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

Carmela G. Stuart
University of Notre Dame Australia

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Chapter Seven

Discussion of the Findings

This study has examined how faith is nurtured within the home of contemporary Catholic families who do not access the Catholic school system. The three previous Chapters focused on developing an understanding of how parents nurture the faith of their children. The findings included the concept of faith held by the parents, how these concepts were put into practise within their homes, and the support parents desire to assist them in their task of nurturing the faith of their children. This summarises the findings of the research and discusses the implications of the main findings regarding how parents who do not send their children to Catholic schools nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home. Chapter Eight will make recommendations on how to support parents in their task of nurturing faith within the context of the home.

This study was set in the context of the documents of the Second Vatican Council which acknowledge parents as the ‘first and foremost educators in faith’ of their children (Lumen Gentium 1964, #11). The aim of the study was to identify how faith is nurtured within the context of the Catholic home. The target group was those parents, who for whatever reason, do not have the support of the Catholic school system for the faith development of their children. All parents who participated in the study had regular contact with the Church. The children within this target group attend PREP for the maximum of an hour per week. Compared to those who attend Catholic schools the target group of children have a more restricted experience of faith education outside the home. Some children, mostly of parents in the voice of orthodoxy, do not attend any formal religious education outside the home.

The Research Questions Answered

The major research question which guided the research was: How parents who do not send their children to Catholic schools nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home? The following sub-questions were used as the frame of reference in the discussion of the major findings.

1. Does parents' understanding of faith impact on the way faith is nurtured within the home?
2. How do parents nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home?
3. How do parents perceive their role in nurturing the faith of their children?
4. Is there a different perception of this parental role between genders?
5. What factors hinder parents from nurturing the faith of their children?
6. What resources do parents desire to assist them in the nurturing of faith within the home?
7. What differences are experienced in the nurturing of faith between parents in the metropolitan area and rural areas?

The answers to these questions were determined by interviewing parents who do not access Catholic schools for the education of their children.

Overview of the Findings

The data from Chapters Four, Five, and Six reveal that parents within the Archdiocese of Perth who do not send their children to a Catholic school are aware of their responsibility for the nurture of faith of their children. The findings strongly indicate that for this group of Catholic parents within the Archdiocese, faith is an essential part of family life. Within these Catholic homes attempts are being made to nurture faith to varying degrees, according to the understanding of faith held by the parents. Strategies for nurturing faith that are foremost in the homes of these parents include: family prayer, Mass attendance, and attending Parish Religious Education Program (PREP).

Most parents see these strategies for nurturing faith as important for children to come to an understanding and an experience of their faith traditions. Some parents, especially those in the voice of lived experience, also acknowledged that opportunities for nurturing of faith can also present themselves within the events of daily living. These strategies correspond with what is proposed by the *General Directory for Catechesis* that catechesis within the home is “more witnessed than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured” (1997, #255).

The study found that there are many factors that hamper parents from nurturing the faith of their children. These hampering factors include: the societal influences, the media, the television and the internet. The findings of the study appear to indicate that the task of nurturing faith is hampered by the lack of support offered to parents by the Church. Unfortunately many parents feel that they are not adequately equipped to fulfil the task of nurturing faith in an effective manner. They believe that they lack the confidence and the religious knowledge necessary to carry out this task fruitfully. There is a call by parents for support from the Church to empower them to take on this task.

Discussion of the Findings

The study recognises that it is not possible to generalise the results to all Catholic parents who do not access Catholic schools for the education of their children. In deliberating the findings of the study the following discussion is framed in terms of the questions that guided the study.

Question 1 Does the understanding of faith of parents impact on the way faith is nurtured within the home?

Addressing the question of how families who do not access Catholic schools nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home, it became evident that there is a strong association between the understanding of faith of the parents and the way the parents nurture faith. Faith is viewed as an important facet of family life which parents desired for their children, especially in relation to a faith tradition from which children can develop and draw upon in their adulthood.

It is clear from the study that even though the parents who participated would consider themselves practising Catholics, one of the characteristics which emerged was diversity in the understanding and the living out of the faith. Groome (2002, p.174) alleges that “people can share a similar faith but expresses it through different beliefs ... people’s faith is more than their particular religion.” The diversity in understandings in this study was categorised into three voices: the voice of orthodoxy (Ch. 4 pp.95–101); the voice of faith as a lived experience (Ch. 4 pp.101–125); and the voice of faith as an active struggle (Ch. 4 pp.125–130). These three voices enabled a paradigm to be developed to contrast the differences in the understandings of faith. These three interpretive voices

were instrumental in determining the relationship between the understanding of faith and living of faith within the context of the homes of those who participated in the study.

As stated in Chapter One (cf. pp.8–9), the context of this study supports Groome's (2002; 1980) understanding of Christian faith. The three dimensions of faith described include: faith as believing; faith as trusting; and faith as doing or said in another way, faith as a way of the hands, a way of the heart and a way of the head. Participants in this study demonstrated, in varying degrees, an understanding of Christian faith that reflects all three dimensions. Those in the voice of orthodoxy appeared to reflect strongest Groome's first dimension of faith – faith as believing (1980, pp.57–61) or faith as a way of the head (2002, pp.190–196). This is not to say that faith as trusting and faith as doing are not interwoven within their understanding of faith. Groome (1980, p.60) cautions that faith as believing is only one dimension of faith and states if faith is seen only as 'an affair of the head' and the affective and behavioural dimensions of Christian faith are ignored, this increases the split between faith and daily life. However, he qualifies that Christian faith "is at least belief, but it must also be more than belief if it is to be a lived reality" (Groome 1980, p.61).

Christian faith ... requires, in part, a firm conviction about the truths proposed as essential beliefs of the Christian faith. Insofar as these beliefs are personally appropriate, understood and accepted by the Christian, there is therefore a cognitive ... dimension to Christian faith.

(Groome 1980, pp.57–58)

The findings establish that the parents who speak with the voice of orthodoxy subscribe to an understanding of faith that reflects a strong cognitive dimension. Faith for parents in this group is grounded in formulistic and ritual traditions of the Catholic Church. The voice of orthodoxy speaks of faith as a deep-rooted acceptance of a faith experienced in their childhood (Ch. 4 pp.96–97). For these parents faith is based on the literal interpretations of creeds, doctrines and Church teachings (Ch. 4 p.97). Faith is dominated by the drive to know and adhere to the rules and regulations of the faith tradition (Ch. 4 pp.97–98). Observance of the faith is at the core of the life of parents in this voice (Ch. 4 p.98). Their aim is to safeguard the Catholicity of the faith tradition within the home by duplicating conventional Church practice (Ch. 4 p.100).

The study indicates that parents, who have an understanding of faith which is orthodox, are more inclined to employ a nurturing style that centres on a cognitive approach to faith sharing. The methods for the nurturing of faith employed by the parents in the voice of orthodoxy centre on a style based on learning, memory, which predominantly promote the observances of the faith (Ch. 5 pp.165–166). Most of the strategies used to nurture faith are planned concentrating mainly on the formalities of the faith. It is evident from the findings that faith in the home of these families is expressed in similar ways they experienced in their childhood. The nurturing style is predominantly structured and scheduled (Ch. 5 pp.165–166). Parents in this voice adopt a nurturing style that instils within their children a practice of the faith traditions with the hope or even expectation that their children will continue to ‘practise’ the faith in much the same way (Ch. 4 pp.101–102).

The findings of the second voice, the voice of faith as a lived experience, reveal that parents in this voice do not necessarily hold on to the faith understanding to which they were exposed to in their childhood. The understanding of faith established within the voice of faith as a lived experience strongly reflects all three dimension of faith described by Groome (2002; 1980). The understanding of faith acknowledged by the parents in this voice support the view that “when faith is understood as belief and intellectual assent is posed as the starting point, then it is difficult to translate belief into action” (Groome 1980, p.60). Parents in this voice have an approach to faith that is engaged with the world. Fowler calls this understanding of faith ‘faith as knowing’. Fowler comments that “faith is a way of being, arising out of a way of seeing and knowing (Fowler 1986, p.19). It is this knowing or believing that enables the construction of faith. Groome (2002, p.179) points out that “if there is a particular Catholic spin on Christian faith, it is to include ‘good works’–the hands–as integral to the life of a faithful person.

Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience construct a faith understanding which, they claim, gives meaning to life (Ch. 4 pp.103–104). Parents in this group are inclined to question the established traditions and practices of the faith experienced in their childhood. This reflects Groomes (2002) dimension of faith that engages the head. Groome (2002, p.191) professes, “there is a stereotype that Catholics are not allowed to think for themselves but must submit blindly to whatever the Church teaches.” He

argues that “to comprehend our faith and ‘see for ourselves’ what it means for life should surely help us to live it” (Groome 2002, p191). Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience appear to construct a faith understanding which blends both the traditions and the practices of the faith and the experiences of life. A premise which emerged strongly from the findings among this voice is that parents have an understanding that faith is a process that changes and develops with new life experiences. This supports the view that for a person to come to a personal faith conviction one needs to recognise that faith development is not static (Stoke 1989, pp.5–6). For faith to make sense, those in this voice maintain that faith is an integral part of everyday life experience (Ch. 4 pp.105–106). This claim is foundational to the personal construction of faith of parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience. It is an understanding based on living Gospel-centred values rather than on the observances of the faith practice (Ch. 4 pp.107–108).

One of the sharpest contrasts in the understanding of faith between the voice of faith as a lived experience and voice of orthodoxy which emerges from the study is that parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience do not identify with the traditional notion of Catholicity which is strong among parents in the voice of orthodoxy. Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience see themselves as nurturers of Christianity rather than explicitly nurturers of the Catholic faith. They make little distinction between a faith that is Christian and a Catholic faith (Ch. 4 pp.111–113). This concurs with the findings of a previous study of Catholic parents within the Catholic school system in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. That study concluded that “many parents see themselves as firstly Christian, then Catholic” (Morse 1996, p.76). In addition it is noted that the findings of the present study disclose that parents in this voice are more open-minded to the beliefs of different religions and profess a tolerance for other faith traditions, Christian or otherwise (Ch. 4 pp.113–114). Groome (2002, p.188) describes that a view of faith that point towards being inclusive reflects the dimension of faith which engages a way of the heart. Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience lived a way of life that promotes ‘a way of including all’ reflecting the call to follow Jesus’ example of inclusion of those excluded by society (Groome 2002, p.189). This characteristic sets this voice apart from the understandings held by those in the voice of orthodoxy, which promote an understanding that the Catholic faith is the one true faith (Ch. 4 p.99).

The study identifies that there is a further contrast within the voice of faith as a lived experience itself. The study respects that the thoughts of parents on nurturing faith are not static. Within the voice of faith as a lived experience two distinct nurturing styles become apparent; one defined as leaning towards orthodoxy) and the other as growing into faith. This becomes apparent when discussing such nurturing strategies as prayer and Mass attendance (Ch. 5 pp. 136–149). It is evident that in the group of parents that lean towards orthodoxy retain an orthodox approach when it comes to the purpose and the intent of these two strategies (Ch. 5 pp.136–138; Ch. 5 p.144). The researcher has reason to deduce that this group of parents use an approach based on the experience in their childhood. An interesting observation made by the researcher is that most parents in this subgroup were educated in Catholic schools overseas. The second subgroup within the voice of faith as a lived experience, growing into faith, demonstrate an approach which is more conducive to the nurturing style that stems from an understanding that faith is integrated with life (Ch. 5 pp.137–142; Ch. 5 pp.144–149).

Apart from the approach to the Mass and prayer, parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience adopt a nurturing style which is somewhat more casual and less rigid than that of the orthodox approach. Their nurturing style places greater importance on the living out of the faith, that is, faith in action, over faith as ritualistic practice. Parents in this voice are less concerned about formal structures but promote a style which encourages an awareness of the presence of God in all aspects of daily life (Ch. 5 pp.151–157).

The voice of faith as a lived experience was the voice represented most frequently in the study. The researcher acknowledges that care should be used in drawing conclusions that may suggest that a large number of contemporary Catholics in the Archdiocese of Perth may hold a similar understanding of faith and thus a similar nurturing style. This study included one group of Catholic parents, who do not access the Catholic school system and thus this discussion relates specifically to the sample of the study. Furthermore, a large proportion of parents who participated in the study were educated overseas which may imply that the findings may not be representative of the general parish population of the Archdiocese of Perth (Table 3.6, p.73).

The findings reveal that there was a third voice. This group of parents does not reflect strongly any one given dimension of faith described by Groome (2002; 1980). This is not to say that parents in this voice do not have faith but it is apparent from the study that parents in this voice are searching to make sense of faith, and of life (Ch. 4 pp.125–129). The understanding of faith of parents in the voice as an active struggle can be best described as tentative (Ch. 4 pp.128–129). What emerges is that parents have a strong conviction that faith is an important facet of life and they have a desire for their children to have an experience of the faith tradition. The reality for them is that they do not have an understanding of faith which will enable them to nurture faith effectively.

It is difficult from the findings to establish a nurturing style that is distinctive to this third voice as parents in this voice have no clear insight into how they nurture the faith of their children within the home (Ch. 5 pp.169–171). These parents are unsure what it means to nurture faith and so have little concept about how to nurture it within their children. They grapple with a nurturing style which is best described as orthodox as they rely on the nurturing style and experiences from their own childhood memories (Ch. 5 pp.169–171). Nurturing strategies are also limited to those recalled from their own childhood experiences. The main concern for those who speak with the voice of faith as an active struggle is how to share a faith with their children a faith in which they feel inadequate themselves. Parents in this voice rely heavily on outside influences for the faith development of their children, PREP and the extended family being two main supports (Ch. 4 pp.126–128).

The voice of faith as an active struggle is the smallest group numerically (Table 5.1, p.173). It may well be that the voice of faith as an active struggle is a small group within this study, but it represents an important component of the Catholic community because this group is most in need of help. One possible explanation for the small proportion that this voice has in the sample is that parents who may associate themselves with this voice would feel very vulnerable discussing faith matters with a stranger. For those who struggle with their faith even regular Church attendance may be difficult to achieve.

Parents in this study do not necessarily have the same faith understandings. While the study accepts that there are commonalities in their understandings, it recognises that

are also differences. The differences in the understanding of faith allowed the different nurturing styles to be identified. Therefore, in addressing the question whether the understanding of faith of parents impacts on the way faith is nurtured within the home, it is reasonable to conclude from this study that the understanding of faith of the parents strongly influences the way faith is nurtured within the context of the home.

Question 2 *How do parents nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home?*

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997, #82) states that “the object of catechesis is to lead people to profess their faith in Christ.” In addressing how parents nurture the faith of their children within the home, the study reveals that within Catholic homes a variety of strategies are implemented by parents as tools through which faith is nurtured.

Familiaris Consortio (1981, #17–64) names four tasks for the Christian family, through which parents can carry out the mission of nurturing faith of the young (Ch. 2 pp.36–38). These tasks are: 1) forming a community of persons, 2) serving life, 3) participating in the development of society and 4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church. Through these four tasks the family is called to build up the reign of God in a way that is unique to the mission of the family. This study highlights how parents engage the task of sharing in the life and mission of the Church through promoting such strategies as; family prayer; Mass attendance; sharing the faith story; discussions and conversations related to faith matters; parental witnessing of the faith by setting good examples and by seizing teachable faith moments that arise with daily living (Ch. 5 p.133). These nurturing strategies support the fundamental tasks of catechesis as described in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997, #85) as they promote knowledge of the faith through liturgical education, moral formation and teaching of prayer. The fundamental tasks of catechesis (*General Directory for Catechesis* 1997, #85) will be used as a framework to discuss the nurturing strategies identified in this study.

Teaching Prayer

In Catholic understanding, prayer is one of the ways in which to develop a relationship with God.

By reason of their dignity and mission, Christian parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer, introducing them to the gradual discovery of the mystery of God and the personal dialogue with him.

(Familiaris Consortio 1981, #60)

It was not surprising to the researcher that prayer is the first strategy that many parents identified through which they nurture faith within the home. The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997, #255) reminds parents that prayer is part of family life and the duty of parents is to “teach the first tentative steps to prayer” (#225). The study reveals that parents have recognised that the teaching of prayer is one of the fundamental tasks of catechesis within the home (*General Directory for Catechesis* 1997, #85). Parents spoke of praying with the family at meal time, at bed time, in the morning in the car on the way to school. How this strategy is used and its purpose is what distinguishes it across the analytical voices.

In discussions on family prayer, Church documents, such as *Familiaris Consortio* (1981, #61), advise parents that certain practices of piety should be observed; the Rosary receiving special mention.

We now desire, as a continuation of the thoughts of our predecessors, to recommend strongly the recitation of the family [R]osary... There is no doubt that... the [R]osary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers in common that the Christian family is invited to pray together. We like to think, and sincerely hope, that when the family gathering becomes a time of prayer the [R]osary is a frequent and favoured manner of praying.

Familiaris Consortio (1981, #61)

The sentiment about the Rosary expressed in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981, #61) is reflected in the findings of parents in the orthodox groups. The findings reveal that the aim stated by many in this voice for teaching their children the Rosary is so that children would know this “practice of piety” of the faith (Ch. 5 pp.133–136). The focus for these parents in teaching their children to recite the Rosary is on memorising of prayers and learning by rote in order to preserve the faith tradition. The teaching of formal prayers matches the understanding of faith acknowledged by this group. In a survey carried out

by Pirola and Pirola (1995) on the transmission of faith in the family within Australia, the results indicate that few parents pray the Rosary, as for most it has lost its meaning. The findings of this research concurs with the findings of Pirola and Pirola's (1995) study in that it reveals that the parents in the orthodox groups are the only ones to acknowledge that the Rosary is one of the strategies through which they nurture prayer life within the family (Ch. 5 pp.133–136).

The findings indicate that parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience prefer a form of prayer that is less structured than that favoured by those in the voice of orthodoxy (Ch. 5 pp.136–140). Parents, especially in the subgroup growing into faith, encourage personal prayers connected with the happenings of daily life. The study discloses that such an approach to prayer is important to this group of parents as this voice believes if faith is to have an impact on life then it needs to be integrated (Ch. 5 pp.137–140). In the same way, for prayer to have an impact on life it needs to emerge from daily living. *Familiaris Consortio* (1981, #59) instructs parents that personal prayer which connects to the experiences of daily life is an essential part of a family's prayer life.

Family prayer has for its own object family life itself, which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to His call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments, birth and birthday celebrations, wedding anniversaries of the parents, departures, separations and homecomings,, important and far-reaching decisions, the death of those who are dear, etc. – all of these mark God's loving as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven.

Familiaris Consortio (1981, #59)

A further conviction revealed by parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience in relation to prayer, is the need for children to understand the meaning of prayers. In contrast to the parents in the voice of orthodoxy who teach prayer by rote, parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience seem to demonstrate sensitivity to the readiness of the child. Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience are mindful of introducing prayers in ways that make sense to the child and employ strategies which make prayer time more manageable for their children (Ch. 5 pp.139–140).

Parents in the voice of faith as an active struggle speak of the importance of prayer and the desire to pray with their children. However, these parents do not specify the ways they do so. The findings reveal that family prayer is not an active part of the faith life of these parents.

Liturgical Education

The second fundamental task of catechesis discussed in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997, #85) is liturgical education. Parents in this study recognise that participation in the Sunday liturgy is fundamental to the nurturing of faith within the Catholic faith tradition.

In the Eucharist gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its “communion” and its “mission”: by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and sharers in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is “given up” and in His Blood that is “shed” becomes a never–ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family.

(Familiaris Consortio 1981, #54)

It is noted that Mass attendance by parents in this study on the basis of self–reporting, is unusually high compared to other studies which explored the development of faith within the home (Morse 1996). One possible explanation for the high rate of Mass attendance reported in this study is that the target group was approached either through a talk in parishes during the Sunday Masses or via their children in PREP classes. It is evident that these parents are sincerely trying to live the Catholic faith as they understand it. Mass attendance is a nurturing strategy central to all parents in the study; the way it is practised and the purpose of the practice is what typifies them from one another. As with prayer, the parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience had two distinct approaches to Mass attendance, one leaned towards orthodoxy while the other was identified as growing into faith (Ch. 5 pp.143–149). The findings show that the approach to the Mass of parents in the subgroup leaning towards orthodoxy is akin to the voice of orthodoxy. Parents in these two groups view Mass attendance as an obligation which is not negotiable (Ch. 5 pp.143–144).

In contrast, the findings show that for parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience subgroup growing into faith the Mass is used as a strategy to nurture faith growth. The

findings indicate that parents in the subgroup growing into faith did not have less regard for the Mass. They are more comfortable with the idea that their children develop their own yearning for attending Mass according to their developmental growth (Ch. 5 pp.145–149). The main focus on Mass attendance for these parents is the understanding that the Mass is an instrument which can assist in developing a deeper relationship with God. The findings suggest that these parents do not necessarily associate with the notion of faith as duty. This is in sharp contrast with the parents in the orthodox groups who view attending Mass as compulsory. The same pressure is not evident in the subgroup growing into faith even though most participants revealed that they attend Mass regularly as a family (Ch. 5 pp.145–147).

Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience commented that they are aware that the liturgy is not child friendly so they devise ways of keeping children interested (Ch. 5 p.147). The aim is to make Mass attendance a pleasant experience from a young age. The hope of parents in the subgroup growing into faith is that children will continue to yearn to attend Mass with the family as they grow older (Ch. 5 pp.146–147).

Parents in the voice of faith as an active struggle use Mass attendance as a tool through which these parents feel secure that their children are part of a faith community. They rely on Mass attendance as one way in which they introduce their children to the faith tradition (Ch. 5 pp.149–150).

Moral Formation

The moral formation is the third fundamental task of catechesis discussed in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997, #85). Parents in this study did not explicitly name moral formation as one of the strategies for nurturing faith within the home. Parents, especially those in voice of orthodoxy, did speak strongly about their duty as parents to inform their children about the teachings of the Catholic Church (Ch. 5 p.161).

One of the strategies used within the home to raise children's awareness of what is morally acceptable is discussions. Parents across the three voices used this strategy in a variety of ways to communicate to their children something of a faith understanding. Morse (1996, p. 76) and Vallance (2000, p.4) both indicate that parents in their studies

use discussions as a mean through which they pass on aspects of the faith traditions. For parents in the voice of orthodoxy discussions on faith issues are mostly planned. Parents in this voice initiate discussions in order to educate their children in the teachings of the Church, especially in the area of morality (Ch. 5 p.161). The main purpose of such discussions is to raise awareness in their children about what is expected of them to live as Catholics. Discussions surround such topics as the Church's view on: abortion, euthanasia, and contraception. Parents in the voice of orthodoxy introduce their children to Catholic literature and this becomes the basis for discussions.

Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience also promote discussions within the home as a way in which to make their children aware of what is morally acceptable. Parents in this voice do not initiate discussions in the planned manner that many of the parents in the voice of orthodoxy employ, but rather, discuss faith issues through the events that arise in family life (Ch. 5 p.162). The study reveals that many parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience use the television viewing of their children as a catalyst of raising their children's awareness of the moral implications presented in the television viewing. The main purpose of such discussions is to teach children a sense of what is right and wrong in light of the values of Gospel.

The voice of faith as an active struggle did not speak of conversing with their children about faith issues (Ch. 5 p.162). The study reveals that these parents seem to give this responsibility to a member of the extended family who they believe "knows" more than they do. These parents believe that they are not equipped to educate their children in Christian morality because they see moral formation as knowledge based.

Promoting Knowledge of the Faith

The study reveals that in conjunction with prayer and Mass attendance three other strategies are used by parents to promote knowledge of the faith. These are: sharing the faith story, the attendance of PREP and promoting the knowledge of the faith through lived experience.

Sharing the Faith Story

Most parents across the voices spoke of sharing the faith story of the faith tradition through Bible stories. Roberto (1992, p.3) claims that “sharing of our Catholic faith story happens when parents share stories from scripture.” The study reveals that reading of Bible stories are a part of the bed time routine of most homes. What is distinct is the aim for employing the strategy.

The findings show that parents in the voice of orthodoxy use the Bible as an avenue through which their children come to know the facts of the faith tradition (Ch. 5 pp.158–159). The aim is to attain knowledge. The findings reveal that a small number of parents in the voice of orthodoxy use this strategy as a tool for meditation and prayer (Ch. 5 p.159). For parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience, the Bible is tool through which they share stories with their children. They use Bible stories as they would other bedtime stories as a form of entertainment and an opportunity in which to bond with their children (Ch. 5 p.160). Parents in the voice of faith as an active struggle encourage their children to read Bible stories but there is no evidence that they share in this activity with their children (Ch. 5 pp.160–161). The researcher suspects that this may be because they are not familiar with the Bible themselves and therefore feel that they are not equipped to instruct their children.

Parish Religious Education Program (PREP)

Roberto (1992, p.3) claims that another way parents promote the knowledge of faith is through the participation of catechetical programs within the parish community. Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience and to some extent in the voice of faith as an active struggle, consider PREP to be a useful strategy in the nurturing of the faith within the home. The findings disclose that parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience lack confidence in their own religious knowledge and therefore rely on PREP for the education of religious knowledge of their children (Ch. 5 pp. 163–164; Ch 6 pp.178–180). The data reveal that PREP is rated highly among the nurturing strategies engaged by parents in this voice because it gave them a sense of security that their children are learning the knowledge of the faith (Ch. 5 p.163).

In contrast, PREP is not one of the nurturing strategies named by parents in the voice of orthodoxy. These parents have opted to take their responsibility for the formal religious education of their children. The avenue for the formal religious education of children is in the home (Ch. 5 p.163). The findings reveal that these parents want a faith education that is Catholic in nature rather than one that may promote a Christian outlook (Ch. 5 p.163).

Promoting the Knowledge of the Faith through Lived Experience

One of the most notable findings in the study is the way parents promote the knowledge of the faith through their lived experience (Ch. 5 pp.151–157). Roberto (1992, p.2) reminds parents that “we encounter God in the lived experience and events of everyday life, ... family life is a privileged locale for encountering God in everyday life experiences.” It appears from the findings that parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience have a greater awareness than those in the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as an active struggle that faith nurturing opportunities can arise spontaneously within the daily events of family life (Ch. 5 pp.152–155). The findings indicate that parents in this voice maintain such moments are valuable because they allow the family to discover God within family life. This understanding is at the core of the faith nurturing process within this voice.

The notion of nurturing faith through the spontaneous moments of family life corresponds with methods proposed in a wealth of literature on faith sharing within the family life (Ch. 2 pp.44–48) and with Church documents on catechesis. The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) describes that catechesis within the home is a catechesis which is more witness than teaching, more occasional than systematic, more daily than into structured periods (Huebsch 2003, p.100). Nurturing faith through the events of daily life also reflects the notion of Christian witness proposed in *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979, #68) “famil[ies] help each to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel.” The findings also suggest that parents within this voice have an understanding, whether conscious or sub-conscious, that the family is the place in which the Gospel is transmitted by rooting it in the context of profound human values (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #255).

Furthermore, parents in this voice have a strong commitment to faith as action (Ch. 5 pp.155–158). This finding is not surprising to the researcher for this strategy further acknowledges this voices understanding that faith is integrated with life experiences. For parents in this voice the call to be a witness of the faith is an important part of the how faith is promoted within family life. The parents in this voice have a conviction that in order for their children to understand how faith is integrated with life, they as parents need to demonstrate this understanding by witnessing faith to their children through actions. The actions of parents are based on Gospel values. This sense of faith witness is very distinct from the understanding held by parents in the voice of orthodoxy. The parents in the voice of orthodoxy would argue that they also witness faith through attending to the formalities of the faith tradition. This study recognises both approaches as valuable strategies for nurturing faith (Ch. 5 pp.155–158).

The faith nurturing strategies identified in this study reflect the findings of a survey of Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) in the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth (Vallance 2000, pp.3–4). The results of this survey are akin to the findings of this study. Parents in this survey responded that their efforts to educate children in the faith included; taking their children to Church, prayer in the home, sending their children to PREP, reading the Bible and to teaching values through living in a Christian way. In a study conducted of Catholic parents in Catholic school children, it was revealed that sending their children to a Catholic school rated as the most effective activity which encouraged faith development of children (Morse 1996, p.46). This was followed by attending Church, setting a good example, family discussions, and prayer. Even though the results of these studies contribute to what is common about the way faith is nurtured, what is unique about this study is that it makes known how these nurturing strategies are operational within the home.

In coming to a conclusion on how parents nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home, the findings indicate that the main nurturing strategies used by parents reflect the fundamental tasks of catechesis which are; to promote knowledge of the faith, moral formation, and teaching prayer.

Question 3 How do parents perceive their role in nurturing the faith of their children?

There is clear evidence in the findings that parents who do not access Catholic schools are aware of their role as nurturers of the faith of their children and are doing their best to carry out this responsibility. It may well be that the parents in this study have greater awareness of their role as nurturers of faith because they cannot rely on the Catholic school system for the faith development of their children. The awareness of parents of their role as first educators of the faith is in contrast to findings made by Morse where she claims that parents in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane are not fully aware of their call to be the first and foremost educators of faith of their children (Morse 1996, p.285). It is fair to note that the data for this study was collected after Morse's study (1996), and that the sample frame is quite different. It is possible that this study may have been influenced by an effort to educate parents in their role as nurturers of faith which began in this Archdiocese of Perth in 1997.

It is clear from the findings that parents in this study associate successful faith development with religious knowledge. There is an anxiety among parents, especially among those in the voices of faith as a lived experience and faith as an active struggle, about their own lack of religious knowledge (Ch. 6 pp.178–180). Parents perceive that this lack of religious knowledge is one of the greatest hindrances to nurture the faith of their children. Parents within the voice of faith as a lived experience and the voice of faith as an active struggle speak of their dependence on PREP as one their main avenues for the faith development of their children.

A number of studies have shown that this sense of inadequacy to nurture faith because of lack of parents' own religious knowledge is not isolated. This study confirms the findings from the 1997 Consultation with Parents of PREP in Archdiocese of Perth (unpublished) in which parents speak of the lack of their own confidence in their role as the 'first and foremost educators in faith' of their children. It is apparent from the 1997 study that there is a strong desire among these parents for their children to have faith. Morse (1996, p.74) reports in her study that 60% of mothers and even more fathers (66%) felt they had limited or very limited faith development since leaving school. This led to a lack of confidence in sharing faith with their children. Pirola and Pirola's (1995)

research indicates that parents have a problem with catechesis of their children because of among other things the loss of confidence among parents in Church teaching and practice. The researcher strongly agrees with the cry of Pirola and Pirola (1995) and Morse (1996) that there is an urgent need to nurture the development of a faith life of parents. The Church in Australia has not yet addressed a systematic way of tackling this issue. Holohan speaks of the new evangelisation of parents in order to assist them in their task of nurturing faith.

It has to be accepted ... that many Catholic parents and families, even if they go to mass, still lack the degree of conversion needed to hand on the Christian faith adequately to their children. ... People in these [this] situations need New Evangelisation.

(Holohan 1999, p.25)

The Church acknowledges that for catechesis to be effective then formation of the catechist, in this case parents, is essential. The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) points out that this obligation is given to the parish. Parishes are to give special attention to parents, assisting them with their responsibility of nurturing the faith of their children through such activities as: direct contact, meetings and courses and adult catechesis directed towards parents (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #233–252).

The results show that the biggest desire parents have is a Catholic school education for their children. This desire arises from the perceived lack of religious knowledge experienced by many parents (Ch. 6 pp.180–181). The findings reveal that the desire for a Catholic school education is twofold. Firstly, parents hanker for support in strengthening their efforts they are making at home to nurture faith (Ch. 6 p.181). They believe a Catholic school education can lead their children to an understanding of how to live a faith that is integrated with life, while at the same time their children would also be educated in the knowledge of the faith. This desire stems from the perception that they themselves lack sufficient religious knowledge.

The second reason parents desire a Catholic education is that they long that their children belong to a community in which they are surrounded by like-minded people who value the same moral and spiritual beliefs (Ch. 6 p.182). The study reveals that even though parents are regular Church-goers they do not feel part of the parish community because they do not have their children in the Catholic school. These

parents feel that they are a marginal group of the faith community. The parents in this study desire for their children to experience a sense of belonging to a faith community which they believe the Catholic school can provide. The researcher recognises that caution should be employed in drawing conclusions as no comparative study was gathered of parents who did send their children to Catholic schools. It is possible that parents in Catholic schools also do not feel part of the parish community.

It is evident that parents who do not send their children to a Catholic school have an understanding of their responsibility in the faith development of their children. They understand that as parents they are the first educators of their children and that the nurturing of faith is included within this responsibility. Parents are clearly not confident addressing this task because of their own lack of religious knowledge and lack of confidence in nurturing faith.

Question 4 Is there a different perception of this role between genders?

What remains unclear, within this study, is the difference between the perceptions of the role of faith nurture between genders. The study did not adequately answer this question as the number of females who participated in the study exceeded the number of males (Table 3.6, p.73). The ratio of females to male is 32 to 4 in this study. Of the four males who came forward three asked to be interviewed with their wives. It may well be that the less frequent response to the study by males indicates that in a large number of households the role of nurturing faith is still seen primarily as one of the roles of the mother. Holohan, (1999, p.32) maintains that mothers are better equipped to understand a child's religious development, as they are in the unique position of being able to guide their child to new insights in religious belief.

This finding corresponds with the result of the 1997 consultation of PREP parents in which those who participated were mainly mothers. Significantly fewer fathers participated even when the consultation was in the evenings.

In coming to an understanding of possible different perceptions of parental nurturing styles, this study can only contribute that the mother or the female of the household is seen as the main nurturer of faith, even in a household where both spouses are

employed full time outside the home. Therefore, this study can make no firm conclusion about the differential roles of parents with respect to gender.

Question 5 What challenges to nurturing faith are faced by parents?

In addressing the fifth question the findings highlights that a number of challenges that hinder parents from nurturing the faith of their children within the home. The first challenge parents identify is very personal in that it is a self acknowledgment of the perceived inadequacies parents feel in their task of nurturing faith (Ch. 6 pp.178–180). This challenge has already been discussed in answering Question Three, how do parents perceive their role in nurturing the faith of their children? The second set of challenges relate to societal influences that are pertinent in hampering faith nurture within the home. These influences include: peer group pressure; the influence of the media; societal demands on family time (Ch. 6 pp.184–190). The third challenge that emerges indicates that parents believe they are largely unsupported by the Church in the task of nurturing the faith within the home (Ch. 6 pp.191–193). A final challenge that arose from a small group of parents across the three voices is the challenge of living within two faith traditions (Ch. 6 pp.193–194).

Parent Lack of Confidence

As consistently reported in the study one of the main challenges faced by parents is related to their perceived lack of own religious knowledge (Ch. 6 pp.178–180). This challenge has been identified and discussed in Question Three, how do parents perceive their role in nurturing the faith of their children? (cf. pp.226–228). The study reveals that one of the main reasons parents sent their children to PREP is for them to acquire religious knowledge. PREP is a source of support for the faith education of their children (Ch. 6 pp.178–179).

Societal Influences

In discussing the societal influences, the study suggests that the fears and concerns named by the parents do not differ from those of many parents trying to raise children today. The findings reveal the fears relevant to the hindrances faced by parents in

nurturing faith of their children within the home. The findings indicate that parents across the three voices recognise Kelly and De Graaf claim that:

*Parents are not the only force affecting religious beliefs.
Children acquire diverse friends outside the family, forming
peer groups that by adolescence exert a strong independent
influence on their religious beliefs.*

(1997, p.640)

Parents across the three voices are concerned about: the influence peer group pressure exerts on the faith of their children (Ch. 6 pp.184–186); the strong influence of the media on family life (Ch. 6 pp.186–188) and the demands from outside influences on family life (Ch. 6 pp.188–191). These concerns coincide with the findings of the United Kingdom project, *Listening 2004: My Family My Church*, (2005). The findings of this project reports that “the frequency of responses mentioning materialism, consumerism, individualism, the media and peer pressure suggests that all factors are closely connected to families’ concerns about conflicting values” (2005, p.5). One can conclude that the majority of Christian parents share the same concerns when it comes to trying to promote a way of life which exhibit gospel values.

Demands on Family Life

A number of studies on effective parenting have suggested that ‘time’ or lack of it, is seen as one of the major factors inhibiting the cultivation of a rich family spirituality (Wright 1994, p.45). The factors inhibiting the nurturing of faith that are identified in this study include sport commitments and other extra curricular activities, and electronic interferences such as the television and the internet (Ch. 6 pp.186–188). The study exposes that all three voices speak of these pressures. In speaking about building a family culture where faith is nurtured and respected, Rymarz (2000, p.3) comments “... a key ingredient is time ...this cannot happen if insufficient time is devoted to family life.” What is clear from the study is that parents acknowledge that time is a key ingredient to nurturing faith. They are aware that within family life one of the first matters that can be neglected is the spiritual well being of the family (Ch. 6 pp.188–191). The researcher noted that the findings indicated that the pressures of nurturing faith within the demands on life are major issues particularly with parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience, especially in the subgroup growing in faith. Parents in these groups admit that first to be abandoned when life becomes busy are family prayer and

Mass attendance (Ch. 6 p.190). The study reveals that those in the voice of faith as a lived experience acknowledge that outside stresses placed on family life drag them away from the practices of the faith (Ch. 6 p.191). The voice of orthodoxy do not speak of demands that are obstacles to the nurturing of faith within family life as they have scheduled prayer time as part of their daily routine which is not negotiable.

In relation to the influence of the television within family life, much research has concluded that children are attracted by the media from a very young age and are influenced by it as they begin to form their attitudes and ideals.

Commercial television as it currently exists presents moral content and values that are often contrary to the predominant values of the society. It emphasizes violence and illegal action; it perpetuates a system in which groups of people are devalued because of sex, race, age, and other such criteria. There is good reason to believe that this type of television content affects children's moral behaviour.

(Stein 1993, p.1)

The findings reveal that parents across the three voices view the influence of television as an impediment to enriching family life (Ch. 6 pp.186–188). The concerns regarding parents of the power of the media in the moral development of their children are not unfounded. Parents in all voices describe how television has become a priority in the home and the impact television has on communication within family life and prayer life with the household (Ch. 6 p.186). Studies have shown that Americans watch an average of seven hours of television each day and the average home has two television sets (Neff 1995, p.151). The researcher suggests that this reflects the reality of Australian homes. The major concern of these parents from a faith development point of view is the continual bombardment of values presented to the children that are countercultural to the values endorsed in the Gospels (Ch. 6 pp.186–187). These same concerns regarding television also pertain to the use of the internet and the accessibility of teenage magazines.

There is some research that suggests there is good reason to believe that many positive moral values and behaviours can be conveyed to children through television presentations (Stein 1993, p.2). The study reveals that a small group of parents both in the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as a lived experience speak of embracing

the television as a means of communicating with their children values and attitudes in the light of Catholic teaching (Ch. 6 p.187). This view supports Rossiter's (1996) claim about the use of media in education.

The aim [of the media] is to help them [students] become people who give some thought to the way that beliefs, values, ideologies, religion, education, images, advertising, parents, peer groups, heroes/heroine, films, TV sitcom, etc, enter into their life structure.

(Rossiter 1996, p.7)

The purpose by this small of group of parents is to use the media as an educative tool in the moral formation of their children.

A quandary faced by a small group of parents is how to live within two faith traditions (Ch. 6 pp.193–194). Kelly (2007) calls such families pioneers.

There was a time when 'mixed marriages' were looked upon as a problem. People were discouraged from marrying someone from another denomination, for the fear that their Catholic faith would be at risk. Today, however, many claim that those in 'interChurch marriages' are pioneers, who are witnesses not just to the possibility of unity in the Church but also to a way that is enriched rather than torn apart by diversity.

(Kelly 2007, p.1)

This finding, even though it represents a minority group, is significant as it clearly demonstrates to the researcher the extent that some parents endure to keep their faith tradition alive in their family. The researcher recognises that this reality is a growing phenomenon within the Catholic Church with the growing number of interfaith marriages. This finding has made a contribution to the way some parents try to maintain the Catholic tradition within the home.

The Support of the Church

There is strong opinion among parents in this study that the Church is not supporting their efforts to nurture faith within the home (Ch. 6 pp.191–194). The study reveals that there is a clear perception among parents of this sample that the Church does not adequately address the faith formation of its faith community (Ch. 6 pp.191–193). Parents name the desire for the Church to address the issue of faith formation in order

for parents to be more able and more confident in educating their children in the faith. This is an issue that is not constrained to this Archdiocese.

Furthermore parents, especially those in the voice of faith as lived experience, articulated that from their experience there appears to be a lack of openness to young people in parish communities (Ch. 6 pp.192–194). The findings strongly suggest that these Catholic parents believe that the Church does not accept the young as members in their own right. Parents articulate that the Church does not actively seek out the young and make them feel welcome. The results of the project, *Listening 2004: My Family My Church* (2005), show that the Church in the United Kingdom has a similar concern about welcoming families, especially children, into the Church community. The study reports, “Many diocesan conversations identified a need for a more welcoming and family friendly local parish community as the foundation of care and support for all, but especially families” (2005, p.68). Such perceptions call for the Church to re-examine the pastoral support it offers parents within parish groups. As already recognised in this study, that the Church names parish community as the most important place where formation occurs (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #257). The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) states, “the Christian community must ... help parents by whatever means works best, to prepare for and assume their responsibility, which is especially delicate today, of educating their children in the faith” (Huesbsch 2003, p.90). Therefore, the support of the Church through the parish community is paramount. The need for the parish to become the locus for family catechesis is not unique to the Archdiocese of Perth. In Australia conversations about the role of the family within the life of the Church have been put aside and largely forgotten as indicated in the historical context (Ch. 2 pp.22–26).

It is reasonable to conclude that the two greatest challenges that this group of Catholic parent face in nurturing faith of their children is first, is a sense of inadequacy. This sense of inadequacy stems from a perceived lack of their own religious knowledge. Second, participants feel unsupported by the Church in their task of nurturing the faith within the home. This is clearly a warning to the Church in the Archdiocese of Perth that the parish needs to become a place where parents who feel marginalised can feel welcomed and supported.

Question 6 *What resources do parents desire to assist them in the nurturing of faith within the home?*

In addressing the support parents' desire in assisting them to nurture the faith of their children within the home, the findings reveal that many parents are unaware of the Church support structures, even though limited, that are available to them. Not a single parent mentioned parish support structures other than PREP. The study reveals that some parents have turned to other Christian faith traditions for support in the nurturing of faith. This search by parents strongly that parents yearn for support in their task of nurturing faith of their children. The concern that is highlighted is that the Catholic Church does not make explicit the support it offers or can offer to parents to assist them in their task. What is clear is that the parents in the three voices desire a variety of resources which they deem could be helpful in assisting them in nurturing faith.

The findings reveal that parents in the voice of orthodoxy desired resources which were familiar to them from their childhood (Ch. 6 p.201). These resources are primarily religious publications which are explicitly Catholic in nature. They provide religious knowledge as well as an element of relaxation. Parents in this voice do not specifically request for resources that would support them as parents in the nurturing of the faith of their children.

Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience name an extensive variety of resources which they believe would be helpful in assisting them in nurturing faith (Ch. 6 pp.201–206). These include two levels of support; the first being materials relevant for parents and children, and the second being support at a parish level. The findings uncover that parents within this group seek such resources as books and pamphlets informing them of contemporary Church teachings; literature on faith development of children; and explanations of formal prayers (Ch. 6 pp.200–201). The findings also indicate that these parents desire resources for their children (Ch. 6 pp.201–206). These resources include not only written resources such as modern prayer books, but also up-to-date CDs with interactive activities that lead children to discover aspects of faith knowledge in a way that are fun and are age appropriate. The findings indicate that the support desired at a parish level by parents includes adult faith formation; faith sharing groups; and parent support groups (Ch. 6 pp.205–206). The desire for parish support is unique to parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience.

The findings show that the parents in the voice of faith as an active struggle desire resources that can help them in nurturing the faith of their children (Ch. 6 pp.205–206). Parents in this small group did not specify the types of resources they desired. The researcher suspects that parents in this voice are not conscious of the type of support they feel will benefit them in nurturing the faith of their children. As has already been acknowledged in this study, this group of parents do have a tentative understanding of faith and struggle to articulate an understanding of faith (Ch. 4 pp.128–129). The researcher expected that the parents in this voice may have suggested support for their own faith development. This request was not made explicit by the faith as an active struggle parents in the study.

The challenges to nurturing faith named in the study and the resources identified across the voices are indicative of the desire of parents to nurture the faith of their children. Since parents do not speak of accessing support from parishes, it is understood by the researcher that they are not conscious of such support structures. Many of the suggestions for support these parents made could be parish based. Is it possible that these support systems are not readily available in their parish communities?

Question 7 What differences are experienced in the nurturing of faith between parents in the metropolitan area and rural areas?

In addressing this final question within the research it is evident from the findings that parents in rural areas, to a large extent, have similar experiences to parents in the metropolitan area in nurturing the faith of their children (Ch. 6 pp.195). The findings suggest there are no distinct differences between the understanding of faith between the parents in rural areas and those in the metropolitan area. The nurturing style and strategies are also similar. The researcher recognises that the understanding of faith is not dependant upon demographics. Participants in rural communities face the same challenges to nurturing faith as those expressed by parents in the metropolitan areas. These challenges include: societal influences such as the drug culture and the pressures of daily living; and the media, the television and the internet.

There is one difference between parents in the rural areas and those in the metropolitan area that has been uncovered by the findings. The difference that became apparent is a result of the struggles trying to support a faith community while there is a shortage of Priests within rural areas (Ch. 6 pp.195–196). The challenges particular to nurturing faith within the home in a rural community include: the availability of Mass within the community; and the availability of the Parish Priest. The concern of parents in the rural areas is the future of the faith within the community. The study discloses that a challenge to the rural community which is closely related to the problems of regular Mass attendance is the absence of a Priest living within the local community. Parents in rural areas lament the lack of access to the Parish Priest (Ch. 6 pp.195–196).

A further challenge which affects the nurturing of faith in rural areas is the impact of weekend sports commitments (Ch. 6 pp.196–198). Although this challenge may not be specific to the rural areas alone, parents in rural areas have the added pressure of Mass attendance around sporting commitments. Unlike parents in the metropolitan area who can access a variety of Mass times in different parishes which are quite close, rural parents may have only one Mass within reasonable range or travel. 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. Sports and other extra curricula activities are also one of the main challenges to nurturing faith within the rural areas.

Participants in the rural communities have the added challenges to nurturing the faith of children which arise from the urgency of trying to keep the faith alive within the community. The challenges to nurturing faith which are common among participants in the rural communities centre on the availability of Mass within the community, the availability of the Parish Priest to the community, the future of the faith community and the sports commitment on the nurturing of faith all impact on the capacity to nurture faith within the home. The added responsibilities of trying to keep the faith alive within these communities are some of the greatest challenges faced by participants in the rural areas.

Conclusion of the Study

The researcher acknowledges that no study can offer indisputable solutions to the findings of the research undertaken. The findings in this study reveal that parents within

the Archdiocese of Perth who do not send their children to a Catholic school are aware of their responsibility for the nurture of faith of their children. The findings strongly indicate that for this group of Catholic parents within the Archdiocese, faith is an essential part of family life. Within these Catholic homes, attempts are being made to nurture faith to varying degrees, according to the understanding of faith held by the parents.

The majority of parents are aware that nurturing faith entails more than the formal and ritualistic practices of the faith tradition. While most parents, especially those in the voice of lived experience, saw these practices as important for children to come to an understanding of the faith traditions, they also acknowledged that the nurturing of faith is more witnessed than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #255).

It is reasonable to conclude that the findings uncovered that the task of nurturing faith is hampered, to a large extent, by the lack of support offered to parents by the Church. Unfortunately, many parents feel that they are not adequately equipped to fulfil task of nurturing faith in an effective manner. They feel they lack the confidence and the religious knowledge necessary to carry out this task effectively. The study highlights the need for the Church in the Archdiocese of Perth to take seriously the call of the Second Vatican Council that the family is the 'domestic Church'. Parents are aware of their task in taking the responsibility to nurture the faith of their children and do so to the best of their ability. However, parents need to be supported and encouraged at the parish level to carry out their tasks in a more effective way.

What is highlighted is that the parish community needs to become the locus for catechesis, if family catechesis is to be effective. The need for the parish to become the locus for family catechesis is not unique to the Archdiocese of Perth. The researcher agrees that, "the ability to address the issues of today's Catholic families is at the heart of the effective achievement of the educational and pastoral goals of the Church" (Graham 1988, p.100).

Chapter Eight will summarise the thesis and present a series of recommendations arising from this research in order to better support parents in their effort to nurture the faith of their children.