



Occasional Paper 7

Survey of Church Attendees Aged 10-14 Years: 2001 National Church Life Survey

J. Bellamy, S. Mou and K. Castle
June 2005

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Introduction

In 1991 and 1996, the National Church Life Survey was carried out among church attenders aged 15 years or over. Consequently the opinions of children aged under 15 years were not sought. This raised concerns in some quarters of the churches in Australia. It was felt that there were good reasons for conducting a survey among attenders aged under 15 years, including:

- Such a survey would demonstrate the inclusion of children as equal members in church life;
- It would give children a voice in reporting to denominations;
- It would provide information about a group in church life who are vulnerable to drifting out of church life;
- It would allow information to be obtained about children's reactions to and experience of church and children's and youth groups.

Some pilot testing had been carried out in association with the 1996 NCLS. This involved children aged 10 to 14 years being asked to fill in the standard adult form. This pilot testing clearly showed that most questions in the adult survey were irrelevant to or inappropriate for children of this age. Therefore the inclusion of children in the 2001 National Church Life Survey needed to be on the basis of their filling in a specially designed form. A survey form for church attenders aged 10-14 years was developed for the 2001 National Church Life Survey, in consultation with professionals working with children.

This report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the responses of 10-14 year olds to each of the survey questions and to outline trends according to the denomination, age and sex of respondents.

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NCLS Research is a joint project of ANGLICARE (NSW), Uniting Church in Australia Board of Mission (NSW/ACT) and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The National Church Life Survey has been carried out on three occasions in Australia: 1991, 1996, and 2001.

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Introduction

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Why the Survey is Important

The survey of church attenders aged 10 to 14 years is groundbreaking church research for at least three reasons.

Firstly, it is the first time in Australia that Anglican and Protestant church attenders in this age group have been given a chance to say what they like or dislike about church services and children's activities, through a large-scale survey. Adults have been surveyed in the churches and their responses have been able to inform denominations and congregations alike about future directions. This survey of 10-14 year old church attenders presents an opportunity to hear directly from children about what concerns they have as members of the church community.

Secondly, children such as those surveyed are the future of congregations Australia-wide. With an ever-aging population in our country, and particularly among church attenders, the concerns of children need to be taken seriously. The teenage years are a time when many people leave church life. This survey allows the churches to better understand the concerns of children at a time in their lives when some will already be growing dissatisfied with church life.

Thirdly the survey provides a systematic exploration of patterns of involvement in church among 10-14 year olds, enabling the churches to gain a broader appreciation of how children are currently engaging with church activities and the relationship between this, their own development of faith and their family life.

About the Survey Sample

The sample comprises 10101 children attending Anglican and Protestant churches, of which 41% are primary school age (mostly 10 or 11 years old) and 58% are secondary school age (12 to 14 years old). The survey was intended only for 10 to 14 year olds, but a small number of younger children also provided responses.

Girls comprise 54% of the sample and boys the remaining 46%. The imbalance of the sexes in church life is evident even at this young age, although the gap is somewhat narrower than for adult Anglican and Protestant church attenders, where 60% of attenders are female and 40% are male.

Denominations already taking part in the National Church Life Survey were also invited to take part in the Survey of 10-14 Year Olds. Around half of the denominations and regions within denominations decided to participate. Consequently the data is not a strict random sample of church attenders, since the Catholic Church and other denominations or regions decided not to participate. Nevertheless, there is a good spectrum of denominations present in the survey, including Pentecostal denominations and churches, evangelical denominations such as the Baptist Church and older mainstream denominations such as the Uniting, Lutheran and Anglican Churches. A full listing of participating denominations and regions is included in Appendix 1.

Presentation of Results

Overall frequencies: Overall frequencies are presented for most survey questions. As mentioned previously, the sample is not a strict random sample of 10-14 year old church attenders, as many denominations or regions within denominations elected not to take part in the survey. Consequently the frequencies represent averages for this sample of children and are not national averages. A full listing of frequencies of all questions by chapter is included in Appendix 2.

Denominational statistics are also provided throughout the report. However, unlike other NCLS publications it needs to be borne in mind that these are generally not based on a national sample of each denomination. In most denominations, only some regions took part in the survey. For example, only 2 out of 6 States, Queensland and South Australia, took part among Lutherans. Among Anglicans only 8 of the 24 dioceses took part. In a few denominations a national representation is present. For instance, all State Synods of the Uniting Church took part in the survey. A full listing of denominations and regions that took part in the survey is shown in Appendix 1.

In the case of the Anglican Church, it has been decided to split the results into 'Sydney Anglican' and 'Other Anglican' in the denominational tables, in view of the large representation of Sydney Anglican children in the database.

Statistics by age and sex: Much has been written about the differing developmental needs of boys and girls and of children of different ages. Consequently breakdowns by age and by sex have been provided throughout the report to enable the reader to see differences in the responses of:

- boys and girls;
- primary school-aged children (up to 11 years of age) and secondary school-aged children (12-14 years of age)

Chapter 1: Retaining Children in Church Life

Since the 1960s church attendance has been in steady decline in Australia. It has been estimated by NCLS Research that church attendance declined by about 7% in the period between 1996 and 2001 alone. Yet it is far from the case that all denominations are in decline. This overall figure of decline disguises the fact that changes in levels of attendance vary considerably from one denomination to another. While some denominations appear to be following a long term pattern of steady decline, other denominations are growing, some strongly so.

A report by NCLS Research (Bellamy & Castle, 2004) showed that attendances fell in the large mainstream denominations during 1996-2001; the Catholic (-13%) and Uniting Churches (-11%) experienced the largest decreases in attendance over the 5 year period, while Anglican, Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches also experienced declines. By comparison, Evangelical denominations such as the Baptist Church (+8%) and Churches of Christ (+7%) registered moderate growth, while Pentecostal denominations such as the Assemblies of God (+20%), Apostolic (+20%) and Christian City Churches (+42%) registered the strongest growth.

Changes in attendance levels within denominations are the result of several competing factors. Attender numbers increase through three main avenues:

- Newcomers joining a church for the first time or rejoining after an absence of years;
- Church attenders switching in from other denominations;
- The birth of children and the retention of older children within the life of congregations.

Attender numbers decrease through the following avenues:

- Attenders decreasing their frequency of attendance or ceasing to attend altogether;
- Attenders switching out to other denominations;
- Death.

The age profile of each denomination provides perhaps the strongest indication of future trends. Denominations with older age profiles will lose large proportions of their attenders through death or infirmity in the coming years. Yet at the same time these denominations have lesser proportions of people entering their child-bearing years, with consequently lower numbers of children being born into congregational life. In these circumstances, it becomes increasingly important for denominations to understand how they can retain the children already within church life.

The ability of churches to retain children lies close to the hearts of their church attending parents. In the 2001 NCLS, some 23% of Anglican and Protestant church attenders said that their children becoming committed church attenders was the most important thing to them and a further 47% said that it was very important to them, a total of 70%. There is also evidence that this aspiration translates into action. In the same survey some 68% of Anglican and Protestant parents said that they frequently encouraged their children to attend church activities during their teenage years and a surprising 21% said that they had changed congregation or parish for the sake of their children's needs. Clearly most church attenders hope that their children will also walk the same road of faith that they themselves have walked.

Yet, as with the data on attendance change, there is evidence that each denomination has had differing levels of success in retaining children within church life. As part of the main 2001 NCLS Attender Survey, church attenders were asked about the attendance patterns of each of their children, as well as the current ages of their children. From this data it can be established to what extent the children of church-attending parents in each denomination are actually still attending church.

Table 1.1 shows the situation for each of the denominations that participated in the Children's Survey. The data represents the responses of parents in each denomination regarding the church attendance of their children still living at home, irrespective of whether the children attend a church of the same denomination or a different one. Data has been weighted to account for differing response rates in each denominational region and to remove duplication of data through both husband and wife providing the same information as part of the survey. It should be noted that unlike the rest of the data in this report, the percentages are based on all participants in each denomination, not just those regions of each denomination that took part in the Children's Survey.

Table 1.1: Children living at home still attending church

	Under 10 yrs	10-14 yrs	15 yrs and over
ALL ANGLICAN AND PROTESTANT	95%	91%	61%
Anglican Sydney	94%	91%	61%
Anglican Other	89%	82%	47%
Baptist	97%	92%	70%
Churches of Christ	96%	92%	67%
Lutheran	95%	91%	67%
Nazarene	97%	94%	57%
Pentecostal	96%	93%	71%
Reformed	97%	98%	85%
Uniting	92%	85%	50%

Source: 2001 National Church Life Survey

A few trends are apparent in this data and are discussed below.

Firstly in most denominations at least 90% of the under 10 year old and 10-14 year old children of church attenders were attending church. This is not surprising given the aspirations of parents and that parents can require their children to attend church at this age. However there is evidence in most denominations of slippage, with participation levels for 10-14 year olds generally being a few percentage points lower than for children aged under 10 years. In this respect, the greatest falls appear to be in the Anglican Church (ex-Sydney) and Uniting Church, with retention levels decreasing by 7% from the under 10 to the 10-14 year age groups.

Secondly in all denominations there is a substantial drop in attendance among children living at home at some point beyond 14 years of age. No denomination is unaffected in this respect. The Reformed Church experienced the least fall (-13%) while the Anglican Church outside Sydney (-35%), the Uniting Church (-35%) and the Church of the Nazarene (-37%) experienced the greatest falls. Such changes reflect the fact that church attendance increasingly becomes a voluntary activity as children move towards adulthood.

Thirdly it is clear that falls in the proportion of children still attending church often translate into significant declines in church attendance overall. While the retention of the children of church attenders is only one factor in explaining changes in overall attendance levels within denominations, it is clear that this is an important factor for particular denominations. In this respect, the losses of children out of large mainstream denominations such as the Anglican and Uniting Churches are noteworthy. The challenge for

churches is not simply about attracting more people from the surrounding community but in better retaining those they already have.

It is in this context that this report is written. Clearly an important transition takes place beginning among 10-14 year olds and continues as children enter adulthood. This transition is being better handled in some denominations than others in terms of children still wishing to remain within church life. Yet all lose some children. The key issue is: how can children be better prepared to make the transition from an activity instigated by their parents to one of their own volition?

Chapter 2: Children's Patterns of Involvement

The Children's Survey provided the opportunity to look in more depth at the church attendance patterns of 10-14 year olds. While the main Attender Survey allowed adults to indicate whether their children attend a church, this doesn't reveal the kinds of activities that 10-14 year olds are attending nor how frequently they attend.

The provision of specialised activities for children as distinct from attendance at church services has a long history in Australia. The first Sunday schools date back to the colonial period and have been an important institution among Anglicans and Protestants. While Sunday school may occur before or after church services, quite often it is held in parallel, with children leaving church services to attend Sunday school. In more recent times, kids clubs have been seen as an alternative to Sunday schools in some quarters.

The high school years are an important period of transition for older children leaving Sunday schools and moving into youth groups. Youth groups often have a more informal structure than Sunday schools, and run by the youth themselves rather than by adults. It has been found in previous NCLS research that attendance at youth groups has become a much more common childhood experience among church attenders and for many was significant in the development of their faith (Bellamy, Mou and Castle, 2004).

This chapter outlines patterns of attendance at both church services and children's activities such as Sunday school and youth group. The chapter highlights activities that appear to attract higher levels of attendance, which is an important indicator of children's preferences. Two basic types of church service are compared – the 'all-age' service and the special children's or youth service – and three kinds of children's activities: Sunday school, kids club and youth group. Finally the type of school that children attend is outlined. It has become more common in recent years for children to not only be involved in a church but to be involved in a Christian school during the week. What was a long standing pattern among Catholic children is now becoming increasingly common among Anglicans and Protestants as well.

CHURCH SERVICES

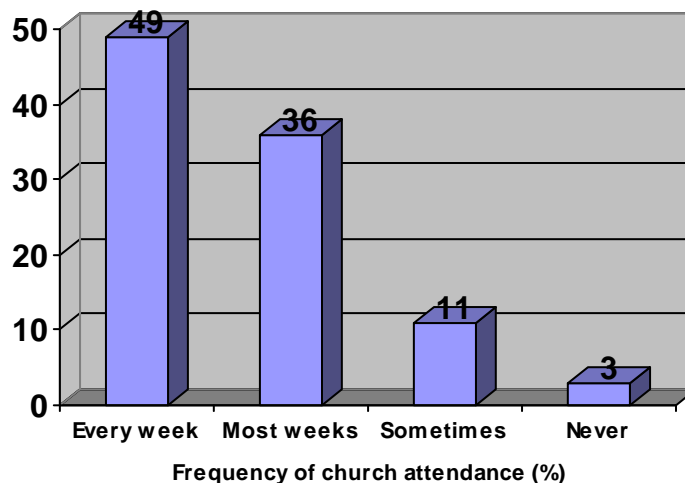
Frequency of Attendance:

About 85% of the children surveyed attend church services every week or most weeks (see Figure 2.1 below). Nearly half (49%) attend church services every week, with just over a third (36%) going to church services most weeks. Only 15% of children attend services occasionally or not at all. These statistics suggest that high frequencies of church service attendance are common among these 10-14 year olds. However it should be noted that a common arrangement in many churches is for children to only attend part of a church service, leaving part way through the service to attend Sunday school or youth group. Of those children who attend church weekly or most weeks, some 46% only attend part of the service.

Naturally, whether parents attend church services makes a difference to how often children attend. About 91% of those children who have one or both parents attending church services

also attend every week or most weeks, whereas only 54% of those where neither parent attend church services also attend frequently.

Figure 2.1: Frequency of church attendance among 10-14 year olds (%)



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

The Children's Survey asked whether respondents attended:

- a special service for children or youth, or
- a service for people of any age.

Among 10-14 year olds attending church services, about a quarter (24%) usually go to a special service for children or youth, with most attending all-age services. Children who attend special services are a little more likely to attend church services every week than those who attend all-age services (56% compared with 48%). Children who attend special children's services are also more likely to attend children's activities every week (71% compared with 54%).

Denominational variations:

All denominations have high proportions of 10-14 year olds who come to church services every week or most weeks (see Table 2.1 below). Those with particularly high numbers of children attending frequently include the Reformed Church and Pentecostal denominations (95%), Church of the Nazarene (92%), Baptist Church (91%) and Churches of Christ (91%).

Church attendance levels among 10-14 year olds tend to reflect adult patterns of attendance across the denominations. Pentecostals and other Protestant denominations (including Reformed and Nazarene) have about 91% of adult attenders usually attending weekly or more often, with Baptists and Churches of Christ having 86% of adults attending church services weekly or more often.

Table 2.1: Frequency of children attending church services by denomination

Denomination	Percentage attending every week	Percentage attending most weeks	Total
OVERALL	49%	36%	85%
Anglican Sydney	57%	30%	87%
Anglican Other	40%	42%	82%
Baptist	64%	27%	91%
Churches of Christ	53%	39%	92%
Lutheran	42%	43%	85%
Nazarene	68%	24%	92%
Pentecostal	71%	25%	96%
Reformed	79%	16%	95%
Uniting	41%	42%	83%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Gender and age variations:

Although boys are under-represented among 10-14 year old attenders, an even proportion of boys (85%) and girls (86%) attend church services every week or most weeks.

About 85% of primary and 86% of secondary school aged children attend church services every week or most weeks. However, slightly more secondary than primary school aged children attend weekly (53% compared with 45%).

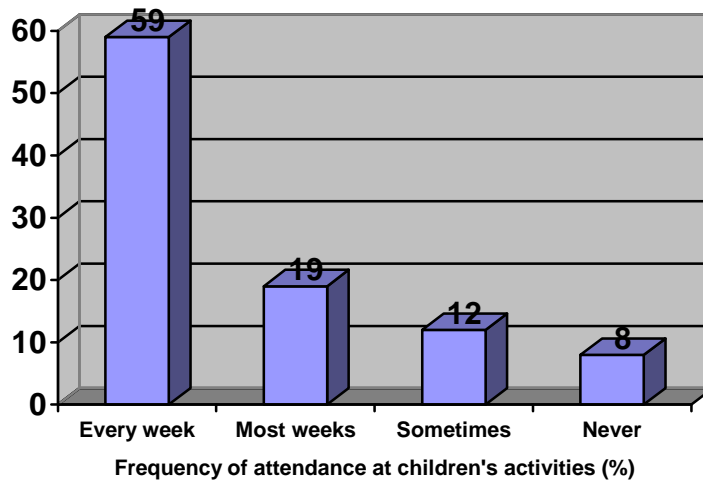
SUNDAY SCHOOLS, KIDS CLUBS AND YOUTH GROUPS

Frequency of attendance :

About 77% of children surveyed attend activities for children such as youth group, Sunday school or kids club every weeks or most weeks (see Figure 2.2 below). Indeed most children are involved in both church services and these specialised activities.

Out of the three kinds of activities, 51% of 10-14 year olds attend Sunday school, 45% attend youth group, and 14% attend kids club. The typical pattern for most of these children is to attend church services and one other children's activity. Only around 10% of children attend more than one type of children's activity.

Figure 2.2: Frequency of Attendance at children's activities (%)



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Denominational variations:

Considering that not all congregations offer the same level of children’s activities, frequent attendance at children’s activities is quite high, especially among Sydney Anglicans (86%), Baptists (85%), Churches of Christ (83%) and Pentecostal denominations (82%), as can be seen in Table 2.2 below. Sydney Anglicans and Baptists both have the highest proportion of children attending children’s activities every week (72%), suggesting that what they offer is particularly attractive to children in the 10-14 year age group.

Table 2.2: Frequency of children attending children’s activities by denomination

Denomination	Percentage attending every week	Percentage attending most weeks	Total
OVERALL	59%	19%	78%
Anglican Sydney	72%	14%	86%
Anglican Other	39%	17%	56%
Baptist	72%	15%	87%
Churches of Christ	65%	18%	83%
Lutheran	35%	21%	56%
Nazarene	66%	12%	78%
Pentecostal	66%	16%	82%
Reformed	49%	24%	73%
Uniting	57%	22%	79%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Gender and age variations:

A slightly lower proportion of boys (75%) than girls (79%) attend children’s activities such as Sunday school, kids club and youth groups every week or most weeks.

As would be expected, many more primary than secondary school aged children attend Sunday school (75% compared with 35%), as well as kids club (24% compared with 8%). Conversely, youth groups (which tend to cater for older children) are attended by many more secondary school aged children than primary school aged children (67% compared with 15%).

TARGETTED CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES – A GOOD IDEA?

There has been a trend over the years towards church services and groups that target a specific audience. The move towards specific services for older people, families and youth rather than 'all-age' services is part of this trend. Some churches are unable to provide a diverse range of services or groups for different people, due to their lack of size or lack of resources. Other churches may be reluctant to split their congregation into such groupings of people, wishing them to attend all-age services, either for theological or pastoral reasons. The question examined here is whether there are any differences in the frequency of service attendance found among children depending upon the provision of special children's or youth services or children's activities.

Table 2.3: Frequency of Church Service Attendance, by Provision of Special Services and Groups

	Percentage attending every week	Percentage attending most weeks	Total
OVERALL	49%	36%	85%
Attend all-age church services only	36%	41%	77%
Attend special children's or youth services only	35%	48%	83%
Attend all-age church services plus children's activities	50%	40%	90%
Attend special children's or youth services, plus children's activities	58%	31%	89%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Table 2.3 shows that those children with the greatest frequency of church service attendance also tended to be involved in some kind of children's activity as well as a church service. Involvement in a special children's service or youth service as well as children's activities is associated with even higher levels of attendance. It appears that at least in terms of more frequent church attendance, the presence of groups specifically designed for children play a role in enhancing their overall church attendance. Whether this is also the case in terms of children's enjoyment of church or sense of growth in faith will be explored later in this report.

Congregations committed to an all-age approach rather than providing separate children's or youth services should note the apparent importance of groups such as Sunday school and youth group. Those providing special services should also note the association between the provision of children's activities such as Sunday school and youth group, and higher frequencies of attendance at church services.

DO THE CHILDREN OF NON-ATTENDERS ATTEND CHURCH?

The constituency of the churches extends beyond those who attend church each week. Nearly 70% of Australians still identify with a denomination in the national Census, irrespective of whether they attend church. There has been a general expectation that the children of those identifying with a denomination would receive some form of religious instruction from the denomination. Apart from the structures present in church life that are designed to fulfil such a function, this expectation also provides part of the ongoing rationale for the teaching of religious education within the school system.

There is evidence that large numbers of adult Australians attended church or Sunday school at some point in their childhood. The 1998 Australian Community Survey found that 73% of

Australians claimed to have frequently attended church or Sunday school prior to the age of 12 years, although this figure declined to 59% among 20-29 year olds. These figures, which are far higher than adult church attendance levels in the post-war period, suggest that many children attended Sunday school or church irrespective of whether their parents also attended church.

However the Children's Survey shows that, contrary to this previous time in Australia's history, the vast majority of children now attending church services or children's activities are also the children of church attenders. About two-thirds of 10-14 year olds (64%) said that both of their parents attend church regularly, and 23% have at least one parent attending, a total of 87%. Only 13% of 10-14 year olds said that neither of their parents attended church.

The proportion of children whose parents do not attend does vary considerably across the denominations. Nearly 1 in 5 children attending Anglican churches said that their parents do not attend church. By contrast, only 10% of children at Baptist churches, 8% at Pentecostal churches and 2% at Christian Reformed churches say that their parents do not attend church.

Table 2.4: Parents' Attendance, by Denomination

Denomination	Both parents attend	One parent attends	Neither parent attends	Total
OVERALL	64%	23%	13%	100%
Anglican Sydney	63%	20%	17%	100%
Anglican Other	49%	32%	19%	100%
Baptist	73%	17%	10%	100%
Churches of Christ	72%	20%	8%	100%
Lutheran	74%	19%	7%	100%
Nazarene	76%	17%	7%	100%
Pentecostal	74%	18%	8%	100%
Reformed	90%	8%	2%	100%
Uniting	59%	27%	14%	100%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

These statistics show the extent to which the custom of sending children to church has diminished over the years to the point where, perhaps with the exception of the Anglican Church, specialised structures such as Sunday schools and kids clubs exist almost exclusively to serve the needs of the children of church attenders, not a wider constituency of affiliates of the denomination. As with the adult programs of the churches, it is no longer an effective mission strategy to simply open the doors of the Sunday school or kids club. Church leaders need to address the issue of how to intentionally engage with children and their families beyond church life, since the churches can no longer rely on favourable cultural conventions to influence parents to send children to Sunday school or church.

There are also several distinguishing characteristics of the children of non-attenders that emerge from this data:

- The children of non-attenders are more likely to be female (62%) than the children of church attenders (53%). Boys appear less attracted to church activities than girls.
- They are more likely to be older children. Only 33% attend Sunday school compared with 54% of the children of church attenders. By comparison 48% of the children of non-attenders go to youth groups compared with 45% of the children of attenders. A possible reason for this difference is that non-attending parents are more likely to wait until their children are older before allowing them to attend church activities.
- Contrary to this explanation, the children of non-attenders are under-represented at Sunday schools but not at kids clubs, even though Sunday schools and kids clubs

cater for roughly the same age groupings. It appears that aspects of the kids club format may be more attractive to the children of non-attenders than Sunday school.

- The children of non-attenders have lower levels of attendance at church services. Only 54% attend church services every week or most weeks compared with 91% of the children of church attenders. Where they do attend church services, they are more likely to attend special services for children and youth (36%) than are the children of church attenders (23%).
- Their attendance at children’s activities such as youth groups is more frequent than their attendance at church services. Some 68% attend children’s activities every week or most weeks compared with 79% of the children of attenders.

There is food for thought here about the impact of different structures upon the ability of churches to make connections with the children of non-attenders. It appears that such children are more attracted to the youth group or kids club than to the Sunday school or church services. This could be due to several different factors. Further research should focus on whether the formality of many church services and the more explicit educational purpose of many Sunday schools acts as a deterrent to the children of non-attenders.

SCHOOLS

Now more than ever, Australian families have a wide choice of school options for their children. The decision is not simply between public and private schools but is becoming increasingly complex, with independent Christian schools providing alternatives to traditional church schools.

The Children’s Survey shows that more than half (58%) of the surveyed children attend public schools, with the remaining 42% attending private schools. In contrast, national statistics show that in 2005, some 67% of children Australia-wide attend public schools. This fell from 71% of school students attending government schools in 1995 (Australian Social Trends, 2006, Australian Bureau of Statistics).

Table 2.5: School Attended, by Denomination

Denomination	Public school	Catholic school	Ang/ Luth/ UC school	Other Christian school	Other	Total
OVERALL	58%	5%	15%	17%	5%	100%
Anglican Sydney	51%	5%	20%	19%	5%	100%
Anglican Other	57%	11%	22%	5%	5%	100%
Baptist	58%	5%	5%	25%	7%	100%
Churches of Christ	63%	5%	6%	21%	5%	100%
Lutheran	43%	4%	42%	9%	2%	100%
Nazarene	48%	7%	3%	26%	16%	100%
Pentecostal	48%	3%	3%	39%	7%	100%
Reformed	16%	4%	0%	79%	2%	100%
Uniting	69%	5%	10%	11%	5%	100%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Private schools in Australia have traditionally been affiliated with the older mainstream denominations, especially the Catholic Church. However, the Children’s Survey reveals that 17% of respondents attended other Christian schools in 2001, slightly more than the 15% educated at schools run by the Anglican, Lutheran or Uniting Churches and much more than the 5% attending Catholic schools. Denominations where children are more likely to attend independent Christian schools include Baptist (25%), Pentecostal (39%) and Christian Reformed (79%). There is a preference for independent Christian schools among Protestant

church attenders that is not reflected in the wider community. At a time when more Australian children attend private schools than ever before, it seems that the children of church attenders have left public schools in even larger proportions than the wider community to attend church affiliated schools. Specifically, the independent Christian schools have benefited most from such a transfer of church-attending students.

CONCLUSION:

The Children's Survey shows that the majority of respondents are attending church services and children's activities every week or most weeks. Boys and girls appear to attend church services and children's activities (Sunday school, kids club and youth group) in roughly even proportions, though some activities are obviously more suited to particular age groups. More secondary school aged children attend youth group while more primary school aged children go to Sunday school and kids club.

Parental attendance has a significant effect on the frequency of their children's attendance. Less obvious but still very important is whether congregations provide specific children's church services and activities that children can attend during church services.

As children move developmentally from an attachment to their parents as caregivers and role models towards peers as a primary reference group, their movement from church service attendance with their parents towards involvement in children's activities is to be expected. Offering such activities encourages young people in their own personal growth and can help them to experience the church as a community of people who consider their needs as important, thereby creating an enhanced sense of belonging and nurture.

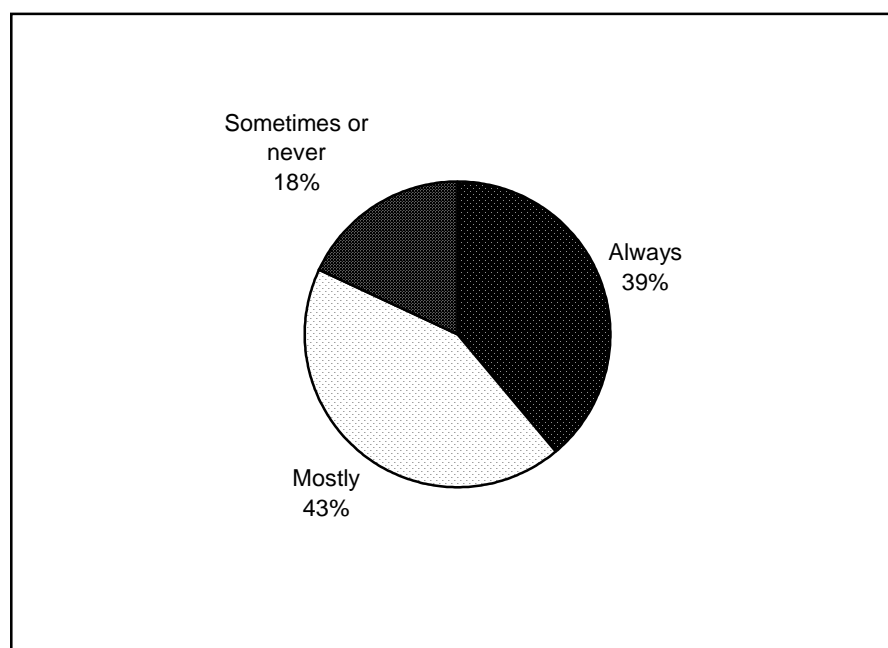
This chapter demonstrates that most respondents attend church and children's activities quite frequently. What particular aspects of church services or children's activities really appeal to children? The following chapter addresses this question.

Chapter 3: Children's Attitudes towards Church Services

It has been noted that children's attendance patterns reflect those of their parents at age 10-14 years. Nevertheless children would be expected to be forming their own opinions about church and what things they like or dislike about it. As today's children grow into adults, their attitudes become more individual, more expressions of their own personal tastes.

Children completing the survey were asked whether they liked church services. In a situation where parents are an important factor in children attending church in the first place, there is always the possibility that many children will not actually like church. Yet it appears that most of them do like church: some 39% said that they always liked church services, with a further 43% liking church services most of the time, a total of 82% (refer to Figure 3.1 below). However, about 18% - or about one in every six children - only like church services some of the time or not at all. This pattern, which should be of concern to the churches, was explored further, looking at age, gender and denomination and at aspects which contribute to children's liking of church.

Figure 3.1: Percent of Children who like Church Services



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Gender and age variations:

Slightly more primary than secondary school aged children always like church services (42% compared with 37%). At the other end of the scale around 20% of secondary school aged children only like church sometimes or not at all, compared with 17% of primary school aged children. These figures suggest that discontent with church does become a little more widespread with increasing age among children.

Perhaps of greater interest to church leaders, more girls than boys (44% compared with 33%) always like church services. At the other end of the scale, about 23% of boys and 14% of girls like church services only sometimes or not at all. Perhaps the ability to sit quietly and to concentrate, so necessary at church services when people of all ages come together, is one reason why boys, typically lagging developmentally behind girls at this stage in language skills (Halpern, 1997), find church services less appealing.

Denominational variations:

Yet the differences in liking church do not just boil down to developmental differences between boys and girls. It is very apparent that the percentage of children who like church services varies quite strongly between the denominations, suggesting that church liturgy and culture are playing a role. The level of children who always like church services is quite high in some denominations. The highest levels of liking are found among 10-14 year olds at Nazarene and Sydney Anglican churches (51%) and at Pentecostal churches (47%). By contrast only 25% of children at Lutheran or Christian Reformed churches always liked church services, followed by children at other Anglican churches outside Sydney (34%).

Table 3.1: Children who always like church services by denomination

Denomination	Percentage of all children	Percentage of primary school children	Percentage of secondary school children
OVERALL	39%	41%	37%
Anglican Sydney	51%	50%	51%
Anglican Other	34%	46%	25%
Baptist	42%	45%	40%
Churches of Christ	42%	48%	38%
Lutheran	25%	26%	24%
Nazarene	51%	46%	55%
Pentecostal	47%??	47%	51%
Reformed	25%	35%	19%
Uniting	35%	39%	32%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

It is important to note the apparent decline in liking church services among secondary school children in some denominations. Table 3.1 shows that secondary school age children attending Church of the Nazarene, Sydney Anglican, Lutheran and Pentecostal churches like church services at much the same level as primary school aged children. However there are significant decreases in other denominations. The most dramatic decreases are among Other Anglican churches (decreasing from 46% to 25%) and Christian Reformed churches (decreasing from 35% to 19%). These statistics raise important questions about how well these denominations are catering for children in this age group.

It also appears that boys generally do not enjoy church services as much as girls, especially in Nazarene churches (39% of boys always like church services compared with 61% of girls) and Churches of Christ (32% of boys always like church services compared with 52% of girls). Sydney Anglicans have the least gender difference, with 47% of boys and 54% of girls always liking church services.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIKE CHURCH?

To 'like' or to 'dislike' church are more general terms that cover a wide range of possible feelings. A person may like something because it makes them feel happy, feel secure or feel that they belong to something bigger. Conversely a person may dislike something because it makes them feel bored, feel upset or feel insecure.

Not surprisingly, feeling bored is most strongly linked to children not liking church services. Among children who always like church services, 43% never feel bored. By contrast, of those who only sometimes or never like church services, only 2% never feel bored. Clearly it is important that church services capture the interest of children if they are to remain motivated to stay involved.

However there are other feelings that are positively associated with liking church services. One is a sense of belonging. The more that children feel a sense of belonging in church services, the more they like attending. Among children who always like church services 84% feel they belong. Again this is in stark contrast to those who sometimes or never like church services, with only 32% often feeling a sense of belonging.

Feeling that they are learning more about God or that God is somehow present at the church service is also important to children. Many children do appreciate the nurturing of their faith and respond to a suitable learning environment. The more that children feel that they are learning about God at church services, the more they will like attending. Among children who always like church services 84% feel that they often learn about God there. Among those who sometimes or never like church services just 29% feel that they are often learning more about God at church services.

Preventing children from feeling bored at church is important in helping them to like it. But providing entertainment is not the main issue. How can children best learn about and experience God in church services? What can be done to encourage a sense of belonging and of mutual care among children in church services? It is clear that many of the same dynamics that apply to adult church involvement also apply to children. It will be important not to overlook such aspects in planning church services that children will like.

HOW CAN LIKING CHURCH BE FOSTERED?

Some may say that it is not important for children to actually like church services, as long as they attend. However, this ignores the link between liking church services and frequency of attendance. Among children who always like going to church services, some 63% attend every week. By contrast, among children who never like going, about 30% attend every week. It is therefore important to probe what might enhance children's enjoyment of church. Here we will consider three aspects that may influence children liking church:

- Programmatic aspects,
- Social aspects (the influence of parents and friends), and
- Faith aspects

(i) Programmatic Aspects

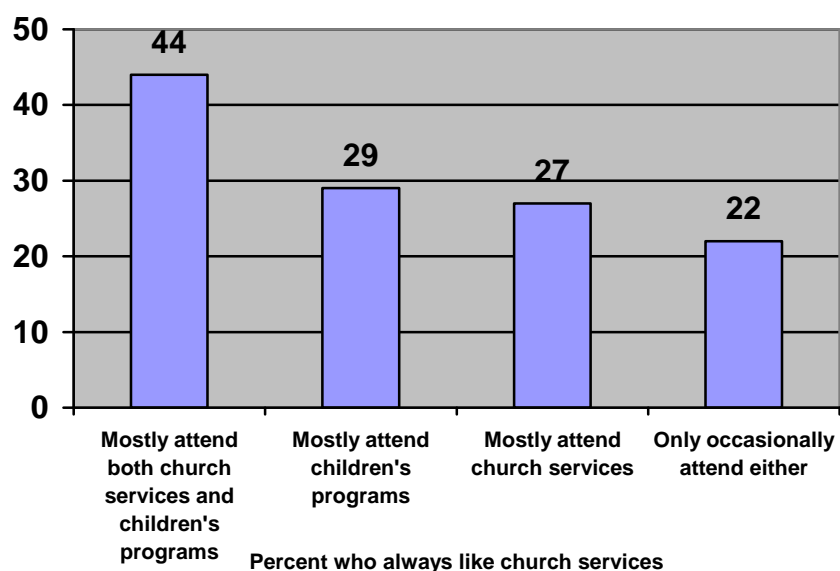
Whether or not children like church services is affected by the kinds of services and programs that they encounter. Just as frequency of attendance is apparently affected by the programs offered, so children's enjoyment of church is also affected.

Firstly, children who attend special services for children or youth (48%) tend to always like going to church more than children who attend all-age services (35%). Again this provides

further evidence that services designed especially for children are more effective than the all-age approach.

Secondly, Figure 3.2 shows that children who attend both church services and children's programs always like church services (44%) compared with those who mostly go to children's programs (29%), mostly go to church services (27%) or only occasionally attend either (22%).

Figure 3.2: Percentage of children who always like attending church services, by attendance at church services and programs.



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Thirdly, liking church services is due in part to children liking the more conventional aspects of church, notwithstanding that the positive responses of children may reflect that these have been done in a child-friendly way. Children liking church overall was a reflection of their liking the singing and music, the sermon, and the prayers; children who did not like these aspects tended not to like church services overall. By comparison, the presence of friends made no difference to whether children liked church services.

Cultivating a liking of the services will come about through the way in which these more conventional aspects of the service are handled. For many primary school aged children, this could mean a special children's talk part way through the service instead of staying in church for the sermon. Some 31% of primary school aged children say that they like a special children's talk, compared with 15% of secondary school aged children. While there are few substantial differences between what is liked about church by older and younger children and by boys and girls, it should be noted that boys (26%) are less likely than girls (43%) to like the singing or music at church. Again this may point to differing ways in which boys need to be engaged in church life.

(ii) Social Aspects

Most children (69%) really like being with their friends or people their own age when they come to church services. However the chance to be with other young people appears to make no difference to whether children like church services. Among children who always like church services, 71% like being with their friends or people their own age, compared with 70% of children who only like going to church services sometimes or not at all. This shows that even among those who don't like the church services they attend, most still like the opportunity to be with friends or with people their own age.

A more important social factor is *how many* close friends children have at church. Children who have lots of close friends at church tend to like going to church services more than children who don't have close friends at church. Just over half of all children with lots of friends at church (51%) always like church services, whereas only 23% of children who have no close friends at church always like church services.

Other social elements seem to make as great a contribution to children liking church services as the number of close friends that they have. Meeting with people after church services and being part of a bigger group both make contributions. Furthermore, as children get older, these social elements appear to increase in importance. For instance among secondary school children who always like church services, 32% like being part of a bigger group of Christians, compared with around 6% of those who don't like church services.

How children regard the minister and leaders also contributes to their liking of church services. Again this is something that increases in importance as children get older. Among secondary school children who always like church services, 39% liked the minister and leaders, compared with around 5% of those who only sometimes or never like church services.

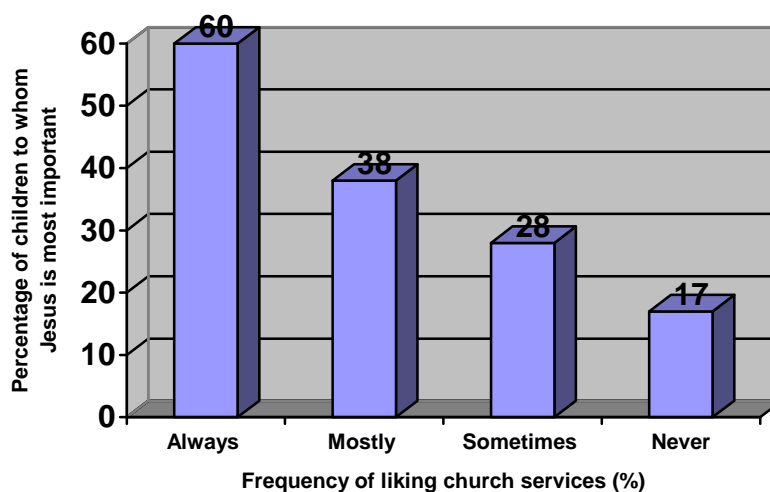
Whether their parents attend church services seems to make virtually no difference as to whether children like church services. However, being forced to attend by parents is negatively related to children's enjoyment of church services, with only 11% of those who say they go to church because of parents saying they always like church services, compared with 60% of those who do not feel any parental pressure to attend.

(iii) Faith Aspects

It would be expected that children's own beliefs about God would make a difference to their liking church services. This is in fact the case among respondents to this survey. Among those who always like church services, 60% say that Jesus is most important to them, compared with 38% of those who mostly like church services, 28% who sometimes like church services and 17% of those who don't like church services at all.

For children who have decided that God is very relevant to them, church services become a way of learning more and applying themselves to their already internalised goal of faith development. One would expect such children to be more highly motivated to learn about God and to attend because of this intrinsic motivation, rather than for any other reason.

Figure 3.3: Liking church services, by importance placed on Jesus



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

CONCLUSION:

As children move to a more voluntary church involvement as an expression of their individual values and desires, they progressively leave behind the patterns of their younger childhood in which parental values and wishes were much more influential. In establishing a voluntary involvement, liking church services becomes increasingly important. Such liking of church services by children appears to be directly driven by programmatic aspects of church services (what is actually done at church), social interaction at church services (particularly the influence of friends) and the importance of God to these children.

Children who really like attending church services especially value communal worship, learning about God and praying together. Belonging to the church family and participation in church services are very important to children. They also feel happiest when their friends come too, and when they like the minister, but appear unaffected by parental attendance at church services.

Those children who are most motivated to attend and enjoy church services are those for whom their faith in God is more important than anything else.

Church leadership needs to be aware that all three aspects of church life contribute significantly to children liking church. However, from the perspective of child attenders, liking church services is not so much about having an entertaining program, but more about coming to grips with conventional aspects of church life. It is not just about being with lots of young people, but giving friendships the space to grow and noticing those who may be on the edge of social groups. It is not just about getting teaching, but assisting young people to develop in faith. These aspects provide children in the church with a solid platform for the future.

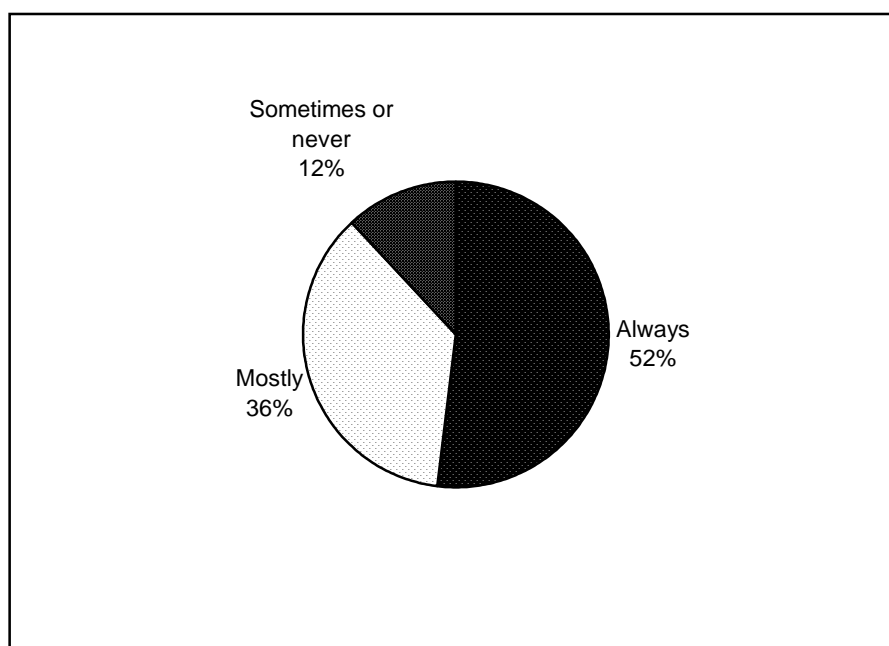
Chapter 4: Children's Attitudes towards Children's Activities

So far we have seen evidence that an involvement beyond church services in a children's program is associated with both higher frequency of church attendance and with children liking church. The Children's Survey presented a unique opportunity to find out more about children's involvement in these activities, and what they really like about children's activities. What does the survey reveal about children's attitudes towards these kinds of programs?

The Children's Survey defined three types of children's activities: youth group, Sunday school and kids club. Most children completing the survey attend children's activities every week or most weeks (77%). Only 11% never attend such activities, including 2% in congregations that do not have such activities.

When children were asked whether they liked children's activities, 52% said that they always liked children's activities, with a further 36% liking children's activities most of the time, a total of 88%. Only 12% liked children's activities sometimes or not at all. These results were explored further, looking at the way that children's age, gender, attendance pattern and denomination are related to children liking these activities.

Figure 4.1: Percent of Children who like Children's Activities



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Gender and age variations:

Overall, there does not appear to be much difference between primary and secondary school aged children regarding their liking children's activities. It would appear that the transition from Sunday school to youth group does not negatively impact on children liking such activities. Very similar proportions of primary (51%) and secondary school aged children (52%) always like children's activities, with 87% of primary school aged children and 89% of secondary school aged children always or mostly liking children's activities.

However boys don't like children's activities as much as girls. More girls than boys (56% compared with 47%) always like children's activities. Another 39% of boys and 34% of girls say they mostly like children's activities, with about 15% of boys and 10% of girls liking children's activities only sometimes or not at all.

Denominational variations:

As with church services, it is apparent that the percentage of children who like children's activities differs markedly between the denominations. The levels of children who always like children's activities is quite high in some denominations; the highest levels were found among children at Nazarene (60%), Sydney Anglican (60%) and Baptist churches (54%). By contrast only 40% of children at Lutheran churches always liked these activities.

Table 4.1: Children who always like activities by denomination

Denomination	Percentage of all children	Percentage of primary school children	Percentage of secondary school children
OVERALL	52%	51%	52%
Anglican Sydney	60%	55%	63%
Anglican Other	47%	53%	42%
Baptist	54%	49%	58%
Churches of Christ	50%	41%	55%
Lutheran	40%	39%	41%
Nazarene	60%	59%	62%
Pentecostal	49%	41%	58%
Reformed	50%	59%	44%
Uniting	50%	53%	48%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

While the overall levels don't change much as children make the transition from primary into secondary school, these statistics hide some large denominational variations. Children at Sydney Anglican, Baptist, Churches of Christ and Pentecostal churches seem to like children's activities even more once they reach secondary school age. By contrast, children become less enthusiastic among Other Anglican, Christian Reformed and Uniting churches.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIKE CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES?

Liking children's activities is a function of a range of associated feelings that children have about their involvement. Children may like children's activities as a result of feeling happy, feeling secure, feeling safe or feeling that they are part of something bigger. For instance, the more that children feel a sense of belonging to an activity, the more they like the activity. Among children who always like children's activities 88% feel they belong. This is in contrast to those who only sometimes or never like children's activities, only 32% of whom often feel a sense of belonging.

At the same time, children may dislike children's activities if they feel bored or insecure. Among children who always like activities, 71% never feel bored. This is in stark contrast to those who only sometimes or never like children's activities, with only 6% never feeling bored. Clearly it is important that children's activities capture the interest of children if they are to remain motivated to stay involved.

Learning more about God is also very important to children, since many children do appreciate the nurturing of their faith and respond to an environment that helps them

grow. The more that children feel that they are learning about God, the more they will like these activities. Among children who always like children's activities 75% feel that they often learn about God there. Among those who sometimes or never like children's activities just 27% feel that they are often learning more about God at these activities.

Preventing children from feeling bored at church is important in helping them to like it. It will be important to consider whether activities are interesting or entertaining or whether they are sufficiently fast-paced. But there are other considerations besides keeping children entertained. How can children best learn about and experience God? What can be done to encourage a sense of belonging and of mutual care among children?

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO LIKING CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES?

As with church services, there is an association between liking activities and frequency of attendance. Among children who always like going to children's activities, some 76% attend every week. By contrast among children who only sometimes or never like going, only about 40% attend every week.

Therefore it is important to probe what are the kind of aspects that contribute to liking. Again we will consider:

- Programmatic aspects
- Social aspects (the influence of parents and friends)
- Faith aspects

(i) Programmatic Aspects

As noted in the previous chapter, children who attend children's activities and church services will more often like church services than children who simply attend church services only. However this is not the case when it comes to liking children's activities. Children who attend both church services and children's programs are just as likely to say they always like attending children's activities (55%) as those who mostly go to children's programs only (54%).

The programmatic aspects that are most associated with liking children's activities tend to be the more conventional ones such as learning about God, Bible study, times of prayer and singing. For instance among those children who always like children's activities, 57% also like learning about God compared with only 17% among those children who only sometimes or never like children's activities.

However singing and prayer tend to be the least affirmed parts of children's programmes in terms of what children like. While learning about God and Bible study were liked by 45% of children, only 21% liked the prayers and 26% the singing. Given that such aspects would be commonly encountered in children's groups, there is a challenge here to approach these aspects in ways that children will enjoy. It should not be assumed that because the prayers or singing are occurring within the children's program that they are being conducted in the most culturally appropriate or child friendly ways.

As children get older, most programmatic aspects make more of a contribution to their liking activities, with a few exceptions. Stories, arts and craft and activity sheets all contribute more to the enjoyment of primary school aged children than secondary school children. Such activities would be more prevalent among Sunday schools than among youth groups. A decline in their importance as children get older would also reflect a change in children's developmental needs as older children begin to respond less to stories and more to reasoned argument.

(ii) Social Aspects

Most children (78%) really like being with their friends or people their own age when they come to children's activities. Among children who always like children's activities, 80% like being with their friends or people their own age, compared with 69% of children who only like going to children's activities sometimes or not at all. Yet even among those who don't like attending children's activities, the majority still like the opportunity to be with friends or with people their own age.

As with church services, more important friendship factor is how many close friends children have at church. Children who have friends at church also tend to like going to children's activities. Two thirds of children with lots of friends at church (65%) always like children's activities, whereas only 31% of children who have no close friends at church always like children's activities.

Other social elements seem to make as great a contribution to children liking activities as the number of friends that they have. The presence of social activities, of being part of a group of Christians, and the chance to meet new people all make a contribution. Furthermore, as children get older, these social elements appear to increase in importance. For instance among secondary school children who always like children's activities, 61% like being part of a group of Christians, compared with around 18% of those who only sometimes or never like children's activities.

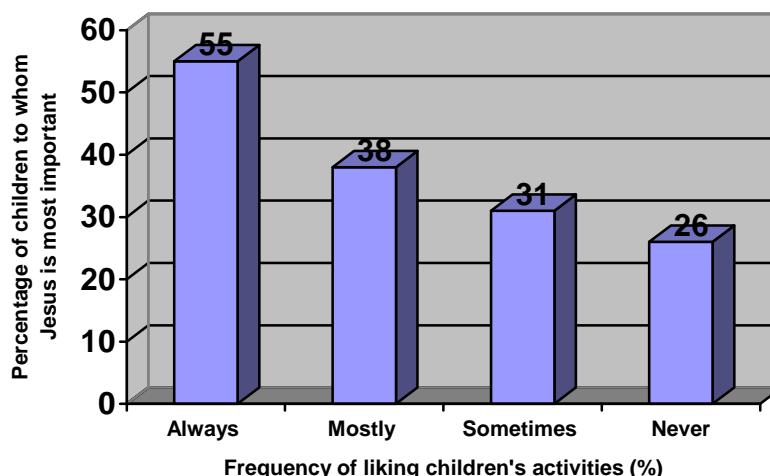
How children regard the teachers and leaders also contributes to their liking activities. Again this is something that increases in importance as children get older. Among secondary school children who always like children's activities, 48% liked the teachers and leaders, compared with around 10% of those who only sometimes or never like children's activities.

As with church services, the church attendance pattern of parents seems to make virtually no difference as to whether their children like children's activities.

(iii) Faith Aspects

It would be expected that children's own beliefs about God would make a difference to their enjoyment of church-based activities. For example, among those who always like children's activities 55% say that Jesus is most important to them, compared with 38% of those who mostly like children's activities, 31% of those who sometimes like children's activities and 26% of those who do not like children's activities.

Figure 4.2: Liking Children's Activities, by importance placed on Jesus



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

CONCLUSION:

It is amazing how similar the picture is between children's liking church services and liking children's activities. Liking children's activities appears to be directly driven by programmatic aspects of the activities, social interaction (particularly the influence of friends) and the importance of God to these children.

The solid framework of faith and belief that children's activities can provide in the lives of adults should not be underestimated. Anecdotally, how many Christian adults can still remember the kindness of a particular Sunday school teacher, or a special song they used to sing at kids club, or how much fun it was to go skating with their youth group? Good memories about belonging to a group of Christian young people who really care about each other can help to sustain faith through the crises that are an inevitable part of growth.

Church leadership therefore needs to consider creating and facilitating groups of young people who can be involved in age-appropriate activities. However, from the perspective of the children involved, liking children's activities is not just about an exciting program, but also about belonging within the group. It is not just about being with lots of young people, but about nurturing friendships. It is not just about teaching and Bible study, but being role models to the young people as they develop in faith. Sometimes, especially as children grow into adolescents, it is also about making opportunity for them to progress to group leadership and mentoring of younger children.

Chapter 5: Why Children Go to Church

It is important the church community understands why 10 to 14 year old children attend church services.

By age 10 children have progressed beyond young childhood to think logically and systematically about tangible objects, events and experiences (Piaget, 1970). They look to adults and older siblings as they acquire cultural beliefs, values and problem solving strategies and often mimic them (Rogoff, 1997).

From 11 to 12 years and beyond many children are able to reason about abstract concepts and become highly idealistic, establishing firm personal beliefs about right and wrong (Piaget, 1970). Their black and white view of the world balances their typically under-developed sense of self as they enter the teenage years.

Beginning around 12 years of age, the major developmental hurdle faced is establishing an identity: a sense of who they are, where they are heading and where they fit into society (Erikson, 1963). This takes much time and effort until young adulthood (and sometimes longer). There may be confusion or anxiety experienced as a result and peers are usually preferred to parents as confidants. However, a solid base of affection and mutual respect at home helps adolescents feel close and valued even if they disagree with their parents in family discussions (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986).

It is within this developmental context that we think about children in the churches. To some, church would represent a safe haven, a place in which they can further explore their developing sense of self with the support of a caring community. To others, church may be a place pretty much like any other, in which to hang out with friends and wear the “right” clothing. Or they attend simply because that is what their family does on a Sunday morning.

Do children decide to go to church, or attend because they are made to go? Do they want to learn about God, or are they drawn to the social interaction? And in the light of the many changes that are taking place to them developmentally, do their reasons for attending church begin to change? The data collected provides important insights into what motivates children to attend.

THREE MAIN MOTIVATIONS FOR ATTENDANCE:

Children were asked to what extent they go to church because:

- Their parents want them to go,
- They want to be with their friends,
- They want to learn more about God.

Although there would be other possible motivations for attendance, these three reasons cover some important bases.

(i) Parental wishes:

Nearly all church attendance among children would begin as a result of their parents' wishes. For 87% of the sample, either one or both parents are church attenders themselves. While children may develop differing attitudes towards church, nevertheless their attendance is not a voluntary activity, at least initially. And having begun their faith journey on their parents' coat-tails, some children find moving to a self-owned faith more challenging than others.

(ii) Friends:

Wanting to be with friends is a reason to attend that has real developmental value to the pre-teen needing to assert their individuality, which is often expressed (ironically) by conforming to peer group norms. Belonging to a larger group and owning shared perspectives feels safer at this stage than navigating one's own way. Following friends in this way is another variation on just doing what one's parents do, with the added benefit of identifying with peers so that these children become more socially adept and more outwardly confident. However, real confidence needs to come from a more internal source.

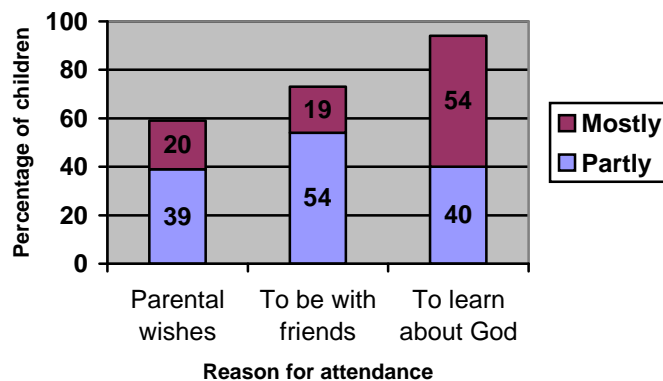
(iii) Learning about God:

Learning more about God is just such an intrinsic motivation to attend church. These children seem to get more out of church services, because they are secure enough to let go of what their parents or friends do and have discovered that faith is something that matters to them. This internal value can become an anchor, able to supply a self concept that can be independent of parental or peer approval, an important tool for healthy, flexible, self motivated functioning.

Of the three types of reasons for attending, the largest proportion of children (54%) mostly attend to learn more about God. Although most children attend for a mixture of reasons (respondents could indicate whether they mostly or partly attend due to any of the three reasons), it is clear that most children attend for this intrinsic reason - a desire to know more about God. Another 40% say they attend partly to learn more about God.

Figure 5.1 shows that about 20% stated that they mostly attend church because their parents want them to go and 19% of respondents mostly attend church to be with friends. Although parental wishes and social reasons play a large role in church attendance among many children, it is evident that most of the children surveyed want to go to church services to learn more about God, either mostly or partly.

Figure 5.1: Reasons children give for church attendance.



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Gender and age variations:

It may be expected that the reasons for attendance would change significantly as children get older. However there is little change from the primary to secondary years. Primary school aged children (25%) are a little more likely than secondary school aged children (17%) to mostly attend because of their parents. Primary school aged children are also a

little more likely to mostly attend to be with their friends (21%) or to learn about God (59%).

Boys (25%) are a little more likely than girls (16%) to attend because of their parents. They are also more likely to attend to be with friends (21% compared with 17%). Girls are more likely to attend to learn more about God (57% compared with 50%). Even at this young age it appears that more girls than boys attend church for more intrinsic reasons.

Variation by denomination:

As in previous chapters there are denominational differences in relation to children's stated reasons for attendance. Table 5.1 shows that among the denominations, the lowest percentages of respondents who mostly attend church because of their parents are found among Sydney Anglican (12%), Churches of Christ (14%), Baptist (16%) and Pentecostal denominations (17%). The highest percentages are to be found among Christian Reformed (27%) and Lutheran (26%) churches.

Children who mostly attend to be with friends are less likely to be found among Lutheran (14%) and Christian Reformed (16%) churches.

Children who mostly attend to learn more about God are more likely to be found among Nazarene (70%), Sydney Anglican (67%), Pentecostal (61%) and Baptist churches (58%).

Table 5.1: Reasons Children Mostly Attend Church, by Denomination

Denomination	Parental wishes	To be with friends	To learn about God
OVERALL	20%	19%	54%
Anglican Sydney	12%	16%	67%
Anglican Other	24%	16%	45%
Baptist	16%	19%	58%
Churches of Christ	14%	23%	49%
Lutheran	26%	14%	51%
Nazarene	24%	19%	70%
Pentecostal	17%	21%	61%
Reformed	27%	16%	54%
Uniting	24%	21%	48%

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% since they are based on three separate questions.
Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

LOOKING MORE CLOSELY AT THE THREE GROUPS:

The differing reasons that children attend church point to differences in their own belief and practice. The survey reveals that the three groups:

- Relate differently with their parents about faith
- Feel differently about church services and children's activities
- Have different personal beliefs.

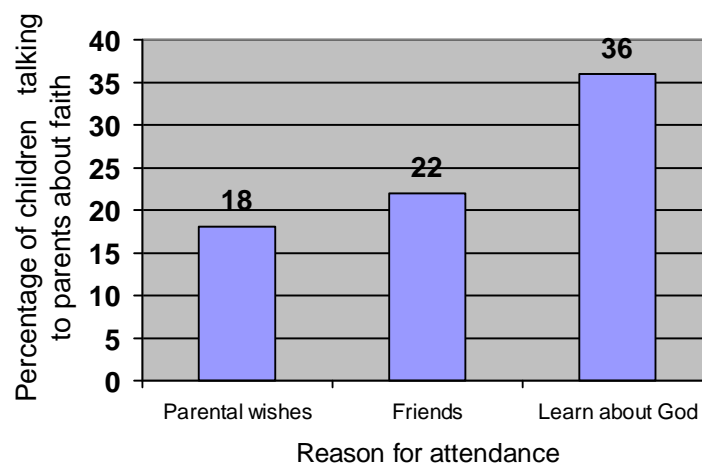
How they relate to their parents about the faith:

There is little difference in the proportion of parents who attend church services across all three groups of children. About 68% of those who attend mostly because their parents want them to have parents attending church services, compared with 66% of those who attend because they want to learn about God and 61% of those who come to be with friends.

By contrast, about 45% of children who attend church mostly to learn about God are likely to pray with their families a few times a week or more compared with 14% of children who attend for other reasons. 'Praying with their family' could mean a family devotional time or saying grace at meals. It could also include praying with a parent at bedtime or at other times. Such activity would be more likely where children themselves wish to participate.

There are also large differences among these three groups regarding how often children talk to parents about God. Only 18% of those children who attend mostly because parents want them to, often talk to parents about God, compared with 22% of those who attend because they want to be with friends and 36% of those who mostly come to church to learn about God. The higher levels in the latter group could be a function of the children's intrinsic interest in spiritual matters, but could equally be as a result of the initiatives taken by parents to foster discussion about the faith with their children.

Figure 5.2: Percentage of children who talk to parents about faith, by the reasons they attend church



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

How they feel about church services or children's activities:

Joining with the church family for church services or in children's activities, children will undoubtedly experience many different feelings. In addition, the motivation that has brought them to church has an impact on their expectations of church, influencing the feelings they have about it.

About 55% of respondents who go to church mostly to learn about God report that they like attending church services. Some 63% of such respondents also say they like the children's activities offered. The desire to learn more about God appears to reflect an important internalised value (faith in God), which the child seems motivated to explore. Liking church may therefore be the result of two important processes: fulfilling an important

developmental task of building personal beliefs, as well as an accompanying sense of self-efficacy while reaching for this goal.

Of those who go to church mainly to be with friends, only 37% report that they always like church services but 52% say that they always like children's activities. If their main aim at church is social interaction, the opportunities exist for them to fulfil their goals, especially at children's activities such as youth groups.

Only 22% of those children who attend church mainly because of their parents report that they always like church services and only 35% always like children's activities. This is evidence that this group of children is getting the least out of church attendance and children's activities. Of all three groups, they are the least self-motivated, which makes it hard for such children to be interested in the experience or to be happy there.

Similar trends emerge in relation to:

- Feelings of happiness at church
- The sense that they are learning more about God at church
- A sense of belonging at church
- Feeling bored at church

Where liking and happiness are highest, commonsense suggests that boredom should be lowest. Only 5% of those children who go to church services to learn more about God report frequent boredom, while more than three times as many (17%) who attend to be with friends and about six times as many (30%) who go mainly because of parents, often feel bored there. Children's activities are generally found to be less boring, with only 5% who go to learn about God feeling bored there, while twice that number (10%) who go to be with friends and more than three times as many (17%) who go because of parents, feel similarly bored.

Table 5.2: Feelings about church, by reason for attending church:

	Reason for Attending Church		
	Parental wishes	To be with friends	To learn about God
Like church services	22%	37%	55%
Like children's activities	35%	52%	63%
Feel bored at church services	30%	17%	5%
Feel bored at children's activities	17%	10%	5%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

What they believe:

Social psychology has long made the connection between beliefs, attitudes and actions. Indeed, these linkages are so strong that if individuals act in a way that is contrary to their beliefs, internal conflict is experienced until beliefs and actions can again be reconciled (Festinger, 1957). Looking directly at the personal beliefs of each of the three groups of children, it is clear that large differences in belief across these three groups would most likely be having a strong impact on their feelings, attitudes and actions, including church attendance.

All children surveyed have a very high level of belief in God, with 84% who mostly attend church because of parents, 89% of those who mostly attend church to be with friends and 89% of those who mostly attend to learn more about God all saying that they believe in God. When asked about their beliefs, differences emerged between the groups in terms of

how important God is to them, how much they feel they have grown in faith over the last year and how often they have personal devotions alone.

Among those who go to church mostly because of parents, God (or Jesus) is most important to only 35%, most important to 41% of those who go to be with friends and most important to 63% of those attending to learn more about God. There is a wide gulf here between children who attend for more intrinsic reasons to do with faith and belief than those attending for any other reason.

About 14% of those who attend church mostly because of parental expectation, and 16% of those who go to be with friends engage in personal devotions (Bible reading or prayer) every day or most days. By comparison, 30% of those who attend church mostly to learn more about God also engage in personal devotions frequently.

CONCLUSION:

Learning about God is the reason children most often give for their church attendance in this survey. Other reasons include parental wishes and being with friends, but each of these reasons are endorsed by less than half the number of children who go to church primarily to learn about God.

It is evident that children motivated by a desire to learn more about God generally feel much more positive about church services and children's activities. Such children tend to discuss their faith with their parents more often and are less bored in church services or children's activities. They consider God to be most important to them, and are more likely to make time for personal reflection and prayer.

Yet from age 10 to age 14, the proportion of children who mostly attend church to learn more about God does not increase. This should be cause for concern for church leaders and people working with children. It would be hoped that the proportion of children attending for more intrinsic reasons would increase with age, gradually replacing other reasons for attending church. Instead things remain in a holding pattern with little movement in the basic reasons that children attend. What is this telling the churches about the impact of various children's programs during this period?

Chapter 6: The Faith of Children

Jesus himself made a statement about the faith of children when he said that anyone who does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will never enter it (Luke 18:17). The scribes and the Pharisees would no doubt have been unhappy with this apparently upside-down ordering of God's kingdom, in which all their adult scholarship was not as valuable as the trusting response of faith from a young person.

Children are important in the churches today not just because they are the future of an ever-aging population of attenders, but because their faith still encapsulates a characteristic aspect of God's kingdom. This survey looks at the things children say about their own faith, in an attempt to understand how the church family can best support and nurture them in it.

Is it important for children's faith for them to have church attending parents, or are personal prayer and Bible reading more indicative of healthy, growing faith among this age group? Does inviting friends to church activities or talking often to parents about God associate more strongly with growing faith among children? The answers children have provided in this survey clearly answer these questions and more.

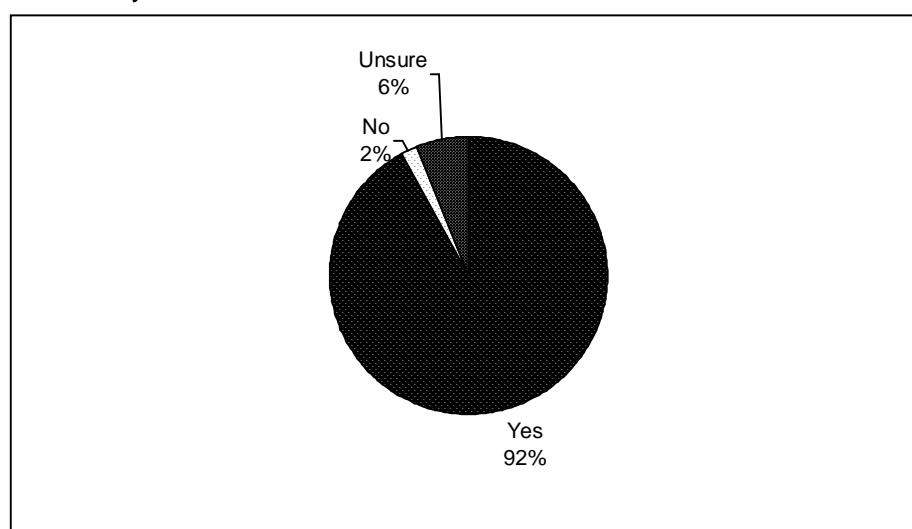
SOME INDICATORS OF BELIEF

Respondents were asked questions about their faith, including:

- whether they believe in God,
- how important God is to them,
- how important Jesus is to them,
- whether they have grown in faith over the last year,
- whether belief in God makes them a better person.

On the first question there was strong affirmation. About 92% believe in God, with 2% saying that they do not believe in God and the remaining 6% feeling unsure (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Percent of Children who Believe in God

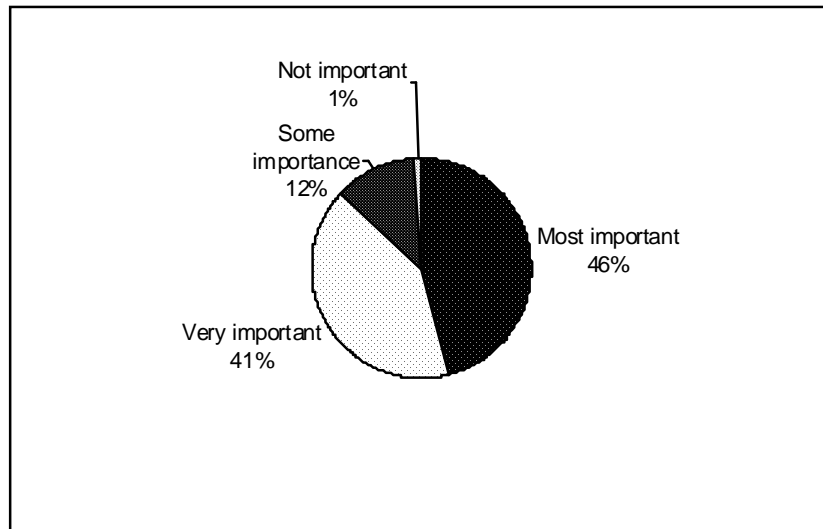


Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

In relation to the importance of their faith, around 46% of children say that God is the most important thing, with 41% considering God very important and 13% feeling God is of some

importance or not important at all (see Figure 6.2). Similarly 44% of children say that Jesus is the most important thing to them, with a further 42% saying Jesus is very important to them, a total of 86%.

Figure 6.2: Percent of Children to whom God is Important

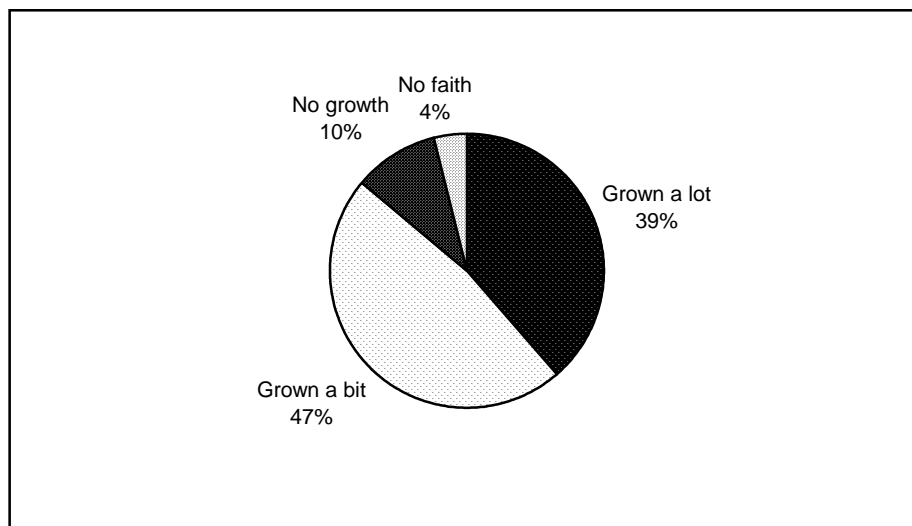


Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

In terms of a sense of growth in faith, 39% of children surveyed feel that they have grown a lot in the last year and 47% think they have grown a bit, a total of 86%. Only 10% don't believe they have really grown in faith and 4% don't think they had faith to begin with (see Figure 6.3 below).

In answer to another question, 73% of children thought that belief in God made them a better person, while only 5% said that it did not. The remaining 22% were unsure.

Figure 6.3: Percent of Children Who Have Grown in Faith



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

There is widespread evidence here of the building blocks of faith among these children, if not of actual faith in God. The majority of children surveyed viewed God and Jesus as being salient to them; most say that belief in God makes them a better person.

Variations by age and gender:

There is no difference between boys and girls (46%) in terms of whether they see God as most important to them.

Primary school aged children (50%) are a little more likely to see God as most important compared with secondary school aged children (43%).

Variations by denomination:

There are more substantial variations by denomination. Table 6.1 shows that the highest percentages of children for whom God is most important are from Pentecostal (68%), Nazarene (64%), Christian Reformed (63%) and Sydney Anglican (58%) churches. On the other hand, the lowest percentages of children who say God is most important to them are in Other Anglican (32%) and Uniting churches (35%).

Table 6.1: Importance of God, by Denomination

Denomination	Most important	Very important	Of some importance	Not important
Anglican Sydney	58%	36%	6%	1%
Anglican Other	32%	46%	20%	2%
Baptist	53%	38%	7%	1%
Churches of Christ	52%	40%	8%	0%
Lutheran	48%	42%	9%	1%
Nazarene	64%	29%	7%	0%
Pentecostal	68%	27%	5%	0%
Reformed	63%	34%	3%	1%
Uniting	35%	45%	18%	2%

Similar trends appear in relation to the importance placed on Jesus, growth in faith and whether belief makes one a better person. While there were very high levels of affirmation across these indicators, children at Other Anglican and Uniting Churches tended to be the most reticent about these issues.

ASPECTS ASSOCIATED WITH STRONG BELIEF:

What contributes to the development of these beliefs? The importance placed on God was examined to find the aspects most associated with it. Four aspects most related to the importance placed on God are:

- How often I spend time on my own praying or reading the Bible
- How often I talk to parents about God
- How often I pray with my family
- How often I go to church services

Personal devotions:

Most children have some private devotional activities, with 46% praying or reading the Bible alone every day or a few times a week and 13% engaging in these practices weekly. Only 12% of children say they never spend time in private devotions, with 29% only reading the Bible or praying at special times.

About 64% of those surveyed who regard God as the most important thing to them spend time alone reading the Bible or praying every day or a few times a week, compared with 9% of those to whom God is of some importance or not important at all. This seems to be the area in which personal faith is most evident, of all the questions asked in the survey. It takes effort to reserve some time out of the day to read the Bible and pray, so it is not surprising that many more children who regard God as most important to them would engage in these activities, compared to those who feel that God is somewhat or unimportant to them.

Talking to parents:

The next most important aspect is the amount of discussion about God they engage in with their parents. About 39% of those who regard God as most important often talk to their parents about God, compared with just 5% of those for whom God is of some importance or not important at all. Again, if children are not motivated to discuss this subject, they will most likely not engage parents about it. It is also likely that this is an activity initiated by parents; it appears that parents spending time talking about faith with their children does have an impact on the importance children place on God.

It is interesting to note that parents spending time talking with children about God is more strongly related to the level of importance that their children place on God than how often parents themselves attend church. Parents need to consider that involvement in the church community is only one factor in their children coming to view God as important; parents themselves have a role through their own discussions with their children.

Praying with family:

Frequency of family prayers, whether simply saying grace at meal times or praying at bed-time or more formal prayer times with family, are also predictive of how much importance children place on God. About 51% of children for whom God is most important engage in family prayer a few times a week or more often, compared with 15% of children for whom God is somewhat or not important. Again these statistical relationships place family life and the role of parents at the centre of children's faith development rather than it being secondary to children's involvement at church.

Church attendance:

The frequency of children's attendance at church services are also related to the importance that they place upon God; some 60% of those for whom God is most important also attend church every week, compared with 28% of children for whom God is somewhat or not important at all. This is an area in which many different aspects may contribute. For example, liking church services and children's activities are also related to the importance placed on God by children. Logically, those who attend church services may grow in faith and find that they want to learn more about God. As a result, their liking of church services and children's activities may increase, and further strengthen their belief.

OUTCOMES OF BELIEF:

Some of these aspects may foster or support belief but may also be outcomes of belief. Many of these variables would be related to each other in a reciprocal way. For example, personal devotions can foster faith as a person studies the Bible and exercises faith through

prayer; on the other hand people with a strong sense of belief in God would be more likely to engage in personal devotions in the first place.

Whether children engage in talking with their school-friends about God or invite them to church activities would be viewed more as outcomes of belief. Just over half of those surveyed (51%) talk to school friends about God either often or sometimes, with the remaining 49% discussing God with friends at school hardly ever or never. By comparison more children talk to their parents about God, with 72% having discussions often or sometimes, and 28% talking about God with their parents hardly ever or never.

About 68% of children invited a friend along to a church service or other church activity (eg: youth group) in the past year, with the remaining 32% not asking anyone along. These levels are much higher than among adult church attenders, only 37% of whom invited someone to church in the previous 12 months.

CONCLUSION:

Many different details of respondents' lives were considered to see which were most strongly associated with the importance placed upon God in children's lives. The role of what happens at home stands out in these results. The kind of things that parents can do to foster faith in their children goes beyond just taking them to church. There is evidence here to show that parents discussing issues of faith with children, praying with their children and encouraging their children to develop their own devotional lives all play a role in fostering the importance placed upon God by their children. It is not enough to simply rely upon programs at church to bring this about.

It is interesting that other group differences such as gender and age group and type of school attended do not discriminate between children to whom God is most important and those to whom God is least important. Whether boy or girl, primary school age or secondary, whether attending a state school or a private school, the aspects most predictive of strong faith are those listed above. Even liking church services and children's activities, and the frequency with which children attend them are not as important as having personal devotions, talking to parents about God and talking to school friends about God.

Chapter 7: Children Who are Drifting

From the adult Attender survey, it seems that from around age 15 onwards attenders report that their children begin to lose interest in attending church services or other church activities. Developmentally there is much that is happening for children from this age, not the least of which is trying to forge an identity which is growing independence from the necessary structures of childhood.

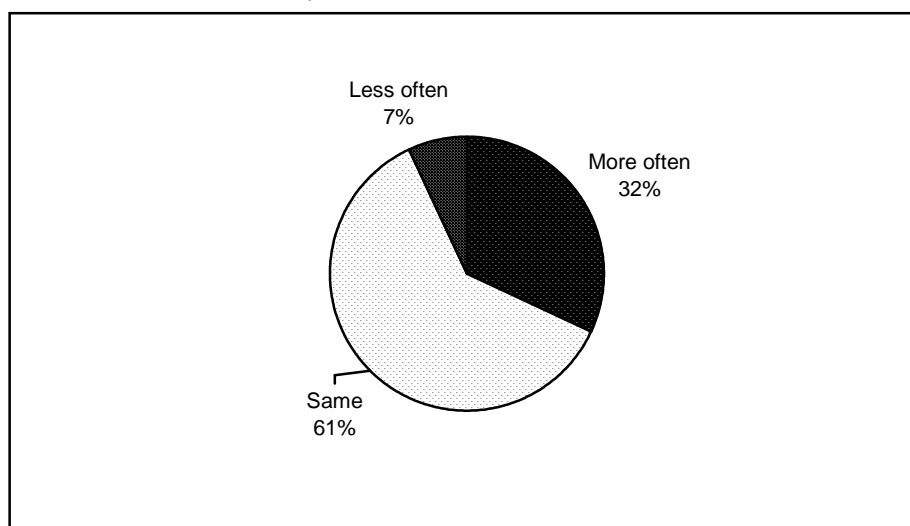
James Marcia (1980) has explored the various stages of identity formation among children and adolescents and found that distinctions can be made between four basic groups: (i) those who have not given their issues much thought, (ii) those who take on an identity that belongs to someone else without really wrestling it through for themselves (iii) those who are actively questioning and (iv) those who have reached some level of resolution by personally owning their beliefs, values and goals. Those in the first group are more likely to feel distant from their parents, or that they are not interested in them (Archer, 1994).

Parenting style can make a significant contribution to children's growing sense of identity by being warm and accepting. According to Grotevant & Cooper (1986), children in stages three and four above are more likely to feel able to discuss difficult issues with parents, which in turn assists children in their task of identity formation. An important part of this process is asking the question: Who am I, and do I fit into the church?

In the light of this developmental journey, how should we interpret drift away from church attendance in this age group? What could this lack of interest be associated with and how can the issues lying beneath this reality be addressed?

Children were asked about their pattern of church attendance, whether it had increased or decreased in frequency over the last year. Figure 7.1 shows that about 32% of children say that they are attending more often than they did last year, with 61% attending about the same amount and 7% going to church services or activities less often than a year ago.

Figure 7.1: Percent of children who are attending church less often, more often or the same amount as last year.



Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Variations by age and gender:

Secondary school aged children are a little more likely to claim that they attend more now (29%) than primary school aged children (26%). Apart from this there is virtually no difference between primary and secondary aged children and between boys and girls.

Denominational variations:

Changes in children's church attendance do vary across denominations, with children attending Anglican churches outside Sydney and Uniting churches being most likely to report reduced attendance (about 9% attending less often than a year ago), compared with children at Pentecostal denominations (4% attending less often than last year). Although the Christian Reformed Church has only 5% of children attending less often than last year, they also have the lowest proportion of children attending more often than a year ago (19%), compared with Sydney Anglicans, who have 40% of their young people claiming to attend more regularly than last year.

Table 7.1: Children's Church Attendance Pattern Compared to Last Year, by Denomination

Denomination	Attend more often	Attend the same	Attend less often
OVERALL	32%	61%	7%
Anglican Sydney	40%	55%	6%
Anglican Other	33%	58%	9%
Baptist	33%	62%	6%
Churches of Christ	31%	64%	5%
Lutheran	26%	67%	7%
Nazarene	32%	62%	6%
Pentecostal	37%	59%	4%
Reformed	19%	77%	5%
Uniting	29%	62%	9%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Attendance levels among those who are drifting:

As would be expected, consistently lower levels of church attendance are recorded among those who say that they have reduced their church attendance from last year. Table 7.2 shows that only 15% of these children currently attend church services every week, compared with 54% of those who are attending more often than last year or maintain last year's levels of church attendance.

By comparison, Table 7.3 shows that 31% of those who come to church services or activities less often than they did last year currently attend children's activities every week, compared with 63% of those who are attending more frequently than last year or the same amount as last year.

Clearly, when children decide to attend less frequently, it would seem that attendance levels reduce dramatically, especially in the case of attendance at church services. Children's activities would appear to retain twice as many children on a weekly basis than do church services among those who are attending less often than last year (31% compared with 15%). Perhaps this could be to do with the greater opportunities to interact with friends and be involved in more age-appropriate activities at children's activities.

Table 7.2: Children's Attendance at Church This Year Compared to Last Year, by Current Frequency of Church Attendance

	Attend church services every week	Attend church services most weeks	Attend church services sometimes or never	Total
Attend less often than last year	15%	43%	42%	100%
Attend more often/same amount	54%	36%	10%	100%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Table 7.3: Children's Attendance at Church This Year Compared to Last Year, by Current Frequency of Attendance at Children's Activities

	Attend children's activities every week	Attend children's activities most weeks	Attend children's activities sometimes or never	Total
Attend less often than last year	31%	24%	42%	100%
Attend more often/same amount	63%	18%	17%	100%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

CHARACTERISTICS OF THOSE WHO ARE PARTICIPATING LESS OFTEN:

Can we identify those who are most at risk of drifting away from the church? Are any of the characteristics measured in the survey useful in predicting who will be participating less often?

The denomination attended by children and whether parents also attend appear to be relatively minor variables in predicting whether children will decrease their participation. Indeed, none of the variables examined here will definitively predict which children are more likely to drift away from church life. It appears that there are other important factors that lie beyond the survey, such as the influence of the surrounding culture that can have an impact on children decreasing their attendance.

However there are several variables here that are moderately associated with a decrease in participation by children. All of these variables are of similar importance. The survey reveals that children who have decreased their attendance in the past 12 months:

- Feel more negative about church services and children's activities
- Feel as though they are not developing in faith
- Have less religious practice and interaction in the home
- Have less friends at church.

Feel More Negative about Church:

The variable most strongly related to whether children had reduced their attendance was whether they liked church or not. As discussed earlier, children liking church does predict their attendance at church, even though there are many instances of children attending as a result of their parent's wishes. Children who like church services will attend more regularly than those who do not. Around 42% of those who attend the same or more often than they did a year ago say that they always like church services. By comparison only 17% of children who now attend less frequently than a year ago always like church services.

Similarly, children's activities need to appeal to children in order for them to attend. Around 54% of children who attend church more often or the same as last year say that they always like the children's activities. By comparison only 29% of children who now attend less frequently always like children's activities.

Do Not Feel They are Growing in Faith:

Of all the variables connected with belief in the survey, children's sense of whether they have been growing in faith over the past 12 months is most closely related to whether they now attend church less often. Around 43% of children who attend church more often or the same as last year say that they grew a lot in their faith. By comparison only 18% of children who now attend less frequently grew a lot in faith.

Practice the Faith less at Home:

Those who are drifting out of church life will also have lower levels of practice at home across the entire range of variables to do with home life. They have lower levels of devotional activity, talk with parents about faith less often, and pray less often as a family. Of lesser importance is parents' own church attendance.

Have Less Friends at Church:

The social dimension is also related to whether children are drifting. Children who have decreased their attendance in the past year (23%) are only half as likely to say that they have lots of close friends at church as children who have increased their attendance or stayed at the same level (40%).

CONCLUSION:

It is difficult to study children who are leaving church life, because they may well cease attendance very quickly once they have decided, for whatever reason, that they no longer want to go to church services or church activities. In fact the current survey will have missed all of those children who have suddenly ended what may well have been a long association with the church. In this regard, the word "drifting" can be misleading, suggesting that children gradually fade out of association with the church.

Despite these difficulties, the survey results here suggest that church services or children's activities that are welcoming and friendly, where children feel a sense of belonging and respect, where they have acceptance to tackle the difficult issues of adolescence, will be places they will be more likely to cling to as sources of support. Liking church services and children's activities and attending them frequently provide rough indices of how supported

children feel there, and as children move towards more autonomous functioning, anything that does not provide help or supportive nurture is quickly (and often suddenly) eliminated.

In this context growth in faith can also give a child a platform of belief from which to approach the often confusing values and attitudes that need to be wrestled with en route to becoming an adult. In this way, a basis of solid faith can be thought of as a compass that can help children keep their bearings in the turbulence of adolescence, something that can provide important support. Helping children in the church to grow their faith deeper and enjoy their interaction with the church family more may be the best ways to retain them as they develop into adults.

In all of this, the role of parents in providing both encouragement to their children and a conducive environment for faith to develop is again underlined. It is not just up to the church to do the best that it can but also the potential influence of parents appears to have an effect.

Chapter 8:

Conclusions

A picture emerges in this study of children who are generally positive about church and about what they believe. One of the stereotypes of church life is that despite our best efforts children find church involvement to be boring, cold and uninspiring. The Children's Survey presents a somewhat different view. The majority of children surveyed 'always' or 'mostly' like the church services that they attend and 88% 'always or mostly' like the children's activities that they attend. Relatively few children (12%) often find their church services to be boring. As Smith (2005, 61) observes, school aged children probably have their expectations shaped by school that sometimes life will be boring and so are not put off by the fact that church might sometimes be boring.

This doesn't mean to say that this is the picture across all of the churches. Evidence was presented in chapter 3 that the percentage of children who 'always' like church services ranges from a low of 25% in Christian Reformed churches through to as high of 51% in Sydney Anglican and Nazarene churches. Similarly the percentage who 'always' like children's activities ranges from a low of 40% in Lutheran churches to a high of 60% in Sydney Anglican and Nazarene churches. The evidence of this survey of 10-14 year olds is that it does make a difference for churches to invest resources in providing services that are geared towards the needs of children and youth, and to provide children's activities such as Sunday school, kids club and youth group. Involvement in special children's and youth services and with children's activities are associated both with higher frequencies of attendance among children and more positive attitudes towards church life.

The survey also reveals another reason why it is important for churches to get their structures right when it comes to children's ministry - being able to make and keep connections with the children of non-attenders. Around 1 in every 8 children attending church have parents neither of whom attend church. Chapter 2 outlined how these children are even more attracted to youth groups, kids clubs and special services for children and youth than even the children of church attenders. This has important missional implications for churches.

Fostering an attraction towards church among 10-14 year olds appears to involve three key elements according to the findings of this survey:

- Making the program as child oriented as possible, rather than an adult program that children are forced to adapt to;
- Create an environment that will lead to the fostering of friendships among children.
- Foster faith among children

A recent report from Lausanne group, the peak evangelical body worldwide, highlighted that a primary weakness among adults working with children is to provide recreational activities, leading to a focus on entertainment rather than spiritual growth (Issue Group 18, 2005, 48). In the light of the Children's Survey, we would agree with the importance of a spiritual focus. The level of importance that children themselves place on God, on Jesus and on their spiritual lives is positively related to the frequency that they attend church, whether they like going to church and the predisposition that they have towards dropping out of church.

And it is not all up to the churches. Parents have a central role in the development of faith. A recent study of American teenagers concluded that,

“...parents are normally very important in shaping the religious and spiritual lives of their teenage children, even though they may not realise it. It seems that many parents of teens rely primarily on the immediate evidence of the overt attitudes,

statements, and sometimes behaviours that their teenage children dole out to them on a daily basis in order to estimate their current level of parental influence. Many of the attitudes and statements that teenagers communicate to parents do not exactly express great admiration and gratitude for and readiness to listen to, emulate and freely obey their parents. Many parents therefore appear to come to the conclusion that they have lost their influence in shaping the lives of their teenage children...most parents in fact still do profoundly influence their adolescents - often more than do their peers...Simply by living and interacting with their children, most parents establish expectations, define normalcy, model life practices, set boundaries and make demands - all of which cannot help but influence teenagers, for good or ill. Most teenagers and their parents may not realise it but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modelled and taught to them by their parents." (Smith, 2005, 56)

We would agree with this broad conclusion based on the Children's Survey. The practice of family prayer times, the encouragement of a personal devotional life for children and parents simply being prepared to talk with their children about faith are all aspects that are positively related to higher levels of belief and a more positive attitude and involvement in church life. It is not the responsibility of churches alone to bring children to faith, but by working in partnership with parents, who are particularly influential at this point in their children's lives.

In this respect churches should consider not only the quality of programs that they provide for children, but how they can better assist parents in their role. In this respect, parents talking with children about the faith should be noted. When adults were asked what was most significant about parents in helping them to come to faith, the ability of parents to explain the faith was one of the least mentioned aspects. (Bellamy, Mou et al, 2004).

It is assumed that 10-14 year old children attend church mostly because their parents make them attend. The Children's Survey shows that this is a long way from the truth. Fewer than one in 5 children say that they mostly attend because their parents make them; far more attend because they want to learn about God. In the same way impressive numbers of 10-14 year olds say that they believe in God (92%) and that God is important to them.

The meaning of these statistics will vary depending upon what was hoped for. Certainly these children appear to be very religious by these measures, with the vast majority believing in God and seeing God and Jesus as most important or very important. On the other hand church leaders may be concerned to find that 13% - or 1 in every 8 children - did not see God as being very important or that 22% were unsure as to whether faith makes one a better person.

We also need to exercise caution as to what children actually mean when they talk about the importance of God. Writers such as James Fowler and John Westerhoff have argued that children move through developmental stages in relation to their faith, from a faith that is more or less handed down from parents to one dominated by feelings and the influence of friends to one that is the product of intellectual searching. Westerhoff doubts that conversion is even possible in the early stages, being more a late teenage experience (Bridger, 1988, pp123-127). In the United States Smith has found disturbing evidence of the lack of knowledge about the faith and lack of content present in the faith of many American teenagers (Smith, 2005, 129-135). Nevertheless with the benefit of hindsight, more than half of Anglican and Protestant church attenders in Australia (57%) claim to have become a Christian by the age of 14 years. In doing so they are able to pinpoint significant people and activities in their coming to faith (Bellamy, Mou et al, 2004). Their feedback highlights the importance of early childhood in laying the foundations for an adult faith.

The Lausanne report highlights the losses of young children out of church life around the world. However there does not appear to be the same flood of children out of church life in Australia prior to age 14. According to their parents, 91% of 10-14 year olds still attend a church which is only a little less than the 95% of under 10 year olds who attend church.

The internal evidence is also good with 85% of the children surveyed attending church services every week or most weeks and 78% attending children's activities such as youth group every week or most weeks. Yet it is known that many of these children will leave church life as they move towards adulthood. As shown in chapter 1, more than 1 in every 3 children of church attenders will leave church life altogether whilst they are still living at home. Children leaving church is an important factor in predicting denominational decline.

Church growth is a function of inflow outweighing the outflow of attenders, with inflow being the combination of newcomers into church life, people arriving from other congregations and the retention of the children of church attenders. While the retention of the children of church attenders is only one factor in explaining changes in overall attendance levels within denominations, it is clear that this is an important factor for particular denominations. In this respect, the losses of children out of large mainstream denominations such as the Anglican and Uniting Churches are noteworthy. The challenge for churches is not simply about attracting more people from the surrounding community but in better retaining those they already have.

Appendix 1

Denominations participating in the survey of church attenders aged 10-14 years

Table A1.1 Percentage of 10-14 year old participants in 2001 NCLS by Denominational Region

Denomination	Percent	Denomination	Percent
Anglican Sydney	21%	Christian Revival Crusade	.1%
Anglican Other	9%	Lutheran	9%
Baptist	11%	Nazarene	1%
Churches of Christ	3%	Presbyterian	0%
Reformed	2%	Uniting	40%
Assemblies of God	1%	Bethesda	1%
Vineyard	.0%	Independent	2%
		Total	100%

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Table A1.2 Percentage of 10-14 year old participants in 2001 NCLS by Denominational Region

Denominational Region	Percentage	Denomination/Region	Percentage
Diocese of Adelaide	1.8%	Lutheran Church SA	6.1%
Diocese of Brisbane	2.9%	Lutheran Church NT	0.1%
Diocese of Grafton	0.9%	Church of the Nazarene NSW/ACT	0.1%
Diocese of Newcastle	2.3%	Church of the Nazarene VIC	0.0%
Diocese of Sydney	20.9%	Church of the Nazarene QLD	0.4%
Diocese of Bunbury	0.6%	Church of the Nazarene SA	0.0%
Diocese of Wilochra	0.3%	Church of the Nazarene WA	0.0%
Diocese of NW Australia	0.2%	Presbyterian Church NSW/ACT	0.0%
Baptist Church VIC	9.8%	Uniting Church NSW/ACT	14.9%
Baptist Church QLD	0.9%	Uniting Church VIC	7.6%
Baptist Church SA	0.0%	Uniting Church QLD	7.7%
Churches of Christ NSW	2.3%	Uniting Church SA	6.9%
Churches of Christ VIC	0.5%	Uniting Church WA	1.9%
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - NSW/ACT	0.7%	Uniting Church TAS	0.4%
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - VIC	0.1%	Uniting Church NT	0.6%
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - QLD	0.1%	Bethesda Ministries International - NSW	0.5%
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - WA	0.6%	Bethesda Ministries International - VIC	0.1%
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - TAS	0.7%	Bethesda Ministries International - SA	0.2%
Assemblies of God WA	1.5%	Bethesda Ministries International - TAS	0.1%
Vineyard Fellowship NSW/ACT	0.0%	Bethesda Ministries International - ACT	0.1%
CRC Churches International (QLD)	0.0%	Other VIC	1.9%
CRC Churches International (WA)	0.1%	Other WA	0.3%
Lutheran Church QLD	3.0%		

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Table A1.3 Number of 10-14 year old participants in 2001 NCLS by Denominational Region

Denomination/Region	Number of Participants	Denomination/Region	Number of Participants
Diocese of Adelaide	180	Lutheran Church SA	620
Diocese of Brisbane	297	Lutheran Church NT	6
Diocese of Grafton	86	Church of the Nazarene NSW/ACT	9
Diocese of Newcastle	237	Church of the Nazarene VIC	5
Diocese of Sydney	2114	Church of the Nazarene QLD	37
Diocese of Bunbury	60	Church of the Nazarene SA	5
Diocese of Wilochra	31	Church of the Nazarene WA	3
Diocese of NW Australia	16	Presbyterian Church NSW/ACT	1
Baptist Church VIC	986	Uniting Church NSW/ACT	1500
Baptist Church QLD	88	Uniting Church VIC	768
Baptist Church SA	2	Uniting Church QLD	779
Churches of Christ NSW	229	Uniting Church SA	700
Churches of Christ VIC	49	Uniting Church WA	194
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - NSW/ACT	68	Uniting Church TAS	43
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - VIC	9	Uniting Church NT	58
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - QLD	6	Bethesda Ministries International - NSW	47
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - WA	58	Bethesda Ministries International - VIC	6
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia - TAS	67	Bethesda Ministries International - SA	20
Assemblies of God WA	148	Bethesda Ministries International - TAS	14
Vineyard Fellowship NSW/ACT	1	Bethesda Ministries International - ACT	10
CRC Churches International (QLD)	5	Other VIC	193
CRC Churches International (WA)	7	Other WA	34
Lutheran Church QLD	304		

Source: 2001 NCLS 10 - 14 yr old Survey

Appendix 2

NCLS 2001 SURVEY OF ATTENDERS AGED 10-14 YEARS

BACKGROUND OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

No. of forms returned = 10101

Age

9 years	4%
10 years	18%
11 years	19%
12 years	20%
13 years	21%
14 years	17%

Total 100%

Age Grouped by School

Primary School aged	41%
Secondary School aged	59%

Total 100%

Sex

Boy	46%
Girl	54%

Total 100%

Country of Birth

Australia	91%
Another English Speaking Country	5%
Non-English Speaking Country	4%

Total 100%

FREQUENCY TABLES

CHAPTER 2

Church service attendance

Every week	49%
Most weeks	36%
Sometimes	11%
Never	3%
Total	100%

Type of Service Attended

Special kids service	24%
All ages service	76%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

I leave service to attend other activities

Yes	44%
No	56%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Parents attend church

Yes both regularly	64%
Yes mum only	20%
Yes dad only	3%
No	13%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Attendance at children's activities

Every week	59%
Most weeks	19%
Sometimes	12%
Never	8%
We don't have these	2%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Attend Sunday School

No	49%
Yes	51%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Attend kids club

No	86%
Yes	14%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Attend youth group

No	55%
Yes	45%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

School attended

Public school	58%
Catholic school	5%
Mainstream Protestant school	15%
Another Christian/church school	6%
Other	5%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

CHAPTER 3

I like church services

Always like them	39%
Mostly like them	43%
Like them sometimes	16%
Don't like them	2%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Feel bored at church

Often	12%
Sometimes	67%
Never	21%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Feel I belong at church

Often	65%
Sometimes	32%
Never	3%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Feel I learn about God at church

Often	63%
Sometimes	35%
Never	2%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Best part of church

Other	33%
Being part with friends	67%

Total	100%
--------------	-------------

Best part of church	
Other	79%
Being part of a group	21%

Total 100%

Best part of church	
Other	77%
The minister/leader	23%

Total 100%

Best part of church	
Other	65%
Singing & music	35%

Total 100%

Best part of church	
Other	85%
Special kids songs	15%

Total 100%

Best part of church	
Other	84%
Sermon preaching	16%

Total 100%

Best part of church	
Other	78%
Special kids talk	22%

Total 100%

Other likes about church	
Other	72%
Taking an active part	28%

Total 100%

Other likes about church	
Other	86%
Prayers	14%

Total 100%

Other likes about church	
Other	72%
Films or videos	28%

Total 100%

Other likes about church	
Other	56%
Meeting people afterwards	44%

Total 100%

Other likes about church	
Other	83%
Something else	17%

Total 100%

Close friends attend church	
Yes lots	38%
Yes more than 2	31%
Yes 1 or 2	23%
None	8%

Total 100%

Jesus is important to me	
Most important	44%
Very important	42%
Of some importance	12%
Not important	1%

Total 100%

CHAPTER 4

I enjoy children's activities	
Always	51%
Mostly	36%
Sometimes	11%
Never	2%

Total 100%

Feel I belong at children's activities	
Often	72%
Sometimes	26%
Never	2%

Total 100%

Feel bored at children's activities	
Often	7%
Sometimes	47%
Never	46%

Total 100%

Feel I learn about God at children's activities	
Often	61%
Sometimes	36%
Never	3%

Total 100%

Other likes about children's activities

Other	30%
Being with friends	70%

Total	100%
-------	------

Other likes about children's activities

Other	65%
Meeting other Christians	35%

Total	100%
-------	------

Other likes about children's activities

Other	61%
Being Christians together	39%

Total	100%
-------	------

Other likes about children's activities

Other	71%
The teachers or leaders	29%

Total	100%
-------	------

Other likes about children's activities

Other	77%
Singing & music	23%

Total	100%
-------	------

Other likes about children's activities

Other	61%
Learning about God	39%

Total	100%
-------	------

Other likes about children's activities

Other	81%
Prayers	19%

Total	100%
-------	------

Best part of children's activities

Other	74%
Stories	26%

Total	100%
-------	------

Best part of children's activities

Other	69%
Films or videos	31%

Total	100%
-------	------

Best part of children's activities

Other	52%
Social activities	48%

Total	100%
-------	------

Best part of children's activities

Other	69%
Activity sheets, art & craft	31%

Total	100%
-------	------

Best part of children's activities

Other	50%
Playing games	50%

Total	100%
-------	------

Best part of children's activities

Other	90%
Something else	10%

Total	100%
-------	------

CHAPTER 5**Attend church because of parents**

Yes mostly	20%
Yes partly	39%
No	41%

Total	100%
-------	------

Attend church to be with friends

Yes mostly	18%
Yes partly	54%
No	28%

Total	100%
-------	------

Attend church to learn about God

Yes mostly	54%
Yes partly	40%
No	6%

Total	100%
-------	------

How often pray with family

A few times a week or more	38%
Once a week	10%
Not very often	33%
Never	19%

Total	100%
-------	------

Talk to parents about God

Often	26%
Sometimes	46%
Hardly ever	20%
Never	8%

Total	100%
-------	------

CHAPTER 6

I believe in God

Yes	92%
No	2%
Not sure	6%

Total 100%

God is important to me

Most important	46%
Very important	41%
Of some importance	12%
Not important	1%

Total 100%

Jesus is important to me

Most important	44%
Very important	42%
Of some importance	12%
Not important	1%

Total 100%

Grown in faith over last year

Don't have faith	4%
Haven't really grown	10%
I've grown a bit	48%
I've grown a lot	39%

Total 100%

Better person from belief in God

Yes	73%
No	5%
Unsure	22%

Total 100%

How often do devotions alone

Every/most days	22%
A few times a week	24%
Once a week	13%
Only at special times	29%
Never	12%

Total 100%

Talk to parents about God

Often	26%
Sometimes	46%
Hardly ever	20%
Never	8%

Total 100%

How often pray with family

A few times a week or more	38%
Once a week	10%
Not very often	33%
Never	19%

Total 100%

Talk to school friends about God

Often	12%
Sometimes	39%
Hardly ever	31%
Never	18%

Total 100%

Invited friends along in past year

Yes and they came	50%
Yes but they didn't come	18%
No	32%

Total 100%

CHAPTER 7

How long attending here

Less than 1 year	14%
1-2 years	16%
3-5 years	20%
6-10 years	21%
More than 10 years	29%

Total 100%

Attend more or less often than last year

More often	28%
About the same	53%
Less	6%
Dont know	13%

Total 100%

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