

Focus Group Interview A (First Session), on 05/04/2016 – ENG

INT: I recently had a talk with your pastor, and he tells me that in the past few years your congregation had a drop-off of roughly 50% of the confirmation class pupils who no longer attend church. You are all parents. Your children are in this congregation where 50% falls away. How does this make you feel?

A4: It depends how you look at it. There are different reasons. Sometimes the young ones leave to go study in the city. But there are probably also those who go to other churches, and I find that very sad, because quite often they do not go to the mainstream churches, for all the wrong reasons.

A3: I agree with you. It is now 33 years that I am part of this congregation. I was born here, baptized, did confirmation and then I also went to explore elsewhere. There comes a time that you want to go see what else is available, and often they are caught up in this new way of doing church. There is a lot of vibe and music and stuff and they miss the plot. So, I think many young people do this. And it is only at about 25 years old that they start to realize what the important stuff really is, and then they do come back.

A1: And your parents play an import role in all of this. I mean, my parents kept me on the right track, and I want to do the same for my children.

A6: I'm afraid that my children might also go that way. We as parents can only give advice, but they make the decision in the end. And it makes me nervous for what happens at church, because this will determine their decision.

INT: Think for a moment of your children. They are currently in a process of faith formation here at church. We hope that by age 16 they will have developed a mature faith as a result of this process. Can you describe this process for me?

A3: It is harder nowadays, than in my time. Take school for instance, they cannot practice their faith at school anymore. So the biggest building blocks now are mom and dad at home. That is the foundation. That is my personal experience that is wat we aim to do at home. I mean, a child sits in the church service, but his mind is elsewhere, he doesn't listen to the pastor. I never listened to the pastor, until recently when I discovered he is actually making sense.

- INT: But surely church has a role to play. What stake does the church have in the faith formation of your child?
- A3: The church must show interest in the week. They need to be more involved than only on Sundays.
- A2: Yes, because that one hour on a Sunday, means very little for a child. He is already thinking of Monday and school. So, if the church can offer more options in the week for involvement, it will have much higher impact than only one hour on a Sunday.
- A6: I think there is nothing wrong with church for us the parents, but our children are in need of more interaction and activities at the church.
- A4: To add to what you are saying, I want there to be better structure. There must be structures that assist me in teaching the right stuff to my kids. I grew up with Sunday school outings, and had to memorize scripture. Nowadays people just lie in front of the TV and listen to a message. The structure of Sunday school is gone. That is a problem at these new charismatic churches. There is no structure to assist in the formation of the faith of the children.
- A5: I think exposure to the Bible is very important. I think a lot of young people today, they don't even have a Bible in the home. I am involved with a crèche, and often the children will have no clue what you are talking about. If I say he is as strong as Samson, who is that? I mean, Samson, Adam and Eve, those are the easier stories in the Bible, and they don't even know them.
- A2: I also think children's church on Sunday are very helpful. We don't just want to entertain the children, we are teaching the Bible. They don't just come for the fun and games.
- A5: And at the Primary School they still pray. I was there on Friday and they started the day with a reading from Scripture and prayer. And the grade one class also prays at the end of the day. I'm glad for that. And they sing spiritual songs.

A7: That is true, it is something, but in my days, we had Bible Studies as a subject. Now that is gone. So the only place where you can see that people make an effort is at home. When people take the Bible and read it, children will understand it. It needs to come from the parents, otherwise they will not know the Bible.

A5: We were like this: I grew up with prayer before you took a journey. We sat in the car and prayed for divine protection before we set off. Now we are teaching our children to do the same.

INT: Who do you see as part of this process?

A4: Parents. That is the Biblical mandate. And that is also where the problem starts. We are so part of the rat race, that quite often we don't find the time to talk to our children.

INT: How will you know if you are successful in the formation of your child's faith? Are there some goals you want to achieve?

A7: Yes, you look at your child's behavior. If you have a child that is a bully, or he talks dirty or doesn't consider others, then you know your work is far from done.

A1: Especially when they are not in your sight, how they behave when they are with their friends or at a party of a school event. People talk and you will hear what happens.

A3: I think when you are a good role model to your children. My mom and dad brought me to where I am today. If one day I can be to my children what they were to me, I would say that I was successful. My actions and example must be such that they would like to follow in my footsteps. Then I was successful.

INT: In this process of faith formation, what do you expect from your church? How can they assist you?

A3: Some guidelines will be useful. We have few role models for our children. Even the pastor is as busy as we are. When I was in school, we used to have speakers coming and

telling us how they recovered from using drugs and stuff, but these days we are just too happy if the pastor doesn't use them himself.

A7: And Sunday school. I want them to teach my children well. We used to have tests and did Bible quizzes, but it isn't like that anymore. They talk a bit and then go home and they don't learn stuff. We had like a book and we had to go do some homework in it. So, I feel a bit let down by Sunday school as it is now.

A5: Old school. The basics. That is what I was brought up with, and I have got good faith.

A4: We had SKJA (Structured youth activity in the week) and Kinderkrans (Same, but for primary school pupils). Those structures aren't there anymore. We had Sunday school camp-outs. That is where you got to know your fellow church buddies.

INT: Can I just come back to the question concerning spiritual goals. Do you have specific goals for your child's spiritual development?

A5: I have never formally thought about this. I'm trying to help them to live in the right manner, to pray and to be there for others.

A6: And if stuff happens at school, that she would make the right choices. She must be self-assertive and be able to stand up for herself – not in a bad way, but firm in her faith for what she believes in.

A7: And she must love Jesus. She must live like someone belonging to Jesus.

INT: If the color of the home is yellow, and the color of the church is red, where do you see orange – that place where ministry purposefully impacts the home? Do you see orange happening in your congregation from time to time?

A5: I don't see it.

- A6: I saw it with our Christmas service, where the children were involved in the service.
- A3: Yes, I think it is something we are trying to bring back now – that families can go to church together. I remember a time when the pastor drew a huge spider on a blackboard and we enjoyed going to church. We did stuff in the week, got together and learned about the Bible. And it opens your eyes for reality when you do some outreach. But the problem is with the people sitting here, the problem is the parents. The children are willing, but the parents have all the excuses. If the parents want to become engaged, we will see much more orange happening. The church will be full.
- A1: If we are honest, we don't see orange. We left our previous congregation because we had problems with some of the people in leadership positions. My child said to me: if that person is a leader in the church, why does he act in this way? It just isn't right. So, I cannot excuse his behavior, so we decided it is better to just leave.
- A2: And our eldest started to complain: there is nothing for us at our church, and they had friends in other churches who were doing stuff on Friday evenings, so they started to go there with them.
- A6: I tell you: children are desperately seeking for that – where a church has activities where they feel at home.
- A4: And teens are never at home. And they get to a stage where they don't want to hear this from you, the parent. They want to go and explore, and see the world. When I was a student, each Sunday I would get on a different bus to a different church just to see what they are doing differently. So, I think we need the support of our congregation to make church interesting. That will help the orange to surface.
- A7: I want to add to that: not only to keep them from joining other churches, but from going to clubs and places where there are bad influences. If the church has a program running, they could go there and it will keep them from harm.
- A3: Now, for me, that is a dangerous topic, because that is what happens with faith. So the children go around to other churches, and it is like a party, and the parents say: well, at least it's not a club. But then they are gone, and they won't come back to our congregation. So I say, bring back the basics, church is not a club, we respect each other

and the Lord. We mustn't change the Bible and change faith and everything just to suit the parents better.

A1: True. We change the Bible to suit our needs. We don't want to change. We use the Bible to fit to our situation.

A7: O.K. I get what you are saying, I was one of those kids who went everywhere, even to a church that did not exist. But if we put up a program, then the parents would know – we don't have to worry. We organize speakers, or watch some of these new movies like God's not dead or Bulletproof. There is so much nice things we can do, on their level. At present the church isn't doing much on their level. My eight year old asks question about how people can say that God speaks to them. I mean the sermons are way over their heads. Sometimes I just feel: lower the level. Life puts pressure on our kids to grow up before their time. Jesus said: let the little ones come to me. They must also feel welcome at church. The Bible was written so that regular people can understand it. We need to lower the level.

A4: I'm in education, and when I talk to children, I see a need for this. They go to all these churches where stuff is happening, but it's all just a show. They are still empty afterwards. Then they come and talk with me, and I ask what is wrong, and then they spill the beans. Children want to be able to do that. Seldom do you find parents who know how to coach their young, and the church didn't equip us to do that. The church didn't equip parents to teach their children how to live in this busy, modern world. If we can create a safe haven at church where they can share their feelings and know its o.k. – that is the need we need to address.

A1: And I was also one of those who left church when I was between the ages of 20 and 30. Every weekend I was someplace else. So I wasn't around to help other children to have those kind of experiences. Actually, that is why I am here tonight, to help see what we can do.

A3: I think the shortcut to achieve this, is the change the attitudes of parents before it is too late. We need to put a system in place that will prevent the children from going elsewhere.

A4: You are right, it is a system. I mean, when someone comes and talk at a school and gives his testimony how he survived drugs. It's just a talk and then he goes away. I have to deal

with all the questions and issues afterwards. There is no system there. We must think of something that happens regularly, say on a Friday night.

INT: Tell me about faith practices that happen regularly in your home.

A2: We pray. In the evening before supper each one get a turn to pray. Each one has a specific evening when He must do the prayer.

A7: When we go to bed in the evenings, we do Bible study together. And if the little one doesn't understand all of it, I will tell him a Bible story afterwards. And the older ones also take turns to pray. And if a child isn't willing to pray on a certain evening, it is o.k. We give grace, they must never feel forced into prayer.

A6: We also talk a lot round mealtimes. How was your day? What happened with you and your friends today? Now the other day my son asked me for an extra sandwich to take to school, because he saw a friend at school eating grass. So, he went to her and asked why she is eating grass, and she replied, because she was hungry. So he gave her his sandwich, but with rugby in the afternoon he was very hungry! It warmed my heart to see that he noticed and cared in such a way.

A7: Sometimes we would talk about children at school: one child hurting another. And I would ask him how that makes him feel, and how he would respond if someone did it to him? And he would reply: I don't know, what should I do? And we would go to the Bible and search for appropriate guidelines and Jesus would do.

A4: We don't have TV in our house. We have a DVD machine and we have like the last Bible story that they sell. We know them all. And Jan de Wet, we know his songs by heart now. And we use the old Children's Bible that I grew up with. So, my wife, she is strict on this: I have to read to the kids. And I must say, she's the drive behind this. So, both our children know the Bible stories well. We have lots of interaction in that time together. We don't compromise on that.

INT: How often do you eat a meal together as family?

A7: Every evening. On weekends it's a little more relaxed.

A1: Definitely once a day.

A4: Monday to Friday once a day, but on weekends even more.

INT: I pick up that there is a connection between eating together and faith practices. Am I right?

A3: That sitting around the table thing. Those 20 - to 30 minutes helps us to sort out a lot of stuff. The other place where this happens, is in the car. Oh boy, get into a car with your teen and they will talk your ears off!

A6: Mine still falls asleep when the wheels roll.

A7: We do one-on-one. I would sometimes have a mom-and-daughter weekend, or a son-and-mother week-end. And then we talk a lot and you hear things that would come out in the regular walk of life.

A6: We often talk, but the best time is in the kitchen when I am preparing the meals. Then she comes and we talk about the stuff. With her dad it is when they are in the car. Sometimes he would say: How do you survive? But that is the way faith is passed on.

A1: But when they go to Secondary School everything changes. Then its tablets and earphones.

A7: Yes, a lot of parenting is age-specific. My children were very happy with the children's Bible until they reached the age of seven, and they started to say: but we know about Goliath and David already!

A3: And again, it depends what the parents did at home. I have a Sunday school class consisting of grade 8 pupils, and they don't even know the Our Father prayer.

A7: We go to CUM Books, they have very nice material. We found a daily devotional for boys that has 'n section with a Bible reading, then it explains to you the background, then it gives an example from real life and you need to decide what the best thing would be in this situation. Really nice. Our daughter is a pre-teen, and she's past that also. She now has questions about God, how does He do this, and thinks about that. Often I don't have the answers.

INT: Say there is a new couple who brings their baby to be baptized, and the congregation would ask you to mentor them somewhat. What would be the one or two things that you would tell them that worked for you?

A6: I think your example to your children are important.

A3: I would say: make effort to eat around a table every day. That brought the greatest change to our house.

A7: And when you come to the table, switch off your phone. We have a rule on this.

A4: Time. You need to make time for family. We choose one evening per month to be together, no electronics. If you don't plan it, three weeks go by and before you open your eyes, they are eighteen and gone!

A2: And when they hit Secondary School they spend more time at school than they do at home. So, yes, evenings and spending time as family together is very important.

A5: My youngest is still a baby. And I would say: start early, expose them early on to the Bible, and teach them how to pray. I mean, we are the ones who should teach them that.

INT: Are you willing to be taught how to form the faith of your child? How many evenings per month would you give up to this task?

A5: Yes! Once a week. It would be helpful. I know I need it.

A6: Yes, I also recon like once a week.

A1: Once a week would be hectic. For instance the whole of next week would be impossible.

A4: Yes, when I look at this week's program, maybe twice a month would suit me.

A2: Yes, our programs are already full of stuff. Maybe on a weekend. If it is a structured course, then you can do it in a given time and it's done. Like more intense, but you do it and it's done. We need those tools.

A5: Week-ends might be better. The upshot is that congregation members can get to know each other better.

A2: I'll definitely come. It might just help me with my difficult child!

A7: And I my teen. They have so much hormones! Then they get emotional, and you just don't know how to handle it.

A4: Say for instance, one of us organizes a braai at his house on a Friday, and we give each person a topic: you, for instance, have teenagers in the house, how do you handle this and that? And you have to give advice according to your topic. I mean, if my child is 8 years old, I would like to know what is coming and How best to handle it.

A1: I think the problem with creating such a group is, not all people share the same values, and we don't know each other so well.

INT: Which factors prevent you from faith formation at home? Things like busy programs, attitudes, etc.?

A2: Super 18 rugby!

A4: Laziness. We are too lazy to bother.

A1: I think it is more difficult for adults to change than for children. I know my program is running at full tilt. If I want to be home at a certain time for devotions, I need to put in a lot of effort. And if it doesn't work out for a few days, then it is so easy just to give up on it. I think we as adults need to say: I have decided, and I will commit to my decisions.

A2: But children also have busy programs. Ours is in matric this year – it's rough!

INT: Name one thing that the congregation can do to assist you as parent in your role. What would you like to ask them?

A7: I would ask for more support for the youth. Like doing youth camps. I mean, they do women's' conferences, and men's' conferences, why not something similar for the youth?

INT: Do you know about the #Imagine that happened this past week-end close to where we are now? It was like a few thousand young people from our church together for the weekend.

A7: See what I mean. I didn't know anything about it. We don't hear stuff like that.

A3: Yes, but I think we need to make this about our congregation. A Congregation is family. These are my people I want to spend time with.

A1: I think we can do this. Let's say the guys aged 13, 14 and 15. If we have 5 of each in each Sunday school class, and if half of them come, we can do stuff together. And we make different kinds of groups, ages, and gender specific. Then we can do excursions on different Fridays.

A4: And I think all the stuff that we preach at home every day - that must be said at those times. They get tone-deaf for what you say at home. Some else must say it in a setting that is conducive to learning.

- INT: If you could start over with your child. If you could turn back the clock and have the knowledge that you now have, what would you do differently?
- A3: I know, I did a lot of damage by working away. If I could do it all over again, I would not work for such long times away from home.
- A5: I would have brought my kids to church from early on. For a long time we took turns: I would stay at home with the kids while my husband goes to church, and then it would be my turn and he would stay at home with the kids. I think that's wrong, we should have just come as a family to church.
- A3: But it's difficult, they can't sit still and listen like we do.
- A7: My kids are older now, and even now they can't listen to the pastor. I have threatened them to ask questions when we come home, and then they will sit upright and listen for a few minutes, but soon they'll start to slide back again. Sometimes they will ask me afterwards what did the pastor mean with this and that, and I would have to explain the whole sermon all over again, and then they would say: so, why didn't he just say that?
- A4: And, why did it take him an hour to say what you just said in 3 minutes?
- A1: I would have searched for a church that can assist me in living up to the promise I made at my child's baptism. It is usually much later that you realize that you do damage not to put in that effort. I know I need help with this. I need a church that will support me and pray for me.
- A2: I also think you need to find a church where you feel at home. Where you feel free to share when you need prayer or help.
- A7: But time is still a big issue. My husband and I wanted to get more involved in the church life, but when we looked at the options we realized, we just don't have the time for this.

A3: You're right. I wanted to organize something for my Sunday school class, and parents started to phone me: please don't do it on this date, or on that date, and we ran out of dates for the year – everyone is just too busy.

A4: And this time of year is hectic. Until the school holidays there isn't one week-end that we do not have sport and sport events elsewhere. So, Saturdays are busy, and on Sundays these kids are just finished!

A6: So, all that remains are Sundays, but that is family time. Then we need to go visit with grandma.

A3: I have learned now: you just pick a date and stay with it. Some people will come, and some won't but that's o.k. don't wait to find a time that will fit everybody.

A7: Well, if you start early and plan well ahead, then it's an item on your calendar. Then you cannot say I don't have time for the Lord's work. We also need to teach our children how to plan ahead.

INT: Guys, no more questions. Thank you for 'n good discussion and for your time.

Focus Group Interview AA (second session), on 06/04/2016 – Eng

INT: I recently had a talk with your pastor, and he tells me that in the past few years your congregation had a drop-off of roughly 50% of the confirmation class pupils who no longer attend church. You are all parents. Your children are in this congregation where 50% falls away. How does this make you feel?

A12: I think it's my responsibility as parent to keep my child in the right track. I mean, that is why we take him to church on Sunday. We are setting an example to them, and I would like them to follow my example until they can decide for themselves if they want to join some other congregation or whatever. At present I can still control some of these decisions, but I know there comes a day when they can decide for themselves, and I will respect their choice.

A14: Honestly, for me it's not about Dutch Reformed or whatever church. I was born into the Single Reformed church and now I am here. For me it's all about God and faith in Jesus Christ, they must not turn their backs on the faith. So, whatever church, that's ok, but I want them to be involved, your whole life must show your devotion to Christ.

A15: We were five children in the house where I grew up. My brother married a German lady and later emigrated and joined her Lutheran Church. The other one is a pastor in his church. One of the others turned to the Apostolic Faith Mission. So, they serve the Lord, in whatever church they chose.

A8: I think those statistics are horrible. We don't want our children to leave. But maybe we do not understand all the reasons. Maybe we are too old school in our ways here. They want a church where stuff is happening and it feels alive, and they will not get it here. Maybe that is one of the reasons.

A10: Yes, I think after school for 3,4 of 5 years they go to explore what the world has to offer, but eventually they will come back. For those years they are in a phase and entertainment is important. They are on a different plane than us. But when they reach 25, 30, then they start to settle, get kids and then they return. It is as if those 5 years are just too wild, our church can't keep them in that time. They don't want to come and sit and listen, they want more.

- A11: We had four sons, and like you said, they want more, but it is true, they do come back, and start to be normal again.
- A13: It may also be that they are simply elsewhere. Maybe they are studying in Pretoria or the Cape in that period. But when they return, then they go to church with us. My son was in Johannesburg and had church on Fridays, but now he is here and we are regulars in die Sunday morning service.
- INT: Think for a moment of your children. They are currently in a process of faith formation here at church. We hope that by age 16 they will have developed a mature faith as a result of this process. Can you describe this process for me?
- A14: My child needs to see my faith as I live it out in a practical way. My example. If they cannot see how faith operates in real life, where will they learn?
- A13: Surely it needs to start at home, but I will also say the church – the stuff the pastor teaches us.
- A9: We are also very happy with the school where our children are. They still have Christian basis. They are not like so many others where they can't even go to the hall to have assembly. Our kids get a good dose of faith every week, Mondays with assembly in the hall, and each day a prefect will open with some Bible reading and prayer.
- A12: I agree with A14, it all starts at the home. But I would like to add Sunday school here. They do get good information there, but we need to make it more exciting. Sometimes they complain that it is too long on a Sunday morning, but if it is interesting, it wouldn't feel as long.
- A11: The Bible teaching at church is a huge building block to me. We do the more practical stuff at home, like reading the Bible and praying together, and practicing what the Bible teaches. Our example, how we interact with people, how we conduct yourselves, that is very important. Our children are now grown up and I can just hope that foundation is laid well.

INT: How will you know if you are successful in the formation of your child's faith? Are there some goals you want to achieve?

A11: We have a twenty-year-old in the house, and sometimes it can be difficult to motivate him to come to church with us, so sometimes we even have to force him. But the upside of this is, we can see with whom he associates, how he conducts himself, and his interaction with others. I can see from his behavior that yes, some of our teaching stuck with him.

A14: But you can also hear from the way they pray. When your children start praying for you, you know they are developing their faith.

A15: I still worry a lot .....

A11: One indication for me, is while they are still students then they are experimenting with a lot of stuff, but when they get a little older, it becomes important for them to go to church again. They make effort with reading the Bible and praying. You see the signs of faith again.

A10: When they are that age it is as if everything you tell them to do, they will not do. But they go through it, and later on they do return to the Bible and the church. But I think Sunday service at 9 o'clock is impossible when you're that age. Maybe we should have church at eleven or twelve – for them.

INT: If the color of the home is yellow, and the color of the church is red, where do you see orange – that place where ministry purposefully impacts the home? Do you see orange happening in your congregation from time to time?

A8: I don't think it is happening. I don't see people from the church coming to homes and helping anybody. When I was young we had elders and deacons and they did home visitation, and we read and prayed together, but that is long gone. Our children don't have any of that. And if he doesn't attend on Sundays, there is nothing else in the week. We have tried some youth activities during the week, but it all died out. That is why I say orange is not happening.

INT: You may also think about existing stuff like the Christmas service, or the communion over Easter time, maybe you saw some orange there?

A14: Yes, but that is very recent. Long ago we had stuff like that, and then it simply vanished, and now it is starting to happen again.

A13: There was a time that we had very few children at church. I thought we won't even have a confirmation class. But it is picking up somewhat. I think we are attracting some young parents again.

A9: And the communion with Easter was very special. Each family received a bag with goodies in. It was different and people were interested.

A10: People like something new and different. When the smaller kids came to sing in the service, we loved that. And also when they had to stand up and go and give their offering, it was different than usual. For a long time we had nothing like that, but it is starting to happen again. We also see more children coming to Sunday school. It is nice to see.

A15: My kids come to Sunday school especially when it is their birthdays, because then they get chocolates.

INT: Tell me about faith practices that happen regularly in your home.

A12: We have a notebook and we write down the text and the sermon notes each Sunday, and later in the week we will go through it again. And if the little one doesn't understand we will explain carefully to him. It helps, because they cannot concentrate that long.

A10: We make effort on week-ends to eat together. Not in front of the TV, but at the dining table, and we talk and you can see if there seems to be a problem. The thing I miss, is, when I was young we used to have Sunday school handbooks, and you had some homework to do, on Monday, Tuesday, and so. You had to fill in stuff, write out a verse and it was good to do that. But our children don't have any of that. I think at one time we had no Sunday school books, so you came to church, but you had nothing to work on in the week. I mean, my mother assisted me with that, and you had to give account on

Sunday. I think it will suit primary school children better than secondary school pupils, though.

INT: How often do you eat a meal together as family?

A9: There was a time when it was non-existent in our house, we just sat in front of the TV all the time. But I decided to change all that. I set the table, and my two sons had turns to help me with that. And their phones must stay in their rooms, and we have those 20 minutes together as family and we talk a lot. Nothing interferes, no TV, and that time together is good for all of us. Initially they thought this was very uncool, but they started to enjoy this. If I change my mind now, and say, let's go sit in front of the TV with our plates, they say no, and go back to the table. They know they get undivided attention, and we can discuss everything.

A15: We also did that from when they were still very small, to sit around a table at mealtimes. And it is the same, they don't want to go and sit in front of the TV with their food. And we have this thing where everyone gets a turn to pray before the meal. Each one has his evening to pray. And it helped them to overcome their fear for praying out loud. Even if we have friends over, if Wednesday is your turn to pray, you pray, and it is o.k.

A14: We don't sit around a table when eating together, but we have a small table in the sitting room, and that is where we do our Bible study, and prayer. Or I would just go to their rooms and we would talk, and read something from the Bible, or they will tell me what they read.

INT: Say there is a new couple who brings their baby to be baptized, and the congregation would ask you to mentor them somewhat. What would be the one or two things that you would tell them that worked for you?

A12: I would tell them to stay involved. Stay involved in your children's lives, but also at church. In that way you help them to stay on the right track.

A15: I have found those last 5 minutes of the day when you just sit with them on their beds, are powerful. Usually you tell them a bed-time story, then you read from the Bible, and you talk about the day. Quite often they did not understand something, or something happened at school that was unfair, and you talk about stuff like that. Those minutes are

really precious. You don't realize it, it may be 10 minutes less TV time, but to them it means the world.

A14: I didn't sing my children lullaby's, I sang them Psalms. In the Single Reformed Church we had to learn them from heart.

A10: And you must tell them to bring their kids to church from a very early age. They often think people will be irritated by a little child. I'm dead set against a nursing room at the church, chaos reigns there. Sometimes I am also irritated by a crying baby in church, that's o.k. then you can go out for a while. But if you keep them from church for like 4 years, and suddenly you expect them to sit still and obey, that just won't work. And I think the little one know if they are comfortable to quickly run to the bathroom and back. That is the way they learn that we go to church on Sundays. When there is a function at church, we go. Don't go drop them off at the grandparents when you come to church, take them with.

A8: I would say, keep the discipline up in the home. If you lose that, you won't get it back. From early on, read the Bible, pray together. If you stop doing it, it is very hard to get that back.

INT: Are you willing to be taught how to form the faith of your child? How many evenings per month would you give up to this task?

A15: My children are now at an age where they have to take the responsibility for their own faith. I taught them what I could, I'm hopefully living out the stuff I taught them, but now it is their turn to choose. And I decided to give them the benefit of trust. I need to let go now. So, I'm somewhat past the training stage.

A14: Well, to be more equipped with knowledge from the Bible, that is always good. But my children are now at a place, I'm like a helicopter, I'm hovering somewhere on the outside, and now and again I can come in for a landing. When your children are young, you need a lot of training. With a 17 year old, I need to know how to let go, and to have faith that he is safe in the Lord's hands.

A11: We also have older children, and living in South Africa nowadays, it's difficult. Lawlessness is everywhere, and it takes a certain skill to tell your 20 year old when all

the other people ignore the stop sign, it is not o.k. when you do. That is very difficult. So, I need training not to say: Because I told you so, but to have a different approach.

INT: Which factors prevent you from faith formation at home? Things like busy programs, attitudes, etc.?

A12: In our case, my husband is English. He grew up catholic and my children and I are at this church. So, that presents a problem. Sometimes we differ over the religion and the faith.

A9: One big obstacle is time. Especially when you have primary school and secondary school age children in the house. When the one is busy, the other one is somewhere else, and the older ones always have stuff happening in the evenings. Often there are extra classes, so you run around trying to get everyone to where they must be. To find time for each other is a challenge.

A13: And relationships are also a factor. If your husband comes from a home where they did not talk about faith, it's a private thing, it is difficult.

A14: And sometimes people think its good enough just to go to church on Sunday, but we know there needs to be more than that.

INT: Name one thing that the congregation can do to assist you as parent in your role. What would you like to ask them?

A15: I think our pastor is really trying his best, but I want my church to do more during the week. Faith must be part of everything you do. When you watch a movie or you're driving, you need to live with faith in mind. That is what I would like to teach my children: to live their faith 24 hours a day. It's not just that thing we do on Sundays. It is a prayer before you go into a difficult class.

A14: Our wording is sometimes wrong. Church is not where you go on a Sunday, church is what you do wherever you go. There you show your faith, every day in the community.

- A13: I am also teaching my children faith is not only meant for Sundays. It's not only the service or the teaching on Sundays. They need to walk with the Lord wherever they go. If they understand that, it is really all they need to know. But they become deaf to me telling them this all the time, so I need my church to stress the same message.
- A15: Also, when you sometimes get upset or even start to doubt, it is not the end of faith. Because children sometimes look around them, and they see all the smiling, happy people and they are taught not to doubt and to be happy, and they think: what's wrong with me? But it doesn't work that way. Each one of us comes to a place of doubt and anger sometimes. And I think the Bible says it's o.k. The Lord is o.k. with your doubt. And we need to train children to live with those questions. They don't have to fake happiness, they may go with their pain to the Lord, it's o.k.
- A9: And sometimes they are angry at their mom and dad, and to whom can they go then? So, we need councilors at church, someone with whom they can talk about their issues.
- A10: I want to suggest if we plan an event at church, we must select the dates long enough in advance. People do not have the time to do anything once a month. Once a quarter will be more reasonable. I'm thinking of a brain storming session, where people can share their experiences and what worked in your house. You sit there and listen, and maybe say to yourself that won't work in our situation, but I'm will to try this. We can even get a speaker, someone who can give us some guidance.
- A15: And as a parent, you often feel like a failure. You have this ideal of how your kid will grow up and the personality he must develop, and if things do not go that way, you wonder where did you fail? What helped me a lot, was that we were a few friends who were pregnant at the same time, and our children were babies at the same time, and from time to time we would do tea together, and you talk about the home and your lives, and when you drive home you, say to yourself: I take my home, and kids and husband back anytime, thank you! As A10 said, to have a session where you can offload your frustrations, to have a safe place where you can talk about it, which will be very helpful to a lot of parents.
- A12: And sometimes it must be a women-only event: we talk easily. But then we need to get the men to do the same, because they often are so macho: we don't need advice, thank you. But if they discover others are also struggling with the same stuff you are wrestling with, it helps. And sometimes it can be mothers-and daughters together, or Sons-and-dads.

- A8: Parenthood is difficult. I'm struggling myself. I have a daughter, from early on she was my difficult child. My son, he's easy, we can talk and do stuff together. But I know I need guidance with the other one.
- A12: We might even give time beforehand for people to write their issues down anonymously, so that whoever takes the lead, can have time to prepare. Then you don't feel shamed when your issue is discussed.
- A11: We have been very privileged in this congregation. Our children and some of the other member's' children we the same age, so they have been together in school since grade one. This group has stuck together through the years. We know each other, we often visit together. There is a lot of support. And they are fellow-Christians, people from our church. There is a lot of potential here.
- A15: It's the same with this year's confirmation class. They are seven friends who have been together from crèche. They played little league rugby together and now they are these huge young men sitting across two chairs here at church. But it creates a situation where everybody supports, gives advice and helps them on their journey in life. It's a safe haven and you know others are looking out for your kid.
- A14: I must say, I watch you guys standing together on Sundays after church, and it is nice to see: the friendship and the atmosphere is nice.
- INT: If you could start over with your child. If you could turn back the clock and have the knowledge that you now have, what would you do differently?
- A9: I would be more relaxed. When you are a young mom everything needs to be just right. She must be the sweetest, brightest and respectful child, and later you think to yourself, why? She's just a little baby, let her be!
- A15: True. Often you sweat the wrong stuff. For instance their blazers from primary school. It hangs there in the closet with all the rewards and ribbons, but each time awards were given, you had a fight about what he should have gotten and didn't get, but one month

later it's forgotten, and now it just hangs there. If there was nothing on it, we could have given it to charity.

A13: And speaking as a parent, when I was young I saw all the faults with my mom and dad, but now I realize they only did their best. I hope that one day my children will also realize that I just tried my best for them.

A12: And here we sit, we turned out o.k. Our parents did their best and we turned out good by the grace of God. I have no regrets about what I taught my children. I wouldn't change a thing.

A15: Quite often, when you look at your child and you want to change him in some way, you miss the point. My son is very relaxed. Sometimes I want to start a fire to his backside just to get him moving a little faster, but that is the way he is. And already he acts like an anchor when I am stressed. That is the way he is, and that makes him special.

INT: Thank you for your time, this has been a delightful time.

Focus Group Interview B (first session), on 21/04/2016 - Eng

- INT: We are all part of the Dutch Reformed Church. And our church has a history of a rather steep drop-off after confirmation. Your pastor tells me that your congregations has experienced this too in the past two years. You are all parents. How does this make you feel?
- B2: I don't think we worry about drop-off from the faith, but I do think that our congregation needs something more dynamic to keep our teenagers. I do know that they are working on it. So, I don't think they will walk away from the Lord, but it's debatable if they will stay with our congregation, if things don't change.
- B5: I would say, for instance, my eldest son should have been confirmed two years ago, and now he doesn't want to come to church anymore. The people from the church phoned once to invite him to classes, and he attended one or two, but then he stayed away again. And there has been no contact since then. He remains stubborn, he doesn't want to go.
- B3: To me it is also a concern, whether my child will walk in the footsteps of my faith. And I think that is why church is so important, to build up their faith. We can only do what we can, and there is always the pressures of life. They must help.
- INT: Think for a moment of your children. They are currently in a process of faith formation here at church. We hope that by age 16 they will have developed a mature faith as a result of this process. Can you describe this process for me?
- B7: Church, and I mean, children's church, and Sunday school, that is very important.
- B1: We do have an excellent Sunday school at our congregation.
- B7: Yes, and the children's church is awesome! The lady who manages it is simply wonderful. The children want to go to children's church on Sundays. If they cannot be there, they will just cry.

- B2: Another building block is what we do at home, by reading and praying together. We try to do it every evening. That is our time together. I think it is important to fix it as a habit, because that is what you need to get you through the day.
- B6: And I think it differs a lot when you have small children or when you have teens in the house. The children are easy, they enjoy those times together, but teens are different. They don't want it so much anymore. You see this at church too.
- B1: But I do believe they know this, and are working towards a solution.
- B6: I hope so, because we are in between the two stages: we have a teen and we have an eleven year old, and we see the difference. The youngest doesn't feel so much at home with the children's church, but still he is not ready to join the teens, so I feel there is a gap there. And to add to this: our child is in Noordheuwel school, and his friends are in other churches where it is much "nicer" than ours. So, he wants to be where they are. Our congregation needs to create an environment where it will keep our teens from going elsewhere.
- B3: Just to come back to these building blocks, to add to what B2 said, our children are a little older, and in the mornings there just isn't enough time. Some of us are off to gym early, other still do homework. We are now at the stage where they have to do their own thing. They have devotional material and they read through it on their own. And I can see that it is important to them. I don't have to force them to do it, it's their choice.
- INT: What, do you think, is the church's role in bringing your child to mature faith?
- B4: They must have the willingness to come. Develop church so that the children will want to come.
- B6: Because, when they get to the teenager stage, and they are making their own decisions, there must be a good incentive for them still to come to church.

B2: When I think back on how I grew up, I remember the parables and the Bible stories. That is what church taught me. And I still remember the pictures. If you ask me about the parables, for instance, my references are the pictures that were used to teach us.

B7: Like the Ten Commandments. Each one had its own little picture. The eighth commandment's were handcuffs, so I know the eighth commandment forbids stealing. That is how it is supposed to be. We don't have that knowledge and pictures at home.

INT: What, would you say, is the role that parents should play in this process of faith formation?

B3: The example that we set.

B2: And doing devotions daily, together. This is important.

B4: And just living every day in the right manner. You cannot come on Sundays and be very holy, and then loose it during the week. We need to be constant throughout the week.

B2: I also think, to get involved. When things happen at church, to be there. And our children see that it is important for us to be there. We help by serving tea, or when there is a fête, we all go.

B1: Yes, and in this way they feel part of what is happening.

INT: How do you measure success in faith formation? How do you know you are on the right track?

B7: When and if you sleep at night! Or, rather, how much you need to pray for them. Do I pray with a lot of tension and fear, or are my prayers full of thankfulness.

B1: We see it when our children want to be involved. Obviously either we, or the church, or both are doing something right when they enjoy coming to church

- B4: And they talk about what they experience, and you hear everything is o.k.
- B1: We are very privileged. Our children are in a Christian school. And they also amplify our message.
- B2: I remember when growing up, we always had to go to Sunday school. It was always just before or after church service. And now it is very important to me: that we should go to church together. You cannot drop them at church and go lie in or go drink tea somewhere and come back and pick them up later on.
- INT: Can I prompt you on this: You come to church together, but you are separated. You go one way, and they attend children's church. Would you like to change this?
- B6: We talked about this just the other day. Maybe there should be a Sunday service once a month where we all go to church together. Because, as you say, they are there at the back doing fun activities. Sooner or later they must learn that it isn't always about the fun, but you also have to come and sit still and focus for half an hour.
- B4: But it is tricky. I want my congregation to teach my children stuff, but if they attend church with me in the mornings, they will quickly get bored. It will be way over their heads.
- B5: Personally, I prefer that they attend children's church. They won't understand half of what the pastor says on a Sunday morning.
- B6: True, but a joint service focusing on the children will be nice.
- B1: I think at present we do that once a year, but we could do it more often. Maybe once a quarter.
- B7: You asked about measuring successes. I just want to add: you hear it in what they say. Stuff that they experience during the day. For instance: "Mom, today this happened at

school, and this one friend didn't do the right thing". A parent can quickly tell his child's understanding of right and wrong, and sense of justice.

- B2: Yes, they talk a lot. And you get the sense that they want to do the right thing.
- B4: Like in our house, in the mornings before we each go our own way, we pray together. And you hear their prayers are developing. They don't just thank the Lord for a nice warm bed, anymore. They are also praying for those less fortunate who do not have a nice warm bed. They develop a caring attitude towards others. You see it in the way they pray.
- B3: Yes, they start to use more mature language. The other day he thanked the Lord for grace, and I thought to myself: when was the last time I thanked the Lord for grace?
- INT: If the color of the home is yellow, and the color of the church is red, where do you see orange – that place where ministry purposefully impacts the home? Do you see orange happening in you congregation from time to time?
- B4: That is difficult. Individually we get good messages in the teaching. Each week you get useful tools for life. But I have not really gotten anything to help me as a parent.
- B6: If you attend a cell group, it helps. There you talk about parenting, and you pray for each other. But if you are not a part of a cell group, you don't have that kind of support.
- B1: And I find that a very difficult subject. We had to make a decision that we cannot attend cell group at this time. I work at least two evenings per week. We have other stuff going on. At this stage we cannot do cell group. But this is a season.
- B2: We once attended a cell group where the other couples' children were somewhat older than ours. And they talked about stuff that parents have to grapple with. Even practical stuff like what to do when they don't want to eat their greens. And it helped a lot.

INT: I've heard from you that the children's ministry is wonderful. I've heard that the teen ministry was like that at one stage. Did you ever experience that they reached out to you as parents? Were you ever involved with what they are doing with the kids?

B6: The previous youth worker was excellent. The children loved being with him. And he said the stuff that we said. He was adding to our parenting. He re-enforced our message: "Your mom and dad always tell you this, but now I'm telling you also!"

B1: But I as a parent need to know what the youth worker is doing. Which isn't happening at present. But if you do, you'll know how you can join forces.

INT: I don't know how you do it in your congregation. Do you have Sunday school materials that you give out? Booklets that they use?

B7: No, we don't, and to me that is a pity.

B3: They give hand-outs weekly. A print-out, but don't ask me what the topic was last Sunday!

B2: Usually we talk about that on our way back home, but if you should ask me now, I would also not be able to remember anything. O yeah, I remember, they had the camp, so it was slightly chaotic.

B7: I would like to propose something: We attended another church for a short while, and what I liked was that their youth ministry was very structured. We received an e-mail every Friday saying what the children in grades 1-3 were doing on Sunday, and the children in grades 4-6, and so. They all received handbooks that stayed at church, so that it could not be forgotten at home. They did a series for the whole year. You knew exactly what they were busy with at any given time. It made so much sense to me. That e-mail was very useful for starting a conversation later.

INT: What are the topics you would like the youth ministry to teach your children on?

B2: I would say, teach them the Bible. We are not equipped to do it properly. We are learning ourselves every Sunday, so there are things that I do not know how to explain it to them. The questions that I don't know how to answer, teach them that.

B4: At this stage in our lives, we read and pray quickly in the mornings, we don't have the time to go into depth into the Word. For instance Moses in the basket, to explain it all, with pictures and everything. We cannot do that in a few minutes in the morning.

INT: Tell me about faith practices that happen regularly in your home.

B7: Reading the Bible as a family. And praying.

B2: Thanking the Lord for our food.

B1: Praying when we go to bed. That time together.

B6: Definitely, eating and talking when we sit round the table.

B7: We started to have Holy Communion together two years ago. We were camping over the Easter weekend, and we decided to do the communion ourselves. And they have a good understanding of why we are doing this.

INT: In a normal week, how often do you eat together as a family?

B3: Every evening. Even when my husband has to work late, myself and the children will eat dinner round the table.

B1: Yes, same with us. Every evening.

B5: My daughters and I eat around the table. My teenage son, he lives in the flatlet outside, so he just comes in and grabs the food and go.

- B6: Yes, I recon it is still easy when they are young. They want to sit around the table. But teenagers are different. And often their schedules are so full, that they cannot share the meal with you at the table.
- B2: I love the discussions around the table. Often it starts with something quite normal, and soon it will turn to faith and what we believe.
- B7: Yes, for instance we have had a lot of break-ins in our vicinity lately. So they say they are afraid. And we began to talk about fear. And we searched for Bible verses on fear. And we can see how they overcame their fears.
- B4: We experience the eating together as a stunning opportunity just to connect with what is happening in their lives and minds.
- B1: Yes, that is where you hear the stories. If there was an incident at school, a fight or something like that, then we talk about it. You can teach them what Jesus taught us about turning the other cheek and how to handle that situation.
- B7: But, it's like B5 said: a teen-age son, how do you get him back at the table? You cannot smack him anymore. So you need to develop this habit from early on.
- INT: Say there is a new couple who brings their baby to be baptized, and the congregation would ask you to mentor them somewhat. What would be the one or two things that you would tell them that worked for you?
- B1: Reading the Bible in the evenings together, as family. And just to do things together. Spending time with each other.
- B7: We talk a lot. And we love camping. We don't have a television when camping. You sit around the fire and you build friendship with your children. And what really makes it nice, is you can develop a one-one-one relationship with each one of them separately.

- B2: That is the foundation for everything. Talking is important. Because there comes a day that they won't want to talk to you anymore. So, you have to develop strong bonds when they are still young. Then they will be able to talk to you about the difficult stuff in life too.
- B6: And I think you need house rules for cellphone also. In our house everyone charges their phone in the kitchen, and that happens after eight. After eight no one phones anymore, it's done for the day. Same with television: we put it off at eight.
- B4: Same here. We don't want to keep them from technology, but with television for instance, there just isn't time for it. We don't even have DSTV in our house, because the television stays off during the week. On holidays it's different. Then they can hang out in front of the TV, but during the week there are rules.
- INT: Are you willing to be taught how to form the faith of your child? How many evenings per month would you give up to this task?
- B4: I think it would be wonderful! I'm an electrician, and I am not equipped to develop my child's faith life. I would benefit greatly from it, but then it must be structured: certain week-ends for parents of children of certain ages.
- B1: And it probably doesn't have to be very regular. Just a workshop on a weekend or so. It might be helpful.
- B5: And it must be presented well. I've been to such events and sometimes they say all the stuff you already know. After a while you say: I know this. But get proper speakers, and people would love to come.
- B7: You can even ask people beforehand to write down the issues they are struggling with, and then prepare practical answers that are relevant.
- INT: Which factors prevent you from faith formation at home? Things like busy programs, attitudes, etc.?

B2: Time, time, time.....

B1: Yes, our schedules are full. I often arrive at home after dark, and then the children are already sleepy. So we pray and read from the Bible, but their attention is very short.

B5: And we have to help with the homework, and stuff.

B4: But, I realize, we must teach them how to find balance. We must show them they cannot do everything they want, they must learn to choose.

B6: And help me how to teach them faith. The reality where we stay at present is crime: the Lord allows bad things to happen to good people. This bothers me also. I would like to take a gun and sort some people out, but I need to learn to react in faith. I don't know how to explain why this nice uncle is lying in hospital, fighting for his life. Sometimes I'm just as angry.

B1: I think our national situation is very different from when we grew up as children. And we are dealing with negative emotions, but we must teach them to be positive. Sometimes when I barbecue outside I also feel unsafe, but I cannot show fear.

B6: There is a fine line between preparing them and scaring them.

INT: Name one thing your congregation can do to help you as parent?

B3: As he said, in practical ways. Teach me to react with faith when life gets difficult.

B6: Also things like what the Bible teaches on discipline. We get lots of opposition for this. Other families just don't care about this.

B5: I need a church that will stand by me in times of need. Someone with whom I can go talk to.

- B2: I understand that we have a large congregation, and the pastors can't possibly go and visit everyone. Therefore we need to be part of a small group, where we can care for each other. People who will be there for you.
- B3: I will be great if there can be a network of people dedicated just to assist families. Especially in times of need. Long ago we had deacons who did home visitation, but I realize nobody has that time anymore.
- B7: And that, for me, is a problem. At this time we do not have the time to be part of a cell group, but if a crisis should loom, where do I find support? And my children will see that we don't have people on whom we can rely in difficult times.
- INT: If you were able to start over again with your child, but with the knowledge you now have, what would you do differently?
- B7: I would be much more relaxed. I would play more.
- B3: Especially when they are little. Play more with the toys, rather than to worry if all the toys have been but away.
- B5: Yes, I would have spent much more time with them when they were still young. And I would do more of the things they liked, like playing with their toys in the tub.
- B1: I would spent less hours at work. I would have liked to enjoy more daylight hours with them, you know, with like playing on the grass, but time runs out so fast. We have one of those electronic picture frames showing all our photos, and then you see the stuff you have already forgotten. Stuff that we simply don't remember to do with them anymore.



Focus Group Interview BB (Second session), on 25/04/2016 – Eng

INT: I recently had a talk with your pastor, and he tells me that in the past few years your congregation had a drop-off of roughly 50% of the confirmation class pupils who no longer attend church. You are all parents. Your children are in this congregation where 50% falls away. How does this make you feel?

B10: I think there is reason to be concerned, because our children come to church because they have to. That is what you do, you go with your parents. And then comes confirmation, and after that they are old enough to say I want to go or not, because then the decision isn't yours (as parent) anymore, it is theirs. Then we cannot force them to come anymore, they have to make the choice to want to come.

B9: And it just doesn't happen so readily anymore. I mean, when I was confirmed, I kept on coming. It wasn't an option not to come. Later on, when I already left home, I started to stay away from time to time. I went through that phase, but later on, I grew up and found my way back to church.

B10: I think the reason why they drop off, is that there are too many choices. They can do whatever they like. There are many churches to visit and sports and stuff to do on a Sunday.

B12: And we do have a lot of churches in the area where they can go to. And parents don't apply discipline anymore, they don't say: no, you should come with us.

B13: But I think I would like to differ from you. I will not force my child to go to church with me, because that is the surest way of losing them. I think children will go to church if their parents do, because they learn from example. And I think they must understand the reasons for us going to church, it is not because we have to. We have a daughter of 16 and a son of 12. On Sunday evenings she attends another congregation because we had too much change with our youth. She started attending with her friends and she enjoys it there. My son and I, we go in the mornings, he loves the children's church there. So, as a family we're split at present, but I will not force my child and say: you have to come with us. I want them to make a choice and then it is their choice.

- B8: I'm with you on this. When I was a child, I was forced to go to church, and I rebelled against it. It is only recently that I started to go to church again. So, I understand that negative reaction to being forced.
- B13: I have seen this a lot with children being forced to go to church. You literally have to drag them to church. And you will lose that child when he is a little bit older. He will have a lot of negativity towards church. And I think a child must understand why we go to church. I get something for my soul there, you grow in the Spirit, and you get power for the rest of the week. Then you will come back for more.
- B9: I also would say that if our children enjoy church, it makes it easier for us to come as well. Some Sunday mornings it is difficult to get them out of bed. But you go through the motions, and afterwards when we leave church, she will say: I'm glad we attended. So, if they enjoy it, it is easier for us to go. I grew up with a very committed dad. You might be dying, but you will rise early and be on time for church. We could never skip church. And every evening we had Bible study. So, I grew up in a house where you were forced on religion. I don't want that for my child, I want them to enjoy it.
- INT: Think for a moment of your children. They are currently in a process of faith formation here at church. We hope that by age 16 they will have developed a mature faith as a result of this process. Can you describe this process for me?
- B9: It starts with the parents. Our examples are important. And then if church is a positive experience, then they would want to be here. And they will come to youth ministry. But then they need to communicate the message clearly, step-by-step to them.
- B11: I think it is the parents, the school, the teachers, friends at school. There are a lot of factors in play here. Especially when staying in Johannesburg, there are a lot of influences. Much more than when we grew up. There are also a lot of negative stuff, and we have to keep our eyes open to prevent that.
- INT: I'm prodding here, you list school and teachers as part of that group. Is that a fact, or do you hope it would be so?

- B11: I really hope so. We, as parents have to think which schools to choose for our children. You have a choice, and we try to give them the best that we can afford, but you have to ask these questions.
- B13: I think we are still very privileged with the schools around here. They still do devotions in the hall, they read the Bible, they pray in class. My child's school has CSA on Wednesday, it's like a Christian group that meets every week.
- B9: Yes, and the secondary school has CSI, it's much the same thing. These schools still allow the practice of the faith in that manner.
- B13: I would like to add: good youth leaders are important. You can't measure the value of a good youth leader. With the smaller children, they are easy. But the teen-agers, they are much influenced by a youth leader. He is like a magnet. If they like him and his ministry, they will come to church!
- B12: And it is also about friends and groups. They talk to each other. If some of them say: come check out our youth group, then the whole group will go there. We saw that with our previous youth leader. When he left, we lost a lot of youth.
- INT: In this process of developing faith in your children, what role do you expect the church to play?
- B13: That is a difficult question, because the church can't control everything. Our congregation tried all it could to retain those youth workers, but then they quit. What can they do? At least they are trying, I think.
- B9: We have a ten-year-old in the house, and she has children's church with Zelna. She makes children's church interesting and lots of fun. There really is never a dull moment. The lessons are creative and you always take something home with you. I'm helping every third weekend, so I kind of know what is happening there, so I think when your children are at children's church, they are on the right track.

INT: Can I prompt you on this: you are involved every third week-end. Is that as a parent, or as a volunteer?

B9: There was a time when they were really short on volunteers, so I offered to help. So I just kept on going, because I love it.

B10: I never grew up with the expectation that the church ought to train up children in the faith. I always saw that as the role of the parent. But my parents involved the church. We went to church every week and it was nice to go. There was Sunday school, and I learned a lot. My friends all went to the same church and we even did confirmation together. Now it's different with my children. They are English, and they don't feel at home in the Afrikaans youth ministry. The two older ones, they attend the youth. The two youngsters, they come to the service with me, because I wouldn't like to miss it. Often I would ask them afterward if they understood everything, and we would have a good discussion. But they are also very blunt. They'll say we sang too long, or we stood on our feet for too long.

INT: How will you know if you are successful in the formation of your child's faith? Are there some goals you want to achieve?

B13: I see it through the spiritual growth visible in my children. You can see their faith developing and how they become more mature in the faith. Even in the way they handle situations, and disappointments. It is not the end of the world, when bad things happen. They develop resilience.

B12: They also become more independent. They can handle problems because they have the Lord at their side.

B13: One failsafe way to see their faith formation, is how they handle peer pressure. A child is spiritually strong when he knows his identity in Christ, and then he will not do stupid stuff just because he was dared.

B10: I look at the way they make decisions. In their choices you see their values. When they choose the right thing over the easy thing, you know. And my youngest one will often ask me questions. And I can see how his faith helps him to sort things out. With the older

ones I also look at their choices, and you can see: this is the way a child of God should act, like caring for others, and not just putting himself first.

INT: If the color of the home is yellow, and the color of the church is red, where do you see orange – that place where ministry purposefully impacts the home? Do you see orange happening in you congregation from time to time?

B11: I think this congregation offers a lot of opportunities to bring people together. There are meetings, and parents can get involved in a lot of good happenings. Like we were invited to a Bible study on Tuesdays. Unfortunately I have to work in the evenings, so we cannot attend, but the opportunity still is there.

B10: There is also youth on Friday evenings. It's happening, and all youth may come. Sometimes I am just so tired, that I don't have the energy to drive them. And were back at the choices we make, as parents. We are just too busy.

B13: I can see the congregation really tries its best. They know they have a problem with the teen-agers and they don't just ignore it, they are trying to fix it.

B10: I just think people do not want to get involved. We all have enough on our plates, and you don't have the capacity to deal with other people's issues. Don't ask me to help you, because I'm busy.

INT: Tell me about faith practices that happen regularly in your home.

B9: Well, we read from the Bible every evening, and say a prayer before bedtime. And we try to follow that principle every day. And our daughter know by now: she will ask: come, Mom, lets read, I'm tired.

B11: And also to pray a prayer of thanks before mealtimes. We really thank the Lord for all His goodness.

B10: We also read from the Bible. Not every evening, but we do it regularly enough. And I will often use some Biblical illustration in a situation. I'll say something like: it breaks Jesus' heart when you do a thing like that. Or even: you just have to believe, or talk to the Lord about it. This usually happens in the car on our way to school, when we talk about life and issues. I'll often say: I don't think that is what the Lord wants from his children. Sometimes I get angry at someone, and then I know they are watching my example now.

B9: And they pick up on your emotions. They know when you are angry or annoyed.

B10: Yes, they do. We are in a very competitive market, and our children know who our competitors are, and I have to explain carefully that we need to bless everyone equally. So, everything in everyday has a lesson to it. Teachable moments. If you played soccer today and didn't score a goal, then it was not meant to be. But don't worry, you don't walk this road alone, the Lord is with you every step of the way. Trust Him, He has a plan. So, we talk about faith a lot.

B13: And that is what the Bible teaches: when you rise and when you go to sleep, and on the road, talk about the faith. It's one of my favorite expressions: The Bible says..... But I do believe that it will get stuck in their minds and one day they will tell their children: The Bible says .....

B12: My son is always busy with his tablet, he loves it. But in the evenings, when it gets to bedtime, he is quick to put it aside and ask his mom to come and pray with him.

B13: Yes, he is the easy one. My daughter is a teen-ager, and I have to admonish her to do it on her own. She is older, and she has to take the responsibility on herself to develop her relationship with the Lord. I need to remind her often to read her Bible and to pray.

B12: And the little one has his daily devotionals, and he reads them through from top to bottom.

INT: How often do you eat a meal together as family round the dinner table?

B8: Round a table, no, that isn't happening at all.

- B13: We know it is wrong, but it is just that much easier to sit in front of the television when eating.
- B8: The table is right there, but as you say, it is more of a hassle to convince everyone to come sit at the table.
- B11: I think it is a bad habit. You just fall into a bad habit.
- B12: We did it the other day by accident. I just sat down at the table, and soon my husband joined me. Soon afterwards the children also brought their plates and we all sat together round the table. It was a Saturday afternoon. And we just sat there and talked, and it was so nice. We just do it way too seldom.
- B11: We did it for a while, to sit at the table for meals, but then it just kind of stopped. It is just so easy to go sit in front of the television set.
- B10: We do it regularly, to eat at the table. Even if we don't eat together, we'll still do it at the table. As a family it is difficult, because of my husband's working hours. But we sit at the table, because the boys are so messy. It is like B12 said, the boys are always fidgeting with their phones or tablets. This is the only time we can actually ask them to leave it be. And we talk. Sometimes there emerge nice stories of experiences they had during the day.
- INT: Say there is a new couple who brings their baby to be baptized, and the congregation would ask you to mentor them somewhat. What would be the one or two things that you would tell them that worked for you?
- B9: That is difficult. I can tell them a lot of things not to do! There are so many things I wished I knew then that I know now.
- B10: I don't think people do that anymore, to get involved with strangers. For instance when you get new neighbors, people will not even go and offer a plate of cookies, or anything.

B13: I would tell them: make a point of eating at the table. I am sorry that we didn't do that. If it can become a habit early on, then it will not be a problem later on. Then the whole family falls into this habit. I grew up in a house where the dinner table was central, and now we don't even do it in our own home.

B10: If I had to give them advice, it would be: get involved. I mean, we are not very involved at the moment, but get involved. With a cell group, or serve tea, or a Bible study at church.

B12: We were in a cell group for a considerable period, and it was very nice. After some time some of the people had to go and we kind of split up, but while it lasted it was wonderful. It's a great support group. And there were a lot of children in the group, and their ages were in the same age-bracket. And those children were a good influence on ours. So, we experienced a lot of good just by being in that group. And the children had each other to talk to, if issues arose at school, they could talk to each other.

B9: I would like to add to that: get your kids involved with the kids' activities at church. There is a lot happening, like the V-kids. We had a kid's camp here at the church and they loved it. I think it helps their spiritual growth.

B13: And pray, pray, pray, pray .... The older they get, the longer your list of prayer requests.

INT: Are you willing to be taught how to form the faith of your child? How many evenings per month would you give up to this task?

B8: I would love to, because I believe you don't get good parents and bad parents, we all make mistakes. But hey, if it can help me be a better parent, I would take it.

B9: And we want to give our kids the best. And we don't always have the best books or knowledge.

B11: And we don't always have the right answers. As they grow older, their issues become more and more complex.

- B8: Or they can just come to listen to other voices telling them the same things. I think they zone out when I start talking, but if somebody else tells them the same stuff, they will listen again.
- B10: My problem is this: most of those events take place in the evenings, and I find it difficult to attend in the evenings. Most moms need to prepare the household for the next day. And also, I will not attend on a Saturday morning at 8. It is wonderful that some people are willing, but, sorry, I am selfish with my time.
- B13: Exactly. If you rise at 5 every morning, you want to lie in on a Saturday.
- INT: Which factors prevent you from faith formation at home? Things like busy programs, attitudes, etc.?
- B10: Most definitely cell phones, PlayStation, Television. All the electronic stuff are way more interesting than to sit and listen to a Bible story. It's like homework, it gets little attention, while the other stuff gets all the attention.
- B11: Too much technology.
- B9: In our house, we get home at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, then it is time for homework – easily for two hours. Then we prepare the food. When you look at the time, its bedtime.
- B12: I think it is how we set our priorities. The stuff you want to do, are the stuff you will get time for. I know, I also tend to do the easier things.
- B13: We try to enforce a no PlayStation rule during the weeks. And when we eat, no cell phones. So, technology is not a problem. My problems are the attacks of the Satan. I will have the best of intentions, and then something happens, and I snap and then we are at odds with each other, and I cannot read the Bible and pray when I'm angry. I first need to calm down.

B10: And we drive around a lot. Every day I need to drive kids to sports somewhere, even till late in the evenings. It prevents us from being relaxed at home, and to have ample time for reading the Bible, etc.

INT: Name one thing that the congregation can do to assist you as parent in your role. What would you like to ask them?

B11: I'll want them to jack up the youth ministry. Make it nice for our kids. We have heard what B13 said: her daughter goes to another congregation now. Our oldest also attends youth at another church. I don't know what they do, but I'm sure we can do the same here.

B8: And create a Sunday school that children love. I think most kids hate Sunday school, because it is too old school.

B10: When I was a child, I loved Sunday school. My parents never had to force me to attend.

B13: We had KJA (youth meeting) on Wednesdays, and we attended on Sundays. And it was great. Even after my confirmation, I volunteered at Sunday school for four years. We played games, and life was not complicated.

B12: Our son attended the children's church here, and he said it becomes boring after a while: they sing, and then nothing more.

B9: I have a different take on that. I think when we were young, they didn't put in much effort. Now we do activities. And then they go to their separate classes, and there is a message, and a game. Sometimes they have to act out some Bible verse. I think the children love it.

INT: Explain that to me: You go to the main service. Your child goes to children's church. Are these two sermons connected? Do you know what message your child receives?

B9: No, these two services do not connect. But the children always get some take-away from their lesson. Maybe a verse from the Bible, or something that explains what they talked about. And then we talk about this on our way home. And I ask questions, to see what hit home.

B13: I think there was a time when these two services were aligned. They had the same topic at children's church as they had in the main service.

INT: If you could start over with your child. If you could turn back the clock and have the knowledge that you now have, what would you do differently?

B13: Everything! I will try to be a better example to them. Because I absolutely believe with my whole heart, that children learn by example. You can say whatever you want, but they will do what you do. If I could turn back time, I'll change my example.

B10: I would also do things differently. When our one son was in grade 4, he had a bad year with bullying. I would have handled it differently. I would not have reacted so strongly right from the start. And if I reacted less violently, he would have reacted less violently, and the whole thing would just resolve itself so much quicker.

B13: I know my example isn't the best there is, but I am learning from the Lord how to change that. It is not that I'm stubborn, but it is like in traffic. I get very angry at people who are breaking the rules, and when I get myself, I hear the one next to me saying the stuff I'm saying. So, I realize, how different will it be when my actions are more in line with God's will for me.

B11: I'm also at that place B13 describes. I would show more patience with my children. And I would make more time to be with them. We have such a rushed life, so we give them the minimum time, and we think it is quality time, but they don't see it that way. They want personal time with you. So often I have said things that I regret afterwards. And it is because we are always in a hurry. You have like a hundred things to do every day.

B10: I think we do O.K. We try. Maybe the only change would be to have them grow up somewhere in a nice little rural town. Isn't that every parent's dream?

B9: I'm with B10. Patience, and to bite your tongue before you say stuff that hurts. My fuse is also very short, but after hearing your confessions, I don't feel like such a failure anymore.

B8: And that thing where you just blow them off. Just give me five minutes, I just want to finish this, or do that. It may be just five minutes, but they needed you in those five minutes. I would handle it differently in future.

Focus Group Interview C (First Session), on 03/05/2016 – ENG

- INT: There is a lot of drop-off of young people leaving the church. Either after confirmation of even before confirmation. Do you see this, do you fear this? How do you feel when you think your child may just walk away from the faith?
- C1: I have a personal experience concerning that. When I was that age, you know, just finished school, I had a lot of questions. And my minister actually told me I was sinning by doubting and asking these questions. I was already confirmed at that time, but I was searching, trying to find meaning in my religion. And the judgemental attitude of my congregation, was probably the biggest thing that turned me away from the church. So, I felt very little grace.
- C3: I see it too in our household. Our eldest is also asking tough questions. And he places himself apart from what is happening. He will often say: Your church says.... And he also feels judged. Although he is confirmed, he doesn't feel part of the congregation or the community here.
- C2: Speaking about that, my own two kids, what keeps them away is this judgmental mind-set. They are overly sensitive. Even if there may not be intent on the other side, they feel it. They were churchgoing youngsters and they have faith. But they don't like being surrounded by Christians.
- C5: This is sad, because the youngsters are the ones that are growing up to be the better Christians, but if they don't get it right with our guidance, we will lose them. I believe we have to instil this into our kids.
- C4: I think for me, it is somewhat different. I've been a Christian since February 2010, and I'm baptised now two years. And what strikes in my mind, is when Jesus went to his hometown, He was turned away. That is my fear. That I have found Jesus, and I want that for my family and for my children. But truth is, I did not grow up in a Christian home. I grew up in a Hindu home. I went looking for God from the age of 17. I completely rejected Hinduism, because it just didn't make sense to me. And my parents didn't stop me. I went from Hinduism, to Islam, to finding Jesus. This was a ten year journey. And I wonder, will our own people follow us? Jesus' family didn't follow Him. So, I need a community, a spiritual family. Brothers and sisters in the faith who will help my family, my children, find Jesus. My greatest fear is, they will not find Jesus through me. I can go quietly about my business, believing, and praying and being an example of a Christian, for them to see it. But I will never be able to force it upon them. Because there will come a day that they will have

questions. So, how wonderful will it be, when I was in a community of Christians and everywhere they went, they were surrounded by Christians. I would breathe easier.

INT: Bring your children to mind. They are currently in a process of faith formation that will hopefully lead to a mature faith by, let's say, age 16. How would you describe that process? What are the building blocks that are part of this process?

C4: I have my set prayer time, which my older one doesn't really appreciate. If I could introduce her to visual material, that could interest her, it will help. Right now, there is nothing at church for her. Yes, she is two, but she is building up her personality. So, if we could introduce a room that is pleasant, and colourful materials, and visuals when I come to church, it would be so wonderful. I call myself a young Christian, and I would love for the church to lead the way, to show me how to build faith in my child.

C1: I think we lost a very important building block, and the younger generations doesn't have that anymore, where the schools still had religion and Bible classes. That helped, because the more voices saying the same thing, the clearer they get the message.

C3: You're right. It's not the policy anymore. But we still have choices. You get private schools where the foundations are still in the faith, and it is part of their curriculum. Of course it is way more expensive.

C1: And as C4 said, we can't force them into the faith. We need to encourage them to get interested themselves. That is the ideal we hope for: that they themselves start to get interested.

C4: Yes, you're talking about young families. Especially multi-cultural. You're going to get more people like me, who haven't live as Christians all their lives. I didn't have the model. So, resources, as to how to do this at home, is very important.

C5: I grew up in the church all my life. We were in the Catholic church, then my parents got divorced, so I went with my mom to her church at the Apostolic Faith Movement. Then I also started to lose my way, because changing your church really confused me. And I see now with my kids, If I don't push them, nothing will happen. His aunt bought him a Bible, but I have to tell him to read it. But I'm just as confused about stuff in the Bible, and I can't answer all his questions. But last year

he had to get a big operation, and the doctors gave him a 50/50 chance, and after that, things changed. He started to come to me and say: Hey mom, we must go to church now. And my husband is also still searching. So, if I say I don't want to rise early on a Sunday to go to church, nothing will happen. But I realized I must show the example. I must lead, to say, let's go to church.

INT: I hear you are saying there are certain things that a congregation must do, but there are also things that parents need to do. Let's focus on that for a moment: what can you, as parent do, to move your children towards mature faith?

C4: For me, I have a set prayer time. To constantly make them aware: we value the Bible, Mommy read from that. We pray. And to bring on exciting things, like storybooks with illustrations, or cartoon videos telling Bible stories. You know, visual stimulating things.

C3: It probably depends what age group your child is. I mean, what you will do for a two year old, is different from a nine year old, or a fifteen year old. But what you said still holds: reading the Bible, praying together and making them aware of the faith – you know – just talking about stuff. Showing them how the Lord is involved in our everyday lives, that is important.

C1: There are awesome movies that you can use. If you look at Matthew the movie, it is a verbatim account of the Bible, but because it's in pictures, it is so easy to relate. When you then read the Bible, it's like: I know this, I've seen this. And the movie Exodus, tells the story from where Moses was born to where he broke the tablets. It's more or less a true account. But suddenly it opens up the world of the Bible.

C2: Yes, that's from a teaching point of view. But closer to your question, how can we educate our kids in the faith, I would say, it's all about our conduct. Because they know the Bible, they know the stories. But they want to see how you as Christian, how you live out your life. How do you handle stress, how do you relate to others. That plays a very important role. They often say: Ah, is that what a Christian is supposed to do? So, these past six years I have been very conscious of this: how do I help other people, or speak about other people.

INT: The role of the congregation, let's explore that for the moment. What can they do to assist in this process?

C1: What I spoke about earlier, we did that at a previous congregation. We had a movie night. And we chose a movie, showed it at church, and had a great discussion afterwards. And we had boerewors rolls and spent time together, and without them knowing, they were being taught. But then you have to have a couple of people who are invested, and who want to make this happen.

C3: There is also Youth Alpha. With short movies, but powerful. And then questions for discussion, and they are engaged. And they get their questions answered. Very powerful.

C2: Yes, I've heard stories of teens whose lives have changed through that. One girl was very dark and anti-social, and she always wore black clothes. And then she changed. She actually gave us advice as to a movie we wanted to see, but she said there were bad scenes in it. And she was right. She changed through Alpha.

C4: I would actually like something more inter-active. You know, something where we bring our children with, and there are young families from different backgrounds, and we learn together. Because I also need to learn at the same time. For instance on a Saturday morning, where you come together and learn and play, with our children. Children need to know that Jesus is excitable. It's not just "Be quiet, Mommy is praying". He needs to be part of our lives. They watch Barney, surely Jesus is more interesting than Barney!

And I have been confirmed, my child is baptised. My entire family are attending church here now. I don't want to go elsewhere. I've had calls, people telling me other churches have far more to offer our children. No, I don't want to go there. This is my spiritual family. I want my children to be part of that.

INT: How will you know if you are successful in the formation of your child's faith? Are there some goals you want to achieve?

C1: When I look at our children, they despise immorality. They try to live a very moral life, and that is commendable for youngsters their age. Our biggest problem is, have they fed the dog. We don't worry what they do at parties, or when they're out on a Saturday night. For me, that is a sign that something has worked.

C3: To add to that, it is true. You can see they have good moral foundations. The way they talk about other people. There is a caring side that grows, and it is good to see, because quite often I'm not like that. I will drive by all the beggars I see and not give anything, but I see they care, and that is good.

- C5: For the last five years I'm a stay-at-home mom. And I always play stuff in the background: music or teachings or stuff. And sometimes they hear things, and they pick up on it, and we have great discussions on faith issues. And they will ask what do I think about that, and what does that really mean. It can easily become an hour long chat, so those teachings really help. We don't watch television. We'll always have some religions DVD on, and then they catch a phrase, and we end up talking the evening away.
- C5: For me, when I see my fifteen year old wanting to read the Bible, and the smaller one saying, OK, Mom, it's time to pray. It's difficult for us. We cannot do one time for devotions, because the older one wants to go to bed later now. But when they go to bed, we pray with them. And with the smaller one, I put the earphones in his ears, and put on Christian music. And he goes to sleep with that music in his ears. The older one, is difficult, because he is at that stage where he is on the phone, and Google all the time.
- C1: Have you ever tried the Bible app on the phone? Recently we discovered some of the Bible versions, they have a narrator, who reads the Bible for you. So, we sit back and let him read to us. I think your child will like that as well. But choose a version that is nice and understandable.
- C3: Just don't try to read the Bible from start to finish. We tried, but there are long dry spells in there, where you really loose interest. But go for Psalms, and Proverbs. There are really nice passages to enjoy.
- C2: Even that may be too much for a nine year old. What I would do, look up Louie Giglio on Youtube. There are powerful messages on the universe and the stars and Gods handiwork. And it will build up their faith!
- INT: If the colour of the home is yellow, and the colour of the church is red, where do you see orange – that place where ministry purposefully impacts the home? Do you see orange happening in you congregation from time to time?
- C1: Orange is in both locations. It's not only the church reaching out to the families, but it is also the families being involved at church. Long ago these colours didn't mix well: you had red and you had orange, and they were quite separated. You went to church on a Sunday. Then it is done. But now, it is really mixed. Church is part of

life, your friends, we sent each other pictures inspiring faith. I thing orange is happening all the time.

C4: I think currently, when it comes to the smaller children, we don't have that kind of support. I mean, all of our parents who come to the service, what do we do with our kids? They run around, and we try to keep them from distracting others. And maybe that message was meant for you today, but you didn't get it because you were so busy with the little one. So, right now we are here because we want to be here. But we may get to a point where we ask what are they getting from this? I can see that some youngsters are excited about the faith, but I'm fearful if we don't feed it, that excitement may just fade.

And I remember when I grew up, the only way I knew somebody was a Christian, was on Sundays. They dressed in their Sunday best, and had a black book in their hands. I don't want my children feeling that. What I would like to see in my children, and I'm beginning to see some of it: she wants to share. And she says thank you. And as C2 said, that has to come from me. They listen to everything you say. They watch everything you do. When the annoying guy comes at the gate, how does Mommy deal with that situation?

C1: Can I just pick up on something you just said. We have children, and we come to church. We don't have the numbers to do specific youth programs for the different age groups. Should not the parents sit together and think of a plan to keep the youngsters occupied and interested? We can come up with the answers collectively.

C4: No, I agree. What I'm saying, is the background that we are coming from, is not a Christian background. I don't know how to instil certain things in my child. I don't know what will just go over their heads. I don't want to become a preaching Mom, either. You know, that picture of Sunday-best with black book in the hand. So, I don't mind doing it with other parents, but to get a sense of direction from the congregation, will really help me a lot. It will never work when the church is doing it, because I need to do this at home. How often are my children exposed to the church compared to how much they're exposed to home.

And what I found when I became a Christian, people give you a lot of books. And they sign you up for newsletters, and you're bombarded with all these propaganda. And, what is the truth? So, I don't want to just give them everything that looks interesting and find out later along the line that this is actually not quite right. So, we also have to be very careful with the kind of resources that we use.

C2: I think it will be a good idea if the parents can form a cell group. I know there are issues and that the groups are not meeting now, but they can help each other by

meeting regularly and doing a book or a teaching that will give support for their role as parents.

C3: We are also not currently involved in a cell group, but some of our friends are, in their church. And they say the children love it. They are part of the discussion early on in the evening, and then they go do their thing while the adults still do some Bible study. But cell group has become their social structure. That is where the kids learn to be part of a Christian family.

INT: Tell me about faith practices that happen regularly in your home.

C4: I have my regular prayer time. But I mean, that is for me personally. They are still too young to participate.

C2: My husband and I we read the Bible on a regular basis. We are very active in our Bible study, looking things and places up. And this is early, every morning.

C1: We don't have television in our house. We're unconnected. So, instead of television, we have DVD's, spiritual music. It's a choice we made to fill our home with good things, not negative things.

C2: My children are already grown up, and we don't do faith practices together anymore. But I try to sow through my example. So, when I go through a really stressful time, I will go into my room, and put the music real loud and pray, and cry and work through the issue. And they are aware of that. They know. And when I come out of that room, I'm smiling, and that's what they want to see. That my relationship with the Lord helps me through the hard times. This is what Jesus did for me.

C5: It's like in our home, I know I need to set the example. If I don't say we are going to church on Sunday, nobody else will take the lead. So, as the Christian mother of the house, I need to be the one taking the lead.

C2: And what I sense with the teenagers: they love debates. They love to question stuff, and try out their wits against yours. They will try to catch you at what you are saying. Even among themselves, they will sometimes go very deep into the discussion. And they will look for answers, examples from the Bible that can help them win the argument.

- C1: I can think of something that can be a good spiritual habit. You know, when you come to church as a family, to take some kind of responsibility as a family. For instance, to put out the chairs, or prepare the coffee and tea. Not that it becomes a chore, but this is your role. Just take on one task as a family. It not only gives the people you help a warm feeling, but it gives you a warm feeling. And I think your kids will relate good to this: we have a purpose for being at church. They need us. And they get to meet the other people, and they socialise with the others.
- C5: Yes, because the small one is very shy. I took him to children's church, but he doesn't make friends easily, you know.
- INT: How often do you eat a meal together round a table as family?
- C2: During the week it isn't really happening, because the guys are all over. But during Sunday or even public holidays, we do. And also, you got to remember, our eldest has got a girlfriend, and wheels. There is no amount of food that can keep him from running off.
- C3: We aren't that keen to sit around a table, but as a family we do gel. We talk a lot. Sometimes in the evening on the stoep. We will just sit and tell of our day and how it went, and so. You know, our fears, and what we want to accomplish in life.
- C1: In our house, what would normally happen around a table, happens in the kitchen. They will just pop into the kitchen and start to talk about stuff round the stove.
- C5: I must say, my husband puts in a lot of effort with the boys. He will always sit with them. So, sometimes I just sit with them, while they are eating, because I would like to eat later. But, like C2 said, it happens mostly on public holidays or Sundays.
- C4: I'm a single parent, so it's very difficult. But I find with my older one she loves it. When I sit down to eat, she will always be there. Even if she has eaten already, she will sit and take something with me. My mom was always a eat-on-the-run kind of person. She was always busy. She would literally stand and eat. So, I'm trying to put the one on my lap, the other one in the feeding chair, and my mom in a chair.

- INT: Say there is a new couple who brings their baby to be baptized, and the congregation would ask you to mentor them somewhat. What would be the one or two things that you would tell them that worked for you?
- C2: I come from a very staunch Catholic background. So I have done catholic catechism, very faithfully until confirmation. And I did the same for my children, but they said afterwards: we didn't get that, we don't see why. So, it is very difficult. It was after I did the Alpha course that I realised the most important thing I could do, is my conduct.
- C4: You have to live the faith. You know I am starting with my children to show them the value of caring. If she had her birthday, the next day, to take the left over cake and food, and to go hand it out to people sitting on the side of the road, looking for work. Also when people come knocking at the gate, she is encouraged to also give them some little thing, like a bottle of water. So, she knows, to share. I'm training her to live like Jesus.
- C3: And how you handle life. If you become stressed, the reason is that your faith is not strong enough for this situation. So, you have to man up. Grow in the faith so that your children can see how to handle stress. They should see: I have issues, life is not moonshine and roses. But Jesus is real, and I take my stuff to Him, and He provides, He helps.
- C4: Yes, I cry, but I also cry out to the Lord. And then I'm OK. But you know, C2 came in one morning, and shared things with me, and told me the thing she loves about this congregation, is people taking time to talk to her. And that is really helpful. I am going through a very difficult time in my life, right now, but when I come to church, this is family. I don't have to hide what I'm feeling, I can say it. If any new person comes in and feels that love, it changes them. If they take the time to ask how you are, and then wait for the answer. That is precious.
- C3: And not only adult to adult, but even adult to child. To show caring commitment.
- C2: Yes, we have a black family that started to come a while ago. At first it was only him, who came for about a year. And now he brought his family from Tanzania, and it's a daughter and a son and his wife. I think the son is nine years old, or so. At first he would always sit with his family, but then one day, I said to him, there is a children's church, would you like to take your son to experience it, and if he likes it, he can stay. And he has never looked back. He absolutely loves it. Every Sunday that child comes running, straight to children's church.

- C1: And the dad told me, he came back to this congregation, because whoever greeted him that first Sunday at the door, greeted him like a real friend. And that meant the world to him.
- INT: If you could start over with your child. If you could turn back the clock and have the knowledge that you now have, what would you do differently?
- C5: I would read them the Bible every single minute. I would instil in them to go to church every single Sunday. That's what I would do differently. Because I lost that totally. When we first moved to Jo'burg, I couldn't find a church where I felt comfortable, so we ended up going nowhere. I missed an important part of their growing up, doing it right.
- C2: I think for me, I would be more part of the church. There was a long time when I would just go to church on Easter or Christmas. I would change that.
- C1: When I grew up, my mother had to hold down three jobs just to provide for us. She couldn't be there with us, because she was always working. And I had to go to church on my own. As a boy, one of the worst things was I had to walk down two blocks to go to church on a Sunday. I always wanted to be part of one of the families where I can sit next to my mother in church. I would make sure that we do it together.
- C4: For me, I haven't brought my baby to church yet. It's just that it is so difficult, to get them ready. I don't want them in the back room. They take time to prepare, and this one wants to comb her hair, and the other one needs to be fed right now, and it's hectic. So, I know I need to put in more effort. They must develop the rhythm. This is what we do on Sundays. This is where we are safe. Our spiritual home.

Focus Group Interview C (Second Session), on 18/05/2016 – ENG

INT: There is a lot of drop-off of young people leaving the church. Either after confirmation or even before confirmation. Do you see this, do you fear this? How do you feel when you think your child may just walk away from the faith?

C9: My views on this question are the following: I think the children are exposed to a lot of things that are interesting and alluring, and not all of that may fall under the auspices of a disciplined Christian family. So, sometimes the temptations that the world has to offer, needs to be sampled.

C6: I also think some children are highly intelligent, and they want to think for themselves. They do not accept that the older people know what is best for them. They want to find out for themselves. I think they need to find their own way. My experience with this is that some will leave the faith, in a manner of speaking. Like the prodigal son. But in the end they will meet Jesus again somewhere along the line. Some of them do. But we as parents must always make sure that we love them, no matter what.

C8: In my business I employ a lot of these young adult type twentysomethings. Young professionals as well, and I certainly see that they are exploring and experimenting with lots of identity issues and philosophy and religion. Even in my own life. There comes a time in your life that you want the adventure and the freedom, and sometimes you think you have to do that without God. But it's not necessarily a bad thing, because when people come to the conclusion that this is the path and they want to be back on the right track, then they are committed.

C6: Yes, I think you're right. It's as if they have to do that. They need to go see what the world has to offer. And we just need to be there for them, and love them, so that they can always run back when they need us. But, I mean, they take their own life and future in their own hands, and I feel, we need to make peace with that fact. My own son is a very clever guy, and he challenges my thinking sometimes. And he is now only fourteen. So, I guess we have to embrace it and walk with them.

C7: I think I was one of those stats. So, after, high school – we were four kids in the house. All of us went to rez after school. And all of a sudden you are outside of your parent's house, and all of a sudden you are like: I can make my own decisions. And my parents were like very conservative, Dutch Reformed, church-going folks. But as soon as we left the house, we stopped going to church. All four of us. Even all through my student years we stopped going to church. It's only

now that our lives are starting to balance out, that we are starting to get involved again. But we went back to church out of our own will. That is our own commitment.

- C8: Same here. When I was still a teenager in the house, I remember lying in bed on a Sunday morning, hoping that my parents have over-slept, so that we could miss church. It never happened, but I remember that hope. And then, when I went to university, I could make that decision for myself. Luckily, they had an evening service that was nice to go to.
- INT: OK, so all of you had this experience of an exploration phase. Of going away from church and not be under this strict religious compulsion. What I would like to know, is, what brought you back?
- C7: I think, for me, my faith was pretty much settled deep in me. So, I was going to come back. But I definitely see some of my friends, they also came from good Christian homes, their parents were committed Christians, and they drifted. They are nowhere now.
- C8: It depends how strong your faith was before that phase, I think.
- C9: This is the beauty of the uniqueness of people and the different life experience they have had. I mean, as a child I grew up in an interesting home. We used to go to church, and my parents them moved away from the religious social life. My elderly parents these days are not church going at all. So, neither is my brother and sister. So, why do I follow this path? I think it boils down to this: every person must make a personal decision, at some point in your life, if you will accept Jesus. The Word says He is a rock, and you either step up with Him, or you are crushed under Him.
- C6: That's a hard thing you are saying. I'm not even sure that I have made that decision by now. Sometimes you think you are there, and then life happens. But I mean, I am trying to get on that path, you know. I want to have that peace in my own life, but also in the lives of my kids. And I know, I cannot give it to them, if I don't have it myself. My experience was, when I was really down and out, and had nowhere else to go, I found solace in Him.
- C8: But you know, with the Lord, He will not let you go. You can't run away from Him forever. He's going to be there wherever you turn. I see it in the youngsters working with me. They can't escape Him. I spoke with my son on the phone before I came, and he asked what I was coming to do at church, and I said it is to help parents with naughty children, but I don't have to worry about you. And he said: "No, you don't have to worry, dad". The base is there, but I know

eventually he needs to come to that crossroad where he needs to decide. Now he still has the faith of his parents, and sooner or later he will rebel. And I mean, when you rebel, you are always against religion. That is the ultimate rebellion. And if we give them enough love and support, I think, then the hope is that they will know where to go.

C9: The tragic thing is, some are down and out, and then they have nowhere to go. They don't have love and support, only judgement and rejection, and I think, then they will never return. Then they're not welcome at home anymore, and the church - they won't go there. That is for good people.

C7: I also think that. Some people think they are not welcome in the church. I mean, maybe they co-habituate with someone, or got a tattoo, or just, they feel as outsiders. They don't know all our rituals and ways. The Alpha course, I did that. There was a guy who said he wasn't in the church for like twenty years. And just because the course was on the church premises, he was totally intimidated. He sat in his car for like twenty minutes, and if somebody didn't come and fetch him at his car, he would have driven away. Some people don't know how to come back.

INT: Bring your children to mind. They are currently in a process of faith formation that will hopefully lead to a mature faith by, let's say, age 16. How would you describe that process? What are the building blocks that are part of this process?

C9: I think it's easy to give an academic answer, but in reality, this is a difficult question. You know, we, as parents don't get it right all the time. We do the best we can, but the fact is there is strife and all types of issues we are facing daily. Kids pick this up. Life happens. We don't get it right most of the time. But at least we need to give them a sense of God loves them so much, no matter what. And that's where they get their strength from.

C8: And it's hard to convince a 6 or 8 year old that Jesus lived and died for them, and that the Bible, this ancient book, has all the wisdom for their lives today. It such an abstract thing to them.

C6: Building blocks of the faith are to do the things that children of God ought to do, I think. And it's not going to church all the time, necessarily, but I think praying, showing them how to deal with life. But saying this, I am convicting myself because I know that as dad, I don't always make the grade. I think we fail our kids more often than we think. Maybe not intentionally, but through our actions.

- C7: For us now, I mean, my firstborn is two. So, it's much more about routine than anything else. We introduce her to reading out of the Bible, praying, singing songs. Even if she doesn't understand it all, but she knows that Jesus lives in her heart. She doesn't know what it means, but she knows that. And some nights I will ask her if she would like to pray, and she says no. Or she will start eating before we prayed. But it's just that routine. Eventually she will understand more and more. Kids learn by example.
- C9: That song comes to mind: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. That good enough to know. That's so powerful.
- C8: But it's also the example. Especially when children are small. They can pick it up: some things are very important to my parents. Even if I started eating, they still feel the need to pray. That's example. The routine communicates importance. And then later on seeing is believing. And that is why, I think, church is so important. It creates a healthy environment. They see others share this importance for things spiritual. This is the way to go.
- C7: But also the association. My daughter loves the singing at church. So when I told her I was coming to church, she immediately asked: are you going to sing? So, they enjoy something here.
- INT: In forming faith in children, then, what do you think, is the role the parent need to play as part of this process?
- C9: I think it is important that children realize that you as parents are also human, and fallible. You also need to ask God for guidance. You are his child, but you are not perfect.
- C8: My wife grew up with this. Every morning her mother would wake her and asked her: where are you going to do today, my daughter? And then she had to answer: I am going to be a human being. Then the mother would ask: And what does human beings do? To which she answered: make mistakes, ma. That's how she started every day.
- C6: And I think our kids also learn from the mistakes we as parents make. How many of us can say that we noticed things that adults did when we were kids that we deliberately rejected. We didn't want to do that kind of thing. The sad thing is, we do the same to our kids. They see stuff that they don't want to emulate. I mean, kids don't come with manuals. Parents sometimes get in wrong and wound their kids in the process. But they learn from it. That's part of life.

- C9: It is like, when you read some of these books: How to raise a son, or you look these nice Christian movies, it's not realistic. Some households don't have money, others have various problems in the home like alcoholism and things like that. I know of a family where the son has tried many times to take his own life. Life is complicated. Nobody has got it down pat. So, I think we need to pray a lot. And with the church, there needs to be a sense of you are not judged, you are welcome. Someone who is poor, or someone who has problems, must not feel judged. We need to exude friendliness.
- C8: It's hard to do. I mean. If someone comes in here who is beating his wife, to show that you love him and not judge him, that's hard to do.
- INT: OK, we talked about the role of the parents. How about the role that the congregation needs to play in the formation of faith in your children.
- C9: Yes, that is exactly that. Those people with the son who tried to commit suicide, they need the support of a congregation of people who care. I mean, they struggle. Or a mother who has got cancer. People need to visit, and talk and pray for other people. I think church is the only place where we can create such a community: where people are not being taken for a ride or abused.
- C7: As he said, the parents must be honest and open, and they mustn't hide behind the front of Christianity. So, like the whole congregation is looking at the pastor in front, and some people are waiting for him to make a mistake. And kids will do that even more. They are quick to spot insincerity. You can't tell them stories. It must be authentic, real, genuine faith on our side.
- C8: I think, also the word: discussion, should be in there somewhere. Ordinary discussions. We talk about life, and what happened at school today, and how things were unfair, and others got away with stuff. I think in many churches you are welcome at the door, but you are lonely on the inside. We need to talk a lot. Discussions between parents can help a lot. There must be sharing and encouraging, and discussion on faith issues. Not only adult to adult, but adults towards children also.
- C6: That leads to availability. We must be available to help and support one another. I must make time to listen to you, or to go visit so that we can have that discussion.
- C7: I also think that the kids coming to church, they are not just kids running around here, they must be viewed as part of this faith community. I remember when I was young we had to go to church and then to Sunday school and that was such a long time. Now, I don't want that for my kids.

But if they can come to church and have a good worship experience, it's like church and Sunday school is combined. So, I think church must encourage parents to bring their kids, that they are welcome that the kids will also enjoy the service. It is for them as well.

- C9: There is also the danger of chasing your kids out of church if you ask them to do too much. I'll give you a practical example in our house. I feel called to the English congregation, but my wife prefers the Afrikaans service. And the kids come in the evenings to Sunday school. So, we are divided. If we make them come to the morning service as well, I know that they will not want to be here. It's just too much for those young ones. It's just, families are different. We need to accommodate that.
- C8: God made us wonderfully diverse. None of us are exactly the same. And I think it would be arrogant to say one size must fit all. And if the congregation is an invitational place, if there is openness and love, people of all walks of life will come to this church. We certainly have that here. Nobody must feel like a square peg in a round hole. Like in your case, it's ok if dad goes to the English service and the rest of the family to the Afrikaans service. Or it's ok if one member of a family comes to church because the others have not embraced the faith yet. And when the rest of the family by chance end up here, it's ok. There is no judgement. It's a challenge that I don't know how you put it in policy, but that is when God's love overwhelms us. Then we can do it.
- C7: And the kids need to sense that too. If they know they are loved and welcomed, they will want to come. Unfortunately we sometimes force them: you will go to church because I say so. Then there's resentment.
- INT: How will you know if you are successful in the formation of your child's faith? Are there some goals you want to achieve?
- C9: I think if a child prays on his own. Even without the guidance of his parents. If he is faced with a difficult choice and he makes the right choice, not because his parents told him to, but because that is based on his convictions. When he exudes care and love to his peers, which is hard to do when you're a child. You can see it.
- C6: But then you get introverts. They don't like to communicate. And then there are kids who are very intellectual minded. They'd rather read a book and they don't want to socialize.

- C7: I think when you talk to a child and you hear about the challenges they are faced with at school, and how they handle it. And then also, the kind of friends you bring with to home. When I was in high school I had one or two friends that I knew my mom didn't like. But deep down I actually knew they were not the best for me.
- C8: I think the one thing that stands out is caring. You know, kindness towards other human beings. People who suffer, poor people. Strangers. Because that is not natural. When a child is kind towards another child that tells me he has a different heart. God is love. Maybe you get some people who are genetically born with kindness, but most teenagers are not like that. Together with humility and respect. Those traits do show that this person is different. And even at age 9 or 10 you can see that.
- C7: And that thing of inner joy. Even an introvert has his own way of showing I have joy and peace. I'm not motivated by a basic unhappiness in life or a basic discontentment.
- C8: I would also say when their point of reference changes. When they are not motivated by this one said that or that one said this, but rather that the Bible says this, and that governs my behavior. This is more faith language. They talk about God and the Bible, and stuff.
- C9: And sometimes it comes out of nowhere. I remember a while ago I was faced with a daunting challenge, and my ten year old came to me and said: Dad, you're big and strong. You know where your strength comes from. From a ten year old, that is deep.
- INT: If the color of the home is yellow, and the color of the church is red, where do you see orange – that place where ministry purposefully impacts the home? Do you see orange happening in you congregation from time to time?
- C9: It's hard for orange to emerge when yellow is closed to red. In today's day and age families are very closed. We don't engage, we don't come to functions. We are very self-reliant.
- C8: I guess the invitation must always be open for the yellow to rather join the red. Some yellow won't allow red close to them. It disrupts their lives. But the invitation must always be there: come join us. Be part of orange.

- C7: I honestly think the church does try, but I also honestly think we haven't created orange yet. I know there are church functions, but we didn't attend. People are not stepping up. Some households know they need this, but it's almost as if they are too proud to reach out and ask for help.
- C8: Maybe orange is where the church can help and assist families at their point of need. But I know, when things are tough, families close rank. They don't want anyone to know they are going through tough times. And the church can only reach out if the yellow allows them into their space.
- C6: OK, that is all about help and issues, but even on the social side, people are slow to engage. Maybe because they are just busy, or they are tired because of being busy. And I know I am one of those people. When I have a weekend, I don't want to come to a dad-and-son event at church. I just want to be at home.
- INT: Tell me about faith practices that happen regularly in your home.
- C7: My daughter loves singing. So we have some CD's with Jesus-songs on it. So after reading out of the Bible, we get to sing! But even that, reading out of the Bible is a challenge. Her Bible has a picture and a few lines about that story in the picture, and it is seldom that we actually get to finish those lines. But you have to start somewhere. And then she wants to sing, and she and her dad go all out on that one. That is what she enjoys. That and prayer which is like a one liner. And she has her nursery rhyme prayer that she says before meals.
- C8: I remember, when they were two years old. It was not the information they get from us reading the Bible, but rather the act of spending time with the Bible, that mattered. Later on the stories start to get important.
- C9: Prayer at suppertime is important for us too. My kids are a bit older, and we are at that point where they prefer to do their own thing. But we will talk about it on a regular basis. I always listen to Christian music in my car, and we often talk about that. And our example. They see us reading our Bibles and praying, and that. Our family, we are very individual. Each has his own way of connecting with the Lord.
- C6: We have tried that for a while, to do home devotions together, but it started to get uncomfortable. I guess we started too late, it never became a habit for us. So they know I read my Bible and pray. But we don't do that together. May I should try again. But again, if you are

uncomfortable with something, you will always find reasons not to do it. Maybe that is the reason for the drop-off: too many children grew up in homes where this was a very uncomfortable thing, and it was forced.

C7: And I think your routine should not change when there are other people around. When we have guests, we still pray before our meals. Or when you're out at a restaurant, the same applies. So, kids start to think, are you shy about your faith?

C8: Even what we watch on television. We have had that a few times, where we pause what is showing and ask ourselves do we really want to see this? You know, when the morals are dipping.

INT: How often do you eat a meal together round a table as family?

C6: That is the wrong question to ask. We seldom do that.

C9: Same here, my work keeps me till late. So, I can't just leave everything and go. And the kids cannot wait till after eight to eat. So it doesn't work with us. But on weekends we can do that.

C7: Our two year old. We had her in her plastic chair in front of the television, and her eating habits were no good. So didn't eat properly, and she was playing with her food. So I said to my husband: let's start eating around the table. Let's put her at the table. And we could see how happy she is. All of a sudden she is part of the conversation. So, definitely we found that this is wonderful for us.

INT: Say there is a new couple who brings their baby to be baptized, and the congregation would ask you to mentor them somewhat. What would be the one or two things that you would tell them that worked for you?

C7: We are that young family. I would definitely say the child likes routine. Just make sure there is a good daily routine. And the other thing is, she likes the singing. That is fun for her. So, the faith is not boring. Look where there is much enjoyment and develop that.

C8: I'm stumped. I can tell them a lot of things not to do.

- C6: Yes, for me it borders on arrogance. To tell others what to do. I don't know.
- C9: I would say, just love them. Even when the hiccups come, and you get angry, just love them and show it. You don't know how long you have them. Your example of love, that is what will stick.
- C7: And people must know that mistakes will happen. Nobody is perfect. So don't expect them to be perfect. And expect them to make mistakes and then help them through it. I know I'm responsible for my child's spiritual journey, and I would like to make sure she navigates all of life's problems.
- INT: Name one thing that you say: if our congregation could do that, it will be a great help to me. What would that one thing be?
- C7: My one is easy. I know my child is too young for the children's church. So, we need a toddler group. I'm willing to help there, but I don't think I ever listened to a sermon right through to the end, yet.
- C9: I would like a manual. If there is a platform for a mom or dad where we can ask for guidance, it would be good to get some info. And we talk about specifics. Growing up pains. How to handle that with wisdom.
- C8: I agree. Specific content, like my son is depressed, or my daughter is hanging out with the wrong friends. When you're in that situation, you can't see the wood from the trees, so it will help to have that forum where you can ask for objectivity.
- C6: Even a knowledgeable speaker who comes, maybe once a year and just gives advice that you can take home and use some of it.
- INT: If you could start over with your child. If you could turn back the clock and have the knowledge that you now have, what would you do differently?
- C6: As a younger man I was less patient. I suppose that is one thing I would change. I was more feisty, you know on matters of principle. And, depending on your spouse, that could be good or bad. But I know I caused a lot of hurt because of that.

C9: Oh, I know what you mean. If a taxi comes and drives in front of you. It's so easy to flip your lid. And I would not like them to have the same problem, because that is the wrong route to go.

C7: I think, just enjoy life together. You know, make time to play and eat and celebrate life. Life is short. I can't believe how fast my daughter has grown, so I realize I want to make the most of the time available to us.

## Structured interview A – English

INT: Do you see the drop-off after confirmation? What percentage would you estimate falls away from church, and would you please share your thoughts on why this is happening?

AP: Yes, children are definitely falling away. There's a huge percentage that falls away. I can only say that I also do this. I think, one of the main reasons is that our congregation is so numbers driven. What has happened in the past is, that, in their confirmation year, people pitch from all over, and they make the biggest promises. Then they sit here for a year, and our members say: Hallelujah, Amen, there are 23 children in confirmation class!! But when you look back, you'll see that only about eight or nine have actually gone the whole way of catechism. So, for a lot of them, it's only a show, and now they and their parents are on the books, and when we look at our statistics we see a lot of them who are not involved in anything. This is the reason why I urged the church board to pass a resolution that you cannot enter the confirmation class without at least doing the previous year also. That is the rule now. I used to see this whole thing in a very positive light: we can seize the opportunity because it is still a big deal for parents that their children be confirmed. But they only want the shortest route.

INT: If you can make a wild guess, how many children in the past couple of years fell away after confirmation?

AP: Last year there was a small group, but the year before that was one of the bigger groups. There were about 20 in the class, but now I know my congregation. About half of them came from somewhere else. Now, I do believe that we must meet those needs in a positive way, but I also believe that we should not make it cheap. It's a fine balance to strive for. I don't want to be that pastor that they talk about when they say: Don't worry, pastor \_\_\_\_\_ he will do their confirmation.

INT: Can you list all your youth activities for me? What is happening concerning youth in your congregation?

AP: At this stage not much is happening. There was a time when lots more was happening. We had a youth event on Tuesdays with 85 children involved. Last year we still retained a candidate pastor as a youth worker. But then, all the children that showed up, were not necessarily from our congregation. What I find now, I mean, my own daughter is in matric, is that the schools make it very hard for our children. Our challenge is to make all the stuff happen on a Sunday morning. Because, by Sunday afternoon everyone is driving

off to somewhere to go and visit someone. So, our aim is to do more than just Sunday school on Sunday morning. We want to involve children in different ways. So we have children's church, that is one of the things we are now developing. Previously it was done by the guy who had nothing else to do, but now we have seven moms who have their children there, and are very excited about doing this ministry. So they are doing stuff, for instance: one of these moms and her husband taught the little children a song one Sunday. And they put on nice little hats, and just after collection was taken, they marched the children into the service and they sang their song to the congregation. These are the type of things we would like to develop more.

INT: If a new family with their small child should decide to become part of your congregation, and that child is here for sixteen year, what is the current process that is in place to help that child develop mature faith? How would you describe this process?

AP: There was a big gap here. I felt that the kids came very willy-nilly to Sunday school: if you want to come, fine, if you don't want to come, fine. And then it climaxes into the confirmation class where the pastor was somewhat strict on discipline and attendance – you have to give a reason for not attending. That was a very negative situation. Now we have some younger adults who are involved in the leadership of the Sunday school. These guys did the rounds: they have visited other churches but for whatever reasons they are back. And they say that our system has been too lax. We need to know who each and every child is. They want to take us back to the old-school way. And somewhat related to this: we have not found Sunday school material that excites us yet.

INT: Do you experience the silo-effect: where we want to separate members into age-related groups and minister to them separately? And if you do, what do you perceive as the pro's and con's?

AP: I myself believe that we need to be together in one Sunday service. My point is it is like a Christmas tree: we all sit around one Christmas tree: grandpa and grandma, mom and dad and all the children. We are one family. But I think we are still not doing enough for our children. The organist we have at present, she doesn't have the time to practice with children in the evenings, but we want to develop a children's ensemble. That is one of the ways that we get children involved, we need an ensemble. We have some high school students who are also singing in the group. We even went so far as to appoint a second organist: one who can also play the piano and practice in the evenings. So one can play the organ, and the other one the piano. Sunday service must be one big family event. But I will not close the children's church. But it must not become a place where people dump their babies. I heard of this one mom who brought her infant with the bottle and just

handed it over. No, children's church is not that! It must also be church, and the children must also participate in the activities.

INT: If the color of the home is yellow, and the color of the church is red, where do you see orange happening? In other words where does ministry purposefully engage with the home?

AP: I see this in families. Parents are taking responsibility. I often see this, for instance on a Saturday at the school's rugby event: the parents who are there supporting their children, those are the parents of this congregation. They are with their children. And our family fest at church, the children are involved. They have their own little stalls. Even the confirmation class has theirs. In the past we had some older church board members who had to approve every move, but it has changed a lot. We planted this garden in front of the building, and we didn't ask anybody for permission. I'm not saying we should do as we please, but sometimes we must just take the initiative. So, on Easter we served the communion from there. Some said that we should just get the kids to hand out the elements, but I told them: no, it is a sacrament. Let's do this properly. Let a deacon do this.

There is a story concerning this: there came a family with a 10 year old son, and when he saw how we are going to do the communion he asked if he can also participate. But his dad was strict on this and said: no, you will have communion when you are confirmed. But he asked his mom why he could not do it that evening. So, she asked him why he would like to. And he answered that he also wanted to have part of Jesus' body and blood, and he explained it nicely to her, whereupon she answered: I see you understand, yes, you may have communion tonight.

INT: How do you measure if you are successful in developing the faith of children? Do you have specific goals in mind?

AP: That is difficult. How do we measure success? In the past we used to measure the amount of people and money involved. I would say the thing that excites me, is that the younger families we have in the congregation, are drawing other young families to also come and join. They talk. And some of them were at charismatic churches, but for one reason or another, they came home here with us. We have fifteen new families attending now.

INT: If time and money were not obstacles, what would you dream for families in your congregation?

AP: Do as we please? Well, that's kind of what is happening at present. At present I'm acting against my typical nature. I leave them to do their thing. I'm giving more freedom for them to do their ministry. I just don't want them to drift away. I actually preached on this this past Sunday: Nathaniel. Why did he get so excited? He realized the Lord saw him. Even in John, the woman at the well, the Lord saw her. And this is my theology: the Lord always sees us. He sees your family. The family is small-church. I have been preaching this for over three years now.

INT: Back to the question. I asked for big dreams, but what about smaller dreams? What would be the next step you would like to give in family-ministry?

AP: I think it is a practical issue. For instance the ensemble. I would like to develop this, but you cannot just sit and sing. We need to practice beforehand. We have two teenagers who are very gifted when it comes to delivering a public presentation. A guy and a girl. Now the other Sunday the guy presented a piece written by Nathaniel that showed a picture of the world we live in. It was beautiful, and this guy is still in grade 10. I would like to see that we develop such gifts in the services. Even the old people clapped their hands.

INT: If you would again have a one year old baby in your house, and you need to raise him in this congregation, how would you change the ministry to youth?

AP: I would want there to be more activities for young people. I do believe we can do this. We have opportunities. Some of the young adults are very eager, but we are not getting this up and running. And it bothers me, we used to have stuff like that. So, yea, we do too little for our youth. The families, yes, stuff is happening there, but not for our youth.

INT: If we could label the current model of faith formation: "church-centered, and family-supported", how would a model look like that is labeled: "Family-centered, and church-supported"?

AP: Each person experiences this differently. I don't want to separate church from family. I still don't know where we are moving to, but I know we don't just want to do a lot of cool stuff for the kids. We have had some Sunday school materials that was very funky and all that, but the content was poor. And this lead to a situation where the grade 8 group of this year cannot even pray the Our Father prayer from memory. They just don't know

their Bible. But there are some, you can see, the parents are doing home devotions. Our confirmation class is smaller, but these guys want to be here. So, there is definitely some depth here. Out of the ten children involved last year, all of them have been part of the church from early childhood. And their parents are involved. When we had our church fete, their families were very involved. I would like to develop this. This one guy has a farm just outside our town, and I would like to take families there, for bike riding, and fishing and eating and spending time together. This is my idea of family ministry.

Structured interview B on 18/04/2016 – English

INT: Let's talk about confirmation and the drop-off that occurs afterwards. From your perspective, do you experience this phenomenon?

BP: Until two years ago we had a brilliant youth worker, and he handled confirmation, and those kids did not go astray. He had good relationships with all of them. Even now many of them are still involved in the church. He has built a lot of spirituality into them. He was very effective with the teenagers. In his time here, they did not drop off. And he involved them, they helped manage his youth camps, and they served in a practical way. Yes, there were those who left to go study elsewhere, but of the kids that stayed, few dropped out of the ministry. The key to this was relationships. I myself probably had a confirmation class 15 years ago. He did all of that. At present we have a crisis concerning our youth. Recently we employed a new youth worker, so I had to jump in and do the confirmation class. But I think it is going well. Have you ever heard of a confirmation class that is growing? But to answer your question, this past two years we have seen a lot of drop-off.

INT: Could you list all the youth activities happening in your congregation – from small till age 16.

BP: At present we have a difficult situation. We have merged with another congregation, we have moved our premises, and there are some of our facilities that are still rented by a private school. Thus we do not have all the space we would like to have and to use for our needs. On Sundays we have a baby room, for 0 – 2 year-olds. There is no ministry there, just baby care. We also have a toddler class for ages 3 – 5. This happens during the Sunday service, and they have a basic lesson and then playtime.

Then, for our primary school pupils, we have children's church, until grade 6. The Americans have a useful divide: they have middle school for grades 7, 8 and 9. We have also found that the grade 7's are too small for the older kids, and too old to fit with the smaller kids. So, we have this symbolic action, were we walk them over to join the high school kids, and then they know this is where they belong now. So, we have a paid person working with the grade 1 – 6 group in the mornings. We use the template of Willow Creek's Promiseland. First they have a large group Bible lesson, and then they split up into smaller groups, each with a young leader. We had a camp for them, this past week-end. Many of them are still too small to sleep over, so they come on Friday evening, and then some sleep over, and then we continue on the Saturday. And once a month on a Friday afternoon we have what we used to know as 'Kinderkrans'. She calls it V-kids. Then they do action learning. That is what we do with our primary school pupils.

With secondary school pupils, we are not in a good place at the moment. We have a youth ministry on Friday evenings, but it is not going well. That excellent youth worker we used to have, started with his own meetings on Friday evenings, and he is pulling our youngsters. But we

will continue on Friday evenings. What we do, is a combination of social and spiritual activities. They work out a nice program. On Sunday mornings the youth have their own service and praise and worship and teaching, and then they split up into discussion groups. I have confirmation class on Sunday afternoons.

We also do a lot of camps. We used to be part of a group who did Sea camps. We also used to have a winter camp, in the Free State, next to a river in June! And the kids loved it. There is also the confirmation class week-end. So, the children's church is running well. Our ministry to our teens, that is in shambles at the moment, but we are picking it up.

INT: If a new couple would join your congregation, and their child is going to be here until age 16. What system is in place to help that child reach mature faith? What are the building blocks for his faith formation?

BP: Honestly, I don't know. Well, you have heard what we are doing at present. Maybe it's a little thumb suck, but we hope our activities will lead to that point. We have seen with the smaller children, that they have little knowledge of the Bible stories. So, we aim to develop some Bible knowledge, and also that they would learn some key verses from the heart. They have this motivational system where you earn 'paddaponde'. If you know your Bible verse for the week, you receive some 'paddaponde' and at the end of the quarter, they can come and spend it on sweets and stuff. It motivates children to come, and to get to know their Bible better. I see this in my youngest child. She often comes home and talk about things that I myself or my wife did not talk about earlier. Then I realize: she must have learned this at church. So, they focus on typical stuff like how to pray, how to have a quiet time, memorizing Scripture, get to know the Bible stories. With the teens, it's different. We focus on life issues. And we keep on stressing that it's not about religion, but about a relationship. But if you ask me whether we have a systematic plan in place, no, we don't. We hope to develop it one day.

INT: The silo-effect, do you experience it? Obviously there are pro's and con's to have separate ministry for all the different age groups, but do you experience this as detrimental in your congregation?

BP: It is definitely a reality. And we know we must fight it at all times. But you have your children's ministry, and then you have your teen ministry, and then you have your twenty somethings, and sometimes they are really very independent. Because each guy is operating on his own. I think the answer to this, is better communication. It may help that we can at least know what the others are doing. So, on Mondays we have a staff meeting just to see what we are all doing this coming week, and what happened the previous week and where are the pains and aces. Yes, we do experience the silo-effect, and it has a negative impact, because it lessens the cohesion. Quite often things happen here that the others are clueless about.

INT: If the color of the home is yellow, and the color of the congregation is red, where do you see orange happening? That place where ministry purposefully engages with families?

BP: I don't think it is happening. We don't have orange in our congregation. With our children's church we often send out a letter to the parents saying today's lesson was about, say healing, and this is how you can continue the conversation. But intentional family ministry is not happening. We have yellow, we have red, but not orange.

Maybe in the old days the pastor did visitation, and the whole family was involved, but I don't do visitation.

INT: How do you measure success in youth ministry? How do you know if you are aiming the right way?

BP: The standard way in the past was to count the heads. But we don't do that. We are looking for children who commit their lives to the Lord. That is a win. That is how we keep score: people coming to the Lord, and developing assurance of faith. Many of our children come from Christian homes, but they never had the opportunity to commit their lives to the Lord. So, each one who comes to repentance is a win. So, we look for lives that are growing in the faith, lives that are changed. And you can see it: children talking differently from what they used to, thinking differently, and acting differently. That is a win. And even in the way they begin to pray, and to start reading the Bible out of their own volition. With the teens we often see that they will start ministering to each other, and they get involved in each other's needs.

INT: If time and money was no concern, what would you like to do in terms of family ministry in your congregation?

BP: I would say to have someone who's sole focus is on doing family ministry. Someone primarily appointed for the task to focus on families and empower them for faith formation at home. I do realize, that this is not a one man show. But you need to have a champion, who keeps the others mindful of families, and who creates programs. In this manner we appointed someone for children's ministry, and someone for teen's ministry, and someone as worship leader. I would appoint someone for family ministry.

INT: I'm hearing some kind of hierarchy. You have certain key functions in your mind linked to priorities. How do you fix those priorities?

BP: I think there are 5 key jobs, three of those are outsourced to additional team members: children, teens, and worship. If any of those are not properly in place, your congregation will fail. Through the years we have worked hard to keep those three strong.

INT: If you could start over with your children in this congregation. If your firstborn was now one year old and you knew her faith would be formed by this congregation. What would you do differently?

BP: I may sound somewhat complacent here, but we are very happy the way things are. The lady doing our children's ministry started here working with the toddlers. That was her calling. She taught our children from early on in the children's church and through all the youth activities. I wouldn't want to change any of that. Maybe there are some things we could learn and add to what we have, but thinking back I'm quite happy with how they were formed spiritually.

INT: If we could label the current model of faith formation: "church-centered, and family-supported", how would a model look like that is labeled: "Family-centered, and church-supported"?

BP: I believe that is the ideal to work towards, that the home does the spiritual formation, and that the congregation supports them. At the moment we have the other model: everything happens here, at church. I think we can make more of this if we could spend some time on this subject, and had some materials, and could empower some members to become active in this respect. At present our model has all the weight at the church-end of the scale.

INT: What would be necessary to make this change happen in your context?

BP: Perspectives must shift. This is a paradigm shift. And you never get a paradigm shift if the leadership doesn't buy into it. If I myself and the other leaders don't immerse ourselves into family ministry, the others will not follow. So, it starts with the leadership. And then we would need tools. Can I make this mind-shift? I believe I can, but do I have time to do this? No. That is why I say we need to get someone on the staff who can devote his time and energy towards this. He can talk about this and be the driving force. He can do research, and create tools to use. If you try to make this some add-on to your already full schedule, it will be very difficult. In our congregation we place high value on ministry to children. We are not just entertaining them. We are intentional with faith formation. So, I think in a church like ours it will be relatively easy to make this shift happen.

INT: If you would go that way and focus on family ministry, what would your expectations be of parents, in terms of forming faith at home?

BP: That saying is true: children will not do what you say, they will do what you do. So, I would start by stressing the example of the parents and of the way they live in their homes. Also I would accentuate that age old ritual of spending time around a table together. Research has shown that a family's happiness is definitely linked to eating together round a table. I would like to plant that value solid in every household, of not eating in front of the television set or on the go. We try to sit around a table and eat at least one meal a day together as family. And then you talk with each other and you connect. And then you can add to that, by reading something from the Bible and praying together. You may ask the others how their day has been, and what their prayer needs are. I would like to get the table back in the center for families. I mean, in most houses the television is in the center. I was tempted in the past to just put a dinner table on the stage, to show parents how important this is. It might sound simplistic, but I believe this will lead to spiritual growth.

Structured Interview C on 28/04/2016 – Eng

INT: In your congregation, do you see a revolving back door concerning children and young people. They come and they go, they don't stay and get involved?

CP: I definitely see a revolving back door, but it does not mean that they stay away. I actually see people coming in, going out, and quite often returning, maybe even a month later. The people in our ministry are not used to attending church weekly, so they come when they have a need.

INT: Do you see this trend with adults only, or also with the young people?

CP: No, children as well. On Sunday we had a father coming with his child. So we see parents coming with their children. Some leave, but some stay. There is more people who come and look and go, maybe because of the children's feed-back. If they don't like it here, they will certainly tell their parents. If the child is happy, everyone is happy. Two weeks ago a lady came to church for the first time, with two teen-age sons, now she hasn't been back yet, but it might just be because of the long weekend.

We also have a coffee and tea session after every service, and that is where people connect to each other. And there they can see: we are an integrated spiritual society: multi-language and multi-cultural.

INT: Can you list all the options and activities that your congregation offers children?

CP: I think our options are limited. The congregation is small, thus we do not have a separate line of ministry. We are trying to create cell groups for parents, so the parents have a support system, and the children are part of that structure. And people do make use of this.

During the main service, we do have children's church. We have one couple from Tanzania, they brought their kid, and he was so enthusiastic about this group that he actually runs to church in the mornings. Since he's been there, he is very happy to go to church on a Sunday.

We don't have any activities during the week. That is a need, but we don't have the manpower for this at the moment. One thing that I see, that works wonderful, is that we have round tables at the back, and mothers will often go sit there with their young. And

other mothers will join them. So, they are still part of the service, but not in the mother's room. The mothers group together.

INT: Do I hear you correctly, when you say you invite families as a family to come to the Sunday service?

CP: Definitely. We try to accommodate all ages. We realize that a lot of families are broken, and that is one reason why people often will not bring their children. But people experience this inclusiveness. We have done some work to create a youth friendly environment. We have put out play-matts in the mothers' room, and teddy bears. And when people come, the young one will just automatically go and play and feel at home. And because we have this inclusive approach, people are relaxed when we have children running around and being there. Children don't feel excluded, there is a family-feel.

INT: Say there is a family in your congregation who has a baby, and this child will grow up in your congregation and be part of it for the next 16 years. What is your strategy for faith formation that will develop mature faith in this child by age 16?

CP: At the moment we are not a program driven community, because we are a relatively small congregation. Our approach is to involve the children in all the programs that we do have for the parents. The adults who attend, are also still growing in their faith, so we have some programs in place for the parents, and the children just slot in with them, so they both grow together.

We also have a working relationship with the school next door. When I spoke with the headmaster he said they cannot integrate faith into their school activities, but we are welcome to come and present faith formation activities on the side. So, there are some possibilities to develop faith there.

We do have two moms who are taking responsibility for looking after the very small ones, at church. We also have a multi-generational confirmation class. We have the grandmother, the mother and the son, all in one class. We talk together and learn together. It started with the Alpha course, which they all attended. From that, grew the confirmation class, and we have 20 people attending it. Now, there are some members who would like to attend confirmation class, but they cannot do so because of time issues. So, I go to two different families, to their houses to do confirmation class with them. So, the child sees you in their house, and faith develops in the home.

INT: If the color of house is yellow, and the color of the church is red. Where do you see orange happening. That is ministry to the home, to support parents in their task?

CP: I think less and less in the formal church environment. More and more to some kind of space where the families are meeting already. People are more inclined to meet at each other's homes. And some have to drive far to church, so it's easier at the homes.

We are about 90 members, and people who associate with us are more than a hundred. So, we have about 10 families with children. So, at any given meeting we don't have lots of children running around. So, we don't do separate ministry to children, we are still doing youth ministry in the family-arena. So, what I see, is that families get together. There is a network happening. I often hear family A went to visit family B, and the "children had such a nice time". Our members are coming from such diverse backgrounds, that the first hurdle to overcome, is just to get into the social action at church. So, I think orange in our context, is relationship building, and this is getting over the cultural barrier. White people, black people, Indian people visiting each other at their homes and beginning a friendship. That is orange for us.

This is quite informal. But on a formal level, I think we could work together with other small congregations in the area, to present youth camps and other activities for bigger groups of children.

INT: Do you have some kind of measurement to see if you are successful with the formation of faith in children in your congregation?

CP: Well, as you now know, we don't have a formal structure in place. But the question that we ask, is: what language do people speak? If they are speaking the language of faith formation that we speak at our congregation, then we have hit home. We accentuate our missional calling, and sometimes we hear children talking that language: you are sent. There is another couple who came, and they said: we like what we saw: it's not glossy or a show. And we liked what we heard, that everyone is on a mission from God.

There is one couple who are experiencing problems in their marriage. And the lady is dealing with this in faith. She has a prayer partner, supporting her in this difficult time. And there you see people who step up and are there to bless others through prayer and support. And this is not a pastor thing. Members are living their calling towards each other. One guy got on his motorbike and drove to the other guy's practice just to go and pray for him. And there is follow up: I prayed for you after the service, so how is your week going? That type of thing. Caring, and missional.

INT: If time and money were no concern, what would you dream to do for the families in your congregation?

CP: I'll start off with a marketing campaign, and getting the best speaker I can, and I would try to get as many people as possible. I would even invite a lot of pastors from the smaller congregations from the Wes-Rand. I had a conversation with another pastor who also battles with smaller numbers and smaller budgets. I would like to create a space that helps all the little congregations, and flowing from that, also helping families in our congregation.

I keep my ear on the ground with the other congregations, and with the Methodist, Anglican and Baptist congregations, they are all losing members and growing smaller and smaller. So, I'm thinking of networking: pooling our strengths and helping each other.

I will also re-do our chapel. I will create more space where other ministries can come and have classes, lectures, and events. Then I would also love to start a big drive to assist poorer families. At the moment the feeling is: the rich white people are helping the poor people of color. I would like to change this, with a program of job creation, helping people draft their CV's and assisting in a better way.

INT: Say for instance you get married soon, and next year you have your firstborn. And you know you will bring her up in this congregation. This is where her faith will be formed. How would you change the ministry to assist you in this task?

CP: I'll start off by gathering previous pastors from this congregation to hear what did they do that didn't work? I don't want to invent the wheel all over again. Then I'd like to go for a setup at the church where faith is the by-product of something else. You don't drive faith formation as the main issue. But you might have arts and creativity classes, and part of that is talking about faith and how it influences our lives. Faith is then the by-product of what we are doing. There might be dance classes, guitar classes, and faith is woven into those classes. They are the vehicle. Then we have a need-based approach: for mothers who need support, or jobless people. It must have the feeling of a center for the community where lots of activities take place, and faith is the underlying principle in it all.

INT: If there is a youth model that is church-based, but home-supported (like in the Afrikaans congregation), how would a model look like that can be labelled: home-based and church-supported?

CP: Ah, great. I think that is exactly what we are talking about, when we go out to different families, going to their houses and visiting with them. The difference would be, to join families on purpose to connect in a social way.

INT: Like cell groups would do?

CP: Not quite. Cell groups have too many people. We need less people at the house, 2 or 3 families. Not overly structured. This is healthy socialization, support and engagement with each other. So I see a situation where I phone families and invite them over to my house, and we start to do this on a regular basis, and after four weeks, I can move on and start the next group, while they still remain together. Then you can challenge those small groups to reach out to their neighbors. You can implement certain rhythms for their households. I don't want people meeting at church, this is dead space. I want them visiting each other's home, which is living space. And then they can spill over to their neighbor's houses, and so on.