A home-centred approach to faith formation in children in a South African context

Bolanle Enang

u20806567

Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree

MTh Practical Theology

in the Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies,

Faculty of Theology and Religion,

University of Pretoria

October 2021

Supervision of Prof. Yolanda Dreyer

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband Daniel and my two precious children, Edidiongabasi and Inemesitabasi Enang. Without you, my family, I would not have made it this far. Mommy has finished her schoolwork. Thank you for supporting me and being there for me throughout this academic journey. I trust that you, my children will surpass daddy and in all your endeavours in Jesus' name.

My dear Daniel, this journey has been an easier one with you by my side. Thank you for never allowing me to give up on myself. Thank you for the sleepless nights and unending encouragement to keep following my dreams. Babes, we did it again! Glory to God. You are definitely, without a doubt, my gift from heaven.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation to the people who have supported me throughout my academic path:

Prof Yolanda Dreyer, your brilliance and academic prowess are my academic goals. Thank you for your patience, guidance and supervision. Once again, you have helped me achieve another long-time dream of mine. God bless you.

To my late father, Chief Oladejo Oladapo Okewumi, thank you for showing us the pathway to success. I love you and miss you. Till we meet again. I shall continue to follow in your footsteps of great work in the world of academics. *Baba rere sun ree o!*

Dr Judith Tinu Ojo-Aromokudu, you have my lifelong gratitude. Your advice and expertise have been invaluable throughout this academic journey. Keep shining doc! The world is yet to discover the diamonds within you. You are precious to me.

Dr Mohseena Osman, my neighbour-turned sister. You have been such an inspiration to me. Our Saturday and Tuesday walks have paid off! Here we are, girl.

To the warm and lovely community of St Stephen's Anglican Church, Sunninghill, your love and support for me in every way. I love this family of God.

Others include Aunty Brenda, you are more than our aunty. You are my encouragement and support! Thank you. Ayo Okewumi, thank you for proofreading and walking with me through this academic journey. I love and value you greatly, big brother.
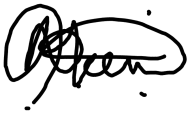
Ms Christine Nel, I thank you for your tireless support and help for me throughout my academic journey at the University of Pretoria.

Femi, Funke and Biola, I love you all. I finished! Thank you, my siblings.

Finally, to my heavenly Father, I am so grateful to you for providing all I needed for this Masters' degree. Only You can do what no man can do! *Eseun Oluwa mi*!

Declaration

By submitting this dissertation, I, Bolanle Enang, student number 20806567 hereby declare that this entire work: **'A home-centred approach to faith formation in children in a South African context',** is my own, original work (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously, in its entirety or part, submitted it for obtaining any qualification at another University.

Signed: Bolanle Enang   Date: 31st October 2021

Abstract

Historically, the church has played a primary role in children's faith formation. Invariably, parents seem to play a secondary or passive role in their children's spiritual development. Globally, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have challenged the traditional way of doing children's ministry. Studies show that the traditional church-centred and home-supported approach for children's ministry is ineffective. There seems to be a pattern of exit from the church when children leave the parental home in their adult years. This study investigates whether the ineffective faith formation in children from early years is a contributing reason for young people's decreasing active involvement in church as well as practising faith in adulthood.

The methodological framework for this study is Richard Osmer's (2008) "core tasks of a practical theological investigation". The *'What is going on'* onfamily ministry in relation to children's faith formation, the role of parents and the church in the faith formation process by explaining the '*Why it is going on?'* and finally an exploration of good practice regarding the faith formation in children and the *What ought to be going on?* The study develops strategies and provides guidelines for good practice for a home-centred and church-supported approach to faith formation by stating, *How might we respond?* The study applies a thematic analysis to the research.

Child development theories, faith development theories, parenting styles, and family ministry approaches provide insight into children's faith formation from birth to pre-adolescent years. These insights are brought into discussion with an African context. The point of departure of this study is that parents and the family should be the primary faith nurturers for children with adequate support and empowerment from the church. An effective partnership between parents and the church can enhance children's lifelong faith formation. This can develop children's ongoing relationship with God and the church.

This study develops guidelines for an inclusive and integrated home-centred approach to effective faith formation in children in South Africa. Also, this effective

partnership can mitigate the departure of young people from the church in adulthood and actively integrate them into the church through positive developmental relationships within the church, at home, and in the broader community.

Keywords: Faith formation, children's ministry, home-centred family ministry, Practical Theology

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1
BACKGROUND

1.1   Introduction

The importance of the role of parents in the faith formation and development of the child is historically indisputable (see Van Niekerk and Breed 2018). With the emergence of Sunday school, youth ministry and other ministries, the parental role, particularly in the faith formation and development of children, has changed. These ministries have become central and the role of parents as the principal nurturers, teachers and role models of faith were neglected or relegated to a secondary position. In my more than ten years of experience and interaction with children's ministry practitioners, I have observed that the active participation of the parents of younger children in nurturing faith in children tends to be rather limited, particularly outside of the church environment. This study focuses on children from birth to the age of twelve.

The two main sources of the nurture of faith in children are the family and the church. The church should understand the pivotal role of the family in this regard and should provide support for the primary nurturers of faith. In a South African study, 65% of participants show that the family is integral to the early years of children's faith development (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018:2; see Van Staden 2015:13). In my experience of youth ministry, I have observed an inadequate partnership between the family and the church. Providing resources and personnel at *the church* for the faith formation of children is often the end of the church's investment in the faith development process of children.

This study indicates that much more can and should be done. The results of the traditional method of children's ministry have become clearer in these current times of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The restrictions on religious gatherings and church services have affected the typical ways of ministering to children, which has led to a reduced engagement by the church with the faith development and formation process in children. In defining faith development, Van Niekerk and Breed (2018:1) suggest it is "an intentional process by which the faithful are guided to grow

in their relationship with God and the accompanying lifestyle change". This involves the calling and identity of believers in Christ (Avenant 2015:63). Faith formation begins from the inception of a child's life (Fowler 1981). The ongoing formation of a person's faith that occurs throughout life can stagnate if the person does not take part actively in a faith community. Faith formation is not only about the specific tasks of teaching children, but also about the small or mundane moments of interaction that affect their behavioural patterns. Faith formation takes place at home and in the community (Keeley and Keeley 2019:13-14).

All the distinct moments of teaching and imparting faith contribute to the faith formation of children. Some indicators of faith formation have shown a steady decline in the active participation in religious activities, integration and a sense of belonging to a congregation, and living out an active faith after young people have left the parental home (Powell and Clark 2011:15). These indicators reflect, among others, the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the child and youth ministries of churches. According to DeVries (2004:26), the usual ways of doing youth or children's ministry have not been adequate. Another cause of membership decline can be the church's inability to translate faith to the children (Gillespie 1988:6; see DeVries 2004:24).

In the American and European contexts, the pattern of young people leaving the church began in the 1960s (Osmer 1996:5). As children grow older and less dependent on their parents, their attendance and active participation in church declines. The study by Nel (2018:333-351), carried out across South African churches, shows a similar pattern of decline, as is evident in other contexts. Mainline churches acknowledge this exit and try to mitigate it. Parents often leave it to the church to deal with the matter. This is concerning, as the church support is not a substitute for the importance of the home in children's spiritual growth. Therefore, the focus of the church should be to the whole family; this is essential. The family ministry relies on factors like the environment, demographics, and cultural contexts.

The two key factors for predicting the faith maturity of a young person, according to a Search Institute survey among 11 000 individuals across 561 congregations in the United States, are the *involvement in Christian education* and *family religiosity*.

Parents who attend church often see the responsibility the church takes for their children's spiritual growth as an added benefit of their church attendance (Barna 2003:77). The risk of producing children with a weak faith is higher, where the church does not partner with the home in this formation process despite churches' strong faith-enhancing programs for children. The involvement of parents in faith formation remains crucial despite the feeling of uncertainty and inadequacy that parents often experience (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:77). The greater concern of the church should be empowering parents to build "good families" rather than building good church buildings (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:20). It is necessary to promote parental awareness of their responsibility in their children's faith development, as well as to properly educate, support, and train them to lead in this area. This can reinforce the faith of children and mitigate the loss of interest and their consequent exit from the church and a Christian lifestyle. Parents who are not well equipped for Christian education or feel inadequate in their faith can easily delegate the responsibility of the faith formation of their children to the church (Clark and Powell 2011:15-16).

This study, therefore, focuses on parents and the church working together effectively to nurture faith in children. It investigates best practices for early life and effective faith formation. The aim of the study is to propose guidelines for best practices for home-centred faith formation in children in the South African context.

1.2   Problem statement

The question is whether ineffective faith formation in children is the reason for the decreasing participation of young people in church activities when they leave the parental home. The church generally takes a leading role in the spiritual development of children. The point of departure of this study is that the primary role should be played by the home to enhance an ongoing relationship with the church and with God and live out active faith in adulthood. This prompts the following research questions: To what extent is the traditional model of children's ministry effective today? What are the roles of the church in children's faith formation? What role does the family play in faith formation in children in a South African context? What methods are most relevant in a South African context?

1.3   Literature overview and research gap

Studies have shown that parents and the family have a decisive influence on the faith formation of children (see Nel 2000:108-109, Barna 2011:11-12; Powell and Clark 2011:16-24; Roberto 2012; Van Niekerk and Breed 2018). The home environment is the primary space for nurturing and teaching "the interpretation of life" (see Strommen and Strommen 1985; Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:10). The family is a social system of primary relationships where individuals are nurtured both psychologically and spiritually (Clinebell 1988:283). The family is a collective unit that focuses on relationships between parents and children irrespective of its configuration, which can include blended-family households, single-parent households and two-parent households (Strommen and Hardel 2000:15). The church is also a social system with an influential role. Various scholars argue that transmitting faith from one generation to another lies primarily with the family and not the church. However, many churches function as the primary faith nurturer of children rather than the family (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:21; cf. Senter et al. 2001:16; see DeVries 2004:104; Jones 2019).

The church has a duty to equip parents effectively for the process of the faith formation of children (see Kolacki 2012). The church can have a substantial influence on the lives of families, depending on the church's structure and programs (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:17). However, the church should not have the sole or primary responsibility for modelling, transmitting, and mirroring faith to children. There is a need for the church to partner with the family (Dean and Foster 1998:100-101). The partnership of church-and-family has the aim to create an intimate connection and a welcoming but also challenging atmosphere that values and integrates young people into the community of faith (Pearce and Denton 2011:70-71; see Cannister 2013:117). One of the methods to the ministry to children and young adults in the church is that of the family ministry approach.

The family ministry model aims to empower families to cultivate an active Christian lifestyle. Here, parents take responsibility for the faith formation of children (Devries 2004:174-175). According to Jones (2019:56), the family ministry is defined as:

> The process of intentionally and persistently realigning a congregation's proclamation and practices so that members develop diverse discipling relationships and parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children's lives.

Some family ministry models will now be discussed briefly and elaborated on later in this study. Freudenburg and Lawrence (1998:98; cf. DeVries 2004:174) identifies two models of Christian education. In the typical children's ministry, the faith learning and faith formation of children is church-oriented, whereas, in the home-centred and church-supported model, the parents are primary faith nurturers in the faith development of children. Proponents of the family-integrated model include Voddie Baucham (2011) and Scott Brown (National Centre for Family Integrated Churches 2019). The National Center for Family-Integrated Churches describes this model as age-integrated and consistent with biblical patterns of worship and discipleship. Jones (2019:56) points out that the family-integrated model is similar to South African Scholar, Malan Nel's inclusive youth ministry model. Nel (2000; 2018:213-232; see Senter et al. 2001:2-38) defines the inclusive youth ministry approach "as a comprehensive, differentiated approach and focuses on integrated and intergenerational ministry to children". Mark DeVries (2004; cf. Jones 2019:56) developed the "family-based ministry model". The approach suggests no changes to church structures, but shifts the focus to intentional intergenerational interaction and learning in the faith community. Both Randy Stinson and Timothy Jones developed the family-equipping model, which is similar to Ben Freudenburg and Rick Lawrence's (1998) family-centred/church-supported model. The family-equipping ministry model does propose a reorganisation of the church. The aim is that parents "disciple their children at every level of the church's work" (Jones 2019:59).

The family-centred church-supported model and family-equipping model are most relevant to this study. These models hone in on the centrality of parents towards leading children's faith formation. Parents take part in every facet of children and youth ministry. Children are not excluded from the life and activities of the church

(Nel 1982:176; 2018:264). According to studies, parents who engage their children in religious talks at home and serve with them triple their children's likelihood of remaining believers as adults (see Strommen et al. 2001:130; cf. DeVries 2004:63). The family should reinforce what the children learn at church through deliberate faith practices and discussions (Roberto and Pfiffner 2007). Other factors in children's faith development include religious socialization, the active participation of parents in worship and regular faith practices. Through a focus on equipping parents and, by extension, the Christian home, the church can keep a flexible and open position towards the changes required for the twenty-first-century children's and youth ministry (DeVries 2004:117). However, this does not seem to happen effectively in practice. The Freudenburg and Lawrence (1998) model of home-centred faith formation changes the typical church methods of doing ministry with children and family.

Building on child development theories in psychology, practical theologian James Fowler (1981) developed the theory of the "seven stages of faith development: primal faith, intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individuative-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalizing faith". This study focuses on children in the age group from 0 to 12 years. This means that stages one to three of the faith development theory are relevant, "namely primal faith (infancy), intuitive-projective faith (early childhood) and mythic-literal faith (middle childhood)". Grobbelaar (2019:7; cf. Landreth 2002:16, see Waldman-Levi 2021), explains that the world of children can be reached through their play and playfulness in a style that is 'from the ground up' and not in the style of the intellectual discourse of the academic world. The theories will be utilised to construct a framework for the investigation of the role of parents and the church in the effective formation of faith as the child develops. The contribution of this study is to provide guidelines for an effective home-centred and church-supported approach to the faith formation of young children in an African context.

1.4   Methodology

This is a qualitative study that investigates existing models of family ministry with a specific focus on the faith formation of children. The home-centred family ministry

model is utilised in the study. The study combines experiential observation with a literature study to gain insight into the dynamics of family ministry and the faith formation of children. The methodological framework of the study is Richard Osmer's (2008) "core tasks of a practical theological investigation". The descriptive-empirical task (Osmer 2008:4) focuses on *What is going on?* in family ministry in relation to children's faith formation. The interpretive task focuses on *Why it is going on?* which explains the roles of both the church and parents in the children's faith formation. The normative task focuses on *What ought to be going on?* and is an exploration of good practice regarding the faith formation in children. The study explores a home-centred approach to family ministry and the faith formation of children for its potential to provide guidelines for better practice. The pragmatic task concerns the question: *How might we respond?* This focuses on procedures for a home-centred and church-supported approach to the faith formation of children.

The theoretical framework of the study will comprise three focal areas: child development, faith formation and family ministry. For insight into child development, teaching and learning theories will be used. These include Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, and Erikson's theory on stages of psychosocial development. For insight into faith development, James Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development is used to understand the process of faith formation in children of the age group that is relevant to this study. Concerning family ministry, Baumrind's (1973) parenting styles will be reviewed. To provide guidelines for effective strategies for the faith formation of children, the study will draw on Nel's (2018) inclusive youth ministry approach, the family-based church model of DeVries (2004) and the home-centred and church-supported model developed by Freudenburg and Lawrence (1998). These will be applied to the South African context.

1.5   Chapter outline

Chapter two explores the child development and faith development process. This chapter describes the role of the family and parental influence on children's faith formation and development. It describes child development in interaction with the environment. This provides insight into how faith is formed in children in the different

stages of their development. Teaching and learning theories such as the socialization theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Piaget's theory of cognitive development and Erikson's theory on stages of psychosocial development will be explored to give insight into child development. James Fowler's (1981) theory of faith development applies to children from birth to age twelve. Baumrind's (1973) model of parenting styles will focus on how parents relate to children and the subsequent effect on faith formation as the child grows. These theories are applied to develop guidelines for best practices to equip parents and the family for the faith formation of children in the home, outside the church environment. The chapter elucidates the effect of child development and parenting styles on the development of faith in children.

Chapter three explores relevant family-based approaches to ministry. This chapter describes an inclusive youth ministry approach in order to explore how ministry to the families is done in practice and to what extent both parents and children are included. The chapter explores the participation of parents and the church in the different family ministry models. It evaluates the effectiveness of these family ministry models for the faith formation in children. These family ministry models were mainly developed by North American scholars. This chapter evaluates the applicability of the models to an African and, specifically, South African context.

Chapter four develops an integrated home-centred approach to faith formation in children. It identifies best practices for family ministry and describes how parents can effectively take part in their children's faith development, specifically in the South African context. It also describes best practices for an effective collaboration between the church and the home for holistic faith formation in children. The family structure is relevant to determining how the church can effectively empower and equip parents for the task of faith development for their children.
Chapter five presents the findings and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER 2
FAITH FORMATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Introduction

Knowledge of child development–including faith development–is necessary for providing effective and holistic guidance to children (Neuman 2011:1). Many factors affect the development of children. These include the spiritual, physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of children from birth to twelve years of age. This chapter explores the impact of these factors on a child. The specific focus is on faith development. This chapter discusses child development, making use of Erikson's theory on the stages of psychosocial development, Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Vygotsky's sociocultural and socialisation theories, and teaching and learning theories. It will briefly elucidate the differences and similarities of the theories of John Westerhoff and James Fowler on faith development stages. James Fowler's (1981) theory is used to explain the faith formation of children from birth to pre-adolescence. To describe the phenomenon, the chapter presents and explores the first question of Osmer's model of practical theological investigation: *What is going on*? It brings general insights with regard to child development into dialogue with the process of faith formation.

Child development is about the processes of change and stability that occur in every human, from birth through the human lifespan (Papalia and Feldman 2011). Factors that affect the child include nutrition and diet, emotional and mental predisposition, and socio-economic circumstances (Chifeche and Dreyer 2019:3). Child development begins from conception and carries on through childhood. The way in which children are raised affects their whole life in some way or another. A child who has adverse childhood experiences will view life from a different perspective than children who grew up in a relatively safe environment (Cluver et al. 2015). Diverse aspects of children's development also affect the process of their faith formation (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018).

Faith is to come to know, love, and serve God. Faith can grow and mature over the individual's lifetime. Little (1983:17) defines faith as "a trust, loyalty, confidence, but it

is more than a feeling. It is a trust qualified by One who is trusted. It is, in fact, a gift from that One who reveals himself." Faith is guided by the Holy Spirit and forms within the contexts of families, relationships, and church communities (Roberto 2021:2). John Westerhoff (1976), in his classic work, *Will our children have faith?* alludes to the difference between learning about the Bible and living as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Salvation is not by actions, religion, beliefs, knowledge, or worship in the church, but by the suffering and love of God. Faith is to live according to that truth. Scholars broadly define spirituality as a connection with something transcendent and an individual's quest for meaning in life. Children have a deep spiritual life, although limited knowledge is available to them. There are not as many studies about children and faith or spirituality as there are about adult faith and spirituality (Neuman 2011:1).

In the South African context, the growth and development of children are further affected by poverty, inequality and unemployment (Lundie et al. 2018). This often leads to a broken family structure with a limited availability of and access to resources, an insufficient diet which makes children vulnerable to disease, exposure to violence and adverse childhood experiences (Cluver et al. 2015). The socio-cultural environment of such a context affects how children perceive the world. Their religious context is created by the church environment and the family and community in which a child is raised. The family, community and faith communities, along with the socio-cultural environment, affect how children perceive the world.

Piaget's theory on stages of cognitive development, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Erikson's stages of psychosocial development are useful for attaining a deeper understanding of child development (Salkind 2002:91; Papalia and Feldman 2011). These theories indicate that children absorb information even before birth. Spiritual formation, therefore, begins very early on in a child's existence and has an effect throughout the life of the person (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018). This chapter brings child development theory into conversation with the faith formation process. Physical developments in children include the growth of the body and the brain, motor skills and sensory capacities. Children's cognitive development is important for their faith development. The way in which children learn, pay attention, think, reason, express creativity, hold memories and develop language all have an impact on their faith

formation process. The development of children's emotions, personalities and social relationships are important aspects of how faith is perceived, received and developed in children. These different development domains are distinct, yet interrelated to children's development (Papalia and Feldman 2011:9).

The socio-cultural context of Africa differs from that of the Western world (Baxter 2006). This must be taken into account when examining the holistic development of children specifically in the South African context. This context is relevant when identifying a useful and effective approach to the faith development of children. The social environment in which the majority of children in Africa grow up differs in significant ways from other cultural environments. It is this context that provides a critical lens through which to examine the existing theories and their usefulness for this investigation. The socialisation of children is a factor in how faith is transmitted to the next generation (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018). When it comes to faith, churches and families are important systems in the South African context (Nel 2018). Individual differences among children should also be considered when investigating children's faith or spiritual development (Roberto and Pfinner 2007; Kolacki 2012). The contexts of children – how they live, where they go to school, with whom they live, how accessible church is, and relationships they have – are vital to understanding how their faith is formed and developed.

2.2   Faith formation and spiritual development in children

In my experience, the church and parents do not give sufficient attention to the spiritual development of young children. Studies show that often adults who had left the church return when they become parents for the sake of their child's faith formation (Weber and De Beer 2016:7). Children make up a large part of membership in churches, but their importance is not usually reflected in the way children's ministry is done. This can be seen in the resources, tools and facilities provided for children's ministry. Adults should re-examine how they convey their faith to children. Children learn through interaction with adults and life events (Weber and De Beer 2016:4). The openness of children to matters of faith seems to be taken for granted (see Nel 2016:1).

Faith, belief or religion is the most fundamental category in the human quest for relating to transcendence (Fowler 1981:14). It is an alignment of the total person, which gives purpose and goal to people's hope and strivings, thoughts, and actions. Niebuhr (1960) explains faith "as a universal human process that involves people trying to find meaning in their lives by placing their trust and loyalty in one or more attractive centres of value that represents for them a reality that is sustaining, reliable, and dependable". Dowling and Scarlett (2006:160) explain faith in two ways – as belief and trust. Faith is defined "as trust, commitment and orientation toward what is taken to be transcendent and sacred". Faith as belief is the most common way of defining faith while faith as trust captures the centrality and most significant aspects of religious and spiritual development.

Faith formation and spiritual development are important aspects of children's overall development as human beings. Several definitions have been proposed for faith and spirituality and its development. In this study, the terms 'faith formation' and 'spiritual development' are used interchangeably to mean the development of faith. Many scholars have defined faith formation and spiritual development in broad terms. Faith development is a life-long process of taking part in God's work of grace in the believer's life (Avenant 2015:65). Faith development is also described as "growing and changing physically, cognitively, spiritually and emotionally in the understanding of our faith, which defines our relationship with God, and the people with an impact on this relationship such as family, friends and people who attend the same congregation, catechesis and reverent teacher" (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018:2). Faith is a gift shared and nurtured through teaching (Fowler 1981; cf. Nel 2000:146). It is a lifetime process that matures over the lifespan of a person. Roberto (2021:3) develops a useful typology:

- The faith of young children is an *experiencing style* of faith.
- This develops into the *community-centred and affiliative style* of faith in middle childhood.
- The faith of adolescents and into adulthood is a *searching and inquiry style* of faith.
- This develops into the *maturing and personal style* of faith in adulthood.

Faith formation and spiritual development is a process that informs, forms, and transforms people. They are immersed in the practices and ways of life of a community. Harold (2012:142) describes spiritual formation as the means or agency to shape the human personality and life to bring a person to faith and to a deepening of that faith. Spiritual development should be part of the integrated development process of children. In a Christian environment, this means that children would be guided and encouraged to embrace Christ as the guide for their life and to live an authentic Christian life, empowered by the Holy Spirit. According to Harold (2012:143), parents and grandparents should learn how to work with God through the Holy Spirit to discover means to help children develop spiritually as part of their holistic personality structure.

Faith formation is an engaged process of learning and practice integrated throughout all aspects of congregational and daily life. It is an inter-generational lifelong process that engages all ages to experience, grow, celebrate, equip people to live the Christian life and follow the way of Jesus in daily life (Roberto 2021:3). Faith formation as socialisation implies a willingness to spend time and be open to learning from each other across multiple generations (Weber and De Beer 2016:7). Spiritual development through socialization and modelling is taken to a next level by *intentional teaching*. Scholars have argued that teaching for faith formation (or spiritual development) is the task of parents and the catechists in the faith community (Nel 2000:146-147; see Osmer 1990:219).

For the past century, the classroom model has been the structure for faith programs for children Christian churches. This structure of this traditional model is that of Sunday school, where an 'expert' or teacher develops the curriculum and teaches the children. This approach brings together teachers or volunteers and children for regular, planned teaching and learning. Significant relationships take shape between adults and children in a congregation in these settings (Roberto and Pfiffner 2007:1). However, the experience of childhood has changed drastically and adjustments are necessary in order to minister effectively to children. There is a need for faith formation that incorporates and forms the whole life of the child — head, heart, and soul. This shift to a holistic approach is essential for finding effective ways for the formation of faith in children (Roberto and Pfiffner 2007:2) There are limitations to

the traditional classroom approach to children's faith formation. This is no longer adequate in today's world.

2.3   Developmental stages and theories

The field of child development studies the processes of change and stability in children from conception through adolescence (Papalia and Feldman 2011:7). The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (NIECDP 2015:22) describes early childhood as "the period in which the foundation is laid for the survival, growth, development and protection of children to their full potential across all domains and 'competencies'. On a national level, the policy states that "the first thousand days offer a unique and invaluable window of opportunity to secure the optimal development of the child, and by extension, the positive developmental trajectory of a country" (NIECDP 2015: 19). The availability of a nurturing and supportive environment in the earliest months and years of children's lives is critical for optimal development (Lindland et al. 2016:9).

 In the South African context, there are challenges with regard to the development of young children across race, ethnic groups, social-economic status and communities. There are many factors, such as the education of parents, environment, income level, poverty, and socioeconomic status, that have an impact on a child's life from the beginning of life (see Lundie et al. 2018; Stats SA 2018). Socio-economic status (SES) encompasses income, educational attainment, occupational prestige, and subjective perceptions of the social status and social class of parents. It encompasses the quality-of-life attributes, the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society. The physical, spiritual, cognitive, and socio-cultural aspects that affect child development are discussed in this chapter.

2.3.1   Physical development in children

The physical development of a child begins before birth. Children already have a history by the time they are born (Popkins 2002; Papalia and Feldman 2011). This history is derived from parental genes, nutrition, and the physical and mental state of the mother, among others. The environment, within and without a child, plays an active part in the development of a child from its mother's womb. The nutrition and

psychological state of the mother are factors that impact the child's development, weight, and wellness. At birth, children are already individuals with distinct characteristics. The environment and inherent genes of a child are already at play. A combination of social, economic, biological, psychological and cultural factors affects the child's development, which begins at conception (Papalia and Feldman 2011:55). The stage of development from conception to the age of two makes up the first thousand days of a child's life. This period is imperative for children to grow and be healthy, happy and well-adjusted. Often, this stage is not taken seriously enough.

There is rapid development and daily improvement as the child does something different and better. The brain of a baby develops more quickly during this time than any other phase in a child's lifetime. New neural pathways develop with each new experience. The brain takes shape and lays the foundations for the child to learn, think, feel, and move. Before birth, they are already developing and responding to voices or other stimuli. In the late stages of pregnancy, a foetus can already learn, remember and respond to the voice of the mother (Papalia and Fredman 2011:85). The earliest period of human life is from conception to the age of two years. This period of early childhood development (ECD) includes pregnancy, birth and the first two years of childhood. The foundational development that takes place here enables children to reach their potential. The National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (2015:13) puts it as follows:

> The science is conclusive: investments in early childhood development yields lifetime development returns for the child, his or her family and society. Notably, early childhood development has the potential to contribute significantly to the reduction of key development challenges facing South Africa, particularly poverty and inequality.

The Heckman equation shows that every investment the society makes in the early childhood phase leads to exponential returns in the future for any society (Lundie et al. 2018:31). Support for caregivers – primary, family, parents or others – to ensure that young children have adequate nutrition, food, safety and stimulation will change the trajectory of any country even in contexts of massive inequality and poverty, such as in South Africa.

Many developing countries contend with the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality, and South Africa is no exception. Poverty is a global factor in the general development of children. In South Africa, children are born under varying conditions and 68% of children born in South Africa grow up in poverty (Stats SA 2014). This means that the rate of stunted growth and the effects of malnutrition are vast. Poverty should not be seen as a single factor. It is characterised by multiple physical and psychosocial stressors. The socio-economic status of parents is a predictor of an array of outcomes across the life span, which includes physical and psychological health. The effects of poverty on a child's growth have long-ranging effects. Access to social amenities, good water, good housing, and sufficient nutrition depends on the economic strength of a family. Some 68% of children live below the poverty line in South Africa. Nearly two-thirds of children under the age of 6 in South Africa live in the poorest 40% of households, where the unemployment rate is high and living conditions are poor (Hall et al. 2017)

The parental environment affects a child's development (Papalia and Feldman 2011). The well-being of a mother directly affects an unborn child (Papalia and Feldman 2011:92-100). It has an influence on the growth and health of the child. Therefore, what a mother eats, how she exercises, the type of work she does and the community that surrounds her, including the church and other social systems, affect the child from conception. The effects of a father's involvement are also critical in the development of children.

As children grow older, fine and gross motor skills are developed. The rate of growth slows down and speeds up as children develop. During the middle childhood phase, children's motor abilities develop at a slower rate compared to earlier years (Popkins 2002). However, there is now more development in strength, endurance, stamina and motor proficiency. The brain grows to support the advanced cognitive changes that are associated with middle childhood. Play is spontaneous and typically rougher and more competitive in nature for boys than for girls. The verbal acumen of girls is typically more developed than that of boys at the same stage. This knowledge is necessary for parents and other adults who design programs and events for children in the middle stage of childhood (Papalia and Feldman 2011).

2.3.2   Cognitive development in children

Cognitive development takes place over time. Changes take place in children's thinking, use of language, problem-solving, sensorimotor ability, and learning (Salkind 2002:87). Psychologists have studied the many influences on cognitive development. These include changes in the brain, the influence of parents, the effect of children's interaction with siblings and peers, and the role of culture. Jean Piaget's (1969) cognitive theory explains the thought and mental processes of human beings. The four stages of development are:

- the *sensorimotor* stage;
- the *preoperational* stage;
- the *concrete operational* stage;
- the *formal operational* stage.

The sensori-motor stage is from birth to two years of age. The preoperational stage is from two to six years. The concrete operational stage is from seven to about twelve years. These three stages of Piaget's cognitive development theory are relevant to this study.

Infants at the sensorimotor stage learn to coordinate the visual and tactile information they receive with their emergent motor skills (Piaget 1969). Children have an increasing awareness of the world outside of themselves. They develop the ability to act in relation to it. As children grow into the preoperational stage, they become egocentric. They are the centre of their experience. They have difficulty seeing things from a perspective other than their own. Language, symbols and imaginative play are important in this stage. In the concrete operational stage, children are able to perform concrete mental operations. They are also more able to engage in flexible and logical thinking. This entails the simultaneous consideration of multiple pieces of information for reasoning, though abstract thinking is not yet manifest.

Piaget's theory provides a rough benchmark for marking children's mental development. Parents, teachers and caregivers who have knowledge of how children think can come to a better understanding of how they operate (Papalia and Feldman

2011:33). This is important for the development of age-appropriate educational and spiritual development strategies. Churches and families should be aware of the appropriate level of faith conversations and practices for each child.

Critique of Piaget's theory is mainly on the view of linear development, which leads to formal thought. Development depends on every child's unique ability and progress. It is a gradual and continuous process. Personal and societal expectations of parents and children vary. From birth, children's development of language and literacy are immersed in their immediate family. Speech emerges naturally as a response to parents and siblings. Toddlers begin to form a growing and recognizable vocabulary. This often leads to rapid speech and language development. The infant and toddler years are critical for establishing the foundation for future literacy (Willms 1999; cf. Young 2002:3). Children's cognitive processes seem tied to specific content and a specific context, as well as to the kinds of information and thoughts regarded as important specific to the culture (Papalia and Feldman 2011:33).

Welsh et al (2010) and Vitiello et al (2011) explain that cognitive development is often delayed when children grow up in environments deprived of stimulating learning opportunities (Bruwer et al. 2014:23). Learning starts long before a child's school entry. Therefore, adequate stimulation during the pre-school years should not be underestimated. External factors that have an impact on the personal or school readiness of a child include the expectations of the parents, the readiness of the school, pre-school experiences, and the child's environment (Bruwer et al 2014:23). Provision of quality early childhood development (ECD) is a public good. The benefits of this spill over to society as a whole. The primary responsibility for the care and upbringing of young children is that of parents and families. The state has a responsibility to subsidise and assure quality ECD services are accessible. The broader community has a responsibility to support and promote the wellbeing of young children and families (Lindland et al. 2016: 4).

Studies show that the highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing very early in a child's life. The best investment for a society is in quality early childhood development from birth to five (Heckman 2012). The first years of children's lives should be the focus of greatest efficiency and effectiveness.

A later start at the age three or four is regarded as late. It is significant that many Sunday schools provide structured programs for children from the age of three. The investment of the church in children's faith development should begin earlier.

In South Africa, due to inadequate learning experiences at home or limited access to quality early childhood development (ECD) programmes, a significant number of young learners do not attain the required level of readiness to cope with formal learning in Grade 1 (Landsberg, Kruger and Nel 2011). Green, Parker, Deacon and Hall (2011) state that quality learning opportunities in the early years have a significant impact on a child's development and future school career. This is particularly true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bruwer et al., 2014:19).

According to the South African Statistics (Stats SA, GHA 2019), there were about 14.6 million learners at school in 2019. Approximately two-thirds (64.3%) of learners were still in school by the age of 18, which usually represents the age at which learners exit grade 12. A significant percentage of learners remained in primary and secondary schools long after they should have exited those institutions. Almost one-quarter (24.3%) of twenty-year-olds were, for instance, still attending secondary school. The percentage of post-school education for young adults has remained relatively low. ECD programmes are offered at day-care centres, crèches, playgroups, nursery schools and pre-primary schools. Almost four-tenths (36.8%) of the 0–4-year-olds attended. Gauteng had the highest number of children with access to these facilities at 46.8% and Western Cape at 46.9%. One half (50.2%) of children aged 0-4 years stayed at home with parents or guardians. These continue to show the long-lasting effect of the early input and intervention of parents, families, schools, churches and the greater community in the lives of children.

2.3.3   Sociocultural development of children

Socialisation is part of the development of a human being. Development is a contextual process within lived experiences and cultures. Children learn through social interaction. The processes of socialisation have the effect that children adopt the religious practices of parents unless there is an intervention of other significant forces (Roberto 2012:1; cf. Smith and Denton 2005:57). The Russian psychologist,

Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, linked the impact of cultural and social processes to Piaget's cognitive development of children (Papalia and Feldman 2011:33). A major difference is that whereas Piaget's theory sees the reception and interpretation of information in children as an *individual* process, Vygotsky's theory understands growth as a *collaborative* process (Papalia and Feldman 2011:34). The sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978; see Salkind 2002:91) emphasises the influence of culture, adults and peers on the developing child. Shared experiences are the way in which a child is inducted into society. Children acquire their behaviour, mode of thinking, language and cognitive skills through their interaction with their society. Language is essential for thinking and learning about the world. In Africa, language is not only a means of communication but is seen as a way of life. Its culture is evident.

Vygotsky's theory describes the parental role as crucial to a child's development. Parents can offer the help that children need for the development of certain culturally relevant skills. Adults should assist children by directing and organising their learning (Papalia and Feldman 2011:34). Adult assistance is effective for children in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). ZPD is the gap between what children can do and what can be achieved through assistance. Learning and assimilation take place when adults provide *'scaffolding'* to children. Scaffolding is the temporary support adults give children when accomplishing a task until this can be done without assistance (Salkind 2002:90). Parents should be sensitive to children's skill level and ability. They should allow children to progressively take on more responsibility to fulfil tasks Children become more and more capable as they engage in age-appropriate tasks.

Also, in faith formation *scaffolding* can be useful. This is a way in which the church and parents can facilitate children's growth and development in faith. *Scaffolding* provides support of adults to children for the growth and development of their faith (Salkind 2002:90). This is perpetuated through building relationship between the adult and children. The focus here is children's learning potential. The focus is then not on what a child knows and processes cognitively and which is typically assessed through caregivers Bible tests and exams. Churches and families should rather focus on the child's ability to learn, assimilate the religious culture and have spiritual experiences in their family and church contexts. Spiritual milestones such as

baptism, confirmation and communion, can be more effective if the teaching and learning process is family-centred (Nel 2018).

2.3.4   Learning theories for child development

Behaviourism and social learning theories provide an understanding of how children learn (Salkind 2002; Papalia and Feldman 2011). These insights are useful to an understanding of child development. Children develop by adopting the social behaviour to which they are exposed. In behaviourism, the observed behaviour in children is a predictable response to experience. Associative learning, which links two events, takes place. The voluntary behaviour in operant conditioning uses reinforcement or punishment to encourage or discourage certain behaviour in children. Parents and adults who influence children should be aware of the effect of these practices which can be adopted also in the faith formation process and spiritual development of young children (Nel 2018).

The social learning theory developed by the American psychologist Albert Bandura postulates that development in children is bidirectional. The concept of *reciprocal determinism* is where children act on the world as the world acts on them (Papalia and Feldman 2011:32). This is foundational to the parent-child relationship. Children learn how to act and respond by observation and imitation. This is also referred to as observational learning or modelling. They observe the behaviours, actions and practices and learn what actions are valuable, rewarded or punished (Salkind 2002). Children engage in observational learning without imitating the observed patterns of behaviour. Children develop a sense of self-efficacy as they build confidence in what they see as standards that enable them to succeed. The faith of children can be built on positive modelling from an early age (Powell and Clark 2011). Mentally, the ability to learn certain behaviours and group them into complex behaviour patterns starts from an early age. The environment of children created by adults and the family can be a deterrent to or inherent to the faith development of children (Lundie et al. 2018). Modelling is critical to children's development and how they perceive the world and relate to faith.

2.3.5   Psychosocial development in children

The concept of self is a total picture of an individual's abilities and traits. Self-concept is defined as a sense of self, a descriptive and evaluative mental picture of one's abilities and traits (Papalia and Feldman 2011:282). The concept of self and awareness emerge in the toddler stage. They gain clarity in cognitive abilities and developmental tasks throughout a person's lifetime. Distinct personality traits are visible in children from the beginning. Personality is a relative blend of temperament, emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. The psycho-social development of children is therefore a mix of personality development and social relationships (Papalia and Feldman 2011:204). Parents mould behavioural and give children their earliest social experience.

Observational learning is a form of social learning that occurs by watching others. Children learn from observing what rewards and punishments are given to those around them on account of the actions that were undertaken. The two types of observational learning are *imitation* and *modelling*. Andrew Meltzoff and Keith Moore's (1983:702-709) classic 1977 study showed that imitation begins at birth. In this way, infants learn many new behaviours. They watch and imitate those around them. Bandura's (1986:23-28) theory of observational learning describes the effects of exposure to violence or aggressive behaviour in children. He concludes that children learn through observation what appropriate acceptable behaviour entails (Bandura et al. 1961:575–582; cf. Salkind 2002:238). According to Bandura's theory of cognitive learning, the four mental processes required for observational learning are:

- attention because the child finds the model interesting;
- the ability to hold the model's behaviour in memory for later imitation;
- sufficient motivation to perform the modelled behaviour;
- sufficient motor control to perform the modelled behaviour.

Children do what parents and those around them *do* rather than what they *say*. Parental influence is primary in the hierarchy of influences in children's lives, especially in their early formative years (see Barna 2000; 2003; 2007). Parents largely influence the socialization of children and the environment in which they grow

up. Stoppard (1993:48) points out that a child picks up many basic social rituals from parents in as short a time as their first year of life. The general attitude toward parenthood affects children's experiences. This influences their development. The parent-to-child relationship is the blueprint of all other relationships. Schweitzer ([1987] 2010:181-182) and Roberto and Pfinner (2007) explain that taking children's different styles of learning into account, contributes to the effectiveness of their faith development. This is fundamental to spiritual and faith development in children. Children's emotions are closely linked to their brain development. Emotional experiences have a long-lasting effect on the structure of the brain. If children associate faith practices with negative emotions, it can affect how they perceive, receive and live out faith throughout their lifetime.

2.3.6   Stages of faith development theory

The process or journey of faith development is at the very core of Christianity (Ziettlow 2017:2). The journey begins in baptism and ends with entrance into the promised eternal life. In some churches baptism constitutes infant baptism. Parents bring or initiate children into the community of faith. In other churches, baptism is an adult response to the invitation to become part of the faith community of Christ. The parents, primary care givers and the church play a pivotal role in the different stages of development in children.

James Fowler's (1981) theory of the stages of faith is premised on the innate spiritual nature of human beings. The stages of faith theory develop the idea of the developmental process of human faith. Faith development theory is part of the family of structural *stage theories* of development. Another example is Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Stage theories aim to identify and explicate the fundamental underlying structures that shape development (Coyle 2011:283). These theories are generally universal and independent of culture. There is an assumption that development occurs in sequential and invariant stages. Fowler (1986:27) describes his theory of faith development as "the deeper structural operations of knowing and valuing which underlie, ground, and organize the thematic content of a person's faith". Fowler's theory separates the content of faith, such as values and beliefs, from psychological factors that support how faith works in affective, cognitive, and social development in humans (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018:3). According to Fowler,

people develop through these stages according to their own individual life and circumstances (Fowler 2001:159; cf. Coyle 2011:284).

Primal faith is to be found in new-borns and infants up to the age of two. Intuitive-projective faith is found in two to seven-year-old children. Mythic-literal faith is synonymous with children from seven to twelve years old. The adolescent stage of development is linked to synthetic-conventional faith. The emergence of adulthood is aligned with the individuative-reflective faith. Conjunctive and universalising faith is not connected with age. Some adults never reach these stages of faith. The stages of development that are relevant to this study are primal faith (infancy), intuitive-projective faith (early childhood) and mythic-literal faith. Many adults do not advance further than the synthetic-conventional faith that is associated with the adolescent stage of life (Fowler 1981:172; cf. Apostolides 2017:2). This is referred to as the conformist stage (Fowler 1981:172). Others do progress to reflective faith and critical thinking also with regard to faith and the meaning of life. The final stages are indicative of an especially mature faith that transcends tensions and comes to harmony.

Primal faith is the infancy or pre-language disposition and an emotional orientation of trust, equipoise mistrust. This stage of faith development is defined as an undifferentiated faith. Conceptual thought and language have not developed. The pre-images and concepts of God or the Holy are forming at this stage. Primal faith is embedded in the mutuality of the infant's relationships with parents and others. It embraces the basic rituals of care, interchange, and mutuality. Infants depend on others for basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and nurturing love (Piaget and Inhelder 1969; see Ziettlow 2017). At this stage, trust is fundamental, as infants discern the world–physical or otherwise–as their home (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018:2). Infants have the foundation of trust in those closest to them. This can lead to the development of trust in an unseen divine being–God. The crisis of this stage is trust of mistrust. Which way the crisis resolves itself will determine much in the future life of the person. This preverbal year is crucial to people's ability to form healthy attachments throughout their lifetime.

The early learning processes of children coincide with the primal stage of faith development. The rate of growth and development is at its greatest during these early years of development (Fowler and Dell 2006:36). Children are exposed to their primary caregivers. The safety of a child's environment is important for how the child perceives the world. Experiences that generate a sense of trust and comfort come from bodily touch and contact, ritualised interactions linked to play, vocal and visual interplay, nutrition and tending. Another factor is the development of affectionate interpersonal relations with primary caregivers (Van Niekerk 2018:4). The activation of a person's capacity for self-reliance and coherence is premised on these factors. It allows for the formation of attachments and shapes a child's disposition to trust parental care. Infants can therefore sense and learn to trust in a safe, warm, and welcoming environment. Therefore, the home is the fundamental place for teaching, learning, and gaining faith. Neglect and a lack of care and attention affect a child's overall development and faith development. Van Niekerk and Breed (2018:4) point out that consistent nurture leads to a sense of safety and trust in the Divine. Distrust in the Divine can be the result of negative experiences in the early years of a child's development. Therefore, the experiences of children with their context –church and home – are precursors to the development of faith in children from an early age.

The primal or undifferentiated faith stage is parallel to Piaget's sensorimotor stage of cognitive development. A child's world is understood through experiences. The child progressively takes part in knowledge construction. An understanding of how children develop can lead to more effective ways of ministering to them and creating age-appropriate spiritual experiences. The awareness of how children perceive God is a precursor to how adults, parents and churches can engage in the faith formation process. The pre-language development of children is not a deterrent to their experience of the Divine. The need for trust and emotional attachment can be linked to faith development in children. The coordination of experiences of children gives them an understanding of the world. Children's interaction with objects, and the knowledge acquired from physical, reflexive and instinctive actions from birth to the beginning of symbolic thought, are pivotal to how they understand the world (Piaget 1964). They tend to be unaware of others' needs and opinions because their own ego is the centre of their existence at this developmental stage of their lives.

Intuitive-projective faith applies to the early childhood period two to seven years old. At this stage, children are capable of sophisticated communication, and gross and fine motor development. The fast rate of brain development makes them susceptible to the effects of neglect and abuse – emotional and physical. Children also develop self-consciousness and positive and negative images are formed. Imagination and the ability to unify experiences are strengths of the intuitive-projective faith. Language development enables children to use speech and symbols to organise their sensory experiences. Fantasy and reality are intertwined. Young children have episodic and intuitive logic (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018:4). Hence, stories and imaginative conversations are ways to communicate values and faith experiences to children. They can, however, also have a negative effect because of destructive imagery. The imagination of children is important at this stage. Imagination can be utilised positively or negatively. Adults who intentionally foster faith development in children have to be aware of the power of imagination, stories and symbols in relation to Christian education.

The conceptualisation of God for children is the result of stories, drama, representations and fantasies from their environment. The inability to think in abstract terms limits young children's experiences and they cannot operate on the level of concrete operational thinking. This sometimes impedes adults from knowing how to convey the Christian faith to young children at this stage of their development. A negative portrayal of Bible stories can lead to a detrimental perception of faith because they cannot distinguish fully between reality and fantasy. Questions of security, safety and power or lack of power are matters of concern to young children. Van Niekerk and Breed (2018) point out that death is a conscious focus of mystery and a source of danger. On a positive note, children have the ability to combine daily and mundane life and activities with God (Newberg 2012:42). In this sense, it makes it easier to convey the experience rather than a cognitive understanding of faith to young children. The effects of imagination, storytelling, puppets and other visual aids cannot be overemphasised at this stage of faith formation in children. The use of visual aids in teaching young children is applicable to the systematic, logical and concrete thinking of Piaget's cognitive development theory. Stories can be narrated and remain important to children. Children can separate fact from fantasy and also associate fantasy with play. Children attach

concrete, literal, one-dimensional meanings to symbols. There is an understanding of cause-and-effect relationships with reciprocity in God's dealings with people (Fowler and Dell 2004). Children are less egotistical and can accept the perspectives of others. They see God in anthropomorphic terms. God has the intentions and struggles of people. Children have a sense of fairness at this stage. According to Fowler (1981), this rather elementary stage can sometimes still be found in adolescents or adults who remain "stuck" in this stage of faith development.

Fowler's broadly accepted faith development theory has been critiqued by various scholars (Gilligan 1982; Breakwell 1986; Slee 2004; Heywood 2008; Coyle 2011). Despite vigorous criticisms, Fowler's faith development theory has been highly influential in for instance Christian education, pastoral care, and practical theology; it has also received considerable criticism in a field such as psychology. Some of the criticisms revolve around Fowler's understanding of faith and the structural logic of development. Some scholars are critical of the emphasis on cognition and the lack of attention to the emotional and psychodynamic scope of processes of transformation and transition. Others criticise it for not accommodating more postmodern trends in psychology. Some scholars purport a gendered bias where women scored less than men on the faith development interviews (see Slee 2004; Coyle 2011). There is also the criticism of cultural specificity as the context in which the theory was developed is late-twentieth-century Euro-American intellectual culture and may not be applicable in other contexts (Baxter 2006). In developing a concept of God, which is essential for faith formation, cultural exposure may help children in reasoning and conceptualising a certain mind-set around the supernatural (Burdett, Barrett and Greenway 2020). The concept of God varies in reference to different religious traditions such as Christianity, Islam and Jewish traditions.

The pioneering work of Fowler with regard to faith development in children is relevant to this study. The three stages are not seen as a linear progression but rather as a spiral one. Fowler's theory seems to suggest that development is linear and sequential. This postulation is not generally applicable, as children develop at individual rates which can be enhanced or inhibited by their environment. Other factors in the process of faith formation include the participation of parents and the church. The style of parenting plays a part in the way in which children perceive and

receive faith. In South Africa, where communal and multi-generational living is prevalent, the living conditions, styles and culture of the day are important factors in the faith development of children. The report of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA 2005; see Nel 2016:5) articulates it as follows:

> Faith development of the new generation of believers as an organic and holistic process where the whole congregation becomes the space for baptised members to participate in, share and receive gifts, in and with the world… [An] ongoing journey of transformation and reformation.

The communal development of children on the African continent is vital in the conversation of faith formation and the application of theories of faith development.

2.4   Parenting styles and faith formation

Parenting is the process by which adults socialize infants, children, and adolescents in their care. The purpose of parenting is to protect children and prepare them to survive and thrive in the world (Popkin 2002:12). Parenting is also defined as the art of providing sufficient education and experience so that children are willing to and capable of making appropriate choices without having to go toe-to-toe with parents on every issue under all circumstances (Barna 2011:63). The family is a social system with subsystems that include parent-child, marital, and sibling systems, enmeshed in the larger social context (Salkind 2002:295).

Children's first relationships are formed at birth with parents and caregivers. The most natural forms of relationship are the parent-child relationships (Nel 2000:21), which form the context for the total development of children, which starts at birth. Parents provide the environment that can be conducive or detrimental to a child's healthy development. Children's behaviour is linked to the cognitive development and cognitive processes attained at certain ages (Nel 2000:142-143). Barna (2011:23) argues that there is no correlation between a family's socioeconomic status and the spiritual development of a child. He however argues that single parents often find it more difficult to nurture spiritual development in children because one parent is facilitating the efforts required by two. However, there are

many successful single parents' homes. On the other hand, two parents can work against each other, whereas one mature parent can provide a child with a stable, predictable, and nurturing environment for faith formation. It should therefore not be assumed that two-parent' homes are the ideal for spiritual development of children. Many children in the South African context grow up in single-parent or elderly family homes. This study argues that children can be facilitated effectively early on in life to gain a well-developed faith. Irrespective of the family structure, the quality of relationships in the home does impact children's faith formation.

Parenting style comprises a set of attitudes that the parent transmits to the child. These attitudes create the emotional climate of the parent-child exchange (Salkind 2002:296). Parents, peers, social role models, socialization, and other interpersonal contacts play a significant role in the formation of faith in children. Two contemporary approaches to parenting explain the impact of parenting on children's development. They are: the *social interaction* approach and the *typological* approach. Typological models focus on general parenting styles that Baumrind (1973) identifies as: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive. Popkin (2002:20-25) similarly calls them: autocratic, authoritative and permissive.

The social interaction approach emphasizes the nature of specific exchanges between parent and child. The *authoritarian* or *autocratic* parenting style is characterized by reward or punishment strategies, a harsh emotional environment, brief communication between the parent and child, and high demands (Salkind 2002:296; cf. Popkins 2002:21). This style of parenting can affect the parent-child relationship negatively and can result in the child developing a negative view of faith. This style is therefore not highly conducive to faith formation. Popkin (2002:23) describes the *permissive style* of parenting as "freedom without limits". Children receive love and warmth without demands or restrictions on their behaviour (Salkind 2002:296). The *authoritative* parenting style displays a warm and accepting attitude towards children and encourages cooperation. It stimulates learning, establishes order, routine and firm expectations with importance accorded to every position in the family system (Salkind 2002:296; cf. Popkins 2002:24).

The open communication that is characteristic of the authoritative parenting style allows children to engage with parents at their level. It allows children to ask questions and be heard by parents. This opens the possibility for the transmission of faith from parents to children. An American Search Institute survey reports that 87% of high school learners feel devalued by and disconnected from adults, and only 22% say that they have positive communication with their parents (Howard 1997:1). Children see things from a unique perspective which differs from that of their parents and therefore it is important that their views are heard and treated with respect (Barna 2011:42). An authoritative parenting style where open communication is valued provides an environment that is not only healthy for the optimal general development of the child but is also conducive to faith and spiritual development.

Through the ordinary process of socialization, and unless other significant forces intervene, children will absorb and mirror the religious attitudes and outcomes of the parents (Smith and Denton 2005:57). This presupposes that the faith development that parents themselves have undergone, will become the building blocks of the child's faith formation. Laymon (1971:106) uses the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6 as an example of how parents could teach children obedience and love by inculcating the words of Yahweh regularly in the routines of daily life.

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deut. 6:1-9).

The *Shema* illustrates that faith development does not only take place where the faith community gathers once a week. Instead, it instructs parents to make faith formation a daily activity infused into the lifestyle of the family. This re-enforces the Old and New Testament instructions to a parent to be responsible and active in the faith formation of children (see Fowler 2004:25-30). The training requirements for

faith formation, using the *Shema* as an example, are therefore to develop a lifestyle with constant exposure to Scripture and faith practices (Fowler 2004:57-62).

In the developmental stage of primal undifferentiated faith which is from birth to two years, positive experiences of babies lead to feelings of assurance, trust in the world and harmony with the divine. A secure environment provides them with comfort, a sense of consistency and care. Negative experiences, such as parental or environmental neglect, results in feelings of fear of the world and the divine. Seeds of doubt later grow into existential angst and general mistrust. The Piaget's sensori-motor stage of cognitive development (see Fowler 1984:52-53) is important for children's early perception of faith and trust. Often adults – both parents and the church – view this stage of a child's development as not so important. This results in a lack of intentionality from the side of the church and the parents to expose small children to faith experiences. The reasoning is that very young children are incapable of cognitive understanding of faith and are therefore unable to experience faith.

At the intuitive-projective stage of faith development between the ages of three and seven years, faith is *experiential*. Faith develops through stories, images, external influences, and a deeper intuitive sense of right and wrong. Children have a basic perception of God and of how the universe functions. At this stage, children have sufficient language to speak and the ability to express thoughts. How children experience parents or significant adults to whom they are emotionally attached affects their views and representation of God in these early years (Fowler 1991:103). This stage is like Piaget's stage of preoperational thinking. Consistent logical-mental structures are still lacking. These only develop later. Children do not have formalized beliefs at this stage. Exposure to the practices of others affected their faith in God and religious activities. The identity that forms at an early age is an indicator of how they will believe later on in life. If there is a lack of spiritual formation in the early years, it is difficult for young people to develop their own spiritual identity during the adolescent years and beyond (Nel 2018:351).

The style of parenting that parents adopt affects every aspect of their children's lives. For instance, the authoritative parenting style (Papalia and Feldman 2011:354) can positively affect children's school success and motivation. This is because of the

involved nature of this style. The permissive style does not yield similar results in children. Thus, the environment parents create is significant to the receptiveness of children in the faith formation process and spiritual development. In middle childhood, when children transit into the stage of co-regulation, the control of behaviour moves from parent to child. Discipline and other engagements are characterised by a conversational tone and negotiation. This transcends into how faith is discussed with children in the middle childhood stage.

2.5   Summary

Every system that touches the lives of children offers an opportunity to leverage this rapidly growing knowledge base to strengthen the foundations and capacities that make lifelong healthy development possible. Explicit investment in the early reduction of significant adversity is likely to generate positive returns (Shonkoff et al. 2012:240). The various development stages provide holistic insight into child development. The physical, cognitive, psychosocial and sociocultural aspects do not develop in a linear fashion but are interlinked. The home and the church need to take these into account when engaging with children with the intent to facilitate faith formation and spiritual development processes. The style of parenting adopted by parents and adults is a critical factor when it comes to children and the development of faith.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF PARENTS AND THE CHURCH IN FAITH FORMATION

3.1   Introduction

This chapter investigates the role of the two most important contexts in which the faith development in children takes place, namely the church and the family. In this study, the descriptive-empirical task of a practical theological investigation (Osmer 2008:4) focuses on the question of *what is going on* in family ministry in relation to children's faith formation. The chapter also accomplishes the second task, to interpret *why* parents and the church play a critical role in the faith development of children.

Youth and children's ministry have the aim of ministering specifically to children and youth in the faith community. These ministries aim to meet the needs of the particular life stage in which children find themselves. Sunday school, catechism, children's church, admittance to communion, confirmation classes, baptism, teen and youth ministry are some forms of ministry to children and youth in many congregations. The congregation, parents, elders, deacons and youth leaders have a responsibility towards children (Nel 2001:4-5; 2018; cf. Strong 2014). The forms of ministry with young people and children in the congregation often operate as *separate or parallel* ministries depending on the structure, style and liturgy of a congregation. The relationship between the church and the family is investigated in this study.

As the lockdown regulations due to the COVID-19 pandemic ease somewhat, new patterns can be observed in congregations. The anticipated eager return to church has not taken place. Many are worried about this new pattern of reluctance among churchgoers to go back to the church building for traditional forms of worship. With regard to children, the question is whether their experience of *church-at-home* compensates sufficiently for the lack of a traditional church experience. Parents tend to no longer regard the physical gathering for worship as necessary. The impact of this on the faith formation of children can be far-reaching. Without engaging with the church, some milestone ministries for children and adolescents, such as baptism,

admittance to communion and confirmation, which are traditional responsibilities of the church, are now limited. The input from parents and others in the church community for the faith formation of children is also reduced if the children are no longer exposed to the church environment.

The current COVID-19 situation has, to an extent, exposed the weaknesses of the partnership between the church and the family regarding children's faith formation. If physical church gatherings no longer take place, the question is how the church would then be able to equip parents to guide the process of faith formation in their children. In the era before the COVID-19 pandemic, the typical role of the church was to minister to children within the four walls of the church. The faith formation of children was the responsibility of the experts–Sunday school teachers, children's ministry volunteers and children's and youth pastors. In this post-pandemic era, it is becoming increasingly clear that there are limitations to this way of ministering to children. The home has become the church, school and workplace for families. This has accelerated the need for partnership. The focus is now on the home as the place for the faith formation of children and the family. The church should equip people for this task.

The studies by American scholars Lane, Wellman, and Evans (2012; see Burdett et al. 2020) and Richert et al. (2016), show that children who attend religious schools and churches have a richer understanding of God in contrast to children who do not have these religious experiences. Also, children from Christian homes had a more theologically accurate understanding of God than children who had no religious background. Children's participation in religious communities likely influences how they think about religion and faith (Lane et al. 2012).

There are different models and structures of family ministry. Some churches adopt a model of integration or inclusion of the entire family. Other family ministry models separate adults and children for age-segregated ministries. This study utilises the theological framework of Malan Nel's inclusive congregational approach. If this approach is applied to faith formation in children, the home would be the focus. The church and the family should work together to cultivate a strong faith in children. The ministry of children and youth cannot nurture strong faith in children by means of

church structures, programmes, and relationships alone. Partnership with parents is essential (Avenant, Nel and Jordaan 2021:1). More often than not, the two contexts–family and church–work in separate silos rather than in partnership. Partnership is critically needed, especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. The family ministry models that are applicable to this study are:

- family-based ministry;
- family-integrated ministry;
- home-centred and church-supported family ministry;
- the family-equipping ministry model.

Most of these family ministry models are American and therefore, from a Western context and perspective. The South African context and family structures are different in many respects. Family and context are major factors for the nurture of children's faith. The faith formation of children takes place in various contexts. The idea of a traditional family structure where children live with both parents is not the reality of many children in South Africa. If the family is taken seriously concerning faith formation in children, factors that are in play include: where a child lives, the structure of the parental home, the literacy of the members of the family, and the socio-economic level of the family. These factors are in play when a home-centred approach to faith formation in children is developed. The influence of parents and their partnership with the church is crucial to the holistic faith formation of children. This partnership for faith formation is especially important in these current times.

3.2 Parental influence in faith formation

The social and religious institution of family precedes the church (Strong 2014:1). Relationships are what bind people to form a family. Relationships in families are about more than blood ties. Relatedness and solidarity are fundamental to people's humanity (Cloete 2016:1). South African scholar, Malan Nel (2000:19; cf. 2018), describes the family as "the primary hermeneutical space where children come to an understanding of themselves, others, the world and God". This explains the place of the family with regard to the formation and faith formation of children. It also highlights the importance of parental involvement in the formative space that is

required for effective children and youth ministry (DeVries 1994; see Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998). Children come into the world through families. Children are dependent on the family for survival and learning. There they learn about life, how to live and how to forgive. Family is "a process rather than as a static arrangement with a community of constructive relationships where all humans are nourished and cannot live without" (Cloete 2016:5).

The interdependence of the family and the church is foundational to children's faith formation. In both the family and the church positive relationships create an environment in which they can be nurtured and cared for. The primary responsibility for the faith development of children is that of the parents, not specialists outside the home (Barna 2011:11-12). In order to nurture children's faith, parents should build a good relationship. It is in such relationships that faith, values, wisdom, and knowledge are transmitted to them (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:38). The duty to raise children to become mature and spiritual adult persons is primarily the responsibility of the parents rather than the church or ministry 'experts' (Eph 6:4; 2 Tm 1:5; 3:15) (cf. Nel 2001:12; Barna 2007:25; Strong 2014:3).

Parenting skills are required in order to establish a strong spiritual foundation in children. However, the strongest influence of parents on children comes from the *relationship* rather than parenting skills (Joiner and Nieuwhof 2010:28). The point of departure of this study is that the quality of the parent-child relationship is of greater importance than the acquisition of parenting skills. Parents are the primary Christian educators. The family is the primary location for building faith in young people and transmitting faith from one generation to the next (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:10).

From a biblical perspective, the family has a unique hermeneutical function (see Nel 2018:86). Parents should enable children to gain an understanding of life and faith. From a biblical perspective, Strommen and Hardel's (2000:17) give an inclusive definition of family. It includes parents, relatives, mentors, and friends. Hence, family is seen as "those people with whom we share our faith, values and purpose as they relate to a life of hope and love" (Strommen and Hardel 2000:17). The Passover meal with its origin in ancient Israel, is an example of where children are free to ask

questions and are told the stories of their religious heritage. The family in the Old Testament was community orientated. This is contrary to the increasingly individualistic nature of the family structures today. Because the context of the Bible was extremely patriarchal, the family is also portrayed as a patriarchal system (Cloete 2016:4).

In industrial and post-industrial societies, there has been a distinct bias towards the "nuclear family" consisting of a married father and mother with children (see McKie and Callan 2012:47). The nuclear family is often described as *the* model that God instituted (Mvududu and Madden 2001:11; Strong 2014:2). Contrary to this, there is also an argument for family as seen from an African perspective, which is integral to communal life, not individualistic. Cloete (2016; see Zinn and Eitzen 2005:10-11) points out that the glorified ideal of family never existed in practice. Family life is usually inundated with internal and external conflict.

Similarly, there is no such thing as a 'typical South African child' from a 'typical South African family'. The report of the South African Institute for Race Relations (Holborn and Eddy 2011) shows that many children in South Africa are raised in a single mother household or in a family where the adults are unemployed. Factors such as HIV and violence contribute to a high number of child-headed households in South Africa. Other trends are absent fathers and extreme poverty. Children are not safe. Many are absent from school. Many are not part of a church. They are often prone to anxiety, depression, and self-death. Though genetic, psychological, and social factors play a role in children who have experienced adverse childhood circumstances are at risk of developing depression and or taking their own life (Holborn and Eddy 2011). In sub-Saharan Africa, large numbers of youth are exposed to adverse childhood circumstances (see Cluver et al. 2015:53).

In this era of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become even clearer that some children are more vulnerable to the psychosocial effects of pandemics than others (De Miranda et al. 2020). In this critical period of development, namely childhood and adolescence they need special care in order to preserve and promote their mental health. For instance, the drastic change in routine is a major effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. The move from classroom learning to home learning has caused a major

shift in how children learn. Screen time has increased as distance education, online and virtual classes have become the norm. This is also the case when it comes to spiritual activities. Church services have been online. Children's ministry has become hybrid or online rather than in person. Less physical activity and exercise in the lives of children, cause challenges for child development. It can lead to frustration when events with children are cancelled or postponed. The general feeling of frustration can cause a decline in school performance, increased agitation, aggression, and even regression. The presence of parents and children's involvement in home activities can contribute positively to children's routine and sense of autonomy. Due to the isolation, there can be more significant contact between parents and children. There is more opportunity for play, but the proximity can also create friction. Child abuse and gender-based violence have escalated in these times of isolation. The assumption that home is 'a safe place' is false. Parents should be a positive presence and supportive companions of children on their life's journey.

Only a limited number of studies from an African context on the influence of parents is available. Therefore, research still has to rely heavily on studies from other contexts. In a 2014 South African study (see Van Niekerk and Breed 2018:2), 65% of those interviewed showed that families play an integral part in faith formation. Mothers play a greater role in the spiritual development of young children, though the role of both parents is significant. Grandparents, siblings, and other family members play a less significant role in the faith formation of children. The church and the pastor are third on the list of influence on young people, namely 44%. As the children grow older, the roles are reversed. The pastor or representative of the church now has more influence (48%), mothers are at 47%, and fathers at 38%. Some 41% of respondents do Bible study with their parents regularly, 65% have religious discussions, and 43% have faith conversations with their parents. A significant number of 95% of the participants in this study indicated that the example of their parents had a great influence on their faith and values. Values are transmitted through stories of faith. According to the study, mothers were more likely to tell stories of faith. Only 11% of the participants indicated that no one at home played a role in their faith development.

TABLE 1: Person playing largest role in faith development as a child.

Largest role in faith development	Percentage
Mother	81
Father	66
Pastor	44
Grandparents	30
Sibling	17
Other family member(s)	11

Source: Nel, M. & Van der Westhuizen, Z., 2015, Skokkend positief, Bybelmedia, Kaapstad

American surveys show that the influence of parents in the faith formation of children ranks highest (Devries 2004:60-65; cf. Nel 2000:108-109). The religious life that is modelled and taught by parents constitutes the most significant social influence on shaping young people's faith and religious life (Powell and Clark 2011:16-24; cf. Barna 2011:30-34). Parents who model an integrated faith in their daily life, tend to engage in family conversations infused with biblical views and practise regular faith activities such as Bible study, worship, and prayer with children. Barna (1995:55-60; cf. Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:12) emphasises the positive effect of *family time* and *meaningful conversations* in the formative years of children. A lifestyle of regular church attendance, service to others, reading the Bible, speaking about faith, and creating a safe space for children to ask questions and express opinions about faith, are ways of developing faith in children.

There is a need to foster a partnership among all the stakeholders in a child's development. These include the family, church and state (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018). Children form part of the faith community. At the early stages of the evangelical movements, parents were identified as important partners in the quest for holy households (Arand 2000: 94-95). Of all the groups that contribute to children's faith development, the parents are the most significant persons. Parents are responsible for inspiration, direction and teaching in the process of children's faith formation. Various theories on faith development identify factors such as imagination, the environment, and above all healthy interaction between parents and

children, as fundamental to children's faith formation (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018:6; see Fowler 1981; Westerhoff 2000).

Family structures are changing rapidly. Today's parenting dynamics vary. Children are no longer raised predominantly in traditional two-parent homes. Families are made up of either one parent, or same-sex parents or heterosexual parents. Out of 989 318 babies born in South Africa in 2017, 61% have no information about the father (Fourie 2018). According to the Human Sciences Research Council, around 60% of South African children have an absent father, with more recent estimates showing even higher numbers. Some 40% of mothers are single parents and only about 25% of children form part of a nuclear family (HSRC 2019). There are single-parent homes, child-headed households, children who grow up with grandparents, uncles, aunts or other family members. Families and households are profoundly important to the developmental, emotional and cognitive growth of children and parents and/or caregivers play a central role in this development. (Van Niekerk and Breed 2018:2). A South African study (Van Staden 2015) questions the validity of the debates on the impact of family structures on children's development. There are indications that family contention, divorce, and the high incidence of absent fathers have a detrimental effect on children. Scholars (Holborn and Eddy 2011:4; DeVries 2004:65) identify some negative effects of family structure on children. There is an increase in the rate of depression, emotional problems, early pregnancy, aggression among boys, low self-esteem and poor academic performance because of a negative family environment. The church has the task to welcome and support all family structures without prejudice (Browning 2007).

South African children live in a diversity of households. According to Stats SA (2019), 39% of households are nuclear families that comprise parents and children. Some 21.3% of children live with neither of their biological parents. Some 32.7% of South African children live with both parents, whereas 42.0% live with their mother. Approximately 14% of children were orphaned, having lost one or both parents. The survey shows that 40.1% of households comprise two generations and 14.7% include at least three generations.

Socialisation is influential in the faith formation of children. The social exposure children have from an early age influence whom they become. Parents teach or reinforce positive or negative behaviour when children experience the consequences of their actions. This can relate to the way in which children receive or perceive faith. In the social context, children learn what is acceptable or unacceptable. *Operant or instrumental conditioning* is the result of the decision that is made to produce a certain kind of behaviour in order to receive a reward or avoid punishment (Salkind 2002:238). The connection parents make between faith and behaviour, action or consequences form children's perception of faith and God. Behaviour, followed by reward or reinforcement, will be repeated more frequently by the child. Behaviour that is followed by punishment will decrease in frequency (Salkind 2002:237). In this way, some responses are weakened, whereas other responses are strengthened. This is learning and can cause a negative or positive perception of faith because of parents' actions.

Imagination plays an important role in children's faith development (Fowler 1981:123). Parents can appeal to the imagination of children when they tell Bible stories. Some 96% of the respondents in the study by Van Niekerk and Breed (2015:67) took their children to catechesis, where stories form part of the curriculum.

The faith development of children is affected by their environment. The quality of the relationship between children and their parents, family, or caregivers plays an important role in children's faith formation (Fowler 1981:119-121; Westerhoff 2000). In a study by Avenant (2015:65-66), 94% of the respondents stated that they had a positive relationship with their parents and 95% felt parental acceptance. Parents and families create the environment that is either conducive to the growth and development of children or not (Friedman, Bowden, and Jones, 2003). Children are dependent on their parents to create a supportive environment in which they are provided with sufficient care.

Children follow and model the examples of their parents, whether good or bad (Strommen 1973:28). In the South African study by Avenant (2015), 91% of the respondents stated that their parents' morality and values directly influenced them. Some 81% of the respondents of this study indicated regular church attendance with

their families. Some 41% did regular Bible study at home and 65% had discussions with their parents about religious matters. Also, 47% of fathers and 58% of mothers told their own faith story with their children. Children have to be able to observe faith in their interaction with adults and be allowed to react to what they experience (Westerhoff 2000).

A characteristic of those parents Barna (2007:56) refers to as "revolutionary parents" is that "they put a high premium on the spiritual development of their children". Parents can leave a spiritual legacy to their children if they teach and model the centrality of God in their own lives. Prayers, family devotion, spiritual discussions and examples of godliness create an environment that is conducive to faith development in children (Mueller 2007). Parents' responsibilities include showing what a relationship with God looks like and setting an example of godliness for children as they rely on God for their children's spiritual growth (Mueller 2007; see Cole 2012; Strong 2014).

3.3 Parenting styles and faith formation

Parenting is the process by which adults socialise infants, children, and adolescents in their care. The purpose of parenting is to protect children and prepare them for life so that they can survive and thrive in the society in which they live (Popkin 2002:12). Parenting includes providing sufficient education and experience so that children are willing and able to make appropriate choices without having to go toe-to-toe with parents on every issue under all circumstances (Barna 2011:63). The family is a social system with subsystems that include the parent-child, marital, and sibling systems. The family system forms part of the larger social system (Salkind 2002:295).

Children's first relationships are with parents and caregivers and are formed at birth. The most natural form of human bonding is the parent-child relationship (Nel 2000:21). This relationship constitutes the context in which the development of children takes place. This process begins at birth. The environment parents create can be conducive to or detrimental to a child's development. Children's behaviour is

linked to the cognitive development process pertinent to a certain age (Nel 2000:142-143).

Parenting style comprises a set of attitudes that the parent transmits to the child. These attitudes create the emotional climate of the parent-child exchange (Salkind 2002:296). Interpersonal contact such as with parents, peers, social role models, and the process of socialization play a significant role in child development. Two contemporary approaches to parenting are the *social interaction* approach and the *typological* approach. Typological models focus on general parenting styles that Baumrind (1973) identifies as authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Popkin (2002:20-25) similarly calls them autocratic, authoritative and permissive.

The social interaction approach emphasises the nature of specific exchanges between parent and child. The authoritarian or autocratic parenting style is characterised by reward or punishment strategies, a harsh emotional environment, brief communication between the parent and child, and high demands (Salkind 2002:296 cf. Popkins 2002:21). As earlier stated, this style of parenting can impact the parent-child relationship negatively. A negative perception of faith can be a deterrent to a child's positive reception of faith and spiritual development. The authoritarian style, however, is not highly conducive to faith formation. The *permissive style* of parenting which can be described as "freedom without limits" is another deterrent to positive perception and disposition to faith formation in children (Popkin 2002:23). Children receive love and warmth without demands or restrictions on their behaviour (Salkind 2002:296). This style of parenting can create lack of structures and boundaries for children. The *authoritative* parenting style displays a warm and accepting attitude towards children and encourages cooperation. This style is positively disposed to the process of spiritual development in children. It promotes learning, establishes order, routines, and firm expectations, and gives equal weight to all positions in the family (Salkind 2002: 296; cf. Popkins 2002:24).

The open communication that is characteristic of the authoritative parenting style allows children to engage with parents at their level. Children may ask questions and they are heard by parents. This opens the possibility of the transmission of faith from parents to children. An American Search Institute survey reports that 87% of high

school learners feel devalued by and disconnected from adults, and only 22% say that they experience their communication with their parents as positive (Howard 1997:1). Children see things from a unique perspective, which may differ from their parents. It is important that their views are acknowledged and treated with respect (Barna 2011:42). Open communication is valuable in an authoritative parenting style. This provides an environment that is not only healthy for the optimal general development of the child but is also conducive to faith and faith formation. Through the ordinary process of socialization, and unless other significant forces interfere, children will absorb and reflect the religious attitudes and outcomes of the parents (Smith and Denton 2005:57). Parents' own process of faith development will become the building blocks for the faith formation of their children. Laymon (1971:106) uses the *Shema* prayer in Deuteronomy 6 as an example of how parents should teach children obedience and love by inculcating the words of Yahweh regularly into the routines of daily life.

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Deut. 6:1-9).

The *Shema* illustrates that faith development takes place not only where the faith community gathers once a week. It instructs parents to make faith formation a daily activity infused into the lifestyle of the family. This re-enforces the Old and New Testament instruction to parents to be responsible and active in the faith formation of their children (see Fowler 2004:25-30). The aim is to develop a lifestyle through constant exposure to Scripture and faith practises (Fowler 2004:57-62).

In the developmental stage of primal undifferentiated faith, which is from birth to two years old, positive experiences of babies lead to a feeling of assurance, trust in the world, and harmony with the Divine. A secure environment provides them with

comfort, a sense of consistency and care. Negative experiences, such as neglect by parents or the environment, can lead to fear of the world and the divine. Such seeds of doubt can later grow into existential angst and general mistrust. Piaget's sensorimotor stage of cognitive development (see Fowler 1984:52-53) is important for children's early perception of faith and trust. Often, adults – both parents and the church – view this stage of a child's development as not so critical. This results in a lack of intentionality from the side of the church and the parents to expose small children to faith experiences. The reasoning is that very young children are incapable of cognitive understanding of faith and are therefore unable to experience faith.

At the *intuitive-projective stage* of faith development between the ages of three and seven years, faith is *experiential*. Faith develops through stories, images, external influences, and a deep intuitive sense of right and wrong. Children have a basic perception of God and of how the universe functions. At this stage, children have sufficient language to speak and the ability to express thoughts. How children experience parents or significant adults to whom they are emotionally attached, affects their views and representation of God in these early years (Fowler 1991:103). This stage is like Piaget's stage of preoperational thinking. Consistent logical-mental structures are still lacking. These only develop later. Children do not have formalised beliefs at this stage. Exposure to the practices of others affect their faith in God and their participation in religious activities. The identity that forms at an early age is an indicator of how they will believe later on in life. If there is a lack of spiritual formation in the early years, it is difficult for young people to develop their own spiritual identity during the adolescent years and beyond (Nel 2018:351).

The parenting style of adults affects every aspect of children's lives. The authoritative parenting style (Papalia and Feldman 2011:354) can have a positive effect on children's success and motivation in school. This is because of the involved nature of this style. The permissive style does not yield similar results. The environment parents create is therefore significant. It has an influence on how receptive children are to faith and faith formation. In middle childhood, when children transition to the stage of co-regulation, the control of behaviour shifts from parent to child. Discipline and other engagement take on a more conversational and

negotiating style. This shift is also pertinent to how faith is discussed with children in the middle childhood stage.

3.4   Parental influence: An African perspective

Africa is seen as the cradle of humankind and the mother continent of the globe (see Knoetze 2019:1). Theories and models of child development and faith formation originate from Western and European contexts. The mode of transmission of values and faith is rooted in the culture and traditions of the people. Therefore, it is imperative to take the rich heritage of African cultures and traditions into account when contemplating the transmission of faith from one generation to the next and the formation of faith in children from African contexts. African people and cultures have similarities, but also significant differences. Therefore, the African heritage is not uniform. Mbiti (1991:4–10) describes the African heritage as historical, cultural, and religious. The historical heritage is the general African life. Cultural heritage is the way people live and act. It includes their physical and intellectual achievements. Religious heritage can be synonymous with culture. African heritage is spiritual to a great extent.

Spirituality is not always about religion but is about the quest for meaning in life. When such a quest involves an explicit search for God or the Divine, then that spirituality is religious (Amanze 2011; see Wellman, Perkins and Wellman 2009:1). African spirituality is not about an explicit set of religious beliefs or practices. It does not need religion to define itself. It is rather how people identify themselves. The holistic African worldview encapsulates how people view the world, interact with others, and make decisions (Knoetze 2019). In Africa, there is a widespread belief in the Supreme God. This belief permeated the cultures of Africa before the European missionaries brought Christianity to the continent. According to Healey (2005:1), the African religious heritage and culture have always been where God revealed Godself to the people the High God knows and loves. There are many forms of religious expression in Africa. This includes various forms of Christianity, the African-initiated churches, Islam, and African traditional religions. This study focuses solely on the Christian faith. Many African rituals directly include children. These include name-giving, birth rituals, and rites of passage (Mbiti 1991; cf. Knoetze 2019). The

practices, values and rituals of African spirituality are transmitted to children by different family members, such as grandparents, parents, siblings and members of the extended family. The traditions are transmitted orally (Knoetze 2019).

'Once upon a time' is usually the prelude to a story. The storyteller recounts experiences and values, and in this way contributes to the formation of the identity of a people. Scholars often refer to these as 'folktales'. However, they are much more than 'just' folktales. They form an integral to African culture. Traditionally, the elders gather the children and young people around the fire to narrate their history, stories and events (Healey 2005:7). The aim is to evoke a sense of pride and the transmission of the communal memory of what makes them who they are. This rich oral tradition includes the histories, legends, prayers, poems, myths, proverbs, sayings and songs of the people. The myths and folktales of African cultures are based on the human experience. They tell of how people wrestle with the mysteries of existence, life, and death. Oral tales are the outcome of African people's reflections on human relations, people's responses to the challenges of the unknown, and the universal need to create order and reason out of chaos and accident (Courlander 1975:1, cf. Richter and Müller 2005:1000). These stories that are transmitted over generations define the people and their place within the larger community or among nations. The stories maintain and deepen the identity of the people (Healey 2005:7).

Against this background, the influence, impact and role of parents on children and their faith formation in the African context should be understood. Western and European family systems differ from those of Africa. The individualistic nature of the contemporary family system in the Western world is not applicable to African family systems. Life is lived in communal spaces and people form part of a community. The African understanding of what a *person* is differs significantly from Western understanding. African people think in terms of both/and rather than either/or. They include both the visible and the invisible communities (Bujo 2015:1). Knoetze (2019:4) describes the African worldview of community as that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Everything is in interaction and inter-reaction with everything else.

Children are seen to link the past, the present, and the future. Therefore, African children have an idea of a family that transcends the nuclear family. Marriage and childbirth have a spiritual connotation. They bring people together. They provide a sense of unity and status in society. They foster the acquisition of personal skills and a sense of completeness (Mbiti 1991). The idea of Ubuntu—"I am because you are"—is fundamental to African people and families. No one fully exists without the other (Muller and Richter 2005:1001). This communal living gives all the people access to the faith and beliefs of the family, community, and society. They are steeped in it. There is no ambiguity.

This can be a reason why Christianity spread so rapidly in Africa. A fusion took place between the communal nature of African spirituality and its worldview, and the values and practises of Christianity. Amanze (2011:9) puts it as follows:

> The logic of grounding Christian spirituality on African spirituality lies in …
> a correlation between African spirituality and the unprecedented growth
> of Christianity in Africa from the time of its inception to the present day.
> There is ample evidence that African spirituality has been a catalyst for a
> Christian presence on the African continent.

Knoetze (2019:1) explains that from a covenantal scriptural point of departure, children and their spiritual formation cannot be discussed as something outside of the family. This is in line with the African worldview. Marc Sevin (1993; see Healey 2005) quotes the 'Parable, Africa' to describe the traditional view of the African family:

> On a steep and rocky path in Africa, I encountered a small girl who
> carried on her back her little brother. "My child," I said to her, "you carry
> a heavy burden."
> She looked at me and said, "I carry not a heavy burden. I carry my
> brother!" I was speechless.
> The words of this child sank deep into my heart. When people's
> troubles seem to weigh me down to a point where I nearly lose heart,
> the words of the child come back to me: "I carry not a heavy burden. I
> carry my brother!"

However, globalisation, economic and other factors have affected the family structure and family life in Africa. Myers (2017:56) explains that "the dominant globalism of the nineteenth century was colonialism, which encompassed commerce, conquest, and civilisation, or missions". Knoetze (2019) refers to a globalised African spirituality. Whether globalisation has had a positive effect on the African continent is debatable. Pertinent issues include economies and the disparity between rich and poor. The effect of this on the family structure is evident. According to Myers (2017:35), many Southern Africans of all ethnic groups think that globalisation paves the way to material progress for all, democracy, human rights, and peace. The new global culture of consumerism, large populations, and technology is severely affecting the young people of Africa and across the world. These effects are visible in the rapid and almost addictive way technology is changing the traditional African and Christian culture and the functioning of families. It is changing what motivates millennials and their interactions. Young people and children are motivated by personal relationships and human connections. These are now greatly influenced by social media and peer pressure. Millennials are currently discipling the world in different ways (Knoetze: 2017; 2019). This is not likely to change with the societal shift to the digital space for conversations and community because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children are socialised through peer influence and many through the digital space.

Globalisation and migration for economic reasons have direct and indirect effects on traditional African families. The unemployment rate is 67% for 15 and 24-year-olds and 43% for those between 25 and 34. This affects the economic status of families and the consequent movement and migration of parents, especially fathers. Bagraim (2018) points out that labour legislation and the use of technology in the agricultural sector and mining industry are all decreasing labour opportunities. This affects families and family life. Fathers searching for work are often not present in the family. There is a high percentage of absent fathers in African societies. This affects the traditional ways and values of families and communities.

The phenomenon of absent fathers in South African society has diverse and dire consequences for children and the family. Reports (see STAS SA 2018) show that

children in South Africa live mostly with only one of their biological parents. In 2018, 76% lived with their mother in the house, but only 36.4% had their father in the house. Black African children up to the age of 17 were less likely to live with their biological father than their contemporaries in other population groups. Many children in South Africa do not live consistently in the same household as their biological parents. International studies (see Social Trends Institute 2017) show that this is a long-standing feature of childhood in South Africa. The degree to which parents are absent from their children's daily lives is fairly unique.

There were 19.7 million children in South Africa in 2018. This is an 8% increase in the child population since 2002. Studies (Stats SA 2018; see Lake et al. 2019:216) show that 62% (886 202) of birth registrations of children had no information about the father (STATS SA 2018). Some 14% of children are orphans who have lost either one or both of their parents. Some 20% of children do not live with either biological parent, and 0.3% of children live in child-headed households. One of the main reasons for the phenomenon of child-headed households is the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. In 2018, 1.6 million people died from HIV/AIDS. Many children were left to their own devices rather than being incorporated into a family. Some create their own family through gangs. Many do not attend school, because they have to work to fend for themselves and their siblings. There is an erosion of respect for authority among young people who grow up without the guidance of adults.

In South Africa, grant income is a main source of household income. This includes the child support grant and the old-age grant. Reports (Stats SA 2018) show that in 2018 two-thirds of children up to the age of 17 (67%) lived in households with multiple members, some of whom were recipients of social grants. More than two-thirds of children up to the age of 17 (68.2%) received the child support grant. The majority of the recipients of the grants are black African children (73.4%). In 2015, 62.1% of children up to the age of 17 were classified as multidimensionally poor, with more than half (51%) classified as money-metrically poor. The largest percentage of recipients of the child support grant was recorded in Eastern Cape, with Limpopo the second largest. In the same year, almost half (48%) of children up to the age of 17

received social grants to the amount of R1 001–R4 000, and almost one-third (32,9%) of children up to the age of 17 lived in households that earned a monthly total household income of R1 001–R4 000. Reports show that the most multi-dimensionally deprived children up to the age of 17 live in Limpopo. Also, the most-deprived are children who live with an uneducated or poorly educated head of the household and in female-headed households. This is an indicator of the state of the economy of a significant portion of the population These realities affect the traditional and communal nature of African households (Chifeche and Dreyer 2019).

 The absence of parents does not necessarily mean that the parent has abandoned the child or children. The absence is related to many factors, including historic population control, labour migration, poverty, housing and educational opportunities, and customary care arrangements. It is common for relatives to play a substantial role in child-rearing. Many children have a sequence of caregivers, or live in a different household than their biological siblings.

Many parents continue to support their children and see them regularly, even if they have to live elsewhere. Although many children live with just one of their biological parents (usually the mother), this does not mean that the mother is a 'single parent'. She is not necessarily the only adult caregiver in the household. In most cases, there are other adults who are members of the household. These are mainly members of the extended family who also care for the children. Studies show the demography of the children of South Africa. The number of children who live with both parents decreased from 39% in 2002 to 34% in 2018. Only 3% of children live in a household with only a father. Twenty percent do not live with either of their biological parents. This does not necessarily mean that they are orphaned, however. Most children who do not live with a parent, do have at least one parent who is alive but living elsewhere. Some provinces, such as Gauteng (49%), and the Western Cape (54%), have a significantly higher number of children living with both parents. The number of children living without their parents is relatively low in these two provinces (11% in Gauteng and 8% in the Western Cape). This is in contrast to the 33% of children who are living with either parent. These patterns have been consistent from 2002 to 2018. Children in the poorest 20% of households are least likely to live with both parents: only 15% live with both parents whereas 74% of children in the wealthiest

20% of households live with both parents. Less than one-third (29%) of African children live with both their parents, whereas the vast majority of Indian and White children (85% and 78%, respectively) reside with both biological parents. Almost a quarter of all African children do not live with either parent and a further 46% live with their mother but not their father. These figures indicate the limited presence of biological fathers in the lives of a large number of children. Younger children are more likely than older children to live with their mother, while older children are more likely to live with neither parent. While 12% of children aged 0 – 5 years (875,000) live with neither parent, this increases to 27% (1.6 million) of children aged 12 – 17 years.

The impact of urbanisation, movement for socio-economic reasons, and commercialisation on family life are both positive and negative. Globalisation has influenced the functioning and composition of African families. The more Western-oriented individualistic tendencies are becoming acceptable. These contrast with the previous socially and culturally accepted predetermined roles in the family (Knoetze 2019:6). It can destroy the community sense of *Ubuntu.* The migration of African families from rural to urban areas results in their relocation to informal settlements, susceptibility to poverty, and the disintegration of their familial support structures. This can erode the stability associated with family life in Africa – communal living, stable and safe sexual relationships, marital fidelity, and a secure formative environment for children (Nurnberger 2007). Also, technologies and globalisation can challenge the creativity, connection, and spirituality of the family. The quality of relationships within the family tends to deteriorate and the transmission of values becomes difficult. Technology has altered the way in which people live, interact and make connections (Pearson et al. 2017).

The context of African life and parenting continues to evolve. This affects how faith is transmitted from one generation to the next. Parental influence is critical to child development, and specifically for the process of spiritual or faith formation. However, the environment in which children grow up in the South African context today poses a critical question with regard to the role of the church in children's lives. This is a context where families are no longer the centre of a child's life. Children who are dependent on parents sometimes do not have parents or caregivers to create an

environment in which faith development can take place effectively. The role of the church in today's world comes under scrutiny. Church means different things to different people. The mode of faith formation in the past is currently being challenged just as family is being redefined in many respects. There is a need for a shift in how the church ministers to children.

3.5   The role of the church in children's faith formation

Church is a social and religious construct. Many parents see it as the church's task to teach their children faith. Therefore, some parents leave the faith education of their children to the church. There are ongoing discussions about whose *primary* task it is to develop faith in children. According to Freudenburg and Lawrence (1998:88), teaching children and adolescents Christian values and instilling a Christian character takes an entire community. For James Fowler (1983:148), the goal of Christian education is the formation of individuals in the community of the Christian faith. Through the grace and power of God's lively presence in the Holy Spirit, people are formed, and through them, God can appeal to the world. Christian education for younger children is not the primary goal of the church. Osmer (1996:5) notes the pattern of young adults leaving the church after having been active participants for many years during childhood. The decline in involvement begins during the adolescent years. The adolescent faith or lack thereof is shaped by more powerful forces than that of the confirmation programme of the church.

Traditionally, the church is central to the faith formation of children. The way in which this was done was through catechism, Sunday school, Bible programmes for children, and other youth initiatives. Youth workers, child workers, and Sunday school teachers typically led these programs. However, these efforts do not always retain young people in the church. There is a steady decline in their participation later in life. According to Freudenburg and Lawrence (1998:20), churches should be less concerned with building 'good churches' and more concerned with empowering parents to build 'good families'. The view of church-centred faith formation has not yielded 'faith-filled children'. The notion that the church is where ministry begins and ends has not prevented the exit of young people. Scholars, both local (Nel 2001:3;2018; Strong 2014) and international (Barna 2000; cf. DeVries 2004:21;

Shafer 2008:6; Smith and Snell 2009:259; Dean 2010:3, 24) point to the evidence that ministry to young people is not guiding them to mature Christian adulthood. These are indicators that the approach to children's ministry in South Africa and beyond is not effective.

Traditional youth ministry or children's ministry is often still practised as an independent ministry. This type of ministry usually leads to the isolation of the youth from parents and the larger church community (Nel 2001:3, 8; DeVries 2004:21, 24; cf. Dean 2010:21-24; Strong 2014:2). Separate ministries to age-specific groups are characteristic of traditional children's ministry (Nel 2001:3; 2018). The traditional youth and children ministry invariably builds on the assumption that what is taught at church is reinforced and modelled in the family home. For this, the cooperation of parents, caregivers and the community that is responsible for raising children is required (Cloete 2016:2).

There are conflicting expectations of youth ministry experts, such as Youth and children ministers. The church expects them to increase the attendance of young people and to entertain the children. Parents expect them to guide children to spiritual formation, discipleship and maturity (Jones 2019:18). These expectations cut across congregations and societies. However, the role of the church in providing spiritual discipline and faith formation in children seems not to be effective.

Faith communities have the influence and power to develop centred, focused, and spiritually healthy young people by uniting and mobilising all of their relational and programmatic resources (Nel 2018:78). These relational resources include families. Because of their networks and resources, faith communities have the potential to support youth development effectively and contribute to the formation of caring, responsible, and committed citizens. The URCSA (2005:272) report concludes that a fresh look is needed at how the church treats its youngest members, given the current challenges in a rapidly changing context.

The discipleship of children and youth is core. For this, the church requires the joint participation of the congregation, community and family. Discipleship of children

represents a shift from a programme orientation to a people orientation (Nel 2015:7). In response to the conversations on discipleship, Stoppels (2013:48) states that:

> [The] church has always and in principle has her centre, her core, her middle point outside of herself. Therefore, when she is close to her centre, she is evenly outside of herself.

A challenge with regard to faith formation in children is the lack of intentional discipleship formation by the church and faith community. Nel (2015) challenges those who are not deliberate about their 'being in Christ' to become involved in Christian education and the formation of children. Jones (2019:20) finds that 'the ministry models many ministers inherit in local churches are flawed. Nel (2016) argues that:

> [the experiences] of African Christians and churches, including their youngest worshippers and witnesses, are taken serious in ministries with children, and… allowed to disrupt domineering practises, these imperial mission campaigns and strategies, and its concomitant theologies, will not be able to seriously address the heart of the plight of African children.

In South Africa, post-colonisation and the emergence of the black church are fundamental to understanding the context of the church in Africa. Colonisation and the influence of Western religion and culture have affected indigenous African beliefs and cultures. The post-colonial black church in South Africa is a fusion of many cultures. Faith is an integral part of African culture.

The traditional youth ministry model is typically structured around events such as Sunday school and service projects (Folmsbee 2007:13). In this model, the youth minister engages with the children and adolescents. The main church is not affected by their activities (Senter et al. 2001: xii). Historically, youth ministry has had an inside-out and outside-in relationship with the church where non-ordained Christians engaged with young people to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ (Senter et al. 2001:x). In the South African context, according to Malan Nel (2018:192), the need

for able youth leaders is increasing. However, congregations often opt for single, dynamic people, usually males, to serve in this capacity for a low salary for a few years before moving on to 'higher service' in the church. This makes youth ministry nothing more than a stepping stone.

In the traditional model, children are separated from the adult members of the congregation during worship. Some congregations begin the act of worship with the children present before adults and children go their separate ways. Adults remain for worship and children go to classes for teaching and other activities. In other congregations, the separation into age-specific groups for worship takes place at the very beginning of the church service. The official view of the church is that children are *the future church* rather than *the church now*. The isolation of youths in separate classrooms and activities reinforces this view (Senter et al. 2001: xiv). Many churches provide younger children with playrooms and some teaching engagement. The aim is to foster social development rather than faith development. In order for the parents of younger children to have the opportunity of 'child-free worship', some churches provide services similar to day-care. There is no intentional faith formation activity. It is rather about 'keeping the children busy' while adults worship.

Traditional youth ministry models are described by Freudenburg and Lawrence (1998:98) as church-centred and home-supported. The idea that guides the Christian education of children in congregations is that the home provides the resources and support for the church to teach the faith to children. Parents bring their children to church so that the church can teach them faith. Parents delegate their responsibilities to the church and school because parents themselves receive no training or education about either parenting or faith formation. Child and youth workers in congregations also receive little or no education with regard to child development (Nel 2018:351). Freudenburg and Lawrence (1998:98-99) explain that the traditional model worked for the past two or three decades because what was modelled at church was also modelled at home. Parents partnered with the church in teaching and practising their faith. Today, this is not necessarily the case because of many reasons.

Nel (2000:108) links the lack of a faith identity in children and youth to parents who have left or are uninvolved with the faith community. The point of departure of this study is that inactive parents can be a reason why children leave the faith community post-confirmation or in adulthood. Parents who drop children off at church for spiritual formation without themselves taking part in the spiritual development of their children deprive them of the opportunity to see and experience their 'church faith' reinforced in and applied to daily life.

The church becomes a space where people can experience God, experience community in faith, and develop authentic mutual relationships (Nel 2015:7). The faith community constitutes a "circle of friends, inviting spiritual friendships" (Nel 2015:123). Osmer (1996:202-210) finds that a mentor is necessary for an adolescent. Even if parents cannot do it, disciple-making churches should find others to fulfil the role of spiritual mentoring for young people.

The role of the church is to transmit the faith tradition from one generation to the next. It should do so with patient endurance (Seibel and Nel 2010:1). According to Cloete (2016:5), the focus of a family ministry approach is to create space for multi-generational learning and to witness to one another. The family ministry approach requires dialogue. It is not about the role assumed by the caregivers, be it the church or the family. It is about the inclusion and active participation of the children (Knoetze 2015; see Cloete 2016). This kind of ministry is a willingness to be challenged to answer complex spiritual questions by the next generation. Family ministry should be contextual, relevant and culturally sensitive (Knoetze 2015:2). Family ministry is often limited and institutionalised. It should rather aim to expand its influence and partner with a wider community (Cloete 2016:7).

3.6   Inclusive congregational approach

This study aligns with South African scholar Malan Nel's inclusive congregational approach (Senter et al. 2001; Nel 2000 and 2018). This provides a framework for the discussion on children's ministry. The need to integrate children and perceive them as fully part of the community of faith is central to this theory. The general church model is organisationally connected but separated in operation. Predominantly, the

traditional paradigm of churches is to provide age-segregated or age-related programmes (Jones 2019:20). Studies show that this is the case in American churches as well as African churches.

The inclusive congregational approach is a departure from the traditional youth ministry model. According to this approach, the youth are an integral part of the local church. Therefore, youth ministry should be integral to the total ministry of and in the local church (Nel 2018:228). The children and youth are *not* separate from the church. Nel (2018:232) describes this differentiated yet inclusive, youth ministry as: "the mediation of the coming of God through God's Word and through the service of people, through all modes of ministry, in a differentiated and focused way, to the youth as an integral and a vital part of the local church". The faith community's view of children and young people is therefore *inclusive,* not segregated. Youth ministry is therefore present in the church's building, programming, budget, and decision making. Nel's (2018:242; cf. 2000:97) definition of youth ministry is the following:

> Youth ministry is a comprehensive and inclusive congregational ministry in which God comes, through all modes of ministry and with especial regard to parents (or their substitutes), with a differentiated focus to youths (as an integral part of the congregation [local church]), and also with and through the youths in the congregation [local church] to the world.

In the traditional model of youth ministry, children were rarely viewed as full participants in the church because of their limited practical experience of what it means to 'be church' and to participate in 'how church-life is done'. Participation in a fellowship of faith with parents and adults was a rarity. The other possibility is that the youth and children can be included as full participants in the church (Senter et al. 2001:4-5). The congregation will then not think of youths as separate from the faith life of the adult members. Though children are unique and do have specific ministry needs, this does not bar them from being treated as crucial members of the congregation. They will not be ignored or neglected. Ministry will incorporate them into every facet of being a church. The responsibility for children and youth becomes

the responsibility of the *entire congregation* and not only of the youth worker or Sunday school volunteers, as is often the case.

The inclusive congregational approach is inherently integral. This model ensures that children find a place within and not apart from the church, even though they require differentiated ministry. As children and adolescents grow toward mature adulthood, they are and should remain connected to the total body of Christ, not be isolated from it (DeVries 2004:44). Dean and Foster (1998:100-101) propose that the congregation become the partner of youth and parents. This model of youth ministry enables the entire congregation to recognise its role in nurturing and raising children in faith, as promised at infant baptism. This includes the more formal aspects of church life, such as Sunday school, admittance to communion, confirmation, worship, mentoring, and youth group, seasons of the church, events, as well as informal aspects such as mentoring. Participation in community rituals is a means of transmitting faith from adults to children in the church. For this to happen, the inclusion of children, their presence and full participation are crucial.

One benefit of the inclusive congregational approach for children is intergenerational interaction. This results in active learning, through observation of the interaction among members of the church. It also provides the opportunity for children themselves to interact with parents and other significant adults in the congregation. They participate in activities such as worship and fellowship. Richards (1983:96-97; cf. Nel 2000:109) describes it as the student (children) seeing the model (parents and other significant adults) in different situations. The model explains behaviour, faith, values and the feelings that motivate that behaviour. This kind of socialising happens in direct personal relationships with people and groups where intimate bonds are shared. Richards (1983:136; cf. Nel 2000:109) explains that in a loving community where individuals know one another and share love, the Christian faith can be discovered authentically. Isolation from the greater community would signal the failure of youth ministry (DeVries 2004:103). Loving community and communion transmit faith without words and allow children to experience a sense of belonging. They know they belong and matter to everyone. They are welcome in church.

South African post-colonial theorists Cannella and Viruru (2004:3; cf. Nel 2016:2), explain the significance of childhood in children's development as follows:

> [We] must stop looking at childhood as an isolated phenomenon, intelligible only through the lenses of 'experts' who have studied the child through the dominant telescope of Western discourses like psychology…. we must start thinking about those who are younger as people who are part of a much larger and complex whole, as linked to and influencing the larger and more complex world.

The inclusive ministry approach is compatible with an African way of life. Nel (Senter et al. 2001; 2018:215) emphasises that children, though they have specific and separate needs, do form an integral part of the faith community. Children's faith-life and experiences should not be thought of as separate from adults' experiences of God. Children are part of the congregation's service to God because they share in God's covenantal relationship with people and are incorporated in the local church. The study will now explore three relevant family ministry models that focus on including children in the church.

3.7   Family ministry models

3.7.1   Introduction

Family ministry can be described as "the process of intentionally and persistently coordinating a congregation's proclamation and practises so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as the primary disciple-makers in their children's lives" (Jones, 2009; Nelson and Jones 2011:15; cf. Nel 2018:85, 258). Ten years later Jones (2019:37) redefines it as follows:

> Family ministry is the process of intentionally and persistently realigning a congregation's proclamation and practises so that members develop diverse discipling relationships and parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable as primary disciple-makers in their children's lives.

According to DeVries (1994:41) family ministry is a response to specialized, separate ministry – a segregated and age-specific youth ministry that is

separate from congregational ministry. Family ministry is not merely an additional ministry with programmes geared towards strengthening or equipping the family structure. Rather, it is an intentional re-orientation of the church's perspective on the processes of evangelism and discipleship – it is faith formation in children (Jones 2019:38). DeVries (2004:176) explains that family ministry is not a new programme or model, rather a recreation of an ongoing ethos, which has the potential to become the 'new normal' for ministry.

Family ministry can contribute to the long-term impact of youth ministry. Family ministry has two goals, namely to minister to parents with the aim to strengthen their own faith, and to minister to parents in order to equip and empower them to build, nurture, develop and take an active part in the faith formation of their children. Families express faith at home mainly through some practises identified by Freudenburg and Lawrence (1998:17) as conversations about faith; family devotions and prayer; family service projects to help others. A survey by Benson et al. already in 1995 showed that less than a third of the young people indicated any involvement with faith practices at home. In a typical week, less than 10% of parents attended church regularly with their children, read the Bible or prayed at home, or did service projects with their children (Barna 2000). This indicates that parents who are active church-going believers are in need of help to be able to effectively nurture their children's faith, and invariably also their own faith (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:17; see Holmen 2011:33-37). A non-participation in faith activities at home can be adverse to the authentic development of a child's faith.

Today, due to multiple engagements and pressures, many parents are not very involved in the church. The constraints of socio-economic factors, busyness and increased family commitments have had an adverse effect on family life. In my personal experience, I have seen previously regular church-goers and committed families pull away from the life and activities of the church due to children's school and extra-curricular schedules. The church can mitigate this by educating and empowering families to better structure, organise and manage their priorities, in order to gain control over their lives and prevent burnout because of pressures associated with

contemporary life. This is particularly applicable to spiritual matters, which tend to give way to the pressures and activities of life.

Typically, the church provides ministry to the family in various forms. Many refer to this as 'family ministry'. However, family ministry means different things to different congregations. The models and practices associated with it are also diverse. A typical family ministry approach aims to involve parents in what the church is doing for and with children. There is no homogenous method, aim or even practice of family ministry. Over time, the traditional or typical family ministry has become a partially effective approach (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:19). In the family ministry model, the parental role in the faith development of children is rather limited. Parents rely on the church to teach their children faith. 'Ministry experts' assist with church programs such as weekly services, camps, holiday clubs, events, social activities at church, Christmas play rehearsals, and the like. Some parents are not interested in any form of spirituality but do want it for their children. The goal of church programs should rather be to involve parents in the ministry to children (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998:20). Family ministry models are diverse. Three models will be discussed, namely the family-integrated, family-based and family-equipping family ministry models.

3.7.2   Family-integrated ministry model

The distinguishable characteristic of the family-integrated ministry model, according to Voddie Baucham, is that integration is seen as an ecclesiological principle. Families are not divided nor compartmentalised into component parts. The congregation has no youth ministers, children's ministers, or nursery. There is no separation according to age, gender or interests. The church is seen as "a family of families" (Baucham 2011: 193-196). The proponents of the family-integrated approach see it as a return to the biblical pattern of worship and discipleship. Just as in the early church, people of all ages worship together (Jones 2019:56).

The church as a 'family of families' aligns with the Biblical patriarchal injunction of men as the head of the home and the spiritual priest of the family. Critics of this model point out that many families, globally and internationally, no longer have a

traditional family structure. The three distinctive commitments of the family-integrated model are: to age-integrated ministry, to evangelism and discipleship in and through the home, and to calling spiritual leaders to manage their homes in a godly manner (see 1 Tim 3:4; Titus 1:6). This model aims to facilitate the kind of discipleship and community that were characteristic of the early church.

The family-integrated church is intentionally inter-generational and age-integrated. However, gender-segregated activities such as men's and women's gatherings, do take place. The integration of people of all ages creates a network of meaningful multigenerational relationships and promotes maturity (Jones 2019:72). Exposure to other and often older people can mitigate the influence of peers on children. The socialisation model of learning is at work here. The younger observe the older and emulate their faith, behaviour, and outlook on life. This can lead to healthier and deeper familial relationships. The family-integrated approach can be followed in a simple traditional setting that is not challenged by the complexities of today's world and culture.

In this approach, the role of the father is seen as a sacred and serious task. The church should equip him for it and hold him accountable. In the home, parents have the opportunity to influence their children daily in the ways of God. This contributes to faith formation. The home is seen as the best place for Christian education and discipleship (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998; DeVries 2004; Nel 2001, 2018). A further emphasis is on evangelism outside the home. In a society plagued with the absence of fathers, discipleship in the home by a male leader and evangelism in the community are hardly viable goals. This is another criticism of the family-integrated model.

The proponents of the family-integrated approach proffer it as a simple, effective and reproducible approach regardless of context, community and culture. Renfro (2019) motivates the family-integrated model as:

> ... the best approach to family ministry because such a model calls men to the sacred vocation of family discipleship. Family integration removes the age-segregating structures that work against

intergenerational discipleship… returns time to families, so that families can be families —living, learning, working, ministering, worshipping, and playing together. …. [a]llows pastors in the body of Christ the time to shepherd their flock and their family for the glory of God.

Principles for the implementation of the family-integrated model include the biblical foundation for family integration, leadership that models family discipleship, equipping households with simple plans for spiritual leadership at home. Children are an integral part of the family worship service. The heads of household should prioritise family time and activity.

The family-integrated ministry has the benefit of bringing the family together rather than separating them in their spiritual experience and faith formation. However, it seems biased and more applicable to a very traditional family setting. It presupposes that every person in the congregation is part of an 'intact family'. There is no place for peer-to-peer learning in this model. The place of women and children 'under' the head of the household seems rather questionable in today's world.

3.7.3   Family-based ministry model

The family-based ministry model of Mark DeVries retains separate and age-related ministry structures but with a distinct focus on intergenerational interaction (Nelson and Jones 2011:25-27; see Jones 2019). The difference between family-based models and the typical segmented programmatic models is that family-based churches intentionally include intergenerational activities in each ministry of the church (DeVries 2004). It transforms age-based ministries into a partnership between the family and the faith community. The family-based model is not about the complete integration of the age groups. The usual age-specific groups are retained in ministry, but there is an intentional partnership of these ministries with families (Jones 2019). This family ministry model is in line with the approach of Ben Freudenburg (1998) who retains a programmes approach, but also with a specific intention. The three levels of the programmes are intergenerational, home-centred and peer-centred (DeVries 2004:135).

With a family-based ministry approach, data with regard to ministry to specific and separate age groups need not be rejected. The separation of children because of age-specific requirements is not regarded as the major challenge when it comes to children's faith development (Barna 1991, 2000; Powell and Kubiak 2009; cf. Jones 2019). Some of this data, while older, can still be useful to provide insight into the effectiveness or not of children's ministry today (Freudenburg and Lawrence 1998; DeVries 2004, 2008; Nel 2018). However, some tendencies in age-segmented ministry are not useful, for example when the focus is on one generation rather than bringing the generations together, and if it is activity-driven (DeVries 2004; Baucham 2011:178, cf. Jones 2019). Activity-driven programmes tend to compete with the family rather than work with families. The church and family together should forge a dynamic partnership for discipleship.

This ministry philosophy is based on the two core values of *flexibility* and *balance*. The aim is to support Christian families and intentionally engage also with non-Christian families. Similar in form to the typical age-organised church models of children's ministry, in this approach "parents and family are critical to faith development in every area of a ministry program". The church prioritises the family as central to its mission and equips families to raise children in the faith (Burns and DeVries 2003:16; cf. Jones 2019). This model can be adapted to suit any congregation without having to make radical changes to the existing structure of its children's ministry. It provides a pragmatic way of focusing on the family while retaining the existing forms of ministry in the life of the church (Jones 2019).

Rather than completely doing away with age groups, the family-based ministry model refocuses existing structures for intentional partnership with families in the discipleship or faith formation processes. Events and experiences that engage parents and children are devised. The aim is to strengthen their relationship. DeVries (2004: 179-180) describes it as "the process of taking current activities and making these family events". Though the ministries in a family-based congregation remain separate, they are connected intentionally. Every separate ministry consistently plans events and creates opportunities for learning experiences that draw families and foster intergenerational interactions. The focus is on facilitating meaningful conversations and interactions between adults and children.

This model is criticised in that it fails to equip parents to do the work of guiding their children in faith at home. Families should focus on discipleship in their daily lives. Activity-focused events do not tend to foster meaningful intergenerational relationships within a church community. Another criticism is that a focus on activities can just add to the already overloaded lives of families. Critics also point out that family-based ministry tends to be immersed in youth culture, rather than cultivate a 'biblical culture'. However, since the activities are specifically focused on intergenerational engagement it is not focused solely on popular culture. The church needs a clear strategy for equipping parents if ministry to and through the family is to be effective.

3.7.4 Family-equipping church model

The family-equipping church model retains some age-differentiated ministries. However, these ministries are restructured with the aim to connect people across the generations and partner with parents at every level of ministry. In this model, parents are acknowledged, equipped, and held accountable for the discipleship of their children (Jones 2019:166). The model focuses on two key areas. The first is to engage with and equip parents to function as the primary teachers in the discipleship of their children. The second is to partner with parents as the parents take the main responsibility for their children's Christian education and faith formation.

Family-equipping ministry aims to connect the church and home as partners in children's disciple-making process. In all aspects of children's ministry, the parents should be seen as the primary transmitters of faith. The family-equipping model is more than a programme of the congregation. It is central to the culture and ethos of the congregation (Strother 2011:256-259). It affects the way in which every facet of ministry is done. Family-equipping churches cultivate congregational cultures that coordinate the various ministries to champion the role of the parents as primary teachers of faith in their children's lives. Also, in the Ben Freudenburg (1998:77) home-centred church-supported model, which is similar to this family-equipping model, the home or parents are acknowledged as the primary teachers of faith to children. In this family ministry model, the church functions as a 'training centre' and the home functions as the 'teaching centre' or 'mission field'. The church does not

take the central role in faith formation, but rather equips, trains, supports and provides resources for faith formation.

The church leaders plan the various ministries to champion the family as a primary unit for the discipleship of children. In planning its activities, the church asks the question: 'Is this the best way to equip parents to disciple their children?' The church equips parents to disciple their children and parents see the church as an active partner in this process. In this model, parents play the central role in children's spiritual development. The aim is to cultivate spiritual maturity in children. Invariably this would also mean a focus on parents' own spiritual maturity. Churches that adopt the family-equipping model therefore intentionally develop a partnership with the family for the spiritual development of children. This is not an implied outcome as is the case with the family-based model. The intended outcome according to this model is the spiritual growth and maturity of children, not their entertainment. Therefore, the parents and church are the catalysts of faith formation in children's lives. The ministry strategy caters intentionally for the developmental stages and milestones in child development. The aim is to connect the family and children with Christ in worship, small group discipleship and services. The model is structured to change perceptions of parenting and to nurture discipleship in children (Jones 2019:168-173).

Challenges could be when a church is so entrenched in its separate children's ministry that it does not focus on discipleship in the home. If changes are incremental, it will take longer to transform the thinking of the church and the family. Critics find that the family-equipping model lacks a decisive missional posture towards the larger community. However, despite these criticisms, this study aligns closely with the family-equipping model. To shift to a meaningful focus on primacy of parental roles and family involvement in children's faith formation requires systemic change and transformation.

Table 2: *Table of Family Ministry models*

	Segmented-Programmatic Ministry Model	Family-Based Ministry Model	Family-Equipping Ministry Model	Family-Integrated Ministry Model
What does this model look like in the local church?	Ministries are organized deliberately to seek to be sensitive to families' needs and schedules.	Church's programmatic structure remains unchanged, but each separate ministry plans and programs in ways that intentionally draw generations together and encourage parents to take part in the discipleship of their children and youth.	Although age-organized programs and events still exist, the church is restructured to draw the generations together, equipping parents, championing their role as primary disciple-makers, and holding them accountable to fulfill this role.	The church eliminates age-stratified programs and events. All or nearly all programs and events are multigenerational, with a strong focus on parents' responsibility to evangelize and to disciple their own children.
What other approaches might be included in this ministry model?	Therapeutic-Counseling Family Ministry Church-Centered/Home-Supported Ministry Family-Sensitive Ministry	Family-Friendly Youth Ministry; Family-Focused Youth Ministry Family-Based Youth Ministry Family-Friendly Ministry	Youth-Focused Family Ministry; Youth-Friendly Family Ministry Home-Centered/ Church-Supported Ministry Family-Empowered Ministry	Age-Integrated Church Family-Centered Ministry Inclusive-Congregational Ministry

Source: Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 views by Timothy Jones Paul

3.8   Summary

The role of parents in the faith formation of children is primary. This should be fully supported by the church. Partnership in children's faith formation is not an *either/or* but a *both / and.* It should be inclusive. Neither the family nor the church can do this important work of nurturing faith in children without the other. Where parents are not part of a community of faith and the children are 'spiritual orphans', the church can become *church-as-family* to these children.

The parenting style of adults is also a critical factor for creating an environment in which faith formation can take place. African communal life sees the development of children as community-based. However, the impact of socio-economic factors, globalisation, urbanisation, and isolation have altered the traditional family context of many South African children. Therefore, the partnership of the church and home in faith formation in children is becoming even more important in today's world.

This chapter discussed three family ministry models in the quest for best practises for family ministry with a focus on children's faith formation. The family-integrated model eliminates separate ministries that focus on age groups. Family-based

churches focus on intergenerational events and activities without having to change current church structures and organisations. The family-equipping ministry rethinks church structures with the aim to call parents to disciple their children at every level of the church's work. The inclusion of children as an integral part of the faith community requires what Jones (2019) calls a *discipline of diversity*. The identified best practices for an integrated and inclusive home-centred ministry for children will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4
AN INCLUSIVE INTEGRATED HOME-CENTRED APPROACH
TO CHILDREN'S FAITH FORMATION

4.1 Introduction

In this study, child development and the stages of faith development in young children are discussed and learning and teaching theories are applied. According to Osmer's (2008) model for a practical theological investigation, the first task is the descriptive empirical task which answers the question: *What is going on?* This study is particularly about *what is going on in family ministry* with a specific focus on the faith formation process of children. With regard to the interpretive task which answers the question, *Why is it going on,* this study explains the roles of the family and the church in children's faith formation. This chapter focuses on the third task in Osmer's model, namely the normative task. The question concerns: *What ought to be going on?* In this chapter, best practices regarding children's faith formation and a home-centred approach to family ministry are explored as part of the normative task. The chapter presents a thematic analysis of those that have emerged in the study in order to find guidelines for best practices.

The current models of children and family ministries require re-consideration and re-construction. Current models are not working well on many levels. In these current times of the COVID-19 pandemic, the activities of the church have been affected profoundly. The traditional ways of doing ministry with the family and children could not proceed as always. The pandemic has prompted the need to discern what could continue and what could not with regard to family ministry and children's faith formation in particular contexts. Today, those who are involved with children's ministry should identify those aspects that should be continued or and those that are not working and should be discontinued. In order to do so, the church needs clarity as to what aspects are the non-negotiables and which are the negotiables that can take on a different form or be eliminated altogether. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent 'new normal', is an opportunity to discontinue certain ways of doing children's ministry without changing the core of what should continue. The 'what' and 'why' of ministry to children challenge the 'how'. Today, the family

ministry for faith formation in children is undergoing a process of change. This is necessary in order for it to remain (or become) relevant.

This chapter that is concerned with the normative task, highlights the non-negotiables and negotiables regarding children's ministry. Christian education and faith formation are non-negotiables. They are foundational to ministry with children (see Nel 2018). The negotiables are those aspects that can and should be adapted to, especially in today's world. These include baptismal classes, Sunday school, youth meetings, confirmation, catechism classes, and admittance to communion. These *ways* of doing ministry require change. They should be adapted to the changing realities of the church and society today and in the future.

The three family ministry models selected in this study, family-integrated, family-based and family-equipping, all have the same core, namely to minister to the family and children. The three models propose slightly different ways of doing so. These family ministry models were primarily developed and utilised in Western and European rather than African contexts. African families function in a communal rather than individualistic cultural environment. Even though family structures are changing, it is still fundamental to African cultures and an African mind-set. The communal aspect is therefore critical when an approach to the process of faith formation in children is considered and developed. The religiosity of a family provides an environment that strengthens values, creates spiritual experiences and contributes to the faith development of children. If the church and family partnership are effective, that can lead to a stronger faith in children. Such an effective partnership can contribute to cultivating a strong faith in children. Children with a strong faith basis will be more likely to actively participate in the activities and life of a faith community; and will be less likely to leave the body of Christ in adulthood.

Christian education and family religiosity are critical components for the faith development of children. This presupposes a partnership between the church and the parents. Current realities show that there is a need to do things differently. The principal participants in the faith formation of children, namely the church and the family, should closely re-examine their participation and cooperation in this mission. A re-examination of this cooperation is especially needed as children grow older and

require to be intentionally discipled in order for them to acquire a mature faith and choose a Christian lifestyle. Family ministry is one approach to intentional discipleship formation. Christian education provided by the church requires the active participation of parents. The church has traditionally provided spiritual leadership for the family, particularly for children. However, changes are now required in this collaboration. For ministry to be effective, the role of parents should be the primary one, whereas the church should assume a secondary and supportive role. This study explores such a shift in roles and suggests guidelines for practice.

Another central issue when it comes to the faith formation of children is the effect of globalisation on family structures. For some, globalisation has improved access to skills development and socio-economic assets. The degree to which parents have access to socio-economic assets has a direct effect on the overall development of their children. Increased migration is another effect of globalisation. Migration often leads to changes in the family structure. It may alter the communal nature of African families, hindering parents from being readily available to play an active role in the faith formation process. The church should take this into account when ministering to the family and particularly to children.

In today's world, an integrated, inclusive family ministry approach is relevant for effective faith formation. Though this study focuses on the faith formation of children, the faith of the entire family should be nurtured in order that it can keep growing and deepening. The process of faith formation is never really 'completed'. Parents should be equipped and trained for both tasks: their own growth and development in faith and that of their children. For that, they need the church's assistance.

The participation of children and their integration into the church is essential because they are an integral part of the faith community. The faith community is incomplete without them and their participation (Strong 2014; see Nel 2018). This is the focus of an inclusive family ministry model. This approach is useful for equipping parents and integrating all members of the family, irrespective of the structure. For instance, the inclusive family ministry model, which is home-centred, can support families such as child-headed homes. A characteristic of family ministry models is that parents are usually deemed the leader and children the recipients of spiritual care. Whereas in

child-headed households, children are the leaders of the household. In the family setting of a child-headed household even greater support is required from the church. The church can function as a substitute 'parent' and should be actively involved as the support for children who have responsibilities far beyond their capabilities and years, and should be the primary nurturer of faith in such households.

Best practice for family ministry would be those that are conducive to the faith formation of children in the specific context with its requirements and demands. Best practices for family ministry and children's faith formation in the South African context will now be explored. The aim is to develop guidelines for an integrated approach to a home-centred and church-supported ministry that leads to effective faith formation in children.

4.2   Effective family ministry in practice

During the infancy years of a child's life, the church has a significant role to play. People are initiated into the faith community through rites such as baptism, child dedication, and Christian education. The church provides ministry to children in diverse ways. There is a growing consensus that the family is where the faith formation and discipleship formation of children should primarily take place. The family is the primary environment of most children. In an African context, effective ministry to the nuclear and extended family is needed. For faith development to be effective in children, the primary caregivers should be equipped, because they are the primary nurturers of faith in children. In practice, it has traditionally been the church that has played the primary role in the faith formation of children, despite its limitations in many respects. Many factors have affected the church attendance of many families which means that the church's ability to fulfil this role effectively has declined significantly.

In this study, three family ministry models are investigated: a *family-integrated*, *family-based* and *family-equipping* model. The inclusive congregational approach undergirds these family ministry models. All three models are family-centred though their methods and ethos differ. A general challenge with regard to these family

ministry models is their focus predominantly on a nuclear family setting. However, in South African society this is not necessarily the predominant family setting in African contexts and also in South Africa. The scope should therefore be broadened. Typically, family ministry models cater for the various members by means of programmes that are age-specific or gender-specific. Families, however, consist of both genders and are multi-generational. In families, there are varying levels of literacy and socio-economic status. The question is what effective ministry to such a complex environment would entail. Effective family ministry should be able to deal with the various family structures that are prevalent in today's society. Specifically, the community-based and communal nature of African families should be taken into account when developing an effective family ministry. To accommodate the existing variety of family structures, the roles of the various participants will have to be re-evaluated and where necessary re-assigned. This concerns the roles of all who are involved in the process of children's faith formation – the parents, the extended family, and the church. Family ministry as an approach can mitigate some issues surrounding family life in African communities.

The underlying values of the *family-integrated model*, namely family unity and industry, are useful for addressing the challenges to family life in contemporary African societies. However, caution is required. For example, the family-integrated approach aims to build the confidence of fathers who may feel inadequate in their leadership position in their family. A criticism of the family-integrated model is then that it perpetuates the ideal of a patriarchal and therefore hierarchical family structure. The consequences of distorted power relations in a family system, namely violence of the one with power perpetrated against those who lack power, are not taken into account. In the South African context where gender-based violence is extraordinarily high, such dynamics cannot be ignored in the interest of establishing and maintaining idealised 'biblical' values. If the emphasis of the family-integrated model is on the father who leads faith in the home, irrespective of the behaviour of that male person, this can erode a child's belief and impede faith development. It can lead to basic mistrust and fear in children. The emphasis on the male as the head of the household as the norm and ideal can lead to a situation where female heads of households are not recognised and respected for their role and accomplishments. They are not seen as adequate nurturers of children's faith.

In today's world, it is necessary to acknowledge and support whoever contributes to the faith development of children, be it a father, mother, grandparents or any other parental adult. There are also children who are the heads of households. They should be especially supported in the enormous task they have of caring for and raising siblings. This includes the faith development of those siblings. In South Africa, there is a high number of child-headed households. Child-headed families are already at a disadvantage economically, physically, and emotionally. Therefore, if a model that recognises only fathers as the head of the household and the leader of the family is followed, the child who is responsible for a household and siblings can be unsupported by the church and left out in the cold, both as a person with extraordinary responsibilities and simply as a child.

The second model, the *family-based model*, focuses on creating opportunities for intergenerational engagement and interaction. This aligns well with the community orientation of African cultures. Although the family-based ministry model originates from a Western context, it can be applied to an African setting. Traditionally, the cultural heritage and values are passed down to subsequent generations in the informal routines of daily life and in social settings. If the faith community intentionally creates opportunities for intergenerational engagement between younger and older members it will feel like a natural continuation of daily life just with a focus on faith formation. Family-based is also conducive to ensuring the inclusion of children in congregational life.

Criticism of the family-based ministry is the implied assumption that relationships will be forged organically if opportunities for intergenerational engagement are created. In African cultures, however, children are generally 'seen and not heard'. If an opportunity is created for generations to be together, deep and lasting relationships will not necessarily be the result. In fact, if the style of these interactions is typically hierarchal that would have the opposite effect than the intended building of close relationships. African cultures emphasise respect for older persons. This 'respect' tends to create and maintain distance between young and older persons. There are no definite strategies for crossing the divides of age and status. The much-needed intergenerational relationships may not emerge. Where leaders in the household do

not participate in church life, it can be difficult to facilitate faith formation in children by means of a family-based ministry approach.

The third possibility, the *family-equipping model* is specifically focused on adults. The aim is to equip, engage, and empower adults – parents or primary caregivers – to nurture faith in children. The family-equipping model intentionally enables cooperation between parents and the church for the faith formation of children. The aim is to equip parents to become the primary nurturers of faith in children. This family-equipping model is especially relevant in responding to the after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The philosophy of the family-equipping model can be described as *home-centred and church-supported*. This represents a shift from the typical family ministry approach. The intentional training and equipping of parents to do ministry with their children are central. This stands in contrast to the rather passive characteristic of the family-based model, where there is no intentionality when it comes to the empowerment of parents and caregivers to actively nurture faith in children.

Rather than the faith formation of children being the responsibility of 'the experts' at church who engage weekly (or less) with them at church, the church focuses its efforts on equipping the parents who share the daily lives of children to take the primary responsibility for their faith formation. The limited exposure children have to ministry experts such as youth and children's pastors, Sunday school teachers and catechists, has proven to be inadequate. Exposure to spiritual experiences one or two hours weekly at church amounts to about 40–100 hours per year. Where this is all the exposure children have, it may not be sufficient for faith formation to take place. Though churches provide age-segmented ministry to accommodate children's level of development and they aim to create an environment for nurturing faith and contributing to the holistic development of children, studies show that these efforts have proven to be inadequate. The results show a lack of interest in faith and spiritual matters in adulthood. The inability to adopt a biblical worldview and apply it to their daily lives, and to integrate into church life, are some of the consequences.

Studies (Barna 2000; see Avenant 2015; cf. Van Niekerk and Breed 2018) have shown that parents are indeed aware of the influence they have on their children's

faith formation. What they need is to be equipped for this task in order that they can contribute effectively to faith formation in children. Family ministry should therefore emphasize the role of parents and primary caregivers in nurturing children's faith.

The environment that is created in the home is important for faith to grow in young children. The processes of socialisation can enable or prevent effective faith formation. This is the primary reason for family ministry to be *home-centred*. Parents and caregivers often feel inadequate when it comes to nurturing faith in children. This can be one of the reasons why the responsibility of children's faith formation has traditionally been almost solely that of the church. Many parents and caregivers find that the church is the place where faith formation should take place. The home then plays only a supportive role. Some even regard the involvement of the home as optional. Where these views inform church ministry, a strong basis for faith formation in children is lacking. Those with the primary influence remain passive or uninvolved. Therefore, it is necessary to change the perception of the primary location where faith development should take place. That should be the home, equipped and supported by the church.

Different family ministry models, therefore, have different emphases and different expected outcomes. The home-centred approach focuses on creating a space at home for discipleship formation to take place. It is a misconception that faith formation depends mainly on the cognitive development and abilities of children. The holistic development and learning processes of children should be central to the training given to parents. Children experience their world in conjunction with the world of their parents or caregivers. In their daily lives, adults and primary caregivers should model faith to children. They should create an environment that has a significant impact on children's faith formation process. They should have knowledge of the developmental stages through which children go. How faith is communicated in these various stages is crucial. Family ministries should be structured and implemented in such a way that these aspects receive the needed attention.

The expectation of *where* faith formation takes place should change and, in some respects, already have. The COVID-19 pandemic has destabilized the notion that worship and spiritual experience should take place at church. In the pre-COVID

mindset, faith was formed at church. When churches closed the process of faith formation required a different stimulus. This affirmed the argument that has been put forward for some years that the home should be the primary place for faith formation. However, neither the church nor the home had been prepared for such a rapid shift as the one required by the circumstances of lockdown. When lockdown regulations were eased people did not flock back to the church in great numbers. With the compulsory transition to the virtual space 'online church' became a necessity.

In practice, this, however, presents a challenge. Studies (UNICEF 2020) show that 2.2 billion or two-thirds of children and young people aged below 25 years do not have internet access at home. These studies show significant inequity among countries, regions, and urban-rural settings. In West and Central Africa, only some 5% of children have access to the internet and data. The South African reality is not significantly different. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, a significant number of South African children experienced a disruption in their education because they could not migrate to the online space. Where the church is not accessible a home-centred approach to church ministry and children's faith formation could present a solution to the problem of the faith education of children. This challenges the church to provide families with resources for the faith development of children in their homes. It can lead to a re-definition of family ministry. The family can be equipped to do ministry at home. It could even present the opportunity for child-led worship in the safety of the home.

Faith communities should become an enabling environment, where young people are mentored as they take part in the life of the congregation. This can be especially useful for equipping those children who of necessity function as the head of the household. Through the efforts of the faith community, young people can develop their abilities and acquire skills in a safe environment (Chifeche and Dreyer 2019). A family ministry model that is relevant for today should foster community-based relationships by means of the activities of the church and the way in which the church ministers to children. From an African perspective on the role of community, there can be a broader involvement than just the family of people who take co-responsibility for the faith development of children. For those households where

there are no responsible adults, the church community can 'adopt' children and take responsibility for their spiritual development and their general wellbeing.

Furthermore, the outdated mindset that children remain on the periphery of the church and only become central to the faith community when they are adults should change. It is not about their 'future membership'. The goal of Christian education should not be limited to preparing them for milestones such as confirmation and communion. Rather, Christian education should prepare them for a life of service in the church and in the community. Nel (2016) calls it systematic empowerment for service. This articulates the point of departure of this study. Children are not the church of tomorrow but the church of today. The proposal to integrate children as full members, part and not apart from the congregation, is critical (Nel 2018). This mindset is significant for an effective family ministry model. An effective model should be inclusive and integrated with clear expectations and the outcome of strong relationships in the church and, even more critically, in the home.

Though various models of family ministry have a somewhat different emphasis, the one common goal is to build relationships in which the development of children and their faith can take place effectively. The *church-to-family* and *family relationships* are important for faith development to take place in the home. In African contexts, also in South Africa, a community-centred ministry is key to family ministry. The whole community should be involved. The home-centred approach aims to nurture families to actively take part in the discipleship formation of children from birth. The focus is on child development, a home environment that is conducive to that development, the role of the community, and the aim that families and children will live out their faith in their daily lives. The point of departure of this study is that an integrated approach can be effective in the faith formation of children.

Churches should therefore adopt an integrated and inclusive approach to faith development in children. According to this approach, the faith of children is nurtured in the families and communities where they spend most of their time in their young lives. This can be conducive to the building up of authentic and strong faith in children that will develop into a mature and active faith in adulthood.

Some guidelines are needed for the transition to more effective means through which the church can reach and equip parents for children's faith formation. Firstly, it is necessary to re-examine institutional assumptions about families and their role in children's lives and development. This study has shown how important the influence of parents and caregivers is in children's lives. Churches and families should be made aware of this. Churches can no longer assume that they know what parents and families need for the effective faith formation of their children. In today's complex world, the engagement of the church with the family should be mutual and relational for it to be effective. In order for ministry with children to be effective, the home should be seen as the primary environment for nurturing faith. This should take place with the support and cooperation of the church. This cannot be a top-down relationship where the church assumes what parents need for their children's faith formation.

Some parents acknowledge their crucial role in the maturation of their children's faith. The challenge, however, is that they often feel that they lack the know-how to engage with children on this topic at the various stages of development. The church and the family should jointly discern what parents require to be effective in the transmission and formation of faith. Only if the value of families and their contribution in this process is fully acknowledged can family ministry be effective. The quality of relationships in the home is key to the role of parents in children's faith formation.

Relationship building is a key component of an effective family ministry. Good relationships with children in faith communities can give children a sense of belonging in the church. In today's world, there are various influences on the relational experiences of children and young people. These include the influence of personal relationships, the experience of human connection, the influence of social media and technology, and peer pressure. Children and young people disciple their world in different ways to older generations (Knoetze 2017). In order to reach, disciple, and build relationships with children in today's world, an understanding of the world of social media is necessary. This should be utilised wisely in order to build relationships with them. Social media should not replace human connection. A key focus of an inclusive family ministry approach is to equip families to build stronger relational ties in the home.

Another priority of an effective inclusive family ministry approach is *discipling*. The family-based ministry model does not seem to prioritise discipleship. Discipling relationships focus on intimacy over program-oriented family ministry which focuses on information. Whereas a few 'experts' can lead a program-oriented family ministry, a discipling relationship supports parents in their own relationship with God. The family-equipping model supports this objective. It provides for conscientious planning to provide the family with the support and tools needed for faith formation in children. An effective inclusive family ministry model, therefore, should focus on assisting parents to lead their children to take their first steps in Christian life.

Observation and reaction are key components in early childhood learning. If children observe love and faith in their interaction with adults, they will respond to what they experience. The church should provide opportunities for engagement where children can experience *lived faith* in a community setting. In early childhood, children may be too young to have conscious thoughts about faith, but they can experience an unwavering faith in God. Their needs at this life stage are to encounter trust, love, and acceptance. These developmental needs should be acknowledged in the development of an inclusive and integrated ministry practice that spans both the church and the home context.

4.3   Effective parental participation in children's faith formation

The influence of parents on the overall development of children has been established in this study. The impact of the role they play regarding children's spiritual development and faith formation process has been discussed. It is pertinent to extend parents' participation in children's spiritual development beyond bringing them to church. Preparing children and youth to live productive and fulfilling lives, in the present and future, is one of the most important responsibilities of parents. Parents should actively guide their children to understand the principles and outcomes that honour God and advance God's purposes (Barna 2007).

Parents should build a relationship of trust with their children. The psycho-social development of young children with regard to basic trust or mistrust is fundamental to how they perceive faith. It is a primary responsibility for parents or caregivers to

provide a child with a safe environment. In order to build trust children's needs should be attended to and not ignored (Van Nierkerk and Breed 2018). The environment in which children are raised and their relationships with their primary caregivers play important roles in their faith development (see Fowler 1981; cf. Westerhoff 2000). A healthy parent-child relationship is very important for faith formation in children.

Children tend to emulate the example set by parents, irrespective of these examples being good or bad. The values and morals of parents have a direct effect on children (see Strommen 1973, cf. Van Niekerk and Breed 2018). Children should be able to observe the faith life of adults in their interaction with them. They should be given the chance to react to what they experience (Westerhoff 2000). If parents take children to church with them, rather than drop them off and drive away, they model the importance of a Christian lifestyle. This influences how children perceive and interact with faith.

Children's development should be at the centre of an effective and integrated family ministry approach. Imagination and stories play an important role in very young children's reality. Parents can utilise this for effective faith formation from an early age. Stories from the Bible can appeal to children's imagination. Through stories, their knowledge of the Bible can be expanded. This can contribute to their faith formation. This resonates particularly well with African oral tradition by means of which family values, faith, identity, and beliefs are transmitted to the next generations. Vivid images stimulate the imagination. This plays an important role in how children gather information and develop knowledge (Fowler 1986:227).

Discussions on matters of faith should be focused on what is relevant to children (see Fowler and Dell 2006:38). This can be done by addressing children's current challenges or interests. In the familiar environment of the home matters of faith should be discussed and demonstrated that they form an integral part of daily living. Parents and caregivers take up the role of being and forming disciples. Those roles should be integral to daily life. The stories of faith told by parents to children reinforce the formation process of children. Parents, not only 'the experts' such as youth pastors and Sunday school teachers, should be equipped to communicate faith to

children and guide them through the various developmental stages which each have their own demands and challenges.

Parents should also be equipped to guide children with regard to influences from outside the family and church. Socio-cultural influences affect children's lives and development in significant ways. Especially very young children should be shielded from damaging content. Dobson (2012) points out that some 40% of parents do not really know what media content and other influences children are exposed to. In the stages of childhood, it is important to lay firm foundations for adulthood (Strong 2014).

Parents can utilise the amenities of the digital world for the faith formation of children at home. Families with access to the internet can make use of the faith teachings, worship experiences and tools for ministry that are available. Parents and the church can harness positive innovations and social media to engage with children in their process of faith development. Children learn in different ways and learning theories have been pointed out. Both structured and unstructured learning experiences are necessary. Different learning styles should be taken into account also when faith is taught. Also in this regard, the church can equip parents and caregivers to teach faith effectively.

The expectations of parents with regard to faith formation will determine the effort they are prepared to make and that, in turn, will determine the outcome. Some parents have no plan or strategy for the spiritual development of their children. They do not prioritise their children's faith development and have little or no training with regard to how to nurture a child's faith. They have no specific standards or goals or any sense of accountability (see Barna 2009; Strong 2014). For the faith formation of children to be effective, parents should not only be actively involved but also have clear expectations of the formation process and the outcome.

For a home-centred approach to faith formation to be effective, parents should be willing to take the responsibility of pastoral and spiritual leadership. It is their task to guide children to pursue a relationship with God (Joiner and Nieuwhof 2010). By virtue of the church's limited time with children and the limited opportunity to forge

relationships, the church should assume the secondary or supportive role. The church should provide support and training for the parents and caregivers who do the main work of faith formation and discipling in the home. This constitutes a reversal of the old model of doing church which was church-centred and home-supported.

Being part of a community is important for children's faith formation. In order for children to be fully integrated as members of the faith community, they should have the opportunity to lead some activities at church. This provides the opportunity for mentorship. For parents to do the primary formation of children's faith they should be active participants in a faith community themselves. According to the communal cultural view of Africa, people are born into a small and caring community of love. The small unit of the family is connected with the larger cultural unit which in turn is connected to a national community and a faith community. A well-known isiZulu saying is: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye* (humans are humans through other humans). This articulates the interdependence of human beings (Nel 2015:9). A challenge of effective family ministry is to foster the relationships between individuals, families, communities and faith communities. If parents do not wish to engage, even the most effective training and support programs provided by the church will not be sufficient (DeVries 2004). This remains a challenge for the church with children's and youth ministry.

Repetition is one of the most basic strategies for learning. The book of Deuteronomy articulates this succinctly. Repetition of faith education is commanded. It is an effective practice of the Jewish community. Children are taught the words and works of God in the home (בבית), where matters of faith are intrinsic parts of regular conversation. Through discussions, studying the Word of God together and setting the right example in their own lives, parents contribute to the faith formation of children in the home environment. Children grasp these truths and values better when they are repeated. Jewish parents stimulate children's interest in the things of God by among others *Sabbath* celebrations in the home that form teaching moments. These home practices aimed at children's faith development become a daily lifestyle of faith for the whole family. Recognising and utilising teaching moments in the home is an effective way to minister to children.

The learning and teaching theories provide insight into how to teach and engage with children effectively. A teaching moment is defined as a "moment of educational opportunity: a time at which a person, especially a child, is likely to be particularly disposed to learn something or particularly responsive to being taught or made aware of something" (World English Dictionary Microsoft Corporation 2007). Parents should use teaching moments to continuously teach children faith in the home. The field of education emphasises that to utilise a teaching moment means to never pass up an opportunity to answer a child's questions (Neuman 2011). These moments can present the best opportunities for discussions with children. Discussions can turn into simple learning moments for the child. Parents can create an environment that engenders frequent teaching and learning moments. These can be either structured or unstructured. The result is a spiritual experience for parent and child.

Family traditions and rituals can be a fruitful part of a home-centred approach to faith development in children. Association of the seasons with religious celebrations can be an essential part of children's faith development. Religious rituals such as grace before meals, bedtime prayers, and service to the community can all contribute to the formation of a life in faith for children. Parents can adapt the complexities of religious rites to suit the level of cognitive, psychosocial and emotional development of the children in order that children can understand the traditions and requirements of a life in faith. The home environment then becomes an ecclesiological space for spiritual experiences and faith formation through the natural liturgy of play and the rhythms of family life.

Peer-to-peer learning can occur in the home and in the community settings. In the highly diverse South African context, there are many opportunities for communal interaction. Children can invite friends into their family and worship spaces. Parents can actively take part in the discipling of children. In circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the home can become a place for a spiritual engagement of hope.

Parents can recognise and foster relationships with other adults that can be conducive to the holistic development of their children. Adults such as grandparents, youth ministers, and schoolteachers can have a positive effect on a child's faith

formation. Such adults can give other input perspectives that have an influence on a child's faith development. Where the home environment of a child is negative, other adults can assume the role of caregiving and nurturing faith. These relationships express care and challenge children to grow as persons and in faith. They can also provide support, mentoring and advice. Such relationships expand children's world of influence and stimulate growth.

In a home-centred approach to faith formation in children, the home constitutes the primary environment for discipleship formation, Christian education, and faith development. However, the family cannot accomplish this task alone. Effective faith formation requires a good working partnership between the two most influential faith contexts in children's lives, which are the church and home.

4.4   Effective partnership: Church and home

Critical to this study is the partnership between the church and the home. A lack of cooperation between the family and the church will probably leave children without a sense of belonging to the faith community and without the motivation to live their lives as believers in adulthood. Historically, the relationship between the church and the home has had many challenges. The focus of the home-centred and church-supported model of family ministry is a symbiotic relationship between the church and the home.

The family ministry models highlighted in this study are from a Western context and cannot be applied directly to the complex South African context. This section explores best practices regarding an effective home-centred family ministry for the relevant context.

Through effective family ministry, the faith community can provide basic support with regard to child development, basic child care, and how to nurture and develop faith in children. This missional role of the church can expand into community outreach. Quality day-care centres can be made available for members of the congregation and the greater community. Qualified adults who offer loving and consistent care should staff the Sunday morning nursery and the weekday child care ministries.

These services provided by the church are vital, but they are *support structures* for the home. The focus of the church should shift to taking up a secondary position and supportive role. The family should be seen as the primary centre for faith formation, with adequately equipped parents, who then effectively fulfil the primary role of faith formation in children.

The expectations of both parents and the church should be clarified. The aim and method of cooperation should be clear. If the church and parents have different expectations with regard to the faith formation of children, it can lead to counter-productive methods of ministry to children. The focus should not be the mere accumulation of Bible knowledge. This only leads to disinterested adults who exit the church. The aim is to inspire children to experience a sense of belonging in the faith community and to cultivate a biblical worldview.

Engagement with families should not be aimed at achieving the goals of the church. It should be on supporting families to work together toward shared goals and aspirations for the children (Pekel et al. 2015). The goal of the church should be to recognize the primary role of parents in children's faith formation, to equip them for the process, and to support the home environment so that effective ministry to children can take place in the home. The criteria for assessing family engagement should shift from physical presence in church and participation in faith activities to good family life and family religiosity that is conducive to the spiritual formation of children.

Christian educational programs should be contextualised for effective teaching at the church and at home. The educational level of the children and congregation should be taken into account when a church programme is devised. Professionals or ministry experts can partner with parents for children's faith formation. Undertaking as a child's discipleship is too significant to be relinquished completely to professionals (Jones 2019). The primary formation of a child's faith is not the task of specialists. It is the task of parents in partnership with the entire community of faith. The church, as an inclusive entity, should acknowledge and fully accept young people and children into the community of faith as an integral part of the church,

irrespective of whether the model of ministry to children is organised according to age groups or not.

Safety and love are the two critical components of this stage of children's development. The church should provide both (Ziettlow 2017:4). The home should also be a safe space for children. Timely intervention is needed when either the church or the home is deemed unsafe.

The partnership between the church and the home should extend to the greater community to include local schools, faith-based organisations and the local neighbourhood. From the perspective of communal culture, partnerships should be developed with the broader community.

There is a need to shift the parameters of the relationship between the church and the home. This study highlights some paradigm shifts in ministry that are relevant to today's world. The following guidelines for shifting the paradigm are proposed:

Shift 1:   Listening to families
The church should listen to families and discern their needs. This should be the basis for the church ministry to the home. Family structure, socio-economic challenges and other factors that affect families today should be taken into account. The spirituality of presence is necessary to discern what families truly need.

Shift 2:   Emphasize relationship building
Building trust and relationships are the foundation for engagement with families. The church and family should be clear about their expectations. The church should invest in families, support families and enable parents to be the 'ministry experts' in their own homes. The church can serve as a network of support and opportunities.

Shift 3:   Equip families for their task
Some parents are not invested in their children's development. Others do care deeply about the faith formation of their children but are not ineffective in communicating this. The church and community should partner with these adults in the process of children's faith formation. Negative stereotypes should be changed.

The home centred approach is an opportunity to equip and strengthen the faith development of children through the home.

Shift 4:   Expand relationships

Relationships with other adults can serve to expand children's experience and deepen the process of faith formation. These developmental relationships within families and across the community can grow in daily interaction with people.

Shift 5:   Parenting as relationship

Parenting styles differ and can either repel or attract children to faith. Parenting is not about a set of rules and programs but is a relationship rooted in mutual affection, attachment, and influence. At the heart of a home-centred approach to faith formation is the empowerment of positive family relationships. A positive example and experience can inspire children to live out their faith in God in their daily lives, also as adults.

Shift 6:   Broaden coalitions to include families

A distinguishing characteristic of African cultures is the broad definition of 'family'. In European and Western contexts 'family' is largely regarded as a nuclear family. The broad and inclusive nature of African society makes it easier to transition into an inclusive church model. It invites other caring adults in the church and the larger community to actively take part in the faith formation of children and deepening their spiritual experiences. The parents or family become the active drivers who are supported by the church and faith community. This can be achieved whether the doors of churches are locked again or remain open. Those who do not have a biological family can experience an inclusive faith community as their family.

4.5   Summary

This chapter has investigated and described best practices for the effective participation of parents as active nurturers in children's faith formation. It has also presented guidelines for effective partnerships between the church and the home drawn from various studies. Child development and parenting styles have been discussed in relation to the effective faith formation process. The proposed shift of the primary and secondary roles of church and home can be done incrementally.

This is a transitional proposal for a more effective ministry to children from a church-centred ministry approach to a home-centred church-supported approach to faith formation in children. In African communities' family is core. Therefore, a home-centred approach to faith in children is a reconnection to the African way of passing inter-generational values, beliefs, and culture down to following generations. It takes a communal and familial effort to help and raise children to become faith-filled people. From a cultural, biblical and discipleship perspective, this study identifies with the saying:

I am and you are because God is.

CHAPTER 5

BEST PRACTICE FOR HOME-CENTRED FAITH FORMATION

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this investigation was to develop guidelines for best practice for a home-centred church-supported approach to faith formation in children in the South African context. This chapter completes the last task of Osmer's model–the pragmatic task, which answers the question of *how we might respond.* The chapter presents strategies for effective faith formation in children. These strategies are derived from the integrated home-centred model of family ministry and even more broadly, of being church.

This study set out to investigate and propose guidelines for best practice for home-centred faith formation in children in the South African context. It investigated the effectiveness of the various kinds of children's ministry provided by churches. Historically the responsibility for the faith formation of children was primarily shouldered by the church. Strategies were children's ministry, Sunday school, catechism classes and youth ministry. The consequence was that parents were relegated to secondary participants in their children's faith formation. They were mostly passive and absent from the formation process, an attitude that gave rise to the practice of 'dropping children off at church'. Parents remained largely unaware of their influence on not only the development of children and their formation as human beings but also on their faith formation. The point of departure of this study was that parents should have a primary, not a secondary role in their children's faith formation. They should be active participants, not passive onlookers. Just as they want their children to develop, grow and thrive as human beings, so the spiritual formation and growth of children will also benefit them in life. It is worth paying attention to this aspect of being human as well.

Various theories were examined to gain a deeper understanding of the process of child development – how they observe, imitate, absorb, experience and process

information. The development of faith in children was examined by means of the first three stages of James Fowler's theory of faith development.

The study also investigated the physical, cognitive, socio-cultural and psychological development of children from birth to middle childhood or the pre-adolescent years in order to come to a broad understanding of child development. Useful to this part of the investigation was Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development. The theory provides insight into how cognitive processes develop and what the capabilities of children's brains are at which point in their development. The context of this study is South African. Therefore, the study investigated the specific environment that has an influence on children's cognitive development in this context. The impact of socio-economic challenges and effect of urbanisation and migration, and the reality of many children living away from their primary family structure, was investigated and explained. Erikson's psycho-social development theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural and socialisation theories provided insight into how children are socialised through their exposure to the social environment and their relationships with parents and primary caregivers. The focus was on how children learn, observe, absorb, and model behaviour. Baumrind's theory of parenting styles provided insight into the major effect of parents and caregivers on the development of the child.

The two key predictors of faith formation in children are *Christian education* and *family religiosity*. These were examined and considered in the context of the church and family. Parents' actions and behaviour are critical to how a child perceives and receives faith. The study investigated the importance of the parental role and found that the role of parents in children's faith formation is of primary importance. The study also found that this is not always acknowledged by churches that follow the traditional model of children's ministry. The traditional model of children's ministry is a church-centred approach. The results of the investigation show that parents should become aware of the enormous influence their own faith, values, and worldview have on children. This raised the question as to the adequacy and the ability of parents to transmit faith from one to the next in the home. The formative years of a child's life from birth to six or seven years of age are of the utmost importance. This period in children's lives has the greatest influence on their formation. The study

concludes that the home environment is crucial also to the spiritual formation of children.

The study investigated the role of the church in equipping parents to become the primary example and teachers of faith for children. The significance of the home and the community in this faith development process was highlighted. Three family ministry models were explored in order to find cues for best practice: the *family-integrated model,* the *family-based model,* and the *family-equipping* model. However, these models were developed in Western contexts. They cannot simply be applied to an African context with its different views, practices and circumstances with regard to family life. The family ministry models all emphasised an important aspect, but as a whole would not be effective in the context that is the focus of the study.

Guidelines are proposed for an integrated family ministry with a focus on children's faith formation. The point of departure is a home-centred ministry approach. Aspects that need attention are active participation in religious activities, the integration into the faith community and a sense of belonging, and how to live an active life of faith even as a child or a young person – a faith that will carry them further also after they have left the parental home. This study investigated the effectiveness of the existing partnership between the church and the home especially with regard to children's faith formation. It found that there is a need to re-assess the relationship between the church and the home. The usual ways of doing youth or children's ministry have proven to be inadequate in the contemporary world. The focus of the church with regard to children's faith formation will have to shift and some change is required.

The study identified an integrated and inclusive home-centred approach as a viable possibility for reaching the goal of effective faith formation in children. The focus of the church then shifts from its church-centred and primary role to a supporting and equipping role with the home as the primary location for discipling children. The focus of the home is then on *active* participation in children's faith formation, both in the home and their daily lives. The church can empower and equip parents and caregivers so that the home *becomes* the mission field for making disciples for Christ. If this partnership of home and church is effective, it will have an impact on the quality of relationships within the home, the faith community and even the greater

community. When it comes to strategies, the African context with socio-economics, environment and demographics, and cultural factors has to be taken into account. Western youth ministry models cannot be applied directly. The communal nature of African cultures is an important indicator of how ministry to children can be effective in this specific context today. The way in which communal values and practices have been affected by how the world has changed, have to be taken into account. The study, therefore, presents guidelines for best practices for a home-centred faith formation in children and relevant to South Africa in today's world.

5.2 Findings

This study focused on effective ministry to children and the family in today's world. The idea of the separation of adult and child believers in worship and traditional teaching methods of Christian education is not effective in today's world. In the post-COVID church, things have also changed. People are not returning to church gatherings in great numbers to continue church life as it was traditionally known. 'Church' in the current era faces different challenges and has needed to make adjustments on various levels. The Coronavirus pandemic has in some ways exposed the ineffectiveness of traditional approaches to children's ministry and faith formation. With the lockdown regulations, this traditional model of children's ministry has been severely challenged. Traditionally the primary focus of children's faith formation has been on what happens in the church – baptism, Sunday school, youth groups, catechism classes and worship experiences tailored to be age-appropriate. Today families are compelled to be in the same space for a longer period of time, for work, schooling, play, and also for worship. With the shift to a 'work-and-learn-from-home' culture and online teaching and church, strategies should be designed for bringing the family and faith community together in a meaningful way.

Two key factors for predicting the faith maturity of young people were highlighted, namely Christian education and family religiosity. With regard to both factors, the context and family situation of South African children have to be taken into account. Then only can a developmentally appropriate educational practice be designed (see Cannella and Viruru 2004; Pekel et al. 2015; Nel 2016). The content and methods for Christian education should align with children's needs and developmental stage.

Family religiosity is foundational to a child's faith. The family is the primary agent of child socialisation. This includes the socialisation into faith and a faith community.

The general assumption that children are readily open to faith is challenged in the existing research (Nel 2016). In a context where children are exposed to violence at the hand of people they trust and on whom they depend, their image of God can be severely affected and the formation of faith impeded. Silencing children or not listening to them, both at home and in the church can also impede the process of faith formation.

Childhood should not be an isolated experience, either in the home and family or in the church. Children should be included and treated as part of the social group. Inclusivity in the church is particularly important. The tendency to view children as 'the church of tomorrow' rather than 'the church of today' is counterproductive to their growth and development. Children are not only part of the faith community; they are part of the identity of the church. Isolating children on account of their age and children's ministry from other forms of ministry goes against what the faith community stands for. Therefore, the integration of all members of the church is crucial for the church to be true to itself and its identity as a community. If children are fully integrated and regarded as part of the core of the church, that will change the perception of their importance to the community. Then they will be perceived as central rather than peripheral. Then intergenerational relationships and engagement that are inherent to the church as a community can also become an intended strategy for integrating children into the faith community.

In effective ministry to children, the importance of relationships to the development of children as persons and of their faith is acknowledged. The focus of the church will then be on enhancing the quality of the relationships between adults and children in the faith community. In South African society, where there are many single-parent families, where fathers are often absent, where there is a large number of child-headed households, the church can function as an extended family and in that way fill the gaps in children's lives. Therefore, the emphasis of ministry should not be wholly on transmitting information, but should first and foremost be on building

relationships that are conducive to the development of children as persons and of their faith.

The influence of socio-economic realities on children's faith formation should be taken into account if effective ministry strategies are to be designed. Children's self-esteem and emotional development are affected by socio-economic realities. It is therefore essential that the church partners with the parents and understand the home environment in order to ascertain what children need and how best to reach them with programmes that focus on the formation and strengthening of their faith.

Parents and the church can sometimes have very different expectations. This can lead to opposite opinions with regard to what children need and how to approach the process of their faith formation. Expectations can range from what the desired outcomes would be, to the method by means of which the outcomes will be achieved. The various expectations of the church and the home have an effect on the development of children and the formation of their faith. If the expectation is that the church is solely responsible for children's faith, the outcome could be a fragile faith that does not mature into adulthood. If parents remain inactive in the process of the faith formation of children, then the outcome is also not a strong and maturing faith. The clear expectation should then be that the church prioritises the role of parents and fully supports the family in their active and full participation in the faith development of their children.

How effective the process of the faith formation of children will depend on the quality of the partnership between the church and the home. The active partnership of these two contexts working together is more likely to produce children with mature faith who are able to live out their faith actively in childhood and into adulthood. Without the cooperation of the church and the family with regard to the faith development of children, the expected positive results of strong faith in children will probably not be achieved. Parents have a God-given task that cannot be left solely to 'professionals'. The primary formation of a child's faith is the task of parents in partnership with the whole community of faith. This finding is fundamental to how ministry to children should be structured. It is the point of departure for developing strategies for practice.

The leadership role of parents within the family is then in essence a *pastoral* one. In conservative churches and according to the family-integrated ministry model this would typically be the role of the father–male leadership with women and children following. However, *adults* lead and guide children. In the South African context, the *adults* who provide care and guidance in the home could be grandparents, parents or family members. Even children can be the ones responsible for the household and for siblings. Whoever the responsible persons are, it is the task and the place of the church to provide support and equip them for their pastoral task.

The study found that a shift is needed as to where discipleship or faith formation should take place. Traditional thinking locates this activity at church. With the COVID-19 pandemic, shifts have already begun to take place. Traditional church practices have migrated to home spaces. These times present the opportunity for the church to accept, support and expand the scope of family worship in the home.

The family structures prevalent in South Africa determine how families and children can be reached most effectively. The church should be aware of the types of family structures present in their congregations. If this is taken into account and churches are prepared to deal with realities rather than with idealised notions of what families are 'supposed to be', the ministry to families and children will be more effective. All kinds of families can then be integrated fully into the broader faith community. Assumptions with regard to what families need should be based on factual knowledge of children, families and their situations. This is applicable to households that are not 'traditional family structures'.

The effects of urbanisation and migration are visible in the rapidly changing culture and family structures in Africa. This can place a greater burden on the church which should then assume the role of an adoptive or surrogate family for children. A sense of belonging in the faith community is necessary if children are to be active participants in the church. The study has shown that including children of different ages in a multi-generational setting, if beneficial to their growth and development. The African value of communal life supports an attitude of inclusivity as a natural part of human existence. The expected exposure to and interaction with older

generations create a natural setting for the transmission of faith and values to children.

This study has discerned what constitutes the negotiables and the non-negotiables when it comes to ministry and the development of faith in children. Christian education is a non-negotiable element, whereas other forms and expressions of ministry in today's world are negotiable. Christian education is a key point where the expectations of parents and the church should correspond. The form in which the education is presented, for instance, Sunday school classes and other traditional ways 'teaching faith' can, however, be considered negotiable. Ultimately, the study finds that Christian education should be rooted in discipleship.

Parental expectations with regard to the process of faith formation in children should be clear. Discipleship should be the central goal. Faith formation is then about more than imparting information. The goal of faith formation is that children will become committed disciples of Christ and not just to 'belong to a group'. This provides the foundation for lifelong learning and the maturation of their faith. Parents and the church should have sufficient knowledge of the stages of faith development in order to set informed and realistic expectations for themselves and their children. Parents should also be focused on the individuality of children in their process of faith formation and development. The journey of faith of every human being is unique.

The curriculum development and teaching should be relevant and applicable to the developmental stage of the child. As the imagination of young children plays an important role in their development, teaching strategies would include stories and visual aids. Current learning theories can be informative. The use of virtual space, online learning, blended learning, and hybrid learning is useful for teaching children in today's world. 'Teachable moments' often arise in the home setting. Parents should have sufficient knowledge and insight to make the best of these moments. Teaching should be relevant and contextualised in terms of both language and delivery. This is key for effective ministry. For all of this, the church can equip parents and support them in their enormous tasks and responsibility. However, it remains the parents' primary responsibility and not that of the church.

The parent-child relationship has been shown to be the most critical ingredient in the process of the faith formation of a child. The quality of this relationship directly affects how children perceive, receive, and absorb knowledge and faith. Children observe how their parents deal with matters of faith and religion. This then affects their own faith journey. Children gain knowledge mainly through observation. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness of the effects of parenting styles.

The study found that the parameters for assessing the impact of faith on children should be re-visited. The main criteria should no longer be church attendance and knowledge. Criteria should be a godly lifestyle, gospel values, integration into the life of the faith community and service.

A task for today's parents and churches when it comes to children's ministry and faith formation is to discern between a need for continuity or discontinuity. The challenge is to take an inventory of the approaches and methods of ministry that have been prevalent in the church. The non-negotiables are those aspects that will be continued. The negotiables of ministry will have to be contextualised differently in the South African context in a post-COVID-19 pandemic era. The shift in the family-church partnership places the primary responsibility for the formation of children's faith on the parents. The task of the church is secondary, namely to equip parents to do the work of pastoral ministry and faith formation in the home.

In conclusion, the 'new normal' of COVID times provides the opportunity to clarify what can be discontinued and changed to function better, and what can be regarded as core and should continue. The *what* and *why* questions of ministry to children present challenges for the *how* question – what constitutes 'best practice'? Family ministry for faith formation in children is in the process of change in order to become and be relevant in today's world. The study proposes an inclusive home-centred church-supported approach to children's ministry and faith formation in children. The aim is not that young people should 'return to church', but rather that families will 'do' church at home. For this, they should be adequately supported by the larger faith community.

5.3   An integrated approach to children's faith formation

This study proposes that an inclusive home-centred church-supported approach to children's ministry and faith formation will be appropriate to and effective in a South African context. It is an integrated family ministry approach. The model can be applied in such a way that it is not only home-centred but also community-centric. 'Community' in this context includes the faith community and the cultural community and extended family. The fundamental shift is that parents or caregivers take primary responsibility for children's spiritual growth. The church takes the supporting role. The success of the enterprise depends on the strength of this partnership, with clear expectations from and of each. The emphasis is on *inclusivity*, which extends to the church, the community and the extended family of the children. This approach is appropriate for African contexts due to the communal nature of African cultures and social systems.

Components of the three family ministry models that were investigated in this study were identified as useful to an inclusive home-centred church-supported family ministry approach to faith formation. One such component is: to express care by listening and including all, and intentional relationship building. This is particularly important for child-headed and single-parent households. Where grandparents are the primary caregivers, the church can be an important support system. Social events and unstructured interaction among generations can be regarded as opportunities for effective relationship-building. In a home setting, unstructured daily living is central, not formal and structured learning events such as schooling or catechesis. Informal interaction in a family setting can become opportunities for pastoral ministry children in their natural milieu. The home-centred approach aims to empower and equip families for their tasks. With such intentional empowerment, the church can ameliorate the feelings of inadequacy that parents tend to have when it comes to the task of nurturing children's faith.

The inclusive home-centred model challenges growth in diverse ways. It changes the orientation of the traditional church models. The new orientation is that the church will become the training ground for discipleship. This new orientation can make the home the mission field.

The inclusive home-centred ministry provides intentional support for the home environment where faith is cultivated primarily. This approach is about sharing power with children and encouraging their participation in the activities of faith-building and learning. It creates opportunities to engage with children physically or virtually. It supports relationship building which is crucial to the development of children in general and the formation of their faith in particular.

Such an integral and inclusive home-centred church-supported ministry can support the main aim of Christian education which is discipleship and faith formation. The quality of relationships can benefit from this, irrespective of their socio-economic circumstances. This study presents strategies to implement the home-centred church-supported approach to faith formation in children in a South African context.

5.4 Strategies for an inclusive home-centred ministry

This study presents the following strategies for developing an inclusive home-centred church-supported ministry for effective faith formation in children. These strategies can contribute to a stronger and more effective partnership between the church and the home for the faith formation of children:

- **Intentionally intergenerational**

The church creates integrated environments. Such environments are conducive to forging intergenerational connections. Children can observe and experience role models of faith at church and in the home. This intentional infusion of the generations in social spaces has psychosocial benefits for all.

- **An environment of trust**

Parents aim to provide children with a happy, healthy and safe environment in which to grow up. The church aims to provide a safe and happy environment for children to engage with others. A safe environment creates a strong foundation of trust on which faith can develop.

- **Parents and spiritual activities**

Children should be able to see parents or caregivers function as active believers. Faith actions include attending Bible studies, attending church, having discussions about issues of faith, and having constructive relationships. Children should be given opportunities for interaction with role models of faith. Faith then becomes who they are and not merely what they do. Their lives become an example of faith.

- **Faith instruction**

Parents should regularly educate their children about their religion on a continuous basis, following the example of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Spiritual input is given even in the most mundane circumstances and activities. Then faith becomes integral to the lived experience of adults and children.

- **Age-appropriate learning**

Parents and the church should engage children at their level of development. The appropriate methods should be used. Stories, vivid images, puppets, songs, movement and an appeal to their imagination work well for small children. Abstract thinking is only possible in adolescents.

- **Developing a curriculum**

Young children are still self-absorbed. Discussions should focus on their personal environment and needs. This can include problems that the children are facing in their lives or focusing on what is of interest to them. The interest of children should be connected to relevant stories or ideas from the Bible. Integrating children's interests with faith in God can be an effective strategy for faith formation in children.

- **Engagement and discussion**

The church and parents should encourage family discussions on issues of faith with children. These become part of daily life. Ideas of faith are discussed not only at church but also at home. These discussions provide the opportunity for children to engage with parents about their faith and life experiences. In this way, faith is contextualised in the family's history and tradition.

- **Modelling and socialisation**

The family is encouraged to adopt good moral values for themselves and to model this to children. Through observation and imitation, children learn how to behave. The lifestyle of parents should be commensurate with their faith. What they see from an early age is what children associate with faith. The desired outcome would then be a Godly lifestyle in adulthood.

- **Parenting**

The church should emphasise that parenting is about relationships and not a set of techniques or rules. An authoritarian parenting style can cause unwilling obedience as long as the child is obligated to obey. It is not conducive to cultivating faith. Parents should rather adopt an authoritative parenting style that is characterised by open communication in a warm environment.

- **Family faith practises**

Families can develop their own traditions and rituals. These can become significant in the lives of children as they develop as human beings and believers. Ritualising mundane moments and embedding their faith can lead to faith practices becoming integral to family life. A connection can be made between the church seasons and celebrations at home in order to cultivate an integrated faith.

- **Family worship**

One way to express family religiosity is regular church attendance and participation in worship. If families attend church activities that create the opportunity for children to be included and experience what a life of faith entails. They can develop a natural relationship with the faith communities. They can see their parents' involvement in and service to the church.

- **Family and church**

Churches should focus on building a strong relationship with families. The message should be that family life is important. A positive message and mindset towards families will enhance the relationship and the understanding that the role of parents and families in the formation of children's faith is pivotal.

- **Equipping families**

Inclusive home-centred ministry develops programmes that are relevant for them. Idealistic ideas of what families should look like do not lead to sustainable ministry. An inclusive home-centred approach accepts the reality of diverse family structures and relationships. Their aim is to equip parents for their central role in the faith formation of children. Parents are discipled by the church so that they can disciple children at home.

- **A communal perspective**

Communal life in African cultures is the context of this study. This is changing because of influences such as globalisation, urbanisation, migration and commercialisation. For this reason, the strengthening of community coalitions is critical. The extended family forms an integral part of the greater community. An inclusive home-centred approach strengthens and engages communities to help create a positive environment for the holistic development of faith in children.

5.5   A way forward

The study recommends an inclusive and broadened mindset when it comes to children's ministry. The church cannot be the primary or only place where faith formation takes place. Faith formation can also not take place solely by means of the church's activities and programs. The scope is too limited. In many church settings, the process of faith education begins too late in a child's life. This process should begin at the very beginning of a child's life. The current COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the weaknesses of church-centred ministry to children and the family. Parents and primary caregivers have the greatest influence on children. Parental participation in child faith development is therefore crucial and should be central. The church should not be the primary role player in the faith formation of children. It should rather play a supportive role. The church is to support, teach, equip and empower parents as the primary nurturers of faith development in children. The content of Christian education should be relevant and appropriate to the developmental level of the children.

Learning by imitation begins very early in a child's life. A sense of trust or mistrust in the environment is also established very early. The parents and the home are therefore of primary importance in the development and faith formation of children. Parents should be intentional in their teaching and discussion of matters of faith. Children observe the lifestyle of parents and those within the church environment. This is how they learn and absorb faith. Parents should integrate attitudes of faith and faith activities into the daily lives of their families. This is more effective than the weekly or only periodic contact with the church and the spiritual activities it provides.

Parents and other caregivers should be equipped by the church for their primary task of the faith formation of children. The family should be equipped to sustain quality relationships in the home. Relationships outside the home, namely in the faith community of the broader community can also contribute to the holistic development of children and their faith. This is especially pertinent to an African context.

The context of the study is the South African environment. An approach that is applicable to this environment should be communal and open to a variety of family structures. The involvement of the family and the church as partners in the faith development of children will increase the likelihood of forming a strong faith and Christian lifestyle in children. The home is the primary location for children's faith formation. The inclusive home-centred church-supported ministry can be conducive to effective and holistic faith formation in children.

Bibliography

Acker, J., Barry, K., Esseveld, J. & Adler, P., 2011. Interviewing children and adolescents. In: J. Holstein & J. Gubrium, eds. *Inside Interviewing,* 32-53. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Amanze, J., 2011. Contextuality: African spirituality a catalyst for spiritual formation in theological education in Africa. *Ogbomosho Journal of Theology* 16(2),1-24.

Apostolides, A., 2017. Adolescent spirituality with the support of adults. *HTS Theological Studies* 73(4),1-6.

Arand, C., 2000. *That I may be his own: An overview of Luther's Catechisms.* St Louis: Concordia Academic Press.

Avenant, J., 2015. Geloofsvorming (Faith formation). In: M. Nel & Z. Van deer Westhuizen, eds. *Skokkend positief,* 63-73. Kaapstad: Bybelmedia.

Bagraim, M., 2018. *Who speaks for the unemployed?*
Available at: http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-08-14-who-speaks-for-the-unemployed/

Barna Research Group, 1991. *Today's teens: A generation in transition.* Glendale: The Group.

Barna, G., 1995. *Generation next.* Ventura: Regal Books.

Barna, G., 2003. *Transforming children into spiritual champions.* Ventura: Gospel Light.

Barna, G., 2007. *Revolutionary parenting: What the research shows really works.* Carol Stream: Tyndale House.

Barna, G., 2011. *Revolutionary parenting.* Vereeniging: Christian Art Publishers.

Baucham, V., 2011. *Family driven faith: Doing what it takes to raise sons and daughters who walk with God.* Wheaton: Crossway.

Baxter, P., 2006. From Ubuzungu to Ubuntu: Resources for pastoral counselling in a Bantu context. PhD thesis, Kimmage Missional Institute, Dublin.

Bendor-Samuel, P., 2020. Covid-19, trends in global mission, and participation in faithful witness. *Transformation* 37(4), 255-265.

Benson, P. & Eklin, C., 1995. *Effective Christian education: A summary report on faith, loyalty, and congregational life.* Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Breakwell, G., 1986. *Coping with threatened identity.* London: Methuen.

Browning, D., 2007. *Equality and the family: A fundamental, practical theology of children, mother, and fathers in modern societies.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

Bruwer, M., Hartell, C. & Steyn, M., 2014. Inclusive education and insufficient school. *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 4(2), 18-35.

Bujo, B., 2015. *Foundations of an African ethic.* New York: Crossroad.

Burdett, E., Barrett, J. & Greenway, T., 2020. Children's developing understanding of the cognitive abilities of supernatural and natural minds: Evidence from three cultures. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 14(1).

Burns, J. & DeVries, M., 2003. *Partnering with parents in youth ministry: The practical guide to today's family-based youth ministry.* Ventura: Gospel Light.

Cannella, G. & Viruru, R., 2004. *Childhood and postcolonialization: Power, education, and contemporary practice.* New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Chifeche, V. & Dreyer, Y., 2019. Faith communities, youth and development in Mozambique. *HTS Theological Studies* 74(5), 1-6.

Churches, N. C. f. F. I., 2019. *A declaration of the complementary roles of church and family.* Available at: http://ncfic.org/about/declaration [Accessed 16 January 2019].

Clinebell, H., 1988. *Basic types of pastoral care and counselling: Resources for the ministry of healing and growth.* Nashville: Abingdon.

Cloete, A., 2016. Revisiting a family approach in youth ministry. *In die Skriflig* 50(1), 1-6.

Cluver, L., Orkin, M., Boyes, M. & Sherr, L., 2015. Child adolescent suicide attempts, suicidal behavior, and adverse childhood experiences in South Africa: A prospective study. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 57(1), 52-59.

Coats, K., 2005. *Everything I know about leadership I learnt from the kids.* Johannesburg: Penguin Books.

Courlander, H., 1975. *A treasury of African folklore: The oral literature, traditions, myths, legends, epics, tales, collections, wisdom, sayings, and humor of Africa.* New York: Crown.

Coyle, A., 2011. Critical responses to faith development theory: A useful agenda for change? *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 33, 281-298.

Creswell, J., 2009. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method approaches.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

De Miranda, D., Da Silva Athansio, B., De Sena Oliveira, A. & Simoes-e-Silva, A., 2020. How is COVID -19 pandemic impacting mental health of children and adolescents? *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 51,1-8.

Dean, K., 2010. *Almost Christian: What the faith of our teenagers is telling the American church.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dean, K. & Foster, R., 1998. *The God-bearing life: The art of soul tending for youth ministry.* Nashville: Upper Room Books.

DeVries, M., 2004. *Family based youth ministry.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

DeVries, M., 2008. *Sustainable youth ministry: Why most ministry doesn't last and what your church can do about it.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.

Dobson, J., 2012. *Dr. Dobson's handbook of family advice: Encouragement and practical help for your home.* Eugene: Harvest House Publishers.

Dowling, E. & Scarlett, W., 2006. *Encyclopedia of religious and spiritual development.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Erikson, E., 1968. *Identity, youth and crisis.* New York: Norton.

Folmsbee, C., 2007. *A new kind of youth ministry.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Ford, G., 2000. *From contented baby to confident child.* London: Vermilion.

Fowler, J., 1981. *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and quest for meaning.* San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Fowler, J., 1986. Faith and the structuring of meaning. In: C. Dykstra & S. Parks, eds. *Faith development and Fowler,* 15-42. Birmingham: AL: Religious Education Press.

Fowler, J., 1991. *Weaving the new creation: Stages of faith and the public church.* New York: Harper Collins.

Fowler, J. & Dell, M., 2004. Stages of faith and identity: Birth to teens. *Child Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 13,17-33.

Freudenburg, B. & Lawrence, R., 1998. *The family friendly church.* Loveland: Group.

Gilligan, C., 1982. *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Graham, J., 2004. *Rock-solid kids: Giving children a biblical foundation for life.* Ventura: Gospel Light.

Hall, K. et al., 2017. *South African early childhood review.* Cape Town: Children's Institute, University of Cape Town and Ilifa Labantwana.

Healey, J., 2005. *African stories: For preachers and teachers.* Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.

Heywood, D., 2008. Faith development theory: A case for paradigm change. *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 29, 263-272.

Holborn, L. & Eddy, G., 2011. *First steps to healing the South African family.* Richmond: South African Institute of Race Relations.

Holmen, M., 2011. *Impress faith on your kids.* Nashville: Randall House.

Joiner, R. & Nieuwhof, C., 2010. *Parenting beyond your capacity.* Colorado Springs: David C. Cook.

Jones, T., 2019. *Perspectives on family ministry: 3 views.* Nashville: B & H Academics.

Keeley, L. & Keeley, R., 2019. *Dear parent: A guide for family faith formation.* Grand Rapids: Faith Formation Ministries.

Knoetze, J., 2015. Perspectives on family and youth ministry embedded in *Missio Dei*: An African perspective. *In die Skriflig* 49(1), 1-9.

Knoetze, J., 2017. Who are the disciples? Identity perceptions about millennials and the church. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38(1), 1-7.

Knoetze, J., 2019. African spiritual phenomena and the probable influence on African families. *In die Skriflig* 53(4), 1-8.

Kolacki, D., 2012. *Equipping families to teach faith to their children*. Commack: PRC.

Lake, L., Shung-King, M., Hendricks, M., Heywood, M., Nannan, N., Laubscher, R., Bradshaw, D., Mathews, C., Goga, A., Ramraj, T. and Chirindavi, W., 2019. Prioritising child and adolescent health: A human rights imperative. *Child and adolescent health*, *3*, 32-53.

Lane, J., Wellman, H. & Evans, E., 2012. Socio-cultural input facilitates children's developing understanding of extraordinary minds. *Child Development,* 83(3), 1007-1021.

Lundie, R., Hancox, D. & Farrell, S., 2018. *The church's role in supporting human development in the first thousand days of life.* Cape Town: Common Good.

Mbiti, J., 1991. *Introduction to African religion.* Long Grove: Waveland Press.

McGregor, S., 2018. *Understanding and evaluating research: A critical guide.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

McKie, L. & Callan, S., 2012. *Understanding families: A global introduction.* Los Angeles: SAGE.

Mvududu, S. & McFadden, P., 2001. *Reconceptualizing the family in a changing Southern African environment.* Harare: WLSA Regional Office.

Myers, B., 2017. *Engaging globalisation (Mission in global community): The poor, Christian mission, and our hyperconnected world.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Nel, M., 2000. *Youth ministry: An inclusive congregational approach.* Pretoria: Design books/Dotsquare, Clubview.

Nel, M., 2015. Imagine-making disciples in youth ministry that will make disciples. *HTS Theological Studies* 71(3), 1-11.

Nel, M., 2018. *Youth Ministry: An inclusive missional approach.* Cape Town: AOSIS.

Nel, M. & Schoeman, W., 2019. Rediscovering disciple-making and the role of faith sharing. *HTS Theology Studies* 75(4).

Nel, R., 2016. 'Children must be seen and heard' – doing postcolonial theology with children in a (southern) African Reformed church. *HTS: Theological Studies* 72(1), 1-7.

Nelson, B. & Jones, T., 2011. Introduction: The problem with family ministry. In: R. Stinson & T. Jones, eds. *Trained in the fear of God: Family ministry in theological, historical, and practical perspective,* 13-29. Grand Rapids: Kregel.

Neuman, M.E., 2011. Addressing children's beliefs through Fowler's stages of faith. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing* 26(1), 44-50.

Newberg, A., 2012. *The spiritual brain: Science and religious experiences.* Chantilly: The Great Courses.

Niebuhr, H., 1960. *Radical monotheism and Western culture.* New York: Harper and Row.

Nurnberger, K., 2007. *The living dead and the living God.* Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.

O'Keefe, A., 2002. Parenting. In: N. Salkind, ed. *Child development,* 295-300. New York: Macmillan Reference.

Osmer, R., 1996. *Confirmation: Presbyterian practices in ecumenical perspective.* Louisville: Geneva Press.

Osmer, R., 2008. *Practical theology: An introduction.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans.

Papalia, D. & Feldman, R., 2011. *A child's world: Infancy through adolescence.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Pearce, L. & Denton, M., 2011. *A faith of their own: Stability and change in the religiosity of America's adolescents.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Pearson, A., Mack, E. & Namanya, J., 2017. Mobile phones and mental well-being: Initial evidence suggesting the importance of staying connected to family in rural, remote communities in Uganda. *PLoS ONE* 12(1).

Pekel, K., Roehlkepartain, E., Syvertsen, A. K. & Scales, P. C., 2015. *Don't forget the families: The missing piece in America's effort to help all children succeed.* Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B., 1969. *The psychology of the child.* New York: Basic Books.

Popkin, M., 2002. *Active parenting now.* Georgia: Active Parenting.

Powell, K. E. & Clark, C., 2011. *Sticky faith: Everyday ideas to build lasting faith in your kids.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Powell, K. & Kubiak, K., 2009. When the pomp and circumstances fades: A profile of youth group kids-post-youth-group. *Youth Specialities* 17.

Powell, M., 2009. *Introducing the New Testament: A historical, literacy, and theological survey.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Richter, A. & Muller, J., 2005. The forgotten child of Africa: Voicing HIV and Aids orphans' stories of bereavement: A narrative approach. *HTS Theological Studies* 61(3), 999-1015.

Roberto, J., 2012. The importance of family faith for lifelong faith formation. Lifelong Faith.

Roberto, J., 2018. *Reimagining faith formation for the 21st century.* Brisbane: Brisbane Catholic Education.

Roberto, J. & Pfiffner, K., 2007. Best practices in children's faith formation. *Lifelong Faith* 1(6), 39-46.

Roehlkepartian, E. C., 1998. *Building assets in congregations: A practical guide for helping youth grow up healthy.* Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Seibel, C. & Nel, M., 2010. Generation X, intergenerational justice and the renewal of the traditioning process. *HTS Theological Studies 66*(2), 1-7.

Senter III, M. H., Black, W., Clark, C. & Nel, M., 2001. *Four views of youth ministry and the church: Inclusive congregational, preparatory, missional, strategic.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Shafer, B., 2008. *Unleashing God's word in youth ministry.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Slee, N., 2004. *Women's faith development: Patterns and processes.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Smith, C. & Denton, M., 2009. *Soul searching: The religious and spiritual lives of American teenagers.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Smith, C. & Snell, P., 2009. *Souls in transition: Religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stoppard, M., 1993. *Know your child: How to discover and enhance your child's true potential.* Capetown: Struik.

Strommen, M. & Hardel, R., 2000. *Passing on the faith: A radical new model for youth and family ministry.* Winona: St Mary's Press/Christian Brothers Publications.

Strommen, M., Jones, K. & Rahn, D., 2001. *Youth ministry that transforms.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Strommen, M. & Strommen, A., 1985. *Five cries of parents.* San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Strong, P., 2014. Effective youth ministry: Embracing a family approach. *In die Skriflig* 48(1), 1-8.

Tetty, S. & Nel, M., 2021. Discerning the essence and mission of the church in the midst of the COVID-19. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 7(2), 1-21.

The Search Institute, 1990. *Effective Christian education: A national study of protestant congregations,* Minneapolis: Search Institute.

Tuttle, A., Knudson-Martin, C. & Kim, L., 2012. Parenting as relationship: A framework for assessment and practice. *Family Process* 51(1), 73-89.

United Nations Children's Fund and International Telecommunication, 2020. *How many children and young people have internet access at home? Estimating digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic.* New York: UNICEF.

Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA), 2005. *Acts of Fourth General Synod*.

Van den Heever, G. & Scheffler, E., 2001. *From Jesus Christ to Christianity: Early Christian literature in context.* Pretoria: UNISA.

Van Niekerk, M. & Breed, G., 2018. The role of parents in the development of faith from birth to seven years of age. *HTS Theological Studies* 74(2), 1-11.

Vygotsky, L., 1978. *Mind in society.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Weber, S. & De Beer, S., 2016. Doing theology with children in a South African context: Children as collaborators in intergenerational ministry. *HTS Theological Studies* 72(1), 1-11.

Wellman, W., Perkins, G. & Wellman, N., 2009. Educational leadership: The relationship between spirituality and leadership practices. *Spirituality in Higher Education Newsletter* 7,1-6.

Westerhoff, J., 1976. *Will our children have faith?* New York: Seabury Press.

Westerhoff, J., 2012. *Will our children have faith?* 3rd ed. New York: Church Publishing.

Willms, D., 1999. Quality and inequality in children's literacy: The effects of families, schools, and communities. In: D. Keating & C. Hertzman, eds. *Developmental health and the wealth of nations,* 72-93. New York: Guilford Press.

World English Dictionary Microsoft Corporation, 2007.

Young, M., 2002. Introduction and overview. In: M. Young, ed. *From early child development to human development: Investing in our children's future,* 1-19. Washington: World Bank.

Ziettlow, J., 2017. *The stages of faith development.* https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f738/75aa0ffc001ebc887fda6e1e19fa ed080438.pdf

Zinn, M. & Eitzen, D., 2005. *Diversity in families.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.