

PASSING THE SPIRITUAL BATON

Determinants of Spiritual Parenting in the Irish Mission of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

“I thought, let me choose a small country. As much as I wanted to make some money and have a better life, I also thought, when I go there, I also have to raise a family, have Christian values and all.... So what am I going to do for my son? Did I bring him here to give him a better life, better in materialistic things, and then destroy his faith, his spiritual life completely? That’s something bothering me now as a migrant coming to the West.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Determinants of Spiritual Parenting in the Irish Mission of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church

In this research, we explored the factors that determined the choices and decisions that parents in the Irish Mission of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church made in fostering spirituality in their children. We considered the principles and values that they sought to pass on to their children, the sources of these ideals and the methods that they used to propagate them. We further explored the challenges that they faced and how they dealt with these issues to prioritise the spiritual welfare of their children.

We interviewed a total of 24 parents of children aged 17 years and below in single, couple or focus group interviews. The participants were parents from diverse cultural and national backgrounds, residing in various regions across Ireland and Northern Ireland. Below, we highlight some of key findings from this research.

We hope that this study will support the Church to partner more closely with parents in the areas that they have identified to help them to build a strong and enduring spiritual foundation in the Church's young people.

Key Findings

Family routines and impact on spirituality

Unchecked, parents' work schedules and children's school and extracurricular engagements left little space for family time and worship during the week. Most spiritual activities were saved for the weekend. Only when parents made decisions to alter their work schedules to facilitate more time with children was it possible to have meaningful interactions during the week. These got disrupted again once parents returned to work and older children started tertiary education. Homeschooling, coupled with self-employment or flexible work, worked for some, but this was unattainable for many.

Spiritual development and its markers

Parents drew from the Bible, nature, family occurrences and other sources to teach children about God. They modelled behaviours, answered questions, reinforced teachings and rewarded children's efforts. Many focused on leading their children to have a personal relationship with a loving, caring and forgiving God. They prayed for their children and engaged them in conversation. Many saw the fruits of their labour, and God's answer to their prayers, when children started living the principles taught. Others sought evidence in external markers of compliance such as church attendance and participation.

Values, sources and adaptation

Parents taught godly principles and values drawing ideas from the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and personal upbringing. Likewise, parents sifted through values systems, adopting some ideals, modifying others and discarding others entirely. Children's personalities, age, birth order and family life circumstances dictated when and how values were taught.

While parents felt they were doing their best to raise godly children, their biggest fears centred around their children abandoning God and the faith – fears that many considered entirely conceivable in the prevailing environment.

Boundaries

Parents set clear boundaries for their children and many ensured children adhered to them. Their focus was on equipping their children to survive and thrive spiritually and in other ways in a confused and confusing world even in the absence of parents. Some parents, however, struggled to enforce boundaries when they impinged on their own time and when dealing with wilful children with changing mindsets.

Obstacles and challenges

Lack of social support (including in extended family networks) compounded the challenges that parents experienced in trying to raise godly children. Segregation, criticism, judgement and negative influences from within the Church made parents' work even harder. While a few parents had been able to create robust spiritual and social networks for their families, many had not, and they desired more cohesive and inclusive church communities and more targeted programming from the church.

Popular ideas in a fast-changing pluralistic society further added to this complexity especially when they led teenagers to question the values held by their parents and the Church. Parents' own limited knowledge of widespread ideas within children's schools and other environments meant they could not fully equip their children to deal effectively with challenges to their faith.

Instructions on sex and sexuality

Most parents appeared well equipped and able to teach their children about their bodies and their care and protection. A minority were unsure about how to approach these and more complex conversations including relationships, gender and sexuality. Moreover, the social and legal implications of what they believed and taught appeared unconsidered by many.

Recommendations

It is with the above observations in mind that we make the following recommendations:

More cohesive and supportive church communities

The Irish Mission needs to take a deliberate approach to foster smaller and cohesive communities within churches centred on spiritual and other practical matters, rather than ethnicity. These groups will support children (and adults) facing isolation because of ethnicity, parents' positions in the Church, disability or even choices like homeschooling and help to increase the spiritual sphere of influence available to growing children.

The need for such communities extends beyond weekly service attendance and cannot be provided by more engaging programmes and Bible studies alone. Building networks, forming friendships and connecting through 'non-church' activities play a crucial role in fostering healthy ways of supporting one another.

Support to develop family spiritual habits

Parents need support to develop spiritual strongholds based on the realisation that Christians live in exile on this earth and, no matter where they take up residence, a robust spiritual practice will always demand commitment and consistency. To that end, they need to be supported to be more intentional about who they are as Christians especially in setting up their own spiritual practices as well as those of their families. These habits need to be observed and reinforced daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annually.

Many parents viewed social media, and digital technology in general, negatively even though they (eventually) allowed children access to it. Given the ubiquity of social media, parents need to be equipped to guide children through online activities and to develop healthy social media habits. Likewise, the Church needs to develop ways to connect with families through social media and support families to develop spiritual habits that include social media discipline.

Education on thorny subjects

More biblical grounding is needed for parents and children alike – for example, through workshops and targeted programmes – to equip them to deal with secular ideas permeating the church especially those relating to Darwinism, humanism, evolutionary creation, sex and sexuality. At the same time, church leaders and parents could consider engaging with educational authorities to gain a deeper understanding of the school curriculum, recognising how it enriches children's knowledge of the world while also posing challenges to their faith.

Support for homeschooling parents / stay-at-home parents

Homeschooling parents need to be better supported to access learning materials and to create supportive networks among themselves. Lack of support, financial stability and a desire for adult pursuits were noted as the main reasons parents went back to work even while wishing to spend more time raising their children. That being the case, more targeted support (for example, workshops on parenting, financial literacy, upskilling and reskilling) could be given to young couples who are considering how best to balance financial demands, career ambitions and their ultimate job of raising godly children.

Adventist education

While not a substitute for a strong spiritual foundation laid at home, Adventist education could further complement parents' efforts to develop an Adventist worldview in their children. The Irish Mission could support children living here to access Adventist education from reputable institutions overseas through the mechanisms made possible by online learning. On a grander scale, the possibility of developing Adventists institutions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland needs to be considered.

Guidance in traversing a new culture

Learning to traverse a new culture is critical both to parents and children. Navigating a new culture with children is complex especially when parents are caught between their traditional approaches to parenting and the laws of the country they have moved into.

Hosting orientation classes for new immigrants (members and non-members alike) and developing biblical responses to cultural challenges will give parents a sense of support and belonging. Fostering cultural awareness will help parents to better integrate and understand their role as Christians better.

Help to guide wilful and older children

Some parents need a greater array of tools to address the demands of wilful children. Moreover, some parents need tools to engage more and more productively with teenagers especially when these children develop a mind of their own and start to defy or challenge parental expectations. This calls for better time management and skill development on the part of parents.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Childhood faith formation is a complex matter that is influenced by many factors. In the final decades of the 20th century, the Christian Church became aware of the need to study scientifically how to be more effective in passing the spiritual baton to the next generation. Various researchers including Roger Dudley (1978), Donna Habenicht (1983), Tony Campolo (1986), Monte Sahlin (1984), George Barna (1988), Pew Research (1990) and Bailey Gillespie (1991) used social research methods to explore this aspect of Christianity.

Three key areas for early faith development that emerged were Church, Adventist education and family. This discovery came about as a result of Roger Dudley's lifelong commitment to researching faith among children and youth in the Adventist church in North America through *Valuegenesis*, a faith study that continues today.

Parallel to Dudley and Gillespie's work, research was also undertaken by psychologist Donna Habenicht and her team. Habenicht wrote diverse reports, articles, and books on how to develop spiritual maturity in a child. Whereas Dudley and Gillespie focused on the experience of children, Habenicht focused on practical ways to grow faith in children. Likewise, Campolo (1993) was a strong believer in challenging children and youth to service-oriented activities.

The emphasis on Church programmes and activities highlighted by these scholars inadvertently overlooks the directive given by God in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to continually and diligently teach His commands to children, and to make these teachings the centre of their lives. This responsibility entrusted to parents by God to introduce their children to a life-long relationship with Jesus is well understood in Christian circles including in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church as outlined, for example, in the 23rd Fundamental Belief (General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, 2022).

Fulfilling this responsibility requires parents to teach their children to connect with God in the most ordinary day-to-day family interactions, and learn to relate to God in the mundane, and often boring, family dynamics. Church leaders and educators have no access to these 'sacred' familial spaces of spiritual development. It is in the same vein that Sarah Holmes (2023) argued for greater dialogue between children and parents about spiritual matters and highlighted the important role that spiritual modelling plays in children's spiritual development. Likewise, the Barna research group (2022) strongly emphasised the role of the parents as the source of effective discipleship.

Every generation deals with unique challenges in this quest and different settings create their own opportunities and challenges. Within the Irish Mission many parents with young children are Generation Xers and Millennials. Many were born overseas but they are now living in and raising their children in an increasingly post-Christian world. Making sense of their own faith and being able to foster faith in their children not only requires emotional and social connectedness but also intellectual maturity. These and the other factors we consider in this study play a big role in passing the baton to their children in this spiritual relay.

1.2 Research Aims and Rationale

1.2.1 Research Objectives

In this study, we sought to uncover the determinants of spiritual parenting among Adventist parents in the Irish Mission of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

We explored the approaches that parents used to pass spiritual values to their children, the factors that influenced the choices and decisions that they made in fostering faith in their children, the challenges that they faced in trying to raise godly children and the adaptations they made to deal with these challenges. We further identified additional supports that could further help parents in this work.

The objectives of this study were underpinned by three considerations which are further explained below:

- The context of faith formation
- Practical methods used to foster faith in children and parent them in a spiritual manner
- Challenges to fostering faith in a pluralistic and increasingly post-church society

1.2.2 Faith Formation

Primary school children spend a minimum 183 days in school each year in the Republic of Ireland (Citizens Information, 2024). At 5 hours per day, that is at least 915 hours per year. Aftercare is roughly the same amount of time. In total a child is therefore exposed to educators and carers for about 1,830 hours per year or 50 hours per week. With a minimum of 200 school days per year in Northern Ireland (NI Direct Government Services, n.d.), the time spent away from the influence of parents is even greater. On the other hand, Church attendance is not compulsory, and, on average, a child attends for four hours per week at most. As such, a large chunk of a primary age child's time is spent with educators and carers.

Although the education systems in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland offer strong support for knowledge and skill development, they do not specifically emphasise Christian spiritual growth. Worldviews like Darwinism and humanism, which omit the Creator and some foundational Christian principles, along with influences from the broader environment, can significantly impact the faith development of children with Adventist parents.

To determine how faith formation happens in this context, we explored family work and school routines and their impact on parents' time with children; parents' interaction with children including in spiritual development; parents and children's spiritual practices; and the impact of educational, social and other challenges in shaping children's faith.

1.2.3 Passing the Baton

The high probability of influencing children at a young age including in matters of spiritual development has been explored by different Christian scholars. George Barna (2013) suggested that children under 13 are more likely to make the decision to follow Christ. In the same way, Adventist pioneer Ellen White indicated that early childhood training is of great importance as habits formed in the early years have more to do with character formation and the direction of one's life than have all the subsequent years of instruction and training (White, 1905). On her part, Holmes (2023) argued that the first three years are the most significant in character development.

These insights – which illustrate the value of the home where the infant spends most of his/her time – are echoed by other faith communities. For example, the Catholic church has a dictum attributed to St Ignatius of Loyola which states: “Give me a child until the age of seven and I will show you the man.” Proverbs 22:6 and Deuteronomy 6 also highlight this principle of the need to train up children in a godly way. While churches have a role to play in this, as Holmes (2023) pointed out, passing the spiritual baton primarily takes place in the home.

The challenge for the parents in this study is how to effectively foster faith in their children in a Western world that is increasingly apathetic (though not necessarily hostile) towards God, the Bible and the Church. It is with this in mind that we explored the drivers and methods that parents used to propagate faith formation in children; spiritual conversations in the home and the picture of God that parents fostered in their children; the determinants of what they taught, when and to whom; how they approached matters of sex and sexuality; and how they helped children to distinguish between biblical and social values.

1.2.4 Pluralism

Both the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and Northern Ireland (NI) are modern, heterogeneous societies that share certain demographic and religious characteristics. According to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) both NI and the ROI have been homogenous until recently. These countries have, however, joined a worldwide trend where, since the 1990s, there is a growing immigrant population resulting in increasingly diverse neighbourhoods. NISRA statistics show that in 2022, there were 27,000 immigrants (16,900 of whom from outside the UK) and 24,700 emigrants. This resulted in a total net gain of 2,300 people (NISRA, 2022). In the Republic of Ireland, in the year to April 2024, there were 149,200 immigrants among whom were 30,000 returning Irish citizens, 27,000 other EU citizens and 5,400 UK citizens. The other 86,800 were citizens of other countries. During this period, 69,900 people left the country, resulting in a net gain of 79,300 people (CSO, 2024).

On matters of faith, the ROI has traditionally been perceived as a Catholic society and NI as Protestant, but today this is changing. The Catholic Church’s influence on the government and the population is declining partly due to the impact of scandals relating to child abuse by clergy, the damaging impact of workhouses and the abuse of unwed mothers in institutions run by Catholic nuns (see Gribben, 2021). As a result of these and other issues, the disillusionment of society with the Church is growing fast.

The largest growing demographic in both NI and the ROI is the ‘no religion’ group (White, 2014). This demographic increased by 74% in the 2016 census. The Catholic Church declined by 3% and the Church of Ireland by 2% while all other religions grew dramatically (CSO 2016, 2022). In NI, the ‘no-religion’ group is growing steadily and now stands at almost 10% of the population (NISRA, 2021).

In the above socio-demographic context, most members of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the Irish Mission (numbering about 1,154 according to the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research, 2024) are first-generation immigrants who worship in multicultural and multiethnic congregations. Given these observations and contexts, we sought to understand family values and how they influenced faith formation; the impact of other Christian and non-Christian faiths on spiritual parenting; and the impact of secularism and the Darwinian-humanist worldview on children and on parents’ ability to transmit spiritual values to the next generation.

1.3 Utility of the Study

The Children's and Family Ministry departments are complementary services to Adventist families. The information in this report will help these departments to understand how they can better support parents to foster spiritual development in their children and encourage whole family discipleship. Specifically, our findings will help these departments to:

- Equip parents better to share faith with their children
- Develop appropriate parental training packages for parenting diverse age groups
- Encourage participation in strategic service opportunities for families
- Support parents on their journey as spiritual leaders
- Build intergenerational faith communities across the Irish Mission
- Foster the idea that every home is a church (White, 1900)
- Develop a spiritual support system for children from infancy through young adulthood
- Commit the Irish Mission churches to be safe from spiritual abuse – that is, to equip members to understand that all children in the Church need to be treated with respect and dignity and that their welfare and growth is the responsibility of all church members

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Participants and Scope

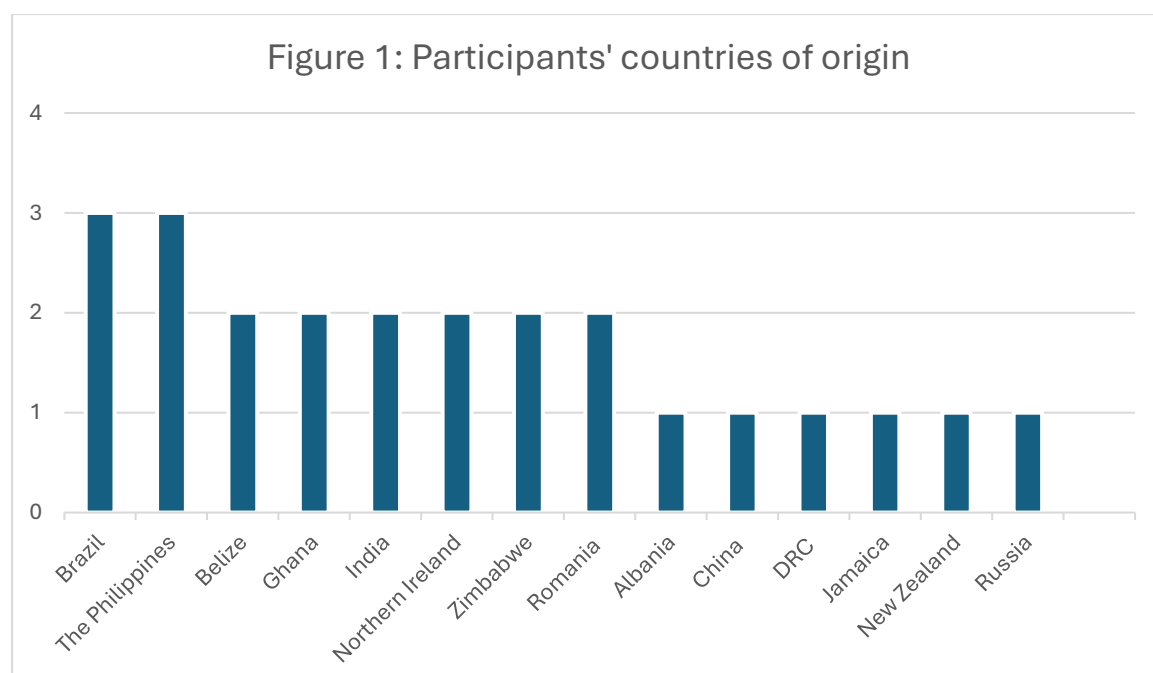
We used a purposive sampling approach to select participants for this study. These were Adventist parents (single or married) with at least one child aged 17 years and below at the time of the interview. For this research, we defined an Adventist family as a family where at least one of the parents was a baptised member of the SDA Church and attended in the Irish Mission (IM) during the life of this project.

The research was conducted by a working group of three members – Petar Popivanov (then IM Children's Ministry sponsor), Gideon Petersen (a pastor serving several churches within the IM) and Margaret Toland (a qualitative researcher and member at an IM church).

Most of the research participants were identified by the working group and approached directly. Where local membership was not known to the working group, some church pastors were consulted to link the working group with potential participants from their churches.

We selected participants from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This was important because many Adventist churches in the Irish Mission are multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, and many congregants, including parents, are first-generation immigrants. As previously highlighted by other researchers (see Georges, 2017 and Pollock, Van Reken & Pollock, 2017) culture is a major factor in how people engage with spiritual matters.

With that in mind, we selected participants representing the following regions: Ireland & Northern Ireland, Southern Africa, Western Africa, Southern Asia, Asia Pacific, South America, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean and a broad grouping from Western Europe, the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. The 24 participants (14 female and 10 male) who took part in this research originally came from Albania, Belize, Brazil, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, India, Jamaica, New Zealand, Northern Ireland (the UK), the Philippines, Romania, Russia and Zimbabwe, with some countries having two or more participants. This is shown in Figure 1 below.



Represented in these families were some 49 living children (one family lost a child in 2019). Forty-three of these children were aged 17 or below during the study. The median age of these 43 children was 9 years and the mean was 9.4 years.

In some families, parents came from different countries. Moreover, some participants had lived in third countries – such as Germany, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Spain and the United Arab Emirates – prior to moving to NI or the ROI. Some children were born in those countries, but most were born in parents' countries of origin and, for younger children, in Ireland or Northern Ireland. In that sense, some of the children referenced in this research were third-culture kids even before their arrival in the Irish Mission and were already dealing with challenges such as rootlessness and alienation from their parents' worldviews (Rockinson-Szapkiw and Heuvelman-Hutchinson, 2018). These factors affected how parents taught values to their children.

Apart from the two respondents from Northern Ireland, all the other families represented had been in the Irish Mission (NI or the ROI) for periods ranging from one year to more than 22 years. More than half of them had been in the IM for more than 10 years. Many of the parents interviewed were raised in Adventist families, but others had converted to Adventism and had been in the Church for a significant period. A few had left the Church (mainly as teenagers) and returned as young adults or adults.

Aside from culture of birth and upbringing, we also anticipated that other factors such as other cultures, education, age and life experience would have also had an impact on parents' worldviews and parenting styles. As such, to ensure broader representation, we drew participants from churches in different areas within the Irish Mission including Ballinacrow, Belfast, Cork, Drogheda, Drumcondra, Dublin, Larne, Limerick, Longford, New Market on Fergus, Portlaoise, Ranelagh, Tralee and Waterford as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Participants' locations of church attendance



2.2 Research Methods

We conducted in-depth interviews with one or two parents from eight different families in March and May 2024. These semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. Following that, in July 2024, we conducted three focus group interviews lasting two hours each with participants drawn from 13 families. One parent from the focus group interviews requested a follow-up one-on-one interview to explain more comprehensively her family's approach to spiritual parenting. This request was granted.

Given the diverse locations of research participants as well as time and budgetary constraints, all these interviews were conducted on Zoom, an online platform. Prior to the interview, we sent the research participants an information sheet detailing the research aims, process and eventual use of the information collected. We subsequently answered any questions or concerns that they raised.

We also sent the participants a consent form detailing their rights and expectations and the researchers' responsibilities. Most participants read, signed and returned the consent form in time for the interviews. We sought, obtained and recorded verbal consent from a couple of participants who did not return the forms despite numerous follow-ups. We, however, insisted on written consent from all focus group participants to underline the importance of adhering to the clauses in the form especially the need to keep other participants' identities and responses confidential.

During the interview sessions, we used two interview guides – one for the in-depth interviews and another for the focus group discussions. These guides had mostly open-ended questions to facilitate a fruitful interaction. All the participants (except one family that had concerns about data privacy) consented to the interviews being recorded. This allowed us to transcribe and analyse the information obtained. The family that did not consent to recording consented to note-taking, and so we relied on that.

We had intended to send the audio/video files to professional transcribers who would sign a confidentiality agreement form undertaking to keep all research data confidential and to destroy all the working documents afterwards. Even so, two concerns led us to deviate from this plan and to handle all the data within the research working group.

The first concern was around data accuracy. Only four out of the 24 research participants interviewed spoke English as a first language. While many of the participants were fluent speakers, others were not, and getting an accurate transcription of the interviews would have proven difficult without extensively proofreading externally-sourced transcripts. It therefore made sense for the researcher who conducted the interviews to do the transcription herself instead of spending a lot of time ensuring the accuracy of the information to be analysed.

The second and bigger concern was that on some matters, secular transcribers might have had vastly different views from the views held and candidly shared by some research participants. This was mainly around the area of family and Christian values. As we could not guarantee that transcribers would feel bound by confidentiality agreements signed with us – especially where the values expressed in the interviews differed from mainstream secular ones – we decided to err on the side of caution and limit the degree to which interview data was shared with third parties.

2.3 Methodological Suitability, Ethics, Challenges and Mitigation

As anticipated at the proposal stage, both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions proved useful in obtaining parents' attitudes, beliefs and practices regarding spiritual parenting and faith formation in children. Even on Zoom, the in-depth interviews provided an intimate space where the researcher could create rapport with the participants and establish a degree of trust that enabled participants to freely share the practices and motivations in their families.

While there was some guardedness among some focus group participants, these sessions were still a rich source of information from parents from different cultural backgrounds. Many parents readily voiced their opinions, including differences of opinion, and explained the reasons underlying these. To create a conducive environment, we emphasised respecting other people's opinions, withholding judgement and avoiding interruption. We encouraged participants to get in touch after the interviews if they needed to clarify any points made. Three participants did that. In all our interactions with research participants, we strived to act with empathy, respect and dignity – values that we carried into the data analysis and reporting stage.

The biggest challenge regarding the focus group interviews was at the recruitment stage. Whereas only one family did not honour their initial agreement to participate in the individual/couple interviews, in the focus group interviews, at least 14 people who were approached to take part did not end up doing so: some declined to take part, others did not respond to the researchers' (or their pastors') callout, and several were unable to avail themselves on the day (or at the time) agreed by other participants. As such, the anticipated additional representation from Ghana, Hungary, India, Jamaica, Lesotho, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Panama, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe did not happen. We respected people's wishes not to be involved and approached alternative participants.

During the interviews there were a few hitches (for example, halting internet connections or some interruptions by young family members in the background), but these did not adversely affect the process. As mentioned before, in some places there were language difficulties because of the many varieties of English in use. Even so, this was easily overcome by requests to repeat or clarify statements made. In one situation, a pre-teen child acted as an interpreter for her parent. This situation was unanticipated before the interview, and it meant that we had to adapt the interview to suit the circumstances, for example, by leaving out questions that would have been inappropriate in that setting. Still, the family provided useful information, and we were grateful for the commitment of this parent (and all the others) to participate in this study.

As promised to the participants, all research data has been handled securely on a password-protected computer and will be destroyed after the delivery of this report.

2.4. Data Analysis and Presentation

Following the interviews, we listened to all the interviews and either transcribed them verbatim or summarised the views expressed by the research participants. Thereafter, using a thematic analysis approach, we read all these transcripts, identified the patterns arising from the data, noted all the key ideas and categorised these into themes. We then made interpretations, drew conclusions and made recommendations taking into account the findings, our initial objectives and the research context.

In our report, we have made every effort to anonymise the research participants and their family members. We have omitted names and other information that is likely to identify participants

while keeping the balance to ensure data reliability and validity. Because of that, while all the quotes are accurate, they are not accompanied by any identifiers that would enable one to triangulate them with the other information provided to identify specific participants. Any words introduced into quotes to ensure clarity are represented within square brackets.

Having detailed the research aims and process above, in the rest of this report we focus on the research findings.

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

“This parenting thing is a very big responsibility that God has put upon our shoulders. We need to be patient, we need to be kind, we need to be loving. And at the same time, we should ask for help.... We need help and our children need help. Without God’s help, we could really miss the road to eternity.”

3.1 Parental Priorities and Time with Children

3.1.1 Work schedules, school routines and impact on family time

Family routines differed, and in many of the families interviewed, weekdays were very busy and regimented with work, school, homework and after-school activities such as music lessons, soccer, ballet, swimming and library visits. Work schedules (fixed hours or shifts), types (contractor, full-time employee or part-time employee), locations (from the office or from home) and engagement in further education alongside work, all had an impact on the time that parents spent with their children including in spiritual instruction. Only stay-at-home parents with very young children (who were not in school) and parents who homeschooled their children spent significant parts of the day with their children during the week.

The parents in this study engaged in different kinds of occupations as shown in Figure 3. Some parents reported finding it difficult to have morning (and even evening) worship – be it individually, as a couple or with their children – due to work and school commitments. This was especially so where parents were engaged in full-time work that required early starts or where they were engaged in further study alongside work.

Figure 3: Parents’ current occupations

Line of Work	Number of parents
Information technology	4
Nursing / Healthcare	4
Stay-at-home mother (some with freelance work or study)	3
Driving	2
Social care	2
Office work	2
Special needs support	2
Bible work alongside food delivery	1
Care work alongside tertiary study	1
PhD research alongside support work	1
Counselling	1
Training	1
Total	24

Family worship also got disrupted once older children got into tertiary education and had different schedules to younger children. Indeed, in many families, most spiritual activities

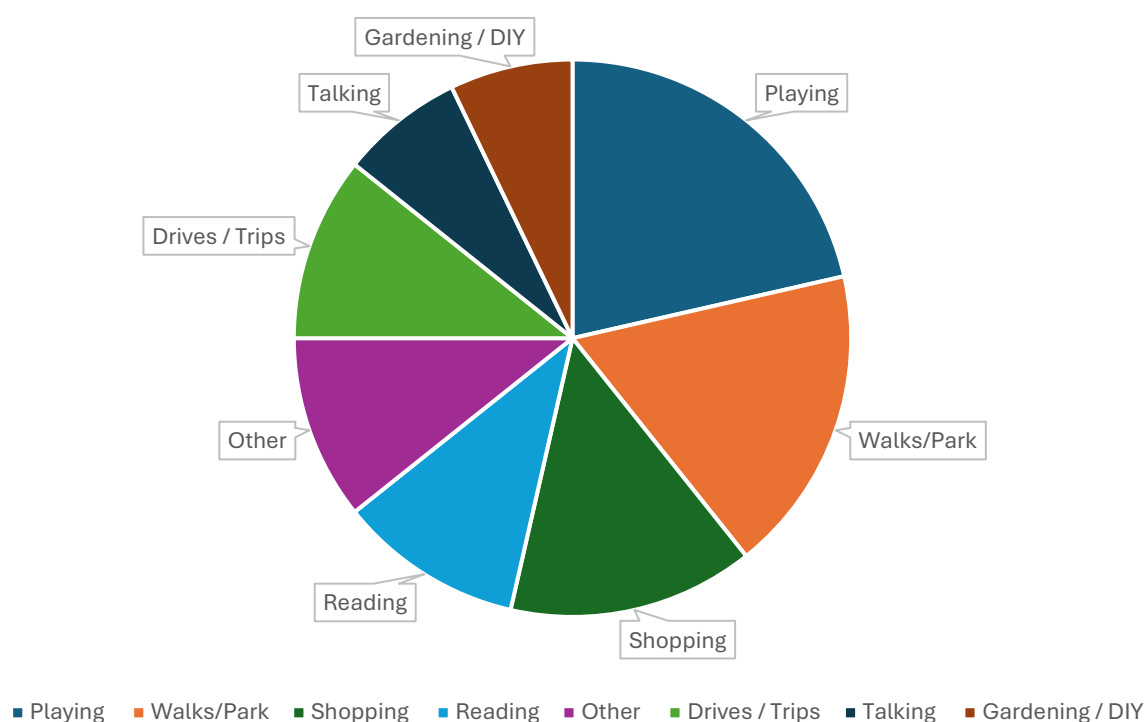
happened towards the end of the week especially on Friday evening, at church on Sabbath and, for some, on Sunday when they had morning and evening worship.

While some children still had scheduled recreational activities such as piano lessons, swimming and football practice, Sunday was a particularly good day for spending time as a family (in families where parents did not have Sunday work shifts). Family activities on Sundays included household chores, walks, hikes and drives especially in good weather. Family time could mean time between children and both parents, children and one parent or, in one case, a child, the mother and the grandmother.

3.1.2 Parents' activities with children

Outside of spiritual activities, when parents spent time with their children, they engaged in a wide range of activities. The examples given are represented in Figure 4, but these examples are by no means representative of all the activities that families did together.

Figure 4: Some family activities



In households with a mix of older children who were in tertiary education and working part-time jobs (while living at home) and younger children in teenage years, parents mostly spoke of family activities in the context of what they used to do when all the children were much younger. In such families, whole family time seemed to happen very rarely and mostly during special occasions such as birthdays. Younger children in these families mainly spent time with their parents at meal times or during worship activities (if these still happened).

3.1.3 Actions to facilitate family time and spiritual growth

Decisions that parents made about the education and spiritual development of their children arose at different points. Some parents had thought carefully about the kind of upbringing they wanted for their children even before the birth of these children. For example, one mother indicated that she married an Adventist spouse to ensure her children had an Adventist home.

Similarly, one migrant parent had thought about his child's future wellbeing in choosing where his career took him. Given a choice between the UK and Ireland, and despite facing derision from his friends, he chose Ireland because he thought that as a smaller country, it would provide a better environment for raising godly children.

"I know we need money, but at the same time my son and my wife also need a spiritual life."

For a few parents, the choices made were brought about or complemented by events outside their making. For example, one mother chose to cut her work hours and focus more on her family after a miscarriage. Her family later realised that it was possible to homeschool their children alongside running a business because of changes to school and work schedules caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Their decision was reinforced by the fact that there had been poor communication between them and their children's schools.

Below we outline some of the choices parents made to promote more family time and a richer spiritual life with their children. Some of these resulted in reduced income for families, but parents felt that they were doing the right thing in their quest to raise godly children.

Tweaking schedules

Some parents prioritised family and worship time despite their busy schedules. They did this by making deliberate choices such as starting their day early. In one family, parents woke up at 5am and their pre-teen children at 7.30am. This enabled them to all have separate devotions and then a family devotion together alongside their other early morning tasks.

"It is that commitment to say, 'Whatever it takes....' It is not just careless planning; it has to be careful planning that has commitment into it. Again, it is also encouraging the little ones."

In other families, parents took turns having morning and evening worship with the children to accommodate work, personal time and other tasks.

In many families, however, morning worship was either dispensed with or a shorter version of it (for example, a prayer) was done. A more comprehensive form of worship was done in the evening when more family members were at home. This arrangement was reversed in one family where parents worked evening shifts.

Overhauling work routines

In a few families, parents overhauled their work lives to prioritise spending time with their children in worship, day-to-day affairs and in education. They did in three main ways:

- Some parents changed careers or roles to be able to work flexibly or to work from home, sometimes with hired carers to look after children in the home space.
- Some worked reduced hours to facilitate school runs and spending time with children after school.
- A few families chose to live on one income for a time – for example, the first seven years of each child's life – to ensure their young children always had a parent at home. The stay-at-home parent was typically the mother, but where the mother had a more secure profession, the man took on this role.

“It is so awesome to do things for your family, to have the time to take care of the home, to make the home.... We need to make our home more home.... It’s the place that we spend most time. It’s the place we are going to root our character, our worship.”

[My husband] had to stop working actually for 7 years. I was the breadwinner. Because we wanted the children to have someone with them 24 hours in the house and even bringing them to school and when they come back from school. So they were really looked after very well.”

These decisions did not always work seamlessly throughout children’s lives. For example, parents immigrating into Ireland sometimes left very young children behind either with one parent or with relatives, and so some children (even those who ended up having a stay-at-home parent later) spent their early years overseas with one parent or in the care of non-parent caregivers. Moreover, once parents went back to work, children ended up spending most of their time in school or with other caregivers.

Some parents with very young children felt conflicted between staying at home and working. While they recognised that their children needed a lot of time with them, they also craved space for themselves and more grown-up pursuits. Some undertook flexible part-time work but felt guilty especially when children did not adapt well to separation. Speaking about time with her young daughter, one mother explained:

“Sometimes it is a lot. It is overwhelming. I do wish I had more time for myself to do something that’s not related to maternity. [But when I am working] it’s hard because I know she’s suffering... so it’s good but not very good.”

Such parents found relief in moments when children played by themselves or with their little friends.

Homeschooling

In some families, parents decided to homeschool their children. In some cases, homeschooling was done by one stay-at-home parent while the other parent worked full-time in the home space, in the office or in a hybrid arrangement. In other cases, the role was shared by both parents and coupled with family businesses.

One family indicated that homeschooling was a consequence of a choice they had made several years earlier to leave employment, work fewer hours running a home-based business and be available when their children came home from school. While acknowledging that this might not be viable for every family, they attributed the success of this setup to the fact that both parents shared the parenting and homeschooling workload. Reflecting on the impact of her deviation from a lucrative career path, the mother said:

“The most important for me was a legacy to leave my children.... They could say in future when they are [in] their 20s, their 30s..., ‘Wow, my Mum was a professor at the university.... Wow, she has so many patents in her name. Oh, that’s nice.’ But maybe they [will] be away from God. [Because] for me to be at that standard, I would be leaving home at 7am in the morning [and] bringing home work.... So for me it was a very easy choice really.”

Homeschooling did not necessarily run throughout a child’s life. In the family cited above, homeschooling started after the children had been in school for several years. Other parents who had homeschooled some of their children in the early years found it difficult to continue

doing so and they ended up sending these older children and younger ones to school. They did this because they struggled with lack of support in a setting where homeschooling was not common.

Sending children overseas

In some cases, family time and children's spiritual development appeared to be pitted against each other. In one family, parents sent their teenage children to an Adventist institution overseas to ensure that these children grew up in a godly environment that was conducive for spiritual development. Speaking about this, the mother explained that in such schools, distractions like mobile phones were drastically restricted and children were meaningfully occupied.

"... they work in the garden and that's useful and that's what we need. That's what we needed here in Ireland. We needed a school that would do this training for children, that would get them learning about biblical things. My daughter is different now... she calls me [and says], 'Mum I learnt about this, and this, and the sanctuary.' And it's amazing. Things I've I taught her but she didn't really hear. There... the phone is not important anymore."

Limiting use of technology

Many parents also made changes within their households to create a conducive environment for spiritual activities and family time. Most of these changes were linked to access to and use of information technology. These were:

- Switching off the internet at a given time in the evening
- Not having a TV in the house
- Limiting time spent on gadgets, including TV, and being consistent about this
- Investing in other activities (such as reading) to reduce screen time
- Only giving mobile phones to older children (for example, from 15 onwards) and linking phone ownership with children's level of maturity and trustworthiness

Some parents were particularly vocal about the negative impact, including antisocial behaviour, that they saw in children whose parents allowed free access to gadgets. These included children in the Church. They therefore tried to limit their children's exposure to these technologies.

"Kids being kids will want these phones, but again as parents we will make a conscious decision that we are not going to buy something that is going to create a problem for them."

"The telephones. They are the worst things invented for our children. Telephone technologies, TV, they are the enemies, they are the greatest enemies in the house that's what they are.... What the phone does is that it keeps them away from reality."

3.1.4 The importance of the Sabbath and church attendance

Parents held up the Sabbath as a special day, with many starting with "an extensive devotion" on Friday night. Borrowing from Jewish tradition, a couple of families had a special ceremony on Friday evening with grape juice and special bread (representing the Communion Table) to underline the uniqueness of the Sabbath and to commit it to their children's memory. Some families also had sundown worship on Saturday evening.

Many parents saw their children's church attendance, involvement in church programmes and taking positions of responsibility in the church as a key pathway to spiritual growth in children and as evidence of that spirituality. They therefore made every effort to get their children there on time every week and stayed for afternoon activities such as Adventurer or Pathfinder meetings and choir practice. Staying in church until the end of the programme was seen as an effective way of keeping children away from the lure of technology.

Some parents made significant changes in the life of the family to facilitate church attendance or to model Sabbath keeping:

- Working parents changed roles or rearranged schedules to ensure that one or both parents were available on Sabbath to take children to church and to attend church events (for example, camps) with them.
- Some parents doing shift work did not take shifts on Friday night or Saturday daytime. Some had shifts on Saturday night, but others did not. One parent stopped taking shifts on the Sabbath to set a good example once her daughter started asking questions about why she was teaching the children to honour the Sabbath, yet she worked on it.
- In one family, one parent was not working because a specific test she needed to do to get occupational registration was only available on the Sabbath.
- Some parents changed their careers or roles to work fixed hours from Monday to Friday (often for less pay) rather than shift work to spend time with the family on Sabbath and role model Sabbath keeping.
- One parent reported ensuring that his prospective employers knew about his Sabbath attendance, and he reminded them of this once he was hired to avoid being rostered on the Sabbath.
- Another parent moved from her family from a big city where they had much better access to work opportunities, options for further education and medical care to a small town where the Adventist Church had people, and especially children, from her cultural background. She moved there purposely because, according to her, "What makes the children stay [in the church] is friends."

Even while making sacrifices to ensure his son attended church every week, one parent was acutely aware that this alone would not ensure that his son grew up in the faith. He said:

"But church one day a week definitely will not help much. At the moment what I feel is that a few hours at church once a week and the rest of the whole week outside, how much influence an Adventist Christian child will have is [not much]."

This was, however, a minority view; most parents associated Sabbath attendance with spiritual grounding.

3.1.5 Parents' spiritual practices

To understand the basis of parents' spiritual activities with children, we asked parents about their own walk with God. Many indicated that they engaged in a range of activities individually, with their spouses or with members of their churches. A minority of parents reported having a robust system of study with one form of study in the morning (for example, a chapter from the Bible) and another in the evening (for example, a section of a book or devotional material) alongside prayer.

Some of the spiritual practices that parents did as individuals were: reading the Bible and reflecting on it, reading spiritual books including Ellen G. White writings, praying, listening to God, studying (or listening to) the Sabbath School lesson and listening to Christian music, often while attending to other matters.

Most of the parents that we spoke with held positions of responsibility within the church (for example, as Sabbath School teachers) and in that capacity they also spent some time during the week preparing for Sabbath services. Some also engaged in group activities during the week including Bible study.

Some parents indicated, however, that because of busy work schedules and dealing with the needs of young children, they had difficulties engaging in their intended spiritual practices and did so on an irregular basis. Some prayed on their way to work and tried to read or listen to biblical materials during breaks at work, at lunchtime or in the evenings.

“I would like to say that I read different books, but at the moment I probably don’t. I used to do more studying than I do at the moment and just probably because I don’t find the time to be honest. And by the time I get home to bed I am too tired, too tired even sometimes to study the lesson.”

[I pray] but maybe not as much as I should do.”

While many mentioned reading Spirit of Prophecy books, a few admitted struggling with such books with one saying about *The Great Controversy*:

“I’ve tried so many times and again sometimes it just bogs me down. There’s just so much detail in it”

Such parents opted for other books or other forms of spiritual engagement particularly audio.

There were no discernible patterns associating parents’ discipline in spiritual matters (or lack thereof) with their cultures of origin. What was evident was that because of smaller congregations in the ROI and NI compared to other countries, most of the parents interviewed had positions of responsibility in their churches. These positions meant that some parents spent time during the week preparing for their Sabbath responsibilities, but that did not necessarily mean that such parents also engaged in other activities aimed solely at their own spiritual development – some did but others did not manage to.

Some migrant parents commented that they had had strong spiritual foundations prior to moving to the Irish Mission. This was largely attributed to godly parents and an immersion in godly environments (for example, Adventist learning institutions, churches and neighbourhoods). The main negative impact on their spirituality while in the IM was a shortage of time – which also affected those raised in the IM. For some, the long distances between home and church also presented as a negative factor. Even so, migrant parents’ adjustments to facilitate spiritual activities after their move to the IM were largely focused on their children’s spirituality as detailed above. On their part, parents generally felt that having moved here as adults who had been in the Church for a while, they already had a strong enough foundation in their faith to weather the difficulties encountered in the ROI and the NI.

3.1.6 Spiritual heads in families

We spoke to many fathers who were fully engaged in the spiritual life of their families. In some families, however, even where fathers were present and interacted with children in other ways,

mothers were the spiritual leaders either because they spent more time with their children, their husbands spent most of their time at work or the women were more mature in the faith (that is, their husbands were either non-Adventist or nominal Adventists). Some mothers desired that their husbands take the lead but also acknowledged that:

“You can’t give much if you don’t have much.”

One mother described herself as feeling alone in doing spiritual work with her child because her husband worked full-time hours, and she felt she needed more support to bring her child up in a godly manner. This sense of being overwhelmed was compounded by the fact that she also ran the Sabbath School programme in church which meant she had a lot to do during the week and on Sabbath.

In families where both parents had a strong spiritual background, either the fathers took the lead on spiritual matters, parents adopted different spiritual roles or they took turns leading them.

3.2 Teaching Christian Values and Godly Principles

3.2.1 Methods of fostering godliness

Parents used a variety of methods to teach their children godly principles and to foster spiritual practices. As explained below, they did this through spontaneous everyday interactions but also during specially carved-out times. Some activities were done with children but sometimes children were encouraged to do them by themselves – with varying degrees of compliance. About his and his wife’s ‘burden’ to see their 12-year-old son grow up in faith, one father said:

“What we desire is for him to have a personal experience [with God] for himself, so that even if, for example, Daddy is not there one day he will say..., ‘I love Jesus and I have had a personal experience, an encounter, with him and I know he loves me or I know he hears my prayer.’”

Some parents echoed this idea and invested time and effort to try and make it happen.

Through everyday home activities

Some parents tied godly principles or spiritual teachings to the day-to-day activities that they did with their children. Using this approach, parents taught children about God’s care and provision as well as the importance of gratitude by referencing things like the houses they lived in, the food they ate and people’s kind actions to them.

For example, one taught the concept of submitting to God (or being obedient to God) by requiring her 4-year-old son to do chores at home and to obey his parents. By making “everything about God” this parent aimed to pass two-fold message: everything the family had came from God and everyone in the family had a responsibility to help others within and outside the home.

She saw the result of this method in the fact that her child prayed (and encouraged her to pray) when in need, that he prayed for others and that he made suggestions about helping neighbours (for example, giving them books and cookies). To be consistent in her messaging, the mother followed through with these suggestions despite her own inhibitions.

“He is four years old now and... he is not a perfect kid, but I was happy to see that he can understand....”

Similarly, a father pointed to God's protection from harm and his answer to prayer in response to a near-miss (accident) in a car while travelling with his children.

Through nature

Many parents taught their young children about God by pointing to nature as God's creation, highlighting its beauty and reinforcing the need to take care of the environment, for example, by picking litter off the streets. Some took this approach because they thought that their young children could not visualise or fully understand the concept of God if it was only taught to them in the abstract.

Others drew from other subjects such as history, archaeology and science and linked these to biblical subjects such as creation.

Using the Bible, Christian publications and media

One of the biggest methods of teaching spirituality was through written and audiovisual resources. The written sources used included the Bible (for example, a parent reading a chapter with a child in the morning), devotionals and quarterly lessons. Some parents did this with children from a very young age, including in teaching about complex subjects like the Passover.

Parents also required their children to read other forms of Christian literature (or read them with/to them) including bedtime stories, storybooks with Bible texts and spiritual teachings, and Spirit of Prophecy books such as *The Great Controversy* and *The Desire of Ages*. Others used books which linked God with science such as *How Great Is Our God: 100 Indescribable Devotions About God and Science*.

In this approach, parents and children discussed the portions read, the teachings that they could glean from them and how they would apply these in their lives.

While adaptations were made to tailor the message to specific children (as explained further below), it was significant that the method or spiritual activity used did not always depend on age. As such, in one family very young family might have read (or been read to) the Bible or even Spirit of Prophecy books, whereas in another family older children did not.

On the audiovisual front, parents used websites and channels such as YouTube, Revival and Reformation (<https://www.revivalandreformation.org/>) and Gracelink (www.gracelink.net) to download songs, sermons, Bible readings and programmes such as SuperBook which they then listed to or watched with their children or allowed their children to watch or listen to.

In other situations, parents used Bible quizzes and games, especially on Friday nights, to teach their children spiritual values. In a minority of cases, parents took their children to online meetings and chat groups to access resources from their home countries. In that way, their children met, studied and recited Bible texts with children from overseas.

Parents did not, however, use the Bible and other Christian resources uniformly. While some used the Bible as a whole, a minority of parents focused on parts of the Bible which supported the particular aspect of God that they wanted to teach their children – for example, a loving and gracious God who created the world and wanted to be in a relationship with people – and left out those parts that were more complex or difficult to explain. For example, one mother considered it unfortunate that her children (aged eight to ten years) had come across stories from the Old Testament.

“I know that the kids have got all the facts and figures from their bedtime audio... Bible stories... so unfortunately, I should say unfortunately, they have heard all about Goliath and all about the Old Testament and yeah but in conversations and in worship for me a big focus is relationships.”

Another mother with children in the same age group reported that she taught her children about God and about principles like love and grace through the Bible, but she did not teach specific Adventist doctrines or use the writings of Ellen White. This was because she wanted to give her children a strong Christian identity without linking it to a particular denomination. It was also because her family closely associated with other Christian, but non-Adventist, families and she did not want to focus her children’s minds on the differences between the doctrines in these families.

“I think this is the most [important] because Jesus gave us this gift of grace. This is the first. Doctrine, things like that will come in their time.”

Teaching by involving

Many parents taught their children to engage in spiritual activities by involving them in these activities and encouraging them to practise them on their own. They sang together, prayed together and read the Bible together. They further asked them to memorise Bible texts and recite them at home or at church. Parents urged their children to practise these activities, too, for example, by praying when in need or when something went wrong.

In some families, even young children were fully involved in family worship, and all members of the family participated in the session, taking different roles (for example, prayer and sharing the Word), on a rotational basis.

“When we are doing the familial devotions, we [say] to the [six-year-old]: ‘Today, you’re the one who is leading.’ So he is the one who is going to read through his devotion, share what he thinks and then invite everyone to share also... what they have learnt from it. So the next day, it is the elder brother who is also sharing the word..., so we try to make it everyone with their individual resources share with the whole family.”

“I am sure that my kids have something from the morning [reading] to think about”

By answering questions and encouraging inquisitiveness

Parents encouraged the questions that arose as children read the Word of God, heard about it or even overheard conversations between adults. Children also questioned things that they heard about or saw in school, at church and elsewhere. One parent saw the questions asked by her young son as evidence of the Holy Spirit leading the child in what to learn.

Speaking about this spirit of enquiry, one parent remarked:

“It’s not like our time when whatever the teacher said, whatever the book said, we just nodded our heads.”

Among other things, children asked about creation vs evolution, the nature of God, spiritual growth and Christian character. For example: a 10-year-old boy asked his father whether God existed based on his friend’s assertion that there was no God; an 11-year-old girl asked her mother to show her biblical evidence of Jesus being God; she also asked about how to love God more and about the importance of having Christian values; in a couple of families, young girls

asked their parents why people in church wore jewellery and had tattoos yet their parents forbade this.

Parents responded to these questions directly, but some also used them as a gateway to talk about larger themes such as the battle between good and evil. They also used these sessions to ground the values that they taught to their children in God's Word, saying:

"We believe in God; let's go into the Word of God and see what God says about [that]."

Some parents emphasised to children that other people, including teachers, could make mistakes, so they should not be afraid to question things said by others. They further taught children that not everyone practised the same values as their families.

"I always tell my kids, 'Be careful. If the teacher says something, you need to check with the Bible every time.' They need to understand [this]. Because in my country the problem is that the teacher is the first person who knows... knows the truth. So I always tell my kids to be careful to what they are listening to."

Modelling behaviours

Some parents indicated that their children learnt "from seeing", and so they modelled certain behaviours in order to set a good example for their children. These included: church attendance, praying, singing and reading the Bible, but also values such as honesty, good communication, sobriety (not drinking, smoking or partying), and being kind, nice and appreciative to other people. Modelling behaviours also included parents acknowledging when they had done something wrong, apologising and promising not to do it again.

Telling or asking

In a minority of families, parents appeared to foster spiritual discipline in children by telling the children what to do, for example, instructing them to pray upon rising and at bedtime. This strategy worked with compliant children but often failed with more strong-willed ones. For example, in one family, when asked to pray, a 10-year-old boy sometimes said, "I prayed yesterday, why do I need to pray again today?"

Based on his personality and their desire not to "overwhelm" him, his parents did not push him to pray at home. Instead, they saw it as a positive thing that he wanted to understand why he needed to do what he was being asked. Furthermore, since the boy was more cooperative in church, they let him be.

Another parent emphasised this notion of choice and suggested that if parents prayed for their children and showed them a good example, the children would not wander too far from God. He added, however, that some boundaries were useful especially for very young children.

Explaining through events

Parents explained concepts such as right and wrong, good behaviour, love, gratitude and even life, death and the afterlife by using events in children's own lives or in the family context.

One mother used examples of things that her 5-year-old son did not like in his peers' behaviour (for example, being unkind) to help him to reflect on his own behaviour and its impact on others. A father whose daughter was not happy about being cast as gift in a nativity play (after having played the prominent role of Mary the previous year) got the child to think about the importance of letting other people have a go, and the notion of Christ as the ultimate gift to mankind.

“There are things we can leverage on and relate to the Bible stories to make them real and to make them stand out for these children to understand.”

Repetition

Parents reiterated lessons, especially ones about values, to make them ‘stick’. In one family, parents repeatedly reminded their children to be well-behaved and to be a good example to others. They also reminded them of their love for them and of God’s unconditional love. In another family, a mother reminded her children to practise self-control in all things especially in appetite.

“Sometimes it can be too boring, but I think it is important... in everything you do, whatsoever you do you give glory to God, eating or drinking I go back to that.”

Parents in families where worship was done consistently also reminded their children to do even shortened forms of worship (such as saying a prayer, reciting a Bible verse or reading a short story in the car before leaving for school) if they forgot to do devotion upon waking up. Parents did this to instil spiritual habits but also to emphasise the accessibility of God anytime, anywhere.

Speaking about the importance of inculcating spiritual practices and faith in God, one parent said:

“The world that we are living in now, you can actually see that if our children grow without knowing God, their life is doomed because a lot of changes are happening.... If we don’t do devotions, if we don’t encourage them to read the Word of God and to hear what God says, imagine in the schools that they go into.... That is the other thing that encourages us to let our children know the love of Christ and who they are in the kingdom of God before they can even go out there.”

Rewarding effort and compliance

Parents reported encouraging positive behaviour by highlighting when children practised the values taught, for example, speaking the truth or being kind to others. They taught children about the importance of doing right even when they were afraid. Some gave incentives to promote positive behaviour or to reward compliance, for example, promising a pound coin to youngsters to get them to memorise Bible texts.

3.2.2 Values taught to children

We asked parents to give examples of specific values that they sought to inculcate in their children. The values they mentioned are represented in Figure 5 below. The most commonly cited values were love, honesty, kindness (especially in the context of being nice to siblings) and respect (including to elderly people and those with disabilities).

Figure 5: Some values taught to children	
Appreciation	Modesty
Clarity of principles	Patience
Cleanliness (in body and language)	Perseverance
Consistency / commitment	Politeness
Discipline	Primacy of God (putting God first)
Empathy	Punctuality
Faith	Reliability
Family and relationships	Respect

Good behaviour	Responsibility
Hard work	Reverence to God
Honesty	Sabbath (importance)
Humility	Service (to God and others)
Kindness (and being nice)	Steadfastness (ability to resist wrongdoing)
Leadership	Temperance
Love	Trust

Many parents emphasised that they modelled these behaviours, thereby leading by example. Some also mentioned that their goal was to equip their children to live these values even when the parents were not with them.

“I have been telling them and I’ve been lecturing them about honesty. Doing the right thing when nobody is looking. That’s like my anthem in the house.”

3.2.3 Sources of values taught

We asked parents what inspired the values that they focused on when trying to raise godly children. Parents pointed to three main sources of inspiration, namely, biblical sources, their own upbringing and observations they made in their children or in others.

Biblical sources

Some parents prayed to God for guidance about what to teach their children and how to teach them. They also read the Bible and drew values directly from it (for example, in teaching children to honour their parents). Others looked at Jesus’ teachings to get ideas about how to educate their children. Parents also mentioned reading spiritual books such as Ellen G. White’s *Education* and Donna J. Habenicht’s *How to Help Your Child Really Love Jesus*.

One parent initially said that the values she taught arose automatically and she did not necessarily think about them. But she soon remarked that her choosing to be a Christian and submitting to God led her to read the Bible, pray and seek to be closer to God, which in turn affected her language use, the treatment of other people and even choice of entertainment. She said:

“I suppose it is because God does change you... When I looked back, I went, ‘Oh wow, how God changed me!... Your journey with Christ, he does, he changes you. And you don’t realise it, I suppose.”

Personal experience and upbringing

Many parents said that their own parents, their cultural backgrounds and their experiences growing up had a big influence on the values that they taught their children. Most of these were considered positive and adopted wholesale, but parents also sifted through their parents’ value systems and picked some things while leaving others behind.

Many parents who grew up in Adventist homes, even those who left the Church and later returned, had positive memories of their upbringing and sought to pass this on to their children. Some mentioned the example set by their own parents in praying and studying the Bible with them, praying for them and consistently doing morning and evening worship. Others recalled how their parents modelled God’s love, grace and forgiveness when they strayed as teenagers. Some highlighted the sacrifices their parents made which underlined for them the importance of fostering spirituality. For example, one parent remembered her mother walking for one and

half hours with her (as they could not afford the bus) to get to a revival and reformation week at church. Parents also mentioned the expectations that their parents had of them as children, for example, in being polite, saying grace before meals and practising cleanliness. Indeed, several said that their parents' voices still rang in their ears long after they had left home.

"We always make sure that Friday is a day of preparation when we do house cleaning because it always brings back good memories with me. It makes the Sabbath more special and so I like to bring that to my family as well."

"I am thankful that I had this experience with my parents which gives me guidance as to what I should be doing at the moment."

"Family is the focus I think for us, and it comes from my own family of origin being a big family."

Parents' personal experiences growing up were not always positive and this also influenced how they parented. For example, one parent emphasised love and patience with her children because of her own memories of being mistreated by her siblings. Parents whose children had a big age gap were particularly sensitive to this.

"I always tell them, 'Be patient, be loving to your brother and your sister because it is not nice to be bullied.'"

Some parents underlined the importance of cultural values from their communities of origin, associated them with godliness and endeavoured to pass these on to their children. Examples of these were dressing modestly and not allowing daughters' male friends in their rooms.

"[I tell them] that although we are here, we are Irish citizens now, we are still Filipinos. This is our value. This is also God's value. We are following the value of the Bible."

Even so, such parents also saw some of their parents' values as too restrictive and chose to leave them behind because, as one parent put it:

"Growing up and being young, you feel insignificant when an adult is not trusting you or believing in you."

Observations

Parents also chose specific values based on observations – positive or negative – that they made in their children, in other children and even in their own social circles. One mother spoke of seeing children who "who could do with some manners" in her neighbourhood and this encouraged her to keep inculcating kindness and politeness in her child. Conversely, a parent who had been away from the church for a time spoke of the positive atmosphere she experienced on her return, saying:

"You're in the church environment and it's lovely and everybody is nice and kind. Sometimes I used to go to a [church] camp for a week and then used to go back to normal life and [find that] normal life is horrible. We are just not nice, you know... [with] people swearing and being cheeky to you and things like that."

Parents also considered relationships within the family and responded to these by underlining certain values (for example, love) while downplaying others (for example, competition). For example, one father whose children exhibited sibling rivalry explained:

“Everybody wants to please Mummy and Daddy and you try to explain... that we love all of you equally and when someone does something that needs to be rewarded, we do it. When someone does something that needs to be reprimanded, we do it. That does not mean that I love [one] more.... It is the act that we are trying to encourage or discourage.... My personal prayer for them always is that they grow in love.”

3.2.4 Value prioritisation

We asked parents to consider why they prioritised some values over others and how they helped their children to distinguish between biblical and social values, especially when both appeared useful or even positive. Parents needed to be prompted to respond to this question indicating perhaps that it was not something that they had previously considered. A parent of a toddler indicated that this was difficult because even parents were still trying to figure this out for themselves.

Among those who responded, two mothers explained that they taught their children to first and foremost have a relationship with God. They hoped that that connection would guide their children’s relationships with other people as they matured and lead them to make good decisions despite negative influence from their friends.

A few parents indicated that it was precisely because the world emphasised some values that they needed to uplift biblical ones. For example, one mother explained that she focused on kindness because it was no longer valued in society. Similarly, the father cited above, whose daughter was very competitive and confident, tried to foster other values such as love and compassion for others. While he considered competition important, his focus was on getting his children to understand that:

“The competition is not among themselves and particularly for the love of their parents. Competition for us is just doing your best and by the grace of God believing that God has endowed them with the skills to excel. So for us [if] they are trying their best and they are making an effort, we are happy.”

Others mentioned the importance of talking about the impact (both positive and negative) of specific actions.

“You can be right and you can do a lot of harm being right... is something both my husband and I often have to bring to the table, that you can be right but you’re wrong in your attitude.”

3.2.5 Adaptations made for different children

Parents adapted their teachings and teaching methods to suit their children’s level of understanding. Parents’ key considerations included personality, age and birth order.

Many parents pointed out that what they taught to children did not so much depend on the age as the personality of the child; what worked for one child at a certain age did not necessarily work for another child at the same age. They therefore combined considerations of age with those of personality and adapted their teachings to suit both a child’s level of understanding and the child’s nature. It is in this context that, for example, parents taught an 11-year-old girl considered responsible to read godly books with values such as gratitude. On the other hand, a more “rebellious” 7-year-old was taught to keep his composure, to respect his older sister and his female peers and to show reverence to God.

“The children are different. Like one of my sons, it is a little bit tricky. He doesn’t want to be involved too much.... sometimes I can see... from far away that this one is doing this [just] because he wants to please me.”

Still, there were adaptations that focused primarily on age as indicated in these examples: parents taught babies and toddlers about God using songs; a mother taught her baby about God’s loving nature by talking to him about God while accompanying this with loving acts such as kissing him and interacting with him in an affectionate way; mothers taught youngsters about the beauty of God’s creation by pointing to flowers and other aspects of nature; parents told their young children to memorise scripture and recite it but reminded their older children of values inculcated in their childhood without forcing them to comply; parents told their 6-year-old son what to do but engaged their 14-year-old daughter in discussions about expectations and boundaries.

“So I am trying to show them that you’re big enough, you’re all baptised so you have to try to take your own responsibility... do it as [though] I am not there. Do it like I don’t exist anymore.”

“Now that they are older, we don’t have big arguments, but I tell them that you know that wearing this necklace is not approved in the Bible, so you know you will decide yourself.... You decide yourself how you will follow the biblical principle. And this wearing [of] the short skirts.”

Birth order also played a role in how parents approached inculcating godly values in children. One parent emphasised the importance of inculcating good values in older children because of the propensity of younger children to copy them. It is in this context that another parent brought up the idea of investing in older children. He pointed out that it was easier for him and his wife to spend time with their first child and teach her about God. Once other children came along, however, they resorted to one method (mainly songs) because of time constraints. During worship, the older child helped to explain things to the younger ones. In that sense, that investment paid off.

Another mentioned that whereas she let her older child get away with things like hitting due to anger or frustration when he was a baby (which were seen as cute baby stuff), she was actively teaching gentleness to her second child who was still a baby by saying, “No, you can’t hit Mummy.”

Sometimes life circumstances prompted a certain teaching regardless of a child’s age. For example, the death of extended family members led parents to talk about it – in an age-appropriate way – to young children.

3.2.6 Picture of God fostered

Through the various methods and tools that they used, parents reported fostering in their children the image of a God who was gracious, loving and forgiving and always ready to help his children to deal with their problems. Further, they presented Jesus as a friend who was not only loving and gentle, but one who also wanted to be in a relationship with people and desired to lead his children in a specific way with his teachings.

These understandings of God were manifest in children’s utterances of faith when they or their parents needed help.

“My boy said last week, ‘God will help you. You do your best, and God will do the rest.’”

“I try to present Jesus as a friend. So it is a bit funny sometimes she sees a guy with a beard and says it is Jesus. [But] I think it is cool because she’s recognising Jesus like someone... as a person.”

“Our words have always been loving and kind and gentle [because God] is a gentle father – but actions at times can speak differently and we are working on that.... We always want to preach God as love....”

“Primarily, it is relational focused and obviously how we relate to God and... his grace and love are the focus.”

“[We tell the children] that God loves them regardless of what steps they take, they can never be too far away from God, and that God is always calling them home.”

As they matured in faith and age, some children got a better understanding of God than presented by their parents.

“[My son] said, ‘There are some things you used to tell me, now I know that they are not true.’ I remember [saying], ‘God is watching you, and whatever you do He is going to punish you for that.’ And now my son says, ‘This is what you were telling me before, but I see that God is loving, and even [when] I do bad things but still he forgives me. He is not like the tyrant God that you used to say.’”

3.2.7 Reflections on spiritual development

Many parents saw their spiritual lives as a rollercoaster ride in the sense that they sometimes felt discouraged in the face of challenges or even in the fact that they had limited time with God. They nevertheless felt they were still growing spiritually and that the important thing was to remain connected to God.

“For now, personally, I am happy [with my spiritual life], but... at times there are points when you feel discouraged maybe because you’re going through a season. Then there are times you feel you are up there on the mountain. But like now I think all is well.”

“Sometimes you trip and fail, but you say, ‘God I am sorry I did this.’”

Many acknowledged that they did not have enough time with their children and did not do as much with them as they wished. A few recognised that this also meant that they did not have as much influence on their children as they should and fewer still recognised that this had a potentially massive impact on their families’ spiritual condition and final destiny.

“I came here for a better life because there is a lot of poverty, discrimination and violence [back home], and I want to live in a place where there is a lot of freedom, a lot of job opportunities and a lot of growth... and at what cost am I gaining that? Am I losing my spiritual life, my children to the society, in gaining that? That’s my biggest fear.”

Some parents felt that if they grounded their children in faith when they were young, those children would return to God even if they departed for a time. Others said they would do the best to teach their children about God and to foster faith, but that whatever decisions children took later in life would be their own. One couple felt they were doing enough in the present day.

Parents saw children’s utterances of faith (for example, their belief that God would answer their prayers) and more so children’s actions as evidence of their spiritual growth. This happened when: children started pursuing spiritual practices on their own, for example, praying or reading

Spirit of Prophecy Books; when they spontaneously participated in church activities; when they lived by values taught, for example, being kind and encouraging to others; and when they spoke up and in school to explain their beliefs to other children especially with regard to creation.

“Intercessory prayer is the thing that [my children] engage with the most. And... relationships.... No wonder the discipline I see is their willingness to pray for somebody else if they know of anyone who is sick, even their own little friends in school or something happens... we see an accident on the road and then somebody in the car will pray, or we see a badger dead on the side of the road and my daughter prays for everything.”

3.3 Approaches to Setting Boundaries and Instilling Discipline

The role of instilling discipline and setting and enforcing boundaries appeared to be shared between parents in most two-parent families. In a minority of families, they were shouldered by the parent who spent the most time with children.

Most parents reported having clear boundaries and forms of discipline. Even the one parent who suggested that she has a ‘no-boundary policy’ and allowed children to set their own boundaries indicated that she had expectations for her children within which the children operated.

“These kids need boundaries. They don’t function well without boundaries.”

“We’ve noticed that that some parents, when we are here [in Ireland], some would cease to be parents... [because] people are more afraid of statutory bodies, like... Tusla says this or government. But the issue for us [is]... what do we say as parents?... We are given to you as custodians of you. We are parenting you for salvation, so we will do everything that is in the best interest of you.”

“Boundaries and limits bring happiness.”

As demonstrated in the two sub-sections below, parents sourced ideas from a variety of places to set boundaries and instil discipline. Some parents drew ideas from the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Some chose specific boundaries in response to their children’s behaviour. Others took ideas from their own cultures or other cultures. A few deliberately chose practices that were different from those used by their own parents (such as screaming, scolding, grounding and hitting) because of the negative impact these had had on them as children but, as explained below, some of these methods were in use by some of the families in this study. In one family, parents’ motivation came in part from their fear of ‘losing face’ and facing criticism from other parents from the same culture.

Parenting is never easy.... That’s why there has never been a perfect blueprint for parenting. I think the best coach would be the word of God itself.”

3.3.1 Boundary setting

The boundaries brought up in the interviews addressed three broad areas: relationships with others, use of media and behaviour in church.

Boundaries in relationships

Parents taught children to manage emotions such as anger, frustration and even exuberance when dealing with other people including their siblings. They taught younger children to respect

older ones and told older ones to be good examples to younger siblings. In doing this, some outlined clear boundaries such as no fighting and reinforced these boundaries by being firm with “stubborn” children.

The issue of children potentially picking up bad habits (for example, swearing) from their playmates presented a dilemma for some parents who were conflicted about whether to let them associate with such friends. In other families, however, parents were sure-footed and reported restricting or forbidding associations with others who they felt would be a negative influence on their children. It is in that context, for example, that some parents did not allow their children to go to sleepovers at other people’s houses.

“You’ve got a friend who came looking for you. He’s 14-years old and you’re only 11. What do you have in common? Convince us why you need to have a friend that age, yet there are also other boys that you play with, maybe a year older or a year younger.”

“We realise that our parenting skills are all different even in church. We all worship the same God, we are all Adventists, but our approaches to parenting are all different. So we feel that because of those differences and [where] we feel that [something] is not okay, again we trust that instinct to say [to the children], ‘In the moment you can’t [go to their house]. You can relate in other spaces.’”

Boundaries about eating habits worked well at home where, for example, children were not allowed to eat between meals. These boundaries, however, created conflict in some families where parents wanted their children to eat healthy food whereas the children wanted to join their friends who enjoyed eating things like pizza and burgers as a group. Some parents felt compelled to allow their children to join their friends even though they did not approve of such food.

Boundaries in media use

Many parents had specific guidelines about their children’s use of media. In some families, children were not allowed access TV, and they were not given phones until they were in secondary school. This was to teach children to conquer their own boredom, be creative and learn through play. It was also to keep them away from bad influences and direct them towards more constructive activities such as reading.

“My son is 10 and he still plays with sticks with his friends which sometimes blows my mind.”

In other families, children were allowed supervised and limited access to phones, the internet, social media and audiovisual media. For example, one family allowed their teenage girl to be on social media on condition that one of the parents had access to the girl’s social media accounts. In another family, children could watch educational and religious videos for a set time, sometimes with parents, but they could not watch anything with elements of magic or listen to rock music. This was because, from their reading of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, parents saw these media as harmful to children’s development and a gateway to demonic influences.

Some parents prohibited non-Christian content on the Sabbath. Others forbade phone use during worship at church and at home.

Although parents had these boundaries in place, some did not always enforce them. For example, one father mentioned that he allowed his 10-year-old son extended access to a digital

device to give himself and his wife a bit of time and space to themselves. The father allowed this even though he had noticed that having access to the gadget meant that his son rushed through other tasks including personal care so that he could have even more time online.

Boundaries in church behaviour

Children's behaviour in church was fertile ground for boundary setting. Parents with young children who had difficulties sitting still or staying silent spoke to their children about the expected behaviour before they got to church. To help them comply, some gave them child-friendly things to do such as writing or colouring. Others gave children the choice of staying in and being quiet or going outside if they could not manage it.

Some parents of older children dealt with issues relating to mode of dress in church and elsewhere. Some promoted modest dress in general. Others disallowed clothing they considered immodest for church, but allowed it in other settings (for example, in summertime or for social outings). Some made accommodations in reaction to their own experiences growing up.

"My mother was very strict. I said to myself..., 'How will I parent myself if I am that age? So I don't want [to parent] the way my parents parented me. It [was] really, really strict."

Most parents indicated that while they had the last word, they explained or even discussed the reasons behind these boundaries with their children. As the children got older, they involved them in boundary setting to ensure compliance.

"Rather than them pushing the boundaries, if they help set them, they are more likely to stick with the boundaries that they have created."

Even so, as noted in the section about challenges below, this became more difficult as children grew older and developed their own ideas.

3.3.2 Approaches to discipline

When children did not adhere to set boundaries, parents responded using a variety of methods to call their children's minds back to these boundaries and to enforce compliance.

Rewarding good behaviour

One family took the approach of rewarding good behaviour to help maintain discipline and respect of boundaries. They periodically gave their children money, the amount of which depended on a sliding scale from the most well-behaved to the least well-behaved over a set period.

For the most part, however, parents' methods of discipline were corrective.

Verbal methods

Verbal methods that parents used included giving warnings, speaking to children, calmly explaining to them that a particular action was wrong and asking them not to repeat it again.

Parents also resorted to "giving out" and shouting when a child's behaviour was deemed a bit "mad" or "crazy". Some parents felt compelled to apologise after shouting at their children and subsequently changed tack by trying to speak calmly when their children pushed boundaries. For others, however, yelling was a legitimate way of enforcing compliance.

"And sometimes we do scream. But we are a very loud family. But not in a way that we scare [the children]."

Withdrawing privileges to encourage reflection

Parents also used methods that involved taking away a privilege to encourage their children to pause and reflect on their behaviour. These included grounding, restricting access to toys, phones or the internet especially where several warnings had been ignored and putting children, especially younger ones, on time-outs. When they did this, parents asked their children to reflect on what had led to that consequence (or explained it to them) and prompted them to apologise or to ensure it did not happen again.

An example where grounding was used was in the case of a 14-year-old girl who went out to meet her friends and came back later than the agreed time. In that context, the child was not allowed out again with her friends until the parents were convinced, based on other actions, that the child could manage herself and her time well. The consequence was therefore intended to help the child choose the right course of action in future.

“Sometimes you need tough love. They will resent you. They will hate you for doing this to them.... They might argue [with you] now but will understand later.”

Why violence was not used

Some parents mentioned hitting (which was also referred to as spanking, smacking or violence) as a method of discipline that was used on them as children, and several said or implied that they would not use it. They gave several reasons for this but, significantly, nobody cited the law of the land as the reason why they did not hit their children.

For some, hitting was not used because of cultural reasons. For example, one family (that was not of Spanish origin but had lived in Spain) had adopted the Spanish approach where “a father can never hit a child.”

Other parents saw hitting as ineffective and likely to create more problems like disconnection or resentment. They wanted their children to know right from wrong without resorting to violence.

“We never hit our children. If you hit your kids when they are small for small reasons, when they grow up, they won’t listen to you.”

“Discipline is an instrument for working through a child. It’s important because that’s how they learn. But never violence... not using bad words. It can be accomplished with a warning.”

Some parents (from Western and other cultures alike) indicated that being hit as children had negatively affected their own relationships with their parents even though they realised, in hindsight, that the parents were trying to do their best, using the few tools at their disposal. They therefore decided to parent differently because they desired to have a better relationship with their children. To do that, they sought ideas from educational books and advice from other parents.

“Before I had children, I used to say, ‘Spare the rod and ruin the child’ As children we’d be smacked. I mean, we’d get hammered, that’s the word I would use. Smacked repeatedly and it was not nice. And I didn’t like it, and I would say that that caused a lot of friction between me and my mum at the time. And then I had to deal with that and to process that and... forgive.... I struggled for a long, long time. So I was like I don’t want my child to be like that with me.”

“Our parents used to [use] the rod a lot when he was young... but then there was not much engagement.... We try to engage more [and ask], ‘Why did you do this? Was it necessary?’ But when we were raised, there was no time for that kind of engagement. It was just being told the offence, and guilty as charged. So we are saying now let’s have more engagement with them.”

Some parents were quick to emphasise that dispensing with violence was not tantamount to relating to their children at the same level. They saw a hierarchy of authority in which God was at the top, followed by parents and then children and children’s friends. To that end, one father explained that he and his wife were friendly with their children, but they were not their friends – they had to maintain parental authority over their children.

“So as parents, we are very friendly to their children, we play with their children, but we are not friends. We are not their friends. They have their own friends... we remain parents”

Another mother, in contrasting her style of parenting to modern ‘progressive’ approaches which are focused on positive parenting, said:

“My family, we are not gentle parents, but we are loving parents.... We are not strict parents, but we have boundaries. Yes, I roll on the floor with my children, I play football, I play basketball, but also we have boundaries for them... this balance.... My children have peace, they are happy, they transmit this kindness, peaceful[ness].”

Among the parents who spoke on the issue of hitting, only one parent said that she used to spank her children but stopped because she felt very sorry after one such occurrence. As she told it, she had just had a baby and was stressed, and when her other child did something wrong, she hit him. The boy just looked at her and she felt very sorry and decided not to use the method again. She described it as a method of last resort when “the deed [was] too serious” like a child disrespecting a parent after repeated warnings to stop had gone unheeded.

While this parent put her use of this method in the past, and no other parent acknowledged ever using it, it is possible that parents’ awareness of the law prohibiting the use of physical punishment in the ROI, and our own warning to parents before the interviews that any revelations of harm would be escalated to safeguarding authorities, prevented some parents from being candid in this regard. As such, to err on the side of caution, we have included in our report a recommendation for the Church to support parents to access more and better tools for instilling discipline.

3.4 Obstacles to Raising Godly Children

Most of the parents interviewed indicated that they had faced challenges and obstacles in their quest to raise godly children as discussed below.

3.4.1 Limited time and availability

Many parents tried to have a positive influence on their children, but those working outside the home (or working and studying) found it difficult to dedicate adequate time to raising children and nurturing their spirituality. Parenting in a godly manner was particularly difficult for single parents, parents who worked full time and those whose spouses lived away from the primary family home – as in the case of those separated for long periods by immigration conditions.

“Raising children is not an easy thing. Parenting.... Raising these children is hard, behaviour-wise, as a lone parent. Getting them to go the right way.”

Some mothers mentioned that working while raising children was not their initial plan. Some had initially envisioned homeschooling, but this plan was thwarted by the rapid arrival of children soon after marriage before the spouses had properly planned their parenting strategy. Some mothers found it difficult to give up work and be financially dependent on spouses who did not share their vision of parenting or their views about the place of wealth. In other cases, the unplanned arrival of subsequent children led to older children being sent to school to allow mothers time and space to care for younger children.

“I can tell for sure that if you asked God if he wanted both parents to work and leave the children to be raised by strangers during the day that don’t share the same principles, he would say, ‘This is wrong.’ And it is wrong.”

“Money is not a bad thing. But it’s a bad thing when you put it above God.”

Even stay-at-home parents struggled with godly parenting particularly if their spouses worked full time. Moreover, because of financial constraints, many such stay-at-home parents eventually returned to part-time or full-time work further curtailing the influence that they had on their children.

3.4.2 Limited social support

Migrant parents found parenting difficult because they had no extended family here, they had limited social support, and their children had few suitable peers with whom to associate. This lack of social networks was spoken of both in terms of day-to-day parenting and in the sense of fostering spirituality.

Without support from extended family, some parents had to “drag the children everywhere” they went, and did not have much time for themselves. Some, especially those who had already moved through several countries, had a resigned attitude about not having extended family nearby. Others, especially working parents, sorely missed this support particularly in Ireland’s poor weather where children could not often play outside.

“If [the weather is not good], that’s when the challenge comes, because he would like to sit and watch something and while away the time.”

On the spiritual front, parents lacked positive role models for their children because the idea that “it takes a village to raise a child” did not apply here because “here everybody is busy with their own lives.” Parents could not correct other people’s children and other people did not correct their children. Moreover, there were few families of similar values in many parents’ neighbourhoods with Adventist families being in the minority. Because of that, parents had to work hard by themselves to develop an Adventist culture at home for their children.

Some parents reported that because of practices such as attending church on Saturday, their neighbours considered them odd (and their children had started thinking of themselves as odd). Such parents had therefore to work very hard to convince their children to keep following Adventist values.

Compounding this issue of isolation was the fact that many families lived far from the Adventist churches that they attended and so association between Adventist families was not easy. Some found it difficult to get their children to church consistently because of lack of transport or

because of lack of motivation from peers. This idea of families being influenced to go to church by their friends or by people in their vicinity was mentioned by a few parents.

“One of the things you won’t find when you come here is the church. The church is maybe 200km away or 250, so usually when you come here you get disconnected from church. And once you get disconnected that’s the end of it.”

“You don’t even have anyone to push you to go [to church]. So for you to go it is something like exceptional. To be honest, it is a very big challenge.”

One family indicated that they had built a social network with a few others from their cultural background. These families were, however, scattered across different counties and did not meet often. Even so, the group had morphed into a spiritual community with several of these families having Friday devotion together and attending church together.

“When we arrived here, we thank God we managed to have the right connections, a few of them, who were also Adventists. They were always ready and willing to give a hand.... They also felt the need and the desire to connect more with God.”

Another parent had moved her family to a location with people from her cultural background because she felt she could get more support there. She also reasoned that if she went to a church that “was strong” and where there were more children, her children would have friends in the church and the desire to spend time with their friends would keep them in the church. Moreover, the community would be her family, and they would help to support both her and her children.

“I see the [this] community as my family. They understand me.... We can speak our own language. Unlike the other place; I was the only [one] among them.... And here... when you need help, they can help. But most importantly, being able for [the children] to stay in the church and grow in their faith. That’s one of the biggest things that made me [to move]. I decided to come because of faith, that they will be able to grow in it and not depart from it.... In [my culture] ... we are each other’s keeper. Someone can reprimand or scold my child when they do something wrong. But in the other community, it is not like that.”

3.4.3 Obstacles associated with church communities

Segregation, tribalism and judgement

In some Adventist churches, attendees operated in a segregationist manner only associating people from their own ethnic groups. That meant that parents and children from minority ethnic groups within these churches were left out of social or other activities. That resulted in a situation where children from larger ethnic groups had friends among themselves and freely associated whereas those from smaller groups had no friends in the church.

Ethnic affiliations aside, a mother from one homeschooling family reported that her children felt excluded from their peers in church. Moreover, even though she was not advocating homeschooling for other families, she felt that other parents reacted defensively to any suggestions she made, which left her feeling silenced.

In some situations, children were put on the spotlight and judged harshly by adults and youngsters alike because their parents held positions of leadership in the church. This isolating and judging of children soured their Christian experience and made it more difficult for parents

to present God as loving and gracious to these children. Speaking about such an incident with her 16-year-old, one mother said:

“We had to have a very strong conversation about the fact that not everyone in church is kind or nice, unfortunately, but we are all still children of God and that God views all of us with love. It was a difficult conversation to have because at that age, you want them to feel loved and accepted in church.”

This family subsequently joined a small group within the church, which the mother described as a “true community” where she and her children felt loved and accepted. She wished she had found such a group earlier. Another mother desired such a community where people would have a genuine attitude of care and interest towards her children and help to guide them.

“More than modelling, more than preachers or teachers..., somebody who turns towards [my children], bends their knees to their height and asks them, ‘How are you? What are you doing? Tell me more.’”

Negative influences from adults and other children

Some parents reported finding it difficult to convince their children that their teachings were biblical whereas some church members openly flouted these teachings and dismissed them as ‘non-salvational’. These included issues such as creation, mode of dress (immodest dress, earrings, necklaces and men braiding hair) and body modification practices (tattoos).

“The challenge is that what you are enforcing in the home, what you are encouraging in the home, what you are promoting in the home, is the opposite of some of the behaviours that are found particularly in a church setting.... [This] is a setback because you are trying to tune them in another direction but if you go to church, it is another direction.”

“Being a home-schooler [family], we don’t get much influence from other people in the schools, but you know our children get influenced from the church, which is sad. In the sense of negative influence – which is a real struggle most of all because you know we have children who believe in evolution... we are trying to promote modesty for our little children and then they see immodesty in the church.”

In such situations, parents reiterated family and biblical values, but also explained that God loved all people and spoke to people at different times and in different ways. They also explained that decisions taken in the past (for example, tattooing) might be difficult to reverse in the present day.

Some parents advocated the creation of small groups within churches as a way of surrounding children with more positive influences. Speaking about her desire to control what her children were exposed to in the Church in matters of sex and sexuality, one mother said:

“That is why sometimes I think the Church has to go back as small groups.... Not because I want to live in a bubble. I want to live in a healthy bubble at least until [the children are] a certain age.... Until a certain age... the children have to have a very strong basis of what is wrong and what is right.”

Administrative obstacles and inappropriate programming

Parents also mentioned obstacles that originated with the Irish Mission itself regarding the conception and delivery of programmes.

Parents desired greater synchronicity between the IM calendar and the General Conference calendar. They reported that several programmes delivered in the Global Church such as Global Youth Day and Family Ministry Week of Prayer were omitted from the Irish Mission Calendar. Because of that, they and their children missed out on potentially impactful teachings, for example, on the prevention of drug abuse. Describing the IM as “kind of lost” and “kind of laid back”, some aligned their local church calendars with other conferences to access these resources.

“We are a global church, so issues that affect our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world also affect us.”

Also coming in for some negative feedback were church programmes that put together children from too broad an age range. These raised safety concerns for parents. One example that was given was youth camps that encompassed children as young as 10 and young adults as old as 21 or even 24 years old instead of having different programmes for different age groups. Parents found church administrators unresponsive to this issue (reportedly because they prioritised big numbers) and some opted to keep their young children away from such activities due to safeguarding concerns.

“We will not allow our child who is 10 years old to go and interact and mingle with 17-, 21-year-olds... those are some of our fears when the church says children are also taken to be youth.... So again we have said we are going to be parents and if we feel this is not appropriate, [our children] are not going to participate.”

Parents also reported that there was little money to fund church programmes and activities and even fewer people to make it happen. In some churches there were no children’s programmes until parents started them from scratch once they had children. Parents also desired more programming for teenagers and, crucially, information sessions facilitated by professionals, not volunteers. They indicated that the sponsorship system did not always work because some sponsors did not have time to visit their churches. Even so, in at least one situation, there was evidence of local church leadership obstructing the delivery of programming support by a willing sponsor.

“[Here] we have to get much more involved to make it happen.”

These challenges notwithstanding, at least one parent mentioned that unlike her home country where she found the Adventist Church overly strict and focused on matters that had little to do with spiritual development, she found God to be more readily associated with love and grace in Ireland. She said:

“I feel that religious and spiritual life here is more practical. It is more real.”

3.4.4 Lack of Adventist schools

As discussed in the section about pluralism below, many parents were largely satisfied with the education their children received. Even so, several other parents decried the fact that there were no Adventist schools in Ireland and reported struggling to find the right schools for their children. Some parents had had an Adventist education which they saw as helping them to develop a firm faith. They therefore wanted the same kind of atmosphere for their children. With no such schools here (and no extended family to help create an Adventist social environment for children), parents tried (and often failed) to find schools where the values promoted were in line with their own values. This created anguish for some parents.

“How is he going to stay in faith when the environment around is not prompting to Christianity? That’s what my concern is. And as children grow, they want to spend less and less time with their parents and at home, which means there will be less influence at home and there will be greater influence from the school or from outside. How am I going to balance that? How am I going to counteract that? [This] is the fear I have.”

Another couple recounted that they struggled to find a mixed secondary school for their daughter because many schools had an “overwhelming [and] very open LGBT agenda”. The parents explained that they were straddling “a fine line between being in the world and keeping their values” and that while they were “not against gay people” they were striving to put their children on the right path and to bring them up in a godly way. (As mentioned above, one family sent their teenage children to an Adventist school overseas to try and attain this).

3.4.5 Difficulties dealing with changing behaviour

Some parents found handling children’s behaviours including fighting amongst siblings challenging and stressful. Others found it difficult to maintain spiritual discipline in their children (and themselves) and noticed that their children’s interest in spiritual matters or their zeal, for example, in memorising scripture, waned as they grew older. One father mentioned that his pre-teen son’s interest was captivated by sports, and he had less and less interest in spirituality.

In many families, parents’ influence diminished as children grew into teenage years, got more independent and became reluctant to follow parents’ wishes such as attending family worship or church. Some started spending extended periods on mobile phones and social media. Some parents found it difficult to grapple with these changes in their children and several took the view that it was now up to such children to choose which path to follow, the parents having done their best to give them a good foundation.

3.5 Perceptions of Pluralism

3.5.1 Pluralism in schools

Apart from three families where the children were homeschooled, parents indicated that their school-age children attended Catholic schools, Church of Ireland schools, other Protestant schools or non-denominational schools. This included the family with some children overseas.

Many in the ROI spoke of Catholicism being pervasive in and out of school with some children being a tiny minority of non-Catholics in their classes.

Pluralism mostly viewed positively

Most parents viewed the influence of these schools positively despite theological differences because most of these schools had a Christian orientation and taught children about “being a good person.” Others thought that school did not have much impact on their children (in terms of faith formation) or that whatever impact there was, was good. This was because at least children in primary school were taught about God (including through religious reenactments of biblical scenes and spiritual songs) whereas as they grew older, these teachings ceased.

A few parents with children in Catholic schools requested that their children be exempted from religious instruction because they did not want their children learning different principles in school than were taught at home. Some did this from the outset, but others did this after children attended a few classes and started to show a lot of interest in non-Adventist doctrines. Whether or not they attended these classes, children in such schools still heard of these ideas

and asked questions at home. Parents saw this interest in these ideas as largely positive as it provided an avenue for discussion.

“It’s not an issue. They come and they ask..., ‘Why is Mary doing this? Why is Mary there?’ And I say, ‘You should have no other gods before you.’ So I explain the commandments of God.... So for me it is not a big issue because I was Catholic.... For me it is a great opportunity.”

Some Adventist children had friends from other faiths (for example, Hinduism and Islam) and cultural backgrounds. Their parents saw this as a positive thing because it was still a way for their children to have healthy relationships given the scarcity of families with similar values or from similar backgrounds in their proximity. A few parents commented that these children from other faiths had a more positive influence on their children than did fellow Adventists. Some also saw it as an opportunity for their children to mature in faith and share their beliefs with others.

“For me, I actually really like that because it has made her question her own faith and find her own faith, not from what I have told her, but from her own talking to her [Muslim] friend about what her friend believes and what she believes. It has made her study her own faith and actually it’s lovely because the two of them, there’s no alcohol when going out. I’m not worried about where they are going. And I don’t necessarily get that with her Adventist friends.”

Children’s curiosity about activities relating to other faiths (for example, Confirmation and Communion services at Catholic schools) were also seen positively or neutrally. Parents saw this curiosity as normal given the pervasive nature of Catholicism in Irish society and in schools. Some felt that if they prevented children from attending, it would make them more curious. They therefore allowed them to participate with some limits, for example, to attend the service but not take part in Communion. Others did not allow their children to attend. In one family, the parents allowed the daughter to join the school choir in a Catholic school and to sing in the Catholic church.

In sum, children’s exposure to other faiths in school was not seen negatively; some parents were much more worried about secularism.

“I am not worried about Catholics. I need you to understand this. I’m not worried about Catholicism because he is learning... what is right at church and [at home]. If he knows what is right, then he can identify what is not right.... My fear is where faith is something in the past.... I am worried about secularism.... When he goes to high school... none of them will have faith in their conversations. Sports will be their religion. These will be the things that they talk about the most and then they dream about it.... And then they have less and less time and less and less influence of what they have learnt from the church and the family.”

Asked to think about hypothetical scenarios that would bring their children into very close proximity with ideas from other faiths (for example, Hindu Diwali festivals or having Islamic Madrassas in their neighbourhoods), many parents indicated that they would allow their children to mix with others from other faiths (including in their religious ceremonies and festivals) but only to a point. They saw it as a way of safely satisfying children’s curiosity about other religions and an opportunity for them and their children to form relationships with their neighbours that would allow them to witness about the Adventist faith. Several parents had

already attended such events as Hindu weddings and Diwali festivals and had found the experiences very interesting.

“Ultimately as Adventists we expect people to come with us to our faith and to our things.... How can we do that if we don’t extend the same courtesy? So it is about educating your children.... For me I think it always strengthens their faith if you’ve given a strong stone for them to stand on. These things help them to discover their faith. And it gives them a respect for others.”

“... if it they are only immersed in their religion and their culture, they won’t know or have anything strong to believe in. So in going to that [Diwali] festival, as long as... there’s limits, it depends on that festival that they are going to, what are they celebrating?... Is it a regular simple festival? Sure, I’ll say go ahead. If it is not harming or something that doctrinally you feel it is wrong, I’ll support them.”

Others were more circumspect and even in the present only allowed their children to mix with their friends from other faiths for limited amounts of time and only outside such friends’ houses (not inside). Some referenced real situations where children had been drawn to other faiths from the initial position of parents allowing them to go to satisfy ‘a harmless curiosity’. In their view, while adults with a strong faith might be able to mingle with others without being unduly influenced, children whose foundation of faith was still being formed might not have the ability to differentiate truth from error. From that perspective, for some parents, it was not wise to allow such mingling.

From a religious liberty perspective, several thought that it should be permissible for others to practice their faiths in the community just as it is desirable for Adventists to have the freedom and space to do so. While seeing the merits of supporting religious liberty, some said they would not fully support institutions of other faiths in their locality because of harmful teachings and practices associated with some of them.

“It’s not our battle at the end of the day. As a church we should always promote religious freedom and just draw the line and say we abstain from any vote on that, but we promote religious freedom.”

But pluralism also presented challenges

Even while highlighting its unavoidability and even positive aspects, some parents pointed to challenges (some inadvertent) posed by the exposure of their children to ideas that differed from those taught at home.

Regarding faith and character formation, parents spoke of children being exposed to teachings that were at odds with what they learnt at home or that parents did not want them to be exposed to until they had the maturity to understand them. This included ideas about gender and sexuality as well as evolution. Some parents saw their children’s ways of thinking changing to embrace ideas that they learnt at school, contrary to what the parents were teaching them at home. This greatly concerned parents who saw their choice to move to Ireland as coming at the cost of their children’s salvation.

“So what am I going to do for my son? Did I bring him here to give him a better life, better in materialistic things and then destroy his faith, his spiritual life completely? That’s something bothering me now as a migrant coming to the West.”

Parents also saw their children absorbing negative influences from people with other value systems and starting to copy those behaviours (for example, in language use, dress and eating habits). Such influence was particularly strong in places where families from different backgrounds were forced to live together for extended periods, for example, International Protection (Asylum) Accommodation Centres. Schools and even Adventist churches were also implicated as places of negative influence. Parents found themselves repeatedly speaking with their children about these issues.

“The toughest thing here in Ireland is mainly the mentality, the different culture. So every day we are reasoning with our children [saying], ‘Okay [other people] did this, this the reason they probably did this, but this is God’s way, this is how we should be thinking in that situation.’”

“We were [living] in a hostel [with] different kinds of people, from different countries, different things.... Sometimes you tell your children something, they will go out there and they will learn something else. They will copy them. When we were in there too, on Friday, we don’t go out.... But children would be knocking on the door [asking my children], ‘Can we go out and play?’”

The comment above about children inviting other children to go out to play on Friday night underlines a bigger issue of young children not fully understanding the reasons behind the boundaries put in place by their parents and sometimes being inadvertently led by other children or even adults to transgress these boundaries. This was seen, for example, in cases where Adventist children innocently ate with their friends’ families food that was not permitted at home. In the same way, children not allowed to use phones, PlayStations and other electronic gadgets at home without supervision had access to these through their school friends. Other things like birthday parties held on the Sabbath left children feeling pulled in different directions and parents saw futures where such children would choose to follow their peers.

“It’s difficult for a kid for all his friends to receive chocolate eggs and he’s doesn’t receive it.”

“I know that as he gets older, it will be a bit more difficult and he might choose, ‘I want to do this, or I want to do that [on Saturday]’ It will be a little trickier I would say.”

Parents’ responses to these challenges

Parents tried to counter the negative influences vying for the attention of their children by repeating and reinforcing the values and principles taught at home and showing God as the origin of these ideas. They emphasised that they were not demeaning other worldviews or religions but wanted their children to be grounded in God’s Word as interpreted by the Adventist faith. One father (whose son had picked up on the contradiction of his school teaching evolution in one class and creation in another) explained to him that once he went to secondary school, biblical teachings would be discarded in favour of theories like evolution. He encouraged his son “not to swallow everything” he heard.

Faced with new challenges, some parents set up additional boundaries for their children and talked to their children about these. That was the case, for example, with things such as Halloween or Santa Claus. In some families, parents forbade their children to dress up for Halloween (as required by their schools) and supported their children to pass this message on

to their teachers. One family reported that when their son told his teacher that he would not be dressing up for Halloween, two or three other children in the same class spoke up and said that they did not want to dress up either.

“But with regard to the witches’ day [Halloween], I told them that this is Satanic, the witches and the rest. So they don’t take part. They go to school, but they don’t dress up for it. They know that it is Satanic, and we don’t do it.”

With regard young children especially, some parents also responded by offering alternatives to the things that their children craved, for example, telling a child he could not attend birthday parties on Sabbath but could attend those held on Sundays. Others substituted negative things with positive ones, for example, discouraging children from eating unhealthy snacks in school in exchange for healthier ones later. Some parents reported continually praying to God to protect their children from negative influences. They further reiterated to their children that they did not need to copy others as they were created perfectly by God.

3.5.2 Knowledge of and reaction to secular and ‘progressive’ ideas

We invited some parents to explain their understanding of some non-biblical concepts such as Darwinism, humanism and evolutionary creationism and share the impact of these ideas on fostering faith or spirituality in their children. Most of those who responded spoke in a general sense about Darwin’s ideas on evolution – ideas that some of their children had been exposed to in school and even within the Adventist churches that they attended. Only three parents were able to talk about humanism or evolutionary creation, with some indicating that they did not understand these concepts. Those who spoke about them did so comprehensively and linked these ideas to the dangers they posed to faith formation.

“Then there’s evolutionary creationism where they want to tell us that God didn’t create the world in six literal days. They say, ‘Yes God created the world, but as part of creation, he has evolution where over years things evolved into fruition.’ But if you believe in that then what happens to the Sabbath? When you believe in that, what happens to biblical prophecies?”

“It’s completely contrary to the word of God and everything that’s in the Bible... and you know we have had talks with my children because of other children in the Church promoting evolutionary ideas.... People might see it as a small thing but it’s a big thing because it changes their way of thinking and it allows people to justify certain things in the day to day. They might not do [something] from a biblical point of view but from an evolutionary point of view they would do it. We have to be very cautious about these topics.”

One parent highlighted the pervasive nature of evolutionary ideas (for example, in recreational areas such as zoos and museums) and the fact that these theories and hypotheses were presented and accepted as universal truths or facts, something that made it difficult for parents to counter them. Commenting on the little influence that parents had on their children and the fact that many of those children had not had a biblical foundation that would sustain their faith, one father foresaw a bleak future for the current generation of young children.

“If as parents we are not careful, if we as parents don’t do more than what we do now, our children will be sucked into those theories, and will believe them and will one day come and say, ‘Oh, you still go to that church?’ It’s a very [scary] thing.”

3.6 Teaching Children About Sex and Sexuality

We began the discussion on sex and sexuality by inviting parents to explain to us their understanding of these terms. Most of those who responded went directly to talk about the manifestations of these issues, not so much the meanings of the terms. A few did, however, and it is from them that we have drawn the understandings of these terms and their usage.

The term ‘sex’ was generally understood in the context of intimacy or intercourse, something that was not suitable to talk about with very young children. Few parents related it to gender. Understandings of ‘sexuality’ were broader and included: matters to do with the body (including physical aspects such as intimate parts) and its care and protection; growing up and experiencing change; gender (male and female) but also LGBT matters; orientation and identities that people form that might differ from biology; and issues relating to marriage and marital relations.

We then invited parents to share how conversations about these issues came up in their household (if at all) and how they were handled. Below is a discussion of their responses.

3.6.1 Knowing what to teach but not how to teach

A minority of parents were not comfortable talking to their children about issues of sex and sexuality – even with their teen or pre-teen children and even with children of the same sex/gender as the parent. They said they were not comfortable discussing these issues with their children because their own parents were not open about this, it was a taboo subject in their country of origin or they were prudish.

“We will slowly try to talk to her but how do we start?”

“Yeah, that’s gonna be a tricky one. For me, I would say I am quite prudish and don’t like talking about things like that.”

Such parents were grateful for sex education workshops or lessons done in schools and some seemed to rely on these as the sole source of information for their children on such matters. Others hoped that through this research, they would be supported to speak to their children.

Even though they clearly identified the things that they wanted to teach their children and the importance of these matters, some parents seemed to be at a complete loss as to how to teach them. One parent indicated that she was uncomfortable answering questions about body parts from her young son and deflected such questions. She also indicated that she would have a hard time talking to him (when he became a teenager) about hormones, girls, not having sex before marriage and being faithful and responsible in marriage. These difficulties appeared to even more daunting for parents faced with a rapidly changing society.

“You might have a woman who has three children, and they might have two different dads. And it is so acceptable. It is the normal. So how do you then, I don’t know, I think it would be pretty difficult to try and teach a teenager that that is not the right thing to do.”

Some parents anticipated conversations about sex and sexuality happening in future but seemed unsure about how these would come about. Some envisioned having mentors closer to their children’s age to help teach their children, but did not think that such people existed even in the Church.

“My challenge is, where are those youngsters who know their boundaries, who are the protective place that am looking for? Where is the protective place? Can you find it in the

Church? That's another question now. Because if I can't find it there, I can't find it elsewhere."

Asked when the right time might be to speak about these issues, one parent with a 12-year-old child indicated that he would not put an age to it because children from different societies "matured" at different rates. He therefore indicated that he would talk about these things when the situation arose and when he knew that his child could understand what was being said. However, as another parent pointed out:

"If I start talking to my 13-year-old about menstruation, it's too late because children are starting as early as 3rd class, 4th class, they're already menstruating. So I think those conversations they need to start at a very early age so that so that children get used to those kinds of conversations."

3.6.2 What parents taught and how

Most of the parents who responded in this area indicated that they taught their children about matters relating to sex and sexuality from a young age. This included parents who were raising children of the opposite sex on their own (for example, a father raising daughters). They wanted to give their children the 'correct' information about these issues before someone else gave them the wrong information.

"If you wait for a child to start swimming before you teach them how to swim, they will drown."

"When you leave the subject blank, the children will want to fill in the way they want it."

"We say... let's be the first ones to communicate with kids what it isn't. It's difficult moments but again we try to take the opportunity to be the first ones to communicate with the kids about issues that affect them every day."

Matters relating to consent and bodily autonomy were extensively covered from a young age. One parent who had indicated that she did not like to talk about these things had nevertheless covered this area with her 5-year-old son even though she did not know how she would talk about other issues, saying:

"I'm not very good with it, but I suppose it is something that I will have to do when the time comes."

Asked about why they were talking to very young children about these issues, parents explained that they wanted to equip the children to protect themselves as they (parents) could not be with them all the time. Parents of female children, in particular, feared that their children would be more vulnerable growing up in a country with a lot of mixed values and with no support from extended family.

Below we explain how parents covered these and other issues.

Actively talking about body parts and explaining impending changes

Most parents actively taught their young children about their body and how to care for it. They talked to children about differences between sexes once children started noticing these differences. In one family, a mother stopped taking baths with her toddler son as soon as he started registering their nakedness and co-opted her husband to talk to the boy about body parts and the appropriate care for them. This included in teaching him that his private parts

were not bad or dirty and that his whole body was created by God and needed to be well cared for.

Parents also spoke about teaching their young children to name their private body parts properly (not using nicknames as was the case in their own childhood). They did this because they did not want their children to be taken advantage of; they wanted the children to know what their body parts were, what they were used for, how they should be used and how they should be treated (for example, covered and kept private). Further, they wanted the children to have clear enough information to resist if people tried to deceive them, lead them astray or take advantage of them. Importantly, they wanted the children not to be embarrassed or afraid to talk to their parents if such things happened.

Parents of slightly older children (including pre-teens) spoke to their children about their developing bodies and the changes to expect. Some did this using age-appropriate media (books and videos) to explain things. In doing this, some recalled the questions they had had in their own childhood and the things they wished they had been told about. This helped them to overcome their own (and their children's) embarrassment to talk about things like impending voice changes, wet dreams and periods.

Actively teaching about staying safe from harm

Parents taught their children about consent and protection from harm, and some reported commencing these teachings even before their children were two years old. In this context, they taught their children that nobody should touch their private parts except their parents, and even then, only if there was a good reason for it – for example toileting very young children. Outside the home, only medical personnel could do intimate examinations and only with the consent of parents (for underage children). It was made clear to children that teachers and other carers had no business being in private spaces (such as toilets) with children except in rare situations where children might have accidents and need help cleaning up.

In some families, children had internalised these instructions so deeply that they even questioned their parents' actions (for example, when they helped them get undressed). Parents took the opportunity to explain the boundaries and limits once again. Parents also taught their children about modesty and privacy (covering up private parts) and related this to protection from harm. They further explained to them the possibility of people wanting to harm them and encouraged them to speak up if this happened.

"We don't let anyone touch anyone. Even Mummy and Daddy should not be touching you, unless there's a reason, a medical reason, and what have you. Or we need to clean it or what have you."

"I tell him, 'If someone touches you and you feel uncomfortable, please scream loudly and Mummy or Daddy will come right away or someone who is not Mummy or Daddy will help you.'"

"We have a book [which] we read to her once a week or twice a week talking about who can touch her, who cannot touch her, how can they touch her, what's allowed, what's not allowed – in a very open and safe space."

We tell them, 'We don't show off our privacy. We have respect for our privacy.... You should respect yourself and present yourself in a godly way.'"

While parents taught children modesty from a young age, these discussions increased in some families once girls reached teenage years and some started copying their friends' trends. Parents reasoned with them about the dangers of wearing clothes that did not adequately cover private body parts. A father parenting alone recounted such a conversation with his daughter.

"[I said to her], 'The more you expose yourself, the more you find you're vulnerable.' I tried to reason with her by saying, 'Look, what you're wearing is western style. I don't disagree with that but the problem you have to understand is you have to protect yourself. So you're exposing yourself. In other words, you're selling yourself, you're showing that [you're] ready for sex.... If you expose yourself, you're saying you're cheaper on the streets and go with that. Or you're expensive, and if you're expensive, you have to protect yourself. You have to cover your body to protect yourself. And the people they will respect you the way you are.'"

Asked about how they would respond to accusations of 'victim blaming' and the right for people to dress according to their wishes without fear of attack, parents said that they explained to their children that in addition to taking appropriate measures to safeguard themselves from harm, they should think about how their actions (such as dressing immodestly) affected other people.

"When I put boundaries, I always explain why. We can't just say, 'Don't do this, don't do that, two inches above the knees is good.' No. We say we are modest, and we don't show ourselves because we don't want to lead other people into temptation, we don't want to cause other people shame or cause shame to yourself as well."

Teaching about refraining from sexual activity before marriage

Parents spoke to their young children, teenagers and even much older children about refraining from sexual activity before marriage because it was against biblical principles. They also explained that it could lead to diseases and pregnancy. They further explained to them that getting into intimate relationships too early in life would affect their mental and emotional development including in hampering their concentration in school. They therefore urged them to prioritise completing school first.

Parents were aware that as children grew older, some might go against these teachings. They therefore pointed out that the choices that they made would have later impacts.

"We always tell our kids, 'We are here to teach you, guide you. But in the end, it is your decision, because that's your life.... Whatever you decide now, and your decision now, will be your future life.'"

Normalising appropriate levels of intimacy and explaining boundaries

Some parents spoke about displaying and normalising appropriate levels of intimacy at home, for example, hugging and kissing. Some explained to them that these displays of affection (aimed at conveying love) were to be only exhibited within the immediate family.

In some families, friendships between teens of the opposite sex were allowed and treated as normal but parents explained that these friendships were not to turn sexual.

Using everyday events to teach and give age-appropriate answers to questions

Parents pointed to using events in their family or their surroundings to teach about sex and sexuality in an age-appropriate way and to answer children's questions. Some indicated that

some children became more aware of these things earlier than others and that one needed wisdom from God to gauge what to teach when.

Pregnancy and the arrival of younger siblings in the family were some opportunities for parents to teach young children about human reproduction. School nativity plays which required some children to act family scenes such as Mary being pregnant, giving birth to Jesus and being Joseph's wife, also enabled parents to explain to children family relationships.

Some parents talked about reproduction by using the natural world, for example, plant and animal reproduction as seen in nature or in documentaries. They then linked these to human reproduction in the context of a biblical marriage.

These discussions, especially with young children, were sometimes difficult as parents did not know just how much information they could give while remaining appropriate but without leaving the child completely puzzled.

"[My son who is now four] once asked where his brother came from.... I explained that Daddy loves Mummy so much that God gave a present to us that when we love someone and get married, we do things that God gave to us to do and that are good. And when we do these things we end up with a baby that came from Daddy to Mummy. When he will be a teenager, I will explain to him, just [like my] Mum showed to me how the process goes through pictures. But for now, I will stick with Daddy loves Mummy so much."

"All these are opportunities to teach about sexuality, but the catch is the kind of information we give and at what age.... Because you can't give too much information or too little information."

Engaging much more closely with ideas from school and intervening where appropriate

Several parents, even those were already teaching their children about sex and sexuality, decried the fact that in schools children were given unfiltered information including explicit videos and photos without considerations of age or maturity. They saw schools as being irresponsible in this regard. Some families, especially those who were previously in a homeschooling situation, were greatly disturbed by the amount of information disseminated, the nature of that information and the manner in which it was presented. This is further explained below in talking about LGBT issues.

In response to children's exposure to unfiltered information, some parents tried to talk to their children as much as they could about these issues in line with their beliefs and values while pointing out that other people might have different values, beliefs and lifestyles. Others protested school policy (for example, requiring children to dress up for Pride events). One mother took her child (who had been previously homeschooled) out of secondary school and sent him to an Adventist institution overseas. She also got much more involved with the education of her younger children – in another school – by asking the principal what the children would be learning and then choosing whether her children would or would not participate.

Teaching children about laws and cultural norms

Some parents who brought children from overseas into the IM taught children about laws relating to sex and sexuality because some of these laws were either different from those in their country of origin or they were much more rigorously enforced here. They therefore talked to them about the protections and penalties that existed within these laws. Crucially, they talked

to them about the age of consent and informed them that engaging in sexual activity with fellow teenagers who were under the age of consent would see them fall foul of the law.

In the same way, parents taught their third-culture children that what was permissible in Irish culture was not always permissible or acceptable in their own cultures of origin. For example, one father explained to his teenage daughter who had started wearing skimpy tops that it was inappropriate for him to see her tummy and that she could not wear short shorts while living in his house.

3.6.3 Teaching about LGBT issues

Not all parents interviewed in the focus groups answered questions to do with sex, sexuality and gender identity. Given the sensitivity of the subject, some parents likely opted to remain silent about their views in a group setting. Indeed, the one parent who requested an additional one-on-one interview spoke much more expansively and candidly on these issues than she had in the focus group.

Many parents who spoke about these issues displayed a fairly complex grasp of the matters under discussion including social transitioning and medical transitioning. In their responses, they expressed clear-cut ideas about their positions with the majority saying or implying that homosexuality and transgenderism went against biblical teachings and a Christian lifestyle, and while they did not condemn gay or transgender people, they were actively steering their children in a different direction. A minority pointed to the necessity of accepting people who had these identities without necessarily embracing these lifestyles. The parents who spoke did not therefore exhibit any conflict in their thinking. Conflict arose when their children encountered a clash of values in school or when children's ideas differed from those of their parents as explained below.

Discussions relating to LGBT issues were less common (or happened much later) in homeschooling families where children were more sheltered by design. This is illustrated by the quotes below from two mothers from such families speaking about their pre-teen and teenage children, respectively.

"About this subject, my boys really live in a bubble. And it annoys me really when someone brings these talks about acceptance. It annoys me really.... [My children] are innocent about it because for them, [there's] man and woman.... What annoys me is when in school, from the age of four, from the age of five, they instil this in children that it's okay to be what you want to be. And then it annoys me when families in church... don't know what [their children] are doing at school, and they think they are okay at school. They are not with them at home. They think they are, but they are not. And then they don't have this counterbalance.... I think acceptance is not a good word for it. Acceptance brings [an] open gate for many things.... I don't think it is about acceptance. It is to understand that is [other people's] choice about something... For me it's very dangerous this word acceptance, especially if children are [still developing]."

"[My children] were home educated. And when my son was 13, I decided to send him to school because there not many children who were home schooled.... He was a child. He went to secondary school. I didn't know anything about this. He came home and he says, 'Mum I don't know if I wanna go back because there's one class it only talks about sexuality.' And so I go, 'They are teaching how to make babies, isn't that the case...?' He said, 'Mum they are teaching more than this. The teacher gives details of what it is. And she also says men with men and women with women.... And there's this type of gay and

that type of gay.' I was terrified!.... And then he came home and said, 'Mum, today I have to wear something colourful because it's about Pride or something. I don't wanna go to school Mum.'"

In other families, however, these conversations were common because, as explained below, children were exposed to these realities in school or, sometimes, in their neighbourhood. A parent in one non-homeschooling family saw it as a blessing that her children were naturally exposed to people whose lifestyles differed from theirs and so they did not need to talk about it.

"We don't have really discussions. But what I'll say we are very blessed that we live in a world where there is so much... where they are naturally exposed to. We are good friends with a family of a little boy and two Dads. And our kids have never had like this weird, yeah, they are just like, 'John's Dad.' 'Which Dad?' 'Oh yeah, so-and-so instead of so-and-so' and there is an acceptance of that."

This was a minority view, however, and many parents from across different backgrounds found their young children's exposure to LGBT issues undesirable – if inevitable – and most spoke to them about these matters and about gender identity and sexuality more broadly.

Focus of parents' teaching

Parents of young children taught their children key differences between men and women. This happened, for example, when parents answered questions from young children about whether they (or their parents) were boys or girls. Where young children asked out of curiosity about the possibility of people of the same gender getting married, parents drew from the Bible to emphasise marriage between adult men and women.

To older children, some parents spoke about LGBT issues and emphasised their families' values and interpretation of the Bible. Some of them zeroed in on issues that were topical in the media or in schools and reinforced their teachings to their children. In one case, a teenage girl reported overhearing adults from her church speaking about a homosexual teenager who, in their eyes, had been lost to the devil and needed to be won back. That discussion left the child quite troubled, prompting a discussion with her parents about love and acceptance.

Parents were also forced to speak to younger children about these issues because they noticed them creeping into media (for example, films and cartoons) aimed at children. In some cases, young children asked questions based on what they saw, for example, classmates who identified as transgender, peers who cross-dressed or Pride parades in town. Moreover, young children reported casual conversations with classmates where these things were mentioned.

Parents tried to adapt their responses to suit children's age and understanding, for example, saying to a 5-year-old, "That boy dresses [like a girl] because that is what he chooses to do" in explaining cross-dressing and/or transgenderism. Some parents were uncertain about how much of their answers their children understood, and some foresaw difficulties explaining these issues as their children got older or got more and more exposed to them in school.

Many parents who spoke about these issues emphasised to their children the importance of respecting other people regardless of who they were or how they differed from them.

"[With my son], it was about a girl in his class who identifies as male and obviously we had a discussion about that, in that we have to accept everybody for the journey they are walking on. These are the values that we hold, but not everybody else has these values or actually, that child might actually genuinely feel that they are trapped in a male's

body, but that's not our place to judge. That's their journey, this is our journey, and we are taught to love and respect everyone."

Some parents, especially those with older children, felt a little more conflicted about where their children should draw the line regarding respect and acceptance. While emphasising the need to love and respect others, they also empathised with the confusion that their children experienced having been raised with one set of values at home but now having to operate within another set of values at school. This was the case, for example, when these teenage children were confronted with demands to call peers, whom they had known all their lives, by new names and pronouns denoting a different gender. Such parents tried to guide their children to respect others and to try to preserve the relationships they had with them without necessarily giving credence to the values that these peers advocated. Others felt that just as they did not force their biblical principles on others, they and their children should not be forced to espouse ideas that went contrary to their beliefs.

Differing views between children and parents

Several parents spoke of their teenage children already seeing things differently from them and espousing ideas that they had picked up in school or from their peers. This was in relation such issues as sexual orientation, gender identity and abortion rights. Some parents responded to these arguments by pointing the children to the Word of God and trying to convince them of the legitimacy of their position. Furthermore, they urged their children not to abandon their beliefs and values in favour of those of others.

Other parents indicated that ultimately, they could not force their thinking on children and that these children needed to choose their own values as they matured. Parents could equip the children when they were still under their influence and pray for them, but the rest was between the children and God. All the parents who gave an opinion on these issues were at pains to explain that they did not condemn anybody but that they tried to steer their children towards what they believed was right.

"So in discussions like these, you see that your children are growing, because they have their own [thoughts], and what can I do? I cannot be debating forever, so I sometimes have to agree to disagree at some point."

"It's all in the hands of God. We shouldn't be afraid. Let's teach the children the way they should go. By the grace of God when they grow, they won't depart from it."

On the hypothetical question about what they would do if their teenage child said he/she was transgender and wanted to start 'transitioning', parents had a variety of views. Some found it difficult to fathom such an eventuality. Several said that they had thought about this and indicated that they would support the child in what would be no doubt a very confusing and potentially traumatic time for the child. Others highlighted the importance of being proactive about grounding their children in the faith especially when they were still young, keeping their children away from negative influences (for example, by homeschooling them) and praying for (and with) them to prevent such occurrences.

"I have often asked myself that question and I think that as a godly person, if your child came home and said something like that, you're going to see the best way you can support them. So there's no way you're gonna push them out or are gonna give out to them or try to change them. You'll just going to try to see the best way you can support them, so whatever support they need, that's the only thing I can do for my child."

“I know my reaction would be. Of course, I would be standing with the truth but how would I be able to convince [the child] to come back to it if they would be in that [position]? It is only through God and it's difficult. It's difficult.”

While acknowledging that this would be countercultural in a society that put a lot of value on feelings and self-determination, one parent proposed supporting the child to question that identity by exploring potential links between the child's feelings and other issues such as nutrition or hormonal imbalance.

“It does come down, you said it yourself when you asked the question: ‘I believe... I think I am a transgender.’ What's the root cause of that belief system? Is it a feeling? I mean we all go through... I mean at age 16, poor girl, poor guy, their emotions are going wild through puberty! They need help. They need to have a discussion and support and say, ‘Look you might be feeling this but is it true?’”

The implication of this quote leads to a brief discussion below about how parents viewed potential conflicts between their faith and the laws of the land.

Potential legal and other issues

We prompted parents to consider potential legal or other challenges that they or their children might face when their values were not in line with mainstream social norms. We suggested that even while they did not mean to cause offence, their words might be misconstrued or misreported, and they might face accusations of homophobia (and, in some countries, gender conversion therapy).

In response to the question, one parent said:

“I don't think there's much that we can do other than to talk to our children because we are tied by the law and they told us we have to obey the law.”

A couple of others, however, disagreed with one noting that “legality doesn't mean morality” in the sense that where civil laws contradicted moral laws, Adventist parents would need to take a stand and obey moral law even if that meant facing legal consequences. Another emphasised respecting people but also standing by biblical values, saying:

“With the legal aspect of things, I try to let the children understand that... it is not every right that is right. So, for us as Christians, it is not every right permitted by the law which is right for us. And the Bible will say, you have the liberty to choose all things... all things may be permissible, but it is not all things that are good and edifying [to] you.”

These two parents seemed to be in the minority in this stance, and very few parents had put much thought into potential legal or social implications of the positions that they took in their faith and how they might deal with consequences arising from these. As such, many were uncertain about what they would do. This discussion also raised questions about the limits of Adventists' involvement in these issues especially in situations where they were not personally affected.

“And I mean as a Church, as an individual who should be promoting liberty of conscience, freedom of choice.... And I am afraid that we are very quiet as a Church, as individuals around these situations despite you know imprisonment or what have you. Then saying that, there is a fine line to say as Adventists: is it our battle? I think it is but

the greater battle we are obviously preparing for is the Sunday law, but these are leading up to that situation, isn't it? It all relates."

"As these things are cropping up and becoming strong in the society your voice will be more and more softer and then silent. You can't shout at your children anymore and in a sense you can't tell them strictly or strongly. Definitely there would be challenges coming up.... What can be done? What to do? I don't know to be honest."

"I don't know how society is going to turn, but it definitely is going to turn bad, not good."

Others indicated that the important thing was to equip their children with the truth, continue to pray for them but let them make their own choices down the line if required to take a stand one way or the other.

"What I can do, the best I can do, I have to pray. There's nothing like the prayer of a parent, the mother, the father. We can fast, we can pray. It's in God's hands because laws will come, yes, it's up to them. I have my choice. I have taught them. And it's up to them now."

3.7 Parents' Hopes and Fears

To conclude our study, we asked parents a two-sided question regarding their hopes and fears for their children. Parents' hopes and dreams (Figure 6) for their children had to do with children's relationship with God, children's outward behaviour and access to environments that would help to nurture this behaviour.

Figure 6: Parents' hopes and dreams for children



Parents' fears for their children (shown in Figure 7 and in the quotes below) were largely homogeneous and had to do with children losing their relationship with God and losing eternal life because of life's preoccupations and distractions.

Figure 7: Parents' fears for children



"My fear is that they should not get so busy in this world. The world is so busy with all the media and social media and things like that, even work, that can separate them from God without their knowledge."

"My biggest fear is that the people that are attending churches today, I don't want the churches to only end up with those people. I want the churches to be filled with the next generation also who are growing up here. My fear is where they are not going to church anymore. The children who are growing up in this western society would choose when they grow up [to say], 'Oh that's my father's church. That's the church I used to attend with my father or with my parents when I was a child. I have nothing to do with them. Oh the old people still talk about faith but that church is for the old people.'"

"We are looking for something at the cost of something else.... Is my son who was born here or my son who is going to grow up here going to be a victim of my better life?"

"I was thinking about how many years I wasted doing my own things, disobeying God when I could have had joy... how many years I wasted doing my own desires, while I could have done God's desires that are so much better than mine. So when I say that I pray for [my son] to be more obedient than I was, I pray for him to the Holy Spirit, for him to really listen to the Holy spirit and love the voice of the Holy Spirit, and for him to do things and enjoy his life here on earth better than I enjoyed"

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Concluding Remarks

This research revealed that parents cared deeply about their children's spiritual wellbeing but preoccupations with work and school meant that they did not spend as much time as they desired with them. This had a big impact on the ability of parents to foster spirituality in their children.

Some parents made adjustments to their work schedules and lifestyles to increase their time with, and therefore influence on, their children. The durability of this arrangement varied, and life's demands sometimes got in the way of parents' intentions. Homeschooling was an option for a few families, but it was an unattainable model for others because of financial demands and lack of support.

Parents taught godly principles and values drawing ideas from the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy and personal upbringing. Likewise, parents sifted through values systems, adopting some ideals, modifying others and discarding others entirely. Children's personalities, age, birth order and family life circumstances dictated when and how values were taught. While many parents felt they were doing their best to raise godly children in spite of the many obstacles faced, others feared that their children might eventually abandon God and the Church, fears that many of them saw as entirely conceivable given the prevailing environment.

While many parents tried to lead children to have a personal relationship with God and strived to present God as a loving and gracious father, many others relied on external markers of religiosity such as church attendance and participation in church activities as evidence of this relationship. Indeed, many parents made significant changes in their lives to ensure their children got to church on time and stayed until the end. In that sense, some parents outsourced a large aspect of spiritual formation to the Church and only a few realised that church attendance and programming would do little if there was little spiritual engagement or consistency at home.

Lack of social support (including in extended family networks) compounded the challenges that parents experienced in trying to raise godly children. Segregation, criticism, judgement and negative influences from within the Church made parents' work even harder. A few parents had created supportive spiritual and social networks for their families, but many had not. Parents indicated that more cohesive and inclusive church communities, small groups within churches, more focused programming and Adventists institutions would create an environment that would help them nurture spirituality in their children and foster deeper and more enduring foundations of faith in them.

Parents set clear boundaries for their children and many ensured children adhered to them. Their focus was on equipping their children to survive and thrive spiritually and in other ways in a confused and confusing world even in the absence of parents. Some parents, however, struggled to enforce boundaries when they impinged on their own time, when dealing with wilful children or when faced with children's changing mindsets.

Many parents were not threatened by pluralism in schools especially if other faiths still presented God to their children in some form. Even so, they recognised that pluralism came with other dangers which made their children, particularly teenagers, susceptible to questioning their own faith. Parents' own limited knowledge of widespread ideas within

children's schools and other environments meant they could not fully equip their children to deal effectively with challenges arising from these.

Most parents actively talked to their children about issues of sex and sexuality especially with regard to their bodies and their care and protection. A minority were uncertain about how to go about this and desired more support especially in dealing with more complex conversations such as relationships, gender and sexuality. Moreover, many parents had not considered some of the social and legal challenges that they might encounter as a result of their positioning.

4.2 Recommendations

The recommendations made below are drawn from the observations made in this study as well as specific requests that parents made.

4.2.1 More cohesive and supportive church communities

Some children and adults experienced church as tribal and judgemental. Parents also craved guidance from more experienced parents and adult role models for their children. Others desired healthy forums for their growing children to mingle.

A deliberate approach to fostering smaller and cohesive communities within churches centred around spiritual or other matters, rather than ethnic identity, would be helpful to those facing isolation because of ethnicity, parents' church positions, disability or even choices like homeschooling. These small groups would go some way in plugging the large gap left by the absence of supportive extended family networks and help to create a larger sphere of spiritual influence for developing children.

The need for such communities extends beyond weekly service attendance and cannot be provided by more engaging programmes and Bible studies alone. Building networks, forming friendships and connecting through 'non-church' activities play a crucial role in fostering healthy ways of supporting one another.

4.2.2 Support to develop family spiritual habits

Some parents struggled to balance family routines with passing spiritual values. Their families' spiritual practices suffered because of the demands of work and school. Few families managed to have consistent spiritual practices. While some parents took comfort in the strong spiritual grounding that they had received in their home countries, they recognised that their children's faith formation was in peril because of the constraints and challenges that they faced. Some parents saw the importance of children developing a personal relationship with God, but others placed too big an emphasis on external markers of compliance in their children such as church attendance, giving tithe once they started working and eventually marrying Adventist spouses.

Given these observations, parents need tools to develop spiritual strongholds. Those who have immigrated into the Irish Mission need to be reminded that Christians live in exile on this earth and no matter where they take up residence, adjusting as spiritual beings is never easy. To that end, they need to be supported to be more intentional about who they are as Christians especially in setting up their own spiritual practices as well as those of their families. These habits need to be observed and reinforced daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annually. These need to be highlights that will cultivate spiritual growth within each family member.

The 21st century family struggles with spiritual habits as social media consumes their personal space. For many people, to be social in today's world requires being connected via social

media. Many parents in this study viewed social media, and digital technology in general, negatively even though they (eventually) allowed children access to it. Given the ubiquity of these technologies, parents need to be equipped to guide children through online activities and to develop healthy social media habits. Likewise, the Church needs to develop ways to connect with families through social media and support families to develop spiritual habits that include social media discipline.

4.2.3 Education on thorny subjects

Some parents need to be better equipped to talk to their children about issues of sex, sexuality and gender. More directly, targeted age-appropriate workshops (facilitated by qualified but also biblically grounded people) could be organised for teens and children. These need to be done with the involvement and approval of parents because different families desire different levels of exposure for their children.

At the same time, church leaders and parents could engage with educational authorities to gain a deeper understanding of the school curriculum, recognising how it enriches children's knowledge of the world while also posing challenges to their faith.

Regarding negative influences that parents identified as arising from the Church (for example, in matters of Christian living and even beliefs about the origins of the universe), these could be addressed within existing programming including on Sabbath afternoons – a time that some families appeared keen to spend in church.

4.2.4 Support for homeschooling parents / stay-at-home parents

There is a need for more support for homeschooling parents both in learning materials but more so in establishing networks with similar families. Some parents using this approach felt isolated, unsupported and discouraged.

Lack of support, financial stability and a desire for adult pursuits were the main reasons parents went back to work even while wishing to spend more time raising their young children. Yet, other parents had successfully altered their work life (for example, by setting up home-based businesses) to facilitate more hands-on child rearing and spiritual training. More targeted support (for example, workshops on parenting, financial literacy, upskilling and reskilling) would help young parents or intending parents who wish to make this transition but do not know how.

4.2.5 Adventist education

Some parents harked back to their own experiences of attending Adventist institutions and desired a similar environment for their children where a biblical approach to teaching the curriculum and a Christian milieu would support their efforts to immerse their children in an Adventist worldview.

While Adventist learning institutions might not become a reality in the Irish Mission in the short-term, parents' efforts could be reinforced through educational hubs or holiday clubs bringing Adventist learners together. Moreover, parents could be supported to take a deeper interest in what their children are learning in school and to be proactive about integrating faith in their children's education, for example, by drawing ideas from the Adventist Learning Community's resource centre, Curriculum & Instruction Resource Center Linking Educators (CIRCLE).

Parents' influence on their children waned as children matured in age and became more independent. This coincided with time when children were finishing secondary school and

moving into the world of tertiary education and part-time work. Given the increased use and acceptability of online systems of learning, the Irish Mission could partner with Adventist institutions based in other countries to explore availing Adventist education to children based in Ireland. At the moment, this is mostly viable at tertiary level but there could be opportunities for this to happen even at primary and even secondary levels. While this would not make up for a weak spiritual foundation at home, it would supplement parents' efforts to create a supportive environment for the development of a Christian character.

More broadly, with regard to religious liberty and liberty of conscience issues, the Irish Mission could engage with educational institutions, occupational licensing bodies and other relevant government agencies in the ROI and NI to uncover and address challenges that Adventist students and workers face. These interventions could help, for example, to ensure access to tests and examinations on days other than the Sabbath for learners / trainees at all levels.

4.2.6 Guidance in traversing a new culture

Some parents seemed to be caught between their traditional approaches to parenting and the new country laws. Learning to traverse a new culture is critical both to parents and children. Navigating a new culture with children is complex.

Hosting orientation classes for new immigrants (members and non-members alike) and developing biblical responses to cultural challenges will give parents a sense of support and belonging. Fostering cultural awareness will help parents to better integrate and understand their role as Christians better.

4.2.7 Help to guide wilful and older children

Some parents need a greater array of tools to address the demands of wilful children. Moreover, some parents need tools to engage more and more productively with teenagers especially when these children develop a mind of their own and start to defy or challenge parental expectations. This calls for better time management and skill development on the part of parents.

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