

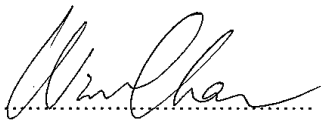
**Appropriate parental participation in faith nurture  
of primary school aged children in urban Chinese families  
of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference  
of the Methodist Church in Malaysia**

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**This dissertation is presented for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
of AGST Alliance  
2015**

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a qualification at any tertiary education institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Winnie Sin Ming Chan', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Winnie Sin Ming Chan

To Joy, Jan, and Josiah,  
and the children in my faith community,  
who never fail to fascinate me.

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated how the parents of primary school aged children of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference (SCAC) of the Methodist Church in Malaysia can be better equipped and be more effective as partners in faith nurture of their children. Many parents of the SCAC churches are concerned with the faith nurture of their children. However, many parents are also not sure how to do this effectively. The study used the qualitative research method of grounded theory. Data were collected through interviews with sixteen parents and seventeen children from four different Methodist Chinese churches in Sarawak. The interview data were coded and analyzed to generate an emerging theory.

The emerging theory has five propositions. They are: 1) The major responsibility of faith nurture of children lies with the parents. 2) The church and the family need to be in partnership in nurturing the faith of the children. 3) Parents need help to build up their own life and emotions if they want to nurture the faith of their children adequately. 4) Parents need to encourage a two-way direction when communicating faith matters with their children. 5) Children's faith is nurtured when they spend time doing ordinary everyday things with their parents.

In conclusion, this study proposes three possible ways to support parental participation in faith nurture of their children in the SCAC churches. First, it is suggested that churches be more intentional in offering creative and accessible ways for the faith community so as to partner with parents in forming nurturing environments that promote the faith development of children. Second, parents may find it helpful to join a parent support group for building their own life and emotions. Third, families may need to spend time with each other, talking about faith matters and also enjoy doing ordinary everyday things.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SCAC	The Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference
MAF	Methodist Adult Fellowship
MYAF	Methodist Young Adult Fellowship

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Children are a gift and a heritage from God. Like all gifts from God, the gift of children comes with responsibilities (Balswick et al. 2003, 31). Parents are to “bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). A literature review shows that the family unit is fundamental to the faith development of children (May et al. 2005, 150-172; Barna 2007; Stonehouse 1998, 130; Westerhoff 1980, 31). Parents play a significant role in nurturing faith of their children (Cupit 2012, 10). Though the children may interact with other adults, their primary attachment remains with the parents and primary caregivers (Granqvist 2006, 197-210). James Draper states that faith nurture of children depends very much on God’s truth being modeled and taught by parents (2005, 1-2). Catherine Stonehouse (1998) affirms that “who we are as adults, what we believe about God, and how we think and feel permeate the world in which our children live and grow” (130). Parents who are committed to their Christian faith can provide a positive and natural environment for nurturing faith of their children. With such great responsibility, the question then on parental faith nurture of children is, “How can parents fulfill this role effectively?”

The question on parental participation in faith nurture of children has seemingly driven parents in the churches of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference (SCAC) to search for effective and appropriate faith nurturing methodologies. It is not uncommon to see parents of today willingly give their children expensive and branded gadgets with a lavish hand but not able to spend more time with their children. While the parents may think that material things can bring comfort to their children, observation indicates that unless faith nurture is being prioritized, the children will miss out on much of the meaning, purpose and real joy of life (Barna 2007, 38).

As such, this research is an attempt to understand the current situation of the parental participation in faith nurture of children among the Chinese

congregations of the SCAC; and to propose a workable frame for parents to be more effective in the faith nurture of their children.

### **A. The Research Context**

In order to understand the research context, it is important to have an overview of the SCAC of the Methodist Church in Malaysia. Malaysia is a land of multi-ethnicities and multi-religions. According to the Population and Housing Census 2010 figures, approximately 9.2% of the population is Christians. In the state of Sarawak, the Christian percentage is 46.2% of the populations (MalaysiaEconomy, 马来西亚人口的宗教信仰 2010).

The SCAC comprise of ten districts. In these ten districts, there are 103 local churches, 24 preaching points and a total of 160 pastors. The membership of the SCAC as of November 2014 was 102,956 (Minutes of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference 2014). However, not all members attend Sunday worship services. Statistics show that there are 34,258 adult Sunday worshippers in 2014 as compared to 31,094 in 2013 and 30,447 in 2012. While the adult Sunday worshippers are growing steadily each year, the number of children attending Sunday school is declining.

Children Sunday school attendance rates are as follows:

Year 2009	9,780 children
Year 2010	9,526 children
Year 2011	9,444 children
Year 2012	9,151 children
Year 2013	8,951 children
Year 2014	8,551 children

In 2014, the growing rate of adult Sunday worshippers is 3% while the rate of children Sunday school attendance is negative -5% (Minutes of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference 2014). The SCAC is aware and is actively looking into the reasons behind this persistent phenomenon as well as formulating strategies to curb the drop of children's attendance in Sunday

school. There could be multiple reasons behind such as low birth rate, migration of families, and children going to tuitions on Sundays. But the fundamental concern remains that the children's Sunday school attendance rate is not growing proportionally with the rate of the adults' Sunday worship attendance. Thus this is the current situation of the SCAC with regards to the children.

## **B. The Research Problem**

Among the church members of the SCAC, faith at large is continued down to the second, third or even fourth generation. President Su Chi Ann of the SCAC laments that though the Church is aware of its rich heritage and has been trying her best to encourage its members to delve into this treasure, yet after 109 years in Sarawak (established since 1901), most members still do not quite understand the belief and the heritage of the denomination (Methodist Belief Handbook 2010, 3). Su (2010) states, "Our basic doctrines are seldom taught in the pulpits, retreats, camps, fellowship meetings, cell groups and Sunday schools. On the other hand, various schools of theological thoughts emerged in the church and our members are perplexed" (3). President T Jeyakumar (2014) of Trinity Annual Conference of Methodist Church in Malaysia (TRAC) also observes, "Many of the churches in the Annual Conference have not equipped the homes to be centers of faith-formation...Parents are not intentionally equipped to disciple their children" (7).

Literature review on parental participation in faith nurture of the children revealed the general problem Christian families face. However, the majority of the data drawn are from the West and little is known about the challenges of Chinese Christian families; even less among families of the Methodist Churches in Malaysia. As the researcher travels and speaks in different SCAC churches and their fellowship groups, she is often invited to address topics on how to nurture the faith of children. In many fellowship groups, she was told it was the first time they have a speaker teach on a topic related to faith nurture of children. Further, observation shows that there is a growing concern both from the SCAC leaders and parents on faith nurture of their children.



### **C. The Research Theses**

On one hand, Christian parents know that they have the responsibility to nurture the faith of their children; on the other hand, they are unsure of how to nurture or what appropriate models to follow, so they render the responsibility to church. Looking at the above dilemma and the uncertain relationship between parents and church, there is great concern for parents to be better equipped and be more effective in the faith nurture of children. Such a study has never been done before in the context of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia. Hence, the research question is:

How can parents of primary school aged children of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia be better equipped and be more effective as partners in the faith nurture of their children?

Underlying the research question are five sub-questions:

1. What aspects of the faith nurture literature have relevance in the context of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference?
2. What do parents currently perceive to be the key elements in the faith nurture of their children?
3. What do children of the families perceive to be the parents' key elements in nurturing the faith of their children?
4. What do the parents and children perceive to be the relationship between church and family in terms of the faith nurture approaches?
5. What could be the key features of parental strategy to enhance the faith nurture of primary school aged children?

### **D. The Research Assumptions**

There are several assumptions underlying this study. First, this study assumes that the biblical perspective of life and faith in God from the Old and New Testaments as understood in Wesleyan perspective forms the foundation in understanding the parental role in the faith nurture of their children.

Second, this study assumes that parents of the SCAC are willing and can be more effective in their participation of faith nurture of their children when the former mature and grow in relationship with God.

Third, this study assumes that primary school aged children between the age of seven to twelve are aware and can verbally express their own feelings about God.

Fourth, this study assumes that the SCAC churches are concerned about the faith nurture of children. The parents and the church leaders acknowledge that each has a role to play in the faith journey of the children.

Fifth, this study assumes that the grounded theory, as a field survey methodology is able to glean the needed data allowing the development of the emerging theory.

Sixth, this study assumes that the emerging theory of the research will be a possible frame for parental strategy to be better equipped and more effective in the faith nurture of their children.

### **E. Significance of Study**

Children “exhibit a spiritual awareness and begin life with a sense of the inexpressible mystery of God” (Allen 2008, 19). However, this sense of awareness needs to be nurtured by the parents and the adults. Donald Ratcliff (2008) warns that when children do not receive the appropriate nurturing, the end result will probably be meaninglessness and will be expressed in negative forms such as drug abuse, violence and corruption (35). Ron Buckland (2009) further articulates, “...all children begin with God, but that they will drift from that safe position unless the drift is halted and reversed” (63). These claims are rather alarming to all the adults and parents who are involved in faith nurture of children.

Indeed, one of the greatest joys for Christian parents is to nurture and see their children grow into the likeness of Jesus Christ (Fuller 2001, 121). Yet this divine job cannot be accomplished naturally without help or effort. In Strommen and Strommen’s research (1993) with more than 8,000 youths and 10,000 parents in the U.S.A., the authors discerned five overarching cries of parents: 1) the need for understanding both self and adolescent son or daughter; 2) the desire for a close

family; 3) the plea for moral behavior; 4) the hope for shared faith; and 5) the call for outside help (Gangel 1998, 295). These cries are still pertinent to parents with primary school aged children today and applicable to the SCAC context.

Most parents of the churches in the SCAC are diligent in bringing their children to church. They bring their children to Sunday school, to prayer meeting, and to their fellowship group. They bring their children through the faith marker events such as baptism and confirmation of the Methodist Church at the appropriate age. However, there are still significant “in between times” between the church and the family. These “in between times” are very crucial for parents in nurturing their children in the Christian faith (Caldwell 2007, xi). This study helps to understand the present situation of the parents of the SCAC churches and the outcomes of this research will be significantly useful for the SCAC and the church leaders to strategize and recommend appropriate approaches for parents to nurture the faith of their children.

## **F. Definition of Terms**

### *Primary School Aged Children*

“Primary school aged children” is defined as children who are from ages 7 to 12 years and attend primary school in the Malaysian context. This is the age group where the children are still predominantly dependent on parental care at home.

### *Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference*

The Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference (SCAC) is one of the six annual conferences under the Methodist Church in Malaysia. The Annual Conference serves as the basic administrative body of the Church and supervises the affairs of the church in a specific territory (*The Book of Discipline* of the Methodist Church in Malaysia 2008, 320). The SCAC has 10 districts with a total of 103 churches and 24 preaching points and 160 pastors (Minutes of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference, 2014).

### *Urban Churches*

The urban churches refer to the SCAC churches which are located mainly in cities or towns or densely populated residential areas in Sarawak. The urban churches experience similar urban life styles.

### *Chinese Families*

The term “Chinese families” refers to families of Chinese ancestry. The Chinese congregations of the SCAC churches are mainly families of Chinese origin who use Mandarin as a common language for communication. Majority of the churches under the SCAC are Chinese speaking churches. There are also six English congregations and several Bahasa Malaysia congregations.

### *Homes*

Homes are places where family members live together. It is common for families in Sarawak to be multi-generational where immediate and extended family members such as grandparents live together.

### *Christian Homes*

Christian homes are places where faith is experienced and communicated through the natural flow of life by its members.

### *Faith Nurture of Children*

Faith nurture is a process in which parents and other significant people create a suitable environment to help children to discover the grace of God, live in response to it, and grow towards the maturity of Jesus Christ.

### *Children's Spirituality*

In this study, children's spirituality refers to the relational consciousness of God and is the bedrock on which a child's faith is founded. While faith nurture is a process of helping children develop their relationship with God, spirituality is the description of that relationship.

### *Religious Activities*

These activities refer to religious or church-related activities mentioned in this research study such as reading the Bible, praying, going to church, attending Sunday school, attending prayer meeting, having quiet time, etc.

### *Methodist Young Adults Fellowship (MYAF)*

The Methodist Young Adults Fellowship (MYAF) is an organisation under the Methodist Church in Malaysia. The structure of the MYAF includes the Local Chapter, the District Commission and the Conference Board. The goal of the fellowship is to help young adults within the age range of 25 and 40 to grow in their faith, to develop a Christ-centred discipleship, to witness for Christ both locally and globally, and to be challenged to serve further in society and missions.

### *Methodist Adults Fellowship (MAF)*

The Methodist Adults Fellowship (MAF) has a similar structure and function with the MYAF except the age group is between 35 and 60. Both married couples with families and singles attend the same fellowship. There are five years overlapping time from MYAF to MAF.

## **G. The Research Methodology**

The research methodology adopts the grounded theory approach. Grounded theory offers the systematic, flexible, and qualitative procedures that enable the researchers to focus their data collection and data analysis and to generate a theory that would explain a process (Creswell 2012, 423; Charmaz 2000, 507). John Creswell (2012) further states that grounded theory design is best to be used when there is a need to develop or modify a theory, to explain a process or interaction between people. The theory is also good to use when “existing theories may have little applicability to special population” (423, 440). In light of these claims, grounded theory seems to be the most appropriate methodology in this research study because this study seeks to explore the phenomenal relationship in the context of the SCAC, where little has been done before.

Another reason for using grounded theory for this research study is to hear from the children and incorporate their perspectives into the emerging theory. Faith nurture of children is often a major concern of adults and parents and is usually studied from the perspectives of parents, teachers or church leaders rather than the children. However, Chris Boyatzis and Babette Newman (2004) urge researchers to study children's relationship with God with a multi-method approach since the nature of this subject is multi-dimensional (169, 177). Sonja Grover (2004) also suggests doing research "which gives power and voice to child research participants and which provides insights into their subjective world" (in Abstract). Using grounded theory in this research study helps "to step beyond the known and enter into the world of participants, to see the world from their perspective and in doing so make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge" (Strauss and Corbin 2008, 16). In this case, it is to enter into the families who are members of the SCAC and to be able to incorporate the insights of both the parents and children.

While there are different types of grounded theory designs, the researcher has chosen the systematic design identified by Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin as the basic model. The Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998, 2008) approach is found to be a more suitable method for a beginning researcher as it provides structure and framework to work the data.

#### *Step One: Preliminary Requirements*

The beginning step started with the preparation of the research proposal as well as seeking approval from the churches and obtaining access to the church members who can participate in this field survey. The process involved writing letters to the pastors-in-charge of the four SCAC Chinese churches in order to seek permission to conduct the field survey and collect data from the families with primary school aged children. At this phase, ethical clearance for the research study with human participants was obtained from the AGST Alliance research committee.

### *Step Two: Data Collection*

In grounded theory, sampling is intentional and purposive. It means that the survey sample is able to provide information that can assist in the development of a theory towards the end of the research (Creswell 2011, 441). In this study, the researcher looked for parents who showed concern for parental participation in faith nurture of their children. After obtaining permission from the pastors-in-charge of the respective churches, the researcher contacted the chairpersons of the MAF (Methodist Adult Fellowship) and the MYAF (Methodist Young Adult Fellowship) of the churches for suggestion of names. Once the names were obtained, the researcher contacted them personally and invited them to be participants of the study. The researcher extended the invitation to both the parents and children.

There were a total of eight families in this research study. The criteria for the selected families were: 1) both parents are Christians, 2) both parents are staying together with their children at home and not working out-station, 3) the families have been consistently attending and serving in the church, and d) the children are Christians and of primary school aged. Adult interviews and children interviews were conducted separately. For the adult interviews, each interview consisted of one set of parents. Interview time with the adults was 40-50 minutes per session. The venue of the interview was either in the church or at home whichever was more convenient and appropriate for the participants. Another eight interviews were conducted with the children of the eight families. Each interview consisted of children from the same family who are between 7-12 years. Interview time with the children was 25-35 minutes per session. The venue of the interview was a place that the children could feel comfortable or familiar with. The places were mainly in the church or homes.

The interview protocols were conducted with a set of closed and open-ended questions. Unlike complete unstructured interviews which offer free flow and unlimited information but with masses of data, these semi-structured interviews helped the researcher to remain focused to the data available. The interview sessions were all conducted in Chinese. The participating parents and children were assured of the confidentiality of the data collected.

### *Step Three: Coding and Analyzing the Data*

This research study followed the systematic coding procedures of the newer version of the classic grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss 2008). The updated grounded theory version consists of two phases of coding: 1) open coding and 2) axial coding. After the data collection, the researcher conducted an open coding in which the data were broken down and grouped into categories and subcategories. During the axial coding, the phenomenon was identified as the main theme of the research study. Then, the data were reassembled in new ways to make connections between the categories and the subcategories. Finally, the researcher developed the emerging theory by integrating the interrelationships between the categories and subcategories in the axial coding paradigm to form an abstract explanation of the investigation.

One of the characteristics of grounded theory is theoretical sampling. In theoretical sampling, "concepts are derived from data during analysis and questions about those concepts drive the next round of data collection" (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 144). Creswell (2011) further explains that the process of collecting data can be more than once and the inquirer keeps going back to the data sources for more information until the categories are saturated and the theory is fully developed (441). Saturation occurs when the data collected reach to the point whereby all concepts are well defined and explained (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 145). In this study, follow up interviews were done with the emerging categories that needed further investigation with the intention to ask more focused and in-depth questions.

### *Step Four: Findings and Recommendations*

In this last step, the researcher interpreted the findings from the study, answered the research question and presented the emerging theory. In order to validate the accuracy of the findings, the researcher triangulated the emerging theory with two senior leaders of the SCAC church to validate the results. Finally, this step concluded with some suggestions to pave the way forward to a more child-friendly nurturing approach consistent with the Methodist confessions lived out in the context of the SCAC.



## H. The Research Limitations

### *Research Topic*

This research focused on developing a theory as to how faith nurture of children among the urban Chinese families in the churches of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia can best occur.

### *Research People Group*

The research subjects are limited to the parents with the primary school aged children from either the MAF or MYAF groups of the SCAC churches. The participating parents are young adults are in their late 30s or early 40s. The children of these participating families have some form of church attendance such as Sunday school or they follow their parents to MAF or MYAF. The children speak Chinese at home and attend the Chinese churches of the SCAC with their parents. They also have some knowledge of the English and Bahasa Malaysia language.

The number of the purposive sample is eight. Although the number is small, the sample is qualitative. These eight participating families from four different Chinese congregations can be indicative of the general conditions of the urban Chinese families in the SCAC churches because of similar church context and urban lifestyle.

Also, while I am aware that in the Asian culture, grandparents play a significant role in their grandchildren's faith development, this study focuses on the parental participation rather than other significant people in the children's lives.

### *Research Location*

This research is limited to the urban Chinese families within the SCAC churches. These families have similar life styles in the urban towns of Sarawak. Since the parents attend the SCAC Chinese churches, the children follow similar faith education programs such as infant baptism and children Sunday school. The children learn to sing similar hymns and songs in church. They are also taught to memorize *The Lord's Prayer* and *The Apostle's Creed* since beginners' Sunday school. The adults go through almost standard faith nurture programs like adult Sunday school, Bible training courses, disciple course, evangelism training and

others. I am aware that although the research participants attend similar religious activities, they do not necessarily have the equivalent standard of experiences.

#### *Language Limitation*

The interviews were conducted in the Chinese language. The interview protocols were translated from English to Chinese and the data collected were translated from Chinese to English. In the process of translation, the researcher acknowledged that it will not be possible to transcribe word for word. However, translations were done with extra care and the full meanings of the texts were brought out. In addition, the respondents' perceived emotions were carefully noted and written down in the transcriptions.

### **I. Chapter Outline**

#### *Chapter One: Introduction*

This chapter introduces the research proposal and states the research problem, theses assumptions, significance of the study, methodology limitations, and chapter outlines. It also briefly describes the present situation of the SCAC in relations to the children and family as the research context.

#### *Chapter Two: The Precedent Literature*

This chapter explores the relevant literature on the importance of parental participation in faith nurture of children. The precedent literature covers three areas: 1) the biblical perspective of parental participation in faith nurture of children, 2) the contemporary theories and research on the importance of parental participation in faith nurture of children, and 3) a review on the history of the Methodist teachings on parental participation in faith nurture of children. This chapter answers Research Sub-Question One (#1)

#### *Chapter Three: The Field Survey Procedure*

This chapter gives an overview of the field survey procedure. It explains in detail the field survey process and the pilot test. It clarifies the language and the main terms used in translation. It lists out the details of adults and the children

participants and explains the reasons for the questions in the interview protocols of the adults and children. This chapter ends with an explanation of the data collection procedure.

#### *Chapter Four: Analysis and Discussion*

This chapter discusses the findings of the field survey. It explains the process of the first phase of open coding. It discusses the eight categories and the subcategories that emerged from the coding and the analysis of the interview data. It states the recurring themes generated from these eight categories and the subcategories. This chapter answers Research Sub-Question Two (#2), Three (#3), and Four (#4).

#### *Chapter Five: The Emerging Theory*

This chapter discusses the emerging theory. It explains the second phase of axial coding. It shows the axial coding paradigm and displays the complicated interrelated relationships between the categories; and the categories and their subcategories. The interview data are coded and analyzed to form the basis for generating the emerging theory which explains the faith nurturing practices in the SCAC. The emerging theory is presented in five propositions. This chapter answers the research study to pave a more effective faith nurturing approach for the parents of the SCAC churches.

#### *Chapter Six: Conclusion*

This chapter concludes the research study with a summary of the dissertation, a personal reflection, recommendations for further research and several concluding remarks.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE PRECEDENT LITERATURE**

This chapter explores the relevant literature on the importance of parental participation in faith nurture of children. The precedent literature covers three areas.

Section A explores the parental participation in faith nurture of children in the Bible. This section shows how parents in the Bible participated in the faith nurturing process of children through the home and faith community contexts. The section also includes insights from the teachings of Jesus and other New Testament texts. The purpose of this section is to build biblical lenses for assessing the current practices of the parents in the SCAC.

Section B highlights the contemporary insights on the importance of parental participation in faith nurture of children. This section reviews the recent theories and research works from seven prominent researchers with an SCAC contextual response. This section also discusses parenting styles and faith nurture of children. The aim of this section is to gain wisdom and insights in shaping the interview protocols. The common themes emerging from the theories and research works are instructive in the forming of field research questions.

Section C reviews the Methodist teachings and practices on parental participation in faith nurture of children in the history of the Methodist Church in Sarawak. This section presents the historical evidences of the Sarawak Methodist Church in their practice of parental faith nurture. The goal of this section is to investigate the long and rich heritage of the church in parental participation in faith nurture of their children; and whether this is still being practiced among the Methodist church families in the present day.

This chapter also seeks to answer Research Sub-Question One (#1): What aspects of the faith nurture literature have relevance in the context of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference?

### **A. Biblical Basis on Parental Participation in Faith Nurture of Children**

The Bible has over 8,000 references to children and family (Zuck 1996, 13). Roy Zuck (1996), in *Precious in His Sight* notes the significant number of Bible references on children namely, “child” (121 times); “children” (448 times); “childhood” (4 times) and “son or sons” (2,700 times). There are also more than 1,400 references to children, childhood, parenting and other matters relating to children in the Index of Scripture References at the end of his book (11-15; 39-44; 53-56). Although not every occurrence of “children” or “son/sons” is necessarily referring to chronological age, it is significant enough to show that children are one of the concerns of God. The Bible is also not obscure concerning the way children are to be nurtured and instructed in the faith. Hence, this section discusses how parents in the Bible participated in the faith nurturing process of children through the home and faith community contexts.

#### Parental Participation in Faith Nurture of children in the Old Testament

Israel is a unique covenantal community. God establishes an eternal covenant with the Israelites. This covenantal relationship applies to all Israelites, descendants of Abraham (Gen. 12, 15, 17); all of Abraham’s descendants—adults and children—are recipients of the covenant. They were never seen as separate identities (McGinnis 2008, 25). Children in the Old Testament were nurtured both in the community and home setting.

##### *The Community Setting*

Children in the Old Testament were accepted into the faith community through birth. However, obeying the charge of nurturing faith of the children does not start with the parents first, rather it is to the Israelites, the whole faith community (Stonehouse 1998, 24). Brenda Colijin (2004) also states, “Old Testament faith had a strong corporate dimension. People did not participate in the

covenant as isolated individuals, but as members of families, clans, and tribes” (74). The people of Israel were to affirm their faith in God; they were to know the commandments of God and be a people of faith. “Only persons of faith can pass-on the faith” (Stonehouse, 25).

In the Bible, it is clearly stated that God charged all the Israelites to teach their children. Deut. 4:1, 9 states, “Hear now, O Israel....” “.....Teach them to your children and to their children after them.” A likewise commandment was repeated in Deut. 6: 4-7a, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children...” From these commandments, it is obvious that the people of Israel must first learn to obey God and then teach their next generations to obey God as well.

Within the community, the faith of children was nurtured through observing and participating in different religious and cultural festivals such as Sabbaths, Passover, and various religious feasts. Reliving history in the faith community helped children to remember. Patrick Miller (2008) states, “the recall of the story is fundamental to the learning process” (55). David Ng and Virginia Thomas further affirm that “worship through remembrance led to obedience in the present” (50). The symbols and meanings of the festivals stimulated the curiosity of children to ask questions. While questions and answers were part of the celebration, parents were instructed to tell. “And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them...” (Exod. 12:26; cf. Exod. 13:8). When asked, parents should re-tell the story of God’s faithfulness, deliverance, and plans for His people. Miller (2008) comments that it is not just the “why” questions that help children know the answers; it is more of the regular enactment that provides opportunities for the children to understand the rationale through hands-on practices (56). Children heard the Story over and over again during their growing years. They experienced the Story and gradually developed their identity as people of the Covenant.

In addition, the visible and sensory symbols of the community such as the national monument (the 12 stones erected as the Israelites crossed the Jordan River), the symbols of the Passover (lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, salt

water, roasted egg, and *charoset*), the particular items the adults wear as part of their garments and body when they pray (tassels, *tefillin*, and *mezuzah*), all help to affirm such identity and faith.

### *The Home Setting*

Even though faith of the children in the Old Testament was at large nurtured in the community setting, the children also observed and learned at homes with their family members. However, the word “family” in the Bible is different from today’s understanding. There is no actual word in the Hebrew language that precisely corresponds to the word “family” (Sell 1995, 74). The closest word translated is “house” or “household” (Colijin 2004, 73). An average number of a household would be 50 to 100 people (Clapp 1993, 35). For example, the household of Jacob had 66 people who went to Egypt (Genesis 46:5-27). A regular Hebrew family in the Old Testament included husband and wife or wives, extended family members, servants, guests, and sojourners (Colijin, 73). There are many examples in the Old Testament suggesting the parent’s role of leading the whole household into worship. For example, Noah led his family to worship God after coming out from the ark (Gen. 8:15-22). Job offered a sacrifice on behalf of his children early each morning. This was Job’s regular custom (Job 1:5). Elkanah went up to give sacrifices to the Lord yearly with his whole family (I Samuel 1:1-8). These verses indicate that fathers of the household lead in worship or go in yearly pilgrimage. It is assumed through these actions children would follow and be nurtured in their faith as well.

In addition, children learned from their parents through the daily routines of life together such as sitting down, rising up, walking and lying down (Deut. 6:7-9). Stonehouse (1998) points out that the commandments of God are “taught best in the normal flow of life” (25-26). For example, at home, the first thing the Hebrew children learned from their parents was to recite the *Shema*. Rabbi Simmons explains that the *Shema* is the beginning word of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which says “Hear, O Israel”. Israelites are commanded to recite the section of the verses twice a day, one in the morning and one in the evening as it is stated explicitly in the Torah, “speak of them... when you retire and when you arise” (Deut. 6:5-9). Rabbi Simmons states clearly that the *Shema* is not a prayer but a declaration of faith. “It

is the Jewish Pledge of Allegiance, a testimony to His Oneness” (Simmons 2014). As children observe and hear their parents recite the *Shema* day after day, the children too will begin to develop reverence for the Lord of Israel, whom they are to love with all their heart, and with all their soul and with all their strength (Deut. 6:4). “This education was to permeate their lives at home and abroad, morning and night” (Ng and Thomas 1981, 49).

Children also observed and learned from their parents in the weekly Sabbath. Ng and Thomas (1981) comment that once a week, the whole family unites in worship and learning through the Sabbath (49). This recurring experience reminds the Israelites of who they are and who God is. Sabbath is a sign of their special relationship with God and it is to be remembered through reinforcement of concrete actions and abundant symbols (49). As children participate in the weekly Sabbath and other kinds of formal and informal activities at home, their faith is nurtured through all these teachable moments.

In Proverbs, children are explicitly to listen to their parents. “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (Prov. 1:8). “My son” suggests parental instruction even though in Koptak’s commentary, “my son” may also refer to the relation between teacher and pupil (2003, 72). In another Scripture, King Solomon recalled that in his childhood his father taught him to revere God. “For I too was a son to my father, still tender, and cherished by my mother. Then he taught me, and he said to me, ‘Take hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands, and you will live’” (Prov. 4:3-4). Again in another verse, Prov. 6:20 “My son, keep your father’s commands and do not forsake your mother’s teaching.” These verses stressed that children are to take heed of the teachings of the parents. Vice versa, parents were also expected to instruct and nurture their children.

Nevertheless, it is sometimes hard to draw a line to distinguish the parental participation in faith nurture of the children between the community setting and the home setting. Duane Christensen (1991) comments that faith nurture of children cannot be done solely within the community but also on the observance of faith within the individual families (152). He articulates that “if parents cannot embody their faith and inculcate it responsibly to their children, the very existence of that faith community is in jeopardy” (152). In other words, faith nurture of children



works best within both the community and home setting. Furthermore, Miller (2008) reminds that such learning cannot happen without early attention of the parents and the larger community of faith (62).

### Parental Participation in Faith Nurture of Children in the New Testament

In the New Testament, parental participation in the faith nurture of the children continued in the location of household and faith community. The people of God take on a new identity and a new entity of faith community was formed. Apostle Paul used the Greek word “*ecclesia*” to refer to the community of believers who live and witness for the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament sheds new light on the teaching of the parental participation in faith nurture of children. Some examples are listed below:

#### *Examples of Jesus in Valuing Children*

Under the rule of the Roman Empire and during the New Testament period, children in general were not treated with privilege and honor. Children in Jesus’ time occupied a low position and abandonment was not considered as a crime (Bunge 2004, 49), especially for girls (Gieschen 2013, 206). However, Jesus treated people differently, particularly with children. The famous account of Jesus rebuking the disciples for hindering the children who came to Him speaks volumes (Matt. 19:13-15; cf. Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). Jesus laid hands on the children and blessed them. This action is a formal action used in bestowing blessings in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 49:14) and has a significant spiritual meaning (e.g., I Tim. 4:14) (Gieschen 2013, 206). The fact that Jesus willingly took time out for the little ones who have little status in society is extraordinary.

Another account of Jesus with children is recorded in Matthew 21. Jesus’ accounts of triumphal entry, cleansing of the temple and healing in the temple were watched by the crowds, the teachers of the Law, the chief priests, and the children. The children shouted praise to Jesus “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matt. 21: 15) in contrast to the indignant chief priests and the teachers of the Law. Jesus affirmed

the children and replied, “From the lips of the children and infants you have ordained praise” (Matt. 21: 16).

In a way, Jesus stood by the children and affirmed their exaltation while rebuking the teachers of the Law. This might not be a direct teaching on children but the affirmation reveals that Jesus treasured children and their praises. One thing worth mentioning is that while this account of cleansing the temple was recorded in Matthew, Mark (chapter 11) and Luke (chapter 19), only Matthew has this record of encountering with the children. Matthew’s narration portrays that the kingdom of God is potentially accessible to all through the ministry of Jesus, but it was the children and those who have childlike faith who can receive it (White 2008, 371). These records in Matthew show that in God’s eyes, children were worthy and pleasing to Him.

Matthew 18:1-5 recorded an incident about the disciples asking Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” In response to this question, Jesus took a little child and had the child stand among the disciples and answered, “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18: 4). Jesus positioned children as both teachers and students (Crozier 2008, 341) and even called them “models of kingdom life and mirrors of kingdom hearts” (Campagnola 2004, 78-79). Children have a privileged place in the Kingdom of God and can be seen as the measuring rod for the spiritual health of the disciples (May et al. 2011, 282). Jesus taught that adults need to change and become like children, otherwise they cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven. Learning from the examples of how Jesus values children, parents need to have a changed mindset in nurturing faith of their children. Their children indeed can be “models of kingdom life and mirrors of kingdom hearts.”

#### *Examples of Early Churches in Faith Nurture of Children*

Similar to the household concept in the Old Testament, families in the New Testament were never meant to refer to one’s own immediate family. A family in modern day cultural understanding is a group of biologically related people living under the same roof. However, this is not the case in the New Testament. In Greek, the word “oikos” or “okkia” is often translated as “house” or “household”. For believers in the early churches, they are families and they belong to the household

of God<sup>1</sup> and are brothers and sisters to each other. This concept can be clearly seen in Jesus' responses to the request of his own mother Mary. Mary, in fear of Jesus' overwork, came to call him but Jesus refused to see her and responded, "Who are my mother and my brothers... Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:31-35). Rodney Clapp (1993) explains that Jesus creates a new family (77). This new and first family of Jesus Christ demands the allegiance of the followers. Yet "Jesus did not expect biological family to be denied or eliminated. He did, however, decenter and relativize it. He expected first family, the family of the kingdom, to grow evangelistically rather than biologically" (78).

After Jesus' time, the paradigm shift of the fellowship of the believers can be seen recorded as early as in the book of Acts, right after the Pentecostal experience. Though the Scripture recorded that the believers continued to meet in the temple courts, Scriptures also revealed that the believers broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 1: 46). Many incidents can be found in the Bible concerning the faith communities meeting at homes. After Peter's miraculous escape from prison, he went to the house of Mary where people gathered and prayed (Acts 12:12). Later in the Pauline Epistles, evidences can also be seen in the records of the church meetings at homes. For example, in the book of Romans, Paul wrote, "Greet also the church that meets at their house" (Rom. 16:5). Similarly, in the final greetings of I Corinthians, "Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house" (I Cor. 16:19). Meeting at homes suggested that children were naturally around as well. Margaret MacDonald (2008) states clearly that "children must often simply not have distinguished between being at home, at the house of playmates, or in the church community" (300).

Because of the shift of the Christian communities, instructions directed at the children and concerning parent-child relationship can be seen in the letters of the Apostle Paul (278). Two closely related passages are from Colossians and Ephesians. In these passages, both the parents and the children have their

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<sup>1</sup> See Alice P. Mathews and M. Gay Hubbard. 2004. *Marriage made in Eden: A pre-modern perspective for a post-Christian world*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books. Appendix B of this book has listed six passages of the household codes in the New Testament. Household codes are "ethical directions to husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters about their conduct and attitudes in those relationships" (204).

responsibilities. Children are to obey and honor their parents; parents are to build their children up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21). In Eph. 6:4, the phrase, “bring up,” is from the Greek word *ektrepho*. It has a meaning of “to nurture, nourish, and provide for with care that nourishes, feeds, or trains” (Keathley 2004). In other words, parents are instructed to provide the kind of care to children that will foster healthy growth and development. Parental participation in faith nurture of children is clearly indicated.

While both parents have their roles to play in nurturing children, yet in both passages, the Apostle Paul highlights the authority of the father in the family. Fathers are not to exasperate their children but to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Col. 3:21, Eph. 6:4). Despite greater focus in the Epistles of the father’s role, mother and even grandmother’s relationships with the child cannot be underestimated (MacDonald, 298). Such can be seen in 2 Tim. 1:5 where the Apostle Paul commended Timothy for his faith which was first lived in his grandmother Lois and then in his mother, Eunice.

The three passages about children in the Pastoral Epistles are on the management of relationships especially by the church leaders. Parents, especially church elders or deacons, are instructed by Paul to manage their households well. “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (1 Tim. 3:4). “A deacon must be husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well” (1 Tim. 3:12). Similar teaching can also be seen in Titus Chapter 1. In the Pastoral Epistles, children are seen as objects of paternal control (Strange 1996, 75). In other Letters, the image of children is used as an example of immaturity and of potential for growth (69).

While families in the Old Testament are called to live in the covenantal community in love, the faith communities in the New Testament are to be bonded together in Christ’s love in the midst of a hostile, pagan society (Richards 1988, 46). Children’s faith needs to be inspired within a faith community (Stonehouse, 37). Fowler (1987) points out that children construct their values and beliefs through conforming to the values and standards of others (57). A community which lives out its faith is essential to the faith nurture of children.

The trends of postmodernism and globalization have reached the families of the 21st century and are affecting them. Families are always in a state of flux

(Westerhoff 1980, 31). Stonehouse (1998, 196) observed that families have been separated from their key family members and normal support systems due to mobility of society. Faith has been stripped off to become a private matter. Religion is seen as an individual preference rather than household and community matter. Walter Brueggemann (2008) stresses that parents should not be contented just to care for their own children, the time has come to move beyond “our children” to “other children” (411). A faith community, particularly in a biblical concept, is not whole unless children are to be included (Ng and Thomas, 23; May et al. 2011, 282).

To summarize, the biblical basis of parental participation in faith nurture of children can be seen as follow:

- 1) The people of Israel must first learn to love God and then teach their next generations to love God as well.
- 2) The faith of the children is nurtured within the community through observing and participating in different religious and cultural festivals.
- 3) The faith of the children is nurtured at homes through participation in formal and informal activities at home.
- 4) Children are valued by Jesus as models of kingdom life and mirrors of kingdom hearts.
- 5) Children are included in the faith communities meeting at homes.
- 6) Parents are to nurture their children in the Lord.

### **B. Contemporary Insights on the Importance of Parental Participation in Faith Nurture of Children**

Charles Spurgeon (1995) said, “Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that the Sunday school is intended to ease them of their personal duties” (70). As early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this highly influential preacher has pointed out the importance of parental participation in faith nurture of children. How have the parents of the 21<sup>st</sup> century responded to this role of parental participation? This section seeks to glean the contemporary insights on the importance of the parental participation in faith nurture of children from recent research and theoretical work.

## Literature Review

In order to understand the parental participation in faith nurture of children, it is important to gain some insights in children's spirituality because these two concerns are interrelated. Children's spirituality can be seen as the bedrock on which a child's faith is founded. While faith nurture is a process of helping children develop their relationship with God, spirituality of Christian children is the description of that relationship. In fact, theories and research on children's spirituality give significant insights into parental participation in faith nurture of children. The following section is a brief historical overview of thinking about children's spirituality.

Before 1990, the research on children's spirituality was heavily influenced by the theories of cognitive development. For example, Ratcliff (2008) comments that Ronald Goldman uses Piagetian terminology to build the progressive stages of children's religious thought (27). James Fowler's stages of faith development also drew from the theories of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg (27). In fact, the emphasis was so heavy on cognitive that faith development of children was rarely addressed. John Westerhoff III in Robinson's book points out that "developmentalism (Piaget, Kohlberg, and Fowler) has become the dominant school of thought underlying contemporary religious education theory" (Robinson 1983, x). He further points out that "developmental theories are not exhaustive," "are limited by suppositions," and may not "be the best way to develop a theory for understanding the religious experience of children" (x).

Starting 1990, there was a shift away from the use of cognitive stages to see the child as a whole and to understand the child's spiritual experience. The shift began with the research of Robert Coles (1990) which revealed the depth of children's faith experiences and suggested that faith is a universal component of humanity. This perspective was later studied and re-affirmed by the research of David Hay and Rebecca Nye (2006). Ratcliff proclaims that "the day of imposing stage-oriented assumption on children was clearly passed" (2008, 34). Boyatzis (2008) agrees that since 1990, it was observed that there has been a great increase in research studies, handbooks and volumes, and doctoral dissertations on children and religion or spirituality (44, 45). The following section reviews seven research

works and theories. These selections are based on the significant insights these works have on the parental participation in faith nurture of children. While these research work reviews may be in the western context, an SCAC contextual response is highlighted at the end of this section of literature review.

*The Research Work of Robert Wuthnow*

Wuthnow, in *Growing up Religious* (1999), studied the relationship between religious upbringing and adults' attitudes and commitments to their journeys of faith. Unlike other studies involving children, this research focused and looked for emerging commonalities on adults who have grown up in different religious contexts. A total of two hundred people with approximately equal number of men and women, of younger and older age groups, and of a diverse representation of races, religions, occupations, educational backgrounds and geographic locations were interviewed. The participants came from a variety of religious backgrounds such as Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and in addition a small sample of Eastern Orthodox, Muslim, and Hindu backgrounds. The results of the study identified three points which most affect long-term religious commitments and attitudes. They are: 1) home with family rituals, holiday traditions, and the influence of different generations, 2) the places of worship, and 3) the personal commitments as an adult in which the upbringing has made a significant impact in life.

Wuthnow discovers that what brings adults back to religious life often has less to do with the religious institutions they grew up but rather with the way the family and other relations formed around religious practice, such as memories of mothers, fathers, and neighbors whose everyday acts were imbued with religious meaning. Wuthnow further proposes that childhood faith development comes to be understood as "a way of life, and it did so because people grew up living it" (xxxvii). This gives great insights to parents as they nurture faith of their children. Parents need to be aware that the family rituals, the holiday celebrations, the family Bible, and the various practices of the families and the faith communities will be embedded in the children's life, even to the point of "woven into the very fiber of their being" (xi).

Wuthnow concludes that parents and grandparents are the key to pass down the faith to their children. The homes and places of worship are important venues to provide spiritual practices. If parents give this enough emphasis, the effectiveness of values being shaped in the lives of the children will be greatly increased. This concept of passing on the faith to the children echoes the teachings in Deuteronomy 6:4-8 where parents and the community of faith are the essential people to impress on the children the commandments of the Lord.

### *The Recommendations of John Westerhoff III*

Westerhoff (2000) in his book, *“Will Our Children have Faith”*, points out that there are three ways that parents and adults can process life and learning with children (100). Children are raw materials waiting to be shaped and molded. Adults are seen as independent, rational, and productive. Therefore, adults are to do something *to* the children to make them into adults. Westerhoff uses a metaphor of a production line for this view. Adults, parents and teachers are seen as skilled technicians ready to mold the children into valuable product (100). Second, it is in terms of developmental stage. People are categorized by their cognitive stages. Adults are to do things *for* the children to help them grow into maturity. The metaphor used is a greenhouse whereby the children are seeds and the parents or teachers are gardeners (100). Third, it is in terms of characteristics of life. Adults are to do something *with* the children. The metaphor used to describe this view is a pilgrimage (101). Westerhoff calls this third way, “a new way to understand people and learning” (101).

For more than three decades, Westerhoff promoted adults and children sharing life and experiencing faith together, be it in the faith communities and the families. Adults have much to learn from the children. Indeed he said, “Children are God’s gift to aid us to mature spiritually” (2008, 365). In the opening message of the Children’s Spirituality Conference 2006, Westerhoff (2008) challenged the adults to change their mentality towards children. He points out that

...we need to change our understanding of children and our adult relationships with them. Rather than chronological age and doing things *to* children or developmental stages and doing things *for* children, we should think of childhood as a characteristic of life; we should be doing things *with*



children, creating a relational model of equals- a model in which all of us have something to offer each other (359).

This revolutionary concept provides deep insights into the parental participation in faith nurture of children. It also rings with the earlier discussion that Jesus values children as “models of kingdom life and mirrors of kingdom hearts” (Campagnola 2004, 78-79). In another book, “*Bringing up Children in Christian Faith*”, Westerhoff (1980) gave five worthwhile and practical guidelines to parents and adults who “walk” with the children in the pilgrimage. Even though this is a much earlier book, the ideas of the author are still relevant today for the families in the SCAC churches.

Parents need to:

- 1) Tell and retell the biblical story: Westerhoff indicates that the Bible is not for knowledge and studies only. Parents should tell and retell the stories as they are without explanation and allow the stories to speak to the deepest chord of the soul (38-39). This action echoes the teaching of the Bible that parents are to impress on the children the Word of God.
- 2) Celebrate faith and lives together with rituals and ceremonies: Rituals are symbolic actions expressing the religious life. Both parents and children can encounter meaningful and in-depth experiences when involving rituals and celebrations (41-43).
- 3) Pray together: Prayer is more than a wish list presenting to God. Prayer is “to be aware of God’s presence, to acknowledge it, and to express it” (45). Parents are to make prayer their way of life and to share with the children a life in friendship with God.
- 4) Listen and talk with the children: Westerhoff suggests that parents share their past experiences, doubts and fears, insights and life stories with their children (49-51).
- 5) Serve and witness together with the children: in this way, faith is expressed and conveyed through actions and lifestyle (52).

#### *The Research Work of Holly Allen*

The goal of Allen’s doctoral research (2002) was “to use grounded theory research methodology to examine children’s spirituality in intergenerational and

non-intergenerational church settings” (Allen 2004, 273). However, in the course of analyzing the data, an unanticipated phenomenon on parental influence in children’s faith development emerged. The research in U.S.A. consisted of interviewing forty children from six different churches between the ages of nine and eleven years. These six churches can be grouped into two types -- intergenerational churches and non-intergenerational churches. The interview protocol of the field research consisted of twenty questions. For example, one of the questions asked, “Of all the people you know, who you think knows God the best?” Out of forty children, thirty-four identified either one or both of their parents as people they thought knew God the best. The children’s answers suggested that parents have a significant role in their children’s faith (Allen et al. 2012, 206).

With what has been gleaned from the interviews of the children and the literature, Allen proposes five practical recommendations which offer insights to parents as they nurture faith of their children. Even though these recommendations were given in the context of North America, they are inspiring to the urban Chinese families in the SCAC churches. These insights are:

- 1) Family rituals are important to nurture a life of faith in the children.  
“Parents should pray with their children, read Scripture, tuck them into bed at night with a prayer and Bible story, and attend worship services as a family” (214).
- 2) Build relationship with the children through sharing, carrying on ordinary conversations, spending time to do ordinary activities.
- 3) Model through actions and words. “Parents need to model what they want their children to do and be” (214).
- 4) Balance loving support with strong boundaries and discipline. A healthy parenting style yields the best results in nurturing the faith of the children (215).
- 5) Nurture faith in the context of intergenerational faith community in which children can observe and interact with others. Allen articulates that “intergenerational ministry embraces a holistic view of family and places all ages in the body of Christ as a family” (216). When parents are intentional in participating in the intergenerational settings, children can

“observe, interact, and participate in cross-generational worship, prayer, teaching and learning” (216).

*The Research Work of Chris Boyatzis*

Parent-child conversations are rich contexts for parental participation in faith nurture of children. Often unidirectional transmission is assumed with parent-child conversation because parents tend to instruct the children and expect the children to listen. However, a recent study finds otherwise. Boyatzis and Janicki (2003; revised in 2004) found new insights in parent-child communication. Twenty-three families with both parents and a child or children at their primary age living together participated in this study. The mean age of the child is 7.6 years. Participants were all Caucasians and almost all Christians. Families were recruited from churches, parochial schools, and preschools in central Pennsylvanian.

Participating parents were asked to complete the parent-child communication diary forms in two separate periods with duration of one week each. Parents were to self-record in their diary entries the spiritual or religious dialogues with their children during this time (Boyatzis 2004, 186-187). The objective was to investigate the frequency, content and structure of the parent-child communication to see if it was characterized by bi-directional (mutual conversations) or unidirectional communication (parent-to-child).

This study reveals that the children have complex ideas about religion and they are not just passive recipients. The study shows that the religious conversations between parents and children support a bi-directional and co-construction results. Mothers recorded virtually all the diaries and almost half of the fathers did not participate in any diary conversations (189). Of the 14 topics listed in the data, the most discussed topics in Christian homes are God, Jesus and prayer (187). Unexpectedly, results show that the children initiated most of the conversations (65% in the first data entry and 78.6% in the second data entry) rather than the parents. Another study by Dollahite and Marks (2005) also indicated that the parent-child discussions of religious issues were often initiated through children's concerns and questions (Boyatzis et al. 2006, 299). Conversations were often triggered by daily routines or religious rituals. Rarely were there conversations en-route from worship services or Sunday schools (187).

One of the drawbacks of a self-record diary report is that there may be private issues that parents do not want to list down. Or, that the entries may have been “edited” by parents in order to read like a “theoretically correct” conversation. Also, because there are only two periods of time needed to be recorded, the actual frequency of parent-child conversations might be different. Nonetheless, this diary form is an important window to understand the nature of parent-child communication.

The study of Boyatzis and Janicki provides insights for parents to participate in faith nurture of their children. Parents need to patiently allow time and create space for religious dialogue. It is with openness and faith that both child and parent can grow and learn together in that space (194).

#### *The Research Work of Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May*

The work of Stonehouse and May (2010) covered four research projects. In these four projects it is discovered that parents play a significant role in nurturing faith of their children. The authors articulate that “Children gave us a glimpse of their spiritual potential, how they were at work putting together pieces of theological understandings, how they experienced God, and how their interactions with adults helped or hindered” (6). The first project “*Listening to Children*” began in summer, 1998. Forty children between the ages of five and ten from two different churches but the same community in North America participated in this project. They were engaged with an interview composed of various conversations and art activities in order to prompt them to share about their experiences with God and the Bible. In order to have a better glimpse of the child’s spirituality, parents were also interviewed. The second set of interviews was conducted after three and half years. A total of nineteen children from the same group were there to talk about God and to share their reflections on Bible stories. Again, the third set of interviews was conducted in 2005 with twenty-one children who were by then mostly teenagers. Parents were also interviewed to gain a better understanding as they reflect on their family spiritual journey. Findings indicated that the children are capable of having meaningful encounters with God and the adults and parents need to be willing to listen to the children.

The second project was the *Adult Reflections Study* in which twenty-seven adults between the ages of 24 and 45 were interviewed. These are adults who have been Christians since childhood. They were asked to share their “memories and feelings about their childhood faith experiences” (4). A follow-up interview was done to verify the findings. Finding of this study revealed that adults had vivid memories of how the message of faith was presented, both for the good and the not-so-good impact (150).

The third project was the *Good Shepherd Research*. Based on the principles developed from the work of Sofia Cavalletti, Jerome Berryman, and Sonia Stewart, a 10-week curriculum for preschoolers which focused on life with the Good Shepherd was implemented in the church. Two months later, fourteen children were interviewed and subsequently, after two years, twelve of the children from the same group were interviewed again. The aim of this project is to find out how young children would respond to a place which was specially and carefully designed as a sacred space for the children (59).

The fourth project, the *Good Shepherd Family Research*, was conducted to see if children would respond in a similar way as the third project, but in a different setting, that is at home. This field study involved a six-week series curriculum designed for families. Six families were invited to participate and the adults were asked to journal their experiences and thoughts. After two months, interviews with the parents were conducted. Results concluded families were able to enjoy this special and sacred time together with God at home (67).

One common thread of these projects was the use of *Reflective Engagement* as a tool to discover or unravel children’s understanding of God and the Bible. This reflective engagement opens a different path and allows both parents and the children to enter into the story and encounter God themselves. This also echoes Westerhoff’s theory of allowing the biblical story to speak to the children without much explanation (1980, 38-39).

One of the great strengths of Stonehouse and May’s study is that it stretches over a period of eight years, from 1998 to 2005. Valuable insights on parental participation in faith nurture of children were gathered through these four interwoven research projects. Some of the common themes that emerged are:

- 1) Parents and children need to practice family prayer together by creating a sacred place to meet God (49).
- 2) Parents and children are to meet God in congregational worship (56).
- 3) Parents and children are to meet God in the biblical story (84). This happens when the parents and children alike make the biblical story their own (86).
- 4) Parents' own growing relationship with Jesus Christ is important (106).
- 5) Parents and children need to show compassion to others and serve others together (120).

#### *The Research Work of Brendan Hyde*

The research work of Brendan Hyde (2008) on children's spirituality shows valid and invaluable insights for the parents. Hyde's study was on thirty-five children (15 boys and 20 girls) from three different schools in Australia. The research method was to conduct three semi-structured meetings with groups of six children with each meeting lasted for about forty-five minutes to an hour. Each meeting focused on one of the categories developed by the study of Hay and Nye (2006): awareness sensing, mystery sensing and value sensing. The data collected formed the basis of the study and was then used to identify and describe four characteristics of children's spirituality.

The research of Hyde gives a solid contribution in understanding the children's spirituality as well as valuable insights in parental participation in faith nurture of children. Hyde admits that the research work of Hay and Nye gave him the initial impulsion and inspiration for devising this research project. Insights on parental participation in faith nurture of children are drawn from the four characteristics of children's spirituality identified and described in the research.

*The felt sense* refers to the "intensity and immediacy of awareness of the present moment" (86). It is a moment that can only be experienced by the individual and often he or she is not aware of the passing the time. Hyde suggests that parents and adults allow the children to engage with the sensory, ordinary and everyday activities of childhood. Hyde laments that in the fast paced Western world, it seems very difficult.

*Integrating awareness* “entails the emergence of a second wave of consciousness” (99). While the *felt sense* bases on the immediacy of experience, *integrating awareness* pertains the attention to the environment. Hyde suggests that parents provide a conducive space for children to have some possible sensory activities, some opportunities for silence and solitude, and also guided meditation (107).

*Weaving the thread of meaning* refers to “children’s ability to draw upon their sense of wonder in order to make meaning of events and to piece together a worldview based around their attempts at meaning-making” (122). Hyde advises parents to be aware of these different frameworks of children such as the media, the music, and the people the children come into contact every day. Parents need to discuss these with the children and take an interest in the children (123).

*Spiritual questing* entails “the children searching for authentic ways in which to relate with Self and Other” (130). Suggestions for parents to be involved in the children’s spiritual quest are to support children in their efforts, affirm the children for who they are, provide guides, become familiar with ways and places children may quest, identify things that really matter, create space and environment, encourage reflection and meditation and journaling (138-140).

In the course of the research study, especially during the value sensing group meetings, Hyde identified the two inhibitors of the children’s spirituality—material pursuit and trivializing. Material pursuit promotes a sense of preference to the material rather than the faith community. Trivializing implies the masking of true inner feelings and retreating into solitude and silence. These two inhibitors reminded parents of this high-technology era to promote the value of simplicity and to spend more time with the children so as to foster trust and honesty (156-159).

#### *The Research Work of Dana Hood*

Dana Hood’s work (2004) involved a qualitative research on six kindergarten children in studying their concepts of God. A multiple layer of contextual influences of people on these children was observed. These people involved are the parents, Bible class teachers, and the children’s pastors who are of a Protestant Christian denomination in U.S.A. Both the six children and the various people involved are from the same faith community. The five influences being observed

are family, faith community, broader community, the child as an active participant, and the study as context (Hood 2004, 236). The study was conducted with interviews and observations. One limitation of this study is the smaller sample size and within the same faith community, this has limited generalizability; however, the findings are meaningful and insightful.

The strength of this research work is also its uniqueness as it examines the context of the children in order to understand the children's perception of God. The theoretical framework of Hood's research (2004) draws on the contextualist perspective of Susanne Johnson (1989), John Westerhoff III (1976), Barbara Rogoff (1990), and the ecological theory developments of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). Hood (2004) points out that research without regard to the authentic contexts will result in an incomplete understanding of children's perceptions of God (235). The result of this study demonstrates that the faith community context cannot be ignored when trying to understand the children's concept of faith. It concludes that the family unit is the primary influence on the child's faith development and the child is affected by the parents' interactions with the faith community (237). This concept echoes the biblical concept of the household and nurturing faith of the children in the faith community.

The implications of this study in relation to parental participation in faith nurture of children are twofold. First, parents are advised to talk *with* the children rather than talk *to* them in the matter of faith nurturing (246). This is to help the children to make sense of their own thinking and ideas in their own way. Second, in relation to the first implication, the adults and parents are advised to listen with anticipation without dismissing the children's talk as immature thinking or ideas.

Concluding this section on literature review, some of the recurring themes gathered from the above seven prominent research works and theories are:

- 1) Develop family rituals: Family rituals and traditions such as praying together, eating meals together, reading bed time stories can vary between families but they are important to the children in their faith development. (Wuthnow, 1999; Westerhoff, 1980; Allen, 2002, 2004)
- 2) Maintain an open space for a bi-directional communication: Parents need to be patient and create space and time to listen and talk with the children.



(Westerhoff, 1980, 2000; Allen, 2004; Boyatzis, 2004; Hyde, 2008; Hood, 2004; Stonehouse and May, 2010)

- 3) Experience praying together: Parents can create a sacred place at homes to experience God in silence and reflection. (Westerhoff, 1980; Hyde, 2008; Stonehouse and May, 2010)
- 4) Read the Bible with the children: It is important to enter the biblical story and allow both the parents and the children to experience God through making the stories their own. (Westerhoff, 1980; Stonehouse and May, 2010)
- 5) Worship together in a faith community: Through observing, interacting, and participating in various church ministries with different age groups of people, children embrace a holistic view of family of God and come to experience Him in the body of Christ. (Wuthnow, 1999; Allen, 2002, 2004; Stonehouse and May, 2010)
- 6) Serve and show compassion together in the faith communities and beyond: Serving together helps children to put their faith into actions. . (Westerhoff, 1980; Stonehouse and May, 2010).

The common themes emerging from the theories and research works are instructive in the forming of field research questions.

#### An SCAC Contextual Response to the Literature Review

- 1) Develop family routines: Though these routines suggested by Allen seem mundane and repetitive, they are indeed very much a reflection of the biblical concept in Deut. 6:7. Yet in the SCAC churches context, it might be a challenge for the parents because most parents are busy with their work and church involvement while children are busy with study and tuition. A typical night to turn in for the families of the SCAC churches is 9 p.m. or later. By then, both the parents and children will find it challenging to do more family routines that could be related to the faith nurture process.
- 2) Nurture faith of children in the context of intergenerational faith community: While Clapp (1993) refers the church as the first family (77), a Chinese Bible Scholar, Samuel Tang, calls the church “large family”.

Relating to this concept closely, Tang (2002) calls the biological family “small family” (小家庭) while the church family “large family” (大家庭). He points out that the individual family is the foundation of the church family. The individual family blends into the church family and then from the church family, support and enrichment flow out into the individual family again (241). They are not competitive; they are also not “either one or the other”. Indeed, the biological families are dependent on the church household to live a victorious life in Jesus Christ.

This concept of nurturing children’s faith in the intergenerational faith community sounds alarm to the SCAC churches. Most, if not all, of the churches have followed the common practice of separating children, youths, and adults when coming to church. Somehow, in an unspecified manner, children and youths are seen as obstacles and noises in the church and are important to “remove” in order for the adults to worship quietly. While there are strengths in reaching out to the age appropriate groups, the fact that when there is little or no intergenerational worship and settings in the church, everyone suffers the loss. And perhaps the parents and the children suffer the most in the faith nurturing process.

John Roberto advocates strongly for the intergenerational Christian experiences for faith formation of the whole family. Roberto (2007) points out that “most congregations would do well to transform their over-emphasis on age-group learning and incorporate family-centered learning programs or intergenerational learning programs, which involve the whole community: singles, couples, families with children/teens, empty nest families, and older adults” (8). The benefits of intergenerational Christian experience are significant yet the SCAC churches seem to overlook such matter.<sup>2</sup>

- 3) Maintain a bi-directional communication: Bi-directional communication echoes the teachings of the Bible where God commanded the parents to

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<sup>2</sup> Roberto’s article provides seven benefits for both the families and the faith communities. 1) Build up the confidence and ability of parents to share faith with their children; 2) Provide a shared experienced of families learning together; 3) Model faith traditions and practices; 4) Encourage family conversations; 5) Encourage conversations among families and other generations; 6) Provide resources to help families share and practice their faith at home; 7) Encourage family to participate more actively in church life (8, 9). More information can be found on [www.lifelongfaith.com](http://www.lifelongfaith.com).

explain and to teach when the children asked questions. Lee Bee Teik (2009), in her book *Experiencing the Heart of Pastoral Counseling*, also articulates communications as ways to build a loving home. She states, “By talking and working and playing and praying together -- parents communicating with God; fathers communicating with mothers; parents communicating with children; children communicating with each other; children communicating with God” (348), indeed communications builds a loving home.

Yet communication also needs time and effort. In her study, Sue Lee Chew (2012) laments that Malaysia parents on average spend eight minutes a day with their children (114). With such a busy lifestyle, it will be very hard to generate a close relationship or meaningful communication between parent and children.

- 4) Experience God in silence and reflection: The reflective engagement tool used by Stonehouse and May promotes a quiet reverent atmosphere to reflect on God. The reflective attitude, the displayed art work, and the storytelling figures are quite foreign to the SCAC churches because the norm for teaching in the SCAC churches is more of rational and oral manner. Parents of the SCAC churches will benefit in this reflective engagement tool and can encounter God in silence and reflection.<sup>3</sup>
- 5) Parenting styles and faith nurture of children: As in personality style, parents also have their own distinct styles when raising children. Some parents are warm and easy going while others are strict and demanding towards their children. While no two parents are the same, there are systematic resemblances and differences between the styles of the parents. This sub-point of parenting styles is a lengthy discussion due to the cultural complexities involved. One common theory of parenting styles was developed by Diana Baumrind (1971). Baumrind conceptualized parenting into three prototypical parenting styles as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. She uses the levels of parental warmth and control as the

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<sup>3</sup> See Scottie May. 2006. The contemplative-reflective model. In *Perspectives on children's spiritual formation: 4 views*, ed. Michael Anthony, 45-102. Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers. This chapter of the book gives significant insights and wisdom in leading children through Contemplative-Reflective model.

measuring standards for the various styles (Morrison and Cooney 2002, 144).

Later in 1983, the three prototypical parenting styles were revised into four parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved or neglectful (Morrison and Cooney 144). These four different parenting styles can be identified by two scales of variations:

*Directive/demanding* and *responsive/supportive*. *Directive/demanding* refers to the control, demands, expectation, and the disciplinary acts of parents towards the children. *Responsive/supportive* refers to the parents' love, support, and responsiveness employ with children. The degrees of *directive/demanding* and *responsive/supportive* create a grid to explain the four styles. Baumrind (1971) argues that too much parental control as in the authoritarian parenting style was harmful to the child's self-esteem; instead, the more preferred style was authoritative (c.f. Buri, Louiselle, Misukanis, and Mueller 1988).

However, recent developments in the study of parenting and family studies demonstrated that these parenting styles may not be culturally applicable to Asians (Chao and Tseng 2002, 78). Ruth Chao and Vivian Tseng (2002) in their extensive study on parenting of Asians state that "Asian parents have been found to be relatively more restrictive in their parenting compared to parents from other societies and ethnic groups" (79). In the area of education achievement, Asian parents "also have very high expectations and aspirations for their children's education" (81). Tay Ee Lin and Tam Cai Lian (2011) in their findings state that "authoritarianism was not universally correlated with negative outcomes in children and adolescents" (VI-21). Abdorreza Kordi and Rozumah Baharudin (2010) also discover "despite the criticism heaped on authoritarian parenting style as practiced by Asian parents, Asian children studies have revealed were autonomous, achievement-oriented, and self-controlled" (221).

There are distinct cultural differences in the understanding of the term "control". In Asian context, parental control "guan" (管) is strongly correlated with warmth which is more connected to authoritative rather than authoritarian (Stewart et al. 1998). In addition, the parental control in

authoritarian style in Asian context could mean setting limits to help children organise their behaviours and learn from their consequences (Lau and Cheung 1987). This is also more related to the authoritative style of parenting. Both “guan” and “setting limits to help children” pointed to the direction of disciplining children in love.

Furthermore, Keshavarz and Baharudin (2009) state that Malaysian parents endorsed authoritarian parenting style and it was accepted locally by the people. Fathers who are strict in discipline yet warm to the children still helped adolescents to behave accordingly and develop better coping abilities. Parents who emphasize spiritual growth, self-control and passion within children also yielded positive outcomes among the adolescents (68).

Another study by Sungwon Kim on parenting styles show that specific parenting behaviours and attitudes can enhance or hinder the faith development of the children (cited in Allen 2008, 15). Kim conducted an extensive analysis of the research on parenting styles and outcomes in children in regards with the religious and spiritual aspect. She concludes that in order for parents to nurture faith of their children effectively, the parental love, support, care, and acceptance are always required (Kim 2008, 244). In contrast, parental discipline yielded varying results. Two key factors were identified concerning parental discipline. They are motivation and manner of discipline. Discipline which is love-oriented rather than power- or punishment-oriented appears to be most helpful in faith nurture of children (245).

Discussions on parenting styles suggested that there is some correlation between the styles the parents used and the faith nurture process. However, there are also controversial aspects in findings. One of the reasons could be because of the differences in understanding of forms and terms of the parenting styles in the cultural context. Despite the terms used in parenting style, it appears that parents who show supportive love and discipline with constraints results in the most positive spiritual outcome in children as suggested by Kim. This concept of supportive love and discipline with constraints rings with the biblical concept of loving discipline of God. Proverbs 3:12, “because the Lord disciplines those he

loves, as a father the son he delights in”. Parents of the SCAC churches can reap the most effective results in faith nurture of children if there is a balance with love and discipline in their faith nurturing process.

### **C. History of the Methodist Church in Sarawak on Parental Participation in Faith Nurture of Children**

This section demonstrates the parental participation in faith nurture of children through the teachings of John Wesley, the Methodist literature, and findings from the church archives and related literature. The goal is to find out how the teachings of these historical records have been followed.

#### **Teachings of John Wesley**

Historical record reveals that the SCAC has its long rich heritage from the Methodist Church. John Wesley, the founder and father of Methodism, demonstrated his concern for the overall well-being of children which includes their faith and moral development. His two sermons “On Family Religion” (Wesley 1986, 334 -346) and “On the Education of Children” (347-360) provided clear instructions for parental participation in faith nurture of children. Wesley gave specific instructions of what parents should do at home with their children; but before he did that, he laid a clear foundation for parents. Wesley indicated that the parents’ relationship with God and the life they lived would be far more important than the things they taught the children (334-336). The tasks of the parents based on the sermons of John Wesley can be summarized as follows:

First, parents are “to restrain them (the children) from all outward sin” (338). This is done with a labor of love, “not only by advice, persuasion, and reproof, but also by correction; only remembering that this means is to be used last-not till all others have been tried, and found to be ineffectual” (330).

Second, parents are to instruct their children, even to the extent of everyone in the family under the same roof, the knowledge of salvation. Wesley took special care to remind parents to allow everyone in the house to attend all the ordinances of God and also “have some time every day for reading, meditation, and prayer” (340).

Wesley specifically said that the instructions must be done as early as the child can understand, and instructions must be spoken plainly. It must also be done frequently, not losing any opportunity. Lastly, it must be carried out with patience and not giving up too soon. In Wesley's mind, no amount of patience is enough for the work. Above all, the parents are to look up to God for enlightenment. Wesley reminded the parents that only "God can make them (the children) to differ herein from the beasts that perish" (340-342).

Third, the ultimate goal of parents is to cure the general "disease" of human nature, namely, atheism, willfulness, pride, love of the world and material things, falsehood, anger, and injustice. While this sermon was written in 1783, the "diseases" listed are relevant today. Wesley gave practical suggestions and examples for parents to follow. He did not just instruct the parents on what they ought not to do, but pointed out to them that the way they treated their children, if not aware, might bring in a complete opposite undesirable effect. Again, Wesley taught in his sermon that the life experiences and everyday life example of parents are more powerful than what one can imagine (350-360).

Fourth, parents are to curb the will of the child as early as possible. By submitting to the parents, the child learns to submit to God (354-360). This advice may sound harsh to the ears of this age, but it has to be understood and implemented in the whole picture of laboring in love. Wesley believed that "the best safeguard against rebellion is a deep-seated confidence in God's love" (Stonehouse 2004, 145). Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Wesley's words and works are still applicable.<sup>4</sup>

### The Methodist Literature

The literature of the Methodist Church in Malaysia is not silent in the teaching of faith nurture of children. *The Book of Discipline* of the Methodist Church in Malaysia serves as a complete guide to doctrinal statements and the general rules to all the Methodist churches. Clear instructions on parental participation in faith nurture of children can be found in *The Book of Discipline*.

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<sup>4</sup> For more Wesleyan's view of faith development at home, see Diane Leclerc and Mark Maddix, eds. 2011. *Spiritual formation: A Wesleyan paradigm*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press.

There are three sections in which ministry and nurture of children are called for or mentioned. The first section addresses the church members; the second section addresses the pastors, and the third section expresses the Social Principles.

#### *Duties of the Members and Meaning of Membership*

In Section IV, paragraph 112, parents are instructed “to be diligent in conducting family worship” (*The Book of Discipline* 2012, 56). The complete paragraph is quoted below with highlights that show the parental role.

#### Section IV. Duties of Members and Meaning of Membership

Para.112. When persons unite with a local Methodist church, they profess their faith in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, and in the Holy Spirit. They covenant together with God and with the members of the local church to keep the vows which are a part of the order of confirmation and reception into the church. Every member should be loyal to The Methodist Church, faithfully upholding the doctrine, policy, rules and regulations of the church as herein set forth. They should be faithful in attending the stated services of divine worship in the church, in celebrating the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, in reading and meditating upon the Scriptures, in engaging in private prayer, and in participating in the public meetings for prayer and Christian fellowship. **Heads of families should be diligent in conducting family worship, in providing Christian instruction and guidance for the household, and in setting a good example in all manner of Christian living.** Every member who is serious about his personal salvation and his desire to follow Christ will give evidence of his sincerity by avoiding that which is forbidden in the Word of God and by endeavoring to do that which is enjoined therein. He will not only avoid the evils specifically forbidden in the Holy Scriptures but will also refrain from that which cannot be practiced in the name of Christ. He will endeavor to love God with his whole heart and to serve Him with all his strength, faithfully discharging every duty belonging to the service of God.

#### *Duties of Pastors in the Church*

In Section VIII, Children and the Church, paragraphs 133-137, the relationship between children and the church is explained. Specifically, the pastor-in-charge of any local church is to fulfill the following duties concerning children in the church.

- 1) Pastor-in-charge is to exhort Christian parents or guardians to present their children to baptism at early age. Parents are to be instructed the



meaning and the vow of this sacrament. Parents are to faithfully nurture and bring their children up in “conformity to the Word of God and in the fellowship of the Church” (*The Book of Discipline* 2012, 62).

- 2) Pastor-in-charge is to furnish the parents or guardians of the child a certificate of Baptism stating that this child is a preparatory member in the Methodist Church. Congregations are admonished to take up the responsibility to nurture the child as well (62).
- 3) Pastor-in-charge is to keep accurate register of the names of all baptized children in his charge so as to transmit to his next pastor-in-charge clearly (62).
- 4) A proper confirmation training course should be given to all the baptized children when they are accepted into the full membership of the Methodist Church (62-63).
- 5) It is the duty of the pastor-in-charge, the parents or guardians, and other significant adults to lead the children to understand and to have a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (63).

#### *Instructions from the Social Principles*

In 2010, the SCAC published the section of Social Principles in *The Book of Discipline* separately as the Methodist Belief Handbook. This handbook serves as a guide and rule of life for members of the Methodist Church. The Social Principles are “formulated as a response of the Methodist Church in Malaysia to human issues in the contemporary world. They are based on a biblical and theological foundation enriched by our Methodist tradition” (*The Book of Discipline* 2012, 32). There are six categories of the social principles, namely: i) The Family and Marriage, ii) Christianity and the Economic Order, iii) Church and General Welfare, iv) Human Rights and Responsibilities, v) Peace and World Order and vi) Political Life (*The Book of Discipline* 2012, 31-52). The introduction of the Handbook states its purpose well:

“The interest of The Methodist Church in social welfare springs from the gospel, and from the labors of John Wesley, who ministered to the physical, intellectual, and social needs of the people to whom he preached the gospel of personal redemption.

In our historic position we have sought to follow Christ in bringing the whole of life, with its activities, possessions, and relationships, into conformity with the will of God.

As Methodists we have an obligation to affirm our position on social, economic, political and environmental issues and challenges” (Methodist Belief Handbook 2010, 41).

Under the category of the Family and Marriage, there are five points with the sub-title of Parent and Child Relationship (See the full text in appendix A).

- 1) We believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity. We believe that the parental relationship is the primary relationship upon which children are welcome members to the family. We affirm the importance of both fathers and mothers for all children.
- 2) We affirm the shared responsibility for parenting by fathers and mothers and encourage social, economic, and religious efforts to enhance and strengthen relationships within families in order that every member maybe nurtured and assisted toward complete personhood.
- 3) We recognize the burden of single parent families and their need for understanding, care and support from the community and the Church.
- 4) We view with concern the diminishing time available for families to be together in our modern society. Families need to give priority to spending quality time together for family life enrichment, and in worship and recreation.
- 5) We believe that children have a responsibility to love, honour, respect and care for their parents, especially in sickness and old age (Methodist Belief Handbook 2010, 51).

The above principles recognize that parental relationship is the primary relationship in the family unit and parents play an important role in nurturing faith of their children. It sees the need, responsibility as well as the danger of modern families having less and less time together in their busy schedule. It echoes John Wesley’s words, “this is a glorious and important trust” (Wesley 1986, 337). These principles set as guidelines for the churches, families, and individuals to put into workable and practical modes.

### Findings on Parental Participation in Faith Nurture of Children from the Methodist Church Archives and Related Literature

The Methodist Church has had a presence in Sarawak for more than 110 years (since 1901). The history of the Methodist Church in Sarawak is intertwined with three dominant strands: 1) the mission to China of the American Methodist Episcopal Church (North), 2) the Methodist Mission in Singapore and Malaya and c) the influx of the Chinese Methodists from Foochow, China (Liong 2000, 103). There were five major periods.

- 1) The Foundational Period (1901-1935). This period witnessed the formation of the early Methodist Church in Sarawak through the Foochow immigrants from China and the dynamic and leadership of the first missionary couple, Rev and Mrs. James Hoover (Liong, 128).
- 2) The Consolidation Period (1936-1951). This period was characterized by more missionaries serving in the churches and training up local leadership (Liong, 150).
- 3) The Great Expansion Period (1952-1968). This period saw the expansion of the Methodist Church in major cities and towns in all divisions of Sarawak (Liong, 166).
- 4) The Early Autonomous Church Period (1969-1976). This period marked the internal struggles as well as the social unrest of the armed guerrillas fighting against the government (Liong, 177).
- 5) The Later Autonomous Church Period (1977-1988). This period witnessed the internal spiritual growth and the external evangelism and missions (Liong, 182). After 1989 until the present, the Methodist Church enters into The Grace Flowing Period (Wong 2004, 32).

The brief history of the Methodist Church in Sarawak since 1901 helps to lay the foundation as well as understand the context of the Church. The followings are some reviews from the Church Archives and related literature on parental participation in faith nurture of children.

In 2001, Methodist Church in Sarawak celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and in conjunction with this celebration, a series of books on the account of Borneo

Chinese Works were compiled. These writings and minutes were works recorded in the Malaysia Message and Minutes of the Malaysia Mission Conference and Malaysia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Wong, 2001; Wong 2002; Wong 2005). These former missionaries' diaries, letters, written records and minutes of Conferences serve as the first hand data of looking into the life of the missionaries and the early settlements. Table 1 summaries the excerpts from the archives which show relationships with education, childhood faith nurture, parental participation and families.

**Table 1: Excerpts from Archives on faith nurture and parental participation**

Event
<p>“Bro. Lim said very truly that our Foochow Christians <i>do not understand their responsibility for the education of their children</i> for they make them work in their gardens instead of sending them to school. The Foochows appear to have brought with them from China the impression that it is the <i>duty of the Mission to educate their children for them</i>, and even to pay the salaries of their preachers” (Rev. W. G. Shellabear, The Malaysia Message, 1/1914).</p>
<p>“The boarding school for girls was opened in 1911 with 15 pupils. Last year we had 45 on the roll, all of them from Methodist homes. Of all the girls that have left school, not one of them is lost to the community. I can put my hand on them all. <i>They are making Christian homes that are models to the rest of the women</i>” (Mary Hoover, The Malaysia Message, Vol. 27, 5/1918).</p>
<p>“My purpose is to so ground these girls in the Bible and Christian literature as to give them a foundation for <i>permanent character building and to prepare them to lead useful lives</i>. The other subjects are emphasized sufficiently, but these girls understand that the Words of Life come first” (Mary Hoover, The Malaysia Message, Vol. 38, No. 11, 12/1925).</p>
<p>“Here I learned to tell a Methodist home from a non-Methodist one. In the front or parlor room of each home is usually hung, facing the front door, a large cloth banner on which is inscribed in the Chinese character, the Apostles Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer. <i>Fully ninety percent of our Methodist homes have these banners hanging in their parlors</i>” (Rev. D.P. Coole, The Malaysia Message, Vol. 38, 4/1928).</p>

“Mrs. Hoover’s object is to educate these girls to go into their future homes as *Christian wives and mothers* and be trained to carry on as Sunday school teachers and help in Christian work as much as possible” (Rev. H.B. Amstutz, *The Malaysia Message*, Vol. 40, No. 9, 9/1930).

“*Our whole gain has been from our own boys and girls.* We make practically a clean sweep of them into the church as they become twelve years old. This is the joy of our work. We have 1,660 baptized children under twelve years, children of our own members, coming through our schools (in which are boys and girls) into the church.”---*This is the last report from Hoover. Shortly after this, he passed away* (James Hoover, Minutes of the 43<sup>rd</sup> session of the Malaysia Conference, 1/1935).

“Looking back to 40 years of missionary work in Sarawak we must acknowledge four notable achievements: viz.

1. The mission has been a pioneer in the field *of education*.
2. It has been one of the most potent factors in bringing into being intelligent and healthy boyhood and girlhood of today.
3. It has upheld moral standards at a time when the Japanese co-prosperity planners threw every moral code and tenet to the winds, and
4. It has led people into a world of hope and of eternal glory” (Homer Chieng, *The Malaysia Message*, Vol. 51, No.10, 10/1947).

“The Sarawak Four Year Movement started in 1948...The following have been stressed this year: 1) One gain one; 2) Sabbath observance; 3) Bible study; 4) *Family worship*; 5) Christian literature” (Wong Dong Sing, Wong King Hwo, and Eugene O. McGraw, Minutes of the 55th session of the Malaysia Conference, 12/1949).

The excerpts from the Church archives reveal that education had been the heart of the Church. One of the major works among the Methodist churches in Sarawak in the early days was education for girls. These “girls go out to become the wives and mothers of the new generation and bring Christ into the homes” (Wong 2005, 21). Details of how these wives and mothers influenced their homes were not found in records, the only one found was in 1949 when churches stressed “family worship” time at home. There were no direct records about fathers involving in faith nurture of children. Teachings of pastors and church leaders also did not have records of instructing the parents to be involved in nurturing faith of their children. Rather, churches and pastors were expected to provide and help educate the families in the church.

After the Japanese occupation (1941-1945), the Methodist Church began to regain its footing and slowly entered into the transition period from the Consolidation Period to the Great Expansion Period. In 1952, resident missionary Louis Dennis, wrote, “The Christian work here is growing rapidly, with the tendency to almost burst at the seams” (Liong 2000, 166). Inevitably, the works of the Church had brought great transformation in society and the lives of individuals in Sarawak. Methodism in Sarawak continues the teachings of their founder John Wesley in “Spreading the Scriptural holiness and transforming the nation”. As a whole, historical records show that the Methodist Church had gone through different periods in the past years. Each period had a different emphasis. In the area of parental participation in faith nurture of children, the humble beginnings of the Methodist church started with the education of young boys and girls. From there, a new generation of devoted Christians was brought up. Families at that time did not have any luxury of life or time; most of them struggled with basic necessities in life.

As the living standard improved and churches grew, training leaders and teaching church members became the foremost priority. During the Later Autonomous Period, the teaching ministries flourished and blossomed (Liong 2000, 279). Well-organized training programs for different fellowship groups, correspondence Bible schools, Sunday school programs and activities for church-related schools were available. Christian Family Life training sessions and Christian Family Life Weeks were organized to enable families to build harmonious loving relationships within the families (Liong 2000, 288). Topics such as dating, marriage, family and parenting, leading family members to Christ and conducting family worship were taught (Liong 2000, 293).

### *Related Literature*

Besides the archives, one other related literature worth discussing is the work of Bishop Peter Chio (Bishop Emeritus of the Methodist Church in Malaysia). In his thesis (1976), Chio studied the families of the Methodist Church in Singapore and found that a majority of the surveyed Singapore Methodists church members agreed that every Christian family should have regular family worship at home. In addition, mothers tend to agree more readily with the proposition than the fathers (24-27). However Chio (1976) observed, to the best of his knowledge of

understanding, that most Christian families do not hold regular family worship. He said agreeing with one thing and doing it is completely two different things (27). Chio further commented that the common practice of the Methodist church members is to have the pastor come to the house to conduct family worship. This was seen as part of the pastoral duty. This mentality echoes the records found earlier in the archives in 1914 that church members expected the pastors to take up their responsibility of faith nurture at home. According to Chio this thinking can still be seen in the 70s and 80s.

Chio concluded that “theoretically, many Methodists surveyed know what the Christian family should be like, and what it should be; but many of them are not actually putting these things into practice. Instead, they divorced their faith from their actual life-situation. They are not adequately nurtured to carry over their faith into their everyday lives: in the home, the Church and society” (Chio 1976, 340-341).

Eleven years later, Chio’s doctoral dissertation (1987) in the context of the SCAC also confirmed similar findings. Chio lamented that many parents send their children to the Sunday school wishing that the children can learn to behave well. Chio observed that many parents, especially the fathers, often drop their children in Sunday school but spend their time outside the church; they only return to fetch their children after the Sunday school is over (29). Chio also commented that parents do not know that they have responsibility at homes. Parents were not sure how to nurture faith of their children at home. Parents saw the Church as the major source of spiritual nourishment (30); however, many also expressed their disappointment in the church for not providing help in nurturing and being unable to stimulate enthusiasm or zeal in the church members (16). Chio called for an adequate nurture program in church which can meet the needs of families and assist families to live effectively in the home, church and society (19).

The study by Chio left the impression that for Methodist families in the 70s and 80s parental participation in faith nurture of children seemed minimal. When entering into the 90s and beyond, the Church has indeed experienced an awakening of family ministry. Family devotional materials were printed for families to use. Every year, the second Sunday in the month of May was designated to be Parents’ Sunday in order to encourage parents to teach their children and the children to

honor their parents. One of the major evidences was the establishment of the Board of Family Wellness and Counseling in May, 1990 (Wong 2004, 102). The main purposes of this Board were to promote family wellness, encourage communications between family members, strengthen family functions and prevent family problems. The ministries of this board had two major areas: 1) preventive and 2) curative. Preventive ministries involved education, training courses and marriage enrichment camps. Curative ministries involved counseling and listening (Wong 2007, 105). In recent years, some of the family ministries included the publication of family devotion materials, promoting family devotions at home, conducting pre-marital course (10 hours), marriage enrichment camps (3 days 2 nights), intimacy courses (3 months), and various parenting courses (Minutes of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference 2012, 75).

Findings from the Church archives and other related literature suggest some key practices that are relevant to the parental participation in the faith nurture of children among the SCAC churches. They are summarized as follows:

- 1) John Wesley affirmed parents as the primary instructors of the children's faith within a faith community.
- 2) Methodist Church literature recognizes parental relationship as the primary relationship in the family unit and parents play an important role in nurturing faith of their children.
- 3) During the Foundational Period, the concern was education to the boys and girls. Churches and pastors were expected to provide and help educate the families in the church.
- 4) During the Consolidation Period, there were promotions of doing family worship at homes.
- 5) During the Later Autonomous Church Period, Methodist church members knew the necessity of conducting family devotions as head knowledge but not as a practice. Churches were seen to promote Christian Family Life training sessions and Christian Family Life Weeks programs.
- 6) In the 1990s and beyond, the Board of the Family Wellness and Counseling published family devotion materials and promoted family devotion times at home.



- 7) Most parents were not involved in intentional spiritual nurturing but saw that as the task of pastors.

### **Summary**

This chapter has explored the relevant literature on the importance of parental participation in faith nurture of children in three sections. First, the parental participation in the faith nurture of children in the Bible is clearly documented. Children are to be nurtured in the faith community. The faith community plays a significant role in shaping and molding the faith of the children. Parents are to be intentional in instructing the children the Word of God through formal and informal occasions. Children should be included in religious activities both at homes as well as in the faith community. Children are valued as models of kingdom life and mirrors of kingdom hearts by Jesus.

Second, the contemporary insights on the importance of parental participation in faith nurture of children revealed that parents are important in the faith nurturing process. A list of the recurring themes from the literature review can be summarized as: 1) Develop family rituals, 2) Maintain open bi-directional communication, 3) Experience praying together, 4) Read the Bible with the children, 5) Worship together in a faith community, 6) Learn to serve together. A contextual response of the literature review suggests that there are challenges in developing family rituals and maintaining open bi-directional communication among the families of the SCAC churches because both the parents and children are very busy. This challenge could be the perceived gap in parental participation in faith nurture of children. A review on parenting styles and faith nurture of children suggests that discipline in love yields the most desirable results in faith nurture of children.

Third, findings from the archives of the Methodist Church in Sarawak and the related literature of the SCAC suggest that John Wesley affirmed the role of parents in nurturing faith of the children. Methodist Church literature also gives clear instructions for parents and church concerning faith nurture of the children in the family. Churches and pastors were expected to help educate the families in the church. Limited family life programs were promoted in the early years of the

church. Parents were not very keen in fulfilling their roles in nurturing their children in faith. Even though the historical records and other related literature are consistent with the teachings and practices of the Methodist faith communities and are affirmed by the Wesleyan teaching, many parents find it hard to apply in their family settings. This could be another perceived gap between the parents and the faith community.

Chapter Two seeks to answer research Sub-Question #1 and that is: *What aspects of the faith nurture literature have relevance in the context of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference?* This question was answered with the recurring themes gathered from this Chapter.

- 1) It is important for parents to model their own faith.
- 2) Parents should allow space and foster trustful and conducive environment for children in order to enhance the faith nurturing process.
- 3) Parents should take an effort to cultivate family rituals.
- 4) Parents and children should maintain an open and bi-directional communication.
- 5) Parents and children are capable of experiencing faith together.
- 6) Parents and children learn and serve together in the faith communities.
- 7) Parenting style balanced with love and discipline reaps the most effective results in faith nurture of children.
- 8) Partnering with the church in faith nurture of children is important.

These common themes are instructive in the forming of the questions in the interview protocols in this research study. The question of the following chapter is thus, to investigate how much or to what extent these practices are continued in the contemporary SCAC situation. For this purpose, the research tool for the field study is grounded theory. The following chapter will explain the field survey procedure.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THE FIELD SURVEY PROCEDURE**

This research study seeks to explore the appropriate parental participation in faith nurture of the primary school aged children in the urban Chinese families of the SCAC churches. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the field survey procedures in detail. Topics addressed in this chapter are: 1) the field survey process; 2) the participants; 3) the language used and clarification of translation; 4) the field survey instruments; 5) the pilot test; and 6) the data collection procedure. The field survey procedure provided data for coding and analysis which will be addressed in the following chapter.

#### **A. Restating the Research Question**

The research question of this study is: How can parents of the primary school aged children of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia be better equipped and be more effective as partners in the faith nurture of their children? Three subsidiary questions guided the field survey procedure.

1. What do parents currently perceive to be the key elements in faith nurture of their children?
2. What do children of the families perceive to be the parents' key elements in nurturing the faith of their children?
3. What do the parents and children perceive to be the relationship between church and family in terms of faith nurture approaches?

#### **B. The Field Survey Process**

This section gives an overview of the field survey process. The main goal of the field survey is to collect data from the participants of this study. The primary method of gathering the data in this field survey is through interviews with separate

protocols for the parents and the children (See Appendix B and Appendix C respectively). Eight families with primary school aged children from four different churches in the SCAC participated in this field survey. I first sought permission through the phone from the pastors-in-charge of the respective churches for conducting the field survey with some of their church members. I then emailed the “Letter of request to church pastor” (Appendix D) to further explain the field survey. With the consent from the pastors of the respective churches, I then contacted the chairpersons of the MAF (Methodist Adult Fellowship) and the MYAF (Methodist Young Adult Fellowship) of the respective churches for suggestion of potential participants. Once the names were obtained, I personally contacted the potential participants and invited both the parents and children of the families to be the field survey participants. The criteria for the selection of the families were: 1) both parents are Christians, 2) both parents and children are staying together; in other words, the parents are not working out-station or away from home for an extended period of time, 3) the families have been both attending and serving in their local churches consistently, and 4) the children are primary school aged.

A total of sixteen interview sessions were conducted, eight sessions with the adults and eight sessions with the children. For the adults’ interview, each interview session consisted of two parents of the same family. Interview time with the adults was 40-50 minutes per session. The venue of the interview was either in church or at home, with the criteria that it was convenient and appropriate for the participants. As for the children’s interview, each interview session consisted of children of the same family who are between ages seven and twelve years old. The interview time with the children was 25-35 minutes per session. The locations for the interview were chosen mainly out of convenience for the parents to bring their children. While some parents preferred coming to the Methodist Theological School where the researcher resides, other parents preferred the interview to be conducted in their homes. One family preferred their children to be interviewed in their church during the choir practice night for the parents. The interviews were conducted in Chinese. The data collected from the interviews were then transcribed into English. The English transcriptions became the data for analysis explained in Chapter Four.

The design of the interview protocols consisted of a set of semi structured questions and some open-ended questions. Though the grounded theory calls for theoretical sampling which requires revised interview questions after the tentative categories of the first round of data gathering, this study chose to have the same semi-structured questions with all eight participating families. The reason for this is that semi-structured questions will help the research to remain focused to the data available while complete unstructured questions usually offer “free flow” and unlimited information in data collection which will be overwhelming and not focused. In this field survey, follow up conversations with four sets of parents were done with emerging categories that need further investigation. The information gathered from these follow up conversations were incorporated into the data for analysis. Finally, the analyzed data were interpreted from the findings to develop a theory. To further enhance the accuracy of the theory, I validated the emerging theory with the two senior leaders of the Church.

### **C. The Participants**

Within the Sibu District of the SCAC there are fifteen churches which have the MYAF, MAF or both. I picked two churches which are located in town and the other two churches which are slightly further out but still have easy access to the town area. The criteria for the selection of these four churches are their locations and the regular fellowship attendance rates. I chose the churches with higher regular fellowship attendance rates. There are about forty-two families within the MYAF and MAF from these four churches that meet the research criteria. Out of the forty-two families, eight families were invited to participate in the field survey. The invited families did not reject the invitation though some took a long time to make arrangements due to the busy schedule of both the parents and the children. Finally all eight families were confirmed and appointments were made for the interview sessions. Four families had both the adult and children’s interviews on the same day while the other four families had the adult and children’s interviews on different days.

Tables 2 and 3 list the adult and children participants. To respect the confidentiality of the participants, an identity code was assigned to each individual in place of their names.

**Table 2: List of adult participants**

M- Mother, F- Father

Family	Date of Interview	Identity of parents	Church affiliation	Fellowship	Venue of interview
#1	7/11/2013	1 M 1 F	II	MAF	Methodist Pilley Institute
#2	4/11/2013	2 M 2 F	I	MAF	Methodist Theological School
#3	6/12/2013	3 M 3 F	III	MAF	Methodist Theological School
#4	15/2/2014	4 M 4 F	I	MYAF	Their house
#5	22/2/2014	5 M 5 F	IV	MYAF	Their house
#6	21/1/2014	6 M 6 F	III	MYAF	Methodist Theological School
#7	9/3/2014	7 M 7 F	III	MAF	Their house
#8	16/3/2014	8 M 8 F	I	MYAF	Methodist Theological School

Table 2 describes the adult participants. Three couples are from Church I, one couple from Church II; three couples from Church III, and one couple from Church IV. Four couples attend MAF while the other four couples attend MYAF. 3F is the former chairperson of the MYAF of his church. 5F, 6F, and 8F are the present chairpersons of the MYAF of their respective churches. The eight interviews were completed within a period of four and half months, from the beginning of November 2013 to mid-March 2014.

The eight couples demonstrated sincerity in their responses. Despite their tight schedules, they still made the effort to arrange time for the interviews. Some of them were nervous as they were afraid they could not answer the questions correctly because they have never been involved with this type of field survey. There were moments during the interview when the couples could not agree with

each other on certain opinions; yet, most of the time, the couples complemented each other in responding to the questions. Two mothers showed their emotions in shedding tears as they responded to some of the questions. Overall, the interview sessions with the adults went well and were substantially insightful.

**Table 3: List of children participants**

B-Boy, G-Girl

Family	Date of Interview	Identity of Children	Gender	Age	Church affiliation	Venue of interview
#1	11/1/2014	1B1 1B2 1G	Boy Boy Girl	11 9 8	II	Methodist Theological School
#2	14/11/2013	2B 2G	Boy Girl	10 8	I	Methodist Theological School
#3	18/1/2014	3B 3B	Boy Boy	11 8	III	Methodist Theological School
#4	15/2/2014	4G 4G	Girl Girl	11 9	I	Their house
#5	22/2/2014	5B	Boy	10	IV	Their house
#6	26/2/1014	6B1 6G 6B2	Boy Girl Boy	12 9 8	III	Church III
#7	9/3/2014	7B 7G	Boy Girl	11 9	III	Their house
#8	16/3/2014	8G 8B	Girl Boy	10 8	I	Methodist Theological School

Table 3 describes the details of the children participants. There were a total of seventeen children (ten boys and seven girls). The age range was from 8 to 11. The mean age of the children is 9.53. These children, together with their parents are from four different churches as mentioned earlier. All of the children started going to church with their parents since infancy and attend Sunday school regularly. Majority of the participating children also serve in their respective churches, such as the children's choir and the dance praise team. One boy serves as the drummer in the praise team of his church. In the interview process, each child was assigned

an identity code to ensure privacy. For example, 1B1 means the first boy in Family One, 1B2 means the second boy in Family One, 2G means the girl in Family Two.

All seventeen children involved in the children's interviews are primary school age ranging from Standard Two to Standard Six. Due to the age gap, there were noticeable differences in their responses. Children who are in their upper primary school level (Standard Four or above) answered the questions without much difficulty. The younger ones (Standard Two and Three) sometimes struggled to answer the questions and the questions were often rephrased. The attention span of the younger ones was relatively short and they inclined to become restless towards the end of the interview. As for all the seventeen participating children, it was the first time they met me. It took some effort for me to build rapport with them in a short time. However, even with the 30 minutes of interview, the children were friendly and honest in answering the questions.

#### **D. The Language Used and Clarification of Translation**

In this field survey, the interview protocols were first designed in English. Then, they were translated into Chinese for the interview sessions because the participating parents and children were all Chinese speaking. After the pilot test, the questions were rephrased for clarity and focus to be the final set of interview protocols for the research. The primary focus and the key term used in the interview protocol is “faith nurture” (信心培育). “Faith nurture” in this research refers to a process in which parents and other significant people create a suitable environment to help children to discover the grace of God, live in response to it, and grow towards the maturity of Jesus Christ. The direct Chinese translation of “faith nurture” is “foster belief” (增加信心). However, the term “foster belief” cannot fully express what the interview questions want to find out. Moreover, this is not a term commonly used in the context of the SCAC churches. Rather, the terms commonly used among the families of the SCAC churches are “spiritual nurture” or “spiritual growth”. In view of this, the closer Chinese translation for “faith nurture” is “spiritual nurture” (灵性培育). Hence, spiritual nurture in the interview protocols is not a direct word-to-word translation from English to



Chinese; rather it is a meaning-translation into the Chinese words in order to allow the research participants to have a better understanding.<sup>5</sup>

### **E. The Field Survey Instruments**

The major instrument used in this research study is a self-constructed semi-structured interview protocol for parents (Appendix B) and for children (Appendix C) respectively. The semi-structured interview protocols have structured questions as well as open-ended or unstructured question. This semi-structured interview protocol allows the research respondents the opportunity to offer information freely, while at the same time, enabling the researcher to remain focused with the mass amount of data collected.

The interview protocols were designed after the ideas gathered from Dawn (1999), Buckland (2009), Csinos (2011), Stephens (1997), Ratcliff (2010), Caldwell (2007), Allen (2004, 2008, 2012) and Anthony (2006). Some common themes emerged from the literature review on the parental participation in the faith nurturing process of children in Chapter 2. These themes are instructive in the forming of the questions in the interview protocols in this field survey. The two activities in the children's interview protocol were patterned to some degree after Eibner and Walker's worksheets (1997, 132, 133). Both interview protocols were shaped and reviewed at their initial stage by Holly Allen and Glenn Cupit through emails in April - May 2013.

#### **Adults' interview Protocol**

The adults' interview protocol consists of eight main questions and several Sub-Questions. All questions were conducted verbally except an additional writing activity required for Question Four. During the interview process, I took notes as well as audio-recorded the conversations. .

**Question One** asked: "*How are you?*" This question aimed to set a friendly atmosphere at the beginning and opened the communication between the

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<sup>5</sup> I am aware that in the English language, faith nurture and spiritual nurture are two different entities. But, in the Chinese culture and language, spiritual nurture is synonymous with faith nurture and the former is a more comprehensive term for nurturing religious beliefs.

researcher and the participating parents. I expressed my gratitude to the participating parents for taking the time out. I also explained to the participants their rights to privacy and sought permission to do an audio-recording of the conversation. The participants were also asked to read and sign the “Informed Consent Form” (Appendix F).

**Question Two** asked for the demographic information. The Sub-Questions were: *“How many children do you have and how old are they? Who lives in the house besides you and your children? How long have you been attending this church?”* These questions aimed to better understand the background of the participating parents and the families.

**Question Three** asked: *“How do you perceive your children’s faith? Can you give a rough idea?”* The Sub-Questions were: *“What are some ways that your children use to express their faith? Can you briefly describe a favorite or memorable spiritual moment with your children or expressed by your child/children?”* The Sub-Questions helped parents to perceive their children’s faith in more concrete ways. The idea was gleaned from Allen’s doctoral research in 2002 asking a child the time when she or he felt surprised or amazed about God (Allen 2004, 273). Since this research is on the parental participation in faith nurture of the children, this Sub-Question was rephrased to ask the parents instead of the children.

**Question Four** asked: *“What specific routines or interactions do your children have that you think help them grow in their faith?”* The Sub-Question was: *“What value do you see in each routine or interaction that is helpful to your children’s faith?”* The aim of the question was to find out the faith nurture process of the children and the values perceived by the parents. For this question, I took hand written notes by dividing a piece of paper into two columns. In the left column, I jotted down the activities or interactions the children have as mentioned by the parents. In the other column, I jotted down the parents’ perceived value of each activity.

**Question Five** asked: *“What challenges or hindrances do you think your children face for growing in their faith?”* The Sub-Questions were: *“What specific challenges or hindrances do you face when you try to help your children to grow in their faith? If there are challenges or hindrances, how do you address them?”* This

set of questions sought to hear the struggles of the parents in the faith nurturing process.

**Question Six** asked: *“What are some indications or evidences in your children that show they are growing in their faith?”* This question aimed to find out the children’s outward expression of their faith as perceived by parents.

**Question Seven** asked: *“Who or what do you think has responsibility for the faith nurture of your children?”* The Sub-Questions were: *“Does the SCAC or church offer any training for parents and/or children and/or families together to help the faith nurture of children? How effective are these ways, in your view?”* This set of questions helped to identify the main people responsible for faith nurture of the children as perceived by the parents. In addition, the parents’ comments on the SCAC and their churches will reflect on the relationship between the families and the faith communities.

**Question Eight** asked: *“Is there any further comment or question you would like to add?”* This was an open-ended and unstructured question. The aim was to provide room for the participating parents to respond freely of what is important to them. The participating parents might have wanted to share some information which was not included in the protocol.

### Children’s Interview Protocol

For the children’s interview protocol, I first sought permission from the parents to conduct the field survey with their children and invited them to sign the Parent Consent Form (Appendix H). The interview protocols of the children are semi-structured questions. Boyatzis and Newman (2004) point out that it is important to acquire appropriate techniques which will encourage genuine responses from the children (169). In view of this, I deliberately began the children’s interview protocol with a session of warm- up questions.

**Question One** asked: *“How are you today?”* The aim of this simple question was to set the atmosphere as friendly as possible and bring the participating children at ease. I further welcomed and thanked the children for helping me to do the field survey. I also sought permission from the children to do

audio-recording as well as inviting the children to read and sign the Assent Form (Appendix J).

**Question Two** asked for the demographic information. The Sub-Questions were: *“What is your name? Is this the name you want to use in this discussion? How was your day? Which school do you go to? What grade? Tell me something about your family. Who lives in your house? (Please draw a picture of your family on this paper).”* The purpose of these Sub-Questions was to become acquainted with the participating children. I provided color marker pens for the participating children to draw a picture of their family on the paper. This activity helped to break the ice and develop enough rapport between the children and the researcher. The activity also helped the children to freely share their ideas later in the interview. After this warm up session, there were a total of ten questions in the children’s interview protocol.

**Question Three** asked: *“How much do you think your Mummy loves God? Not much; Somewhat; Very much”* The Sub-Questions were: *“What makes you think your Mummy loves God? Anything else?”* The concept for the questions came from Allen (2004, 2008) to explore the child’s relationship with God through the people around them. The questions were thus designed to ask about the parents’ relationship with God as perceived by the children. Literature reviews show that parental modeling is an important factor in faith nurture and these questions will be able to provide the needed data for analysis.

**Question Four** asked: *“How much do you think your Daddy loves God? Not much; Somewhat; Very much.”* The Sub-Questions were: *“What makes you think your Daddy loves God? Anything else?”* This was a variation of Question Three. After asking about the mother’s relationship with God, this question aimed to find out the father’s relationship with God as perceived by the child.

**Question Five** (optional): *“... how about others in the family?”* This question refers to the genogram of the child’s household and refers to grandparents and other relatives. This question was only asked when there were other adults in the family. If there were no other adults indicated in the drawings, this question was not asked.

**Question Six** asked: *“Who do you know more, God or Jesus? Or who are you most comfortable with, God or Jesus?”* This question determined the child’s preference on God or Jesus and will be used accordingly throughout the interview.

**Question Seven** asked: *“Can you tell me what you think or how you feel about God? How much do you think you love God? Can you choose from one of the following: Not much; Somewhat; Very much?”* The Sub-Question was: *“What do you do to show that you love God?”* These questions were directed to the children’s own perceived faith. The children should be able to answer them without embarrassment after the ice breaking questions and the initial questions.

**Question Eight** asked: *“Tell me about the activities you attend in a normal week. Which of these help you know God more? How do these activities help or not help?”* The aim of these questions was to understand the children more in their daily routines and regular activities. I wrote down the list on paper while the child related the routines and activities. This question is similar to Question Four of the adult’s interview protocol but addressed to the children in order to understand both perspectives of parents and children.

**Question Nine** asked questions on knowing God more. The Sub-Questions were: *“What does your Daddy or Mummy usually talk about with you? Who helps you to know God better? Besides your parents, is there anyone else? What helps you to know God better?”* These questions sought to know more about the children’s perspectives on knowing God more.

**Question Ten** asked: *“How does your Daddy or Mummy talk about God at home?”* This sought to find out more about the faith nurturing process at homes and how it happened. A set of Sub-Questions were asked: *“Do they read the Bible to/with you? When does it usually occur? Do they read other books about God/Jesus to you? What is the book about? Can you remember the title of the book? Do they pray with you? How does that usually happen? Anything else you can think of. Do you hear Daddy or Mummy talk about how God answers prayer? How was it? Can you give one example? Do they talk about how God help others? How? Can you give me one example? Do they watch Bible videos or movies with you? What happens after watching? Do they talk about the story with you?”*

**Question Eleven** asked: *“When does Daddy or Mummy usually talk with you about God?”* The Sub-Question was: *“Is there a fixed time like in the morning, at night or during meal time, etc.?”*

**Question Twelve** asked: *“How do you feel when you talk with your parents about God?”* The purpose of this question was to compare the views of the children and the parents and to draw insights of the faith nurturing process. This question addressed the emotions of the children as they are nurtured in faith by the parents.

Towards the end of the children’s interview protocol, the participating children engaged in two activities.

**Activity 1:** The children were asked to circle ways their parents helped them to love God. They are to color green for activities their parents have done with them; red for activities they like, and blue for activities they do not like. The purpose of this activity was to understand the children’s thoughts and desires through drawing. Another reason was to provide some interesting variations during the interview for the children.

**Activity 2:** On a separate piece of paper, the children were asked to draw or write any other activities they wish to do with their parents. The purpose of this activity was to provide an unstructured opportunity for children to further express themselves and provide data which the interview protocol may have missed.

## **F. The Pilot Test**

The adults’ interview pilot test was conducted on 16 August, 2013 with a married couple from the Methodist Young Adult Fellowship (MYAF) of Wesley Methodist Church, Sibul. The interview lasted for 25-30 minutes and was conducted in the hallway just outside one of the function rooms in the Wesley Methodist Church. The children’s interview pilot test was conducted on 18 August, 2013 with two 11-year-old children, one boy and one girl. They are both in Primary five and both attend the Sunday school of Wesley Methodist Church. The interview lasted for 15-20 minutes and was conducted on Sunday in one of the Sunday school classrooms.

The purpose of the pilot test was threefold: First, to test the interview protocol for its effectiveness to evoke responses. Second, to field test the Chinese version of the interview protocol and assess whether the participants could understand what they were being asked. Third, to access and gain insights in skills for the researcher when interviewing children.

During the pilot test of the adults' interview, the participants were uncertain of one question: "*How do you perceive your children's faith?*" The pilot test participants found the question too ambiguous and too vague to answer. The question was later rephrased into two questions, "*How do you perceive your children's relationship with God?*" and "*Can you give a rough idea?*" The rephrased version conveyed the message with more clarity. Apart from the above revision, all other questions of the adults' interview protocol yielded responses which confirmed that the questions were clear and understood in the way that was intended.

As for the children's interview, two participating children responded well in both activities even though at the very first, the participating boy lamented that he could not draw. However, the protest was only for a short while. He ended up with a detailed drawing of his family. The children also responded well without hesitation when asked, "How much do you think your Mummy or your Daddy loves God?" They were given three choices to choose from: "Not much"; "Somewhat"; "Very much". A similar question was asked about them, "How much do you think you love God? Can you choose from one of the following: Not much; Somewhat; Very much?" It was observed that the girl answered "very much" immediately while the boy paused for a moment before giving the answer "somewhat". This showed that the question seemed to draw personal and careful responses from the children.

In general, the pilot test brought about the kind of information the research was seeking. Other than one question in the adults' interview protocol that needed to be rephrased for clarity, others questions yielded satisfactory results. The adults showed their eagerness and concern about the topic of parental participation in faith nurture of their children. There was little problem in relating to the children. They understood the questions and were genuine in responding to the questions.

## **G. The Data Collection Procedure**

Upon the completion of the pilot tests in August 2013, further amendments were made in the protocols according to the responses of the pilot tests' participants. The purpose of this fine-tuning of the protocols was to sharpen and shape the questions. All the interview forms and letters were first drafted in English and then translated into Chinese for the interview participants (see Table 4). Ethics clearance was approved by the AGST Alliance Education Programs Committee on 10 September, 2013 and permission was granted to proceed with the survey.

**Table 4: A list of letters**

1. Letter of request to church pastor	Appendix D
2. Letter of invitation	Appendix E
3. Informed consent form	Appendix F
4. Parent information statement	Appendix G
5. Parent consent form	Appendix H
6. Children information sheet	Appendix I
7. Assent form	Appendix J

Prior to the interviews, the nature of the research and the relevant forms were explained to the parents over the phone. On the days of the appointed interviews, participating parents and/or children were asked to read and sign the forms. Before the adults' interviews began, "Letter of invitation" was given to the parents. The parents read and signed the "Informed consent form". Similarly, before the children's interviews began, the "Parent information statement" was given to the parents so as to explain to them the details involved in interviewing their children. The parents then read and signed the "Parent consent form". The "Children information sheet" was shown and read to the children before the interviews began. The children then read and signed the "Assent form". All participants were assured of anonymity and they were free to withdraw anytime up until the data have been processed. Permission was obtained to do an audio recording of the conversation.



Some of the adults' interviews were done on a separate day from the children's interviews while others were done together with the children's interviews on the same day. If the adults' interview was done on the same day with the children's interview, it was arranged for the children to play or watch television under supervision in a nearby room while waiting for their parents. In one of the adults' interviews (Family Four) the researcher brought along two babysitters to "entertain" the children while the interview was in session at their house. The interview with the parents was in the kitchen while the children with the babysitters were in the living room watching television. Apart from the interviews at homes, other interviews were done in an open public area where there were people passing by occasionally.

The participating children were interviewed in groups with their siblings except 5B who is the only child in his family. Perhaps due to this situation or being worried about not able to answer the questions, 5B seemed tense throughout the interview although the venue of the interview was his study room and his parents were just outside in the living room. 5B gave a sigh of relief after the interview session was over. The other children's interviews had either one or more siblings together. Most children began to warm up after two to three minutes and seemed to participate happily in the activities and responded to the questions. One girl, 2G, was a bit shy at first and requested her mother to be around. So the mother stayed around, but read a newspaper. After about ten minutes, the girl seemed to be more at ease and I asked her if it was alright for her mother to leave the room and wait outside. She agreed. When the whole session was over, 2G and her brother played in the open area not wanting to go home. Two families had three children together in the interview sessions. The other five families had two children. All the participating children showed their eagerness in the drawing activities with color marker pens. Some showed particular interest and could draw in detail. The last two activities took about ten minutes.

The sixteen interviews were carried out between November of 2013 and Mid-March of 2014. Data collected through these interviews were transcribed into a total of one hundred and thirty-four pages, with seventy pages of the adult's interviews and sixty-four pages of the children's interviews. The transcription was

made within weeks of the data collection. There were also thirty-four pages of drawing and writing from the children's activities.

### **Summary**

The goal of the field survey was to gather data of the parental participation in faith nurture of children from the eight families of the four different churches in the SCAC. Data collection was through interviews with the participating parents and children. A pilot test was conducted in order to assess the interview questions. There were a total of 33 participants, 16 adults and 17 children. Both the adult and the children's interview questions were shaped after the recurring themes gathered from the precedent literature. The questions were designed to be semi-structural to enhance sharper focus in the research study. The interview protocols were first written in English and then translated in Chinese because all the participants are Chinese speaking. There were sixteen sessions of interview, eight with the parents and the other eight with the children. The field survey yielded data used for the coding and analysis. The following chapter explains the details of the coding and analysis process.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

Chapter Four discusses the findings of the field survey and answers Research Sub-Questions Two (#2), Three (#3), and Four (#4). The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and make meaning of the vast amount of data collected using classic or systematic grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990, Corbin and Strauss 2008). The analytic process is based on open coding. Open coding examines, breaks down, and compares the data in detail to form categories and subcategories. The findings of this chapter are later used in the second phase of coding to develop a theory which will be explained in the next chapter.

#### **A. Open Coding**

The first phase of the analysis is open coding. The aim of open coding is to break down the data into discrete parts so as to identify similar concepts in terms of different variables such as their properties and dimensions. Eventually, the similar concepts were labelled and grouped to form categories and subcategories. First, I reviewed the 134 pages of transcriptions and 34 pages of drawings and writings of the participating children from the interviews. I listened to the audio recordings as well as read through the transcriptions over and over again. While reading the transcriptions and listening to the audio recordings, I asked: “What is this about?” “How do the participants define this?” “How are these different or the same?” I also highlighted the repeated phrases and made memos to record recurring thoughts, impressions, and directions that emerged.

Second, I looked out for adjectives and adverbs that described the frequency, extent, intensity or duration of different incidents mentioned by the participants. Several words like ‘busy’, ‘long’, ‘tired’, ‘many’, ‘happy’ were prominent. These words are referred to as dimensions in open coding. I also looked for nouns and verbs that described the characteristics of the incidents or concepts. These words are called properties or subcategories in open coding. Some words

that stood out are Bible, camps, Sunday school, taking responsibility, distracting, praying, and reading. From the data, similar concepts emerged in terms of their dimensions and properties. After many readings of the transcriptions, similar concepts emerged in terms of their dimensions and properties. Finally, a total of 150 concepts were formed from the data (See Appendix K).

Third, these 150 concepts were then grouped into 15 broad themes through further comparisons of dimensions and properties. The 15 broad themes were again regrouped into a higher order, categories<sup>6</sup>. Each category is further divided into its properties and dimensions. The eight categories are 1) Family background, 2) Living faith, 3) Faith nurture, 4) Challenges of parents and children, 5) Significant others, 6) The faith community, 7) Connecting moments, and 8) Faith experiences. Table 5 summarizes the eight categories of open coding with properties and dimensions.

**Table 5: Open coding of categories with properties and dimensions**

Categories	Properties/Subcategories	Dimensions/frequency
Family background	Parent's own faith	All parents are Christians since childhood except one, 7 F.
	Family members	Only immediate family members live in the house.
	Family unit size	Largest family size: 6 members (Family Four) Smallest family size: 3 members (Family Five)

<sup>6</sup> A category is a classification of concepts which is more abstract in nature than the concepts.

Living faith	<p>Loving God</p> <p>Religious activities</p> <p>General behavior</p>	<p>From somewhat to very much</p> <p>Attend church activities regularly. Church commitment as a duty to fulfill. Pray (From sometimes to everyday).</p> <p>“Teach me to study” Fold clothes Wash cups Loving and caring</p>
Faith nurture	<p>Parents taking responsibility of faith nurture of children</p> <p><u>Routine and its values</u> School Church Home</p> <p><u>Carrying out activities</u> Read Bible Read other Bible story books Pray Talk about answered prayers Watch videos on Bible stories</p>	<p>Certainty of own responsibility</p> <p>Weekly, consistent, regular, everyday life effort, continual, non-stop, diligent.</p> <p>Every night, sometimes, read on their own Used to, read on their own</p> <p>Pray as a family, pray on their own</p> <p>Often</p> <p>Not often, used to</p>

Challenges of parents and children	<u>Parents</u> Time constraints Busy with work Church ministries and commitment Physical fatigue  <u>Children</u> Technology distraction iPad Computer Television School work Homework	Long hours during weekdays. Many nights away from home in a week.       Learn to exercise self-control Sometimes cannot control     A lot
Significant others	Books/Audio/CD Sunday school teachers School teachers Pastors Grandparents	Story books and comics     Meals together- from daily to weekly
The faith community	Church and the SCAC Training courses and camps Training opportunities Talks	Help provided limited Within church, outside church No time to attend Parents not pay attention
Connecting moments	<u>Religious moments</u> Pray Family devotion time Bible reading Follow parents to church activities     <u>Ordinary moments</u> Conversations, Q and A, Story telling Games Exercises Spend time at night	No fixed time Almost every night In different forms and manner Younger ones show desires to follow parents Older siblings prefer to do their own things     Fun-filled Mild Exercise Excited Long for more

Faith experiences	Participation in church activities  <u>Behaviour and character</u> Obedience to God and to parents Encourage younger siblings to pray Show kindness to other siblings	Active to minimal participation  Show concern to non-Christian friends Attitudes change gradually From happy to argumentative. Parents proud of their children. Parents' faith being challenged by children.
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### Category One: Family Background

Family exerts the primary influence on a child's faith development (Hood 2004, 236). The background of these eight families shed light on parental participation in faith nurture of children. At the beginning of each interview, there were questions designed to get to know the participants and their family. Some emerging thoughts were gleaned from the responses of the participants.

First, 15 out of 16 parents started going to church when they were in their childhood or preteen years. 7F is the only exception. He said he started attending church when he was in his early twenties and already working. Even though he came to know Christ much later as compared to other parents, he was as committed as the other participating parents in the faith nurture process. His love for God and commitment to serve God in the church was highly spoken of from the perspectives of his own children.

Second, all participating families consist of only immediate family members living together in the same house. The average size of the family is 4. The largest family size consists of six persons -- two parents and four children (Family Four). The smallest family size consists of three persons -- two parents and one child (Family Five). One family has a live-in maid. Two families have their grandparents living next door or very close by. Family Eight stayed with the grandparents during the weekdays and went back to their own home during the weekends. 8F said, "We stay with my parents during the weekdays because their house is nearer to the town and the school of the children. On weekends we go

back to our home. Our own house is very far. ” All parents mentioned that they visit their grandparents sometimes or on Sunday after church and have a meal together. However, the parents indicated that the interactions with the grandparents are usually limited and short. Most of the families returned to their homes after meals. No parents mentioned other extended family members living nearby except grandparents.

One common thread among these eight families is that they do not live with the grandparents or other extended family members. They all have their own homes. This does not mean there is no connection between each other. The visitations and meals with the grandparents show that the grandparents play a role among the urban families of the SCAC. The children in the survey are influenced by the parents’ interactions with others such as grandparents. However, the influences are inextricably connected. Further discussion will be done concerning grandparents in Category Five: Significant others.

### Category Two: Living Faith

Parents’ own growing relationship with Jesus Christ is important (Stonehouse and May 2010, 106). Children need to see their parents setting aside time for prayer, worship, and open discussion concerning faith issues (Thompson 1996). In this category, living faith of parents was examined from the children’s perspective. From the children’s interview protocol, two questions were asked,

- 1) *“How much do you think your Mummy loves God? Not much; Somewhat; Very much.”*
- 2) *“How much do you think your Daddy loves God? Not much; Somewhat; Very much.”*

Table 6 summarizes the parents’ love for God from the children’s perspectives.



**Table 6: Parents' love for God**

Family	Children	Degree of father's love for God			Degree of mother's love for God		
		Not much	Somewhat	Very much	Not much	Somewhat	Very much
#1	1B1,1B2, 1G			XXX			XXX
#2	2B,2G			XX			XX
#3	3B1,3B2			XX			XX
#4	4G1,4G2			XX			XX
#5	5B			X		X	
#6	6B1,6G, 6B2			XXX			XXX
#7	7B,7G			XX			XX
#8	8G,8B			XX			XX

The children were given three choices to choose from. Almost all children chose that their parents love God very much. There was little hesitation in answering the above questions. All 17 children from 8 families agreed that their fathers love God very much. 5B of Family Five said his mother loves God somewhat. All other children from 7 families agreed that their mothers love God very much. The researcher asked further questions in order to understand more. The questions were:

- 1) *“What makes you think your Mummy loves God? Anything else?”*
- 2) *“What makes you think your Daddy loves God? Anything else?”*

Table 7 summarizes the behaviours in which parents show their love for God as perceived by the children.

**Table 7: Parents showing their love for God as perceived by children**

Religious behaviour	Child Interviewed	No. of Times indicated (per family)	Dimensions
Go to church	all	8	Consistent
Pray	all	8	Sometimes (4) to every night (4)
Read Bible	all	8	Sometimes (4) to every night (4)
Go fellowship	all except 2B	7	Regularly(6) to occasionally(2)
Very attentive in church	2B,5B, 6B1	3	Always
Go prayer meeting	5B,7B,8G	3	Consistently
Teach us to read Bible	1B1	1	Occasionally
Bring us to church	1B1	1	All the time
Bring us to Sunday school	1G	1	All the time
Get up early to prepare for church	3B1	1	Always
Take sermon notes	3B1	1	Always
Find revelation from Bible (study God's word)	3B2	1	Sometimes
Serve God	5B	1	All the time
Will not skip church	6B1	1	Always
Use God's words to correct us	7B	1	All the time
Go morning prayer	7B	1	All the time
Do memory verses	7B	1	Sometimes
<b>General behaviour</b>			
Teach us to do homework	1G, 7B	2	Sometimes
Help me with school project	1G, 7B	2	Sometimes
Very loving	7B	1	Always
Very sincere	7B	1	Always
Will not tell lies	7B	1	Always
Do not hit us	2G	1	Usually
Will not even kill a house lizard	7B	1	Always
Fold our clothes and wash cups	6G	1	Always
Total number of items: 25			

All the above 25 items are behaviours that children observed as the expressions of their parents' love towards God. 17 out of 25 items can be grouped as religious behaviours while the other 8 items can be sorted as general behaviour. All eight families of children noticed that their parents go to church, pray and read the Bible at home consistently. Seven out of eight families go to fellowship groups regularly. 1B1 said, "My father teaches me to understand the Bible more" and "My father brings us to church." 3B2 mentioned, "I saw my father studies the Bible and tries to find some answers from the Bible." 1G commented, "My parents love God.

They bring me to Sunday school.” These practices vary from one family to another but they are significant enough for the children to notice. Children also noticed their parents’ behaviour in church. For example, 3B1 said, “My mother takes sermon notes during the worship service.” He added, “Dad always prepares himself very early to go to church. We all need to follow him too. He never skips any church.” 5B observed that his parents serve God in the church. 7B related, “My mother always insists on going to morning prayer meeting of the church. If she cannot go, she will ask daddy to take notes for her so that she can read later.” He further added, “Mum uses God’s words to correct us. She memorises the Bible verses.”

Children are aware of their parents’ general behaviour. For example, 1G and 7B said that their parents taught them how to do homework and helped them with the school project. 7B added, “My father is very loving and very sincere. He will not even kill a lizard.” 2G said, “My daddy does not hit me.” 6G observed, “Mum folds clothes and washes cups even though she is very tired.”

From the responses shown in Table 7, it can be noted that the children’s comments yielded two themes expressing the parents’ living faith.

First, to the children, all their parents love God. The children in the survey are aware of their parents’ love for God because they observe and see that their parents are diligent in the religious practices such as reading the Bible, praying, going to church and going to fellowship.

Second, in the children’s eyes, parents’ love for God is not limited to religious activities; it is also translated to helping them, caring for them and being kind to others and to animals.

### Category Three: Faith Nurture

Faith nurture of children is a multifaceted process. This category was discussed from both the parents’ and the children’s perspectives. There are three subcategories: 1) parents taking responsibility, 2) routine and its values, and 3) carrying out the activities.

### *Parents Taking Responsibility*

Three questions were asked from the adult interview protocol in order to find out the views of the parents with regards to the responsibility for faith nurture of their children.

- 1) *“Who or what do you think has responsibility for the faith nurture of your children?”*
- 2) *“Do both of you take on the role of nurturing faith in your children?”*
- 3) *“Does one take more of a lead role? Or does someone else take this role in your household, e.g. grandparents.”*

All parents agreed that both parents should play a major role together in nurturing faith of their children. They responded to these questions quickly and positively indicating their conviction. However, four out of eight mothers expressed that the fathers should be more deliberate in taking the lead role in the process. The four fathers did not object to the comments. The parents of three families commented further on the need of setting examples set for the children. For example, 3M said, “We need to be careful; they see us clearly; they have their standards. We have requirements from them but they also want to see us fulfil the requirements.” 3F further explained, “For example, if we tell them not to tell lies, they will make sure we do the same; if we cannot, they will say we are telling lies.” Similarly, 4F responded, “We need to set good examples to the children. We should do family devotion.” 4M commented, “Yeah, we have talked for a long time and yet still no action.” 8F gave more concrete examples. He said, “We go to church on Sunday so as to show them that we need to observe the Sabbath day. We want them to develop the habit of reading Bible and also have church life. We want them to learn to go to church since young.”

One theme generated from the above conversation is that the parents are deliberate in setting good examples for their children. Even though it seems there is a slight struggle on who should take the lead between the father or the mother, both parents are sure of their role in faith nurture and do not think other people or institute can take over their responsibility.

### *Routine and its Values*

This subcategory discussed the routines of the children and the related faith value. Routines are the regular activities of the children. Three places in which routines of children could have happened are at home, in church, and at school. Two questions from the adult interview protocol were asked in order to understand the parents' perspectives. Similar questions from the children's interview protocol were also asked in order to glean the responses from the children.

- 1) *“What specific routines or interactions do your children have that you think help them to grow in their faith? At home? In church? In school?”*
- 2) *“And what value do you see in each routine or interaction that is helpful to your children's faith?”*

Table 8 summarizes the routines of children at home and the expressed faith values.

**Table 8: Routines and interactions of children at home and the expressed faith values**

<b>Routines and interactions of children at home</b>	<b>Values seen by parents</b>	<b>Values seen by children</b>
Read Bible	More knowledge (3) Memory verses (2) Develop devotional life in the future (2) Sow seeds (1) Secure (1) Bond with Daddy (1) Peace (1) Spiritual discipline (1) A habit (1)	Learn to obey God (3)
Pray	Learn to forgive (1) Good relationship with each other (1)	Feel closer to God, talk to God (1)
Watch TV/CD	Nil	Nil
Eat meals with grandparents	Nil	Nil
Drawing	Nil	Nil
Read comic books	Nil	Nil
Play iPad	Nil	Nil
Read books	Nil	Nil
Listen to music	Calming effect (1)	Nil
Exercise/play	Nil	Keep healthy body (1)

Table 8 shows the routines and interactions that the children have at home. The number in the bracket indicates the number of the responses. All eight families mentioned Bible reading and praying. The children's values are rather straight forward while parents see greater implications. For example, for the children, reading the Bible was to learn to obey God. The parents interpreted it with more values such as sowing seeds, spiritual discipline and even developing a spiritual habit for life time. The children saw praying as talking to God and feeling closer to God. The parents interpreted it differently. For example, 8M mentioned, "Prayer in our family is an opportunity to learn to forgive. There are times we are angry at each other. And when it is time to say night prayers, we learn to forgive each other and restore the relationship." This comment suggests that the parents are doing more than activities and rituals and intentionally nurturing faith of their children.

Both the children and parents did not see any faith values in other activities at home such as watching television, eating meals with grandparents, drawing, reading comic books, playing iPad, reading books, etc. A slight variation is from listening to music. 3M mentioned, "Listening to music can calm my son because he tends to have hot and quick temper." 7B suggested that exercise is good for the body. He said, "We need to have a healthy body to serve God."

From the responses shown in Table 8, the comments of the participants generated two themes:

First, praying and reading the Bible are the two main routines for the parents in the survey to nurture the faith of their children. The parents consider these with important values.

Second, most parents and children in the survey see that only religious activities have values in faith nurture. They are not aware that the general routines also have values. Table 9 summarizes the routines of children in church and the expressed faith values.

**Table 9: Routines and interactions of children in church and the expressed faith values**

<b>Routines and interactions of children in church</b>	<b>Values seen by parents</b>	<b>Values seen by children</b>
Church worship	Learn to worship God(3) Honour God (1)	Learn lessons from the pastors' preaching (1)
Sunday school	Overall quite good (3) Most of the time they are not sure (5) Offering (2) Memory verses (3) Learn to turn and find the books of the Bible (1)	Know more about Bible (5) Do memory verses (3) Learn to be thankful and behave well (3) Learn to pray (4)
Go fellowship with parents/join the children's corner	Just play (2) Learn to observe and watch adults/relationship with others (1)	Sing songs (2) Play (2) Bible stories (2) watch CD (1)
Go prayer meeting with parents	Learn to pray (3) Sometimes not focused and being playful (2)	Praise God (3)
Give offering	Learn to serve (2)	Learn to serve (3)
Choir	A service unto God (2) Learn to be patient (2)	Sing songs to praise God (4)
Serve God	Commitment (3) Humility (3) Build up confidence (3)	Learn to serve (1)
Vacation Bible School (VBS)	Discipline (4) God's words (1)	Nil because no child thought of this activity

Many activities and values were observed in the church setting. Worship service and Sunday school were the first two activities on the list. Concerning Sunday school, out of eight sets of parents, five mentioned that they were not very sure what the children learned or did in Sunday school because the children did not talk much about it at home. Three set of parents mentioned that in general, Sunday school was quite good. There were contrasting opinions on this matter.

As for the fellowship group, the children saw it as a fun and happy time. The parents saw it as just a play time and without much benefit. However, 4F mentioned that the children could learn and observe and build relationship with others. Another activity to be highlighted was participation in the prayer meeting.

Children said it was to praise God. Adults said otherwise. For example, both 5M and 7M said that the children were playful and not focused in the prayer meeting. In the area of serving, many of the participating children were in the children choir. 5B was a drummer in church service. Three sets of parents mentioned that they wanted their children to learn lessons about commitment, humility, and confidence.

From the responses shown in Table 9, it can be noted that there are great values in church routines and activities as seen by both the children and parents. Two themes emerged from the data:

First, there are differences among the Sunday schools in the churches. Some are more effective than others in nurturing the faith of the children.

Second, the parents in the survey are eager for their children to learn spiritual lessons from the church activities such as prayer meeting, fellowship groups, and other ministry opportunities. The parents are serious with their faith nurture responsibility and want their children to learn as much as possible of the Christian faith.

Third, the children in the survey seem to view play as an essential learning element in church activities, while the parents tend to have a negative view of it.

Table 10 summarizes the routines of the children in school and the expressed faith values.



**Table 10: Routines and interactions of children in school and related activities and the expressed faith values**

<b>Routines and interactions of children in school and related activities</b>	<b>Values seen by parents</b>	<b>Values seen by children</b>
School	Kindergarten teachers had positive impact on the children (4)	Learn about mission (1) Character building and good manners (3)
Tuition	Nil	Nil
Piano lessons	Nil	Nil
Extra school curriculum: Boys' Brigade (BB) and Girls' Brigade (GB)	Discipline (3) Perseverance (3) Character building (1) Play (1) Learn to share (1)	Fun games that teach about God (1) Praise and worship (1)
Do home Work	Nil	Nil
Extra-curriculum like school clubs	Nil	Nil

From the responses shown in Table 10, it is noted that teachers in the public schools could impact the children's faith. Four out of eight mothers mentioned that the kindergarten teachers of their children positively influenced their children in matters such as praying and obeying parents. But the mothers also added that the children have now grown up and have forgotten much of their kindergarten days. Another observation is that both the parents and children saw values related to faith in Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade curriculum, but not to other school extra-curriculum. One child saw that the curriculum of the Boys' Brigade has fun games to learn about God. Other related activities such as piano lesson, tuition, and homework were seen not to have faith related values. The responses show that the school and related activities have the least impact on the faith nurturing process of children.

### *Carrying out activities*

This subcategory discussed the faith nurture process carried out by the parents when they talked about God at home with the children. Two questions directed to the children were asked.

- 1) *“How does your Daddy or Mummy talk about God at home?”*
- 2) *“When does Daddy or Mummy usually talk with you about God? Is there a fixed time like in the morning, at night or during meal time, etc.?”*

Table 11 summarizes the answers from the children concerning the parents’ talk about God at home.

**Table 11: Answers from children concerning parents’ talk about God at home**

Questions	Answers of the children
Do they read the Bible to you?	Yes (families 1,4,5, 7 ) No (families 2, 3, 6, 8) “When I was small only” (6B2) “Before yes, now I read on my own” (8G)
Do they read other books to you?	Yes (families 7) No (families 1,2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8) Not any more (2G, 8G) Read on our own now (4G1, 5B, 6B1)
Do they pray with you?	Memorize the Lord’s Prayer together (1G) Yes (families 3, 4, 5, 7, 8) Used to pray before but now pray on their own (2G, 6B1) Sometimes (4G1)
Do you hear your parents talk about God’s answering prayers?	Yes (families 3, 6, 7, 8) No (families 2, 5) Don’t know (families 1) Sometimes (families 4)
Do they talk about how God helps others?	Yes (families 1, 2, 3, 4,6, 7 ) No (families 5, 8)

Do they watch Bible videos with you? What happens after watching the video? Do they talk about the story with you?	Yes (families 1, 2, 5, 7, 8) Yes but now no more (families 3) No (families 4, 6) Dad talks about the teachings of the videos (5B) Talk about the funny things in the video (1B1)
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Table 11 shows the responses of the children. Some key phrases and similar ideas that emerged were “now no more” or “used to”. Altogether these phrases were mentioned seven times. On four occasions, they referred to Bible reading with the parents. Two other times referred to the prayer times. One more reference was watching Bible videos together. For example, 4G1 said, “When we were younger, we used to read Bible together with parents.” She further explained, “Mum reads Bible to my youngest sister. My sister sleeps early. I have a lot of homework now. No time to read with them.” 6B1 said, “We used to pray together. Now we pray on our own.” The children also mentioned of their parents talking to them about answered prayer. For example, 8G recalled, “Mommy wants a lipstick. She prayed and someone gave her a lipstick.” Another boy, 3B1, said, “Mom told us a story about a person. This person prayed to God and God helped her. She was safe from danger.”

Responses from the parents also shed some lights on this matter. For example, 7M mentioned that when her children were younger, they were eager to pray every day. Now as they grow older, it seems that they do not know how to pray anymore. 7F further added, “When my children were younger, they have more time to read the Bible stories. It used to be very consistent.” Similarly, 2M also said, “Our family used to read story books together, but now (we have) no more time. The children have lots of homework.”

When asked about the usual time parents talked to them about God, five families expressed that there was no fixed time. Typical replies were “mostly meal time”, “bed time” and “before going to school”. For example, 8G said, “My parents talk about God during meal time, before going to bed and morning time when going to school.” She further explained, “My parents pray for us on the way to school when the traffic light turns red.” 7B said, “My mum talks to me about God

when I do not behave well.” 3G said, “My parents sing thanksgiving songs before meals.”

From the responses shown in Table 11, it can be noted that the comments of the participants highlighted several themes.

First, there is a change in the pattern of the faith nurture activities as the children in the survey grow and become busy with their school work.

Second, there is a correlation between the time availability of children and the participation of religious activities at home. The less time the children have, the less likely they are able to participate in the religious activities of the family.

Third, most of the parents in the survey do not have a fixed time to talk about God with their children.

Follow up questions were directed to the parents and the children concerning their emotions in the process of faith nurture. Two questions were asked:

- 1) *“How do you feel when you try to nurture the faith of your children?”*
- 2) *“How do you feel when you talk with your parents about God?”*

Table 12 summarizes the emotions of the parents and children towards faith nurture.

**Table 12: Emotions and feeling of parents and children towards faith nurture**

Family	Parents	Emotions and feelings	Children	Emotions and feelings
#1	1M 1F	Feel annoyed when they asked too many questions Feel comforted and assured but sometimes angry and impatient	1B1 1B2 1G	“As if fire is burning in my heart”  Nothing special Happy
#2	2 M 2 F	Happy, good, very relaxed	2B 2G	Happy Happy
#3	3 M 3 F	Proud Excited	3B1 3B2	Before very impatient, now willing to listen more Before feel very annoyed, now not that annoyed
#4	4 M 4 F	Good and feeling blessed	4G1 4G2	Ok good Don’t know

#5	5 M 5 F	Feel not enough, frustrated, want to do better but there is a difference between the outcome and the expectations (cry) A spiritual battle	5 B	A bit happy, a bit of wanting to listen, feel that they are a bit nagging too
#6	6 F 6 M	Good and blissful	6B1 6G 6B2	OK No good Very good
#7	7 F 7 M	Happy and feeling blessed Helpless and frustrated	7B 7G	“If it is interesting, I will listen; if not...” “Will not listen unless it is storytelling”
#8	8 M 8 F	A job that must be done Feel comforted	8G 8B	Happy Happy

Five sets of parents (Families Two, Three, Four, Six, and Eight) demonstrated positive feelings towards faith nurture of their children and saw that it was a blessed thing to do. For example, 8F said, “I feel comforted to see my children welcome the faith nurture process. But sometimes I feel lazy, want short cut, because we do the same things every day.” 3M said, “I feel excited about faith nurture.” 4M said, “It is a blessing for us.” The other three sets of parents (Families One, Five, and Seven), conveyed mixed feelings. For example, 1M said, “I feel very annoyed with them because they asked too many questions.” 1F added, “Sometimes I can be impatient with them but I also feel comforted because my children know God.” 5M expressed that she was very frustrated and even shed tears during the interview. She felt that the efforts she put in did not meet up to the expected results. 5F saw faith nurture as a spiritual struggle. 5F further explained, “I think we can see the sinful nature of a human being. My child does not like doing devotions and prayer unless we give him rewards. We need to keep encouraging him.” 7F felt happy and blessed while 7M felt helpless and frustrated.

As for the children’s responses, there were more positive than negative responses. 10 out of 17 children said they were generally happy with their parents talking to them about God. 1B1 related that when his parents talked to him about God, he felt that “as if fire is burning in my heart”. 1B2 said he felt nothing special. While 1B1 and 1B2 are brothers, their responses were different. This insight

suggests that faith experience is a personal matter and every child has a different path in the journey. In the interview, 3B1 hesitated for a while before he answered, “I used to feel bored and annoyed but now is getting better.” The younger brother 3B2 nodded his head and added, “I also feel annoyed but not so bad.” 5B complained that his parents nagged too much. 4G2 said she did not know how she felt. 6G said “Not good” because her mummy scolded her. 7B and 7G commented that they would only listen if it was interesting or storytelling time.

From the responses shown in Table 12, it can be noted that the participants’ comments highlighted some common themes:

First, not all the parents in the survey are happy towards the faith nurturing process of the children. Some parents are struggling; some are relaxed and feeling blessed.

Second, the children in the survey are generally happy when their parents talk to them about God.

Third, the children of the same family have different emotions and feelings towards the same faith nurture process.

#### Category Four: Challenges of Parents and Children

This category discussed the challenges and struggles parents and children faced in faith nurture. Literature review suggested that there are challenges and struggles in the process of faith nurture of children. In this category are two subcategories: 1) challenges children face and 2) challenges parents face.

##### *Challenges Children Face*

Under this subcategory, a question was asked of the parents, “*What challenges or hindrances do you think your children face in faith nurture?*” Table 13 summarizes the responses from the parents’ perspectives.

**Table 13: Parents' perspective of the challenges their children face**

<b>Family</b>	<b>Challenges children face</b>
#1	Sometimes the teachings of the Bible seem unrelated
#2	Technology causes distraction and temptation
#3	Frustrated when they face problems and cannot solve them
#4	Little time with parents
#5	The child feeling his prayer not answered Technology distraction Temptations to search game online
#6	Don't know. The children seldom talk about struggles and challenges with the parents
#7	Computer and smart phone distraction A lot of homework and tuition Tiredness Need to wake up early for school
#8	Not many challenges

The parents of three families (Two, Five, and Seven) mentioned that technology such as computer, iPad, and smart phone had caused distractions in the children. In fact, 4F also mentioned elsewhere that his child was distracted by computer. 1F commented that sometimes the Bible seemed to be irrelevant to the child's life. 5F mentioned that his child was disappointed with God. He said, "My son prayed for no rain in the afternoon so that he could play Frisbee with us. But a few times the rain still came. He felt that God did not listen to his prayer." 4F said his child was busy with lots of homework and had lesser time for the parents. 3M said that her challenge was the inability of the child to solve problems in life. The other two families were not aware of any specific challenges.

From the above observations, technology distraction was mentioned more than other factors. Other challenges children faced included not having answered prayer from God, finding the Bible irrelevant, and busy with lots of homework and tuition. Below is a further investigation of the challenges that parents face.

### *Challenges Parents Face*

This section asked the parents, “*What specific challenges or hindrances do you face when you try to help your children in faith nurture?*” Table 14 summarizes the challenges parents face in the faith nurture of their children.

**Table 14: Challenges parents face in faith nurture of their children**

<b>Family</b>	<b>Challenges parents face</b>
#1	Mothers’ own emotion issue Not setting good examples for the children No time and too busy
#2	No time Too busy
#3	We as parents need to set good examples The children observe us
#4	Time management Dad is not home most of the time due to work and church ministry Children age range very wide
#5	Find it challenging to set boundary for the child to play games in computer or on line
#6	Did not put a lot of thoughts in this matter Do not have time
#7	Physical tiredness No time and too busy Seem not much improvement even the children attend Sunday school Computer distraction, play with the smart phone The child argues with the mother and says nasty things to her
#8	Work stress Fatigue Tiredness Own emotions

Table 14 indicates that the main struggle and challenge of parents is time constraint. Six out of the eight families mentioned this as the foremost struggle. For example, 4M lamented, “The father is too busy... No time at home... Almost every night he is not around...” 8M also commented, “I am a teacher. Sometimes after a whole day in school, I do not want to talk any more. But I will still show love and spend time with the children at night.” Two parents, 1M and 8M, agreed that their own emotions were the challenges. 1M said, “I am impatient with the children. If



their father comes back, I will direct them to him.” Two mothers, 5M and 7M, admitted that they found it challenging to set boundaries for their children in playing the electronic gadgets. For example, 5M said, “I explained to him my expectations for him to use the iPad. I gave him rules and regulations.” However, 5F said, “I think my wife is a bit too lenient in controlling the boy.” Facing an argumentative child, 7M lamented in frustration. She said, “I feel despair because my children do not listen to me and sometimes my son argues with me. He said nasty things to me. This made me very angry.” She further added, “They will listen to their father but not me.”

A follow up question on challenges of parents asked, “*If there are challenges or hindrances, how do you address them?*” Table 15 summarizes the ways to address the challenges by the parents.

**Table 15: Ways to address challenges by parents**

<b>Family</b>	<b>Ways to address these challenges by parents</b>
#1	The mother relinquishes the problem to the father
#2	Buy more books for them to read Try our best to spend time with them at night
#3	Allow children to remind the parents
#4	Not at all Father should take the lead
#5	Give the child boundaries Need to pay close attention to him
#6	Tried but not much help
#7	Persevere to continue the faith nurture activities
#8	Persevere to continue Look further to the goal and the importance of nurturing the children Self-evaluation

Table 15 shows the responses of the parents. Two sets of parents (Family Seven and Eight) mentioned that they would persevere to continue, even face challenges of faith nurture. Other parents said they found help from other resources. For example, 1M relinquished the problem to her husband. 2F said, “I like to read. I will buy books to get help. We like to buy books for our children too.” 5M said, “Give boundaries and pay closer attention to my son.” No parents mentioned possible resources such as the church or relatives to address the challenges.

From the responses of the children and parents shown in Table 13, 14, and 15, several themes emerged:

First, the perceived challenges of the children in the survey are technology distraction and heavy school workloads for older children.

Second, there is a direct relationship between the children in the survey spending time playing electronic gadgets and the parents experiencing difficulty in setting limits and boundaries for the children.

Third, the challenges of the parents in the survey are physical fatigue and time constraints.

Fourth, there is a direct correlation between the physical fatigue of the parents in the survey and the faith nurture process. The more physical tiredness parents experience, the more challenges they face in faith nurture of their children.

Fifth, the parents in the survey do not think of other resources such as the church or people when addressing these challenges.

#### Category Five: Significant Others

Literature review showed that the responsibility of faith nurture of children should not be solely on the parents. Other people have a role to play too. This category explored the perceived roles of the significant others by the parents and children. Question directed to the children was, “*Who helps you to know God better?*” Table 16 shows the people who help children to know God better from children’s perspective.

**Table 16: The children's perspective of people who help them to know God better**

People who help children to know God better	Number of times mentioned by the children	Identity of the children
Sunday school teacher	17	All
Pastors	10	2B, 2G, 5B, 6B1, 6G, 6B2, 7B, 7G, 8G, 8B
Parents	9	2B, 2G, 3B2, 5B, 6B1, 6G, 6B2, 7B, 7G
School teachers	2	4G2, 8G
School principal	1	7B
School friends	1	1B1
People who worship God	1	6B1

Table 16 shows that from the children's perspectives, the three most important people to help them know God more are: 1) Sunday school teachers, 2) the pastors, and 3) the parents. Five families (Two, Three, Five, Six, and Seven) of children mentioned that their parents helped them to know God more. No families of children mentioned about grandparents as someone who can help them to know God more. The responses from the children indicated that the parents are not the only people who contribute to the faith of their children. There are significant people who help too.

A similar question was asked of the parents. *"Who help your children to know God better?"* Table 17 summarizes the people who help the children to know God better from the parents' perspective.

**Table 17: Parents' perspective of people who help their children to know God better**

People who help children to know God better	Number of times mentioned by the parents	Identity of the family
Parents	8	All
Sunday school teachers	7	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8
Grandparents	4	1, 2, 5, 7
School teachers	3	2, 5, 7
Church friends	3	2, 3, 7
Kindergarten teachers	3	4, 7, 8
Pastors	2	1, 3
Other family members	1	1
Tuition teacher	1	5

Table 17 shows the parents' perspectives of people who help the children to know God better. Out of the list of nine, five were also mentioned by the children. These five were: 1) parents, 2) Sunday school teachers, 3) pastors, 4) school teachers, and 5) church friends. Three sets of parents (Families Four, Seven, and Eight) mentioned that when their children were in kindergarten, they encountered some very good teachers. For example, 4M mentioned that these teachers gave the children really good foundation in faith and impacted their lives. However, as the children grew, they could not remember much of their kindergarten teachers. Parents seemed to be very impressed with the role that the kindergarten teachers played in their children's lives. Similarly some primary school teachers also played a role in nurturing faith of the children.

Four set of parents mentioned the grandparents and other family members in the list while no child mentioned grandparents and other family members. Parents of Families One, Two, Five, and Seven agreed that grandparents played a significant role in their children's lives. Though all the families did not live with the grandparents, they were connected through regular visitations and meals

together. The grandparents would remind the grandchildren to pray and go to church. Other relatives could make an impact on children's faith too. For example, 1F said, "My children like their uncle a lot. They love to hear him tell them stories."

One exception was Family Five in which the grandparents were not yet Christians. The parents related that the grandson was influenced in a unique way. 5F said, "Impact in a sense not nurturing my son's faith but challenging it. Sometimes the grandparents talk about non-Christian viewpoints and perspectives, and then my son will listen. These viewpoints are different from the Christian perspectives; it makes him wrestle in his mind and think." 5M added, "...Grandmother has a great impact in his life." When the other significant people make an impact on the child's life, it does not always mean nurturing faith; but could be challenging the child's faith. This was what happened to Family Five. The parents were aware of this possible influence and often took the opportunity to guide and explain to the child. However, the specific role of grandparents in the faith nurture of their grandchildren is beyond the scope of this study.

From the responses shown in Tables 16 and 17, it is seen that the comments of the participants yielded some themes:

First, almost all the parents and children in the survey agree that Sunday school teachers are the most significant people in helping the children to know God better.

Second, the faith of the children in the survey is influenced by many other people both from the church and at school.

Third, most parents in the survey think that relatives such as grandparents and uncles can also play a certain role in nurturing the children's faith.

Fourth, it seems that the children in the survey do not consider relatives as someone who can help them to know God more.

### Category Six: The Faith Community

Literature review cited in Chapter Two showed that faith nurture of children is a collaboration of both the faith community and the family. The "large family" (大家庭) refers to the faith community while the "small family" (小家庭) refers

to the biological family (Tang 2002, 241). In this category, the perceived role of the church and the SCAC were discussed. Two questions were asked.

- 1) *“Are there ways that your church or the SCAC have offered help or suggestions to do nurturing faith of children? In your view, how effective are these ways?”*
- 2) *“Does your church or the SCAC offer any training for parents and/or children and/or families together to help the faith nurture of children? In your view, how effective are these ways?”*

Table 18 summarizes the responses of the parents concerning help from the church and the SCAC.

**Table 18: Responses of parents concerning help from the church and the SCAC**

Family	Help from church	Help from the SCAC
#1	Very little	Publish some parenting courses and materials for family devotions
#2	Not sure	Not sure. May be some courses
#3	Parenting courses	Not sure. May be some parenting courses Small group for fathers
#4	Preaching from pastor sometimes Short courses	Small groups for fathers and mothers
#5	Church wide campaign to encourage families to have family devotional time at homes Talks and seminars Preaching from pastor occasionally	Classes for fathers and mothers
#6	Courses	Classes for fathers and mothers
#7	Some talks about parenting in the fellowship Family Day	Not sure I think some courses
#8	Some courses Family Day	Not sure

From the responses shown in Table 18, the parents were aware of certain help offered by the church and the SCAC. The most common help was to provide parenting courses. However, four out of eight sets of parents said they were not very sure. Almost all parents knew of some kind of parenting courses but most of them did not bother to attend. For example, 2M said, “We do not have time to join.”

3F said, “We do not go.” 6F said, “I know there are classes but (I) do not go.” 7M said, “The time is not right, so I cannot go.” Most parents found themselves too busy to attend more courses. Parents from Families Four, Five, and Seven mentioned about teaching from the pastors on Sunday or in the fellowship groups. For example, 4M said, “Our church pastors sometimes will teach during the sermons in worship service. I do take note of it and learn from it.” Apart from these helps, 2M mentioned that she would buy parenting books to read. 1M said that they attended some courses before not offered by the SCAC and found that helpful. Incidentally, two sets of parents (Families One and Five) suggested that there should be classes on how to nurture faith of the children instead of the regular parenting courses.

From the responses shown in Table 18, it is noted that the comments of the parents yielded some common themes:

First, the available parenting courses offered both in the church and the SCAC are perceived as ineffective to the parents in the survey.

Second, the parents in the survey find no time to attend the courses offered by the church or the SCAC.

Third, the parents in the survey benefit from the occasional teachings on the topic in the fellowship groups and worship services.

Fourth, the parents in the survey try to seek help from books and courses offered outside of the church.

Fifth, the partnership between the faith communities and the families is weak as the parents in the survey find themselves not getting enough practical help though they are aware of the theories.

### Category Seven: Connecting Moments

Feeling is a way to access what we value (Hay and Nye 2006, 76). The things that matter the most can be associated with strong feelings. Hence, this category explored the joyous moments of faith nurture between the parents and the children as well as the preference and desires of children. Under this category, there were two subcategories: 1) religious moments and 2) ordinary moments.

### *Religious Moments*

A question was asked, “*Can you briefly describe a favorite or memorable spiritual moment with your children or expressed by your child/children?*”

Some of the parents were unable to recall the joyous moment with their children in the faith nurture process. Even though the parents of Family Two, Family Three and Family Six tried to recall, they could not articulate one incident. What they mentioned was rather vague. They said it was overall the time when they prayed together at night. Out of eight families, five families were able to describe the memorable moments. Of these five particular incidents described, four are related to praying and sharing time with the family. For example, 1M related, “There was one time during the family devotion time that all of us were to say something to appreciate each other. This act of affirmation to each other brought tears to my oldest boy. I was very touched too.” 8M said, “Our family has this ritual of blessing each other before sleep. I feel this is a very warming and connecting moment with the family.” Only one incident was related to the obedience of the child towards the word of God. 7M recalled, “I remember one time my son did not want to do homework. He was throwing his tantrum in the car. I told him many Bible stories to encourage him and learn from the Bible characters. Finally he agreed to do homework again. This was a memorable spiritual moment for us, especially for me.” From the feedback of the parents, praying and the retelling the Scripture is a vital connecting moment between the parents and children in the faith nurture process.

Another question in this subcategory was an activity directed to the children. It was one of the two activities in the children’s interview protocol which was designed to allow the children to respond to the field survey in a more creative way. This activity invited the participating children to do three things:

- 1) Circle the religious activities which they have tried with their parents in *green*.
- 2) Circle the religious activities which they like in *red*.
- 3) Circle the religious activities which they do not like in *blue*. Table 19 summarizes the children’s religious activities and their preferences.



**Table 19: Children's religious activities and their preferences**

Religious activities	Tried with parents (Items circle in green)	Likes (Items circle in red)	Dislikes (Items circle in blue)
1. Pray before I eat	16	5	1
2. Pray before I go to sleep	16	4	2
3. Take me to church /Sunday School	13	9	0
4. Give tithes or offering	12	8	0
5. Sing songs about God and Jesus	11	10	0
6. Read Bible	11	5	3
7. Draw/Skit/drama/act out the stories in the Bible	9	13	0
8. Listen and talk to each other about God	9	2	4
9. Read story books about God	7	6	0
10. Watch Bible stories movies	6	7	0
11. Serve others e.g. give food or money to the needy	6	6	3
12. Visit other churches	6	8	0
13. Pray before I go to school	5	3	7
14. Family devotion time	5	5	2
15. Talk to other people about God	5	6	4
16. Think about God quietly	4	4	2

Table 19 shows the responses of the 17 children. The children were requested to circle more than one item in each of the activity. They could also circle the same item both *green* and *red* or *green* and *blue* if applicable to them. Because the children could circle more than once and also with different colours, the total number of each item will not be tallied to 17 which is the total number of the children.

From the responses of the children, the top five religious activities tried with the parents are: 1) praying before meals and bed time, 2) going to church, 3) giving tithes and offering, 4) reading the Bible, and 5) singing songs about God and Jesus. The item the children did least with their parents is thinking about God quietly. It suggested that families from the SCAC are probably unfamiliar with this style of approaching God. The most liked items were drawing, skits, dramas, and role play about the stories in the Bible. The second most liked item was “sing songs about God and Jesus”. When these data were compared with the data collected

from the adult respondents, it is noted that what parents think as a joyous activity may not be the same as what the children think. The parents see family prayer time as a connecting and joyous moment but the children prefer actions such as singing songs, drawing, and role playing. The most disliked item was “pray before I go to school”.

Referring to the list of disliked items, no children disliked singing songs about Jesus, watching Bible story movies, giving tithes, drawing and acting out Bible story, going to Sunday school, and reading story books about God. Since no child objected to these items, it shows that they liked these religious items.

However, not every child in the same family welcomed the same activities. For example, the item, “pray before I go to sleep”, all parents did this with their children. 15 out of 17 children circled this item *green*, indicating that the parents have done this with them. 6G circled this item *blue* indicating that she did not like this. However, her siblings 6B1 and 6B2 circled this item *red* indicating that they liked this activity. Similar incident also happened with Family Seven. While 7G circled the item *blue*, her brother 7B circled it *red*. Another example was “listen and talk to each other about God”. 1B1 circled this *red* indicating that he liked this activity while his siblings, 1B2 and 1G circled this *blue* indicating that they disliked this activity.

From the responses shown in Table 19, it is noted that the comments of the children yielded several themes:

First, the children in the survey like religious activities which are more action oriented such as drama, skit, drawing, and singing. This finding indicates that the parents need to have more action orientated activities with the children.

Second, the children in the survey generally do not like religious activities such as praying before going to school and talking about God with each other. Also, most children are not very keen to carry out conversations with parents about God.

Third, every child has his or her preference of religious activities. The parents in the survey sometimes expect a one-size-fits-all faith nurture approach.

### *Ordinary Moments*

Under this subcategory, there was one follow up activity designed for the children in the children's interview protocol. This activity invited the children to write or draw something they wish they could do with their parents. The children were given papers and markers to express their desires. The intention of this activity was to create space for children to express whatever they would like to do with their parents but had not been listed in the first activity. Table 20 summarizes the activities children wish to do with their parents.

**Table 20: Activities children wish to do with their parents**

<b>Religious activities</b>	Sing songs to praise God Pray especially at night Go to church Read Bible Attend church camp Give money to others Care and protect others
<b>Leisure and fun related activities</b>	Exercises:- jog play badminton ride bicycles swim jump ropes  Games:- board games generally play game together play water  Others:- handicraft drawing gardening travelling picnic camping sleep with mum watch movies tell jokes

The 17 children were very excited to write or to draw things they would like to do with their parents. A total of 24 items were collected. These items were divided into two groups: 1) Religious activities and 2) General activities. The data collected revealed that there were only 7 items related to the religious activities while the other 17 items were in general more fun and leisure related activities. The responses of the children suggested an interesting finding. For the children, the happy moments are times when they can do leisure and fun activities with their parents. For example, 7B likes to draw and his desired activity with his parents was to have the whole family draw together. He said that he wished they could all draw the Bible characters together and also photograph the finished drawings. Another example is 1B1, his drawing showed that he liked to play badminton with his parents and attend camps organized by the church with family members. He even drew a tent and a camp fire with his mother preparing food and his father sleeping in the tent. These drawings reflected the child's interests and inclination and his desire to do such activities with their parents.

A follow up question concerning the connecting moments in faith nurture asked, *"What are some further things you think you could try, to improve how you nurture the faith of your children?"* Table 21 summarizes the responses of the parents to improve faith nurture of their children.

**Table 21: Ways parents can improve the faith nurture process of their children**

Parents	Comments
1F	"We need to fix the time for family devotion, at least once a month. We want to pray and read Bible every day too."
2F	"My job is very demanding but I need to spend more time with the family."
3M	"We need to resume the family devotion time that we have stopped for a while. We need to do more. Pray with them before bed time. Teach them to pray too when they are fearful."
4F	"Family devotion, set good examples."

5M	“From everyday life. I think spiritual life cannot just depend on reading Bible a little bit every morning. Spiritual growth has to be seen from a wider perspective of life. See things with God’s eyes, not the worldly ways.”
6M	“Willing to give more time to be together.”
7M	“Pray for them more. Encourage them more.”
7F	“We need to persevere, keep bringing them to church, cannot be lazy.”
8M	“Take some courses, do family devotion.”

All parents were aware of their need to improve their effort in nurturing faith of the children. One term that stood out in the data was “family devotion”. Four out of eight sets of parents mentioned that they would like to start family devotion. Another key word was “time”. The parents acknowledged that they needed to make time and spend time with the children. The parents were aware that it was a tough faith journey. For example, 8M said, “...need to continue and do not stop... Think ahead of the long term goal... Cannot be lazy.”

From the responses shown in Table 20 and 21, the comments of the participants yielded several themes:

First, the children in the survey desire to spend time and do more “ordinary everyday things” with their parents such as riding bicycles, playing games, and drawing other than just religious activities such as reading Bible and talking about God.

Second, the parents in the survey are aware of the need to spend more time and to hold family devotion with the children in order to be more effective in faith nurture.

Third, the children from the same family do not always have the same response to faith nurture.

### Category Eight: Faith Experiences

Literature review in Chapter Two suggested that both parents and children need to experience faith together. This category explored how the children live out their faith from the perspectives of the parents and the children. The data collected were divided into three subcategories: 1) perceptions of children's faith by the parents and their own, 2) expression of children's faith, and 3) faith experiences with the parents.

#### *Perceptions of children's faith by parents and their own*

Two questions were asked in this subcategory. 1) In the adult's interview protocol, the parents were asked, *"How do you perceive your children's faith? Can you give a rough idea?"* 2) In the children's interview protocol, the children were asked, *"Can you tell me what you think or how you feel about God? How much do you think you love God?"*

The above are close-ended questions and the children can choose one of the answers shown: 1) Not much; 2) Somewhat; 3) Very much. Table 22 summarizes the perceptions of children's faith by self and parents.

**Table 22: Perceptions of children's faith by self and parents**

Family	Parents' perception of children's faith	Identity of children	Age	Children's perception of own faith: Degree of loving God
#1	Know God on the surface level	1B1	11	Somewhat
	Fear God	1B2	9	Somewhat
	Fear judgment day Fear the end of the world Accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior	1G	8	Very much
#2	Quite good quality	2B	10	Very much
	Boy-Can think through Girl-Can be hasty	2G	8	Somewhat
#3	Desire to go to church and meet God	3B1	11	Somewhat
	Learn from parents to pray when issues arise	3B2	8	Somewhat

#4	Beginning stage Know God	4G1	11	Very much
		4G2	9	Very much
#5	Know God but not as deep as the adults	5B	10	Somewhat
#6	Medium range around 4 if put on a scale of 1-10 with 10 the best.	6B1	12	Somewhat
		6G	9	Somewhat
		6B2	8	Very much
#7	Boy - read Bible, fast in learning Girl - slow in learning	7B	11	Somewhat
		7G	9	Not much
#8	Simple faith Understand	8G	10	Somewhat
		8B	8	Somewhat

From the responses in Table 22, the word “know” appeared three times in the column of “Parents’ perception of children’s faith”. A similar word, “understanding” appeared one time during the interviews. For example, 1F said, “My children know God and fear God but it is only on the surface level, not very deep.” Parents of Family Four and Five echoed this thought and said they perceived the faith of their children at a beginning level. 1F further mentioned that he felt comforted and secure because he believed that his children had the assurance of salvation. Parents of Family Two and Seven perceived their children’s faith separately. This shows that the parents were aware of the differences in the children especially in faith nurture. The children could respond differently though the faith nurture process might be the same.

5M pointed out, “Nurturing the faith of a child is a lifelong process. It could not be judged by outward behaviour such as going to church or attending Sunday school on Sundays.” She admitted that the child’s faith in God was much deeper than what parents could observe. On the other hand, parents of Family Five, Seven, and Eight expressed their uncertainty and fear because no one could guarantee the outcome of their children’s faith even though they were doing all they could now to nurture faith of their children.

As for the data on “Children’s perception of their own faith”, 11 out of 17 gave themselves “somewhat”, one said “not much”, and five said “very much”.

The average age of those who chose “somewhat” was approximately 10 years old, while for those who said “very much” were about 9 years. However, it is not possible to say whether this is statistically significant for this small sample of respondents. The children who came from the same home did not always give the same response. In fact only three families of children had the same responses while the other five families of children all had different responses. For example, the three children in Family One responded differently -- the oldest boy mentioned earlier that he felt that as if fire burned in his heart when his parents talked about God, he perceived himself loving God “somewhat”. But the youngest sister perceived herself loving God “very much”. In Family Seven, the younger boy perceived himself loving God “somewhat” while the younger sister perceived herself loving God “not much”.

From the responses shown in Table 22, the comments of the participants yielded several themes;

First, the parents in the survey perceived their children’s faith as at a beginning level.

Second, almost all the children in the survey perceived their own relationship with God “somewhat” and “very much” indicating a relatively satisfying relationship with God.

Third, the children’s faith is a very personal matter. Even though the children can come from the same family and under similar process of faith nurturing by the parents in the survey, they can be somewhat different in terms of how they express their faith experience.

#### *Expression of children’s faith*

In this subcategory, the children’ faith was explored. A question for the parents asked, “*What are some ways that your children use to express their faith? What are some indications or evidences in your children that show they are growing in their faith?*” Table 23 summarizes the expressions of children’s faith from parents’ perspectives.



**Table 23: Expression of children's faith from parents' perspectives**

Family	Expressions of faith	Indications of spiritual growth
#1	Fear God	Willing to obey parents Able to discern Desire to have spiritual blessings
#2	Pray	Give offering to missions Apply what they learn in Sunday school Stand up for others Think of others
#3	Pray	Pray aloud Enjoy memory verses and Sunday school
#4	Pray	Pray when they have exams Copy the Bible Teach the younger sister to pray
#5	Pray	Pray when facing problems Understand some truths Speak words of gratitude Can control anger better now Has improved in character
#6	Do not take note	Better character Know if they have done wrong things Will ask questions Use God's words to deal with problems Talk about what he learns in Sunday school
#7	Fulfill what has promised God	Learn to praise God Read Bible everyday Confess sins Give tithing Willing to say "sorry"
#8	Not very obvious	Boy - more emotional, will pray Girl - join church activities Better behavior No cheating in school

From the responses shown in Table 23, one of the most prominent expressions mentioned by parents is "pray". Four out of eight sets of parents mentioned prayer as the way their children expressed their faith. Parents observed that the children prayed when they faced problems in life or when they had examinations in school. For example, 4M said, "I saw my elder girl teaching her younger sister to pray when she faced some difficulties." 3M also observed, "My son can pray aloud now, before he cannot. He learns to lead the whole family in prayer when there is some need." Four families mentioned that their children have improved in behaviour and shown better character. For example, 6M said, "My

children will admit if they have done something wrong.” Similarly, 7M said, “My son is willing to say ‘sorry’ if it is really wrong.” 5M said, “My son’s temper is more under control.”

The parents also observed their children expressed their faith through the attitudes towards Sunday school and God. For example, 2F said, “The children apply what they learned from the Sunday school. The Sunday school talked about missions and they learned to give to missions.” 3M said her children enjoyed memory verses and Sunday school. 6M said, “My younger boy would talk more about what he learned in Sunday school. He likes the rewards from the Sunday school.” 1F was the only parent who mentioned “fear God” as the expression of their children’s faith. He said, “My children know that God is powerful and they fear Him. For example, if they see lightning they will fear God. My older boy will think of the end of the world.”

A similar question was addressed to the children for comparison “*What do you do to show that you love God?*” The data collected were summarized into two groups: 1) actions/participations and 2) attitudes/behaviour. Table 24 summarizes the expressions of children’s faith from their own perspectives.

**Table 24: Expression of children’s faith from their own perspectives**

<b>Participation in religious activities</b>	Pray every day/every night (1B1, 1B2, 1G, 2B, 2G, 4G1, 6B1 6B2, 6G, 8G, 8B, 8B) Go to Sunday school (3B1,6B1, 7B, 7G, 8G, 8B) Do memory verses (3B1, 3B2, 6B1, 6B2, 6G) Go to church every Sunday (2B, 2G,3B2) Go to fellowship with parents (3B2, 8G, 8B) Read Bible (1G, 3B1,8G) Sing in the choir (8G, 8B) Join GB/BB (8B) Serve in church (5B)
<b>Behaviour</b>	Help the weaker persons (4G2) Obey parents (5B) Behave well in Sunday school (7B)

Table 24 shows the children's perception of the expression of their own faith. As compare to Table 23, prayer was also on the top of the list as mentioned by the children. The other most mentioned items are 1) going to Sunday school, 2) doing memory verses, 3) going to church, and 4) following parents to the fellowship group. A small number (3 children) mentioned about attitudes as the expression of their faith. For example, 4G2 said, "I helped the weaker people. I do not bully the ones smaller than me." 5B said, "I obey parents in front of others." 7B said, "I will try to behave better in Sunday school. I will not talk all the time."

From the responses shown in Table 23 and 24, two common themes were gleaned:

First, the parents perceived that their children can express their faith through praying and good behaviours.

Second, the children perceived that their way of expressing faith is mainly through praying and participating in religious activities.

#### *Faith experiences together with parents*

Faith is not just a personal matter; it can also be experienced together. During the interview of Family Two, an incident was described by the parents suggesting faith experiences together. 2F wanted to skip church for work. 2F further explained, "One night, I had to rush to get my project done. So the older boy did not go to the small group with me. He stayed home with me also because he had a test. Then he asked me, 'Who is more important? God or study?'" Through a simple question by the child, the father was challenged about his priority.

Another incident in Family Three also suggested similar event. 3M said, "My children are watching us, we need to be careful of our actions and words too. This, in a way, is also helping us to grow in the Lord. For example, if we require the children not to lie. We also have to be able to follow this."

One theme emerged from the responses of the parents is that faith nurture is not one sided; it is reciprocal whereby both the parents and children gain from the experiences.

### Summary of Open Coding

This section discussed the first phase of the field survey analysis which is open coding. Eight categories emerged from the grounded data analysis and recurring themes began to emerge from the responses of the participants in each category. Table 25 summarizes the themes generated in each category.

**Table 25: Summary of open coding and the themes generated**

Name of the category	Themes generated from the responses of the participants
Family background	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The families do not live with their extended family members but there is constant and regular connection.</li> <li>2. The children are influenced by their parents' interactions with others such as grandparents.</li> </ol>
Living faith	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The children are aware of their parents' love for God because they see their parents' diligence in the religious activities.</li> <li>2. The children see their parents' love for God by helping them, caring for them and even being kind to others and to animals.</li> </ol>

Faith nurture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The parents see themselves having the major role in faith nurture of their children.</li> <li>2. Most parents are not aware that the general routines might have faith values as faith nurture faith is holistic.</li> <li>3. There is a change in the pattern of the faith nurture activities as the children grow and become busy with their school work.</li> <li>4. There is some correlation between the time availability of the children and the participation of religious activities at home. The less time the children have, the less likely they can participate in the religious activities of the family.</li> <li>5. Most of the parents do not have fixed time to talk about God with their children.</li> <li>6. Not all the parents are happy towards the faith nurturing process of their children. Some parents are struggling; some are relaxed and feeling blessed.</li> <li>7. The children are generally happy when their parents talk to them about God.</li> <li>8. The children of the same family could have different emotions and feelings towards the same faith nurture activity.</li> <li>9. The children seem to view play as an essential learning element in church activities, while the parents tend to have a negative view of it.</li> </ol>
Challenges of parents and children	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The perceived challenges of the children are technology distraction and heavy school workloads for older children.</li> <li>2. The perceived challenges of the parents are time constraints and physical fatigue.</li> <li>3. There is a direct correlation between the physical fatigue of the parents and the faith nurture process. The more physical tiredness the parents experience, the more challenges they face in nurturing the faith of their children.</li> </ol>
Significant others	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Sunday school teachers are the most significant others in helping the children to know God better.</li> <li>2. The relatives such as grandparents and uncle can also play certain role in the children's faith.</li> </ol>

The faith community	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The available parenting courses offered both in the church and the SCAC are perceived as ineffective to the parents.</li> <li>2. The parents benefit from the occasional teachings on the topic in the fellowship groups and worship services.</li> <li>3. The parents try to seek help from others such as books and courses offered outside of the church.</li> <li>4. The partnership between the faith communities and the families is weak.</li> </ol>
Connecting moments	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The children like religious activities which are more action oriented.</li> <li>2. The children desire to spend more time with their parents doing ordinary things.</li> <li>3. The parents are aware of the need to spend more time and do family devotion with their children in order to be more effective in faith nurture.</li> </ol>
Faith experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The faith expressions of the children perceived by the parents are praying and behaving well.</li> <li>2. The faith expressions of the children perceived by them are through praying and participating in religious activities.</li> <li>3. Faith nurture is not one sided, it is reciprocal whereby both the parents and the children both gain from the experience.</li> <li>4. The children express their faith differently even though they may be from the same family and under same faith nurture process.</li> </ol>

### B. Research Sub-Questions Findings

This research study was guided by five research Sub-Questions. Chapter Two answered the first research Sub-Question. Chapter Three discussed the Field Survey Procedure. Chapter Four analyzed the grounded data with open coding. The findings of the open coding are used to answer the remaining three Sub-Questions. The followings are the findings to the Sub-Questions.

### Research Sub-Question Two (#2)

What do parents currently perceive to be the key elements in the faith nurture of their children?

#### *Findings to Sub-Question Two*

The participating parents agree without hesitation that they themselves play the main role of faith nurture of their children. They do not think that other people or institutions can replace them in faith nurture of their own children. All the parents directly or indirectly articulate that their own examples of faith are the keys to the faith nurturing of their children. The parents are aware that their manner of reading the Bible, going to church, attending the fellowship groups and praying are very much observed by their children. The parents know that they need to teach, instill, instruct and impress the teachings of God's words upon the children. The participating parents perceive faith nurture of their children with mixed feelings. Some feel very blessed and happy with the task. They see the task as a privilege and are at ease in carrying out the faith nurturing process. Others feel annoyed, impatient and frustrated with the process. However, all the parents admit that they have different degrees of challenges when nurturing their children in the area of faith. The most common challenges of the parents are physical tiredness and lack of time.

#### *Key Thought*

While the parents approach the faith nurture of their children with mixed feelings and see the task as both a blessing and challenge, they affirm that it is their primary responsibility to nurture the faith of their children and to set good examples for them.

### Research Sub-Question Three (#3)

What do children of the families perceive to be the parents' key elements in nurturing the faith of their children?

#### *Findings to Sub-Question Three*

The participating children observe their parents and expect their parents to live up to their confessions. The data show that the children perceive their parents

going to church, praying, reading the Bible, going to fellowship, being attentive in Sunday worship, and taking sermon notes as indicators that their parents love God. The children also notice that their parents are helping them, caring for them and being kind to others and animals. The data also show that the children perceive that spending time in other forms of activities is also part of the faith nurture process. The activities are not just religious but also include many other fun related and general activities such as riding bicycles, playing games, and drawing. As a whole, the children welcome and enjoy the parental faith nurture.

### *Key Thought*

The children perceive the key elements of parental faith nurture as: 1) The parents need to set good examples for their children to follow, 2) The parents need to spend time in religious activities with their children, and 3) The parents need to spend time in leisure and fun related activities with their children.

### Research Sub-Question Four (#4)

What do the parents and children perceive to be the relationship between church and family in terms of the faith nurture approaches?

### *Findings to Sub-Question Four*

As to the faith nurture approaches, the parents perceive the relationship between the church and family as uncertain and of limited help. Most parents are not sure of how the church or the SCAC can help them in the task of nurturing the faith of their children. The helps that the parents received from their respective churches are fragmented; mainly from sermons or other talks from the fellowship groups. Some parents are aware of the courses provided by the SCAC, but they find these courses to be not helpful. Some of them have no spare time to attend the courses. Others feel that the courses are mainly theoretical rather than practical. The parents prefer to have more hands-on and supportive help from the church or the SCAC.

As for the children, their perceived relationship between the church and the family in terms of the faith nurture approaches is generally positive. The children see both the church and family as important avenues of learning more about God



and faith development. None of the children mention being unhappy in going to church and Sunday school; they are eager to attend and enjoy the activities.

### *Key Thought*

While the parents see the help provided by the church and the SCAC as ineffective, not very relevant and impractical, the children seem to be happy with the faith nurture approaches provided by the church and the family.

## **Summary**

This chapter has investigated the parental participation in faith nurture of children in the SCAC churches. As described in Chapter One, there is a growing concern among the SCAC leaders and the parents in the matter of the faith nurture of the children. Churches in the SCAC are facing the challenges of declining number of the Sunday school children each year. Parents of the SCAC churches are not well equipped to nurture faith in their children. Though the parents seem to know that they have the responsibility to nurture the faith of their children, they are either unsure of how to carry it out or have no appropriate model to follow. In view of this, this research study seeks to find out how parents of the SCAC churches can be better equipped and be more effective as partners in nurturing the faith of their children.

The purpose of this field survey was to collect data from the parents and children through interviews in order to understand the present situation of the parental participation in faith nurture of children among the Chinese families in the SCAC churches. The data collected from the field survey were coded and analyzed using the grounded theory approach. There are two phases of coding: open coding and axial coding. This chapter discussed the first phase: opening coding. During the process of open coding, the data received from the field survey were transcribed, studied, identified, and compared. Eventually eight main categories and their subcategories emerged from the open coding and the analysis of the interview data. The eight categories which developed from open coding are 1) Family background, 2) Living faith, 3) Faith nurture, 4) Challenges of parents and children, 5) Significant others, 6) The faith community, 7) Connecting moments,

and 8) Faith experiences. A summary of the recurring themes of these eight categories is found on pages 102-104.

This chapter answers the Research Sub-Questions Two (#2), Three (#3), and Four (#4). The findings of this open coding will be used in the second phase of the field survey analysis whereby the categories and the subcategories are put together to form a paradigm in order to observe their relationship with each other. The second phase of the field survey analysis is axial coding and will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE EMERGING THEORY**

Thus far, the findings revealed significant characteristics of parental participation in the SCAC churches in the faith nurture of the children. Hence, the aim of this chapter is to generate a theory from the field research based on the interrelationships of the categories and the subcategories in the axial coding paradigm. The grounded data collected from the interviews of eight sets of parents and seventeen children from the four SCAC churches provided the content and the context for the evaluation. The chapter includes: 1) the description of the second phase in axial coding, 2) the explanation of the axial coding paradigm, 3) the generation of the emerging theory presented in five propositions, 4) the summary of the theory in a form of a descriptive story, 5) the validation of the theory, and 5) the proposal which paves the way for a more child-friendly faith nurturing approach in the context of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference.

#### **A. Axial Coding**

In axial coding, the data are “put back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories” (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 97). The purpose of axial coding is to recombine the categories and subcategories in order to develop a coding paradigm that expresses the interrelationships between categories and subcategories. This process will eventually reveal the emerging theory in the research already mentioned. There are three steps in the axial coding:

First, I identified the phenomenon from the categories that emerged from the open coding. A phenomenon is the central idea, event, happening, incident about which a set of actions or interactions are related. Criteria for choosing the phenomenon are what 1) appears to have the greatest explanatory relevance, 2) appears frequently in the data, and 3) has the highest potential to link all other categories together.

Second, I placed the phenomenon at the center of the axial coding process and returned to the open coding and re-studied the categories and subcategories for further analysis. Subsequently, I identified the 1) causal conditions, 2) intervening conditions, 3) context, 4) interactional strategies, and 5) consequences in order to show the interrelationships between the categories and the subcategories.

Third, I patterned a paradigm to indicate the interrelationships between the phenomenon, causal conditions, intervening conditions, context, interactional strategies, and consequences. This paradigm provided a frame for systematic thinking of the complex relationship between the categories and the subcategories. The paradigm also ensured that the data were analyzed with “density and precision” (Strauss and Corbin 1990, 99). While in the process of axial coding, it is sometimes hard to distinguish the steps clearly. The steps can happen simultaneously. In fact, Corbin and Strauss (2008) clarify that open coding and axial coding sometimes “go hand in hand” because the mind automatically make connections and the connections come from the data (198). Diagram 1 shows the axial coding paradigm expressing the interrelationships between the categories of parental participation in faith nurture of children.

**Diagram 1: The axial coding paradigm of parental participation in faith nurture of children in the SCAC churches**

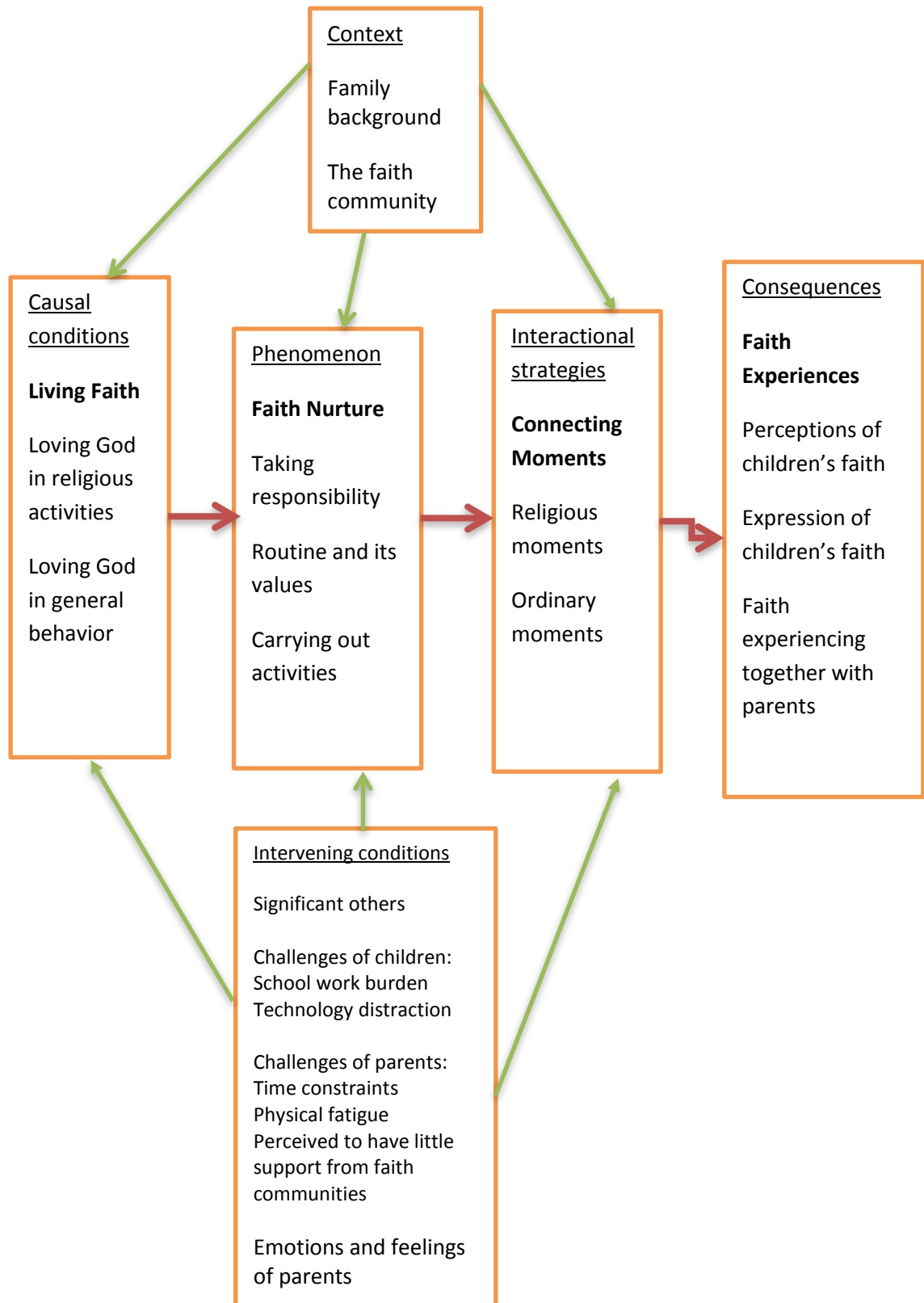


Diagram 1 shows the paradigm expressing the interrelationships between the phenomenon, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, interactional strategies, and consequences for the present research. A horizontal view of the paradigm shows that the causal conditions influence the phenomenon. The phenomenon together with the context and the intervening conditions influence the interactional strategies; and the interactional strategies in turn influence the consequences. A view from the top of the paradigm shows that, the context also affects the causal conditions, the phenomenon, and the interactional strategies. A view from the bottom of the paradigm shows that the intervening conditions influence the causal conditions, the phenomenon, and the interactional strategies. The following explains the components of the paradigm in detail.

### Phenomenon

Phenomenon refers to the central theme of the research. It serves the common thread that ties other categories and subcategories together. Faith nurture emerged as the phenomenon because all other categories and subcategories could be related to it. Moreover, almost all the data had some level of indications towards this theme. The subcategories are 1) taking responsibility, 2) routine and its values, and 3) carrying out activities. The data analysis findings are consistent with the literature review in Chapter 2 whereby all parents take their responsibility to carry out the faith nurture daily routines such as praying and reading the Bible.

Faith nurture is affected by the causal conditions in which parents' living faith make a difference in the process of faith nurture. For example, the degree of the parents' love for God influenced the way the parents carried out the faith nurturing process. At the same time, the context such as family background and the faith community also impacts the phenomenon. Biblical discussion in Chapter 2 affirmed that the faith community has substantial impact on the faith nurture of children. Similarly, the intervening conditions such as 1) significant others, 2) struggles and challenges of parents and children, and 3) emotions of parents also affect the phenomenon. For example, when the parents felt blessed and relaxed with their role in faith nurture of their children, both the parents and the children showed a greater degree of enjoyment in the faith nurturing process.

## Causal Conditions

Casual conditions refer to the events, incidents, and happenings that lead to the development of the phenomenon. The parents' living faith was identified as the causal conditions. Under this category are two subcategories: 1) loving God in religious activities and 2) loving God in general behaviour. As the phenomenon shows, the faith of the parents affects the faith nurturing process of their children. The data analysis revealed that the children were aware of the faith of their parents and the way their parents expressed it. The parents also came to the awareness that they should be the models of faith to their children. For example, some parents deliberately set an example for their children to follow. By attending church on Sundays and reading the Bible, the parents hoped that their children would observe, see the actions and the commitment of their parents, and in turn catch on their behaviour. The children observed their parents' love for God through the way the parents treated them, helped others and served God in the church. Parents' living out their faith as model is consistent with the historical records of the Methodist Church discussed in Chapter 2 where as parents are instructed to have close relationship with God. Wesley emphasized that the life the parents lived would be far more important than the things they taught the children (1986, 334-336).

At the same time, the family background and the faith community in the context affect the causal conditions as shown in Diagram 1. For example, the religious activities could not happen adequately without the context of the faith community in the SCAC churches. In addition, the intervening conditions such as significant others, challenges of parents and children, and emotions of the parents also affect the causal conditions in the paradigm.

## Context

Context refers to the structural conditions that shape the phenomenon. In Diagram 1, the context serves as the specific condition that influences the causal conditions, the phenomenon and the interactional strategies. Two categories are grouped under the context. They are: 1) the family background, and 2) the faith community. The data analysis revealed that nearly all parents were from a Christian

family background. Their own upbringing sets the tone for the faith nurture process of their children. Another category under the contextual conditions is the faith community. Faith nurture of children cannot be done effectively when it is detached from the faith community. Literature review affirmed that children need to belong to a faith community and learn to serve and show compassion to others (Allen 2002, 2004; Stonehouse and May 2010). For example, the children considered themselves loving God by being involved in the church activities. Children also observed how their parents behaved in church. All these could not be done without tapping into the context of the faith community. However, the data analysis revealed that the parents perceived there was limited help from the local church level and the SCAC level. Not all parents had the time to participate in the training courses or public forums; and some of the parents considered the courses as not very effective and practical. Hence, there seems to be a gap between the families and the faith communities in the process of faith nurturing of children.

### Intervening Conditions

Intervening conditions represent the broader structural context which includes society, community, nation and even the world. In Diagram 1, the intervening conditions influence the causal condition which is the living faith of the parents. The living faith has further influence on the phenomenon and the connecting moments. The three categories of the intervening conditions are: 1) significant others, 2) challenges of parents and children, and 3) emotions and feelings of parents. The data analysis revealed that the parents commented that some of the kindergarten teachers and the Sunday school teachers were the influential figures of their children's faith.

Both the parents and the children faced struggles and challenges. For example, the challenges of the children were mainly technology distraction and a heavy load in school work. For the parents, their struggles were time-poor, busy life, work, and ministry. Parents found themselves exhausted in the process of juggling the daily demands in life. The challenges which were closely related with the emotions of the parents affect the way the parents live out their faith. The ways



the parents live out their faith in turn affect the faith nurturing process and the connecting moments between the parents and children.

### Interactional Strategies

The interactional strategies are specific actions that happen in response to the phenomenon. It is an on-going process, evolving in nature. The interactional strategies are affected by the phenomenon as well as the context and the intervening conditions. In Diagram 1, connecting moments is placed under the interactional strategies. Under this category are two subcategories: 1) religious moments and 2) ordinary moments. The dimension of the religious moments and the ordinary moments capture the interactional process of the families in faith nurture. The connecting moments are formed while the parents and children are doing the religious activities and the ordinary everyday activities together. The data analysis revealed that the children desired to do many activities with their parents. Yet many of these activities are of ordinary everyday life experiences. These findings affirm the literature review in Chapter 2 that suggested that a loving home is built when family members are talking, working, playing and praying together (Lee 2009, 348).

### Consequences

Consequences are the outcome of the interactional strategies in response to the phenomenon of faith nurture. Consequences answer the question of what happens as a result of the actions and interactional strategies (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 89). In Diagram 1, faith experiences were listed as the consequences. There are three subcategories: 1) perceptions of the children's faith, 2) faith of children expressed through actions and attitudes, 3) faith experiences together with parents. The data analysis revealed that the parents perceived their children's main faith of expression as praying, participating in religious activities, and acceptable behaviour. Children perceived themselves to have experienced faith when they participated in religious activities and behaved well. In addition, during the process of faith nurture, the faith of the parents was also challenged and inspired by the children.

The research findings affirm the literature review that adults and children are able to experience faith together (Westerhoff 2008). Faith nurture is not one sided, it is reciprocal whereby both the parents and the children are experiencing faith together.

## **B. Generating a Theory**

According to grounded theory, there are three possible ways to present the emerging theory: 1) visual-coding paradigm, 2) propositions and 3) a story form (Creswell 2012, 437). In this study, an axial coding paradigm describing the interrelationships of the categories and subcategories was presented in Diagram 1. In relation to this paradigm and to further enhance this process of generating a theory, five propositions were identified.

*Proposition 1: The major responsibility of faith nurture of children lies with the parents.*

The paradigm shows that when the parents take up their roles in faith nurture, it influences the connecting moment and also the consequences. The present data findings revealed that all parents were aware that they played a major role in nurturing the faith of their children. Five out of eight families were happy with this role and felt very blessed in carrying out the task.

Early historical record showed that “Foochow Christians do not understand their responsibility for the education of their children for they make them work in their gardens instead of sending them to school. The Foochows appear to have brought with them from China the impression that it is the duty of the Mission to educate their children for them, and even to pay the salaries of their preachers” (Excerpt from “The Malaysia Message” 1914). That was the early settlement era.

As years went by, parents of the churches began to understand their role in faith nurture of the children. Churches also began to be outspoken in promoting family devotion and family life. However, according to the research works of Chio (1976, 1987), parents knew and understood but they could not carry out the practice. This happened in the 1970-80s among the Methodist churches in Singapore and Malaysia respectively. As such, the data suggests that the families of

the Methodist Church in the SCAC are taking up their responsibilities of nurturing the faith of their children but with a certain degree of struggle and uncertainty.

*Proposition 2: The church and the family need to be in partnership in nurturing the faith of the children.*

The paradigm shows that the faith community as the context has influence on the living faith of the parents, the faith nurture process, and the connecting moments between the parents and the children. The present data findings revealed that the parents perceived that the faith community had little role to play in the parental participation in faith nurture of children. The parents were aware of certain significant people in nurturing faith of their children but not a nurturing faith community. The parents perceived that they could not find significant help from the church or from the SCAC. For example, the parents knew about certain programs or courses offered by the church or the SCAC but they were not able to attend due to their busy schedule, commitments in life, or simply not motivated to do so. Parents were frustrated and disillusioned as they tried to fulfill their duty of nurturing faith of their children but perceived that they had nowhere to turn to for help. Nonetheless, the church and the SCAC perceived that they had indeed provided certain courses and help for the parents. However, the courses and the help might not be meeting the deep needs of the parents.

The data suggests that the gap between the church and the family concerning the parental participation in faith nurture of the children might need to be bridged in order to enhance the effectiveness of the faith nurturing process in children. Biblical review stated that faith of the children is to be nurtured in the context of a faith community. Literature review suggested that parents cannot accomplish the task of faith nurture of the children on their own, they must partner with the church. Indeed, the biological families are dependent on the church household to live a victorious life in Jesus Christ. Clapp (1993) says it well:

“So outside the church, isolated from it, individual families are simply caught in competing cultural currents. On the wild whitewater of post-modernity, the church is a kind of ark – providing a place to stand,

companionship with others of like mind and imaginations, and a rudder to guide in a society that has otherwise lost direction” (85).

Parents are encouraged to understand the importance of the faith community in their lives and in the process of nurturing the faith of their children. It will be good if parents can see church not just a place to go for religious activities but as their “first family” or “large family (大家庭)”. On the other hand, it is suggested that churches be intentional in offering creative and accessible ways for the faith community so as to partner more effectively with parents in forming nurturing environments that promote the faith development of their children.

*Proposition 3: Parents need help to build up their own life and emotions if they want to nurture the faith of their children adequately.*

The paradigm shows that one of the major intervening conditions that affect the phenomenon is the parents’ own emotions. The survey results indicate that if the parents were in a good mood and they felt blessed, the faith nurture process was a delight; however, if the parents were fatigued and busy, the faith nurture process tended to be a burden. The present data findings revealed that some of the participating parents did experience angry emotions and frustrations during the process of faith nurture. Out of the eight sets of parents, three sets of parents responded that they have anger and disappointment issues.

When probed for the cause of such emotions, one set of parents said they felt angry, impatient and annoyed when the children asked too many questions because they were physically too tired to carry on conversations with the children. Another set of parents said that they considered this process of faith nurture as a spiritual battle. The parents became frustrated when faced with criticism and comments from others concerning their child. They became disillusioned when their child did not show similar outcomes as other children after all the efforts the parents had put into nurturing the child. Still another mother said she felt so helpless because her child argued with her and would not listen to her. She sometimes felt as if she had failed miserably in this faith nurturing process.

In addition, different parenting styles may also have different expectations. For example, parents with high control and demand might want to see “results” in the children. If the outcome was not as expected, parents might have further frustrations and helplessness. Literature review proposed that the parenting style that encourages parental love with support and parental discipline that is love-oriented rather than punishment-oriented yields effective results in faith nurture of children (Kim 2008, 245).

Parents are being pulled by different directions with many voices competing for their attention. Busy schedules tend to push off the activities that are related to church or faith nurture at homes (Roberto 2007, 1). In view of this affirmation, it seems that if parents want to adequately nurture the Christian faith of their children, they will need some help to build their own life and emotions.

*Proposition 4: Parents need to encourage a two-way direction when communicating faith matters with their children.*

The paradigm shows that the living faith of the parents affect the faith nurture in children, and in turn it affects the strategies and results in the faith experiences by both the parents and the children. One of the important threads that linked the causal conditions, the phenomenon, the strategies, and the consequences together is the way the parents communicate faith matters to their children. The present data findings revealed that the parents of the SCAC churches were eager to teach and instill in their children the Word of God. For example, one mother tried her very best to teach and to impress on her child the Word of God since the child was very young. She read and prayed with her son every morning and every night but somehow she was not able to always see the results she expected from her child. One father lamented that a lot of churches in the SCAC still use the “old methods” in the way of conducting the Sunday school. He commented that a number of Sunday school teachers still followed the traditional way of “authoritarian” and “screaming” method to maintain order in the class. He pointed out that some parents “learned” from this model and did the same with their own children.

On the other hand, the present data findings also revealed that some children felt quite annoyed and did not want to listen when their parents lectured

and nagged at them especially in the issues of faith development. The children felt the stress and showed reluctance to the faith nurture process. This causes further frustration in the parents.

A gap was identified in which some of the parents and children confessed to have negative emotions in the process of nurturing faith. Often parents of the SCAC seemed too eager to fulfill their duty and wanted to get the “job done” in nurturing the faith of their children. Driven by this goal, parents sometimes forgot to take the time, to allow space and maintain an open and bi-directional conversation with the children and enjoy the faith journey with their children. Literature review suggested that children, unlike the common misconceptions that they need to be taught in a one way direction, actually can initiate bi-directional conversations with their parents concerning faith matters (Boyatzis 2004). Parents are encouraged to talk with rather than talk to the children in the process of faith nurture (Hood 2003). Indeed, as Westerhoff (1980) articulates, “through parent-child relationship, we awaken, strengthen, enhance, and enliven each other’s faith. We cannot live for our children; we can only share life and our lives with them” (34).

*Proposition 5: Children’s faith is nurtured when they spend time doing ordinary everyday things with their parents.*

The paradigm shows that the interactional strategies between the parents and children consist of religious activities and ordinary everyday activities. Both of these activities are important in leading to the consequences where the children and parents can experience faith together. The present data findings revealed that most of the participating parents were very involved and busy in the church. While the parents knew that they needed to take more actions in the process of nurturing faith of their children, they often found themselves too tired or had no time to do so. Yet, from the children’s perspective, faith nurture from the parents did not necessarily have to be always doing some religious activities. The children were genuinely happy and felt blessed when they could just spend time with their parents. Often, the ordinary and fun related activities like playing badminton, riding bicycles,

jumping ropes, playing board games, drawing, gardening, or even telling jokes were wonderful experiences to the children.

The present data findings agree with Sullivan's (2010) concept that there should not be any segregation of secular and holy activities. All places, all people and all time belong to God. Faith nurture with children does not only happen with religious activities but also with ordinary every day activities. Stonehouse (1998) describes it well when she said, "The spiritual journey is not a path separate from the rest of life. Every portion of the journey is important because what we learn and who we become along each section of the way influences what we see, hear, and become in the future" (195). Children find meaning when they connect with the adults and the people around them at play, in everyday life and in worship (Stonehouse and May 2010, 22). The concept is an expression of the biblical teaching that instructs parents to talk about the commandments of God with the children when sitting at home, walking, lying down, and getting up (Deut. 6:7).

### Summary of the Theory Generated

The theory generated by this research and validated by precedent theory can be summarized in a descriptive story explaining the process of parental participation in faith nurture of children in the SCAC churches.

The churches in SCAC came from the long rich heritage of Methodism. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, demonstrated his deep concern in the faith development of children. He gave specific instructions to parents in nurturing faith of their children. The church literature of the Methodist Church in Malaysia also recognizes that parental relationship is the primary relationship in the family unit and parents play an important role in nurturing faith of their children. SCAC archives showed that Methodist churches and pastors were expected to provide and help educate the families. Even though the church members knew that they had the responsibility to nurture faith of their children, they still expected the pastors and the church to do the job for them. At the beginning of the 80s and 90s era, the Methodist churches promoted the Christian Family Life training sessions and the Christian Family Life Weeks programs. Family devotional time was also encouraged and mentioned as one of the goals of the churches. Parents of the

Methodist churches began to recognize their role in faith nurture of their children and attempted to be active participants.

As the Methodist churches entered into the second millennium, there was more awareness from both the churches and the parents. This can be seen from the ministries organized by the Board of Family Wellness and Counseling of the SCAC and the local churches. However, there is not much information about how the parents are actually responding to these ministries or the effectiveness of these ministries. There seems to be a gap between the church and the family especially in the area of parental participation in faith nurture of the children. Hence, this research was embarked in order to understand more about this situation and to provide a workable frame for parents in faith nurture of their children.

Nonetheless, parental participation in faith nurture of children is a complex process with many factors interwoven together. The theory generated by this research suggests the following. It starts with parents who have a relationship with God and that they desire to see their children grow in the relationship with God too. Parents live out their faith and love for God through the religious activities such as attending worship and serving in the church. Parents also live out their faith through loving God in the general behavior of responding to their children and the others. The ways parents live out their faith influence the process of their faith nurture with the children. Children observe how their parents express their relationship with God and with others and learn from them. Parents are convinced of their responsibility to nurture faith of their children; therefore, the parents are eager to carry out the many religious activities both at home and in church settings. In the process of nurturing faith of the children, parents need to be aware of the intervening conditions such as significant people in the nurturing process, the challenges facing them and their own emotions. Therefore, the presence of the faith community and significant others is an important consideration to the faith nurture process.

Both the context and the intervening conditions influence the connecting moments between the parents and the children. The connecting moments are divided into the religious related moments and the ordinary moments. In the process of faith nurture, parents are conscious to carry out religious activities with the children. However, it is also important to carry out fun-related and ordinary



everyday activities with the children. Children want to spend time with their parents and do things together with them or as a family, not just religious activities but also ordinary activities. The connecting moments contribute to both parents and children experiencing faith together. Experiencing faith together is the consequence in which all the categories and the subcategories weave together. Children are seen by their parents as having improvement in both their attitudes and actions especially in the area of prayer. Children perceive themselves experiencing faith by participating in church activities and developing a better attitude towards siblings, parents and others. At the same time, parents' own faith is sometimes challenged and encouraged by the children's faith as both parents and children experience faith together.

### **C. Validating the Theory**

Validation is an active part in the process of the research in grounded theory (Creswell 2012, 442). The purpose of validating the theory is twofold: 1) to determine if the emerging theory portrays the correct picture of the phenomenon, and 2) to serve as a triangulation to enhance the accuracy of the findings and obtain a more comprehensive view on parental participation in faith nurture of children.

Two senior church leaders of the SCAC churches were identified. The first church leader is Rev. Dr. Tiong Chung Tiing. He is the District Superintendent of Sibul North and a senior pastor with over twenty years of pastoring experience. He is very well informed of the situations of the families among the Chinese congregations of the Methodist churches. The second church leader is Rev. Dr. Khoo Ho Peng, a lecturer of the Methodist Theological School, Sibul. Dr. Khoo is the Dean of Students at the school. He has seven years of pastoral ministry and twelve years of teaching experience. His major is Pastoral Theology and Counseling. With his expertise, he was able to give valuable insights to this research. .

In September 2014, I made several telephone calls to the two church leaders to explain and seek their assistance to validate the research findings. Upon their consent, a formal email was sent to them with the summary of the research findings (See Appendix L for the letter and Appendix M for the summary of the findings).

The comments from the two evaluators were received within ten days; one through email and the other one was hand written.

As a whole, they had no major disagreement on the findings of this research. In the comments of the validation for Proposition One, Tiong affirmed that the parents nowadays admit that the major responsibility of faith nurture of children lies with them. However, Khoo raised a concern with this proposition. He said this proposition seemed to apply to committed Christians only. As for those Christian parents who are not aware of their role in faith nurture, they will expect the church to do the job for them. Tiong further commented on Proposition Two that since some parents are not aware of their own major role in faith nurture of their children, they will be happy with what the church can offer to their children. Hence, the misunderstanding in partnership between the church and family described in Proposition Two is not an issue. The validating comments of Khoo and Tiong raise an issue that Proposition One seems to apply to committed Christian families. I am aware that this is a limitation of this research study, in that the samples are purposive and small in number and may not be consistent with the experience of other parents.

On the other hand, Khoo commented that parents are taught from the pulpit to be intentional in carrying out the process of nurturing the faith of their children; however, there is no concrete planning and the parents are left to struggle on their own. Even with certain programs and activities offered by the church, the parents are usually not heading towards the goal of narrowing the gap. This validates the second proposition that church and family need to be in partnership in nurturing faith of the children.

As for Proposition Three, both Khoo and Tiong agreed that parents' own emotions affect and weaken the commitment of the parents in faith nurture of their children. Tiong also added that the value system and the spiritual maturity of the parents are the two other contributing factors of frustration. These comments are supportive of the third proposition. Indeed, parents' own emotions and spiritual walk with God need to be built up in order to adequately nurture faith of their children.

In Proposition Four, both church leaders agreed that it is common practice for parents of the SCAC to "teach" rather than interact with the children in the

journey of faith. Parents want to see result and become frustrated when things do not go as expected. This supports the proposition that two-way communication is encouraged. In Proposition Five, Khoo suggested that the religious activities can be incorporated into the ordinary daily activities in faith nurture. Khoo's validation serves as a good reminder in balancing the religious activities with the leisure and fun activities. His suggestion of incorporating ordinary everyday activities into faith nurture process is biblical yet challenging. It is because if the parents do not build up their own faith, they may find it difficult to incorporate as mentioned.

Khoo further commented that the SCAC churches generally find it difficult to determine what is important and what is not so important concerning the programs of enhancing the faith of the parents. The challenges fall on not just the churches but also on the parents. Khoo observed that it is difficult to motivate parents to be committed to nurturing the faith of their children. Often churches recognize the importance of nurturing the faith of the parents but face the problem of demanding more of the parents' time away from home. The comments made by Khoo brought out the time-poor issue of most parents in this research study. This is closely related to the value system and the spiritual maturity of the parents, as commented by Tiong earlier. This raises another issue: that if the respondents in this research study are experiencing struggles with their value systems and time-poor status, would the same apply to other parents in the SCAC churches? This warrants further research.

Tiong further suggested that a support group of parents to be carried out in a covenantal discipleship group setting in which the mutual support and accountability will foster better result in building up own life and emotions. In a way this validates the third proposition that parents need help to build up their own life and emotions.

#### **D. Proposal Forward**

Being a parent is a great responsibility. In an ever changing world, parenting can be stressful and demanding. For human wholeness and in all its dimensions of growth, parents need to provide for their children not just the physical, but also cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual needs. Often parents

find themselves fighting time for church, work, family, leisure and even for their children. On top of these demands, the parents also need to strike a balance between materialism and necessities in life in the midst of this fast-paced technological era where new gadgets are constantly available in the market. Data suggested that parents of the SCAC churches with primary school aged children needed to be actively engaged in nurturing the faith of their children in the midst of all these demands. Concurring with the emerging theory presented in the five propositions, here are three suggestions which can possibly pave the way forward for a more effective faith nurture approach. The suggestions are consistent with the Methodist confessions lived out in the context of the Methodist Church in Sarawak.

### Suggestion for the SCAC Churches

In light of Propositions One and Two, if parents are to carry out their role of nurturing the faith effectively in their children, it may be helpful to consider enhancing the relationship between the SCAC churches and the families. It will be beneficial if parents and the congregations of which they are a part are to see each other as partners in faith nurture of the children. If this partnership between church and family is not underestimated, parents in the SCAC churches may not need to feel they are struggling alone because they can tap into resources provided by their church. For example, in the SCAC churches setting, intergenerational worship services are occasionally practiced in many churches. Although this is a good start, it seems that the Methodist churches can go a step further by creating opportunities for whole families to be involved in ministry. Some of the examples may be missions trips, home visitations, church wide spring cleaning, community services, praise and worship team, and projects to help the needy.

More importantly, it may be helpful if churches uphold a nurturing community whereby families with children are welcome in different occasions and congregational activities and are seen as integral part of a mixed-age group experience. At the same time, the faith community may serve as a model in attitudes and practices of family life as parents and children participate and observe in the congregational activities. If the leaders of the SCAC churches are intentional

in creating environment and providing appropriate channels for intergenerational processes, the gap between the church and the family may be narrower.

#### Suggestion for the Parents

In light of Proposition Three, the parents may need help to deal with their emotions if they want to nurture faith of their children adequately. One of the possible ways is for parents to join a parent support group. Presently, the SCAC churches are providing parenting courses and not parent support groups. Often parenting courses focus on skills while parent support groups provide parents with opportunities to discuss their experiences and learn from one another on how to deal with different situations. It seems that what the parents of the SCAC churches need is help and space to build up their life and emotions and perhaps this need cannot be met through a structured “1, 2, 3 step” program or “ought and ought not” parenting method from the courses. The above statement may suggest the reason why the participating parents perceived the parenting courses offered by the SCAC or their own churches as ineffective because the courses were not meeting their real emotional needs.

Having another additional gathering might sound challenging to the already time-poor parents, yet the parent support group may provide space for parents to share their struggles, worries, and emotions. Hopefully, this can encourage the parents to have greater confidence and peace within themselves; and in turn, they can better move on and enjoy the faith journey with their children. It seems appropriate for the SCAC churches to organize support groups with just three or four families. Those who attend fellowship groups may be grouped together with their fellow members. The support group may also be conducted as a covenantal discipleship group in order to provide spiritual and emotional support as suggested in Tiong’s validation.

#### Suggestion for the Families

In light of Propositions Four and Five, it can be fruitful if families spend time talking with each other about the faith matters and also enjoy doing ordinary

things together. Parents of the SCAC churches sometimes seem to be too enthusiastic to fulfill their duty in faith nurture and therefore perhaps forget to spend time to play with their children, walk with them, and talk and laugh with them. It may make a difference if parents understand that activities like playing badminton with the children, telling jokes, drawing, playing games and the likes are also part of the faith nurturing process. These non-religious activities which are seemingly unrelated by the adults' perspective are important to children. It is suggested that families with regular routines of fun, games, and opportunities to talk things over will prompt more teachable moments. As a result, the children may naturally desire to become the initiators of conversations about God rather than parents alone.

Having said this, it is advisable that parents cannot neglect religious activities. Comments from the validation of Khoo suggested that both ordinary and religious related activities can be blended together to nurture faith in the children. For example, the SCAC churches may foster interactions and connecting moments between the parents and children by organizing Family Day, Family Outing, and Family Camp regularly. At the same time, churches may also designate one night a week as a family night. In other words, no church activities are arranged for those nights. Hopefully, parents will be home and spending some "ordinary moments" with their children.

### **Summary**

Chapter Five has discussed the emerging theory of this research study. The chapter began with the second phase of coding which is axial coding. It presented the axial coding paradigm showing the interrelationships of categories of the parental participation in faith nurture of children. The emerging theory was generated from the interview data which were coded and analyzed. The emerging theory was then presented in five propositions.

Proposition 1: The major responsibility of faith nurture of children lies with the parents.

Proposition 2: The church and the family need to be in partnership in nurturing the faith of the children.

Proposition 3: Parents need help to build up their own life and emotions if they want to nurture the faith of their children adequately

Proposition 4: Parents need to encourage a two-way direction when communicating faith matters with their children.

Proposition 5: Children's faith is nurtured when they spend time doing ordinary everyday things with their parents.

The emerging theory was then validated by two senior church leaders. Dr. Tiong Chung Tiing and Dr. Khoo Ho Peng are senior members of the SCAC and are well informed of the situation in the SCAC. They both affirmed the theory generated, supported the five propositions and provided further suggestions. In conclusion to the chapter, three suggestions are given to pave a more effective faith nurture approach for parents of the SCAC churches. These three suggestions also answered the last research Sub-Question #5 and that is: *What could be the key features of parental strategy to enhance the faith nurture of primary school aged children?*

First, in light of Propositions One and Two, if parents are to carry out their role of nurturing faith effectively in their children, it may be helpful to consider enhancing the relationship between the SCAC churches and the families. It is advisable that churches are to be intentional in offering creative and accessible ways for the faith community so as to partner with parents in forming nurturing environments that promote the faith development of children.

Second, in light of Proposition Three, the parents may consider receiving help to deal with their emotions if they want to nurture faith of their children adequately. A suggestion is for parents to join a parent support group in which they find space to freely share their emotions, worries, and problems with the group members.

Third, in light of Propositions Four and Five, it seems that parents may need to spend time talking with the children about faith matters and also enjoy doing just ordinary everyday things with their children. It is suggested that the church can organize a weekly Family day where parents are to be at home with their children. The families are encouraged to attend Family Outing or Family Camp organized by

their church in which bonding and connecting moments may be created within these activities.

The next chapter will conclude the research study with a summary of the dissertation, a personal reflection, recommendations for further research and several concluding remarks.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **A. Summary of the Study**

This study investigated how parents of the primary school aged children in the Methodist Church of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference in Malaysia can be better equipped and be more effective as partners in the faith nurture of their children. Eight families with primary school aged children from four churches in the SCAC churches participated in the field survey. The criteria for the selection of the families were: 1) both parents are Christians, 2) both parents and children are staying together; in other words, the parents are not working out-station or away from home for an extended period of time, 3) the families have been both attending and serving in their local churches consistently, and 4) the children are primary school aged.

The research process was designed according to Strauss and Corbin's updated grounded theory procedures (2008) using a qualitative survey instrument. The means of collecting data was through interviews, audio recordings and drawing activities with the participating families. Adult and children interviews were conducted separately. Overall, there were thirty-three respondents in this research study in which sixteen are adults and seventeen are children.

A total of sixteen interviews were conducted over a period of four and a half months from November, 2013 to Mid-March, 2014. Data collected from these interviews were transcribed into a total of one hundred and thirty-four pages, with seventy pages of the adult interviews and sixty-four pages of the children interviews. The transcription was made within four weeks of the data collection. There were also thirty-four pages of drawings and writings from the children's activities. The interviews were conducted in Chinese and the data were transcribed into English.

The data collected from the interviews were coded and analyzed through two phases of coding: 1) open coding and 2) axial coding. First, in the open coding, similar concepts and ideas were grouped together; and about 150 concepts emerged from the data. Then, these 150 concepts were further regrouped into 15 broad themes. Eventually the 15 broad themes were placed into eight categories: 1) Family background, 2) Living faith, 3) Faith nurture, 4) Challenges of parents and children, 5) Significant others, 6) The faith community, 7) Connecting moments, and 8) Faith experiences. Second, in axial coding, these eight categories together with their subcategories were formed in a paradigm (Diagram 1 in Chapter 5) to display the interrelationships between the phenomenon, causal conditions, intervening conditions, context, interactional strategies, and consequences. Finally, the emerging theory was generated and was presented with five propositions and summarized in a form of a descriptive story. Then, the emerging theory was validated by two senior church leaders of the SCAC. The five propositions in the generated theory are:

Proposition 1: The major responsibility of faith nurture of children lies with the parents.

Proposition 2: The church and the family need to be in partnership in nurturing the faith of the children.

Proposition 3: Parents need help to build up their own life and emotions if they want to nurture the faith of their children adequately.

Proposition 4: Parents need to encourage a two-way direction when communicating faith matters with their children.

Proposition 5: Children's faith is nurtured when they spend time doing ordinary everyday things with their parents.

Finally, concurring with the generated theory and the five propositions, three suggestions are made to possibly pave the way forward for a more effective faith nurture approach:

First is the suggestion for the SCAC churches. It may help to narrow the gap between the SCAC churches and the families if the churches are to uphold a nurturing community whereby families with children are welcomed in different

occasions and congregational activities. This nurturing community may serve as a model in attitudes and practices of family life where parents and children may freely participate in the congregational activities.

Second is the suggestion for the parents. If the parents receive help to deal with their own emotions in the effort to nurture their children's faith, they may be able to nurture faith of their children adequately. A support group in an open and trusting environment may ease the parents' fears and struggles in nurturing task. Also, the parents may have an avenue to share their concerns, worries, and disappointments. If the parents are at peace with themselves, they might better enjoy the faith journey with their children.

Third is the suggestion for the families. Parents and children of the SCAC churches are encouraged to take time to do fun related activities as a family such as playing badminton, jogging, and even telling jokes. The parents are also encouraged to spend time talking with the children about faith matters as well as enjoy doing ordinary everyday things with their children.

## **B. Personal Reflection**

As I worked on this research, memories flashed back to moments in my own journey of nurturing my own children's faith. There were sweet moments when we as a family shared our problems, prayed for one another, and read and acted out the Scripture. In my children's teenage years, they were particularly excited whenever my husband and I discussed some Bible issues or topics related to end times. Even now, conversations on God and the Bible are common in our family life. However, there were struggles too. Demands in life and the busy schedules of both parents and children tend to push aside our family faith practices such as reading the Bible together, memorizing Bible verses or praying together. At times, we as parents did these activities out of duty. Other times, it was the children who found it annoying and wanted to get it over with as fast as possible. The journey of faith nurture is not smooth sailing but it certainly is a worthwhile and rewarding call. This research has deepened my conviction to be more intentional in the faith nurturing process, a journey of faith that will lead both my children and me to grow more and more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Recently, the Lord opened more opportunities for me to talk about faith nurture of children in different churches and Christian groups. One thing I observed is that, for many churches or fellowship groups, faith nurture of children is the business of the Sunday school teachers and the parents only, other individuals are not involved. However, through this study, I have come to appreciate the importance of the church and family partnership. The faith community plays a significant role in faith nurture of the children. This is something I would like to continue to share and promote amongst the SCAC churches.

Finally, this research satisfied my curiosity because at the very beginning of the study I wanted to find out how parents are actually doing in faith nurture of their children in the SCAC. From this research, the SCAC church leaders will be better equipped to know how to foster effective partnership between the church and the family so as to narrow the gap in between.

### **C. Recommendations for Further Research**

This study has been limited to a small survey sample of eight families in the context of the Methodist Church in the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference in Malaysia. The participating families were relatively homogenous as they are active in church ministries and have primary school aged children. It is hoped that in the future, additional research can be conducted to represent a broader sample, more diverse backgrounds, different languages and even different denominations. Earlier in this report I have suggested these areas with potential for further research: the role of grandparents in the faith nurture of their grandchildren and the time-poverty issues among other parents in the SCAC churches. Further studies could also profitably be done on developing a curriculum that can enhance the partnership between the church and family in the faith nurture of the children. A follow-up longitudinal study is also recommended with families to observe the process and the transformation of the children.

#### **D. Concluding Remarks**

Christian parents are genuinely concerned about the faith development of their children. Practically, they are willing to do all they can to take up this God-given responsibility to nurture the faith of their children. However, parents are at a loss if they do not have the guidance and support from the church. As the church leaders are diligently seeking to build up the church members, they need to be aware of this important partnership with the families in faith nurture of the children. The reason is that “family faith practices and congregational participation complement one another” (Yust 2012, 226). Effective parental participation in faith nurture of the children must be anchored in the context of the faith communities. A faithful generation shall come forth when the partnership between families and their faith communities is stronger and more effective.

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## APPENDIX A

### The Social Principles of the Methodist Church

#### †83. Our Social Principles

The following Social Principles are formulated as a response of The Methodist Church in Malaysia to human issues in the contemporary world. They are based on a biblical and theological foundation enriched by our Methodist tradition. The Social Principles call on all members of The Methodist Church to a prayerful response of faith and practice. The categories of social principles are as follow:

- The Family and Marriage (†84)
- Christianity and The Economic Order (†85)
- Church and General Welfare (†86)
- Human Rights and Responsibilities (†87)
- Peace and World Order (†88)
- Political Life (†89)

#### †84. The Family and Marriage

We affirm the importance and sanctity of the family. We believe that the healthy family unit forms a basic social environment in which responsible teachings can be imparted, moral values disseminated, and where love is shared and the worth of each person is affirmed. We deplore and reject values and morals which undermine the sanctity of family life. We also understand the family as encompassing a wider range of options than that of the two-generational unit of parents and children, including the extended family, families with adopted children, single parents, stepfamilies, and couples without children.

##### *1. Marriage and Divorce*

- a. We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant which is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards in marriage. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman, thus we do not support same sex marriage as it is against Christian teachings. We do not allow Christians to practice polygamous marriage.
- b. We affirm that matrimonial service in the Church should only be conducted for Christians. We do not permit non-believers taking the marriage covenant in the Church before God.
- c. We believe that God's plan is for lifelong, faithful marriages. The church must be at the forefront of premarital and post-marital counselling in order



to create and preserve strong marriages. We do not encourage divorce and always seek for reconciliation of both parties involved. However, when a married couple is estranged beyond reconciliation, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel and prayer, divorce is a regrettable alternative in the midst of brokenness.

- d. It is recommended that methods of mediation be used to minimize the adversarial nature and fault-finding that are often part of our current judicial processes. Although divorce publicly declares that a marriage no longer exists, other covenantal relationships resulting from the marriage remain, such as the nurture and support of children and extended family ties. We urge respectful negotiations in deciding the custody of minor children and support the consideration of either or both parents for this responsibility in that custody not be reduced to financial support, control, or manipulation and retaliation. The welfare of each child is the most important consideration. We encourage an intentional commitment of the Church and society to minister compassionately to those in the process of divorce, as well as members of divorced and remarried families, in a community of faith where God's grace is shared by all.

## 2. *Single Persons*

We affirm and enfold the integrity of single persons, and we reject all social practices that discriminate or social attitudes that are prejudicial against persons because they are single.

## 3. *Parent and Child Relationship*

- a. We believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity. We believe that the parental relationship is the primary relationship upon which children are welcome members to the family. We affirm the importance of both fathers and mothers for all children.
- b. We affirm the shared responsibility for parenting by fathers and mothers and encourage social, economic, and religious efforts to enhance and strengthen relationships within families in order that every member maybe nurtured and assisted toward complete personhood.
- c. We recognize the burden of single parent families and their need for understanding, care and support from the community and the Church.
- d. We view with concern the diminishing time available for families to be together in our modern society. Families need to give priority to spending quality time together for family life enrichment, and in worship and recreation.
- e. We believe that children have a responsibility to love, honour, respect and care for their parents, especially in sickness and old age.

## 4. *God's Gift of Sex*

- a. We recognize that human sexuality is a gift of God. We believe that sexual intercourse is a sacred experience and constitutes a needed expression of

affection only when it is accompanied by the love and fidelity of a holy matrimony between a man and a woman.

- b. We call all persons to the disciplined, responsible fulfilment of themselves, others, and society in the stewardship of this gift. We believe that sexual relationships outside the bonds of matrimony are contrary to the will of God.
- c. We deplore all forms of commercialisation and exploitation of sex with their consequent degradation of the human personhood. The distribution of pornographic and other sex-exploitative material should always be banned.
- d. We advocate thorough educational efforts in home, church, and school designed to elevate our whole understanding of the meaning of sexuality and sexual experience.
- e. We consider the practice of homosexuality to be incompatible with Christian teachings. However, we do recognize that homosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. The Church is committed to provide counselling, healing and guidance as well as the spiritual and emotional support of a caring fellowship.
- f. We believe that individuals who are confused about their sexual identity need the healing and transforming power of God's grace rather than sex-change operations.

#### 5. *Birth Control and Abortion*

- a. We believe that planned parenthood, practiced with respect for human life, fulfils rather than violates the will of God. It is the duty of each married couple to prayerfully and responsibly seek parenthood, avert it, or defer it in accordance with the best expression of their Christian love.
- b. We affirm that life begins at conception and that the human embryo is not simply a mass of tissue that has the potential. We therefore do not subscribe to abortion except on medical grounds under proper medical procedures. We call on all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry in situations in which abortion maybe contemplated and to seek medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counselling.
- c. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection. Decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel.

#### 6. *Infertility and Assisted Method of Reproduction*

- a. We affirm that every child is a gift from God and not a right to be demanded from God. Procreation is always by the grace of God and not simply a product of modern science even when assisted methods of human reproduction are used.
- b. We recognize that infertility maybe cause of suffering for some married couples. We accept the procedures of assisted human reproduction which can be regarded as methods to assist natural reproduction as long as the egg

or sperms of another person are not used. We do not accept surrogate parenthood.

- c. Married couples who are burdened with the problem of infertility should prayerfully examine their motives for wanting a child and consider and understand the medical, spiritual, moral and legal implications of assisted reproductive procedures.
- d. We are also concerned that assisted methods of human reproduction maybe used for sex selection or by single persons to have a child. We believe that this is not God's divine plan for the family.

## *7. Adoption*

Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received. We recognize that some circumstances of birth and childhood make the rearing of a child difficult. We affirm and support the birth parent(s) whose choice is to allow the child to be adopted. We recognize the agony, strength, and courage of the birth parent(s) who choose(s) in hope, love and prayer to offer the child for adoption. In additions, we also recognize the anxiety, strength, and courage of those who choose in hope, love and prayer to be able to care for a child. We affirm and support the use of proper legal procedures. When appropriate and possible, we encourage open adoption so that a child may know all information and people related to the child, both biologically and relationally. We affirm that the adopted children should be given the same legal and social benefits. (2009 edition)

## APPENDIX B

### Adult Interview Protocol

1. Welcome and thank them for their willingness to participate in this interview.  
Explain again that they may stop the interview at any time or may choose not to answer a question. Everything they said will be kept confidential and the answers will be collated to reveal findings of the concern. No real names will be mentioned in the report.

Ask permission to tape-record the conversation.

2. Demographic information:

How many children do you have and how old are they?

Who lives in the house besides you and your children? (Please draw on a piece of paper.)

How long have you been attending this church?

3. How do you perceive your children's faith? Can you give a rough idea?

What are some ways that your children use to express their faith?

Can you briefly describe a favourite or memorable spiritual moment with your children or expressed by your child/children?

4. What specific routines or interactions do your children have that you think help them to grow in their faith? (There is not much distinction in Chinese, so I will keep with "their faith",) At home? Away from home? (E.g. Sunday school, children's fellowship, etc.).

What value do you see in each routine or interaction that is helpful to your children's faith?

5. What challenges or hindrances do you think your children face for growing in their faith? What specific challenges or hindrances do you face when you try to help your children to grow in their faith?

If there are challenges or hindrances, how do you address them?

6. What are some indications or evidences in your children that show they are growing in their faith?

7. Who or what do you think has responsibility for the faith nurture of your children? (Please write down on a piece of paper. Now, could you prioritise the list with 1-2-3, etc. with 1 as the most important? You can make some equal if you wish.)

Do both of you take on the role of nurturing faith in your children?  
Does one take more of a lead role? Or does someone else take this role in your household, e.g. grandparents.

How do you feel when you try to nurture the faith of your children?

How much do you think your children welcome your effort to nurture their faith? Please clarify your answer.

What are some further things you think you could try, to improve how you nurture the faith of your children?

Are there ways that your church or the SCAC have offered help or suggestions to do this? What are these ways that you know of? How effective are these ways, in your view?

Does your church offer any training for parents and/or children and/or families together to help the faith nurture of children? How effective are these ways, in your view?

Does the SCAC offer any training for parents and/or children and/or families together to help the faith nurture of children? How effective are these ways, in your view?

8. Is there any further comment or question you would like to add?

## APPENDIX C

### Children Interview Protocol

1. Welcome the children and thank them for their willingness to help me in this “question and answer survey”. Explain again that they may stop the discussion any time or may choose not to answer a question. Tell the children that a report will be written of the survey but no real names will be mentioned. Ensure the children that the questions have no right or wrong answer.

Ask permission to tape-record the conversation.

2. Get acquainted and ask some general questions.

What is your name? Is this the name you want to use in this discussion?

How was your day?

Which school do you go to? What grade?

Tell me something about your family. Who lives in your house?

(Please draw a picture of your family on this paper.)

3. How much do you think your Mummy loves God? Not much; Somewhat; Very much.

What makes you think your Mummy loves God?

Anything else?

4. How much do you think your Daddy loves God? Not much; Somewhat; Very much

What makes you think your Daddy loves God?

Anything else?

5. Referring to the genogram of the child’s household, how about others in the family? (Optional. Ask only if there are other adults in the family.)

How much do you think they love God? Not much; Somewhat;

Very much. What makes you think like that?

6. Who do you know more, God or Jesus? Or who are you most comfortable with, God or Jesus? (This question determines the child’s preference on God or Jesus and will be used accordingly throughout the interview.)

7. Can you tell me what you think or how you feel about God? How much do you think you love God? Can you choose from one of the following: Not much; Somewhat; Very much? What do you do to show that you love God?

8. Tell me about the activities you attend in a normal week. (Write down the list on paper together with the child.)

Which of these help you know God more?  
How do these activities help or not help?

9. Questions on knowing God more.

What does your Daddy or Mummy usually talk about with you?

Who helps you to know God better?

Besides your parents, is there anyone else?

What helps you to know God better?

10. How does your Daddy or Mummy talk about God at home?

Do they read the Bible to/with you? When does it usually occur?

Do they read other books about God/Jesus to you?

What is the book about? Can you remember the title of the book?

Do they pray with you? How does that usually happen?

Anything else you can think of.

Do you hear Daddy or Mummy talk about how God answers prayer?

How was it? Can you give one example?

Do they talk about how God help others? How? Can you give me one example?

Do they watch Bible videos or movies with you? What happens after watching? Do they talk about the story with you?

11. When does Daddy or Mummy usually talk with you about God? Is there a fixed time like in the morning, at night or during meal time, etc.?

12. How do you feel when you talk with your parents about God?

(See next page)

*WAYS MY PARENTS HELP ME LOVE GOD MORE*

Sing songs about God and Jesus	Watch Bible stories movies
Pray before I eat	
Skit/drama/act out the story in the Bible	Pray before I go to sleep
Family devotion time	Pray before I go to school
Draw-God's creation or Bible stories	Take me to church /Sunday School
Do handicraft	Listen and talk to each other about God
Read Bible stories	Talk to other people about God
Read other story books about God	Give money to needy people
Serve others –e.g. Bake/cook for others	Visit other churches
Think about God	Help people who are poor

Please circle: (you are allowed to put more than one colour around something)

1. Circle the activities your parents do with you in **GREEN**.
2. Circle the activities you like to do in **RED**.
3. Circle the activities you don't like in **BLUE**.
4. Write in the box below other activities you wish to do with Daddy or Mummy in **SEPARATE PIECE OF PAPER IN BROWN!**

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## APPENDIX D

### **Letter of request to a local church pastor to use some of his/her church members in a research project**

Date: 4 September 2013

Dear Rev...,

May I request your permission to invite a few members of the MYAF/MAF in your church to participate in a research project I am conducting?

I am a candidate in the EdD (Education) program of AGST Alliance. As part of my program, I am working on a research project entitled "Appropriate Parental Participation in the Faith Nurture of Primary School-Aged Children in Urban Chinese Families of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference". This project requires that I get the views of participants in the MYAF/MAF of several congregations of the SCAC of Malaysia.

I would like to invite 2 couples from your congregation to participate. I would personally contact the chairpersons of MYAF/MAF for the possible suggestions of families. These participants will be the parents of primary aged children, and I will invite them to have a 30-45 minute interview with me.

Participation by any couple will be voluntary. At any time up until I have processed the data they may request that their interview information not be used. The information participants give in this survey will be kept confidential and anonymous: names and personal details will not be revealed in any of my research writing.

If you would like more information, or you have questions about this request, please contact me at tel. 0198476215 or email [wintiesm@yahoo.com](mailto:wintiesm@yahoo.com). If you would like to discuss aspects of my request with someone not directly involved, please contact Dr. Allan Harkness (email <[dean@agstalliance.org](mailto:dean@agstalliance.org)>; tel. +65-6219-7855), chair of the AGST Alliance Education Programs Committee which is responsible for reviewing and approving this study.

If you are interested to receive a summary of the results of my research, I will send it to you at the conclusion of my research.

I am grateful for your consideration of this request, and I look forward to your response.

In Christian Fellowship,

[signature]

Winnie Chan  
No.51, JalanTunAbang Haji Openg, Sibul, 96007.  
0198476215  
[wintiesm@yahoo.com](mailto:wintiesm@yahoo.com)

## APPENDIX E

### Letter of invitation to participate in an interview

Date: 4 September 2013

Dear Mr. and Mrs. ...

May I request your assistance, by participating in a short interview?

I am a participant in the Doctor of Education (EdD) program of AGST Alliance. As part of my dissertation for this program, I am working on a research project to discover what parents and children think about how the children's faith is nurtured.

This project requires the views of participants in local church who are parents of primary aged children.

As a couple in this category, would both of you please be willing to participate in my research? I would like to gather information from you about how you perceived faith of your children and how you might nurture faith of your children. The interview will be just with both of you. The session will likely last about 30-45 minutes.

If you are willing to participate please sign the attached informed consent form. We can then make arrangement for the actual interview session. The venue and date will be at your convenience.

Your participation in my research is completely voluntary. At any time up until I have processed the data you may request that your interview not be used. The information you give in this interview will be kept confidential and anonymous: Both of your names and personal details will not be revealed in any of my research writing.

If you are interested to receive a summary of the results of my research, I will send it to you at the conclusion of my research. Please indicate on the attached consent form whether you would like to receive the summary.

If you would like more information before you make your decision whether to participate, or you have questions about this request, please contact me at tel. 0198476215 or email [wintiesm@yahoo.com](mailto:wintiesm@yahoo.com). If you would like to discuss your participation in this interview with someone not directly involved, please contact Dr. Allan Harkness (email <[dean@agstalliance.org](mailto:dean@agstalliance.org)>; tel. +65-6219-7855), chair of the AGST Alliance Education Programs Committee, which is responsible for reviewing and approving this study.

I am grateful for your valuable time, and hope that you will agree to participate.

In Christian Fellowship,

Winnie Chan

No.51, Jalan Tun Abang Haji Openg, Sibu, 96007.

0198476215

[wintiesm@yahoo.com](mailto:wintiesm@yahoo.com)

## APPENDIX F

**Informed consent form for study participants****Informed Consent**

We agree to participate in the study to discover what parents and children think about how the children's faith is nurtured .conducted by *Winnie Chan* for her AGST Alliance EdD (Education) dissertation research.

The procedures required for the research and the time involved have been explained to us, and any questions we have about the research have been answered to our satisfaction.

We understand our participation is completely voluntary, and we can withdraw from the research at any time up until the data has been processed.

We consent to audio taping of the interview. We understand that we can stop the interview at any time if we do not wish to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.

We understand that the information and views we provide will be kept confidential and anonymous: names and personal details will not be revealed in any of the research writing.

Husband's Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_

Wife's Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Name \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

We are interested to receive a summary of the results of the research, when it is available.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel. no.: \_\_\_\_\_

**A copy of this informed consent is for you to keep.**

## APPENDIX G

### **Parent/guardian information statement when children are involved**

You are invited to permit your child/children to participate in a study in which we hope to discover what parents and children think about how the children's faith is nurtured. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because he/she is aged 8-12 and is part of the family I have chosen as participants of the interview.

If you permit your child/children to participate, my assistant and I will conduct a 20-25 minutes interview with them with the purpose of finding out how and what they are doing in their faith growth. We will conduct this interview at the convenience of your child's time. The interview session will be held at the church or a place where you agree and the children are familiar with. If you have more than one child who is between the ages of 8-12, they are all invited to be part of the interview session.

We cannot promise that your and/or your child/children will benefit directly from being in this study.

Information that is obtained from your child/children in connection with this study will remain confidential. In any publication, information will be presented in such a way that you or your child will not be able to be identified.

If you decide to permit your child to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue your child's participation at any time. While you will not be able to sit in on the interview, you may stop the interview at any time if you do not wish it to continue, the audio recording will be erased and the information provided by your child will not be included in the study.

If you have any additional questions, please contact me at 0198476215. I will be happy to answer them.

If you would like to discuss your participation in this survey with someone not directly involved, please contact Dr. Allan Harkness (email <dean@agstalliance.org>; tel. +65-6219-7855), chair of the AGST Alliance Education Programs Committee, which is responsible for reviewing and approving this study.

Winnie Chan  
No.51, JalanTunAbang Haji Openg, Sibu, 96007.  
0198476215  
wintiesm@yahoo.com

**A copy of this information sheet is for you to keep**

## APPENDIX H

**Parent/guardian consent form**

I, ..... agree to permit my  
child/children ..... to participate in Mdm Winnie  
Chan's research project on what parents and children think about how the  
children's faith is nurtured

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. I have read the Information Statement. The researcher has given me the opportunity to discuss the information and ask any questions I have about the project and she has answered to my satisfaction.
2. I understand that I may stop my child/children's participation at any time and that my child/children may decline to participate or terminate participation at any time.
3. I consent to audio taping of the interview. If I/my child do not wish to continue the session the audio recording will be erased and the information provided will not be included in the study.
4. I agree that research data gathered from the results of the study maybe published but that neither my child nor I will be identified in any written reports on the research.
5. I understand that if I have any questions relating to my child/children's participation in this research I may contact the researcher for answers.

Signature of parent/guardian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ NRIC:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested to receive a summary of the results of the research, when it is available.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel. no.: \_\_\_\_\_

**A copy of this consent form is for you to keep.**

## APPENDIX I

*Children Information sheet*

Hi ...

How are you?

I would like your help. I want to learn some more about how children like you relate to God. Would you be willing to talk to me about this?

If you would like to help me, my helper and I will chat with you for about 20-25 minutes. Your brothers or sisters who are within 8-12 years old might be with us too.

In our chat, if you feel uncomfortable, you can choose to not answer a question. It is even OK if you don't want to continue talking with me.

Even after our chat, you can ask me not to use what we have talked about, and then I will forget it.

What we talk about will be between us. I'm not going to report your ideas back to your mum and dad, or any other person.

Afterwards, I will write a report, but your name will not be used.

If you want to ask me any questions you can call me on my hand phone 0198476215. I will be happy to answer them.

Thank you for thinking about helping me in this way. If you say yes, I will be grateful. If you say you don't want to help, that's OK too.

God bless!

Auntie Winnie Chan

No.51, Jalan TunAbang Haji Openg, Sibu, 96007.

Tel. 0198476215

wintiesm@yahoo.com

## APPENDIX J

*ASSENT FORM*

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's/Guardian's name: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to participate in the research project that Winnie Chan is conducting. No one has made me participate.

I understand that I will be asked some questions about God and how I relate to Him.

I understand that I may stop the interview at any time if I feel uncomfortable.

I may choose not to answer a question.

I understand that Winnie Chan will write a report about this research, but that my name will not be used, so anything I say will be confidential.

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

There are two copies of this assent form included. Please sign one and return it to Winnie Chan. The other copy you may keep.

## APPENDIX K

Third coding and memoing on 21 May 2014

Broad Concepts	Narrative data to be coded/Concepts
Family background	<p>Background---All parents started going to church since young/early teens except one father, he started while he was working (a-7)</p> <p>All parents started going to the same church since they got married</p> <p>All families live by themselves, no other family members or grandparents stay with them, some stay nearby, except one has a maid in the house (a-6)</p>
Modeling faith	<p>Set good example (a-5)</p> <p>Parents go church, read bible, pray, fellowship</p> <p>Go Praying meeting/Thursday prayer meeting (before yes.. now less) (a-7)</p> <p>Children observe parents if they can do the requirements</p> <p>Children have standards and challenge parents(a-3)</p> <p>Parents go by faith</p> <p>Parents plays the main role in faith nurturing</p> <p>Parents pray for children everyday(a-6, 7)</p> <p>Set goal/ultimate goal –train up the child to walk in his path (a-8)</p> <p>A responsibility/a duty (a-6,7, 8)</p> <p>Church life (a-8)</p> <p>Sunday, rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day (a-8)</p> <p>Learn to trust and obey (a-8)</p>
Nurturing faith	<p>Parents make sure of the salvation of the children, received JC as their personal saviour (a-2, 6,7,8)/ sure can go heaven (a-8)</p> <p>Either father or mother participate in reading bible or praying with them/ Both participate</p> <p>All families pray/</p> <p>Recite the Lord's Prayer (c-1)</p> <p>All read bible (sometimes to them, sometimes have children read on their own, diligently (a-7)</p> <p>Copy bible (adult 1,3,5,8), /not yet start or stopped due to too much homework</p>



<p>Parental struggles/challenges</p>	<p>Continue, more regular prayer time before bed  Parents teach/implant/instill/engraft (灌输 guoshu) (a-6)/concept(a- 7, 8)/ remind them (a-8)  Everyday life effort (a-6)  Read proverbs to them while they are still sleeping in the morning (a-7)  Pray before meals  Make sure they go Sunday school, church, participate in different activities or service –when talking about ss, the response usually said increase knowledge and then add in, not sure what they learn or do  Read bible while feeding them when they were small, run a few times in a year (a-7)</p> <p>-ve Before.... Now (before buy books, before pray...)  +ve Before... now (before won't open mouth to sing and pray, now can....)(a-4)  Since young read to him... now he reads himself (a-6)/now train them to read(a-8)/read devotional materials (a-8)  Challenge—annoy and emotions  Time factor-no time/ too busy/time constraints/do not spend time with them/ we don't put it into thoughts  Parents try their best/有心力不足)  Mass media, internet, fb, iPad, technology, smart phone  Not sure what children learn in ss or if pastors have impact on them/"a lot of things we don't know what they do"(a-8)  Stress from other church commitment (a-4)/stress from work (a-8)  Wide age range of children (a-5)/ a little baby (a-8)  Talk for a long time, not start  Not sure what the children learn, not sure of their thinking  Cannot carry out the process through  Persevere (a-6)/not persistent, not persevere enough to do family devotion (a-7)  Children learn from bad source (classmates, games)  Lacking of, impatient, frustrated, how come opposite come out (a-6)  Spiritual battle (a-6)  Parents themselves lack of spiritual nurture too (a-6)  Not sure (sigh)... just hope some seeds sow in his heart (a-7)/I do so much, not sure guarantee/ I do my part (a-8)  Play with friends at prayer meeting, make me angry (a-7) when they were younger, if ask them to pray, they will, now...(sigh)—(a-7)  Lots of homework</p>
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<p>Parenting style</p>	<p>Tired (a-7,8)          Not happy, failure, is there hope (a-7)          Need something else to teach children to grow, not just ss (don't have, a-7)          When face challenge--must do, think ahead , cannot stop, persevere (a-8)          Feel like taking short cut because every day the same (a-7,8)          Children argue among each other (a-1)</p> <p>Father pity the children (a-7)          Father does not think much on faith nurturing (a-4)          I feel if I am more stern, they will obey better (a-7)          Children afraid of father, but struggle with me to the end, make me Very very angry at them (a-7)          Lower standard (a-7)          Parents play different roles          Need monitor/boundaries (a-6)</p>
<p>Assisting tools/people          -significant people          -books          -courses</p>	<p>Parents buy books for children to read(adults interview1, 3)          Church friends, Christian school teachers (some pretty good, some –ve—(a-7), primary school all no good—a-5)          Sunday school teachers, pastors, friends in school (c-1)          Outside course/materials to help          Grandparents especially grandmothers/one family mentions grandfather          Camps/courses/scac/church          How to help parents build up children's faith          Some talks available-but parents did not go, some did not take notice, some go/ most said they know about some courses but they Do not have time attend or they do not take notice at all          Should have compulsory courses          Kindergarten teachers (all good comments if they talk about them)(a-5, 6, 7,8)</p>
<p>Experiencing life/faith          Perhaps consequences:          experiencing faith</p>	<p>Know God/ beginning stage (a-4)/ not a very deep or adult-ish way (a-6)/simple childlike faith (a-8)/relationship with God quite good (a-1)          Fear God</p>

together or living out faith	<p>Challenge each other good testimony or not (a-1)/</p> <p>Bring changes gradually/ fight for others especially the younger ones and weaker ones (a-1, c-4)</p> <p>Older child encourage the younger one to pray when the younger one faces some unhappy moment in school (a-5)</p> <p>Want spiritual blessings</p> <p>Character building</p> <p>Habit</p> <p>Submit/obey parents</p> <p>Apply God's words in classmates</p> <p>Apply God's words in offering/learn no cheating</p> <p>Must go church/determination rather than obligation/some obligation</p> <p>Some breakthrough</p> <p>Memory verses/has rewards</p> <p>Music/choir/ learn worship</p> <p>Learn Self-discipline</p> <p>Face difficulty can't resolve/ pray for no rain/talk about for a year (a-3), pray for no rain to play Frisbee (a-6)</p> <p>Pray for each other, for sick relatives</p> <p>Don't want to be late for church activities</p> <p>Receive rewards</p> <p>Read prayer book</p> <p>They know they are Christians</p> <p>Pray when exam time</p> <p>Children say grace</p> <p>Children adore father (a-5)</p> <p>God does not answer prayer</p> <p>Learn to use internet or tools wisely (a-6)</p> <p>Process of growing</p> <p>Challenge faith by grandmother, unbeliever (a-6)</p> <p>Dutiful, simply, just find the shorter chapter to read</p> <p>Knowledge bible</p> <p>Grow spiritually not seen by activities or serving but behavior (a-8)</p> <p>Share a blanket with others (a-1 or 2??)</p> <p>Show concern to their classmates' salvation (a-1)</p>
Expressing discontentment	<p>Parents complain children noisy, naughty, too active, won't listen(a-4)</p> <p>Children complain parents go church again/when the talk can finish/when can go home (a-2,a-4)</p> <p>Really really bad, say nasty things to mom, argue, fret over it, insist not wrong (a-7)</p> <p>Children argue among each other (a-1)</p>

Children attitude	<p>Activities versus life transformation</p> <p>Service/love/ commit (drummer a-6)/serve in choir (a-8)/perform for God (a-8)</p> <p>Humble(a-6)</p> <p>Looks forward, enjoy</p> <p>Obligation</p> <p>Focus</p> <p>Temper improves (a-6)</p> <p>Devoted</p> <p>Enthusiastic (not that) the boy (a-7)</p> <p>Burden heavy, stress (a-7)</p> <p>Cannot discipline</p> <p>Peace, secure</p> <p>Have confidence/learn to be independent (a-8)</p> <p>Perseverance</p> <p>Courage (a-8)</p> <p>Be grateful/maintain good relationship/ learn to forgive (a-8)</p>
Common experiences	<p>Interaction with others</p> <p>Play Frisbee with parents (a-6)</p> <p>Jump ropes, play badminton, go camping together, exercise,</p>
Learning style	<p>Think versus impulsive action</p> <p>Children different</p> <p>Young one asks/older one relates facts</p>
Conversations	<p>Q and A</p> <p>Story telling/explaining the truth of the bible</p> <p>Children ask questions/parent listen/(adult interview 4)</p> <p>No fixed time to talk about God (c-1)</p> <p>Don't go to people's house, don't eat junk food, don't simply run</p> <p>/study hard during exam (c-8, 4)/study close to God, ask me questions (c-5)/read bible, pray, go sleep, behave well (c-6)/fear God, do your portion (c-7)/ others nothing special</p> <p>Pray together as a family</p> <p>Bless each other every night (a-8)</p>

Connecting moments	<p>Follow parents go church/ prayer meeting/ fellowship/          Having fun in the children's corner following parents to fellowship          Young ones like to follow parents, not so much of older siblings          Goal—for supper after fellowship? (a-7)          Sweet moments –blessings/praying together/affirming each other          Observe adults in small group and in fellowship/listen to them          Children share faith with others/with grandparents (a-6)          Do family devotion          Stay home at night with parents: parents work from home, children do HW (a-1)</p>
Bearing fruits	<p>See situation/observe their response          If their character good, if their answers positive, very happy and comforted          Feel proud that they really do well          Children talk with each other</p>

## APPENDIX L

## LETTER OF INVITATION TO EVALUATE A SURVEY FINDING

Dear Rev. Dr. ....

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

My name is Winnie Chan and I am a student at AGST Alliance (Asia Graduate School of Theology). I am in the later stage of a research study with the title "Appropriate Parental Participation in the Faith Nurture of Primary School-Aged Children in Urban Chinese Families of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia". In order to validate my research findings, I would like to invite you to help me evaluate the research conclusions and my suggestions for the way forward in ministry. I believe your experience in pastoral ministry and knowledge in your field of expertise will help give invaluable insights to this research. The validation will help determine if my findings portray the correct picture of the situation and to obtain a more comprehensive view on parental participation in childhood faith nurture.

Enclosed, you will find a brief summary of the research findings. Please feel free to comment from your perspective of the situations described. Two sets of questions are posted:

Section A: In what ways does your experience as a pastor/lecturer confirm or dispute the research findings?

Section B: Based on your experiences, please comment whether the "three ways forward" are sufficiently adequate or helpful for the SCAC church? What would you add or delete?

Thank you so much for your willingness to assist me. I am grateful if I can receive your response before 1 October 2014. You can email your comments to me at wintiesm@yahoo.com. If you would like more information, please contact me at tel. 0198476215.

I am grateful for your valuable time.

In Christian Fellowship,

Winnie Chan  
No.51, Jalan Tun Abang Haji Openg, Sib, 96007.  
019-847-6215

## APPENDIX M

## EVALUATION OF FIELD RESEARCH

Research Title: Appropriate Parental Participation in the Faith Nurture of Primary School-Aged Children in Urban Chinese Families of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia

Research Problem: How can parents of the primary school-aged children of the Sarawak Chinese Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in Malaysia be better equipped and be more effective as partners in the faith nurture of their children?

Field Survey: (8) The survey respondents were parents and children from eight families currently worshipping in four different SCAC churches in the Sibu District. The children and parents were interviewed separately.

Section A:

Does your experience as a pastor/lecturer confirm or dispute the findings stated? Kindly comment on the propositions below.

- *Proposition 1: Parents admit that the major responsibility of faith nurture of their children lies with them.*

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- *Proposition 2: There is a gap in understanding about partnership between the church and family concerning the faith nurture of children.*

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- *Proposition 3: The frustrations and anger of parents in the faith nurture process are related to parents' own conditions such as time constraint, physical fatigue, expectations of the children in obedience and the nature of their own parenting styles.*

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- *Proposition 4: Children desire to spend time and do more ordinary everyday things with parents such as riding bicycle, playing games, and drawing other than just faith-related activities such as reading Bible and talking about God.*

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- *Proposition 5: Parents tend to use a one way direction to communicate faith matters with the children and this causes further frustration when the parents do not see the expected results from their children.*

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### Section B:

In summary, the researcher listed three possible ways to address the research problem. Based on your experiences as a pastor /lecturer, to what degree are the suggestions adequate or helpful? What would you add or delete?

#### 1. NURTURING PARENTS' FAITH FIRST

The parents' own faith is the utmost important factor in faith nurture of children. John Wesley's sermon clearly indicated that parents' relationship with God and the life they live is be far more important than the things they teach the children (Wesley, 1986, pp. 334-336). This admonition is consistent with the instructions found in the *Book of Discipline* whereby the duties of the church



members are described as, “They should be faithful in attending the stated services of divine worship in the church, in celebrating the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, in reading and meditating upon the Scriptures, in engaging in private prayer, and in participating in the public meetings for prayer and Christian fellowship. He will endeavor to love God with his whole heart and to serve Him with all his strength, faithfully discharging every duty belonging to the service of God” (*The Book of Discipline*, 2012, p. 56).

The grounded data findings disclose that almost all participating parents are involved in ministries either at the local church level or at the SCAC level. However, the researcher observed that involvement in ministries does not necessarily guarantee a close and growing relationship with God. The children observed that when their parents are overly busy with church responsibilities, the parents tend to neglect their personal time in prayer and Bible reading. As such the faith nurture process in the home is also affected.

Hence, it is important for the church to be intentional in nurturing the faith of the parents and not overly demand their time away from home with all kinds of programs, courses, training or camps. While all these activities have certain benefits, more important is for parents to be able to grow deep in their faith and anchor themselves in the Word of God. A growing faith that springs forth from within brings life and joy in nurturing the faith of others.

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## 2. PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR PARENTS

One of the major findings from the grounded data is the emotions and the feeling of helplessness among a majority of the parents in the process of faith nurture. Some parents are seriously frustrated; some are confused; some are a bit disappointed. In other words, parents experience stresses and emotions in a variety of degrees. In view of this, the parents need assurance that what they are doing is in obedience to the teaching of the Bible and consistent with the Methodist confessions.

The SCAC needs to commend the parents that they are indeed playing a vital role in passing on the faith to the next generation and providing the spiritual nurture for the children. Methodist churches can provide space for parents to share their struggles, worries and emotions. For example, a support group in an open and trusting environment can help ease the parents’ fears and struggles in nurturing

their children. When parents are at peace with themselves, they can better move on and enjoy the faith journey with their children.

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### 3. PRACTICAL STEPS

Another major concern highlighted by the participating parents is that they are uncertain of what to do or whether what they do is effective or correct. The SCAC and churches can help by providing some guidelines and practical steps in the faith nurture of children at home.

However, this should not be relegated to a “1, 2, 3 step” or “ought and ought not” parenting method. Westerhoff comments that every family is different in terms of their life-styles, commitments, practices, hobbies, priorities and even meal times (Westerhoff, 1980, pp. 34-35). What is good for one family may not be good for the other. The following are three guidelines for parents involved in the faith nurturing process of their children. These guidelines are consistent with the Methodist confessions and applicable in the context of the Methodist Church in Malaysia. They are: a) family rituals, b) ordinary moments and c) serving together.

*Family rituals:* Observing and maintaining family rituals are important in passing on the faith to the children. Rituals are “signs of remembrance” (Grun, 2010, p. 25). They open up space to connect with God (Ibid.). Westerhoff (2008) explains, “Rituals are repetitive, symbolic actions, in both words and deeds that manifest and express a community’s sacred story. These rituals, these symbolic actions, are the basis of the spiritual life” (p. 364).

Often, families of the Methodist churches imagine that rituals are formal, boring events or limited to going to church. However, from the data gathered, each family is already having and developing their family rituals. The examples include, reading the Bible or listening to Bible stories before bedtime, blessing each family member, holding hands to pray the Lord’s Prayer, reading one chapter of Proverbs before breakfast, and praying in the car. Churches need to help parents understand that family rituals are important for the faith formation of their children. Every family is different and should develop their rituals along the way. There is no one particular way of doing it.

The SCAC needs to assist parents to develop their home rituals in line with the church calendar events such as Christmas, Lent, Easter and Advent. For example, a family tradition during Christmas time could be sitting around the

Christmas tree and singing carols or lighting advent candles in the house during the Advent season. The family can also observe fasting during the Lent season. Children growing up in families with rituals will treasure all these memories, remember and celebrate God's goodness and build them into the practices for their future homes.

Ordinary moments: Grounded data in the research suggests that the parents are sometimes too eager to fulfill their duty in faith nurturing and neglect to take time and space to foster the parent-child relationship. Hence, the parents are encouraged to spend time to *play* with their children, to *walk* with them, to *talk* and *laugh* with them. For example, parents need to know that, by playing badminton with the children, telling jokes, drawing, playing games and the like are also part of the faith nurturing process. These "non-faith activities" which are seemingly unrelated by adults' perspective are important to children. Families with regular routines of fun, games and opportunities to talk things over will arise more teachable moments and as a result, without surprise, children are seen more eager to become the initiators of conversations about God than parents alone.

Acts of service: Children need to experience faith in real life situations and to see how their parents live out their faith. One of the best ways is to involve the whole family in different ministries in the church. In the SCAC setting, intergenerational worship services are occasionally practiced in many churches. Although this is a good start, the Methodist churches need to be more intentional to create opportunities for whole families to be involved in ministry. Examples of ministry involvement include mission trips, home visitations, church wide spring cleaning, community services, and projects to help the poor. Parents need to be sensitive and be purposeful in serving the children. Most important, churches need to welcome the possibility of having whole family involved in ministries and intentionally create appropriate channels for this. Serving together helps parents to see another perspective of faith nurturing in which there is joy and satisfaction in obeying and doing God's will as a family.

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THANK YOU.