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Nurturing Faith Within the Catholic Home: A Perspective from Catholic Parents  
who do not Access Catholic Schools

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## Chapter Six

### *The Findings: Challenges to Nurturing Faith*

Chapter Five established that parents who participated in the study had a strong desire to nurture the faith of their children. The strategies and nurturing styles used to nurture faith within the context of the home were identified. This Chapter continues to make use of the metaphor of voices established in Chapter Four. The analytical metaphors will be employed to describe the diversity of challenges faced by parents in their task to nurture the faith of their children. Lastly, this Chapter presents the support desired by parents to sustain them in their task of nurturing the faith of their children.

This Chapter is divided into three main parts. In the first part of the Chapter, the challenges to nurturing faith will be made explicit. In the second part the resources desired by participants are identified and discussed. In the final part, the issue of availability and accessibility of resources is examined.

### **Concerns and Hindrances Faced by Participants to Nurturing Faith**

Participants identified a number of concerns and hindrances that challenge the nurturing of the faith within family life. Firstly, participants expressed concerns which related to the perception of their ability to nurture the faith. Secondly, participants named a number of influences within society that hinder them from nurturing faith within the home. The third concern named, centred on the participant experience of the attitude to young people by the Church. A final challenge for some participants was the trial of nurturing faith between two faith traditions. The concerns and hindrances expressed by the participants became the challenges to nurturing faith. These will be explored in detail in the following sections.

The input of the whole population in this group formed the Data for this analysis. Table 6.1 demonstrates the number of quotations by participants across the three voices used in this Chapter. It is not unexpected that within this larger group not all the conversations of all participants are not quoted. Tables 4.2 (. pp.93–94), 5.1 (cf. p.172-

174), and 6.1 indicate the distribution of quotations used in these Chapters. It has not been the intent to have equal representation, but to use the quotation that best identifies the point being discussed while fairly representing the thoughts of the person quoted. That stated, the Tables do indicate that the distribution of quotations has been fair, wide and inclusive of the participants.

**Table 6.1 Chapter 6: Distribution of Quotations by Participant Voice (n=36)**

<b>Name of Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Voice</b>	<b>No. of times quoted in Ch 6</b>
Kerry	F	Orthodoxy	0
Maria	F	Orthodoxy	1
Mary	F	Orthodoxy	2
Terry	M	Orthodoxy	2
Tina	F	Orthodoxy	1
Alice	F	Lived Experience	2
Andrea	M	Lived Experience	1
Carmel	F	Lived Experience	0
Carole	F	Lived Experience	3
Cora	F	Lived Experience	3
Doreen	F	Lived Experience	2
Elizabeth	F	Lived Experience	2
Heidi	F	Lived Experience	3
Helen	F	Lived Experience	1
Ian	M	Lived Experience	1
Jack	M	Lived Experience	0
Jacque	F	Lived Experience	1
Jane	F	Lived Experience	3
Janet	F	Lived Experience	1

<b>Name of Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Voice</b>	<b>No. of times quoted in Ch 6</b>
Jill	F	Lived Experience	4
Judy	F	Lived Experience	0
Julie	F	Lived Experience	2
Karen	F	Lived Experience	2
Kylie	F	Lived Experience	0
Lisa	F	Lived Experience	1
Lyn	F	Lived Experience	1
Marian	F	Lived Experience	1
Nancy	F	Lived Experience	1
Pat	M	Lived Experience	1
Phillip	M	Lived Experience	1
Stephie	F	Lived Experience	1
Susan	F	Lived Experience	1
Trish	F	Lived Experience	2
Vigi	F	Lived Experience	0
Anne	F	Active Struggle	4
Chris	F	Active Struggle	3

## **Challenges to Nurturing Faith**

### ***Sense of Inadequacy***

One of the greatest challenges to nurturing faith identified in the data centred on the perceptions by the participants of their own inadequacies in relation to faith matters. This was chiefly noted with participants in both the voices of faith as a lived experience and the voice of faith as an active struggle. Participants in the three voices spoke at

length of their concern about the perception that they lack the skills needed to take on the full responsibility of the faith education of their children. They themselves had little or no formal religious education and therefore, felt inadequate communicating matters of faith with their children. Participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle spoke of relying heavily on PREP for the formal faith education of their children. Those in the voice of orthodoxy did not explicitly name a sense of inadequacy as a challenge to nurturing the faith of their children.

The sense of being inadequately formed in the faith and not being confident in communicating matters of faith was highlighted by the difficulty experienced in gathering a more sufficient sample for the study. For many people, sharing one's perceived inadequacies can be intimidating and may be one of the contributing factors that made the gathering of the sample of parents a slow task contributing to the low response rate from parents. The difficulties experienced while developing the sample have been discussed previously (Ch. 3 pp.67–68).

### ***Lack of Own Religious Knowledge***

Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience and the voice of faith as an active struggle named their own lack of religious knowledge as one of most significant factors that hindered them in nurturing the faith of their own children. For many of the participants, their greatest quandary was that they could not adequately communicate with their children on faith issues because they felt that they could not effectively answer questions raised by their children. Doreen sums up the dilemma faced by many of the participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience.

*As a mother I don't know what to say to her [daughter] and make her more interested in what's happening. She will ask me "why do they do that" I myself don't understand somethings, so how do I explain it to her? I feel it's like I wasn't taught these things when I was growing up in my school, in my religion class, even though I went to a Catholic school in India, these things weren't taught to me. So things were not explained, so I am still unsure of how to explain it to her. Sometimes it is easier to say little. (Doreen)*

Many participants remarked that they relied on the minimal faith education they received in their childhood and that their knowledge of the faith had not been developed

since they were at school. Carole called her understanding of faith an 'uneducated faith'. When asked what she meant by uneducated faith Carole answered;

*Well I feel that I don't know all the theology of the faith and I haven't studied aspects of the faith through a course or something. I rely on what I learned as a child and what I think to be the right way of doing things from what I have experienced in life, but then I could be misleading them as well.* (Carole)

Carole, like many others in the voice of faith as a lived experience, tussles constantly with the question "Am I doing and saying the right things about the faith to my children?" When asked if the sense of inadequacy in sharing faith with her children stemmed from her own perceived lack of knowledge, she commented:

*Well yes. I feel I am not to be able to pass faith on to my children because they have many questions that perhaps I simply can't answer. I'm not sure. Sometimes I feel I am not equipped with the particular teaching expertise to teach my children what they need to have in the development of their religion. You know, like at what point in your teaching capacity should I develop their knowledge of their religion apart from the very standard things like teaching them about saying prayers, showing them how you live. They are the standard things but with other faith things I just don't know that I am equipped to teach them because I just don't know things.* (Carole)

Those in the voice of faith as an active struggle spoke of a similar frustration with their own lack of religious knowledge. The story shared by Anne was similar to that of Doreen. For Anne it was of great concern to her that she was not able to answer the questions of her children. As she spoke of this concern in the interview, she began to realise that her own faith understanding had not developed and it became a source of anxiety for her. She spoke very slowly and in a reflective manner when expressing her sense of inadequacy.

*I feel sometimes I don't even have the knowledge, like if Jordan asks me a question, but I know that I have faith. I just can't explain it to him. I don't think I am that knowledgeable to answer his questions. I would love to answer my kids' questions, you know like I do for their maths. I mean I can answer like that. So, it's a big thing for me. I think O my God I don't know anything. It is such a big thing that I think O my gosh maybe they should be at a Catholic school, getting this exposure because I can't answer that. I rely on my sister to help me. She is a teacher in a Catholic school so I often send Jordan to chat to her. But it is not right is it? I should know how to answer his questions.* (Anne)

It is worth noting that those in the voice of orthodoxy did not express a concern about their own lack of religious knowledge. Those in the voice of orthodoxy were confident about their own knowledge of the faith. The data revealed the level of schooling or religious knowledge of those in the voice of orthodoxy was not in any way different or more substantial to those in the other voices.

### **The Desire for a Catholic School Education**

The desire for a Catholic school education was not uncommon between participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience and as an active struggle. An overwhelming 27 out of 29 participants in these two voices desired a Catholic school education for their children as compared to 1 out of 5 of participants in the voice of orthodoxy. The desire to have their children in the Catholic school system stemmed from the sense of inadequacy brought about by the perceived lack of religious knowledge. Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience and faith as an active struggle desired that their children be educated in the Catholic schools so that they would have support in trying to nurture a faith that is integrated with life. At the same time their children would be educated in the knowledge of the faith. The comments of Cora and Elizabeth were typical of many in the voice of faith as a lived experience desire for a Catholic school education for their children.

*My preference would be to send them to a Catholic school because I would like them as part of the learning experience to be taught religious education as part of everything they learn and not just as a separate thing. I don't want them to see it as something we do on a Sunday or we do it on a Tuesday. I want it to be a part of their normal everyday life. To me that is normal and I would like that to be the normality for my kids. I think that in the Catholic school they would come to understand that faith is a part of everyday life.* (Cora)

Elizabeth's cry was a further sentiment expressed by participants who speak with the voice of faith as a lived experience who pined for a Catholic school education. A sense of being supported both morally and spiritually by a community which had the same belief system was important to many participants. Many were disheartened at the realisation that their children may never attend a Catholic school. Participants felt that their children do not have the opportunity or freedom to fully participate in the traditions of the faith within a State school. They longed for the support of the Catholic school to reinforce the efforts they were making in the home.

*I would like my child to attend the Catholic school. If I was in a community that believed in the same thing I believe, I think it would be a lot easier to get involved in a lot of the religious activities. But as we don't experience that, I find that I have to work a little bit harder to make it known that this is my belief. We have tried to book him in at [local Catholic school] and I know that is not possible because we kept being told there is no room at the Catholic school.*  
(Elizabeth)

A further concern by participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience desire for a Catholic school education for their children was that they wanted their children to belong to a community of like-minded people. A number of participants mentioned how their children in the State school had been ridiculed because of their religious beliefs, especially if they attended the Special Religious Instruction (SRI) once a week within the school.

*I think at a Catholic school, the children would be of a more similar background. I think in a like-minded environment it is harder to do things like drugs I could be wrong. Also they wouldn't be teased. The children are often, what's the word I'm looking for, you know when people pick on you for different religious beliefs – persecuted! I wouldn't think there would be that at a Catholic school.*  
(Heidi)

Chris, who speaks with the voice of faith as an active struggle, feels less than equipped to nurture the faith of her children. In rediscovering faith herself as an adult she recognises that she is not adequately skilled in nurturing the faith of her children. Her desire for a Catholic school education is to help her educate her children in the faith in a way that she feels she is not capable.

*We have only just begun attending Church regularly. In terms of doing things that nurture the faith I suppose this is a start ... I suppose taking one step at a time. I would like them to broaden their knowledge in the faith and I think that if they were in a Catholic school they would be able to do this. I can't give them this because I'm not really sure myself. Going to a school with other children of the same faith I suppose it reinforces what they learn as suppose going to a school with no particular religion... I think the Catholic schools lead the way a little bit with values and that stuff, but not going to a Catholic school you don't really have any direction.*  
(Chris)

## *Access to Catholic Schools*

One of the main issues for all those who desired that their children attend a Catholic school is the limited accessibility. This was a major concern for many of the participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience and in the voice as an active struggle. Many participants spoke of the struggle and the anxiety they go through in the hope that a vacancy becomes available for their children.

*God willing they will get in a Catholic high school. But we're taking a chance because they're in a public school and they may not get in because the way in which children are accepted, if they're accepted. They need to come from feeder school a feeder Catholic primary school and if they've got siblings and that kind of criteria so we may not [get in]. They may miss out which worries me now as they are getting older. It is really hard to get in and we are active parish members.*  
(Karen)

Chris's anxiety was of similar vein.

*Opportunity of attending a Catholic school is a big thing. I would like them to attend but it is just so hard to get into a Catholic school. For starters unless you put their name down when they are born and I suppose because I came back to the Church after they had already started at school it's hard to get them into a school. Just to have the opportunity to have them go [to a Catholic school] would be great.*  
(Chris)

A further issue which was named by participants in the voices of faith as a lived experience and an active struggle to accessing the Catholic school system was affordability.

*I think sometimes ... If I had (long pause). If I could have afforded to get my children into a Catholic school, I have a feeling that would have been really good. Unfortunately they do tend to get that little bit more expensive and we just can't afford it.*  
(Elizabeth)

Nancy lives in an area in which access to a Catholic school is not an issue. The Catholic school has vacancies but for Nancy this is no consolation. Being a relative new-comer to Australia, finances are tight as they try to establish themselves.

*Yes I want them to go to the Catholic school but I think that our finances are not ready yet. Maybe later because we have just settled down in Australia and I had to choose. Before I thought that I can teach them the [faith] at home. Now I think it's not easy but I will have to do it. It would be easier if I had support of a Catholic school even to know how to explain things very well in English to them.*  
(Nancy)

At the time of the study the Fee Relief Package put into place by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia for families on low income, was not available. The Fee Relief Package is a scheme that allows families who are on the national healthcare card to access Catholic school at a reduced fee. This initiative however does not help parents where there are no vacancies in the Catholic school in the area.

For most participants who speak in the voice of orthodoxy the desire for their children to attend a Catholic school was not an issue. The data revealed that 80% (cf. p.163) of participants in the voice of orthodoxy had withdrawn their children from the Catholic school. The main reason for the withdrawal was that most participants in this voice felt that the Catholic school was not meeting their expectation in the faith development of their children. The comment shared by Tina was indicative of the attitude of many in the voice of orthodoxy when commenting on why they had withdrawn their children from the Catholic school system.

*I haven't seen any benefits of a Catholic school education ... If you don't have it [faith] in the home, you can teach it all you want in the school and if it is not supporting the home it's not going to succeed ... I haven't seen any child that has gained anything from the Catholic school system as far as deepening of faith. So to me I've worked that out and I choose to take my children out of the Catholic school system and I will teach them about the faith at home.*  
(Tina)

A large percentage of those in the voice of orthodoxy had their children in alternative education systems and made a conscious decision to take responsibility for the faith education of their children.

In summary participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience and the voice of faith as an active struggle desired for their children to have a Catholic school education. The main reasons named centred on support and knowledge. Those who speak with the voice of orthodoxy did not have the same fervour about Catholic school education

because many of them are quite secure in their understanding of faith and have a firm view of what they believe their children need to know about the faith.

This thesis was not about why people do not choose Catholic schools but rather about nurturing faith. Others have explored the reasons for not attending Catholic schools (Vallance 2000, Walch 1996).

## ***Influences in Society***

Participants in the three voices named societal influences as one of the major things that hinder them from nurturing the faith of their children. Such challenges included peer group pressure, the drug and alcohol culture, the media, and the lack of time parents share with their children. These challenges were not different from the challenges and fears of many parents trying to raise their children in the world today. The main perspective relevant to this thesis was how these pressures impact on the faith development of their children.

### ***Peer Group Pressure***

The peer group pressure to which children are exposed was one of the fears most participants named as hindering them from nurturing the faith within the home. A number of participants spoke of the ridicule their children experience within the State schools they attend, especially if their children are known to attend Mass. Participants spoke of the dilemma faced by them as parents as they try to encourage their children to practise their faith while their children are being ostracised by their peers for their beliefs and practices. When participants were asked what was the greatest hindrance to nurturing faith many of the participants spoke of a similar concern to Andrea.

*I would say peer pressure ... I am lucky at least he [son] stands up for himself and his rights. Some kids at this age think he's not cool because he does things like attend Mass so he is not cool enough to be seen near them. Because that is what the young are bothered about; being accepted, being modern, and being whatever. They feel by not doing it and falling in line with them they will not be accepted. This worries me at times because our children get teased for their faith.* (Andrea)

Many participants spoke of their fear that as their children grow older and peer pressure becomes more insistent their children would rather be seen doing what their friends are doing than getting caught going to Mass with their parents.

Pat was concerned, like most parents in society, about the added distraction children are faced with as part of their daily lives. He, like many participants in the three voices, is anxious about how parents can protect their children from not only the easy access to drugs and alcohol but the internet as well. Many participants supported the concern raised by Pat by naming the internet as the most recent challenge to parenting. From a faith perspective the fear for most participants was the materialistic attitudes and immoral behaviour that their children are constantly bombarded with through such a medium.

*There are far more distractions in our world now than during my time for people of my generation. You have, as a result, say, the internet being available to all families, pornographic sites being available to children and there's no way we can contain all these kinds of things. You have, from that alone, so much evil and of course drugs and so forth, so if a child does not have a well developed understanding of faith they will fall to all these temptations very easily. But I know in reality their faith is not an adult faith and therefore they can give in to peer group pressure, no matter how hard a parent tries.* (Pat)

Like Pat, participants across the three voices came to the realisation that their children will, at some stage, be tempted by the things that society has to offer which may be countercultural to Christian beliefs. Several participants were consoled by the thought that their main responsibility is to give their children the foundations of the faith tradition. Their children will have to come to their own acceptance or rejection of values which do not reflect Christian ideals. This was more strongly acknowledged by participants who speak in the voice of faith as a lived experience.

*We are living in a society and I feel there are times when they [children] may want things which may not always be the right thing for them. Well we hope they will always see the right thing. They may not always see our way but they have the right to choose and they have the right to make decisions as they grow and they learn from their mistakes in the same way we have learnt from our mistakes.* (Alice)

Participants in the voices of faith as a lived experience and faith as an active struggle are aware that there is a possibility that their children might drift from the Church.

Some participants in both voices admitted to having drifted from the Church, especially in their teens after they had left school and thus see the possibility of their children doing the same as a reality.

### *The Influence of the Media*

The influence of the media was identified as another hindrance to nurturing faith which was common among the three voices. The first concern for many of the participants in the three voices was the impact of the television. The second concern named by many participants across the three voices was the values and lifestyles that are promoted by all forms of media which are countercultural to Gospel values.

A number of participants spoke of the television as an obstacle to enriching family life. Participants across the three voices spoke of the growing lack of communication which happens in families because of the television. They spoke of the impact the television has on the prayer life within the home. The comment made by Elizabeth sums up the opinion of many of the participants in relation to the impact of the television on family life.

*I believe that the TV is one of the hindrances that faces many families. It is easier to watch TV than to shut it and pray. What will our children do if this is what we are modelling? (Elizabeth)*

Terry confessed being a television addict. This addiction was one that resonated with many participants in their discussion of the use of television in their household.

*TV takes up time in family life. It stops you praying or it stops you taking up anything in the family ... I mean I myself am addicted to the TV. Quite often I just sit and watch TV for no particular reason. I have become aware of this and just recently have started to turn it off, while the kids are home and only after the kids have gone to sleep will I watch TV. (Terry)*

The common fear in relation to the television across the three voices was the priority it holds in their homes. Each voice named how the television impacted on all aspects of family life and especially the spiritual aspect.

In contrast, Susan was the only participant who spoke strongly about television not being part of family life. She is very aware of the influence of the television can have on her children. She does not allow the children to watch television. In fact television is

taboo in her home. The only person who watches television in her home is her husband but only after the children have gone to bed. She does not believe that children need to be exposed to things that are in direct opposition to what it is to be Christian.

*TV is a taboo subject in our house. We don't have TV for our children. It is just not part of our life.* (Susan)

Another concern participants raised in relation to the influence of the media in general, was the values to which children are exposed. Many of the participants across the three voices spoke of the dilemma they face trying to instil in their children Gospel values. Participants discussed that they understand that one can not withdraw their children from the influences of the world and that children must live within the world. However, they are concerned with the continual bombardment of attitudes that are countercultural to what it means to be Christian. Janet expresses her concern.

*We have to be so careful especially on Saturdays and Sunday morning they switch on Rage or channel 10 the Top Twenty ... Have you seen that way they dress? I could see that the six year old was trying to imitate a lot of what she saw and that concerned me. But at the same time I know it is inevitable they will be exposed to the media and one day I just said 'Hey look those are the things that you shouldn't be doing, those are the dresses you shouldn't be wearing and those are the guys you shouldn't be dating' (laughs). 'Just look at them. Just remember whenever you are going to dress like them, don't'.* (Janet)

Lisa was also concerned about the values that are promoted through the media. Her main concern was that children are bombarded with messages that promote an understanding that God is not important in our world and she struggles with such negativity towards what she holds as important for life.

*Oh, it's society – it's just the fact that they have so many negative influences on them. You know, the television, they listen to the songs, you know explicit type of sexuality, the encouragement to be independent to be without God, all of that stuff that you fight everyday especially when they are teenagers. The media I believe has a very negative influence on them.* (Lisa)

Heidi has older children and is also concerned about what they view and hear. She is at a stage with her children when they choose what they watch and Heidi has decided to use the opportunity to discuss the values and attitudes that are presented. Even though Heidi named the media as a hindrance to her nurturing the faith of her children,

she has embraced it as a tool by which she can communicate to her children the values and attitude she believes are in keeping with the Catholic faith.

*I watch what they watch on TV. There are a lot of things I don't let them watch. There are other things which can be a tool for teaching, or not teaching but discussing certain subjects, you know, you can watch Neighbours and say Oh I hope that doesn't happen where you are or stuff like that. But once again I don't want to hide them from a lot of the stuff. They need to know what's going on in the world. The news I don't mind them watching, they need to see some of the horrors that are going on. ... I do go by the ratings in movies, sometimes bad language is difficult because it is in a lot of the movies so I do try and say to them, yes it's in this movie but it is not to be used at home and that sort of thing and we don't use that sort of language at home. We chat about values and stuff that are presented and we see how that fits our understanding as Christians. (Heidi)*

In summary, the first concern which was strong among participants was the effect of the media, especially the television, on family life. . The second concern was that while the media continues to bombard the children with values and morals which are not Gospel-centred, children come to accept such values as the norm for life. .These place pressure on the homes on the capacity to nurturing faith effectively

### ***The Demands on Family Time***

The demand on family time was another of the societal influences that hinders the nurturing of faith. A number of participants named similar competing demands on the time and energy of family life. These included work commitments, sport and other extra curricula activities. Such demands impact on how faith is the nurtured within the home. Once again this concern was common across the three voices.

Work was one demand on family time which was a great concern to most participants. Most of the families in this sample were two parent families and in most of these families both spouses worked in employment outside the home. The small number of single parents also worked outside the home. Many participants spoke of feeling guilty that they are giving their children little quality time because they are caught up with the busy-ness of daily life. Once they are at home they are quite exhausted. Jane speaks of the guilt that she feels in not being able to spend time with her children and thus does not nurture faith in the way she would desire.

*We are guilty of that. Sometimes I think we are just too busy as we both work teaching so quite often we are very busy and we do not spend enough time teaching them [the children] the faith. I often think to myself I am guilty of that. I am not passing on the faith as my mum passed it on to me. Just being too busy, and caught up with my daily life ... I do try often on a Tuesday after religious education to go over what they have done and question them on it. I still don't think we are putting enough of an effort in and maybe after today we have a thought to tell us to do more to pass on the faith, otherwise it is going to be lost. (Jane)*

Mary commented that in her household the main hindrance to nurturing faith is the many extra curricula activities in which her children are involved. The largest part of her time has been overtaken by caring for the physical and mental well-being of her children and she admits to neglecting to a degree their spiritual well-being.

*Oh what hinders me? Mainly time. Oh their music practice (laughter). Often we should be saying the Rosary but I'll make sure they get their music practice in first make sure they get their tennis in, their exercise in. (long pause) I don't nurture faith enough, I'm sure that there is a lot more I could do there but I'm too busy with all their academic achievements and their keeping fit or let them have their free time and all of that. I should be preparing Liam for his first Holy Communion and Ella for Confirmation. I've just run out of steam. He's so ready to receive Holy Communion and I just cannot find the stamina and the time to do the work with him. And I desperately want to do this and I desperately want to find the time and the energy. It's the energy I just don't have which is really bad because when you think about it I do piano with him virtually everyday so I find time for piano which means I'm putting that priority above First Communion. I know it is a matter of prioritising things but the pressure just mounts up. (Mary)*

The comment made by Mary highlights the lack of awareness, understanding, and appreciation of life events for the synthesis of life and faith culture. The realisation arrived at by Mary was not an isolated incident. Karen expresses the same dilemma. She has identified the stress such activities place on family life. Her experience is that by the end of the day both parents and children are too tired to communicate to one another and one of the first things that is overlooked is the nurturing of faith.

*What hinders us? Probably time and energy (laughter) Yes we are noticing more as the children are growing older that we're spending more time with after school activities and it tends to fragment our family life more than it did when they were younger. At the end of the day, when we do come together, we are too tired and the energy is just not there. I must admit that the first thing*

*that goes is family prayer or something to do with faith. I realise that Sunday Mass is only the beginning. I know it but I still get caught up in world where we seem to be running to and fro. What are we teaching our children?*  
(Karen)

A similar demand on family life which was revealed in the data was sport. Participants in all voices recognised that priority is given to sport within the home. Marian spoke of the lengths families go to be at sporting events and recognises that she is caught up in the same quandary.

*There's lots of obstacles that are thrown in your way I suppose. There's always football and there's always soccer. You know we do anything for sport but I wonder why we don't go the same mile for our beliefs. We tend to put them aside much easier than sport. Maybe that is only in our household.*  
(Marian)

Other comments suggest that sport is a priority in many households. Anne explains that in her household sport interferes with attending Mass and she can not come to grips with it. The sporting activities of her child have become a source of fragmentation within her home because she believes that faith should come before sport. Her husband does not share her belief.

*Sport is one hindrance. The only time Connor [husband] would not go to Mass and I would be at Mass alone is if Jordan has a big competition on in cycling. See the sport would then take over and that eats me as well, that really eats me. I begin to think should he be doing that? But there is nothing said from Connor because it is such a huge day and they leave at seven and come back at six. Well then I think he could have gone [to Mass] Saturday night. It stresses me so much that I am the one that brings it up all the time. Sport over religion is too much for me.*  
(Anne)

Sports and other extra curricula activities is a particular challenge to nurturing faith within the rural areas. Jill explains that not only do sports and other activities interfere with Sunday worship but, in her case, it also interferes with PREP. She feels that faith takes a back seat with the parents when it comes to sports. She finds that this pressure not only affects her as a parent but her role as a catechist as well.

*I guess it is not just in a small community, but every day after school there is something on. There's football and there's golf and there's music and there's jazz ballet and that's four days out of five. So there is just even after school there is not a lot of time...Finding the time and you know, within the country town and, there are parents who want their children to be Catholics as long as they don't have to do anything about it. So you are caught*

*between wanting your own children to have a sense of an occasion when they receive the sacraments, so you want as many of them as possible to make it nice. And even for the learning environment so that your child is not being taught on their own. It is much easier if there is a group of three, four or five kids receiving a sacrament but it is difficult to get five sets of parents to actually agree to a time or class. So some of them have their children go through the program because it is convenient. (Jill)*

Participants across the three voices commented on the pressures which impinge on the faith life of the family. The main concern, especially for those in the voice of faith as a lived experience and faith as an active struggle was that one of the first tasks to be put aside to meet the other demands placed on family life was family prayer time. Those who speak with the voice of orthodoxy were more vigilant about the demands placed on family time that draw them away from the practices of the faith. As mentioned in Chapter Five (cf. pp.135–136), participants in the voice of orthodoxy spoke of setting specific time for prayer within their family schedule.

### ***The Openness of the Church to Nurturing Faith***

A number of participants, especially in the voice of faith as a lived experience, expressed the concern that they did not have the support of the Catholic Church in assisting them to nurture the faith. Even though these opinions may appear not to be directly connected to the study, the researcher wishes to respect this concern as one of the challenges facing parents in nurturing faith. The concern resonates with the view that if parents participate in such things as discussion groups, education programs, and shared prayer in their parish community they cannot help but grow in faith themselves and are more able to nurture the faith of their children (Emswiler 1988, p.127).

Helen spoke strongly about the need for parishes to educate the whole congregation, both young and old, on the contemporary Church teachings. In her view this would enable the parents to educate their children with some degree of confidence.

*I mean sometimes we as adults become disillusioned with things the Catholic Church sort of preaches ... I think that is the whole thing of the Catholic Church it has to be relevant not just to adults but little kids and adolescents as well. It has to sort of move with the times without sacrificing what its core beliefs are. I mean I don't expect the Catholic Church to trade off what its basic foundation is about with the times but there must be a way of making it more relevant. Making kids feel that they are wanted it*

*and needed in our Churches is important. And when we were kids we just accepted the chapter and verse and that was it. Kids don't do that any more. I mean I still want my kids to practise as Catholics and to grow up as Catholics and get married in the Catholic Church because they want to and not because I think they should. It has to be special to them or something that they treasure or honour or value. That's the challenge for the Catholic Church I suppose, to be able to put it to kids like that so that they do carry it on or even if they lose it in their adolescence to go back to it in their adult life.* (Helen)

The concern voiced by Carole is if the Church does not educate its people in aspects of the faith then the tradition will be lost and irrelevant to future generations.

*I think some of the tradition I was able to enjoy in my earlier years hasn't been sustained for my children.... So some of the traditions are not there and that is sad because that is what helps you acknowledge things in the Church. I feel I don't want anymore erosion of that. I try with some traditions, my boys are quite aware of somethings that we do but that is a bit of a battle occasionally because I don't know that they understand what is behind the traditions. I think they think it's just one of mum's things again. Perhaps again with maturity that they will see that mum was trying to establish something for us. I only hope I'm telling them the right thing.* (Carole)

A number of participants who speak with the voice of faith as a lived experience named the attitude to young people by the Catholic Church as another challenge to nurturing the faith of their children. Many within this voice felt that the Catholic Church does not cater adequately to the needs of children and some participants have turned to other Christian faiths for ideas on how to support their children in the faith.

*I listen to my sister and what she does in her congregation. My sister is now an Anglican, she changed her Church and she did a Masters in Theology and is now an Anglican Minister. She has her own parish and some of the things she has done with the kids or with the parishioners are just so lovely. Last Easter, as the children came into Church she gave them all little packets of smarties with like eight different smartie colours. Eight like red, green and they were to listen closely to her sermon and when certain words came up they were allowed to eat that particular coloured smartie so when she mentioned resurrection they were allowed to eat the yellow one or whatever and that kept children interested. That parish feels that they are all equal and accepted and that children are a very important part of the future Church. I doubt that our kids feel like the future Church.* (Heidi)

A common yearning from those who speak in the voice of faith as a lived experience is for the Church to acknowledge their children and teenagers as being part of the worshipping community in their own right. The dilemma faced by these participants is how to keep their children in a faith that does not actively seek them out and welcome them. The concern about the openness of the Church to children was particular to those who speak in the voice of faith as lived experience. This voice was more articulate than the other two voices in this matter.

Participants in the voice of faith as lived experience, struggled between their efforts in nurturing the faith of their children, and the perceived lack of effort by the Church in supporting their efforts. The main concern by this group of participants was that if the Church does educate its followers in the teachings of the Church and does not embrace the young, the young will not continue to practise their faith.

### ***The Challenge of Living Between Two Faith Traditions***

A small number of participants shared the challenges of living between two faith traditions. Even though this was a reality for a minority of participants, it crossed all voices, and thus describes the context of the efforts of some participants to preserve the traditions of the Catholic faith within their households.

Jacquie explained that she exposes her children to two different faith traditions because she wants her children to respect her Catholic faith tradition and the faith tradition of her husband. Her husband belongs to the Uniting Church. Jacquie's children attend Mass every Saturday night and on Sunday they attend Sunday school run by the family of her husband. When asked why she made this decision she remarked:

*The Catholic faith has the sacraments and because we were married in the Catholic Church the children have had their sacraments; their baptism, one's had Holy Communion, the other two are working towards that. That I believe is the important about following the Catholic way. They go to Church every Saturday night and sometimes I think the children don't like going twice a week but they have got to understand they were baptised Catholic so we go to Church in the Catholic Church and on Sunday... My sister-in-laws are very good. They pick them [the children] up every Sunday and take them to Sunday school and then drop them off. The Christian way is more about you don't have to have all these particular sacraments but you need to understand Christ the person. So I believe that I am nurturing the Catholic side of things*

*as well as the Christian side of things because I know where they would rather go and it isn't the Catholic Church. (Jacquie)*

Maria shared a story which is somewhat remarkable. Maria was also practising in between two faith traditions, one Christian and the other non Christian. She is the Catholic and her husband was a Hindu. In the early years she and the children attended the Hindu temple with her husband in order to give her children an appreciation of her husband's beliefs. Maria explains that things became increasingly difficult for her as the children grew older because she could not accept the Hindu way of being and so her husband banned her and the children from attending the Catholic Church.

*It was difficult when we got married. He decided he would prohibit me, stop me from going to Church and everything because he said that he did not want the kids to be influenced by any religion. He felt that I was very traditional and for this part I was very open minded especially on the religion side, but still for him I was orthodox and he was not very committed to Hinduism but he was still believing in reincarnation and a completely set of different rules and perspectives. So for him he didn't want to feel threatened that the kids would not follow his faith but rather mine so he tried to establish a rule saying that we won't do anything so they can grow up wild and do whatever they feel to. But as they started to grow to three years old I started to realise that was an error. First because I knew myself that I was committed to that life and I couldn't disassociate with that so the kids were learning anyway and then second because I felt that unless a child, you're in a future what you have learnt you know everyday is a present day that becomes a future. So unless you live the present correctly you can't be fine in the future and so I realised that that was a big mistake. So as I started to incorporate these things he started to abuse me and the kids very badly. He would beat us. He would throw my Bible in the bin many times, the Rosary beads anything, our crosses. Every time I would go to Church with the kids he would beat me and it was terrible. He would not allow the kids to be baptised, he wouldn't let the kids to do Reconciliation or Holy Communion or anything. We have separated from each other. (Maria)*

The stories of Maria and Jacquie highlight the sacrifices some of the participants make in order to nurture the faith of their children. At times, the conviction and deep desire these people have to nurture faith in their children places added burdens to the already heavy loads parents carry in their role as parents. Both Jacquie and Maria wanted to preserve that part of the faith that is Catholic.

## **Challenges to Nurturing Faith Within Rural Communities**

There were some challenges which participants in rural areas named that were specific to nurturing faith within the home in a rural community. These included: the access of Mass within the community; the availability of the Parish Priest; the future of the faith within the community; and the effect of sport commitments on the nurturing of faith.

### ***Availability of Mass Within the Community***

The first challenge, which has already been discussed in Chapter Five (cf. pp.164–165), is the availability of Mass in rural communities. Closely connected to the availability of Mass within communities is the availability of the Parish Priest to the community. Participants in rural areas consider the absence of a Priest within the local community a hindrance to the nurturing of faith within the family. The community does not have the same access to the Parish Priest as participants in the metropolitan area and at times this can be a source of frustration. A number of the Priests in rural areas do not live in the town. Many Priests spend their time between Perth and a number of rural towns within a zone. Jill described her concern.

*I miss for my kids that the Priest does not live in [town] and is not easily accessible, and even for our Scripture classes [PREP], I just can't get a Priest there, whereas when I grow up the Priest lived at school. You know there was the school, the Church and the presbytery and he would come across and he would be at morning recess and at lunch time. We knew the Priest as a person and not just as someone that was there on a Sunday. And I see the Priest as a really good resource. So I miss that and I don't quite know how to address that even because I just think this poor fellow has got four parishes and he can only do so much. But at the same time our kids don't see him very often and if we the parents want to ask him about a faith issue we need to wait up to a month. (Jill)*

The concern which Jill raised is not exclusive to her town. Most of the participants in the rural area expressed similar sentiments about trying to hold the Catholic community together. Without the Priest in town participants feel that their children do not have an opportunity to relate to the Priest as the leader of the faith community in the same way they, the participants, experienced in their childhood.

## **Diminishing Population within Rural Areas**

A further concern which is strong among rural participants is the fear about the future of faith within the community. Many younger families are moving from the towns into bigger centres and cities in order to find work. A large percentage of people of the rural communities are elderly. Participants with younger children feel the added pressure of continuing to keep the faith alive in the community for the sake of the faith development of their children. With the lack of Priests and with the circumstance that most Priests do not live within the local community, participants fear that the faith traditions will not be passed on to their children. With no real sense of leadership within the community families have little or no support to nurture the faith of their children. As the older generation step down from various ministries the younger generation do not feel confident taking on such ministries. The older generation had the advantage of having the Priest in town to train and form them in the various ministries but the younger generation do not have the same support. Jill explains that the younger generation have to take the initiative to allow things to happen within the parish community.

*Our parish is old you know. The average age would be sixty and then it would drop down to me which is closer to forty these days. I certainly have a concern about the future of our parish. In another twenty years I wonder if it will still be their and if there will be anyone still going, so there's that. On Sunday Aiden was an altar server and he was on his own. Now I have never been an altar server and as much as you to Church I just don't know what an altar servers does. ... We have no men in our Church. Aidan he made a mess of it. He forgot what he had to do, but I thought he shouldn't have been up there if he didn't know what he was doing. Then I thought that is the next thing I need to do. I need to talk to Father and say what does an altar server do and we need a manual, we need something. I am very ignorant about the Church and the rituals and what should and shouldn't be done ... I've never had to worry about the workings and what happens on that altar because that was someone else's problem. But I can see, the ladies that are there now have that knowledge and it is not being passed on. That's where I can see that those sorts of rituals and knowing what the correct procedures are is going to be difficult. It is going to be a problem in our little parish in years to come.*  
(Jill)

## **Sporting Commitments**

A hindrance which affects the nurturing of faith within homes in rural communities is sporting commitments. Although this challenge may not be specific to the rural areas alone, participants in rural areas have the added pressure of Mass attendance around

sporting commitments. Unlike most participants in the metropolitan area, who have alternative times and venues for Mass, even if it is outside their parish boundary, participants in rural areas do not have the same opportunity. The choice for participants in rural areas is either to attend Mass and miss the sport or to play sport and fail to go to Mass. This choice becomes a dilemma in the households of many participants in rural areas as it has an impact on the faith life of the family.

*In a small community because everyone has to pull together and everybody is involved in the Net Ball Club or the Cricket Club or Football or what ever is on, so the community as a whole doesn't allow for Church. So you'll know that Church is at ten o'clock on a Sunday and there will be a football game that your son is supposed to be playing in. So then you have to say to the kids well it's Church and how do you choose that and how do you decide if they let the team down or do you go to Church or do you compromise and think well we'll not go to Church this week but we will get there next week. Whereas when I was growing up in a Catholic school no sporting event, happened without having Mass first, but it was always allowed for, it was never a conflict of where do I go or what do I do.*

*(Julie)*

In summary, there were three significant challenges to the nurturing of faith which were identified by participants. The greatest challenge to nurturing faith which was identified by those who speak in the voice of faith as a lived experience and those in the voice of faith as an active struggle was the sense of their own inadequacy in relation to nurturing the faith of their children. Those in the voices of faith as a lived experience and faith as an active struggle had a strong desire for a Catholic school education for their children. This desire was rooted in their perception of their own lack of confidence in educating their children in the faith. The participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle desired the Catholic school because of their perception that they were not capable to effectively nurture their children's faith

Second, the participants in the three voices named peer group pressure placed on children, the influence of the media, and demands on family time as the main obstacles to nurturing faith within the home. The concerns and hindrances which challenged participants are relevant to the dilemmas of how to nurture Gospel-centred morals and values within their children. Demands on family time such as sport commitments and other extra curricula activities in which children are involved was noted by most

participants as another significant hindrance to maintaining a faith culture within the home.

A further dilemma which was identified as a challenge to nurturing faith, especially by participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience, was the concern of the attitude to young people by the Church. This concern was named because many of the participants in this voice felt that the Church was not supporting parents in their role of nurturing faith, in fact some participants felt that the Church was undermining what they as parents were struggling to achieve. Those in the voice of orthodoxy did not comment on the openness of the Church to the young.

## **Resources Participants Identified as Useful to the Task of Nurturing Faith**

The previous section was focused on identifying the challenges to nurturing faith within the context of the home. The focus naturally led to the question of the kind of support participants deemed helpful in assisting them in their role of nurturers of faith within the home.

The analytical voices were once again useful in establishing the types of resources participants' desire. Participants across the three voices made suggestions of various kinds about the types of assistance they felt could help them. The types of resources were twofold. Participants were interested in resources that were suitable for children as well as resources to assist them as parents in their task of nurturing faith. Most participants spoke of written resources such as books on faith development of children, pamphlets on different aspects of contemporary Church teachings and religious publications. Others spoke of visual aids such as videos or CDs as well as computer software. The first type of resource was 'things' and materials that would be able to be accessed as individuals. The second type of resource mentioned was for parents themselves and included personal and interpersonal programs such as adult faith formation and support groups at a parish level. The data revealed that some types of resources which were suggested were specific to a particular voice.

### ***Resources Desired by the Voice of Orthodoxy***

Most participants in the voice of orthodoxy spoke strongly of the lack of religious publications available to the family. The main resources for which they desired were those they were familiar with from their childhood. Many spoke of the publications in their childhood that would arrive by mail. These publications contained content for both children and adults. Terry and Mary spoke at length about such publications.

*There aren't enough publications for kids to read. Back in India, the Don Bosco's used to come out with a magazine to read, I don't know, every month or whatever. I remember once a year they use to come out with a magazine which used to highlight how a particular saint lived. You know I still recall those things. When I was a kid, my mother use to get these things, there was a subscription she used to pay. That's something that is lacking over here. We haven't been able to get any really good materials for kids.* (Terry)

The comment made by Mary was of similar vein.

*There's booklets that I've got from I don't know where. I think it was the Magellan Messenger booklists in the days gone by that I have found very lovely. I remember my mother used to receive them in the mail when we were kids. I don't know if they are still available but I think they would be useful. Yes a modern version of what we used to receive would be very useful.* (Mary)

Participants in the voice of orthodoxy did not explicitly suggest other forms of support for themselves or their children other than such publications. They spoke mainly of such religious publications as appealing because they desire for resources which are specifically Catholic in nature. This is in keeping with their desire to preserve within the family the Catholicity of the faith.

### ***Resources Desired by the Voice of Faith as a Lived Experience***

Those in the voice of faith as a lived experience offered a wide variety of suggestions about the types of resources that they felt would benefit them in their task as educators of their children in faith. This was consistent with their understanding of faith. The suggestions made suggested a variety of support material for both children and parents. In contrast to the suggestions offered by those in the voice of orthodoxy, those in this voice spoke also of a yearning for support for parents at a parish level.

## Material for Parents

A large number of participants in this voice expressed the desire for materials designed specifically for parents to assist them nurture the faith of their children in the world today. They suggested resources such as materials on the faith development of children and a variety of literature. This is in contrast to the voice of orthodoxy which did not perceive need for their own faith development. Cora was among those who spoke strongly about materials on the development of faith in children.

*I would like to have information on what I should be doing with my children at what age. Like, what an eight year old child can understand or ways to help them develop their faith. I know you can teach them facts about the Church that sort of stuff but I want something that will help me understand how they should be developing at this stage. That's what I want materials about faith development for parents in easy to understand language. (Cora)*

Another resource parents in this group desired was literature on contemporary Church teaching. The sense of the lack of their own religious knowledge held by participants in this voice was highlighted by their yearning for materials that would inform and to some degree educate them on current Church teachings, especially on current debates such as stem cell research and euthanasia which were not part of their education when they were at school. Many participants spoke of wanting to attain up-to-date material which is modern that they could share with their teenage children. Some participants confessed that they themselves are confused about many of the reasons behind Church teachings.

*I would like materials for parents, especially when they [children] get into the teenage years. Pamphlets on things like sex education from a Catholic perspective in the modern world would be excellent. Even things like coping with grief, and contemporary issues like the divorce issue, things like the abortion issue and stuff. This would help if there is a particular issue and I wouldn't know how to explain it to them, then I could go and say Oh have you got or is there a pamphlet on this that I can have rather than having the look through an encyclopaedia or book. The questions are ongoing. I remember thinking I just accepted things blindly but a lot of kids are questioning a lot more now and we've got to be prepared with the answers and to answer them sensibly. I suppose that is where education is today. It is more a questioning and sorting for the answer rather we learned the facts and that was it. (Trish)*

Like Trish, many participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience spoke of wanting to be able to address issues with their children from a Christian Catholic perspective but they needed first to be educated or at least re-educated themselves.

Another resource which was named by participants in this group was the need for books on ideas for faith sharing within the home. Participants spoke of wanting ideas on various strategies which would assist them to further nurture the faith of their children. Ian summed up this idea by saying:

*I suppose something I'd like is a book on how to link what happens everyday to Gospel things ... I think it would be really good if I had some kind of ideas about how to do that. It is probably one of the most important ways for someone to realise how important religion is to them.*  
(Ian)

### **Materials for Children**

A small group of participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience hanker for up-to-date materials for children, not only in written form but also visual and interational activities. The participants who suggested visual aids spoke of the concern they have with most religious productions they have viewed. They reported that children in the world today are used to sophisticated types of technologies and most of the booklets and visuals the participants have accessed are not in keeping with digital and presentation standards of today. Participants felt that the Church needs to develop materials which are inviting and entertaining for children and at the same time educate them as is the case with any good educational tool.

One visual resource that many of the participants in this voice desired was the development of modern videos or CDs. Many said that they had viewed some videos that were in their parish libraries but they regarded them as 'old Church'. These participants wanted something that would help her children to come to know about the life of Jesus in a way which was appropriate to children. Stephe spoke of the observation she made how other denominations seem to have a better grip on what is appealing to children and develop relevant materials to assist in the faith development of children.

*A man I met at work who is a minister for some Church gave me a video on the life of Jesus that was aimed at children which is good because there is not a lot around like that, well not that is freely available. I think they are great to have as part of the children's*

*video collection. The children really like them and watch them over and over again. I don't know why the Catholic Church can't get its act together in the same way.* (Stephie)

Lyn confesses that she uses resources from the Pentecostal Churches because firstly she finds the material is much more accessible and secondly she feels that the material is family centred and relevant to her need.

*There are so many materials out there that are really good. There are books that help parents and equip us to say, how can we introduce a concept of this God to our child in a way that is relevant to their reality ... in a fun way, to introduce family prayer there could be a lot of creative ways of having family experience a faith and, but I know for myself there is a hunger for all of this but I really don't know how to do it. I don't know how to do it I don't know how to do it. I'm sort of going out and sort of trying to learn trying to search myself, but I am being drawn to the Pentecostal type resources because I don't know of anything within the Catholic context that is able to provide that sort of thing, and I want Darcy to experience the fun of knowing God.* (Lyn)

Trish made many suggestions about the types of resources she desired for her children but spoke most strongly about the desire for computer software. She came across some Christian based computer software quite incidentally. After viewing them with her children she was not only impressed by the quality of the resource but also at the content they contained.

*Interactive things are great that they can do. We have actually a couple of CD ROMs that we got from a computer shop in [local shopping centre] and they're Australian produced. They are Danny and the Lion's Den. It is all computer skills but it is centred on stories of faith. I thought what a brilliant little find. It certainly engages them.* (Trish)

Others like Julie, still preferred books for their children.

*I'd rather a book, but that's me. I can see in today's society people couldn't be bothered wading through a book and might prefer a CD, but I am not very literate in computers.* (Julie)

The participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience also desired prayer books for their children. The most common request was for books with current and contemporary type prayers that relate to the lives of children. The data revealed that participants in this voice sought books that help their children understand the meaning of the more

common prayers of the Church. Many spoke of the difficulty they encounter finding suitable books.

*The prayer books I have seen have all like prayers for grown up people in grown up language. You know there is nothing for, like, I won't say kids language but, you know, younger terminology; terminology which kids can identify with, which, you know they can actually read and understand prayers.* (Doreen)

The desire for relevant and up to date prayer books requested by Heidi is akin to Doreen's view.

*I would like prayer books but not just any books... but more relevant books to Australian life. A lot of these are American books and the wording isn't crash hot. We need good up to date prayer books, not the old fashion prayers that are still found in some Catholic bookshops. I want prayer books that our children can relate to but they are few and far between. Children don't need to pray in the old fashion way we were taught.* (Heidi)

### **Support for Parents**

Support for parents at a parish level was also named by those in the voice of faith as a lived experience. Participants in this voice long for such support as adult faith formation and faith sharing groups at a parish level. This is in contrast to those in the voice of orthodoxy who did not explicitly name the desire for such support. As has been documented in Chapter Five for those in the voice of faith as a lived experience, the sense of community is an important element of faith.

### **Adult Faith Education**

One of the suggestions made by participants in this voice was the opportunity for adult faith education. The comment made by Jane about the type of resource she yearns is characteristic of most in this voice.

*What I would really want is, I don't know what word to use, maybe as refresher classes because you know it for yourself but then it gets lost along the way. Maybe if you could have an up date for adults every now and then, say for six weeks or so. The children have their catechism classes but I do think that adults do need a refresher class as well.* (Jane)

The yearning for adult faith education stems from the perception by participants of their sense of inadequacy in relation to matters of the faith. These participants want to be

able to assist their children to come to their own understanding of faith and consequently want to be able to answer the questions their children raise.

### *Faith Sharing Groups*

Another suggestion which emerged from the participants in this voice was the desire for faith sharing groups. Jane spoke of her experience of being in a faith sharing group and the benefits that such groups have on the faith within the home.

*Faith sharing groups that what we had and that sort of keeps you in contact with your faith. We used to have faith sharing groups once a week where people would get together in different groups. The parish was actually divided into these faith sharing groups and if you wanted to join you could join voluntarily. And they would have these group meetings in homes every week, different homes. I think that was a valuable experience. It just served to enrich your whole experience, your whole faith so I think if I could get into something like that it would give us more than what we are presently doing. This would be for ourselves, not just enriching the children's lives but enriching our own as well. Strengthening our own faith and then we this would be more confident about pass it on to our children.*

*(Jane)*

### *Parent Support Groups*

A small group of participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience desired support from other parents. This was mainly indicative of those participants who had teenage children. They desired the support of other parents who had experienced this stage of life to offer them advice on how they handled faith issues with teenagers. Cora explains what this group of participants desired.

*I suppose probably if there were any groups or to talk to other people about their experiences you know how they might deal with children. Especially as they come into their teenage years and they are fairly likely to rebel against practising the religion. If there was some group of parents that you could get some type of support from just hearing what other people experiences and add it with yours. To have other people help you deal with trials and tribulations that you have to deal with actually trying to bring the children up within this society we live in today and recognise the things that other people have done. Some might say I tried and that didn't really work for me, it would have been better if I had done this, so that you get some help and you can tell people of your experiences of how you are coping.*

*(Cora)*

Those in the voice of faith as an active struggle suggested a variety of resources and were actively seeking resources that would be of benefit to both themselves and their children. Those in the voice of orthodoxy did not comment on actively seeking resources but were rather content with what they already knew.

### ***Resources Desired by the Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle***

The small group of participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle found it difficult to name specific resources that they felt would be of benefit to them in their task of nurturing faith. In discussing the assistance Anne desired to help her nurture the faith of her children, she commented;

*Anything. I'd give it a go and I'd make sure the children are involved in it as much as possible.* (Anne)

After further conversation, while still not able to specifically name a type of resource that she desired, Anne suggested that she desired a resource which would help her come to an understanding of the religious knowledge.

*Anything is worthwhile. Anything that will help my knowledge. Anything that will help widen my knowledge. No I wouldn't knock anything back that will help me in that way.* (Anne)

The desire for resources that would benefit Anne for the development of personal faith understanding and the desire for resources for children is akin to those in the voice of faith as a lived experience. It highlights the continuum that occurs across the three voices.

In contrast, Chris named resources which she desired for her children but did not name any particular resource that would be of benefit to her. In the conversation with Chris, she felt very strongly that she was not adequately skilled in nurturing the faith of her children. Not naming resources that would assist her as an adult could indicate that she was unsure of her needs and thus could not suggest resources that might be of assist her.

*Those kinds of things like the Bible and videos, immersions of faith and getting them to understand through pictures and books rather than me telling them, often they don't want to listen to their parents, they like to look at things and work them out for themselves.* (Chris)

The participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle were not as confident in suggesting resources. They were not sure of what they needed in order to carry out the

task of nurturing faith because they are still struggling to come to some understanding of faith for themselves. Those in the voices of orthodoxy and faith as a lived experience were more able to suggest resources because they had come to accept for themselves an understanding of faith through which they view life and faith.

## **Availability and Accessibility of Resources**

Lyn's comment (cf. p.202) alerted the researcher to the challenges participants face in accessing resources. This concern was unanimous across the three voices even though the foci and purposes were diverse. Many of the participants expressed that they do not know where to access materials. Participants reported that Catholic bookshops do not have a range of resources that are appealing and in some cases affordable for families. Most commented that the materials they had seen in Catholic bookshops are not very appealing for children, and do not cater for the sophisticated standard that children experience in other mass media communications.

Many mentioned that their local Parish does not have a library from which they can borrow or if a library is available, the books are out dated. Phillip struggled with the idea of how the situation could be improved within Parishes so that parents had access to materials which they could share in the home.

*I don't how it could be made more practical but it doesn't work at the moment. In an ideal world every parish would have their own resources, its own resource centre, where parents could avail themselves to books and videos and things like that. (Phillip)*

Some participants had knowledge of the Catholic Library housed at the Catholic Education Centre but commented that it was not easily accessible. The opening hours were not conducive to working parents and the loans system did not seem practical. Participants in rural areas also commented about the practicalities of accessing resources from the Catholic Library.

*I know there is the Catholic Library in Ruislip St. We have joined but you have to have the videos back in a certain time frame and it gets too hard. It's a long way to go. It is not very practical really. (Jill)*

To summarise, the resources participants identified as useful to the task of assisting them in the nurturing of faith were varied. Those in the voice of orthodoxy referred to materials which they were familiar with from their childhood. The main resource named

was religious publications that were explicitly Catholic in nature. The participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience suggested a wide variety of materials. These materials included written, visual aids and computer software, including resources that were not explicitly Catholic. Another suggestion which was unique to this group was the desire for opportunities such as adult faith education, faith sharing groups and support groups at a parish level. The desire for such groups is consistent with the perception held by many in the voice of faith as a lived experience that their knowledge of the faith is not strong. Those in the voice of faith as an active struggle, on the other hand, were not as certain about the resources they desired or needed. Not being able to identify resources that would be able to assist them with the nurturing of faith is consistent with the struggle this group has with faith.

## **Conclusion**

Trying to maintain a Christian Catholic culture within the home was a challenge to most who participated in the study. Participants across the three voices named a number of concerns and hindrances that challenge the nurturing faith within the context of the home. Even though some of the concerns and hindrances were indistinguishable from those faced by most parents raising children in the developed world, the main focus for these participants was how to keep nurturing the faith of their children within such influences. The support for which parents hunger for in relation to the challenges was heard from the researcher's understanding that those who participated in the study have an innate desire to nurture the faith of their children.

The findings have been presented as three separate Chapters because the material touched on three distinctly different perspectives of the faith experiences of parents. Chapter Four establishes analytical metaphors which described the three distinctive understandings of faith which emerged through the data. Chapter Five presented the findings on how the understandings of faith, identified in Chapter Four, were put into practise within their homes. Chapter Six, this Chapter, presented the challenges that parents face in their tasks of nurturing the faith of their children within the home. Chapters Four, Five and Six have brought these three facets of the findings together and analysed parental approaches to nurturing the faith of their children. Chapter Seven will present the discussion on the findings of the study.