



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY FUTURES RESEARCH



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY FUTURES RESEARCH REPORT

A snapshot of children's ministry health
in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne



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Centre for Children's
& Youth Ministry

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The *Children's Ministry Futures Research Report* presents a snapshot of children's and family ministries in the parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne. It provides an understanding of the health of children's ministry across the Diocese and a sense of the opportunities and challenges before us. This report complements the parallel project completed in 2021, which focussed on ministry among teenagers.

From April to July 2023, invitations were extended to all vicars in the Diocese to participate in a 45-minute video call responding to questions about key indicators that determine a healthy and fruitful ministry among children (those aged 0–12 years) and their families. As with the youth ministry project in 2021, we chose to interview vicars rather than specialist children's or family workers, to better understand how children's and family ministry is integrated into the life of the whole parish.

Following initial contact by email or telephone, our team interviewed 152 parish leaders (predominantly vicars or priests-in-charge). This represents 71% of the 213 parishes of the Diocese. Core statistical data (numbers of children and young people involved in ministries, staffing, numbers of volunteer leaders, and ministry activities) was gathered from 124 of these parishes (58% of all parishes).

Vicars were asked to rate and describe the overall health of children's and family ministry in their parish, as well as their hopes for this area of ministry over the coming years. They were then asked to assess five specific aspects of their parish's approach to children's and family ministry. These are five key 'health indicators' identified in the research literature on children's and family ministry.

Health Indicator 1: Children participate as members of the church family.

Health Indicator 2: Parents and caregivers are recognised as the primary disciple makers of their children.

Health Indicator 3: Children's ministries are focussed on growing children as disciples of Christ.

Health Indicator 4: Children's ministry leaders are equipped for their roles.

Health Indicator 5: The church has an outward vision for children and families outside of the church.

Vicars were invited to comment on each of these indicators, as well as on training in children's ministry that the parish has found useful in the past, and present training needs. The survey concluded by asking vicars how they would like to see ministry among children and families develop across the Diocese of Melbourne in the future.

Research Team

The project was led by the Director of the Ridley Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry, Graham Stanton, in partnership with the Diocesan Youth Ministry Consultant, Brian Holden. The project was funded by the generous donation of one of Ridley's financial supporters. We are indebted to professional expertise from external research consultant Dr Duncan Rintoul, Director of Rooftop Social. Data collection was led by research assistant Anna McLean, with data collection and analysis by Amy Brown, Claire Cheeseman, Tom French, Matt Keller, Louisa Pfitzner, Stacey Slater, Jake Wilkins, and Karen Winsemius.

Citation

Stanton, Graham D., Matt Keller, and Duncan Rintoul. *Children's Ministry Futures Research Report: A snapshot of children's ministry health in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne*, Parkville, VIC: Ridley Centre for Children's and Youth Ministry, 2024.

Healthy children's and family ministries are evident where children play a visible and willing role in the intergenerational life of a parish. Hopefulness for future ministry arises when there is a clear priority placed on ministry among children in parish planning.

However, the numbers of children involved across the Diocese are small, and the general trend is one of attrition, where the number of young people involved in our churches declines as they move through teenage years into young adulthood.

Overall, this research emphasizes the importance of intentional planning, leadership investment, and collaborative efforts to build sustainable and effective children's and family ministry across parishes in the Diocese.

For realistic change to occur in our Diocese, we need a sustained commitment and strategic investment in ministry among children and families. To that end, this report makes five recommendations:

01
Include Children's and Family Ministry in Parish Planning: Integrate children's and family ministry into parish mission plans with proactive inclusion strategies.

02
Agree on Criteria for Children's and Family Ministry Health: Expand the use of the CMF health indicators for baselining and tracking the health of children's and family ministry across parishes and the Diocese.

03
Invest in Training Leaders: Prioritise training and support for children's and family ministry leaders, developing clear opportunities and pathways for leadership development.

04
Build Effective Partnerships: Foster collaborative relationships between parishes, and with schools, for resource-sharing, program development, and outreach efforts.

05
Expand Diocesan Support: Enable parishes to draw on the available resources and support from the Diocesan Children and Young People Ministry Team for training, planning, and facilitation of partnerships.



KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

An Uneven Distribution

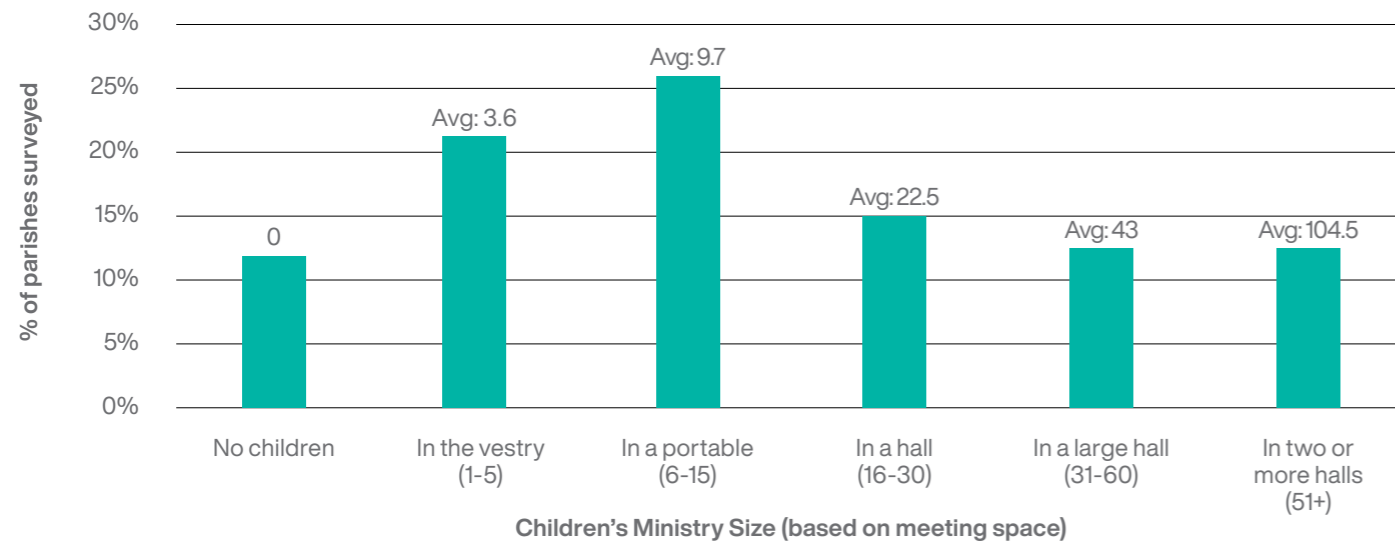
Across the 124 parishes who provided statistical data, there were 3,329 children involved in church activities and ministries of one form or another across a regular month.¹

While the total of 3,329 children in the CMF data equates to an average of 27 children per parish involved in the survey, the distribution is far from even.

- Two parishes included attendance at Anglican school services in their numbers, resulting in over 500 children counted as being part of the church. Removing these two outliers drops the average from 27 to 17 children per parish.
- At the top end of attendance numbers, one in eight parishes (13%) have big and busy children's ministries, with more than 50 children coming through their doors on a regular basis, whether for Sunday School, kids' church, playgroup, or other ministries that involve children (including the two parishes with Anglican school services).

- At the other end of the spectrum, 12% of parishes reported having no children involved in ministry activities at all. As an overall percentage of parishes in the Diocese with no children, this figure is likely to be an underestimate. Many of those vicars who declined to participate in the survey did so because they had no children to include in the data.²
- In between these two extremes, we can categorise the relative sizes of children's ministries in the Diocese based on the spaces in which they meet: 21% are small enough to meet in the vestry (1-5 children), 26% could meet in a portable classroom (6-15 children), 15% in the church hall (16-30 children), and 13% in a large hall (31-50 children).

Figure 1: Number of Children's Ministries of different Sizes as a Percentage of Parishes Surveyed.



¹ See appendix 3 for comparison between CMF data and 2023 Synod returns.
² Among the parishes from whom we had no response, 33% reported having no children in annual parish returns. Only 19% of parishes in the CMF study reported having no children in parish returns.

A Story of Attrition

Across the Diocese there are far more children involved in our churches than there are teenagers or young adults. Four in five (81%) of the vicars we spoke to reported having fewer teenagers and young adults involved in the parish than there were children. Vicars reported an average of nine teenagers in each parish. More than one in four (28%) reported no teenagers at all.

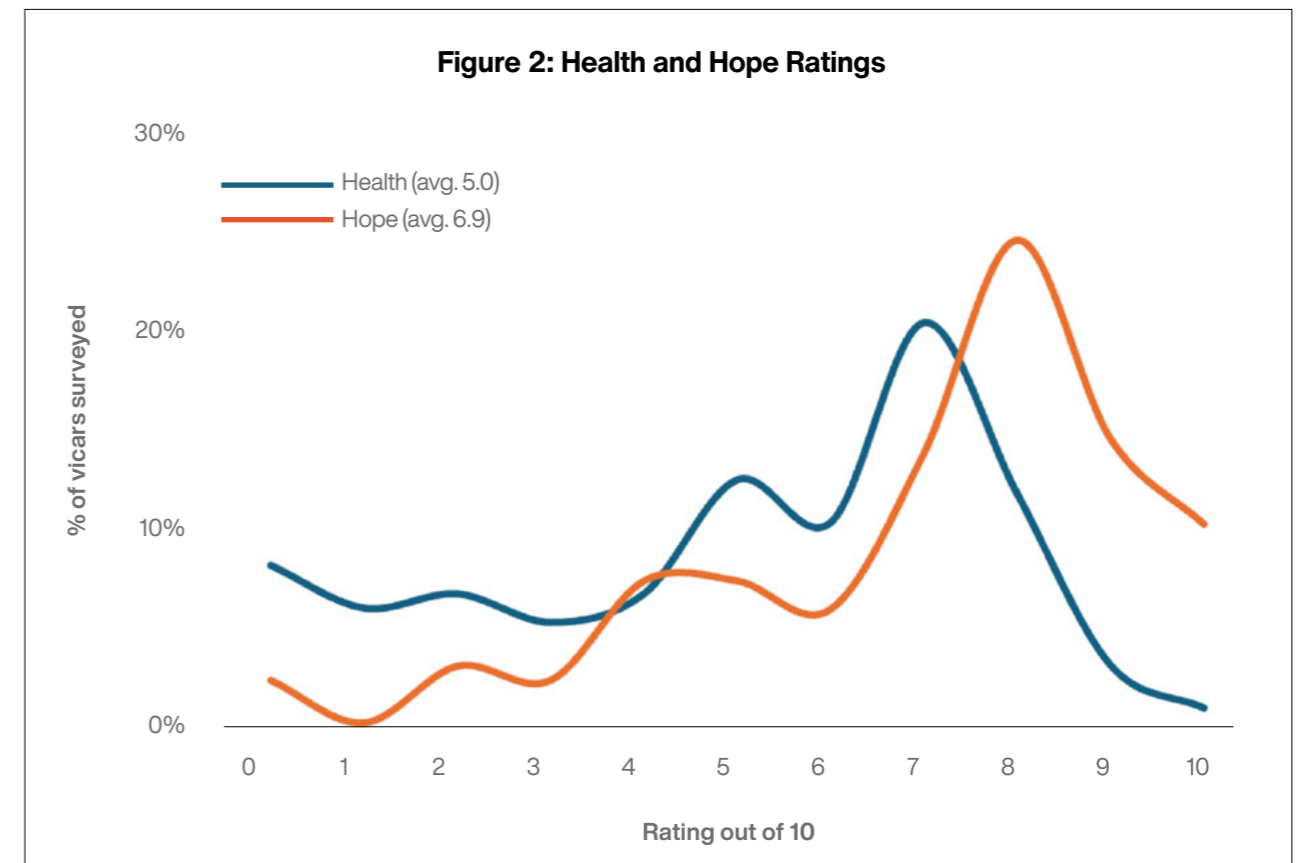
For most parishes (two-thirds of the total in our sample), the church community includes 19 children, five or six teenagers and four young adults. These numbers paint a sobering picture of attrition: most of our parishes are losing two-thirds of the children who attend by the time they reach their teenage years.

More Hopeful than Healthy

When asked to rate the health of their children's and family ministry on a scale from 0 to 10, the average self-assessment from vicars was plumb in the centre: 5.0. When asked how hopeful they were about the future of children's and family in their parish, the picture was more positive: a self-assessed average of 6.9 out of 10.

Overall, vicars were more hopeful about the future of children's and family ministry than the perceived current level of health indicated. Some 78% of vicars gave a higher rating out of 10 for future hope than present health.

There was wide variation around these means: ratings for both health and hope ranged all the way from zero to ten. The most frequent health rating of 7 out of 10 was given by 29% of vicars. The most frequent rating for hope was 8 out of 10, given by 35% of vicars.



Three common factors underpinned higher ratings for both health and hope:

- **Numbers:** health and hope both increased with total parish size, and with larger numbers of children involved in parish activities (a 'critical mass').
- **Leadership:** having children's ministry leaders, whether staff positions or volunteer leaders, was positively related to ministry health and hope for the future.
- **Programs:** having vibrant and sustainable the activities in place for children was positively related to the levels of health and hope reported by vicars.

Other factors that boosted vicars' assessment of ministry health for this cohort included:

- children playing a willing and visible role in intergenerational parish gatherings; and
 - effective recovery of children's ministries after COVID.
- Other supporting factors that made vicars more hopeful for ministries among children and families in the future included:
- new families joining the parish;
 - children's ministry being a stated priority of the parish; and
 - opportunities to collaborate with other parishes—a particularly evident factor among parishes with small numbers of children currently involved.

For more detail on self-assessed health, see pages 12-13. For more on hope, see pages 25-27.

Vicars were shown five indicators that are discussed in the research as reflecting different dimensions of the health of a children's and family ministry.



Health Indicator 1: Children participate as members of the church family.



Health Indicator 2: Parents and caregivers are recognised as the primary disciple makers of their children.



Health Indicator 3: Children's ministries are focussed on growing children as disciples of Christ.



Health Indicator 4: Children's ministry leaders are equipped for their roles.



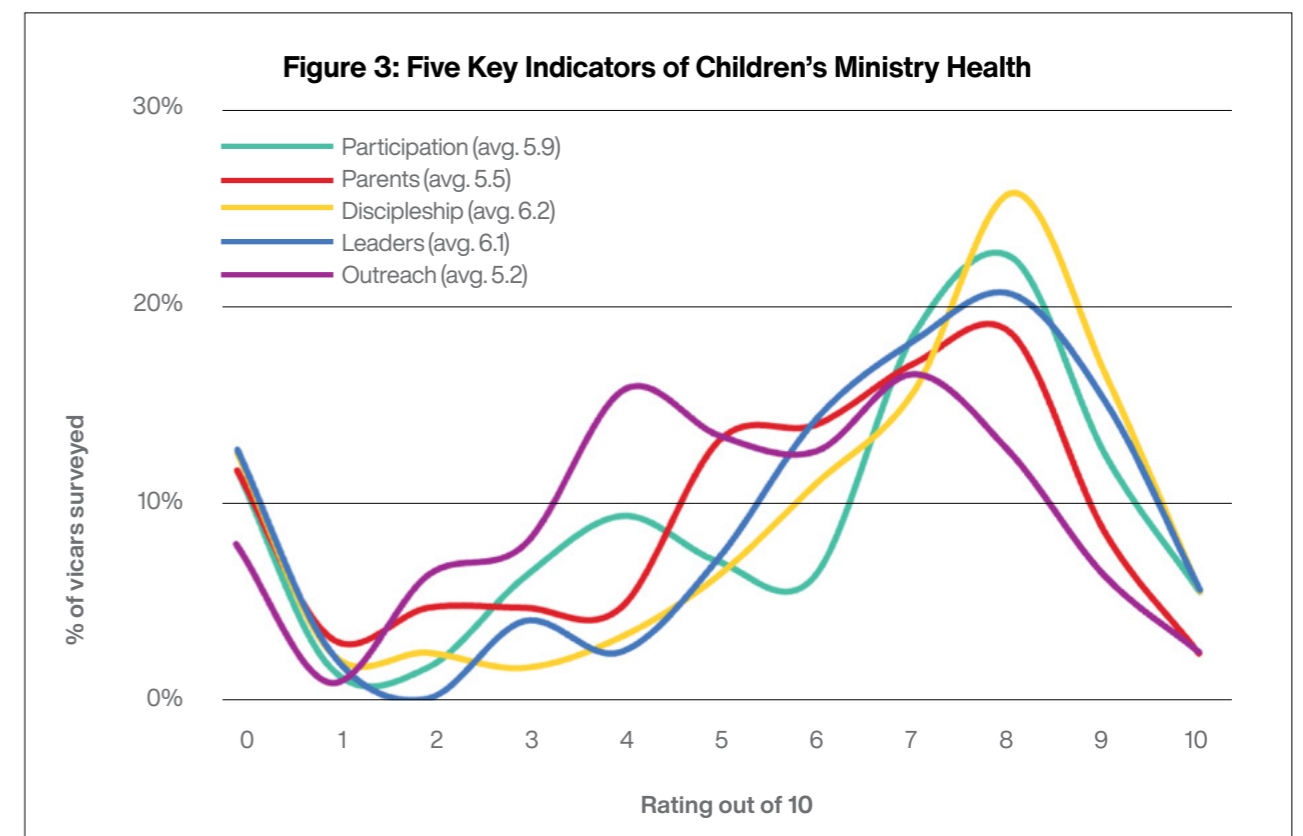
Health Indicator 5: The church has an outward vision for children and families outside of the church.

The average rating for each of the five indicators ranged from a low of 5.3 (for having an outward vision) to a high of 6.2 (for having a focus on discipleship). These averages are all higher than the overall health rating of 5.0, indicating that, on average, when asked about the overall health of this ministry area vicars are more critical of this ministry area than they need to be.

Of the three common factors which underpinned higher ratings for both health and hope, having children's ministry leaders is the only factor that the literature supports as being included in the five key indicators of health. Though a critical mass of numbers and offering vibrant programs does suggest health, those factors are neither necessary nor sufficient for an effective children's ministry.

Rather than focussing on big numbers and multiple programs, effective children's and family ministry is the result of a commitment to these five underlying features of ministry health.

For more detail on each health indicator, see pages 14-24.



Have we reached our goals?

Strategy 2.4 of our Diocesan Vision and Directions 2017–2025 set the goal to see 'Children and Families Ministry ... fully embraced as a key area of ministry in all parishes.'

Defining a 'full embrace' of children's and family ministry is a difficult task.

Many parishes reported that they are doing 'all-age worship'. However, our interviews revealed wide variation in what this looks like and what people understand by the term. Some describe fully integrated intergenerational gatherings characterised by mutuality and reciprocity, while others described a church service with some activities provided for children, should they turn up.

Similarly, vicars hold a very broad definition of 'discipleship' of children. Some had clearly mapped out age-specific goals for faith formation, while others had a desire that children become Christian, but without specific avenues for how this would be promoted. It is worth celebrating that the health of children's ministry has been added to annual returns as presented to Synod. However, we need to establish some agreed measures of health to obtain a clearer

and more consistent picture. Better statistics would be possible if there was a consistency across the parishes as to how to measure the health of our children's and family ministries. Just counting numbers and programs is, at best, a partial indicator of ministry health. Utilising and further expanding on the five indicators used in this project could go a long way to meeting this need.

We need to be realistic about both the state of children's and family ministry across the Diocese and our expectations of what is required for things to change. The research findings indicate that having just one child present was enough to make a vicar hopeful for the future of children's and family ministry in the parish; but is this a realistic expectation? We must be careful to distinguish between well-placed confidence and wishful thinking.

We have a challenging journey ahead if we are indeed to fully embrace children's and family ministry as a key area of ministry in all parishes, and we cannot expect this goal to be achieved by the end of 2025. Neither the existence of a paid position in a local parish, nor the provision of a few specialists employed by the Diocese, have the potential to shift the needle as far as it needs to shift, or as quickly.



For realistic change to occur, a sustained commitment over a longer period needs to be invested into ministries among children and families.

That we may continue to strive towards fully embracing children's and family ministry across our Diocese we make the following recommendations:

01 We need to include children's and family ministry in parish planning.

Survey results indicated that churches without hope for the future of children's and family ministry tend not to see children participate as church members, do not recognise parents as the primary disciple makers, and do not have any plans for outreach.

We recommend that parishes prioritise including children and family ministries in their parish's Mission Action Plan so that steps towards welcoming and including children who visit can be considered, along with potential plans made to incorporate children into the ongoing life of the church.

02 We need to agree on criteria for children's and family ministry health.

The research team was encouraged by the large number of vicars who asked for a copy of the CMF health indicators to use as an ongoing reference point in their parishes.

We recommend embedding these indicators across the Diocese as the basis for measuring and reporting on children's and family ministry health.

Self-assessment and reporting against these criteria will provide more useful statistics and give the Diocese tangible and consistent data to track in future research. Embedding the indicators as shared goals will enable more productive conversations within and between parishes in relation to the health of our children's and family ministries, as well as strategies for investing in them. We encourage parish councils to make use of the health indicators in their meetings in order to facilitate robust discussions on these matters.

03 We need to invest in training leaders.

Two key findings of this survey were that the number of lay leaders involved in children's and youth ministries is directly proportional to how hopeful a vicar is for the ministry, and that having paid staff in specialised roles make a measurable difference to both the perceived health of, and hope for, children's and family ministry in a parish.

These results are unsurprising when one considers that the ongoing viability of a ministry is directly tied to who will be running or assisting in it. Parishes with few children present reported that employing someone to help in this area gives them someone who prioritises this ministry. Parishes with larger numbers of children saw staff roles as valuable for empowering and equipping lay leaders and parents.

We recommend four ways forward in this area:

- 3.1 Identify a Champion**
Parishes need to identify in their Mission Action Plans someone to oversee and champion ministry to children and their families, even if money is not available for an employee in this area.
- 3.2 Leadership Support**
Parishes need to support and care for these ministry personnel. Since the number of leaders is proportional to the hopefulness of the ongoing work, these leaders need to network so that even if they are the solo 'champion' in their church they will receive support and encouragement from others.
- 3.3 Training Programs in Addition to Safe Ministry**
Investment in this area of ministry is more than simply requiring parishioners to do the Safe Ministry training (as essential as this is). Rather, training resources for a variety of church sizes and traditions need to be developed and used.
- 3.4 Leadership Development Ecosystem**
We need to build a leadership ecosystem to identify, train, develop, deploy, support, and celebrate more leaders or 'champions' for specialised ministries among children and families.

04

We need to build effective partnering relationships.

Having at least some options for practical ways to pursue children's and family ministries directly affected a vicar's evaluation of both the present health of the ministries, and their level of hope for the future of the ministries in their parish. However, many vicars felt they lacked the critical mass they need to get viable ministries off the ground.

We recommend that collaborative relationships be pursued between parishes, with schools, and other community groups, so that various models of effective partnership relationships can be identified.

Partnership between parishes could enable viable ministry programs where a genuinely reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship can be established. Effective partnerships could also address the need for more training and equipping of parents and leaders.

Partnerships with local schools and other community groups are also critical. Churches with established relationships with local schools or other community groups were the most hopeful of their chances for outreach and growth.

05

We need to expand the capacity of the Diocesan Children and Young People Ministry Team.

Many vicars expressed a desire for central resourcing of support. The good news is that resources are available to support practice in many of the in-demand topics, through the Diocesan Children and Young People Ministry Team.

Since the conclusion of the data collection phase of this project, the Diocese has made a welcome appointment of an additional 0.5 FTE role in the Children and Young People Ministry Team, thanks to generous funding from an external organisation and the assistance of the Melbourne Anglican Foundation.

The Children and Young People Ministry Team has been effective in providing assistance in parish planning, training leaders, and in suggesting and identifying parishes to build effective partnering relationships. These are the very things that many vicars have asked for, and which will enable the Diocese to fully embrace children's and family ministry.

This team continues to work at capacity, demonstrating the ongoing need for further investment in this work.

We recommend that the Diocese continue to promote and expand the work of the Diocesan Office for Children and Young People to enable parishes to draw on the available resources to facilitate more effective children's and family ministry.



HEALTH AND HOPE: DETAILED FINDINGS

We asked vicars:

Thinking broadly about the children’s ministry in your parish over the past 3 years, (So that includes the time during and after COVID-19 lockdowns):

On a scale of 0–10, how healthy would you say your ministry among children (aged 0–12) has been over this period, where 0 is ‘not at all healthy’ and 10 is ‘extremely healthy’?

What would you say makes it healthy? And what held you back from rating the health of the ministry more highly?

Overall Findings

The average health rating across all parishes surveyed was 5.0 out of 10. The most frequent health rating was 7 out of 10, given by 21% of vicars. While very few rated their ministries as a very healthy 9 or 10 out of 10, the number of vicars giving responses between 0 and 4 out of 10 were each around 10% of the total.

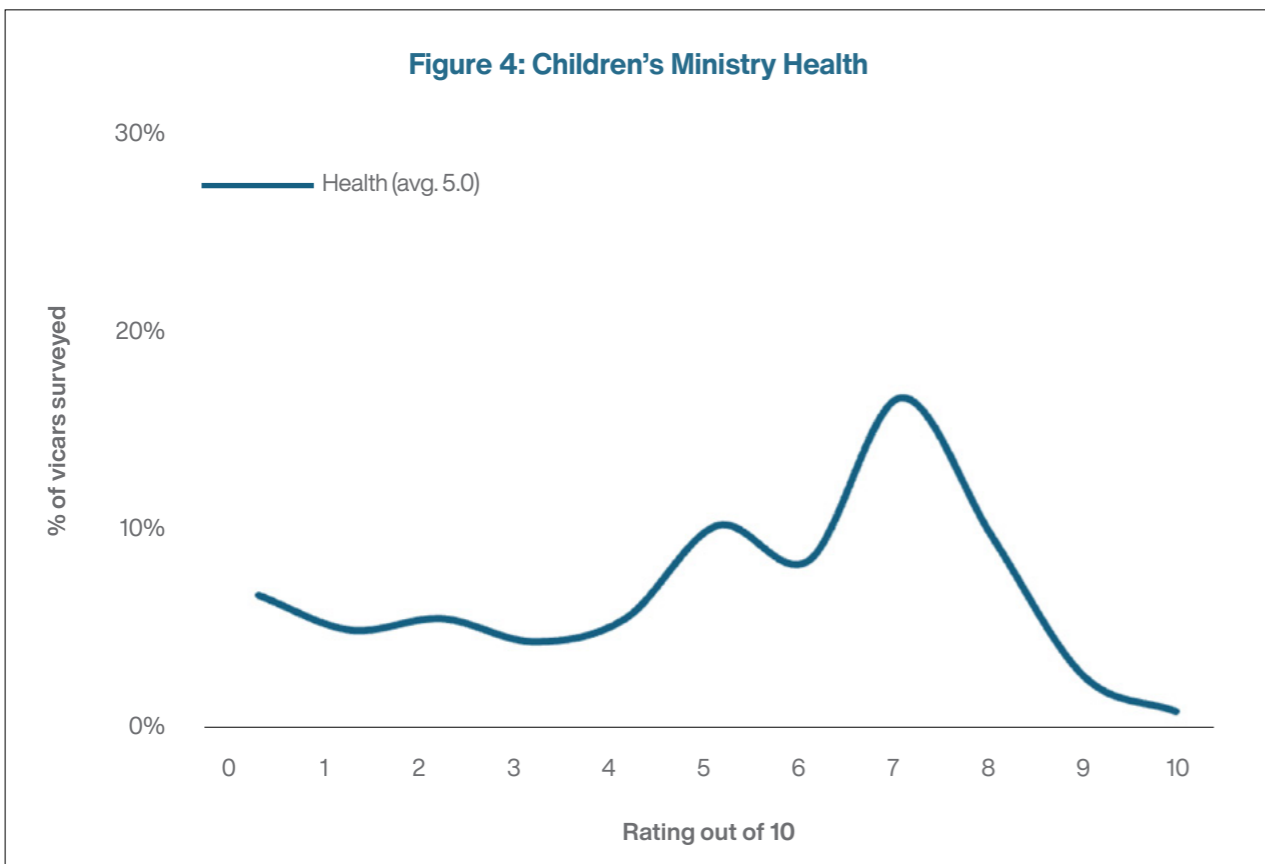
A healthy score correlated with the number of children at the church. As numbers of children increased, health scores increased. The average health rating was 1.5 out of 10 for vicars in parishes with no children, compared to 7.0 out of 10 for those with 31–90 children.

The size of a church also influenced the perceived health of its Children and Family ministries. Among large churches, 53% of vicars scored themselves as 8–10 in healthiness, while 27% of small churches scored themselves 0–2 in healthiness.

Those churches with a dedicated children’s ministry staff member gave a higher average (6.2) than those churches with no such staff (5.4). The more volunteer children’s leaders a church had also correlated with greater health. Vicars from parishes with more than 10 volunteer children’s ministry leaders averaged 6.9 in health.

Parishes with no children’s programs averaged 1.8 in health while those with some kind of program for children averaged 5.8.

Figure 4: Children’s Ministry Health



Factors influencing Children’s Ministry Health

- 51% of vicars attribute the health of their children’s ministry to their programs:**

We have kids that regularly attend ... resourced ministries.⁴

Kids and their parents both love the program. It’s inviting, engaging, it’s not surface level. It’s real biblical content and curriculum.

- 23% of vicars attribute the health of their children’s ministry to effective leadership:**

We have a fantastic children’s minister—they have done a wonderful job of doing children’s ministry during and post-lockdowns.

Our children’s minister runs a really healthy ministry: engaging, caring, teaching.

- 22% of vicars attribute the health of their children’s ministry to engaging with children:**

Kids [are] excited to be at church and in the community. [There’s a] 10-year-old keen to be baptised of their own accord ... Kids also want to be a part of our youth ministry.

Kids read out prayers in the service. Kids [are] more engaged because of these things.

What do Vicars attribute an unhealthy children’s ministry to?

- 34% of vicars attribute an unhealthy Children’s Ministry to insufficient numbers:**

It’s hard to establish a ministry when you’re not sure if any children are coming.

We have an aging congregation [so] there are not many children involved; it’s hard to get a critical mass of numbers.

- 24% of vicars attribute an unhealthy children’s ministry to a lack of leaders:**

The basic issue is that there is only one person to run the children’s ministry, so everything stops when she goes.

It’s difficult to find volunteers to lead the kids’ ministry, which means that perhaps overall the parish is not really prioritising the children’s ministry.

Struggled to find a dedicated children’s minister who can drive the program.

- 23% of vicars attribute an unhealthy children’s ministry to the impact of COVID:**

Before COVID, there were lots of children, maybe 10–15. After COVID, only two or three would come.

Resources are stretched as well because of the pandemic recovery—a lower proportion of the members are serving as volunteers.

Our multicultural community was shattered because [they were] used to being close. Because of English being a 2nd language [it was] hard to communicate; [they] simply didn’t log in to online offerings.

³ Full time equivalent staffing levels (for clergy, authorised stipendiary lay ministers, and other staff) as processed by the payroll of the Melbourne Anglican Diocesan Corporation (MADC) was used as a proxy measure for the overall size of each parish. ‘Small’ parishes have up to 1.5 FTE on the MADC payroll; ‘medium-sized’ parishes have more than 1.5 and less than 3 FTE; ‘large’ parishes have 3 or more FTE.

⁴ Verbatim responses from vicars are indicated throughout the report in italic text.

Health Indicator 1: Children participate as members of the church family.



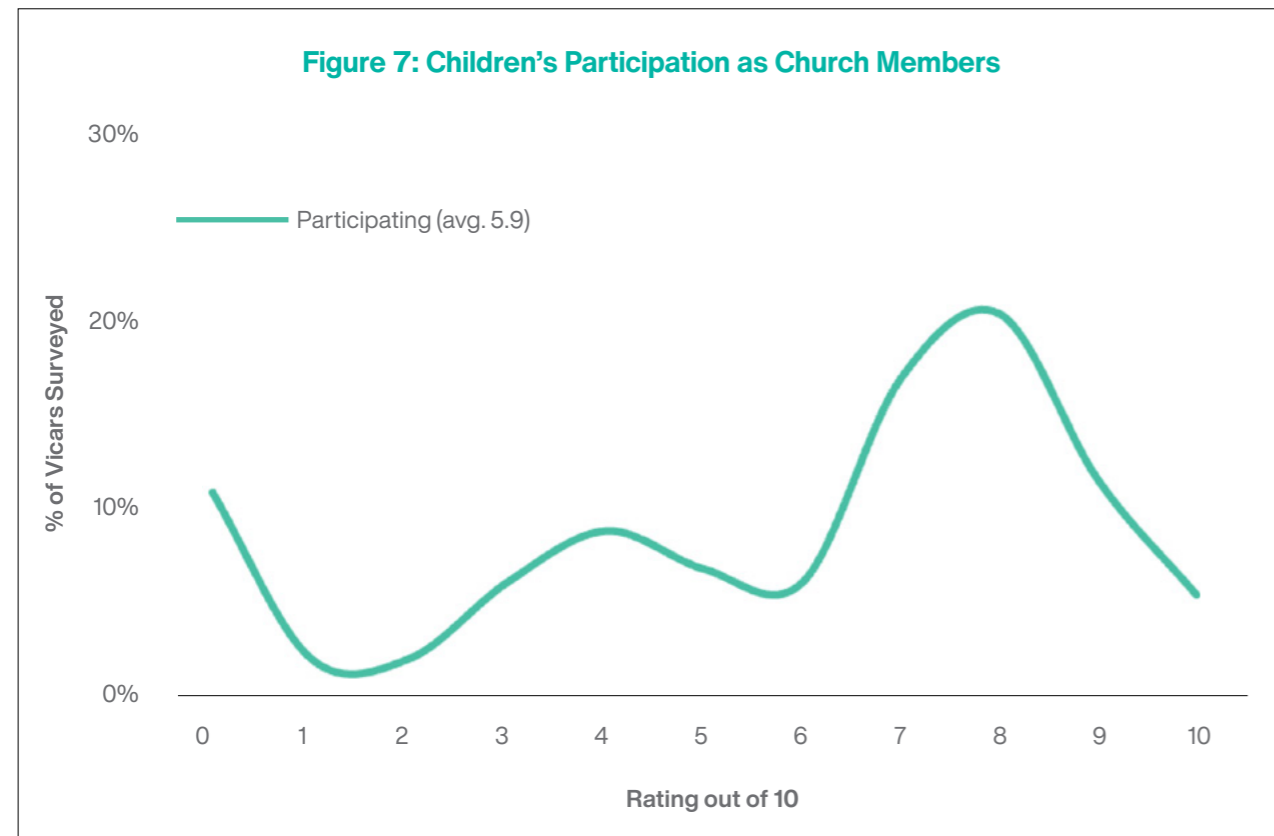
‘We therefore receive and welcome you as a member with us of the body of Christ, as a child of the one heavenly Father, and as an inheritor of the kingdom of God.’⁵

In healthy children’s ministries:

- a. children are named, noticed, and nurtured as members of the church family;
- b. children make genuine contributions to the ministry and mission of the church⁶ ;
- c. all church members share in the responsibility, privilege, and joy of handing on the faith to the next generation⁷ as spiritual mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc⁸ ; and
- d. children with additional needs are welcomed and valued.

INPUTS <small>(What we should do to make this happen)</small>	EVIDENCE <small>(What we will see if we are doing this well)</small>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are known by name by adult members of the congregation. • Children of all abilities are given opportunities and training to use their gifts to serve others. • Church services are planned with children’s participation in mind. • Leaders seek children’s input in planning church ministries and mission. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults other than their parents have conversations with children outside of church services. • Children of all abilities make substantial contributions to all-age worship gatherings. • Children are included in church service rosters.

We asked vicars: to what extent do children participate as members of the church family?



⁵ Anglican Church of Australia, *A Prayer Book for Australia* (Alexandria, NSW: Broughton Books, 1995), 79.
⁶ Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Churches and Families Collide* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009).
⁷ Psalm 78:1-8
⁸ Mark 10:29-30

Health Indicator 1: Children participate as members of the church family.



The average score for this indicator was 5.9 out of 10. A higher score correlated with the number of children at the church; the more children in a parish, the more they participated as members of the church family. The average score was 1.3 for those with no children. There was a large jump to a score of 5.0 amongst parishes that had any children at all.

The size of a church also influenced the involvement of children in the life of the church, with large churches scoring 7.8 in this regard, while small churches scored only 5.8. This suggests that the larger a church, the more likely it is that children will be regarded as active church members.

This factor was influenced by whether a parish had a dedicated children’s ministry staff worker. Some 54% of vicars in parishes with no staff scored themselves in the 0–2 range (children do not participate as members), while only 2% of churches with a staff member scored in this category.

Vicars in parishes with some kind of program for children and a person involved in overseeing it evaluate the ministry in relation to this health indicator more positively than those in parishes that do not have either of these features in place.

Over half (54%) of vicars of parishes with no programs or staff scored themselves a 0–2 on this measure, while only 2% of those with a Sunday School/Kid’s Church program and a staff member overseeing it viewed their ministries in the same way. This suggests that a dedicated program and a staff member for children contribute positively to greater participation of children in wider parish life.

Healthy and hopeful outlooks on children’s ministry overall also correlated strongly with higher ratings on this indicator. Those vicars who indicated that children’s ministry in their parish was unhealthy were much less likely to see children as part of the church family (an average score of 3.1 out of 10 among parishes with health scores of 5 or lower; versus 7.5 out of 10 for those with health ratings above 5). Similarly, all vicars who had very little hope for their children’s ministry (0–2 out of 10) did not see children participating as members of the church. In contrast, of those who were very hopeful (8–10 out of 10), only 1% did not see children as participants in the wider church family.

In what ways do children actively participate as members of the church?

- 1. 67% of vicars feel that children actively participate in services:**

We have young children helping lead services sometimes. One of our service leaders will invite children to help lead with him.

Children are involved in evaluations of the church. The children participate in the service, in the sanctuary team, lead on rosters, and attend the eucharist and parish social activities. They’re involved in meaningful and purposeful ways. They in turn feel honoured and respected... that they know that their input is valued.

- 2. 50% of parishes have all-age services:**

There’s monthly intergenerational worship that is more tailored for kids (e.g. all age sermon, simplified/no liturgy for communion, kids participating and serving more in the service).

Children are taking part in the reading and intercessions rosters. Then once a month [we have an] all ages service, where children help with music.

- 3. 48% of vicars report that children are named, noticed, and welcomed:**

Kids stay on in church if adults know their name—adults find this achievable.

When children are there, they participate fully. Usually this is grandparents bringing their grandchildren, and so our church is known because of that.

The church is willing to sacrifice hymns and liturgies to see new families attend. The church welcomes and includes children and people don’t mind the noise or mess that accompanies involving them.

Because we’re not an enormous church (around 100 people), the whole atmosphere of the church is geared toward the integration of the whole community ... and this extends to children.

What do churches see as an obstacle to children actively participating as members?

- 1. 63% of vicars who do not have children actively participating in their church family say it is because of low numbers of children currently attending:**

They’re just not there.

Health Indicator 2: Parents and carers are recognised as the primary disciple-makers of their children.



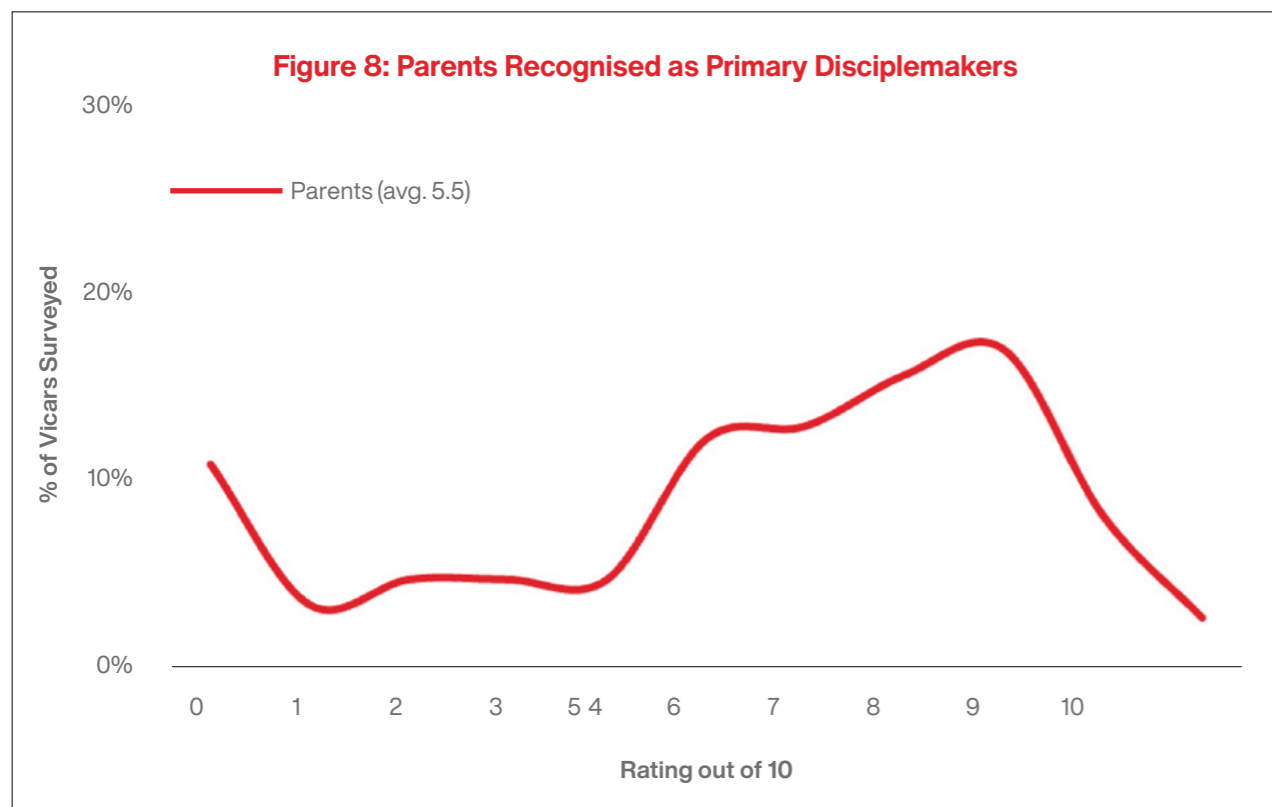
'Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.' Ephesians 6:4

In healthy children's ministries:

- a. parents and carers⁹ are encouraged and empowered to take up their responsibility and privilege to share Jesus with their children;
- b. churches make special effort to build positive relationships with non-church parents and carers;
- c. churches provide training and support for parents and carers to fulfil their role as primary disciple-makers of their children¹⁰; and
- d. church ministries for children complement the primary role of parents and carers¹¹.

INPUTS <small>(What we should do to make this happen)</small>	EVIDENCE <small>(What we will see if we are doing this well)</small>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church leaders and children's ministry staff talk with parents about family discipleship. • Churches use a variety of means to equip parents for the task of parenting, such as preaching, training, and mutual support. • Churches communicate with parents about church ministries and programs for children. • Church ministries provide resources for parents to follow up with at home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents read the Bible and pray with their children at home. • Parents are consulted in ministry decisions. • Parents are named and known by children's ministry leaders. • Parents are aware of and appropriately involved in children's ministry programs.

We asked vicars: To what extent are parents and carers recognised as primarily responsible for their children's growth in faith?



⁹ Including legal guardians, grandparents, or other family members.
¹⁰ Timothy P Jones, *Family Ministry Field Guide: How the Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011). Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home Through Time, Moments, and Milestones* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).
¹¹ Rachel Turner, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Parent: Creating a Culture Where Parenting for Faith can Flourish* (Abingdon: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2018).

Health Indicator 2: Parents and carers are recognised as the primary disciple-makers of their children.



The average score for this indicator was 5.5.

A higher rating on this indicator correlated with the number of children at the church. In parishes with no children present, vicars were less likely to see parents as the primary disciple makers (averaging 2.3 out of 10 on this indicator), compared to an average of 7.0 in parishes with over 30 children.

The more children there are in a parish, the more likely it is that parents will recognise and discuss the importance of reading the Bible and praying with their children and will be equipped to do so. This is an interesting finding, undermining any suggestion that the strength of larger churches is solely tied to their ability to offer child-focussed programs. An investment in adult discipleship and a resultant confidence among these adults is key here.

Over one in four (28%) vicars who rated the children's ministries in their parish between 3 and 5 out of 10 on this measure said that parents lacked the ability and confidence to do so. Some 70% of those who rated the ministry highly in relation to this indicator reported that parents read the Bible and prayed with their children.

Staffing for children's ministry correlated with high scores on this indicator. Vicars in parishes that employed children's ministry staff gave much higher average ratings for equipping parents to disciple their children than those without (6.6 out of 10 in parishes with children's ministry staff, compared to only 2.8 in parishes with neither staff nor programs for children). This is an encouraging finding as it reveals that employing staff in children's or family ministry does not equate to off-loading discipleship from parents. Rather, children's ministry staff can help equip parents to disciple their children.

In a similar vein, the more volunteer leaders a parish had in children's ministry programs, the more likely they were to recognise parents as the primary disciple makers. Parishes with more than 20 leaders in their programs had an average of 7.1 out of 10 on this indicator, significantly higher than parishes with fewer leaders. This finding is again encouraging, indicating that parishes with high numbers of volunteers in their children's ministry do not see the volunteers as replacing parents or caregivers in the spiritual formation of their children.



Health Indicator 2: Parents and carers are recognised as the primary disciple-makers of their children.



In what ways do churches recognise parents as the primary disciple makers of their children?

1. 70% of vicars mentioned the value of caregivers reading the Bible and praying with their children:

Grandparents work with grandchildren; they all take an active role in discipleship.

Most parents train their children to read the Bible and say prayers; parents are given 'homework' to help them disciple their children.

I've heard from the children that their parents read the Bible with them so that they know what's happening at church.

2. 63% of vicars have a two-way connection between parents and children's leaders:

We don't have many families so it's easy to connect and equip families, and then support them with their kids.

Parents are really engaged in ministry decisions and involved in the church. There's a close-knit community of parents, and parents are empowered to serve.

3. 55% of vicars provide parents with training and resources:

We've had lots of training for parents in that aspect to help them to realise and understand their role as Christian parents to help their children to grow in their faith.

Baptism families from the church are disciplined in how to raise their children in Christ.

What do churches see as an obstacle to caregivers actively discipling their children?

1. 32% of vicars do not have parents or children actively participating in their church:

Conceptually we recognise it, but we just don't have parents of young children attending the church.

Parents are not usually coming to church, so we don't have access to or contact with them. Children who are coming are coming with grandparents.

2. 28% of vicars believe caregivers lack confidence and ability:

Parents have the attitude that bringing children to church is all they have to do. Our church recognises their role, but we have to shift parental attitudes.

Parents feel busy, like they don't have time and capacity for their kids' faith.

People are looking for help and encouragement in discipling their children. Parents feel disempowered in our current secular state to integrate the faith of their children with life and with what's being taught in schools.

Health Indicator 3: Children's ministries are focussed on growing children as disciples of Christ.



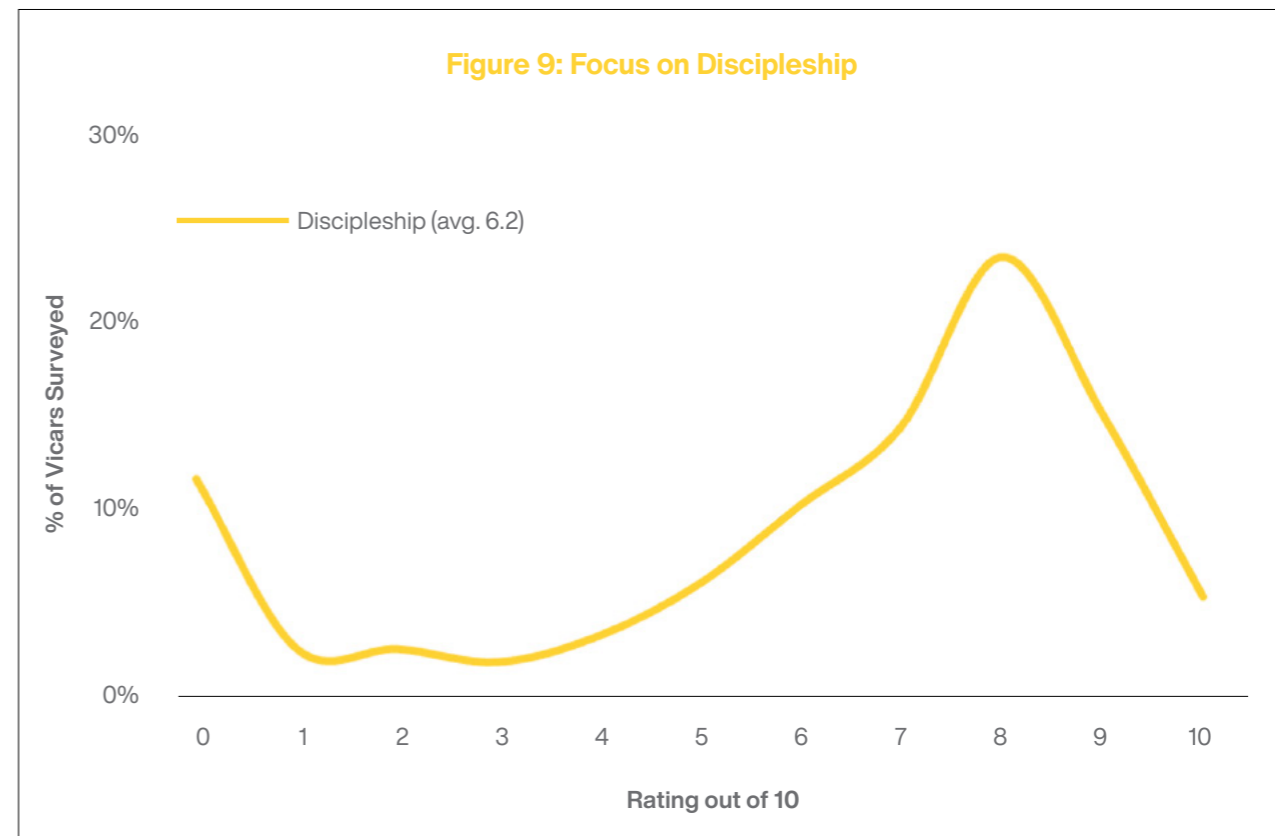
'Jesus said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"': Mark 10:14

Healthy children's ministries:

- a. empower children to live as children of God as they face the challenges and opportunities of their day-to-day lives¹² ;
- a. provide children with foundations of faith in God and fellowship with God's people for whole of life discipleship¹³ ; and
- a. are the beginning of an intentional pathway for growing children in faith from early childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood.

INPUTS (What we should do to make this happen)	EVIDENCE (What we will see if we are doing this well)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church ministries pursue intentional programs of instruction for faith formation. • Children are provided with meaningful and appropriate ways to help them engage with and respond to the word of God in their lives. • The church prays for children and their growth in faith. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children worship God and live for Jesus in authentic ways. • Children feel they belong to the church. • Children find models for faith in young people and other church members. • Children continue in faith through adolescence and into adulthood.

We asked vicars: To what extent are the children's ministry leaders equipped for their roles?



¹² David M. Csinos and Ivy Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2013).
¹³ Jack Klumpenhouwer, *Show Them Jesus: Teaching the Gospel to Kids*, (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2014).

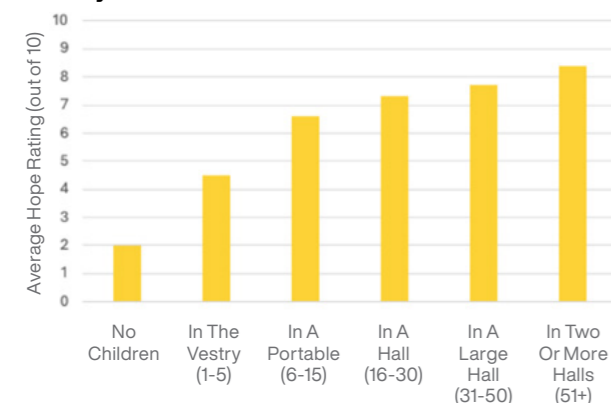
Health Indicator 3: Children's ministries are focussed on growing children as disciples of Christ.



The average rating for this indicator was 6.2 out of 10 – the highest average of the five indicators, though only marginally higher than the average for indicator 4 (leaders being equipped for their roles, 6.1 out of 10). But 47% of vicars rated their parish highly on this indicator, while only 40% rated it highly on indicator 4. Higher ratings correlated with larger numbers of children involved in the parish. The average rating for a focus on discipleship rose steadily in a linear fashion from 2.0 when there were no children, through to 9.5 when there were 50+ children in attendance.

Over one in four (28%) vicars who rated the children's ministries in their parish between 3 and 5 out of 10 on this measure said that parents lacked the ability and confidence to do so. Some 70% of those who rated the ministry highly in relation to this indicator reported that parents read the Bible and prayed with their children.

Figure 10: Discipleship Based on Size of Children's Ministry



Planning for the discipleship of children gives hope for the future of children's ministry when the whole church is involved.

Vicars' hopefulness for the future of children's ministry in their parish was closely tied to their ratings on this indicator. Those with very little hope rated themselves at an average of 2.1 out of 10 for having a focus on discipleship of children. The average rating increased to 4.3 for those with little hope, 6.6 for those with moderate hope, and 7.4 for those with high hopes.

Over three-quarters (77%) of vicars in parishes that had a plan for discipleship characterised themselves as very hopeful for the overall ministry with children in their parish (8-10 out of 10), compared with 0% for those with no plan. Hope for the future owes much to intentional planning for discipleship of children.

How do churches maintain a focus on discipleship in their children's ministries?

- 77% of vicars noted a discipleship focus for children as part of their parish plan:**

It's a smaller parish (70 with 20 children) but the investment in children is really purposeful.

Our mission statement is about growing everyone as mature disciples of Christ and that starts with the children.

- 56% of vicars reported their program and leadership were focused on discipleship:**

The activities the kids do with their leaders are all about being disciples. They don't just play games; they're being taught to pray, care, and love.

Kids' leaders know what they're on about and are supported by the rest of the church.

- 52% of vicars felt they had a relatively strong emphasis on discipleship because of transition points:**

We have great role models and involvement by our youth with the children. We work hard on transition points to keep children involved.

[We have] good theological teaching and a great pathway to youth and young adulthood.

What do churches see as an obstacle to actively discipling children?

- 55% of vicars felt they didn't have enough children to focus ministry on discipling children:**

There aren't enough kids attending regularly for the parish to own the concept.

We make the most of the opportunities we've had but it is very difficult.

- 21% of vicars felt a lack of leadership was the problem:**

Most people like to have children in the church but most want entertainment rather than discipleship.

Human resources just means that I can't be involved with kids and I'm unsure that volunteers are equipped to provide intentional support.

Health Indicator 4: Children's ministry leaders are equipped for their roles.



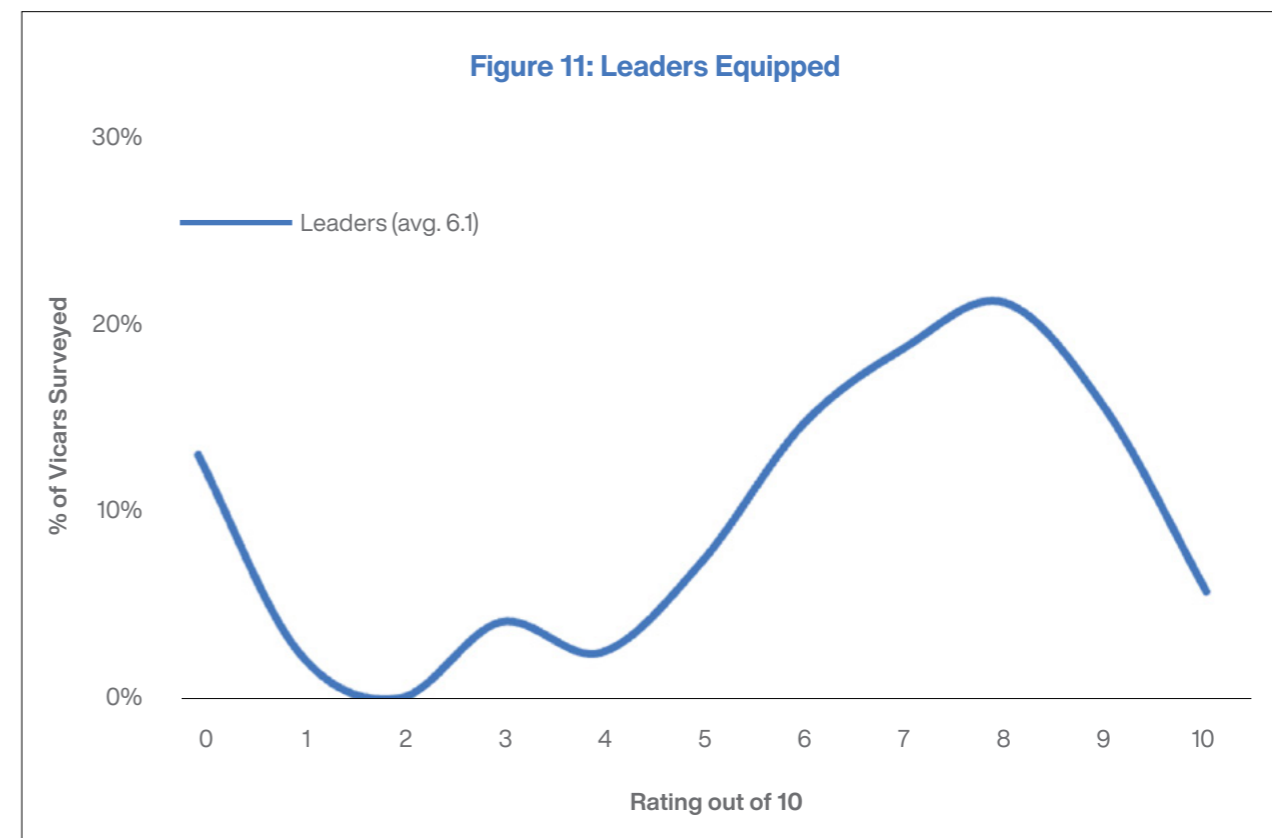
'If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.' Matthew 18:6

In healthy children's ministries, children's ministry leaders:

- wholeheartedly fulfil child-safe practices and faithfully satisfy mandatory reporting requirements¹⁴ ;
- are intentionally recruited and appropriately screened¹⁵ ;
- are amply resourced and encouraged for their roles; and
- continue to develop their expertise in supporting children's learning and formation in Christian faith.

INPUTS (What we should do to make this happen)	EVIDENCE (What we will see if we are doing this well)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parishes maintain up-to-date records of children's ministry leaders, including Safe Ministry to Children and Young People training. Parishes have appropriate budgets for children's ministry. Leaders have regular and effective supervision. Leaders have ongoing training opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaders are Safe Ministry compliant before they begin serving. Leaders are reimbursed for expenditure related to their ministry. Leaders teach in age- and stage-appropriate ways. Volunteer leaders are committed to the ministry and grow in ministry skills over time.

We asked vicars: To what extent are the children's ministry leaders equipped for their roles?



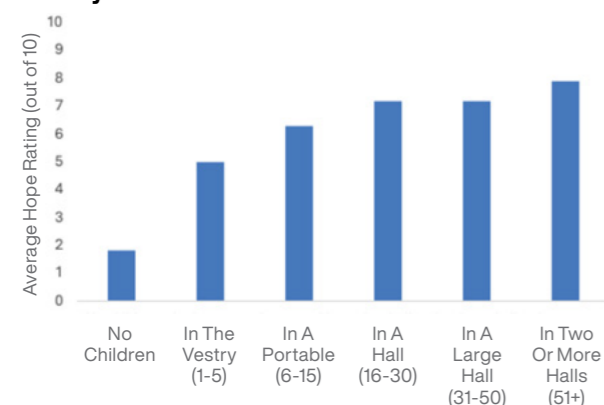
¹⁴ Commission for Children and Young People, Childsafe Standards, <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/the-11-child-safe-standards/>
 Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, Safe Ministry Training, <https://www.melbourneanglican.org.au/governance/professional-standards/safe-ministry-training/>
¹⁵ Mark DeVries and Annette Safstrom, *Sustainable Children's Ministry: From Last-minute Scrambling to Long-term Solutions* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2018).

Health Indicator 4: Children's ministry leaders are equipped for their roles.



The average score for this indicator was 6.1, which was the second highest average for the five indicators. Higher ratings correlated with the number of children at the church; the more children, the more that training and equipping leaders became a priority.

Figure 12: Leader Equipping Based on Size of Children's Ministry



Higher ratings for equipping leaders also correlated positively with higher ratings for overall health of, and hope for, children's ministry in a parish. Vicars who said that ministry leaders in their parish were not being equipped on average rated themselves a 2.6 in overall health, and a 1.4 in overall hope. In contrast those in parishes that did equip their leaders, rated themselves at 7.0 or above in both health and hope.

Staffing levels impacted the likelihood of training leaders. Parishes with paid specialist staff tended to have a higher focus on equipping lay leaders (an average of 6.7 out of 10 for those without specialist staff, and 7.4 for those with specialist staff). This indicates that parishes which invest in children's and family ministry staff members are more likely to invest in training and equipping others to disciple children.

Vicars who did not rate their churches highly on equipping leaders tended to view their overall ministry among children and families as unhealthy. These vicars gave an average score of 2.6 out of 10 on the health scale, whereas vicars in parishes that did equip leaders gave an average score of at least 7.0 for the overall health children's ministry.

Similarly, parishes that have low ratings for equipping leaders were less hopeful for the future. Vicars in these parishes gave an average rating of 1.4 out of 10 for hope compared to vicars from parishes that did equip leaders who gave an average score of 7.0.

These results indicate that parishes that train, equip, and empower their leaders are more likely to be healthy, hopeful, and growing.

How well do churches feel their children's ministry leaders are equipped for their role?

- 87% of vicars say their leaders receive good training:**

We intentionally select people who have a heart for children, do all the screening, and make sure they have source materials for teaching. We always do refresher courses, and train together as a team beyond child-safe. We meet once a month to pray and reflect on how the children are going.

The children's ministers are well trained and provide the training for volunteers. We do very deliberate training. We do all the screening and safe ministry training that is necessary and more: we pay for the volunteers to go to conferences, and I've provided books for the volunteers.

- 68% of vicars feel their leaders need to be better equipped:**

Some of our leaders are a 9 on their commitment and training, while others are there because we just need someone. We could provide more training if we had the resources.

We've done a lot of the training we could do pre-ministry engagement, and now it's about development over the journey with them.

Health Indicator 5: The church has an outward vision for children and families outside of the church.



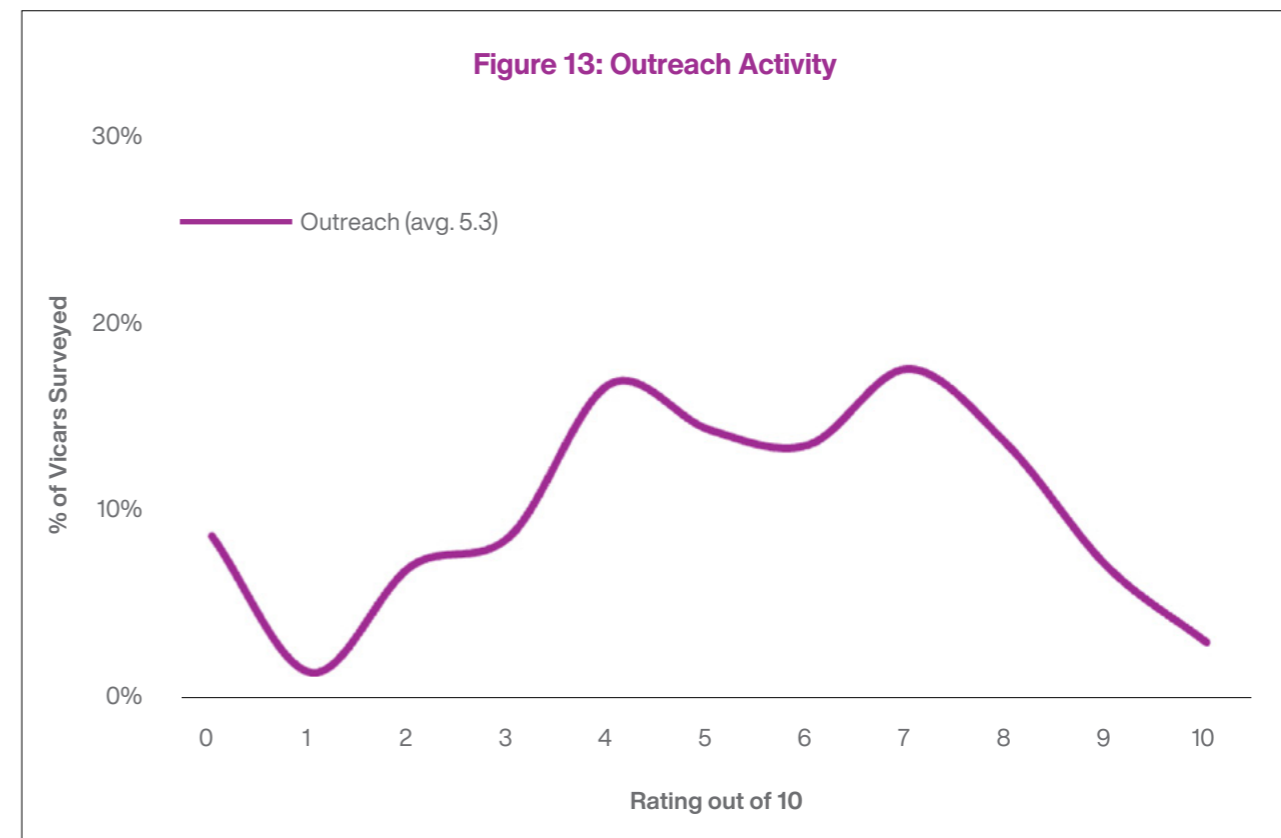
'Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations"' Matthew 28:19

A healthy children's ministry:

- recognises children's capability as agents of God's mission in the world ;
- connects with and responds to the needs of families in the community;
- welcomes non-church families and provides opportunities for them to learn and respond to the good news of Jesus; and
- makes extra effort to provide non-church children with adult examples of faith.

INPUTS (What we should do to make this happen)	EVIDENCE (What we will see if we are doing this well)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about children's and family ministries is accessible to visitors and newcomers. Church members connect with community services for children (schools, sporting clubs, community groups). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children are eager to invite their friends to church activities. Children and families from non-church background are involved as visitors, seekers, and converts.

We asked vicars: How active is your church in reaching out to children and their families outside of the church?



¹⁶ Wess Stafford, *Too Small to Ignore: Why Children are the Next Big Thing* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2007).

Health Indicator 5: The church has an outward vision for children and families outside of the church.



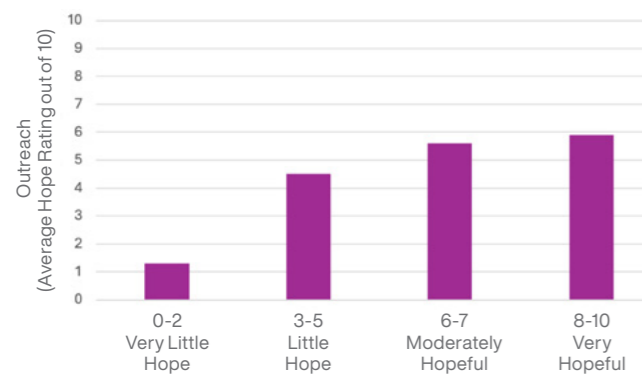
The average score for this indicator was 5.3, the lowest average rating across the five indicators.

The number of children involved in the ministries of the parish correlates to the focus given to outreach; the more children, the more active a parish was in outreach. And unfortunately, most churches with no children had no active involvement in reaching out.

Vicars in parishes with an employed staff member overseeing children's and family ministries were more likely to be active in outreach. Where there was neither children nor specialist children's ministry staff in the parish, vicars rated outreach activity as 3.0 out of 10, while those with both children and staff averaged ratings of 6.2.

Whether a church was active in outreach was also found to be directly proportional to the perceived overall health and hopefulness of the children's ministry. Some 78% of those who were not hopeful about their children's ministry did not rate themselves highly on active outward vision.

Figure 14: Discipleship Based on Size of Children's Ministry



How do churches express their outward vision for children and families outside the church?

1. 78% of vicars want to build connections through schools and individuals:

We're always trying to integrate people who aren't church goers into activities: grandchildren and great-nephews, those who are regular attenders with their families yet are completely non-Christian.

We are building relationships with parents and carers through Mainly Music and a lot of the church members who participate in that are thinking missionally. [We] also have Kids Hope in the local primary school.

2. 78% of vicars noted specific evangelistic events for the local community:

We're ramping up the church activities that are specifically evangelistic so that church members and their kids can invite their friends along.

Started monthly outreach BBQ; families are super keen and inviting other non-church families or COVID-lost church families back to join in.

3. 59% of vicars described church-initiated community connections:

Our playgroups involve parishioners engaging with locals. Hospitality, care, and other avenues offered.

The Iranian community in Melbourne is a small one, so they try to get involved with children and families through events. The kids also know this, and they are active in inviting their friends to church. The children are bold to share their faith with others.

Why do churches struggle with an outward vision for children and families?

1. 58% of vicars felt that outreach is important but a struggle:

Would like to see new children come but the congregation is not sure how to get them.

When families come, they are very much welcomed, but there isn't a lot of proactiveness from the church.

Hope

We asked vicars:

How hopeful do you feel about the future of your church's children's ministry over the next three years?

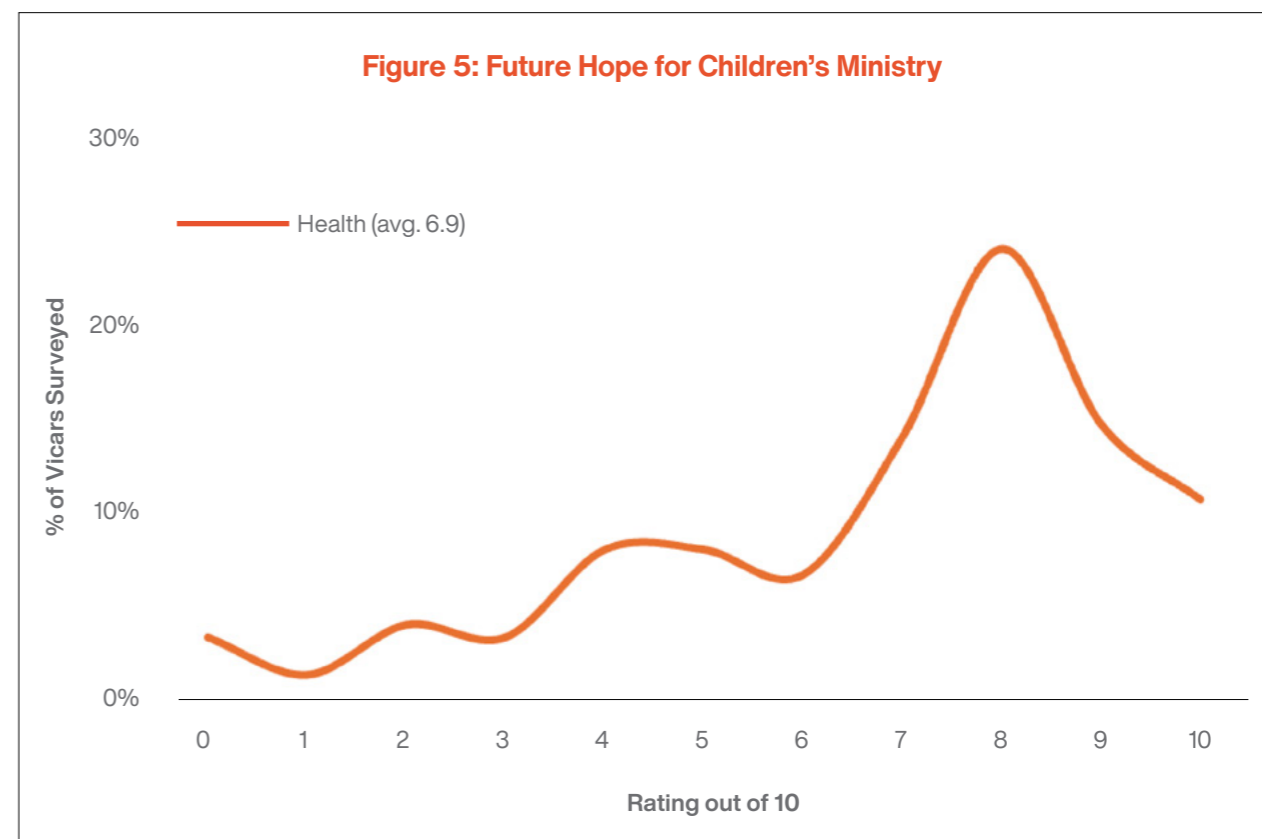
What would you say is encouraging as you look at the future of your children's ministry?

What would you say concerns you about the future of your children's ministry? What are the obstacles you face?

Overall Findings

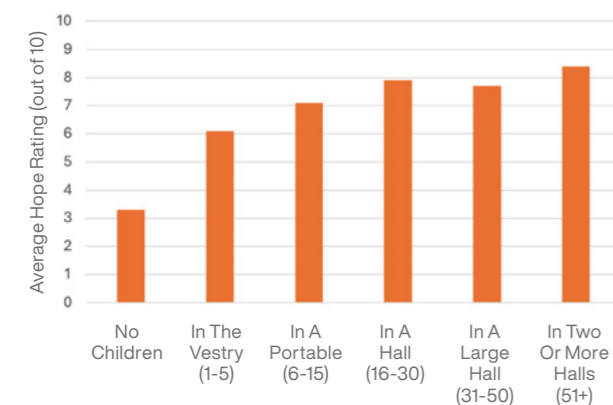
The average hopefulness rating given by vicars was 6.9 out of 10. Over two-thirds (35%) of vicars gave a score of 8 or above (21% gave a hope rating of 9; 15% chose 10). Low ratings of less than 4 were sporadic, and only one in four vicars (26%) gave a rating of 5 or lower.

Figure 5: Future Hope for Children's Ministry



Across all parishes, hope rose in proportion to the number of children who attended. The more children a vicar had in their parish, the more hopeful they were. Hopefulness rose from an average of 3.3 (in parishes with no children), to 6.1 (in parishes with 1–5 children), and to 8.4 (in parishes with more than 51 children in attendance).

Figure 6: Hope Based on Size of Children’s Ministry



The jump in hopefulness from those with no children to those with at least one child is stark. All it takes is one child!

Unsurprisingly, there is a clear correlation between future hope and the current health of a children’s ministry. A healthier ministry correlated with greater hopefulness. Vicars with very little hope for the future of their ministry with children (hope rating of 0–2 out of 10) averaged a rating of 1.6 out of 10 for health. Those with some hope (3–5 out of 10) rated health at 3.3. Those who were moderately hopeful (6–7) rated health at 5.1, and those who were very hopeful (8–10), rated health at 6.2.

Parishes with no children’s programs were generally not hopeful about the future. Those who offered Sunday School/Kid’s Church were most hopeful. Some 62% of vicars in parishes with no programs were not hopeful (5 out of 10 or lower); 87% of those with a Sunday School were hopeful (6 or higher).

Vicars from parishes with children’s programs and dedicated children’s ministry staff were the most hopeful for the future. Only 7% of parishes with little hope for the future had both children’s ministry programs and dedicated staff, while 79% of parishes with both were very hopeful.

The number of leaders volunteering in children’s programs also directly impacted how hopeful the vicar was. Some 75% of vicars in parishes with no leaders had little hope; 82% of those with between 11–20 leaders were very hopeful.

Grounds for Hope

- 1. The top three reasons for hope are enthusiasm of participants, new families coming to church and children’s ministry being a priority (all around 25%):**

[We have] ten kids when things are on twice a month; kids are keen and are engaged even when there is no official program.

Slow to rebuild, but there are a couple of babies about to be born to families who have joined recently.

We know the future of our church relies on a flourishing children’s ministry for the next few years. It’s not just about the money or the staff, but about the reason our church exists.

Our council area has the largest number of pre-school children in Melbourne. So their presence gives us a mission and a reason for us to be on mission. The mission gives us a reason to exist and a lot of vision and excitement for the future.

- 2. Those with no children currently were most hopeful if children’s ministry is now a priority in their MAP (40%) or if they have a new minister coming (27%).**

New priest coming in and there are local children and schools that we could connect with.

- 3. Those with small numbers of children (1–5 in attendance) were most hopeful if they had potential to collaborate with other ministries.**

We are close to an Anglican school and that connection is starting to build some momentum.

There is a very successful op shop run by a lady who has strong connections to the community.

What do people attribute a lack of hope for their children’s ministry to?

- 1. 60% of vicars attributed a lack of hope for their children’s ministry to a lack of leaders:**

The consistent experience of churches in regional areas is that getting children’s workers is impossible, especially for part time roles. We are an aging congregation which is relatively small so there’s no opportunity to grow our own people into that ministry.

We are very reliant on our lay people as leaders, and they are a small team—not many people put their hand up for children’s ministry. Concerned that those already in the ministry are slowly getting worn out.

- 2. For churches with less than fifteen children attending, critical mass was a factor:**

Critical mass is an obstacle and a problem. It’s hard to find families that want to be involved in church, particularly more traditional denominations.

We asked vicars how many volunteer leaders they had serving in ministries of pastoral care and teaching of children, and whether there were dedicated staff members (paid or unpaid) for children's ministry.

Volunteers

Overall, there were 1,269 volunteers serving in children's ministry across 119 parishes, an average of 10.7 per parish.

This is a significantly higher number compared to the 387 volunteers serving in youth ministry across 81 parishes (average 4.8 per parish) identified in the 2021 Youth Ministry Futures Research Report. The higher number of children's ministry volunteers is largely because youth ministries are served by a regular weekly team of volunteers, while children's ministry teams often serve less frequently on a rostered basis.

Forty-nine parishes (41% of the total number of parishes with volunteer children's ministry leaders) had teams of five or fewer volunteers, with an average of 21.4 children participating in Christian ministry programs or activities in the parish in a regular month. Parishes with 6-10 volunteers had a slightly smaller average number of children involved (21.2) than those with smaller teams. The larger number of volunteers in these parishes is most likely an indication of volunteers serving less frequently on the rosters.

Where there were 11 or more volunteers, volunteer teams were associated with higher numbers of participating children.

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS	NUMBER OF PARISHES (% of total parishes with volunteers)	AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN
1-5	49 (41%)	21.4
6-10	31 (26%)	21.2
11-30	33 (28%)	49.2
31-65	6 (5%)	87.3

Employed Children's Ministry Staff

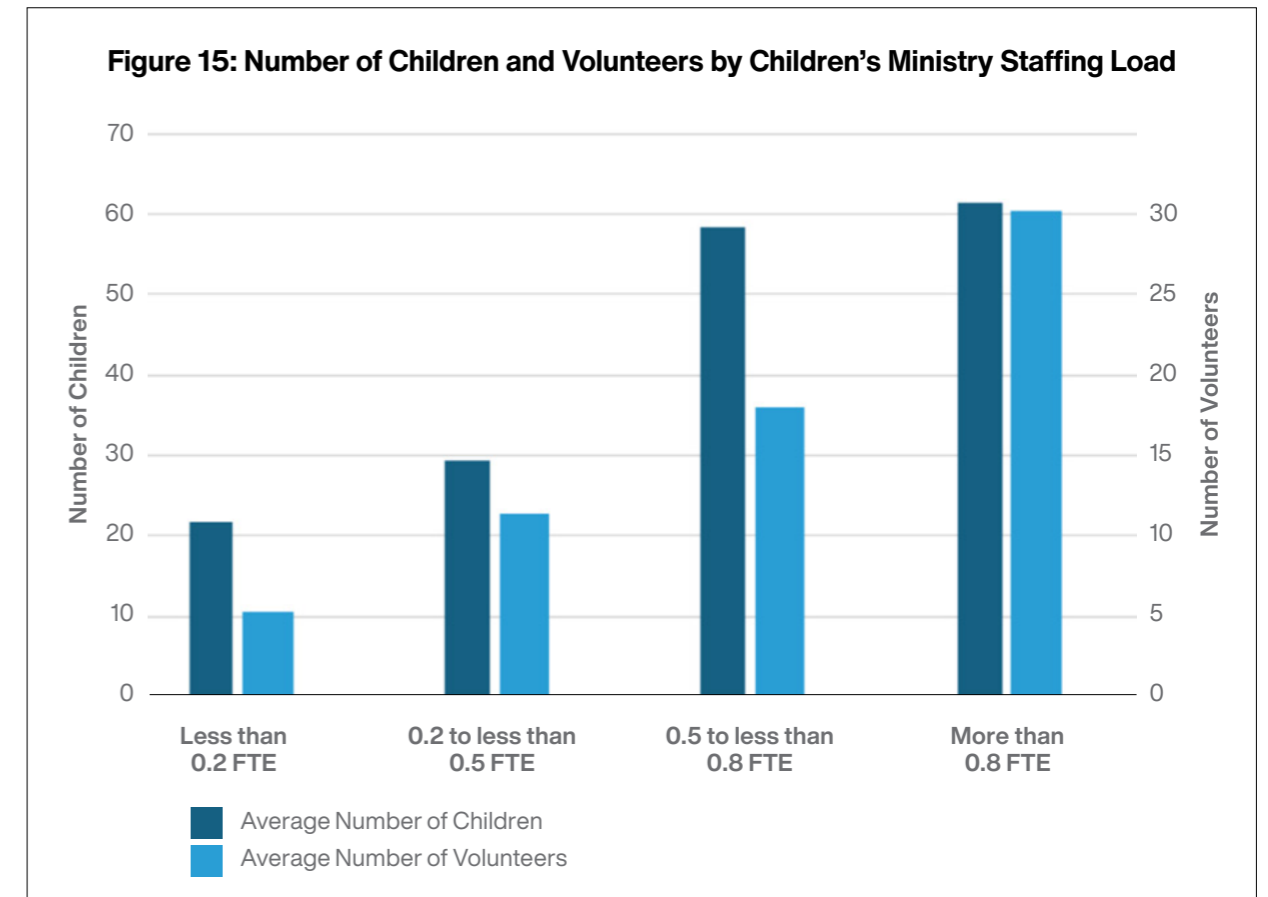
Vicars provided details of up to four employed staff who had some responsibility for children's ministry.

There were 74 people with dedicated staff roles in children's ministry. Fifty-five were in paid employment, and 14 were volunteers. All but 2 of the volunteer roles were for fewer than 10 hours per week (the other 2 were each employed for 2.5 days a week).

Of those who were in paid children's ministry employment, 12 were employed for fewer than 8 hours a week, and almost 50% of children's ministry staff were employed for less than a half-time load. Only seven people are employed in full-time roles dedicated to children's ministry, with another four in close to full-time roles with loads of 0.8 FTE or above.

A greater investment in children's ministry staffing was related to increased numbers of children participating in Christian ministry programs or activities in the parish in a regular month. Average numbers of children rose from 21.8 for parishes with less than 0.2 FTE load of paid children's ministry staff, to 61.5 for staff of 0.8 FTE or higher.

Higher levels of children's ministry staffing were also related to increased numbers of volunteer children's ministry leaders. Average numbers of volunteers rose from 4.5 for parishes with less than 0.2 FTE load of paid children's ministry staff, to 25.9 for staff of 0.8 FTE or higher.

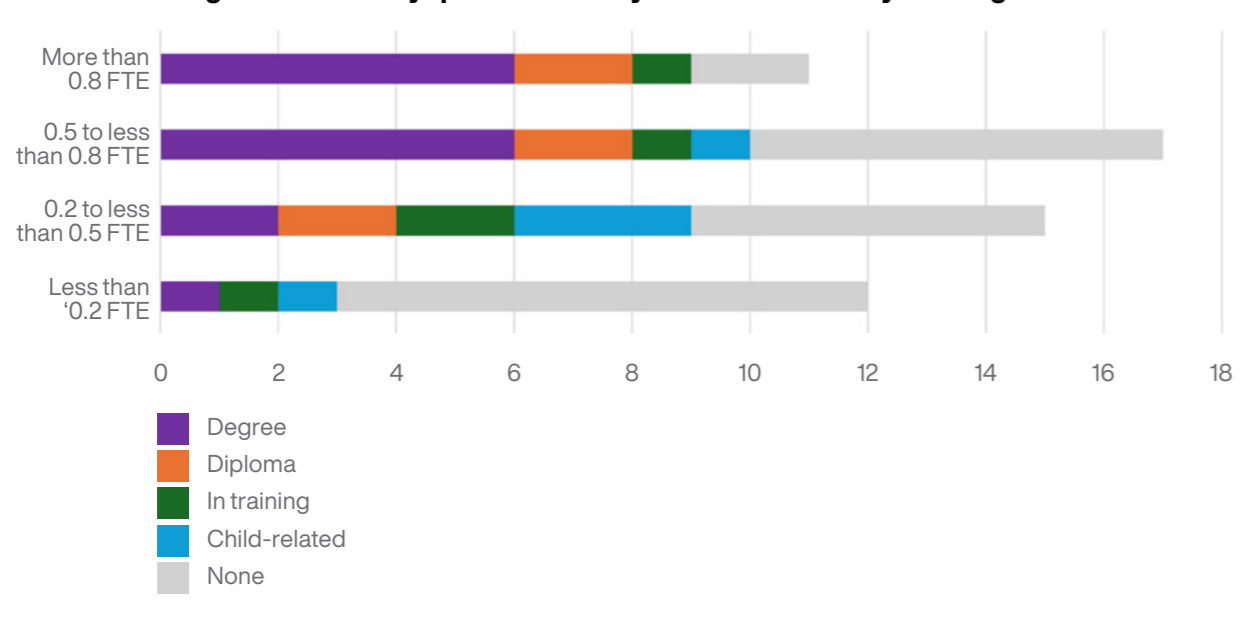


Of the 55 people employed, only 15 have a degree in theology or ministry, 6 have a diploma, and 5 are in the process of completing ministry training. Five have qualifications in child-related areas such as teaching or early childhood studies. The remaining 24 paid employees have no formal qualifications in theology or ministry.

Those without formal qualifications are most likely to be employed for less than one day per week. Those with a degree in ministry or theology with less than a 0.5 FTE load have children's ministry as only one part of their ministry employment.

The majority of full-time and close to full-time staff members dedicated to ministry with children have some formal qualification in ministry or theology, or are in the process of completing their studies.

Figure 16: Ministry qualifications by Children's Ministry Staffing Load



To provide some additional information relating to equipping children's ministry leaders for their roles, we asked vicars:

What support or training have your children's ministry leaders had access to, and found helpful?

Is there other support or training you would like for them?

Training Accessed

Safe ministry, but not much more

It is encouraging that parish leaders are aware of and taking up the opportunities for engaging congregation members in safe ministry training. However, while safe ministry is an essential starting criterion for ministry with children, additional training is needed for congregation members to be equipped to share Jesus with children.

A handful have only done Level 2 Training, so we are unprepared for children.

In parishes where there are no children present, the only training provided to leaders is safe ministry training. Safe ministry training is also likely to be the only training provided in parishes with three or fewer children's ministry leaders.

Our volunteers are already very busy.

The child-safe training hasn't left much room for anything else.

The need for specific training in sharing Jesus with children is also indicated by the value placed on teacher education for children's ministry. While teacher education is valuable for understanding how to engage well with children, additional training is needed to provide effective Christian discipleship. Parishes that identified as unhealthy had identified school-teacher training as a large source of training (20% of 30) compared to healthy churches (9% of 22).

Internal Training Provided

Vicars from parishes able to provide internal training to volunteers and leaders that goes beyond child safety were more likely to give higher ratings for overall children's ministry health.

We provide in-house training from the pragmatic (i.e. classroom and behaviour management) through to teaching skills and increasing confidence.

We gather as a team and discuss the values we want in our ministry.

External Training Accessed

External training is more likely to be accessed by churches with smaller numbers of children involved in the parish.

Accessing external training is also associated with being optimistic about the future, although the cause-and-effect relationship here potentially goes both ways. One in seven (14%) of the parishes with higher health ratings (6 out of 10 or higher) had engaged with the Diocesan youth ministry consultant, compared to none of the parishes with health ratings of 5 or lower.

Training Needed

Basic Training

The most frequently requested training content was basic training for volunteers. It was requested by 39% of vicars.

Some kind of introduction course or video program.

Something to help parents disciple their own children as some have no idea or feel inadequate in discipling their own children and they need something to empower and motivate them.

Behavioural management 101, how to create a culture of gospel-sharing with our children.

Our volunteers need children's ministry 101.

Basic training was most often requested by vicars in the mid-range of overall children's ministry health. It was requested by 46% of those who rated their children's and family ministry as unhealthy, and 45% of those who rated this ministry as healthy. The same request only came from 33% of those with very healthy ministries, and 26% of those with very unhealthy ministries.

Resources

18% of vicars indicated the need for resources for children's ministry. Many indicated a desire for a curriculum or resource they can run without the need for any formal training or adaptation to the way they run their current program.

Tools that can be picked up by our volunteers that they can run with without formal training or Bible skills themselves.

It's hard to find off-the-shelf curriculums.

Volunteers are time poor, so they see training as a burden rather than a blessing. There is a need for pre-prepared resources specific for small church contexts that alleviate the burden on over-worked ministry volunteers.

The provision of resources for children's ministry was more likely to be requested by vicars in churches with large numbers of children (43% of churches with over 91 children).

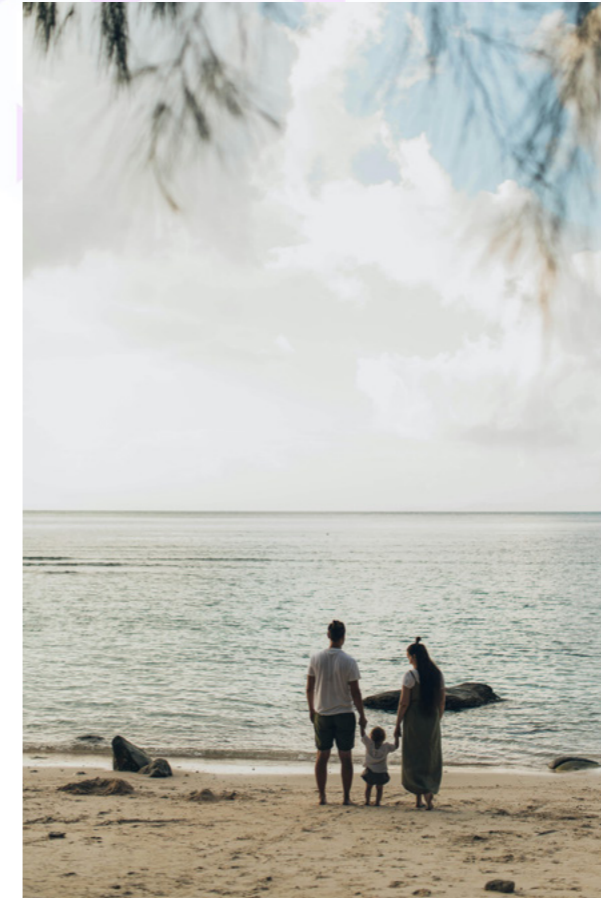
Outreach

Training in outreach was particularly noted as significant in half of the parishes with no children.

We need to know how to start from zero to change our thinking from the past to the present.

Accessible

Just under one in four vicars (23%) indicated a desire for training that was accessible to those in regional areas or for online participation.



The survey concluded by asking vicars the big picture question, what would you like to see for ministry among children and their families across the Diocese of Melbourne?

The biggest need from the Diocese noted by churches is resources (28%), followed closely by training and support at (27%) and helping parishes cooperate with each other at (19%).

The larger the parish, the more they identified training and resources as important needs from the Diocese.

Resources

A library of dedicated or suggested resources alongside best practice ministry guidelines.

We need to have a resource centre and an office for children's ministry in the Diocese.

I'm alone and part time in ministry, we lack resources

Training

Training for volunteers, coaching and supervision for leaders, and sharing simple resources and ideas.

A lot of people can access ready-made resources, but they can't apply them, they need input on 'how to' do children's ministry.

Cooperation

Helpful to have more integration among churches.

Building connections between churches—have volunteers from other churches to help so they can provide training.

To bring the children together—interconnect churches in area or episcopate for 1 or 2 days - all coming together as God's children—opportunity for children to commit to Jesus and be encouraged by one another.

Those with very little hope are looking for outside help (22%) and training and support (33%), whilst the main request of those with a lot of hope is for the Diocese to provide resources (30%).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Trends according to Theological/Ecclesiological Tradition

A few key trends in the vicars' assessments of each health indicator are evident according to the number of children present in a parish and whether the parish had specific programs in place for children. These trends are highlighted below.

Vicars were asked to give an indication of the theological/ecclesiological tradition of their parish selecting as many that applied from a list of options:

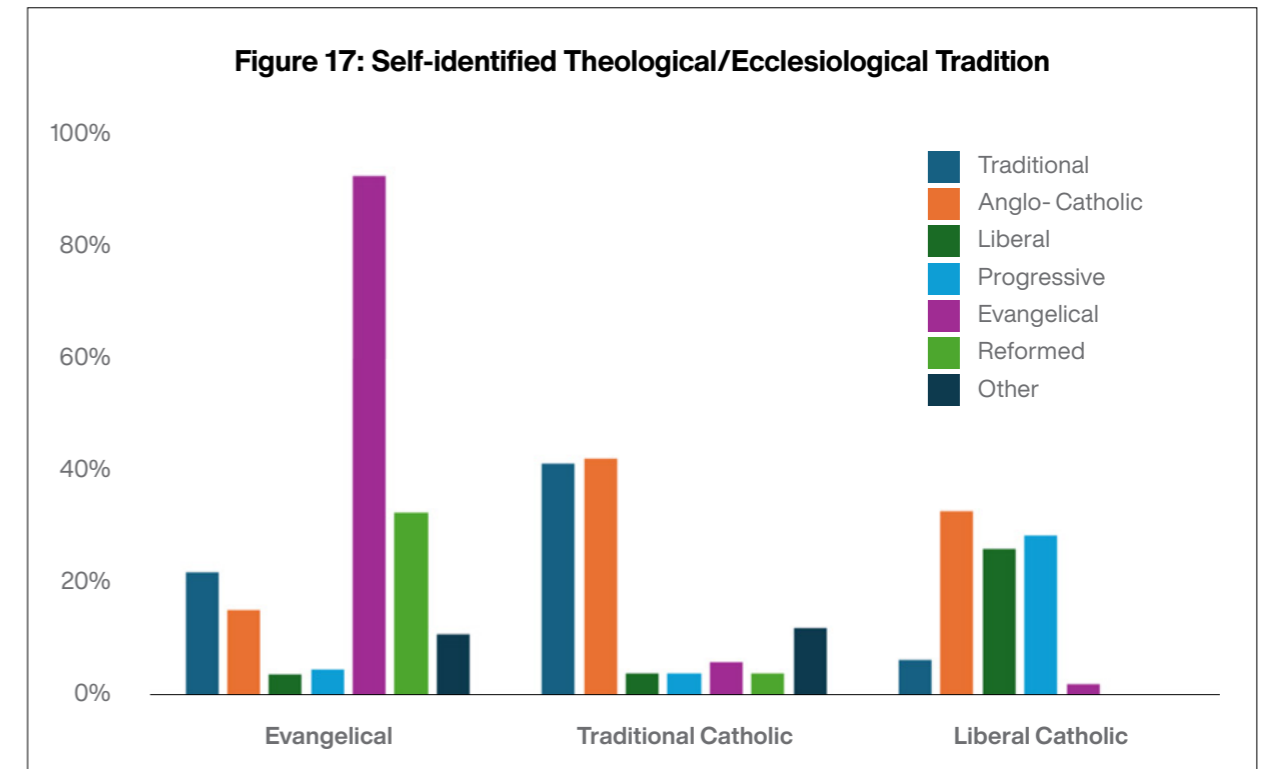
- Evangelical
- Traditional
- Anglo-Catholic
- Reformed
- Conservative
- Liberal
- Progressive
- Other

While there was considerable overlap in chosen designations (some vicars chose every option to describe their parish!), the researchers identified three broad groupings of theological/ecclesiological tradition: 66% of responding parishes categorised as being Evangelical (100 parishes), 19% as Traditional Catholic (28 parishes), and 15% as Liberal Catholic (23 parishes).

The following graph shows the percentage of descriptors chosen by vicars in each of the three categories. The totals add to more than 100% because vicars could choose multiple options.

In the evangelical grouping, 5% included the descriptor 'conservative', and 6% identified as charismatic. In the Traditional Catholic grouping, 8% also identified as conservative, and 4% identified as broad.

Figure 17: Self-identified Theological/Ecclesiological Tradition



Appendix 1: Trends according to Theological/Ecclesiological Tradition

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Notable differences between these three groupings of theological traditions were evident in the data.

Overall Health

59% of Traditional Catholic churches and 65% of Liberal Catholic churches rated themselves as very unhealthy or unhealthy, while only 44% of Evangelical parishes rated themselves in this way.

Overall Hope

Once again, self-designated traditions of a parish also correlated to a pattern of hopefulness. On average, Traditional Catholic churches were less hopeful than Liberal Catholic churches, which in turn are less hopeful than Evangelical parishes (hopefulness scores were 5.4, 6.1, and 7.4 respectively). A total of 82% of Evangelicals reported they were hopeful.

Health Indicator 1: Children participate as members of the church family.

38% of vicars from Traditional Catholic parishes rated themselves in the very low range (0–2) compared to only 8% of vicars from Evangelical parishes. Children are more likely to participate as members of the church family in an Evangelical setting.

Health Indicator 2: Parents and caregivers are recognised as the primary disciple makers of their children.

Vicars from Liberal Catholic and Evangelical parishes gave slightly higher ratings (5.6 and 5.7 out of 10) for the recognition of parents as primary disciple-makers of their children compared to those in Traditional Catholic churches (4.5 out of 10).

Health Indicator 3: Children's ministries are focussed on growing children as disciples of Christ.

There was a noticeable difference in discipleship focus depending on a parish's self-identified theological tradition. Over one in two vicars from parishes identifying as Evangelical rated their discipleship focus highly (8, 9, or 10 out of 10), compared to one in three Liberal Catholic parishes, and just over one in seven Traditional Catholic parishes. Planning for discipleship was particularly evident amongst Evangelical parishes (72% mentioned a whole church plan).

Health Indicator 4: Children's ministry leaders are equipped for their roles.

Vicars from Traditional Catholic parishes reported they were least likely to train leaders for children's ministry with only 30% in the high category (8 out of 10 or higher). Vicars from liberal/progressives parishes were

the most likely to give a high rating to training leaders, with 59% giving a rating of 8 or higher.

Health Indicator 5: The church has an outward vision for children and families outside of the church.

Low ratings for outreach focus were evident across all theological traditions. Ratings were lowest among Traditional Catholic parishes (4.4 out of 10), then Liberal Catholics (4.9), and Evangelicals (5.5). Momentum is critical here: the more children a church has, the greater priority given to outreach. Over half (57%) of the vicars from parishes with children's programs rated outreach positively, while 78% of those who were not hopeful about their children's ministry did not score this measure highly.

Training Accessed

58% of Traditional Catholic parishes only do safe ministry training and have no focus on further equipping for children's ministry. Only 27% of vicars from Traditional Catholic parishes identified further training as a need.

Evangelical churches are more likely to provide internal training that goes beyond child safety to volunteers and leaders (36%). Internal training beyond child safety was provided in only 5% of Traditional Catholic parishes, and in none of the Liberal Catholic parishes.

External training is accessed and valued by a similar proportion of Liberal Catholic (50%) and Evangelical (44%) parishes, but by only one in four Traditional Catholic parishes (26%).

Training Needs

It was more common for vicars from Evangelical parishes to want more training and resources, whereas those Traditional Catholic parishes would like more cooperation and combined activities.

Appendix 2: Trends Associated with Numbers of Children

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The CMF survey gathered basic statistical data from participating parishes. This included estimates of the number of children (aged 0–12 years), teenagers (at High School, or aged 13–18 years), and young adults (19–25 years) involved in Christian ministry programs or activities in the parish over a regular month.

Interviewers asked vicars to think of programs and activities that have an explicit Christian ministry focus, including church services, Sunday School, kid's club, Mainly Music, GFS/CEBS, youth groups, and Bible study groups. Vicars were asked to exclude activities such as visitors to an Op Shop and community activities using parish facilities but without involvement from church members. If the same child or young person came to two or more activities or programs over the month, they were to be counted only once. Numbers were to be of children and young people who participated in ministry programs over a regular month (excluding Christmas or Easter) rather than the number who were listed on a church role or contact list.

12% of parishes have no children

Parishes without children tended not to have any programs for children or any staff employed in this area. Most (72%) vicars in these parishes classified their children's ministries as very unhealthy, and 41% reported that they had very little hope of this changing. Anglo-Catholic and Traditional parishes were over-represented in this group, making up 44% of the parishes without children even though they represented only 19% of the overall sample.

21% of parishes can gather their children in the Vestry (1–5 children)

Parishes with between 1 and 5 children were unlikely to have staff employed in this area, although 58% were still able to offer programs for children. 44% had between one and three volunteer leaders; 43% had four or more.

40% of vicars in these parishes rated the health of their children's ministry between 0 and 2 out of 10. Having small numbers of children equates to viewing your ministry as very unhealthy.

Liberal Catholic parishes were over-represented in this group, making up 35% of parishes who can gather in the vestry, even though they represented only 15% of the overall sample.

25% of parishes need a Portable classroom (6–15 children)

Vicars in parishes able to gather their children in a portable were most likely to give a rating of 3–5 out of 10 for the overall health of their children's ministry. 16% had no dedicated ministry programs for children. Very few (6%) had any more than ten volunteer leaders available for this ministry, none had more than twenty.

15% of parishes need a church hall (16–30 children)

Parishes needing a church hall for their children's ministries all offered either Sunday School/Kid's Church or some other kind of children's ministry program.

19% of parishes need a large hall (31–50 children)

Parishes needing a large hall were far more likely to have a Sunday School or Kid's Church program (97%) than other parishes. One-third of vicars in these parishes (34%) rated the health of their children's ministries as being between 8 and 10 out of 10. Almost all described themselves as Evangelical (97%).

7% of parishes need two or more halls (more than 51 children)

Parishes needing two or more halls to gather their children all had specialist children's and/or family ministry staff employed in this area. Close to half (45%) of these parishes classified the health of their children's ministry between 8 and 10 out of 10.

Appendix 3: Comparison with Synod Returns

Data contained in the 2023 Reports to Synod show the estimated number of frequent attenders in the sub-categories of pre-school, primary school, secondary school, and post-secondary school.

Combining the pre-school and primary school figures corresponds to the question asked in the CMF research for numbers of children aged 0–12 who participate in Christian ministry programs or activities in a regular month.

Note that where Synod returns report 'estimated number of frequent attenders', CMF asked about numbers of young people involved in all ministries in a regular month; and where Synod returns asked about educational categories (pre-school, primary school, secondary school, post-secondary), CMF asked about specific age ranges (0–12 years, 13–18 years, and 19–25 years).

The differences in wording may in part explain the difference in numbers reported.

TOTAL NUMBERS

	CHILDREN (0-12)	TEENAGERS (13-18)	YOUNG ADULTS (19-25)
CMF	3,329	1,125	1,197
SYNOD RETURNS (CMF PARISHES)	2,747	944	862
SYNOD RETURNS (ALL PARISHES)	3,688	1,273	1,037

AVERAGES PER PARISH

	CHILDREN (0-12)	TEENAGERS (13-18)	YOUNG ADULTS (19-25)
CMF	27.1	9.2	10.0
SYNOD RETURNS (CMF PARISHES)	18.9	6.5	5.9
SYNOD RETURNS (NON-CMF PARISHES)	14.7	5.1	2.7