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

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

by

Carmela Giovanna Suart, Dip. Teach., B. Ed., M. Ed.

A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the School of Education, Doctor of Education, the University of Notre Dame Australia.

March 2007
Abstract

Throughout its history, the Catholic Church has regarded the family as the most influential factor in shaping and nurturing the faith of each generation. Within the family, parents are considered to be the first and primary educators of the faith of their children. Irrespective of years of genuine effort by the Catholic Church in Australia to support parents in their task of nurturing the faith of their children, the area of family catechesis still remains inadequately addressed, hence the significance of the study. The aim of this research was to investigate how Catholic parents, who do not send their children to Catholic schools, nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home.

A review of the literature indicated that this specific target group has largely been understudied with only fragmentary research. The purpose of this study was to give this group of Catholic parents, who consider themselves a marginalised group within the Catholic Church, a voice in sharing their experiences and concerns of the task of nurturing the faith of their children. The study sought to make a contribution to remedying this marginalisation.

A total of 36 parents (n=36) participated in the research. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling procedure. The parishes were drawn from two Regional Zones of Priests within the Archdiocese of Perth; a rural zone and a metropolitan zone. A total of eleven Catholic parishes participated in the study; each parish having distinctive demographics.

The research was qualitative in nature. The primary means for gathering data was face–to–face interviews. Semi–structured guiding questions were used during the interviews. The interview data was coded and analysed using three coding methods; open coding, axial coding and selective coding. Transcriptions of the interviews were set up within the qualitative data analysis computer program QRS NUD*IST [Non–numerical, Unstructured Data, Indexing, Searching and Theorizing Tool] (N6).

The study identified three distinctive understandings of faith. The metaphor “voices” was used to distinguish between the understandings. These three interpretive voices were identified as the voice of orthodoxy, the voice of faith as a lived
experience and the voice of faith as an active struggle. These voices are archetypes, or descriptions of distinctive styles. The understanding of faith identified in each voice became the basis to describe the link between the understanding of faith held by the parents and the way faith is nurtured within the context of their homes.

The results indicated that a number of nurturing strategies have been implemented within the homes of this group of parents. The most common nurturing strategies included: Mass attendance; prayer; reading the Bible; conversations and discussions about faith issues; through witness and example; and attending the Perth Archdiocesan Parish Religious Education Program (PREP). The way in which such strategies are implemented, that is, the nurturing style, is what set the three archetypal voices apart.

From the results a conclusion was drawn that parents within the Archdiocese of Perth who do not send their children to a Catholic school, are aware of their responsibility as the nurturers of faith of their children. For this group of Catholic parents, faith is an essential part of family life. There is a strong parallel between the understanding of faith held by parents and the nurturing style adopted to nurture faith within the context of the home. The results also revealed that most parents in this group are clearly not confident in their task of nurturing the faith of their children within the home. They perceive their own religious knowledge to be inadequate and thus depend on Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) for support.

This study has been valuable as it has given voice to a group of parents whom have been largely understudied. The study enabled this group of parents who do not access the Catholic school system to make noteworthy input to the story of how faith is nurtured within the context of the Catholic home.
Declaration of Authorship

This thesis is the candidate’s own work and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other institution.

To the best of the candidate’s knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

__________________________  ________________
Carmela G. Suart               Date
Acknowledgements

In submitting this thesis I wish to express my gratitude to the people who have assisted, encouraged, and supported me in this study. Without them this dream would not have become a reality.

Firstly, I am particularly indebted to my supervisor, Professor Roger Vallance, who has been a constant source of intellectual challenge, prudent guidance, and gracious persistence. His encouragement made the journey easier especially when I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel. Thanks also to Sr Margaret Beech for critically reading this work and offering her advice. I am deeply grateful.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Priests of the Archdiocese of Perth, especially those in the South Central Zone and the Merriden Zone, for granting me permission to carry out my research in their parishes. Also I express my gratefulness to the parents who participated in the study. Without their invaluable contribution this study would not have been possible.

My appreciation goes also to my family and friends. My deep gratitude to my dear husband, David, and three children Amy, Sarah and Joel for understanding and respecting the time I needed to dedicate to this study over the years. I wish to thank my Mum and my late Dad for teaching me the value of persevering; a skill which I called upon many times on this journey. To my brothers Joe, John and Justin, my sister Anna and my sister–in–law Jenny I wish to thank them for their support and encouragement. Thanks to the many friends who took an active interest in the study.

Finally, thanks to my colleagues at the Catholic Education Office of WA, in particular my co–workers in the Catechist Service Team, for their support and their interest in this study.

I dedicate this thesis to my father and my sister Anna; both passed away before its completion.
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List of Abbreviations

ABS  Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACS  Archdiocesan Catechist Service
AC   Catechist Service
CEO WA Catholic Education Office of Western Australia
PREP Parish Religious Education Program
SRE  Special Religious Education
SRI  Special Religious Instruction

List of Catholic Church Documents

AA   Apostolicam Actuositatem (The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity) 1965
CT   Catechesi Tradendae (Catechesis in Our Time) 1979
CCC  Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994
CF   Christifideles Laici (The Vocation of the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World) 1988
EN   Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelisation in the Modern World) 1975
FC   Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) 1981
FR   Fides et Ratio (The Relationship between Faith and Reason) 1998
GS   Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution in the Modern World) 1965
GDC  General Directory for Catechesis 1997
GE   Gravissimum Educationis (The Declaration on Christian Education) 1965
LG   Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) 1964
RD   The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School 1988
Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to give an outline of the organisation and scope of the research project.

This study has examined and described how faith is nurtured within the home of contemporary Catholic families who do not access the Catholic school system. The study has focused on both the perceptions of faith as viewed by the participants and how they put their understanding of faith into practice within the context of the home. The methods employed to investigate how faith is nurtured within the context of the home of this group of parents include face-to-face interviews held mainly in the homes of the participants.

The thesis comes from a Catholic perspective within the lived experience of Catholic family life. It is not a treatment of Catholic theology but an investigation of one aspect of faith education.

This thesis consists of eight Chapters. A brief outline of each Chapter is presented.

**Chapter One** sets the context for the study. Chapter One first gives a brief background to the personal history of the author and states the motivation for the study. Second, the research questions are made explicit and then an explanation of the terms used within the study are offered to establish their definition within the context of the study.

**Chapter Two** explores the literature relevant to this research study. The literature is approached from four perspectives: historical, theological, sociological, and pastoral. The literature explored include relevant Church documents both pre and post Second Vatican Council. The response of the Catholic Church in Australian to the role of parents as the primary nurturers of faith is examined within the discussion of the four perspectives.

**Chapter Three** introduces the methods employed in the research and it establishes the context for the study. Chapter Three describes the research methods used to answer the research questions; the research setting is made explicit; and the
Chapter describes the procedure for selecting the sample. Data collection methods are described and the procedures used in analysing the data discussed.

**Chapter Four** is the first of three independent but related Chapters that focus on the data gathered. This Chapter presents the findings on the perceptions of faith held by the participants in the study and establishes three archetypal understandings of faith that become the framework for discussion within the following two Chapters.

**Chapter Five** describes how the perceptions of faith which emerged from the three voices established in Chapter Four, are practised within the homes of the participants. This Chapter identifies the nurturing style and strategies employed by participants to nurture faith within the home.

**Chapter Six** continues to make use of the metaphor of voices established in Chapter Four. The analytical metaphors are used to describe the diversity of challenges faced by parents in their task to nurture the faith of their children. This Chapter then presents the support for which parents desire to assist them in their task of nurturing the faith of their children.

**Chapter Seven** discusses and summarises the findings of the study in relation to the research question.

**Chapter Eight** presents the conclusions and names some recommendations for further research. Suggestions to improve current practice in the area of family catechesis are also offered.
Glossary of Documents

*Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) 1964.
This Vatican II document treats several key aspects of Catholic theology. It holds a central place among the documents of the Second Vatican Council as it is looked upon as the document from which all the remaining Council documents flow (Huebsch and Thurnes 1997, p.17).

This Vatican II document is unique as it speaks to the Church and to all people of the world about the hopes and dreams of the human family. “The document seeks to befriend and engage people of goodwill everywhere to make human life on this planet more dignified and, hence, closer to God’s plan for us humans” (Huebsch and Thurnes 1997, p.121).

This Vatican document addresses the place of lay people in the Church. “This … document details how the apostolic work of the laity is to proceed and how lay persons are to be prepared for this work” (Huebsch and Thurnes 1997, p.222).

*Gravissimum Educationis* (The Declaration on Christian Education) 1965.
This Vatican II document deals with formal Catholic education, especially within the school setting. It discusses the major principles of what constitutes a Catholic school and Catholic religious education.

This document develops the concept of evangelisation as understood after the Second Vatican Council. “This document emphasised the concept of liberation through the acceptance of Christ and his teaching and described the role [of all] as witnessing to what they taught by their lives” (Malone 1992, p.7).

*Catechesi Tradendae* (Catechesis in Our Time) 1979.
Catechesi Tradendae addresses the need for a systematic approach to catechesis. “It stressed … the need to link teaching with the real needs of the group concerned,
and stated that prepared material ‘must try to speak a language comprehensible to the task in question’ “ (Malone 1992, p.7).

**Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) 1981.**
Familiaris Consortio speaks of the role and mission of the family in the modern world. This document is fundamentally important to Catholic families. It comprehensively addresses issues most affecting families in the modern world.

**Christifideles Laici (The Vocation of the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World) 1988.**
This document speaks of the role and mission of the lay members of the modern Church.

**Catechism of the Catholic Church 1994.**
This document presents the official teachings of the Catholic Church. “The Catechism is given … that it may be a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local catechisms” (John Paul II 1997, p.5).

**General Directory for Catechesis 1997.**
This document outlines the process for proclaiming the Christian message. It seeks to arrive at a balance between two principal requirements. The first is to “place catechetical work in the context of evangelisation, as envisioned by Pope Paul VI in *Evanegelii Nuntiandi* (1975)” (Huebsch 2003, p.2). The second principal requirement is “to be sure the content of the faith is fully treated in catechetical work, as presented in the Catechism of the Catholic Church” (Huebsch 2003, p.2).
Chapter One

Establishing the Research Questions

The family is, so to speak, the domestic Church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.

(Lumen Gentium 1964, #11)

The Background of the Researcher

For ten years I worked as a primary school teacher in Catholic Schools. Then I was employed by a Catholic Church agency, the Perth Archdiocesan Catechist Service (ACS), to write and produce the Religious Education Program for volunteer catechists who teach religious education to children within the parish setting. This agency is responsible for the religious education of children outside the Catholic school system. Since 2002 the ACS has been fully incorporated into the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) and is known as the Catechist Service Team within the Religious Education and Faith Formation Section of the CEOWA. Currently, my main responsibilities are in the areas of adult faith education and family catechesis.

Personal Perspective

As a parent of three children, I have become increasingly aware of the responsibility for the faith formation of my children. I clearly understand the call of the Church that parents are the first and foremost educators of the faith of their children (Lumen Gentium 1964; Apostolicam Acitusitatem 1965; Familiaris Consortio 1981). There is a desire that my children share in the same faith traditions as myself and thus I decided to take on this responsibility and be proactive in their faith formation. My faith was nurtured by my parents; it was at the core of my parents’ life. They have a very strong faith commitment and in my and my siblings' childhood made efforts for faith to be an integral part of our daily life. In my early childhood Sunday Mass was a priority in our home as was the Rosary. As my siblings and I grew up, mum and dad always had religious publications arrive in the mail from their country of origin (Italy) and I remember many evenings sitting with mum as she shared some of the many stories they contained. We all attended Catholic schools for most of our
education. My parents never pushed religion onto us. They allowed us the freedom to make our own choices even though I know that at times they were distressed that my siblings chose not to practise their faith in their adolescent and adult life. One thing our parents demanded was that we respect what they had nurtured within us.

**Professional Experience**

As I began to look more deeply at the issues concerning nurturing the faith of my children, I became aware that many parents struggled to nurture the faith of their children. In 1997, having completed the writing of the Religious Education Program *The Truth will set you free, Catechist Program*¹, a program for PREP Catechists, I held a consultation with parents of children attending the Parish Religious Education Program (PREP). The central focus of the meeting was to ascertain how parents could be assisted in the faith education of children in the home, with a view to designing a resource that would link them with the religious education their children were receiving at PREP.

Eleven metropolitan parishes within the Archdiocese of Perth, represented by 166 parents, participated in the consultation. Participants were mainly mothers of children, with far fewer fathers participating even when the consultation was held in the evening. The purpose of the consultation was twofold. First, the consultation helped to determine the needs parents identified as essential, in assisting them in becoming more actively involved in the faith education of their children. Their needs were described by drawing from parents’ ideas and suggestions about the content and design of a resource which would be of benefit to them within the context of the home. Second, the consultation aimed to identify areas of support parents needed to assist them in the faith development of their children. The areas of support acknowledged by parents would become the framework for the future development of resources for parents.

As the consultations proceeded from parish to parish it became increasingly obvious that parents felt strongly that they were not skilled in the responsibility of being the primary educators of the faith of their children. A large percentage of parents, mainly mothers, expressed that they themselves had little or no formal religious education and felt inadequate sharing their faith with their children. They relied

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¹ This publication uses unconventional capitalisation for its title.
heavily on PREP for the faith education of their children.

The findings of the consultation with parents whose children attended PREP showed that three concerns were common to most of the parents. First, there was no appropriate support structure within the parish to assist parents in their role as faith educators of their children. Second, many of the parents did not have a Catholic school education themselves (whether through choice or circumstance) and felt they did not know what to teach their children or how to teach them in this area. Finally, it became apparent that a large group of non–Catholic parents, mainly mothers, were thrust into a role that was foreign to them. As their concerns emerged it became evident that they were not aware that parents nurture faith by word and example within the everyday events of family life.

Within my capacity as a parent and as a consultant with the Catechist Service, I turned to Church documents and academic literature for insights on faith sharing within the context of the home. Through exploring Church documents it become evident that since the renewal demanded by the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), the Church has continued the constant call to reclaim the right of parents as the first and primary educators of the faith. Recent Papal documents such as, *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) 1964; *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity) 1965; *Gravissimum Educationis* (The Declaration on Christian Education) 1965; *Familiaris Consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) 1981; and *Christifideles Laici* (The Vocation of the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World) 1989, all speak of the sacredness and mission of the family in the modern world. These documents, which span the leadership of three Popes (i.e. John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II), recognise that as the Church develops and expands into the secular society, the responsibility of parents as the first and primary educators of faith is becoming increasingly crucial. Throughout these documents the Popes affirm parents in their endeavour to nurture the faith of children and shift the responsibility of this duty from solely religious education, which is the instruction of knowledge, to acknowledging that the family is the prime place of catechesis (*Catechesi Tradendae* 1979, #68). The impact of these documents will be discussed in the coming Chapters.

Academic literature suggests that nurturing faith within the home is grounded firstly in the everyday experiences of family life (Chesto 1998, 1995, 1988; Bowen 1997;
Curran 1997, 1980, 1979; Dodds 1995; Meehan 1995; Barber 1994; Grienacher and Elzondo 1994; Finley 1993; Roberto 1992; Dunlap 1991; McGinnis and McGinnis 1990; Murphy 1990; Gallagher 1982; De Gidio 1980; Saris 1980). It is through the everyday issues and concerns of life that parents can take the opportunity to foster the spiritual growth of their family. De Gidio (1979, p.17) reasons that if family catechesis is understood as being grounded in the everyday experiences of family life “there are few, if any, family faith sharing experiences which fail [as long as the] focus is in the sharing rather than doctrine.” The simple and natural incidental happenings of family life "are the actions which constitute teachable moments" (De Gidio 1980, p.61). Such moments are valuable for faith sharing as they allow family members to discover God in the everyday moments of life.

The outcomes of the 1997 Consultation with Parents of PREP and the insights from literature crystallized the research interests. In view of this, the question arose how do parents who, for whatever reasons, do not access Catholic schools, nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home, especially when they do not feel skilled to do so? The intention was not to evaluate the religious knowledge of parents, but rather to come to an awareness of their understanding of faith and how this understanding impinges on the way they nurture faith within the every day moments of family life.

The Motivation Behind the Study

This study undertakes to explore how parents share their faith with their children within the context of the home. The driving force was to identify ways parents share faith within family life, particularly when this specific group does not have the added support of the Catholic school environment. One of the main reasons parents feel so inadequate, I believe, is that parents themselves experienced what is termed the 'delegation model' of religious education. In this model religious education was seen as the role of the religion teacher, the Catholic school, and the role of the parish catechist. For many parents, religious education is a body of knowledge which prepares children for specific aspects of Church life. Examples of these aspects might be sacramental preparation, teaching of the formal prayers, the parts of the Mass, and the teachings of the Church.

The premise of this study is that the nurturing of faith is not solely the transmission of knowledge. It is also through the affective domain that we recognise the
presence of God in the interactions which happen daily within family life. In other words, faith is an embodied experience, a way of living, a manner of interacting with the world rather than a set of concepts to know or remember. In order for parents to rediscover and reclaim their duty as first educators of faith of their children, they may need to be skilled in recognising ways they can nurture faith within the everyday events of a daily life.

Research Questions

This research examined how the faith of children is nurtured by parents within the context of the home. The central question was: How do parents, who do not send their children to Catholic schools, nurture the faith of their children within the home?

The research question under investigation is particularly Australian. The Australian Church focus on Catholic schools as the principal source of religious education is unique when compared to that of many other countries. The Australian Church is distinctive in the amount of resources it devotes to Catholic school education. In other countries, such as the United States of America, the locus for religious education is in the parish as well as in the Catholic school. In Australia fewer resources are made available for religious education outside the Catholic school system.

In order to understand and discover how faith is nurtured within the home of those who do not access the Catholic school, it was important to establish what parents understand faith to be; why faith is important to family life and thirdly, the concerns that hinder parents from carrying out this task effectively.

The study was guided by the following questions.

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 aim of these sub-questions was to identify the relationship between the understanding of faith held by parents and the nurturing strategies employed to nurture faith within the home. These questions helped to ascertain the complexities facing parents in their endeavour to share faith with their children. The questions also helped to determine if parents have a sense of inadequacy when faced with the responsibility of nurturing the faith of their children, and how they nurture faith in their children? This study was an effort to hear parents speak of their own experience and explore possible means of support which would empower them in their task of nurturing the faith of their children.

The particular target group chosen for this study were Catholic parents who do not send their children to Catholic schools. This particular sample group was chosen as these parents do not have the support or resources offered to parents in Catholic schools, particularly by a comprehensive religious education curriculum. For those not attending Catholic schools formal religious education is limited to PREP or Special Religious Education (SRE) offered within State schools and home teaching of religious education by the parents.

An Explanation of the Terms Used
A series of short definitions of terms is offered to establish the context of this study.

Parents
For the purpose of this study, a parent is either a biological father or mother of an offspring, or an adult person who has guardianship of a child who is not necessarily blood related.

Children
The understanding of children in this study is that of offspring of a couple related by blood, or fostered into care.
Family

Within society parents and children within the same unit constitute a family. The official teaching of the Catholic Church, insists that the Christian family must spring from Christian marriage. *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) declares:

> Thus the Christian family which springs from marriage is a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, as a participant in that covenant, will manifest to all [people] the saviours living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all members of the family work together. (#48)

While respecting the ideals presented in *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) this study recognises the diversity in which contemporary families exist in society. The study acknowledges that some families are not necessarily blood-related. White (1995, pp.207–208) describes a number of types of families that are typical of our society. They include the nuclear family; the extended family; the blended family; the couple family; the single parent family; the single person and the adoptive family.

These types of ‘family’, with few exceptions, exist within the Catholic community. “Rather than judge one form of family as somehow superior to another, religious educators recognise that they all are of God and involve various coping arrangements to make and keep life human” (White 1995, p.209).

Catholic School

Distinct from other types of schools, the main aim of the Catholic school is to “form in the Christian those particular virtues which will enable [the child] to live a new life in Christ and to help him to play faithfully his part in building up the kingdom of God” (Gravisimum Educationis 1965, #2). Such an education is based on a “Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ” who is the “foundation of the whole educational enterprise” (The Catholic School 1977, #33–34). The particular task of the Catholic school is:

> Fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the Gospel; the second in the growth of the virtue characteristic of the Christian.

(The Catholic School 1977, #37)
Faith

In the context of this study, faith refers specifically to Christian faith. Christian faith is a gift from God, a lived reality destined to grow in the hearts of believers (Groome 2002; 1980; General Directory for Catechesis #56, 1997; Fowler 1993; Meissner 1987; Westerhoff 1980; Rahner 1975). This study embraces Groome’s (2002; 1980) understanding of Christian faith. Groome (2002, p.178) states that “Christian faith has three aspects: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. Or faith entails believing, trusting and doing.” In other words, the wholeness of Christian faith involves the head, the heart and the mind (Groome 2002, p.178).

**Faith as believing – Christian faith as engaging the head**

Faith as believing, points primarily to a cognitive activity. Christian faith does require a firm understanding and conviction of the truths. Faith as believing is necessary since, “all faith includes a knowing and interpreting of human experience” within the context of a religious tradition. The knowing of and “the assent to, the stated beliefs of the tradition is a way of making meaning of what it is to be a Christian” (Groome 1980, p.74).

However, in the context of this study, Christian faith is much broader than solely an intellectual and cognitive process of beliefs, one that separates the matters of faith from the rest of life (Fowler 1993; Chamberlain 1988; Meissner 1987). Meissner argues that, “the traditional Catholic view had long been concerned with the substance and the content of faith, that is, faith as a body or a system of revealed truths, rather than with phenomenology or psychological analysis of faith as a human process” (1987, p.115). Groome (2002, p.192).explains that “the primary purpose of the mind is not only to clarify ideas, but to empower a lived and living faith.”

Groome (2002; 1980) agrees with Meissner (1987) when he remarks that “to see Christian faith only as belief in the sense of rational assent to official doctrine tends to increase the split between faith and daily life” (Groome 1980, p.60). This is not to say that the cognitive act is not important to the dimension of faith, however, it is not the only activity.

**Faith as trusting - Christian faith as a way of the heart**

The second activity that is important to the lived reality of Christian faith is trust. Groome (2002, p.184) acknowledges, “Christian faith is a profoundly relational affair
—of the heart.” It is the fiducial dimension of being in faith. This fiducial dimension is concerned with relationships, firstly to a God who is always faithful and secondly with others (Groome 1980, p.61). It finds expression in such things as love, loyalty, and commitment. As these are deepened there is a growth in the activity of trust (Meissner 1987).

Faith as doing – Christian faith as a way of the hands
For Christian faith to be a lived reality, it must include also a behavioural dimension. Groome (1980, p.76) names the behavioural dimension of Christian faith as “an activity of doing.” Groome (2002) describes faith as doing as a way of the hands. “Hands represent the lived commitments of Christian faith, the everyday “doings” required of disciples” (2002, p.178). It is an active response that calls for transformation at three levels, the personal, the interpersonal and the social and political. Faith is expressed in the way we respond to God and others, for without the response, there is no faith.

Christian faith needs to include all three activities of faith; believing; trusting and doing. Groome (2002, p.178) believes “Christian faith should engage people’s heads (all one’s mind), hearts (all one’s heart and soul), and hands (all one’s strength).” All are essential to the Christians way of life.

Nurture
This study refers to the notion of ‘nurturing the faith’ as distinctive from transmitting the faith traditions. This distinction is central to the study. Nurturing the faith here is understood as an ongoing process in which parents share faith through recognising the presence of God in the interactions which happen daily within family life as well as through formal instruction.

_The task of the religious educator is far more than to teach the “content” of the faith tradition. Our task is to nurture people, with the help of God’s grace, in their ability to be in faith. Being and becoming a person in Christian faith is a process of formation and maturation._

(Groome 1980, p.66)

A Process for Nurturing Faith
The primary assumption of this study is that family is the prime place for the nurturing of faith of children. The approach for this nurturing is through the process of family catechesis. For the purpose of this study, it is crucial that the term family
catechesis is defined and a distinction is made between the terms evangelisation, catechesis and religious education, as these terms have impact on the fundamental underpinnings of this study. These terms will be discussed in light of the understanding declared in recent Church documents and Catholic education writings.

**Catechesis**

Catechesis is about formation of a believer towards maturity of faith and therefore, is “not a body of conceptual truths, but the mystery of the living God” (Fide et Ratio 1998, #99). Initiatory catechesis, “promotes and matures initial conversion, educates the convert in the faith and incorporates him [the believer] into the Christian community (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #61). It “lays the foundation for building a life of faith” (Huebsch 2001, p.22). The fundamental tasks of catechesis are:

- to promote knowledge of the faith,
- to promote liturgical participation,
- to promote moral formation,
- to teach how to pray,
- to educate for participation in Church community life and to promote missionary initiation.

(General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #85–87)

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) points “out that all these tasks are necessary for the full growth of the Christian life” (Huebsch 2001, p.33). The two principal means used to accomplish these tasks: transmission of the Gospel message and the experience of the Christian life (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #87). As a result catechesis is not restricted to traditional formal religious education but rather is an ongoing process which continues within the family and the parish community (Holohan 1999; Purnell 1985; Gallagher 1980).

**Family Catechesis**

As this study is concerned specifically with the nurturing of faith within the home, the term catechesis needs to be defined within the context of family life. The focus of family catechesis is generally on the family unit. One of the most comprehensive definitions of family catechesis is offered by Purcell and Weithman.

*Family catechesis is about the nurturing and maturing in faith that happens formally and informally within a family system at every stage of life. Family catechesis considers both the individual and the family group itself ... It recognises that family members have needs and gifts. ... Family catechesis deals with the conversion process which happens as family members live together in community and move through the family life cycle. The ministry of catechesis can bring light as well as the challenge of the Gospel to the work of the family agenda. The*
Family agenda can illumine the significance of the Gospel message in different ways through the various stages of the family life cycle.

(Purcell and Weithman cited in Roberto 1990, p.20).

Family catechesis is therefore concerned with the maturing of faith within the context of the home. It focuses on the growth in faith within the family as a unit as well as each individual (Purcell and Weithman in Roberto 1990; Saris 1980; Hill and Hill 1980; Gallagher 1980; Iannone and Iannone1980). “Family catechesis works on the principle ‘first practise, then talk’” (Saris 1980, p.141). The task is formative.

[It helps] (1) the family to grow in faith by providing opportunities for a family to understand and live the message of the Gospel; (2) to help strengthen the bonds within the family and with other families; (3) to enable families to pray and worship together; and (4) to motivate families to serve, care for and nurture others.

(Gallagher 1982, p.165)

Family catechesis provides, for Christian parents, a way of nurturing the faith of their children through the whole ethos of family life.

Evangelisation

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) “designates evangelization as the umbrella description of the Church’s whole mission in the world and situates catechesis as one function within it” (Groome 2001, p.20). Paul VI wrote:

For the Church, evangelisation means bringing the Good News into all strata of humanity, and through its influence, transforming humanity from within and making it new.

(Evangelii Nuntiandi 1975, #18)

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) claims that evangelisation is the process through which the Church carries forth the Good News throughout the entire world (1997, #46–49). It distinguishes two basic elements of the evangelisation process; Christian witness and ministry of the Word. Christian witness involves relating with others, being involved in their lives and needs. “Good witness, therefore, cannot be achieved from a distance or by conveying some sense of religious or moral superiority” (Holohan 1999, p.18). Ministry of the Word refers to the human words used to speak of the works of God. One way baptised people exercise the ministry of the Word is through catechesis (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #50 and #142). Essentially evangelisation, in the understanding promoted in the General Directory for Catechesis (1997) is “about Christians ever
renewing themselves to live their faith as credible witnesses of the world (Groome 2001, p.19).

**Religious Education**

Religious Education, on the other hand, is about the knowledge of faith beliefs and practices and thus follows an educational process. Religious education is concerned with meaning (Holohan 1999; Purnell 1995; Groome 1980). Its aim is to help students understand the religious meaning of their own experiences. Its contribution is to hand on the Christian faith by seeking to help students to learn the teachings of the Gospel and “to develop ‘a sense of the nature of Christianity’ and of ‘how Christians are trying to live their lives’ ” (The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School 1988, #69). The difference between catechesis and religious education is an important distinction to the understanding of this study.

This study is contextualised by the Catholic faith. While Catholicism is not the only Christian tradition, it is my tradition. As such I choose to work within it, since the diversity of Catholic religious thought and expression is sufficient diversity for any one study.
Chapter Two

The Literature Review

Those who have given life to children and have enriched them with the gift of Baptism have the duty continually to nourish it.
(General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #177)

The framework of this paper lies with the understanding that “the real motivating forces in a child’s life, which become the child’s real religion, are taught all day long in the home even though parents may not realise they are teaching religion” (Girzone 1989, p.8). Over the years much has been written on the religious education of children within the Catholic school context. There has been much less written about how faith is nurtured within the home (Morse 1996).

Background

Dolores Curran (1978) in her book, In the beginning there were parents, shares her perspective as to why Catholic Americans have lost their confidence and ability to pass on their faith to their children. She comments that in the past, one’s faith was not a private matter but one that was embedded in daily life. “They spread the Good News from generation to generation as easily as they planted and harvested the seed” (Curran 1978, p.5). She points out that these people were not highly educated and had no formal faith education yet they lived their faith and were able to pass the faith traditions to their children. The whole culture was centred on the life of the Church community and this went unchanged for many centuries. As immigration was opened, many of these people moved out of the villages of Europe to a new world. Being able to adapt to a new land was at times difficult because it was counter to the culture that once was so sacred to them. Now they had to embrace a new culture in order to belong. For many the Church was a place to make sense of this new culture and at the same time preserve some of their faith traditions. The Catholic Church took it upon itself to preserve the faith in the new culture by providing Catholic schools for the religious education of Catholic children (Curran 1978, p.5). As a result the Catholic school became the centre for faith development of children and not the home.

Curran (1978, p.6) proposes that with the development of Catholic schools, what began to emerge unintentionally, no doubt, was the belief that the religious sisters and brothers were the experts in teaching about the faith. Faith was no longer seen
as a lived experience which was modelled firstly in the home as it had been for the previous generation. Faith quickly became associated with doctrines and teachings of the Church, and parents no longer saw themselves as the primary educators of faith of their children, as that was now the responsibility of the Catholic school and of the parish. As a result, “eventually parents forgot how to pass on the Word to their children. They forgot how to pray together as a family. They became embarrassed to sing together. They no longer spoke about God or religion comfortably” (Curran 1978, p.6). In other words the “tribal culture” where once religious beliefs were expressed as part of the overall social group was now slowly becoming extinct (Doherty 1997: Drane and Drane 1995; Finely and Finley 1995). Australia, even though more recent in foundation as a country, has a similar history to that of the American experience as described by Curran (1978). In the following pages the Australian perspective will be further developed.

**Approach to the Literature**

The literature review will be approached from four perspectives: historical, theological, sociological, and pastoral. Within each perspective is a strong foundation for family catechesis. The historical perspective will provide the background on how the Church over time has viewed the role of parents in the nurturing of their children. A brief account will be given of the various Church documents which have influenced and shaped the theology and understanding of the Church on the role of the parents in relation to the faith of their children. The theological perspective explores relevant Church documents since the Second Vatican Council which have renewed and reformed the understanding of the role of parents as the first and foremost educators of their children. The sociological perspective presents the influences on society which have impinged on the family, the role of the family in the faith and religious development of children. The emphasis in the final part of this Chapter is on the pastoral considerations which are crucial to the nurturing the faith of children within the context of family life.

**Historical Perspective**

Throughout history, the Catholic Church has regarded the family as the most influential factor in shaping and nurturing the faith of each generation. Within the family, parents are considered as the first and primary educators of their children in faith (Proctor 1996, Gallagher 1982).
The discussion in this section concentrates on issues pertinent to the historical development of the nurturing of faith within the home. It examines the influence of the Judaeo–Christian tradition in the understanding of the home as the place for nurturing faith; the influence of the reformation on the view of the role of the family in the Catholic Church, and the response from the Council of Trent; and the influence of the introduction of compulsory education within Europe on the nurturing of faith within the home will also be outlined. Finally the renewal of the Second Vatican Council will be discussed along with the response from the Australian Church to parents in the role as faith nurturers.

**The Role of the Family within the Early Church**

The Christian understanding of the role of the family emerges from the Jewish tradition in which the family is seen as the first teacher of the faith. It is the home and not the synagogue that is the centre of religious life. In the Jewish tradition the home is the place for nurturing the faith and the parents are considered to be the primary catechists (Proctor 1996, Finley 1993; Gallagher 1982). “The primary teaching method is the observance of the rituals for the Sabbath and for special holidays or feast days” (Proctor 1996, p.43).

For the early Christians too, parents were the primary educators of their children. The home was the primary place where the early Christians met to pray and celebrate the Eucharist before they moved into Churches (Finely 1993, p.36). There are no clear guidelines in the New Testament that address the role of parents in teaching faith to their children (Proctor 1996, p.45). St Paul gives some instructions to the early Church of the role of parents in his writings to Timothy (1Tim 3:4 and12). Paul outlines one traditional model of how most children learn their faith when he describes Timothy as possessing “a faith that lived first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and now, I am sure, lives in you” (cited in Proctor 1996, p.45). Proctor claims that “by this remark Paul implies that parents and grandparents play a significant role in the spiritual development of their children” (1996, p.45).
The First Centuries

As the Church established itself in the first centuries there were still no specific guidelines addressing how parents were to instruct their children in the faith. What had been established was that “the Christian nurture of children was the parents' fundamental duty, a duty which could not be delegated” (Westerhoff 1980, p.85). So, “during the first five centuries of the Church there were three major educational influences on children; the family, the liturgy and the community” Gallagher (1982, p.166). These influences were consistent with the model being attributed to the Jewish tradition which had a well established system for teaching scriptures, moral behaviours, rituals, and values (Proctor 1996, p.44).

A movement is noted in the sixth century when St Augustine specifies a broadening of the parental role as the primary educators of the faith to include the godparents. The role of the godparent was significant in preparing and presenting the child for baptism. They were allocated the task of teaching children, who were old enough to answer for themselves, the foundational prayers such as the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. If a child was not old enough to answer for themselves then the godparents would speak on their behalf. The instruction given by the sponsor or godparent took place in the home and it was assumed that it was not part of an organised program for religious instruction (Proctor 1996, p.46).

By the twelfth century, the responsibility of passing on the faith traditions of the Church was given to the godparents, as parents were seen to have neglected their God–given responsibility of preserving the faith (Westerhoff and Edwards 1981). The godparents had the responsibility for teaching children the basic formularies of the faith and “had the duty of inculcating the young with essential moral teachings of the Church” (Gatch 1981, p.88). This continued in a variety of ways within different communities until the sixteenth century. It is interesting to note that at the same time there was an emerging movement within the Church that saw “raising children and teaching them … as a less important than [vocation] the spiritual disciplines of the celibate religious orders” (Proctor 1996, p.47).

The Reformation

A major concern during the period of the Reformation was the perception that parents had continued to neglect their primary responsibility of educating their
children in the faith. The sixteenth century reformers, such as Martin Luther [1483–1546], founder of the German reformation, “looked to the family as the basic building block of human society” (Haugaard 1981, p.131). Reformers recognised once again that the parents were the primary educators of the faith and acknowledged that the best place for ‘religious instruction’ was within the context of the home. Luther went so far as to proclaim that “no one should become a father unless he is able to instruct his children … so that he may bring up true Christians” (Westerhoff 1980, p.86). The translation of the scriptures and liturgies into the vernacular enabled people in the reformed Churches to access the scriptures that became the tool for religious instruction within the home. Luther developed his own catechism as the standard text for religious instruction, which all who were true to the faith were required to learn by rote; hence the role of the parents became more of a teaching role.

The reformers, in general, held believing parents responsible for their children’s catechesis. … Christian faith was to be nurtured in the home, not only by parental love and example, but also by explicit and systematic examination and exposition.

(Haugaard 1981, p.135)

However, disillusioned with the efforts of parents in carrying out their responsibility effectively, Luther then established schools in which children would learn the foundations of faith by studying the catechism (Haugaard 1981, p.137). In establishing his case for Christian nurture in the schools Luther remarks:

Even if parents had the ability and the desire to do it [religious instruction] themselves, they have neither the time nor the opportunity for it, what with their other duties and the care of the household.

(Haugaard 1981, p.137)

The Council of Trent [1545–1563]
The Catholic Church also had concerns about the neglect of families in passing on the faith traditions. At the Council of Trent [1545–1563] the Church saw the need to fight the rise of protestant popularity and to ensure the preservation of the Catholic faith. In an effort to address these problems, the Catholic Church took the opposite approach to that of the Protestant Churches. To ensure the preservation of the faith, new orders of religious men and women were instituted to run schools so that children could receive “proper” religious education outside the family. Two such groups were the Ursulines [1535] and the Jesuits [1540] (Bryce 1981, pp.211–213). Groups of laity emerged also whose main purpose was to provide organised religious instruction mainly on Sundays before or after Mass. The rise of
professional religious educators led to a situation where “in the mid sixteenth century, the parish was at the centre of religious life … not the home. The Parish Priest replaced parents as the one ultimately responsible for teaching children about their faith” (Finely 1993, pp.36–37). “Since the Council of Trent [1545–1563] the Church has lost a family dimension in its understanding of religious life … we have now relegated most of our religious life to the parish to the detriment of the family” (Finely and Finely 1995, p.13). In light of this movement, the family was no longer regarded as the place in which faith was nurtured. The prime responsibility for the religious development of children was now the responsibility of the emerging Catholic schools.

**The Introduction of Compulsory Education**

After the Council of Trent [1545-1563] until the late 1800s, life in Europe was changing rapidly. Universal schooling and compulsory education were introduced for children between the ages of seven and approximately twelve years in many European countries, such as Germany (1606), Denmark (1721), England (1802), France (1882) and some parts of America (1882) (Hall in Bryce 1981, p.206). With the emergence of schools the poor were becoming more educated and were able to be socially mobile, thus the middle class was growing (Bryce 1981, p.206).

With the event of compulsory education becoming more the norm, Church authorities became more persistent in preserving the faith. As the threat of state—run schools began to emerge, papal encyclicals concentrated on the importance of setting up Catholic schools with the purposes of preservation of the faith and the moral education of Catholic children. The catechism became the main text for formal religious instruction. Learning the catechism by rote became the main method of instruction in the faith. This method continued until the 1960s in the Catholic Church.

Pius IX, in his *Instruction of the Holy Office to the Bishops of the United States*, November 24, 1875 clearly stated that those who were responsible for teaching the faith were to preserve the Catholic teachings.

> [P]arish Priests and missionaries will teach the catechism with great attention and will take special care to explain the truths of the faith and of morals that are opposed by the incredulous and heterodox.

(#63)
In the same document parents who did not send their children to Catholic schools were addressed. This group of parents was told that they could not celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and thus, as was the requirement of the time, were excluded from receiving the Eucharist.

This instruction and this necessary Christian education of their children is often neglected by those parents who allow their children to frequent schools where it is impossible to avoid the loss of souls or who, notwithstanding the existence of a well-organised neighbouring Catholic school or the possibility of having children educated elsewhere in a Catholic school, entrust them to publics without sufficient reason and without having taken the necessary precautions to avoid danger of perversion; it is a well-known fact that, according to Catholic moral teaching, such parents, should they persist in their attitude, cannot receive absolution in the Sacrament of Penance.

(#63)

This statement clearly shows a shift in the responsibility for the nurturing of faith from the home to the Catholic school, further emphasising the movement from home to Church.

Leo XIII in his encyclical Officio Sanctissimo (Common Duties and Interests) December 22, 1887 to the bishops of Bavaria, addressed the duties and rights of parents. The document “urges education of children under the auspices of Church warns against freemasonry” (Carlen 1990, p.49). It recognised parents as the educators of their children in faith, however, it also states that if they are unable to carry out this duty effectively then they were obliged to send their children to teachers authorised by the Church.

Hence, let parents reflect that, while they are under the grave obligation to support their children, they have also the other much important duty of bringing them up in the nobler life that concerns the soul. If they themselves cannot ensure this, they must allow themselves to be substituted, but in such a manner that the children receive and learn the necessary religious doctrine from approved teachers.

(Officio Sanctissimo 1887, #112)

In a later encyclical (Christian as Citizens) January 10, 1890, Leo XIII sums up the rights and duties of the parents. The encyclical acknowledges again that parents are the primary educators of the faith of their children. It calls parents to preserve the faith by instructing parents to protect their children from secular influences. The call of previous encyclicals to send children to a Catholic school is also reiterated.
By nature parents have a right to training of their children, but with this added duty that the education and instruction of the child be in accord with the end of which, by, God's blessing, it was begotten. Therefore it is the duty of parents to make every effort to prevent any invasion of their rights in this matter, and to make absolutely sure that the education of the children remain under their own control keeping with their Christian duty, and above all to refuse to send them to those schools in which there is danger of imbibing the deadly poison of impiety. (Sapientiae Christiana 1890, #42)

Parents, within this period of Church history, were instructed by the Church to have their children educated by religious within Catholic schools. Parents were no longer regarded as the first and foremost nurturers of the faith. The understanding of the early Church of the role of parents had been hijacked in this period by the Church’s commitment to preserve the faith.

**The Early Twentieth Century**

Entering the twentieth century, the theory of Horace Bushnell, an American religious educator in the Protestant Church, was drawing attention within Protestant circles. “For Bushnell, the true function of parenting was to nurture the faith that is already at work within children” (Proctor 1996, p.50). This new perspective claimed that children develop faith through the nurture of the family and the community of faith. Bushnell “tended to emphasise the catechesis of the individual in the context of the family, assisted by the insights of psychology and the general understanding of human nature and human development” (Booty 1981, p.280). “It is through our parental example that our children’s faith is determined” (Bushnell in Westerhoff 1980, p.87). He opened the door to discovering how faith was actually passed on to children.

Meanwhile the Catholic Church also made an attempt to re-establish the understanding that the first educators of the faith are the parents. The Church maintained that the three influential societies necessary for the transmission of the faith were the family, the Church, and the State. Here family takes precedence over the State. In 1929 Pope Pius XI released what is considered to be one of the most significant pre–Vatican II documents of the 20th century on the discussion of the role of parents in the Christian education of their children. The encyclical, *Divini Illius Magistrii* (Education of the Redeemed Man) December 1929 “strongly stated the family’s responsibility for the religious education of children” (Westerhoff 1980, p.88). In addressing ‘those who educate’ the encyclical states:
In the first place the Church’s mission of education is in wonderful agreement with that of the family, for both proceed from God, and in a remarkably similar manner. God directly, in the natural order, fecundity, which is the principle of education of life, hence also the principle of education for life, together with authority, the principle order.

(Divini Illius Magistri 1929, #257)

This encyclical was published in English under the title The Christian Education of Youth and became the authoritative statement on Catholic education (Fogarty 1959, p.385). Many scholars suggest that this encyclical was timely as it re–established within Catholicism the true Christian basis of education. With the event of state–run education systems which were thoroughly secular in many countries, the Christian way of being was seen to be under threat. Pius XI gave the world his new encyclical letter to “point out the dangers and to re–establish the true Christian basis of education” (Fogarty 1959, p.385). He also reminded parents that they were the first teachers and education would be efficacious in proportion to their teaching and example. “According to the divine plan, the parents are the first educators of their children … parents should, therefore, give the best time they have at their disposal” (Divini Illius Magistri 1929, #379). This encyclical was to be the foundation of the Second Vatican Council’s document on Christian education, Gravissium Educationis (1965).

However, even as late as 1951, many Church documents still echoed the fear that parents were neglecting their God–given responsibility of passing on the faith traditions of the Church to their children. Proctor remarks that at this time “the locus of religious education had almost totally shifted away from the family to the Church school with its formal and organised programs” (1996, p.50). In addressing the role of the educator at the Inter American Congress of Catholic Education August 15, 1951, educators were instructed “here is the first and very serious task incumbent on the Catholic educator of today: to make up for the deficiencies of home training” (The Image of God 1951, #547). In relation to parents, most documents at this point reflected mainly the role of parents as the ones to provide children with a healthy environment that will safeguard the children’s faith, religious and moral development so that the child would be able to take his or her place in society.

Until the Second Vatican Council, Catholic schools tended to assume dominant roles in the education of faith in such places as Australia and the United States. Parents were not fully trusted by the Church to adequately educate their children in
the truths of the faith and consequentially parents were becoming less involved in
the faith development of their children.

History of Faith Education in Australia

Faith education in Australia was heavily influenced by the trends which arose in both
Europe (1600–1800) and the USA (1800). Australia was establishing itself as a
colony when Europe was experiencing rapid change, revolutions, and unrest. In
early Australian homes “the only provision for religious education for Catholic
children was that which was provided by the parents. Some Catholic families met in
each others’ homes to pray, sing and sustain each other in the faith” (Ryan and
Malone 1996, p.31). These Catholics were poor and had to fight hard to keep their
religion alive in a predominantly Protestant culture. Yet some new fears arose; “one
of the greatest perceived threats was the new secular school system which, they
[Australian bishops] believed, was designed to undermine the religious ethos of the
Catholic people” (Dwyer 1996, p.1).

In Australia, as was true of most of Europe and America at this time, the purpose of
the Catholic school was to “preserve the religious culture of the Catholic people
[and] also to be a means of their rising from poverty in which so many of them found
themselves” (Dwyer 1996, p.2). The Catholic schools in Australia had a closeness
with the poor and were successful due to the hard work of both the members of
religious congregations and of parents. Parents “in turn were promised a
preservation of faith and, where possible, social mobility” (Dwyer 1996, p.2).

Education in Australia 1788–1900

As State run schools began to surface, funding from the governments for Church
run schools was slowly withdrawn. In 1872, in Victoria, an Act of Parliament
abolished aid to Church schools. In 1880, in New South Wales, aid to Church
schools was abolished through the Public Instruction Act. Eventually government
aid to Church schools was withdrawn in all Australian colonies. Bishops within the
Colony became concerned about the secular influence on the moral education of
Catholic children and became more persistent in preserving the faith. To deal with
this concern of the secular influence on Catholic children, the Catholic bishops
issued a statement in 1869 making it clear to parents that Catholic children were to
attend Catholic schools.
The only schooling acceptable to Catholics ... was one which be conducted in a religious atmosphere that nourished the Catholic faith. Secular education of the kind offered in state schools was unacceptable.  

(Dwyer and English 1988, p.57)

With the elimination of government aid, the Catholic community was not able to pay the teachers a just salary, buildings were in need of repair and “there was not a great deal of parental interest in education” (Dwyer and English 1990, p.77). One way to cope with the financial burden was to replace teachers with religious sisters and brothers and they were “almost without exception from Ireland” (Turner 1992, p.162).

The decision was made to persevere with a Catholic system. In order to keep Catholic schools open enrolments were crucial. In 1885 in the First Plenary Council of Australian bishops relied on such documents as the Instruction of the Holy Office to the Bishops of the United States, November 24, 1875, (cf. pp.18–19) to threaten parents with refusal of Holy Communion if they chose to send their children to schools run by the state system. “Catholic parents were obliged to send their children to Catholic schools and those who sent their children to state schools without cause were to be denied absolution in the confessional” (Dixon 1996, p.6).

In some dioceses, bishops gained from the Pope the right to offer rewards to the obedient Catholic laity, the elite, who could seek out those parents and whose children did not attend Catholic schools and urge them to see the error of their ways.  

(Turner 1992, p.162)

Furthermore, it was made explicit as a principle of the Provincial Council of 1844 that a primary or elementary school was to be established in every mission where there was a Priest (Fogarty 1959, p.309). The Second Plenary Council 1905 adopted the Penny Catechism as the religious syllabus for primary schools.

In some Australian colonies the bishop forbade Priests from visiting State schools as a protest to state school education. This meant that those children who for whatever reason were attending state schools and children who lived in isolated areas were not receiving any form of religious instruction outside the home. As it became more evident that these children were not being instructed in the faith some Priests and lay Catholics arranged a suitable place for these children to be instructed. Priests were asked to provide catechists to undertake this responsibility. In isolated areas children were instructed after Sunday Mass or at another suitable time.
Progress of Catholic Education in Australia 1900–1930s

The twentieth century was a time of rapid expansion for the Australian Church. At the First Australian Catholic Congress 1900 the cardinal and bishops of the colonies continued to push for Catholic children to be educated in Catholic schools. The cardinal and bishops clearly stated that the “Christian education of a people cannot be accomplished at home and that therefore it must be accomplished in the school” (cited in Turner 1992, p.230). At this point, “parishes offered catechism classes in Sunday schools [for adults as well as children]. The aim was to have a common form of religious instruction between home, school and parish” (Ryan 1997, p.23). The use of the catechism meant that parents were able to participate in the education of their children and at the same time they too were being educated in the faith. “The simple catechism gave parents confidence that the interpretation of the faith was orthodox, answers were clear and accessible” (Ryan 1997, p.3).

The 1905 Victorian Education Act decreed that all teachers in Victoria had to be trained. In response to this decree a number of the teaching congregations established their own training colleges. At the same time the bishop ordered that Catholic schools conform to the standards laid down for the state. The Third Plenary Council 1905 repeated the injunction that the religious syllabus for primary schools was the Penny Catechism and this was reinforced again at the Fourth Plenary Council in 1937.

The population of the Catholic schools in the early to middle 20th century increased rapidly and many more Catholic schools were built throughout the country. Primary schools became the core of parish life. The Fourth Plenary Council made reference to the encyclical Divini Illius Magistri (1929). Pius XI reminded parents that they were the first teachers and education would be efficacious in proportion to their teaching and example. This point about the influence of the home was instantaneously taken up by the Australian bishops. It became a priority to educate girls for “the proper education of our females depends the spiritual and temporal welfare of the family and, by consequent necessity, that of society” (Bishop Shiel cited in Fogarty 1959, p.386). Consequently, the Fourth Plenary Council retained the 1869 prohibition of the sacraments against Catholic parents who sent their children to the state school to ensure that children were properly educated in the faith.
Religious Education of Children in Isolated Areas

Despite all efforts made by the bishops, two large groups of Catholic children were not receiving any form of religious instruction. These were children who for whatever reason were attending the state schools and those who lived in isolated areas. Priests were asked by the bishops to provide catechists to undertake the religious instruction of these children. As this catechesis became difficult some bishops suggested that the families take on the role of catechist and educate their own children.

In Western Australia in 1923 Fr J.T. McMahon initiated a correspondence course known as ‘Religion by Post’ for children living in isolated areas. Fr McMahon (1936, p.77) states that the main objective of the correspondence course “is communication with each child”. His idea was to bring to Catholic parents and children some support and to assure them that the Church had not forgotten them. The scheme was carried out by the religious congregations. They would send a personal letter to each child monthly with an instruction. These instructions included ordinary prayers for the children to learn and the truths of the faith. Other Australian states began to run similar courses. By the end of 1935 in New South Wales, a year after it had been introduced in that state, 14,000 children had enrolled (Turner 1992, p.246).

In 1925 Fr McMahon introduced another initiative, the Religious Holiday Camps. The aim of the camps was “to provide a Catholic atmosphere for the children (Turner 1992, p.246). The camps occurred during the holidays when “children board in Convent Schools in country districts for two or three weeks, during which they are instructed and prepared for the reception of the Sacraments” (McMahon 1936, p.5). The Sacrament of Confirmation was also made available for those who were of age. The camps were a mixture of organised sport activities and time for instruction and prayer.

The Influx of Post War Immigration 1940–1962

With the influx of immigration after the Second World War there was a notable increase in the Catholic population. In only a few years many Catholic schools had a larger number of immigrant children than children who were Australian born. This placed stresses on Catholic schools. Many parishes took it on themselves to build new classrooms and even new schools without government assistance. The aim was to provide for every Catholic child a place in a Catholic school. A further
problem noted by Dwyer and English (1990, p.82) was that the number of people entering the religious life was beginning to decline, especially in the 1960s, and thus once again the Catholic schools relied on lay teachers to staff the schools. The catechism continued to be the main tool for religious instruction. During this time the Catholic school was still the main educator of the faith for children and the Church still lamented that parents were not taking seriously their fundamental duty and obligation of educating their children.


The Catholic Church was to experience a renewal through the efforts of the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council is seen by most Catholics as “the most important event in the life of the Catholic Church during the twentieth century. The Council has … had a powerful impact on the human family throughout the world” (Joseph Cardinal Bernardin in Flannery 1996, p.xxii). Pope John XXIII “had observed the need to provide an update of Church practice and language to more adequately address the modern world” (Huebsch 1997, p.53).

In the renewal demanded by the Second Vatican Council the Church reclaimed the right of parents as the first and primary educators of the faith. The first document of the Second Vatican Council that referred to the family was Lumen Gentium (1964). Here the family is referred to as the “domestic Church” a concept which derived from the Jewish tradition in which the family is the central place for nurturing faith.

\[
\text{The family is, so to speak, the domestic Church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children.}\]

\[
\text{(Lumen Gentium 1964, #11)}\]

The call for the family to be recognised as the domestic Church gave a renewed insight to the purpose of the role of the parents. The Catholic school had played the major role so far in educating the children in the faith. The Council wanted to emphasise that the nurturing of faith is more than the learning of religious facts in isolation from the experiences of life. The Council recognised the value of the traditions of the early Church in which the family together with the worshipping community were the main instruments for nurturing the faith.
It is particularly significant that the Second Vatican Council discussed the family not in a separate document but in the context of all its Church documents. It’s as if the Council said that if we are going to talk about the Church we must talk about family life too. Also, we can’t talk about family life without talking about the Church.

(Finely and Finely 1995, p.13)

Other early documents of the Second Vatican Council referred to the family as “the principal school of social virtues which is necessary to every society” (Gravissimum Educationis 1965, #3) and “the primary [basic] cell of society given by God himself (Apostolicam Actuositatem 1965, #11). The Council claimed that:

The family is the place where different generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonise the right of the individuals with other demands of social life; as such it constitutes the basis of society.

(Gaudium et Spes 1965, #52)

In re-establishing the understanding of the family as the ‘domestic Church’, the Council was strong in recognising that it is within the family that children come to understand their faith. The Second Vatican Council recalled that since parents have given life to their children God has entrusted them with the responsibility for the education of their children in faith. The Council proclaimed this role is of such importance that it cannot be adequately substituted as it is connected with the transmission of life.

The role of the parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.

(Gravissimum Educationis 1965, #3)

The Church called the family the ideal place in which the faith of children is to be nurtured and nourished and a place conducive to promoting Christian values. The documents refer to the home as the first educational environment of children, and urge parents to set good Christian example to their children through living their own lives in a true Christian spirit. As these Christian values permeate through the life of the home they will become the norm for daily living.

It is therefore the duty of the parent to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow–men which will promote an integral, personal and social education of their children.

(Gravissimum Educationis 1965, #3)

This understanding of the role of the family in the life of the Church was reiterated in subsequent documents of Paul VI and John Paul II.
The Christian Family, as the ‘domestic Church’, also makes up a natural and fundamental school for formation in the faith: father and mother receive from the sacrament of matrimony the grace and the ministry of Christian education of their children, before whom they bear witness and to whom they transmit both human and religious values.

(Christifideles Laici, 1989, #62)

In the writings and speeches of John Paul II, the family emerges as a strong theme within the concerns of the Church. In an effort to raise the consciousness of parents of their privileged role in the Church he brings to mind the renewal of the Second Vatican Council in regard to the family. In Familiaris Consortio (1981), John Paul II considers the role of the Christian family in the modern world. “He sees the family’s apostolate as being exercised in the first place within each individual family” (Gregory 1988, p.39). He emphasises that the parents have a God–given duty to educate their children in the faith because they are the bearers of life. He sees the family home as the first community children experience. It is within this community that they learn the meaning of love and in turn how to love others. Familiaris Consortio (1981) states clearly the Church’s view about the family and society. On the family it states:

The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.

(Familiaris Consortio 1981, #42)

John Paul II reminds parents that they are the ones entrusted with the raising and education of their children. One of the key ways parents nurture faith is through their witness of living the Gospel values.

Through this witness families become tools for evangelisation. As family members accept the Gospel challenges and faith is nurtured and matures the document suggest that the family becomes ‘an evangelising community’.

(Familiaris Consortio 1981, #52)

In Christifideles Laici (1989), John Paul II reminds parents once again that their role in educating their children is irreplaceable and thus should be taken seriously and with care.

The lay faithful’s duty to society primarily begins in marriage and in the family. This duty can only be fulfilled adequately with the conviction of the unique and irreplaceable value that the family has in the development of society and the Church herself.

(Christifideles Laici 1989, #40)
The Christian Family, in The Teaching of John Paul II (1990), contains many dialogues delivered by the Pope on the role of parents as prime educators of their children in the faith. Most of the dialogues are taken from John Paul II’s most important document on this issue, Familiaris Consortio (1981). One of the dialogues was given at the visit of John Paul II to Australia in 1986. At his homily at Belmont Park Racecourse, Perth, in Western Australia (22–23 November 1986), the Pope restated the role in the family in the life of the Church by quoting extensively from Familiaris Consortio (1981) and early Vatican II documents already discussed in this section.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994, #2223–2226), while making no new contributions, reaffirms and restates what had been presented in earlier documents on the role and mission of the family in the contemporary Church. The General Directory for Catechesis (1997), the most recent document addressing the role of the family as the source of nurture of the faith in the life of the Church, refers to the family as “an environment or means of growth in faith” (#255). It again reminds the Church that parents are the primary educators in the faith and that the community, which the family forms, is a domestic Church where “the Gospel is transmitted and from which it extends” (#255). This document calls the family to catechesis rather than religious education as mandated in Catechesi Tradendae (1979). These two documents will be further discussed in the theological perspective.

Outcomes from the Second Vatican Council for Australia

With the renewed spirit of the Second Vatican Council, it became obvious that the Church recognised that most of the faith development of a person did not take place in the school or the parish but rather in the home (Ryan 1997; Flynn 1979). For countries such as Australia and the United States of America this was a new way of being Church. Until this point Australia and the United States of America had poured money and effort into Catholic schools in order to preserve the faith. After the renewed call by the Church to reclaim the right of parents as the first and primary educators of the faith, the Catholic Church in the United States took note of the influence of the family on the faith development of the child. The bishops chose to redirect the resources of the Church from the Catholic schools into parish-based catechetical programs, appointing Directors of Religious Education (DRE) to oversee the programs. These programs were catechetical in nature, addressing not only the needs of the children but also the needs of the parents as suggested in the documents on education and catechesis of the Second Vatican Council. With this
redirection of energy came a decline in the numbers of new Catholic schools in America. “No new Catholic schools have been established in the past twenty years … there has been no serious attempt to re-establish US Catholic Schools to the same extent as before” (Ryan 1997, p.149).

The bishops in Australia, on the other hand, chose to keep the Catholic schools as the prime source of religious education. Graham observes “the Australian Church kept improving its Catholic schools and only recently returned to the family question in earnest” (1994, p.4). He also argues strongly that because most of the resources of the Australian Church are being poured into the Catholic school system little time and few resources are being made available “to provide support and infrastructure for family religious education.” Ryan concludes, “this neglect of family education [in Australia] ignored the official Church directives which gave primacy to families in education” (1997, p.147). The Church in Australia did not relinquish the dominant role of educating children in the faith from the Catholic schools.

It was not until 1970s that the Catholic Church in Australia recognised a variety of family concerns pertaining to family life, one of which was family catechesis. During the 1970’s in response to changing pastoral patterns, social changes in the family, refinding of the parental role in religious education, family ministry, as it was called, grew in significance. (Treston 1982, p.20)

Different styles of family catechesis were initiated, resources were developed, and the focus of sacrament programmes became family–based giving an impetus to family catechesis. However, the Church in Australia was not successful in sustaining such an initiative. Many dioceses made some attempts but family catechesis did not become an established ministry.

In summary, throughout its history the Church has assumed a diversity of positions regarding the role of parents as the prime educators of the faith of their children. From time to time the emphasis changed from assigning a significant role to parents and the family to other times when teaching responsibility rested on lay persons, such as godparents and then the Catholic school. The early Church based its understanding of the role of the family on the Hebrew heritage that faith is taught first within the context of the home. By the Middle Ages the Church authority was becoming disillusioned by the neglect of parents in their duty of passing on the faith
tradition to their children and therefore gave godparents responsibility for teaching children the basic rules of the faith. For the Churches of the Reformation the focus shifted to the instruction of adults. At the same time the Catholic Church was consumed with the notion of preserving the faith and this gave rise to religious orders to educate children in the faith outside the home. The Catholic school continued to be the main educator of children in the faith. This practice continued until the renewal of the Second Vatican Council which urged the Church to reclaim the role of parents as the primary educators of the faith of their children.

**Theological Perspective**

A second perspective that will be explored in this Chapter is the theological understanding with regard to family catechesis. “One of the objectives of family catechesis is to enable families to discover that spirituality is inherent in family life. Spirituality in this context refers to the ... recognition of the extraordinary in the ordinary, the presence of God” (Gallagher 1982, p.167). Over the years much has been written and debated in the legal arena about the rights and duties of family, of parents and of children. For Christians the duties and rights are “primarily theological, and their theological formation is clear: ‘Follow me’ (Mark 1:17) that is, model your life after mine” (Lawler 2002, p.204). The call for parents to be the first educators of the faith of their children is based on Christian action more than “pious Christian talk” (Lawler 2002, p.204). The challenge of being a Christian family is “to provide active hospitality [and] to ‘promote justice’. The family is to manifest Christ’s presence in the world” (Lawler 2002, p.205).

In discussing the theological perspective of family catechesis two approaches are considered; one is scriptural and the other relates to Church documents. This study will pay particular attention to the theological perspectives of family catechesis within post conciliar Church documents.

**Theology of Family in Scripture**

From a theological viewpoint family catechesis seeks to give family members insights into their lives which will help them see things in a way that brings meaning to existence. The scriptures provide families with insights into how their lives are in intimate relationship with God. They “point to the God–life in the family” (Gallagher 1982, p.166). There are many images within scripture which pertain to the family. “One senses that the scripture writers could not think of a better way to tell people of
their intimate relationship with God than to use family images (Gallagher 1982, p.167). Balswick and Balswick (1989, p.27) claim that “through scripture we can know something of God’s ideal for family relationship.” Gallagher (1982, p.168) suggests “it [the scriptures] is certainly a place to begin.”

**Understanding of Family in the Old Testament**

*The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away.*

*(Deuteronomy 6:4–7)*

The Old Testament image of family is entrenched in the understanding that “God desires all humankind to be in relationship with the Creator as well as in relationship with one another” (Balswick and Balswick 1989, p.21). Examples from Old Testament scripture use family imagery to illustrate the intimate relationship God desires. “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son … Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk … I took them up in my arms … and I bend down to them and fed them” (Hosea 11:1–5). The imagery of God as a parent is the central message especially in the Book of Isaiah. God’s relationship for all people is further strengthened when the Old Testament writers also symbolise God as a mother: “Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, I will not forget you” (Isaiah 49:15).

Throughout the scriptures of the Old Testament God is in the role of parent, loving, forgiving, guiding and in intimate relationship with humankind.

*A reading of the Old Testament Scriptures reveals the cycle of Israel’s turning away from the true God and getting into difficulty, God’s reaching out and forgiving them, Israel's being reconciled into intended parent/child relationship, and Israel being blessed and renewed in their relationship to God.*

*(Balswick and Balswick 1989, p.23)*

Reflections on such passages affirm parents and enable them to identify elements of how family life fosters growth in faith.

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2 The New Revised Standard Version
**Understanding of Family in the New Testament**

The New Testament reveals a theology of family that is grounded in the understanding that the family is the domestic Church. This understanding comes from the Hebrews who believed that faith is taught first in the home. Proctor (1996, p.44) suggests that it was not necessary for Jesus to spell out a theology of family because it was ingrained within his cultural and religious experience.

*Jesus did not propose a method or system for religious instruction to be used by the Church. More specifically he gave no guidance to households or parents for teaching faith to children. It can be assumed, then, that Jesus expected such education to occur in much the same manner as that of the ancient Hebrew culture, namely, through family rituals and observances of the holy days and through the teaching in the synagogues.*

(Proctor 1996, p.44)

Gallagher (1982) advocates that even though the Gospels are scant on the family life of Jesus they do provide a blueprint for a healthy family life.

*Jesus constantly affirmed people; he made friends rather easily; he shared meals; he experienced confusion; he studied scripture and understood the patterns in them; he used a lot of common sense; he trusted and was betrayed. This is the stuff of family life. This is where holiness is found.*

(Gallagher 1982, p.168)

In the writings of the early Church there are several examples of Christian families as small Church communities within homes. St Paul speaks of house Churches (I Cor 16:19; Rom16:3–5) and that the following of Jesus was the guiding principle of those house Churches (Lawler 2002, p.209).

*In Romans 16:3–5, Paul cites couples such as Prisca and Aquila as living examples of the faith in the home. This couple welcomed other Christians into the circle for small communities of faith. In their life together, Prisca and Aquila embodied the message of Christ and communicated it to others.*

(Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.62)

The household codes of Colossians and Ephesians state the principle concisely:

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17–25: Eph 6:1–9).

*In these writings the family is exhorted, urged to love each other, forgive each other, worship together, and accomplish all the tasks of life in the name of Jesus Christ.*

(Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.62)
Theologians such as Heaney–Hunter (1996) believe that Ephesians 5 has become the foundation stone of the domestic Church, for it clearly states the ways in which Christian families can live out their calling to be like Christ in all they do. Families exhibit the love of Christ by their lives. Lawler adds, “a further specification is that this family following of Jesus is required for full Christian fruitfulness” (2002, p.209).

Two theologians of the early Church, John Chrysostom and Augustine, expounded on this principle. Chrysostom urged spouses to “make your home a Church” and to live your family lives “in Christ and in the Church” (cited in Lawler 2002, p.209). Augustine acknowledged the family as “a little Church, ecclesia domestica”, required of it respect for elders, love and justice and begged prayers from the entire domestic Church” (cited in Lawler 2002, p.209). The theology of the family as the domestic Church is grounded in the renewal of the Second Vatican Council.

**Theology of the Christian Family in Church Documents**

This section revisits some of the documents already discussed, and explores the theological underpinnings that the Church has named as essential to the process of sharing faith within the family. “The Second Vatican Council reintroduced to the Catholic theological tradition the designation of family as ‘domestic Church’ (Lawler 2002, p.209). Various documents of the Second Vatican Council, post conciliar documents and theological writings since have revived the notion of the family as the domestic Church, the “foundational Church where holiness is nurtured and lived out” (Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.59). Groome (2001, p.26) suggests “this implies that the family, within its own life, and as appropriate, should carry on the standard functions of Christian ministry”.

As already noted, the image ‘domestic Church’ has its roots in biblical references to the first Christian Churches and in the writings of the early fathers, like John Chrysostom, and Augustine. Contemporary theologians describe the ‘domestic Church’ as a way in which the family can embody Christ in the day–to–day experiences of life and are connected precisely as foundational Churches to the whole people of God (Heaney–Hunter 1996; Rubio 2003). “In principle, the domestic Church, ... incarnate ideals of reconciliation, justice, peace, hospitality, and prayer” (Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.59).
The ethos of every home should reflect a community of Christian faith, hope and love. And every family must practise compassion toward those in need and justice toward all, both within it and out toward the world. Because a family’s faith is more “caught than taught”, its common life is the curriculum. (Groome 2001, p.25)

Several documents of the Second Vatican Council allude to the sacredness of the family and the role of parents in the nurturing of faith of their children. These documents include *Lumen Gentium* (1964); *Apostolicam Acituisitatem* (1965); *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) and *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). Within these documents the idea that Church is initiated and flourishes within the home is a noteworthy teaching. These documents recognise that parents are “the architect of family life” (Amendolara 1994, p.16). The documents “discuss in detail ways in which Christian families function as domestic Churches and why this idea is important” (Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.63).

As already established, *Lumen Gentium* (1964, #11) declares parents as the first and foremost educators of their children; ‘pastors’ of the domestic Church. The document proclaims that Christian family life is prophetic.

In connection with the prophetic function, that state of life which is sanctified by a special sacrament obviously of great importance, namely, married and family life. For where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth.

(Lumen Gentium 1964, #35)

*Apostolicam Acituisitatem* (1965) describes the Christian family as “the first and vital cell of society”.

Christian husbands and wives are cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children, and all others in their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them by word and example for the Christian and apostolic life.

(Apostolicam Acituisitatem 1965, #11)
Apostolicam Acituositatem claims that the apostolate of the Christian family is crucial in the Church and society and that family life is the basis for the formation of the laity in mission and ministry in the Church (Apostolicam Acituositatem 1965, #30).

Post conciliar papal writings have echoed the understanding that the family is the domestic Church and that parents are the first educators of the faith of their children. Paul VI refers to Lumen Gentium as the basis for his approach to the family in Evangelii Nuntiandi.

At different moments in the Church’s history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of the: “domestic Church”. (Lumen Gentium 1964, #11). This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. (Evangelii Nuntiandi 1975, #71)

He declares that the family is “where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates” (Evangelii Nuntiandi 1975, #71).

John Paul II builds on these thoughts, particularly in his apostolic exhortation Familiaris Consortio (1981) where he presents a vision of the Christian family. He states that “the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial community, and for this reason too it can and should be called “the domestic Church” (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #21). Akin to Paul VI, he also declares that one of the primary functions of the Christian family is the transmission of Gospel values and the building of the kingdom of God (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #42). “The Christian family also builds up the Kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life” (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #50).

The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World

The role of the contemporary Christian family is made clear in Familiaris Consortio (1981). John Paul II advocates that Christian families are not to think of themselves as an exclusive sanctuary “but as a community with a mission that goes beyond itself” (Rubio 2003, p.105). In this document the Pope defines the family as “a community of life and love” that has four key tasks that provide the basis through which parents can carry out the mission of nurturing faith of their children. Each task has a community aspect. These tasks include: 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 (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #17).

The first task calls the family to “guard, reveal and communicate love” (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #17). John Paul II considers that love is the beginning point of the mission of the Christian family because “love among family members is primary … because it serves as the foundation for the rest of what the family does” (Rubio 2003, p.106).

The second task is ‘serving life’. Serving life means more than procreating; it includes the transmission of life and the transmission of faith through education. Here the Pope calls to mind the responsibility of parents to serve life by nurturing children and by bringing them up within the world and not parallel to the world. Parents are reminded of their responsibility to the education of their children (#36) with the task of instilling in children “the essential values of human life’ (#37). The Pope insists that parents teach their children about the Gospel as the passing on of faith is as important a task as passing on life (Rubio 2003, p.106).

The third task to which the Pope calls the family is to participate in the development of society. This task indicates that families “cannot stop short at procreation and education” (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #44). This task brings to mind the call from Apostolicam Actuositatem (1965, #11) that the Christian family is “the first and vital cell of society”. The Pope declares that the Christian family is an experience of communion and sharing (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #43) and asks families first, to practise hospitality, open their table and their home to those less fortunate; second, to become politically involved, assisting the transformation of society; and third, to practise the preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged manifesting “love of all poor, … the hungry, the poor, the old, the sick, drug victims and those who have no family (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #47). The third task invites families to be actively involved in the political and social concerns of society.

The final task calls families to share in the mission of the Church. “He again places emphasis on the public dimension of the family’s call [and] suggests that families must serve the Church as well as one another ” (Rubio 2003, p.107). As a domestic Church the family evangelises its members (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #50–52), gives witness to the world (#53) and uses its home as a sanctuary (#55–62). Significantly, the document names family prayer, moral teaching, and witness of
Christian love as means through which catechesis within the domestic Church is achieved. The final task of the family is to serve the wider community (#63–64).

These four tasks outlined by John Paul II are fundamental to what it means to be a Christian family in the modern world. “The genius of Catholic teaching on the family is that it refuses to limit families by telling them to just take care of their own”, the responsibility is to contribute to the ecclesial mission (Rubio 2003, p.107).

The Theology of the Christian Family and Catechesis

Catechesis is a ministry of the Church, which helps recognize and respond to that loving presence [God] ... Catechesis seeks the conversion of the whole person in community. ... Catechesis is a ministry in which the catechist acts as an activator, facilitator, leader and catalyst for the assembled community. The catechist leads the community to reflect critically on its life and then interpret the meaning of life through Scripture, through sacramental rituals, through doctrine, through the Church’s living and acts of justice... No one can program an experience of God nor faith growth. Those are grace filled gift moments. (Mongoven 2000, pp.107–111)

For the Christian family the ministry of catechesis begins within the home. Within the home the parents are the catechists who activate, facilitate, lead and are the catalyst for the family community. It is through reflecting on experiences of daily life in light of the Scriptures, worship and acts of justice that the family discovers the presence of God. The Christian family is asked to give witness to the world and uses its home as a sanctuary. Huebsch comments that the catechesis “is most powerful when parents take the time to explain to their children the religious significance or meaning of certain events including holy days and family moments, and of social, political or moral questions” (2003, p.90).

The first document, which is crucial in shaping a process for the sharing of faith within family life as a form of catechesis, is Catechesi Tradendae (1979) written by John Paul II. The essential understanding portrayed in this document is that “family catechesis … precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis” (#68).

The family’s catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. ... Education by parents, which should begin from the tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of Christian lives, a witness that is often
without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to–day life lived in accordance with the Gospel.

(Catechesi Tradendae 1979, #68)

This document adds that catechesis within family life is more effective when it honours moments which are part of everyday living.

This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of the great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events.

(Catechesi Tradendae 1979, #68)

John Paul II continued to encourage parents to nurture faith by setting good Christian examples to their children through living their own lives in a true Gospel spirit (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #17).

By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the Body of Christ – both the Eucharist and the ecclesial Body- they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of the bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. … The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.

(Familiaris Consortio 1981, #39–#42)

As these values permeate through the home they become the norm for daily living in the lives of their children.

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) calls the family to catechesis rather than religious education. The document describes the process for family catechesis as an on–going process which is grounded in the experience of family life.

It [family catechesis] is indeed a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on–going and daily than structured in periods.

(General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #255)

The General Directory for Catechesis (1997) quotes from Catechesi Tradendae (1979, # 68) to remind the Church that the role of the family is about “transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values” (#255). The family is called to awaken within its members the sense of God through a means of catechesis which comes from within the experiences of everyday life.
This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable. It is consolidated when, on the occasion of certain family events and festivities, care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events. (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #226)

This approach portrays the family as the domestic Church and describes it as “a locus of catechesis” (#255). It states that the family has a unique privilege in the role of catechesis.

In summary, current theological insight on the Christian family is contained within the understanding which emerged in the early Church that the family is a domestic Church. The documents of the Second Vatican Council and post conciliar documents speak of the Christian family as a true expression of Church. The task of the Christian family in the nurturing of faith cannot be ignored if it is to manifest the presence of Christ to the world. The Christian family carries out the mission of the Church by giving witness to Gospel values in ordinary ways within family life. Families do so when they love; profess their faith in God through prayer and worship; educate their children in the ways of the faith; by serving others and forgiving and seeking reconciliation. The Christian family is called to celebrate life within community. Through the ministry of catechesis within the home, parents invite the family to recognise within daily life signs which manifest the presence of God and to understand them with the eyes of faith. Catechesis becomes the means through which families can come to the understanding that faith is integrated with life experiences.

**Sociological Perspective**

A third perspective discussed is the role of the family as a conduit of socialisation. Like the Church, society recognises that one of the most powerful socialisation agencies is the family. Shmay describes the family as “a mirror of society” (2002, p.2). Recent psychological and sociological thinking confirms that the family is the institution primarily responsible for the development of its members, particularly in their formative years.

*The family is a critical social institution in the organisation of any society. As one of the basic social institutions of any people the family reflects the core of society. The family performs the crucial role of social control, economic production, religious propagation, procreation and socialization.*

*(McDaniel 1990, p.225)*
Socialisation is a life–long process that begins at birth and continues through life. The principal agent for socialisation is the family, and it is here that most children learn among other things, the beliefs and a prescribed set of values of our society and culture so that they can function within it (Shmay 2002; Eastman 1999; Kelly and De Graaf 1997; Carlson 1996; Myer 1996; Hammerston 1995; Ratcliff 1995; McDaniel 1990; Durka 1988; Elias 1980; Moran 1980; Natale 1979). By nature the family, like any social institution, best socialises its members to values which are necessary for its own survival (Elias 1980, p.39). Through this process, culture and religious values are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Studies have shown that the learning of religious and societal values is strongly related to home influences. Religious beliefs are intimately linked to attitudes and behaviours within family structures.

_The most significant factors in transmitting values … are: (a) democratic relationship between parents and children, (b) parental example, (c) encouraging children to do their own thinking, and (d) positive experiences of both religion and the social dimension of the religious community._

(Kuusisto 2003, p.292)

Myers (1996), in a study on the effects of childhood, parental and family influence on the religiosity of adult offspring, concluded that the factors that contribute to the transmission of faith include parental religiosity, quality of family relationship and traditional family structure (p.864).

_Adult religiosity is determined largely by parental religiosity … Parental influences have considerable staying power even as offspring move out of home and form independent households. … Parents maximize religiosity transmission if they agree on religious beliefs so that offspring do not receive mixed messages about the role of religion in life._

(Myer 1996, pp.863–864)

Other studies conducted by Hayes and Pittelkow 1993; Greely and Jenks in Elias 1980; McGready in Gallagher 1980; Flynn 1979 and Hyde 1975, have conferred that the religious behaviour of a child is influenced by the religious behaviour of the parents and by the quality of the relationship between spouses.

A further factor that aids the transmission of faith is the quality of family relationship. Myer (1996, p.865) claims that “positive parent–child relationship foster continuity in religious behaviours between generations.” Flynn in his conclusion to how parents influence the faith of their children states:
Not only do parents influence the development of their children's faith directly through their own example and religiousness, but they also influence their growth in the faith indirectly through the manner they relate to them in the most ordinary actions of everyday life in the home.

(Flynn 1979, p.201)

Blum (cited in Eastman 1989, p.86) in a study on the religious influence of the family, reported that the religious beliefs of families underlay their insistence that the core of the family was love, respect, forgiveness, and understanding. Parents, through their love, guidance and modelling share in the experiences of their children, and in turn, children share in these experiences by "listening to family stories, personal experiences, hopes and dreams" (Meehan 1995, p.19). It is an ongoing process of faith growth which matures as the family experiences different stages of life.

It is through the everyday concerns of life that parents are able to foster the spiritual growth of their family and instil in their children the Gospel teachings of love, forgiveness, trust, and patience. “The meaning of these events is inextricably woven with personal, family and religious associations” (Eastman 1989, p.86).

**Nurturing Faith within the Family**

The nurturing of faith within the family culture was highlighted by Horace Bushnell’s work *Christian Nurture* (1876). In this work Bushnell provides an insight into Christian socialisation for the modern world. Bushnell proposed that “rather than waiting for conversion at a later age, the child is to be nurtured as a Christian from his or her earliest years” (cited in Groome 1980, p.116).

*What is the true idea of Christian Education? ... That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.*

(Bushnell 1876, p.10)

Bushnell (1876) grounded his case for Christian nurture to what he called the ‘organic unity’ of society. He described that organic unity takes place unavoidably between parent and child. The responsibility of the parent, in Bushnell’s understanding, is to be of witness to their children of what it is to have Christian faith. Bushnell claims “have it [faith] first in yourselves; then teach it as you live it; teach it by living it; for you can do it in no other manner” (1876, p.71). Bushnell named the home as the primary source of Christian nurture, an idea that is steeped in most current Church documents pertaining to the family. He stresses that parents
must ensure that they create a culture that is thoroughly Christian because “the children grow into faith, as it were, by a process of natural induction … because their faith is both quickened and grown in the atmosphere of God’s own Spirit, always filling the house” (Bushnell 1876, pp.346–347). He argues that Christian nurture must begin as early as possible and it is to be the foundation of all educational efforts. Bushnell’s emphasis on the primary role of parents (both father and mother) and the home as the main avenue for Christian formation became a forerunner for the modern socialisation approach to Christian nurturing (Groome 1980, p.116).

Modern theories of modern culture and religion reflect Bushnell’s idea that the family unit is foremost in nurturing faith. Wunthow (1999) argues that Christian nurture takes place primarily “through embedded practices; that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of having conversations, of adorning the spaces in which people live, of celebrating the holidays, and of being part of a community” (Carroll, Williams and Williams 1999, p.1). He adds, that though formal religious education is important it “pales in significance” when compared with these socially embedded practices. Faith is nurtured through the lived realities of life.

Socialisation Institutions that Influence the Nurturing of Faith

John Westerhoff identifies six social institutions that have enabled parents to nurture and pass on the faith traditions. “These six institutions intentionally worked together to produce an effective educational ecology” (Westerhoff 1976, p.15). He states:

(1) The community as a social institution in which [all denominations] lived and were nurtured in their homogeneous communities.  
(2) Stability, in which both parents were frequently home and shared family life and had the support of the extended family as there was little mobility.  
(3) School systems supported the Christian ethos. For most Catholics this was through the Catholic schools.  
(4) The parish was central to the local neighbourhood and all those who attended knew each other. A variety of social activities centre on parish life.  
(5) Religious publications were readily available which provided families with materials which promoted religious education within the home.  
(6) There was deliberate engagement in religious education, which for Catholics was mainly through classes run by nuns which were held in the parish.  

(Westerhoff 1976, p.13)

Westerhoff’s patterns of family life have changed and diversified. These six institutions no longer serve as the basis by which parents pass on traditions of the faith. Societies which parishes are a part of today have become heterogeneous and
much more complex than in earlier times. The Church is rarely at the centre of the social and community life of people. “The community can no longer be called to transmit a particular set of understandings” (Westerhoff 1976, p.15).

The composition and understanding of ‘family’ also have changed (White 1995; Drane and Drane 1995). Drane and Drane propose that “today’s families are … striving to redefine what it means to be a family” (1995, p.20). The term ‘family’ has been extended to include divorced families, single parent families, blended families as well as the traditional heterosexual two parent families (Drane and Drane 1995, pp.20–36). By comparison, modern families have become smaller and more often nuclear (White 1995, p.209). The interaction with extended family is minimal compared to that of previous generations. Due to economic necessity in many families both parents work in full time employment outside the home. Interfaith marriages are more acceptable within a diversity of cultures. Many households do not have one set of religious beliefs that binds them. With the mobility of the modern family, the population is more transient and thus families are no longer rooted to one part of the world. State school systems have become religiously neutral and a falling percentage of children are attending parish schools. At the same time there is easy access to the secular media through technological information (Westerhoff 1976, p.15).

Smith states that, “the religious profile of today’s parent has also changed” (1998, p.18). The parents of today were born after the Second Vatican Council, and many received their own religious education in a time when new curricula reflecting the renewal of the Second Vatican Council were being developed in the Church. This generation is the “fuzzy Jesus generation” because “they express confusion about how to integrate what they learned with the Church’s body of theology, moral and social teachings” (Smith 1998, p.18). Proctor believes that “most parents of this generation feel incapable, or at best ill prepared, for teaching faith to their children” (1996, p.41). In the lives of most parents today the home of their childhood was not seen or understood as central to the faith education of the young. The main educators of faith for many parents were the religious sisters, brothers, or catechist within the parish setting (Curran 1978; Amendolara 1994; and Brady 1994).

In summary the family is considered as the most important agent for socialisation for children. It is through the family that children learn the values and core beliefs the family holds. In the family religious development is shaped, faith traditions are
experienced and passed on to the next generation. Patterns of family life have altered and expanded and therefore, structures that enabled parents to nurture and pass on the faith traditions in the past are no longer conducive to be an effective educational ecology for today’s families.

**Pastoral Perspective**

Finally, the pastoral viewpoint regarding family catechesis is examined. When considering the pastoral considerations of family catechesis, many components worthy of reflection emerge from the literature. As discussed in the last section, changes in the understanding and dynamics of family and family life raise implications for the mission of the Church in its task of family catechesis. Emswiler comments:

> [T]he need for family catechesis has never been greater than at the present time in Church history. With the contemporary state of busyness and frenzy in family life, the Church has a unique opportunity to serve the core communities of its membership.

*(1988, p.127)*

Gregory suggests that “the issue is not what the Church can do for the family; it is rather, how essential the mission of the family is to Church” (1988, p.39). Pastorally what is of significance is how the Church can work in partnership with families “in order to guide them to understand their mission and to encourage them to fulfil it” (Gregory 1988, p.39).

In *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) John Paul II “affirms the responsibility for catechesis which is carried by all members of the Catholic Church community, not only appointed officials” (Malone 1992, p.7). It places the family at the centre of the parish and establishes the primary settings for the nurturing of faith.

> Encouragement must … be given to the individuals or institutions that, through person–to–person contacts, through meetings, and through all kinds of pedagogical means, help parents to perform their task: the service they are doing to catechesis is beyond price.

*(Catechesi Tradendae 1979, #68)*

*Catechesi Tradendae* represents a profound turning point in how family catechesis is to be understood within parish life.

Much of the literature in the area of family catechesis advocate that the success of family catechesis lies in “viewing (the) family as pivotal to all of our religious
education” (De Gidio 1979, p.81). Gregory emphasises that “in the parish opportunities should be found for nurturing wholeness at each stage of life’s journey” (1988, p.46).

All parishes, nevertheless, through their ministry network of worship, sacrament, education, justice, and social concerns, and through their relationship to the local community, are in a strategic position to respond pastorally to the developing family life-cycle.

(Gregory 1988, p.56)

Hence family catechesis is to be seen as integral to the parish and contributes to other aspects of the life of the faith community.

Roberto in his work with the Archdiocese of Melbourne in 1984 on ministry with families, calls for "a shift in paradigm" from the current parish structure if family catechesis is to be at the centre of parish life.

[Family Catechesis] encourages parishes to move from the parish at the centre, to families at the centre of Church and community, from administering to families, to ministering with families, from families serving the parish to parish serving the family.

(Roberto 1994, p.3)

The new paradigm calls for an integrated family perspective in all parish ministries whether or not their focus is ‘family’. Such a paradigm suggests the family perspective pervades all parish ministries and that all ministries become aware of their impact on family life in the parish.

Every parish community must make it a priority to ‘nurture the nurturer’, providing families with the resources, training, encouragement, and suggestions that they need to function effectively as ‘domestic Church’.

(Groome 2001, p.25)

The General Directory for Catechesis asserts that to support families in their responsibility as nurturers of faith, the parish must be "the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis" (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #257). The Directory goes on to suggest that parishes need to address the needs parents experience by promoting meetings and courses and providing adult catechesis directed towards parents (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #227). In order for parents to rediscover and reclaim their duty as first educators of their children in faith and have an awareness of the ways they can nurture the faith of their children, parents need firstly to be secure in their faith.
Until they [parents] experience the depth of faith possible in family centred catechesis, it is wise to continue to offer some kind of class or occasional workshop for the children, not [only] for the sake of the children, but [also] for the sake of the parents from the concern that their children might not “learn” enough from them.

(Curran 1980, p.38)

Curran is suggesting that the way forward requires a bridging process. Curran infers that as parents become actively involved with the faith sharing of their children, they begin to focus on their own faith life and they examine their own understandings (1980, p.38).

If parents are secure in their faith, if we help them to live that faith life, ritualising it, be aware of the numerous teachable [faith] moments they have every day, then the faith will indeed be passed on to the next generation.

(De Gidio 1980, p.18)

By supporting parents in coming to a deeper understanding of their faith a spark is ignited within them and allows them to recognise that faith is above all a gift coming to them through the initiative of God.

A further shift in understanding lays in the ways faith is nurtured within the context of the family; a result of the distinction between family catechesis and religious education. Authors such as Darcy–Berube (1995); Roberto (1992); Dunlap (1991); Chesto (1988); Emswiler (1988); Meehan (1985); Saris (1980); Westerhoff (1980); Curran (1978, 1980); and Hill (1980) claim that family catechesis is not an extra program but rather “a perspective from which to examine everyday actions within family setting” (Gregory 1988, p.52). One of the aims of family catechesis, therefore, should be to affirm parents in what they are already doing just by being a Christian family.

As discussed (cf. pp.36–38) the Church recognises four key tasks that provide the basis through which parents can carry out the mission of nurturing faith of their children. These tasks include: 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 (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #17). Within the context of the home such tasks are carried out through the events of everyday life. These include the celebration of rituals, the telling or sharing of faith stories, praying together as a family, performing acts of justice and service and relating as a family to the wider
community (Roberto 2005, p.1). These elements within family life provide a structure for family faith sharing.

*Passing on the faith is not merely a matter of particular formulations or cognitive learning. If faith wants to be something that is truly alive in the coming generations as well, it must be experienced in practice: in everyday actions and behaviours in the celebration of worship, in experiences that are emotional in kind.*  

(Greinacher and Elzondo 1984, p.ix)

From the pastoral perspective it is important to acknowledge that the family is primarily concerned with the nurturing and maturing of faith within the family at the various stages of family life. If family catechesis is to be understood as being grounded in the everyday experiences of family life pastorally “there are few, if any, family faith sharing experiences which fail [as long as the] focus is in the sharing rather than doctrine” (De Gidio 1979, p.17).

In summary, when considering the pastoral implications of family catechesis the parish has a major role to play. Pastorally the parish is ideal for supporting family catechesis because it is important to the faith life of the community. Parishes provide a structure that supports the catechesis of the home. As parents are supported by the worshipping community in nurturing the faith of their children they cannot help but grow in faith themselves. In all that parishes offer parents “is the need to affirm families in their efforts to hand on their faith and values to their children” (Staffa Geoghegan 1993, p.299).

**Conclusion**

This Chapter was divided into four parts; each part addressing one of the four perspectives which have shaped the Catholic understanding of the role of parents in the faith development of their children. First consideration was given to the historical perspective of the role of the family throughout Church history. It explored the understanding of the role of the family from the early Church through to the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. The historical perspective also outlined the affects the introduction of compulsory education had on the Church and the ways in which the Church responded to the threat of secularism. Finally, this first section traced the response from the Australian Church to parents in their role as faith nurturers.
In the second part, consideration was given to the theological understanding of the Christian family. This section explored several key documents of the Second Vatican Council and post conciliar papal writings which were pertinent in shaping much of the Catholic understanding of the role and task of the Christian family in the world today. The third consideration was given to the sociological perspective. Here attention was given to the changing understanding of family and to the societal influences which affect the faith life of the family. Finally, attention was given to the pastoral perspective. This part of the discussion centred on the preferred process the Church promotes for nurturing faith with the context of family life.

To conclude, through these four perspectives, historical, theological, sociological, and pastoral, this Chapter has sought to identify the understandings and practices which have affected and influenced the way the Church has understood the role of families as nurturers of the faith. Current Church thinking acknowledges;

1. Within the Church, parents have the prime responsibility to nurture the faith of their children.
2. The Church has always maintained that the nurturing of faith begins in the home even though, as history shows, this role has at times been confused and delegated to the Catholic school.
3. With the renewal of the Second Vatican Council, the role of the family was made more explicit. Vatican II called parents to be firstly witnesses of faith for their children.
4. The task of the family is to make the message of the Gospel a lived reality in the lives of their children.
5. The message of the Gospel as a lived reality is achieved through nurturing faith within the life experiences rather than solely through the teaching of doctrines.

In relation to the research question of the study, the literature confirms that the Church today regards the Christian family as the domestic Church. Within this community parents are the first and foremost educators of their children in faith. It is through the Christian witness of parents that children learn how to live the values of the Gospel. The argument is that the Church needs to embrace this understanding if this vision of nurturing faith is to be sustained. This understanding has led to the research project that is reported in the remainder of this dissertation. In the next Chapter, the methodological issues associated with the research will be discussed together with the procedures used to acquire the data for analysis.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This Chapter is concerned with the methodological issues associated with the research. It describes the procedures used to acquire the data for subsequent analysis. The first part of the Chapter describes the design of the study, the research procedures highlighting the approach made in order to gain access into the parishes, the manner in which parents were invited into the study, and the procedures that led to the interview. The second part of the Chapter describes the sampling strategy and the sample used in the study. The third part of this Chapter focuses on the data collection methods utilised in the study and then outlines and discusses procedures used in analysing the data. Finally, the timeline for the research project is presented.

The Methods Used to Answer the Research Question

This study was qualitative in nature. An ethnographic design was employed as the method of inquiry since it allowed for the collection of descriptive data that was most appropriate to the aims of the study. The particular tools, which were used to gather the data, included face–to–face interviews, observations of the environment and field notes. These tools became the methods used to answer the research question: How do parents, who do not send their children to Catholic schools, nurture the faith of their children? The study, and especially the data gathering process, was guided by the following six questions:

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?
In order to answer the main research question, the sample of parents was restricted to those who do not access Catholic schools for the education of their children.

**Design of the Study**

This study was qualitative in nature. Studies show that little qualitative research has been conducted in the area of family and faith. The small amount of research that has been conducted mostly centres on the Catholic school.

> [R]esearch reports that have been available are largely quantitative in nature, indicating, for example percentages of Mass attendance not trying to determine the complexities, understanding and fears of parents in relation the faith development of their children.

*(Morse 1996, p.3)*

The nature of the research implied a complexity of issues that needed to be addressed and hence qualitative research is well suited to the research question in hand.

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinctive methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

*(Creswell 1998, p.15)*

Qualitative research requires that “the researcher attempts to gather evidence that will reveal qualities of life, reflecting the ‘multiple realities’ of specific ... settings from participants’ perspective” *(Burns 1990, p.221)*. The qualitative paradigm was appropriate to this study as the intent was to “focus on understanding a given social setting, not necessarily on making predictions about the setting” *(Janesick 1994, p.212)*. It was concerned with obtaining information that was descriptive and interpretative rather than quantified and predictive.

**Ethnographic Approach**

The particular qualitative approach employed in this study was an ethnographic approach. The purpose was to obtain first hand the ‘big picture’ about how the parents of children who do not attend Catholic schools nurture the faith of their children within everyday family life. As most available research centres on the Catholic school, an ethnographic design allowed the researcher to enter into the world of a distinct group of Catholic parents that have been largely understudied. In Western Australia 50% of Catholic children attend non–Catholic schools. An
ethnographic approach was useful as the study related to struggles that this marginalised group may be facing in their endeavour to nurture the faith of their children. The design allowed the researcher to enter into the world of this group and gain an understanding of the reality of these Catholic parents.

The sample group was not large, therefore, an ethnographic approach allowed the researcher to enter into the natural setting of these families to “examine various phenomena as perceived by participants” (Shaffir 1999, pp.676–687). Faith is seen by many as a private and delicate matter that is not freely discussed, especially with strangers or experts. Entering into the territory of the respondents empowered them in that they had a sense of control. The personal engagement with the respondents helped to establish a sense of trust that enabled them to be open and honest to the reality of their own situation. A sense of trust was important as the main aim of the study was to gather descriptive data that would attempt to reveal a picture of how parents nurture faith within the context of their homes.

Furthermore, an ethnographic design was most appropriate as it allowed the researcher to choose from a wide variety of methods suited to collecting descriptive data. The particular methods used to collect the data for this study, interviews and observations of the environment and notes gathered in the field, were seen as appropriate as they were personal and immediate and allowed the researcher to become the research instrument (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p.204). That the researcher becomes the research instrument means that the researcher develops a sense of the lived experience of parents and explored the efforts made to nurture within their children a faith that is important to them. The methods were also constructive in discovering new insights and perceptions of a way of life that may be different to what is already perceived. “These descriptions can help to identify the lived situation and thus help to develop resources that are based on the experiences at the grass root level” (Burns 1990, p.225). The methods used to collect the data for the study are described later in this Chapter.

Research Procedures

The Research Setting

The research setting for the study was the network of Catholic Parishes in the Archdiocese of Perth, Western Australia (Figure 3.1). The Archdiocese of Perth is divided into twelve zones. Two zones of the twelve zones were included in the
study: the South Central Zone (Figure 3.2 p.54) and the Merredin Zone (Figure 3.3 p.56). The Merredin Zone was included in the study for the purpose of comparison.

**Figure 3.1  Geographical Map of Dioceses in Western Australia**

* (The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia 2004)

*The South Central Zone*

The South Central Zone is within the metropolitan area of Perth (Figure 3.2 p.54). It comprises 11 parishes on the south side of the Swan River in the city of Perth. This Zone stretches approximately 15 kilometres south west of the city and follows the Swan River east up to the Canning River with its furthest point being approximately 30 kilometres from the centre of Perth.

The South Central Zone was chosen for three main reasons. First, it was felt that Parish Priests in this Zone would be receptive to the study, as a rapport had been established with them through the researcher’s work in the Archdiocese. Secondly,
this Zone had a cross section of parishes. There is diversity of parish sizes; established Parish Religious Education Program (PREP); Special Religious Instruction (SRI), a denominational religious education within State schools; and Special Religious Education (SRE), an ecumenical religious program within State schools; and at least one Catholic primary school within each parish boundary. A third reason for the choice of parishes in South Central Zone was the large population of primary school aged children within the zone. Many parents within this Zone who desire a Catholic school education cannot access such an education because the demand is greater than the positions available.

**Figure 3.2** Map of Metropolitan Parishes Within the Sample Frame of the Study

Figure 3.2 does not display parish boundaries for the sake of the clarity of the diagram. Generally, parishes more central to the city of Perth tend to be smaller in area, longer established and with older and smaller parish profiles.

**The Merredin Zone**

The Merredin Zone is within the rural area of Perth. It is approximately 300 km north east of Perth (Figure 3.3 p.56). It is located within the central wheat belt area of Western Australia. It is made up of seven main Mass centres. Two Mass centres within the Merredin Zone were included in the study. A rural zone was included in the study for the purpose of comparison as the experiences of rural parishes may be very different from those within the metropolitan area. Over a number of years a number of the rural parishes within the Archdiocese of Perth have suffered economic and social hardship and thus many communities have become smaller due to the fact that farmers have left their land to seek work in the city or larger towns. As a consequence, several of the Catholic schools within country communities have closed. The Archdiocese is experiencing a shortage of Priests and thus many communities do not have a Priest in residence. The Parish Priest within a rural community usually resides in the largest town within a given zone and provides services to smaller communities at allocated Mass centres. This means that many people in the country travel great distances to celebrate Mass on a Saturday night or Sunday morning. Within some centres, Mass is celebrated with a Priest on average only once a month. On the other weekends, the community takes the responsibility for preparing a Liturgy of the Word and a Communion Service, or they might travel to a nearby town where Mass is being celebrated. For people within rural parishes, even Sunday Mass services cannot be relied upon as in the metropolitan parishes.

In the rural areas most primary school children attend local State schools. They receive thirty minutes of Special Religious Education (SRE) or Special Religious Instruction (SRI) once a week during school time. The Schools Bill of Western Australia (1997, #69) states:

1. *Special religious education may be provided to students in government [state] schools in accordance with provisions made by the regulations.*
2. Subject to the regulations the principal of a government [state] school may allow time for the special religious education of students in the school, but the total number of hours so allowed in a school year is not to exceed 40.

The regulation referred to here states that “the curriculum and teaching in State schools is not to promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect” (The Schools Bill 1997, #68, 1a). Some schools have opted for no religious education, a decision at the discretion of the Principal.

**Figure 3.3  Map of Rural Parishes Within the Sample Frame of the Study**


**Approach to Parish Priests – South Central Zone**

Permission to conduct the research was requested initially from Parish Priests within the South Central Zone of the Archdiocese of Perth. The first approach was made by telephone to the secretary of the South Central Zone of Priests, to inform him of the study and second, to ask that a letter outlining the proposed study be tabled at the following meeting of the Priests. This was approved and a letter was forwarded
giving a general overview of the nature and purpose of the research and how parishes could support the study [Appendix 1].

Following the tabling of the letter at the Zone Meeting of Priests, telephone calls were made to each of the Parish Priests within the South Central Zone to set up individual appointments to further discuss the research. Seven of the eleven parishes in the zone agreed to discuss the study and appointments were made. Of the four who did not take up the offer of the study, two Parish Priests expressed the concern that they did not have PREP in their parish as most children attended the local Catholic school, one Parish Priest did not return the many telephone messages left by the researcher, and in one parish there was no appointed Parish Priest as the parish was experiencing some difficulties.

On meeting the Parish Priests, the purpose, methods, and the expected benefits of the research were explained and discussed, and an invitation was extended to them to participate in the study. A request was made to address each parish congregation at all Masses on one given weekend, explaining the nature and purpose of the study, and for brochures to be placed on pews with pencils before each particular Sunday Mass, inviting parishioners in the target group to participate.

Once the discussion with the Parish Priests was completed and consent was granted, a date to address each congregation was set. A letter to each Parish Priest followed, confirming the details of the conversation and once again stressing that at no stage was it mandatory for the Priests or parents to participate in the study [Appendix 2]. One Parish Priest did not agree to the researcher addressing the congregation on a Sunday. He preferred parents of PREP be addressed while classes were conducted in the parish since this was the researcher’s target group. This was respected and followed through.

**Approach to Parish Priests – Rural Area**

In the rural areas, the Parish Priest in a wheat belt town in the Merredin Zone was contacted first by letter and then a follow up phone call was made to further discuss the study [Appendix 3]. The Priest invited the researcher to address the congregation at a Sunday Mass on a weekend, when a workshop was being conducted as part of the researcher’s work.
The Parish Priest of a second rural town was also contacted. This location was also in a wheat belt town in the Merredin Zone. The Parish Priest in this town was leaving for overseas for a few months and expressed the concern that there was a Catholic school in town and therefore most of his congregation would not be suited to the target group necessary for the study. There was no PREP group in operation in this town either. This parish centre was not included in the study.

**Approach to PREP Coordinators**

After gaining access into the various parishes, contact was made by telephone with the PREP Coordinators in the South Central Zone to inform them of the study and to ask for their support. The contact proved useful as the Coordinators were supportive of the study [Appendix 4].

**Further Approaches Made**

When it became evident that the number of participants for the study was well under the anticipated fifty, it was decided to revisit the parishes that had agreed to the study. First consideration was given to make use of the PREP groups in each parish as this population was the target group. The PREP Coordinator of each parish was contacted and asked to assist by providing the number of families in the group and then to distribute an information package about the study through the classes. The package consisted of a letter introducing the researcher and outlining the nature and purpose of the study and a brochure that was used at the parish talks containing the expression of interest tear off slip, together with a self-addressed envelope [Appendices 5 and 6]. The families were requested to return the expression of interest slip in the envelope provided to the coordinator within two weeks. Alternatively, they had the option of mailing the expression of interest to the researcher using the envelope provided. PREP Coordinators from five parishes agreed to distribute information packages to families in their PREP group. One of the Coordinators invited the researcher to speak to a group of parents who met in the parish centre while their children attended classes. This offer was accepted.

Two more parishes were invited to participate in the study. A Parish Priest from a South Eastern Zone that was geographically next door to the South Central Zone was very keen to support the study and asked that the information kit be sent to the Pastoral Worker in his parish. She would distribute the kit to the PREP group.
operating in the parish. After discussion with the Pastoral Worker the packages were sent for distribution.

A Parish in the Western Zone expressed an interest in participating in the study after the researcher conducted a workshop with a group of parents in the parish. After the nature and purpose of the study was explained the Parish Priest requested that some brochures be sent for distribution to this group. Brochures were then sent with a return self-addressed envelope.

During March 2004 much of the work of the researcher was in country areas facilitating workshop sessions for Catechists who taught religious education in state schools. As a rapport was established with these women, there was opportunity to explain the study to the group followed by an invitation for them to participate in the study. Three women took up the invitation. All were from the Merredin Regional Zone of the Archdiocese of Perth.

By mid March 2004 the number of participants was still well under the anticipated fifty. A second attempt was made to address the congregation in one of the parishes. Since the first appeal in the parish in March 2003, there had been a change of Parish Priests. The two new Priests to the parish were both keen to support the study. Since the researcher was quite well known in this parish a plea was made for ten people to volunteer for the study. Twelve people expressed an interest in participating in the study. This brought the total number who expressed an interest to 43 people. After consultation with the academic supervisor, it was agreed to conclude recruitment with this number as the sample was broad enough to offer the required diversity.

### Invitation to Participate in the Study

The invitation to parents to participate in the study commenced after permission had been granted by the Priests in each parish. On the date agreed by each Parish Priest the congregation was addressed at all parish Masses. Six Priests agreed to have the address after the communion prayer so as not to disturb the flow of the liturgy. One Priest asked that the address be given after the homily as he felt that on that particular Sunday the talk would enhance the point of his homily.
All Parish Priests were concerned about the brochures being placed on the pews before each Mass. To accommodate these concerns, the brochures were placed in the foyer in each parish. The brochure contained similar information given to the Priest about the study. A tear–off slip to register an expression of interest to participate in the study was included in the brochure [Appendix 6].

Parishioners interested in participating in the study were asked to collect a brochure from the researcher in the foyer of the Church, to complete it and then place the tear–off slip in the box provided. Parishioners had an opportunity to meet with the researcher after Mass for any clarifications. The box was left in the foyer of the Church for the following two Sundays. The box was then collected after the second Sunday and a reminder was placed in the parish notices asking those who were interested in participating in the study to send the expression of interest slip to the address on the back of the brochure. The appeal was made at a total of 22 Masses.

**Setting up the Interviews**

The next phase of the research was to collate the response slips. A total of 43 were received. The original plan was to send letters to all those who expressed an interest in participating in the study to acknowledge their expression of interest. However, since the number of respondents from each parish was smaller than anticipated, a telephone call was made to each respondent thanking them for volunteering for the study. At the same time the procedure for the interview was reiterated and upon acceptance by the respondent, a time, and an appropriate venue for the interview was discussed. After the telephone conversation, dates, times and venue were confirmed immediately in writing. One day prior to each interview, the participants were telephoned to reconfirm the details.

**Confidentiality of Participants**

Confidentiality of the participants and the parishes involved in the study were given careful consideration. To ensure the confidentiality of identities, specific locations of individuals and places were concealed in published results, data collected were held in discretion, and all data were kept securely confidential (Bulmer, in Denzin and Lincoln 1998, p.175). Hence, to safeguard against the invasion of privacy, each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym.
Before the commencement of the interview, participants were briefed on the nature and purpose of the study. As participants were all adults, there was no written consent asked of the participants. Rather, participants were given a letter – An Undertaking of Research Confidentiality – outlining the purpose of the study; the procedure for the collection of data; the amount of time expected from each participant; what would happen to the data after it was compiled; and an assurance that the principles of confidentiality would be maintained both during and after the completion of the research. The letter was signed and dated by the researcher and given to each of the participants [Appendix 7].

Any references to the parish or to the identity of an individual Priest were also protected. Parish Priests were asked to choose a pseudonym for their parish. The pseudonyms selected by the Priests were used in the transcriptions. The code given to each parish was recorded in a notebook and was stored separately from the transcripts and field notes. Similarly, in the case of the name of a Parish Priest being revealed in the interviews, his identity was safeguarded by using a name from the same pseudonym list used to protect the identity of spouses and children. Each participant was asked permission for the interview to be audio taped and the consent was recorded as the first part of the interview.

**Sampling Framework**

The sampling framework for the study comprised of Catholic parents who, for whatever reason, do not send their children to Catholic schools. As already mentioned (cf. p.51), most studies have centred on parents of Catholic school children but not on Catholic parents outside this system (Morse 1996). These parents see themselves as marginalised because they do not fit the mainstream and are sensitive to issues of mainstream, and often do not have the support or resources offered to parents within the Catholic school system. Formal religious education may be limited to PREP or religious education classes offered within State schools with some children receiving no religious education as part of their schooling. Due to time restraints, PREP provides a less comprehensive religious education program than that offered in Catholic schools. Children in PREP receive between 30 and 60 minutes of religious education per week as compared to 20 to 40 minutes received daily in the Catholic school system. The parents within this sample framework may struggle with the problem of how to effectively educate their children in the faith.
Sampling Strategy

The purposive sample procedure was chosen for selecting the participants for the study (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This type of sampling was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to “use … special knowledge or expertise about some groups to select subjects who represent this population” (Berg 1998, p.229). Purposive sampling seeks out those people who can be most informative of the research question.

Qualitative researchers employ … purposive, and not random, sampling methods. They seek out groups, settings and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur.

(Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p.202)

The purposive sampling was useful as the study was concerned with a particular group of parents within the Catholic community. The sample was drawn from those people who have a desire to nurture the faith of their children and who do not have the support of the Catholic school system for religious education.

Locale of the Sampling

The following section provides a profile of the parishes which were approached to participate in the study. The profile lists the pseudonym for the parish to be used for the study, approximate population of the parish, the year the parish was established, average age of the parishioners, the ethnic diversity of the parish, the number of Catholic, State, independent and alternative primary schools and the number of secondary Catholic schools within the parish boundaries.

Profile of the Parishes

A total of 11 parishes participated in the study. Six parishes were located in the metropolitan area, Southern Central Zone, one located in the South Eastern Zone, one in the Western Zone (Figure 3.2, p.54), while the remaining three were rural parishes within the Merredin Zone (Figure 3.3, p.56). A Parish Profile Sheet [Appendix 9] was sent to each Parish Priest participating in the study. The Parish Profile asked for such information as the approximate population of the parish, the year the parish was established, average age of the parishioners, the ethnic diversity of the parish, the number of Catholic schools in the parish, the number of non Catholic schools in the parish. Priests were asked to return the form in the stamped self–addressed envelope provided. All were returned. The data from the
Parish Priests were compared to the official Archdiocesan figures. These figures were sought from the Commonwealth Census 2001, Perth Archdiocesan parish ranked Catholic population data. Parish names are pseudonyms. The parishes that participated in the study included:

**St Andrew**
St Andrew’s parish is located in a wheat belt town of Western Australia on the outskirts of the goldfields. The parish was established during the gold rush in 1896. The total Catholic population of the area is 647. The ethnic make up of the parish is mainly Anglo Celtic. There is no PREP but children have SRE in the state school once a week.

**St Agnes**
St Agnes was established in 2001. It has a population of approximately 3,500 parishioners. There are two Masses celebrated on a weekend. The parish is made up of young families with mostly pre-school and primary school aged children. The ethnic make of the parish is diverse with a multicultural influence. There is one Catholic primary school within the parish boundary which is in its second stage of development and so does not yet cater for children in years 4–7. There are three state schools and one private school within the parish boundary. At the time of the study there was no PREP established in the parish.

**St Bernard**
St Bernard was established in 1951. The approximate number of parishioners is 4,000. The parishioners are largely middle aged with some younger families moving into the area. The ethnic make up of the parish is diverse with the groups including Australian born, English, Irish, Scottish, Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Malay and Singaporean. There is one double stream Catholic primary school in the area, and three state schools. The area in which the parish is based has traditionally been working class. PREP is established in the parish with approximately 57 children attending.

**St Claire**
St Claire is in the central wheat belt area of Western Australia with a Catholic population 580. The parish was established in 1949 during the height of the post war wheat industry boom. The ethnic make up of the parish is mainly Anglo Celtic, which is fairly typical of this area. There is no PREP but children have SRI in the local state school once a week. There are approximately seven children attending.
**The Cross**

This parish was established in 1951. The approximate number of parishioners is 2,600. There are three Masses celebrated on a weekend. Until recently the parish was comprised largely of retired couples who had moved into the area at the establishment of the parish. The ethnic make up to this point has been traditionally third and fourth generation Australian. In recent times there has been a change in the demographics of the parish. As the older people have moved out of the larger homes, younger families are moving in. The ethnic make up of the younger family have added an Asian influence to the parish; the main groups being Indonesian and Singaporean. The area in which the parish is based has traditionally been classed as a high socio-economic area with many professionals making up a large percentage of the population. There is no Catholic primary school within the parish boundary. There are three state schools and one non Catholic independent girls' school. There is no PREP established in the parish. Children are prepared for the celebration of the sacraments on a needs basis.

**St John**

St John was established in 1986. The number of parishioners exceeds 8,000. There are five Masses celebrated each weekend. The parish consists largely of young families with primary school aged children and teenagers. Sixty four nationalities are represented with the majority being of Asian origin. There is one double stream Catholic primary school within the parish boundary and nine state schools. The area in which the parish is based has traditionally been classed as middle to upper middle class. The area has a significant population of professionals and business people. PREP is established in the parish with approximately 235 children attending.

**St Mark**

St Mark was established in 1954. It has a population of approximately 2,200 parishioners. There are three Masses celebrated on a weekend. At present the area is experiencing a change in its demographics. As the older people move out to smaller dwellings, younger families are moving in to the larger homes. There is one Catholic primary school spread over a number of campuses. The ethnic make up of the parish is chiefly Anglo Celtic. The area in which the parish is based has traditionally been classed as a high socio-economic area with many professionals making up the majority of the population. PREP is established in the parish with approximately 50 children attending.
St Michael
St Michael is located in the central wheat belt area of Western Australia. The parish was established in 1927. The total Catholic population of the area is 520. The ethnic make up of the parish is primarily Anglo Celtic. There is no PREP in the area but children have SRE in the state school once a week.

St Miriam
The parish of St Miriam has two Churches within its boundary. St Anne was established in 1960 and the main Church of St Miriam established in 1985. The number of parishioners exceeds 7 000. There are a total of six Masses celebrated between the two Churches on a weekend. St Anne is made up mainly of retirees whereas St Miriam is made up of largely of young families with primary school aged children and teenagers. The ethnic make up of the parish is diverse with the biggest population being Malay, Chinese and Indian. There is one double stream Catholic primary school, nine state schools and one co-educational non Catholic independent school within the parish boundary. The area in which the parish is based has traditionally been middle class. PREP is established in the parish with approximately 185 children attending.

St Peter
St Peter was established in 1937. There are a total of two Masses on the weekend. The parish is primarily made up of retirees with a growing population of professionals moving into the area. The ethnic make up of the parish is mainly Anglo Celtic. There is no PREP in the parish.

St Theresa
St Theresa was established in 1968. The approximate number of parishioners is 2 000. There are three Masses celebrated on a weekend. The parish is diverse in its population with a balance of retired couples, middle aged people and young families. The parish is multicultural with no main dominant group. There is one single stream Catholic primary school within the parish boundary and a total of two state schools. The area in which the parish is based has traditionally been classed as one of the lower socio economic areas of Perth. PREP is established in the parish with approximately 40 children attending

Table 3.1 presents a summary of the setting for the study.
### Table 3.1 Parish Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>St Andrew</th>
<th>St Agnes</th>
<th>St Bernard</th>
<th>St Claire The Cross</th>
<th>St John</th>
<th>St Mark</th>
<th>St Michael</th>
<th>St Miriam</th>
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<td>South Central</td>
<td>Merredin</td>
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<td>Middle Aged</td>
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<td>Multi cultural</td>
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<td>Anglo Celtic</td>
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66
The Sample

The sample frame to answer the research questions was made up of two target groups. The first group comprised of the parents of primary school aged children whose children did not attend Catholic schools, but attended PREP. The second target group was the parents of primary aged children who did not send their children to either a Catholic school or PREP. This target group was obtained from those who attended Mass on the Sunday when the researcher was present in the parish. Initially it was thought that both these target groups would limit the study to those who attended Mass. This proved not to be the case as those who responded from the invitation through PREP classes were not necessarily regular Mass attendants.

Prior to the commencement of the study the following particular selection guidelines were proposed should the participants exceeded fifty.

1. Fathers who expressed an interest in participating in the study. Several studies have shown that mothers are considered the primary educators within family life. In the event that the sample exceeds the sample quota for the study, all or as many as possible, fathers would be will be selected to participate in the study so that fathers comprised up to 10% of the total sample.

2. Parents of those children who have no formal religious education within the school or parish will comprise up to 10% of the total size.

3. Parents of those children who do not access a Catholic school or PREP will comprise up to 10% of the total size.

4. Parents of those children who access religious education through the SRE program offered in State schools will comprise up to 10% of the total size.

5. Parents of those children who access SRI offered in State schools will comprise up to 10% of the total size.

6. One parent per household will be selected to participate in the interview. In the event that both parents from one household register an expression of interest the parent who considers himself or herself as the primary educator in the faith of the child concerned will be interviewed.

In the event the respondents did not exceed fifty, all respondents would be invited to participate in the study.
The aim of including fifty participants in the total population became more complex than initially anticipated. The reluctance to participate in the study was attributed to two main reasons. First, faith is often viewed as a very private matter for many and a matter that is sensitive. Parents, especially within the target group, may feel a sense of insecurity in the area of the faith development of their children. For many who already feel insecure, speaking with someone with whom they have not developed a rapport may have been seen to be confronting and threatening. Parents may feel that they are being judged, as a result making them more vulnerable. Second, in our society today people do not readily commit to things which are not an immediate priority. Time is a very precious commodity, as both parents work in many households, and it is structured to fit around family schedules. Hence, the accumulation of a useful sample took longer and more effort was expended than initially anticipated.

Over a period of two and a half years a total of 43 respondents registered an expression of interest in the study. Of the 43 who volunteered for the study, five respondents were not interviewed. Two females withdrew from the study. They had misunderstood the purpose of the study and did not feel that they could contribute adequately to the outcome. The third person was a male who expressed an interest in the study. However, the mobile phone number given to register an expression of interest had one missing digit. Attempts were made to trace the person but it was unsuccessful as no address was given. A fourth person, also a male, did not suit the target group as his children attended the local Catholic school. A fifth person interested in the study was a female who was a shift worker in a medical profession. She was on 24 hour call. A number of attempts were made to find a suitable time for the interview but on each occasion the interview was cancelled due to work commitments. After several attempts it was decided that it would be too difficult and she withdrew from the study.

Two interviews which were conducted were not used in the analysis of the results. The first of these participants was female. On the completion of the interview it was found that the interview had not been recorded on the tape. The batteries had been checked prior to the interview and the tape was running on a sound check. As a consequence of this incident a second recorder was always taken as a backup for future interviews and a sound check was done just prior to each subsequent interview. The interview was not rescheduled as the condition of the study was that
only one interview was required by each respondent so detailed notes of the
corversation were made. The second interview which was not used in the analysis
of the data was with a male. The interview was held in the home of the respondent.
This interview made the researcher feel very uncomfortable. The respondent was
quite aggressive in his approach and even though he alluded to the fact that his
family was at home, the researcher heard or saw no one. The major concern
became how to end the interview and leave the home, and consequently, the
researcher did not give due attention to the content of the interview. After
consideration, followed by a discussion with the academic supervisor of the
researcher, it was suggested that it would appropriate not to include the interview for
analysis. Essentially the decision was based on the evidence that an agenda other
than the research questions was being pursued.

**Table 3.2  Respondents in the Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents Nominated for study</th>
<th>Interviews Conducted</th>
<th>Respondents Interviewed</th>
<th>Interviews Included In Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2 shows the number of respondents who expressed an interest in the study. Of the remaining 38 respondents three couples chose to be interviewed together bringing the total number of interviews conducted to 33 with the number of respondents totalling 36. Even though the criteria for the interview were set for one member of the family, when the couples volunteered for the study they requested that they both be interviewed together. On reflection, it was decided to respect the sensitivity of the request and thus not exclude partners. The opportunity presented a number of practical benefits. First, data were able to be gathered from two people at the same time. This became important as the number of volunteers was well below the expected fifty. Secondly, at this stage the male voice was not well represented, it was decided that including partners was a means through which the male voice would be more represented. Since the opportunity came about it was welcomed and taken up. A total of 93% of participants indicated that they were in a married relationship.
Table 3.3  **Total Number of Participants in the Study**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Interviews</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of couples interviewed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total No. of participants interviewed</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 3.3, a total of 33 interviews were conducted and the actual number of participants was 36 in total.

From this point and throughout the data analysis stage, the respondents will be referred to as participants. ‘Respondent’ to this point has referred to all who volunteered for the study. ‘Participants’ from this point will refer solely to those whose interview was used in the data analysis.

**Profiling the Participants**

This following section presents a profile of the participants who volunteered for the study. The profile presents biographical data such as the age, gender and nationality of the participants; the parish in which each participant worships, the number of children in the household of the participants, the religion of the participants and spouse, schooling of the participant, spouse and children; and whether their children attend PREP.

**Age of Participants**

The participants were not asked to state their age but from conversations it is safe to assume that the population varied between mid twenties to early forties. This being the case, all who participated in the study represented the post conciliar generation of the Church, meaning they were born and educated after Vatican II. The Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II, was an Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church opened in 1962 under Pope John XXIII and closed under Pope Paul VI in 1965.

**Number of Children**

An overview of the sample data showed that all who participated in the study had at least one child in primary school. Six participants had teenage children while eight had preschoolers. No participants had preschoolers and teenagers. The average
number of children per family is two which is consistent with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2000 census, for population per household. The ABS reports that the average number of children per household is 2.5. Two participants had more than four children, five and seven children respectively.

Gender of Interviewees
Many studies have concluded that mothers are traditionally considered the primary educators within the home. This study contributes to this opinion. Table 3.4 shows that the majority of the participants were female; thirty one in total, representing 86% of the total sample. Five participants were males, representing 14% of the sample. Of the five males interviewed, two were interviewed individually and the other three chose to be interviewed with their spouse.

Table 3.4 Gender of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Total</td>
<td>86.1%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men and women were not equally represented in the study. The reality is that the total number participants did not exceed the original target of fifty, so all respondents who expressed an interest in the study were invited to participate in the study. Eight males responded to the study. As already mentioned one could not be contacted and one did not fit the target and so these males were not interviewed. Six males were interviewed with five being included in the data analysis.

Nationalities Represented
Of the thirty six participants, seventeen representing 47% of the population were born and educated overseas, nineteen (53%) were born and educated in Australia, and of these, five (14%) indicated that they were first generation Australian. Table 3.5 shows the diversity of nationalities of the participants.
Table 3.5 Nationalities Represented in the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationalities</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealander</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South American</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Column Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Religion
Most of the participants (94%) were Catholic. It is worth noting that six (17%) of the participants revealed that they were converts to Catholicism. Of these, two spouse and participant converted to Catholicism at the same time. Two participants were currently in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) which is a process for those wishing to be fully initiated into the Catholic faith. Of the spouses, 61% were Catholic, one spouse was Hindu and the religious background of two spouses was unknown.

Schooling Background of the Participants and Their Spouses
Schooling among the participants was diverse. Table 3.6 illustrates the schooling background of the participants. Twelve participants, representing 33% of the interviewees, had been educated in Catholic schools overseas, mainly in Asian countries. They referred to their schools as ‘convent schools’, with some also attending Catholic colleges and universities, while 66% of the participants were educated in Australia and of these 22% attended a Catholic school for some part of their primary or secondary school education. A small percentage of participants were boarders and thus attended the local state school usually in a country town and then went to a Catholic boarding school in Perth for their secondary education. Of all participants, six did not have a Catholic education, and two of these were converts.
### Table 3.6  Schooling Background of the Participants and Their Spouses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Catholic School</th>
<th>State School</th>
<th>Private Independent School</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Families Who Attend the Parish Religious Education Program (PREP)

Of the 33 families represented in the study, 67% had their children in PREP. In 6% of families the children had attended PREP but were not attending at the moment. One family had children too young for PREP and one had pulled her children out of PREP and this child was receiving no other religious education outside the home. A number of participants indicated that SRE (Special Religious Education) was offered in the state school their children were attending.

Table 3.7 provides a summary of the Biographical data of the 36 participants participated in the study. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality.
### Table 3.7 Biographical Data of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>No of Chn</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Schooling</th>
<th>PREP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
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<td>Indian</td>
<td>St Miriam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>St Miriam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td>State and Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>St Miriam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; generation Australian</td>
<td>St John</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carole</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>St Miriam</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; generation Australian</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Non Catholic</td>
<td>State No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Irish</td>
<td>St Miriam</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td>Catholic and State No</td>
</tr>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Indian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>St Miriam</td>
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<td>Non Catholic</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic and State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Non Catholic</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Gender</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Parish</td>
<td>No of Chn</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td>PREP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>State o/s</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Convert</td>
<td>State o/s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>St Miriam</td>
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<td>Convert</td>
<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td>State and Catholic Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Catholic o/s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>St Claire</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>State and Catholic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Private Boys’ School</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
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<td>Australian</td>
<td>St John</td>
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<td>Convert</td>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Convert</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>St Michael</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>State and Catholic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>State and Catholic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>1st generation</td>
<td>St Bernard</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>State Catholic and State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>State Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Lisa</td>
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<td>St Andrew</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>State and Catholic</td>
<td>State and Catholic Not Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>State and Catholic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>St Miriam</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Not school age No</td>
</tr>
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<td>The Cross</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>Private/ State Not Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marian</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>St Bernard</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>State</td>
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<td>Gender</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Parish</td>
<td>No of Chn</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Schooling</td>
<td>PREP</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Spouse</td>
<td>Participant</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mary</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>St Peter</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>St Agnes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic o/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>St Miriam</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic o/s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>St John</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Convert</td>
<td>Convert</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephie &amp; Ian *</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>St Theresa</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Convert</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>St John</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1st generation Australian</td>
<td>St Bernard</td>
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<td>Non Cath</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trish</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>New Zealander</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Non Cath</td>
<td>State and Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigi</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>The Cross</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Catholic and State</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of participants N = 36. Total number of families represented N = 33

* Husband and wife both participated.

o/s Overseas
Table 3.8 depicts a summary of the distribution of participants across the eleven parishes accessed for the study. Table 3.8 preserves confidentiality by referring to the parish by the pseudonym. The extended time that Table 3.8 describes is a consequence of this research being a part time degree while the researcher's full time employment was undertaken.

### Table 3.8 Timing and Nature of the Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parishes Approached</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No of Masses Accessed</th>
<th>Nature of the Sample</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>A. The Cross</td>
<td>February 2002</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mass</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. St Mark</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mass PREP</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. St John</td>
<td>June 2002</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mass PREP Mail</td>
<td>5 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. St Bernard</td>
<td>August 2002</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>PREP Mail</td>
<td>1 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. St Theresa</td>
<td>August 2002</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mass PREP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>November 2002</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. St Miriam (1)</td>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mass PREP</td>
<td>5 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Miriam (2)</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mass Mail</td>
<td>10 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. St Peter</td>
<td>March 2003</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Work related</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. St Agnes</td>
<td>October 2004</td>
<td>PREP</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>I. St Michael</td>
<td>November 2003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mass</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. St Andrew</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Work related</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. St Claire</td>
<td>March 2004</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Work related</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Data Gathering Methods
The primary instrument for gathering data was the semi structured interview. The interview data were supported by field notes made through observations. In ethnographic methodology these instruments are valuable as they enable the
researcher to “share [further] in the understanding” of the participants to unlock the realities of the situation through a conversational mode (Berg 1998, p.2).

**Face–to–Face Interviews**

Specific to this study, interviews were used to gather data that assisted the exploration of the three main issues of the study: the understanding by parents of what it means to nurture faith; the strategies employed by parents in everyday life to nurture the faith of their children within the home environment; and the difficulties parents experienced in nurturing the faith of their children. The data were collected by means of semi-structured ethnographic interviews, using a set of questions developed from the central research question as a guide [Appendix 8]. In conducting the interviews, the researcher was guided by strategies suggested by Rubin and Rubin (1995), pointing out that “qualitative interviewers listen to people as they describe how they understand the worlds in which they live and work” (p.3).

Face–to–face interviews were conducted as they promote “a higher level of motivation among the respondents” (Burns 1990, p.302) and are the most effective type of interviewing for encouraging participation and are conducive to building rapport with the respondent (Berg 1998, p.75). In conducting face–to–face interviews the aim of the researcher was to engage in a real but guided conversation in order to develop an empathetic understanding.

The interviews were semi–structured in nature as this style gave the researcher the freedom and flexibility to probe and actively solicit ideas and themes from the perspective of the respondents (Berg 1998; Rubin and Rubin 1995). The inbuilt flexibility of the semi–structured interview allowed for the interviewer to empathetically hear the meaning of what the participant was saying and enabled the interviewer to explore arenas that were unanticipated (Rubin and Rubin 1995, pp.45–46). The flexibility of the semi–structured interviews allowed not only for the assessing of a personal understanding of faith but also of the values, opinions and attitudes of those bring interviewed. Even though a set of interview questions was prepared, the questions served mainly as a guide. This guide allowed for the order of the questions to be varied as the conversations with different individuals raised particular issues. Probes and follow–up questions were used throughout the interviews to clarify points or
to request further examples to elaborate on main ideas, encouraging the participants to share their experience without making them feel threatened or uncomfortable (Rubin and Rubin 1995, pp.208–212).

**Observation of the Environment**

Initially it was envisaged that observations of the site of the interview (i.e., family room, kitchen area) would be made. Observations were to note external expressions of faith indicative of a “religious environment”. Such things would include: the presence of religious icons; the evidence of religious literature; and the presence of a specific prayer space. This proved to be difficult as many of the interviews were conducted in the lounge room of the house, while other interviews were held outside the homes of the participants. The interviews which were conducted in the family room or the kitchen areas of the house were few. The number of observations made in the kitchen areas and the family room were too few to make any significant contribution to the study.

**Field Notes**

The researcher wrote field notes after each interview. The field notes recorded such things as perceptions, reactions, points of interest, points of reflection that would be useful to the overall story of each participant and that would later assist in interpreting the written transcripts. The field notes were read in conjunction with the coding of each file to enrich the interviews. The field notes also became another way of bringing the researcher back into the event of the interview. Field notes were typed as files, one per interview and were stored on disk. These disk files became part of the material for the subsequent qualitative data.

**The Interview Schedule**

The aim of the interviews was to discover how participants nurtured the faith of their children within the context of the home. The interviews explored this topic through discussing four broad areas. The discussion of the four broad areas was preceded by a set of questions to gain biographical information. The biographical data related to parish attendance, gender and number of children in the family, ages of the children, religion of participants, religion of spouse, schooling of participants, spouse and
children, and whether PREP was attended (cf. pp.61–76). This information was valuable for building a picture of the background of the participants.

The first set of questions following the biographical information was designed to gain insight into the understanding of faith held by participants and their desire for their children in relation to faith development. The questions centred on such things as what is faith? Why is faith important to you? What desire do you have for your children in relation to their faith life? This first set of questions was the basis for further exploring the second set of questions. The second set of questions focussed on how faith was put into practise in their home. The aim here was to identify strategies which were employed by the participants to nurture the faith of their children within the everyday life of the home environment. The third set of questions centred on the challenges faced by parents in their endeavour to nurture the faith of their children. The fourth set of questions sought the types of resources participants would find useful in assisting them in their task to nurture the faith of their children within the home. To conclude the interview, participants were asked to summarise the essence of what had been discussed through a metaphor, a picture, word, or phrase. This was a way of letting the interview come to a natural conclusion.

**The Pilot Interviews**

In order to test the general wording and sequencing of questions, the researcher was guided by Berg’s (1998, pp.69–71) advice to pilot the interview questions. In designing the set of guiding questions for the interview, the greatest concerns were: not to include terms that were jargonistic or academic in nature; to avoid using words with emotional ‘baggage’ because participants could react to the emotionally laden words rather than the issue under discussion; and not to ask leading questions that might prejudice participant’s responses (Neuman 1997, p.234). The aim was to design a schedule using open-ended questions that would encourage participants to share their experience through story.

A pilot study of the instrument was conducted with three females, two known to the researcher and one who volunteered after reading about the study in the Perth Archdiocesan Catholic Church newspaper, *The Record*. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine whether the set of questions would obtain the data, eliminate
confusion and problematic questions that may have existed, as well as to determine the length of the interview (Berg 1998, p.71).

Once the pilot interviews were completed, the transcriptions were made and it became clear that two questions led to some confusion and were therefore problematic to the participants. A debriefing session was held with two of the participants interviewed and in consultation with the researcher’s academic supervisor, the two questions were revised. A second pilot group to test the revised questions was not used before the study was conducted. It was agreed to start the data collection and to further modify any questions that proved to be problematic, but at the same time to remain flexible enough to introduce questions to examine new ideas and themes as they emerged during the interview (Rubin and Rubin 1995, p.45). The revised questions clarified the confusion therefore, there was no need for a further review. The revised schedule was used to gather the data for the study. The final format of the interview schedule is presented in Appendix 7.

The following protocol guidelines for conducting the interviews were set up with particular consideration being given to making participants feel at ease. Each participant would choose the appropriate time for the interview to take place with the majority of interviews taking place in the home. The interview was conducted in an informal manner to highlight the understanding that the interview was a conversation about the story of the participants rather than a formal procedure to extract information. Preceding the interview, explicit permission was sought to tape the interview which was itself the initial part of the recording.

Since the accumulation of the sample was gradual, it allowed for the incremental examination of the data. This was useful, as it helped to identify new ideas and themes that emerged during the interviews and helped to assess if the data gathered to date were actually useful to the study. The gradual accumulation of the sample also enabled self evaluation of interviewing skills, giving opportunity to develop more sharply focussed interview techniques in subsequent interviews. This self evaluation influenced the later conversation questions as ideas developed and initiated new lines of questioning built on concepts and categories that emerged from earlier interviews.
The Interview Process

Careful consideration was given to making each of the participants feel comfortable. The location for the interviews was chosen by the participants. Twenty seven interviews were conducted in the homes of participants providing a safe and comfortable environment in which the respondents felt in control.

Another seven participants requested alternative locations. Two requested to be interviewed in the home of the researcher. These interviews were held when no other family members were in the house. Three interviews were held in a café. The two participants from the country chose to be interviewed at a local café when they came into the local town for their shopping. One interview was conducted in the work place of the researcher as the participant was also from a country area and travelled to Perth for business. The participant felt comfortable as it was a place with which she was familiar. Two other participants were interviewed at their parish centre away from their family. Care was taken with the interviews both inside the home and outside that they were conducted away from other family members or patrons. All efforts were made to ensure reasonable privacy so that the participants felt secure and would not be concerned about being overheard (Berg 1998, p.88).

Initially, it was planned that the interviews would run for 60 minutes. After the pilot it became evident that this duration proved difficult for most participants who in the main were not used to an interview situation. Further the subject itself was very personal and for many of the participants this was the first time they had openly shared faith issues, especially with a stranger. It was decided rather to honour the natural conclusion time. The approximate length of most interviews was between 40 and 45 minutes with two exceeding 60 minutes. After data was collected, all participants were thanked for their support.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was an ongoing process. The first part of the analysis was the transcription of the interviews. Transcribing began while the interviews were still in process (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Analysing data along the way was beneficial to ascertain if the information gathered was valuable and useful to the research. It was found, after the pilot study, that two questions were not generating data deemed useful
to the research question, so the questions were redesigned in order to focus more specifically on the type of information which was relevant.

...data analysis begins while the interviewing is still under way. After completing each interview and then again after finishing a larger group of interviews, you examine the data you have heard, pull out the concepts and themes that describe the world of the interviewees, and decide which areas should be examined in more detail.

(Rubin and Rubin 1995, p.226)

The Interview as Data

An audio recording of the interviews was performed using an analogue Sony Portable Dictator BM–21 with Maxwell UR C90 cassettes. A duplicate of each original tape was made and used for transcriptions. The transcriptions were made using a Lanier VM 20 which included a foot pedal control with speed, tone and volume adjustments. The transcriptions were made directly from the tape. The first 21 interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the later 15 were contracted out to a qualified transcriptionist using the same equipment.

Data preparation was guided by McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig (2003, pp.63–81) with the purpose that computerised data management would be employed. Noting the belief of Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (cited in McLellan et al 2003, p.65) that a transcript cannot ever produce a verbatim record of discourse; the main aim of the transcriptions was to capture the context and words of the discourse. Attention was given to where and when punctuation was required, so as not to change the intent or emphasis of the response or comment of an interviewee (McLellan et al 2003, p.66). Several other conventions were used to make transcripts readable. Nonverbal sounds, such as the sound of laughter were typed in parentheses (laughter). Fillers such as “mm”, “yeah”, “errs” and “um” were omitted from the transcriptions if they did not contribute to the overall purpose of the story. In the case where these words were of importance to the meaning of the conversation they were transcribed. Inaudible segments or inaudible words which were unintelligible were defined by an ellipse “…”. On the occasion where there was an overlap of speech a new line was used to distinguish the speech of each speaker. Significant pauses, those longer than three seconds, were indicated by using “long pause” in parentheses. Words inserted into the text to clarify meaning were enclosed in square brackets [ ]. In the event of the transcriptionist being unsure of the
accuracy of a statement, the statement was typed in red followed by two question marks for the researcher to clarify. All names were replaced with pseudonyms in the transcriptions to protect the identity of the participants, the name of others, locations and organisations. A solid long line together with a notation indicated an interruption to the interview from an outside source, for example, the door bell rang, or a child walked into the room. A new line was then used to indicate that the interview had resumed.

All transcriptions were printed and stored electronically as individual computer files identified by a code on disk. A check of the transcriptions was made by reading the hard copy of the transcriptions while concurrently listening to the tape and following the text. This process was repeated for each transcription until all possible corrections were made as required so that the most accurate account of the interview was obtained. Then an updated copy was retained on disk and stored away from the audiotapes (Rubin and Rubin 1995, McLellan et al 2003).

**Coding the Data**

To preserve the rich textual details collected in the interviews the data were coded and analysed using three coding methods particularly suited to ethnographic research: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Berg 1998; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Strauss 1991; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

**Open Coding**

Open coding was employed to identify the various themes that emerged from the data. Transcripts selections were allocated into preliminary coding categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990, pp.61–74; Rubin and Rubin 1995, p.228). Before coding commenced, a summary of each interview was made. From these summaries a small list of preliminary coding categories was identified. Then the coding began. The data was read and reread several times to identify the major categories contained in the transcripts. Relevant words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs were underlined and the data coded using a descriptive coding system. As new categories were identified, all interviews previously examined were re-coded in the light of the new category. Code notes were written throughout the data analysis, first in the right hand margin and on subsequent readings in the left hand margins. This made it easier to identify new categories that were emerging. When there was doubt about the intended meaning of
the respondents, the researcher returned to the field notes and the taped conversation for closer scrutiny noting such things as the intonations of the voice, pauses in the conversation or emotions that helped clarify the meaning.

**Axial Coding**

On the completion of the open coding, axial coding was then employed to further examine the themes identified in the open coding. Axial coding assisted in the intensive coding around one category identified in the open coding (Berg 1998; Strauss 1987). During this second phase of the data analysis careful consideration was given to all the existing data, and it was then reorganised into clusters that were thematically related. The relationship between the various themes was then examined (Creswell 1998; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Strauss 1987). Again the transcripts were read and reread to identify and code themes, concepts and stories noting the interconnecting categories. A descriptive coding system, together with notes made in the margins was used in the reorganisation of the coded data.

**Selective Coding**

Selective coding was then used for the final analysis of the data. At this stage, all the subordinate categories and subcategories became systematically linked with the core categories to “form a comprehensive picture of their [participants’] collective experience” (Aronson 1994, p.1). This understanding of coding is also held by Berg (1998); Creswell (1998); and Strauss (1994; 1987). The aim of this exercise was to identify the relationships between the categories and to ‘build a story’ giving a clear description of the data by identifying the overarching themes that have emerged throughout the coding process (Creswell 1998; Rubin and Rubin 1995). It also enabled the researcher to discard data that was not particularly useful to the particular study. The findings were then interpreted and compared with the literature in this field.

At the end of the coding the transcriptions were set up within the qualitative data analysis computer program QRS NUD\*IST [Non-numerical, Unstructured Data, Indexing, Searching and Theorizing Tool] (N6).

*NUD\*IST is a qualitative data analysis program with theory building capabilities. By providing tools for managing and coding "documents" (including non-text documents such as musical*
scores and videos) on the one hand, and creating and organizing categories on the other, it is intended to facilitate asking questions about meaning in document collections.

(Population Studies Centre University of Pennsylvania 2005)

N6 assisted in the organization and management of the data and “allow[ed] for the retrieving of information and the reassembling of information as data is grouped and regrouped into themes and categories identified within the data analysis” (Kelle 2000, p.285). The texts were imported into N6 document system as individual MS-DOS ASCII text files. N6 uses a hierarchical tree structure to organise codes which can be easily updated and changed as the coding scheme develops so the relationship and connectedness between concepts and ideas can be easily examined (Silverman 2000, p.167).

The first information to be coded was the biographical data for each participant (eg: gender, religion, schooling of children, participants schooling background, etc) and then for all responses to each question of the interview schedule. Each interview was read several times and marginal notes made. These were then coded. Reports were generated that related to each question and item of interest that were seen to be useful for consideration in the discussion. The quotations of forthcoming Chapters Four, Five and Six were directly from the reports generated by N6, the literal material imported as the interview transcripts.

Timeline for the Data Gathering Phase
Table 3.9 reports the data collection timeline. As already reported (cf. p.69) a total of 35 interviews were conducted over a period of two and a half years. The data collection commenced in October 2001 with the pilot group and concluded in June 2004. There were two main reasons that contributed to the long duration of the collection of data phase of the study. The first reason concerned the nature of the study. As already mentioned, the anticipated number of participants for the study was fifty, however, there was reluctance among those in the target group to commit to participate in the research (cf. p.59). Reasons for this have been discussed earlier. A second factor that contributed to the span of the data collection phase was that this degree was completed in part time mode. The data collection had to fit around full time work commitments which included a heavy work load of evening work, thus, most data was collected on
weekends and during time taken off work as holiday leave or integrated with work when out of town.

Table 3.9   Timeline of Research Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar Year</th>
<th>January – June</th>
<th>July – December</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td></td>
<td>Approached South Central Zone of Priests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pilot study—3 interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Contact with all Parish Priests South Central Zone</td>
<td>Parishes Accessed St Bernard St Theresa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parishes Accessed</td>
<td>Number of Interviews conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Cross</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Mark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St John</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Interviews conducted</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Parishes Accessed</td>
<td>Parish Accessed St Michael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Miriam (1)</td>
<td>Number of Interviews conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Agnes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Western Zone – work related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Peter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Interviews conducted</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Parishes Accessed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Merredin Zone – work related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Claire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>St Andrew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Interviews conducted</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Data reduction: – transcriptions and data analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Data analysis and writing the thesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Three has presented the methodology used in the study. It has discussed the
design of the study, the research procedures, the sampling strategy and sample used in
the study. The context of the study was established by providing a profile of the
parishes and the participants who participated in the study. The final part of the Chapter
reviewed the data collection methods utilised in the study and the procedures used in
analysing the data. Finally the timeline taken to collect the data was presented.
Chapters Four, Five, and Six will present the findings of the study. Chapter Four will
present three archetypal understandings of faith which emerged from findings.
Chapter Four

The Findings: Developing the Analytical Metaphors

Faith is the foundational core of a person, the fundamental disposition that colors and shapes everything that comes after it. Thus it is the primary focus, the basic disposition or orientation to being in the world by which the person makes, maintains or transforms human meaning. Arising from one’s “structural core,” faith is the primary orientation of a person’s existence. (Fowler 1986, p.67)

The findings presented in this study are the thoughts and expressions of a group of parents who in their own words describe how they nurture the faith of their children. These words reflect, at a grassroots level, the lived reality of a group of parents who value the gift of faith and acknowledge the importance of nurturing it in their children.

Chapter Four is the first of three Chapters that present the findings of the research. This Chapter will present the findings on the concept of faith held by those who participated in the study and the desires these participants have for their children in relation to faith. Chapter Five will present the findings on how faith is nurtured within the context of the home and Chapter Six describes the challenges faced by parents in their task of nurturing the faith of their children. Chapter Four is divided into two main parts. In the first part of the Chapter, the aim of the interview is made explicit. In the second part, three archetypal understandings of faith which emerged from the data are defined and discussed.

The Aim of the Interview

The aim of the interviews was to listen to how parents nurture the faith of their children within the home. The first part of the interview centred on questions such as: What is faith? Why is faith important within family life? What do you desire for your children in relation to faith? The second part of the interview focussed on how faith is put into practise within the context of the home. The final part of the interview explored the concerns and hindrances parents experience in nurturing the faith of their children and the types of resources they identified as useful to assist them in their role[Appendix 8].
Chapters Five and Six present the findings from the second and last sections of the interview schedule.

In trying to determine how parents nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home, it was necessary first of all to come to an understanding of the faith of the participants. This Chapter will communicate the connection between the personal understandings of faith of the participants and how these understandings impinge on the way faith is nurtured within their home. This connection will be discussed further in Chapters Five and Six.

This study was mindful of the view that the faith of a person is constantly growing and maturing and is not static but rather constitutes a process (Stokes 1989, pp.2–4). All participants were volunteers who before the interview knew the general topic and area of research. The participants were not informed of the questions beforehand, nor previewed the interview schedule. Their conversations about faith in the interviews are understood to reflect their own perceptions, beliefs, and understandings. Direct quotations in these Chapters were used in order to preserve the voice of the participant; the punctuation was intended to clarify the meaning expressed by intonation, rhythm, and context of the conversation of the participants.

All participants acknowledged their faith belief to be based on Christian principles. Participants identified themselves as Catholic including those who were involved in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) with the view of being fully initiated into the Catholic Church in the near future. Thus, Christian faith is at the core of their understanding of life and an integral part of family life. These participants are not theologians in the sense of having formal studies in theology; indeed, most have not been formally schooled in faith. However, they attempted to construct their lives around and through their faith experiences. In other words, they were committed believers; parents of primary aged children.

Participants indicated that initially they felt uneasy during the interview when they were confronted with questions about their personal faith understanding. For many this interview was the first time they had articulated their faith understanding. Most participants commented that they felt inadequate when trying to describe their personal
understanding of faith. By the end of the interview, however, it was common to hear comments that the experience had been beneficial to them. These sentiments echo Fowler’s observation of the people he interviewed for his study:

*In the course of the interview, people became involved in the important work of bringing their faith to words, something that many of them were doing for the first time … Articulation means bringing experiences and commitment to word and action.*

(Fowler 1986, p.39)

As with the experience of Fowler, participants in this study repeated that the process had helped them work through the meaning of faith in their lives at a deeper level than they had ever shared before. Some participants even questioned why they had not been given such an opportunity earlier in their life. They found that the experience enabled them to become conscious of what they truly believed faith to be.

**The Concept of Faith**

This section deals with the concept of faith held by those who participated in the interviews. From the conversations with the participants it became apparent that for most of them faith was an integral part of who they are as humans, living in the world. Faith, for most, was not an isolated cognitive concept detached from life; rather it had to do with the making, maintenance, and the transformation of human meaning. “It is a mode of knowing and being” (Fowler 1986, p.15). Most participants indicated that, “Faith is more than doctrine, belief, religious laws or creed” (Stokes 1989, p.5). It is a lived reality. (Groome 1980, pp.58–66). The faith understanding of most participants does not appear to be isolated from life; rather it is an integral part of what it is to be in relationship with one another and with God. Said in another way, it is an acceptance that faith is fundamentally a belief in God.

During the course of the interviews the impact that faith had on daily life of participants became increasingly evident. It could say that faith, to varying degrees, is at the foundation or core of daily life. In discussing why faith was important to their lives, most participants went beyond the practices of faith to sharing the lived experience of their faith. Participants declared these as essential to what it meant for them to be Christian, and in this case Catholic. It was from these understandings of faith that they constructed meaning for their faith and lives.
Three Archetypal Understandings of Faith

Upon examining the concept of faith held by the participants three distinctive understandings of faith emerged. The metaphor of ‘voices’ has been used as an analytical tool to describe how each archetype speaks of a specific perception of faith. The concepts of faith held by the participants fell into three interpretive voices. The researcher named these:

1. The voice of orthodoxy; speaking of a faith that is grounded in traditions with an emphasis on the literal interpretations of creeds, doctrines and Church traditions.
2. The voice of faith as a lived experience; speaking of a faith that has been constructed by the experiences of both faith and life.
3. The voice of faith as an active struggle, speaking of a faith that does not have a clear focus in their lives.

The names of the voices are not meant to be pejorative, critical, or negative. The names chosen are trying to reflect the sense and tone of the conversations and the concerns of participants. The participants in the voice of orthodoxy might even like to be so labelled as they see orthodox to be a sincere compliment of their position in matters of faith. The conversations of participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience likewise always speak of their interaction of the Gospel values with day to day life and therefore the label reflects this conviction. Those labelled with the voice of faith as an active struggle might also like to be labelled so as their conversations highlight the inadequacies and struggles they experience in sharing faith with their children.

Table 4.1 illustrates the number of participants in each of the interpretive voices. As shown, the majority of participants reported having an understanding of faith that was characteristic of the interpretive voice of faith as a lived experience. This group represents 80% of the total population. The group identified as having an understanding of faith that was orthodox represents 14% of the total population; those identified as struggling with an understanding of faith was 6% of the total sample.
Each of these voices speaks of faith through a different perspective. The three voices (the voice of orthodoxy, the voice of faith as a lived experience and the voice of faith as an active struggle) are by no means exhaustive but they are representative of most of the participants’ views. This is not to say that all participants fit exclusively into one voice, nor is it claimed that any one participant could be completely described in one or other voices, but it was felt that the archetypes that were these three voices fairly indicate the diversity among participants.

Table 4.2 illustrates the number of times that participants across the three voices were quoted in this Chapter. While the contribution of everyone across the three voices shaped the data for this analysis, only those expressions that best presented the thoughts of a particular voice were chosen. It is argued that the quotations used are indicative of the view of each voice in terms of the analysis of their contributions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>No. of times quoted in Ch 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lived Experience</td>
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<td>Carmel</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>0</td>
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It was predicted that participants who became characterised as the voice of faith of lived experience were most likely to come forward for this study. Therefore, it was not surprising that the majority of participants belonged to this group. In some ways it was expected also that a number of participants who are here characterised as the orthodox group would participate in the study but it was unexpected that those in the voice of faith as an active struggle would come forward. In the following sections these three distinctive voices will be discussed in greater detail.

**The Voice of Orthodoxy**

The first voice identifies a concept of faith that can be best described as orthodox. This metaphor fits this voice as it speaks of a faith which is closely associated with an approach which might appear to be formulistic and ritualistic in nature. While Groome (2002, p.178) states that to reflect the wholeness of Christian faith it needs to encompass three aspects: cognitive, affective and behavioural, the understanding of faith by participants who speak with the voice of orthodoxy reflects most strongly a dimension of faith that is intellectual and cognitive. The understanding by participants in the voice of orthodox is grounded in tradition and refers to faith as specifically Catholic. Those within this voice work hard to preserve the Catholicity of the faith within the home. Table 4.2 (pp.93–95) lists the five participants identified in this voice.
The understanding of faith described by those in the voice of orthodoxy stems predominantly from an understanding of faith that is entrenched in the memory of participants. The memory is what they had been taught during their childhood. Participants speak of an understanding of faith that is static and does not change as one grows and matures; an understanding of faith that is ritualistic in nature and centred on the observances of faith; and an understanding of faith which, on the whole, is knowledge based. These characteristics will be discussed in the next section.

Acceptance of a Faith Learnt in their Childhood
Stoke (1989, p.7) identifies a group of people who throughout their faith development accept the creed and dogma of the Church without questioning. The data of the current study showed that this is also true of the participants who speak in the voice of orthodoxy. One of the strongest themes which emerged among those in this voice was the acceptance of a faith they learnt as a child. They have a sense of loyalty; thus deviation from what they have been taught in their childhood in matters of faith gives them a sense that they are not being faithful to the Church.

Many participants in this voice indicated that they did not question faith. Heidi was one such participant. She was brought up in South Africa in a household where her mother was the Catholic. She was educated in a Catholic school for girls and then had little faith formation after she left school. Heidi considers that for one to be ‘Christian’ one must have faith, a faith that requires no proof and no questioning. For Heidi, the term ‘Christian’ is not distinctive from ‘Catholic’. She believes that the faith in which you have been brought up is not to be questioned. She tends to see the idea of people questioning their faith as being a disturbance to her understanding of faith. The interview with Heidi was conducted the week after Easter and she shared how she became rather anxious over the Easter period for the people she encountered who questioned the whole Easter event.

*I think every Christian has to have faith to believe things that we obviously haven’t a definite proof of and I think sometimes that the hardest thing with it today everyone is questioning this or (pause). We just had Easter and people are questioning if He rose again and that if He actually was crucified and I think just some things you have to have faith in that what you have been brought up with and that’s what you believe. So I guess faith is what I believe and what I have been brought up believing.*

(Heidi)
Comments made by Heidi are akin to most participants in the voice of orthodoxy. Of the five participants in this voice, four spoke strongly of what they were taught about faith during their childhood. The acceptance of a faith taught and experienced in childhood by those in this voice lay at the foundation of how they constructed their understanding of faith. The concern by those in the voice of orthodoxy was that the Catholic faith was being diminished by those questioning their faith.

**Faith is Static**

Stoke (1989 p.6) claims that faith is a process that is ever changing with life experience. This understanding of faith was not reflected by those in the voice of orthodoxy. Those in the voice of orthodoxy tend to hold definite views on the teachings of the Church, views based on their childhood perceptions. The view of faith expressed by this voice was seen to be static. This understanding was demonstrated by Kerry.

> We have very traditional beliefs. You know the Catholic faith is pulled apart in all sorts of directions now, but I believe in Adam and Eve, I believe in the creation story whereas some Catholics believe it is symbolic, but I believe that what is in the Bible is what is in the Bible and that is all we need to believe.  

*(Kerry)*

Kerry acknowledges that her concept of faith is traditional giving an indication that she recognises that others express their faith in other ways. For her, like others in the voice of orthodoxy, there is no room for interpretation of matters on faith other than a literal one.

**Faith is Being Loyal to the Rules**

A further understanding of faith that emerged by those in the voice of orthodoxy was that to be truly Catholic one needs to be loyal to the rules of the Church. It was clear that this understanding was one that has also been embedded in an understanding of faith learnt in their childhood. The acceptance of rules and regulations give participants in this voice a set of guidelines by which they can safely live out their faith. As illustrated by the comments from both Heidi and Kerry, participants in this voice find the idea of questioning faith somewhat a dilemma. They felt strongly that the Catholic Church is being threatened by those who question its teachings. Most participants in
this voice were happy to accept what they have been taught as true and were loyal to them.

**Faith as Observance**

Another perception common to those in the voice of orthodoxy is a fervent commitment to practices of the faith tradition. The rituals and practices of the faith are at the core of their faith life. Observances of the faith become for these participants the expression through which they witness the faith. They relate to rituals and practices that were part of their faith upbringing. Participants in this voice are secure in the structure that these observances provide. Tina reflected this view. For her, as with others in this voice, to be truly Catholic one needs to adhere to the practices of the faith traditions.

> I guess it’s … (long pause) my understanding of faith. Well it’s my belief in God, in Jesus and the way he lived his life and the how I can emulate that. Through his teachings how I lead my life as a Catholic. Practising the Catholic faith, actually practising it. (Tina)

The view of emulating the faith held by Tina does not refer to following a life based on the life of Jesus but rather on the practices of the faith. This became apparent when she described how she practised her faith.

> I practise my faith, you know like I’ll say the Rosary, I’ll go to Church and they [children] actually see me say the Rosary and I pray with them. (Tina)

Observance of the faith is one of the central activities for those in the voice of orthodoxy. It is the means through which they express what they believe it is to be Catholic rather than Christian. The impacts of a formulistic and ritualistic expression of faith on the home will be discussed in Chapter Five.

**Being in Relationship With God is About Doing What is Right**

An understanding that faith is about being in relationship with God is common to those in the voice of orthodoxy. For most in the voice of orthodoxy being in relationship with God means to be on God’s good side by doing the right thing according to the practice of the faith. The relationship with God from the understanding of those in this voice can be interpreted as being contractual. Maria illustrates this point in her discussion.
Faith is not just one thing. It has been a combination of things. But most important it is about relationship with God. God loves us very much and we are called to love him in the same way. I think the only way you can show this is by doing the right thing.

(Maria)

When asked what the right thing was Maria responded:

Like saying your prayers every day, going to Mass, saying the Rosary and doing the Novena. You know all the things we are asked to do. Through these ways we show God that we care and love him.

(Maria)

Other participants concur with this understanding of what it means to be in relationship with God. Those in this voice did not speak of an unconditional understanding of relationship but of one that is duty bound.

Faith is Believing Without Proof

Another theme that emerged within the voice of orthodoxy is that faith does not rely necessarily on logical and rational reasoning: rather, faith is a belief that comes from within. For participants in the voice of orthodoxy the understanding of faith comes from an acceptance that faith is unchangeable. Those in this voice proclaim that one does not need proof that there is a God because God is an innate part of who we are as humans. Those in the voice of orthodoxy did not have a difficulty in accepting a God that could not be explained. They understood this as part of the mystery of faith.

Mary and Heidi (cf. p.96) express their thoughts about believing without proof. For them faith is a mystery and they are comfortable in accepting this. Mary’s justification for believing without proof come from her understanding that faith is not to be questioned; it is duty bound.

Faith is one of those things. I think it’s what we call a mystery. But for me it is not so much a mystery than just believing. I don’t need proof. God is God. What more do we need to know. We must just accept this. We shouldn’t worry about questioning this; we are called as Catholics to believe and this is what I do.

(Mary)

Faith is Knowledge Based

Groome (2002, p.194) suggests that one aspect of Christian faith which engages the head is to cherish the faith traditions. He explains that Jesus cherished his own Jewish faith and in his ministry drew on from the treasure of the tradition both the new and the
old. “Christians should hand on their faith traditions in vital and life-giving ways” (Groome 2002, p.194). In other words to reduce the understanding of faith to intellectual assent based solely on officially stated doctrines reduces the fullness of the understanding of Christian faith. Many participants in the voice of orthodoxy identify with a faith understanding that is predominantly based on rational assent to official doctrines. One way in which such participants memorise such doctrines is through the rote learning of such texts as the catechism. This was a consistent characteristic of the understanding of faith proposed by those in this voice. Terry’s view is a useful illustration. In discussing his understanding of faith, the comment Terry made is close to the old ‘Penny Catechism’ learnt by rote. On sharing his understanding of faith he did not hesitate, but rather launched into what seemed a well rehearsed statement.

*Faith is belief in Jesus Christ our saviour who came into this world with the sole purpose of saving us from our sins and eternal damnation. And I think we believe basically that we will rise again with him when we die because we believed in him during our life. Not so much of what we do but just what we believe in.* (Terry)

One could argue that Terry certainly ‘knows’ his faith in an intellectual sense. He articulated his beliefs, his profession of faith, in a definite and somewhat confident manner. The comment that faith is “not so much of what we do but just what we believe in” demonstrates the fundamental understanding of this voice – believing is enough. In fact, Terry used the word ‘just’ quite strongly in the conversation to highlight his faith conviction. For those in the voice of orthodoxy relating faith with daily life is not as strong as is the intellectual acknowledgement of the faith.

In summary, the interpretative voice identified as the voice of orthodoxy subscribes to an understanding of faith that is entrenched in the acceptance of a faith learnt in their childhood. This understanding is carried and practised in much the same way into adulthood. What is characteristic about the understanding of faith of this voice is that faith is static; it is governed by the rules and regulations and thus formalistic and ritualistic in nature; the relational understanding is centred on doing the right thing by God, and calls for a unified belief.
Voice of Orthodoxy’s Desire for the Faith of Their Children

Participants in the voice of orthodoxy described two main desires which they held for the faith of their children. The desires were first, that their children keep the practice of the faith; and second a small group also desired that their children be open to the call to religious life or life as a missionary. These desires were in keeping with their understanding of faith.

The Desire to Keep the Practice of the Faith

The practice of the faith was one desire which was strong amongst the five participants in the voice of orthodoxy. The focus for those in this voice was on the hope or even expectation that their children would continue to practise the faith in much the same way they do. Tina’s view was demonstrative of this sentiment.

*Well I would want them to practise it [the faith] regularly and make it a bigger part of their lives as it is in mine so that it affects almost every decision they make.*  
(Tina)

She again reiterated what she meant by practice of the faith.

*I mean practice the faith as I said before as in prayer and the ritual, the going to Church, the Rosary and all the facets of the Catholic religion. So practise and incorporate it as part of their lives.*  
(Tina)

The aim of those in the voice of orthodoxy was to saturate their children in the rituals of the faith so that they would be able to keep the observances of faith. Keeping the faith for those in this voice was centred on preserving the Catholicity of the faith.

The Desire to Dedicate a Life to God

Two participants who speak with the voice of orthodoxy also alluded to an inner desire for their children to become a missionary or a religious within the Church. This desire was exclusive to participants in this voice. Terry comments:

*If tomorrow she says ‘I want to go and join the mission, I want to become a nun’ or ‘I want to become a missionary’ or something, it’s fine with me. I mean it’s her calling, her intention, her life, let her do what she feels fit.*  
(Terry)

Maria spoke also of her desire for her children becoming missionaries and to “consecrating their life to God”. She spoke of her thirteen year old:
My thirteen year old girl is beautiful really. She wants to be a Focolarina. A Focolarina, I don't know if you are aware, they are consecrated in the world. They live in communities and they give their lives to people like missionaries that travel around. She is very bright. She got a scholarship to [a private non Catholic school] and she is doing very well in her studies. First she wants to become a brain surgeon, that's what she says and then she wants to become a Focolarina and travel, give her life to God.

(Maria)

The researcher sensed that for these participants having a child enter into a life that is dedicated to God means that they as parents have been successful in nurturing the faith of that child.

In summary, the desires named by most in the voice of orthodoxy for the faith of their children also centred on keeping the practice of the faith. Participants spoke of the desire for their children to have a faith that was Catholic by nature, a faith that would be demonstrated by keeping to the rituals and traditions which are specifically Catholic and to do this in much the same way they do as parents.

**The Voice of Faith as a Lived Experience**

The second voice that was heard in the data, the voice of faith as a lived experience, was one that speaks of an understanding that faith is grounded in the experiences of life. The understanding of faith by those in this voice is entrenched in the living of a faith life that is markedly diverse from the formalism of the orthodox approach. Faith for these participants centres on personal construction. It demands a lived response. That is, ‘I believe, therefore I am called to act.’ This understanding of faith supports what Groome (1980) refers to as ‘faith as doing’ or ‘a way of the hands (Groome 2002)

Groome (1980) claims this dimension of faith is at the core of the matter of what it means to be Christian. He proposes that “the faith is in the response, and without the response there is no Christian faith” (Groome 1980, p.63).

For this group of participants faith is more than religion; it is the essence that makes sense of life. The guiding principles for those in the voice of faith as a lived experience are not so much the rules and regulations such as for the voice of orthodoxy, but rather living a life that is in accordance with the values proclaimed in the Gospels. The characteristics that set the voice of faith as a lived experience apart from the
understanding of faith professed by the voice of orthodoxy will be discussed in the following section.

**Faith Is Based on Personal Construction**

Discovering a personal understanding of faith was a strong characteristic among those in the voice of faith as a lived experience. This discovery was not exclusive to converts to the Catholic faith. Some participants who were ‘cradle Catholics’ shared that at some stage in their lives, usually in adulthood, they had to come to their own understanding of faith which at times conflicted with the faith expressions of their parents. The participants shared how they found themselves, at times, challenging the established traditions that they were taught in their childhood in order to make sense of faith for their life. The comment offered by Karen summarises succinctly the view shared by many in the voice of faith as a lived experience.

*My faith is something I received as a child and I’ve made it more meaningful as I have grown up and become an adult. I have made faith my own.*  
*(Karen)*

The example given by Ian is indicative of the faith journey travelled by many in this voice in order to come to a personal construction of faith.

*So I guess faith is what I believe and what I have been brought up believing. I guess it started with, my childhood. … At home you just believed and that is just your basic belief. What I have come to accept as an adult is different to that of my childhood. I mean I still believe in the faith but I express my beliefs in a different way. It is not as rigid. It is more liveable.*  
*(Ian)*

Westerhoff speaks of people like those in the voice of faith as a lived experience as “persons who discovered a dimension of faith expression that is truly their own” (1980, p.27). The voice of lived experience speaks of a faith that has been constructed by questioning what they have been taught in their childhood and then coming to a personal decision of how they will express their faith within the faith tradition. Westerhoff (1980 p.26) calls this ‘owned faith’ and Fowler (1986) calls it ‘conjunctive faith.’ It is the time when people draw on various influences on their lives and come to an understanding of faith which is uniquely theirs. Stokes (1989) explains this idea further by adding:
It draws together several strands of the individual’s faith journey – family upbringing, previous religious affiliation (if any), and the influences of education, social context and lifestyle upon them. Put simply, a … person builds on his or her previous faith journey … [and] comes in the fact that now one’s faith expression is no longer that of parents, Church, or tradition, but is now clearly one’s own. ‘Our faith’ becomes ‘my faith’: It is an owned faith. (Stokes 1989, pp.20–21)

Representatives of the voice of orthodoxy could become frustrated with those who focus on the lived experience of faith as they may feel that these participants do not follow the faith in the true sense. This is not to say that those who speak with the voice of orthodoxy have not come to a personal commitment of faith. They construct their faith understanding from a different perspective.

**Faith is a Process**

A further understanding that emerged in the voice of faith as a lived experience supports Stoke’s (1989) thought that faith is not static but rather a process that is ever changing with life experience. Most participants in this voice are open to the idea that the understanding of faith evolves and changes with new life experiences.

Judy is one of the participants who became a Catholic in recent years. Her understanding of faith was challenged as she went through the initial process of coming to an understanding of faith within a new faith tradition. For her, if one is to grow in faith, one must recognise that it is an ongoing process.

> Faith is a part of our lives and faith is a nurturing process. People have a preconceived idea that everyone is on the same path of faith or at the same level. It is not. It must be nurtured and will be nurtured until the day you die. That’s faith. (Judy)

Doreen has challenged her childhood understanding of faith. Doreen is Terry’s spouse and chose to be interviewed with her husband for the study. In this part of the conversation Doreen states how her understanding of faith differs from that of her husband. As discovered earlier in this Chapter, Terry speaks in the voice of orthodoxy (Table 4.2, pp.93–95). His understanding of faith centres on what Doreen calls “black and white” type of faith. She does not resonate with the faith understanding which she experienced and practised in her childhood; a faith that she describes as being focused on saving oneself from eternal damnation.
The background from which we come [Anglo–Indian]... God is portrayed as a revengeful God, and that is something from the beginning I thought was the wrong image. That was being portrayed to us kids as the fear factor and it's not like that... if you don't do this, if you don't say your Rosary, if you don't say the Angelus it's eternal hell and damnation, and I don't agree with that part. He [Terry, her husband] is still in the fear factor thing I reckon. I have come to understand that each person's understanding [of faith] grows and becomes more relevant as one grows older and experiences different things. Well that is how it is for me. (Doreen)

She articulates what many participants in this voice alluded to regarding the nature of faith. Many participants revealed a sense that they could not sustain their faith with an image of God which was not life giving. For many, it was the experience of having to care for and love their children and spouse that revealed to them an image of God which enabled them to grow in their faith understanding.

Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience are not bound solely by the literal explanations of the creeds, doctrines and traditions of the faith as is the case with participants in the voice of orthodoxy. One of the characteristics that has shaped the understanding of faith of those in the voice of faith as a lived experience is the awareness that faith is a process. As a result, those in the voice of faith as a lived experience may have a much broader sense through which they interpret the traditions of the faith.

**Faith is Integrated With Life Experience**

An understanding that faith is integrated with life is foundational to the faith understanding of participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience. For the participants in this voice, the lived reality of this understanding of faith goes further than living a faith that is steeped solely in being faithful to the rules and ritual practices as is proclaimed by those in the voice of orthodoxy. For those in this voice of faith as a lived experience, faith centres on the experience of God within the ordinariness of daily life.

The main perception for those who speak in the voice of faith as a lived experience is an understanding that faith is integrated with life, not parallel with life as can be the case with those who speak in the voice of orthodoxy. The voice of faith as lived experience is grounded in the personal constructions of faith that come from a lived
reality. As with the voice of orthodoxy, God is at the centre of the faith and for those in
the voice of faith as a lived experience faith is also at the centre of their daily life.

*Faith is belief in God. Faith is what you do everyday. Yes, that’s
right. And faith is not just going to Church on Sunday that’s just
part of it that sort of the overt practise of it. It’s, you know, all these
other things that we do everyday.* (Helen)

Elizabeth comment was representative of strong emphasis of those in this voice on how
their understanding of faith allowed them to relate with God in the ordinariness of daily
life.

*For me faith is something that I live everyday. Something that I
take from everyday. I argue with God about the things that happen
to us, I thank him for the things that are happening to us and I draw
comfort. This is what faith is for me.* (Elizabeth)

Pat articulates another sentiment which is supports the understanding of most
participants in this voice. It was revealed in his exchange that his understanding of faith
is primarily not solely knowledge based. For Pat, it is first and foremost through
personal experiences that one comes to more fully understand the meaning that faith
has for his life.

*Faith is the reason for existence. That’s how I look at my faith.
Faith is something that you live everyday. Very much so. If not,
then you would think that faith has become something like only
knowledge. I mean that is what the Pharisees thought in the days
of old. That’s how they thought they were that just because they
were more knowledgeable that they were the people who were
closer to God. That should never be the case. Christ came to
change all that ... Faith should never be the domain or the
monopoly of people who think they have total knowledge of that
particular thing or people who think that they are more trained for
that purpose. We go through all kinds of experience, so when I
say this is my faith all these experiences come into play.* (Pat)

The main focus for those in the voice of faith as a lived experience is that life is guided
by the practices of the faith, not ruled by them. The practices of the faith give them a
tool through which to live out their faith in their everyday lives. Those in the voice of
orthodoxy do not share similar understandings of the integration of faith with life: that is,
they do not speak of a faith that is integrated with the ordinariness of daily life.
**Faith is Based on Living the Gospel Values**

Participants who speak with the voice of faith as a lived experience speak of faith as a way of life centred on values which are proclaimed in the Gospels. Participants in this voice believe that the foundational guiding principles for living a faith-filled life are found in the Gospels.

Alice is a representative of the understanding of those in the voice of faith as a lived experience. She has constructed her faith around an understanding that calls people to acknowledge Gospel values.

*Faith? Faith is being a good Christian. Living a good Christian life in the sense that may not be too religious but what I would say is being a good person in your heart, helping others, sharing, being kind and generous, respect, respecting your elders. Those are the values we were brought up with and which I believe I should instil in my children.*

(Alice)

When asked from where do these values come, Alice replied:

*Oh, they come from what we hear and read in the Bible, and the Gospel on Sunday. We know this because that is how Jesus lived his life and we are asked to do the same. This is why I believe I should instil these values in my children.*

(Alice)

Doreen establishes that she does not have a name for her understanding of faith; rather, it is grounded in her understanding of conscience. This conscience is formed by Gospel values.

*To me faith is … just I don’t have a name for it. For me it’s my conscience. For me to do right or wrong and, it so happens, it’s all described by Christianity. I have been born in the Catholic faith. But I don’t believe everything is all about black and white, right and wrong thing. I don’t know about eternal damnation, all that kind of stuff. For me, it’s just doing right and wrong. I know this by following what Jesus tells us in the Gospels. … I feel that is you have no faith, you have no conscience. I believe faith is my conscience based on the teachings of the Gospels.*

(Doreen)

For Doreen, faith is about living life in a way that is guided by conscience. If one does what is right according to what Jesus taught, then one is doing good. For some this may seem that Doreen has a humanistic approach to faith, but as the discussion went
on she revealed that her main issue was that the name for God, the religion, or faith was not as important to her as the way one lives life.

For Julie, as with many of the participants in the study, the question to describe her understanding of faith was quite daunting at first. It took some time for her to engage in conversation. Finally, in a succinct remark she articulated an understanding of faith that relies on a connection between belief and action. Her response was to ‘basically’ try to live according to the will of God. She used the commandments as her yardstick on which to assess that what she needed to do in order to live according to God’s will.

Oh gee, … (long pause) first of all believing that there is a God and basically trying to live in accordance to what the commandments are. I think that is probably it. Simplistic but that’s it. (Julie)

To be a Christian for those in the voice of faith as a lived experience means to do the will of God while engaging in the world; that is, God’s will is based on the values proclaimed in the Gospels. The priority for those in this voice is to live these values within daily life rather than expressing faith through a pool of knowledge, as is more commonly associated with those in the voice of orthodoxy.

**Faith is Relational**

The voice of faith as a lived experience supports the notion that humans, by nature, are not created to be alone. Humans are communal beings and therefore relationships are important to how people function. This is in contrast to the understanding expressed by those in the voice of orthodoxy where a relationship with God is duty bound. The voice of faith as a lived experience speaks of a faith that is centred on an image of God who loves unconditionally. The focal point here is that God is always with them.

Elizabeth expresses the belief of many in the voice of faith as a lived experience. She declares that if one has faith, one never need feel lonely. Communicating with God develops a relationship that is meaningful and fruitful in all areas of life.

It is like I say to my husband, at times if you’re really happy and if you have nobody around you to thank for it. No friends, nobody and you say thank you God. You’re sharing it with somebody which is such a wonderful thing. You’re not alone. Or if you’re sad and again lonely and there is no other human being that you can have around but if you have this religion where you can say thank you Lord, you are never alone. You’re getting something out of
your religion. You’re getting something good for yourself. You can blame someone. You can blame God as well, you know. You don’t need to find… because in our lives we always want to be with people, we want to be social creatures. It never always happens and there is despair if you cannot fall back onto God that is always there. It would be nice if you… if maybe you could speak to him and he answered back it would be another human relationship. (Elizabeth)

Lyn shares a similar understanding. For her, there is nothing more important than to be in relationship with God. Her relationship with God stems from her belief that God is an intimate part of her life.

For me it’s a relation with a God that is intimately involved in my life, you know, and to me it’s everything, I mean for me personally. Like I lived fifteen years as a single person full time, divine providence, value and income and I’ve seen God provide and I’ve seen you know … I know he’s so real and he’s so intimately involved in our lives; I’ve seen him, I’ve seen him move in my life, I’ve, I know him. I love Jesus he is the most, you know, so to me it’s there’s nothing more important. (Lyn)

For those in the voice of faith as a lived experience faith is about being in relationship with a God who is present in all aspects of life. The relationship with God is not conditional upon living by the practices of the faith as claimed by those in the voice of orthodoxy but rather it is a call to strive to develop an intimate relationship.

**Faith is Believing Without Proof**

Another theme that is shared by the voice of faith as a lived experience and the voice of orthodoxy is that faith is a call to believe without proof. Both voices believe that faith does not rely necessarily on rational thinking; rather, it is a gift and the believer does not require empirical proof. For participants in the voice of orthodoxy the understanding of faith comes from an acceptance that faith is a mystery. Those in the orthodox voice proclaim that one does not need proof that there is a God. The data revealed that the understanding held by participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience was that God is an innate part of who people are as humans and thus an integral part of daily living. Proof for those in the voice of faith as a lived experience does not mean to passively accept faith in a non–questioning way; however, proof is not important because, even though this voice may question aspects of their faith tradition, they do not question if there is a God.
An illustration of the perception which is common to those in the voice of faith as a lived experience is the exchange by Jill. She explains that, for her, proof is not so much in the rational reasoning of faith as it is in the experience of God. For her, faith has an element of mystery.

> What I understand and what I try to impart is a belief in God and in a greater being. It’s believing without being able to explain it properly to the kids. … It’s not something that you can explain or concretely say or prove. So that’s faith, believing without proof.
> (Jill)

Jacquie expresses a similar idea to Jill. For her, belief in God is the most important element of faith. It is the belief that has the greater impact on life and helps to make sense of who she is as a Christian.

> Faith to me is actually believing in a particular concept or belief without necessarily having proof as in something you can hold, or something you can read or something you’ve seen, touched, smell or tasted, so that for me is faith.  
> (Jacquie)

When discussing the issue of proof of God, a large number of participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience spoke of their belief in God as something that is innate in the nature of a person. Carole illustrates this point.

> Faith is something that is inside. It’s just a true belief and it comes from inside. It is just something that you know you can connect with.  
> (Carole)

Trish reiterated that proof is not an essential element of faith because her sense of faith is mainly dependant on what is within her. Faith is a fundamental part of the person. For her faith is innate.

> Faith is separate from having to have things proven to you. It’s something right inside. It’s very important to me and it is very important to get that over to my children as well.  
> (Trish)

When asked to further explain why this was important to her, Trish went on to explain how science and faith need not be in conflict with each other. Having a science background, she could see how science actually enhanced her understanding of faith.

> I think science and faith go hand in hand because science is involved with proofs and things, but faith is deeper than that, you don’t need to prove but that develop along the same way. You
believe the faith, you believe the science but science because you can see, faith because you know.        (Trish)

In the last line of her quote Trish stresses again her understanding of the nature of faith. She concludes that whereas science is believable because it can be seen, faith is believable because one knows. It is a knowing that comes from within. Janet also believes that faith is innate and for her proof is secondary to the trust she has in the knowledge that God will provide all that is needed. She does not question but completely puts her trust in God.

Faith is something that I don’t think you can see or touch. It is something how you feel. It is so different for every one. I suppose faith is a strong belief in hope and is so intangible. I mean there are lots of things I cannot explain but I know that I should not be worrying because I know that I will be alright in the end. Don’t know how but I’ll be alright because someone is looking after me and that’s my faith.            (Janet)

For participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience and to some degree for those in the voice of orthodoxy, a belief without proof is not a concern in trying to construct an understanding of faith. The perception that was emphasised by both the voice of orthodoxy (cf. p.99) and the voice of faith as a lived experience was that faith is innate and thus the believer does not depend on empirical proof. It is one of the themes that surfaced strongly in both voices.

Faith has Little Distinction Between a Faith that is Christian and a Catholic Faith
A distinctive understanding of faith that is unique to the voice of faith as a lived experience is the belief that there is little substantive difference between faith that is Christian and a Catholic faith. Those who speak in the voice of faith as a lived experience have a much broader view of faith than is accepted by the voice of orthodoxy. First the data reveal that the distinction between being Christian and being Catholic in this voice, the voice of faith as a lived experience, is in contrast to that of the voice of orthodoxy. For participants in the voice of orthodoxy, faith is synonymous with being Catholic; for those in the voice of faith as a lived experience, the understanding of faith does not depend on whether one is Catholic or not. Faith, for this group, is values-centred.
Jacquie is one participant who does not distinguish between being Christian and being Catholic. She exposes her children to two faith traditions, both Christian, because she wants her children to experience a broader view of Christianity than that offered by the Catholic Church. When asked why she made this decision she explained that she wanted her children to be part of the Catholic Church because of the sacramental aspects the Church offers. She believes that the sacraments are important for life as they deepen the spiritual dimension of the faith. However, she believes that the Catholic Church is ‘not child friendly’. She considers that it is better to send the children to a place where they enjoy learning about God than it is for them to be turned off on the concept of religion at a very early age. Her husband’s family belong to the Uniting Church so the children attend Sunday school at the Uniting Church.

I believe in Christianity. I am a Catholic myself, my husband is not. He was brought up Uniting, he doesn’t particularly have any religion per se but he believes in morality and Christianity. Oh no I can’t say he believes in Christianity because he doesn’t believe that there is the one Christ per se but um for myself I believe there was a Christ. I hate to be honest (sic) here but sometimes I believe the Catholic faith – yes it may be the one that came from the very beginning and all the others are branches of it – but sometimes I believe it is very, very not old fashion, behind the times and so I am very much into Christianity as in being good, love everybody you know, just look after your own behaviour and um that’s what we have been trying to instil in our children. … From the time they were three years old they’ve been going to Uniting Church Sunday School because Joel’s sister, my husband’s sister, is a Sunday School teacher. They come and pick them up, take them, bring home that’s on a Sunday that’s why we usually attend Church on a Saturday. So I don’t, I hate to say this (sic) but I don’t believe the Catholic faith at this point of time is the be all and end all of Christianity and that’s why I’m trying to expose them [her children] to all sorts of, the perception of Christian faith rather than [just] the Catholic faith.

(Jacquie)

When asked what is at the centre of her faith Jacquie replied;

Christ the person. Be Christ–like. Whereas being Catholic is more. There are a lot of traditional practices, more than I can understand to be Christian practices. That’s it in my little mind, anyway.

(Jacquie)

Belief in Jesus is not the issue for Jacquie. She has a deep sense of her call to live as Jesus taught. The issue for her, as for many in the voice of faith as a lived experience, is that many of the traditions of the Catholic Church just do not seem to make sense to
her. The traditions are viewed as being too formulistic and the meaning of the rituals have been lost on them so they do not see the relevance of them for life.

Susan and Jacquie share similar views. Susan has chosen to send her children to an independent alternative school because she does not differentiate between being Christian and being Catholic. For Susan, the name of the religion is not important. Her main priority is to find a parish or Church of any Christian denomination in which her family feels comfortable worshipping, and a school that promotes Christian values in an explicit manner. It just so happened that the local Catholic Church was to her liking and so she attends this Church regularly with her family.

*What’s my understanding of faith? That’s a good question isn’t it? (long pause) To me it is just one thing that we will always do together as a family. That to me is the critical thing, whether it is Catholic or Protestant or something else is really secondary to me. Particularly that Church [local parish] seems very new age or that they think in a modern form rather than in a very old fashioned form. It seems very children oriented.* (Susan)

It was important for Susan that her place of worship catered for the children and that the children were included or welcomed in the liturgy.

For most participants in this voice, having a faith was much more significant than the faith tradition that they associated with. They were open to the idea that whether one is Christian or Catholic, the call to live faith is based on their perception of how to live the Gospel values. Participants in the voice of orthodoxy, on the other hand, hold the view that the Catholic faith has a religious conviction of its own and must be preserved.

**Faith Includes Being Tolerant of Other Beliefs**

One of the characteristics evident in the data which sets this group aside from the participants in the voice of orthodoxy, was that participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience are also more open-minded to the beliefs of different religions whether the religions are Christian or not. This is consistent with the broader view of Christianity held by this voice. The voice of orthodoxy alludes to the only way to salvation is through the one true faith – the Catholic faith.
Some of the interview data were collected relatively soon after the New York City disaster of September 11, 2001; thus, it is possible that this event had some bearing on the way people viewed other faiths. Another factor that may have had an influence on a tolerance for other religious beliefs by some participants was that some grew up in an environment surrounded by faiths that were not Christian. Elizabeth was one such participant. She expressed a belief that all religious traditions request their followers to lead a good life.

Religion for me whether it be Catholic or Muslim or whatever: religion is being a good human being. Not doing something that would upset you or hurt you and getting something good.

(Elizabeth)

As illustrated by Elizabeth, faith for participants in this voice has more to do with how one responds to God through the way one leads life, rather than adherence to one particular faith code. The guiding principles are based on the values promoted in the Gospels. The participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience have an understanding that all who have a faith belief are called to live in ways that promote similar values. These values promote acceptance of all.

As already discussed, the understanding of faith professed by participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience is centred on living Gospel-centred values. The difference between the understanding of faith between the voice of faith as a lived experience and the voice of orthodoxy is that participants in the voice of lived experience challenge the established traditions and practices of their faith taught during their childhood and have constructed an understanding of faith that is integrated with daily life. In contrast to the voice of faith as a lived experience who profess a tolerance for other faith traditions, the voice of orthodoxy strongly distinguishes between being Christian and Catholic. The voice of faith as a lived experience also does not have the same zeal as those in the voice of orthodoxy who aim to preserve the Catholicity of the faith tradition within the home.

The Voice of Faith as a Lived Experience Desire for the Faith of Their Children

A number of ideas were expressed by participants who speak in the voice of faith as a lived experience when they were asked what desires they held for the faith of their
children. Even though some of the desires were akin to those named by those in the voice of orthodoxy the intention behind the desires come from a different perspective.

**Experience of Faith Desired for Children**

When asked what they desired for the faith of the children as they grew into adulthood, the data revealed two contrasting views. One group of participants desired that their children have a faith experience which was similar to a faith experience they have developed for themselves. This group of participants, 10 in total, shared that they desired that their children felt that they belonged to a community which was able to support them, especially in times of need, an experience which was of value to the participants. Sentiments of this desire were expressed by Cora and Karen. One desire named by Cora was the sense of wanting her children to experience what she has in her faith which stems from her experience of a faith community in which she felt she belonged.

*I suppose I just want them to experience what I have experienced and to get out of it what I have received from being part of the Church. To get the support I have had. I think it is a really really good thing to be part of a Church, to have in times when things might not be going well in their life and that they have their religion to turn to as opposed to other things that children sometimes turn to.*  
(Cora)

Karen also believes strongly in the support of the faith community.

*I hope they have the same love for the faith as I do. I hope they have a faith that they’ll nurture, a faith that will sustain them in the experiences of life that come along for all of us. I would hope that they have a sense of belonging to a parish community. That they have the opportunity to build up God’s world in a meaningful way, to contribute, to be builders of the of the way in which Jesus gives you a vision of what the world could be like. I hope that they are part of that in a positive way. And I hope that they are on the journey of their faith development all their lives. I really hope that they continue that as I have experienced it for myself and continue to wish also for myself.*  
(Karen)

A second group of participants, 19 in total, within the voice of faith as a lived experience desired that their children do not have similar experiences of the faith tradition that they encountered in their own childhood. This group of participants desired that their children develop an understanding that God is an approachable God. Most who named
this desire were educated overseas in ‘convent’ schools. Heidi and Doreen were two such people.

A desire for the faith of her children identified by Heidi was that they continue to develop an understanding of God who is merciful and compassionate rather than the God of fear she had to endure in her childhood. For her this could only be achieved by questioning, a luxury she did not have in her formative years.

I would like them to get to know God possibly better than we did growing up, more as a loving God. When we were educated at school he was one of those Gods to be feared and you lived in, yes, fear of the wrath that was going to come down on you and if you did something wrong and if you missed Church on Sunday, that sort of thing. But today’s way of teaching is so very different, to what we were brought up, which is good. And I think they need to question other religions. They need to be taught about other religions as a background where once again we weren’t allowed to question that too much. (Heidi)

As already revealed by Doreen (cf. pp.107–108) she holds a similar experience of the portrayal of God presented in her childhood. The image of God presented to her in her childhood was a God of revenge. This God was always watching, waiting to catch one out if one did not hold fast to the practices of the faith. When asked what image of God she would like her children to develop, Doreen remarked that she wanted her children to discover a God who was not concerned with the rules and formalities that faith traditions tended to impose on believers. This was in contrast to the understanding of God proposed by participants in the voice of orthodoxy. Doreen, other the other hand, desired that her children come to develop a relationship with God who is ever present to them, a desire which was named by most in the voice of faith as a lived experience.

I would just like to them to know that if they knock, the door shall be open. He’s [God] there. You go to him and he’ll speak to you. You have a problem, you go to him, but don’t go to him only when you need things. He should be an approachable God. You should be able to talk to him like whenever you want whether you go to Church. Accordingly you don’t need all these ceremonies, you know these different things. It should be just something you have to love to do and that is what I want for all my children, for them to want to have faith because they love God, not the Catholic faith. (Doreen)
Desire for Children to Have a Faith

The first desire for all participants in this voice was for their children to have faith. In professing this, many participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience did not specify that their children needed to be bound by the traditions of the Catholic faith but rather that they have a relationship with God.

> I believe I would like my children to believe so I would like to foster it [faith] as much as possible and give them every opportunity to experience their religion and to experience God and to know about it all. Hopefully they will follow it in the way they live their life, with God in their life … I also hope that they too will feel a faith inside themselves. That they’ll have a tool or a skill whereby wherever they are in the world, they can walk into a Church and they can connect with somebody and it’s a whole wider community. I think it is not a perfect world, it never will be, therefore they have to have something extra from the material or the physical things that are around them every day. They need to have a connection with something else and it would be the greatest thing if you actually pass on a simple faith like my own that just levels you, makes you believe that there is something else that you can believe in. So that is the hope.  

(Cora)

Julie revealed that she desired that her children have faith which has a Christian outlook. She felt that this is all she can hope for especially in the rural experience. She understands that her children will be educated in a non Catholic school and wants them to have an experience of what is specifically Catholic but at the same time desires that her children will have a faith that respects Christian values.

> I want my children basically to have a Christian faith. To believe there is a God. My husband went to [private boys school] as did his father and grandfather and I have agreed that they will go there basically once at thirteen. As far as the Catholic faith, I would like them to make sure they have done their Reconciliation, First Communion before then. As for Confirmation I am unsure about that, whether to leave it for them to make the decision or be sure that that’s been performed or been looked at by year seven. But while they are at boarding school, I want them to join into the religious aspects of there school life and embrace the Christian values promoted by the school.  

(Julie)

The desire by participants in this voice for their children to have faith was not imbued with the same intention proposed by those in the voice of orthodoxy. Those in the voice of orthodoxy desired that their children have similar faith practice to their parents with the underlying purpose of preserving the faith traditions. Those in the voice of faith as
lived experience wanted their children to have faith, a faith that promotes the values of the Gospels.

The Desire for Children to Know God as Loving

The desire common with most participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience was that their children develop a personal relationship with God. Participants in this group professed that faith become a tool through which their children develop their own understanding of faith and come to love God.

*Very simply just to love God. Know that God is there and know that God loves them. It is as simple as that really, to have a relationship with God, which is alive.* (Stephie)

Kylie also remarked that she desired that her children develop the understanding that God does not expect them to be perfect because God will love them regardless.

*Making them [children] feel that it’s okay to be themselves because that is the way God made them. They don’t have to be a certain way for God to love them or for me to love them. God will not judge them if they are not right all the time. I hope they understand that they have the freedom to express themselves and that God understands however they are feeling and however they want to express it.* (Kylie)

Lyn, on the other hand, has a preschool child and has not given much thought to the faith desire of her child in adulthood. She answered from her own experience of faith. Her first desire was that her child has faith. Her understanding of faith centres on the call to love. What she desires for her child, is that coming to his own faith conviction that he will always understand that he is loved by God.

*I’m passionate about giving my child an opportunity to meet him [Jesus] as well. Ultimately he’s got to make his own choice. I don’t know what Darcy is going to decide, but I am passionate about giving him every chance to come know Jesus in his own heart, and to know that Jesus will always love him. What more can we do. For me that faith dimension is really important.* (Lyn)

Desire For a Personal Faith Commitment

Another desire which was held by those who speak with the voice of faith as a lived experience was that their children see faith as something that is important for life, not just as a requirement but rather because of what faith can offer them for life. An overwhelming 25 participants (of 29) commented that what they desired for their
children was for them to come to own their faith understanding. Most participants were realistic in that they had an understanding that the expectations that they have for their children are not always what their children will wish for themselves.

Marian summarises the fears of many of the participants in this voice. The inner desire for Marian is that her child continues to attend Mass but she showed caution in her statement as did many of the participants. Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience realised that even though this is a desire for them as parents, ultimately they have no control over this.

* I just hope that he realises how valuable it is to have faith, and that it will be a part of his life, and that he will always continue to do so. I hope he will always continue to attend Mass, that would be great. Really just so long as he realises that it [faith] is just as important in his life as any other factors in his life. That it is always an important aspect of his life. (Marian)

The desire that resonated with many in this voice was the desire named by Kylie. She desired that her children have faith; a faith which is constructed from their own experiences and thus personal to them, and not a faith that was imposed by her experiences.

* As they grow older and into adulthood I hope that they find their own way to understand faith. If that means that they are pulling away for a little time and they experience what that’s like to be without God completely then so be it. That’s the journey, to learn. As a mother you want them to learn the easy way and you don’t want them to have to face the hard lessons in life but that’s how we learn from what we experience, I think. I see that the ultimate act of love is to allow them to learn and let them come to their own understanding and ultimately a faith choice. (Kylie)

Helen’s children are entering the teenage years. She desires that her children come to their own faith commitment as they grow into adulthood. She does not desire for her children to take on her faith blindly. Her deep desire is that her children continue the practice of the faith but only if it has meaning for them.

* Just because I was raised in a way that we accepted faith Chapter and verse and that was it, I don’t want my kids to. I mean I still want my kids to practice as Catholics and to grow up as Catholics and get married in the Catholic Church but because they want to, 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
[faith] over to kids in a way that will draw them in 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. At some stage they [the kids] have too become responsible for their faith. (Helen)

A point which was raised in many conversations with participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience was the desire that their children do not view faith as something that is imposed upon them. The desire for their children to develop their own faith commitment was strong. A significant number of participants, the majority (25 of the 29) within this voice, spoke of a desire for their children not to view faith as a duty but rather as something that is meaningful to their lives. Jack and his wife Jane share similar views on not forcing their children to take on a faith understanding that is not their own.

I want my children to see faith not as a duty kind of thing. That way they will feel that we must go to Church every Sunday because it is something that we are used to doing. I want them to want to do it. It mustn't be duty like it's Sunday today so we must go to Church, but it means nothing to them. I would rather have them going to Church once a month but understand the full meaning of why they are going every week rather than duty sake.

… To be able to go to Church on their own and to maintain their faith on their own rather than be coerced or forced. (Jack)

Jacquie articulates a similar view. She also believes that forcing children into practising faith in the same way as the parents is not beneficial because children are not given the opportunity to come to their own understanding of the impact of faith on their lives.

I would like to instil in my children that they feel they want to go to Church not that they're being dragged there. Um yeah, so faith-wise I want them to be good decent people, religion-wise I would like for them to want to go to Church and to practice the faith rather than feel that it is being forced upon them. (Jacquie)

A significant number of participants within this voice had an acceptance that their children may choose to practise in a faith that is not necessarily specifically Catholic in practice. In this case participants expressed that they desired that their children have a Christian outlook on life, in other words, a life that is centred on promoting the Gospel values.

What I hope for my children basically is that they are good people. That they are good and kind to other people. That they can help other people or see when there’s the need for that. That they can stand up for people if they see they are being wronged in any way.
that they have the guts to do that or say don’t do that, that’s not good. And I would like them still, obviously to be good Catholics but I don’t see that as the major thing, as long as they’re better Christians, then I’m happy with that. (Heidi)

Alice had a desire that was similar to the one Heidi expressed. She desires that her children become responsible adults. When speaking of responsible adults Alice is speaking of an adult with good Christian values.

Well I hope and I pray in a very special way that they grow to be good, young responsible adults. Responsible for their own behaviour, because I always tell them about an action and a consequence, whatever action there is always a consequence to it. I always speak to them about a conscience about right and wrong and always when you are doing something you are taking a decision about it, there will always be a feeling of whether you are doing a right thing or a wrong thing. I hope that they live good Christian lives. That is important to me. (Alice)

Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience recognised that their children are individuals and therefore need to develop their own individual relationship with God. They prefer to encourage their children to come to their own understanding of the importance of faith for themselves. This is not to say that they do not desire that their children do not attend Mass or do not develop a prayer life; quite to the contrary. The focus for participants in this voice was to allow their children to develop their own sense of faith through the faith tradition. Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience were conscious of the decisions their children will need to make if they are to make a personal faith commitment. Those in this voice are aware that such a choice might not necessarily be through the Catholic faith. This view is one that those in the voice of orthodoxy would find problematical and hard to accept. This view is quite different from the view promoted by those in the voice of orthodoxy. Participants in the voice of orthodoxy were more determined that their children develop a faith that is similar in practise and understanding to their own.

The Desire for their Children to Respect their Own Faith and other Faith Traditions

A further desire which was unique to the voice of faith as a lived experience was the desire for children to respect their own faith tradition as well as the faith traditions of others. This desire was in keeping with the understanding held by participants in this voice that an element of faith includes being tolerant of other beliefs (cf. pp.113–114).
In all, 84% of participants in this voice spoke of this desire. This theme was not named overtly by those in the voice of orthodoxy as their main focus, as revealed in the data, was to preserve the traditions of the Catholic Church thus instilling in their children what is explicitly Catholic. Those in the voice of faith as a lived experience have an openness and a yearning for developing in their children a tolerance of all faith traditions, including their own.

The desire Cora has for her children to respect her faith beliefs was one that was very strong among many in this voice.

> Another thing I hope is that they will always respect, their religion, I would hope that they have that.  

(Cora)

Helen expressed a similar desire.

> Well we hope they’ll keep up with it, they’ll stay with the Church or if they don’t stay with the Church at least they stay with the values that the Church represents even if they don’t continue to practice you know, on a Sunday that they will sort of still carry, on you know the Christian sort of side of it and the moral sort of side of it as well.  

(Helen)

Karen speaks of the desire for her children to be tolerant of other faiths, including those that are non Christian. This sentiment was strong among other participants in this voice. As mentioned earlier in this Chapter (cf. p.114), a heightened awareness of this may have been alerted by the disaster of September 11, 2001 in New York City.

> I find that because our children do not go to a Catholic school we share our Catholic faith with other people of different faith backgrounds whether that be like Baptist or we’ve met some interesting people from the Muslim faith even though that is a very sensitive issue these days. I pray that as my children grow older they will continue to be non judgemental especially to others of different faiths. After all this is what Jesus was on about.  

(Karen)

Trish sees that an advantage of attending a State school, is that children need to become tolerant of others in order to survive. Trish desires that her children learn about other faiths so that her children will learn to respect all people by seeing the face of Christ in all people.

> If my children learn to treat everybody as though they have Jesus … and that they have that basic respect and underlying love for everybody, then I can’t see them having any problems apart from
people’s attitude to them. Perhaps in this day and age it is hard for them to stand up to various pressures around them. This is one reason why we chose not to send them to a Catholic school. I wanted them to learn tolerance and understanding of everybody and or everything so they are in class with people of Hindu faith who are practicing their religion and who have strong faith. They are with people who have no religion or apparent faith in anything. They have people who follow Confucius, who are Buddhists and they see that these people have strong faith so they see that Christianity is a faith but it is not the only faith either. They don’t argue with these people about it. They accept and it is more than tolerate, they are also interested. They take an interest in what these children do and hopefully it works the other way as well. In the multi cultural society that we have I think it is very important that we they understand that there are lots of different people of all different races and religions about. Where I grew up there were all white Anglo Saxons at our Catholic school. As far as I knew we were the only people that existed and it did give a blinkered outlook. I hope our children will have an appreciation of what each faith has to offer while at the same time being proud to be a Christian. (Trish)

Heidi also desires that her children learn about other faiths because she too believes that children will become more tolerant of others. At the same time Heidi desires that her children remain true to their Christian tradition but she does not specify whether that be in the Catholic tradition or another Christian tradition. For her that main desire was that follow the teachings of Jesus in their lives.

I think they need to question other religions. They need to be taught about other religions as a background where once again we weren’t allowed to question that too much and I’d like them to be able to do that freely. And I’d encourage them. And I would like them still, obviously to be good Catholics but I don’t see that as the major thing, as long as they’re better Christians, then I’m happy with that. (Heidi)

When asked what do you mean by a better Christian? Heidi explains;

Following the teachings of Christ. To be more like him I guess. I think that is more important than whether your Anglican or Catholic or Presbyterian. My husband being Presbyterian he’s a nicer man than a lot of, in the things I see him do, than some Catholics who are Catholic in name but not necessarily in action. So that is not very important. It’s not important to me. Tolerance and living as Jesus taught are important. (Heidi)
Living among people of other faith traditions has heightened awareness of the necessity to treat all people with dignity and respect for Elizabeth. She desires that her child learn to have the same tolerance of others.

*I do try and tell him about other religions and what that means, because I’ve grown up with having Hinduism and Buddhism and Muslim religion very predominate around our lives. And we were always thought to accept other religions so I’d like for him to be open about other human beings and their beliefs and what they get out of it. I respect them and I hope he will respect all people regardless of who they are or what they believe. This is very important if we are true Christians.*

(Elizabeth)

Judy comes from an experience where she has had little contact with people of non-Christian beliefs. With the current events in the world, she wants her children to be able to embrace people by respecting their faith traditions. She believes that her children need to become tolerant of all beliefs if harmony is to be restored in the world. Judy hopes that her children feel comfortable in sharing their faith perspective with others so that, in turn, their beliefs will also be respected by others of different faith traditions.

*I think the big thing about nurturing faith within the home, particularly with children these days is that it has to be spoken about in regard also to other faiths. I’m not talking necessary...well certainly other Christian faiths but also Muslim, Buddhists. I’ve spoken to my children about all different faiths and I’ve said to them that the day that they disrespect other faiths is the day I will be very annoyed. I think if they know about other faiths when other faiths speak to them, they’re comfortable speaking about their own faith, because they know the difference. I always say to them to say to other people how wonderful that you have such a good faith and that it is important, even though we don’t have the same one, it’s just great that you have one and I’ve got one [faith]. So there is no situation where they’re put in that they feel uncomfortable, or that they are going to deny their faith, because kids have times when they think that they have to deny their faith... People have this horrible feeling that if you talk about others faiths they might try to convert you. What a lot of crap. It’s not going to happen. So that would be my one area that I think people should do more of when they are teaching their children about faith.*

(Judy)

The desire for children to respect their own faith as well as other faith traditions was strong among participants in this voice. As has already been recognised, this desire may have been heightened by the actions of terrorism that are in the world at present.
Desire for their Children to Pass on the Faith Traditions

A final desire which surfaced in the data was the desire for their children to pass on their faith traditions. This desire was similar to those in the voice of orthodoxy. This desire was tied to the role of the parent as first educator of the faith of their children. The desire for their children to pass on the faith traditions to the next generation stems from the fear of some participants that future generations will not have faith. This fear was common to participants in both the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as a lived experience.

Later on we want them to be able to do it on their own even if we are not behind them. They must also be able to pass on their faith to their children. If they don’t learn it now, or through their lives now, then they will have nothing to pass on to their children. In the end if we do not do it now and they don’t learn anything now then the faith stops, it just stops dead there. It is a continuing cycle.

(Jack)

The comment made by Jack is typical of the desire of many participants in both voices. Those in the voice of orthodoxy alluded to this desire and the intention of their desire would be to preserve the practices of the faith. Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience want their children to be able to have a faith that sustains them in their adulthood and, as Jack believes, that the only way this can be achieved is to live faith within their family life so that children will have the desire to pass it on.

In summary, those in the voice of faith as a lived experience held a strong desire that their children develop their own faith understanding shaped by their own life experiences and that children respect their own faith tradition. The participants this voice were also more open to being tolerant of other faiths and encourage their children to become informed of other beliefs because these participants believe that tolerance is itself a sign of lived faith. This was in direct contrast to those in the voice of orthodoxy as their main focus is to preserve the Catholic faith.

The Voice of Faith As An Active Struggle

The third voice that was discerned in the data analysis was that of those who spoke about faith as an active struggle. This group was not large (Table 4.2, pp.93–95) but their voice was clear and distinct. Stoke reminds us that:
Participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle speak of an understanding of faith that is tentative. As with those in the voice of orthodoxy, they revert to their childhood experiences of faith to try to make sense of faith for themselves and their children. The desire for faith is strong among those in this voice. The dilemma for the participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle is the coming to an understanding of faith which makes sense for their life.

**Personal Understanding of Faith is not Clear**

The participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle indicated that they are at a stage in life where they are searching, trying to make sense of not only faith, but of life. These participants were struggling between being faithful to what they were taught in their childhood and coming to their own personal ownership of faith. Participants in this voice desired faith for themselves and their children but found it difficult to express verbally their understanding of faith and depended strongly on resources outside the home, such as the Parish Religious Education Program (PREP), to be the primary faith nurturer of their children.

One participant of this voice, Chris, reported that she was not raised in a religious family. She did not attend a Catholic school but received religious instruction, as it was known, through the State school system. Chris was away from the practice of the faith for a number of years and has only recently made it a priority for her and the family. She desired faith for herself and her family but was struggling to connect with a faith that made sense for her life.

"I was brought up in a Catholic family but we weren’t like a religious kind of family. When I was married we were married in a Catholic Church but we didn’t attend Church. It’s only just recently that we have settled down where we are and we evaluate life and I think well we haven’t been to Church for a long time and it’s time to bring the children in. So we have only just begun to be regularly attending Church." (Chris)
Chris found it hard to express her understanding of faith. When asked to share her understanding, Chris looked confused at first and questioned, “The Catholic faith or any faith?” before she launched into her understanding.

I suppose it [faith] is all about God, about knowing I suppose where we all came from ... I suppose it is a lot of things, it’s not just going to Church and all that. Now that we have a family, it all relates to having a family and how you bring up your family kind of thing. — (long pause) I don’t know the exact words to describe it [faith].

(Chris)

The comment ‘I suppose’ was taken to indicate that she was not sure of her own faith conviction. She seemed unsure of what was asked of her. As she revealed insights of her understanding of faith, she possibly wanted to be affirmed before she moved on to her next thought. She then admitted to her struggle and concluded with “I don’t know the exact words to describe it [faith].”

Chris appears to show the beginnings of constructing her own faith understanding but is still uncertain of the traditions associated with the practice of the faith. She knows that attending Mass is one of the fundamental practices of the Catholic faith and thus uses the Mass as a means through which she can introduce a faith understanding to her children.

Another participant, Anne, on the other hand, was very upfront about her struggle. When she was asked what faith was for her, she took a long while before she gave her response. She was fighting to find the words that would convey her meaning. She struggled and in the end she commented:

O God, I don’t think I can answer that. I don’t know if I have the faith to answer that question (laughs). What faith means to me? — (long pause). I think, I don’t know just seeing my parents have faith for me that is what I am striving for I guess. I feel sometimes I don’t even have the knowledge like if Jordan asks me a question...See my mum and dad’s faith I think that’s what I need and I look at them and think that is what I need. I would like my children to follow that. As far as I think sometimes I feel believe I just send Jordan for knowledge, just gaining that knowledge and then he can make his decisions and obviously have his faith grow and things like that. So I find it a hard question to answer. I don’t think I am that knowledgeable to answer the question in a deeper sense I guess. ... For me it [faith] is a struggle.

(Anne)
When asked to explain what the faith of her parents looked like, she went on to clarify;

Just their belief, you know. Just believing and being good Catholics, Christians. I think it’s hard and I think sometimes coming to this country probably it’s been a little bit hard for me because we were exposed to different things to the things I was exposed to in India. Our life is different there. We move around with the strict Muslim and the strict Hindu views that here I think I found it probably a little bit harder. Obviously mum and dad struggling with that they had to make sure that we all kept our faith and that we’d go to Mass and things like that. I don’t know if I am explaining myself. (Anne)

Participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle were less confident in articulating the understanding of their faith. Their lack of confidence was in contrast to the confidence and enthusiasm which most participants in both the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as a lived experience demonstrated when asked to express their understanding of faith.

**A Tentative Faith Conviction**

A second characteristic of the voice of faith as an active struggle was that they had not yet come to their own faith conviction. For Anne, her struggle did not come from her doubts about the faith but rather from how to live this faith that had been nurtured by her parents. The difficulty is that until the present time Anne has been trying to live her faith through the faith of her parents. When asked whether she was still searching for an understanding of faith, Anne replied immediately with:

Oh Yes. Oh gosh yes. I mean I know but I just? I mean if you say to me let’s go to Mass I wouldn’t think twice. To me I really enjoy going to Mass. Again if you say let’s pray the Rosary, I wouldn’t think twice about it. That I know I want to do. Yes. I may not understand everything or whatever but I definitely want to do it and I want to know more and that sort of stuff. That’s why a few years ago I did the Catechist course and it was great you know. To listen to Father I learnt so much from it and you know for me you are always learning. (Anne)

Anne has knowledge of the faith in the sense that she is familiar with the traditions associated with the practice of the faith. Up to this point in her life, Anne has not been able to internalise what faith is for her personally. She views faith as ‘having the knowledge’, an intellectual cognitive understanding, and believes she does not have sufficient religious knowledge; therefore she does not have adequate faith. Anne
knows how to practise her faith but does not know why she should believe. She finds herself trapped in a faith that is essential the faith expression of her parents. She has not grasped an understanding of faith that is integrated with her life experiences.

The struggles of coming to a personal faith understanding are indicative of what was articulated by this small group of participants. Participants within the voice of faith as an active struggle are ‘living in the gap’ trying to make sense of faith in their life. They have a desire and a commitment to the faith but are confused by the many grey areas or contradictions they are experiencing as they try to grasp it for themselves. One fact of which they are convinced is that they want their children to have a faith tradition.

**The Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle’s Desire for the Faith of their Children**

When participants were asked the desire they have for the faith of their children those in the voice of faith as an active struggle were concerned about the faith knowledge of their children. They claimed that this desire comes from the inadequacies they have themselves of religious knowledge. Chris desired for more support in the area of faith development for her children because she felt that she was not skilled to do so herself. Her children do not attend PREP. The only desire named by Chris was that she wanted her children to attend a Catholic school.

>`I would like them to broaden their knowledge in the faith like in a Catholic school but like I said they don’t go to a Catholic school for various reasons I think that is one reason I would like them to do. Going to a school with other children in the faith I suppose it reinforces what they learn as suppose to going to a school with no particular religion whatever, they don’t talk about it. It takes them a bit longer to understand the values I suppose. (Chris)`

The desire named by Anne was very closely aligned with the desire of those who hold an orthodoxy view. She desired that her children practice the faith in the same way she practised her faith as a child.

>`Well I would like them to practise. I would definitely like them to practise. A lot of people say that you can just be a good person and we don’t need to go to Mass. Yes I suppose that what I want for the kids and expect them to respect what we believe. Never mock or hurt. As I said to Jordan we never know unless we learn. I say mum doesn’t really know how to answer your question so I make sure you go to catechism [PREP] to learn from that, learn`
From the Mass and the family like their nanna and their uncles and aunts. (Anne)

From the data is it fair to conclude that those in the voice of faith as an active struggle have a genuine desire for their children to share in the faith tradition to which they belong. Participants in this voice acknowledge that they are somewhat inadequate in taking on the task of nurturing faith as they struggle with their own faith understanding.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data revealed three distinct understandings of faith among participants. These were identified as: the voice of orthodoxy, the voice of faith as a lived experience, and the voice of faith as an active. The findings revealed that for most, regardless of the voice they represent, faith is the means through which they make meaning of life and thus are able to engage with the world with the purpose of doing the will of God. The fundamental element of faith is belief in God, a God who is loyal, trustworthy, and reliable who calls and awaits a response.

The main differences in the understanding of faith occurred between the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as a lived experience. The participants in the voice of orthodoxy have a structured understanding of faith that is guided by the rules and regulations of the faith. Their understanding of faith revolves around the practices of the faith. Those in the voice of faith as a lived experienced have a broader understanding of faith. Their understanding is entrenched in a lived faith and is guided by Gospel-centred values. Alternatively the third voice, the voice of faith as an active struggle is at a stage where a clear personal understanding of faith has not yet been reached by the participants.

Furthermore the desires participants held for their children in regards to faith also stemmed from the understanding of faith in keeping with each voice. The desire which was common to the participants across the three voices was that their children have faith. The understanding of what it means to have faith was defined differently across the three voices. The voice of orthodoxy centred on such things as the desire to keep the practice of the faith, the desire for their child to dedicate a life to God and the desire for their children to pass on the faith tradition. The focus of their desire was the hope
that their children would practise the faith in the same way they do. This desire is in keeping with their aim of the preserving the Catholicity of the faith.

Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience also desire that their children have faith. The difference in the desire between those in this voice and the voice of orthodoxy was the hope that their children would develop their own personal faith commitment rather than merely adopting that of their parents as desired strongly by those in the voice of orthodoxy. Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience were more open to being tolerant of other faiths and encourage their children to become informed of other beliefs. Participants in this voice demonstrated a belief that tolerance is itself a sign of lived faith. They desired that their children be tolerant of other faiths as well as have a respect for their own faith tradition. The desires named by participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience were in direct contrast to those in the voice of orthodoxy. Those in the voice of orthodoxy ultimately desired that their children practise specifically a faith that is a Catholic.

Those in the voice of faith as an active struggle also ultimately desired faith for their children. They did not name specific desires for the faith of their children; rather they spoke strongly of the desire for their children to attend a Catholic school so that they would come to know their faith because they felt inadequately skilled to nurture their children. This sense of inadequacy was strongest in the desires by this voice. The yearning for Catholic education and the sense of inadequacy due to limited faith knowledge will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Each voice discussed in this Chapter will become the foundation for understanding the main question of the study: how do parents who do not send their children to Catholic schools nurture the faith within the context of the home? Chapters Five and Six will present the findings of how the three understandings of faith, presented in this Chapter, nurture the faith of their children within their homes.
Chapter Five

The Findings: Nurturing Faith

*Faith cannot be taught by any method of instruction ... we can only expand in faith, act in faith, live in faith. Faith can be inspired within a community of faith, but it cannot be given to one person by another. Faith is expressed, transformed, and made meaningful by persons sharing their faith in an historical, tradition-bearing community of faith.*

(Westerhoff 1976, p.23)

The aim of the interviews was to listen to how parents nurture the faith of their children within the home. The findings presented in this Chapter describe how the faith understandings of the participants, presented in Chapter Four, are put into practise within their homes. This Chapter firstly explores the strategies employed by participants to nurture faith and secondly, it identifies the nurturing style of each voice. The challenges that parents face in their tasks of nurturing faith will be described in the following Chapter Six.

**Nurturing Faith Within the Home**

This group of participants volunteered to participate in a study exploring faith nurturing issues. It was evident that nurturing the faith of children within the context of the home was a priority for all who participated in this study. All participants had a strong desire to share their faith with their children and this was reflected in the variety of nurturing strategies used. The metaphor of voices established in Chapter Four continued to be useful. These voices were clear, distinct interpretations of the way faith was understood within the home. The researcher recognised that the practical processes of parenting undergo change; therefore it was not surprising that the data revealed, in some few cases, a mixture of nurturing styles which can not be uniquely depicted by one or other voices. It was noted that even though all participants named similar nurturing strategies, each voice had a different approach in the way that the strategies were used and the intent of their use. This difference in approach is characterised as the nurturing style. The nurturing style of each voice will be discussed in the second part of this Chapter.
Nurturing Strategies Identified in the Study

The study sought to explore how faith is nurtured within the context of the home. One way of revealing this was to investigate the strategies used to nurture faith within the homes of the participants. The data revealed that no participant named only one way of nurturing faith within the home. Each participant shared a number of strategies which were used to nurture the faith of their children. These strategies included; prayer, Mass attendance; reading the Bible; conversations and discussions; witness and example; and attending the Perth Archdiocesan Parish Religious Education Program (PREP). Such nurturing strategies are in harmony with the documents of the Catholic Church which deal with catechesis within the home. As described in Chapter Two (cf. pp.36–38) in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), John Paul II names four tasks for the Christian family, through which parents can carry out the mission of nurturing faith of the young. 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 (*Familiaris Consortio* 1981, #17). The strategies through which families are called to nurture faith and promote the growth of faith within the family include: celebrating faith through rituals, telling the Catholic faith story, enriching family relationships, praying together as a family, performing acts of justice and service and relating as a family to the wider community (Roberto 1992, p.3).

Praying Within the Home

Prayer was central to the nurturing of faith for most participants in the study and a strategy that each participant named. The data revealed that although most participants named prayer as a nurturing strategy within the home the approach to prayer reflected the particular understanding of faith of each participant.

Approach to Prayer by the Voice of Orthodoxy

As discussed in the previous Chapter (cf. pp.95–102), the understanding of faith for those who speak with the voice of orthodoxy is based on knowledge, expectation, and efficacy. The approach to prayer by those in the voice of orthodoxy was, in the main, strongly focused on the knowing of the formal prayers of the Church and teaching their
children to recite them by rote. The data seemed to indicate that the main emphasis by
participants in this group was to teach their children the formal prayers of the Church so
that they would be able to keep the observances of the faith.

Praying the Rosary was an important part of the daily prayer life of participants in the
voice of orthodoxy. All participants in Table 5.1 (p.173) spoke of the Rosary as part of
their daily ritual.

We try to make the Rosary an everyday affair. We encourage the
children to pray it with us. It is a very important part of the faith the
Rosary. (Terry)

Praying the Rosary was central to the daily routine those in this voice because for this
group this prayer is an important part of living the Catholic tradition. Praying the Rosary
was a strong part of their prayer life experienced in their childhood. The sentiments
expressed by Maria were common to most participants in this voice.

The Rosary is important. We pray the Rosary because that is how
Catholics pray. I remember we prayed the Rosary at home every
night with my family. We never missed. My father would lead it. I
want my children to pray the Rosary too so I lead it every night
expect Sundays. I tell my children this is the most beautiful prayer
we have as Catholics. (Maria)

Those in the voice of orthodoxy named teaching of the formal prayers as an important
part of this nurturing strategy as such prayers were necessary to pray the Rosary.
Terry and Tina suggested that praying the Rosary gave rise to teaching children the
basic prayers of the faith tradition. Terry, in his conversation about the Rosary, pointed
out quite emphatically that ‘of course’ his daughter knew the basic prayers of the
Church.

My daughter of course knows the ‘Our Father’, she knows the ‘I
Believe’, she knows some basic prayers that are necessary for the
Rosary. (Terry)

Tina commented also that teaching her children the formal prayers of the Church has
led them to praying the Rosary with her every night.

They learnt the basic prayers and now I say the Rosary every
night. I started once, like they share a bedroom and I started that
when I put them to bed. We’d say a prayer and say our night
prayers. I had the Rosary in my hand and they asked, ‘what’s
that.’ I just said it was a Rosary and I explained what it was about.
Then I started to explain the mysteries and then I said I’m going to
say it now, and they said, ‘Can you say it with us’ and now it's become a routine and they want me to lay between them and say the Rosary. Then they’ll say to me ‘which day is it.’ Now they will say, ‘what mystery are you saying?’ I taught them the mysteries. They know all the three mysteries and which days they are supposed to say it. So like last night I said to Harrison, which mystery am I saying and he worked it out. (Tina)

The learning of prayers for those in the voice of orthodoxy was primarily focused on knowing the formal prayers.

**Setting a Prayer Schedule**

One of the things that became apparent in the data was that participants in this orthodoxy group shared that they had established prayer time in their family schedule. Three participants shared that their scheduled prayer time was in the car on the way to school.

> On the way to school we say that prayer that the Archbishop sent out to all families, you know, the family prayer. … The kids know it off by heart. Then there is an intention and then we all say we ask this in Jesus’ name. So we do that every morning Monday to Friday. (Kerry)

Others, such as Terry, spoke of setting a time in the week when they would visit the Church with their children. Other prayer times included praying in the morning, at meal time, and at night time before going to bed. Most participants in the voice of orthodoxy expressed that each day they would come together with their children for prayer. It was an essential part of their family’s life.

Participants shared various structures which they had in place for family prayer. Maria, for example, has a strong expectation of efficacy of prayer. She shared that she would spend a significant amount of time in prayer each night with her children, up to an hour. This time is structured.

> We pray the Rosary, then we do a meditation every night and then the kids can do a free prayer [spontaneous prayer] and then we go to bed. Sometimes, a lot of people have realised that our faith is quite strong so they ask for special prayers and different opportunities and so as soon as those calls come we gather together, we come together independent of the time and we get together to pray as a team. (Maria)
The data revealed that similar structures were common in many of the homes of participants who speak with the voice of orthodoxy.

Maria was the only participant in the voice of orthodoxy who named spontaneous prayer as part of their family prayer time. Most other participants only mentioned the teaching and the praying of formal prayers within the home.

In summary, the approach to prayer by those who speak in the voice of orthodoxy was centred on ‘knowing’ the formal prayers of the Church. The purpose of prayer, as stated by most participants in this voice, was to know the basic prayers so that they could recite them as part of the rituals of the worshipping community.

**Approach to Prayer by the Voice of Faith as Lived Experience**

As already mentioned (cf. p.132), the study does not claim that all participants necessarily fit the characteristic of one voice only. In some cases a two nurturing styles emerged within one voice. Two groups were identified within this voice; one that leaned towards orthodoxy which was concerned more about knowledge and the second group, growing into faith, was more focussed on developing within the child an understanding of the relationship between themselves and God. This was most evident in the discussions on Mass attendance and prayer.

**Approach to Prayer: Subgroup Leaning Towards Orthodoxy**

As with the voice of orthodoxy, for most in the subgroup leaning towards orthodoxy the prayer life within the home was centred on formal prayer. The teaching of formal prayers was a key nurturing strategy. The main difference between the voice of orthodoxy and the participants in this subgroup was that those in the subgroup leaning towards orthodoxy, had a different approach to the way they pray with their children. The findings identified that the Rosary was the main form of prayer for this subgroup of participants. What set this group apart from the participants in the voice of orthodoxy was the approach to teaching the children to pray the Rosary. Those who speak in the voice of orthodoxy were keen for their children to pray the five decades of Rosary at a time. In contrast, the participants in the subgroup leaning towards orthodoxy preferred to pray a decade of the Rosary each night to allow their children to concentrate on what
they are praying. They indicated that to pray the five decades of the Rosary each
evening was less than a prayerful experience for their children.

Before bed, we say one decade of the Rosary then we say our
night prayers and then it’s bedtime. We try to do that because
otherwise the Rosary gets too long and the children are quite tired
by the end of the day, all of us are. (Alice)

Like Alice, Andrea also did not see the benefit of praying five mysteries of the Rosary in
one day. Andrea commented that in her view, the Rosary does not become a prayer if
it is recited by rote, not paying attention to its meaning. Speaking of her son Andrea
comments:

I am proud to say he [her son] will always say his prayers and he
also says a decade of the Rosary which I am really glad he has
learnt. In the beginning he wanted me to say the whole Rosary
with him which maybe I should have done. But he says it on his
own now; a decade a day. I feel that is a better way to pray for a
little boy. I find it hard to say it all in one go. I get tired. I think it is
better to do less and think about what is being said. (Andrea)

Even though the participants in the voice of lived experience within the subgroup
leaning towards orthodoxy confer with the voice of orthodoxy on the teaching of formal
prayers as the main strategy to nurturing faith within the home, the approach varies.
Those who lean towards orthodoxy are aware that for prayer to be an effective tool to
nurturing faith then the children need to be introduced to prayer at a level that is
appropriate.

**Approach to Prayer: Subgroup Growing into Faith**

For participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience, growing into faith,
spontaneous prayer was the main form of prayer within the home. Prayer was often
related to the experience or the events of family life and to the happenings in the
community and the world. This group spoke strongly of how spontaneous prayer was
not only a strategy that encouraged the family to pray together but also that this form of
prayer helped develop stronger family relationships.

Kylie and Cora spoke of how prayer helped develop stronger relationships within the
family.

At night when I tuck them into bed we say the Our Father together
and then we would pray about different things that may be an issue
at the time, personal things at school, friendship dynamics. It might also be about what’s happening on the earth, such as the wars etc. We do that every night as part of the going to bed ritual.
It’s really important to the children because that’s their time with me and in that form of prayer I get to know what they’re feeling and where they’re at as well. (Kylie)

Cora commented on how she guides her children through what might be considered an examination of conscience at the end of each day. This examination of conscience allows her to work through with her children ways of living in a way that promotes the values of the Gospel. By spending time in prayer with each child, Cora was able to give each child special one-to-one time and like Kylie, she can enter into the lives of her children and is able to support them not only physically and emotionally but spiritually as well.

At night I say prayers with the children, with each of them individually. I bring them through what they’ve done through the day and what they should be thankful for and the things they didn’t do well. We talk about how they can do them better and to pray for help to do what ever it is better next time ... Prayer is more like I ask them to say the usual, you know God bless the family and friend, you know the normal kinds of things and then I say well what do we have to be thankful for today, you know and they sometimes say, oh nothing. Then I say do you remember you said you had that and that your friend did this for you. Maybe we should say thank you to God for your friend or whatever. Then they might say well I fought with so and so and I say well you need to think about what you did to allow that to happen and ask God to help you say, not to shout back to that person ... I help them to see how to better themselves through using or rather being with God … I think it helps them. It is also sometimes an opportunity for them to talk through the worries they have. It is a good way for me just to be a parent to them. It gives me the opportunity to talk to them and because I talk to them regularly and they tell me the things that have happened that I might not be aware of myself. (Cora)

Cora guides her children to pray about the different aspects of their lives giving them a format to follow as they develop their own style of prayer. Cora directs her children to be mindful of the wonderful aspects of life as well as the aspects of their lives which may need attention when they pray. It could be said that Cora is schooling her children in ways to pray.
Ian also encourages spontaneous prayer as a way of opening the eyes of his children to the world and for them to become aware of those who may need special support.

As we say our prayers on the way to school we might say “help us to be kind and loving to those around us.” We’ll ask God to bless the school, bless the families and perhaps if there is a child having a difficulty occasionally, we even put a little prayer in for a particular child. I suppose through prayer their eyes are open to caring for others. (Ian)

For these participants prayer was a time for encouraging their children to reflect on the things that affected them during the day, and to offer these to God in thanksgiving. In the same manner, prayer time also allowed the parents to develop a closer relationship with their children as they come to understand their feelings and views of their children about different issues in life.

As with the voice of orthodoxy and participants in the sub group leaning towards orthodoxy, this group spoke of a variety of prayer opportunities which they practised within the home. These opportunities included: praying in the morning, at meal times, and at night time before going to bed.

**Understanding the Meaning of Prayers**

The data highlighted that for participants in both subgroups within the voice of faith as a lived experience teaching children the meaning of prayers was essential. This was one reason why those in the subgroup growing into faith of participants were more comfortable with spontaneous prayer. Those in this subgroup viewed the praying of formal prayers more as a formula and a series of words that have little meaning for children if such prayers were not explained.

When I was a kid we just said stuff. It wasn’t a prayer really because I didn’t understand what I was saying. Remember the prayer Hail Holy Queen? What was that all about? In fact I still don’t know….I want my kids to understand what they are saying and if it is important that they need to know the Our Father or the Hail Mary then they should know what they mean. Someone needs to teach me that first. (Ian)

The comment made by Ian was representative of 18 of the 23 participants in this subgroup. The understanding promoted by those who speak in this subgroup was that
for prayer to be an effective nurturing strategy it needs to be more than a string of meaningless words, it must be related to life.

Jack has teenage children and he discussed his view that children today are more questioning of what is presented to them. He believes that if he was going to instil in his children the importance of prayer then he should enable his children to question what prayer is about just as they would question most things in life. At the same time he wants them to understand what they are praying rather than forcing them to recite words which are meaningless to them, as may be the case with formal prayers.

*Kids are asking questions now days because they want to understand. Not like us; we just accepted. They ask why do we need to do things? It must have meaning for them because if it does not have meaning for them, then they will just classify it as useless. So I think you have to teach them the whole meaning behind all you do especially when it comes to prayer, so they can understand how it affects their life and not just a string of empty words that they recite.*  

(Jack)

As has been established, the approach to prayer by those in the voice of faith as a lived experience, especially those in the subgroup growing into faith, differs greatly from the understanding of those in the voice of orthodoxy. For those in the voice of orthodoxy formal prayer is crucial to the experience of the faith tradition. Prayers are learnt, usually by rote, for the purpose of being able to participate in the rituals and formalities of the Church. This view of orthodoxy which values rote memory of prayers was also true of participants within the voice of faith as a lived experience that have been identified as leaning towards orthodoxy. For those in subgroup growing into faith, it was crucial that children understand the meaning of prayer with the hope that such an approach would enable them to develop a personal relationship with God.

**Praying as a Family can be a Struggle**

The subgroup growing into faith recognised that praying as a family can be a struggle. One comment which surfaced frequently within this subgroup was the admission of ‘slipping up’ when it came to praying. This was in direct contrast to those who speak with the voice of orthodoxy and those who lean toward orthodoxy who scheduled prayer time into the family’s daily routine.
On an everyday basis we try to make our child say good night prayers. And we slip up on our grace before meals. Occasionally we do remember to say it. (Elizabeth)

The data revealed that for 15 of the 23 participants in this subgroup shared that praying as a family was a struggle. They admitted that even though a desire to pray together as a family was present, sometimes the other pressures of life took hold, praying as a family was not always as frequent as they would hope.

I try to say prayers with the kids at the end of every day. We always say family grace and we include personal pray around the table for anything that we are thankful for or asking for. We occasionally get our Rosary beads out and pray the Rosary although that’s not something that we do that often. It slips away. We have this desire to do it and it just it slips away. (Karen)

The struggle experienced with praying as a family in this subgroup was in contrast to the approach to prayer stated by most in the voice of orthodoxy and those who lean towards orthodoxy. As has been already established (cf. pp.135–136), most participants in the voice of orthodoxy claimed that they have structured prayer time within their home. The data showed that participants who speak within this subgroup of the voice of faith as a lived experience were not as concerned about setting a specific time for prayer even though many did mention bedtime as their preferred time for praying with their children. Furthermore, of the 15 who admitted that praying as a family was a struggle, five participants confided that prayer was not a regular part of family life. The remark made by Lisa was typical of the response of these participants.

I must admit we don’t say grace or anything like that on a regular basis. We pray sometimes but I usually pray by myself. We don’t really pray as a family. I don’t know why, thinking about it. (Lisa)

Others participants, such as Trish, spoke of prayer as not being a routine part of their family life, not because prayer was not important in their lives; but rather because she had a different approach to prayer. Trish explained that she does not see the value of the type of prayer life that was part of her childhood. She found the approach to prayer which her mother advocated was routine and duty filled rather than prayerful and relational. Trish argued that she wanted her children to develop their own prayer life so that they could understand the power of prayer through their own experience of life. With guidance, Trish believes that children will develop a prayer life that has a greater impact on their faith than does learning prayers by rote.
We don’t always pray together. It is not a routine part of the day like my mum did with us every morning, half an hour before we were ready to go to school on your knees. I want my children to think it is not something that is forced upon them. It is something that they can come to, with us guiding them but part of their own decisions as well and I think that is working well because they do. When something happens they say mum I’m going to pray about this, so I can see it working although it is not the formal thing.

(Trish)

For those in the subgroup growing into faith the approach to prayer is less formal and structured compared to those in the orthodox groups. The main priority for the participants in the subgroup growing into faith was to use prayer as a nurturing strategy that would help their children develop a personal prayer life which had meaning for their lives.

In summary the emphasis on prayer for those in the voice of lived experience subgroup growing into faith was on the meaning of prayer. This was in sharp contrast with those in the orthodox groups where the main emphasis was the teaching of formal prayers. Another difference in the approach to prayer between the subgroups was in the subgroup, leaning towards orthodoxy, the main aim is to learn the prayers for the purpose of praying, whereas the subgroup growing into faith, prayer has more of an emphasis on relationship.

**Approach to Prayer by the Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle**

Participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle did not make specific reference to prayer within their homes. Anne’s reference to prayer was of her childhood memories of the Rosary. She recalled that in her childhood the Rosary was not an optional part of being a Catholic. They prayed the Rosary every day without question. She was quite distressed at the realisation that they did not pray the Rosary within her home today.

*My upbringing was always very, very strict. I remember we had to say the Rosary and things like that. So I am probably a little bit more paranoid about that since we don’t say the Rosary. I feel that something is wrong because we don’t pray the Rosary in our house. In fact we don’t pray as a family.*

(Anne)

On the other hand, Chris was the only participant in the study who made no mention of praying with her children in her conversation. She was more focussed on introducing her children to the faith through attending Mass.
Mass Attendance

For Catholics, the Mass is at the centre and summit of their worshipping community. Regular Mass attendance is recognised as one of the main expressions of faith for Catholics, therefore it was not surprising that Mass attendance was the second strategy named by participants across the three voices as important for nurturing faith. As was the case with prayer, what set the three voices apart were the different approaches to the Mass as a nurturing strategy. Each voice emphasised a different aspect of why Mass attendance was important to the nurturing of faith within the home.

Approach to Mass Attendance by the Voice of Orthodoxy

The five participants who speak with the voice of orthodoxy placed significant importance on Mass attendance as a nurturing strategy established within their home. The data revealed that the approach to the Mass by this group was driven by the understanding of faith which is attributed to them in Chapter Four (cf. pp.95–102). Participants in the voice of orthodoxy spoke strongly about Mass attendance as obligation. This was in keeping with the orthodox understanding that faith is ritualistic in nature and centred on the observances of faith (cf. p.98). All participants in this voice viewed Mass attendance as a sense of duty. Mass attendance is seen as one of the obligations of a Catholic. Maria’s comment on Mass attendance highlighted this attitude.

As a Catholic we are expected to go the Mass. It is one of the commandments that we need to obey. We go to Mass every Sunday and I tell the children that we have to go because we are Catholics and that is what being a Catholic is all about.  (Maria)

The sense of duty as described by Maria was common to the ideas expressed by participants in this voice. Mass attendance was one of the central strategies used by participants in this voice to instil in their children that to be truly Catholic one needs to adhere to the practices of the faith tradition and thus preserve the Catholic faith.

A second purpose that emerged in the data when speaking about the Mass attendance as a nurturing strategy used within the home was the focus on the ritualistic behaviours of the faith tradition, behaviours that participants in this voice were taught in their childhood.
I guide her to look at the things that I had been taught as a kid about the Mass. Things like: do not to talk in the Church; pay attention in the Mass; to pray the prayers of the Mass. Other things like when we must stand and sit and kneel. These are important to the ways Catholics celebrate the Mass and I believe that children need to learn them so that they can be respectful in Mass. (Terry)

For many in this voice Mass attendance is much more than Sunday worship; many spoke of it as a daily ritual. Kerry is one who reported attending Mass daily. She commented that attending Mass is important to her faith life, and at the same time she believes that she is giving witness to her children of her faith commitment.

I started going to weekday Mass years ago. The kids have actually grown up with the concept that mum goes to 8.00 Mass every morning. Just recently they’ve questioned it. “Mum is it a sin not to go to Mass Monday to Friday”. And I say “No”. So that’s part of my experience that they have all of a sudden sat back and noticed. (Kerry)

Approach to Mass Attendance by the Voice of Faith as a Lived Experience

As with the voice of orthodox, Mass attendance was an important part of faith life of participants in voice of faith as a lived experience. All participants in this voice acknowledged Mass attendance as one of the strategies in which the faith of their children was nurtured. As with prayer, the discussion on Mass attendance as a strategy for nurturing faith within the home exposed that the two subgroups within the voice of faith as a lived experience, leaning towards orthodoxy and growing into faith had different approaches to this strategy.

Leaning Towards Orthodoxy

The subgroup leaning towards orthodoxy reflected strongly the approach to Mass attendance held by participants in the voice of orthodoxy. The data indicated that for participants in this subgroup Mass attendance was driven by a sense of duty. This sense of duty reflected the tone of the orthodox group. As with those in the voice of orthodoxy the sense of duty was attributed to their childhood faith experience.

Sunday Mass is important first because it was part of our growing up. Sunday was a day of obligation and we had to go to Mass and we have never missed. In my home we always go to Mass without fail. (Alice)
Growing into Faith

The approach to Mass attendance described by those in the subgroup growing into faith was significantly different to those in the orthodox groups. For participants in the subgroup growing into faith Mass attendance was one strategy used for developing the faith of their children. Many participants in the subgroup growing into faith stated that even though it is a desire that their children attend Mass, they did not force them to attend because it was an obligation, a rule of the Church. The data revealed that participants in this subgroup did not necessarily have less regard for the Mass than those in the orthodoxy groups. Those in the subgroup growing into faith expressed a desire for their children to develop their own yearning for attending Mass. This yearning was cultivated by the participants by exposing their children to Mass at a young age.

The view of Doreen on Mass attendance is characteristic of those who speak in this subgroup. She remarked that even though she agrees that attending Mass is an important part of the Catholic tradition, she does not have the same viewpoint on the matter as was mentioned by her husband Terry (cf. p.144). Doreen stated that she has rejected her childhood rigidity of having to attend Mass because it was considered compulsory. She is not convinced that one must go to Mass for the reasons which were presented to her in her childhood. However, she felt the need to introduce her children to the experience of the Mass as she understands that the Mass is part of the faith tradition. Her emphasis on Mass attendance is not so much as to comply with the rules of the Church as it is to give her children the opportunity to experience the Mass so that they can come to their own decision about attending when they are older.

When I was a child I had to go [to Mass]. It had to be done and we went. I don't strongly believe that you have to go, but at the same time I tell my child it is necessary. You can't enjoy something if you are not there … So on the basis of that I wish that my daughter should go to Church and because I want it [the Mass] to become important for her. (Doreen)

Elizabeth held a similar view to Doreen about Mass attendance. As with Doreen, Elizabeth understands that the Mass is an important part of the faith tradition and most of the time she has little problem with attending Mass. In fact she enjoys the hour away from her routine to sit and meditate without distractions. However, she too does not believe that the Mass is the only way to be in touch with God.
A lot of times I say it’s Sunday and we need to go [to Mass]. It’s not because it’s the service that we have to attend. It’s because I feel that it is one hour when I am doing something different from what I would be doing otherwise. If I said I’d give that one hour in prayer at home it wouldn’t be the same because there would be so many distraction. But I go to Church and that is one hour when I can meditate, my mind can go to other things, but it is still that one hour where I’m doing … I believe that times when you have not been able to Church for what ever reason I say to them let’s go to the beach for that hour and make that our blessing. We don’t have to attend a service but we need to go where we can be in touch with our Being.                 (Elizabeth)

Jack and Jane expressed that they would like their children to understand that the Mass is an important part of what it means to be a Catholic. They are mindful of the fact that their children are entering into a stage of life where it is not ‘cool’ to go to Church.

_We try to instil in them [children] that it is very important that they go to Church regularly to maintain that contact because if that breaks then they will go astray sooner or later. We try to enforce, not enforce, but try to stress upon them the importance of going to Church regularly and to try to maintain their faith, to become stronger in their faith._ (Jack)

Jane reinforced the comments made by her husband by adding:

_Yes. We don’t force, we try never to force them and say we have to go to Church. We try gently to reach them all the time. We never like to leave them say with the older one as they say they can stay home. We just encourage them and say that it is something that we do as a family. We impress on them all the time that while we have to go to Church, we need to go to Church because that is the only way we can nurture our faith._ (Jane)

The approach to Mass attendance of Jack and Jane is representative of the majority (15 of 23) of the participants in this voice of growing into faith.

Participants in this subgroup desired that their children attend Mass but did not want to force them in the fear that the children would turn away from the faith completely. Turning children away from the faith was a fear that many participants spoke about. Heidi shared a story which resounds with many in this group. She spoke of her struggle with her son to attend Mass. She desires that he attend Mass but knows the reality with which she is faced. Together with 14 of 23 participants in this subgroup of growing into
faith with a similar dilemma, she has given up trying to force him to attend Mass as it only causes more stress on the family.

\[ I am having a really hard time with my son right now. I've decided, it's not worth getting into too many fights about it. He will come and when he is eighteen, I guess he will have to make his own decision about whether he wants to go to Church. It's not worth me stressing too much about that. He will make his own mind up and you can't force them to something that they don't want to do. Hopefully if you have instilled that background of going to Church and how you should behave towards other people maybe later on they may come back to the Church or whatever. I'm not sure about that. (Heidi) \]

As was stated by participants in the orthodox groups attending Mass is a compulsory family affair. This sentiment was resonant of the view of a group of participants in the subgroup growing into faith. However, even though the participants in the subgroup growing into faith have a similar desire to attend Mass as a family, the approach was one of encouragement and witness rather than compulsion.

Judy explained that she has taken her children to Mass since they were babies. She believes that attending Mass as a family is important as it strengthens faith. She is aware that the liturgy is beyond the capability of small children so she devised ways of helping her children experience the Mass as a positive experience from a young age.

\[ One thing I do is … actually I did this when they were younger not so much now, but still with my nine and half year old. I ask them to come back with one question or no one thing that they learnt from Mass every week. Now when my little one was four or five he would say there were nine lights in the Church and you know that's a learning thing. Now it's more that you know that they listen to in the homily, the Gospel, and things like that. That is something that really worked, actually extremely well, because then they go 'oh I remember such and such oh yes'. So it wasn't just a one thing. They ended up talking about everything. (Judy) \]

Pat shared his experience of the Church in Malaysia. From Pat's experience celebrating the Mass is not just a family affair but a community affair also. From his experience, the nurturing of faith belonged to the whole community. The community does not gather to celebrate Mass as a group of individuals. In his experience Sunday is a day for ‘fellowship’ where people gather for Mass, prayer and Bible study. It is a day that the family comes together and shares all aspects of faith with the wider
worshipping community. Pat commented that such a community experience was not fully representative of the more common Australian experience.

As a family what we do is try to pray together as often as possible. We believe that the family that prays together stays together. It helps keep the family very closely knitted. So what we do every Sunday, of course there is the Sunday morning Mass, then the Sunday school. They [children] attend the Sunday school because in Malaysia they attend a non Catholic school. There are no more mission schools in Malaysia so this is how they dispense by the Church the instruction by a facilitator who have committed their time. Then in the afternoon, after lunch say from 2 o'clock to 6 o'clock the family attends some kind of family worship with about say 50 or 60 people. Parents together with their children come for praise and worship, for intercessory prayers, for healing, and also for some Bible studies. This is what we do usually. (Pat)

When asked how often they would experience this type of fellowship afternoon Pat replied:

Every Sunday except for maybe the Christmas break. (Pat)

The community sense of worship described by Pat is in contrast to the orthodox understanding of worship. Elizabeth (cf. p.146), for example, described attending Mass as an individualistic activity; a time when she can remove herself from the distractions of others and have a one to one relationship with God.

On the other hand, for a small group of participants in the subgroup growing into faith the same compulsion of attending Mass as a family was not as strong. Carmel is typical of participants in this voice who shared that she did not take her children to Mass until she thought the children were ready to understand and participate in the celebration. Carmel explained:

My two older ones do come with me. That's something I didn't start with the children until they did start RE classes because I feel when they were really little they had no appreciation for it. I just found that it didn't work you know. It just didn't. I used to come to Church and get more agitated if anything. You know they wouldn't keep still. So the two older ones do and I find that my oldest boy is like me, like he'll sing and you know respond, whereas the second one doesn't as much and I say come on join in. Sometimes my boys don't want to go the Church. Sometimes they do come under protest but they come... for now! (Carmel)
Mass attendance for most participants in the subgroup growing into faith is about coming to an appreciation of the meaning of the celebration. Even though the majority of participants desired that their children attend Mass weekly, the focus was on allowing the children to experience and take in what is developmentally acceptable. This group of participants wanted to nurture an understanding within their children that attending Mass is not so much about duty, but rather a means through which they can deepen their relationship with God.

**Approach to Mass Attendance by the Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle**

As with the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as a lived experience the Mass was a key strategy for nurturing faith within the home of those in the voice of faith as an active struggle. For the participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle the Mass was a concrete way of introducing faith to their children. It was one of the strategies with which the participants were familiar from their childhood experience and therefore comfortable with sharing in it with their children.

In nurturing the faith of her children, Chris reverted to the things that she remembered in her childhood that were associated with faith. As already mentioned in Chapter Four (cf. p.126), Chris was not raised in a practising Catholic home and thus has to rely on the things she remembers from her limited religious education which she received in a State school. Chris remembers the importance placed on the Mass and thus used Mass attendance as the first strategy to introduce her children to the faith. In her conversation Chris repetitively used words such as ‘I suppose’ and ‘I think’ indicating to the researcher the struggle or uncertainty she has about nurturing faith.

*I suppose we go to Church because I want the children to understand the faith when they are adults or old enough to make decisions they can choose whether they want to follow the faith. But we go to Church, I think, because at Church is a lot of valuable lessons and it sort of brings the family together and provides us some kind of unity and something each week like a message. I think that’s what I have got out of the Church … In terms of doing things that nurture the faith I suppose this is a start from then on I suppose taking one step at a time.*

(Chris)

The need for Chris to introduce her children to the faith comes out of her own need to develop her faith understanding. She spoke many times throughout her conversation about what she got out of the Mass for herself and what she hoped attending Mass
would do for her children. Her main dilemma however, was the sense of not knowing what else she could do to develop her faith and the faith of her children.

Anne had a different struggle. She was trying to fit her orthodox understanding of faith into a culture with which she struggles. Anne speaks of her struggle with nurturing the faith of her children.

*Back in India we went to Mass everyday and it wasn’t even thought of, we just went to Mass. Whereas here, I don’t know it just became a struggle and even more so now, now that I am married. It is more of a struggle. I want my kids to experience what I experienced because it made an impact on my life. Basically I am saying I want to give them the foundations of the faith as I can and then as they grow up they have the foundations and Mass is one of the foundational things about our faith. After that they can do whatever they want. After that you loose control. You are out of their control (sic) after they leave the home and I don’t know whatever happens. I do struggle with this. To me my husband is a perfect being. He doesn’t do anything wrong but when it comes to Mass, it is quite easily forgotten, you know. I think why haven’t you got them ready and that is when I get angry you know, and that annoys me, not that he doesn’t know how I feel about the Mass. I think if I married a practicing Indian or whatever then Sunday Mass would be alright … Well Connor [husband] doesn’t think about going to Mass as much as what I do, so to I try to do all these little things that I feel is trying to show the kids that we some how practice.*

(Anne)

For Anne, trying to hold on to her traditions of the faith that she recalls from her childhood is a major struggle for her, especially because she feels that her husband does not have the same fervour. It seems from the conversation with Anne that the reasons for her family to attend Mass reflect strongly on the voice of orthodoxy. For Anne attending Mass is bound in the sense of duty. Although Mass attendance plays different roles in the faith life of these two participants, both rely on it as a nurturing strategy for introducing their children to the faith tradition.

**Promoting an Understanding that Faith is Integrated with Life**

As already documented in Chapter Four, an understanding of faith that emerged strongly from the data was the awareness that faith is integrated with life experiences (cf. pp.105–106). In investigating the nurturing strategies employed by participants to nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home, it became evident from
the data that participants, especially those in the voice of faith as a lived experience, use a number of strategies in which to promote an understanding of faith that is integrated with life experience. This section analyses the different ways the three voices understood the integration of faith and life experiences. This understanding was strongest among participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience.

Integration of Faith with Life Experience – Voice of Orthodox
In developing an understanding that faith is integrated with life, the data showed that Tina and Kerry were the only two participants in the voice of orthodoxy who revealed that they attempted to share with their children the idea that faith has some impact on life through conversations with their children about every day events within their lives.

That’s another thing we do. When things happen like the bullying thing, when things come up in the kids lives and they come home from school and we have afternoon tea, and everybody is talking about this thing that happened we talk about from a spiritual point of view. Mainly because that is how I live with my issues so that’s how I deal with theirs therefore I think that they are starting to put a spiritual slant on things that happen to them. You can ask them, if you want to get a feel for how they draw on their faith that is something that they would be happy to do. (Kerry)

The data revealed that most participants in the voice of orthodoxy integrate faith with life through teaching their children the formalities of the faith tradition. They demonstrate a faith that firstly engages what Groome (2002) describes as the head, and then the heart and hands.

Integrating Faith with Life – The Voice of Faith as a Lived Experience
Promoting an understanding that faith is integrated with life was at the core of the understanding of faith for participants within the voice of faith as a lived experience. They demonstrate a faith which engages faith first through the hands and heart, and then the head. The main aim for participants who speak in this voice was to encourage this understanding within their children. As described in Chapter Four (cf. pp.105–106), the guiding principles for this voice were not so much observing the rituals and observances of faith; but rather living a life which is in accordance with the values proclaimed in the Gospels. Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience spoke of nurturing strategies which arose in the natural happenings of family life. By using the opportunities which arose from their daily experience they were able to illustrate to their
children particular faith concepts in a concrete way. These nurturing opportunities were more often spontaneous faith teaching moments even though there were planned moments as well.

**Seizing the Teachable Faith Moments**

Seizing the moments within the events of family life as tools for nurturing faith was at the heart of those who speak with the voice of faith as a lived experience. Participants referred to the everyday moments which arose naturally as moments to raise the family's awareness that such values as love, respect, and forgiveness are an integral part of daily life.

*We would tend to teach, you know, that part of being a good Christian is having nice manners, and treating people respectfully, and not lying, and not be jealous of what other people have, but being happy with what you have, and looking for the happy, the joy in the simple things. … They’re the types of things that we teach. We just teach them things what we consider good values and morals based from our experiences.*

(Vigi)

When Cora was asked how she put her understanding of faith into practise in her home she explained that in her family life is based on the values of love and respect for one another. It is through the interactions within family life that Cora leads her children to an understanding of faith as a lived experience. One example that Cora shared was how she spends time with her children every night reflecting how they have shown love and respect to others throughout the day.

*The principles that or the rules within the house are based around not so much don’t do that, it’s more that we need to show each that we love each other no matter what. That is the part of showing somebody that we love someone to do that, to showing the children that we are all one. So I try and explain that. But it is based around respect and love and within that I suppose again it is spoken about at night time when they go to bed and I sit with them. I don’t so much with my older child. I let her make her own personal choices as far as practicing her religion or what she wants to do and at this stage because she is over eighteen now.*

(Cora)

Trish had a similar outlook to Cora. She too believes that by being a living example to one another is one of the most effective ways in which to lead children to an understanding that faith is a lived reality.
Through example mainly, just through the way we live. We teach them how to be a good Christian, we might not necessarily call it Christian living, but this is how we live it. We do attend Mass regularly and have that side of things going but I think it is very important to just have it [faith] as part of your every day living. … I think treating everybody as though they have Jesus in them and that means everybody no matter where they’re from and that they have that basic respect and underlying love for everybody. I think this is how I teach my children about real faith. I usually tell my children it’s not what other people do, so why should I do it. I say it doesn’t matter what other people do. We need to do things because it’s the right thing to do. Just treat other people as you want to be treated or live in the way that Jesus wants you to do it.

(Trish)

A total of 23 of the 29 participants within the voice of faith as a lived experience spoke of conversation times as ideal moments in which they could discuss faith matters with their children in a spontaneous manner. Andrea shared a conversation which arose at the death of her father. She was able to use this moment to share with her children a faith perspective on death.

Yes, we have sat down and discussed and spoke about death because we have had one or two deaths in the family. We have talked about heaven, we talked about what happens after you die. It was the right moment to address such a thing. He asked and so I answered. Hopefully it helped in his grieving. I believe as soon as there is an opportunity never let it go by without pointing out to them the values and the traditions of the faith.

(Andrea)

Conversations were very much part of family life in Karen’s household. They have an open approach and talk about most things that they encounter daily. Karen commented that it a natural part of family life that they talk about God and other faith issues because this has always been part of their conversations. Karen considers these opportunities as moments when she can come to understand what her children are experiencing in their lives. She believes also that such conversations allow for children to develop faith at their own pace.

We talk a lot. We talk a lot about God. We talk a lot about life, where people go when they die, and things like that. They’re the sort of the bedtime conversations we have that I’m sure that lots of families have them. I think my five year old has a very simple trust in faith which is beautiful and my seven year old is starting to ask a lot more questions and my ten year old has still got a very simple trusting faith. So they are all different in their personalities and I think their faiths will be different and the way in which they live their faith will be different. That’s kind of exciting too. I am aware that
we all experience our faith in different ways. ... They are unique in the way they have their relationship with God and that makes them feel special. (Karen)

Jacquie also promotes an understanding that faith is a lived reality through the conversations she shares with her children. She uses events from everyday life to raise awareness within her children of how to live their faith.

We are very much into being nice to our neighbours. For example, my daughter had an issue with a girlfriend of hers at school who was being a bit rude and nasty and, you know what girls are like. I said, Hey look she’s just got a baby in the family, her mother is going to and from the hospital because the baby is not well. The whole family is stressed. If anything you have to be extra nice to this girl. You find she may be nasty to you but eventually she will understand that you’re going to be a friend for her no matter if she’s got stress in her life or not. Bit hard for a 10 year old to understand this but, you know, afterwards she came back to me and said she was alright to me today at school, and I said, see you didn’t have to make a bit deal about it and being a bit more understanding rather than just, I don’t want to be friends with you anymore because you were rude to me. I just try to let them understand things from a Christian point of view, that sort of thing. So it’s more the loving, forgiving and the treat of others in everyday situations that I try and teach them how to be good Christians. (Jacquie)

Not all participants expressed that they find it easy to talk to their children about faith matters. Carmel confided that she does not find speaking to her children about faith issues an easy task because she feels that she does not have the confidence and the knowledge to express matters of faith. She found it quite difficult to express her understanding of faith to her children.

I don’t know! Just in open communication, and bringing the faith understandings into everyday life. Just in conversations mention God and Jesus. I can’t think in words what I really want to say. It’s really hard without talking down to them. We talk about turning the other cheek and sometimes it is difficult.... We talk about not get involved in situations because it doesn’t get you anywhere. For example, like people get shoved or called names by doing the same back to that person it doesn’t achieve anything as such. I hope that the conversations teach them how to be Christ like. (Carmel)
The sense of inadequacy described by Carmel was not isolated. This issue will be further discussed in the challenges to nurturing faith which will be addressed in the following Chapter.

**The Call to Witness**

The call to witness was an aspect of faith nurturing that was prevalent with participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience. The notion of witness was unique to this voice. For the voice of faith as a lived experience promoting an understanding that faith is integrated with life through the call to witness was crucial and is at the foundation of this understanding of nurturing faith held by this voice. Many in the voice agreed that in order for their children to understand how faith is integrated with life, they as parents were called firstly to witness faith through the ways they lived their own lives.

Nurturing faith through the witnessing of their own faith to their children was strong, especially with those who are converts to the Catholic faith. Judy is a recent convert to the Catholic faith. She described how during her journey to becoming a Catholic it became evident that her perception of the Catholic faith being a Sunday thing was far from the reality. As she delved deeper into the Catholic faith she came to an understanding and an appreciation that faith was a way of life. Like many in this voice, she recognised that in order to nurture the faith of her children she had to live it first herself.

*I believe faith nurturing comes from witnessing of the faith. … It’s not so much about let’s sit down and pray about it. I try and nurture their faith by firstly living it myself.*

(Judy)

Phillip is also a recent convert to the Catholic faith. At the time of the interview Phillip and his wife were journeying through the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) process in their local parish. His hope was that he and his wife would be initiated fully into the Catholic Church the following Easter. When asked what things they do with the girls to nurture their faith like Kylie and Judy, he spoke first of the importance of witnessing to the faith.

*Well in many ways we are trying to develop a faith within them by living it out ourselves.… I guess we’re talking little things here too which are almost trimmings in terms of grace, prayers and this sort of thing. But in essence teach the girls about how to live the faith by living it out ourselves.*

(Phillip)
Alice has no family in Australia and she expressed her concern for the faith development of her children. She shared that she does not have the support of the extended family to help her in this task, an experience that she had in her childhood. Alice feels that she is very much the role model for her children in order to lead them to know how to live their faith.

Well we are in a different country and the culture is different. There will be a lot of peer pressure and I can see it happening but at the same time I feel if we model faith ourselves, we serve as a model to our children then they will learn from us. … I don’t think prayer is everything, just saying all the prayers may be meaningless if we do not have values of respect, of kindness, of sharing, of helping others, being good, being useful, like being a good person. That’s my opinion. (Alice)

Stephie and Pat promote similar values within their home. They named the call to love as a way in which they witness their faith to their children. Stephie spoke of teaching her children the Gospel value of the call to love through the way she relates with them. In this way she believes that her children can come to an understanding what it means to be loved. Through her example, she trusts that her children will come to an understanding of it means when they are told that God loves them; an understanding which was common the participants in this group.

I believe that parents need to be the first to show their children what faith is really about. For me, I look at it like this. You love because you believe in God’s love and you are an example of that love to others and from there it goes on. So through showing love to my children I allow them to come to know that God loves them. (Stephie)

Pat also spoke of the Gospel value of the call to love. He had a similar understanding to Stephie.

I remember someone said a long time ago if you love somebody, or profess to love somebody, you try and go out of the way to do your best for the other person. This is how I teach my children. Because I believe that my faith is important, then I live it in a way that shows my belief. I mean love them, love my wife, respect, be tolerant, then if I profess my faith by living it, my children will learn from this. This is how I look at it. (Pat)

Karen is aware of her call to be a witness to her children. She commented that both she and her husband witness a different aspect of faith. Karen described her way of
witnessing more as reflective whereas her husband’s example of integrating faith with life was through the active involvement with parish groups and other groups in the community.

Something I try to do for myself is to get have a retreat every few years. I don't get to them as often as I would like to or used to with the kids. That’s like a meditative type of retreat. My husband, on the other hand, is more active in the parish. He finds that he lives his faith in a more active way. He is not contemplative type faith person, he prefers to be active and try to make a difference so he belongs to our local St Vincent De Paul Group. I am different. If I buy birthday cards for friends I try to always make the message a bit more special in the card about the gift of their life and what a celebration their lives are and. You see that’s my faith, that’s where I’m coming from in my faith experience and that’s been my gift. So the kids actually see their parents participating in a volunteer way of witnessing to our Catholic faith. I can only pass on what my experience has been and be an example of this to the kids. And I suppose that’s a powerful tool. (Karen)

Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience view faith as action. In their homes faith is nurtured through not only the formalities of the faith tradition but in also through action. Parents become the primary initiators of the way to reflect the Gospel values through they witness to their faith. This becomes a tangible model for their children to see faith in action. The call to be a witness of faith within family life was one strategy participants in this voice believed was vital in trying to nurture faith within the home. The belief that children do what they see was very much at the heart of this nurturing strategy.

**Integrating Faith with Life – The Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle**

Participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle were unsure how to integrate faith with life. The connection between faith and life was not strong in the minds of these two participants. Anne was strong on parents modelling faith to the children, an experience with which she grew up. For Anne modelling faith was about setting an example for her children on how to live life. She shared that the desire to model faith as she experienced from her parents consumes her existence.

I think that modelling your faith so your children will see it. Yes that is what I believe I am trying to do by our morals and things like that, through our value system. I suppose through our behaviour within the home, just through our environment, yes all that sort of stuff. I think it is of a huge importance that children see faith in
Anne does not connect with the idea of witnessing faith in the same way as those in the voice of faith as a lived experience. As has already been acknowledged (cf. pp.155–157) those in the voice of faith as a lived experience view that for children to understand how faith is integrated with life they as parents are called first to witness faith through the way they lived their own lives. Anne’s difficulty with this understanding arose because she has an understanding that to witness faith is to practise the formalities of the faith traditions. This view is more in keeping with the voice of orthodoxy. The faith Anne witnessed from her parents, as mentioned in Chapter Four (cf. pp.127–128), was more about seeing them attending Mass daily and praying the Rosary and such things. As already mentioned Anne is caught between cultural practice and faith understandings. She appears not have an understanding that faith is also witnessed in a very real way in lived experience of family life.

Sharing of the Faith Story
A strategy which was employed by many across the three voices was the sharing of faith through Bible stories. While the approach to this strategy was diverse across the three voices one common element across the three voices was that most participants spoke of sharing Bible stories with their children as part of the bed time routine in the home.

Sharing the Faith Story within the Home of the Voice of Orthodoxy
The data revealed that the orthodox group uses the Bible in a particular way that differs from the other two voices. All participants in this voice mentioned that they had a children’s Bible in the home. The Bible is used by participants in this group mainly as a tool to inform or instruct children about the facts of their faith tradition. The example reported by Tina is characteristic of how most participants in the voice of orthodoxy use the Bible to share faith.

I read them Bible stories and they really love it. They love listening to the stories. My older son particular is … like I went into the Old Testament a little bit and he was just blown away by the stories in there …. Harrison has a wonderful imagination so he got right into the genealogy of the Old Testament. He was fascinated by it. Then my aunt brought them a gift last Christmas or the Christmas
before of children’s stories in the New Testament in a puzzle form. Well, I had to read it over and over and over again. They still want it every now and then. They’ll ask ‘who’s that apostle’s name’ and we come up with the names and I related the names to people that they know so that they could remember. (Tina)

On the other hand, two participants, Mary and Terry, commented that they used the Bible as a tool for meditation and prayer. Mary uses scripture as part of the family prayer time each night. Slowly she is encouraging the family not only to listen to the readings of the night but to reflect on the impact the readings have on their life. This approach was unique.

Each night we just read a passage [from the Bible], just a short passage. Usually say we do say Chapter 16 and 17 and we don’t necessarily read the whole Chapter. We will read a story or a section there. Usually we just leave it at that. Sometimes now that I’m becoming more aware of how we need to do a lot more I will do the thing where we will have a little bit of silence and then anyone who wants to can say what did you get out of this reading. Some of us, you know, one of us, two of us, whatever, will have a little something and it’s a lovely richness that comes from that. But often we just might do the reading and leave it at that. (Mary)

The approach described by Terry was a little more direct. Terry believes that his daughter is old enough to reflect on the scriptures for herself.

I have encouraged my kids to read the Bible by buying a children’s Bible for my daughter. We sit and tell stories about the Bible. Small stories before she could read from the Bible. It’s a big letter Bible so she can read it easily and see the pictures. … She [oldest daughter] said, “today is Good Friday and what am I to do today.” I said go to your room, take your Bible and read the Bible a little bit and spend some time reflecting on the Bible asking the Lord to help you and talk to the Lord, tell him your troubles and see what he says to you. She was there for a long time, I am not sure whether she was actually reading or not but I decided not to disturb her and let her be by herself and she sat in her room for about an hour and then she came out. (Terry)

Apart from Mary and Terry, the main aim, for most in the voice of orthodoxy in regard to sharing the story of the faith, was for their children to know the facts of the Bible stories.
Sharing the Faith Story within the Home of the Voice of Faith as a Lived Experience

Only a small number of participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience specified that they had a Bible within the home. For these participants the Bible was not so much a tool of instruction, but rather, within these homes the reading of Bible stories are used in the same way as other bed time stories.

*We have a Bible, a children’s Bible on the bookshelf and at night time I ask the children to choose their bedtime story. Sometimes they choose the Bible, especially at Christmas. We read the story together and it becomes a time when I spend with my children.*

(Phillip)

Those in the voice of faith as a lived experience did not express that they used the Bible as a particular tool to instruct children in the faith story of their faith tradition.

*My mother gave the children a book of Bible stories last Christmas. Read them the Christmas story as part of our bedtime routine … Every now and then I ask them to choose a story from it for me to read to them but I don’t use it as a way of teaching children. I use it as I would any other book. It is just a time to share together.*

(Stephie)

Participants claim that they use the Bible as a form of entertainment and an opportunity in which parents bond with their children.

Sharing the Faith Story within the Home of the Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle

Of the small group of participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle Chris was the only one who spoke of using the Bible within the home. Chris spoke of buying a Bible so that she could introduce it to her daughter. Chris appeared to use the Bible as a tool through which her daughter can come to know about her faith.

*My daughter is learning to read and she sort of has a Bible so she learns about Jesus and those kinds of messages. In those children’s Bibles they have got those kind of little messages about cooperation for example, and forgiveness and people that do wrong, she sort of learns from there. And it is reinforced by going to the Church and when the Parish Priest talks about things like that.*

(Chris)

On closer examination it becomes evident that Chris does not read the Bible with her daughter; her daughter reads it slowly by herself.
Again this quote demonstrated the desire for Chris to introduce her children to the faith but it appears that she does not know how to do it.

**Nurturing Faith through Discussions**

The use of conversations to initiate discussions on faith issues was a further nurturing strategy which was common to the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as a lived experience. Three participants in the voice of orthodoxy used this strategy in a much more formal way than would be used by those in the voice of faith as a lived experience.

**Discussions within the Homes of the Voice of Orthodoxy**

Maria shared an example of how she uses the media as a way of initiating discussions on the Church’s teachings on morality. She explained how she would initiate conversations based around what they watched on television and through the written media. Maria monitors the television viewing of her children and she introduces Catholic based literature such as the Catholic newspaper *The Record* and other publications by Church agencies as tools for family discussions.

*First the way I talk to the kids, the way I choose things for the kids like the TV programs … Also when I find an interesting article, for example in the newspaper, the Record the Catholic newspaper, or, I work for pregnancy assistance as a volunteer as well, so sometimes I get articles from there regarding abortion or human rights and things like that. I bring it home and I discuss it with them. I put the Catholic perspective, and I put the other perspective and make them discuss about it so that they can understand the whole.* (Maria)

The approach through which Maria uses of the media was indicative among those in the voice who spoke of the use of the media. The aim of such discussions by participants in the voice of orthodoxy was to lead children to an understanding of the Church teachings and not be influenced by the secular views on morality. Participants spoke quite strongly about their duty as parents to inform their children about what the Catholic Church teaches on matters of morality so that their children would behave accordingly.
Discussions within the Homes of the Voice of Faith as lived Experience

Parents in the voice of faith as a lived experience do not plan discussions on matters of faith as is the practise in many homes of the participants in the voice of orthodoxy. Most participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience discuss matters of faith as they arise within the events of family life.

Participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience named the television as one tool through which they converse with their children about faith issues.

* I actually watch TV with my children because I want them to know that everything they watch is not always the behaviour we accept as Christians. We will watch shows like Home and Away and I will say to them “Do you think that was the best decision for that person to make? I will challenge them to think of the consequences and I will say I don't believe that is what our family believes to be right. Sometimes they ask why and I will try to give them the Church’s perspective on the situation and try to let them understand the Church’s position. I know I might be mad but I find that it is one of the ways in which I can let them know what the Church is saying.*

(Heidi)

Many participants spoke of using the television or popular music to raise their children’s awareness of what is right and what is wrong in accordance with living a good Christian life.

Discussions within the Homes of the Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle

The participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle did not reveal how they speak to their children on matters of faith. The researcher suspects that conversations are limited, due to the perceived lack of religious knowledge.

* When my boy needs to know something about the Church or how the Church looks at things I tell him to ask his aunt. We don't have many discussions like that at home. Say if I tell him the wrong thing. My sister or the after school program can teach him that.*

(Anne)

PREP as a Nurturing Strategy

A nurturing strategy which was named by most participants, especially those in the voice of faith as a lived experience, was Parish Religious Education Program (PREP). Participants named PREP as the means through which they ensure their children come to know the knowledge aspect of the faith tradition.
PREP as a Nurturing Strategy for those in the Voice of Orthodoxy

The data revealed that attending PREP was not named by those in the voice of orthodoxy as a nurturing strategy. In fact only one orthodox participant had a child who attended PREP. The faith of the children of participants who speak with the voice of orthodoxy is nurtured largely within the home by the parents. Participants in this voice, such as Tina, commented that they had removed their children from PREP and have taken on the responsibility of the faith development of their children.

I entered Harrison in the religious class and I had nothing but admiration for the teachers. I think they are wonderful. Harrison was getting distressed to go because he found that we just sit there and colour in these sheets and he didn’t like the discipline. They did things, he didn’t mind that like when they went to the Church and looked at things, but most of the time he found that they were sitting and colouring and things like that. He found this quite frustrating and it was a battle getting him there and I thought it might have an adverse affect on him. The purpose of it was for him to get religious education, but was having an adverse affect on him. I spoke to the coordinator and he agreed. He said fine. I took him out and I thought I’d wait until he is a bit older and I’ll see what is being taught but otherwise I have taken it on solely. And will continue to do so.    

(Tina)

In summary, those in the voice of orthodoxy did not rely on PREP for one of the strategies to nurturing faith. Those in the voice of orthodoxy chose to educate their own children in faith without the assistance of PREP.

PREP as a Nurturing Strategy for those in the Voice of Faith as a Lived Experience

Participants in both subgroups of the voice of faith as a lived experience also named Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) attendance as one of the nurturing strategies which they promoted within the home. Of the 29 participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience, only six participants do not access PREP with three of the six participants being in rural areas where PREP is not available. The 23 participants who access PREP commented strongly that it was an essential tool for nurturing faith because many have a sense of inadequacy when it comes to sharing the faith traditions and teachings of the Church. PREP is a support structure in which they can further develop the faith of their children. Most participants spoke positively of PREP and of how they have conversations with their children about what they have learnt in their classes.
It [PREP] is a very good support system. Going through the sacramental program at the RE [PREP] is really good. We can talk about what they do in class and it helps us to have a conversation to our children about faith. RE classes are a fantastic support. If we didn’t have them it would be extremely hard to help our children know about their faith. (Trish)

Those in the voice of faith as a lived experience named PREP as an important strategy for nurturing faith. They rely on PREP to assist them in the nurturing of the faith of the children, especially when it comes to religious knowledge.

**PREP as a Nurturing Strategy for those in the Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle**

Participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle did not name PREP as a strategy through which they nurture the faith of their children. One participant sent her children to PREP classes and spoke of these classes as the means through which her child gains religious knowledge. She did not name it as a nurturing tool but rather as place where her child is educated in the faith. The second participant did not access PREP because she has just joined her parish community and has only recently become aware of PREP.

**A Rural Perspective**

In discussing nurturing strategies employed by participants across the three voices it is worth noting the rural experience of nurturing the faith of children. The discussion in this section does not relate specifically to the understanding of faith within the voices but rather discusses the issue of Mass attendance which is pertinent to those in rural areas in relation to the nurturing faith.

Mass attendance as a strategy for nurturing faith is one thing that sets rural participants apart from participants in the metropolitan area. In the rural areas attending Mass can be a challenge for many because Mass is not available in each town each week. They need to travel to a different town within their particular region each week in order to celebrate Mass.

*We go to Church as often as we’re able to which is, we have an irregular Church service here in [town] if that makes sense. We have the first and third Sundays. The first Sunday of the month it is at eight o’clock in the morning, the third and fifth is ten o’clock in the morning and the second and fourth is Saturday night, so it just*
depends where you are and how things fit in and if you’re in town. But we do go to Church as regular as we can.  
(Jill)

Julie, one of the participants from a rural community, commented that for this reason attending Mass regularly is not a reality within family life and it becomes a difficulty for her.

Going to Mass not as regularly as it should be I will admit and the children don’t always come. We need to travel and that becomes difficult at times. Sometimes we need to leave our farm quite early to get to a town for Mass. It just gets too hard sometimes.  (Julie)

For those in rural areas Mass attendance does not have the same impact on their faith life, especially for the children. Because of the travelling time involved the children are not taken as often especially if one of the spouses is a non Catholic. The observation of most husbands being non Catholic is likely to be particular to this sample. Participants in rural areas accept the reality that regular Mass attendance is not a possibility for them. They attend Mass when it is possible and encourage their children to attend whenever possible.

The Nurturing Styles
In ascertaining the strategies used by participants to nurture faith within the home, the data showed that within each of the three analytical voices there emerged a distinct nurturing style which, for most, was in keeping with participants understanding of faith. What surfaced was that the three voices had different intents behind the ways strategies were used. These differences were defined as the nurturing style.

The Nurturing Style of the Voice of Orthodoxy
As established in Chapter Four (cf. pp.95–102), participants in the voice of orthodoxy identified their perception of faith as grounded in the practices and traditions of the Church. When it came to understanding the nurturing style used by participants in this voice, the data revealed that this voice used strategies that centred on the formalities of the faith. Characteristics which were common to the nurturing style of those who speak with the voice of orthodoxy were strategies that would ensure the preservation of the faith. The comment made by Tina highlighted the nurturing style which was characteristic of those who speak in the voice of orthodoxy. When asked how she put her understanding of faith into practise within the home she disclosed:
How do I put it [faith] into practise? I actually, … because I’m practising I make them aware of the fact I’m practising.  (Tina)

When asked what she meant by practising, she remarked:

I mean practise the faith, as in prayer and the ritual, the going to Church, the Rosary and all the facets of the Catholic religion. So practise and incorporate it as part of their lives …. And with them I’ve taught them basic prayers, I’ve taught them about the Rosary and we read Bible stories. I bring them [Bible stories] back from my school and we read them and we talk about Jesus.  (Tina)

The nurturing style adopted by those within the voice of orthodoxy focussed on acquiring and employing knowledge and was largely based on their childhood practice of the faith. The nurturing of faith centred on strategies that mainly encouraged observance of the faith. Strategies promoted within the homes of those in the voice of orthodoxy were, in the most, structured. This formalism was most noticeable in the approach by this voice to prayer and the Mass. It was evident that for those in the voice of orthodoxy the knowing of the formal prayers of the Church and the purpose of attending Mass were, in the main, to fulfil a sense of obligation which was specifically Catholic rather than Christian. The goal for sharing faith stories for those in this voice was also knowledge based. Discussions and dialogues on faith issues within the home were planned and structured.

**The Nurturing Style of the Voice of Faith as a Lived Experience**

As determined in Chapter Four (cf. pp.102–108), the concept of faith held by the participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience comes from an understanding that faith is grounded in the experiences of life. The data revealed that participants in this voice, on the whole, adopted a style that was less formal and structured to those in the voice of orthodoxy. Participants in this voice utilised the natural events of family life which arise in daily living as the tool for nurturing faith. By using the events of everyday life, participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience believe that they nurture the faith of their children in a way that is appropriate to the needs and age of the child. Those in this voice believe that the approach they have adopted, allow their children to develop an understanding that faith is a lived experience and therefore, not isolated from life.
A Blending of Nurturing Styles
At the beginning of this Chapter (cf. p.132) it was declared that the three voices are representative of most of the views of the participants. However, it was not claimed that any one participant can be described exclusively in one or other voices. The study respects the ambivalence that the thoughts of people, in this case, of nurturing, are constantly changing. This ambiguity was evident within this voice. The data revealed two distinct nurturing styles emerged; the first identified as leaning towards orthodoxy and the second as growing into faith.

Nurturing Style – Leaning Towards Orthodoxy
Most in this subgroup were participants who had been educated in Catholic schools overseas. Their nurturing style was based on what they had experienced in their childhood. In other words, they had retained a nurturing style with which they felt comfortable and secure. At the same time they had a sense of what was a more reasonable expectation of what their children could cope within the practice of the faith. This more grounded expectation of their children, together with their personal faith expressions as reported in Chapter Four, constituted the difference of this subgroup to the orthodox participants in the previous section. This was particularly evident on the approaches to prayer and Mass attendance. These two strategies will be discussed in the following sections.

Growing into Faith
A second nurturing style emerged within the voice of faith as a lived experience. For this subgroup, identified as growing into faith, the nurturing style placed greater emphasis on the living out of the faith. The contrast between this subgroup and the subgroup leaning towards orthodoxy was that when it came to the nurturing strategies of prayer and Mass those who lean towards orthodoxy spoke of a faith which was placed on the children by their parents. Participants in this subgroup growing into faith spoke of recognising nurturing opportunities which arise incidentally within family life as well as planned teachable faith moments.

The voice of faith as a lived experience adopted a nurturing style which promotes an understanding that faith is integrated with life. Fundamental strategies central to those
in this voice are ones which recognise and promote moments within everyday life as tools to nurture the faith of their children. They believe that their actions and the way they relate to others become key strategies for nurturing the faith of their children. Such strategies were in contrast with those employed by those in the voice of orthodoxy. The main form of witness which was important to the orthodox group was the witnessing of faith through the practising the formalities of the faith. In contrast, those in the subgroup growing into faith adopted a nurturing style that promoted an understanding that faith engages with the world.

As with those in the voice of orthodoxy, the central practices of the faith such as Mass attendance and prayer were very important to this group. The main difference between the two voices is in the approach. The orthodoxy group are guided by the formalities of the faith, whereas those in the voice of faith as a lived experience have adopted a nurturing style which has at its core Gospel–centred values and family cohesiveness. To accommodate this understanding those who speak in the voice of faith as a lived experience implement a nurturing style that utilises the natural events which arise in daily living as a means for nurturing faith.

One of the most notable differences by those in the voice of orthodoxy and those who speak with the voice of faith as a lived experience was the approach to prayer. In the main, those in the voice of orthodoxy and those in the voice of faith as a lived experience who lean towards orthodoxy concentrate mainly on teaching children the formal prayers of the Church in order to preserve the faith traditions. An expectation by those in the voice of orthodoxy is that children learn the formal prayers of the Church by rote. Participants who speak with the voice of faith as a lived experience in the subgroup growing into faith, had a strong conviction that children need to understand what they pray and thus formal prayers, even though introduced, were on the whole, not learnt by rote as was the expectation of those in the voice of orthodoxy. The main form of prayer adopted by most in the voice of faith as a lived experience in the subgroup growing in faith is spontaneous prayer as it is a means through which they connect the happenings of daily life with their faith life. Another difference between the approaches of the two voices when it came to prayer was that those in the voice of faith as a lived experience, especially in the subgroup growing into faith, admitted to struggling with making prayer, especially formal prayer time, a part of family life. They
spoke of ‘slipping up’ when it came to setting a routine for prayer time. The orthodox
group referred to a structured approach to family prayer with many claiming they have
scheduled prayer time as part of their family routine.

A further perception that was raised by participants in both subgroups in the voice of
faith as a lived experience was the awareness of the responsibility that they needed first
to witness to the children how to integrate faith with life. Those in this voice were aware
that it was through the actions of themselves as parents that their children come to their
own understanding of faith. This was in contrast to the understanding of witness held
by those in the voice of orthodoxy where the main form of witness which was relevant to
them in nurturing faith was that they witness to their children the practices of the faith,
that is, mainly to attend Mass and to be seen praying.

PREP was considered by the participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience as
an important strategy which aided in the nurturing of the faith within the home.
Participants were grateful and appreciative of the assistance, especially when it came
to religious knowledge. The sense of the importance of PREP was akin with those in
the voice of faith as an active struggle. Of the two participants in the voice of faith as an
active struggle, one spoke of the reliance on PREP for the nurturing the faith of their
children. Those in the voice of orthodoxy, in the main, were quite confident in
themselves to educate their children in all aspects of the faith and most participants had
chosen not to send their children to PREP.

The Nurturing Style of the Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle
The third voice that was discerned among the sample of participants is the voice of faith
as an active struggle. As has already been established in Chapter Four (cf. pp.125–
129), this group was small in comparison to the voice of faith as a lived experience.
The voice of faith as an active struggle however, was clear and distinct and echoed
sentiments of the journey many of the participants in the voice of faith as a lived
experience had travelled to come to their understanding of faith and ultimately their
nurturing style.

In contrast to the other two voices, those who speak with the voice of faith as an active
struggle found the idea of nurturing the faith of their children a concept which did not sit
comfortably with them. Participants in the voice of orthodoxy and participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience had a strong sense of the way they nurtured the faith of their children. The participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle found it extremely difficult to speak about nurturing the faith of their children.

_I take them to Church so that they can hear from the readings about how to be a good person. I take them so that they will learn about the faith._ (Chris)

The participants in this voice did not see themselves as nurturers of the faith of their children because they felt that they were not skilled in nurturing faith.

_I really don't know how to teach my children about the faith. What can I tell them? As I said before I rely on my sister and others in the family. I just get too up tight because I don't know if I know enough myself._ (Anne)

Chris was keen to have her children attend a Catholic school so that she would be secure in the knowledge that her children would learn about the faith.

_I really wish they went to the Catholic school because then I would know that they would be learning about the faith. At the moment they go to the parish classes only once a week. I don't think that is enough._ (Chris)

Both participants did not name themselves as a nurturer of the faith of their children.

What became apparent in the data was that these participants were at a stage on their faith journey where they are searching for their own personal understanding of faith and how to live it. Both participants spoke of sharing a faith with their children employing their remembered childhood experiences. The main strategies named were limited to the Mass attendance and PREP. The participants in this voice did not name prayer as one of the strategies to nurturing faith within the home. This was in contrast to the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as a lived experience where prayer is one of the central nurturing strategies even though the approach to prayer differs. The nurturing strategies of the voice of faith as an active struggle will be discussed in this section together with the desire which this voice holds for their children.

In comparison to the voice of orthodoxy and the voice of faith as a lived experience, participants in this voice spoke very little about the nurturing strategies within their
homes. This third voice seemed resistant to the notion that they nurture the faith of their children. Because the participants themselves do not feel comfortable about their own faith, they feel that they do not have the knowledge or the skills to nurture the faith of their children. Those in the voice of faith as an active struggle had a sense that faith is important and therefore have taken steps to introduce their children to the faith by employing strategies which were familiar to them from their own childhood. Of the strategies mentioned by those in the voice of faith as an active struggle, the nurturing style is more conducive to those who speak with the voice of orthodoxy. The participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle want their children to have knowledge of the faith. They did not speak of nurturing a faith; as promoted by participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience where the central focus is that faith is integrated with life. The main concern for those who speak with the voice of faith as an active struggle was how to share a faith with their children in which they felt so inadequate themselves.

It is possible to summarise the most pertinent characteristics of the three voices’ approach to nurturing faith of their children within the home. The nurturing style adopted by those within the voice of orthodoxy was, in the most, structured. The nurturing style of participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience had less rigid manner to nurturing faith within the home. Nurturing faith by those in the voice of faith as a lived experience had more to do with living a faith that was integrated with life experience. The voice of faith as an active struggle does not have a style that sets it apart from the other two voices. Participants in this voice tend to adopt a nurturing style that was influenced by the memories of the faith experiences from their childhood.

**Participant Quotation in this Chapter**

As indicated in Chapter Four (cf. pp.93–95) the contribution of all participants across the three voices formed the data for this analysis. Those expressions that best presented the view of the group were selected as quotations. It is claimed that the quotations used are indicative of the whole of this group in terms of the analysis of their contributions.
As indicated in Table 5.1, all five participants who speak in the voice of orthodoxy have been quoted on the discussion on how faith is put into practise within the context of the home.

**Table 5.1  The Voice of Orthodoxy Participants (n=5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Times quoted in Ch 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Mary</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data revealed that within the voice of faith as a lived experience a blend of nurturing styles emerged. As Table 5.2 signals that six of the 29 participants who speak in the voice of faith as a lived experience showed inclination of leaning towards the voice of orthodoxy when it came to the approach to nurturing faith within the home. For this reason this subgroup was identified as leaning towards orthodoxy. It is not unexpected that within this larger group not all conversation is quoted.

**Table 5.2  The Voice of Faith as Lived Experience – Subgroup: Leaning Towards Orthodoxy (n=6)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Times quoted in Ch 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Heidi</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3 indicates that 23 of the 29 participants in the voice of faith as a lived experience adopted a nurturing style which promote an understanding that faith is continually growing. This subgroup was identified as growing into faith.
Table 5.3 The Voice of Faith as Lived Experience – Subgroup: Growing into faith (n=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Times quoted in Ch 5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Carole</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doreen</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacquie</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kylie</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyn</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillip</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephie</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.4 illustrates the number of times participants in the voice of faith as an active struggle were quoted in this Chapter.
Table 5.4  The Voice of Faith as an Active Struggle Participants (n=2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Times quoted in Ch 5</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables are offered to give some evidence to the fairness and diversity of the quotation selections. This range of quotations is part of the argument towards validity of the analysis.

Conclusion
Chapter Five was divided into two main parts. The first part discussed the nurturing strategies which emerged from the data. The second part of the Chapter showed the relationship between the understanding of faith held by participants and the nurturing style through which faith is nurtured within the home. For this reason, the three voices established in Chapter Four were a useful lens through which to discuss the differences in the nurturing styles which emerged from the study. The findings in this Chapter showed that even though the strategies for nurturing the faith within the home appeared to be similar across the three voices, it was revealed that the way the strategies were used and the intention behind the strategies differed. These differences were in keeping with their understanding of faith established in Chapter Four.

Chapter Six will present the challenges the participants expressed. These challenges relate to the efforts of the participants to nurture the faith of their children. Chapter Six will continue to use the analogies of the three voices to better focus the differences in the experiences of theses participants.
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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Pseudonym</th>
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<td>Mary</td>
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<td>Orthodoxy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terry</td>
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<td>Orthodoxy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Orthodoxy</td>
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<td>Name of Pseudonym</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Voice</td>
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<td>Trish</td>
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<td>Vigi</td>
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<td>Chris</td>
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<td>Active Struggle</td>
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</table>

**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
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 the 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.*

**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 interactional 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. Stephie 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 want 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.
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).

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\text{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.} \\
\text{(Groome 1980, pp.57–58)}
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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 experienced, 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 is 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 in 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 Catechesis1997, #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 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.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion and Recommendations

This Chapter attempts to bring together the findings and analysis of the previous three Chapters. To achieve this aim, this Chapter will first evaluate the research methods employed before summarising the main findings of the study. The Chapter will conclude with recommendations based, within the limits of the study, on the research findings, before offering a final conclusion.

The research question which directed 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 sub-questions used as the framework in the discussion included.

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?

A total of 36 parents (n=36) participated in the research, the majority (n=31) were mothers. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling procedure because it wanted to target a specific group of parents within the Catholic community, that is, parents who did not access Catholic schools for the education of their children. The sample was drawn from two Regional Zones within the Archdiocese of Perth; a rural zone and a metropolitan zone.
Evaluation of the Research Methods

It is important to qualify the generalisability of the results. The aim of this qualitative study was not to produce a generalisable conclusion in a statistical sense: the sample was purposively selected rather than randomly selected. A characteristic of the sample was that participants were recruited from Catholic families who have an active connection with parish, either through Mass attendance, through PREP or both. The researcher is aware that this makes this group of participants a distinctive sub group of the Catholic population and might not be representative of the whole group who call themselves Catholic. However, the study does make a unique contribution to the understanding of how faith is nurtured with contemporary Catholic homes. This study is the first major Australian qualitative study conducted with parents who do not access the Catholic school. As has already been acknowledged, this group of parents often feel themselves at the edge of Church life and most have low involvement in the parish. In the Australian context, most studies in the area of faith development and religious education have been conducted with the parents of children who access the Catholic school system. The study aimed to give Catholic parents outside the Catholic school system a voice so that they too could share in the faith story of how parents nurture faith.

This study was conducted by sampling a number of parishes with diverse demographics, including parishes in rural areas. This allowed for the opportunity to gather data from a range of people with varied experiences. The data was collected over two and a half years as parents were not as forthcoming to participate in the study as was initially anticipated. The reluctance to volunteer for the study may be indicative of the marginal Catholic parents who do not send their children to Catholic schools but do try to nurture faith in their children.

The study rigorously followed the methods described in Chapter Three (pp.50–88). The main methods employed to collect the data for this study were interviews, observations of the environment and notes gathered in the field (Ch. 3 pp.77–79). The strength of the face–to–face interview method is that it allowed the researcher to unravel at a grass–roots level the many realities faced by parents in this task of nurturing faith within the home (Ch. 3 pp.78–79). The interview method gave the researcher scope to access what was at the heart of the concerns and feelings of the parents in relation to
the faith development of their children. The interviews were conducted mainly in the homes of parents. This allowed the researcher to enter into discussions on faith and parental nurture roles in an environment of familiarity and safety. Such discussion is seen by many as a private and delicate conversation and was possible in an environment in which parents felt they were in control (Ch. 3 pp.78–79).

The study was to gather descriptive data that would reveal a picture of how parents nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home. An ethnographic approach was chosen to achieve the aim of the study because it allowed the researcher to obtain first hand the ‘big picture’ about how this particular group of parents who do not send their children to Catholic schools nurture the faith of their children (Ch. 3 pp.51–52). The main aim of this study was to hear, understand, and narrate how this particular group of parents nurtured the faith of their children; in the difficulties, confusions and successes that these parents could report.

The results are, at the very least, informative of the understandings of faith held by a group of Catholic parents who do not access Catholic schools for the education of their children and the nurturing styles and strategies used to nurture faith within the context of the Australian Catholic home. The results are important as guidelines to be addressed as parishes respond to the needs of the parents in the area of family catechesis. Parishes need to be mindful of those parents within their community who do have the support or resources offered to parents in the Catholic school system. The study highlighted that the many parents and their children do not access Catholic school education because they cannot access them. With the expanding populations in suburban areas, Catholic school access, especially in Western Australia, is not likely to become more accessible due to the financial limitation of providing new school buildings. The high demand for admission into Catholic schools means that Catholic parents rely on parish resources for the support needed in the area of faith development of their children. According to Church documents (General Directory for Catechesis 1997), parishes have a responsibility to identify who their marginalised members are and put into place support structures that will enable them to feel part of the community as well as educate them for the task at hand.

The following points are a summary of the key findings of the study:
1. The most significant revelation which emerged from the study is that parents are not a single ‘type’ when it comes to an understanding of faith. Three individual ‘types’ or voices were evident in this study. By identifying that parents are not a single ‘type’ the research was able to identify a number of characteristics which allows differences to be discussed between the nurturing strategies and nurturing styles used by parents of the sample within the Catholic home (Ch. 4 pp. 91–130).

2. The nurturing strategies used by parents in this study reflected the Church’s call to families of sharing in the life and mission of the Church (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #49–64). The main strategies which parents use as tools for nurturing faith include: prayer, Mass attendance, attending the Parish Religious Education Program (PREP) and being mindful of seizing teachable faith moments that occur within the events of family life (Ch. 5 pp.132–164).

3. The understanding of faith strongly influenced the nurturing style adopted by parents and the nurturing strategies implemented within the context of their homes (Ch. 5 pp.164–171).

4. The findings did not resolve the question whether there were different perceptions of the role of nurturing faith between genders. However, the study supported previous studies which have revealed that the responsibility for nurturing faith within the household is carried out mainly by the mother (Ch. 7 pp.227-228).

5. Parents are aware of their task as nurturers of faith. While there are societal influences which parents feel impact on nurturing faith within the home, the study reveals that one of the greatest hindrances faced by parents to nurturing faith is their own sense of inadequacy. The sense of inadequacy acknowledged by parents stems from what they recognise as their own lack of faith knowledge. This led parents to experience a lack of confidence in carrying out their nurturing task effectively (Ch. 6 pp.178–199).

6. The desire for a Catholic school education rated high among parents in this study. The researcher recognises that the study was carried in a region of the
Archdiocese of Perth where the demand for Catholic school education far exceeds the places available (Ch. 6 pp. 180–184).

7. Parents are anxious for support at the parish level to assist them in their task of nurturing the faith of their children (Ch. 6 pp.191–193).

8. Few parents are aware of resources to support the nurture of faith in the home already available within the Archdiocese of Perth (Ch. 6 pp.206–207).

9. This study accessed a proportion of parents who consider themselves on the fringe of the mainstream parish life. The study gave opportunity for these parents, the voiceless in the parish, to speak their desire for inclusion.

The data presented in this study are suggesting that even though parents do try to nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home, there is a crisis when it comes to supporting parents in the task. The crisis centres on parishes within the Archdiocese of Perth being slow to promote ongoing faith formation with regard to nurturing faith within family life. Bishops and Priests need to confront this crisis as the Church in Western Australia, and indeed Australia, embrace the 3rd millennium. The Church needs to support parents at a parish level by first offering opportunities for them to grow in their own understanding of the faith and then to recommend ways of sharing this faith with their children within the home.

Recommendations
In light of what has emerged through the responses of parents who do not access Catholic school for the education of their children it is possible to present a number of recommendations which can be considered in assisting parents in the task of nurturing the faith of their children within the context of the home. The following five recommendations are based on the experience and outcomes of this research. While these recommendations might be seen to relate directly to the Archdiocese of Perth, there is evidence that similar conditions may pertain elsewhere in Australia. These recommendations are grounded in the conversations and findings of this research. They are an endeavour to address how the Archdiocese of Perth can assist parents, in
a more effective manner, in their task of nurturing the faith of their children within the context of the home.

The first recommendation from this study is that a common understanding of family catechesis be formulated for the Archdiocese. A common vision of family catechesis would aim to help parishes formulate strategies that could assist families to grow in faith and grow in awareness of what it means to live the message of the Gospel within the domestic Church. It is reasonable to conclude that if a shared vision of family catechesis is established across the Archdiocese then a process to support parents within the parish structures can be designed and implemented. The understanding of family catechesis needs to consider both theological and empirical data.

A second recommendation that emerges from the study is that an agency funded by the Archdiocese of Perth be established specifically tasked to assist parishes to develop support structures to aid parents in their task of nurturing faith within the context of the home. Such an agency would assume responsibility for developing a parish–based program that would aim to educate, train and sustain leaders of family catechesis within parishes. The training program could include: awareness of theology on Church and family; skills in helping parishes becoming aware of the specific needs of their parents; knowledge of existing resources and contacts to facilitate family ministers to provide education and oversee services to parishes; and awareness of ways to integrate family ministry into existing parish programs and initiatives.

A third recommendation to support families in their responsibilities is that the parish must become "the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis" (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #257). The Archdiocese of Perth can address the needs of parents by promoting within parishes meetings and parish–based courses and providing ongoing adult catechesis directed towards parents (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #227). It is reasonable to conclude that parents would become better equipped and more confident in their task of nurturing the faith of their children if support is offered at a parish level.
The fourth recommendation is that a set of strategies be formulated which can assist parishes to identify families who consider themselves marginalised, and implement ways of making them feel genuinely welcome in the worshipping community.

A final recommendation is that the Catholic Church in Australia looks at alternative models of religious education which do not rely solely on the Catholic school as the major educator of the faith.

Limitations of the Study
The following limitations are recognised by the researcher in relation to this study.

1. The study was confined to a specific target group of parents whose children do not attend a Catholic school. To confirm the outcome of this study it would be beneficial if further studies were conducted to include all groups of Catholic parents. These studies would give further insight to how faith is nurtured in Catholic homes and describe how different support structures have an impact on the nurturing of faith within the home.

2. A second limitation was that the study was conducted in one diocese only. A recommendation would be to conduct the study in a representative group of dioceses in Australia to ascertain if these results are consistent across the Church in Australia. The Archdiocese of Perth did encompass diverse socio economic and geographic factors and these were represented in the sample of parents in the research.

3. The methodology used in this study was limited to a single face–to–face interview of between 30 to 45 minutes duration with each parent. If this study is replicated, it is suggested that the study be carried out using a number of research methods.

Conclusion
This research was useful and worthwhile for a number of reasons. As already stated at the beginning, little study has been conducted with parents of children outside the Catholic school system in Australia. This research has given voice to a group of parents whom the researcher recognises as living on the fringes of the parish life of the Catholic Church. The participants themselves confirmed this sense of marginalisation.
The study enabled this group of parents who do not access the Catholic school system to make a significant contribution to the story of how faith is nurtured within the context of the Catholic home. The findings are the results of careful application of the interview method and a detailed, rigorous and transparent analysis of the data collected.

From the findings presented in this research it is reasonable to conclude that Catholic parents who do not access the Catholic school system do try to nurture the faith of their children within the home. This task is not an easy one, but one that they take seriously. The challenge is how to support these parents to carry out the task as the first and foremost educators of faith within the context of the home. Support for parents can be assured if the Archdiocese of Perth recognises the importance of the role of family catechesis and sets up structures with parishes to educate and support parents in their task.

This study grew out of the work and professional experiences and the role of the researcher. This study confirms that despite years of genuine effort this pastoral and catechetical area still remains inadequately addressed within the context of the Australian Catholic Church. The data is offered to the Archdiocesan authorities so their pastoral concerns can be better informed, and their efforts to support the faith education of parents can be better facilitated. It is hoped that this work will contribute to the faith of families in the Archdiocese of Perth and in Australia in general.
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Appendices
Appendix 1 Letter to South Central Zone of Priests

10 Templetonia Rt
Canning Vale 6155 WA
Phone: 9212 9263
c.suart@ceowa.perth.Catholic.edu.au

Secretary
Southern Central Zone of Priests
[address]

Dear Fathers

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Carmel Suart. I am a Doctor of Education (EdD) student at the University of Notre Dame. My study is being supervised by Dr Roger Vallance. I have been a consultant with the Archdiocesan Catechist Service for ten years, more lately working with Sr Margaret Anne Beech. During the past four years I have been working in the area of family catechesis within the Archdiocese. I have worked with many groups of parents throughout the State assisting them in their role as first educators of their children in faith.

As a result I have produced and published a Parent Support Package which accompanies the catechist Program The Truth will set you free and the family discussion papers, Living, Loving, Learning, which many priests have made available to the parents within parishes. My work in the area of family catechesis has led me to pursue an interest in the ways families nurture the faith of their children within the context of the home.

I am seeking approval to conduct part of my research towards my degree with a group of your parishioners. I am looking for the parents of primary school children who do not access Catholic schools. To inform this group of parents about the research and to invite them to participate, I would like to talk to congregations in various parishes about the purpose and nature of the research. The talk will be at notice time after communion, at your weekend Masses and will be approximately three to four minutes.
I also wish to place brochures on pews with information about the research at each Mass inviting parishioners, who fall into the categories eligible for the research, to participate. A tear off slip to register an expression of interest to participants in the research will be included in the brochure.

I am hoping that this request meets with your approval. I will contact you by phone in mid September to make an appointment to further explain the purpose and benefits of this research. I will also seek your permission for the research to be conducted in your parish. If you need any clarifications before I contact you in mid September, please contact me by email or by phone at the Catholic Education Office of WA.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Yours Sincerely

Carmel Suart
Appendix 2  Letter of Confirmation to Parish Priests

10 Templetonia Rt
Canning Vale WA 6155
31 July 2001
suart.carmel@cathednet.wa.edu.au

[address of parish]

Dear Father

Thank you for granting me access into your parish community to address your congregation on the nature and purpose of my study. I wish to confirm the following details from our conversation on [date].

Date(s)

Time(s)

As agreed, the talk will take place after the communion prayer; will be between three and five minutes; and the brochures will be place in the foyer of the Church.

I once again stress that it is not mandatory for the parish to participate in the study and parents will be invited into the study only if they fill out an expression of interest. The box for the reply slips will be collected from the foyer on [date].

Once again I thank you for your support. I am truly grateful.

Yours truly,

Carmel Suart
Appendix 3 Letter to Parish Priest in Merredin Zone

10 Templetonia Rt
Canning Vale WA 6155
20 October 2001
suart.carmel@cathednet.wa.edu.au

[address of parish]

Dear Father

I hope you have settled into your new parish without too many headaches. I am sure that the people are very happy to have you as their parish priest.

Father, I am not sure if you are aware that in my other life, I am a Doctor of Education (EdD) student at the University of Notre Dame. I am conducting a study on the ways families nurture the faith of their children within the context of family life. The aim of the study is to develop resources that will better support parents in your efforts to nurture faith within the home.

I am seeking approval to conduct part of my research in your parish zone. I am appealing to the parents of primary school children who do not attend Catholic schools to assist me in my research. This particular group is an under researched group. I wish to tap into this group of parents to uncover how they nurture faith within the home and the struggles that they may be facing in doing so. Most research to date has centred on the Catholic school.

I am interested in both a city and rural perspectives. I have chosen Merriden zone, as I know that there are no Catholic schools in the immediate area and thus most Catholic children attend the local state school.
To inform this group of parents about the research and to invite them to participate, I am prepared to come into the community and talk at Mass, after communion on a weekend. The talk will be approximately three to four minutes. Alternatively, if there is a more practical way, I would be more than grateful for suggestions. I know your numbers may be small but every participant makes a valuable contribution.

Enclosed is the brochure with the information I give to parents, with a tear off slip to register an expression of interest for those interested in finding out more about the study. What is required by the participant is approximately 45 minutes for an interview at a time and place which is convenient to them. Phone interviews would also be a consideration.

I am hoping that this request meets with your approval if you think the Merriden zone is a suitable area for the study. Please contact me by email or by phone on 9212 9263 at the Catholic Education Office to discuss the matter further. Your parish will be the only country parish in the study at this stage.

Thank you for your cooperation and support. Hope to hear from you soon.

Yours Sincerely

Carmel Suart
Appendix 4  Letter to Coordinators

10 Templetonia Rt
Canning Vale WA 6155
29 July 2003
suart.carmel@cathednet.wa.edu.au

Dear [name of PREP Coordinator]

Thank you for assisting me in distributing this information to the parents in your PREP. I have enclosed a letter and a pamphlet in each envelope for you to pass on to each family in your classes. The letter explains the purpose of the study and invites parents to participate if they so wish.

I have requested that expressions of interest are returned to you at next [name day] classes or that they post them directly to me. I have enclosed a stamped and address envelope for you to send the ones that are returned to you next [name day].

I appreciate your support. I hope that some parents will want to participate in the study. If there are any problems please do not hesitate to contact me at work on 9212 9263 or at home on 9455 1837.

Thank you.

Carmel Suart
Appendix 5  Letters to Parent of PREP

10 Templetonia Retreat
Canning Vale WA 6155
29 July 2003

Dear Parents

My name is Carmel Suart. I am a Doctor of Education student at the University of Notre Dame. I am conducting a study on the ways families nurture the faith of their children within the context of family life. The aim of the study is to develop resources that will better support parents in your efforts to nurture faith within the home.

I am appealing to the parents of primary school children who do not attend Catholic schools to assist me in my research. This particular group is an under researched group. Most research has centred on the Catholic school. I wish to tap into this group of parents who do not have the support of Catholic schools for the faith education of your children to uncover how you nurture faith within your homes and the struggles that you may be facing. To do this, I would like to conduct a face to face interview. The interview is a one off and will take approximately 45 minutes at a time and place which is convenient to you.

I need your help. I have the support of your parish priest to conduct the research in the parish. At this stage I am in need of at least 16 people for my study to be viable. I know you fit this category so your contribution will be invaluable to me. I will ensure that your responses will be confidential and that all reporting will preserve the anonymity of each participant and parish.

You will find out more about the study in the enclosed pamphlet. Please take a moment to read the information and give consideration to supporting the study by filling in the expression of interest slip on the brochure. Place the slip in the envelope provided and return it via your child within the next two weeks or post it to the above address.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Carmel Suart

Carmel Suart, College of Education, University of Notre Dame Australia.
Appendix 7  An undertaking of Research Confidentiality

This document is an explicit agreement that the subjects of my research will not be identified in any works that I publish or otherwise produce.

No parent who is the subject of my research will be identified by name or description.

The parish and situation that becomes part of my research will be dealt with in a manner that will prevent identification of people, places and particular parish.

Parents will be offered the chance to choose a name that will be used in all transcripts of the interviews. I will use this name of convenience in all work from the original transcription onwards.

Parishes will be similarly disguised with a numerical code for parishes and parish priests, and other names which may arise.

This undertaking of anonymity within my research process is my preferred way of ensuring that participants have confidence that they are adequately protected and that material from the research will not become prejudicial to their interests.

It is anticipated that findings of this research project will be written up in a doctoral thesis, form part of professional journal articles, and may be included within Chapters of a book about nurturing faith within the home. The undertakings of anonymity pertain to all uses of these data.

Signed  Date

Carmel Suart, College of Education, University of Notre Dame Australia.
Thank you for volunteering to this interview.

I will tape this interview so that I can have an accurate record of our conversation? Is that OK with you?

The idea of this interview is to explore how faith is nurtured within your home. Firstly, let’s talk about your children.

1 **How many children do you have?**
   - What are their ages?
   - What are their gender?
   - Do they attend PREP?
   - How did they come to attend PREP?
   [If children do not attend PREP]
   - Do your children receive formal Religious Education outside the home?
     - Where does this take place?
   - Did you attend a Catholic school?
   - Did your spouse attend a Catholic school?

2 **Can you describe what faith is for you?**
   - Why is faith important to you? (Why is it worth the effort?)

3 **How do you put this understanding of faith into practice within your home?**

4 **What do you desire for your children in terms of their faith?**

5 **What are your main concerns about nurturing the faith of your children today?**
   - What do you feel hinders you from nurturing the faith of your children?

6 **What do you think will benefit you as a parent in assisting you to nurture the faith of your children?**

7 **What, for you, is the essence of nurturing faith within your home?**
   - How could you sum up your experience for me with a metaphor, a simple picture or description?
   - What story about faith education do you want me to hear from you?

Thank you for volunteering your time.
Appendix 9  Parish Profile

Parish Profile

Name of Parish ________________________________________________

Suburb _______________________________________________________

Approximate population of the parish
lessthan 1000  ☐
1000 - 3000  ☐
3000 – 6000  ☐
more than 7000  ☐

Age of the parish (Years of establishment)_________________________

Average age of the parishioners?  Mainly Young families ☐
Mainly Middle aged ☐
Mainly Retired ☐

Ethnic make up of the parish? ___________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Number of Catholic primary schools within the parish____________________
Number of non Catholic primary schools within the parish_________________

To protect the identity of the parish, parish priest and parents please choose a fictional
name by which you would like to be referred to within the study.
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Please return this form in the stamped self addressed envelope provided.