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FAMILY FUEL: THE CHURCH PARTNERING WITH PARENTS IN THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY

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FAMILY FUEL: THE CHURCH PARTNERING
WITH PARENTS IN THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILY

by

Vanessa Amor Flores

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for the encouragement and motivation,

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And God, to whom all glory is given.

Abstract/ Keywords

ABSTRACT: American culture is shifting responsibilities away from parents and onto professionals, such as teachers and coaches for the informing and developing of their children. Is this applicable in the church setting, where parents drop off their kids to let the children's ministry pastors spiritually influence their child? Through the corroboration of theology and social science, it is seen that the impact of children's pastors is incomparable to the spiritual and emotional influence that parents give to their children. With the enjoin of Deuteronomy 6, churches today are equipping families to become the church so that there is a reciprocated relationship of the church as the family and the family as the church.

KEY WORDS: Family Ministry, Deuteronomy, Church Ministry, Church work with Families, Christian Living, Christian Parenting

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Introduction

“These are the commands, decrees, and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land...so that you, your children, and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life,” (Deut. 6:4).¹

This passage from the book of Deuteronomy is the genetic code of a family, the primary institution that God created. Moses is giving a farewell speech as he passes down leadership to Joshua and enjoins the Israelite nation to not only preserve the Law, but to advance the faith, impressing them upon the upcoming generation. This was in the time of an old covenant, where the Law was in place. Families were held accountable through the lens of the Law for practicing and knowing rituals of purification, cleanliness, and tradition. Deuteronomy 6 is not confined to the Law, for there is a new covenant through the Gospel of Jesus Christ that applies today. This covenant calls for a contemporary application of families submitting to the will of the Triune God, understanding the work of His grace and the mission of the Gospel. Called by God and atoned by Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit seals a family, fueling them to keep the decrees and commands through the freedom of a new covenant. The church still has a duty as Moses did with Israel to ensure families are shepherded. Family ministry seeks to understand the discipleship and spiritual formation of individuals under a communal household. It is geared towards meeting the needs for families to thrive outside of the church and develop spiritually within the domestic realm. In essence, as the family is equipped by the church, the grouping itself will become a “little church,” advancing the mission of the church beyond its walls.

¹ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

A roadblock that is seemingly taking place in American churches that hinder the empowerment of families is the conception of programmatic ministry. Programmatic ministry entails separate communities of fellowship, for these programs serve specific demographics. This creates a plethora of ministries such as children's ministry, men's ministry, mom's ministry, and 50+ ministries. This is popularly known as a programmatic silo, which is a ministry grouping geared towards specific demographics such as age or gender-specific fellowships. While these ministries may thrive and prosper on their own, they may not feel a part of the church body holistically. This is shown in lacks of representation in church services, partnership with other ministries in service projects, or being in a mutual space of fellowship and discipleship. Family ministry, like any programmatic ministry, is a ministry apart from the whole of a church congregation, often geared towards parents and children. Such a perspective creates a generational and tribal division, opposite of the communal nature that is found in the Biblical narrative. Programmatic silos were never the call, for fear of the Lord shown in Deuteronomy was holistic, speaking among all generations at once.

Silos impact interactions generationally and relationally. Generationally, those young and old are given less of a space in interacting and learning from each other, creating gaps in relationships. Relationally, the church becomes less of a family and more of a categorized herding of different demographic groupings. However, there is a way that generations can be reconciled and families can be ministered together. That is through the establishment of a church's priority in family ministry. This can be catalyzed through a children's ministry due to its prospective of having multiple generations interact when carried out through the impression of Deuteronomy 6. While having a ministry geared toward children's ministry serves the developmental needs of children, it should not be their primary source of spiritual formation.

This is where Deuteronomy 6 bridges spiritual formation sourced from the church into the home, for parents become the connector to the church fueled as a family and a family fueled as the church.

With culture lessening the role of parents and heightening the efforts of professionals for the physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing of their child, it seems almost countercultural for a church to call parents into the development of their children's faith. The concept of family ministry is countercultural in the sense that the faith formation of a child is not promoted through a pastor or religious professional, but through the parents whom God anointed. The local church is the place where families are fueled by equipping children and families to fear the Lord and keep His decrees. The family fuel from the church creates unity among the body, raises a generation of children who fear the Lord, and hosts a culture of discipleship, apostleship, and fellowship. In a reciprocal relationship, families fuel the church by empowering individuals in the home to serve and build. This is not about the church being a kid's ministry, a parent's ministry, or even a family ministry. Rather, the church has a purpose in being one ministry *for* children, *for* parents, *for* families and *for* all within those demographics. Children's ministry, in that understanding, serve as a supplement to parent's teachings and should seek to unify generations through volunteerism, family resource equipping, and church partnership.

This thesis seeks to grasp an understanding of utilizing the church as an empowerment of families, using the parents as a catalyst for change in discipleship through their anointed position. There is a universal agreement that parents start a child's spiritual formation and development.² However, is that truth articulated to parents?

² "Who Is Responsible for Children's Faith Formation?," *Barna Group*, accessed January 1, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/children-faith-formation/>.

With the rise of generational division, this is a relevant topic to investigate. The church is the ideal place for families to flourish, for it is an atmosphere of faith-filled families ready to grow and serve when empowered. This thesis seeks to understand current efforts made to establish intergenerational discipleship of families both within the domestic realm and among the church holistically. The questions that drive this research are the following:

- How can a church become less programmatic while hosting a culture where families can flourish?
- What are children's pastors and churches doing today to meet the needs of spiritual formation and discipleship in the home?
- How can families and churches partner with each other to enable intergenerational discipleship and fellowship?

These questions aim to discover means of catalyzing the anointing of parents and enabling them a confidence to pave the way for their children in knowing God personally, while also taking part in the global Church's mission. This emphasizes the need for aligning a church's mission with a family mindset so that the whole of families are reached and equipped for further discipleship outside of the church. To fuel the families is to fuel the Church in spiritual formation. When parents are reached, children are reached. When children are reached, the next generation of the Church will reconcile demographic division and lessen programmatic silos.

Literature Review

This literature review will discuss the multiple facets that contribute to the spiritual and relational wellbeing of children and families. For the purpose of this paper, family will be defined as one or both parents and their children under one domestic realm. Families with children under 11 years old, or in the 5th grade will be in focus. This is due to the fact that parental influence is primary up to this age range. This age also heightens the role of a parent bringing a child to salvation before they reach their teenage years because Barna research shows that children who are saved before the age of 14 have the best likelihood of being “absolutely committed” to Christ for the rest of their life.³ Children’s faith formation in the family through the leadership of parents will be observed in this literature review.

While the traditional form of a nuclear family is lessening in presence among American families, this literature review looks at a role of a parent and child, remarking that relationship to be enough of a catalyst for spiritual formation. When looking to God’s Word for understanding, it is evident that His institution of family applies to a household where parents transmit the faithfulness and understanding of God onto their children. This will show the Biblical relevance for understanding the household that God desires. Parents and children will be evaluated, bringing a gestalt perspective on how their individuality is relevant to the family system. The family itself will also be evaluated, transitioning into communion with other members of the Church. The church will be defined as a local body resembling the greater Body of active, Spirit-filled, Christians responding and fulfilling Christ’s mission. The literature in review depicts the theology of a family, the social science of familial relationships, and data that will advocate the need for the church’s aim in ministering to families.

³ “Evangelism Is Most Effective Among Kids - Barna Group,” accessed January 20, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids/>.

Theology: The Spiritual Framework of a Family

Scripture is primary in understanding the revelation of God and His mission for families. His Word gives the anointed call of a family, including the theological realms in parenting and child development. Theology matters, for the Holy Spirit is an active agent that fuels families and empowers them to be the Church.

Deuteronomy 6: A Call for Holistic Discipleship

Before he died, Moses made a final speech before all of Israel, coaching Israelites how to pass on the faith as they embark on entering the land God had promised them. Moses gave the Israelites one final challenge to guard the faith and transmit it to succeeding generations.⁴ It was not only a practical instruction but a missional call for all generations. Deuteronomy 6 catalyzes the call of a theological networking within the family. This passage serves as a brief, practical way for parents transmit the knowledge and understanding of God.⁵ The framework of family ministry is this passage:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and your gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

This passage, known in Hebraic culture as the Shema, is a practical guide for parents communicating faith to their children.⁶ The Shema instructs parents to make discipleship holistic, implementing the decrees and will of God in all aspects of life. The call is also an

⁴ Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 52.

⁵ Carl Ellis Nelson, “Spiritual Formation: A Family Matter,” *Journal of Family Ministry* 20, no. 3 (2006): 13, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001553390&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁶ Ibid.

anointing for parents, as they become ordained as spiritual leaders in the home responsible for spiritual formation in the home. With such a reasonability, it is up to parents to ensure that they impress God's word and His will onto their children. This passage, when given the contextual analysis, makes this role incarnational, for spiritual formation is not a transaction of faith but a transformation of spirit.

Transformation is continual in the faith formation of a parent. The first part of the passage, "Hear," is an imperative that means more than attentiveness; it is directly aligned to a personal knowledge of God.⁷ "Hear O Israel" then is a reminder of relationship that ruminates on the knowledge of God and his character. It is not a call to gain; it is a spiritual call to *receive*. This imperative invites families to receive as a nation, noting a holistic call among a community. C. Ellis Nelson reflects on the implications of this strong opening by writing, "I interpret 'hear' to mean that our stance before God is that of a hearer; we listen for God's words of guidance or comfort. It means God has a will for our lives and that God can communicate that will at any time."⁸

Theology comes from the knowledge of God. God's revelation of self is provided through His Word and experienced through relationship. Both serve as His call to communion with humanity. The call to hear is incessant; the Triune God enjoins all within a context of community as the Trinity exists to call within His communal nature. The cross was a call to hear because it is a reception of the love Jesus exemplified in his atonement. The Holy Spirit gives a daily call to hear as God's present comes upon believers to enable, and empower through guidance, comfort, and His power. In Deuteronomy 6, instruction for the knowledge of God is primarily communicated from parent to child. However, this passage says to "Impress them on your

⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁸ Ibid.

children,” which means that hearing God must be practiced by a parent before a child can fully comprehend. This means that a child’s understanding of God can be best cultivated when a parent is active in discovering the personal mission of God. The Shema gives parents an opportunity to take their role of understanding God seriously as they endeavor to interpret God to their children.⁹ As parents seek the revelation of God through Scripture and a prayerful relationship, there is more that a child may comprehend through the testimony of a parent. As children “hear” God intentionally, they too will have the capability to grow in the love and mission of God. Personal knowledge begins with the parent for it is where God’s love and the understanding of obedience can dichotomize.¹⁰ God’s institution of a family is rooted in the mission of the Shema. It is through this understanding that the theological call for families is grasped and practiced. Hearing God comes if it is generationally impressed. Deuteronomy 6 ensures an ongoing worship of God as old generations die and new ones arise. A parent is called to take every opportunity to find a way in their day and throughout their home for God’s word to be spoken, repeated, and discussed.¹¹ Hearing God through a personal, intimate knowledge catalyzes one’s conception of their theology, for it explores who God is and his relationship to humanity.

While society is calling for individualism, a Deuteronomy 6 family reverses such a belief. It prioritizes the essence of encountering God more than family values, logistics, and matters that are not directly related to the relationship with God. Reggie Joiner, advocate for family ministry,

⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰ James M Jr Hamilton, “That the Coming Generation Might Praise the Lord,” *The Journal of Family Ministry* 1, no. 1 (2010): 16, accessed April 2, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001886183&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

uses Deuteronomy 6 to rally for holistic discipleship starting in the domestic realm with families.

He shows the importance of the Shema by stating,

“Practically speaking, when families intentionally and consistently embrace the value that God is God, it means they strive to parent from a single-minded perspective. The more they remember this is really about God, the easier it is for them to focus their priorities on what matters most.”¹²

God’s purpose for the family does not stop at the instruction of parents. God’s plan for the family was to be an agent for discipleship and evangelism, impacting the landscape of future generations through a testimony of one’s faithfulness. Families glorify God, for they advance His multigenerational plan to fill the earth with worshippers.¹³ In a family, parents and children come together in glorifying God and advancing His kingdom.

With the multiple instances stated, faith formation is found within a family holistically. With that comes identity, for it is affirmed in their environment.¹⁴ A child knows the nature of God through a parents’ personal knowledge that is passed on and through a hospitable environment where God is known and obeyed.

Parenting as a Reflection on the Parenthood of God

Families contain two elements that reflect God’s character: marriage and parenthood.¹⁵ Marriage is the first institution God had implemented, shown through Adam and Eve. The love between a husband and wife reflect the love Christ has for us, His Bride. Marriage paves the way for the family. In this institution of marriage, the reflection of God’s eternal union through a marriage is meant to illustrate the fruit of the Gospel. Marriages to children unpack the narrative

¹² Joiner, *Think Orange*, 54.

¹³ Family Challenge, “Family-Challenge-Biblical-Foundation-Statement-2016-Edition.Pdf,” 3, accessed September 12, 2019, <https://www.transform-world.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Family-Challenge-Biblical-Foundation-Statement-2016-edition.pdf>.

¹⁴ Nelson, “Spiritual Formation,” 25.

¹⁵ “The Purpose of the Family,” *Focus on the Family*, last modified June 29, 2017, accessed October 19, 2019, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/the-purpose-of-the-family/>.

about Christ and his bride, and see it through conversations, attitudes, and applications of Sunday services during the week.¹⁶ Marriage shows the relationship of self-giving, which is further developed in the act of mutual service in Ephesians' household codes that carries from parents to child.¹⁷

In the same fashion, parenthood shows the character of God being relational, loving, and protecting over us as His children.¹⁸ Family is created by God to reflect the character of God in a tangible way, for the love and character of God may be understood through the love within the family, an institution that comes from Him.

Theology is a communicator of family discipleship, for it recalls the observation of God and the application of relationship to Him. Understanding the love of God starts with recalling the love a parent has for a child.¹⁹ Parenting fulfills the parenthood analogy of God, where His love for humanity mirrors the love parents have for their children. Parenting, in the theological realm, becomes incarnational, as it is a divine appointment by God to fulfill expressing His love in their role. Parents have the best opportunity in developing spiritual formation of by actively expressing the analogous aspects of God. Nurture and discipline reflect God's providence that has expectations. It brings understanding that the radical call to discipleship is lifelong. Using the DNA of a family, parents are given the role and responsibility to carry out the knowledge of God

¹⁶ Randy Alcorn, "A Christ-Centered Marriage Is Christ-Centered Parenting - Blog," *Eternal Perspective Ministries*, last modified November 17, 2010, accessed March 7, 2020, <https://www.epm.org/blog/2010/Nov/17/christ-centered-marriage-christ-centered-parenting>.

¹⁷ Jakobus Vorster, "Marriage and Family in View of the Doctrine of the Covenant," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 72 (April 8, 2016): 4.

¹⁸ "The Purpose of the Family."

¹⁹ Myron Raymond Chartier, "A Theology of Parenting: An Incarnational Model," *American Baptist Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (March 1984): 75, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000940027&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

by incarnationally representing the love and character of God, which includes providing children with compassion. Love is the center of parenting, for God is love and His love is shown by multiple dimensions of Biblical parenting.

Once knowing the nature and action of God through the call found in Deuteronomy 6, the enterprise of parenting is clarified.²⁰ The nuts and bolts of impressing the understanding of God onto children is through the given duties of parents as teachers and children the learners.²¹ Research can support the God-given influence parents have on their children, thereby heightening the implications of recognizing their God-given anointing over their spiritual influence in the domestic realm. The family is a child's first exposure to relationships, and it does not compare to the minimal hours spent in a church nor in other formal Christian events.²²

Family Relationships in the Bible

Families in the Bible exemplify the necessity of relationship with God through relationships within the family and among the faith community. The household understanding of Israel in the Old Testament setting bids the importance that familial cohesion brings to the community of faith holistically. While there were twelve tribes that united their blood relations, their everyday life was determined by the clan and local household.²³ The general health of the community is dependent on the teachings of nuclear families, for Israel was a nation set apart by God. Joshua 7:16-26 paints a clear illustration of the organizational aspect of a family. Through the sin of

²⁰ Chartier, "A Theology of Parenting."

²¹ David W T Brattston, "Your Children's Education: Duties in Christian Education, by Parents as Teachers, and Children as Learners," *Journal of Christian Education* 53, no. 3 (December 2010): 20.

²² Perry W H Shaw, "Parenting That Reflects the Character of God," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1 (2016): 44, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIgFE160705003439&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²³ Ken M. Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 36.

Achan, the serial examination of Israel as a whole body was narrowed from the whole the tribes, the clans, the households, and the nuclear families.²⁴ This assumes that Biblical families were not in isolation from other families, but had accountability and fellowship. Multiple families can be considered one household, which is to be noted when understanding the influence one family may have on one another in a faith-filled community. In the Old Testament context, “Ancient Israelite perceptions of family were grounded in the theological conviction that all human beings are created as images of God and that our humanity is expressed first and foremost in the context of community.”²⁵ The role of the family is then clarified in the realm of the Spiritual community. The family is in community with other families, edifying the Church through mutual accountability, fellowship, and championing the faith through the foundation laid out in Deuteronomy 6.

The Church, defining the body of Christ followers, is even metaphorically referred to as a household, which should motivate believers into shaping their domestic discipleship.²⁶ Paul’s writings in Ephesians give families a framework that helps apply Deuteronomy 6 in a practical sense. The household codes in Ephesians show that it is in the immediate family, “where the alternative community that the church was called to be was grown and nurtured.”²⁷

With children’s theology, it is also imperative to impress theological understanding as they’re developing because it becomes a cognitive ability that processes real hermeneutical questions and bring Biblical metaphors and narratives into reality.²⁸ Children have a spirituality

²⁴ Ibid., 38.

²⁵ Ibid., 101.

²⁶ Bill Prevette et al., “Theology, Mission and Child: Global Perspectives” (n.d.): 127.

²⁷ Ibid., 129.

²⁸ Mirjam Zimmermann, “What Is Children’s Theology? Children’s Theology as Theological Competence: Development, Differentiation, Methods,” *HTS Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1, accessed March 12, 2019, http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_abstract&pid=S0259-94222015000100062&lng=en&nrm=iso&tlng=en.

that requires interaction with adults, who are also alongside them processing while also holding central positions.²⁹ The typical setting of classroom environments secluded from the congregations does not support the relational needs of children. Children learn relationally, and the Gospels answer that need.

Children's theology becomes everyone's mission, for Biblical narrative calls for relationship. This is also a reciprocated relationship, as it reminds one of the adoption God has given to humanity, calling them His children. When conveyed as such, welcoming children into faith formation with the church is an act of hospitality and a reminder of God's gift of Jesus.³⁰ Children also have a spirituality existing in four realms: relationship, vulnerability, imagination, and emotional protection, and living in openness and hope.³¹ The spirituality of children provide a new curiosity that is unjudgmental and open to receiving the mystery of God.

Though there are theological implications calling for the necessity of a family becoming its own church in discipling parents and children, there was little to no information regarding a theological perspective on the church's role in family formation; rather there were many practical approaches that lacked a Biblical foundation. Theology can quickly transform to theory. It is through understanding God through His revelation in Scripture that the church and family discover their call.

While the theological nature of families have been explored, it is not to overrule the mission of the Church. If a family's purpose isn't to follow Jesus wholly, then there must be a push to review the realities that Scripture provides.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

³⁰ David H Jensen, "Adopted into the Family: Toward a Theology of Parenting," *Journal of Childhood and Religion* 1, no. 2 (2010): 11, <http://childhoodandreligion.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/JensenApril2010.pdf>.

³¹ Vivienne Mountain, "Four Links between Child Theology and Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 16, no. 3 (August 1, 2011): 268, accessed February 2, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364436X.2011.617729>.

Family cannot promote discipleship without the Church. Idolizing family at the cost of ministry cannot happen. However, individuals in a family share the common faith and recognize there is a sacrifice in following Jesus, which is a shared sacrifice.

Though there are theological implications calling for the necessity of a family becoming its own church in discipling parents and children, there was little to no information regarding a theological perspective on the church's role in family formation; rather there were many practical approaches that lacked a Biblical foundation. Theology can quickly transform to theory if Scripture is not utilized for understanding and application. It is through understanding God through His revelation in Scripture that the church and family discover their call. Through the discussion of theological implications through the hermeneutical approach to Scripture. This also needs to expand into the bigger picture of Jesus, who called all into relationship with God through his atonement. All that was theologically included must point to a Christocentric theology, tying Deuteronomy 6 and all parental theology into relationship with Jesus Christ.

Social Science: The Makeup of a Family

Data from the social sciences, history, and statistics of families support the theological parenting models and family faith formation. This also points to the support towards the church as setting where families develop and flourish both individually and holistically.

Systems Theory: The Emotional Makeup of a Family

First, what are the inner workings and relationship connections within a family? Understanding the interaction of families through emotional processes and relational networking is a mark commonly missed by the church. While spiritual matters remain a priority in the ministerial context, emotional processes shape relationships, affecting the atmosphere needed for fellowship and collaboration. Systems theory, which is also known as the Bowen Theory, is the

leading way of understanding relationships and individuality within a familial structure. The Bowen theory includes the understanding of emotional triangles, which is a three-person emotion configuration.³² This is the smallest facet of an emotional system within relationships, for it shows where tension arises and who contributes to the stress and happenings. This lessens the extraction of symptomatic happenings from underlying causes, bringing a bigger picture that solves the emotional crisis. These triangles influence relationships, and can be used in family ministry to understand family dynamics that may hinder or prevent at-home discipleship.

Systems Theory also depicts the need for each member to have strong differentiation of self. Differentiation dichotomizes the needs for individuality and togetherness.³³ Systems theory is not isolated from theological support. Thomasma portrays systems theory at work in Scripture through Philippians 4:2-9, where Paul states,

“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.”

Paul is showing a conflict in the congregation that is rooted in emotional processes, not merely spiritual clashing. This passage is not an isolated conflict between members in division, for the church is there to tackle emotional systems that connect everything and everyone. Thomasma states, “Like a family, if there is tension in one aspect of the family, there are causes and effects throughout the whole system or congregation.”³⁴ This can help explain the hinderance of parents under emotional and relational tension to feel equipped for at-home

³² James R David, “The Theology of Murray Bowen or the Marital Triangle,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 7, no. 4 (1979): 260, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000774409&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³³ Norman Thomasma, “Utilizing Natural Family Systems Theory to Foster Health in Congregations: Murray Bowen as Teacher of Congregations,” *Reformed Review* 58, no. 2 (2004): 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

discipleship practices. Communal atmospheres in the church cannot be whole if families themselves are inharmonious within. Here, he is also calling others to aid the quarrelers in the emotional tringle for a resolution. Systems theory involves everyone within the network, for a family is a system of emotional processes.

Rabbi Edwin Friedman, author of *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* applies Systems theory to practical ministry and uses it as a guide for parents to use their influence to ensure a homeostasis (emotional balance) in the home among all individual members. Understanding the individual and relationship systems within members of a family wholly contribute to reaching them where they are at. This is not for merely nuclear families, as it can help understand families with single parents or parents struggling to parent because of their prior relationships. Systems Theory is an understanding crucial to detect hurts in relationships, while also using the ideas of differentiation in individuals to bring healing and reconciliation. This is a system that is also useful for healing relationships within the congregational community, as all relationships come down to emotional happenings.

While configuring the emotional processes among families, it is also imperative to note the lack of influence in a child. This calls for leadership to rise from parents. Interdependency of children call for parents who understand a child's right to be heard, but also know the obligation to be clear in taking charge to lay the groundwork of values for the family.³⁵ Parenting cannot be passive in informing children the roles of influence and the understanding of their positions as the voice of their family's values. Because a child lack's influence, it is up to the parent to use their influence to shape the self-differentiation of their children so that they may have healthy, balanced relationships.

³⁵ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, The Guilford family therapy series (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 102.

This psychological phenomenon utilized in pastoral care of families cultivates faith formation in the realm of relational development. Applying this concept on a family shows how parenting impacts a child's image of God. It is not an implication of creating an idolization of a self-created God; it is a depiction of the perception children have of God as a result of their relationship with their earthly parent. As children lose attachment with parents with age and maturity, attachment theory states that God becomes that perfect substitute for attachment.³⁶ If there is a lack of attachment to a parental figure, that directly correlates to the lower chances of an attachment to God. This becomes even more important to realize that parents directly impact one's image of God. Parenting style matters, for "Images of God as a powerful just authority and/or as a nurturing, compassionate care-giver seem to relate to gender."³⁷ This confirms both parent's role in teaching the character of God through their parenting. It also shows that child development creates a perception on God. With this social study, students were given adjectives to describe a mother, father, and God. Attachment theory was at work in the results, for younger children saw God as a father and older children saw God as a mother.³⁸

Relational Understanding of Parent and Child

Data does not stop at the perception of parents in God, for relationship systems between parent and child have a spiritual impact. Because relationships are rooted in emotional processes, that involves similar transmissions of spiritual processes. This was proven in Donald Ploch and

³⁶ Jane R Dickie, "Parent-Child Relationships and Children's Images of God," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 1 (March 1997): 26, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001021910&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 31.

Donald Hasting's research study that measured the relationship between a person's church attendance and their parent's salience of religion. It was confirmed that a parent's church attendance had "small but statistically significant effect on respondent's church attendance. Salience of religion has much more powerful effect on respondent's church attendance."³⁹ With that knowledge, it is shown that faith, not attendance, influences a child. The church is the environment in which religious salience is most cultivated. It is creating an urgency for churches to develop parents into better influencers of their child's church attendance and faith formation.

Child Psychology and Spirituality

Not only is the theological understanding of parenting a contribution for a family, child theology will show that children grasp what biblical parenting aims to teach. As children's education and environment become more secular, there is a greater call for biblical parenting that fuels the spiritual knowledge of a child. Matthew 18:1-5 passage where Jesus calls children recipients of the Kingdom of God catalyzed the Child Theology Movement. Child theology links generations as it shows that both parent and child are equal partners in grasping the knowledge of God. Because kids are called by Jesus in Matthew 18, relational living in an intergenerational setting is a core truth.⁴⁰ The Church can foster such settings, as the call of communion is prominent.

With children's theology, it is also imperative to impress theological understanding as they're developing because it becomes a cognitive ability that processes real hermeneutical questions and bring Biblical metaphors and narratives into reality.⁴¹ Children have a spirituality

³⁹ Donald R. Ploch and Donald W. Hastings, "Effects of Parental Church Attendance, Current Family Status, and Religious Salience on Church Attendance," *Review of Religious Research* 39, no. 4 (1998): 309–320, accessed March 6, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3512441>.

⁴⁰ Mountain, "Four Links between Child Theology and Children's Spirituality," 265.

⁴¹ Zimmermann, "What Is Children's Theology?," 1.

that requires interaction with adults, who are also alongside them processing while also holding central positions.⁴² The typical setting of classroom environments secluded from the congregations does not support the relational needs of children. Children learn relationally, and the Gospels answer that need.

Children's theology becomes everyone's mission, for Biblical narrative calls for relationship. This is also a reciprocated relationship, as it reminds one of the adoption God has given to humanity, calling them His children. When conveyed as such, welcoming children into faith formation with the church is an act of hospitality and a reminder of God's gift of Jesus.⁴³ Children also have a spirituality existing in four realms: relationship, vulnerability, imagination, and emotional protection, and living in openness and hope.⁴⁴ The spirituality of children provide a new curiosity that is unjudgmental and open to receiving the mystery of God.

There is a gap in communication of social sciences in the church impacting its curriculum and culture for families to flourish relationships. This brings a call to understanding correlations between church and family relationship.

The Church: A Family Fuel

The Household of God

Given the data from the social sciences, an opportunity is naturally given by the church to partner with parents to foster a culture where families flourish in faith formation and relationship. Social science supports the reliance children have on those above them to contribute to their faith formation and relational development. The praxis of ministering to families is found

⁴² Ibid., 4.

⁴³ Jensen, "Adopted into the Family: Toward a Theology of Parenting," 11.

⁴⁴ Mountain, "Four Links between Child Theology and Children's Spirituality," 268.

within the church's aim for ridding programmatic silos and implementing intergenerational ministry.

Gaps were found within research that corroborates social science and praxis that apply a contemporary and relevant way to use the church culture to reaching families. Fundamental changes in family relationships, child development, and societal norm call for a fundamental change in providing faith formation that forms lives fully- head, heart and soul.⁴⁵ This means that there cannot be a singular approach to ministry; it must include every facet in one's life that is affected by one's home environment and relationships.

Family matters in the church realm, for it is a "training ground for ministry in the church."⁴⁶ Programmatic silos lessen when the church makes it a mission to integrate faith formation and relationship among families and generations. This is backed up through biblical qualifications of deacons and elders, for Scripture shows that relationship with the family is a prime indicator that qualifies one for leadership in the church. Churches need families that model the Gospel.

Families Need the Church

Systems theory recognized that emotional processes drive relationships, and it is reinforced in the church for parents. Families, especially those lead by young adults rearing children, find congregational interactions vital, especially for "social insurance" in the realm of child-rearing and access to community.⁴⁷ This is shown by Benjamin Gurrentz's longitudinal

⁴⁵ John Roberto and Katie Pfiffner, "Best Practices in Children's Faith Formation," *Lifelong Faith* (2007): 2, http://www.faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/best_practices_-_children_faith_formation.pdf.

⁴⁶ David Sunday, "Embracing the Biblical Tension Between Family and Church Ministry," *The Gospel Coalition*, n.d., accessed October 19, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/embracing-the-biblical-tension-between-family-and-church-ministry/>.

⁴⁷ Benjamin T. Gurrentz, "Family Formation and Close Social Ties Within Religious Congregations," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 79, no. 4 (August 2017): 1125, accessed January 14, 2020,

study of family formation and social ties in congregations, which depict the need for parents to thrive within the church. Benefits from a shared social network in the church include improved family outcomes, improvements in health, life satisfaction and a feeling of satisfied social support.⁴⁸ This study goes beyond attendance and affiliation, for it quantifies the impact of social ties that resonate outside of the church and into the home.

Gurrentz's study suggested that children are a contributor to parents' social networks in congregational life. This can start as early as conception, where a church perspective embraces pregnancy as a "miraculous life event" and pique a parent's interest to looking to the faith community for an understanding of their new "sacred role."⁴⁹ This goes to show that congregations embracing the parent and recognizing that anointing not only invites parents to understand their duty, but it also brings community as social relations start happening. His study brought up two implications for congregations. The first was that congregational programs and activities that lure married couples with children increase social ties in the congregation, found strongest in young adults.⁵⁰ As this is a 2017 study, this reliance of recent data shows the need for churches in becoming proactive in providing space for young parents to interact and receive social support and advice. The second implication was that churches need to stay socially relevant in adapting to the harsh reality that growing complex family structures are replacing the nuclear family structures.⁵¹ This means that hosting a space for families to interact must provide the congregation multiple ways for single parents, blended families, and broken families to receive a sense of community and support from the local church.

<https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=123996567&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1129.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1139.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1140.

Church Efforts for Parental Discipleship

As the primary spiritual authority, churches partner with the parents by using children and youth ministries to point children in forming their faith with their parents in an act of obedience and learning.⁵² This is also a call to understanding the connect with church vision and congregational reception. This begs to question if there is a disconnect between the intentionality of the church and efficacy of family faith formation. This calls for a church to provide space for children to encounter God in all areas of a service, from prayer to Sunday worship to experiences.⁵³ Faith formation directly involving children allows children to encounter God directly- for there are no programs that hinder the ability for a child to interact and respond to God the same way any adult could.

Surveys of church leaders depicted inadequate parental guidance, contributing to a weak faith formation among families today. In a Barna survey, it was shown that children's spiritual formation was primarily done through a church's Sunday school, vacation bible school, or services.⁵⁴ This means that outside of the church, the church has little to no measure ensuring families are kept accountable to giving parents a role in shaping a child's spiritual formation. While this survey showed over 90% of church leaders agreeing that parents are primarily responsible for their children's faith formation, only one in five clergy make it a priority to train parents.⁵⁵

Timothy Paul Jones articulates the call of ministering to families by using the church as a "tool to develop habits of life that will help families to embrace the sufficiency of Christ's work

⁵² Brattston, "Your Children's Education," 25.

⁵³ Roberto and Pfiffner, "Best Practices in Children's Faith Formation," 4.

⁵⁴ "Who Is Responsible for Children's Faith Formation?"

⁵⁵ Ibid.

in their lives at home and in church.”⁵⁶ Research that evaluated the church meeting the domestic needs of families were in lack. This means that there is an unsure way of proving the efficacy of ministering to families through anecdotal approaches given. This is a call to further look into the relationship between pastor and parents, particularly directors and pastors of a children’s ministry. There is also a gap in resources for children’s pastors hoping to foster effectiveness of child discipleship. Upon reviewing children’s ministry research, Dr. Robert Crosby found that resources were, “typically based on philosophical assertions, anecdotal evidence, or the personal experience of the author.”⁵⁷ This means that there is a lack of quantitative research evaluating the effectiveness of family discipleship through a children’s ministry.

Given that the theological grasp of a child is developing and maturing, a classroom styled way of religious education is not efficacious. When fostering a culture that fuels the family in faith, prayer should be imperative. The development of a prayerful attitude is approached fundamentally the same among youth and children.⁵⁸ It is primarily a way to develop individual spiritual formation while also connecting generations. Children’s ministry contributes to intergenerational relations in the sense that “what children are learning in the program is aligned with hands-on participation in congregational life and does not replace it.”⁵⁹ This also helps a child find their own way of communicating to God with the styles and attitude of prayer introduced to them. Therefore, intergenerational cultures provide the family support in apply

⁵⁶ Timothy Paul Jones, “Equipping the Generations: Developing Family Ministry Curriculum for Your Church,” *The Journal of Family Ministry* 2, no. 1 (2011): 68, accessed March 4, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001897959&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁵⁷ Leon Blanchette and Robert G III Crosby, “The Measurement and Evaluation of Children’s Ministry Praxis,” *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 2 (2016): 248, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI60V161031000862&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁵⁸ Lee Yates, “Strategies for Praying and Spiritual Formation with Children and Adolescents” (2018): 1.

⁵⁹ Roberto and Pfiffner, “Best Practices in Children’s Faith Formation,” 6.

Biblical education. Parents in intergenerational settings become equal discourse partners with the children, and both are taken seriously as they express and discuss their relationship and questions about God.⁶⁰ Having the church accommodate to an intergenerational model, while hosting ministries serving developmental needs of children and youth, can be done. This is by the church adapting a culture where liturgy, events, and outreaches accommodate generationally. In the church, it is not merely about God's communication, but humanity hosting this hospitality and communication towards others.⁶¹

The family, given the call of holistic discipleship as mentioned earlier, needs the church in order to be equipped in the home. The role of pastors, or with the ministerial anointing, have a role in equipping believers to do the work of ministry (Eph 4:12). The Old Testament is a prime example of reconciling families together for corporate worship and spiritual growth.⁶²

The church needs the family and the family needs the local church. Research indicates a strong triangular relationship between strong families, strong churches, and strong fathers. Research showed that when a church is intentional of maximizing intergenerational ministries and minimizing segmented programs, churches and congregations had the strongest interaction with each other.⁶³ This then helps pave the way for conducting research involving local church pastors. The interactions of church pastor and families will show the church's intentionality in creating a relational environment. The type of sermons preached will determine how the pastor depicts relationships at home and in the church. Finally, the voices of the congregation will

⁶⁰ Zimmermann, "What Is Children's Theology?," 4.

⁶¹ Gareth Crispin, "A Theology of Accommodation as a Resource for Integrating Youth and Children into Intergenerational Church," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 1 (2017): 17, accessed February 7, 2019, <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIBCB170424001817&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁶² Family Challenge, "Family-Challenge-Biblical-Foundation-Statement-2016-Edition.Pdf," 1.

⁶³ Wesley Ryan Steenburg, "Effective Practices for Training Parents in Family Discipleship: A Mixed Methods Study" (May 16, 2011): 48, accessed February 2, 2019, <https://repository.sbps.edu/handle/10392/2849>.

show if pastors are communicating the vision effectively. Ministering to families will thrive when the church partners with parents to equip the next generations while also empowering the adults to be the leaders of their children.

Conclusion

Upon reflection of the literature review, there are evident gaps and needs that will help corroborate a practical way of changing a church culture to fuel families. While there are many theological implications supporting the family as a primary “little church,” social sciences are not applied to theology as often. The corroboration of social science study and theological understanding will not be contradictory, for God’s hand is upon both. When taking both into account, there needs to be further research to see if there are any disconnects between the church’s vision and the family’s needs. However, it is evident that parents have a role in the faith formation of a family. The church has a duty to host a culture in which families flourish, with generations old and young interacting so that these relationships are not merely secluded from family to family; rather a family flourishes so that it may be a hand in the church, further fulfilling the church’s mission.

Methodology

The methodology for this thesis consisted of conducting an online survey through Google Forms for children's pastors and parents of their respective church. These churches were in various geographic regions across the United States. Each survey had a specific aim, thereby differentiating the questions.

Children's pastors were given an online questionnaire, that examined their theological and practical understanding of effective practices to equip families, specifically parents, in their congregation. These questions aimed to understand their theological framework for family ministry and their application of that Biblical call.

The second survey was directed towards parents in that pastor's church. This examined their reception of the efforts made by the children's pastor to equip the for at-home discipleship. Different churches were contacted, asking for participation from both pastors and parents.

This was conducted to compare a children's pastor of family ministry with the perception of parents in his/her church. Data would help determine if pastoral expectations met the parent's needs for family discipleship outside of the home, configuring the needs of families with children. This also helped grasp tangible ways children's pastors and their churches are equipping parent and families today. With the inclusion of parental input, it allowed for perspectives on the practice of family ministry in today's churches to determine how there can be a direction of progress towards success in reaching families to lead the spiritual formation in the home. It will also gain reasonings for the necessity of a family ministry in the church. The aim is to show that families need the church and the church needs families.

The children's pastors were contacted through email. They will be referenced by their church's regional location. Each survey contained a link specific to a regional church's

children's pastor and parents of that same church. The children's pastor was invited to participate in the pastoral survey and encouraged to invite parents in their church to participate in the parental survey. Attached was an email that could be forwarded to parents that had an invitation for them to click the link attached and participate in the survey.

The specific questions asked to parents and children's pastors are attached [see Appendix A] for reference. The questions were based on information gathered from the need for family discipleship and theological implications on parental influence, referenced in the Literature Review. They were created to get answers to the research questions introduced in this thesis, with the hopes of understanding where churches stand in partnering with families to extend the reach of discipleship. Questions from the parent and pastoral surveys were similar, hoping to see if there were any disconnects between church and family. Responses are coded and analyzed in the next chapter, with clarity on the perspectives stated.

Data Analysis

Church Backgrounds

Five pastors from four churches responded to the survey. There was intentionality in reaching out to pastors and churches from various geographic regions, including the Midwest, east, and southeast region of the United States. Each church was then coded into a letter, with the pastor corresponding to that same letter. Four churches were affiliated with the Assemblies of God denomination, with one associated with the Church of the Nazarene. The brief overview of the churches contacted are as such:

Name	Location	Affiliation	Parental Input
A1	Tampa Bay Region, main campus	Assemblies of God	0
A2	Tampa Bay Region, plant campus	Assemblies of God	2
B	Tampa Bay	Church of the Nazarene	0
C	Chicagoland Region	Assemblies of God	10
D	Central Minnesota	Assemblies of God	0

While the intention was for comparable insights between a children's pastor's perceptions and a parent's reception was the intention, there was limited participation by parents to fulfill the goal. Parents in churches that took part in this survey were contacted both through an email invitation and through the request to the children's pastors in their invitation to participate. Follow up was given to churches that had limited to no responses from families. Multiple factors

could be considered for lack of responses, such as timing of survey (November- December of 2019), inefficient communication, or through the decision to not take part. Each parental insight gave significant understanding to not only the pastor's efforts in equipping families, but also presented relevant perceptions on reception to the church partnership with families.

Children's Pastors: General Overview

Children's pastors were contacted through email, inviting them to take part in a survey about their role in ministering to families in their church. Five pastors agreed to take part in the survey, which consisted of mostly open-ended questions that focused on church cooperation, personal values for family, and practical approaches to reaching parents as a spiritual leader. Of the six pastors, only one pastor was a woman. While other female children's pastors were invited through an email invitation, one agreed to take part. For future studies, there should be a greater effort to ensure voices from both male and female pastors to ensure representation. However, in this study gender was not a consideration to the efficacy of family ministry to families, for the anointing of God is through the call. The table below shows their experience in full-time ministry and the length of their employment at the church they currently serve:

Name	Years in full-time ministry	Years at current Church
Pastor A1 (Man)	16	3
Pastor A2 (Woman)	1	1
Pastor B (Man)	2.5	2.5
Pastor C (Man)	17	13
Pastor D (Man)	9.5	7

This table shows diversity in experience, ranging from one pastor finishing her first year of ministry to another being in ministry for seventeen years. Church A has the opportunity to juxtapose two pastors in the same church, for they differentiate in ministerial vocation by 15 years, but are close in length of employment at the church they both work at. This can provide

insight into their perceptions on the church's efforts for holistic family discipleship. Pastor C has served thirteen years, which covers the span of a child going from kindergarten through high school. This experience shows not only the vocational longevity, but the generational diversity pastors have encountered. Pastor C has been able to see a generation of children birth through senior year of high school pass through in his church, which is a 12-year cycle.

Vocational training was asked to see if the pastors had received any formal training that would help equip them spiritually, theologically, and practically. Four pastors received training that involved ministerial aspects that would equip them to reach families. The education received among the pastors varied. Pastor B was the only pastor with a bachelor's degree in a discipline outside of a ministerial vocation. Pastor C possessed ministerial certification offered by the Assemblies of God through continual training courses. The others attained a bachelor's in a discipline related to ministerial education to children, youth, and/or families, which means they have educational experience relevant for the field that they are currently working in.

Perceptions on Family Discipleship

Two pastors (C and D) in the survey are parents. They all have personally walked their children through the salvation prayer, showing a capability in modeling a parent's willingness to lead a kids to Christ once they make that decision. They are also confident that they are equipped to teach kids biblical truths and leadership on a daily basis, which is encouraging to see their confidence in spiritual leadership inside the home. All of the parents are fathers, so the reinforcement of Jones' triangulation of a strong father, home, and church are evident in their children receiving salvation and the confidence in rearing children biblically.

Pastors were asked to define their Biblical foundation for family ministry. Following that, they were then asked how they equip parents to disciple children. These two questions were

consecutive to see if there is disparity in value and application. The table below shows their Biblical understanding on families that is paired with their ways to equip families. These answers given are merely rephrased for clarity in grammar and sentence structure.

Pastor	Biblical Foundation	Equipping the Parents
A1	As a result of God's grace through Jesus, we are equipped to share the Gospel and make disciples. This means passing on the faith to the next generation in the homes and through the church.	Resources for families to pass the faith in the home, vision casting, parent classes and involvement with kids ministry.
A2	God walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden. Children should be encouraged to walk with God daily. From that point on, the Bible shows support of families walking with God from Deuteronomy and on throughout families seen in Scripture.	Family devotionals, briefings on weekly teachings with focus on the next week's teaching (so parents can be the first voice in the topic), small group classes specifically aimed towards parents leading devotions.
B	Luke 15:4 Shows Jesus' intentionality in going after the one. Families are to mirror that example.	Children's pastor walks parents individually through their child's activities and interactions. Suggestions are given to encourage the child to go deeper in faith.
C	Mark 12:30-Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength.	The children's pastor encourages regular conversations around the values of loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. Baby dedications give parents a chance to create values for their family raising the child in the faith.
D	Deuteronomy 6:6-9 shows parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual development of their families, which should take place daily.	Parenting small groups and classes are a resource to equip their daily parenting. Conversations with parents help give them supplements to the lessons learned in Kids'

		ministry, including a chance for parents to be the first voice in covering Biblical content before it is brought up in church that following week.
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These answers will be used to understand the children's pastor's aims in ministering to families and how church leadership partners in their vision to reach parents in their ministries. Each church will be examined through the lens of a children's pastor. With this, it will be shown what pastors and churches are doing to partner with children and families for faith formation outside of the home.

Church A1

Church A is a church in the Tampa region. Pastor A1 has worked at Church A1, the main campus, for 3 years. While three years was spent at Church A1, this pastor has served in full time ministry for 16 years, showing longevity and passion for the call into full-time vocational ministry. Pastor A1 does not have any children, but the 16 years' experience in ministry is an indicator of relevance and expertise in perceiving practical ways of reaching children and families. His input shows how churches can equip families through a time of churchwide transition towards family ministry.

As the chart had indicated, this Pastor's biblical foundation for family ministry shares the importance of sharing the Gospel intergenerationally, making disciples and maturing in the faith. Not only is discipleship important, but Pastor A1 notes that the faith is diligently passed on to the next generation through the church and through spiritual formation in homes. Faith passed on generationally is a crucial aspect that is touched in Deuteronomy 6. He shows this being practically resourced to parents through classes, ministry service, and encouragement. This

approach is pedagogical in approach, for it seems that this type of communication is expressed across the whole of parents rather than one-on-one vision casting. What is notably different in A1's effort to equip parents is encouraging parental involvement in the children's ministry as volunteers. This not only engages parents to serve where their children are worshipping and receiving, but it also equips them as ministers of the Gospel that goes into the home and out in the world. Pastor A1 and B's foundation catalyze families from moving beyond the domestic realm into the Church and to the world as ministers of the Gospel.

Pastor A1's Biblical foundation for family ministry is evident throughout the survey, for he shows the need for generations to interact and seeks discipleship resources for parents. The needs pointed out by Pastor A1 for families in Church A are connections that aid the challenges in parent and opportunities for parents to connect with other parents for mutual encouragement. He notes that parents not only need connections, but seek advice in Bible recommendations for their kids, and next steps in their child's spiritual formation such as water baptism. For parents ambitious in their role as their children's spiritual influence, Pastor A1 provides resources. These include parent classes recommendations on books, and podcasts that can help in at-home discipleship. With this, not only is Pastor A1 providing his voice and insight into family discipleship, he is also providing supplements that may reach parents in different ways, appealing to their learning styles and ways of thinking.

Pastor A1's role in family ministry, though the analyses of data given, is a connector between spiritual formation in the home and the encouragement and resource giving opportunities presented in the church. As a church, Church A has sponsored a streaming service that contains Christian content like Bible studies, biblical shows, and practical discipleship tools that families can download onto their devices and watch together. Amidst the resources that are

available, the main avenue that brings family discipleship is through devotionals given at the end of a children's ministry service. For his location, parents in Church A1 are receiving weekly devotional resources that give parents and leaders of the home a primary voice in their children's lives.

In carrying this out of the children's ministry and into the whole of Church A, this is a process that they are transitioning into. Weekly on Sunday nights, families come together in a time of worship before children break out into their service. Church A's leadership is acknowledging the need for emphasizing family ministry Sunday mornings that carry out into the home. As a churchwide effort, Church A promotes holistic discipleship in the home through vision casting of the importance of spiritual formation at home and linking parents with resources towards that endeavor. Pastor A1 acknowledges the fact that not all programs are aligned to a vision of family ministry, there is a time of strategizing and alignment taking place to grow in connecting the ministries. While there is still alignment happening, the church is hosting an atmosphere for family interaction through family events, service opportunities for international service and fellowship to take place. This is noting a change in church thought and practice as programs are lessening its individuality and becoming unified within all its programs and all its generations.

While the vision casting is a unified effort of the church in the direction favoring families, there can be some areas of growth and opposition faced when casting vision to families. When discussing roadblocks to partnering with families, a key problem he found was in communication. Communication is difficult in a culture where families are busy and do not attend church regularly. Pastor A1 exemplified this a common occurrence with parents who are not regular church attenders and those who do not feel like they have the time available. While

lack of attendance in the church is one contributor for hindering ministry to happen in the home, there was also the note that parents are a part of a busy culture. This shows the need for not only discovering ways for parents to disciple their family the home, but raises a need for the church to heighten the influence a parent may have. With spiritual formation, fueling a family may start with simple communication of the importance of parents' spiritual influence. This can also be encouraged through mentored relationships, which was noted in the literature review to encourage parents to become engaged with their congregation. His aim for family discipleship is to see parents and grandparents raising their kids to know Jesus through every stage of life and partnering with the local church in passing on the legacy of faith.

Pastor A1 partners with parents as a connector between the Church and the home. When asked, he stated that the Church needs families because the Church is people, not a building. In the church, a community of believers encourage each other, build each other up, and strive towards discipleship. Church A is realigning their vision that not only gives parents and children the fuel for faith formation in the home but extends to intergenerational relations through small groups and hosting an atmosphere of interactions and encouragements. With his Biblical foundation and Church A's acknowledgement of the power in fueling families, it can be seen that this church is finding the path towards intergenerational relations and lessening programmatic silos through establishing a unified vision and creating space for that vision to unpack in all its ministries within.

Church A2

Church A2's children's pastor is a woman who has finished her first year as a children's pastor full-time. She pastors the children and families in Church A2, the plant campus of Church A. This is her first full-time vocational ministry position, but she has served at this church for the

past five years and worked part-time for Church A2 for a year. This gives insight to longevity in relationship with the children's ministry as a volunteer, with potential that transitioned her to leadership at this church. She does not have children, but has an undergraduate degree that specializes in children, youth, and family ministry. This shows knowledge and passion in the field that she ministers in.

Pastor A2 has a Biblical foundation that is found through the narrative of the Bible. She displays the account of God walking with Adam in the Garden of Eden, which is meant to encourage children and family to walk with God each and every day. Pastor A2 used Deuteronomy as a model for developing the notion of families relationally walking with God. This foundation aligns to the importance of a personal relationship with God through the imperative "hear," described in the literature review. For family discipleship, she envisions parents and guardians partnering together and with the church to pour into the next generation and learn from them while they are impressing onto them. In family discipleship, she wants all ages walking with God together, with the home a main avenue for worship, learning, and fellowship. This statement reflects the essence of Deuteronomy 6, which is not only for the families, but for intergenerational relationships. From this answer and the way, they are equipping this vision, it seems to be a yearning for children's pastors to see parents rise in influence and partner with them in family ministry.

This Biblical foundation is applied by giving parents space to lead in the home through devotionals. This is not only meant for parents to lead their children in walking with God; it is a resource for parents themselves to ruminate on their children's teaching, giving opportunities for a parent's walk with God to grow. One opportunity that will help a parent's leadership fuel spiritual formation is through a class that Church A will launch that focuses on leading children

in family devotions. Through classes and weekly briefings, Pastor A2 shows how her Biblical foundation of family shapes parents into becoming a model of Godly followers as they continue to walk with God themselves. In this approach, there is an ongoing process of the parent being fueled by the church so that it may fuel the home under their influence.

Like her colleague at Church A's main campus, Pastor A2 notes the realignment taking place that favors family ministry. She states the recognition of leadership in the emphasis of family ministry, so this has been a phase of dreaming and strategizing. One of the projects that is taking place to equip parents is creating pamphlets that promote discussion on topics such as baptism or salvation as a guide. Another is to continue using devotionals as the main avenue for discipleship in Church A2 just as Church A1 is doing with supplements like RightNow Media.

For Church A2 in specific, they host an atmosphere for families to interact in the cafe area where families can eat breakfast together and mingle with other parents. As it is a plant campus, Sunday night family worship time takes place only at Church A1. On special occasions, families come together at A2 for worship, fellowship, and discipleship. With Church A's launch of parenting class, there is a potential growth for families and intergenerational relationships to form within the church. As mentioned under Church A1, Church A is ensuring that programs in the church are aiming towards ministering to the family in the homes, bridging the church and home and changing the culture for spiritual formation in the family.

When carrying out the implementation of ministry to families, there are hinderances that prevent the vision. To her observations, families have multiple elements outside of children; there are parents, older siblings, grandparents, and other caregivers who are a part of a family's spiritual formation. Every person makes up a family, and that includes those that are single, adults who are not parents, siblings, and children. Understanding this recognizes the application

of family ministry onto the whole church, as it is intergenerational. Systems theory can show what individuals are included in the homeostatic nature of a home, so family ministry can apply to those within the same emotional triangles or a part of a domestic realm. The church's partnership with families includes of understanding the families they reach and their way of communication.

Without such understandings, this causes pushbacks from other ministry programs because people who do not understand the vision of family ministry will think that children's pastors are trying to "nudge their ministry" into everyone else's. As a hinderance to family ministry recognized by Pastor A2, this could be a tension faced by ministries where parents are not the main demographic of the programs. However, she noted that it needs to be communicated that families are not only applicable to children and parents, but to the household of God. The essence of family ministry can be faulty into letting the connotation only include children and parents, which then makes it less appealing to a church prioritizing this concept wholly. Pastor A2 bridged this programmatic concept by encouraging Church A's aim in all ministries having a part in contributing to an element related to family ministry present in its purpose.

When asked, she felt herself to be a primary spiritual influence for many of the kids in her ministry. This is because of parent's hesitation towards saying the wrong thing or lack of an answer to a tough question their child asks. When asked if she felt herself to be the primary spiritual teach for many of the kids in her ministry, she agreed due to the parent's fear of the competency for spiritual leadership in the home. She notes this happening among parents who set expectations too high for themselves as spiritual leaders and fear messing up their children's spiritual formation. Out of that is her recognition for families to be resourced and taught practical ways of discipling kids. Another need that rises out of this is for ministries outside of children's

ministry to recognize the importance of spiritual formation in the home, where the main teachings of God should come from.

All in all, it is seen through Pastor A2's input that church alignment towards all programs partnering with parent and families is crucial in both intergenerational relations and fueling spiritual discipleship in the home with parents and caregivers as spiritual leaders. She believes that the Church needs families because God made his Church to function in family units. To elaborate that, she wrote, "The Church is a family made up of smaller family units. If the young and old are not learning from each other, we miss out on what God is doing and what God has done." As Church A progresses towards aligning its purpose to equip families, Pastor A2 is providing resources that are similar to Pastor A1's and seek to equip confidence in parents to understand their role as a primary voice in the home.

Church A2 Parental Input

Two parents took part in the survey to represent voices from Church A2. One was a father and the other was a mother. Both were married, volunteers in children's ministry, and were saved before their children were born. With a longevity of salvation and commitment to the church in serving the next generation, these parents seemed to have the capability to serve their children as spiritual influences outside of the church.

One parent has walked through their child in the salvation prayer and one has not, but their child was the one to tell them of his/her choice to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. Both felt well equipped and confident in leading their home spiritually. When asked for their children's biggest influence on spiritual formation, both recognized themselves and their spouse, which exemplifies their commitment to leading their homes in spiritual formation. In addition, they attributed their faith to shaping the spiritual atmosphere in the home by leadership in family devotions and discussing the Biblical narrative's testimony in their lives. This shows healthy communication with their children over spiritual matters, which is showing two families engaged in spiritual discipleship, meeting an aim that Pastor A2 wanted families to achieve.

As a spiritual leader in the home, both parents agreed that they have been told that they are primarily responsible for the spiritual care of their child. One parent displays Pastor A2 equipping their leadership through homework with scripture memory and offering challenges that they can work on with their children. The other parent feels equipped to lead their home spiritually by being given Bible verses to help children memorize and with discussion prompts in the weekly devotionals. Their input shows the efficacy of at-home devotionals that serve as the primary avenue for home discipleship in Church A.

When asked what areas they were needed to be resourced as the primary spiritual influence, one said that there were no other areas they needed to be equipped. Their lack of needs may either show a confidence in family discipleship through the resources already given or shows that this parent may not know areas of growth in discipleship at home. However, when asked about hinderances in promoting a culture of family worship at home, this parent acknowledged that busy schedules bring distractions to discipleship and worship at home. This was a hinderance noted by Pastor A1, which is something that Church A is hoping to realign vision in so that families may prioritize at-home discipleship. This parent, when asked about topics they are comfortable asking their children's pastor for advice in, trust Pastor A2 with providing advice for practical ways to equip their family and answering questions regarding theology and knowing their biblical role as a parent. They agree that their church hosts an atmosphere where they can interact and build relationships with other families, which shows Church A's effort for fellowship taking place. This parent ended the survey saying they need the Church for community, which is an aim of Church A to provide churchwide.

The other parent wants resources that gives him diligence in reading the Bible and seeing the necessity for a strong prayer life. Parental classes that launch soon in Church A could be an avenue for this parent to grow in Biblical literacy and in spiritual formation as he continues to lead his family. This same parent also stated that they do not have any hinderances from promoting a culture of family worship at home. In his home, he states that his wife and family openly talk about their walk with God, with Bible studies and prayer taken place as a family unit together. He feels comfortable with theology related questions and practical ways to equip kids spiritually. While he did not mark the options indicating advice in child rearing questions and his role as a parent, being in fellowship with other families and referencing to the take home

devotionals is a resource that can equip his parental influence when examining contributors to spiritual formation of children.

With input from two parents, it shows that Church A's partnership with families come through the intentional discipleship efforts found in the take home devotionals through the children's ministry. Both parents have displayed Pastor A2 to be a resource in equipping faith formation in the home. This is because resources given are meant for all of the family at home, which gives each individual in the family unit a chance to reflect and interact with the Bible. As Church A realigns its purposes with ministry, it can promote intergenerational relations through small group classes, space for ministries to interact, and in encouraging parents of many walks to be a part of the children's ministry.

Church B

Church B is located in the Tampa Bay area, with Pastor B serving for two years as the children's pastor. His vocational training is not in a field of ministry, but based in responses given, it is shown that his church has brought emphasis on family ministry, which directs the heart of his children's ministry.

For his foundation in family ministry, he references Luke 15:4 with the mindset of intentionally going after the one. Like Pastor A1's biblical backup for family ministry, Pastor B's foundation for family ministry did not explicitly show the role of parents or family households in discipleship. However, it recalls the mission of the church, which is a mission that can be fueled through families. This is the heart of family ministry, for families fuel the church and the church fuels families with the intention of reaching the one. Pastor A1 and B's foundation catalyze families from moving beyond the domestic realm into the Church and to the world as ministers of the Gospel.

In partnering with parents to disciple his children, Pastor B walks parents one-on-one with their child's progress in church and how volunteers and leadership partner with the family. With that is not necessarily teaching moments, but suggestions on discipling their children at home. He believes that all programs are connected to a vision pertaining to family ministry, for he states that they church holistically agrees in partnering with the next generation to be world changers. To equip parents in the spiritual leadership in their home, there are monthly review sheets that parents can refer to that recap what their children are learning about. Weekly, children are given challenge cards that spark interaction with parents and require a partnership in completing challenges that promote holistic discipleship. Family devotions accompany these challenges that are presented as handouts and media teachings online. In addition to weekly resources, for children who want to take the next step and get baptized, there are baptism packets parents can use to lead their child in that process.

With the resources listed, it is seen that Pastor B brings tangible methods for parents to follow so that they may walk in spiritual formation with their child. Not only are these resources a recap of a child's experience on a Sunday morning, they challenge the child and family to look to fellowship for a common goal. This is a practical way of getting parents of all walks a takeaway to bring church happenings to home. When asked if he felt himself to be the primary spiritual teacher for many of the kids in his ministry, he was the only one out of the six pastors to disagree. He acknowledged his influence, but recognized the partnership between his volunteers and parents, whose relationship brought influence on children. In that answer, it seems that in Church B, children are seeing partnerships happen between volunteers and parents, seeing a collaboration of church and family in that context. Pastor B provides insight that may lead into further unpacking ways to use volunteers to bridge families and church. Like social sciences in

the literature review suggested, communal engagement that parents found brought their sense of belonging and longevity in church attendance.

In continuing to find needs of families in Church B, he recognized a need for emphasis on families with individuals who have special needs. For families in his church, Pastor B wants to provide a place that is well equipped for the family to worship together while serving the needs of individuals in that family. In recognizing that need and seeking a solution, it is a reflection on his intention of going after the one. This is seen because he seeks to find a place that does not isolate to need of an individual but provides a solution that maintains the unity of a family for worship. Though Pastor B has resources provided through the avenue of children's ministry, Church B continues the promotion of holistic discipleship by reaching families through their space and events.

As part of their agreement to host an atmosphere for families to flourish, there are spaces designated in the church to promote intergenerational interactions like cafes and sitting areas that attract multiple families in a communal setting. Not only are there settings that have the space for families to interact, the church also has an aim in encouraging families to join small groups. In small groups, this promotes church community in an intimate setting with people from different walks of faith. On Sunday mornings, families do not come together for a time of worship unless there were special occasions. However, the mention of small groups gives parents to find a small group that either equips them as spiritual leaders or fuels the family wholly. This gives the family options in choosing what is the path that brings spiritual formation in their home.

With what is set in place now, there are problems that occur in Church B that hinders the efficacy of executing spiritual formation in the home. Pastor B recognizes the problem of miscommunication that is happening with getting parents on board for family ministry. Pastor B

expressed a problem in parental ignorance of symptomatic behaviors of children, which can in turn be a misunderstanding of emotional processes in the home that cause a lack of balance. Without the homeostasis, the ground for spiritual formation is more difficult to achieve. With communication to parents on their role as a spiritual influence, it should be clarified so that they see the role of a children's pastor as a resource to families to thrive outside of church, thus implementing household discipleship. Communication in the church regarding the understanding of families in the domestic realm matters for familial relations inside the church.

Church B is unified in their emphasis on family ministry, with Pastor B not indicating any programmatic silos, for families are seen as a unit wholly. While the children's pastor has individual partnership with parents, the church supports families in providing avenues for encouragement, teaching, and fueling family discipleship. This church partners with families by being hospitable to them, creating events, small groups, and spaces that get the family together in devotions, interactions, and becoming a part of the church community. They are establishing families to become the church through devotionals, small groups for fellowship, and challenging children and parents in spiritual formation through weekly challenges. Church B is also trying to make their church a family through relationships of volunteers and parents influencing children and hosting events that are family focused. Their avenues of equipping parents come through the children's ministry, for Pastor B's role is displayed through practically giving parents ways to bring the faith to the home and influence their children through such resources. Through Pastor B's insight, there is a call to go after individuals in families to equip them to be a part of holistic family discipleship.

Church C

Pastor C has been a children's pastor at Church C for thirteen years. He has been in full time ministry for seventeen years, with Berean Certification in ministry. He has three children, all who had walked through the salvation prayer. Pastors C references Mark 12:30, known as the Greatest Commandment as his Biblical backup for family ministry. This is interesting, as it is the same concept that is in the imperative of Deuteronomy 6, which points loving God holistically. Pastor C shows that the greatest commandment holds centrality in establishing a relationship with God and others, for these all stem from the values of loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. This pastor uses this holistic value of loving God and others to equip parents as spiritual influence by applying his foundation comes in encouraging parents to talk about the values found in Mark 12:30. With that, he views family ministry to be a practical and relevant way for parents to be encouraged and equipped in the spiritual formation of families by practicing holistic love.

His aim in family discipleship is to teach every individual in the family how to properly seek out and honor God in order to have a collective conversation as a family or home unit. His understanding of teaching every individual in the family about honoring God and conversing about it brings differentiation, which brings a healthy balance according to systems theory. In emotional relationships, gaining a sense of self, especially in the faith realm, and discussing it with others in that relational atmosphere is a healthy way to influence and be inspired spiritually and emotionally. In elaborating this concept, he shows the conversation applying to a wider understanding of family to be more than relatives. For some family units, he sees single parents operating in a unit; for others it can be young adults whose roommates make up a family unit.

To give parents resources for parents to lead in the home, Pastor C has writings in progress for parents that revolve around the values of Mark 12:30. Another media he is using to reach parents, volunteers, and even children are through a series of podcasts that he is launching this coming year that will cover various topics. Besides from that, he states that there are sadly not any other resources provided that equip families in leading families in spiritual formation.

With the incoming writings and podcasts, it can fill the needs of families that he sees displayed. In Church C, he recognizes the need for family counseling due to divorce, Biblical guidance through topics like sexual identity, and self-worth, and walking families through emotional issues such as anger and isolation. With some families communicating such needs, he indicates that homes without spiritual pursuit or discipleship give him the impression that many of the kids in Church C's children's ministry look to him as a primary spiritual teacher. His common way to equip parents are to reach out to those seeking common advice regarding emotional processes, behavioral happenings, and spiritual steps like baptism.

Though he is in the progress of bringing resources from the church into the home, Church C does not contain a cohesive vision among its programs that pertain to family ministry. Pastor C explains the reason behind disconnect in ministry programs being the incohesive vision for the church wholly. This is an example of a programmatic structured church, where multiple ministries are available for serving various demographics of those attending the church. To build community, small groups are an avenue that Church C has to host a space for families to interact with each other. There are also communal spaces such as an in-church coffee and sandwich shop that provides a communal space for families to interact before and after church services. A tension that hinders implementation of family ministry holistically comes down to the alignment of all programs in the church. Pastor C recognizes the lack of support for implementing cohesive

visions such as family ministry because many work for the benefit and needs of their respective ministry. However, there are special occasions that involve all ministry programs to take part in something related to family discipleship. These programs can be a key towards understanding the importance of holistic family discipleship, seeing the fruit of events that bring familial interactions and fellowship.

Church C as aims in its events towards family fellowship and hosts a space for them to engage in small groups, get encouraged as parents, and learn how Mark 12:30 catalyzes the call to faith formation from the individual to the family. In this stream, the family then applies this Biblical foundation to the church, where holistic loving is given and received through the families of Church C. with parental input, it can be seen that there are ways not noted by pastor C in which parents received as resources to partner with the church in spiritual formation in the home. When asked why the Church needs families, Pastor C emphasized the functioning of society falling into family groupings. With that, the Church has to be the place to model healthy relationships. With family fellowship at home, they bring wholeness and lead the way for communal grouping that the church aims to achieve on a greater scale.

Parental Input: Church C

With the emailed invitation for parents to take part in a survey, 10 parents from Church C agreed to take part in this survey, which was a greater response rate than the other churches. While their opinions do not reflect the general perception of Church C's children's ministry, it does provide insight on their reception of their partnership with the church.

The makeup of the parents who responded to the survey helped bring a variety of voices from both mothers and fathers who were in different stages of child rearing. These parents

represented twenty-two kids in Church C's children's ministry. Seven of the ten were mothers, and the rest were fathers. No caregivers, grandparents, or guardians took part in this survey.

Eight out of ten of these parents are married.

Parents in this survey were all Christian and volunteers at Church C with only two parents serving in a capacity outside of children's ministry. Nine out of the ten were saved before their children were born. One was saved after their child was born, but before their child received salvation. This reflects a demographic of saved parents who not only serve the church, but are invested in their children's spiritual formation based on their intention to serve the church and through their salvation taking place before their child was born. They also showed their role as a spiritual leader through their understanding of their child's salvation. Eight parents personally walked their child through the salvation prayer, which indicates their capability to disciple and evangelize to their children. Two have not, but they indicate that they know that their child received the salvation prayer, which still shows the communication of spiritual walks happening in the home.

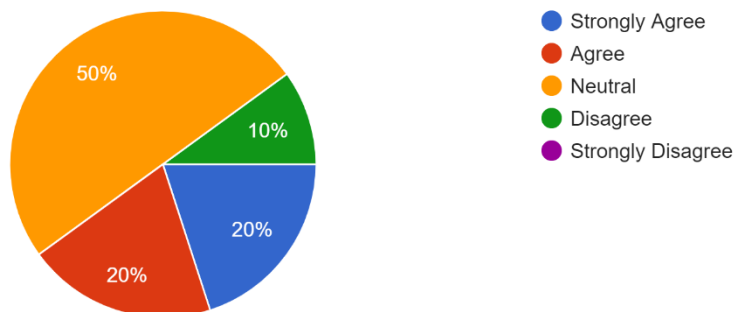
When asked how who had the biggest influence on their children's walk with Jesus, eight out of ten parents said that they were their children's biggest influence. This is encouraging, for parents at Church C seem to practice a culture of spiritual formation in the home through their leadership exemplifying their faith. Those that did not answer themselves as spiritual influence signified that either their Sunday teachers, their Christian school, or their church is their child's biggest influence. This showed how Church C's intention in serving the next generation impressed parents and saw their aims in influencing their families through their children.

When asked about perception on being the primary spiritual influence of kids in his ministry, Pastor C felt that he was for children who were from unique homes of those with parents not

having a spiritual pursuit nor looking to discipleship. It seems that at Church C, parents who are involved in children's ministry are modeling at-home discipleship and have a spiritual pursuit in these situations. This can be a growth point to find how to reach parents who have not been matured in the faith nor are as involved in the church.

To understand the parent's relationship with the children's pastor, it brings good insight into the relational aspect of Pastor C's connection to parents directly, especially as the majority of these parents volunteer in children's ministry. While large scale churches like Church C may not give some children's pastors a closer relationship with parents, it was asked to determine if parents saw a relationship with a secondary voice in their children's spiritual lives. The table records their responses.

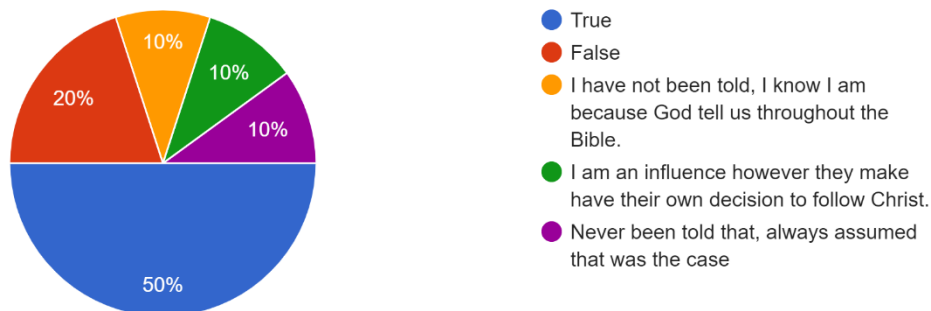
I have a strong personal relationship with my Children's Pastor
10 responses



Only one parent did not agree to having a strong personal relationship with their children's pastor. Half were on a neutral stance, which may be due to the size of the church or greater relationships built with the staff who are also hands on in the children's ministry. Pastor C has been in this church for thirteen years and the graph displays a credibility in being relational with parents, shown by a lack of those denying a relationship with him.

In regard to understanding their role as a spiritual influence, below is a chart that indicates their responses.

I have been told I am primarily responsible for the spiritual care of my child
10 responses



This indicated that parents, a majority whom are serving in children's ministry, had mixed responses on communication of their role as a spiritual influence. While it may not necessarily be communicated directly, it seems that half of the parents felt that they have been told. The rest that know their role as spiritual influence was because of their Biblical understanding or assumption. This question can be relevant for Church C to seek ways to communicate their anointed position onto parents, fueling the call for spiritual formation and partnering with parents.

In developing their perception on resources given by the children's pastor, they were asked how their children's pastor has equipped them as primary spiritual leaders. Below are the answers, rephrased for clarity:

- Parent 1: His influence has been very indirect, what we have obtained have been through sermons given to the children that I see as I serve in the kid's ministry. Being in kid's ministry has given me some knowledge that helped me grow in my spiritual life and leadership.
- Parent 2: N/A

- Parent 3: I have not received any information from their pastor.
- Parent 4: He has taught us how to discipline our time with God
- Parent 5: N/A
- Parent 6: The pastors are amazing, and they have given so many teaching tools.
- Parent 7: There are fundamentals that we have been given to lead our home.
- Parent 8: The Children's pastor teaches my children Scriptures.
- Parent 9: He is an encourager and compassionate for us.
- Parent 10: Not sure that I have been.

Through their input, it can be shown that Pastor C has resources available to parents, such as words of encouragement and tools for family discipleship, but it may not be tangible for other parents to grasp. This could be solved through clarified communication and by understanding greater needs of the parents. Parent 1 noted that he has an indirect influence, so vision casting may communicate through the staff or volunteers so that the essence of his hope for families is carried out in the ministry he oversees. With other voices communicating that vision, parents are indirectly resourced through staff partnering with them directly. In discovering what resources are needed for parents, they were given space to communicate them.

When asked how the church can better equip parents as spiritual leaders, parents gave lots of answers that fell under theology, Biblical understanding, and learning how to speak to their children on different topics. The answers that fell under theology were showing a desire to understand spiritual discipleship, praying as a family, and engaging in topics that children were learning on Sunday mornings. One parent wanted to know what was taught at church to understand spiritual truths and encourage their children as a spiritual champion. Looking at different methods of equipping parents, providing resources and communication to parents on their anointed position as a spiritual leader can give them confidence that their prayer life and salience of faith (as described in the literature review) is a theological model that gives kids a

foundation to build faith upon. Theology for parents could be communicated through tangible ways of praying and understanding the acts of domestic discipleship.

With the answers that fell under wanting Biblical understanding, it involved both understanding the Word of God and applying it in the home. This was shown through a parent wanting to exemplify Jesus' leadership in the home. Two parents wanted to be equipped in having a Bible study at home and applying the Word of God. This could be through handouts that have devotional cues, which was a way that Pastor A2 equips their parents. This gives parents a start in knowing what was taught in Scripture while also giving them the platform to teach their kids.

Parents wanted topical information that would equip them as spiritual influences. This is a need evidently recognized by Pastor C as he has noted his preparation in podcasts over relevant topics that reach parents. One parent wanted services and resources on different topics related to child-rearing in different stages of their child's life. Another wanted to understand how to speak to their child based on their age and where they are at spiritually. The church holistically can partner in services by reaching parents where they are at and having intergenerational relations of parents in different stages interact and fellowship so that they may be mutually encouraged in the faith.

While parents listed areas they needed to be equipped in, these all do not necessarily fall onto the sole responsibility of a children's pastor. Theology, Biblical truth, and topical advice can be applied in the church throughout different programs, services, and leadership that partners with parents in championing for their success as spiritual leaders of the home. Church C has been seen to host family discipleship according to parents. They find interactive sermons with the family responding together, car ride and coloring page recaps, and Wednesday and Sunday

services to contribute to their family discipleship in the home. One parent noted that the family devotionals around Christmas brought the church to their home. Nine out of ten parents then proceeded to agree that their church hosts an atmosphere for parents to interact and build relationships with other families.

Two parents did not feel that Church C has hosted a place for family discipleship. One answered saying that they do not feel resourced in bringing the church to their home. Another elaborated, stating there was a lack of participation as a family for spiritual formation. A lot of the times this parent feels that events that bring spiritual formation is geared towards individuals, lacking space for families to come together as one and seek God's direction for their homes. This could be a result of programmatic silos, where individuals in the family look to their ministry for fueling their faith and a lack of cohesive fellowship among generations are noted. However, there are also happenings in the home that hinders parents from promoting a culture of family worship. Six parents acknowledged a lack of time commitment and busy schedules contributing to lacking faith formation in the home. One parent wasn't sure where to start with the family or how to communicate a culture of family worship with their kids. The rest of the parents acknowledged that they are intentional on making their own efforts to lead their children spiritually.

When asked why they need the Church, it was almost unanimous that families needed the church for community and guidance. One parent wrote,

“We strongly believe that we as individuals are the church, we gather together with other brothers and sisters to live in community, help each other to grow deeper in the Word of God, to put our talents and resources to the service of the body, and together reach more souls for Christ. We had been called to leave in community, love each other and serve God.”

Upon that reflection, it is aligned with the mutual need that parents displayed in this survey. Church is needed by families for mutual encouragement, support, and growth. They note these needs, but it is also key missions of the Church. In partnering with families in spiritual formation of children and family, community must be established with a holistic vision and a mirror of the intergenerational and familial model that is displayed in Deuteronomy 6. Families need the church for partnership in the home, so that both individuals and home units wholly have the resources to grow and share the Gospel. Church C has parents wanting community and encouragement over their role as spiritual influences in their home.

Church D

Pastor D has spent the majority of his experience in full-time ministry at Church D, stating his tenure of seven years and his experience in full-time ministry for ten years. Pastor D used Deuteronomy (specifically, chapter 6) to establish parents as primary influence over the spiritual discipleship that happens in the home. This reinforces the Biblical anointing that parents have in their purposeful position and reflects on the daily discipleship of children that they must establish upon reflection of the passage. He is a parent of two, both whom he has walked through the salvation prayer. He indicated that he feels equipped to disciple his children daily, indicating that his parental leadership is one that mirrors his Biblical foundation for family ministry.

Deuteronomy 6 can serve as a practical guide for pastors to understand the need for equipping spiritual leadership in parents, for this pastor exemplified such a notion. Pastor D heavily reinforces this Biblical foundation by equipping parents through classes and consistent conversations. This pastor also practically gives parents a way to lead by allowing them to become the first voice in their children's life to cover Biblical truths that will be reinforced in church. To cultivate the sense of duty in parental responsibility for their family's spiritual

development, Church D offers parenting and small group classes to equip parents. To him, family discipleship is parents leveraging everyday events to point to who God is and how He is at work in their lives. In family discipleship, making prayer and God conversations becomes a regular occurrence. This emphasizes the imperative, “hear,” that showed a relational understanding of God as depicted in the literature review.

For parents wanting to lead their family spiritually, it seems that Pastor D gives parents resources that go beyond their direct influence, which can expose them to a variety of other voices that speak into a parent’s life. It also allows parents to grasp concepts that may be taught differently through the influence of other mediums of communication. There is a church library with readily available resources, but parents do not know what is available unless they ask. A commonality in responses of children’s pastor is the lack of parent knowledge of resources they have available. While some seem readily available, placements like a church library might hide the efforts of family ministry the resources of other churchwide topics.

Pastor D believed that the majority of church programs connected to families. Pastor D’s senior pastor uses the mantra, “It’s easier to build a kid than to fix an adult,” to drive the church budget favoring children and youth ministries. Church D believes that this budget change will carry out a family ministry vision. This is relatable to Church A, where the vision is present and the execution of that vision is in the works. While it is a process with churches A and D to realign vision favoring family ministry, exemplifies churches across regions recognizing the need for youth and children’s ministries to drive the family ministry to existence.

In understanding the hindrances that occur, Pastor D noted that there is a lack of developed strategy and preexisting culture takes time to change so that parents understand their responsibility. Pastor D believes that while there is a vision for all programs to contribute to the

family, tangible strategies to accompany the family wholly are not present yet. In this transition, he notes that his Wednesday night audience has families disengaged, which makes him feel like a primary spiritual teacher of many kids that service. On Sunday mornings, he sees families more likely to have parents who understand their role in leading their children's' spiritual growth, but do not always rise to the responsibility. This flowed into his perception that the needs of families are coaches and cheerleaders in the realm of discipling their kids and partnering with the church for support.

Church D uses the children's ministry as the avenue to reach families. There are not many outside resources not related to their kid's ministry that is given to parents and families. As there is a transition towards family ministry, Church D hopes to launch small groups geared towards families. The church itself hosts facilities conducive for families to hangout before and after services. These facilities are also open during the week for families to come and play, opening interactions with church staff and other families. Pastor D's role in family ministry is strategizing ways to coach parents to acknowledging their role as spiritual influence and bringing it home. Pastor D believes that the Church needs families because the church cannot thrive without a familial atmosphere. In becoming less programmatic, aiming to the family as a whole gives space for family units to become equipped as little churches, expanding the Gospel outside a church building. While resources are coming into existence to encourage parents, Church D is in the process of partnering with parents through their offering of space for families and through realigning vision that favors pouring into children, youth, and family.

Conclusion of Analysis

There are multiple methods churches are taking to lessen programmatic silos, and partner with parents in the spiritual formation of children and family. One way that corroborates intergenerational relations and fuels families are through small groups. This not only creates a community for other families to learn, but parents are in a community of other families that allow interaction within the church community. This is about communicating the goal of at-home discipleship, which is to go beyond their influence at church and encourage it to continue in the home

Another method allows parental engagement through material that reviews what the child learned at church. This can be through a handout or one-on-one conversations that they may reinforce in the home. The review of the teaching that Sunday through a handout or conversation with parents gives parents a chance to focus on a lesson to reinforce. The preparation for next week's teaching that other pastors may use offers parents a primary voice in their children's lives as they introduce the teaching on their accord. This not only equips parents as leaders, but gives them a duty to imprint what they learned or were given onto their children in multiple facets, depending on the style of the parent. This method is a way of pointing back to Deuteronomy 6, which gives all a reminder to "hear" the Lord through relationship and conversation.

A third way that pastors are equipping parents is through devotions. This is an aim that goes beyond a week-to-week basis as influence rather than information is the output of this method. Here, parents are given the chance to relate with their child and instill values of who God is and can share their relationship with God as a testimony. This is a way for families to interact with God's word and respond as a family. This carries out the need for spiritual formation of families outside of Sunday services and into the domestic realm. Devotions show a

church's intention on giving parents a tangible way of leading their home through guided resources. This is an aid that would be most universal for parents both new in the faith and in a continuous growth of their faith.

Giving parents practical ways to lead the home is imperative in not only lessening the programmatic structure of ministry, but it also gives parents a sense of duty in becoming a leader shaping their child's faith. Pastors in this survey gave practical ways that not only align to Deuteronomy 6's enjoin; they grow the parent in their spiritual walk with the Lord so that it may be passed on generationally. Their methods of equipping families are not dependent on a parent's spiritual maturity, for there are classes available and resources that are configured for them. Rather, it seems that a parent's willingness to receive such resources is what creates the holistic nature of families.

The methods of equipping families that pastors provided is for all parents in general. Pastors are aiding parents by giving them resources for specific topics. This gives parents an ability to readily handle common theological and child-rearing topics. Churches are showing growth in family ministry, which looks promising for the direction towards lessening silos and integrating families together in the home and at church. When asked, "What does family discipleship look like to you?" pastors brought a plethora of answers, located in Appendix B. The common theme of all the answers was mentorship from parents outside of a service onto their children. An additional commonality among all pastors is not only the desire to see generations reconciled and families in spiritual formation outside the church, but a vision for consistency of such discipleships. Each pastor articulated either the daily walk with God

individually and as a family or emphasized family discipleship in every stage of a child's life. Spiritual formation is continuous, and while childhood comes in phases, the discipleship of family is ever constant in their home.

Children's pastors make it clear the importance of family discipleship, which goes out beyond the influence of parents and invites grandparents, relatives, and individuals in many family formations to take part in seeking spiritual formation in the home. Though this is strong with the children's pastor and into the way they reach families, the question that then develops concerns the church as a whole's efforts in partnering with families.

For the church to partner with parents in bringing family ministry from the church to the home, these responses shown have noted major needs on the church's part. Partnering with families takes effective communication, working through time constraints, and reaching parents where they are at.

Conclusion

Family ministry seeks to mirror the intergenerational call of personally knowing God and finding spiritual direction with communal influence, so everyone in the congregation has a role in that call to hear and teach the Word. For the church to partner with parents in bringing family ministry from the church to the home, this thesis noted major needs on the church's part to connect with parents and align programs holistically. Partnering with families takes effective communication, working through time constraints, and reaching parents where they are at.

In American households, busyness is almost a norm in the life of both children and family. However, in this tension, supplements such as parental involvement on a Sunday morning as volunteers, or podcasts accessible on morning commutes can show that faith formation is not addition, but integration. Instead of adding another facet to the family life, this should be lessened by seeking ways to integrate activities that engage the family wholly. This bridges Sunday service learnings onto the rest of the week. However, not only is busyness about time management skills, but prioritization. Communication once again becomes a necessity so that children's pastors are not serving a primary role as a spiritual champion for children, but a resource for parents to fuel the faith in their children. This thesis found aims toward alignment to the theological call of a family coming to its needed place, an encouragement for the Church and families.

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Appendix A; Survey Questions for Children's Pastors

1. I am a
 - a. Man
 - b. Woman
2. How long have you been in full-time ministry?
3. How long have you worked at this church?
4. What vocational training have you received?
5. Do you have children? If so, how many?
6. Have you walked your child through the salvation prayer?
7. How well do you feel equipped to disciple your children (Scale of 1-6)
8. What Biblical foundation shapes your view on family ministry?
9. How do you equip parents to disciple children?
10. Are all programs in the church connected to a vision pertaining to family ministry?
11. Why or why not?
12. How does your church host an atmosphere for families to interact with each other?
13. How does your church promote holistic discipleship in the home?
14. What problems occur when implementing a family ministry?
15. What does family discipleship look like to you?
16. How often are families together for a time of worship, fellowship and discipleship on a Sunday morning?
17. Do you feel yourself to be the primary spiritual teacher for many of the kids in your ministry? Why or why not?
18. What are needs of families in your ministry today?
19. What resources do you have available for parents/ caregivers wanting to lead families spiritually?
20. What advice do parents commonly seek advice in?
21. Why does the church need families?

Appendix B: What Does Family Discipleship Look Like to You?

- Pastor A1: “Family discipleship is parents and guardians partnering together and with the church to pour into the next generation and learn from them as we teach them. It is all ages walking with God together, with the home as the main avenue for worship, learning, and fellowship.”
- Pastor A2: “Parents and grandparents raising their kids to know Jesus through every stage of life, and partnering with the local church to pass on a legacy of faith to the next generation.”
- Pastor B: “To me, this means that families are not only attending church weekly, but both parents/grandparents are working together to pour into their children and share the love of Christ to them.”
- Pastor C: “Teaching each individual in the family how to properly seek out and honor God in order to have a collective conversation as a family or home unit. Not all family should be discussed as relatives. We must at some point look at what it means for single parents or even young adults with roommates.”
- Pastor D: “Parents who leverage everyday events to point to who God is and how He is at work in our lives. Making prayer and God conversations a regular occurrence.”