look like?

Taylor

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Oh, successful. If it's a more internally focused children's ministry. So we're looking at the success of a group that is there to cater to and serve children within a local church. I think a good proportion of engagement. So whatever number that is a good amount of people, families and kids are part of that church or part of age bracket are engaging, showing an interest. I think. Children being transformed on the back of it. So seeing noticeable change in the lives of kids. That's a sign of health anywhere, healthy things grow. I do believe that how the things naturally will grow, people will bring people others will come and also the growth of people as well. So the growth of the individuals involved. So seeing that the growth arc of a child throughout the years in the group and then with an outward with a more outward focus children's ministry. By what what would a healthy is that word?

Matt

Healthy, successful

Taylor

What would a successful, more outward focus group look like? I think it is reaching children from the locality that they're in. So it's seeing local families reached it seeing people at the local area who you're targeting coming through the doors, and it's being able to meet the needs that you find when they come in. And that takes very versatile leadership and very skilled workers, but being able to shape what you do in a way that will speak to those in a language they understand at a level they're going to connect with and it's not going to be over their heads or beneath them either. So yeah, and I think yeah, there's other things that you know, I think anything that's successful or healthy, what you'll notice is when kids love something, they talk about it. So anything healthy, children will talk about it. They'll be excited. about it. They'll pester their families about it. They'll hear the name of it and they'll cheer out loud, just those little involuntary reactions. So yeah, things that are healthy and sign of a good thing is that kids will kids will talk, how

Matt

you've kind of answered this as well. How do we know or gauge if the children's ministry is having a positive impact? Is there a way of gauging it?

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Taylor

Yeah, sure.

seeing kids transformed is a great sign of a great children's ministry. Kids are being changed. They're coming in with a question going away with an idea of an answer, coming in with a problem and leaving with some kind of solution. Perhaps coming in, carrying sadness but walk out with some kind of renewed hope. I guess it's all the hallmarks of an encounter with Jesus. So transformation. I think, a good way of gauging

Matt

how do we know children are having a positive impact like gauging a positive impact?

Taylor

Yeah. I think you'll Yeah, it's all about changing the kids and changing families as well. And I think another positive impact you'll see is you'll notice kids naturally starting to make friends. Wherever a kid feels welcome. Or a group of children feel accepted for who they are. They open up themselves they they feel free to be who they are. They find people of a like mind to them, but also people who are totally different to them. And they they make friends and connections so their social circles grow. As a result, that confidence grows, they change, and you can see it in a kid and I believe you can sometimes meet, you could meet three children who are part of the local church, and within maybe a few minutes, you could, without a doubt, say this is a child who's here every week. This is a child who say once a month, and this is someone who's been in the midweek groups on the weekends away they've been on the they've had encounter for themselves. And it because it's not just about confidence. I think it's about assurance and who they are and they do found a home there. When you find a home somewhere you and your full self and you feel you can be that and sometimes doing that with children of different cultures is a challenge. Especially when the approach to churches. But this is more of a regimented thing that we do every week. And some of their approach to church is different in different cultures. But I think that's pretty similar everywhere kids find a home

Matt

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How can the church equip and empower others for further Ministry of Children? So how can we actually equip Like the church community, parents of children, to Further Ministry of Children, so perhaps outside of Sunday mornings and midweek groups?

Taylor

Yes, I think we have to model something that people feel they can replicate and we have to equip people to go and do something. So outside of a midweek and Sunday context that could look like impacting local schools, so giving parents and carers and families, equipping them and praying them as they go out into the school gates and as they pick up their children making connections with others making an impact in local schools. It might look like impacting their neighbourhoods and being good news to people on their street. teaching people about the importance of loving our neighbour and what that looks like. throughout the pandemic. It's something we considered greatly about how can people go now and be Jesus to people around them? What does that look like acts of kindness care, offering prayer, and going beyond just inviting people to things but going into their local areas and making a difference? And I think something we're increasingly aware of is we have to equip our parents for the other six and a half days that they're with their children or week, some children that we meet, they're from families where faith is not even discussed or considered or maybe even by belittled or derided through the week. So it's how we equip those children to further their own spirituality and develop their own relationship with God. But also for our, for our families who are would describe themselves as a Christian family. How do we teach those? Those spirit those parents to become spiritual parents or those carers to become spiritual carers throughout the week? How can they incorporate prayer into their daily lives and encountered it becomes normal for them? What does that look like? And increasingly, we know that it's not just up to kids teams or church leaders to help grow a child and spiritually in the end, the main growth is going to come in the place where they are most.

Matt

Great Final question. Research shows that the traditional Sunday school model is not impacting children as much anymore. What alternatives or extra activities ie midweek

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groups, could the church do to further impact children? So what can the church do or what is the church doing beyond the hour on a Sunday morning?

Taylor

Well, I personally think that the impact that was had by the Sunday school programme, especially in the last 200 years in Britain has been a lot of it fairly surface level anyway. I believe it, Looking back, it would seem it just became culturally what people did on a Sunday. In the same way that children you know, 99% of children will go to school. And perhaps sometimes the value of a teacher or what they're learning is lost, like people understood the importance of it, but maybe didn't value it as highly as they could have done. So. I actually think now we have a great opportunity. It's not the norm for a family to send their child to Sunday school on a Sunday. It's not in a culture where that 45% of people say they're Christian. You know, there's no way 45% of people who say that I must send my child to a school for them. It's just a nominal belief in God and understanding there's something more or an association with British values. So for those, for those people, actually, the best thing we can do to make an impact is go and meet the needs for them where they are. So instead of you come to Sunday school to learn about Jesus, it's, we are the church and we are bringing Jesus to you in a place where you are. So it's changing the perception of you have to come here to to hear about failure, rather than instead it's equipping people to go into their world and express faith in a way that's going to connect with people. So a great example of that is, I think, 60% or so. Stay and play groups in the UK or run by or in a church. And there is a brilliant example of people who are in a time where with under fives, they need friendship connection, and they need to grow have a place to rest and to be assured and for many to be affirmed and have fun. in those in those times the church has stepped up and has met the need and that continues. I think a good challenge is how we do that with older kids who are increasingly busy. Their attention spans are increasingly short. Church for them may seem increasingly irrelevant. How do we how do we go to the needs of the people, and how can we take that to them? So I again, I think impacting local schools in the way we can, offering love and support letting the church in our communities be places that meet the needs of people with their hungry wanting clothing, or need support or prayer and making our church buildings visible as a representation of the fact that the church is alive, making our buildings look alive, filling them with activity, and thinking creatively how we do that through the week so it doesn't

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look like the church is dead on the inside. How do we how do we fill buildings with life again?

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## Appendix Four - Interview transcript: Ashley

Matt

Hello, what's your name?

Ashley

Ashley

Matt

And what is your job role?

Ashley

My job. I'm Associate Minister in the Holy Trinity Leicester, and my specific job role is leading children's and youth work.

Matt

how long have you been doing that for?

Ashley

So, Trinity I've been there 22 years in that role. Prior to that, I was a school teacher for seven years, so I kind of was more youth work. And then before that I did four other years of youth and kids work across three different churches.

Matt

And when did you give your life to Jesus

Ashley

I gave my life to Jesus when I was 13 years old. I heard God speak to me directly. that shook me up but also led me to him

Matt

what do you feel the purpose of children's ministry is?



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Ashley

I think the purpose of children's ministry is to equip them to be disciples to be healthy in God to have a relationship with Jesus and see him start a walk with him that's going to carry on for the rest of their lives.

Matt

What do you think are the most important factors of children's ministry? Or elements?

Ashley

I think that kids need to know that they are loved, and they need to know that they belong, and that they need to know that they are valued by the church. I think that they need to know who God is that they can interact with his stories, and that those stories have meaning in their lives and they need to understand how those stories connect with them. They also need those have a one to one relationship with Jesus and be able to connect with him. They need to know how to talk to him themselves and to hear from him. And they need to be encouraged to then live out their faith in their life. So that's them acting differently to how their mates might act and telling others about Jesus.

Matt

What would a successful children's ministry look like?

Ashley

I think a successful children's ministry is one where you can track through and see that the kids are continuing on in faith into teenage years, hopefully on into adulthood as well. And actually, having been at trinity for so long, it has been a real blessing because I've seen lots of kids who have gone through from being a baby all the way through to leaving us to go to university or whatever. And they're still following Jesus and then even then seeing them go on to do amazing things.

Matt

So it's part of functioning in bigger picture, isn't it?

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Ashley

Yeah.

Matt

Doing a part in big picture. How do you think we can gauge or know if children's ministry is having a positive impact?

Ashley

I think you can. I think that longitudinal study is really important. So I think that's the acid test is that you can see kids who are continuing on in faith. Yeah, obviously children's ministry isn't the only part of that their parents also play an amazing role. Their peers play an amazing role. I think. Apart from that, they also can see whether kids are engaging with God.

Matt

Yeah. How would you feel that the church can equip and empower others for Further Ministry of Children? So for example, how can we equip and empower parents, other children and church community to further the Ministry of Children?

Ashley

So we need to let parents know that they are the primary influences that we often see kids maybe for one or two hours a week, whereas they are seeing them for hundreds of hours a week. They also need to know that children will make a big decision upon not just what their parents say, but how their parents act. And so actually, I know that a study was done, which showed that the most significant factor in whether kids carry on in faith into adulthood is whether they perceive that their parents faith was real and active, because their parents encouraged them, but they didn't see their parents live it out. Then that wasn't enough, then you'd see that their parents it made a difference in their parents lives their parents were relying on Jesus.

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Matt

Final question. A big hitter. Research shows that a traditional Sunday school model is not having an impact on children. What alternatives or extra activities could the church do to further impact children?

Ashley

I'm intrigued about research because I think I still see God doing great things. I think it depends on what you mean by traditional Sunday school model

Matt

Traditional Sunday school model is more traditional teaching like classroom based teaching. Right and two hours on a Sunday morning without any other talk of faith around it in a week

Ashley

Yeah, and that's I think the thing, isn't it? It's all about parents being consistent with that? Yeah. So what was the what else can the church do? Yeah, so what well, I think we need to try and make sure the parents are involved in that. So we try and make sure that parents know exactly what we are teaching. You encourage them to continue with that we need to empower the parents parenting faith classes are good. And then we also need to give kids opportunities to mix, I think a critical age is around about 11 to 14 age and there you shift from what your parents think or your parents telling you to what your peers think. So I think that if you do not give kids at that age, the opportunity to have good Christian peers, that opportunity to develop friendships with Christian peers, then that is a real weakness.

Matt

So overall, you sort of say, High parent involvement in what you're doing and what they did at home, but also ensuring kids have a good community around them outside of the two hours.

Ashley

That's exactly what I'm saying. Yeah, that's perfect.

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Matt

Ashley, thank you.

Ashley

Thank you very much.

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## Appendix five - Focus group transcript: Boys

Matt

The first question I'm going to ask you is your name, your age and your favourite food?

Who should we start with? Let's start with you. What's your name? Your age, your age, and your favourite food?

Ryan

Ryan, nine, bananas.

Matt

What's your name, age, favourite food?

Jay

Jay, eight, white chocolate

Matt

Same questions for you

Mike

Mike, ten, McDonalds

Mark

Mark, seven, KFC

Matt

What's your name?

Josh

My name is Josh, nine, pizza.

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Matt

and I like you that pizza. Nice. okay. Take a piece of paper. And you can turn away from everyone so you don't see anyone else's. But I want you to draw. The first thing you think of when someone says church what do you think of when someone says charge? Draw it. Don't tell me or anyone else, just draw it. You have a couple of minutes to draw it.

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Matt

Okay, turn around. Who'd like to start?

Ryan

The cross

Matt

Why have you drawn the cross?

Ryan

It reminds me of Jesus

Matt

reminds you of Jesus. Jay What did you draw?

Jay

People going into a church building.

Matt

People go into a church building is that a new building or an old building?

Jay

Just a building

Matt

What have you drawn Mike?

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Mike

A church building

Matt

And what have you drawn Mark?

Mark

A church and a book

Matt

And what have you drawn Josh?

Josh

I've drawn Tom

Matt

You've drawn Tom, that's very interesting, very good.

I've got a question. For all of you. What do you enjoy most about going to church, and that can be going to church on a Sunday or going to church in the week. At any point. What do you enjoy most?

Ryan

Playing in the sports hall?

Jay

The snacks

Mark

Hide and seek

Josh

playing with my friends.

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Mike

games, okay.

Matt

I'll give you a little bit of time to think, what is your favourite memory from church? So it could be from something happened at church on a Sunday. Or it can be something that happened at reach or a weekend away or a day trip out? What's your favourite memory from church?

Ryan

Going to twinLakes

Jay

Christmas party, Narnia Christmas party

Mike

Mark

Fireworks

Ryan

What about yours? You haven't told us anything about your favourite memory

Matt

My Favourite memory? I always enjoy the weekend away.

Ryan

I thought you were going to say when you tried to tip water over me when it was actually jelly.

Matt

I remember It was funny.



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Josh

The weekend away in the big house

Mike

Pancake day

Matt

Pancakes. Nice. Okay, got a question. This might be a difficult one. Is there anything you can remember learning in church? learning either in reach or a weekend away? Or on Sunday? You remember really well

Ryan

Somebody got blinded by a light

Matt

Do you remember what happened next?

Ryan

Then he turned good

Matt

Yes. Jay?

Jay

Learning about the amazing things God can do

Mike

That God can do miracles and help us

Mark

I think of when Jesus healed a blind man

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Matt

And Josh?

Josh

Same as Ryan.

Matt

Okay, final question. If you could change anything about church and I mean anything. What would you change?

Jay

On Sundays, more snacks.

Ryan

No singing, I do not like the noise. Last week I was on the front row and it was 100% loud.

Josh

I'd change the seats to massage chairs

Matt

Massage chairs! Comfort is important

Mark

Also to massage chairs

Mike

At the very end, everyone would watch a bit of a movie

Matt

Is there anything else anybody would change?

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Ryan

Massage seats as well

Matt

Anything esle other than massage seats?

Jay

No practice just the real thing

Matt

Thank you that was very helpful!

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## Appendix six - Focus group transcript: Girls

Matt

So first of all, hi. you're gonna tell me your name, your age and your favourite food

Sarah What's your name?

Sarah

You just said it

Matt

Sorry, participant one What is your name? Your age your favourite food

Zena

My name is Zena, my age is 10, my favourite food is burgers and chips

Rachel

My name is Rachel, I am nine, my favourite food is pasta

Anna

My name is Anna Yes. You already know. I'm 10, my favourite food is pesto pasta with bacon

Matt

with Bacon? I've never tried it with bacon, I'm going to now..

Sarah

My name is Sarah, my favourite food is oreos cover in white chocolate

Matt

Okay, take a piece of paper. And I want I want you to draw without looking at anyone else's. What You think of the first things you think of when someone says church? draw what you think of when someone says church or going to church or anything about church?

Zena

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The first thing on your mind?

Matt

Yes. You can write it. You can draw two things. You can draw whatever comes to your mind.

Matt

You've got a little bit of times if you want to add anything else

Matt

I got one more minute. What? Don't worry.

Matt

Okay, here we'd like to share first. Rachel, what did you draw?

Rachel

I drew a cross and God and Jesus

Matt

Why?

Rachel

Because when we go to Church we learn a lot about God and Jesus

Matt

nice. Anna, what did you draw?

Anna

Rainbow, and happy

Matt

Why?

Anna

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Because you have to be happy when you go to Church. Oh, wait, I have two more, Jesus with a beautiful smile, and a Bible that's very wonky.

Matt Wardley

A Bible that's very wonky, Sarah what did you draw?

Sarah

I draw a church, old fashioned and it has a bell on top of it, which has an equal sign and it says bell.

Matt

Yeah, so it's an old Church with a bell. What did you draw Zena?

Zena

God. Jesus / God. Both

Matt

Well, what do you enjoy most about coming to church? That can be on a Sunday on a Tuesday, anytime a week. Zara, what do you enjoy?

Zena

praying to the Lord

Rachel

Doing fun activities whilst learning about Jesus. Like in kids clubs

Anna

I like when my mom does the kids clubs. Cause like, the last time before last time she had fake snow and Turkish delight. And we had sarees this time.

Matt

What do you enjoy most about coming to church?

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Sarah

Playing with friends. Me and Zena go to the same school but don't really hang out much cause we're in different classes. But we hang out at church.

Matt

Yeah. Okay. Here's a question you might think about. What is your favourite memory from church? So it can be on a Sunday morning at reach. On a weekend away on a trip. It can be your favourite memory?

Zena

When my mum gave birth to Israel, the whole church prayed for her

Matt

The whole church prayed for you remember that? Do you?

Zena

Yeah, a bit

Matt

wow. It can be fun memory doesn't have to be spiritual memory

Sarah

I've got one It was a while ago. It was the old building. Yeah.

It was like the fireworks thing he asked me like wonders like popping like fireworks and I went poo

Anna

basically, um, because like little stars, you know? Well, when you went up the stairs Yeah.

Matt

I remember

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Anna

when I used to dress up, it's pretty princesses. And basically used to eat biscuits and read the Bible. I used to be like, guess what princess I am today

Matt

Do you remember that? Do you or someone told you about that?

Anna

Oh, I remember that.

Matt

What's your favourite memory?

Rachel

I'm not sure

Matt

what is something that you can remember you've learned either in Planetshakers on a Sunday morning at reach or a weekend away.

Rachel

I'm not sure and this is a sensible idea. But the first thing that came to my mind is that the end toilet, two away from that is the best toilet.

Matt

That was a conversation me and your daddy had, that was not teaching. what's your favourite thing you've learned? Do you know what always sticks out in my mind. The garlic bread of life.

Anna

So I remember we were praying and Carys farted.



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Matt

I do remember that, it was very funny. Anyway, do you have any memories of anything that we've actually taught you?

Sarah

Can it be from a show?

Matt

Yes

Sarah

Okay. So I was watching young Sheldon. My mum let me, I didn't like do it behind her back. I was watching young Sheldon and the pastor from the church that young goes to says always love your neighbours

Matt

Zena, anything that we've taught you?

Zena

God's always there, even when you don't think it, when you're sleeping, when you're yawning. Gods are always looking after you with his angels by his side.

Matt

Rose, anything you remember?

Rachel

I know, not recently, a while ago everyone like seems to remember the Esther series because like I think they really liked it.

Anna

when basically we will well it was like orchard Avenue something was a really big speech about this comedian.

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Zena

Oh J John?

Anna

Yeah J Jogn And then I remember how he was talking like I understand everything. But something really weird then all the people were like hahahaha.

Matt

Oh, right, final question.

Anna

Can I please do my evil laugh?

Matt

Yes

Anna

Muhahahaha

Matt

Nice Final question. If If you could change anything about church I mean literally anything if you had all the money or anything in the world what would you change about church?

Zena?

Zena

I'd make the church bigger with extra rooms, one like a prayer room.

Matt

What would you change about Church Anna?

Anna

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Basically, the leaders, that there'll be way more leaders. Way more by the way. There will be one to ones for people like Nathan and stuff. And then just for people, when people when you tell them to stand they will stand.

Matt

Rachel what would you change?

Rachel

I don't think I would change anything, because the Church is a church, its a family.

Matt

So you wouldn't add massage chairs?

Zena

I would, I would

Sarah

No cause you'd fall asleep

Matt

Sarah, what would you change?

Sarah

I'd make it more fun for the kids

Matt

Thank you everybody, you can go back out!