

A young girl with dark hair, wearing a light-colored cable-knit sweater and dark polka-dot pants, is jumping in a puddle. She is holding a large, dark-colored umbrella. Water is splashing up around her feet. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene. The entire image has a purple tint, except for a yellow diagonal stripe in the bottom right corner.

EVALUATION OF THE VINE PROGRAMME

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NCVO
CHAMPIONING
VOLUNTARY
ACTION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About the evaluation

The Douglas Trust is funding Care for the Family (CFF) and the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) to develop and deliver programmes that support Christian parents to nurture faith at home. These programmes are the Kitchen Table Project (KTP) run by CFF and Parenting for Faith (PFF) run by BRF. The two programmes together are known as the Vine Programme.

The evaluation draws on monitoring data for both projects as well as primary data from a survey and interviews. The survey was conducted in July-September 2020 and received 308 responses. Of these, 136 responses were from parents, carers, grandparents or godparents, and the remainder were from church leaders or children's, youth and/or family workers, 103 of whom were also parents.





Thirty-eight interviews were conducted: 13 with parents, five with children's, youth or family workers who were not themselves parents, and 20 with parents who had some role in children's, youth or family work, whether as a paid worker or a volunteer.

Both the survey and interviews were with those who had expressed interest in being part of the evaluation, and therefore were likely to be the most active users. The findings from this evaluation cannot be generalised to all users of the Vine Programme.

Engagement with the Vine programme

The Kitchen Table Project



WEBSITE  36,000 unique visitors	MONTHLY EMAILS  3,900 individuals signed up	KTP FACEBOOK'S PAGE  4,357 4,865 likes followers
RAISING FAITH BOOK  5,500 copies sold	RAISING FAITH DVD  196 copies sold	INSPIRE LEADER'S GUIDE  1,200+ 1,200 downloads hard copies given out

Parenting for Faith

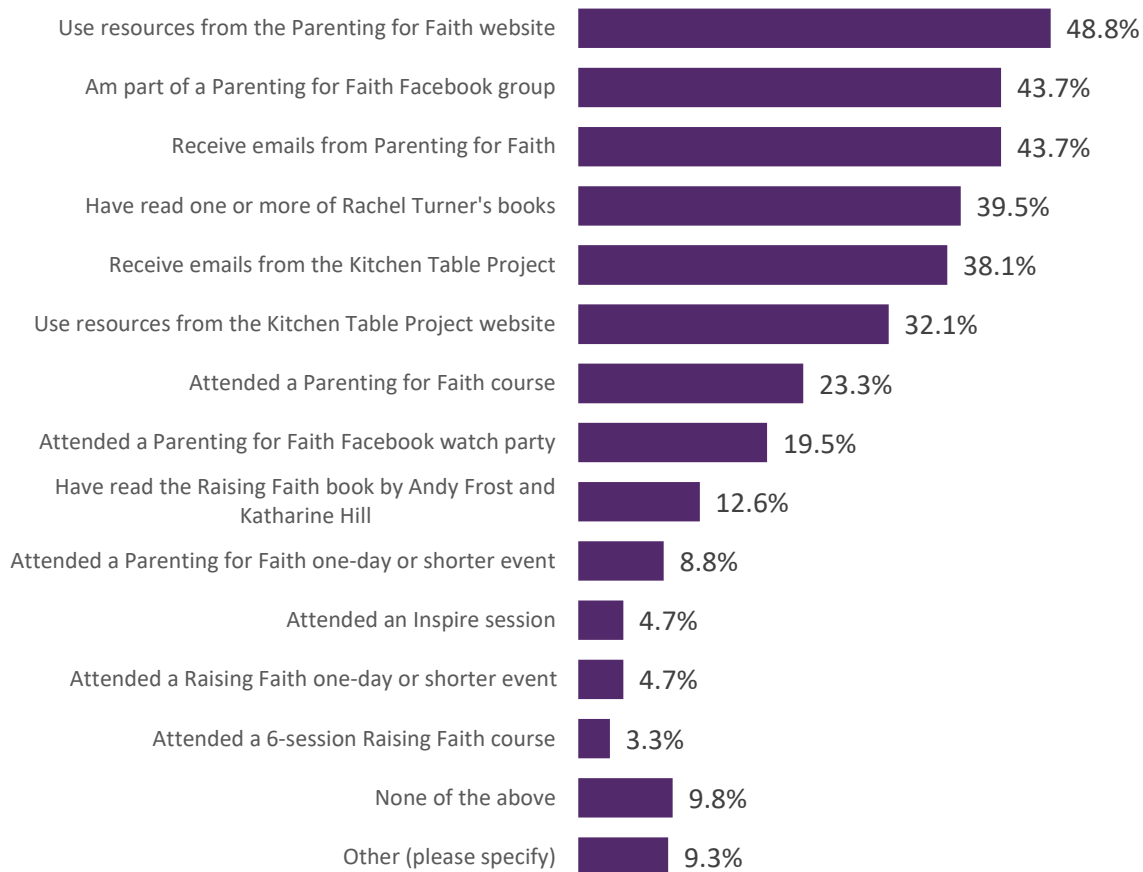


parenting for faith®

WEBSITE 	EMAILS 	PFF FACEBOOK'S PAGE 	
86,568 unique visitors	1,631 subscribers	3,611 likes	3,995 followers
PODCASTS 	PCLF* BOOK 	PFF COURSE VIDEOS 	
998 Average plays per episode	6,113 copies sold <small>* Parenting Children for a Life of Faith</small>	14,393 course video plays	3,394 downloads

Engagement by survey respondents

Parents and church workers accessed Vine Programme materials in a variety of ways, with no one channel accessed by more than half of survey respondents. This suggests that the variety of channels is important for reaching parents and church workers, particularly across email, websites and social media.



Some form of personal connection appears to be important for initial engagement, particularly for church workers. Generally, church workers in the interview sample had found out about the Vine Programme either via recommendation, prior connection with the organisation or attending an event with a speaker from either KTP or PFF. This would benefit from more in-depth exploration.

Once church workers had accessed the materials they adapted them in a huge variety of ways to fit their church context and to ensure that however they used them was accessible to their particular cohort of parents. Despite the wide variety of adaptations, though, many church workers in the interview sample sought to maintain the ethos of the materials, particularly the down-to-earth and encouraging approach.

We did it very, very informally. We got up and we fluffed it and we made mistakes. And we told them when we'd had a bad day. And we created a sense of belonging then because we were just like them. We weren't getting up there as church people saying this is how you do it. We were sharing stories of when we've royally messed up with our own kids. [church worker interview response]

Feedback on the materials

Feedback on the materials was generally positive. The approachable, down-to-earth and encouraging tone was frequently highlighted, as was the practical nature of the materials, with tools and ideas that could easily be implemented.

There were some suggestions for improving the ease of navigation of the website, and for developing further resources for specific circumstances (older children, neurodiverse children and parents where one partner is not Christian).

Course leaders generally found the course materials useful, but found challenges in encouraging parents to attend or to sustain attendance.

There were a few comments about the lack of diversity in the materials in terms of gender, socio-economic group and ethnicity. This may affect who accesses the materials.

A lot of the families that they showed weren't relatable. So I mean, some of our families are accessing Food Bank, and you can have a family home, they've got bookcases, loads of toys, fruits around them. They [our congregation] haven't even got fruit on the table in their home. And so some of it, we have to say beforehand, 'Some of those families look different than ours, but what they're saying is just as true,' and we have to qualify it first. But there was a lady on the Raising Faith video that had purple hair. She was a single mum. And she'd got two girls. Now she was relatable, and they kept saying, 'We like the one with purple hair.' Yeah, she was more like them. So if they use academic language, if they use big words, if they went around it with a long explanation, or if they seemed quite affluent, they couldn't relate to that the same. [church worker interview response]

Outcomes

For parents

Almost twice as many parents (including church worker parents) who attended courses strongly agreed that the main outcomes of the programme had been achieved than those who had engaged with web and print resources only. In both cases, fewer parents strongly agreed that they had gained confidence, compared to those that strongly agreed that they had a greater understanding of opportunities to nurture children's faith or more ideas to do so.

While many parents in the survey and interviews talked about practical changes they had made to more intentionally nurture children's faith, this was often underpinned by a key insight about children's relationship with God.

The idea about not being the high priest also really impacted me and has made me more intentional in encouraging my children to connect directly with God themselves rather than placing myself in the role of intermediary. [parent, survey response]

The insight that children had, from a very early age, their own direct, unmediated relationship with God led, in many cases, to several related outcomes. These included taking a child-centred

approach to nurturing faith, letting go of expectations about 'getting it right' or what 'right' looked like, and modelling their own faith in a more authentic way. Authenticity may be a crucial element in developing a faith that is sustainable through the twists and turns of life, so this may be worth exploring further.

I think parents make a massive deal out of getting it right. You know, 'I've got to get my child's faith journey right. And I've got to make them Christians. It's all my responsibility. And if I don't get it right, and they fall away from church, then I'll never get it back, it's all my fault.' And I think people realise actually, they need to cut themselves a bit of slack. [church worker interview response]

In some cases, the courses also supported parents to engage more deeply with their own faith. 'Chat and catch,' in particular, provided some parents with an opportunity to explore their own direct, unmediated relationship with God in a new way.

Although in some cases parents and church workers felt that the course enabled parents to talk about their child's spiritual life with others more, more could be done to facilitate this outcome and to create community, as it remained a gap for some churches and parents.

For children

Several survey and interview responses illustrated children's varied responses to more intentional nurturing of their faith on the part of their parents. There were several illustrations of children beginning to develop their own personal relationship with God or exploring questions of faith within the family.

Some parents were very sensitive to their children's personalities and needs, and could see how they needed to meet their children where they were, rather than expecting them to fit into a particular model of faith development.

A small number of parents were concerned that their children were engaging with faith just to please their parents. This is a complex area to unpack, as the interactions between children's relationships with God and their relationships with their parents are varied and not easy to separate. With older children, relationships with their peers may also be a factor and a small number of parents were concerned about supporting older children who had few peers in church or were struggling with peer relationships in church.

For churches

Transforming church culture takes time and a concerted effort from a range of key individuals and groups, so those churches at earlier stages of engagement had generally not embedded the values and insights as extensively in their church culture as those who had been engaged for longer.

A key entry point to transforming church culture is using the materials in training for church leaders and volunteers within children's and family work, which several churches in the sample had begun to do or had been doing for some time. This enabled church workers to align the language that they used with children and parents as well as, in some cases, the wider church.

Several church workers had thought carefully about what it meant to be 'intergenerational' – sometimes contrasted with 'multigenerational.' This involved changes to the structure and form of church services, as well as creating opportunities for social interactions between generations.

However, this was an area where many church workers felt that there was more that could be done, particularly in relation to children using their gifts and serving within church.

Another area where church workers felt that more could be done was in building sustained relationships with parents and families, so that parents felt more confident to talk about their faith challenges with children and families workers, or indeed with other parents. While this may happen during an RF or PFF course, it may not always be embedded or sustained within the wider life of the church, even in the most engaged churches.

Enablers and barriers to being a supportive church

Church workers and parents talked about a wide range of enablers and barriers to being a supportive church. The Covid-19 pandemic was at the forefront of many people's minds, and transition to online church has not always been easy, although in some cases it has thrown up unexpected opportunities.

While the quality of children's ministry within a church (often dependent on the size and resources of the church) is a key factor, a whole-church approach is crucial.

The key is not really the kids' worker thinking it's the right thing. It's the church leader, and particularly in the Church of England, obviously, there's very minimal to no training at all on children and spiritual development in a child. [church worker interview response]

Church leaders who are willing to learn, develop and change culture create an enabling environment in which the church can best support parents to nurture their children's faith. This does also require some alignment with the approach taken by the Kitchen Table Project and/or Parenting for Faith.

It would be worth exploring the degree to which the Vine Programme is counter-cultural in a wider sense – not just in doing church differently, but also challenging cultural norms about the privatisation of faith and of parenting, and how this might be both a potential strength as well as a potential challenge.

Key insights and recommendations

God-connection and authenticity

At an individual level, the evaluation highlighted that one of the key insights for parents was that children can and do have their own direct, unmediated relationship with God. This can shift parents' understanding both of the individual relationship with God and of their role in relation to their children. This was evidenced in the ways that some parents changed the way that they prayed with their children as well as the impact that some parents saw in their own faith life.

Building on this, if the individual's relationship with God is to be sustainable, it is possible that authenticity is at the heart of this. Even at a human level, relationships where we cannot bring our whole, imperfect selves into the relationship tend not to be sustainable or fulfilling. Therefore, the role of parents is not to model a 'perfect walk with God' but rather their own imperfect, messy relationship with Him, while understanding that their child's relationship may be completely different.

Individual parents therefore may need to be supported to model that authentic, imperfect walk with God, and therefore creating supportive spaces where they can share their challenges and doubts might be particularly important in sustaining the outcomes of the Vine Programme.

Creating community

Churches have taken a wide range of approaches to creating and sustaining community among parents and intergenerationally across the church, but this is also an area where, in both the survey and interviews, many church workers acknowledged that there was more to do.

In some churches, the courses were a starting point to building community but this may not always be sustained through the structures of church life and may ‘fizzle out.’ Some ways of sustaining community included parent-specific home groups or life groups, family events and varied approaches to doing intergenerational church. As with any community, individuals may have different levels of engagement with church communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also led to churches finding innovative ways of ‘doing church’ when unable to meet in person and this can also be extended to building relationships with and among parents. Some churches have created informal online spaces via Zoom or other video-conferencing platforms for parents and others to meet and share their thoughts and struggles.

Creating sustainable community, especially when parents are juggling multiple priorities, may be a challenge within churches and indeed within both Parenting for Faith and the Kitchen Table Project more widely, but may be essential to sustaining the outcomes for individual parents and their children.

A ‘long game’ and a whole-church approach

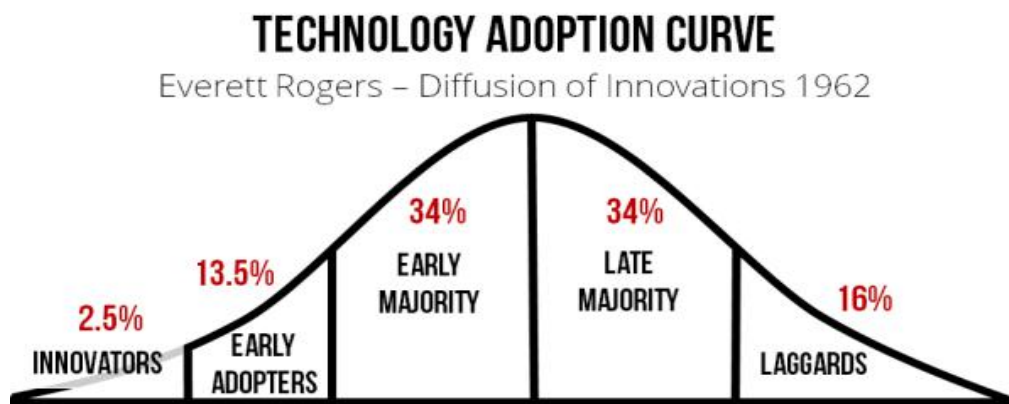
Interviews with churches showed that embedding a shift from children’s ministry to a church that supports parents and families can take a long time and requires concerted effort. Those churches where the ethos of the Kitchen Table Project or Parenting for Faith had been most deeply embedded had done so over a period of years, with the support of a committed children’s and family worker and the church leadership. They had often sought support either from peers or from the teams at BRF and CFF throughout their journey.

This suggests that a deep engagement might be helpful in sustaining churches through what might be a long and sometimes difficult journey to culture change, particularly given that some of that change might still be counter-cultural. This means engagement with church workers at all levels, including volunteers, and building community among committed church leaders, wherever they might be on the journey. Building networks of churches and church leaders may be the key to ensuring that culture change takes place. There may also be a role for building sustainable networks of parents who may not have that support within their churches, particularly in smaller and less well resourced churches.

‘Crossing the chasm’

The technology adoption curve is often pictured with a gap or ‘chasm’ between the early adopters and the early majority. It appears to be received wisdom in marketing circles that a different

approach is needed to reach the early majority, compared to the early adopters¹. The early majority tend to be pragmatists, only adopting a new initiative when there is a proven benefit to them. Seeing clear evidence that the initiative works is key to appealing to this group.



Both BRF and CFF are fortunate in having committed networkers and advocates who can share and recommend the Vine Programme, and can provide evidence about how it is working in a range of settings. This is an important first step in appealing to the early majority. Building a network of church leaders and appealing to key influencers within particular denominations may also help to create credibility for the Vine Programme. This evaluation and ongoing evaluation work may strengthen the case for the Vine Programme and establish how it solves a problem that church leaders and parents are facing right now.

Who is not in the room?

As part of the programme's intention to appeal to a wider group of churches and parents, it may be helpful to reflect on who is not in the room when decisions are made or content is created. It is clear that the primary audiences for the programme as it stands are white, female and broadly at the evangelical end of the churchmanship spectrum. This broadly reflects the demographics of the programme development teams and indeed the early enthusiasts who have been involved in content development. A small number of participants pointed out the consequences of this – that outside of that core demographic, some of the materials had limited appeal or indeed were off-putting because they were not as relatable. The question here for both organisations to consider is how far they wish to appeal beyond their current core demographics, and how much effort they are willing to commit to doing so.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed from those discussed with key stakeholders from BRF, CFF and the Douglas Trust at a meeting in December 2020.

Short-term recommendations

- BRF and CFF to provide further guidance for running the Raising Faith and Parenting for Faith courses online and with very small groups.
- BRF and CFF to adapt courses for online delivery including reducing the course length.

¹ See, for example: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2013/12/17/geoffrey-moore-why-crossing-the-chasm-is-still-relevant/?sh=496402ec782d>

- BRF and CFF to explore ways of marketing the courses to churches and supporting them with course delivery.

Medium-term recommendations

- BRF and CFF to explore user journeys and how best to encourage users to engage with more in-depth material such as courses and books.
- BRF and CFF to intentionally develop content featuring input from men, BAME participants and participants from lower socio-economic groups.
- CFF to deepen relationships with advocates.
- BRF to further explore running courses for clusters of churches or churches within a region.
- BRF and CFF to further explore how churches can be better networked with each other to build community.





Longer-term recommendations

- BRF and CFF to continue to commit resource to this work, acknowledging that culture change takes time.
- BRF and CFF to develop content for parents of older teenagers and children with additional needs.
- BRF and CFF to continue to evaluate their work and build a bank of evidence of success – both numbers and stories.

1 ABOUT THE VINE PROGRAMME

1.1 The Vine Programme

The Douglas Trust is funding two organisations to develop and deliver programmes that support Christian parents to nurture faith at home. These two organisations are:

  Inspire a faith that lasts	<p>Care for the Family (CFF), which is a national charity aiming to promote strong family life and to help those who face family difficulties. Its work is motivated by Christian compassion. CFF run the Kitchen Table Project (KTP) including Inspire sessions and the Raising Faith course, as well as books and web/social media resources, as their offering under the Vine Programme. The Kitchen Table Project launched in January 2018.</p>
	<p>The Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF), which is a national charity working with churches of all denominations, with the vision of enabling all ages to grow in faith and understanding of the Bible. Parenting for Faith (PFF) is BRF's initiative under the Vine Programme, including books, web/social media resources, podcasts, events and the Parenting for Faith course – all designed to equip parents to raise God-connected children and teens. Parenting for Faith began as part of Rachel Turner's ministry in churches in 2005, and became part of BRF in 2016.</p>
	<p>Parenting for Faith (PFF) is BRF's initiative under the Vine Programme, including books, web/social media resources, podcasts, events and the Parenting for Faith course – all designed to equip parents to raise God-connected children and teens. Parenting for Faith began as part of Rachel Turner's ministry in churches in 2005, and became part of BRF in 2016.</p>

The Vine Programme is the Douglas Trust's name for both programmes together. In so far as they share similar aims and a shared evaluation framework, as well as signposting to each other's resources, they can be considered a single programme with separate projects.

1.2 About the evaluation

This mixed-methods evaluation was intended to understand more about how the Vine Programme is making a difference to both parents and churches. While both projects collect monitoring data and receive feedback on events that they directly organise, they do not conduct in-depth evaluations with stakeholders. The fact that most courses and sessions are run by third parties, whether parents or churches, and BRF/CFF may not know that courses are taking place, adds a further layer of complexity to the evaluation.

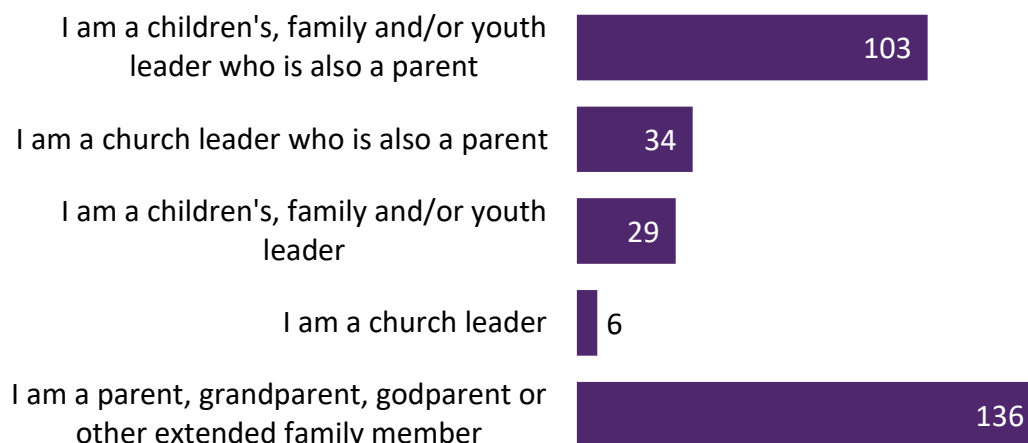
This evaluation draws on some of the monitoring data from both organisations but also on primary data collected directly by NCVO through surveys and interviews. We are grateful to both organisations for promoting the surveys and interviews and supporting us to access participants for both forms of data collection, and to all the participants who contributed their thoughts and stories.

1.2.1 Data sources

Survey

The survey was conducted in July-September 2020 and received 308 responses. Of these, 113 came via the Kitchen Table Project's promotional channels and 195 via Parenting for Faith's channels.

The survey was aimed at parents, church leaders and children, youth or family workers in churches. The graph below shows how many of each responded to the survey.



Interviews

We conducted 38 interviews. Of these, 34 were with respondents who had completed the survey and indicated a willingness to be interviewed. The remaining four were contacts passed to us either by other interview respondents or directly by the Kitchen Table Project team.

Of the 38 interviews, 13 were with parents, five were with children's, youth or family workers who were not themselves parents, and 20 were with parents who had some role in children's, youth or family work, whether as a paid worker or as a volunteer.

Six interviews were with people outside the UK – in Denmark, Sweden, New Zealand, Nepal and the USA².

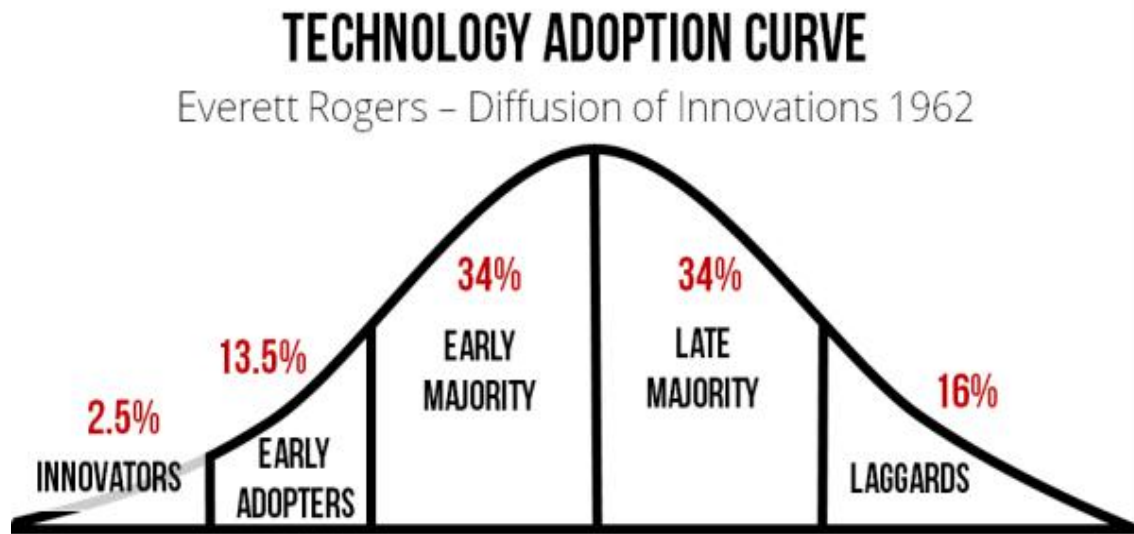
1.2.2 Limitations

Both the survey and the interviews were with an opportunity sample – those who were willing to complete the survey or be interviewed. Because of the relationships that the two organisations have with those who use their resources, we do not have population-level data about the types of churches and parents that use these resources. Therefore, there is no way to ascertain whether the sample is representative of the churches and parents that use the Vine Programme resources.

It is likely that those who were willing to talk to us are the most active users of the resources and have strong relationships with the two organisations. We assume that these are 'early adopters'

² Of these, five had predominantly used PFF resources and one had predominantly used KTP resources

according to the [Rogers technology adoption curve](#). This means that we cannot make assumptions about less active users from the results of this evaluation.



We had intended to use snowball sampling to access parents via church workers, but as a result of the pandemic and the compressed time for interviews, this was not possible except in a small number of cases. Snowball sampling would have enabled us to make better comparisons between churches and to better understand the experiences of parents who had not accessed the materials except via their churches.

A high number of parents interviewed also had a role in their churches. This means that it is difficult to use the evaluation findings to understand the experiences of parents who might be less active within their churches. This is a key limitation of not having been able to use snowball sampling.

Interview respondents were predominantly female (we interviewed three dads and one male church worker) and all were White. Without population-level data, it is impossible to know whether this is representative of those using the materials, but it seems likely that this is broadly representative of the more active users.

1.3 About this report






This report covers:

- parents' and church workers' engagement with the programme
- feedback from programme participants
- outcomes for parents
- children's responses
- outcomes for churches
- enablers and barriers at church level.

2 ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PROGRAMME

2.1 Numbers engaging with the programme

2.1.1 The Kitchen Table Project

WEBSITE  36,000 unique visitors	MONTHLY EMAILS  3,900 individuals signed up	KTP FACEBOOK'S PAGE  4,357 4,865 likes followers
RAISING FAITH BOOK  5,500 copies sold	RAISING FAITH DVD  196 copies sold	INSPIRE LEADER'S GUIDE  1,200+ 1,200 downloads hard copies given out

Website visitors peaked at just over 3,000 in February 2020, and since then have averaged 1,000-1,500 unique visitors per month in 2020, with a total of 36,000 unique visitors since the website launch in January 2018.

A total of 3,900 individuals (parents, church workers and others) have signed up to receive monthly emails.

5,500 copies of the Raising Faith book have been sold from the launch of the book in March 2018 to December 2020.

196 copies of the Raising Faith DVD course have been sold from its launch in April 2019 through to December 2020, and 1,023 people have registered their details to access the free online version in the first three months of its release in that format (although far fewer than this have downloaded any of the content yet). It is not known how many people have run a course.

Since its launch in spring 2019 to December 2020 there have been over 1,200 downloads of the Inspire Leader's Guide and a further 1,200 hard copy Inspire packs have been given out. It is not known how many of these have been used. There have been 400 downloads of the Church Toolkit user guide, and 354 copies of the KTP calendar have been purchased in its first three months since release.







The Kitchen Table Project has an active Facebook presence, with 4,357 people who have 'liked' the KTP Facebook page and 4,865 followers. It is not clear how big an overlap there is between these two groups. While this is not typical, the top post in terms of organic reach received 67,464 organic impressions (i.e. without any paid advertising) in December 2019. High-performing Facebook posts

generally receive between 1,500 and 6,500 organic impressions. Paid advertising has also been used at times to extend the project's reach on Facebook.

The Raising Faith event was held in nine locations across the UK during 2018 and 2019, with 1,246 people attending in total. A slightly shortened version of the event has been recorded and streamed online on five evenings in 2020, reaching 2,473 viewers in total.

An online event for church leaders and children's workers on 'helping children's work flourish in a pandemic' reached 278 church leaders and children's workers over six dates in October and November 2020. This is in addition to face-to-face events for leaders and speaking engagements at events organised by others.

2.1.2 Parenting for Faith

WEBSITE  86,568 unique visitors	EMAILS  1,631 subscribers	PFF FACEBOOK'S PAGE  3,611 3,995 likes followers
PODCASTS  998 Average plays per episode	PCLF* BOOK  6,113 copies sold <small>* Parenting Children for a Life of Faith</small>	PFF COURSE VIDEOS  14,393 3,394 course video plays downloads

Website visitors peaked at 6,000 in May 2020 and have been consistently above 2,500 per month in 2020. The total number of unique users to December 2020 is 86,568. There are 2,250 registered website users.

The Parenting for Faith course videos can be watched online. There have been 14,393 course video plays up to December 2020, with a peak of 700 in May 2020. The course can also be downloaded, and there have been 3,394 video downloads to December 2020.

There are 1,631 email subscribers who receive regular emails.

Parenting for Faith have an active Facebook presence, with 3,611 people who have 'liked' the Facebook page and 3,995 followers of the page. It's not clear how far these overlap. The Parenting for Faith children's, youth and family leaders' group has over 1,700 members and the parents' group has 842 members. The course 'watch party' has 830 members. The top Facebook post reached 25,667 people (including paid reach). Organic reach for top posts varies from around 5,000 to around 7,000. The monthly Facebook Live sessions for parents reach between 2,500 and 3,000 views, and those for children's, youth and family leaders reach between 250 and 450 views.

The weekly podcast averages around 998 plays per episode.

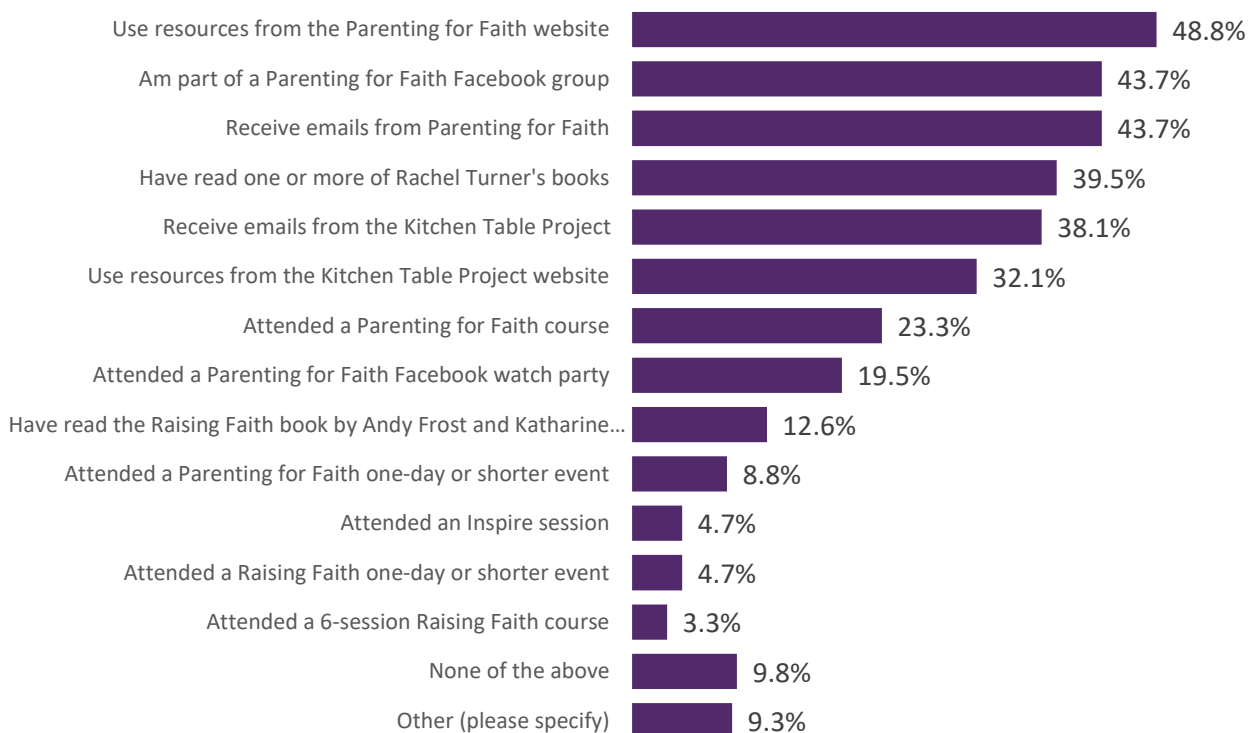
There have been 242 courses registered via the website since 2017, with 20 repeat courses. The team are aware of a significant number courses that have not been registered as well as several repeat courses where the first one has been registered but others have not.

Parenting for Faith run a gathering for children's, youth and family leaders known as The Forge. This was run online in November 2020, with 52 attendees. A *Parenting as a Church Leader* online event in November 2020 reached 40 participants. Parenting for Faith speakers also speak regularly at events organised by other groups, reaching a wider audience.

Parenting for Faith have published several books. *It takes a church to raise a parent*, has sold 1570 copies to December 2020. An omnibus edition of the three Parenting for Faith books for parents has sold 747 copies to August 2020. *Parenting as a Church Leader*, published in March 2020, sold 316 copies in the period to December 2020. The original *Parenting Children for a Life of Faith* book has sold an estimated 6113 copies between its launch and December 2020.

2.2 How survey respondents engaged

Survey respondents tended to use a number of different modes of engagement with the Vine Programme. There was no single resource that was used by a majority of respondents. The graph below shows the variety of resources engaged with by parents and by church workers who were also parents (n=215). This does not show resources engaged with by church workers or leaders in their leadership roles.



It should be noted that the six-session Raising Faith course was released in Easter 2019, so is less likely to have been accessed than other resources which have been in production for longer.

Survey respondents who selected 'other' specified that they listened to the Parenting for Faith podcast or watched Rachel's Bedtime Drinks on Facebook. One respondent mentioned watching videos by Ian Grant, a New Zealand based speaker on parenting not affiliated to the Vine Programme.

Of those who responded to this question and had used one or more of the KTP or PFF resources listed (n=194), 29 had used only Kitchen Table Project resources, 86 had used only Parenting for Faith resources, and the remaining 79 had used both. The greatest areas of overlap were emails and website resources.

Out of 176 church leader or children, family and youth worker respondents, 76 (43%) had run courses. The majority had run the Parenting for Faith course.

Course/session	Number
Inspire session	11
Raising Faith course	5
Parenting for Faith course	44
Other	4

The survey asked church workers and leaders who had not run courses to identify their reasons for not having run courses. The most common reason was not having had a chance to explore the materials in depth.

Reason	% of respondents
I have received the course materials but haven't had a chance to look at them properly	31%
I haven't heard of Raising Faith, Inspire or the Kitchen Table Project	19%
We don't have enough parents in our church to run sessions or courses	19%
We have run courses/events at our church but I wasn't the one running them	14%
I haven't heard of Parenting for Faith	12%
We don't have anyone willing to run sessions or courses for parents	9%
We tried to run a course but couldn't get enough participation	6%
I have tried to set up a course but faced resistance from others in the church	6%
We have a course scheduled for later this year	3%

2.3 How people came across the programme

The survey did not ask how parents and church leaders/workers had come across the programme. However, this was asked in the interviews. The interviews showed that people came across the programme in a variety of ways, but generally through some form of prior engagement with the organisations or recommendations from others.

Those who had come across KTP had predominantly done so through prior engagement with CFF as an organisation. This might have been through an event or via Spring Harvest.

We've known about CFF for years. We heard about KTP when it was first launched. I heard about it coming and saw the promo videos. PFF was more recently, I think probably through KTP. [parent interview response]

I started with Raising Faith first, which I came across as a parent, probably in 2017 or 2018. I went along to an event when my kids were younger. I then went and bought the book for lots of people for Christmas because I loved it. [church worker interview response]

Several respondents mentioned being given PFF books or hearing about it via word of mouth, especially children's workers who had heard about it from other children's workers. Almost all respondents had heard of PFF either through recommendation (within or outside their own church) or through attending an event with a PFF speaker. Two respondents mentioned a personal connection with Rachel Turner through previous churches.

Two respondents mentioned encountering PFF through knowing BRF from Messy Church.

The first thing I would have come across probably would have been Rachel's book. Because of being a Messy Church, we hear about what BRF are doing more widely. And so that's helped me to know about Parenting For Faith as well. So I read some of Rachel stuff, and I've watched a couple of her videos on Facebook, and I suppose it was sort of going back three or four years I came across the stuff. [parent interview response]

Two respondents mentioned finding the materials without a personal connection or recommendation, or without having attended events at which one of the PFF team had spoken: one respondent mentioned actively looking for materials having decided that they wanted to focus on parenting in their church, and then finding KTP and subsequently PFF, before deciding to do the PFF course, and the other came across the materials via Facebook but was invited to the group by a friend.

2.4 Adapting the materials within churches

Across the surveys and interviews, church workers and leaders used the KTP and PFF materials in a wide variety of ways.

2.4.1 Using the materials in the regular life of the church

In some churches, church workers use the materials as part of their regular communication with parents, either instead of or as well as running courses. This may include training volunteers and church leaders, as well as sharing the resources with parents via regular emails or resource packs. One church used the Inspire and Raising Faith materials to run an 'equipping Sunday' for parents.

Case study: The church as IKEA for parents

Alex has been the children's and family worker at New Church for several years.³ The church had a 'baby boom' some years ago and now has a large group of families with children. They run the Parenting for Faith course regularly and most of the church is familiar with the principles behind the course. In 2019 they were considering how best to support parents outside of running the course.

We have tried doing things like sending stuff home, like this is what we did this week, take it away with you. We found that they don't work. Parents either don't read them don't even get them out. Sometimes they're just all over the floor. They don't tend to go very far.

Inspired by a comment in the book *It takes a church to raise a parent*, which describes churches as being like 'IKEA for parents,' Alex 'took that literally and had a walk around event' in early 2019.

And so we had an event where they went around the building and we'd set up each room as a room of a house. And so like in our café area, we had tables – dining room tables – and they had an option of different things that they could do and take with them. One of them was a Bible study and they could do that together. Another one was eating oranges and praying as you ate the orange, and so they did that.

Then they had another room that was like a bedroom and there were ideas of different bedtimes with your children. There was a playroom with a toy-based activity like build a Bible story out of Lego. Then we had like a craft room so there were lots of different ways you could respond to a story and different crafts. And I think there was a lounge as well and lots of resources. So we used that to set up, kind of have a bank of resources now that we can recommend for different things: different ages, books, Bibles, and kind of encouraging people to have them at home.

That was really good – that was really well received.

2.4.2 Integrating the materials into home groups/life groups

Of 50 survey respondents who ran courses, 11 ran them as part of a small group or home group. This was the most popular alternative format for those who did not run them as stand-alone courses.

³ All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of parents and church workers

Some groups of parents also came together informally to do the course, outside of the context of official small groups or home groups.

There are two other families in our church and one of the mums was thinking about doing it. I don't know how she came across the course, but she said to the other two families, 'Would you be up for doing it?' So we just met and had dinner together, the six of us, and tried to watch the video beforehand, and just came in and discussed, but it was just our own thing. [parent interview response]

Another parent is part of a regular group of mums who have been meeting for some time, and decided to work through the Raising Faith book together.

We have a group of about eight mums – most have babies or toddlers, a couple have primary age children. Before Covid we saw each other at church. For about a year and a half we've been using the Raising Faith book – mums felt they wouldn't have time to sit down and read a book but that doing it together as a group would be helpful. [parent interview response]

Within these small, informal groups, there tended not to be an official facilitator, although it tended to fall to one individual to gently guide the discussion and bring people in.

One church does not have regular small groups but runs small-group courses twice a year. Parenting for Faith is part of the course programme for these small groups, but while other courses on the programme run for six weeks, the church worker has ensured that Parenting for Faith runs over a longer period in order to make sure that all the material is covered. In that church, the course runs weekly with a break in the middle.

2.4.3 Running stand-alone courses

There was a huge variety of approaches to running stand-alone courses, depending on the specific context of the church and the families it served. These included:

- **Timing and frequency:** Some churches ran the course (whether Parenting for Faith or Raising Faith) weekly over six or eight weeks, while others ran it fortnightly or monthly. One church found running monthly sessions worked well to give people time to reflect, while another found that running monthly sessions lost momentum and switched back to weekly sessions. One church ran it over two Saturdays, with four sessions on each day, but found that this was a lot for parents to take in. Another church specifically chose to run the Inspire session instead of one or other of the courses, as they felt that parents might not be able to commit to a regular course.
- **Social time:** Not all churches provided a meal or extensive social time during in-person courses, but some did provide refreshments and some social time, whether that was tea and coffee or a meal. Those churches that did this found it helpful for bringing the group together and allowing more open discussion during the sessions.

We start the session at half past seven. But I would say to people, 'Come from seven. And we will have half an hour where there'll be tea, coffee, muffins, doughnuts – you name it – and it's to have a cup of coffee and have a chat.' And they were lovely times. Actually, I just think that actually put everyone at ease before the session started. [church worker interview response]

- **Childcare:** As mentioned earlier, childcare was an issue for some churches. One church ran a course during school hours, where parents were able to bring younger children to the course. This required some adaptation to ensure that young children had things to do and also required a relaxed approach to interruptions!

It seemed wrong to run a parenting for faith course that embraces accepting children into faith and into church life and say no they can't come [to the course]. So we ran that one slightly differently in that there were small children present. They had toys and activities that they could play with while we were watching it. And they interacted.

- **Location:** The majority of stand-alone courses were on church premises, although one church which had run several Parenting for Faith courses had a policy of running courses in homes, with smaller groups, so that there was less childcare to arrange. This limited the group size to a maximum of six.
- **Group size:** Group sizes varied from four participants up to just over 20 in one case, although there tended to be ten or fewer. In the largest group, participants were divided into smaller groups, with older church members as facilitators.
- **Facilitation:** Stand-alone courses tended to be facilitated by children's, family and/or youth workers, sometimes alone, sometimes jointly with other volunteers or with parents.

And we also wanted to have some group leaders in our discussion groups who would just kind of help facilitate discussion and keep things running on track. And so we asked three people who were slightly older, sort of in their 60s, and had their children grown up and kind of flown the nest. And we said, 'Actually, this isn't about your experience, but it's about your ability to be a facilitator.' Because we had one other gentleman come back and say, 'Well, I'd like to help but none of my children are Christians. And I don't really feel that I'm an expert.' We said, 'That's okay. We're not after experts. We're after people who want to sit with and pray for and be with parents.' [church worker interview response]

- **Breadth of cohort:** Cohorts tended to be broader than just parents, often with grandparents attending, or children's workers who may not have children of their own. In smaller groups, or churches with larger numbers of families with children of the same age, there was sometimes more homogeneity. Some church workers found it difficult to cater for the breadth of different needs in one course and, to be better prepared with ideas, found it helpful to know the ages of children in different families.
- **Keeping in touch between/after sessions:** One church set up a WhatsApp group for parents to keep in touch during the course, which was well used during the course but 'fizzled out' after the course completed. One church worker survey respondent said that they had merged the course into a Parenting Faith life group at the end of the course.
- **Finding ways for couples to attend:** Some churches found that they needed to adapt so that both parents in a couple could attend. This sometimes meant running parallel courses that partners could attend separately, allowing people to bring their children, or running courses online to minimize the need for childcare. In one church, some couples alternated sessions and the church worker ensured that there were extra resources available for both partners.

So the agreement was that their partner who was on the course would take extra resources and materials, and then would go home and, at some point, they'd watch the video and have a chat together. [church worker interview response]

- **Running the course online:** A number of courses had been run online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some church workers found this helpful because it reduced the need for childcare and meant that attendance was sustained. Other church workers found some of the activities more difficult to adapt to Zoom or found that parents were less likely to take part in some of the activities, such as the session on prayer ministry.

Church workers were also creative in how they used, adapted or added to the materials within the context of stand-alone courses. One church chose to add quiet reflection time at the end of each session.

We ran the course and then we had 15 minutes for reflection at the end, which we really varied. So one time I did a soaking in time, just listening to music, one time our curate Sophie led a Taize meditation. And other times we've just had, you know, sit and pray together about your families. [church worker interview response]

Another church used the Inspire materials and realised that their use could be extended beyond a single session. They therefore put together several follow-up sessions using the discussion cards.

The first session we did, we led it exactly as the pack suggested. We provided childcare for families and we put on a breakfast. It was about two hours long. We watched videos and then had some round-table discussions. I'd do that again but the name Inspire suggests you do it and then move on – but we didn't get through all the questions, so we did follow-up sessions, with breakfast again and I shared a thought or focus for the morning. I selected question cards that were the same sort of thing and left them on the table. They chatted for 45 minutes, led by me and what the question card said. The whole session was an hour long and then we closed with a prayer. It was on a Saturday morning, so it didn't interrupt their weekend too much. The idea was just to come and get some inspiration through the conversation. We did three of them and I probably could have done one more to be honest. The discussion cards were great. In the time we had we got through about two or three each time and there are 25 in the pack. It was easy to keep the conversation going. [church worker interview response]

Whatever approaches churches might have taken to the organisation of the courses, it was clear to some church workers that they needed to maintain the overall ethos of the materials, in particular the non-judgmental approach. Several church workers mentioned this as they talked about how they approached running courses – the response below is typical.

We did it very, very informally. We got up and we fluffed it and we made mistakes. And we told them when we'd had a bad day. And we created a sense of belonging then because we were just like them. We weren't getting up there as church people saying this is how you do it. We were sharing stories of when we've royally messed up with our own kids. [church worker interview response]

2.4.4 Precursors to courses

One church worker survey respondent and one interview respondent talked about the need to build up to running the Parenting for Faith courses by 'drip-feeding' the ideas into the wider life of the church and into children's work. For one interview respondent, it took several years before the time was right to run the Parenting for Faith course.

Some churches were preparing to run courses or use the materials in person when lockdown began in March 2020. For some of these churches, it was not appropriate to run courses online at a time when parents were juggling work, home-schooling and the other ramifications of a global pandemic. One church worker decided to take a more informal approach to supporting parents during lockdown.

In this time I decided to look at some of the Kitchen Table Project material. I decided to start a parent forum called 'Cups of Chat'. The idea is that after the Zoom time with the children, I invite parents to come on and join me. The only proviso is they bring a cup of anything and we talk. I'm a very organised individual in life. Something else lockdown has taught me is that things need to be a bit more flexible. This is one hour, or depending on how long the parents want, that is driven with no agenda. So it may not be directly from Kitchen Table Project, but it gave me the inspiration to think about the parents and how to reach out to them and find out how they're doing and coping in family life and talk about what we do. So my intention with Cups of Chat was in the background to push more interaction with the children at home, but also for the parents to build up a rapport with myself and build some trust.

This has had some effect on building relationships between the church worker and the parents, and parents have since responded well to suggestions from the church about activities to do with their children.

2.5 Summary and conclusion

Parents and church workers access Vine Programme materials in a variety of ways, with no one channel accessed by more than half of survey respondents. This suggests that the variety of channels is important for reaching parents and church workers, particularly across email, websites and social media.

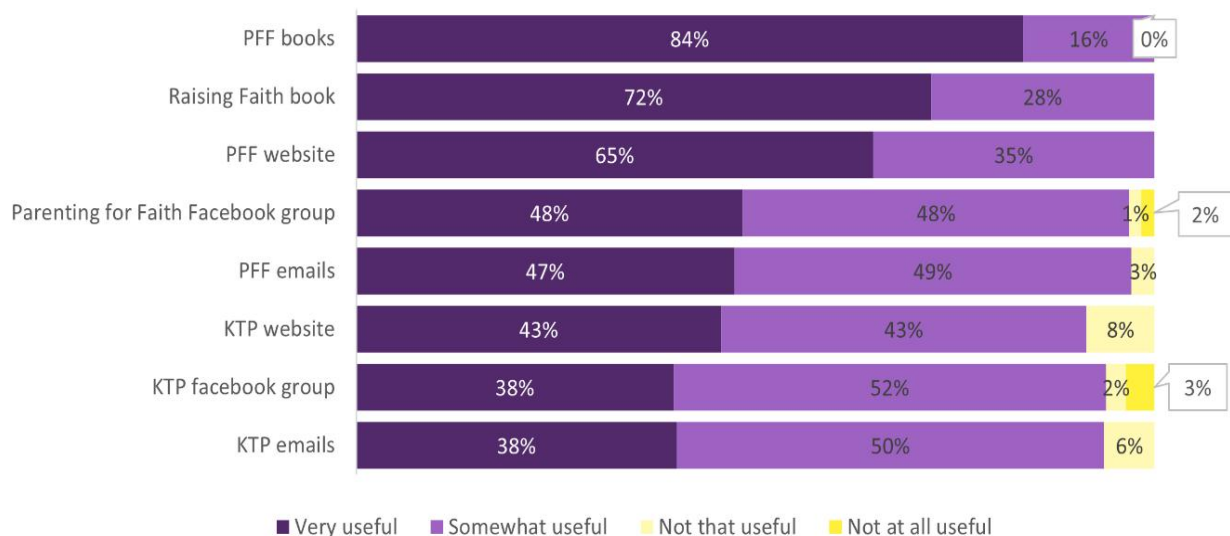
Some form of personal connection appears to be important for initial engagement, particularly for church workers. Generally, church workers in the interview sample had found out about the Vine Programme either via recommendation, prior connection with the organisation or attending an event with a speaker from either KTP or PFF. This would benefit from more in-depth exploration.

Once church workers had accessed the materials, they adapted them in a huge variety of ways to fit their church context and to ensure that however they used them was accessible to their particular cohort of parents. Despite the wide variety of adaptations, though, many church workers in the interview sample sought to maintain the ethos of the materials, particularly the down-to-earth and encouraging approach.

3 FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS

3.1 Feedback on resources

The survey asked parents and church workers who are also parents how useful they found web-based resources, emails and books, whether or not they had attended courses. While the books were much less widely used than other resources, those that had used them found them more useful than other channels.



The survey asked what they found particularly useful in the web, email and print resources. Across 38 full-text responses, the following key themes emerged.

- Fifteen respondents identified a specific resource – a video, podcast or book that they found particularly useful. These were often resources that they could fit into their day easily:

Podcast is great as can listen to it at football matches

Rachel's 5 minutes thoughts are good to fit into a busy day. Love Rachel's bedtime drinks at 8pm gauged for different ages! Have shared amongst friends



The raising faith book was inspiring and easy to read.

- Ten picked out that the resources were practical, accessible and/or down to earth, easy to implement:

Quick, readable and accessible resources that are very practical for a busy parent of young children.

- Eight picked out the encouraging tone – the ‘you’ve got this’ approach. One survey respondent said that they felt particularly encouraged by the videos from other families and church leaders.

All of these resources strike a really encouraging tone that give us confidence that we're well placed as parents to share faith.

Love their attitude of encouraging parents that 'you've got this', 'you are the expert in your kid' and in making 'parenting for faith' something accessible and natural and easy to do in everyday life rather than a daunting 'extra' that's hard to fit in.

- Smaller numbers liked being able to search on the website to find specific resources or being able to ask questions.
- There were 12 ‘other’ responses. These ranged widely from those who appreciated online resources because they could not attend training, to those who felt they had not yet explored the materials in depth.

There were fewer responses to the survey question asking whether there was anything less useful in the resources.

Six respondents found the website hard to navigate. It was not always clear which website they were referring to but three specifically mentioned the Parenting for Faith website. Four found some types of resource less accessible – such as podcasts for those who are less used to accessing materials online. Four respondents found some resources less relevant to their specific circumstances.

One church worker interview respondent wanted more accessible resources and perhaps an app for families to use together.

[I appreciate] things that are short and snappy. The Kitchen Table Project stuff I've liked has been visually orientated. Stuff that's placed on Facebook and Instagram, people read and connect with. Those kinds of things are really good ... There are plenty of resources out there but it takes time to find them; it takes me hours, so to ask a parent to do that is too much. There's very little in terms of apps for parents or things to do as a family together. The New Version Life Church has a nice app for devotions for families. Children these days are going to be using a phone more than a book, so I think that kind of thing would be really helpful.
[church worker interview response]

Of the seven ‘other’ comments, most said that there was nothing to improve or that they did not have enough experience with the materials to comment.

One survey respondent felt that the materials were too middle-class and that BME families as well as those from some socio-economic groups might find them hard to relate to. This was also echoed in two church worker interviews (one related to KTP and one to PFF), for example in the quote below.

A lot of the families that they showed weren't relatable. So I mean, some of our families are accessing foodbanks, and you can have a family home, they've got bookcases, loads of toys, fruits around them. They [our congregation] haven't

even got fruit on the table in their home. And so some of it, we have to say beforehand, 'Some of those families look different than ours, but what they're saying is just as true,' and we have to qualify it first. But there was a lady on the Raising Faith video that had purple hair. She was a single mum. And she'd got two girls. Now she was relatable, and they kept saying, 'We like the one with purple hair.' Yeah, she was more like them. So if they use academic language, if they use big words, if they went around it with a long explanation, or if they seemed quite affluent, they couldn't relate to that the same. [church worker interview response]

3.2 Feedback on courses and events

From the survey, almost all parents who attended courses, and church workers who attended courses and events in their role as parents, had positive feedback on the course. Almost all strongly agreed or agreed to the following statements:

- I felt welcome at the course (98%)
- I found the course useful (100%)
- I enjoyed the course (100%)
- I would recommend the course to a friend (100%)

Of 22 parents and 29 church worker parents who attended courses and commented on what was useful, the following key themes emerged:

- Practical nature of the course (12 respondents)

Short sessions, practical tools. This is the first parenting course I have been on that isn't all about theories that you have to try and implement at home. It is deeply practical and simple.

Rachel Turner (hosting the session) is friendly, relatable, and the tips she gives are so helpful practically as well as spiritually. It's a gold-mine!!

- New tools and ideas for nurturing children's faith (12 respondents)

So many great ideas (and some new concepts) for engaging children in their own faith journey, and how to incorporate an understanding of God and faith in our daily family life.

- Encouraging and non-judgmental nature of the materials (12 respondents)

No-one on the team has a superior attitude, they're very gracious – it's great you don't feel like a failure for struggling!!

Other responses included appreciating that the course could be held online, or having time to discuss the course content with their partners. Some church worker parents also mentioned the videos specifically.

There is considerable overlap between the positive feedback on the courses and events and the positive feedback on the resources, suggesting that there is a strong coherence in approach across

both KTP and PFF and across the courses and other resources. There is also considerable overlap between the feedback from courses received as part of the survey and that received directly by CFF and BRF, with the same core themes emerging.

As with the other resources, there was less feedback on what was less useful. However, there were some suggestions for improvement. Some parents raised technical issues related to Facebook or online courses. One parent said that fewer sessions would be helpful in sustaining commitment. As with the web resources, there were some calls for more support related to specific groups: teenagers and children on the autism spectrum.

One parent said:

I sometimes felt we were encouraging children to use their imagination and attribute it to God, which I wasn't comfortable with.

This was the only comment specifically about the theology of the materials.

A small number of parents in both the survey and the interviews sought more support for parents whose partners were not Christian. Those parents who mentioned having non-Christian partners found this very challenging. This was also echoed in some of the direct feedback received by BRF and CFF, for example in relation to Raising Faith events. However, the quote below is from someone who used the Parenting for Faith materials.

My husband is not a Christian. He'd rather the kids went to a C of E school and it didn't have much impact on them. That's not what I want for them. I want them to make an informed choice. My experience is God makes a difference to my life every day; why shouldn't they have access to the creator of all – and if they have the opportunity to understand it they can make an informed choice. And [my husband] agrees with informed choice – but he struggles with the idea of answered prayer, that God talks to you. I tend to have the conversations when my husband is not around so it doesn't irritate him. We do them at the dinner table when he's not there or in the car. And so he has no idea about the spiritual journey my children are going on and he has asked not to know about it because it annoys him. [parent interview response]

3.2.1 Feedback on running courses/sessions

Out of 57 church workers and parents who ran courses (PFF, Inspire or Raising Faith), 37 highlighted the videos as the best thing about running the course.

The videos helped explain the key tools in a relatable way.

A further 13 survey respondents mentioned the handbooks and 11 the leaders' guides while eight respondents mentioned discussion cards. Several responses mentioned more than one resource.

The extra guides for leaders were helpful as they helped me be prepared for questions and different scenarios.

The videos and the discussion booklet. They made running the course easy and facilitated good discussion.

The discussion cards are a great resource to use as part of the session or as a stand-alone resource. They are great discussion starters.

There were 17 responses coded as 'other' including some saying 'all of the resources were helpful' and others explaining how they had adapted resources as well as some that referenced how well put together the whole package was.

The videos and instructions do mean that you can run the course with little prep, although of course the more you prep the better it is.

Two respondents mentioned the team praying for the course.

I also love that Parenting for Faith email to let you know they are praying for your course – I felt very supported.

Of the 52 church workers and parents who had run courses (PFF, Inspire or Raising Faith) the most challenging thing about running the course was getting people to come in the first place, with 20 respondents highlighting this.

Most challenging was getting parents to value it and want to come. I realised that I needed to do a lot more work around it in terms of the importance of Parenting for Faith before running it.

There were also some issues in sustaining attendance across the course. Some course leaders mentioned that it was difficult for parents to commit to six or eight weeks, and that parents found it difficult to secure a babysitter for every session. This was also mentioned in some of the feedback received directly by BRF and CFF, in which course leaders and participants mentioned the difficulty of sustaining attendance over multiple sessions.

A further 13 respondents had challenges related to timing, whether this was about finding a time that people could do, adapting the sessions to fit a shorter time span or working out the best way to spread out the sessions (weekly, fortnightly or monthly).

Others had issues with Zoom/online delivery or tech issues in their churches (11) or ensuring that there was childcare while parents attended the course (6). Four said that there was nothing they would change.

Two respondents mentioned that the vox pops with parents were less helpful than Rachel's videos:

It's a great course but the vox pops videos with parents can make it all sound unattainable and guilt-inducing because they make it too easy for parents on the course to compare themselves unfavourably with peers.

One worker mentioned that the videos are 'very female heavy' which may have been a challenge in encouraging fathers and grandfathers to attend. The response did not specify which course this related to.

3.3 Summary and conclusions

Feedback on the materials was generally positive. The approachable, down-to-earth and encouraging tone was frequently highlighted, as was the practical nature of the materials with tools and ideas that could easily be implemented.

There were some suggestions for improving the ease of navigation of the website, and for developing further resources for specific circumstances (older children, neurodiverse children and parents where one partner is not Christian).

Course leaders generally found the course materials useful, but found challenges in encouraging parents to attend or to sustain attendance.

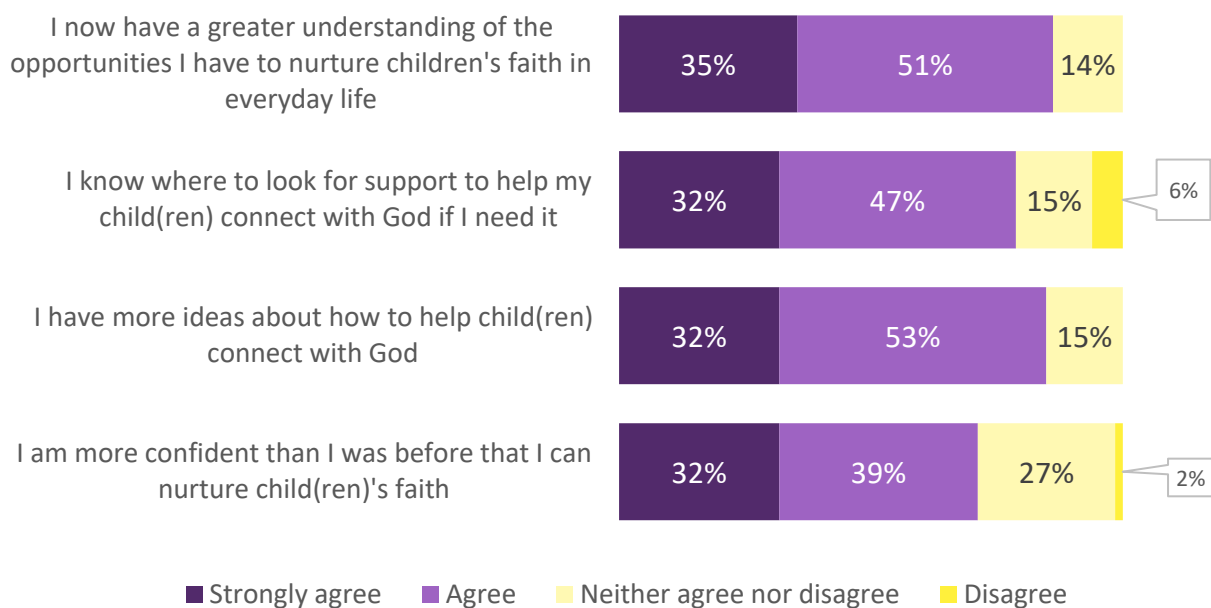
There were a few comments about the lack of diversity in the materials in terms of gender, socio-economic group and ethnicity. This may affect who accesses the materials.

4 OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS

My parenting has literally changed for the better. My relationship with my children has changed. My children have engaged with God because of the suggestions about things to chat to God about and how they are part of his big purpose, how I can open a window into my life and just show them what it looks like for me to relate to God etc. [parent survey response]

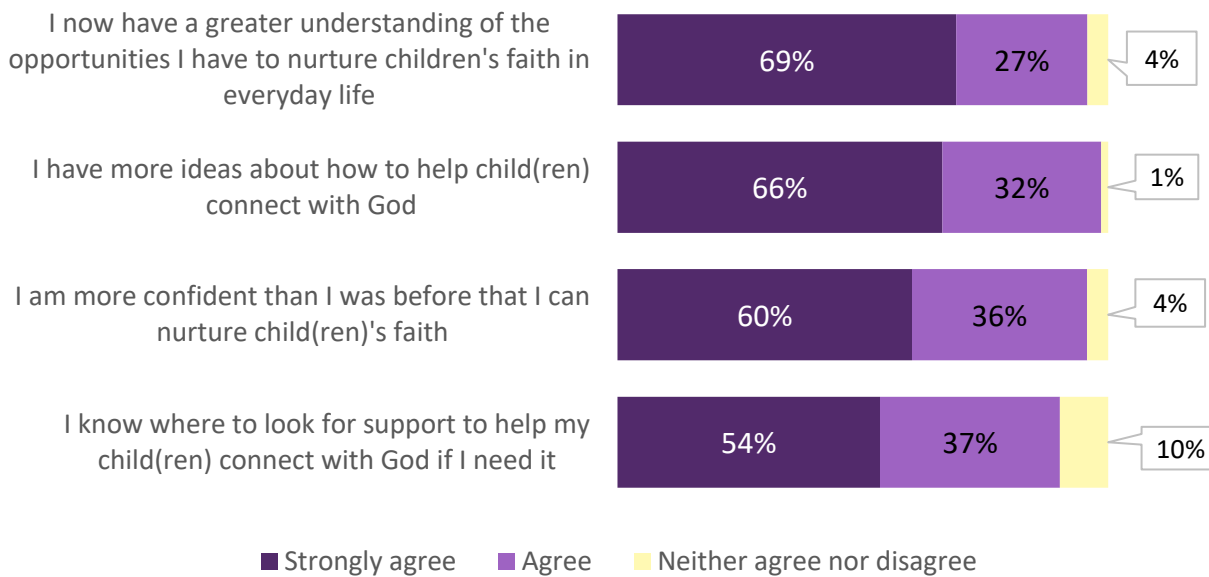
4.1 Overall outcomes

The survey asked parents (and church workers who are also parents) who had only used web and print resources about the difference that those resources had made to them in relation to their ability to nurture children's faith at home. The graph below shows that the majority of parents (and church workers in their role as parents) agreed that their engagement with the materials had made a difference to their parenting (n=66).

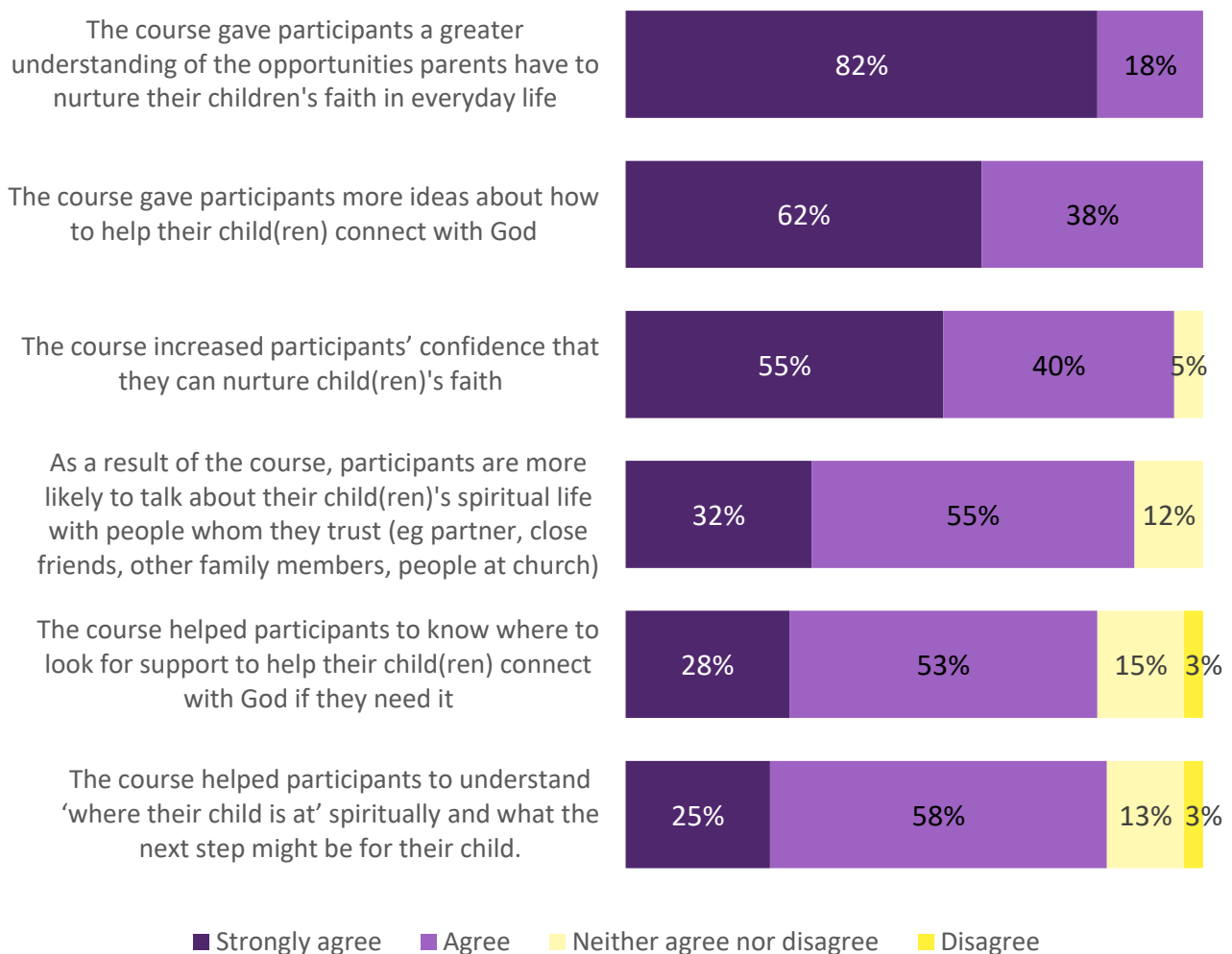


Fewer parents agreed that they were more confident than they were before, compared to the other statements. It's not clear what the reasons for this might have been. It may be that they were already confident, although full-text responses suggest that this is unlikely to be the case, or it may be that the resources they accessed focused more on tips and ideas than on confidence building.

Parents (and church workers who were also parents) who had attended courses (n=71) were also asked about the outcomes of those courses. Considerably more parents who had attended courses strongly agreed on all the outcomes in the chart below than those who had only used email, web or print resources.



Course leaders were also asked to consider how well they felt that the course had achieved its outcomes for participants (n=60).



As can be seen, course leaders were far more confident that the course had given participants an understanding of opportunities, ideas about how to help their children connect with God, and confidence, than they were about the course supporting participants to talk about their children's spiritual life, know where to look for support or better understand 'where their child is at' spiritually. This was also reflected in the interviews with parents and church workers.

4.2 Practical tools to support children

In both the survey and the interviews, parents appreciated having practical tools to support children in growing in faith. In the survey, parents (including church workers who were also parents) who had attended courses identified specific ideas from those courses as particularly important for them: in particular 'chat and catch', framing and creating windows from the Parenting for Faith course.⁴

A smaller number of parents who had attended courses highlighted specific resources that they had used, for example the '101 ways to chat with God' question grid.

I have printed out the grid with the different frames with questions in and we've used them at the dinner time. [church worker who is also a parent, survey response]

One thing pinged up a few months ago, I think was probably during lockdown. They shared something about '101 ways to get your children talking to God'. And it was a downloadable sheet of 101 statements of ideas of how you could get your children, either as a parent or as a leader, to talk to God. It said things like, 'Tell God about your favourite board game' or 'Tell God what makes you laugh'. It was a mixture of what seems like really trivial things, but then also really deep things. And I loved that, because it didn't give anybody a lecture about who God is, or how you can talk to him or anything. It just spoke volumes about what/ who I think God is and who I'd like to share with other people. So I printed that out and put it in our toilet. I didn't sort of say 'Right kids, you're going to do this now.' I don't actually know if they've even read it. Maybe they did. Maybe they didn't. But I know I did. Even as an adult, I'm still learning huge amounts from stuff that's meant for children. [parent interview response]

Parents who had engaged only with the website, emails and books were more likely to identify specific resources that they had used, with 18 out of 37 parents identifying a specific book, video or web-based resource as being particularly useful for them. These included book recommendations from the podcasts/videos, the podcasts themselves, the Big Scrumptious Faith-Filled Feast or printables such as the '101 ways to chat with God'. This group of parents were also more likely than those who had attended courses to identify more general ideas that had resonated with them, for example on the unique role of parents or the shift from God-smart to God-connected. A recurring

⁴ It should be noted that almost all parents who had attended courses had attended either the Parenting for Faith course or the Parenting as a Church Leader one-day course. Fewer than five parents had attended a Raising Faith course.

theme in the survey responses, interviews and monitoring data was parents feeling equipped to be more 'intentional' about how they nurtured their children's faith.

4.2.1 Modelling faith in the everyday

One of the ideas that resonated most for parents was that of letting children see how the parent connects with God – known within Parenting for Faith as 'creating windows' but also emphasised within the Raising Faith course. Many parents had not previously recognised that their relationship with God was primarily conducted out of sight or hearing of their children – whether this was on the train or after children had gone to bed, or simply in silence. Both parents and church workers described the idea of creating windows as a simple but profound change. Several parents pointed out that they had realised that children may not be able to understand what prayer, connecting with God, having a relationship with God or having quiet time really look like unless it was modelled for them.

I was brought up in a Christian household but my parents never modelled it [a parenting for faith approach] and I didn't become a Christian. I realised that modelling is important. I never heard my parents praying out loud. Children don't know what it looks like to have a relationship with God unless you show them. [parent interview response]

According to a few parents, this seemed to be an idea that had not necessarily occurred to parents before but was obvious once it had been pointed out.

They made so much sense. Once you've seen them you think, 'Oh, of course that makes so much sense' – it gives it a language and a framework which helps hang everything else on. [parent interview response]

Parents responded to this approach in a variety of ways, including praying out loud more, reading the Bible in front of their children more often, changing the times when they prayed so that their children would be awake and see them or shifting their routine. One father chose to pray at home instead of on the train so that his children would see him. He saw this as a way of making his relationship with God 'really normal' and 'just a commonplace thing.'

Some parents could see that this had an impact on their own children, as in this survey response and several other survey and interview responses.

Creating windows has been excellent – I hadn't really recognised how much of my connecting with God was private, so my kids couldn't really understand what 'being with God' time was. Especially since lockdown, my time with God includes my children, so we connect with God together. I'm more intentional about verbalising my prayers through the day, so they can see how I'm connecting with God throughout (rather than a prayer in my head). It's been brilliant, as I've seen my children connecting with God in their own way, and prayer becoming a natural response through all of life together. [parent survey response]

One parent also mentioned that being more intentional about modelling her faith was helpful for her as a parent as well as for her children. She found that intentionally saying that she was going to talk to God, if her children were 'kicking off or being difficult' gave her 'a moment to breathe and ... just kind of calm down and give stuff to God.'

4.2.2 Creating space for everyday conversations about faith

A smaller number of parents talked about finding ways to bring conversations about faith into the everyday as an important change that had resulted from engaging with the Kitchen Table Project or Parenting for Faith. For one parent, her engagement with Parenting for Faith enabled her to see talking about faith as more of an everyday occurrence rather than something that needed to be built up to.

I think it's definitely helped me talk about faith and changed how I approach faith with my kids. Before it felt like this kind of big, scary burden. A big responsibility I guess. Worrying about how you communicate faith well and how you help the kids in their faith journey. But the Parenting for Faith model is a lot more freeing and takes the pressure off, because it's just that you approach faith as you would other everyday life things. So it's not like 'now I have to sit down and have this massive conversation'. It's like, just as you're walking along, you can just drop things into conversation. [parent interview response]

In a similar vein, another parent talked about having worship music on in the car as an opportunity to frame some of the key concepts for their foster children and support them to understand what the songs were actually talking about.

Some survey respondents referred to using some of the resources 'at the dinner table,' as mentioned above. In relation to this, one parent talked about his experience of using the Big Scrumptious Faith-Filled Feast as an opportunity to have a conversation with his family about God.

The Big Faith Filled Feast was about having a meal together and using that as an opportunity to 'do church,' and share your faith stories and things that God's done for you. All you're doing is creating a bit of an environment and space for that conversation to happen. Not praying prayers that are so lofty that your kids can't understand what it is you are praying but stuff that really makes sense, hearing from them, inspiring them. [parent interview response]

In summary, parents appreciated the practical tools and resources that enabled them to bring faith into their everyday lives with their children and to be more intentional about both modelling that faith (creating windows) and talking to children about faith, without this needing to be a 'big serious thing.'

4.3 A child-centred approach

Both in the surveys and in the interviews, parents described taking a more child-led and child-centred approach to nurturing children's faith as a key outcome of their encounters with the Kitchen Table Project and Parenting for Faith. One parent mentioned that the course had been a catalyst for her seeking to listen and understand her children's viewpoints rather than telling them what to do.

[Since the sessions] I've been making more time to talk. I'm a typical teacher, it's a bit 'do what I say' and everyone follows me. My boys are at the challenging age of 12 or 13 and someone in the session had said the value of listening to, 'Why should we start the day off praying?' or 'Why should we pray at bedtime?' and

not just saying, 'Because I say so'. Chatting about reasons why and bringing them on board. Asking 'Why are you saying no?' and 'What's your feelings?' [parent interview response]

Another parent mentioned in an interview how the broad approach of Parenting for Faith has encouraged her to 'get down to the children's level' and seek to understand what's going on for them.

It also reminds me to do things like getting down to the children's level and actually saying, 'What's wrong? Why do you want to do that?' for example. It's general parenting advice and I like the way it takes the pressure off and just says, 'Look, be yourself, try to model being a good person and try to model your faith to the children.' Rather than focusing on teach them this, teach them that, get them into Sunday school, get them into church, I use them as a reminder and a thought catalyst. [parent interview response]

What's striking about this response is the shift from 'teach them this, teach them that' to 'getting down to the children's level' (and indeed 'being yourself,' which is discussed in section 4.4.1 below). This shift in approach was frequently noted by parents and church workers. As can be seen in the above response, and echoed in several others, the shift away from a need to 'teach them this, teach them that' took the pressure off parents and enabled them to adapt to their children's specific needs and interests.

Another idea that led to parents taking a more child-centred approach was the idea that everyone encounters and responds to God in their own way. Both church workers and parents identified this as a key turning point for some parents, particularly those with more than one child, in becoming more child-led in their approach.

Two parents really found looking at the different ways we all connect with God really helpful, especially as their children are different to each other. Discussing the different ways we all connect with God was useful for them and helped them to identify different techniques they could use with their children. [church worker survey response]

One idea that has helped is recognising that we each have our own unique way we encounter God best – recognising that for us as parents has better equipped us to be sensitive to how our children best engage (rather than trying to force them both into the same box). [parent survey response]

Parents who had engaged with Parenting for Faith tended not to use the term 'surfing the waves' in interviews, when taking a more child-centred approach, although two survey respondents identified 'surfing the waves' as a way of supporting them to know 'when to encourage things and not to worry if they aren't interested.' However, they were clearly drawing on this concept in the ways that they thought about and responded to their children's interests and questions.

Some parents showed very deep sensitivity to their children's specific needs, interests and qualities, enabling them to find ways of nurturing faith that drew on their children's particular interests or tendencies.

My middle boy is quite a highly sensitive child. So I guess he's kind of more aware of God, and the world and nature. So that might just be more conversations about, 'Oh, wow, isn't that amazing that God made that.' Those kind of conversations, or he might be talking about, 'Oh, it's so cool that God made a car,' and I'll say, 'Actually, that was a person but God made a person.' He's trying to work out how everything works. [parent interview response]

That was really helpful because I think my daughter is more creative than I am and more expressive in arts. When we've got worship music on it's tempting to say, 'Let's dance,' but she said, 'I just want to draw a picture about God's love', so it's been helpful for me to realise, 'Oh yeah, there are other ways of worshipping or hearing what God's speaking.' So that was really helpful for me and stuck with me. [parent interview response]

4.3.1 Children having their own, independent, relationship with God

A central idea in both programmes is that children can have their own, direct, independent relationship with God, unmediated by either priests or parents. A small number of parents picked this up as the most transformative, if challenging, idea from their engagement with the Vine Programme.

The idea about not being the high priest also really impacted me and has made me more intentional in encouraging my children to connect directly with God themselves rather than placing myself in the role of intermediary. [parent, survey response]

I try to use these everyday bits to connect to my children and talk to them about Jesus and his way of thinking about them. At bedtime we sometimes pray with the idea of 'which three things shall we tell Jesus about tonight.' That has been very different from what I did before ... asking them to have that relationship instead of it being them, me and then God [the respondent gestured with her hands to show that before she was in the middle of them and God, brokering the contact, and now it is direct between them]. I teach them now that they can talk directly to God. I'm on this journey to try to help them hear God's voice. That's more difficult because children don't have the same way of connecting, so I'm challenged in this area. [parent interview response]

This is a challenging idea in that it fundamentally transforms both the individual's relationship with God and the child's relationship with the parent, in parallel and connected ways. The individual's relationship with God is their own, direct and unmediated. Others may facilitate or support, but cannot direct that relationship. This is true of both children and adults. This can be challenging for parents who, perhaps, may not have grown up with the same freedom in their own relationship with God. At the same time, the child's relationship with the parent is transformed by this idea. The parent is not, and cannot be, the expert on God or on the child's relationship with God. All that the parent can do is model their own journey and facilitate or support the child's relationship. For some parents, this meant re-thinking their understanding of children's spirituality. Parents rarely talked about this directly, but church workers tended to mention it as a key outcome for parents and within their wider church context.

The thing that's been most valuable for me personally, in terms of looking at our congregation, is giving people base values. So just the idea that, 'Oh, actually my children *can* hear from God,' and they can communicate with God, even though they're only three or four, or whatever age they are. I think doing the Parenting for Faith course increases people's expectations of what their children can do and hear from God. [church worker interview response]

I think for some there was a realisation that: 'You know what, children are incredibly spiritual, and we could be the ones who are actually stunting their growth, because of the way we perceive they should be following God or the way we want to be the dictators of how children's faith is, when actually it's not up to us to make our children Christians.' They're the ones who are spiritual. They're the ones who can have that relationship with God ... So I think some parents realised that, actually, it was a challenge to their theology. It certainly was [a challenge to] mine. [church worker interview response]

This understanding of the spirituality of the child, and of the relationship between the individual and God, is perhaps better aligned to some traditions of Christianity than others – and this was seen in the traditions that the interview respondents came from. Interview respondents tended to be from 'low church' Anglican traditions or Free Churches, where the idea that the individual can communicate directly with God, unmediated by priests, is perhaps more inherent to those churches' approach than it might be in, for example, 'high church' Anglican or Catholic churches.

As challenging as this idea can be, some parents found it powerfully transformative, even empowering. One church worker described a parent realising that she wanted her children to 'grow more like Jesus, not like her.' Another parent described this approach as more 'life-giving' than 'just reading a Bible story with a child and them then knowing that story' because 'it makes it a real experience for them rather than just head knowledge.'

4.3.2 'Chat and catch' as part of a child's developing relationship with God

For many survey and interview respondents, 'chat and catch' was the idea that most strongly resonated and was easiest to implement in their daily lives. The below are typical survey responses from parents about the difference that chat and catch has made to their faith lives as families.

Chat and catch has changed the way we pray together at bedtime completely. Instead of me praying for the girls I do things like, 'Let's ask God a question. Let's ask him what game he would like to play with us. Let's ask him what he likes about you.' [parent survey response]

Chat and Catch is now a regular occurrence in our house and my toddler now sits and plays and suddenly starts whispering to chat to God as she plays or eats. [parent survey response]

Parents also tended to say that chat and catch made prayer more 'accessible' to their children and less formulaic. This was particularly true for parents who had grown up with more formulaic or ritualised approaches to prayer, who could immediately see the difference between their own experience and chat and catch.

And that kind of chatting and catching thing, that's a very different way of talking with God than I grew up with. And that's something that I've used when I've led some of the kids' sessions and you're telling Jesus a joke, some of those kind of ideas. The kids have really appreciated that and had fun with that, those kinds of different ideas. [parent interview response]

One parent, whose own approach was less formal, felt reassured that they could allow their children to 'say what they want' to God and build a relationship without being overly focused on theological correctness.

But I just want to encourage them [with] whatever you want to say to God, you can say, because it's just an open two-way communication. I know that, in my faith, when I'm angry I just pray and I don't cover stuff up. And I'm one of those people that thinks God can take it and I just sort of like telling him my feelings. I want them to feel that they can just do that whenever they want too. One of them, his bedtime prayer is: 'Jesus keep the bad guys away.' He prays to the police, 'Put the bad guys in jail and Jesus help the bad guys turn into good guys.' And the other one prays, 'Jesus, thank you for everybody.' Lots of people would go, 'That's theologically not correct'. But I feel like they're saying what they want to God and that's good enough for me. They're five and a half.

However, you want to define a personal relationship with God. That's more important than going, 'That little bit of theology is not right.' The relationship is the most important thing, because we can always work out the theology after, because we'll have slightly different opinions. But actually the empowerment of feeling that direct connection, that you can just pray to God, that's something that you can only model and encourage over time. [parent interview response]

Several parents also saw 'chat and catch' as a catalyst for shifting the relationship between themselves, their children and God. Whereas previously they might have prayed with or for their children, they now encourage their children to chat directly to God, or Jesus, and tell Him about their day or ask Him questions. Parents talked about this as 'facilitating a direct connection with God' or 'encouraging their direct connection with God.'

Some parents had also previously been fearful of encouraging their children to 'catch' from God directly, out of concern that children might not 'catch' anything.

Putting that [chat and catch] into practice and giving them space to catch from God themselves was a bit daunting at first – you think what if they don't hear from God, you think that will put them off. But actually it really surprised me that they did catch from God.

Not all children did catch from God – which caused some concern for some parents —and in some families one sibling took more naturally to the 'chat and catch' approach than another. However, most parents who talked about 'chat and catch' said that their children did 'catch' from God, albeit not necessarily in ways that the parent would have expected.

4.3.3 God-connected as opposed to God-smart

For most parents, the idea of God-connected as opposed to God-smart did not come out strongly in interviews. However, for two parents and one church worker this was a key idea that had impacted on their views and strongly illustrated the difference between how they had grown up themselves and how they wanted to parent their children. One parent summed this up as follows.

And the language of raising ... how does she phrase it ... not just kids that know about God but kids that know God. The idea of really helping them and giving them opportunities to connect with God for themselves, that's been really helpful. It's been something I wanted to do but I'd maybe fallen into a trap of it being about them knowing about God and doing our bible story at bedtime rather than helping [them] personally connect with God for themselves. [parent survey response]

The other parent linked the idea of being God-smart as opposed to God-connected to the reasons why many people might come to reject the faith they had grown up with.

I think very early on the God-smart versus God-connected thing led to quite interesting discussions. They wanted to talk a lot about [things] from that session, I think why you might leave. We'd looked at some statistics before, how many children are leaving the church from Christian households. And I think that kind of played a big role in that conversation actually, if you're God-smart, you're more likely to think it doesn't apply to me, it's just stories, whereas if you feel God-connected, you know that God is real. And so I think that was quite an interesting [conversation]. [parent interview response]

However, on the whole this seemed to be less salient for parents than the idea that children's relationship with God was direct and independent.

4.4 Being freed from the need to 'get it right'

And I think even the more mature Christians who've come have felt like there's a tick list they need to do to get their kids to turn out okay at the end. [church worker interview]

For both parents and church workers, this was the outcome that came through most strongly from the interviews. Parents' engagement with the Vine Programme supported them to let go of a need to 'get everything right'. It also freed them from a rigid or singular model of what a child's developing faith should look like and indeed what their own faith should look like.

We have already seen that some parents had previously identified faith development with learning Bible verses or knowing the stories, rather than having a vibrant, independent relationship with God, and that their understanding had shifted. We have also seen that there was a clear shift in understanding of the role of the parent, from directing the child's relationship with God to facilitating and making space for it. At the same time, the Vine Programme strongly emphasised that parents, wherever they are in their own faith journey, are perfectly positioned to nurture their children's faith. Parents and church workers both spoke about how these shifts in understanding could be 'releasing' or 'freeing.'

I think it's definitely released us to not worry about things as much. I think one of the things they teach towards the beginning is like, it's not about 'they've got to memorise this verse'. But it teaches us that it's in God's hands. Like, we're just there to love them. [parent interview response]

I think parents make a massive deal out of getting it right, you know. 'I've got to get my child's faith journey right. And I've got to make them Christians. It's all my responsibility. And if I don't get it right, and they fall away from church, then I'll never get it back; it's all my fault.' And I think people realise actually, they need to cut themselves a bit of slack. [church worker interview response]

This was challenging for some parents, particularly those who admitted to a more 'controlling' approach in their general parenting. For one parent, the realisation that it was 'not my job to be their relationship, it's my job to give them space' was particularly difficult because, as she said, she liked to think that she was in control and so 'the faith work of "let go and let God" in parenting is a huge test of that.'

There was a delicate balance between parents feeling perfectly positioned to nurture their children's faith and feeling pressured or overly responsible. Two parents mentioned this in interviews but felt that overall the pressure on them had been released through their participation in the Vine Programme. As one parent mentioned, 'It's very releasing to be encouraged that you're the person that God has designed for these kids.'

This sense of freedom from needing to get everything right released parents to 'try new things' and worry less if they didn't work.

I would say the whole course was very releasing. You didn't go away thinking you had to do all these things. But I came away feeling excited to have a chat with him [her son] about it. And if it doesn't go well, it's okay because we'll get another chance. [parent interview response]

Parents and church workers emphasised that the non-judgmental and down-to-earth approach of the courses and materials supported parents to feel more equipped and less fixed on getting everything right. In recognising from the start that all families are different, the materials offer space for parents to adapt the ideas to their own contexts. Both parents and church workers also noted that the materials generally start from the perspective that parents are already nurturing their children's faith. Some parents, in both the survey and the interviews, reported being reassured that their approach was on the right lines.

It's made me feel more confident that I'm doing things vaguely right. It's built me up in terms of 'these are great tips, I now know how to tackle things'. I've got more tools in my belt. [parent interview response]

Church workers who ran courses were sometimes able to see children's developing faith and reassure parents that they were already nurturing their children's faith, which further developed parents' confidence.

And so, sometimes one of the lovely things about the course has been that we knew some of the children already and were able to say, 'Your so-and-so did that the other day, and that didn't come from nowhere. When she told us the story

about when she did whatever she did with you. That was a moment right there.’ And sometimes as parents I think you do things with your children and your hope is that that's gone in but you don't necessarily know. And somebody else sometimes is the person that sees that being lived out and it's really lovely to be able to go, ‘Yeah, they're doing it, absolutely they're doing it.’ [church worker interview response]

Some parents expressed guilt that they were not doing enough. Both parents and church workers recognised that feeling guilty about not doing enough, or feeling overly responsible, could be paralysing and lead to parents doing even less to nurture their children's faith. This continued to be a barrier for some parents and made it more difficult to nurture their children's faith at home.

For a whole host of reasons we've not given up on that responsibility, but it just feels too much of a burden. And therefore, rather than doing it badly, quite a lot of us don't do it at all. And all the resources in the world don't make it easier to do. I think it just adds to the guilt that you're not doing it that way. [parent interview response]

Several church workers recognised that they needed to balance providing resources for parents with not burdening them with extra things to do, particularly during the extended period of lockdown when they recognised that some parents were struggling with the added pressures of working from home and home-schooling. This response was typical.

I think for a lot of people that feels like homework that they have to then do. Some people love it. But I think for a lot of people it's like oh, here's another thing that I feel bad about because I've not done it. And so I think that's a big thing in the mix of how you encourage people to do things without them feeling like you're trying to make them do more work. [church worker interview response]

4.4.1 Modelling an authentic, imperfect faith

Being freed from the need to be the expert and to get everything right also supported parents to model their faith as it is, rather than as they wished it to be or felt it ‘should’ be.

I've just started engaging with the material but was inspired and challenged by the idea that we do not have to model a perfect walk with God but to model a walk with God that takes into account all the struggles and difficulties. Takes a lot of pressure off to try and achieve a perfect walk with God to model. [parent survey response]

Parents described both being more ‘intentional’ about talking about their faith with their children and being more ‘authentic’ about how they did this. This could be about the struggles they found in fitting time with God into a busy day, or their doubts and questions about their own faith journey.

I said to my daughter the other day, ‘I had a bit of a wobble – I encountered this situation and I really wondered what on earth God was doing in that situation.’ And I probably wouldn't have thought about showing that much candour, authenticity, honesty about my faith, and the struggles of it, if I hadn't seen [the Parenting for Faith materials]. [parent interview, Sam]

This also freed parents from the need to have all the answers when their children asked difficult questions about faith. Another parent talked about thinking through questions of faith alongside her children and modelling how she approached doubt or questioning, rather than assuming that she needed to have the right answer.

While it is too early to tell at this stage, it may be that authenticity is key to sustaining faith. If a child grows up with an idealised or ritualised version of faith then they may struggle when they first encounter doubt or have questions that cannot easily be answered. Seeing their parents' questions and struggles may be one way for children to understand that faith is not always straightforward.

4.5 Deepening parents' own faith

Doing the course for the first time has been a great learning curve. I think one of the biggest things for those running it is realising that everyone is on a different part of the journey and how they may disagree with concepts because of their own faith journeys. Knowing how to reassure and direct parents to further information is good. [church worker survey response]

Church workers found that the courses, in particular, nurtured parents' own faith as well as supporting them to nurture their children's faith. Parents, however, tended not to mention this.

In some churches, many parents who were accessing the courses were newer in their own faith journeys and therefore the opportunity to explore their own faith was also important. In others, parents might have been more likely to be 'mature Christians' but not always having had opportunities to reflect on their own views and the impact on their parenting. Some church workers picked out the aspects of the course that invited parents to reflect on their own views of God as important for parents in terms of their own faith journeys.

Because I think probably what we found is a lot of people will pick the similar ones [statements about what God is like]. But seeing the whole of God is challenging for people's own view of God as well as for how they do that with kids. They're like, 'Oh, this is what I think and that's how that affects what I do. And then how I get down to my kids, I guess, as well. I see God in this way. I see faith in this way. So that's how I parent, and how I teach kids about God is this way because this is how I did it.' [church worker interview response]

One parent also talked about how reflecting on their own views of God helped them to understand more about how to communicate these to children so that they did not end up with misconceptions.

One of the early sessions talks about how we actually perceive God as adults, like different characteristics of God, which aren't a problem but on their own might be misinterpreted. If we only emphasise that to our child, they could get a slightly warped view of God. So, for example, God always being there. So I'm comfortable with God always being there. But [my three-year-old son] might be, [puts on a scared voice] 'He's always there, argh.' Sometimes when I pray with him I say 'Jesus is always with you'. I'm trying to say that as a comforting thing. But I could come into his room at midnight and wonder, 'Why are you crying?' and he might

say, 'I'm scared Jesus is still here'. I could actually do some damaging things because, as an adult, we have the full picture of God. And we just give snippets to our children. So that's just got me thinking when I talk to [my son] about God and what we believe. Something I've got to remember is his brain is less developed than mine. So that's one of the biggest things, that it's changed my mentality I'd say. [parent interview response]

'Chat and catch' was particularly eye-opening for some parents, as, according to some church workers who were interviewed, some parents on the courses had struggled to catch from God themselves and were therefore particularly nervous about trying this technique out with their children.

The part that astounded most people was catching from God. Most people didn't really consider that kids could hear from God so this was quite eye-opening for them. [survey response, church worker]

Church workers told powerful stories about their experiences of trying out 'chat and catch' with parents during the course itself, including this one.

It was in the catching session that we had one of the best stories. It became very obvious that there were parents who really struggled hearing from God. And actually they were like, 'How am I going to be able to encourage my child to be able to hear from God if I don't believe I can hear from God either?' And that was like, 'Whoa, okay. That's really interesting.' And I think actually, once one person said it lots of other people put their hand up and said, 'Actually, do you know what? I think I struggle from hearing from God.'

So we actually did, there was a practical bit where we did a bit of chat and catch. And I think Becky Sedgwick from Parenting for Faith always uses the question. If you could play one game with God, what would it be? And that was the question. And the parents just sat there and spoke to God about it. And then we followed up with 'Why that game, God?' And it was really interesting, going around the room, then, hearing what these parents' games were. I think one parent said the game I got was Russian roulette, or something. But more than that, that that is the first time I feel like I've ever clearly heard from God. And it was amazing that, you know, forget doing this for kids, our adults to need to do chat and catch. And so this lady just sort of came out of the session going, 'I just cannot believe that I've come to this session and I've clearly heard from God for the first time. And I can't wait to go back and do this with my child.' And I was thinking, wow, this whole eight weeks is worth it just for that, it really is. [church worker interview response]

4.6 Conversations with trusted others

Course leaders were, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, less confident that the courses had encouraged participants to talk about their children's spiritual life with trusted others, within and outside their church. In both surveys and interviews, parents tended to mention this as a key outcome only rarely. Some church workers, however, saw the open conversations during the

sessions and the opportunity to share honestly and build community as an important aspect of the course.

It was as much about them being sociable together, and talking about what it was to parent, as it was about being there to talk about the parenting course itself. I think they got something from it by socialising together as well. [church worker interview response].

Some parents also strongly appreciated having a space in which they could talk openly about the challenges of parenting.

The best thing about it was coming together to chat about our families and what we're doing. It's a hard job, parenting. Creating that environment for us all to talk was great. We're friends anyway but having that specific time to chat about our families and our church and bringing up our children in a faith environment was great. There were lots of little things I got from that. [parent interview response]

Some church workers and parents saw friendships form among the groups that were sustained after the course, whether formally through home groups or informally.

I particularly love the way our parents on the course seem to have connected more through it, with more people sharing frustrations, giving advice, and celebrating successes together.

One group of parents who had gone through the Parenting for Faith course together as a group continued to meet as prayer partners and, when possible, to meet as families with their children.

The three men and three women [who did the course together as a small group] have gone on to be kind of prayer partners together. And so that's kind of developed off the back of it, which has been really nice. And over lockdown we met up – the three families – a bit in the summer when things were a bit easier to do kids' church in the park ... which worked quite well. So it definitely it worked really well doing it. And then it's definitely benefited our relationships, our friendships and our kids' friendships as well. [parent interview response]

It was not clear that all parents experienced this or that it was sustained in all groups or churches. In some cases, the relationships that had been developed were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown, which made it more difficult for people to get together and continue the conversation.

Some church cultures may make it more difficult for parents to share openly with each other. One parent, who had accessed the materials outside of the context of her church, expressed her frustration at not being able to have deep conversations with other parents in her church.

And I was frustrated with the lack of conversation that PFF had taught me to expect about spiritual faith. I wanted more of those conversations where people were talking about how they pray with their children, and which stories their children like – the sorts of conversations I can have with my mum and sister but couldn't have with people at church who I saw every week. [parent interview response]

According to this parent, this was because of the particular church context, in which church members tended to be careful about what they shared with each other.

Another parent expressed his feelings of difficulty when talking about faith in any context.

And like, I mean ... we were totally okay talking about my football team, or what we follow on Twitter or whatever. And yet, this thing [faith], which is way more important than those things, you just feel like there's not the space.

He felt that this impacted parents' confidence to talk about faith even at home, because they may be used to not talking about it in other contexts. He found Parenting for Faith a useful corrective to that, particularly the very open approach to talking about faith.

I did like the woman in the videos. I did like the fact that she was like undaunted, that she was completely okay with her faith – that way. And that didn't mean that she thought it was perfect but she was like, this is my thing. And, you know, totally okay talking about it. [parent interview response]

This was echoed by another parent who felt more confident in talking about her faith with others as a result of Parenting for Faith, but also acknowledged that she felt that there was a cultural reticence to talk about faith or spiritual life in the UK.

I don't think people talk about their spiritual lives much at all and PFF has given me confidence that people think you're weird [if you do talk about it] and that's okay, or they don't and they think, 'Wow, that's not how I think about prayer.' [parent interview response]

4.7 Summary and conclusions

Almost twice as many parents (including church worker parents) who attended courses strongly agreed that the main outcomes of the programme had been achieved than those who had engaged with web and print resources only. In both cases, fewer parents strongly agreed that they had gained confidence compared to those that strongly agreed that they had a greater understanding of opportunities to nurture children's faith, or had more ideas to do so.

While many parents in the survey and interviews talked about practical changes they had made to more intentionally nurture children's faith, this was often underpinned by a key insight about children's relationship with God. Parents' insight that children had, from a very early age, their own direct, unmediated relationship with God led, in many cases, to several related outcomes. These included taking a child-centred approach to nurturing faith, letting go of expectations about 'getting it right' or what 'right' looked like, and modelling their own faith in a more authentic way. Authenticity may be a crucial element in developing a faith that is sustainable through the twists and turns of life, so this may be worth exploring further.

In some cases, the courses also supported parents to engage more deeply with their own faith. 'Chat and catch,' in particular, provided some parents with an opportunity to explore their own direct, unmediated relationship with God in a new way.

While in some cases, parents and church workers felt that the course enabled parents to talk more with others about their child's spiritual life, more could be done to facilitate this outcome and to create community, as it remained a gap for some churches and parents.

5 CHILDREN'S RESPONSES

In both the survey and interviews, parents and church workers told stories about the difference that the Kitchen Table Project and Parenting for Faith had made to children's engagement with faith or relationship with God. Several families mentioned having more open discussions about faith with their children and their children participating more actively in those conversations.

We have started something called Dinner table Discussions which is a weekly question to get families to talk to each other. And my girls love them! One in particular was, 'If you could talk to the world right now what would you say? Or what would God say to the world?' My five-year-old answered, 'God would say I love you and I would tell them he is magic,' which melted my heart! And as my three-year-old added 'like Elsa', it made me chuckle. But it did in fact lead onto a very good discussion about our awesome miracle-working God. [parent survey response]

Parents talked about these discussions being sparked by worship music or by things that children were hearing in church, including online church. For one parent, their child being able to hear adult sermons in lockdown had sparked deeper questions that surprised the parent as they thought their child had not been engaging with online church services.

Parents and church workers also mentioned children becoming more interested in their parents' quiet time and either choosing to have their own quiet time or copying their parents. One parent mentioned their son choosing to play board games with God in his quiet time. Another parent felt that things had changed quite deeply for her son because he had seen faith modelled at home more consistently during the period when he was home-schooled.

The number of times my husband and I have said this year, 'Wow, something's changed this year.' We feel he definitely believes in Jesus this year. That has really changed. I think it's been having more time at home together in the pandemic and the opportunity to chat about things and model things more often. When kids are in school you have to be more intentional about sharing what's in your head. Having space in the day to say, 'I feel sad, I've just been chatting to Jesus about that' is harder. I would put it down to him seeing it modelled more. As he's my oldest I'm not sure at what age he relates to things or how understanding changes with age, but from what we've seen it makes me more on board with nurturing faith at home. [parent interview response]

On occasion, church workers saw in their children's work that children had responded to changes in their parents' routines. One church worker, speaking of a parent who had changed his routine to pray at home in front of the children rather than on the train away from them, said:

And within that family, we then had his daughter. There's just something in her that that clicked and changed. Suddenly she was fundraising and baking cakes, and it just ... the application of the faith became a lot more real to her. [church worker interview response].

5.1 Children's varied responses to 'chat and catch'

Parents most often talked about their children's independent relationship with God, facilitated by the idea of 'chat and catch.' Some parents expressed in interviews how surprised they were that their children did catch from God and were able to express what they had 'caught' in different ways.

Actually, it really surprised me that they did catch from God. They were really special moments. My six year old, at a bedtime – we've not done it every bedtime, it's been as and when. We had a time when we were quiet and allowing her space; I didn't know how she'd handle it but she got really excited and she said, 'God's my dad!' It was a really lovely moment. [parent interview response]

My husband was praying with my daughter (7) and [they] were asking God questions. She asked God, 'What do you think of me?' She had one word in her mind, 'diamond'. She didn't really understand, so my husband explained about what diamonds are like (precious, beautiful, etc etc) to which her response was 'Wow, God thinks that about me?!' It has continued to be an encouragement to her months and months later. When we went away in the summer she spent her holiday money on a diamond shaped magnet so that 'when I don't feel it I can be reminded what God thinks'. [parent survey response]

When we first started chat and catch we introduced [it] at bedtime and gradually let her do it by herself (after using prompts several weeks before hand). One eve I asked my daughter 'What did you chat to God about?' she replied 'baby Jesus is with Mary and me and we playing toy cars and bridge and Mary sings baa baa pink sheep.' I replied 'that sounds like you had fun playing with baby Jesus'. My daughter then paused whispered into her hands, waited and then said 'mummy baby Jesus says great job.' I had had a real downer of a day and was feeling quite low at that point and those were words that I desperately needed to hear. I replied 'thank you for sharing that with me, it made mummy feel very happy to hear that'. It was just such a special moment and the first time she had caught something for someone else to pass along. We have had several similar moments since. [parent survey response]

And it applies for all the ages. For my teenager over the lockdown period we had more time to have some devotional times together; I did it quite differently in terms of allowing more space to catch from God themselves – they were excited about those times, to meet in the mornings and hear from God themselves and there have been significant moments that they've journaled or kept hold of. [parent interview response]

Some parents expressed concern that their children had not yet 'caught' from God or found it difficult to catch from God. In the below interview, the parent

My youngest has not engaged anywhere nearly as well as my eldest. My youngest is a completely different personality type. He hasn't heard God speak to him. When he was two he didn't hear God talk back to him when he asked him what

his favourite colour was. He's a stubborn character and I think he's decided there is no God; he kicked books out of my hand and I think he was really cross. He hears me and my eldest talk about the impact and he hasn't had that experience of hearing God speak. I think my youngest will need someone else to help him talk about it because I am now the wrong person to engage him in these conversations. He will join in conversations and sing songs but he gets cross. [parent interview response]

One church worker who is also a parent spoke about how, for children who are used to chat and catch, the sense of doubt still arises, often still phrased as: 'Well, I don't hear God.' In her case, she 'expected that to be lessened by the fact that we've introduced the different ways of catching from the beginning.' They have found that they need to unpack this in more detail with children, particularly to be able to explore the idea of 'catching in your mind' and how this might differ from 'just my imagination.' This particular church worker noted that this sense of doubt might be a natural part of the faith journey. However, other parents who felt that their children struggled to catch from God were sometimes more concerned about this and about the impact it might have on their child's faith, particularly if a sibling was catching from God more readily or talking about it more.

5.2 Adapting to children's needs and circumstances

A number of parents who were interviewed had thought carefully about their child's particular needs, interests and personality type and had found ways to facilitate their children's connection with God.

Our eldest loves reading the Bible, absolutely loves it. He'll reasonably frequently just take himself off to read the Bible. He loves reading the Psalms and he says he gets a really nice feeling when he's reading the Psalms. But try to get that kid to pray out loud and it's like trying to get water from a stone. Getting him to join in, whether it's in a kind of a fellowship group, or home church, he just really does not want to. In some ways that fits with his character – until he's comfy with something he holds right back. I've got my guesses as to what's going on there. I think he's got much more of a cerebral understanding and he feels comfy reading the Bible, and he can feel a connection to God with that. But if he doesn't feel much of a connection with God yet, and you can't control that, but you can control what you're reading. If he doesn't feel that he understands the kind of 'rules of that engagement' I think that he's probably holding right back on that one right now. Until he feels that he's kind of got it. When he's comfy, then I think he'll engage more readily. [parent interview response]

For this parent, as for many others, supporting their child to engage in ways that work for them took the pressure off them needing their child to engage in particular ways that might not be appropriate. One parent talked about how the standard model of reading the Bible and journaling would not work for her dyslexic child, so she found other ways to engage him, including simply asking him questions that he would readily answer.

So we're just figuring out what works. And it's different every day, of course.
[parent interview response]

5.2.1 Ages and stages

Some parents talked about engaging with their children in ways that were appropriate for their age and stage of development. One example was described in section 4.3, where a parent had decided to enable her five-year-old children to develop their personal relationship with God first, and then explore the theological nuances as they got older.

Parents of very young children sometimes found it harder to see how they were responding to more intentional parenting for faith, because they were so young. In some cases, though, parents were surprised at what very young children came up with, as in this example:

Because they're young, it's easy to dismiss things. Our four-year-old loves reading Bible stories and puts me to shame sometimes. It's opened up some really lovely conversations. There's definitely things going on in their hearts even though they're really young. I've been quite challenged as I started Couch to 5K recently and I mentioned I needed a new playlist to listen to and my daughter said, 'Why don't you listen to the Bible!' and I thought: 'She's right!' And I realised maybe it was God speaking to me through her and saying, 'You need to spend more time in my Word.' So little things like that show that there's a little spark inside them and it's our job to fan it into a bigger flame as they grow up. [parent interview response]

Parents of older children sometimes found that their approaches needed to change as children moved into their pre-teen and teen years. Sometimes this meant taking a lighter-touch approach or, as one parent put it, 'finding the balance between nurturing and ensuring that he has the space to make his own decisions.'

5.3 Faith development as a journey

Some parents spoke eloquently of the twists and turns of their children's faith development journeys. One parent's survey response showed how the parent taking a gentle approach to a child's doubts created space for that child to experience God's presence in the midst of doubt and struggle.

We've been doing chat and catch as part of our Sunday morning family time with God during lockdown. On Sunday we asked Jesus what he wanted to show us in what way he was the ___est! Loved hearing my older daughter say, "He's the light-est" [brightest]. My older daughter has had big faith questions sparked over lockdown to the point of, 'God probably doesn't exist'. Cue lots of quiet prayer on my part and interesting chats with her. One evening when she was struggling at bedtime I prayed in tongues. She said, 'It's working!' and described how she was having time with Jesus in her mind and they were baking a cake together. More recently she couldn't sleep and I invited her to come and choose a worship song to 'soak' together. Afterwards she said she had tears in her eyes and, when I asked why, she said, 'Tears of joy of course!' It's so encouraging to see God

helping her meet him even when she's feeling discouraged. [parent survey response]

Within the context of the interviews, it was not always easy to understand whether parents saw these doubts as a normal part of an individual's faith journey, or whether they saw them as barriers to a child's faith development. In some of the interviews, it seemed that parents did sometimes see children's doubts and questions as them 'not getting it' or as a failure on the parent's part. In this quote, for example, the framing of 'getting it' or 'not getting it' suggests that there is something to 'get' and hints at an underlying binary of success/failure, despite the language of 'journey' that is also used.

He's on a journey. So he will sometimes say really profound things. But then sometimes he'll say, 'You know, I'm just not ready to follow Jesus. I don't want to stand up and sing in church.' Things like that. So I feel like he's on the path. But some days, I'm like, 'Yeah, we're getting it.' And some days, I'm like, 'Oh, okay. We're not getting it quite yet.' [parent interview response]

5.3.1 Are they just trying to please us?

A small number of parents raised concerns about whether their children are saying what they want to hear or trying to please them by making a commitment to God, rather than it being something that the children wanted to do for themselves. One parent acknowledged that there 'might be a bit of that' but felt that on the whole their children were beginning to develop a personal prayer life, independent of their parents. Other parents were not so sure, and one expressed a fear of finding out.

Number two son is like, 'Yeah, God's there. But that's fine'. I have asked him sometimes if there's been a difficult situation at school. I ask him, 'Do you know God is there and you're not alone' and he says, 'Yea, yeah mum, I know.' It's hard for me to get more serious conversation with him about how he relates to God. Maybe I'm a bit scared of digging into that because what will I find? Will I find that he doesn't really care or he does it because of me. I need some courage to find out where are you and where should we be heading. [parent interview response]

This illustrates the complexity of a child's relationships with God and with parents. In some ways, children wanting to demonstrate a relationship with God to please their parents may be positive, as it may demonstrate a positive parent/child relationship. However, over time, as children grow up and develop their own sets of values independent of their parents, if they see their relationship with God as a way of pleasing their parents, so too they might see rejecting that relationship as a way of rebelling against their parents. This is not an easy issue to unpack, although the key idea that parents are facilitators of a child's relationship with God may provide some support to parents and church workers in wrestling with this complexity.

5.3.2 Relationship with faith or relationship with church?

One parent of teenagers talked about her children's relationship with both faith and church. While her older child is disengaged from both, her younger child is happy to talk about faith at home but does not enjoy attending the new church that she now attends, because he misses his friends at his

previous church. This illustrates the complexity of relationships with God and with peers at church. Transitions are not always easy for children – or adults – and changes of church can be destabilising. This can then have an impact on a child’s relationship with God.

In terms of their faith, it’s tricky at the moment in the light of Covid. Pre-Covid, they would both come to church with us every week and were relatively happy going into their groups – Sunday school and teenage group. It’s been much harder to engage them again since everything stopped. I started as a curate in July, so moved church, and we have been dragging E (younger child) along with us since they started their Sunday school again. They weren’t doing anything for teenagers at first, but now they are, but M (older child) refuses to go. She says she doesn’t know them and she doesn’t want to go. Our church still isn’t really doing anything and I know it should be all about parents [to engage children], not about church, but yeah [it would help]. E is still kind of engaged in faith and M is not remotely. Trying to get teenagers to do anything is not the easiest task.
[Parent interview response]

In the pre-teen and teen years, relationships with peers can become more significant. Parents were often aware of this and raised it as a challenge in survey responses, particularly in contexts where children did not have peers of their own age at church or had few Christian friends.

5.4 Summary and conclusions

Several survey and interview responses illustrated children’s varied responses to more intentional nurturing of their faith on the part of their parents. There were several illustrations of children beginning to develop their own personal relationship with God or exploring questions of faith within the family.

Some parents were very sensitive to their children’s personalities and needs and could see how they needed to meet their children where they were, rather than expecting them to fit into a particular model of faith development.

A small number of parents were concerned that their children were engaging with faith just to please their parents. This is a complex area to unpack, as the interactions between children’s relationships with God and their relationships with their parents are varied and not easy to separate. With older children, relationships with their peers may also be a factor and a small number of parents were concerned about supporting older children who had few peers in church or were struggling with peer relationships in church.

6 OUTCOMES FOR CHURCHES

The material from Parenting for Faith and the work that Rachel Turner does has been transformational for me as an individual, for how we do children's and youthwork as a church, for families, and for how our church as a whole talks about and pursues growing in relationship with God. [church worker survey response]

Churches were at different stages of transformation, depending on their engagement with the materials. A clear finding from the evaluation as a whole was that changing church cultures takes considerable time and hard work across the whole church. The churches that had been most transformed had been working with either Parenting for Faith or Care for the Family for several years and were strongly aligned to the values across the whole church. However, churches at earlier stages of engagement also saw some key changes as a result of their engagement with either the Kitchen Table Project or Parenting for Faith.

6.1 Building skills across children's and youth work

Church workers most often talked about building skills and a shared language as an outcome of their engagement with Parenting for Faith or the Kitchen Table Project. Some churches had trialled the materials with children's work volunteers before rolling them out to parents. In one church, the Parenting for Faith materials were the 'main resource' for training children's work volunteers.

Many churches, even those who had not yet run courses, used the concepts in their children's ministry and appreciated having a shared language that they could use across families, children's and youth work.

What I've enjoyed is that I can use the same language with the kids as well as the parents and they each know what I'm talking about - eg chat and catch. It's been great hearing stories of what is happening at home and being able to encourage parents that what they are doing is exactly the right thing and offering some ideas for next steps or tweaking. I think it helped a lot of parents understand that a lot of what they are doing is right on track and they no longer feel as unsure and have greater confidence. [survey response, church worker]

In one church, Parenting for Faith had been used within children's work for several years before the course was run for parents. It took some time for it to be embedded and for parents to notice the difference in their children and ask the children's worker more about it, but eventually 'conversations happened and parents started to sit up and take notice.' At that point, the church decided to run the Parenting for Faith course. This meant that parents were already aware of the difference that the principles could make for children before taking on the course themselves. In other churches, the principles were introduced into children's work at the same time as running the course for the first time. It is not possible to say which approach was more effective, and this might depend on church context in any case. Perhaps the key lesson is that church workers can consider how best to introduce the ideas within their church and need not feel constrained to run the course immediately if drip-feeding the ideas via children's work at first might be more appropriate for their context.

One church used the Raising Faith materials to train church leadership across the whole church, not solely those involved in children's and family work.

Just one, just one more thing that came from Raising Faith is because I've been working on, like, what church family means. We used the last session from Raising Faith – the one about belonging and church – in a leadership training morning. And we took that, and we took them through the last session, and then the whole of the church found out what it would mean, to have that in practice in church, and it was the leadership from all of the ministry teams that were there, and all of the house groups. So we use it as a training for church. [church worker interview response]

This has led to deeper conversation within the church about what it means to be 'church family' although the outworking of this is still in its early stages.

A small number of church workers also commented in interviews that they themselves felt encouraged, resourced and equipped by the materials that they had accessed.

'Chat and catch' was the key idea that gained currency within children's ministry, with several church workers stating in interviews that they used this technique in their children's work across the church. In some cases, it was introduced first into children's work. In others, it stemmed from work with parents and was then embedded into children's ministry.

And I actually met with my kids' church team afterwards. And we changed our language that we use around prayer. So we now talk about chat and catch.

So I think for the [age] threes to fives, it went from 'now we're going to sit and pass prayer bear around' to ... we would put the blanket out and we had some quiet music. And we got the three year olds to just lie down and listen to God for three minutes. And they did it. And I was surprised, and they did it. [church worker interview response]

In this particular church, the shift to 'chat and catch' was linked to a change in mindset around activities in children's ministry, where the connection with God became the focus rather than the activity itself.

6.2 Relationships between parents, and with church leaders

Relationships between parents, and between parents and church leaders, varied considerably across churches, according to interview respondents. While the Raising Faith or Parenting for Faith courses had sometimes enabled parents to have more open conversations with each other or with church leaders, this was not always mentioned as an outcome by parents or church workers, and church workers did not always find it easy to sustain these connections. Just under one-third of church worker survey respondents agreed that parents regularly talked to them or other church leaders about their children's spiritual life.

One church worker described the Parenting for Faith course as breaking down barriers where parents would not previously have considered talking to each other or the children's worker about

the struggles their children were facing. The course 'opened them up' to telling each other, and the children's worker, about their challenges.

As mentioned in section 4.6 above, some churches have established ongoing spaces for parents that have emerged from either the Parenting for Faith or Raising Faith courses. One parent particularly appreciated having a home group specifically for parents that met during the day.

They have done a few parenting groups and recently set up a daytime home group just for parents where you could bring your kids. Not like a toddler group that's specifically for the kids. This one is actually content for the parents, and they can bring their kids. A way of watering parents in a dry season, which has been really helpful and helping to equip us to do that kind of thing at home despite the messiness of young kids and things not going to plan. This is held online at the moment, but before Covid we would meet in someone's home, with about eight of us. [parent interview response]

While Raising Faith and Parenting for Faith have encouraged church leaders and other church workers to be more 'intentional' about creating community among parents and families, this has not yet been as deeply embedded as perhaps it might be. Even in those churches that have been engaged with the material for several years, there may be a high degree of openness during the courses, but this may not always be sustained after the course or in the church community as a whole.

6.3 Becoming an intergenerational church

Church workers and parents noted efforts within churches to make them more intergenerational. These varied considerably with church context and leadership, depending on the church's previous approach to all-age or family worship and to being intergenerational more generally.

Some churches had changed the way that regular services were structured, so that children could take a greater part in key aspects before going to children's groups. In one church, communion had been moved to the beginning of the service so that children could participate in it, as had any guest speakers or testimonies. The children's groups that followed then helped to 'frame' these for the children. Equipping the parents to explain what was going on to children was also a key aspect of that church's approach to becoming more intergenerational.

Now we thought about some of the service the children didn't understand. It was like, all that the parents were doing was just keeping them entertained with them. How can we equip parents to explain what's going on and help the children to worship? So this is what we're doing. [church worker interview response]

For one parent, the variety of services offered by her church was supportive in showing her children the different ways in which people connect with God.

And just the way that they see that people do faith in different ways as well. We have two different services – one is very traditional and the next one is for families – it's more relaxed. Even the fact that the children know that some people like one and some people like the other, and they're all engaged in different ways. Some people put their hands up and kneel down, others just stand

or sit quietly. All that kind of stuff is really helping them picture that you can do life with God in all different ways. [parent interview response]

The same parent also found her children's relationships with people of different ages within their church very helpful and found that they missed those relationships during lockdown. This was echoed by other parents who referred to social activities or structured opportunities for interactions between younger and older generations as well as worship, when talking about the extent to which their church was intergenerational. It should be noted that intergenerational church is as much about intergenerational community and relationship-building as about all-age worship.

Church workers and parents sometimes contrasted being multi-generational with being intergenerational. Several parents said that their church was multi-generational but not yet intergenerational – while many generations might be present in the congregation, there could perhaps be more interaction between generations or integrated worship. Not all parents felt comfortable bringing their children into the main services, which was a source of some frustration as they felt that their children often picked up more from 'adult' worship than from children's groups.

Welcome children into the grown up service that don't want to be in kids' church. My son picks up interesting stuff when he listens in to the main service and this leads to interesting conversations with me at home. I always feel a bit awkward and judged as a bad mum when he is in the service with me instead of his 'proper' place in kids church. [parent survey response]

Case study: Messy Church as an intergenerational offering

One parent who is involved in children's work at her church talked about how they had changed Messy Church from being an after-school offering to an intergenerational offering monthly on a Sunday morning.

I think there's a lot of people that really believe in intergenerational stuff. At the moment we have one service a month which has, in the last year or so, taken the place of the weekly traditional service. Traditionally, we have had one service a week every single Sunday, and it was always traditional. In addition to that, we had Sunday school and the children got taken off for Sunday school during that service. Prior to lockdown, that had changed. We'd replaced that once a month with an informal service, which was like Messy Church. We didn't call it Messy Church to everyone because we felt we needed to call it something that convinced everyone that it was for them. Some of our regular people felt that Messy Church couldn't be for them, and they should stay at home. Instead, we call it informal church. But we have been really careful to make sure that it includes all of the elements of a proper Messy Church. And actually one of those is being intergenerational, isn't it? Our old weekday Messy Church, we didn't get any older people coming because they didn't think it was for them. They thought it was an after-school play club. So really, I believe, on a Sunday morning, the Messy church is more ticking the boxes than the weekday Messy church used to do. And that is our intergenerational offering at the moment. [parent interview response]

6.3.1 Children and young people using their gifts

Both Raising Faith and Parenting for Faith had encouraged church workers to rethink the idea of intergenerational worship and to consider how children could use their gifts. Several church workers talked about the default position in churches being that the children might come to the front in a service to sing a song, or show off what they had learned, but not really serving in the church until perhaps in their late teens when they might lead worship or be part of the band. This was ripe for a re-evaluation, sparked by either Raising Faith or Parenting for Faith.

In Rachel's book she talks about how children can be praying for people, children can be speaking in church, that children are just as capable as adults, if not more so, of hearing from God. So how do we try and be the body of Christ better, or the body of Christ that actually believes we are a body and everyone's equal and has something valuable rather than saying, 'Now it's time for an action song'.
[Church worker interview response]

In one church, the children's worker ran a breakfast session for years Five and Six, at the end of which the children were invited to help set up for the usual Sunday children's groups. This seemed to have gone well but was a one-off, prior to lockdown, and the children's worker was considering how to make this more sustainable once churches can meet again in person. In the same church, children take active roles in a Tuesday afternoon session which is 'like Messy Church but not Messy Church,' but this does not translate to them taking an active part in the main Sunday service.

6.3.2 Introducing key ideas into adult worship

In three churches, key ideas from Parenting for Faith had been introduced into services for adults, through talks or preaching. In one church, the children's worker did 'chat and catch' as part of a series on what God is like.

I did a really brief chat and catch thing for everybody, and that really impacted a number of people. We just asked questions and got them to talk to God about it, and then did catch questions. And people said that it was the most powerful experience they'd had in church. So that got a lot of people's attention.

Case study: 'Who God says you are'

In one church, adults were regularly told what the children were learning about in their children's ministry groups. They commented that these were 'deep' topics, which gave the children's workers a way to convey to adults that children were capable of engaging with these deeper topics. In the context of a whole-church series, one activity was particularly powerful.

I think one of the really powerful ones was that we got the children to write labels, characteristics of who God says you are. That was what it was, it was about how we take off our old labels of what other people say we are and put on who God says we are.

We did it with all the ages, so the under-fives had pre-printed labels that they'd coloured in and the older ones had written their own labels. And we brought them back into the service, and they went round and stuck the labels on all the adults. 'You're loved,' 'You're a child of God,' 'You're precious,' those kind of things. So that was really powerful, when they walked around, even the really little ones.

And I had people messaging me the next day – adults, who didn't have kids – saying, 'That was so powerful,' or 'The first label that someone put on me was this word and it really meant a lot to me.' [church worker interview response]

A small number of church workers expressed the view that the key ideas from Raising Faith and Parenting for Faith were just as useful for adults as they were for children – they were core ideas, simply expressed, that could support adults of all ages in their faith journey.

6.4 Summary and conclusions

Transforming church culture takes time and a concerted effort from a range of key individuals and groups, so those churches at earlier stages of engagement had generally not embedded the values and insights as extensively in their church culture as those who had been engaged for longer.

A key entry point to transforming church culture is using the materials in training for church leaders and volunteers within children's and family work, which several churches in the sample had begun to do or had been doing for some time. This enabled church workers to align the language that they used with children and parents as well as, in some cases, the wider church.

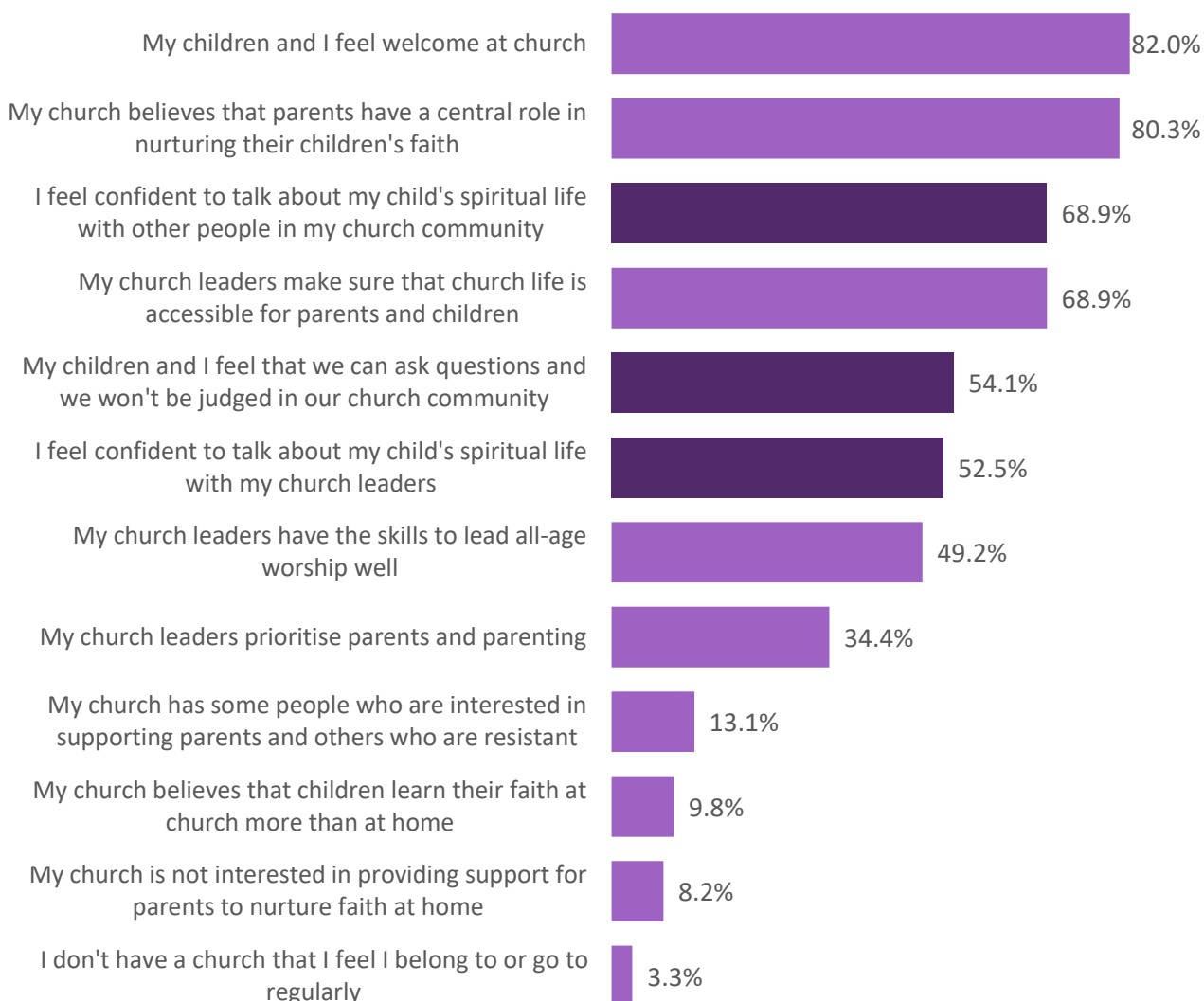
Several church workers had thought carefully about what it meant to be 'intergenerational' – sometimes contrasted with 'multigenerational.' This involved changes to the structure and form of church services, as well as creating opportunities for social interactions between generations. However, this was an area where many church workers felt that there was more that could be done, particularly in relation to children using their gifts and serving within church.

Another area where church workers felt that more could be done was in building sustained relationships with parents and families, so that parents felt more confident to talk about their faith challenges with children's and family workers, or indeed with other parents. While this may happen during an RF or PFF course, it may not always be embedded or sustained within the wider life of the church, even in the most engaged churches.

7 ENABLERS AND BARRIERS TO BEING A SUPPORTIVE CHURCH

The survey responses highlighted some key enablers and barriers to churches supporting parents to nurture their children's faith. These were then explored in more depth in some of the interviews.

Parents were generally positive about their churches (n=61), and particularly about the welcome that they received at church.

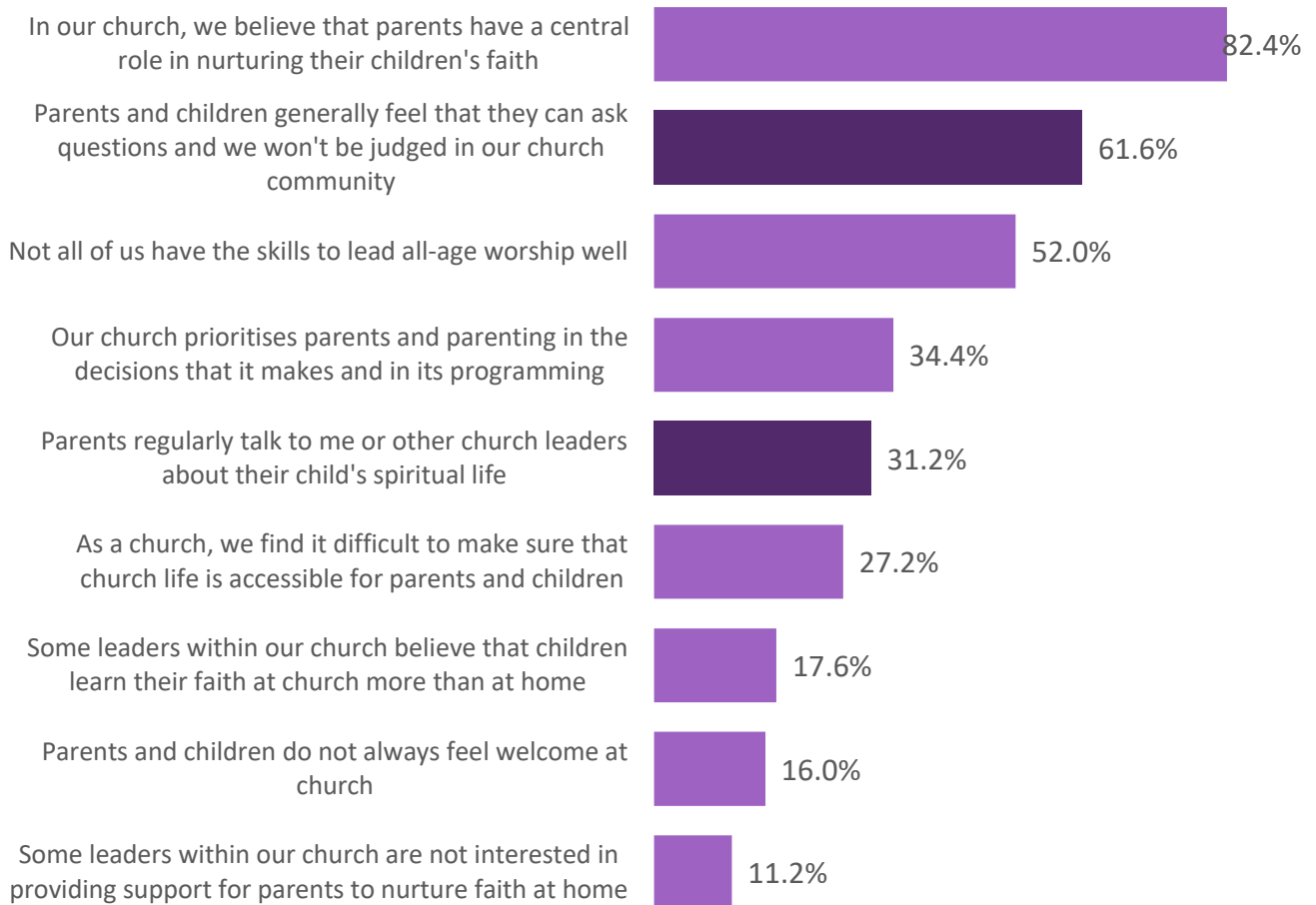


Interestingly, parents who responded to the survey felt more confident to talk to others in their community about their children's spiritual lives than to their church leaders.

It may be a potential cause for concern that only just over half of the parents who responded – who, as mentioned in section 1.2.2, are likely to be highly engaged – feel confident that they can ask questions and will not be judged. This suggests – as mentioned in section 4.4 – that fear of

judgment may be a major barrier even for those parents who are most engaged, and that perhaps churches can do more to create spaces in which parents are not fearful of being judged.

Church workers' views about their churches (n=125) paralleled those of parents in most cases.



Again, given how highly active these church workers are within the Kitchen Table Project or Parenting for Faith, there may be a potential cause for concern that 27% of church workers find it difficult to make church life accessible to parents and children, and that 16% of church workers feel that parents and children do not always feel welcome within their church.

It is also worth noting that only one-third of parents and the same proportion of church workers felt that parents and parenting were prioritised within their church. This suggests that even where parents do feel welcome and church life is accessible, parents and parenting may not feel like a priority and the church may be juggling this with other priorities.

Both church workers and parents recognised the challenges of leading all-age worship, with around half of both parents and church workers questioning the skills of church leaders within their churches to lead all-age worship well.

Exploring the survey and interview responses in more depth revealed a number of key factors affecting how well placed churches were to support parents to nurture their children's faith.

7.1 Theological alignment

Interview respondents came from a large variety of church contexts, from small church plants and rural churches to larger urban churches and international and mission contexts. Few, if any, could be described as ‘high’ Anglican, and no Catholic or Orthodox churches were represented in the interview sample, although one family’s children attended a Catholic school. The majority of churches represented were ‘low’ Anglican, including two affiliated to Holy Trinity Brompton, or free churches, including Methodist, Baptist and Elim Pentecostal.

There may be something worth further exploring here in terms of theological alignment with the Kitchen Table Project and Parenting for Faith values. Churches that take a more liturgical approach to prayer or strongly emphasise the role of priests as mediators between the congregation and God may be less aligned to the values of these two projects and therefore less likely to engage. This does not mean that they do not encourage parents to nurture their children’s faith, but rather that it might look very different. One parent noted that some of her friends from different churches had found challenges with some of the approaches taken by Parenting for Faith.

One of my friends is listening to the podcasts. It’s been nice to engage with her about that. We go to different kinds of churches so I wouldn’t necessarily have known if she’d get on with that [ideas from PFF]. I have other friends who don’t agree with catching pictures and words from God – it’s not something they would do in their church environment. [parent interview response]

In another church, Parenting for Faith had sparked a theological conversation about whether children can or should be ‘catching’ from God because they are not yet ‘saved’ (this is in the context of a church where adult baptism is the norm). In this case, it led to a deeper conversation in the church about what it means to be ‘saved’ and about how children’s spirituality is conceptualised within that.

Even if there is no theological opposition, the informality of prayer encouraged by Parenting for Faith in particular may still be counter-cultural in children’s ministry. One church worker commented on how difficult it is to find online videos for children’s ministry that do not end with a formalised prayer. This can make it challenging to sustain the ‘chat and catch’ approach.

7.2 Church demographics

In general, parents in churches where there were fewer children found that their churches were less supportive or simply had fewer resources to support parents. In small churches with fewer children, there is less likely to be a children’s worker or, if there is, it is more likely to be a voluntary role rather than a paid role. One parent found herself feeling isolated because she was the only parent speaking up about online services not being as family-friendly as they could have been, and eventually decided to seek out online services from another church rather than her own church.

By contrast, where there were large numbers of children and well-resourced children’s work, parents and children tended to be more of a focus within the church. The sheer numbers also made it easier to run courses and have ongoing support for parents. Having said that, sometimes, for

larger churches, it was more difficult for children's workers to build individual relationships with parents because it simply was not possible to get to know everyone within the time available.

7.3 Church leadership

Church leadership was identified as one of the key factors affecting how, and how far, the church was experienced as being supportive for parents. Where church leaders openly prioritised this, there was much more scope for church workers to engage parents, and parents also felt more supported.

One church worker framed this as needing a 'whole church approach' – while the children's worker can build the principles into their own work, embedding it into the church requires visible support from the church leader.

The key is not really the kids' worker thinking it's the right thing. It's the church leader and, particularly in the Church of England, obviously, there's very minimal to no training at all on children and spiritual development in a child. [church worker interview response]

The most supportive church leaders tended either to have a children's or youth work background or were themselves parents.

In one church the church leader was openly supportive but acknowledged that it was not his area of expertise and empowered the children's worker to do what she felt was correct. She felt that this was a strength of his leadership. This suggests that a more light-touch approach can work if there is a strong children's worker in place and if that individual is able to contribute to leadership decision-making.

Lack of leadership support could be quite subtle. One parent noted that the church leader in her church was highly supportive of children's ministry but was interested in supporting children, not equipping and resourcing parents, and she found this a source of real frustration.

Leadership turnover could also be a barrier for parents – two parents mentioned this as a challenge. The turnover itself was experienced as destabilising, and the lack of permanent leadership meant that it was difficult to understand, or to influence, the church's approach.

It's hard to know ... when we don't have official people in official positions, what the vision of the church is at the moment from where I stand. [parent interview response]

7.4 Quality children's and families' ministry

Of the 41 parents who responded to the full-text question in the survey about the best thing that the church, the most frequently mentioned 'best thing' was providing resources (11 responses) some of which were described as 'excellent.' These included take-home sheets related to children's ministry as well as specific resources developed during lockdown.

This year our church delivered Easter bags to all the children connected to church. Our kids loved it and it helped in our conversations about the Easter story and celebrating Jesus' resurrection. [parent survey response]

Other parents picked out general children's work (eight responses), general encouragement and support for parents (eight responses), keeping in touch with parents or finding ways to put parents in touch with each other (five responses) and running courses, including Parenting for Faith and Care for the Family courses (seven responses). Five parents responded that there was 'nothing' that the church did to support parents.

Parents appreciated the children's workers or church leaders keeping in touch with them, as in this survey response.

We have an excellent children's and family pastor who is always connecting with parents and finding ways to connect with those who may be less engaged and with the wider community. [parent survey response]

Parents were also seeking this contact from children's workers where it was not already the norm, with 'keeping in touch' and 'communication' the most frequently mentioned responses to the survey question asking what one thing churches could do more of.

One children's worker felt that children's ministry needed to improve significantly to be of value to parents and children.

I think kids' ministry suffers from a lack of excellence. I think what we need to be is absolutely incredible. I once heard this thing that said, you know, most churches are about 30 years behind current culture and kids' ministry is another 30 years behind that. I thought, 'No, I can't have that.' Kids' ministry needs to be speaking the same language as kids nowadays ... We need to be impassioned about what we're doing, that it's not babysitting, it's changing the world and fulfilling the vision of the church. You don't need to go and help the homeless to be doing social action actually, [you could be doing that by] loving this kid right here. Imagine if that kid is loved and stayed in church, what they could do. [church worker interview response]

7.5 Creating community

Creating community among parents has been a key theme throughout the evaluation. If guilt, and fear of judgment, are key barriers for parents, and if authenticity in faith is a core value to be passed on to children, then supportive community is essential. Church workers have found the courses a useful starting point for building this community, although several have also acknowledged that there is more to be done in this area.

This course was my favourite thing in the past six months, but we are working to build a community of parents and families doing life together, having genuine conversations, and normalising the imperfect and messy experience of spiritual parenting. [church worker who is also a parent, survey response]

Some church workers mentioned the need to create spaces where parents could be authentic and vulnerable in conversation with each other as one thing that the church could do in order to better support parents.

Create a better culture of vulnerability and sharing. Maybe create discussion groups that meet regularly to share ideas and support each other. We planted the seeds of this at our equipping Sunday but are unsure how well it has taken off.
[church worker survey response]

7.6 Locus of responsibility for nurturing children's faith

There was a clear disparity between parents and church workers on the question of responsibility for nurturing children's faith. The parents that were interviewed universally recognised it as their own responsibility and were sometimes frustrated that the church did not support or equip them in the way that they might have wished.

I think parents are really important in nurturing faith. I think my church could have done more in lockdown to demonstrate their faith on a children's level. They just basically sent out the resources and didn't engage with the children at all online. [But] they are now offering family reflections now that church services are allowed from a Covid point of view. [parent, interview response]

One parent survey respondent was particularly frustrated that the church emphasised parents' responsibility but did not equip or support parents to take up this responsibility. For that parent, the thing that the church needed to do to support parents was 'equip parents in some way, rather than just expecting them to get on and do it.'

By contrast, church workers were sometimes frustrated that parents did not see nurturing children's faith as their own responsibility and wanted to leave it predominantly to the churches.

I think generally within church, and I think this is a national problem, we provide a 'babysitting' approach of 'the kids are going upstairs now or out to their groups'. I think what I really noticed in lockdown is I was sending material home that I was creating and trying to get parents to nurture that on their own. Now I've stopped sending that out, parents are saying, 'You're not sending us stuff for the kids to do while we're watching Sunday zoom church.' So I think there is that whole mentality of not taking responsibility for nurturing their child's faith. I think parents still don't grasp how important it is to nurture their children's faith and not just leave it to a volunteer on a Sunday. And doing faith together, and being able to share that and develop it, is important. [church worker interview response]

This is perhaps understandable, as the parents who contributed to the survey and interviews, and who seek out this content on their own, are the most highly engaged and conscious of their own responsibility, whereas church workers are likely to encounter a wider range of engagement among parents. Church cultures over several decades may also have contributed to a general sense that the locus of responsibility for nurturing children's faith rests with the church, not the home.

We've farmed out so much of our kids' ministry by sending them off to Sunday school that parents don't feel confident doing anything. [church worker interview response]

7.7 Individualism and privatisation

Some parents mentioned their struggles with talking about faith in general, as discussed in section 4.6. A root cause of this may be the cultural trend that faith is an increasingly private and privatised activity in the United Kingdom, and hence not something openly talked about or engaged with as a collective and communal endeavour, even within churches. One church worker mentioned that there can be a view that 'it's all about the individual' and that makes it difficult for families or communities to pray together for something or commemorate key events together.

The same trend may exist in parenting, which has also to some degree become increasingly individualised and privatised. There may be an increased reticence to discuss parenting with others, because this may come across as unwarranted interference. This was mentioned by one church worker:

And other people in the church could be thinking, 'Oh, this is interfering'. As a society we're very individualistic, but saying 'it takes a whole village to raise a child' feels like a big culture change, because people feel you're interfering. [church worker interview response]

These two trends may make it more difficult to create community within churches where it feels natural and normal both to practice faith and to parent within a community structure, rather than as an individual; and yet this sense of community does appear to be important in supporting parents and they seem to strongly appreciate it when it is offered.

7.8 Covid-19 and transition to online church

The transition to online church and children's struggle to engage with this was the most frequently mentioned challenge that parents encountered in nurturing their children's faith. These struggles could be a result of children experiencing increased screen time and less in-person interaction more generally, or a result of online church not being as family-friendly as it perhaps might have been.

Churches have also struggled to find ways of making online church family-friendly and church leaders have tried a wide range of approaches, from sending physical resources home to running separate children's activities, to encouraging families to send in video recordings that are then shared with the wider church.

In some cases, church workers have found it more difficult to keep in touch with individual families during lockdown, often because it was more difficult within a working week to contact every family separately. However, in others, church workers intentionally created spaces for parents to come together and found that this led to more in-depth contact that they can manage in church, when they are usually running around setting up or packing up. One church worker talked about how she had stepped up contact with parents during lockdown.

And the parents are as far as possible, they're in Connect groups or house groups, and they're meeting via Zoom. And I'm in constant contact with the families to be honest, I'm ringing and texting and emailing, and they send in prayer requests and we get people to pray for each other. So we're sort of aware of where families are up to and, if a need sort of seems to come out, then we try and feed that into what we're doing. [Church worker interview response]

Church workers and parents mentioned the challenge of homeschooling and of working parents having more demands on their time during lockdown.

I was working at home all day and on Zoom all day with meetings and then having to sort of ignore my children during the day as well as trying to get them to do their schooling and me to do my work and everything else.

In this context, engaging with Parenting for Faith or Raising Faith online, whether via Zoom or Facebook Live, was just one thing too many for some parents.

Some parents had found positives in lockdown. One parent talked about their child picking up ideas from online sermons that they would not normally have overheard because they would have been in children's groups. Several other parents talked about having more time to model and discuss faith during lockdown when they had more contact time with their children.

Some church workers also found that transitioning to online delivery of courses was an advantage because parents did not need to find childcare, as mentioned in section 3.2.1. However, one church worker mentioned that they would have preferred the materials to be adapted for online delivery rather than needing to adapt them themselves, which they found to be a lot of work.

Church workers were keen to understand what parents needed during and after this period and what would be most important if the current situation continues or if in-person church becomes possible once more.

Covid has thrown a completely different light on everything – how we do church, how we support families. I think it was on PFF I read an important question to ask parents is what is important to you at the minute, is it the social side of things, is it learning about the bible, is it meeting together to worship, what element of church is important to you because it's different for different people. That's been helpful for me in knowing how to support parents, because everybody is at a different stage and different things are important. [church worker interview response]

7.9 Summary and conclusions

Church workers and parents talked about a wide range of enablers and barriers to being a supportive church. The Covid-19 pandemic was at the forefront of many people's minds, and transition to online church has not always been easy, although in some cases it has thrown up unexpected opportunities.

While the quality of children's ministry within a church (often dependent on the size and resources of the church) is a key factor, a whole-church approach is crucial. Supportive church leaders who

are willing to learn, develop and change culture create an enabling environment in which the church can best support parents to nurture their children's faith. This does also require some alignment with the approach taken by the Kitchen Table Project and/or Parenting for Faith.

It would be worth exploring the degree to which the Vine programme is counter-cultural in a wider sense – not just about doing church differently, but also challenging cultural norms about the privatisation of faith and of parenting, and how this might be both a potential strength as well as a potential challenge.

8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 God-connection and authenticity

At an individual level, the evaluation highlighted that one of the key insights for parents was that children can and do have their own direct, unmediated relationship with God. This can shift parents' understanding both of the individual relationship with God and of their role in relation to their children. This was evidenced in the ways that some parents changed the way that they prayed with their children as well as the impact that some parents saw in their own faith life.

Building on this, if the individual's relationship with God is to be sustainable, it is possible that authenticity is at the heart of this. Even at a human level, relationships where we cannot bring our whole, imperfect selves into the relationship tend not to be sustainable or fulfilling. Therefore, the role of parents is not to model a 'perfect walk with God' but rather their own imperfect, messy relationship with Him, while understanding that their child's relationship may be completely different.

Individual parents may need to be supported to model that authentic, imperfect walk with God; therefore creating supportive spaces where they can share their challenges and doubts may be particularly important in sustaining the outcomes of the Vine Programme.

8.2 Creating community

Churches have taken a wide range of approaches to creating and sustaining community among parents and intergenerationally across the church, but this is also an area where many church workers acknowledged that there was more to do in the survey and interviews.

In some churches, the courses were a starting point to building community but this may not always be sustained through the structures of church life and may 'fizzle out.' Some ways of sustaining community included parent-specific home groups or life groups, family events and varied approaches to doing intergenerational church. As with any community, individuals may have different levels of engagement with church communities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also led to churches finding innovative ways of 'doing church' when unable to meet in person and this can also be extended to building relationships with and among parents. Some churches have created informal online spaces via Zoom or other video-conferencing platforms for parents and others to meet and share their thoughts and struggles.

Creating sustainable community, especially when parents are juggling multiple priorities, may be a challenge within churches and indeed within both Parenting for Faith and the Kitchen Table Project more widely, but may be essential to sustaining the outcomes for individual parents and their children.

8.3 A 'long game' and a whole-church approach

Interviews with churches showed that embedding a shift from children's ministry to a church that supports parents and families can take a long time and requires concerted effort. Those churches where the ethos of the Kitchen Table Project or Parenting for Faith had been most deeply embedded had done so over a period of years, with the support of a committed children and families worker and the church leadership. They had often sought support either from peers or from the teams at BRF and CFF throughout their journey.

This suggests that deep engagement with church workers at all levels, including with volunteers, and building community among committed church leaders, wherever they might be on the journey, might be helpful in sustaining churches through what might be a long and sometimes difficult journey to culture change, particularly given that some of that change might still be counter-cultural. Building networks of churches and church leaders may be the key to ensuring that culture change takes place. There may also be a role for building sustainable networks of parents who may not have that support within their churches, particularly in smaller and less well-resourced churches.

8.4 'Crossing the chasm'

The technology adoption curve is often pictured with a gap or 'chasm' between the early adopters and the early majority. It appears to be received wisdom in marketing circles that a different approach is needed to reach the early majority, compared to the early adopters.⁵ The early majority tend to be pragmatists, only adopting a new initiative when there is a proven benefit to them. Seeing clear evidence that the initiative works is key to appealing to this group.

Both BRF and CFF are fortunate in having committed networkers and advocates who can share and recommend the Vine Programme, and can provide evidence about how it is working in a range of settings. This is an important first step in appealing to the early majority. Building a network of church leaders and appealing to key influencers within particular denominations may also help to create credibility for the Vine Programme. This evaluation and ongoing evaluation work may strengthen the case for the Vine Programme and establish how it solves a problem that church leaders and parents are facing right now.

8.4.1 Who is not in the room?

As part of the programme's intention to appeal to a wider group of churches and parents, it may be helpful to reflect on who is not in the room when decisions are made or content is created. It is clear that the primary audiences for the programme as it stands are white, female and broadly at the evangelical end of the churchmanship spectrum. This broadly reflects the demographics of the programme development teams and indeed the early enthusiasts who have been involved in content development. A small number of participants pointed out the consequences of this – that outside of that core demographic, some of the materials had limited appeal or indeed were off-putting because they were not as relatable. There is a question here for both organisations to

⁵ See, for example: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2013/12/17/geoffrey-moore-why-crossing-the-chasm-is-still-relevant/?sh=496402ec782d>

consider how far they wish to appeal beyond their current core demographics, and how much effort they are willing to commit to doing so.

8.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed from those discussed with key stakeholders from BRF, CFF and the Douglas Trust at a meeting in December 2020.

8.5.1 Short-term recommendations

- BRF and CFF to provide further guidance for running the Raising Faith and Parenting for Faith courses online and with very small groups.
- BRF and CFF to adapt courses for online delivery, including reducing the course length.
- BRF and CFF to explore ways of marketing the courses to churches and supporting them with course delivery.

8.5.2 Medium-term recommendations

- BRF and CFF to explore user journeys and how best to encourage users to engage with more in-depth material such as courses and books.
- BRF and CFF to intentionally develop content featuring input from men, BAME participants and participants from lower socio-economic groups.
- CFF to deepen relationships with advocates.
- BRF to further explore running courses for clusters of churches or churches within a region.
- BRF and CFF to further explore how churches can be better networked with each other to build community.

8.5.3 Longer-term recommendations

- BRF and CFF to continue to commit resource to this work, acknowledging that culture change takes time.
- BRF and CFF to develop content for parents of older teenagers and children with additional needs.
- BRF and CFF to continue to evaluate their work and build a bank of evidence of success – both numbers and stories.