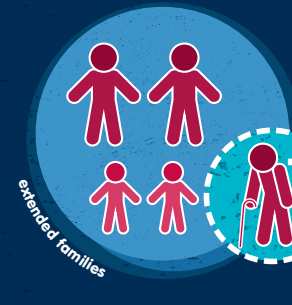


We are Family

The Changing Face of Family Ministry

FULL REPORT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS



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Commissioned by



Consultative Group on Ministry among Children
A network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

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Merida Associates is an independent research consultancy, unaligned to any Christian church denomination or linked organisation.

1. Introduction

This report has been commissioned by CGMC (Consultative Group on Ministry among Children) in partnership with The Methodist Church in Britain as part of a wider research project on the nature of family ministry in the 21st century in Great Britain. A detailed study of family ministry within the Methodist Church has been undertaken separately and findings from that study have been incorporated into this report to provide a fuller picture of what family ministry looks like currently. It is presented within the context of other studies in the field in recent years: 'From Anecdote to Evidence', a study in church growth published by the Church of England in 2014 and 'The Impact of Church Based Parent and Toddler Groups' published by Jubilee+ in 2015.

According to the Office of National Statistics data from 2014, there were 18.6 million families in the UK, 12.5 million were married couple families, the most common family type in the UK. Cohabiting couple families grew by 29.7% between 2004 and 2014. This is the fastest growing type of family. In 2014 there were 2.0 million lone parents with dependent children in the UK. And women accounted for 91% of lone parents with dependent children. 28% of the 26.7 million households in the UK contained only one person, households containing two or more families were the fastest growing type in the decade to 2014, increasing by 56% to 313,000 households¹. These statistics reflect the ongoing changes to families and households occurring across contemporary society and provide a valuable backdrop for the church-based family work explored in this report.

The project originated in November 2013 at the CGMC Conference in Birmingham, entitled 'Children and Family Ministry - where are we now?', where delegates were able to engage in conversation about the concept of family ministry, contribute their opinions and discuss how churches might engage more holistically with families in their church and geographical communities.

The theme of the conference recognised that

there is movement within the Christian church towards engaging with families as a whole, instead of children and young people in isolation, both within the 'church family' and in the context of social action. This research, undertaken by Merida Associates (an independent research consultancy) sought to explore how that shift in emphasis is being expressed in local churches, whether it is a strategically planned move or more organic, how it is being resourced and whether the people leading 'family work', whether paid or voluntary, are being effectively supported to manage the change in direction. The concomitant research study within the Methodist church has gathered extensive data on the experiences of church workers on the ground who are working with families on a daily basis and the research for this report provides a broader context.

It is hoped that the evidence gathered through the research will help support further strategic thought, prioritising key areas for the development of family ministry and the dissemination of good practice, and the identification of opportunities for working in partnership with family workers, parents, churches and linked organisations to support families into the future.

1.1 Overall research aims

- To undertake a qualitative study of family ministry work and practice, gathering illustrative examples and stories.
- To establish a comprehensive picture of current family ministry practice across Great Britain from a variety of perspectives beyond the work of the Methodist Church to include other denominations and other organisations and agencies (sections 2 – 5, 9)
- To identify current trends in publishing related to family ministry, the range of resources and training available to practitioners and any gaps in provision (section 6 and 7)
- To gather data from family work organisations that are seeking to support families, from a variety of sources (section 8)

Sections 2, 3 and 4 of the report present the researchers attempts to unpick the variety of responses encountered when people were asked what family ministry means to them and aim to formulate and differentiate some of the ideas discussed.

Section 5 brings together the findings of the family ministry survey with the Methodist research and some interview evidence to present what family workers are saying about their roles and how they are changing.

Sections 6 and 7 present findings about training, resources and support from church-linked organisations that family workers can access. Section 9 offers two example case studies of approaches to developing the church family.

1.2 Methodology

A number of methods were employed to gather information for this qualitative study from different sources in order to build up a fuller picture of family ministry practice.

Online research was used to find out what information and resources are easily available to family workers seeking training, support or examples of good practice in family ministry. The findings provided a snapshot of what is available and formed a baseline from which to structure the next phase of the research process.

The parameters of the online research were to identify:

- Training providers (academic and non-academic) that offer courses containing elements specific to family ministry
- Conferences and events including or promoting speakers and resources to support family ministry
- Research, publications and resources to support family ministry
- Examples of church-based family work and family projects with Christian links
- Church-linked organisations that provide services to families

The online research was designed to find resources, projects and organisations that support social action with families, focusing

on churches and agencies operating in Great Britain. There is a growing range of resources available to support the development of faith and spirituality within the family and some of these have been included from discussions with interviewees. The findings of the online search provide a sample of what is currently available; by definition it highlights only resources and projects that have been promoted on the internet. The findings establish a new resource that can be extended.

The scope of the research has been reviewed and refined in consultation with the Methodist Church Family Ministry Development Officer over the research period in response to a number of factors: the findings from the online search, the need to ensure it dovetails with the Methodist church element of the research project and to take into consideration the need to focus where data could most effectively be gathered. Emerging findings have been shared from each element of the research during the research period and it has been useful to discuss and test key themes as they have developed.

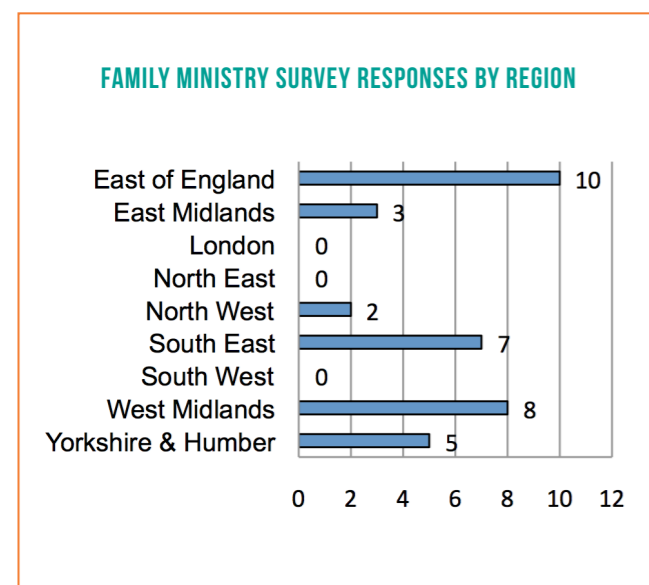
Online surveys were designed to capture quantitative and some qualitative data from training providers, local churches and church-linked organisations. The training survey sought to identify the kinds of training that are available to support work with families and to establish some sense of who is accessing it, as well as any emerging trends in training provision. The survey was distributed to targeted providers identified with the commissioner and responses were received from 12 providers of training, conferences and events. The family ministry surveys asked about the types of family work being undertaken, the range of family combinations engaged with, the sorts of training workers find useful and any emerging trends they have noticed in family work. The survey was distributed to key contacts within CGMC for dissemination through their networks to capture family work experience from a range of denominations. It was also shared with Action for Children, a national charity linked to the Methodist church, who distributed it to their teams around the country. This approach was taken as it was felt that an unsolicited survey would generate few responses. The survey was to an extent self-selecting, people received

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2014/families-and-households-in-the-uk--2014.html#tab-Introduction>

the online link in an email and chose whether or not to respond. This method precluded the researchers from issuing reminder emails or making follow up calls to increase the survey response rate.

67 responses were received, of which 17 were

Chart 1



No. responses: 35

The survey reach shows a reasonable geographical spread across England, although no responses were received from the North East, South West or London. The survey did not reach into Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland which means there is a gap in the survey data for those parts of Great Britain. The data generated from this survey and from the Methodist research suggests that neither reached many family workers located in areas of high deprivation where more outreach family support and issues of poverty might be expected. The report can present only the data it has gathered, however the online research in Appendix 1 lists additional research that provides a wider context the these findings².

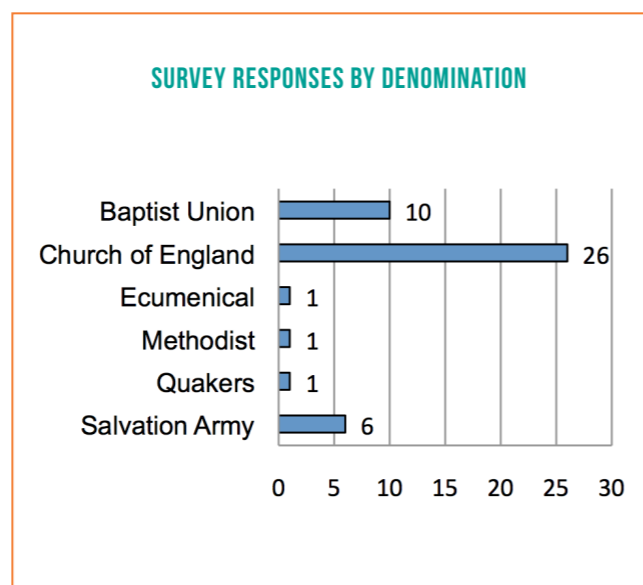
The Methodist led work employed a range of approaches in order to learn about current family ministry practice, through a combination

² See for example For the Next Generation (2011): Church of England

Action for Children staff and 9 were people with a national or regional remit.

Charts 1 and 2 show the reach of the family ministry survey by geography, across English regions, and into different denominations.

Chart 2



No. responses: 45

of consultations, surveys, visits and interviews. It included inviting layworkers, primarily, to participate in consultation days hosted at locations across towns and cities in Great Britain: Leeds, Warrington, Cardiff, Truro, London, Birmingham, Harpenden, Jersey, Middlesbrough and Derby. These day long events gathered approximately 100 paid staff, volunteers and ministers or presbyters. They provided the opportunity to hear first hand about experiences of family ministry, participants were invited to share views on their role, workload, the types of families worked with, training requirements and challenges they face. During the course of consultations the topics explored were: kinds of families, family ministry workload, training and challenges faced.

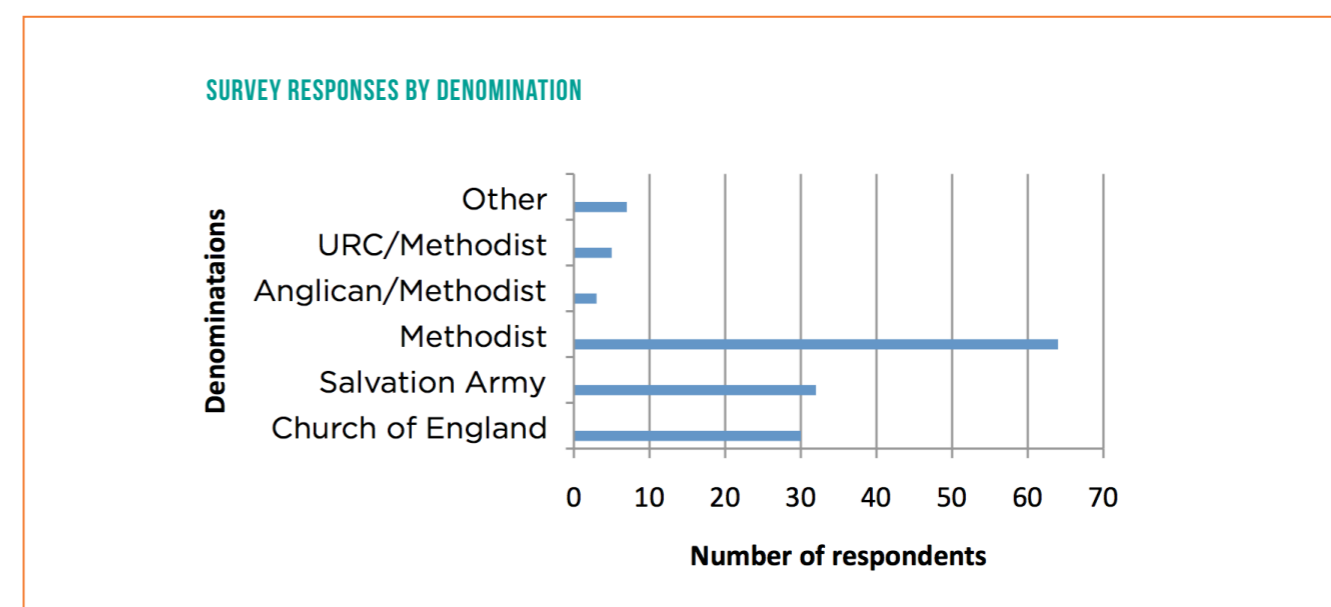
Visits to various projects and churches were also undertaken to observe work in action, learn more about the features of this work and conduct interviews with staff. These ten visits were to

Scotland, North Wales, Rugby, Stockport, Redditch, Birmingham, North and Central London, Wokingham and Newcastle upon Tyne.

Two surveys were shared as part of the Methodist research: the first aimed specifically at those employed as family workers in local contexts by Methodist churches and circuits received 50 responses (Methodist survey). The other had a wider remit and 152 respondents contributed from across denominations including the Church of England, Salvation Army, United Reformed Church and Methodist (Ecumenical survey: see chart 3). The former

survey sought information around the kinds of families and the frequency with which they were met during a standard week. It asked participants to identify the main issues and concerns for these families and requirements for future development. The main focus for the second survey was training: the kinds of courses attended, the benefits and areas where training was required. It also sought information around the kind of work they engaged in with families and where this involved working with other organisations. Both surveys provided a wealth of data that illustrates the diverse nature of contemporary family ministry.

Chart 3



In addition a small sample of 11 job descriptions for family workers in Methodist churches were studied in order to discover the requirements and responsibilities of these posts.

The third phase of the research was to gather qualitative data by undertaking telephone interviews with people who are engaged in the wide field of family ministry, to hear different perspectives, understand more about what people are doing and where energy in working with families is being directed. 19 interviews were undertaken with people from colleges, conference organisers, speakers, publishers, a number of Christian denominations and church-linked organisations. Interviews were recorded,

where permission was given, and key noted, although some people preferred to remain anonymous.

See Appendix 2 for a list of research participants and Appendix 3 for a summary of the findings from all surveys. Appendix 4 contains additional accounts of family ministry and extended case studies.

For the purpose of consistency, people who are paid to work with children, young people and families in a church setting are called 'family workers' or 'practitioners' as a generic term.

2. What is family?

Before moving on to talk about how churches are approaching family ministry, it may be helpful to reflect on what family means. This is challenging as what constitutes 'being a family' presents difficulties in being clearly defined. In contemporary society family is found in a variety of places and forms that go beyond consanguinity or relationships formed by law. Yet it is vital to develop a clear understanding about the kinds of families engaging in family activities and support offered by Churches. This formed a significant area of discussion during the Methodist Consultations where information was gathered on the range of kinds of families met in the course of family ministry.

When talking about family ministry, interviewees were keen that the context in which 'family' was being discussed should be clarified.

2.1 Individual families

Workers in the Methodist research considered what family means in the context of their day to day work, who they see and work with, highlighting the broad range of households they encounter. Primarily they are families with children under 11 and rarely those with teenagers possibly reflecting the way family ministry has evolved from roots in children's work. 65% of family workers indicated meeting between 11-30 families

“... the nuclear family is one of a range of family types found in most communities and church cultures meaning that structures and services must adapt to reflect people's lived experience.”

on a weekly basis through a range of different activities and groups.

Family workers recorded a wide range of family combinations, including specifically 'families' of grandparents with grandchildren where they identified parents as a 'missing generation' not engaged with church. Interviewees for this element of the research expressed a variety of views on the increased diversity of family make-up but the consensus was that churches must

recognise in practice, as well as intellectually, that the nuclear family is one of a range of family types found in most communities and church cultures meaning that structures and services must adapt to reflect people's lived experience.

Many people talked about the rapidly changing nature of family and what this means for churches today. For most interviewees the concept of family encompassed single parent, blended, fostered and adopted children families, same sex couple families, families with children with additional needs, families from different faiths, couples without children, those with adult children (so called 'empty nesters') and extended families where children are being raised by grandparents or other relations. One interviewee noted *“there is a strong biblical motivation for engaging and valuing the family BUT it is about always trying to keep up to date with the societal and cultural definitions of family.”* Both the Methodist research and the wider research show that people across denominations have moved away from a simple 'nuclear' concept of family and are exploring more fluid and complex models and trying to understand better what those models look like in the communities where they are located.

The changing role of grandparents was often discussed, particularly in terms of their place in being childcare providers:

“A lot of grandparents are doing the caring, as both parents are working.”

“We have a grandma who is bringing up her granddaughter...she's on her own, so she's a single parent bringing up a child under very difficult circumstances”

“A lot will come not with a parent but either a grandma or a carer, but actually increasingly grandmas more than anybody else.”

There are a wide range of ways single parents are met in the context of community work and family ministry, with a number of references to women participating without male partners:

“We have a lot of Dads who work away; we're located quite near the Air-force, so it attracts lots of jobs where you need to fly out...we have single-parent families in a different way. They're

single parents for Monday to Friday.”

“It was basically to create a safe place for women and their kids...particularly vulnerable women...who were coming through their homeless hostels and so on that didn't have a lot of connections with the community, quite socially isolated and just struggling a bit.”

“There's a young woman who comes to playscheme, who's from Sudan, whose husband has died and she's got two kids and she's on her own, she's got limited English, really struggling.”

“We do get some dads, mostly mums, because it's the area we live in, dads work and mums stay off for the kids.”

The way churches met and engaged with some kinds of families was commented on, for instance blended families or those with same sex parents:

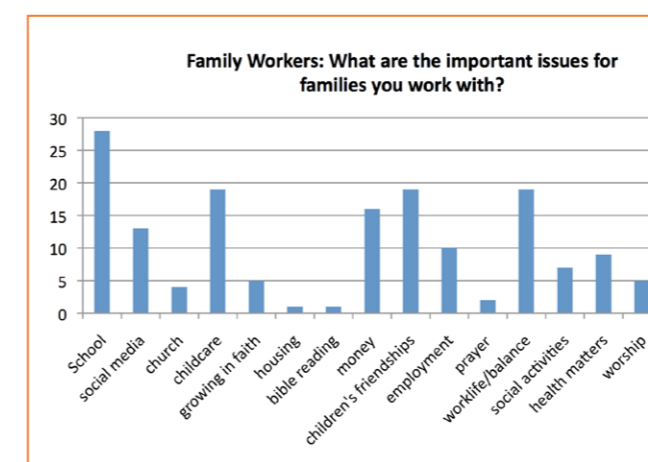
“Certainly in my church history...blended families weren't made to feel as welcome really and I think that's something we discussed and feel that that's important”

“We've got quite a few same-sex parents... which is fascinating on how the church embraces them 'Oh you've got two mummies. How does that work?..But that's quite interesting.”

“In the future when some children might have two daddies and two mummies...how will they be received into the church?”

86% of workers agreed or strongly agreed that

Chart 4



No respondents: 152 Ecumenical survey

the families they worked with have complex needs (survey 2). The challenges of meeting the needs of different kinds of families, from diverse backgrounds and providing appropriate support was often raised, with workers striving to find ways to do this well:

“We had a ‘Something Special’ group...which was for the parents of children with disabilities or special needs.”

“There is a particular need for families with special needs. I would like to invest time and energy into a community project that helped address their needs and gave them a safe place to come and play.”

“We also have families that are in crisis...we meet [them] and take a lot of time. I think one of the challenges is time, and commitment to those families.”

“Divided families where children live in separate homes, you may get time with Mum and get time to spend with Dad, but if they live apart you would seldom get time to see the child with both parents together...”

“There are some women who come from a sikh background and the Sikhs are now a third generation sikh community...been here a long time.”

“Within the church we've got some Ghanaian families...there are quite a lot of Eastern European families...especially on the fun mornings we have a few.”

When asked about the main issues the families involved in their work were facing, workers identified 3 areas of concern: children's schooling, achieving a healthy work/home balance and childcare (see Chart 4 from Ecumenical survey). Faith related aspects such as worship, prayer and bible study were considered low concerns for families as other practical aspects of life proved more difficult to manage.

The Methodist element of the research found that family workers identified a need to engage fathers more in the life of the church and there is an approach called “Who let the Dads out?” which provides opportunities for fathers to engage with their children within a

church context. It started out as an alternative to toddler groups, targeted at Dads, but has developed to offer groups to bring Dads together with their older children too. It provides an opportunity to bring Dads into the church environment and potentially to then engage in an exploration of faith.

According to the Ecumenical survey, the majority of family workers – 85% – believe their church to be a welcoming place for families of all kinds. It was observed that welcoming a wider range of family types was often encouraged but seemed to come with conditions, in terms of expectations around behaviour and likemindedness, as one family worker stated about attitudes in her church: *“Our doors are always open, as long as you like the things we like.”*

Some people talked about the way in which families, children and young people are portrayed in the media as stereotypes – victims, perpetrators or scroungers from the state – and wondered where the portrayal of *“normal everyday families can be found”* and how media depictions affect families, with one interviewee going as far as to suggest that *“there’s lots of media pressure on families and we’re seeing families lose confidence in being a family.”*

Findings suggest that while many churches have been accepting of a wider interpretation of family, the language of the church had not changed to reflect this and had remained more traditional. For a few interviewees the concept of family was closely related to their theological understanding of the Bible and was one of father, mother and children living in the Christian faith, and for some people the Government’s introduction of same sex marriage was outside their definition of what constitutes family.

2.2 Extended family

Closely linked to the diversity of individual families is the growing understanding of the importance of the extended family, which may include grandparents, step-parents, step-brothers and -sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins, family friends, neighbours, in-laws and family members overseas, plus anyone accepted as ‘family’. Several people noted that children are

brought along to activities such as Messy Church by all sorts of adults who may or may not be related to them.

2.3 Church family

Several interviewees felt that it was important to understand, not just that there are theological differences between denominations on the subject of family and roles within families, but there are practical differences in culture too and diverging views about how children are brought up in the Church. One interviewee commented *“there are huge differences about HOW to bring ministry and mission to children, for example some churches feel that all children under 3 need to recite the Lord’s Prayer.”*

One interviewee noted that in some churches there can be ambivalence about whether children are full members of the church, children may be seen as

‘in waiting’, being schooled for church membership and that somehow the adults in the church had a greater or deeper understanding of faith and spirituality. The same interviewee challenged the view that adults are *“at a higher stage of faith than children”* and went on to say that *“faith development is nothing to do with age. A child can have an understanding of God and a grasp of faith that adults would struggle with.”*

Much of the research is concerned with the development of the church community or ‘family’, including considering to what extent children and young people can be accepted as fully participating members. Many people are interested in enabling members of churches to come together more cohesively and embrace a shared sense of family, being of one body, across all ages and enabling them to minister to each other. There is recognition that in some churches cultural and structural change is needed to enable a new form of church family to develop.

“... while many have been accepting of a wider interpretation of family, the language of the church had not changed to reflect this and had remained more traditional.”

3. What is Family Ministry?

Family ministry is a difficult concept to define outline, as is clear from the discussions at the CGMC Conference in 2013 and the findings of this supporting research project. There are varied perceptions around the role of family work in the church as a whole. Family ministry has risen up the agenda at a strategic level across denominations and there are a number of drivers behind it (see section 4).

The findings of this research have identified that the term ‘family ministry’ in itself is not commonly understood or consistently applied within or between denominations. An interviewee replied when asked how family ministry could be defined: *“there are hundreds of definitions out there, people call it different things and mean different things by it, people use all age ministry, intergenerational ministry, family ministry, household ministry, households of faith...”*. Other interviewees noted that *“family ministry is not a phrase we use a lot, outside the church it has little meaningwe tend to talk about family support.”* and *“I do recognise the term but it’s not one we use...”*. The only commonality across all the interviewees (for both parts of this research) was that everyone used the term in a different way to express different ideas, concepts and ways of working that, while not necessarily mutually exclusive, are not always generally held or commonly agreed. It is useful, therefore, to set out some of the ideas and attempt to unravel some of the cross-cutting elements that appear to make up the current landscape of family ministry in the UK.

From the research it is clear that churches are reflecting on the nature of family, and on how to engage children, young people and their families in the life and work of the church today. The prevailing mood is one in which churches are being asked to consider what it means in the 21st century to encourage children, young people and their families to meet with God and grow in faith. Churches are exploring what it means to be family friendly, what it means to be a church family and what it means to be part of God’s family. In thinking about family ministry as a natural extension of children’s ministry, some interviewees and survey respondents felt it reflected a general recognition that working

with children or young people in isolation was not the most effective way of enabling a lifelong relationship with God, that nurturing spirituality needs to involve parents and a wider ‘family’, leading to a growing awareness around an all age approach to church. In some churches, this recognition has resulted in some children’s workers being asked to work with families as well as children: *“employed specialist workers are having ‘family’ popped into their title without being clear what that means”*.

Consultation participants and people interviewed for the Methodist research identified two strands of work around families, namely **Ministry** (concerned with matters related to faith and spirituality: prayer, worship, knowledge and understanding of Christian life and practice as well evangelistic activities) and **Support** activities and programmes designed to offer support (practical, emotional, mental, generally related to wellbeing). The dual strands of ministry and support were reflected in many comments, with both seen to develop a sense of community, often seen in terms of family or community ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the church. Figure 1 (p.10) presents an illustration of the broad elements of family ministry and family support that have emerged from the research findings, indicating where they could be seen as inward- or outward-facing.

“nurturing spirituality needs to involve parents and a wider ‘family’, leading to a growing awareness around an all age approach to church”

3.1 Family Support

Within the ‘Support’ strand, activities were grouped around being **Community focused, Building relationships, Social action** and **Partnership working**.

- **Community Focused**

Family workers frequently referenced services designed for local people to participate in that had a community element such as toddler groups, parent support groups, clubs or

courses. These were offered with an attitude of hospitality, to include and welcome all, this being held as a high value by practitioners who sought to find meaningful ways to bring people together.

- **Building Relationships**

Community based activities also provided opportunities to build relationships and get to know those participating personally. Many workers testified to the regular occurrence of meeting parents and carers for a cup of coffee to discuss issues and offer a listening ear. It was seen as a vital part of their role in supporting those they worked with. This element of family support can be considered as pastoral care and captures what people might consider part of the traditional role of the church. It is the provision of care and compassion, relationship and bereavement support, help with family problems, crises of faith, preparation for marriage and other major life events, including end of life. Often seen as the domain of the minister, those working with families find themselves increasingly involved in this area.

- **Social action**

This is an outward facing element and some people identified it at the heart of family ministry, when asked. Whilst not necessarily expressed in these terms by interviewees or survey respondents, faith in action is what people were alluding to when talking about food banks, families in need, churches doing service in their communities or churches being embedded in local networks alongside children's centres and other secular partners in the community, providing a safety net for the poor, vulnerable and elderly from all communities in the neighbourhood of the church. All of these activities take up a lot of time and energy within churches and for many they are seen as key expressions of their faith as they are meeting needs in the church community and the wider community. These aspects of work included offering help to families with housing, financial and schooling issues: supporting applications for benefits, signposting to foodbanks, offering debt advice, mediating with schools when problems

arose are all examples of how this was provided.

Several people felt that the church is often the 'last man standing' in communities that are being adversely affected by the closure of other facilities and services provided by local authorities and voluntary organisations, often due to the austerity measures being implemented due to budgetary constraints. As one worker stated, the church has an important role here in the current context: *"There's a lot of families out there that we know about that have real problems...the social workers and the people out there, there's not many at the moment and children's centres are being cut. There's a place there that maybe the church could step in, because it's a worrying time at the minute."*

- **Partnership**

Establishing close working partnerships with other organisations is clearly vital. The Ecumenical survey indicates that local schools and other churches are often the primary place where partnerships are forged, as well as children's centres, community groups, other faith groups and charities. The vital role of other agencies and organisations was underlined, particularly when seeking additional support for families with specific needs. The information gathered from Action for Children indicates there are sound partnerships existing between many of their Children's Centres and local Methodist Churches. As Gillian Haigh, manager of Mirfield Children's Centre stated: *"We have worked very closely with St Andrews Methodist Church, Mirfield, for the past 5 years, and have a strong relationship with the church. St Andrews... has been absolutely instrumental in the success of Mirfield Children's Centre and we consider them to be a vital partner."*

Together these are able to address some of the struggles that arise for families in the local community, with benefits for children and young people: *"There were loads of issues for families in the community as well, and it wasn't just children alone, but there were lots of children and young people with chaotic family backgrounds and lots of issues going on."*

Evidence from the Church Urban Fund's

research³ highlights a crossover between this element of family ministry and the community focused work. It suggests that where churches were able to look outwards and have a vision for faith in action by: *"working with a range of partners, they each started a journey of remarkable transformation, repositioning the church to be at the very heart of the community. And as they did so, these churches became more attractive - to worshippers, to volunteers, as a place to belong. They attracted funding or donations of goods and services and support from other organisations wanting to work with the local community."*

All churches will have some 'doing' elements, services they provide or partnership working projects they are involved with, however there are significant factors that are likely to determine how much of their work has a faith in action focus, these are the leadership and vision of the church (how it sits in the wider community), the location of the church - urban or rural, affluent or deprived area - and the demographics of the surrounding communities (old or young population, ethnic diversity), plus there is often a historical perspective.

Some concerns were raised in interviews about whether church-based workers always have the skills, knowledge, support or supervision to engage with some of the complex social, economic and emotional issues faced by families in need. There seems to be wide differences in experience in churches across all denominations in terms of links with professional providers of family support, statutory or voluntary, from workers with no knowledge of what agencies are working in their area to those who are fully networked and form part of multi-agency teams around children and families. Generally, however, churches in areas of high deprivation are often working in partnership with both local agencies and other churches and, where appropriate, other faith communities.

3.2 Family Ministry

Within the 'Ministry' strand, activities fell under broad headings of Mission, Discipleship, being Intergenerational community and Faith in Families

- **Mission**

The mission element reflects a desire expressed in the research to build on existing links with children, parents and young people to welcome members of their families or households into the church and / or to develop new ways of doing church that are attractive to people not currently engaged.

There is recognition that children and youth ministries, church-linked schools, church-run toddler groups, holiday clubs and after-school activities all engage children and young people with the Bible and teachings of Jesus but for many it is in isolation to the rest of their lives. One interviewee commented: *"workers on the ground often longed for contact with the families of the children they were working with and though they tended to see the same children year on year they in reality had very limited contact with their families."*

Parents may think it is a good thing for their children to learn Christian principles and values and to develop a relationship with God but not feel confident to lead in that themselves, or think it is the church's role to teach and lead. Some may have been part of church as children but disconnected later in life. There was a view that although people do not attend church, that does not mean they do not have a spiritual life and beliefs: *"faith is a blip in the horizon of their lives, which doesn't mean that there isn't any spirituality in their lives, there may be, but those families are not necessarily part of the faith community."* Several interviewees felt that people want to talk about 'big questions' around life and spirituality, but they no longer turn to the church for answers.

There is a sense from some people that a focus on 'doing' as church, such as delivering Sunday School, holiday clubs, social activities, is often a missed opportunity to re-engage people in a conversation about faith. For example:

³ Christian Research Consultancy (2012): Growing church through social action: A study of actively-engaged and growing churches; Church Urban Fund

“Thursday...it’s a toddler group...Half-termly we do an optional Bible story which we go into the Church for, the children can, and families can come in for that if they want to. I’m always surprised how many come, I always think, “There’s nobody here today who’s going to be interested,” and there’s always a dozen who come through, parents or grandparents with the children.”

“The numbers of families who are interested is definitely growing. But it’s actually bringing them further into the church and bringing them further to the core of what we’re about...that seems to be the big sticking point at the moment.”

This element of family ministry is seeking to build on those opportunities to reach out to ‘unchurched’ family or household members and offer them a way to become involved with God. Churches

are looking to engage parents more directly in what children are doing at Sunday School or holiday club and encouraging them to talk about the messages at home. The Church of England has strong links with primary schools and some churches are looking to develop missional activity through schools – “beacons of light” – to reach out to parents and families that they consider part of the church community but may not be actively engaged.

A popular way to do this is to offer an alternative to Sunday church such as Messy Church usually held once a month (see section 7 on resources) which is designed for people who are not already part of a church community and is structured to build a sense of community, and to create a space for prayer and exploration of faith along with food and fun activities.

An outcome of adopting this approach was shared by one worker: “a couple of people have come along to a few of the services and one of the mums had her children baptised here about a month ago.” There was a shared desire to explore various ways to do this and a lack of consensus however on the best approach to take.

• Discipleship

Questions around discipleship arose in consultation discussions, often in relation to how to support families to develop faith together. Comments included:

“The numbers of families who are interested is definitely growing. But it’s actually bringing them further into the church and bringing them further to the core of what we’re about...that seems to be the big sticking point at the moment.”

“There was an interesting question posed...about making disciples...we’re constantly asking people in Messy Church, well how many people have you brought to faith? How many people have you made a disciple?...It’s a long journey...it can take six years from people who know nothing to actually coming in to a relationship of sorts [with God]. Yet we’re trying to measure it on quite a short scale.”

Workers were asking questions about how to support and develop faith and understanding of those participating in activities, wrestling with approaches to doing this in purposeful and relevant ways.

• Intergenerational Community

It was identified that being part of a church congregation offered unique opportunities to meet with people of different ages and this aspect of being an intergenerational community was felt to be important:

“My children haven’t got a granddad...so actually they go to church and they’ll sit there. In holiday club I’ve got a lovely photo of my daughter sitting with D, who’s a really old guy in his late 80s, doing the craft. They’re having a whale of a time.”

Yet this raised questions about how to effectively bring different generations together: “I think we segregate an awful lot. Its like, “Okay, the children go out, now the real stuff happens.”...A once in a blue moon family all age isn’t enough.” This was coupled with a sense of understanding church to be a community outside of Sunday services which presented challenges: “Those people, they come only once a month, they’re still part of the church and they

are still important, whether they are one year old or ninety years old. I think it’s quite difficult to change people’s mindset, the whole thing is part of the church, it’s not just 10.45, the traditional service, it’s really, really difficult to engage younger children or teenagers, or twenty-something year old people.”

There is a cross-denominational, although not universal, direction of travel away from ministering to the church community in separate age groups and towards an integrated approach, acknowledging the whole church community as one body, as a family, where differing styles of worship and learning are accommodated, across all ages, yet people are engaging in the same conversation and exploring the same themes. Some people use the term ‘household’ for the church family, to get away from the conventional connotations of ‘family’ that may exclude people without children or partners, and to embrace the biblical concept.

A move to integrating worship through all-age services is a process that takes time, energy and commitment. It may also require a different kind of leadership: “we need to look at the model for training leaders, we need enabling leaders rather than teaching leaders”. People felt it was very important to enable the church community to participate actively in any change process and a number of resources have been developed to support this, such as Today Not Tomorrow⁴ and Explore Together⁵.

A growing awareness that children should be at the heart of the congregation has seen the development of approaches such as Pizza and Praise which is about growing a congregation of family worshippers within the church. Interviewees talked about how much better it is to pass on the Gospels within the family, sharing bible stories with children and their parents or significant adults at the same time helps families to join together in their faith journey.

This is an inward-looking element of family ministry as it is very much about developing the church community as a ‘family’, creating a

shared vision and strengthening relationships between all groupings within the community, although new ways of doing church may also bring more people in over time.

• Faith in families

Sitting alongside the issues raised around being intergenerational community were questions related to how families developed faith with each other, particular in the context of their home or household life. When asked what family ministry means for them, many interviewees started from the point, mentioned above, of wanting to enable children and young people to “have a life transforming encounter with Jesus Christ” leading to long lasting faith and the growing recognition that “you can’t work with children and young people without taking families into account”.

There was a strong consensus that families didn’t necessarily know how best to develop faith together, with 96% expressing this opinion in the Methodist survey. People talked about the need to engage parents more actively in enabling and creating space for faith at home, to support the understanding that nurturing faith entails more than taking children to Sunday School or a church-based holiday club: “parents can’t delegate responsibility for their children’s spirituality” “how might we see a world where parents see their role as primary spiritual care givers”. One area being explored is the importance of helping people to live out their Christian vows from Baptism.

There is also recognition that it may be grandparents or other adults that are bringing children to church and that the extended family has an important role to play in developing faith. In both elements of the research people talked about adopting the biblical term ‘household’ when discussing individual families, to acknowledge the diversity of family structures, both biological and non-biological, that surround children in the 21st century: “faith is caught, taught, experienced and learnt in an intergenerational context”.

Faith in families may be considered an inward-looking element of family ministry, as support

⁴ Developed by the Baptist Union and Arise ministries, see online research summary

⁵ Developed by Scripture Union

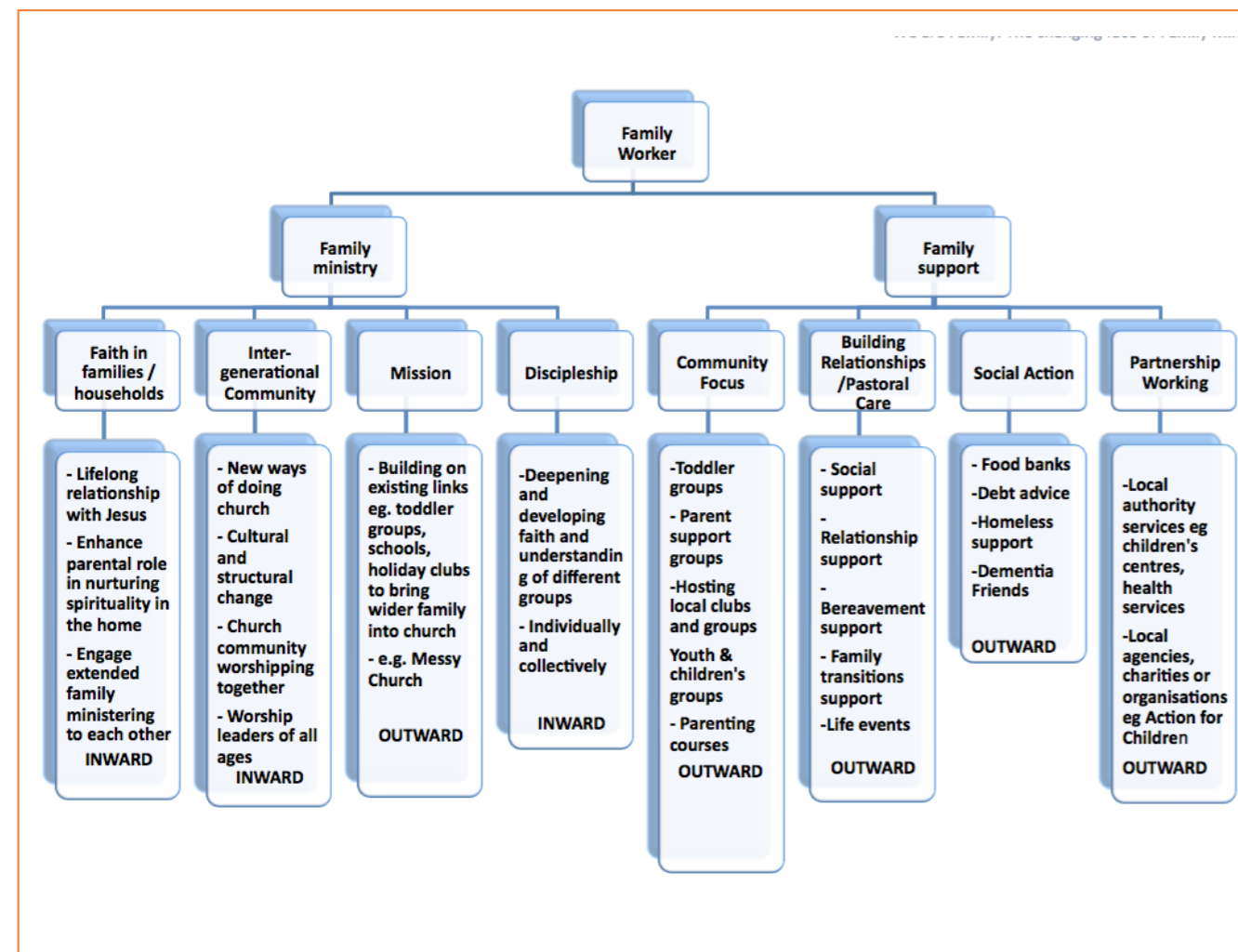
may primarily be targeted towards families within the church community. It is an area where some workers are looking for resources and guidance on how to support parents. Workers are asking questions about how best to engage with parents, children and young people where faith is concerned, exploring strategies to do this and testing out new ideas and approaches in this field.

It is not just about parents and other adults nurturing faith in children and young people however, as more than one person noted, children come to church expecting to meet God whereas their parents may not have that expectation, so this work can help to re-connect

parents with their own faith and they can learn equally from their children: *“we share bible stories with children and parents at the same time and find it is children who are often more open to faith”*.

These elements are reflected in Figure 1; it is important to state that this is not definitive and the edges between the elements are not solid, in practice churches may deliver a combination of any or all elements of family ministry or support, however presenting the elements in this way does help to understand some of the motivations driving family work forward across churches and the communities in which they work.

Figure 1: Areas of family work



3.3 Challenges to work

Those interviewed and participating in consultations reflected a number of challenges when working in the family ministry context. These fell broadly into 4 areas: Perceptions of church, **Pace of family life**, **Evaluating Success** and **Time Constraints**.

Perceptions of church: it was occasionally sensed that the notion of church is quite alien or daunting for some which can serve as a barrier between family work/the church and families. A difference existed in perceptions of who the church as a group were and expectations of whether it would be a welcoming place: *“It was just trying to find something really that would break down the barriers because I do think it's really easy to forget what it feels like when you've got no Church background at all,”* said one worker. Another commented that

“Looking from someone who doesn't come to church...I think the actual concept of church is quite scary. You think...how would I go in? What would they say?...I think a lot of people probably feel the same as me.” There was the idea that this might hinder parents and carers from participating with their children: *“There doesn't seem to be a willingness to join in. It varies from the parents. Some parents don't seem to be willing to join in on what the holiday club has been about, they just see it as free childcare.”*

Pace of Family life: It was universally agreed that the majority of families are very busy, leading lives that are faster paced, participating in activities, clubs and groups throughout the week. Attending church and church activities are one of a range of 'social' options that families choose to participate in or not. It competes with a number of other groups and events which children attend, said one family worker: *“Everyone's very, very busy now aren't they?...We have swimming on a Sunday morning actually now...there's just so many things.”* This preceded discussions around the place and value of church in the lives of families and how it could contribute something unique and distinctive to the lives of families.

Evaluating Success: Workers reflected the difficulty in assessing family work and that outcomes are often difficult to measure. There were expectations from the wider church that community facing missional work would result in people attending Sunday morning church services, indeed this was often the basis on which workers were employed: to bring families to church. Yet this rarely happened, people were often willing to explore faith and Christianity in other ways besides church services. One worker commented: *“I do find a lot of this 'bums on seats' thing...our circuit struggles financially, so I can understand where it's coming from, but I do find that difficult.”* When reflecting on a management meeting another recalled: *“They said...how many people have come from Messy Church through to Sunday morning? Well, a, that's never been my intention and b, yes we've been doing it for a year, but we only do one a half term.”* Workers were keen to explore ways to evaluate work more effectively, beyond counting numbers and attendance at Sunday services.

Time constraints: From the surveys and consultations many paid workers reflected the tough choices they often faced in how they manage their time, with many being part-time, they're very aware of the limitations this places on their workload. It meant there were often challenges in prioritising various aspects of their role and responding to family's needs on occasion: *“the fact that I spend a Tuesday afternoon having coffee with a mum who is in real difficulty at the moment, I then have to justify that, because, officially, she's not really on our pastoral list and isn't a member”*

Grappling with ways to overcome these challenges was frequently discussed, solutions were often difficult to identify and in some part it was felt unachievable. These areas continue to be problematic for practitioners as family ministry evolves and develops.

4. Why do ‘family’ work?

The context within which models of family ministry are developing in churches is changing, and the following drivers to working with families have emerged from this research. It is already happening as observed across the Church in the lives of adults, children and young people yet a greater intentionality to be working in this way has evolved. It seems that a mixture of all three drivers can often be in play, to varying degrees of priority, and often they are not clearly articulated or fully recognised.

- To focus on equipping children and young people to have a lifelong relationship with Jesus, to create spaces within families, households and church communities to engage meaningfully with the Bible and its teachings, to nurture faith and enable spirituality to grow and flourish in the home and in the church family across all ages.
- As a core expression of lived Christianity, responding to meet needs in the local community and especially those of the most in need. This construct usually has a practical aspect such as food banks, feeding the homeless or supporting children’s charities. Family support is offered to people of all faiths and none, with no expectations that people will engage in the spiritual life of the church but with the door open to those who may wish to explore faith.
- In response to the realisation that in some churches the numbers of attendees are falling so family ministry is a potential strategy to attract new parents and children into the life of the church. This also recognises that some church congregations have a ‘missing generation’ of those aged 25-40 years, the age group often with young families participating in other provision offered by churches. It has been claimed that the Church is “one generation from extinction” unless it could find ways to engage younger people and reach more creatively into local communities.

4.1 Church leadership

Supportive informed leadership was seen as a key enabling factor for ensuring the success of family ministry at both local and national levels by a significant number of people interviewed for this research, and while other informants⁶ tended not to discuss leadership in the same terms, it is clear that workers on the ground find it harder to do their jobs where leaders do not recognise or understand the value of their work.

Interview respondents discussed the nature of leadership in the following terms:

- Training for church leaders
- The knowledge and experience of church leaders
- The role of the national offices in developing and leading the vision that carries family ministry forward

Amongst this group, leadership was used to express all or some of the following:

- Individual church or parish leadership
- National leadership, circuit, council or diocesan leadership
- Leadership of family ministry through paid workers or lay people

The leadership of any denomination is defined and determined by the training and structure that shapes and informs it. A clear theme arose around the training and development of church ministers - local level leadership, with several interviewees commenting that often the approach to training clergy (of any denomination) in faith and theology is very academic, concerned with ensuring that those trained have a solid theoretical and biblical base to their teaching. Theological training seeks to ensure that clergy are able to lead and teach their congregations, and several interviewees wondered if this training was more heavily weighted to faith development and a worship-

⁶ Respondents to the online surveys (Part 2) and interviewees in the Methodist research made little mention of leadership

led approach to teaching God’s word rather than to skills that may help church leaders to build relationships and to understand how to become an enabling rather than a teaching leader.

Others felt that church leaders at all levels tended to look to specialists to do work with

“family ministry is most successful where churches have a fully embedded family ministry ethos shared by church leaders, paid workers and congregations that work together to cultivate and support the wellbeing of all kinds of families.”

children, young people or families, the common view being that churches tend to think anything new needs an expert, or that anything outside general ministry should be delivered by an expert in that field. Some informants felt

that while church leaders are vital to building the foundations for family ministry, their lack of knowledge or awareness of the practicalities of delivering family ministry sometimes made this problematical. One person had this to say about a traditional worship or formal church services model of teaching *“but it’s not right for all families and all children, vicars won’t necessarily understand the differences between children, family and youth and will have little or no theological training to understand these differences....”*

The view was expressed that clergy might benefit from support in the early years of their ministry to understand that people engage with God in different ways and to value the effectiveness of different forms of worship.

Interviewees for this research felt that local church leadership needed to recognise that the growth of congregations (particularly in those churches where congregations are getting smaller) and the role of families and all-age worship within the church are interconnected - however several people felt that children and families are not a priority for local clergy whatever their denomination. In order for family ministry to flourish, local clergy must be seen to support and lead all-age and family work within the church, where they don’t, these

areas of work will be undervalued across the congregation, lay workers and paid staff. As one interviewee commented *“...if the vicar isn’t engaged it gives out messages to the rest of the church and the worshippers that do attend....”* Practitioners involved in the Methodist research confirmed that from their experience family ministry is most successful where churches have a fully embedded family ministry ethos shared by church leaders, paid workers and congregations that work together to cultivate and support the wellbeing of all kinds of families.

There was a view expressed that sometimes the most effective family ministry practitioners are not ordained leaders. Messy Church, for example, can help develop shared leadership approaches as it is often led by lay people who are passionate about ‘giving something back’ to the church community. Other interviewees were more cautious about family or all-age ministry being left entirely to lay members and expressed concerns that sometimes no-one in the church involved in running children, youth or family work has had formal or informal training in working with these groups and some talked about the potential risks (around safeguarding for example) associated with this approach.

Several interviewees noted that family ministry needs strong national vision-casting and leadership in order to ensure that there is a positive meeting of theology, and the concept of family ministry and practice. Where paid staff deliver family ministry activity they need access to high quality training, support and supervision that values their professional skills and personal development and encouragement to engage in reflective practice. Where family ministry is delivered through lay members, church leaders need to be proactive and tenacious and begin conversations about skills acquisition and

“Where paid staff deliver family ministry activity they need access to high quality training, support and supervision that values their professional skills and personal development and encouragement to engage in reflective practice.”

development, moving towards all lay members (volunteers) taking up training and development opportunities. One interviewee went so far to say that without a proactive approach and mechanisms to share and cascade good practice, policies and knowledge, family ministry

will fail to embed and an opportunity to invest in people at a local level and develop a new approach to bringing new people into the church may be lost.

5. Range of worker roles involved with family work

This section explores the roles in which workers are delivering or enabling family ministry on the ground. Survey and interview findings support the results of the Methodist research that there is a move towards churches appointing staff to posts that include 'family' in the title and job descriptions. Even though most workers who completed the survey identified as children and / or youth workers, there was a sense that people are broadening their remit more holistically to extend into work with families.

Some interviewees expressed the view that this was in response to a growing awareness across churches of all denominations that working with children within the context of their family was more effective at helping children grow and develop their faith than through children's ministry alone. Some people felt that these changes to roles and job descriptions may reflect the economic situation many local churches face, with fewer paid workers having to take on a wider range of roles.

16/40 survey respondents felt that family work is a higher priority than 12 months ago, 24 people felt it was about the same and no-one felt it was less of a priority. Four factors were felt to contribute to family ministry becoming more of a priority: the impact of economic downturn, a rise in poverty, unemployment and increased stress on family relationships.

However, there appears to be a general view that a change from working just with children towards working with children and families more holistically, which has been emerging over the past few years, is the main factor pushing family work up the agenda within the broader context of the drivers identified in section 4.

5.1 Family worker roles

The changing role of workers within churches

While it would seem that more children's workers roles are changing to or being advertised as family workers than previously, some interviewees noted that trained children specialists or youth workers are being asked to take on family work as an addition to their existing job. A small number of people expressed concern about the potential erosion of professional skills and highlighted the fact that youth ministries and youth workers in particular are often JNC (youth work) qualified with no training in or experience of working with families, or of undertaking ministry with families. Several training providers, for instance, felt that this blurring of roles reflected a lack of understanding about the differences in professional training and skills between children's, youth and family work. One interviewee commented *"specialisms are becoming conflated...people will have wider responsibilities and will work with wider age groups. ...It's sad to see the loss of specialisms and of specialisms being consolidated in larger roles..."* This interviewee noted that, while in church-led community and youth work a blurring of specialisms is becoming more acceptable, this would not be accepted in other professional bodies such as teachers who are trained to teach within specific age bandings. Another interviewee noted that *"it is not necessarily helpful to tie youth work into family work as there are different skill sets needed that people develop via different training and professional development routes"*.

The study of job descriptions supported this, demonstrating the range of tasks and responsibilities included in a role, from child focused groups to family-oriented work to leading groups for young people. It was evident that the role of a family worker encompassed a vast range of ages, specialist work and tasks, alongside administrative duties such as writing reports and newsletters, keeping records and creating rotas for volunteers.

Training providers speculated that the broadening of the role is related to funding difficulties at parish, district or circuit level, and expressed concerns about the impact on workers of delivering an extended role, the quality of work they are able to deliver and the accessibility of appropriate support and supervision for workers on the ground.

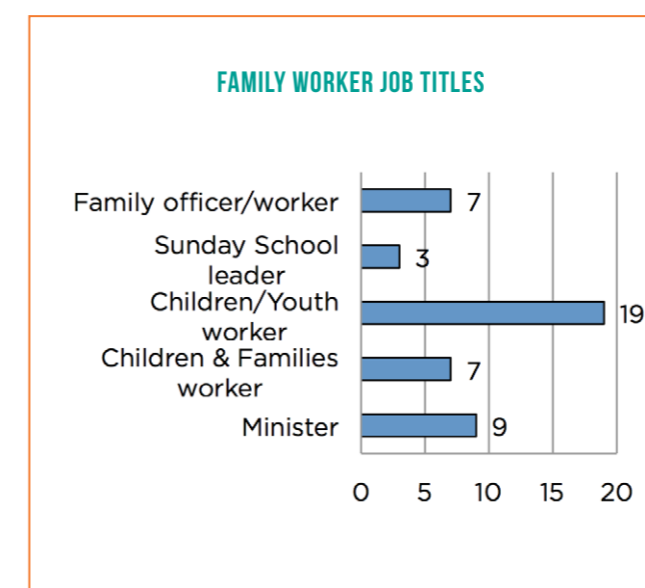
The descriptions offered in survey responses of the kinds of family work people are doing illustrates the complexity of church-based family work as discussed in section 3; there are those who understand their role as developing family faith, nurturing relationships between God, the church and families, and teaching children about Jesus; those who emphasise a more operational focus in supporting, resourcing, training, coordinating, running and managing children and youth activities, services and events, almost

in isolation from other church activities; and those who see their role as more facilitative, a link between the church, families, the wider community and other organisations (either through outreach or through church-based community events). Some descriptions cover a number or all of these facets, but most can be categorised within a family ministry or family support narrative.

There is a tension expressed that exists between having a congregation or community focus to a role, also described as either a mission or discipleship focus. Yet the separation between these can be unclear as "fuzzy edges" may exist between them. This is difficult to navigate for practitioners, striving to manage roles which are often very broad in nature and whose job descriptions contain a wide range of tasks and responsibilities.

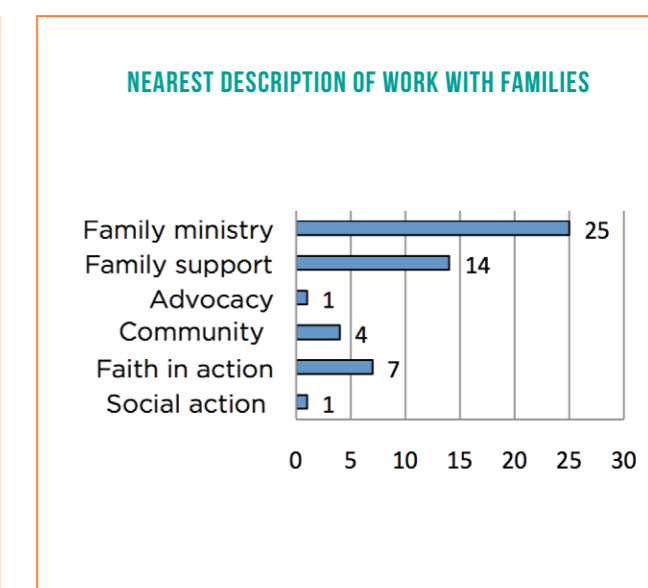
Survey respondents were a mixture of children and family workers, ministers, family support workers (Action for Children) and people with a more strategic regional or national role, which is reflected in the data that shows while half of respondents spend 25-100% of their time working with families, half spend less than 25% of their time. Significantly more respondents were in paid roles, with an almost even split between full-time and part-time. However,

Chart 5



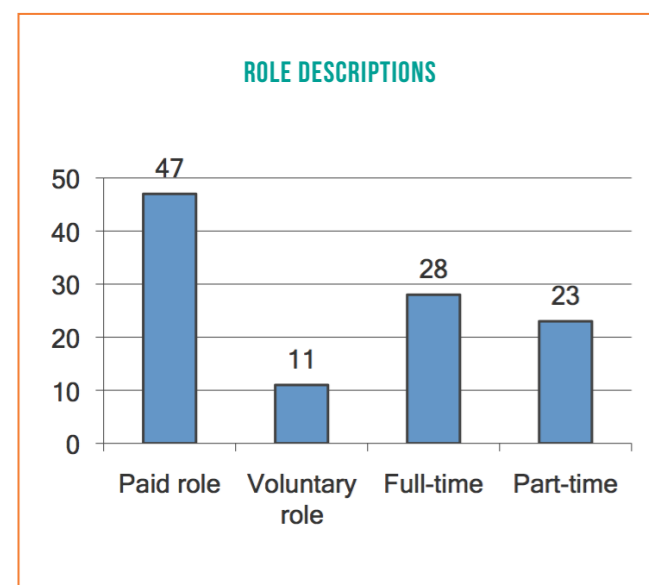
No. responses: 45

Chart 6



No. responses: 52 (incl Action for Children staff)

Chart 7

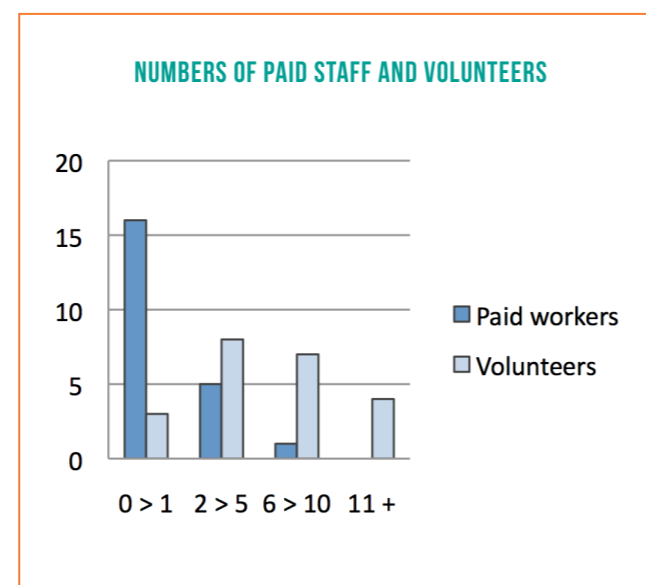


No. responses: 59
(includes Action for Children staff)

looking at responses from church-based workers shows that those who responded are mostly lone workers or volunteers. The majority of respondents report that they do receive supervision, 7/46 respondents do not. Questions of supervision frequently arose in discussions with Survey respondents were a mixture of children and family workers, ministers, family support workers (Action for Children) and people with a more strategic regional or national role, which is reflected in the data that shows while half of respondents spend 25-100% of their time working with families, half spend less than 25% of their time. Significantly more respondents were in paid roles, with an almost even split between full-time and part-time. However, looking at responses from church-based workers shows that those who responded are mostly lone workers or volunteers. The majority of respondents report that they do receive supervision, 7/46 respondents do not. Questions of supervision frequently arose in discussions with Methodist layworkers with wide ranging reports of differing arrangements and support in place.

The range of work that family workers who participated in the survey are doing illustrates the competing / complementary strands of family work – the family support/ social action

Chart 8



No. responses: 24 (church-based only)

strands and the ‘mission/discipleship/ faith at home strands. The sample is skewed by the professional family support work of Action for Children staff, however pastoral care is evident, and the higher numbers offering social activities and parenting support (see Chart 7) chimes with the findings of the Methodist research which was that the reality of family work for many workers is the provision of parent and toddler groups. Several workers talked about these groups offering parenting support, facilitating bonding between parents and children and combating social isolation. Some people said that they provide these groups without expectations of people coming into the church, that they consider themselves to be modelling a Christian life and providing a safe space for people to share and spend time together. On the other hand, some interviewees considered toddler groups⁷ that did not engage parents in conversations about faith were a missed opportunity, some went further and felt it was not the job of church to provide services that do not engage with faith, and Scripture Union have produced a training resource with ecumenical support called Building Blocks to encourage churches to bring a missional aspect into their

⁷ Please note that few family workers in areas of high deprivation, whose work is likely to have a more social action focus, participated in either part of the research

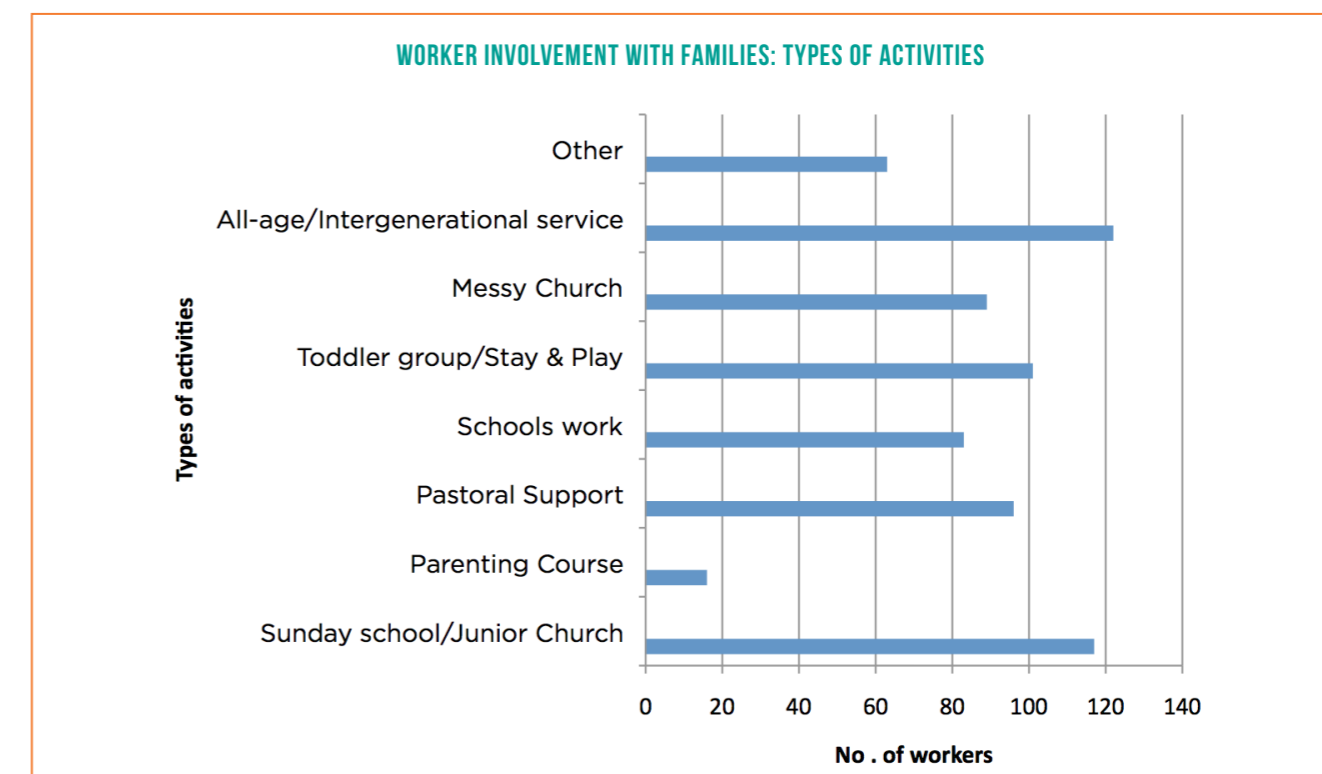
toddler group work, for instance to develop it as ‘midweek church’ with a separate congregation. From whichever point of view, there was consensus that toddler groups in church are a birthing place for family work.

According to the ecumenical survey, the role of those working with families continues to have a significant focus on work with children (apart from parents/carers). When asked about the types of activities that featured in their working lives it was clear that Sunday School/Junior Church and schoolswork are primary functions (77% and 54% respectively). A large proportion – 80% – are involved in all-age/intergenerational church services as well as toddler groups (66%) and Messy Church (58%). Offering pastoral support featured in 63% of respondents regular workload but only 10% planned and led parenting courses of any kind.

In terms of activities that fell into the ‘Other’ category these are reflected in chart 10 below and also included uniformed organisation involvement and residentials with children and young people.

There are strong indications that churches are offering both family support and family ministry, although not always through the same person, sometimes elements are shared amongst a team, including volunteers. Some people recorded only what they personally did for the survey and some people recorded what their church offers so it is difficult to attribute activity solely to family workers. Work with primary schools is mentioned as an additional key element of work with families, as is work to develop structures in church to improve faith development with families. The Methodist research suggests that there is often a lack of clarity about which aspects of the role should be prioritised and workers expressed that church leaders can have mixed expectations about the purpose of working with families, reflecting the different drivers in section 4, so family workers can be expected to deliver traditional children’s ministry, recruit new families to the church and support families in need in the wider community all at the same time.

Chart 9



No. responses: 152
Ecumenical survey

It is possible to view these activities and range of provision as falling into 4 categories:

- Specific children or youth-related work
- Family events or groups involving different generations or age groups
- Family support for practical issues
- Routine administrative work

Practitioners who participated in the Methodist research reported that they were often expected to bring more families into the church through their family or children’s ministry work, and some talked about needing to educate people within the church about the role of family ministry. Some noted that while some churches think they are family-orientated, families and children were not being engaged in traditional worship and one worker commented it sometimes felt like leaders were really saying “let’s throw the kids out of the room and then we can do the proper God stuff.”

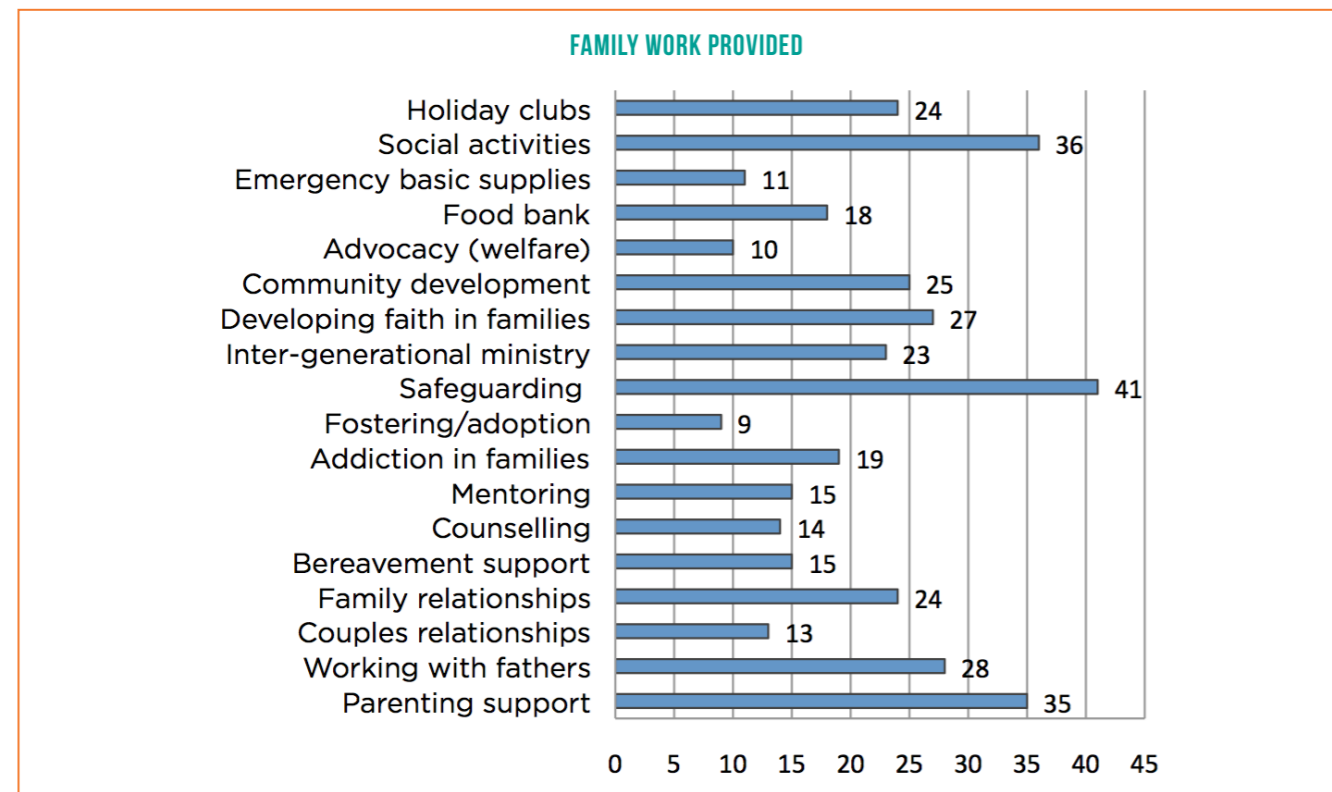
Some workers talked about how they had set up

a monthly family service, sometimes along the lines of Messy Church (see section 7.3), and there was an expectation that this would be a stepping stone to people joining the traditional Sunday services, whereas workers did not necessarily see that as a natural progression. One worker working with vulnerable and ‘unchurched’ families felt she could not invite them to a traditional service:

“But if I’m totally honest I find it very, very difficult to put that next to coming to church on a Sunday morning. Because there are so many people who I know that I would love to invite to church but church isn’t... the service that I go to on a Sunday morning isn’t, I don’t think, what they would relate to. I hate to say that because it sounds really rude, because I know that a lot of people are putting a lot of effort into it.”

Other workers reported having two family networks within their work, the ‘churched’ and the ‘unchurched’, and they worked differently with each group.

Chart 10



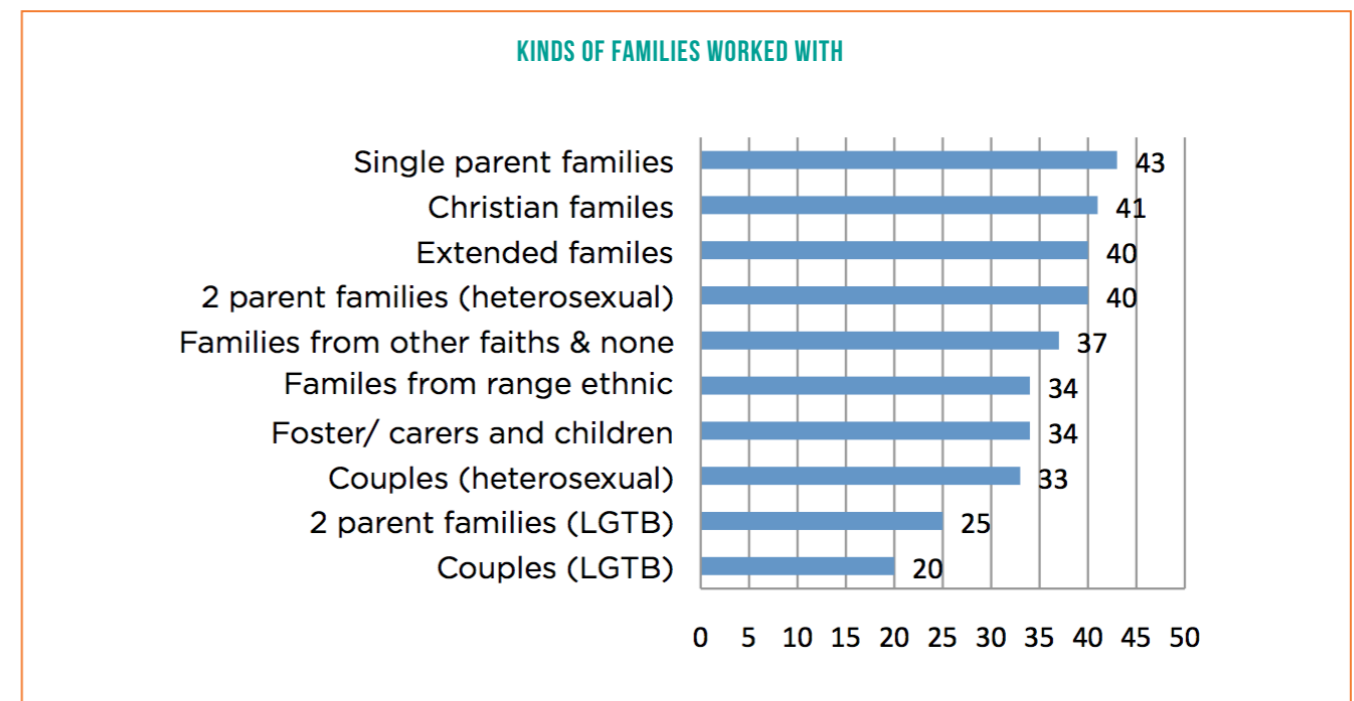
No. responses: 52 (includes Action for Children staff) (multiple choice)

Survey respondents were asked about the kinds of families they work with to see if there was a range of experiences across the group. Overall, the sample suggests that churches are able and willing to work with all family groupings. The “other” responses offered for this question either reaffirm that their family projects are open to the whole community (or anyone at all), or state (no. 4) that they don’t know if they work with LGBT families but are happy to work with anyone regardless of sexuality. Everyone (no. 43) said they worked with single parent families, this was the only 100% answer (see Chart 8), and workers made the point that split families and single parents require more support and flexibility.

This finding illustrates, as mentioned in section 1, that the concept of ‘family’ has moved, across denominations, from the nuclear family model to a much broader and fluid understanding of the diversity of individual and extended family structures.

Family workers identified overall a need for more resources and support, for example a call for more full-time staff so that more families could be reached; the need for better networks for family workers to support each other and the need for churches to break down silos so teams work together.

Chart 11



No. responses: 43 (includes some Action for Children)

5.2 Partnership working

The survey tried to gain a sense of how well networked family workers are with local agencies who provide family support. Respondents identified a number of agencies including: local schools, social services, children’s centres, local council, local charities, Family Matters, other churches, Care for the Family, domestic violence support agencies, the Police, and Sure Start.

Of church-based respondents, 20 are working with other agencies and 11 are not, suggesting there may be a significant number of family workers who are not connected to existing networks within their communities.

It was suggested by a training provider in interview that being able to clearly present the role of the church in family work, being clear about what a church is both offering and trying to achieve by working with families, in a way that can be understood by organisations outside the church, such as local authorities, would be an aid to working in partnership with a range of agencies to support families in the community.

5.3 The role of volunteers in the delivery of family work

The Methodist research found that children’s and youth workers in the church are having their role extended to include families, and that finding was supported by some interview data here. However, there was also an emerging view across a number of sources that there is a move away from employing specialist children or youth workers and an increasing expectation that volunteers within the church should take on responsibility for children, youth and family ministry. Two key drivers around the shift in direction are:

- A reduction in resources that means churches are unable to fund paid workers to lead those areas.
- A view that churches should move away from ‘outsourcing’ responsibility for the development of faith to ‘professionals’, particularly in children and young people, so it is shared by the church family as a whole..

The research shows that family workers usually work alongside one or more volunteers who help to deliver family ministry and family support. There is evidence from Action for Children of church volunteers working as part of a family support team in the delivery of services located in local churches. Findings also show that some paid workers are allocating significant time to training and equipping volunteers to lead ministry with children, young people and families as well as co-ordinating the family support activities that volunteers run, such as food banks. There is recognition that volunteers add significant value to the work of paid workers and that without them many paid workers would not be able to run all of the activities that they do.

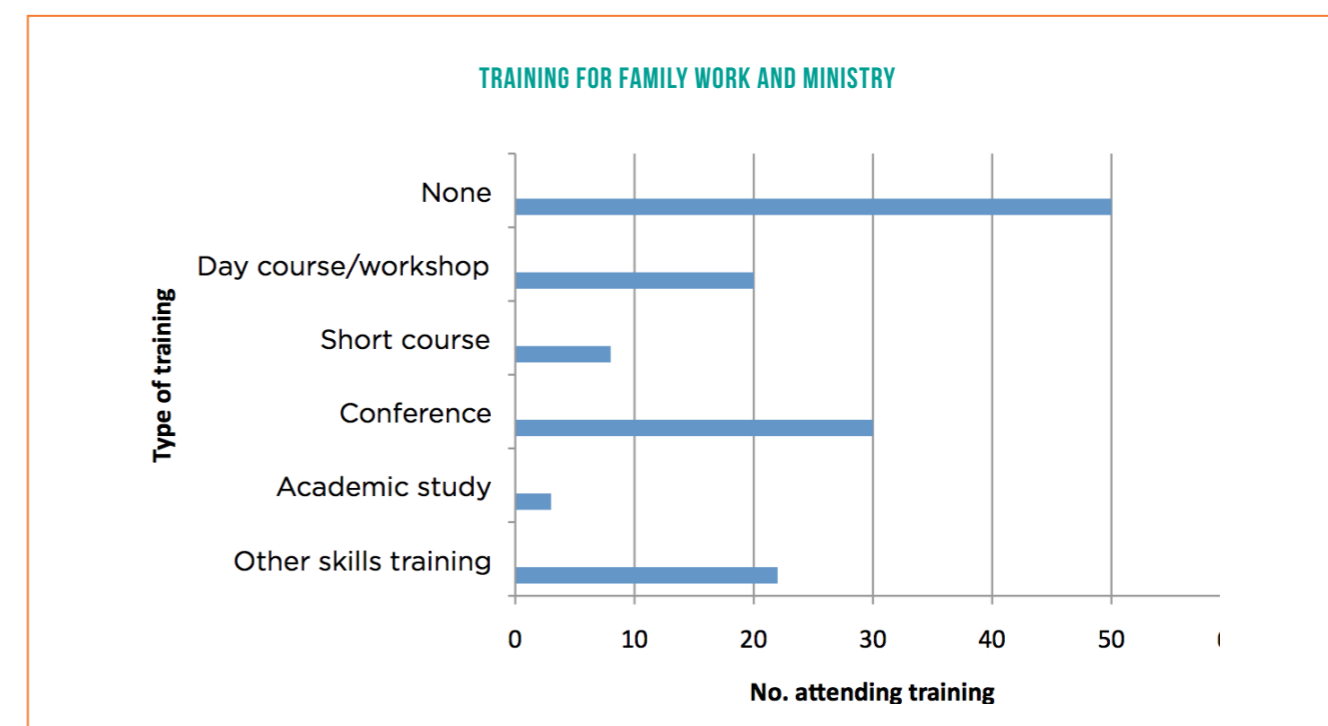
6. Training for family work

The first phase of the research consisted of online research to identify existing training provision and resources available to support family workers (see Appendix 1). From the online research a group of training providers, conference organisers and publishers were identified and invited to take part in telephone interviews. The training providers included people in both academic and non-academic settings who provide accredited and non-accredited training, including conference workshops. In addition, an online survey was completed by 12 training providers to gather some quantitative information. Practitioners

views were also sought via the online Methodist and Ecumenical surveys. This section brings together the findings from all strands of the research.

According to the Ecumenical survey the majority of those working with families have not undertaken any associated training or study to be equipped for their role in this field. For many practitioners, conferences (such as the Hand in Hand Conference) and day courses (often provided directly by denominations) or workshops were the place to participate and receive relevant training.

Chart 12



No. responses: 133

Training in these areas had been valued for a number of reasons and the benefits acknowledged across various aspects of their role. These included:

- Theological insight and exploration of scriptural understandings of family and ministry
- Opportunities for discussion and networking with other practitioners, learning with others and sharing practice and experience.

- Receiving recommendations of good ideas and available resources
- Being encouraged and inspired by speakers or through stories shared by other practitioners.

Some of the barriers to participating in training included a lack of awareness of what is available, the geographical location of training and the cost. These often hindered workers from undertaking further study in the field.

6.1 Academic training

The theological or higher education colleges that took part in the research offer a range of courses at different levels – pre-degree (or foundation level), degree and post-graduate – with core or optional modules on working with children, young people or families depending on the qualification studied. Most academic providers also offer shorter courses on working with children or young people that are open to all, either as a stand-alone course or as a way for graduates to extend their skills and knowledge.

The colleges differ in the overall focus of their training programmes, for instance Cliff College⁸ grounds its training within a framework of mission and evangelism, whilst Moorlands College has its training and course content firmly rooted in applied theology, taught by people who have “*practical and up-to-date ministry experience*”⁹. However, only a few of the people who took part in the family ministry survey or the Methodist research had completed theology degrees with children, youth or family elements. Indications are that it is mostly ministers who gain higher education-level ministry qualifications while children’s and youth workers often have specific play or youth work qualifications, including at degree level.

One Children, Youth and Families Minister in a Church of England parish had completed a 3 year degree in Youth & Children’s Ministry at Oakhill College. The philosophy of his tutor was to highlight parents as an area of focus, but the overall aim of the training was to prepare individuals teach children about Jesus, rather than how to help the whole family or the whole church ‘family’. The minister felt, however, the training was going in the right direction; that family ministry is an emerging theme and

training providers are exploring what it means and what might be the best way to do it.

Training Developments

Alongside this research, a new Core Skills in Family Ministry curriculum is being developed by members of the CGMC, led by the Methodist Church Family Ministry Development Officer, in response to cross-denominational discussions and a shared identification of training need.

In conjunction with the development of the Core Skills curriculum, Cliff College has introduced a Certificate in Family Ministry in partnership with the Methodist Learning Network and the CGMC which is designed for family workers within the church and the community. It is a week long course to be delivered via lectures and seminars, and will have practical as well as theoretical applications. The aim is to enable family workers to reflect on their practice, as well as learn new skills.

The course will cover:

- Biblical, historical and Contemporary reflections on the family
- The importance of family, and ideals surrounding family
- The seasons, celebrations and significant moments of family life
- The role and relationships in family life, and between families and the Church, and the community
- The wellbeing, wholeness and health of the family
- Practical approaches to working with families.

6.2 Informal training

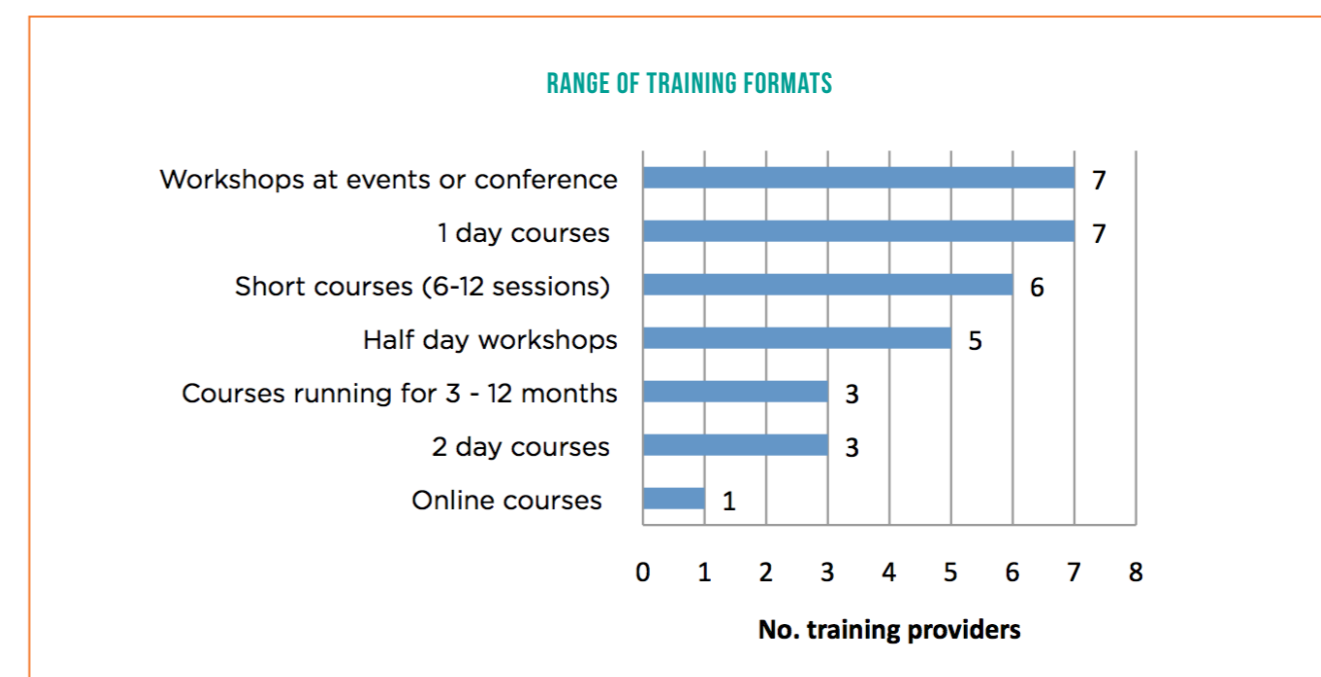
Survey evidence suggests that most family workers access informal training to develop their family work practice, usually seeking out a specific course when they identify a particular skills gap or in response to a local need, such as supporting people with drugs issues or responding to self-harm. In both the Methodist research and the broader research,

workers identified that an important part of informal training was the opportunity to meet up with other workers and share experiences. Learning from others and being able to reflect on their own practice is identified as valuable in developing their family ministry and family support activities. It is not surprising, therefore, that many family workers and volunteers access training at conferences and events. Attendance at annual conferences like the Hand in Hand Family Ministry and Neos conferences and Who let the Dads out? events and Care for the Family’s ‘Playtime’ conference appear

to be popular, alongside children’s ministry conferences and events.

In general it appears that the onus is on family workers to identify their own training needs and to source appropriate training opportunities. Training is made available by a wide range of providers and in different formats to enable more people to participate. 6/10 providers offer accredited training and 7/10 offer unaccredited training, meaning that some offer a mixture of both.

Chart 13



No. responses: 10

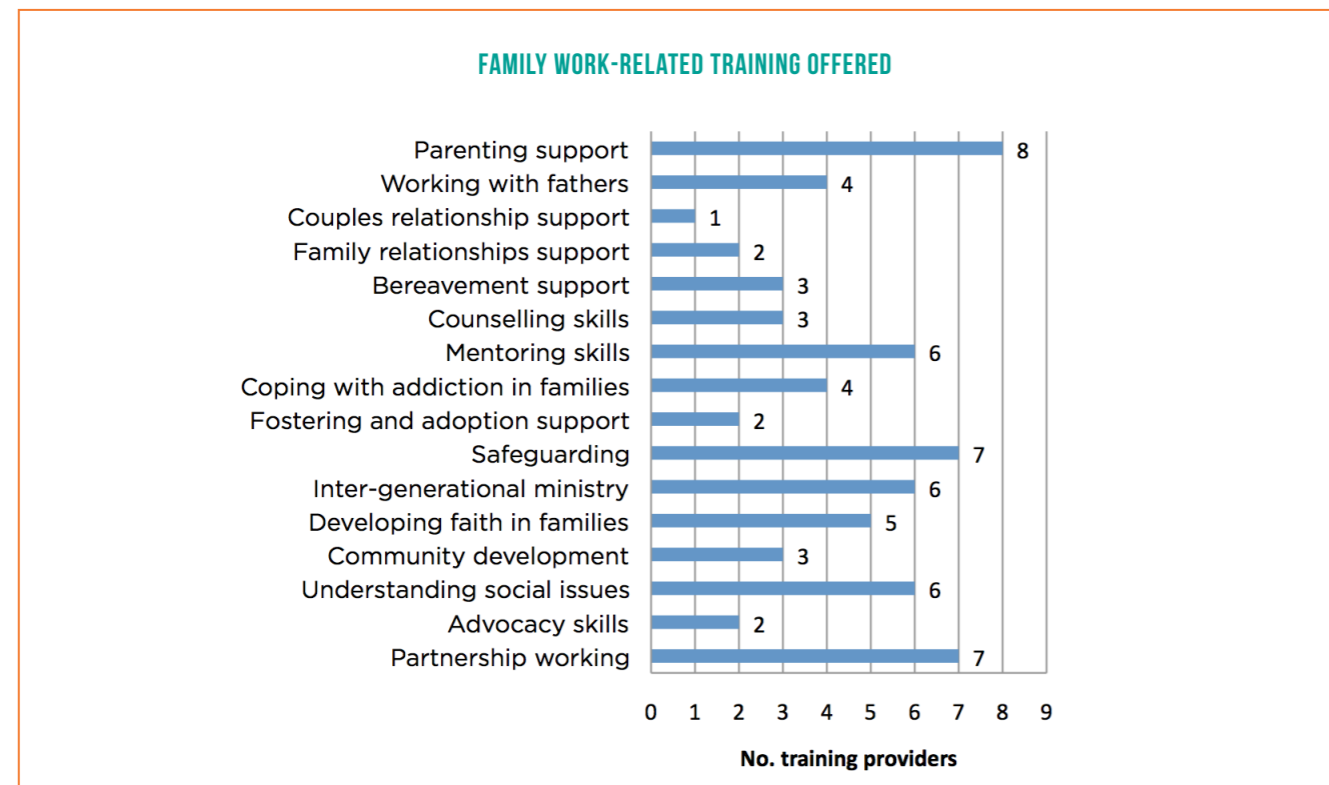
Other training on offer includes befriending, faith literacy, group facilitation, working with families with additional needs, play and creativity, community and culture. The sample shows that training is offered across the 5 areas of family ministry and family support identified in section 3, for both inward-facing family work with the church community and outward-facing work with the wider community.

Respondents to the online training providers’ survey identified the following as their most requested courses:

- Developing intergenerational, all-age worship
- Messy Church
- Forming faith in homes/families
- Parenting Skills (including work with Dads)
- Drug Prevention for Family Workers
- Safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults
- Establishing and running a Family Support Group.

⁸ “Cliff College provides education and training with a particular focus on mission and evangelism.” <http://www.cliffcollege.ac.uk/>
⁹ <http://www.moorlands.ac.uk/>

Chart 14



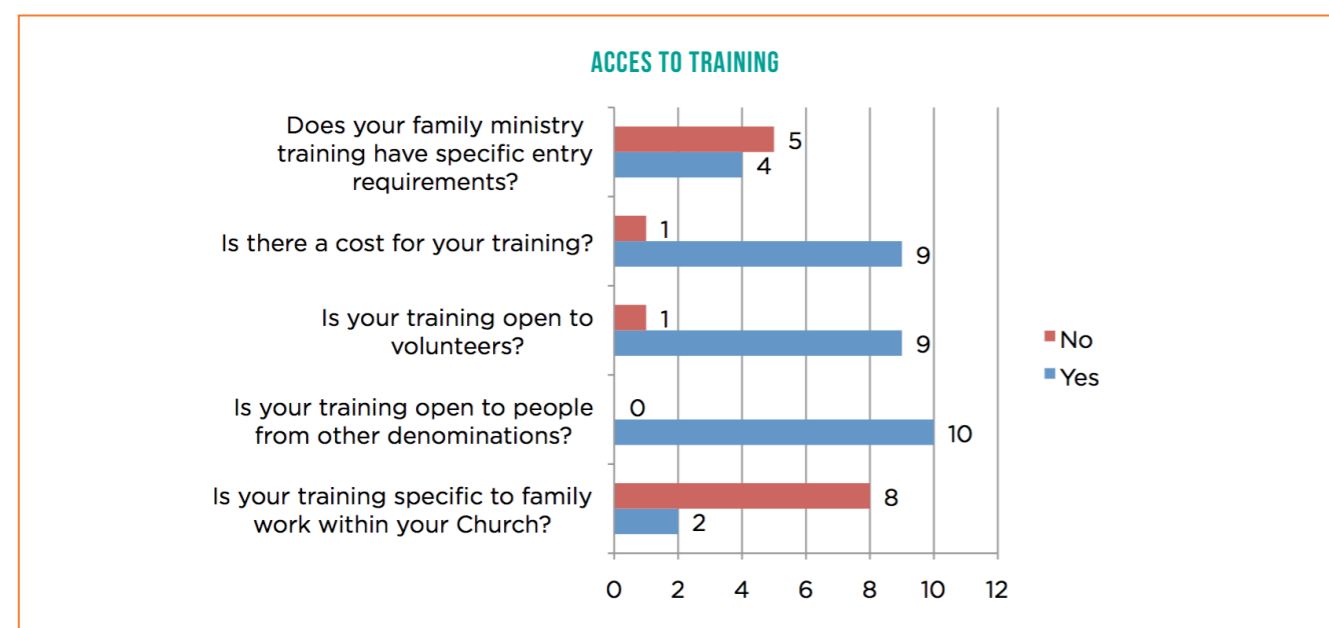
No. responses: 10

These topics were also cited by family workers who took part in the Methodist research as areas in which they had undertaken training.

Feedback from training and conference providers suggests that the numbers of participants accessing family-related training

is stable or increasing, with the possibility of a decline only in the higher education sector due to the increase in course fees for students. In terms of accessibility, 9/10 providers charge fees for their training and only academic providers have specific entry requirements.

Chart 14



No. responses: 10

6.3 Future training needs

Responses to the Ecumenical survey indicated a strong conviction that more opportunities to train in this field should be made available: 87% affirmed the need to be further equipped in their work with families. Training and conference providers reported that they try to respond to needs for family-related training expressed by family workers on the ground, or picked up in feedback from conferences and events. They engage in national debate around family ministry and discuss emerging trends in training and skills needs within their own networks with a view to developing new courses and materials in different formats.

Providers of training and conferences agree that working with families is an emerging theme for training provision, reflecting the national direction of travel in the desire to support people to work with children and young people within the context of their families, rather than in isolation. There is also a recognised move encouraging workers to develop as reflective theological practitioners, viewing and considering their work in role in the light of scripture and Christian belief.

There is consensus across family workers who responded to the survey and the Methodist research, and training providers, about the key areas where family workers are looking for family ministry-related training and where there are opportunities for development in training provision.

The following were identified as emerging training areas:

- **Exploring the definitions of 'family'** within the context of church. Understanding the changing nature and more fluid structure of families, supporting families at times of change and transition.
- **Develop a theology of family ministry** providing the context for reflective thought and practice.
- **Developing approaches to family ministry:** increase awareness of models of family ministry, how to develop a strategy and plan for family ministry and build and share a vision with others for family ministry. Training

and equipping leaders within the church to support and facilitate working with families.

- **Family Ministry with a focus on discipleship** and equipping families to talk about faith at home and to develop faith within their children, with specific reference to how churches can encourage, support and enable families to nurture faith.
- **Family Support and dealing with issues:** guidance on undertaking practical outreach with families, particular around supporting families experiencing stress or crisis such as drug or alcohol use or domestic abuse.
- **Intergenerational Church:** exploring models for all-age and intergenerational worship and how to implement them and how to sustain all age congregations that are family friendly.
- **Working with volunteers:** training and supporting volunteers and giving them the skills to be effective in their roles. Workers also want to learn how to manage volunteers well and how to deal with strong individuals effectively.

The main thing that family workers valued from training and events, and wanted more of, was to get together with other workers and share ideas and good practice. In the Methodist research a lack of networking and a sense of isolation from colleagues in the circuit were key challenges that workers reported. One role of interest in this respect is that of Divisional Family Officers for the Salvation Army. Their role is to resource, train and encourage officers in all Salvation Army centres within their divisions with appropriate family ministry for their locations. They help Corps to respond to the needs of the local community, ensure all provision is compliant with any regulations and that officers have the skills and resources they need. This enabling role appears unique among the denominations that participated in the research in having a family focus and a remit to support workers on the ground in way that responds to their specific needs and the needs of their communities, both practical and spiritual. However, they do cover very large geographical areas. The Salvation Army also has Divisional Children's Officers who work alongside their family-focused colleagues.

6.5 Questions on training for volunteers

The engagement of volunteers in training for family ministry and support raised a number of questions from research participants:

- What systems, structures and processes are in place to support and train volunteers at a local or national level? Family workers may identify their own training needs but it may not be appropriate to expect volunteers to do the same.
- Should volunteers be expected to undertake a programme of basic training including, for example, safeguarding? Should church leaders be enabling all volunteers working with children, young people and families to have training and regular support and supervision?

How do volunteers get access to training and information about training and conferences? Paid workers often have access to information on training, conferences and other professional development opportunities through their own networks and contacts. Volunteers may not

have access to such resources, how do they find out about training opportunities? How does information on training and events that comes into church leaders or church administrators get cascaded to volunteers? One interviewee remarked: *“lots of this work is carried out by volunteers or a lay minister Sometimes there’s no-one in the Church running children’s, youth and family work who has had any formal or informal training. They may not even have been at a conference or workshop about it.”*

- Where volunteers are given access to training, or are encouraged to take up training, what needs to be in place to ensure that they are able to participate in the opportunities on offer e.g. travel costs, cover for caring responsibilities etc? One training provider noted that it can be difficult to get volunteers to attend training and shared experience of volunteers booking places on courses and either simply failing to attend or ringing at the last minute to cancel due to other priorities or commitments.

7. Resources to support family work

There are myriad resources to support different aspects of family ministry, the research brief was to identify those that are currently being used and developed in the UK for the different aspects of family ministry and family support and any resources that family workers are asking for. Appendix 1 provides a summary of online resources and recommendations from people who have participated in the research. It is an indicative list of resources and more can be found by following the website links that have been included. There are links for all of the resources and publications highlighted in this section which presents examples of resources that have been mentioned or recommended by people who have participated in the research.

7.1 Organisations Supporting Family Ministry

There are a range of organisations, agencies and publishers which support family ministry of different kinds. Many of these are working in a local or denominational context. However several have a national reach, offering a variety of resources, projects and information for church or community focussed family ministry.

It includes a number of large charities that provide professional family support services to children, young people, families and older people, and in one case all four groups. They work with vulnerable people and the most in need and are established, well-respected organisations, with strong governance and

robust HR and management systems. As such, they have the potential to offer support to church-based family workers who are facing increasing numbers of families in crisis, through opportunities to access training alongside their own professional staff, or by putting in

1277

<http://www.1277.org.uk/>

1277 is an alliance of church and Christian agencies which support the work of church based toddler group. The website and Facebook page offer a network and resource for ministry with families and under 5s in carer and toddler groups.

Action for Children

<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk>

Action for Children offers support to families through offering a wide range of services, including via children’s centres and fostering and adoption services. It campaigns on various issues related to children, families and young people.

Bible Reading Fellowship

<http://www.brf.org.uk/>

BRF has a growing range of core ministries which support family ministry through websites, published resources and staff members which includes:

- Faith in Homes a website to encourage and support families as they live their faith together beyond church
- Messy Church – a flourishing fresh expression of church which brings together families together across the generations through worship, hospitality, creativity and celebration
- Who Let The Dads Out is a ministry which creates space for dads and their young children to enjoy time together hosted by the local church community

place formal referral mechanisms or offering ‘professional’ supervision sessions to help family workers cope.

The following is a representative rather than exhaustive list.

Care for the Family

<http://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/>

Since 1988, Care for the Family has supported marriage and family life through its web presence, conferences, training programmes and publications.

Children’s Society

<http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/helping-children>

The Children’s Society supports families through advocacy and lobbying government to improve life particularly for vulnerable and impoverished children and young people. It offers resources for churches to engage in these issues through prayer and campaigning.

Church Urban Fund

<https://www.cuf.org.uk/how-we-help>

The Church Urban Fund works to support local church projects which are helping marginalised families transform their lives. It has a range of publications to help churches begin and continue ministry of this kind.

CrossReach/Church of Scotland

<http://www.crossreach.org.uk>

CrossReach is the professional arm of Church of Scotland’s Social Care Council, it provides services to adults, family and children, primarily funded by local councils.

Hand in Hand Conference<http://www.handinhandconference.com/>

Held in Eastbourne at the end of January/ beginning of February each year, the Hand in Hand Conference has a stream of seminars and workshops which explore differing aspects of childrens and family ministry.

Home for Good<http://www.homeforgood.org.uk/>

Home for Good encourages churches to see fostering and adoption as an important ministry with children and families. It offers networks and resources to help churches provide local support to families which are fostering and adopting children and young people.

GodVenture<http://godventure.co.uk/>

Through an extensive website, published resources and a variety of workshops, GodVenture encourages families with young children to pray, explore and celebrate their faith together.

Make Lunch<http://www.makelunch.org.uk/>

Free school meals ensure that children from impoverished families receive at least one nutritious, balanced meal a day during term time. Make Lunch is a growing network of churches and Christian groups who are concerned to provide meals for these children during school holidays when there is no other free meal provision.

Scripture Union<http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk/>

Although their primary focus is on ministry with children and young people, Scripture Union have published resources to help churches develop engagement with families through their Top Tips and Explore Together materials.

Spurgeons Network<http://www.spurgeonsnetwork.org>

Spurgeons Network is a membership network of Christians in the UK working with children, young people and families. They encourage, support and link together individuals, churches and Christian organisations and seek to share Spurgeons experience, expertise and resource with others.

Treasure Box People<http://www.thetreasureboxpeople.co.uk/>

Each month, Treasure Box People create a box of activities and prayer ideas to help families explore a biblical story or theme together. The boxes are posted to recipients.

The Trussell Trust<http://www.trusselltrust.org/foodbank-projects>

The Trussell Trust invites churches to be part of a wider ministry which provides food banks to help families in poverty have access to the basic necessities of life.

8. Case studies in Family Ministry

These case studies offer examples of how churches are delivering family ministry and engaging the church community in conversation about what family means for them. They reflect the various ways of being church that create opportunities for shared worship, exploring scripture across all ages, family care and support as well as opportunities for families to enjoy time together develop faith. They offer a range of perspectives of how churches are currently approaching work in this field.

St Silas' Episcopal Church, Glasgow

Family ministry in St Silas, an inner city Scottish Episcopal Church, is rooted in an understanding of 'oikos' (household). We are a church for whom being 'family' is very important so we hope that our varied pattern of services and events helps us to facilitate different aspects of corporate life and worship relevant to all. This incorporates intergenerational services (called Together) which are core to the pattern of worship services, intentional events and environments where people can gather for fun, to serve, experience a sense of belonging and be disciple and includes 'Dangerous Church' a group for Dads and their children. The church aims to cultivate a culture of extended family, where authentic discipleship for all ages/stages can take place.

The Ark at Crawcrook, Tyne & Wear

The Ark is a soft play centre, church and cafe in the ex-mining village of Crawcrook in Gateshead. About 5 years ago, the congregation at Robert Young Memorial Church made the difficult decision to close as they were no longer able to keep filling all the roles needed. The Circuit then had to make the decision as to whether to sell the building or use it as a centre for mission. They decided to build a soft play centre which would become a community hub and a fresh expression of church.

In May 2013 The Ark opened. It predominantly serves the under 5s and families in the local and extended communities. They seek to listen to

what the community needs and work together to try and support these needs and work with other agencies such as the local Council as well as local organisations. When a place like The Ark opens it is easy to be full of good ideas but they soon discovered that it was only God ideas which would work.

In the last two years a special needs play session has been established which runs fortnightly and came about from conversations with local parents and Councillors. Messy Play sessions are also run, a mums and babies club called Babyccinos which runs twice a week which came from conversations with local new mums. Other activities include a story and rhyme session, hosting RE lessons for local schools, supporting local special needs schools, local charities, carers organisations....the list goes on. All that The Ark does tries to respond to real need rather than good ideas. They now have a reputation for listening and responding in the community and local agencies now approach them to help with issues.

Seasonal services are held for families and baptisms too but at the moment the team feel strongly that it is really important to build relationships and trust before being entitled to share the Gospel with them. As Deacon Tracey Hume says *"We have so many conversations which are triggered by life experiences or seeing what we do that we rarely need to start them ourselves. Most of all we cover all we do in prayer and seek to join in with what God is already doing."*

Baptisms have been an interesting development, as weekly or monthly service are not held and there is not a regular congregation. This was reflected on theologically on with people involved with Fresh Expressions and felt that the minister and a representative from the Ark family of staff and volunteers could suffice as "Members of the Body of Christ". These baptisms are quite different: they are authentically "Ark" and use the playframe. The child is very much at the centre of the service and it is made as accessible for them as possible. The service begins with a Bible story and children are encouraged to find

something hidden on the playframe. Then there are readings and the baptism itself using the font which was used by Robert Young Memorial in order that there is an ongoing story in that place. Some of the language of the baptism service is adapted in order to make it more understandable for those present who are generally unchurched. After the baptism the imagery of a butterfly is used and children are sent on a butterfly hunt so that each person present receives a butterfly with the child's name in so they can remember to pray for the child. An Ark Godparent, one of our staff or volunteers, is provided who promises to pray for the child, send them a birthday card and let them know about special services and events coming up at The Ark as a way of ongoing contact.

Frankley Plus Children's Centre, Birmingham – a children's centre based at Holly Hill Methodist School working with families that are considered hard to reach. It's a centre that runs with a strong Methodist ethos inherited from the school wanting to provide the best services and caring for those in that neighbourhood. When the centre opened in 2006 it worked with 600 families and had a reach figure of 97%- built up a strong and crucial reputation built on word of mouth recommendations where there's a sense that the families view the centre as their own. Their remit has grown so they're now working across 3 centres locally providing stay and play sessions, midwife clinics, stop smoking groups and support for those experiencing domestic violence. Essential services for people in that area. Many of those who originally accessed services have gone on to become key volunteers working for the centre today.

Church of Scotland / CrossReach and ConneXions

CrossReach is the professional arm of Church of Scotland's Social Care Council. It is one of the biggest social care providers in Scotland, providing Adult, Family and Children, and Older People services, primarily funded by local councils. It is moving towards a more holistic model of working across all ages as it supports people from age 0 to end of life. CrossReach has created a new Department for Children and

Families to bring services together and set up ConneXions, a service offering support to local churches on a number of levels:

- It is developing networks with people in local churches using social media to create a contacts database for social action in communities. ConneXions has a sophisticated social media strategy making use of a number of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Storify.
- It aims to enable church workers and volunteers to access resources, examples of good practice and online training drawing on the family support expertise existing in CrossReach.
- It is developing mechanisms for CrossReach staff to share workshop materials, guidance for working with families on particular issues and information sheets on the CrossReach website and for church workers to be able to access them.
- It is exploring innovative methods of capturing good practice, for instance by creating films showing 'how to' provide good family support which would help all workers and particularly those located in isolated areas.
-

Acorn Centre, Leith, Edinburgh – a partnership between YMCA Edinburgh and the Methodist Church,

This centre operates in a deprived part of the city providing services for parents, children and young people. At the Tuesday women's group women of all ages and preschool children take part in a range of social and educational activities, beginning with a meal. There are women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and ages that participate. The group provides a safe social setting where women can meet and make new friendships. Some of the Mums who've been involved over the past ten years shared how vital the group had been in building confidence and supporting them as parents. They spoke so enthusiastically about the importance of being able to meet together and the love and care they'd experienced from those running the group. The centre has organised short breaks for parents and children to further

encourage mutual support and develop family relationships. The centre youth worker has a much more family oriented role now, liaising with parents and local schools regarding children's behaviour and progress. This has proved to be an enormously helpful link. There is a move towards a much more strategic and holistic approach when working with families to tailor services to meet their needs.

Parents Support Group, Kinver Methodist – this group was set up in 2013 by two family workers to provide a space for parents on the fringe of church life, it began life as a support group, has grown so there are now over 25 people coming along and recently they embarked on their first bible study exploring the armour of God in Ephesians. It is a mixed group of people from varied family settings, some parents bring their young children who are minded by older congregation members. They have also created 'Baptism Discovery Evenings' where families are invited to learn more about baptising a child, this happens in an environment of hospitality and openness which often leads to many spiritual questions being asked. The workers have hosted two reunion-type events in a local soft play centre, offering prayer opportunities and building relationships further.

Jersey Methodist Layworkers – the children and family workers on Jersey work together to plan and provide Messy Churches across the island, opening a dedicated Messy Church Centre in a church building in 2013. They've also developed Messy Church Community for adults with special needs and regularly visit nursing homes locally taking Messy Church to residents there. Work is well joined-up here, with workers coordinating activities and events across churches on the island and sharing resources where need be.

Kings Cross Methodist Church, London – one church with 3 congregations speaking Cantonese, mandarin and English where the women of the older generation lead English classes often for mothers with young children, supporting them as they adapt to life here and get to grips with a new language and environment. The church is a vital centre for

the community as it offers a place for new immigrants to acclimatise and be supported as they adapt to life in a different culture. They also run a Wednesday lunch club, Chicken Chow Mein, providing food for anyone in need of a meal, this being a way to love their neighbours and the local community.

St John's Methodist, Market Weighton – a small rural church in Yorkshire that intentionally sought to meet the needs of parents and families. In 2008 when Rev Sue Pegg arrived there were no children or families in the life of the church. Since then they've established 'Tea and Toast' for parents and young children after they drop off at the school next door which now welcomes up to 50 families. Other family activities and services have been added so that the church is now thriving with parents and children all week long all very much based on the expressed need of families in the village.

Missional work at Bramhall Methodist Church

Jo Fletcher, Children's and Family Worker, coordinates a number of activities and programmes at Bramhall Methodist Church, including Junior church, Little Fishes toddler group, youth fellowship, the pre-school, Messy Church and various uniformed organisations. She is a link to the various groups and seeks to draw them together in the life of the church. She says *"A pattern began to emerge in the conversations with some of the parents attending our weekly toddler group or with those bringing their children for baptism. While there seemed to be a genuine interest in church and exploring faith, there was an obvious and increasingly understandable reluctance to come along on a Sunday morning to something which was so out of routine and potentially alien."*

A need was identified for the church to offer a 'half-way' meeting point, encouraging people who were starting out on a journey of faith to explore further. In the summer of 2012, a series of five evening sessions called "Intro" was launched – an introduction to faith and to life. Each session, headed under a different theme, provided an opportunity for people at a similar stage in life to explore and ask questions

about a relationship with God. Home-made cakes, biscuits and fresh coffee were offered as different aspects church life were unpacked. Another very powerful element to each session was a weekly testimony from a different member of the church about their journey of faith, and how they had discovered God. The church has welcomed a group of people into membership, some of which has been a direct result of the work of groups such as 'Intro'.

Toddler Church at Loughton Methodist Church

Toddler Church meets on a Tuesday morning as a brief time of worship followed by refreshments of toast, tea and coffee with time for participants to get to know one another better. The congregation consists of many grandparents bringing grandchildren (primarily as they are in a childminding role). The service is informal, consisting of prayers, storytelling, singing and an offering moment where children bring forward coins to place in a special money box. It has a relaxed atmosphere where all are invited to actively participate and respond regardless of age.

Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru - Eglwys Gymunedol Noddfa

The Presbyterian Church of Wales - Noddfa Community Church

Misson work started in Noddfa in 1955 under the leadership of Sister Emily Roberts who came to live and work in Ysgubor Goch, the new housing estate built by the local council on the outskirts of Caernarfon. Half a century later the estate which is now called Peblig, it is classed as a 'deprived' area according to the Welsh Index for Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) which measures various factors such as education, health, employment, access to services etc. What the WIMD does not measure, however, is the strength of community and sense of belonging that is present in Peblig.

Noddfa has a small but committed congregation meeting every Sunday afternoon for worship, Sunday School and a 'panad' (cuppa)! It has a good cross-section of ages, Welsh language worship is still quite traditional in most chapels in Wales - but not in Noddfa! Services are

informal and welcoming, the church strives to be inclusive, holding family worship and have also started Messy Church which has seen even more families and children being part of worship. This is often the first step in building relationships with people which is imperative for any church involved in community work.

There are currently two full time posts at Noddfa, employed by the PCW: a Community Worker and youth and children's worker. The 'week's work' is different: community work involves offering practical help and support to people with various social issues that usually involves benefit claims and delays, housing issues and debt problems. In youth work various weekly clubs and play schemes in the holidays are organised, the worker also supports families with various issues they might face.

Like Sister Emily in the 1950's, Noddfa today attempts to preach the Gospel and serve the community in Christ's name, believing that both go hand in hand in mission work there. They serve the community as a response to hearing the Gospel of love, grace, justice and hope, praying they make a difference, however small, in improving people's lives both practically and spiritually.

Intergenerational pilot in Kingston Circuit

Bonnie-Belle Pickard, the circuit superintendent, described a pilot project that took place in the summer of 2014. A new style of worship was explored with the express intention of seeking to create more intergenerational involvement with opportunities to worship together. This 4 week experiment adopted a zone approach: the first half hour spent together with a story shared then for the second half hour a choice of four zones offered: art, a sermon, meditation or active. These zones changed in content and form week to week and feedback sought after. They have proved to be popular and have observed that no one under the age of 50 stays in the sermon. The widest range of ages are found in the active zone, there is a hope to potentially offer these times again in future.

Kingston Methodist Church

Kingston Methodist Church is located just at the edge of the town centre and has about 80 members with 20 different nationalities which shows clearly the diversity of the church life. Quite a few of West Africans and Eastern Europeans have influenced the worship style, with more lively hymns. There are many families in the congregation, the Sunday school is popular and there are strong links with Boys Brigade. Messy Church takes place once a month, which is very well attended by the local community.

One of the strengths of this church is their 'welcome' and caring approach, everyone feels their differences are respected and valued, and they all feel the sense of belonging like a family. Currently they are trying to put more emphasis on learning and growing in faith as many have come from different backgrounds.

Action for Children and The Methodist Church: Children Centre partnership

Mirfield Children's Centre in Kirklees, West Yorkshire, is an Action for Children project. The Rev Alison Crookes is a member of the advisory board, suggesting ideas and proactively supporting the centre in its work. They have built a close partnership between the church and the centre so that a number of links have been created such as fundraising for Christmas presents, using the kitchen to run cooking classes, putting up an info board, hosting a one stop shop for advice, a family forum group and parties at Christmas and Easter. Gillian Haigh, the centre manager says: *"we have worked very closely with St Andrews Methodist Church, Mirfield, for the past 5 years, and have a strong relationship with the church. St Andrews...has been absolutely instrumental in the success of Mirfield CC and we consider them to be a vital partner."*

Eucharistic midweek congregation

A eucharistic midweek congregation in suburban North Ascot in Berkshire aimed primarily at under 5s and their families. This fresh expression of church, called Mini Mass, meets on a Tuesday morning at 9.30am after the school run in the

Chapel of St Mary and St John.

The vicar believes that one real strength of Mini Mass is that it has proved for some to be a gentle way 'into the church' or 'back into the church'. One ongoing concern is that for some it has proved to be merely a cul-de-sac, with a service designed for children being the only act of worship for a few of the adults. While some reflection on how to move beyond this is required, Mini Mass remains one of the important opportunities for outreach, service and pastoral care offered by the parish of All Saints.

These reflections of the parish illustrate one of the dilemmas of church for under 5s. Who is being disciplined in this context and what does discipleship mean? What is the long term strategy for helping young children grow up in the Christian faith?

Church in a soft play centre

Caroline Holt, a lay member of the local Methodist congregation, established The Wesley Playhouse in Birstall, West Yorkshire in 2008. Every month, as many as 1,000 pre-school children plus mums, dads and grandparents, visit the play area midweek for fun and relaxation.

Those that come know it is a soft play area run by Christians. There is a prayer board, as well as booklets on tables introducing the Christian faith. Volunteers chat with those who use the centre, and a counselling room has been created that offers parents the chance for a quiet chat while being able to watch their children play through a large glass window. The feedback Caroline and the team receive from those that use the Playhouse has been remarkably positive. The relaxed and caring atmosphere of the Playhouse is sensed and much appreciated.

For the numerous parties that are held in the centre, invitations are included in the party bags for families to come to the once a month Sunday 4pm gathering called Playhouse Praise. Crafts, songs and prayers are used in a similar style to a Messy Church gathering. Three christenings have taken place in the centre this year. The majority of those who visit Playhouse Praise have never before had any meaningful contact with church.

Weekly creative self-esteem/low key discipleship group

Space4Me is for mums of children under 5 in Sheffield that has evolved out of a flourishing mother and toddler ministry of a large church. It is aimed at women who are interested in exploring more about God but struggle to 'fit' into a usual church setting. It is deliberately kept small to enable friendships to deepen and discussions to take place.

A fresh expression of worship at Sheffield Cathedral

Little Fishes is a monthly toddler service that meets at 10.30am on the first Thursday of every month. Toddlers and their parent and/or grandparent follow the trail of little laminated fishes from the cathedral door through this beautiful sacred building to the side chapel. As the service begins, each parent and child lights a tea light and places it on the altar, a symbol of special time set aside together with each other and with God.

Sitting on cushions on the floor in a circle, simple songs are sung and simple prayers are prayed. Canon Dr Joanne Grenfell, residentiary canon on staff at the cathedral, guides the group through their time together. Boxes of raisins are handed out just before a short Bible story is told by a team member in Godly Play style. Everyone quietly eats their snack while listening. This is followed by a craft activity prepared and led by one of the mums, with tea, coffee and biscuits served by a volunteer.

The service concludes with prayers where the children are asked to think of anything that has made them feel sad, worried, happy or thankful; with the help of a bubble machine, all this is offered to God, and the service ends with a farewell song and a blessing.

An Integrationist Approach –St Johns Church, Cheshire

The youthworker role here has moved away from being focused just on young people, to a broader focus on the 'household' (extended family) and the wider church family and is now titled 'Youth, Children & Families Minister'.The

focus on the 'wider church family' relates to the gathered community of St John's and the notion that every child is in some way in relationship to the rest of the church. This approach requires not seeing children and young people in isolation but locating them within a household.

There are several strands to this approach of integration, one is that part of the Youth, Children & Families Minister's role is to support parents to take the lead and responsibility for building their children's faith. Another is looking at how the wider church family fulfils its responsibilities for nurturing children's faith and how the structures and culture of the wider church help or hinder the understanding that whole households matter, not just parts of them in separate groups.

Work has included setting up an Intergenerational discussion group with representatives from every decade of the church family - 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80 - has been set up. It makes recommendations for change in church and meets every 4 months to review progress. Young people (14+ years) have been trained and encouraged to move from a separate contemporary-style evening service into the morning service with adults and different groups in church now cover the same topics for discussion, if the adults are doing the Gospel of John then so are the children. In that way, people in the household or the wider church can all talk about what they have been doing when they get back together.

9. Key Findings from the Research

A review of the findings shows that overall there are consistent themes and messages emerging from the research undertaken for this report. There are broadly similar experiences being shared by family workers across different denominations, although there is lots of diversity in the detail of what people are doing. This section will summarise and reflect on the themes identified and highlight some points for consideration by churches at strategic and operational levels. These findings fall under four headings: Understanding Family Ministry, The Spectrum of Family Ministry, Issues in Family Ministry & Support and Equipping for Family Ministry.

9.1 Four Key Findings

Understanding Family Ministry

There is a broad consensus that the understanding of family has changed, the nuclear family is no longer representative of the only lived experience of many people and churches are recognising that families are diverse and fluid. Churches are struggling to find terms that effectively describe the contemporary nature of family and terms such as 'household' have been used which is indicative of this. It enables a wider understanding of family to develop that goes beyond the concept of the nuclear family to encompass multifarious relationships. It suggests a desire to adopt more inclusive language when considering the features of family as encountered in the 21st century. The research also identified the church congregation, community or family as an important focus of family work.

Recognising the shift in family types, the changing experience of being family in today's society and embracing the wider context of ministry with families can present challenges for churches, its work and ministry. Finding ways to increase knowledge and understanding, appreciating the needs of different families and adapting language are all vital in this new landscape so that everyone receives an authentic welcome.

The appointment of 'family' workers illustrates the general direction of travel away from working with children or young people in isolation, and the recognition that a more holistic approach of working with children or young people alongside their family or extended 'household' is likely to achieve better outcomes for all. This is the case for both family ministry and family support.

The Spectrum of Family Ministry

Through the course of the research it has become clear that activity considered to be 'family ministry' is varied and has its place on the wide spectrum of work churches engage in with families. Two main strands of church-based family work have been identified:

- Family *ministry* is about nurturing faith in households, bringing together the church family, intergenerationally and 'all as one body' as well as growing the church community
- Family *support* is about providing services to meet the needs of local families, churched and unchurched, including pastoral care in the form of support during life events and social action such as food banks and homelessness shelters.

Both family ministry and family support have elements that are inward-facing to the church community and outward-facing to the wider community. Outward-facing family support usually includes non-congregational families, often without expectations of bringing them into the church community. It is likely that many churches do elements of both.

Family workers are delivering a wide range of services and activities, mostly based in group-work such as toddler groups, parent support groups, holiday activities, Messy Church and church social activities. Some are involved in food banks, providing practical care and advice, as well as supporting family work led by professional agencies on church premises.

There are different views on whether all services and activities delivered by church should have a missional aspect. Some people feel

they should, particularly services like toddler groups and youth clubs where building faith in families should be a core component. Family support services, it is generally felt, should be accessible to everyone in need, of all faiths or none. However, it is often the same family worker delivering all of these services and workers report a lack of clarity in expectations in relation to missional focus on them and on families. Some report that they have been surprised when 'un-churched' parents willingly turn up to church activities that their children are involved in but they are unsure of the best approach to engage them further as an invitation into Sunday worship might be a step too far too quickly.

The findings suggest that local context for churches is an important consideration for family work and possibly one that is not fully recognised if church leadership has an inward-looking focus.

The location and demographics of the local community within which the church sits is a significant factor. Ethnically and culturally diverse neighbourhoods require an outward-facing approach to enable the church to maintain a meaningful place in the community (these churches are not well represented in the sample) and this is likely to offer opportunities to work in partnership with other churches and / or faith organisations to support different groups in the community. In areas of high deprivation, the focus of family work is more likely in the current climate to be on meeting the needs on the doorstep, working to support both 'churched' and 'un-churched' families who are struggling.

Where poverty is less of an immediate issue for the local community, more energy may be directed to reviewing the internal culture and structure of the church, if needed, to develop the 'church family' and explore how it could be more inclusive, more open to doing things differently to broaden its reach (while still providing core activities in church and in the community).

The reflection is that family ministry and support should be defined in the context of each church community. Churches should understand their environment, undertake a community mapping exercise perhaps, to capture where they have strong outreach links to support family ministry and support, such as with local schools or

professional family support agencies, and where they can be better connected to ensure they are relevant to their local community. This will be increasingly important as the context changes, as other local services continue to reduce due to financial cuts and churches may need to develop more opportunities for working as Churches Together partnerships where they are the 'last men standing'.

Three drivers for family work were identified that often underpin work in this field:

- To focus the whole church community on supporting each other to have a lifelong relationship with Jesus. The priority is usually identified as embedding faith in children and young people so that they continue in faith into adulthood. There was a strong view expressed that parents should take back some responsibility for nurturing faith in their children. People talked about the whole church family coming together to nurture faith in each other.
- As a core expression of lived Christianity, responding to meet needs in the local community and especially those most in need. The work of the Salvation Army, for instance, is very much led by the specific needs of each community in which its Corps are located. It offers a mixed model of family ministry and support with a strong mixture of practical 'faith in action' and creative approaches to worship and ministry.
- A strategy to attract new parents, children and young people into the life of the church. This is linked to the first driver in respect of the 'missing generation' breaking the cycle of faith in families. It is inspiring churches to try new things but perhaps not always to think through what they want to achieve other than to bring more people in.

Developing an understanding of these drivers and the place they occupy within a church's work with families is important. This can bring clarity to purpose and intention around family ministry activity which encourages a more strategic approach to practice.

Issues in Family Ministry and Support

Questions are raised by the research about working with the 'missing generation', the church as intergenerational community (finding ways to nurture relationships across differing age groups) and the forming of effective partnerships with other organisations working with families.

In the process of the research it emerged that parents are often the 'missing generation' in churches, where children are attending with grandparents, and even where parents are attending they are not expecting to meet God in church, where children do have that expectation. There is a general feeling that if parents do not attend, children and young people will not develop a sustainable relationship with God.

There is concern that traditional church models have become too differentiated in a bid to appeal to more people. The church family has become segregated, with a lack of meaningful relationships between different groups of members – like a dysfunctional family.

There is a view that the segregation has been exacerbated by a 'consumerist' approach on the part of church goers, with people feeling the church must meet their preferences, or their schedule, or they will not attend. Again, separation engenders the lack of a sense of responsibility to other church members or to the church family as a whole.

Conversely, there is concern that specialist skills are being diluted where children's or youth workers, for example, are being asked to extend their role to include family members of all ages, where they might not have appropriate skills or experience.

There is a sense that in some areas the church is the 'last man standing' able to offer support to families with rising levels of need, more complex needs and requiring more crisis intervention due to the impact of cuts in local authority services and other austerity measures, such as welfare reform. This is only likely to become more common.

A third of family workers who responded to the survey reported that they were not working in partnership with local agencies therefore they are unable to refer people on to professional

family support services or seek advice and support for themselves.

Increased levels of social action offer opportunities for church volunteers to get involved, however volunteers need to be managed, supported and trained to work sensitively with vulnerable families and often the structures to do this effectively do not appear to be in place.

Equipping for Family Ministry

Some family workers feel under-qualified to deal with some issues they are encountering in families in need, or that they need more training and support to be able to respond effectively. It was noted that families with complex structures often require more support and flexibility. Many workers experience isolation and believe that children and families work is side-lined within the church. The view was expressed that some church leaders may feel that they have delegated family work to a paid professional with the necessary expertise and place confidence in the judgement of the family worker.

Alongside delivering core services, some workers are actively involved in encouraging integration within the broader mission and ministry of the church by engaging people in dialogue to change attitudes, planning and organising new approaches, recruiting, training and equipping volunteers and reporting to management, as well as engaging in debate in the wider church through conferences and events.

Identifying effective training courses and pathways for study is a significant question relevant for all those working with families. This research suggests that more opportunities to undertake training encouraging the development of knowledge and practice at a greater depth is much sought after by family workers. Enabling them to become reflective theological practitioners is a vital area to explore with potential to embed current good practice as well as cultivating valuable understanding for the future.

9.2 Challenges for the Church

The findings from this comprehensive research raise 15 significant questions for the church, leaders, workers and congregations. These are outlined below and provided as a path to encouraging wider conversations about family ministry and support with the aim to develop thought, practice and approaches in the field.

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|--|---|
| Q. What are the various types of family found in your local context or community? | Q. What impact are funding cuts having on services in your area? |
| Q. How could the family work and ministry in your context become more inclusive of different kinds of family? | Q. What structures does your church have to manage, support and train volunteers? |
| Q. Which elements of family work are a priority in your church? Are they the right ones? | Q. What training can be offered to more fully equip those working with families? |
| Q. Which of these drivers sits behind work with families in your church? Is it a combination of them, or something else that makes family work a priority? | Q. What does effective supervision look like that provides both accountability and support for family workers? |
| Q. How does your whole church community come together for shared worship and conversation? What would need to change to make this happen? | Q. What opportunities exist in the church and local context for family workers to engage in wider, more strategic discussions about ministry with families? |
| Q. How are leaders in your church being trained and equipped to support intergenerational ministry? | Q. How do churches achieve a balance between responding to need and missional activity? |
| Q. How well connected are your workers and volunteers with local agencies that support families? | Q. How does your context impact on your priorities for family work? What is the profile of the local population? |
| | Q. Who are your key local partners in family ministry and support? |

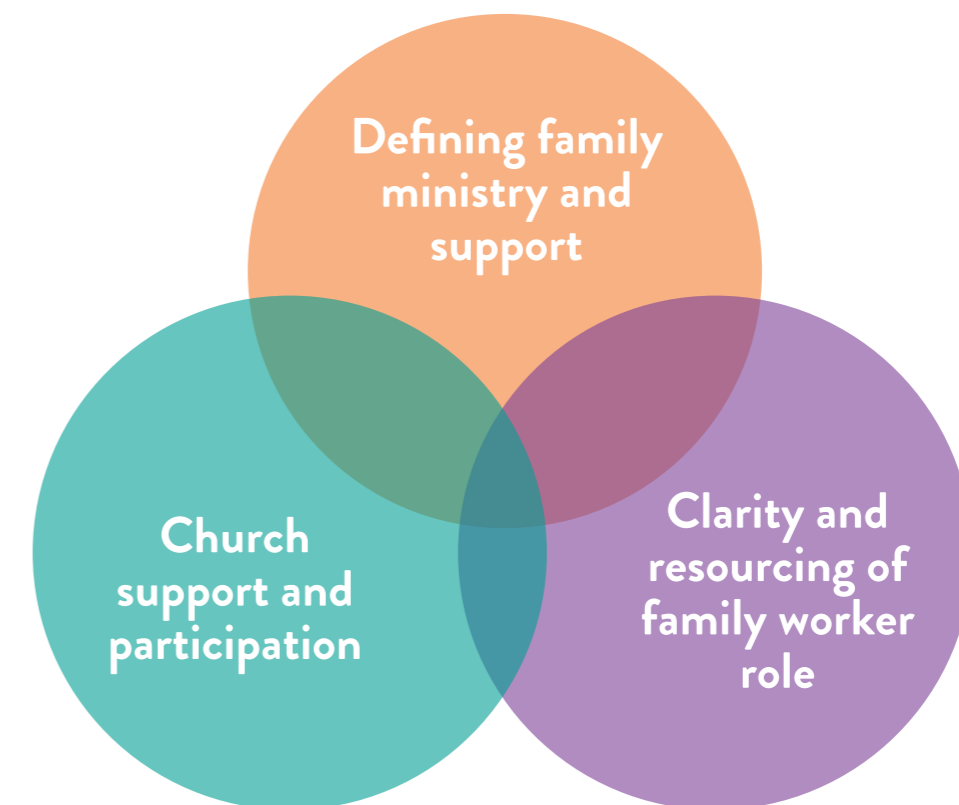
9.3 Closing Remarks

Factors for effective family ministry and support

The research suggests that family ministry and support is most effective when:

- There is a clear definition of what is meant by family ministry and support in a particular context, the parameters are defined and areas of work are distinct. A common understanding exists of the nature and scope of family work within the church
- Family workers have a clear mandate for their role and are well equipped in terms of resources, awareness of needs and training. This enables them to develop an intentional family ministry and support strategy
- Churches have a fully embedded family ethos, sharing the vision of what ‘family’ means in all senses for the church community and a commitment to support families in that local environment. Church members are will to participate in family ministry and support is seen as a whole church approach to supporting and cultivating the wellbeing of all kinds of families within the church and the wider community.

Figure 2: Factors for effective family ministry and support



This research has sought to present the current landscape of church based work with families. It has reported extensively about the nature of family ministry today and provides a foundation for future developments in this field: supporting and equipping those committed to seeing families thrive and offering a vital contribution to the wellbeing of families in communities across Great Britain.

