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# The Relationship between Ministry Praxis and Spiritual Development Milestones in the Lives of Children

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINISTRY PRAXIS AND  
SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES  
IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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by  
Leon Marcel Blanchette, Jr.

December 2008

## APPROVAL SHEET

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINISTRY PRAXIS AND  
SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES  
IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

Leon Marcel Blanchette, Jr.

Read and Approved by:



Michael J. Anthony (Chairperson)



Hal K. Pettigrew

Date \_\_\_\_\_

To Teri,  
the love of my life,  
and to  
Sarah and Emily,  
the joys of my heart

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAGR	Annual Average Growth Rate
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CR	Contemplative-Reflective Models
CSDS	Children's Spiritual Development Survey
df	Degree of Freedom
DGR	Decadal Growth Rate
DVD	Digital Video Disc
F	F Statistic ( $MS_{\text{group}}/MS_{\text{error}}$ )
IA	Instructional-Analytic Models
MDAE	Media-Driven Active-Engagement Models
MS	Means Square
p	Probability
PP	Pragmatic-Participatory Models
SS	Sum of Squares

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## PREFACE

The completion of this dissertation represents a significant moment in my life. It is the culmination of an educational journey that has spanned eighteen years. It represents the end of a journey of preparation and a new phase of educational effectiveness. One part of a lifelong journey of education has ended and new one has begun.

I would be remiss if I did not thank several important and influential people in my life. First, my wife, Teri—a faithful, loving partner who has stuck with me through the long educational journey and has always been an encouragement and support. Our daughters, Sarah Anne-Marie and Emily Noel, who are beautiful ladies both inside and out. A dad could not be more proud. And to my mother, Donna Ratliff, who has always been the prayer warrior in my life.

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Leon Marcel Blanchette, Jr.

Bradley, Illinois

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## CHAPTER 1

### RESEARCH CONCERN

This study analyzed the relationship between children's ministry praxis in Nazarene churches and significant spiritual milestones in the lives of Nazarene children. The study was designed to identify relationships between particular ministry models of children's ministry praxis and four key spiritual milestones that function as markers for spiritual development in children's lives.

#### **Introduction to the Research Problem**

“Every generation of Christians finds itself wrestling with the issue of how best to pass on the faith to the coming generation of Christians” (Wilhoit and Dettoni 1995, 19). This sentiment rings true in the hearts of Nazarene children's pastors across the country as they attempt to provide ministry that helps children grow spiritually. In the midst of this desire to help children grow in their walk with Christ, there is confusion about what exactly it means and how to measure outcomes. In an effort to begin to address this confusion, many scholars have attempted to provide thorough and accurate descriptions of spiritual growth or development among children and in doing so have recognized that it is virtually impossible to provide a one-size-fits-all definition (Ratcliff 2004, 9-10). In preparing to deliver a paper to the Children's Spirituality Conference in 2003, Babette Newman discovered over 17 essential qualities found in a variety of



proposed definitions that have been used in research (Boyatzis and Newman 2004, 167). Further, Michael Anthony notes that “children’s spirituality is multidimensional and convoluted. At best it defies simplistic attempts to define and describe; however, it’s knowable and worthy of investigation” (Anthony 2006, 24). While a single definition of children’s spirituality is not likely to be resolved soon, scholars are in agreement that research in the area of children’s spirituality must be accompanied by a working definition (Boyatzis and Newman 2004, 167; Ratcliff 2004, 10).

### ***Current Research***

In recent years there has been a growing interest in children’s spiritual development research that has focused on the spiritual development of children from a wide range of religious backgrounds, including no religious background (Anthony 2006, 10). Disseminating from the research of various religious perspectives a focus on the spiritual development of Christian children has prospered. Research on the Christian child continues to be a subject of growing interest especially among evangelical scholars in the United States. Rebecca Nye adds, “The majority of research to date has offered a more *general* perspective, dealing with the nature of children’s spirituality rather than nurture of the child’s spirituality for a specific faith tradition” (Nye 2004, 90). The difference between nature and nurture is the difference between the personality and characteristics of each child and the environment which influences each child (Downs 1994, 144). So it seems that while research attention has been focused on the personality and characteristics of a child in his or her spiritual development, research on the environmental impact on spiritual development has been neglected, which in turn has left

children's pastors with a lack of knowledge when attempting to develop an environment which would help children to grow in their relationship with God.

### *Lack of Definition*

Perhaps the most difficult part of studying children's spiritual development is one of definition (O'Hara and Inskeep 1999, 279). As research continues to flourish the number of proposed definitions of spirituality also grows, and yet with over 100 attempts at defining the term by a variety of specialists including researchers, therapists, chaplains, pastors, and experts in spirituality, there remains no single accepted definition (Bregman 2004, 157; Shults and Sandage 2006, 14). The lack of an accepted single definition of spirituality has made research in the area of children's spiritual development a difficult endeavor and one that few have been willing to attempt. Rebecca Nye believes that the study of Christian children's spirituality is too new to identify a single definition and doing so will restrict the consideration of alternate areas of research (Ratcliff and Nye 2006, 477). Quoting Nye, Roehlkepartain acknowledges the difficulty in defining spirituality:

Attempts to define [spirituality] closely, and derive an adequate 'operational definition' can be sure of one thing: misrepresenting spirituality's complexity, depth and fluidity. Spirituality is like the wind—though it might be experienced, observed, and described, it cannot be 'captured'—we delude ourselves to think otherwise, either in the design of research or in analytical conclusions. (Roehlkepartain 2004, 121)

While it is true that leaving the definition of Christian children's spiritual nurture open for additional interpretation has practical research advantage, the lack of a single definition has left the practitioner of children's ministry with the difficult task of developing a personal definition of Christian children's spiritual nurture by which to

implement ministry praxis. As a result of the need of practitioners to contemplate their own definition, many of the articles and books on the subject have been written by practitioners out of necessity. Many of these practitioners have few research skills and much of the research that has been done lacks validity beyond anecdotal (Ratcliff and Nye, 2006, 476). Is it possible that the lack of an acceptable definition has led children's pastors to resolve to do what seems to work without an intentionality of designing ministry to help children grow spiritually? Overwhelmed by a myriad of children's curricula and programs, do these same children's pastors give in to the temptation of using the latest and greatest program with little attention or concern for the program's role in the spiritual development of children? While it was not the purpose of the research to attempt to provide a new definition or synthesize previously proposed definitions, one must consider that the lack of an acceptable definition may contribute to an apparent void of intentional focus on the spiritual development of children.

It is clear that one should base ministry practice on sound biblical and theological understandings of how to help children grow spiritually, but in part, because there is no single accepted definition and no apparent way of measuring outcomes it seems that many children's pastors do what works and what is enjoyable with the hope that somehow children will grow. Ministry appears to be implemented based on what works or what is flashy and exciting, rather than an understanding of how children grow spiritually.

### ***Alternative Approach***

Perhaps another difficulty is that the focus of research has been limited in scope. Much of the research has focused on psychological development of children, with

a strong emphasis on developmentalism. While developmentalism plays a significant role in understanding the growth of children, when it comes to their spiritual development perhaps other options should be considered. Alternative approaches are supported by scholars who subscribe to the approach to children's spirituality found in the Spirituality and Child Theology periods of psychology (Ratcliff 2006a).

Michael Anthony believes that by utilizing the truths discovered in Urban Holmes' typology for spiritual life and David Kolb's Learning Cycle that a new way of looking at children's spiritual development is uncovered (Anthony 2006, 30-35). Perhaps by turning away from defining children's spiritual development as the primary focus and instead turning the focus on outward significant milestones in the life of the child that demonstrate spiritual growth, a new understanding of the process of children's spiritual development will be uncovered that will help Nazarene children's pastors intentionally focus on designing programs that meet the spiritual needs of their children and in turn help them to develop spiritually. Ivy Beckwith, making reference to Micah 6:8, identifies the process of children's spiritual formation as helping children "see that in the economy of the kingdom of God being successful is loving others, showing mercy, fighting for justice, and walking humbly with God" (Beckwith 2004, 57). This focus on outward expressions that demonstrate a love for God and for others may provide insight into the spiritual development of children.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the children's ministry praxis in Nazarene churches and four significant spiritual milestones in the lives of Nazarene children. A mixed method study was used to obtain statistical,

quantitative results from the population and then followed up with two small groups to explore those results in more depth through personal interviews.

### **Research Questions**

1. What model(s) of children's ministry do Nazarene children's pastors use in their ministry praxis?
2. What are the differences between each ministry model and the attendance growth rate among children?
3. What are the differences between each ministry model and the conversion rate among children?
4. What are the differences between each ministry model and the baptism rate among children?
5. What are the differences between each ministry model and the evangelism rate among children (children bringing their friends to church with them)?
6. What are the differences between each ministry model and the service rate among children?

### **Delimitations of the Study**

The research was delimited to those who served in local churches in the United States on a part-time or full-time basis as a staff person responsible for ministry to school-age children and who have identified themselves as such through the International Church of the Nazarene Headquarters database. Throughout the research these staff persons were identified as children's pastors. The current number of Nazarene children's pastors at the time of the research, according to the Nazarene Children's Pastors database, was 312 individuals. The results of the study were generalized to Nazarene children's pastors in the United States.

## Terminology

The following terms and meanings are offered in order to provide clarification of their usage in the proposed study.

*Annual growth rate (AGR).* The annual growth rate “compares the growth of the church from one successive year to another” (Waymire and Wagner 1984, 15). For the purpose of this study, AGR is used to compare the growth of each children’s ministry from one successive year to another.

*Baptism rate.* For the purpose of this study, the baptism rate is the percentage of children who have been baptized in a given church over the past year. This percentage was calculated by dividing the number of children who were baptized in the past year by the current children’s attendance.

*Children.* For the purpose of this study, children refer to humans beginning at kindergarten and continuing to the completion of sixth grade. The researcher recognizes that childhood begins at birth and that in many communities sixth grade is a part of middle school, but the decision was made to stay within the traditional elementary school parameters.

*Children’s pastor.* For the purpose of this study, a children’s pastor is an adult who has been hired by a local church to lead ministry involving children in that local church and the surrounding community. This person may be employed part-time or full-time, male or female, and serves in a Nazarene church. This includes those who understand their role as administrator, those who understand their role as pastor, or a combination thereof. The phrase “children’s pastor” is used as a descriptor of a person who is an employee of a local church and works with children and not as a title.

*Contemplative-Reflective Model.* This quadrant can be found in Anthony's typology of children's spiritual formation and is "characterized by periods of quiet reflection, introspective prayer, and storytelling. Its goal is two-fold: first to empty the mind of self-absorbed thoughts and to come before God as a clean vessel. Confession and honest self-assessment are essential to this process. The second goal is to find a place of solitude for quiet reflection" (Anthony 2006, 36). Though the author of this chapter in Anthony's book prefers the title Reflective Encounter, the title Contemplative-Reflective is used throughout the study to avoid confusion (May 2007a).

*Conversion rate.* For the purpose of this study, the conversion rate is the percentage of children who report having asked Jesus to be their Savior in a given church over the past year. This percentage will be calculated by dividing the number of children who have asked Jesus to be their Savior in the past year by the current children's attendance.

*Decadal growth rates (DGR).* "Decadal growth rates are used for determining the rates of growth across a period of more than one year. DGR is a standard measurement that can be used not only for ten years (a decade, thus 'decadal') but for two or five or 20 or any number of years. Converting growth for any period to what the growth would have been for ten years allows for ready comparison, and therefore is valuable in diagnostic efforts" (Waymire and Wagner 1984, 16).

*Development.* Development is the step-by-step, gradual movement in an intended direction. Development may include emotional, moral, physical, psychological, and spiritual progress and is always holistic (Wilhoit and Dettoni 1995, 25).

*Evangelism rate.* For the purpose of this study, the evangelism rate is the percentage of children who have invited at least one friend to church with them in a given church over the past year. This percentage will be calculated by dividing the number of children who have invited at least one friend to church with them in the past year by the current children's attendance.

*Instructional-Analytic Model.* This quadrant can be found in Anthony's typology for children's spiritual formation and "has a high regard for thought processing. These individuals grow and nurture their spiritual formation through consistent and systematic study of God's Word. . . . It is characterized by a systematic presentation of biblical teaching, emphasis on Scripture memory with elaborate reward systems" (Anthony 2006, 38-39).

*Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model.* This quadrant can be found in Anthony's typology for children's spiritual formation and is characterized by "high-energy, heavily vested in instructional technology, with children always in motion" (Anthony 2006, 41). Guided imagery, a passionate form of storytelling, is a common trait (Anthony 2006, 41).

*Nazarene.* The Church of the Nazarene is the official title of the denomination, which finds its roots in the Wesleyan/Arminian tradition, but Nazarene is used in common day verbiage and is used throughout the proposed study.

*Pragmatic-Participatory Model.* This quadrant can be found in Anthony's typology for children's spiritual formation and includes a "propensity toward choreographed singing, dramatic presentations of Bible stories, numerous activities in a



teaching hour, and a mild integration of instructional technology. Learning in a context of activity and fun” (Anthony 2006, 39).

*Quadrant.* A quadrant is one of four categories that best describes a children’s pastor’s ministry praxis. These quadrants are sometimes referred to as models and can be found in Anthony’s typology for children’s spiritual formation (Anthony 2006, 36). These quadrants appear to be rigid in the typology presented by Anthony, but research shows that there are many similarities among the quadrants and as a result there is significant overlap. This research project focused on the uniqueness and distinctive of each quadrant, an approach strongly supported by Catherine Stonehouse (Stonehouse 2007a).

*Service rate.* For the purpose of this study, the service rate is the percentage of children who have been involved in intentional ministry to others, either inside the church or outside the church, in a given church over the past year. The service rate percentage will be calculated by dividing the number of children who have been involved in some form of service ministry in the past year by the current children’s attendance.

*Spiritual, spirituality, spiritual development, spiritual formation, spiritual nurture and spiritual growth.* These terms are used interchangeably throughout the this study. While technically there are differences in these terms for the purpose of this proposed research the advice of Roehlkepartian will be followed: “Perhaps the best stance, at present, is to consider ‘working definitions’ that may be accepted to a greater or lesser extent by others. . . . What is most crucial is that each working definition of spirituality or spiritual experience within a given study be clearly articulated, as well as presuppositions and perspectives implied by the working definition” (Roehlkepartian et

al. 2006, 477-78). Ratcliff adds, “It is important that any given analysis or study of children’s spirituality identify the definition being used in that work, whether the definition is assumed prior to the study or emergent from it” (Ratcliff 2006a, 10). For the purpose of this study the working definition is as follows: “the interaction between one’s theology and the living out of that theology in daily practice” (Anthony 2006, 42). Recognizing that spirituality takes place in other religions as well as in non-religious contexts, it is to be understood that when these terms are used it is through the lens of orthodox Christian doctrine (Anthony 2006, 10-18).

*Sacred spirituality.* Sacred spirituality, sometimes referred to as Religious Spirituality, is a broad category that includes any form of religious spirituality. While there is some objection, and rightfully so, to distinguishing between sacred and secular in everyday life, it is necessary to make this distinction when discussing spirituality.

*Secular spirituality.* Secular spirituality, sometimes referred to as Natural Spirituality, is a broad category that includes any form of non-religious spirituality. Included in this category are Existential Spirituality, Humanistic Spirituality, Postmodern Spirituality, Developmental Spirituality, and Psychological Spirituality (Anthony 2006, 10-17). One unique distinction from sacred spirituality is that secular spirituality does not require a belief in God or a god (Van Ness 1996, 2).

### **Research Assumptions**

The following research assumptions are foundational to the study:

1. The researcher assumed that all Nazarene children’s pastors have an understanding of children’s spiritual development whether they recognize and acknowledge it or not.

2. The researcher assumed that children are capable of a life-changing relationship with God.
3. The researcher assumed that it is the responsibility of the children's pastor to assist children in their spiritual growth while not in a primary role for this is the responsibility of the parent.
4. The researcher assumed that all four models of ministry praxis have equal potential to cause children to grow spiritually.
5. The researcher assumed that an understanding of children's spiritual development is only a subsection of a children's pastor's philosophy of ministry.
6. The researcher, whose roots are planted in the Church of the Nazarene, viewed issues of theology through a Wesleyan/Arminian lens.
7. The researcher assumed that the Holy Spirit is an active participant in the spiritual development of the child.

### **Procedural Overview**

This study used a mixed methods approach to determine the relationship between ministry praxis, as identified through four ministry models, and spiritual development milestones, as identified through four key outward expressions. The use of a mixed method approach is endorsed by Boyatzis and Newman when they note that leading psychologists of religion suggest a “multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm” for the study of children's spirituality that includes “the collection of different kinds of data and multiple levels of analysis” (Boyatzis and Newman 2004, 166).

### ***Quantitative Process***

In the first phase, quantitative research statements were included in a survey that was used to gather data for analysis (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 261). The purpose of the instrument was to determine which of the four models proposed in Anthony's book, *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation*, best describes current ministry praxis

among Nazarene pastors and to determine the level of involvement among Nazarene children in four key spiritual development milestones.

### **Development of the Instrument**

Research was conducted using a survey that was distributed to Nazarene children's pastors. The survey included background questions to determine the length of tenure of the children's pastor at his/her current church, the attendance rate among children at the beginning of his/her tenure, and the current attendance rate. The Decadal Method formula (Appendix 1) was used to compare growth rates among churches based on common data.

Also included in the survey were four questions that identified the level of children's involvement in four spiritual development milestones followed by twenty-four statements that were used to identify ministry praxis using a Likert scale of measurement. After the statements were developed, they were sent to the authors of each chapter in Anthony's book, *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation*. These authors, who are considered scholars and leaders in each of the models represented, were asked to read and validate the content of each statement by agreement that the statements accurately represented the uniqueness of the model or by providing modifications to the statements so they better represented the uniqueness of the model (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 98). Once content validity was confirmed a pilot study of six non-Nazarene children's pastors was conducted to provide construct validity (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 99 and 116).

Upon receiving construct validation of each question the instrument was given to a statistician who applied Cronbach's alpha to measure the correlation coefficient. This

process provided internal consistency reliability (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 98; Meltzoff 1998, 281). These steps strengthened the validity and reliability of the instrument.

### **Implementation of the Instrument**

The surveys were delivered to 312 part-time and full-time Nazarene children's pastors in the United States via snapsurvey.com following ethics committee approval. The responses were recorded through the software reporting system followed by analysis of the data by a statistician using SPSS statistical software.

### ***Qualitative Process***

In the second phase, small focus group qualitative interviews were conducted of individuals who designated on their survey a willingness to be interviewed. The individuals were divided into two focus groups of four to six persons who completed the survey. This grouping was determined by identifying the two geographical regions of the United States that had the most respondents to the survey. All respondents who identified a willingness to be interviewed on their survey were sent an email invitation to participate in the focus group interviews. The first eight respondents from each of the regions made up the focus group for that region. The Midwest focus group participated in a conference call on Tuesday, September 2 with six of the eight members joining the conference call. The West focus group participated in a conference call on Thursday, September 4 with four of the members joining the conference call (Appendix 2).

The focus group interviews were used to further explore the relationship between ministry praxis and spiritual development milestones in the lives of Nazarene children (Creswell 2003, 188). At the completion of analysis of the quantitative survey

responses, a number of open-ended questions were designed that addressed key concepts discovered from the data. These open-ended questions were presented to the focus groups for their interpretation and assessment of the conclusions that were reached through the analysis of the quantitative data. The information gathered from the two focus groups was invaluable in the interpretation of the data.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRECEDENT LITERATURE

A study of spirituality and an attempt to define it may initially seem like a manageable task, but once engaged in the study one quickly discovers that the study of spirituality is a vast field that covers many approaches and strongly held opinions. Fontana expressed well the struggle in attempting to define spirituality, “Defining spiritual and spirituality is even more difficult than defining religion. . . . In addition, spirituality has many meanings outside of religion” (Fontana 2003, 11). A list of proposed definitions of spirituality can be found in appendix 3.

Although the field of spirituality covers a wide array of topics, it can generally be narrowed down to two divisions: secular and sacred spirituality. While the purpose of this study was focused on sacred spirituality, and in particular the study of children’s spirituality in a Christian context, a cursory overview of secular spirituality was necessary.

#### **History of Spirituality**

The study of the history of spirituality followed the structure presented in a diagram by Anthony titled “Theological Perspectives on Spirituality” (Anthony 2006, 16). While this model functioned as a guide to traverse the various perspectives of spirituality, Anthony rightly notes that “complex thoughts can rarely be limited to a

diagram. Something inevitably gets lost in translation. Such is the case when we try to illustrate evangelical spirituality” (Anthony 2006, 15). While it is true that a serious in-depth study of theology raises concerns that are not addressed in Anthony’s diagram, it did serve as a guide to address the major considerations of the history of spirituality.

### *Secular Spirituality*

At first glance one might think that the terms “secular” and “spiritual” are oxymora; such is not the case. When “spirit” or “spiritual” are used in the context of secular spirituality they may refer to a higher power or to self, but do not necessarily refer to God or a god (Unruh, Versnel, and Kerr 2002, 8). In an attempt to define spirituality, Unruh, et al., have identified seven thematic categories of spirituality that clarify the distinction between secular and sacred spirituality:

- 1) relationship to God, spiritual being, higher power, a reality greater than self; 2) not of the self; 3) transcendence or connectedness unrelated to a belief in a higher being; 4) existential, not of the material world; 5) meaning and purpose in life; 6) life force of the person, integrating aspect of the person; and 7) summative. (Unruh, Versnel, and Kerr 2002, 8)

The first two categories include a focus on the sacred while categories three through six include a focus on secular definitions of spirituality. The seventh category includes definitions that may include both sacred and secular (Unruh, Versnel, and Kerr 2002, 8).

Secular spirituality, also known as natural spirituality, covers a wide range of views which include, but are not limited to, existential, humanistic, postmodern, developmental, and psychological spirituality; they also include a focus on topics such as New Age Spirituality, Feminist Spirituality, Gay Spirituality, Twelve Step programs, and such (Van Ness 1996). Christian spirituality differs in many ways from each of the secular spiritualities listed above, but there are important truths discovered in many of



these views that have contributed to a deeper and more complete understanding of Christian spirituality. While it was impossible to represent all of the secular views of spirituality, and with much detail, for the purpose of this study a summary of the major views was presented. An attempt to transcend the secular/sacred divide was at times problematic, but certainly not unique in Christian spirituality research; therefore, when appropriate, each view of secular spirituality highlighted ways in which it has contributed to, or is consistent with, a developed understanding of Christian spirituality (Webster 2004, 17).

### **Existential Spirituality**

Existential spirituality involves the answering of deep personal questions about the meaning of life (Webster 2004, 7). It addresses such questions as “What is the meaning of life?” and “What is the meaning of *my* life?” (Webster 2004, 16).

“Existential themes include choice, freedom, identity, alienation, inauthenticity, despair, and an awareness of our own immortality” (Soccio 2004, 428). This view of spirituality is founded upon “the premise that human individuals have a concern for the meaning of their being” (Webster 2004, 7). Webster concludes, “This existential framework centres the concern an individual has for his or her relations with other entities that he or she is in-the-world with, in order to establish a personally significant meaning for his or her existence” (Webster 2004, 17). Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre are among the leading philosophers in this field. While Heidegger and Sartre wrote from a purely secular perspective of existentialism, Kierkegaard wrote from a Christian orientation (Sahakian 1968, 353). This distinction in perspective may partially explain Julian Marias’ statement that “existentialism is a rather ambiguous and inexact denomination”

(Marias 1967, 435). While existential spirituality is not necessarily a Christian perspective, those who are interested in the spiritual development of children may deal with the same types of questions about the meaning of existence. In a Christian context the meaning of existence and one's significance are found in Christ.

### **Humanistic Spirituality**

“The term humanism has been used in many senses: there are scientific, religious, atheistic, and ethical humanists” (Titus, Smith, and Nolan 1995, 261). Paul Kurtz notes that each of these foci of humanism are *for humans* and they wish to “actualize human potentials, enhance human experience and contribute to happiness, social justice, democracy, and a peaceful world. . . . They are opposed to authoritarian or totalitarian forces that dehumanize man. All profess compassion for human suffering and commit to unity of mankind” (Kurtz 1973, 6). In an attempt to keep from mutilating the definition with an “epithet,” Blackham abstractly defines humanism as “a concept of man focused upon a programme for humanity” (Blackham 1973, 37). In its most recent manifesto, the American Humanist Association described humanism as “a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity (Humanism and its aspirations [2003], 1). Since the Enlightenment there has been a move from the meaning of life being found in religious experiences to the meaning of life being found in human experience; humanism is the epitome of that move (Meehan 2002, 292). Humanistic spirituality recognizes that all religion should be seen through the lens of nontheists; and it begins “with humans not God, nature not deity” (Humanist Manifesto II [1973], 3).

## **Postmodern Spirituality**

Postmodernity, in general, is a reaction to the shortcomings and failures of twentieth-century Modernity. As Wm. Loyd Allen points out in his article, “Christian Spirituality in the Age of Growing Secularity,” “Society’s trust in technology and science during those hundred years increased with an almost religious zeal” (Allen 2004, 5). The technology and science of Modernity promised answers to the problems of society. The subsequent reaction to the non-emotional approach to spirituality that was found in modern spirituality is a “rejection of crass materialism and the positive revaluation of spiritual and human values in contemporary society” (Allen 2004, 5).

A uniqueness of postmodern spirituality, as well as developmental and psychological spirituality, is that it sometimes integrates with religious spirituality. There is a strong movement in the church today toward a new understanding of spirituality that includes a re-evaluation, and sometimes rejection, of the modernist approach and views of what it means to be Christian. Brian McLaren and Dan Kimball are significant leaders in this movement that is known as the “postmodern” church and “emerging” church, which is a reaction to the modern church (Hohstadt 2005, 1). David Kowalski identifies a Postmodern or Emerging Church as one that “consists of a diverse group of people who identify with Christianity, but who feel that teaching the postmodern world requires us to radically reshape the church’s beliefs and practices to conform to modernism” (Kowalski 2006). While the postmodern “movement” has gained momentum and influence among Christians, many such as D. A. Carson, have reacted strongly and often venomously toward the rejection of traditional understandings (Carson 2005).

Many conservative Christians are concerned about the teachings of the Postmodern Church that reject long-held beliefs. In his book, *Postmodernizing the Faith*, Millard Erickson lists what he calls the seven “tenets” of postmodernism. These tenets are the beliefs that are often fought over.

1. The objectivity of knowledge is denied. Whether the knower is conditioned by the particularities of his or her situation or theories are used oppressively, knowledge is not a neutral means of discovery.
2. Knowledge is uncertain. Foundationalism, the idea that knowledge can be erected on some sort of bedrock of indubitable first principles, has had to be abandoned.
3. All-inclusive systems of knowledge, whether metaphysical or historical, are impossible, and the attempt to construct them should be abandoned.
4. The inherent goodness of knowledge is also questioned. The belief that by means of discovering the truths of nature it could be controlled and evil and ills overcome has been disproved by the destructive ends to which knowledge has been put (in warfare, for instance).
5. Thus, progress is rejected. The history of the twentieth century should make this clear.
6. The model of the isolated individual knower as the ideal has been replaced by community-based knowledge. Truth is defined by and for the community, and all knowledge occurs within some community.
7. The scientific method as the epitomization of the objective method of inquiry is called into question. Truth is not known simply through reason, but through other channels, such as intuition. (Erickson 1998, 18-19)

For many within conservative denominations these postmodern foundational concepts threaten the orthodoxy of the church and have led to theological battles.

### **Developmental and Psychological Spirituality**

In practice, developmental and psychological spirituality are separate categories, but Anthony correctly notes that they are “closely aligned” because their roots are found in developmental psychology and for this reason will be discussed together (Anthony 2004, 14). Developmental spirituality follows a “stages or seasons” approach to spirituality. It is the belief that the developmental theories of psychologists such as

Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, and James Fowler lead to an understanding of the spiritual developmental process and that spirituality can be reduced to developmental stages. From the perspective of the psychologist, finding truth in religious or spiritual beliefs is beyond the field of psychology. The most that can be done is “to acknowledge that there appears to be something intrinsic in us that seeks for meaning in life beyond the constraints of the material world, or to dismiss religious inclinations as a sign of our immature readiness to take refuge in fantasies rather than face the cold fact of human mortality” (Fontana 2003, ix).

Both developmental and psychological spirituality have contributed to an understanding by many within the Evangelical Christian community that science and religion are compatible. The debate at hand is the level at which science and religions are compatible. The impact of developmental theory, in general, on the church is undeniable. Most children’s ministries are designed with a recognition that children do develop in stages and as a result often focus on the intellectual development of biblical data within the child as a means of spiritual development. In theory most scholars (including the authors that represent the four models that will be discussed later) and many children’s pastors question this approach and propose that spiritual development is more than the acquisition of biblical data. Downs goes as far as saying that seeing people as empty vessels to fill with knowledge, even if that knowledge is the God’s Word, is disrespectful of God’s creation (Downs 1994, 69). Developmentalism provides a structure for understanding the process involved in the spiritual development of children. The question remains regarding the relationship between developmental and psychological approaches to spirituality and the Christian nurture of children.

### *Sacred Spirituality*

While a holistic approach to spirituality includes the study of those who have both religious and non-religious backgrounds, spirituality in education is often discussed in a religious context (Webster 2004, 7). This religious context includes the study of sacred spirituality that extends beyond what would be considered Christian. Before a discussion of Christian spirituality can begin, which was the intended focus of this research project, one must recognize that sacred spirituality, also known as religious spirituality, includes a spirituality that is not Christian. For the purpose of this paper non-Christian sacred spirituality was not discussed because it would lead far from the intended target, but it is important to recognize that sacred spirituality includes “the world’s religious traditions –Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and many others” (Yust et al. 2006, 3). Meehan also notes that spirituality has become so important in the world’s religions that it has become common place to refer to the separate categories of “Jewish spirituality, Muslim spirituality, Native American spirituality, Aboriginal spirituality, and so on” when discussing the issue of spirituality. Every major religious tradition calls its people to spirituality (Meehan 2002, 305).

The field of Christian spirituality includes a wide array of perspectives and beliefs often broadly distinguished as Catholic and Protestant spirituality. H. Richard Niebuhr identifies five categories of Christian spirituality: Christ against culture; Christ of culture; Christ above culture; Christ and culture in paradox; and finally, Christ the transformer of culture (Niebuhr 1951, 40-44; Callen 2001, 43). This study narrowly focused on the biblical call to nurture children spirituality, on a theology of children’s spirituality, and on the role of parents and the church in children’s spiritual development.

(For a more broad study of the history of Christian spirituality that begins with the Early Church and continues through to Martin Luther King, Urban Holmes' book, *A History of Christian Spirituality*, may be beneficial).

### **Biblical Call to Children's Spiritual Nurture**

The study of spirituality is a vast and complicated field to navigate, with a variety of definitions and contexts. The study of spirituality can be an intimidating prospect. The focus of this study was the narrower topic of children's Christian spirituality, but narrowing the field did not make the path much easier. The field remained vast and at times overwhelming. In an attempt to make the journey manageable and productive the study began with an investigation of God's Word. Once a solid biblical and theological understanding of children's spiritual development was established, the path led to an investigation of the history of spirituality from the perspective of the church and social science.

### ***Old Testament Teachings on Nurturing Children***

While the number of references to children and their spiritual nurture are somewhat limited in the Scriptures, those texts that do address the topic demonstrate a clear and consistent model of the parent passing on the faith to the child (Clark, Brubaker, and Zuck 1986, 7). From the earliest days of recorded biblical history parents and other family members shared the stories of the love and faithfulness of Yahweh with the children of the family. The telling of these stories was viewed as an important venue for passing on the faith. Many of these stories can be found in both Old and New Testament and are helpful to understanding the way children are to be viewed within the

community of faith and how they are to be reared in that faith. An exploration of the Old Testament teaching on child nurture follows.

### **The Shema**

Hear, O Israel: 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 way, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

The Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, is one of the most sacred and well-known texts in ancient Jewish tradition, for in it is found the central theme of the book of Deuteronomy: to love God. As a part of Moses' final words to the community of Israel, he presents a model for loving God and passing that love on to future generations through the spiritual nurture of the community, the family, and children (Erdman 1953, 36). He essentially restates the first commandment, later referred to in Mark as the Greatest Commandment, reminding the community that while others may worship the many gods, they are to remain loyal to the one, true God with their full devotion and love. This "call to love God is without doubt the most central challenge of the Book of Deuteronomy" (Varaghese 2003, 125).

In the Shema, a movement takes place from instruction to the community to instruction to parents. Throughout the book of Deuteronomy there is a movement in pronoun usage from the plural form of the Hebrew word that translates "you" to specific directions for parents, as identified by the singular form of the Hebrew word that translates "you." A. D. H. Mayes, an Old Testament scholar, acknowledges that "there is remarkable interchange of second person singular and plural forms of address"



throughout the Deuteronomy text (Mayes 1987, 35). In the Shema, the second person singular form of the word “you” is used (Owens 1989, 782-83). In addition, the connection between verses 4-9, in an implicit manner, and the later resulting child’s question that is found in verses 20-24, in an explicit manner, reinforce the idea that these passages are presented in a context of a father instructing his son (Mayes 1987, 175). The movement from second person plural to second person singular demonstrates that parents are to be the primary teachers of the faith (Owens 1989, 782-83). The father-son context further demonstrates the movement from a focus on the entire community to a focus on parents.

The central idea of Moses’ instruction is obedience to the words of God, and obedience comes when one knows and understands God’s word. As a way of demonstrating their love for God, Moses challenges the people to hide God’s words in their hearts so that the way they live their lives will match up with what they understand and confess with their mouths; so they will be obedient (v. 6). The hymn writer affirms Moses’ directions as he confesses, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11 AV). Obedience in this context is not a matter of formal legalism, but rather a response out of love for God and deep understanding of his words (Christensen 2001, 144). In the context of Deuteronomy, “obedience” and “love of God” are virtually synonymous (Mayes 1987, 176).

### ***Directions for Parents***

Beginning with verse 7 there is a movement from directions for loving God to directions for teaching these truths to one’s children. After parents have loved God with all their being and have hidden God’s commands in their own hearts, then they are ready

to teach them diligently to their children (Christensen 1991, 144; Deere 1985, 274-75). The implication of verses 6-9 is that teaching obedience to God's commands is to be done at all times, in all places, with intention, as parents are being obedient to God's commands (Erdman 1953, 36). The imagery used in verse 7 comes from the word *shanan* (Alexander 1999, 161) which is defined as the sharpening of an instrument such as an arrow (Brown 1980, 1041). In a reference to this passage, Adam Clarke notes that only with "reiterated friction or grinding" can the instrument or tool be sharpened to the point that it is effective in accomplishing the task for which it was designed (Clarke 1881[?], 755). This sharpening occurs when God's Word is taught to children by parents with diligence, persistence, patience, consistency, and in a way that children will understand and obey (Clarke 1881[?], 755). The purpose of teaching the commands of God to one's children is to provide them every possible opportunity to be obedient to God Himself.

**Formal and informal education.** The teaching of one's children is to take place in both formal in informal teaching moments. Teaching obedience is to take place in informal moments as life is being lived (v. 7) and in formal ways as described by the binding of the law on one's body and the posting of the law within one's territory (vv. 8-9). Formal teaching is defined as "the many forms of organized, planned, budgeted, staffed, and deliberate teaching and learning" (Ward 2001, 121). Formal teaching is best described by the typical classroom setting where the teacher is the deliverer of knowledge and the student is the recipient; the setting is controlled and curriculum is tightly organized. The weakness of formal education is that it is possible for the student to learn the data isolated from life experiences. The strengths of formal teaching is that specific

outcomes can be identified, it provides accountability for learned material, and certain level of competence is achieved (Downs 1994, 187). In addition, formal knowledge provides the foundation for future informal teaching.

While formal teaching plays an important role in Christian education, informal teaching moments produce learning occasions that produce life-change. Making reference to Norman Steinaker and Robert Bell's Taxonomy of Experiential Learning, Perry Downs proposes that the highest levels of learning, application and adoption, are best achieved through informal teaching (Downs 1994, 39). Opportunities for informal teaching occur more often than those of formal teaching and these moments "allows the learner in varying degrees to participate to the extent that he can clarify, assimilate and make meaningful, on the spot, the information and ideas being treated" (Richards 1975, 237). The setting is unstructured and focuses on learning through the experiences of life. The strength of informal learning is that it is mostly based on experience; which is also its weakness. There are times that one's experiences are wrong or incomplete, leading to inaccurate conclusions (Downs 1994, 188).

Many scholars recognize that education in general, but specifically religious education, is best learned by the model of "walking in the shadow of parents who live out their teachings" (Joy 1986, 6). In a similar way that one's first language is learned not by deliberate teaching but through "surroundings, people, and experiences," much of Christian education is learned through the everyday opportunities of experiencing life together as family (Ward 2001, 121). Donald Joy adds that if one had to choose between the formal approach to education provided through public and private schools, and the

informal education provided by parents as life is experienced, the schools would lose out every time (Joy 1986, 6).

**Concluding thoughts about formal and informal education.** While it is true that informal modes of teaching the faith are extremely effective in transforming the lives of students, there must also be intentional formal educating of the Word of God as described in the *Shema*. It is clear by the biblical examples of Jesus' teaching ministry, which will be discussed in the New Testament section, that there is no single way to teach and that both formal and informal forms of education benefit the believer in their spiritual nurture (Downs 1994, 38). Richards summarizes the need for both formal and informal education in the following comment:

The formal setting is not particularly appropriate for communicating faith as life, and is not very effective in bringing the learner beyond understanding to action. This means that we cannot rely on formal education settings for our nurture or transformation functions. *It does not mean that we should abandon the formal setting entirely.* In fact, the formal setting is appropriate when our goal is to encourage cognitive mastery. And we should never lose sight of the fact that a framework understanding—of theology, of Bible history, of the sequence of progressive revelation, of the setting and culture of various books, etc.—is important equipment for the believer. A framework knowledge makes it possible for a person to apply Scripture more accurately . . . not falling into the trap of applying to himself truth or injunctions specific to a certain person or certain time. (Richards 1975, 317-18)

Richard clearly articulates that the combination of formal and informal teaching is necessary for the spiritual nurture of children. Formal education is important for teaching doctrine, data, and facts, and informal education is important for bringing about life-transformation. Together these two approaches provide a balanced prescription for the spiritual nurture of children.

**Immersion in the story.** In verses 7-9, Moses emphasizes the importance of providing children continual opportunities to experience obedience to God's law. This process, which has been described by some as immersion, takes seriously the command to teach the truth to children at every moment in every activity of every day by making life a school (Joy 1986, 7). This command is observed by orthodox Jews by the wearing of phylacteries (a box that is placed on the forehead and forearm that contains Scripture) as a demonstration of their seriousness of obedience to God's law. Many scholars believe the reference to "binding" and "writing" in verses 8-9 should rather be taken symbolically with the emphasis being placed on a constancy of teaching the Law to one's children (Deere 1985, 275). The teaching of obedience to God should be done at all times as parents interact with their children in the course of daily activities. Children do not learn obedience to God by occasional instruction alone, but by actively learning obedience to God in daily life. Teaching is to be done so that the law of God permeates every part of the life of the Christian and that continually (Craigie 1976, 170).

"The focus on teaching your children 'these words' diligently within the context of the family—at all conceivable times and places—illustrates once again the pedagogical purpose of Deuteronomy" (Christensen 2001, 143). Teaching these truths to one's children is not an option and the acquisition of knowledge is never meant to be the goal but the means by which life is lived. The purpose for teaching the laws and commandments of God is for obedience.

### **Hear and Obey**

The basic meaning of the verb *shāma* is "to hear," but when it is associated with such words as "commandment" as it is in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the meaning takes on

the additional command “to obey” (Harris, Archer, and Waltke 1980, 938). Therefore, when the commandments of God are being taught by parents or other teachers, children are not only to be taught for cognitive understanding but more importantly for obedience.

Many Old Testament passages focus on the themes of hearing and response in obedience. In Genesis 18:19, God announces that Abraham is to charge his children to “keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice.” In Deuteronomy 4:5-8 the focus is on teaching the statutes and ordinances of God for obedience. Deuteronomy 11 focuses on the same theme as Deuteronomy 6: to be obedient to God’s instruction and to teach the same to one’s children (Weinfeld 1991, 340). In Deuteronomy 11:19-20, the exact words are used that are found in the Shema, except for the command to “bind them as a sign on your hand and fix them as an emblem on your forehead” is stated prior to the command to “teach them to your children.” In Deuteronomy 31:12, the people are told to gather men, women, children, and aliens to hear, learn, and observe diligently the law of the Lord every seven years. The concept of obedience continues in Psalm 78:5-7 as Asaph reminds the reader that God’s plan for Jacob and Israel is to teach the commands of God to their children “that the next generation might know them” and not turn away from God as did their ancestors. The first seven chapters of Proverbs identify the benefits of obedience to God’s commands as taught by one’s parents and the consequences of disobedience when the choice is made to ignore the instruction.

### ***Silence and Disobedience***

Teaching the statutes and commandments of God to one’s children is so important that Scripture identifies the reason for the ultimate downfall of Israel and Judah as their disobedience to the commandments of God. Choon-Leong Seow notes that 2

Kings 17:7-23 is a theological explanation of the ultimate fall of Israel and a call to Judah to turn back to God while there is still time (Seow 1999, 255). This passage serves as a warning of the consequences when God's people are disobedient. Verses 14-18 explain that the children of Israel chose not to turn back to God and in minute detail describes the reason for the fall was the result of God's people worshipping foreign gods and adopting the religious practices of their neighbors. God's people rejected the decrees and covenant that He had established with them (Hobbs 1985, 234). One might conclude that one of the reasons the people became disobedient to God is that their ancestors neglected to teach them to obey the statutes and commandments that God had commanded. The church must learn from the errors of those who have gone before; the church must take seriously God's command to teach the statutes and commandments to its children so they will be obedient.

### ***Recommitment and Obedience***

The church and parents have often neglected to teach the statutes and commandments to its children, but 2 Kings is a reminder that it is not too late to repent of the sin of silence. Josiah's reform is an example of a group of people who neglected to teach the statutes and commandments of God to their people. Second Kings 23 tells of King Josiah, upon discovery of the Book of the Law, reading the words to "all the people, both great and small" (v. 2). Hearing the words of the Book of the Law, Josiah reestablished covenant with God by committing to obey the commandments, decrees, and statutes. Verse 3 states that the people joined with him in the covenant. One wonders why the words of the Book of the Law were a new revelation to Josiah and the people of Judah. It seems clear that the people were not obedient in teaching their children to hear

the Word of God and to obey its statutes and commandments. The Scripture speaks the same mandate to Christian parents; teach the Word of God to the children. Christensen adds his own warning that that given in Scripture, “If parents cannot embody their faith and inculcate it responsibly to their children, the very existence of that faith community is in jeopardy” (Christensen 1991, 152). Such was the case for Israel and Judah.

### **Learning and Teaching in the Old Testament**

An old cliché states that if a student has not learned, then the teacher has not taught. While there are qualifiers that must accompany this saying, apparently this statement was true for the ancient Hebrew. Deuteronomy 4:1 is a command to the children of Israel to follow the decrees and laws of the Lord that are being taught to them so that they may live and take the land that God was giving them. Deuteronomy 5:1 is a command to learn the decrees and laws of the Lord and follow them. A careful study of the Hebrew word for “teach” in chapter four and “learn” in chapter five uncovers that both words originate from the same root word *lamad* (Alexander et al. 1999, 28; Brown 1980, 540; Owens 1989, 768, 777). The verb form of the root word means to “exercise in” or “learn” (Brown 1980, 540). In the *piel* the same root word used in 5:1 means “to teach someone something” (Brown 1980, 540). The implication is that teaching and learning are closely related. One might go as far as saying that in the context of these verses if one has not learned then one was not taught. The teacher’s job was to go beyond just presenting the material, but to teach in such a way that the student learned. The two go hand-in-hand. These same verses emphasize that learning is also closely connect with “doing.” Christensen notes that the verb *lamad*, as it appears in



Deuteronomy 5:1, implies obedience (Christensen 1991, 111). The logical conclusion is that teaching in the context of spiritual nurturing only takes place when learning has happened, and the gauge for measuring whether learning has happened is not a test, but obedience.

### **Summary**

Several significant truths are revealed in a summary of the Old Testament passages that address the spiritual nurture of children. The role of the community of faith is significant in the spiritual nurture of the child; however, it is secondary to the role of the parent(s). The community of faith is to function as a support system to parents as they teach the commandments and ordinances of God to their children. Children are to be taught to love God which is demonstrated in the life of the child by obedience to God. Teaching is to be conducted using a variety of techniques which include: formal and informal teaching, modeling, relationship building, and immersion. A test of the level of success in teaching a child is by determining if the child has learned the information, which is gauged by their level of obedience. Teaching, learning, loving, and obeying go hand-in-hand.

### ***New Testament Teachings on Nurturing Children***

Despite a change in language and culture, the Jews of the New Testament held many of the same customs, traditions, and ways of thinking of their Old Testament ancestors. The commonality and unity found in the Old and New Testaments does not pertain alone to customs, traditions and ways of thinking, but also to the relationship between the Old and New Testament (McGrath 2006, 49). The simple phrase that has

been attributed to Augustine of Hippo, although some scholars question its authenticity, “The New Testament is veiled in the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New Testament,” accurately expresses the significance of the relationship between the Old and New Testament (Steinhauser 2007). (Others, including McGrath, have cited this quotation as “The New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament; the Old is made accessible by the New” [McGrath 2006, 49]). For this reason it should not be a surprise that many of the teachings on the spiritual nurture of children found in the New Testament are similar to the teachings that have been discovered in the Old Testament. An exploration of these New Testament teachings on nurturing children will be the focus of the section that follows.

### **Greatest in the Kingdom**

Each of the synoptic gospels tells the story of Jesus’ response to the question, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matthew 18:1-5, Mark 9:33-37, and Luke 9:46-48). Jesus called a child to himself and while holding the child in his arms (Mark 9:36) said to the disciples, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Matthew 18:3-5). Jesus recognizes the disciples’ concern with the hierarchy of status and in response sets the child as the model, “not by reason of its innocence or purity, but because of humility, lack of pretension, and unconcern with status” (Hill 1981, 273). The child’s disinterest in social significance was the antithesis of the disciples’ desire for power and greatness (Hagner 1995, 517). Hagner concludes that the humility of the child is not due to action or feelings of humbly, but the result of

the child's lack of status (Hagner 1995, 518). Jesus answers his own question, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" by focusing his audience's attention on the lowly children who he held.

Jesus elevates the importance of children in a culture where children had little value and in doing so demonstrates their value to God and His Kingdom. While these Gospel texts focus more on the disciples than on the child, it simultaneously serves as a model of humility and as a call to accept a different understanding of social status (Hagner 1995, 521; Boring 1995, 374). Not only does this exchange emphasize the importance of children to Jesus, but the words of Christ himself testify to the value of children in God's kingdom; there is no caste or class, everyone is important, "there are no little souls inside the Kingdom" (Morgan 1979, 228). Jesus' act of holding the child in his arms is more than a display of affection toward a cute child. It is an example that to be great in the Kingdom of God these disciples must love and serve children in spite of their status in society because these children are valuable to God (Gundry-Volf 2001, 43).

### ***Welcoming Children***

While Jesus underscores the humble child as "greatest in the Kingdom," He also emphasizes the importance of welcoming them. The stakes have been raised by Jesus when he says that not only is welcoming children a sign of greatness, but welcoming children is welcoming Jesus himself, because "Jesus identifies himself with the weak and seemingly insignificant" (Garland 2001, 191). While some scholars believe that the reference to children in verse 5 is not an allusion to young children, but rather to those disciples who have become childlike as Christ has required (Carson 1984,

398; Hagner 1995, 521), the point is that in receiving the child Christ himself is received (Boring 1995, 374).

### **Let the Children Come**

Children are to be seen as important and significant in the Christian community and are, therefore, not to be hindered from coming to Jesus. These truths are demonstrated in each of the synoptic gospel stories of Jesus' ministry in Judea following time spent in Galilee. Large crowds gathered around him and the Pharisees seized the moment to ask Jesus a series of questions about the lawfulness of divorce. Following Jesus' response and further discussion on divorce and marriage, little children are brought to him to receive his blessing. After the disciples rebuked the parents of these children, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:14, and Luke 18:16). While there are similarities between the stories found in Matthew 18, Mark 9, and Luke 9, and this story, one important distinction is that the former addresses children as a symbol of lowly status in the Christian community and the later is concerned with the role of children in the Christian community (Boring 1995, 387). Children are often seen, by both society and the church, as significant and important in the future as they mature. Education and training of children is often done for the future benefits. While it is important to provide sound education and training for the future of children, society and the church often overlook the child's ability to contribute here and now. The church community has the responsibility to provide learning experiences for their children, but these children also have the ability contribute to the growth of the community. The authors of *Children Matter* clearly express the role children play in the faith community.

Often we view children's participation as a learning experience for them. It is that but also much more. Children should be involved in the work of the church because they have gifts to offer: the joy their presence brings as they visit and elderly shut-in, their energy and faithfulness as they pickup papers and straighten songbooks each Sunday after worship, the musical ability of the gifted fifth-grader who accompanies the children's choir. Along with adults, children grow spiritually through expressing their faith and love for God in service, when as members of the church—not just *future* members—they do the work of the people of God. (May et al. 2005, 141)

Children are not only contributors to the community by their action, but also by their sincere faith in God. Children bring to the community an innocence of faith that is refreshing and inspiring. Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath recognize the value of a childlike faith that children bring to the community. In addressing the simplicity of faith among its profundity they write,

Children understand the simple things. The important things. The profound things. They don't bother taking the time to pick truth or love apart until either becomes powerless to do them any good. They simply trust truth and love with their hearts, because they trust the relationship between the gift and the giver. Jesus loved them. They knew it. Not because the Bible told them so but because Jesus did. And he demonstrated it to them each day. So when he called, they came running with reckless abandon. (Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath 1999, xii)

While the sentiment portrayed by Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath is supported by those who believe that children have the ability to trust God with an innocence that often eludes adults, Perkins warns against the tendency of modern readers to romanticize the child in this encounter (Perkins 1995, 647). Viewing children as cute and sweet misses the point of this story – children have a significant role in the Christian community and they should be escorted in as vital members.

### ***Children as Models***

In many societies children are viewed as having little value, but Jesus not only sees children as valuable, he sets them as a model for receiving the Kingdom of God.

The child, who is generally seen as being of little value by New Testament society, is elevated to a place of importance by Christ as one who demonstrates humility and deserves to be welcomed and not hindered (Garland 2001, 204). This idea of welcoming children into the reign or kingdom of God may be best explained by looking at the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23). “Blessed are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. . . . Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:3-4, 6). In the “let the children come” passage, the children represent those who are weak, dependent, and vulnerable in society (Garland 2001, 204). Perkins makes it clear that if children were not viewed as weak, dependent, and vulnerable in this social context Jesus would not have used them as a model; the focus is not on the children themselves, but on their social status. Perkins believes that if Jesus were present in person today he would not use children as a reference to “non-persons” (Perkins 1995, 647). Perkins statement is true in that in some societies children are no longer seen as “non-persons”; however, in many, if not most societies, children remain of little value and considered second class citizens at best.

Jesus does not see children as objects to be merely tolerated, but as models of how the kingdom of God is to be received (Boring 1995, 387). If little children are the models, and their proper place is in the presence of Jesus, then they must be welcomed into the community of faith in the same way that Jesus welcomed them. These little ones “illustrate in a vivid way what the kingdom is about and how it is to be received” (Hagner 1995, 553).

## **Out of the Mouth of Babes**

Children are capable of a level of understanding with regard to spiritual matters that often elude adults. Jesus quotes from Psalm 8:2 when addressing the angry priests and scribes that have watched him perform miracles and now hear children singing his praises. He says to these religious leaders, “Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’” (Matthew 21:15-16). Jesus recognizes the sincerity, faith, and spiritual ability of children as he willingly receives their praise as it is contrasted with the disbelief and lack of spiritual depth among the spiritual leaders. In spite of Hagner’s view that the children had “little, if any, understanding of the meaning of their chant,” they properly utter the truth of God as Jesus, himself, acknowledges their praise (Hagner 1995, 602). It is not insignificant that, whether understood fully or not, children rightly give praise to God while the religious leaders and other adults lack spiritual sensitivity to the truth. It is clear that humble children perceive spiritual truth more readily than sophisticated adults who proclaim to be of superior spiritual capacity (Carson 1984, 442). Jerome Berryman, director of the Center for the Theology of Childhood and Episcopal priest, supports Carson’s assertion when he says, “Children can intuit Jesus’ presence and express their discovery . . . [and] children can intuit Jesus’ power in a way many over-confident adults cannot” (Berryman 2004, 24). Judith Gundry-Volf, Research Fellow and Associate Professor of New Testament at Yale Divinity School, adds, “In the gospel tradition, children are not mere ignoramuses in terms of spiritual insight. They know Jesus’ true identity. . . . They have this knowledge from God and not from themselves” (Gundry-Volf 2001, 47). Jesus’ affirmation of these children acknowledges the value of their

spiritual understanding, their value to the kingdom of heaven, and most importantly, their value to Him.

### **Child and Parent Relationship**

Children are to obey and honor their parents, and fathers are to instruct and bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. In Ephesians 6:1-4, Paul instructs the people to follow these mandates. Similar instructions are given to the church at Colossae in 3:20-21 as Paul demonstrates the importance of both child and father fulfilling their responsibility in relationship to each other (Bruce 1984, 397). These verses follow a section of texts that introduces the household code that begins in Ephesians 5:21 and continues the focus on providing directions for family responsibilities and relationships (Lincoln 1990, 395).

### ***Understanding “Children”***

There is some controversy as to the meaning of the word “children” in Ephesians 6:1-4. For the Essene, strict observers of the laws of Moses and isolated from those who did not follow their beliefs (Lockyer 1986, 354), the word *tekna* refers to adult children and their obligation to respect and care for aging parents (Perkins 2000, 452). This interpretation goes hand-in-hand with the Essene community’s intentional focus on teaching children their obligation to take care of and honor their parents in their old age (Perkins 2000, 452). Snodgrass affirms the possibility of this interpretation by noting that a father in that society continued to have authority over his children until the age of 60 or even until his death (Snodgrass 1996, 321). Snodgrass also notes that in spite of the possibility of interpreting *tekna* as a reference to adults, the text seems to be referring to



young children who are “still in the process of learning and being shaped” (Snodgrass 1996, 321). Lincoln confirms Snodgrass’ conclusion and notes that “children” used in this text refers more to relationship than age. The child is not too young because the child is capable of understanding a relationship with the Lord, but not too old because the child is still in the process of being brought up (Lincoln 1990, 403). Morris agrees that the focus is young children and notes that the context includes references to wives, children, and slaves; all seen as subordinate, and therefore supports the idea that *tekna* in this context refers to children who are still growing up at home (Morris 1994, 189). Hendriksen also agrees that young children are the focus of this text (Hendriksen 1985, 258).

### ***Message to Children***

Children should be included as significant members of the church who are capable of learning and following the direction of Scripture. In the early Christian church the child is seen as a full part of the Christian community and would be expected to be present when the letter to the Ephesian church is read to the community and to understand the content (Lincoln 1990, 403; Hendriksen 1985, 258). The early church recognized the importance of including children in the life of the community, not only so knowledge would be attained, but more importantly, so the children would learn how to live. The implication is clear that children should be included in the faith community and messages should be preached in a way that children can understand and learn from them how to live as Christians (Hendriksen 1985, 258).

### ***Obedying Parents***

Children are commanded to obey their parents. The Greek word *hypakouō*, which is found in Ephesians 6:1, translates to “listen to and heed” (Taylor 1985, 82). In the ancient world there was an expectation that children obey their parents (Lincoln 1990, 402), so Paul’s words for children to obey their parents were not new; but his message to “obey your parents in the Lord” was new. In this message Paul tells the children that they should obey their parents as one obeys the Lord (Snodgrass 1996, 321). Paul’s desire is to help children move from obedience due the requirements of culture to obedience as part of a Christian’s spiritual growth and therefore “as to the Lord” (Lincoln 1990, 402). In a similar distinction, Downs refers to this progression as a move from “grace and fear” to “grace and gratitude” (Downs 1994, 49-50). One’s spiritual nurture should cause a move from obedience of God and parents out of fear of consequences for disobedience to obedience out of thankfulness and love for God and parents (Downs 1994, 50). The key is one’s motive for obedience.

### ***Honoring Parents***

Paul’s second command to children is to honor their parents. The source of this command is found in the Ten Commandments, though neither Deuteronomy 5:16, nor Exodus 20:12 was directly quoted by Paul, it is clear that these texts lay behind Paul’s command. For the Old Testament Jews, honoring parents was directly related to future blessing, in particular good and long life in the land of Israel. Paul expands the blessing of honoring parents and becomes more generic when he says that honoring parents results in a life long lived on the earth (Snodgrass 1996, 322). Not only did the honoring of parents bring blessing, but in the Jewish context honoring parents was

closely connected to a child's relationship with God and, therefore, seen as honoring God (Lincoln 1990, 402). Lincoln adds that it can be assumed that Paul is addressing children of Christian parents; therefore, the text is not intended to deal with the dilemma children face when obedience to God is in conflict with obedience to parents (Lincoln 1990, 403). Application of this text in a Christian context is the same as in a Jewish context: obedience to parents is a form of obedience to God.

### ***Message to Fathers***

The fathers are the teachers. Ephesians 6:4 raises questions as to the meaning of the Greek word *pateres* which translates "father" (Lincoln 1990, 406) in particular and "parents" in general (Morris 1994, 191). While scholars recognize that *pateres* can refer to "parents" in general, most believe that in this context the correct translation is "fathers" (Snodgrass 1996, 322; Lincoln 1990, 406; Hendriksen 1985, 261; Taylor 1985, 83). Lincoln notes that in verse 1 the word *goneis* is used when Paul is referring to "parents" in general, a reference to others and fathers. Paul's decision to change the word in verse 4 to *pateres*, added to the fact that fathers were the educators of children in both the Jewish and Roman-Greco world, is strong support for *pateres* to be translated "fathers" in this verse (Lincoln 1990, 406).

**Discipline and instruction.** Fathers are instructed not to provoke their children to anger, but to bring them up on the discipline and instruction of the Lord. This imperative is a foreign concept to the fathers of the ancient world. The custom of the Roman-Greco world allowed for almost unlimited power on the part of a father. Fathers were permitted to punish their children severely, they were allowed to work their children

extremely hard, and if they felt it necessary, they could even have their children killed. Fathers could determine if a newborn child would live or die, and many sold their female children as slaves. Sirach 30:1-13, a text found in the apocrypha, demonstrates the harsh discipline that is prescribed so a child will be obedient and grow up to honor one's parents. This text is an example of the attitudes of the ancient world (Snodgrass 1996, 325). It is in this context that Paul presents to Christian fathers a double command: "don't" provoke them to anger and "do" discipline and instruct them. Paul challenges the status quo by imploring Christian fathers "not to indulge in arbitrary rule of their family," not to cause their children to be angry, and not to form in their children hard hearts toward them and God (Morris 1994, 192).

On the positive side, fathers are to discipline and instruct their children. The focus here is "to nourish" one's children to follow the example of Jesus. Children were to be instructed through consistent and firm adherence to the rules and appropriate punishment for disobedience when necessary (Lincoln 1990, 407; Hendriksen 1985, 262). The discipline and instruction of the Lord involves following Jesus' example of "meekness and gentleness" (2 Corinthians 10:1) as well as living according to his commands (Bruce 1984, 398). Bruce further notes that these concepts are best learned as they are modeled before children: By following Jesus' example and living as he instructed, fathers (parents) can show the way (Bruce 1984, 399). The focus has changed from a father who rules over his children to a father who desires for his children to learn, grow and live in relationship with Jesus. Discipline and instruction is accomplished through formal training and through a changed heart that leads to living life as a model before one's children.

## **Two Sources for Learning: Scripture and Modeling**

Teaching Scripture and modeling what is taught are two critical elements in the transformation process of followers of Christ. In 2 Timothy 3:10-17, Paul reminds Timothy of two sources that have contributed to his learning: Paul's own example and the Scriptures which were taught to him as a child (Johnson 1987, 35). While acknowledging both Paul's influence and the role of Scripture in Timothy's life, Mounce, in *Pastoral Epistles*, insists that the character of those who taught Timothy the Scriptures is significant (Mounce 2000, 562). The modeling done by Timothy's mother and grandmother played a significant role in his living according to the Scriptures (Mounce 2000, 561). Likewise, in 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul encourages his son in the faith to model his life after his own, reminding him that doing so is not always easy because those who desire to live in Christ will be persecuted (Johnson 1987, 38). Paul encourages Timothy to remember what he has learned from Paul's personal example and the gospel which he has preached. In addition, Paul reminds Timothy of the Scriptures he was taught as a child (3:15). Some scholars believe that the Scripture Timothy was taught is a reference to the Old Testament (Ironside 1960, 226; Johnson 1987, 35, Dunn 2000, 851), while other scholars note that this is more than just a reference to the Old Testament but also a reference to the gospel message (Hultgren 1984, 135; Fee 1988, 278; Mounce 2000, 562).

Timothy is directed to continue in what he has learned and firmly believed (3:14). The Greek word for "learn" in this text is *matheō*, which means "to learn or understand" (Kittel 1967, 410), to "gain knowledge or skill by instruction, to be someone's disciple" (Danker 2000, 615). Paul's concern is that learning had become a threat to piety as a result of false teachings (vv. 6-9). Instead, Paul believed learning

truth should lead to pious living (Kittel 1967, 410). Paul refers to the truth that was taught to Timothy as a progression of learning that began in childhood, by his mother and grandmother, and continues in Paul's teaching, or *didaskalia* (Mounce 2000, 564). Paul says to Timothy, You have followed "my teachings, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, [and] sufferings" (2 Timothy 3:10-11) and as a son in the faith Timothy must continue to do so while modeling it to others (Dunn 2000, 850-51). Much of the learning; past, present, and future, takes place through the modeling done by those who taught Timothy as a child and he is strongly encourage to do the same.

### ***Education at a Young Age***

Teaching the Scriptures to children at a young age becomes the foundation for spiritual growth. The word "child" in 2 Timothy 3:15 comes from the Greek word *brephos*, which translate "a new-born child, an infant, a babe" (Wuest 1952, 150). Early Rabbinic traditions identify the start of education beginning at the age of 5 (Mounce 2000, 564). Timothy's education in the Scriptures likely began at a very young age and is identified in this passage as the foundation for his continued spiritual growth (Dunn 2000, 852).

### ***Profitability of Scripture***

Much discussion and debate have taken place over the meaning of 2 Timothy 3:16-17. A. T. Hanson identifies several of the problems that are encountered when interpreting these verses, much of which deals with Greek grammar (Hanson 1982, 151-52). For the purpose of this study the researcher will take the approach proposed by

Johnson: the passing over the part of the passage that “ordinarily receives obsessive attention, namely ‘all Scripture is inspired by God,’ except to note that Paul is here obviously referring to Torah” (Johnson 1987, 35). The portion of this verse that directly relates to this study is the phrase “is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” The first two descriptors, teaching and reproof, deal with doctrinal issues of orthodoxy; the two descriptors, correction and training in righteousness, deal with behavioral issues, often referred to as orthopraxy (Mounce 2000, 570). Hultgren, describing this second set of descriptors as categories of moral guidance, says they are inseparable from doctrinal issues found in the first set (Hultgren 1984, 137). The combining of these four descriptors, the bringing together of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, is the process of formation (Hultgren 1984, 137).

**Teaching.** The primary responsibility of the Christian is to teach others. Gordon Fee identifies Timothy’s primary responsibility as teaching the Scriptures (Fee 1988, 279). Arland Hultgren notes that the emphasis in teaching is not to be based on a doctrine of inspiration, but rather by the use of the Scriptures (Hultgren 1984, 136). The teaching of the Scriptures is understood as “imparting knowledge concerning God’s revelation in Christ” (Hendriksen 1984, 303). The Scriptures provide the “content and direction necessary for Timothy, Christian leaders, and by implication all Christians to be fully equipped [and] enabled to do every good work” (Mounce 2000, 570-71). Sound teaching of the Scriptures is the mandate for all Christians.

**Reproof.** The Scripture is not only helpful for teaching truth, it is useful for correcting error. Whereas, teaching in 2 Timothy 3:16 focuses on the Scripture as a

means for helping students to learn the truth, reproof focuses on the Scripture as a means to expose error in teaching (Fee 1988, 280) and to convict of false doctrine (Mounce 2000, 570). The word *elegmon*, which translates “reproof” refers to the “rebuking of the sinner” or “convincing” of wrong belief (Kittel 1980, 475-76). The word can also be translated “rebuke” or “confront” and is unique in that it is found in no other passage in the New Testament (Bernard 1980, 137). Scripture is the standard of truth; as it is taught false doctrine is exposed. Reproof is used to issue warnings, to identify errors in doctrine, to point out dangers in thinking, and to expose false teachers (Hendriksen 1984, 303).

**Correction.** Correction is somewhat similar in function to reproof, but it differs because it offers practical encouragement to walk as God instructs. As Paul addresses correction he moves from a focus on doctrine to a focus on behavior, ethics, and morals (Fee 1988, 280; Hultgren 1984, 137). Just as the word used for reproof is only found in this text, so also the word translated “correcting” is only found in this text (Fee 1988, 280). The word *epanorthōsis* means “to set straight” (Liddell and Scott 1989, 496) or “to set on one’s feet” (Moellering 1970, 165). The idea being that reproof, the negative side of pastoral work, identifies the wrong belief, whereas correction, the positive side of pastoral work, is the process of getting one back on their feet and moving in the right direction (Hendriksen 1984, 303; Moellering 1970, 165). There is a close relationship between reproof and correction with the former focusing on doctrine and the later on ethical behavior (Fee 1988, 280; Hendriksen 1984, 303). In practical terms this could be described as a synthesis of teaching and practice (Hultgren 1984, 137).



**Training in righteousness.** The final step of the process of being fully “equipped for every good work” is training in righteousness. Whereas teaching focuses on the usefulness of Scripture for learning correct doctrine (Johnson 2001, 420), training in righteousness focuses on the continued guidance of Scripture in the spiritual and moral progress of the Christian (Moellering 1970, 166). Once a person is reproved of incorrect doctrine and has been corrected so as to move in the right direction, then ongoing training is required for continued growth in righteousness. This process of training in righteousness occurs through the guidance of Scripture.

### ***Purpose of Scripture’s Inspiration***

In the final verse of 2 Timothy 3 the purpose of Scriptures inspiration is revealed: so that everyone is equipped for good works. Mounce correctly notes that verse 17 is not an afterthought on the part of the writer (Mounce 2000, 570). In this verse the purpose of this text is revealed. For Mounce the purpose for the inspiration of Scripture is to provide both content and direction so the Christian will be fully equipped to do good work. The focus is not on the good works, but rather on the Scripture that is sufficient to fully equip one for ministry (Mounce 2000, 571). James Dunn proposes that the purpose of Scripture can be narrowed down to two integrated concepts: to produce a mature follower of Christ equipped in graces and skills for the church and society, and to make clear the wholeness of salvation (Dunn 2000, 852). Armin Moellering notes the person who heeds the words of verses 10-16 is both one who is a “thinker and theorizer” as well as a “person who is ready for action, one who cannot fail to respond to every situation that calls for a ‘good work’” (Moellering 1970, 166). Ultimately, the central focus of this

text is to remind Timothy of the place of Scripture in his life and the role it plays in both his ministry and daily life (Mounce 2000, 583).

## **Conclusion**

Several significant truths are revealed in a summary of the New Testament passages that address the spiritual nurture of children. Repetition of Jesus' instruction to welcome children, to include them in the fellowship of the community of faith, and to recognize the unique relationship they are capable of having with Him, places these truths among the premier teachings of Christ regarding the role and place of children in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus also acknowledges that children are models to adults for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Children have value in the Kingdom, but they must be trained in the way they are to live their lives. Parents and other significant adults are to train children in the Scriptures and model lives lived in obedience to God. The ultimate goal is to honor the value of children while teaching and modeling for them obedience to God.

## **Toward a Theology of Children's Spirituality**

Old and New Testament teachings on the spiritual nurture of children, as well as church tradition, cognitive reasoning, and personal and corporate experience, have contributed to a movement toward the development of a theology of children's spirituality. Among the many topics that could be included in a theology of children's spirituality, Bunge suggests six "almost paradoxical perspectives of children" that have been the focus of many scholars when discussing a theology of childhood (Appendix 4)

(Bunge 2006, 58). Bunge also expresses her concern with the way scholars have handled these perspectives.

Christian theologians have often viewed them [perspectives] in isolation from one another, resulting in narrow and destructive understandings of children and their obligation to them. Theologians have often focused on one or two such perspectives alone, failing to appreciate the range of Christian thinking regarding children and critically retrieving them into serious and full-blown theologies of childhood. (Bunge 2006, 58)

While Bunge's perspectives have value and several points will be discussed in this section, the format of this theology section was based on a more traditional approach to theology. An in-depth study of theology includes the broad categories of metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology, along with many corresponding sub-categories (Knight 1998, 13-30). It was not the purpose of this study to develop a theological treatise; therefore, this study focused on those sub-categories that are unique to the development of a theology of children's spirituality. The focus of this study was upon the sub-categories of anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, and ecclesiology.

### *Anthropology*

It pleased the all-wise God, at the season which he saw best, to arise in the greatness of his strength, and create the heavens and the earth, and all things that are therein. Having prepared all things for him, He 'created man in his own image, after his own likeness.' And what was the end of his creation? It was one, and no other, -- that he might know, and love, and enjoy, and serve his great Creator to all eternity. (Wesley 1986b, 229)

God's creative activity included his most significant creation; humanity.

God's perfect creation of male and female was "very good" (Genesis 1:31) and created to be in perfect relationship with him, with each other, and with creation (McGrath 2004, 41). The doctrine of God as Creator reveals four significant truths: there exists a

distinction between God and His creation; God has authority over the world; God's creation was good; and God created humanity in his image (McGrath 2004, 41-42).

For the purpose of this research the fourth of these truths is significant. While there is continued debate as to the full meaning of humanity being created *imago dei*, one can be certain and confident that children are "whole and complete human beings made in the image of God" (Bunge 2006, 60). As image bearers of God, children are worthy of respect and dignity, and should be seen as beings that are made for God and have the capacity to have a relationship with Him. Children are not to be seen only as humans that have value in the future as they develop and become adults, but rather, as Catholic theologian Karl Rahner states, children are to be seen as fully human and as such have "value and are worthy of dignity in their own right" (Bunge 2006, 61). Dawn DeVries refers to these two contrasting approaches of valuing children as the instrumental valuation and intrinsic valuation. The instrumental view is recognition that the child has value for what he/she will contribute as adults in the future; the intrinsic view celebrates the value of the child regardless of future development (DeVries 2001b, 162). The intrinsic view is consistent with Jesus' value of children as expressed in Matthew 18:1-5 and 19:14. The distinction between these contrasting approaches is necessary to one's understanding of the spiritual capacity of children. Children are often seen as having little or no value to society and the church; but God created in the *imago dei*, and they therefore have value to God, the church, and society in their own right. As image-bearers of God, children have the capacity to have a real, life-changing relationship with Him that begins a journey to Life (McGrath 2006, 135).

### *Hamartiology*

[Humanity] willfully and openly rebelled against God, and cast off his allegiance to the Majesty of heaven. Hereby he instantly lost both the favour of God, and the image of God wherein he was created. (Wesley 1986b, 230)

God's gift of free will allowed humanity to choose to become his own God; an act of sin that alienated humanity from the true God. The act of sin broke relationship with the Trinity and for the first time exposed "the contrast between God's holiness and human depravity" (Pazmiño 2001, 38 and 40). Sin did more than just break relationship between God and man; it also resulted in the loss of relationship with others, creation, and with self (McGrath 2006, 135). Sin became the instrument of death (Romans 6:23a), leading to total separation from God (Wynkoop 1972, 107). Sin led humanity into a state of total depravity: an inability, by themselves, to do right and to seek reconciliation with God. As a result, there is no desire within humanity, without God's initial activity, to restore proper relationship with God, others, creation, and self. Second-century theologian, Irenaeus of Lyons, describes the act of sin as a *deflection* from God's true path for humanity. In contrast, Augustine describes the results as more than just deflection, but as *defection* from God's true calling (McGrath 2006, 136). This defection left humanity in a state of alienation, with no hope of reconciliation without free grace that God has provided for all humanity (Wesley 1986b, 373).

### *Soteriology*

God established a new covenant with man; the terms of which were no longer, 'Do this and live,' but, 'Believe, and thou shalt be saved.' (Wesley 1986b, 230)

God recognized humanity's inability to restore relationship with God, self, others, and the world, and to overcome death that resulted from sin. In the ultimate act of

love God “made him to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21) which brought the possibility of “reconciliation between God and man . . . man and man . . . and at [a] cosmic level” (Dunning 1988, 341). This atonement that has been provided by the death of Jesus, the Son of God, and the Father’s raising of His Son from the dead has been expressed in many theories, none of which is adequate to explain what took place in the death and resurrection of the Son. McGrath identifies the “doctrine of the work of Christ” (atonement) as a combination of “the cross as sacrifice . . . , the cross as victory . . . , and the cross and forgiveness.” “The cross as sacrifice” addresses the cost that was paid by Christ’ death, “the cross as victory,” *Christus Victor*, addresses the change that took place as a result of Christ’ final victory over sin and death, and “the cross and forgiveness” addresses the restoration of relationship that God has provided for those who repent of their sin (McGrath 2004, 75-81).

God initiated reconciliation with humanity through prevenient grace, a term that means literally “the grace that goes before.” God always takes the first step, and his grace awakens recognition of a void in the heart that can be filled only by God. (Dunning 1988, 338). Augustine, in *Confession*, declares, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee” (Oates 1992, 3). God always makes the first step in the reconciliation process of bringing rest to the restless. Not only does He make a way of salvation and restoration of relationship with Himself, but He also seeks and pursues those who are lost. Through His prevenient grace, “God graciously draws persons to consider their need and find rest for their restless souls” (Pazmiño 2001, 48). Dunning rightly asserts that prevenient grace “creates both awareness and capacity, but neither is saving unless responded to or exercised by one’s grace-endowed freedom”

(Dunning 1988, 339). The restoration of relationship with God occurs when those who are on the journey to death respond to God's grace through repentance, a turning away from the journey to death and a turning toward the journey to life.

### **Spiritual Capacity**

The theological question that must be asked is at what point a child is capable of entering the journey to life? Horace Bushnell responds to this question with his earth-shaking proclamation "that the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise" (Bushnell 1953, 4). Bushnell's response clearly communicates his belief that children are capable of entering this journey at a young age. Bushnell abhorred the modern idea that children should grow up in sin and be converted at a more "mature age" (Bushnell 1953, 4). While some accuse Bushnell of not taking the conversion process seriously based on his response, his intent is that to champion the cause for children's ability to love God from a very young age and to "grow up in Christ" (Bushnell 1953, 8). John Wesley recognized this same truth within many of the children that he encountered. Throughout his journals Wesley notes instances when, apparently to his initial surprise, he observed spiritual maturity among young children. In one such journal entry he wrote the following:

Sat. 28, 1746—I inquired more particularly of Mrs. Nowens, concerning her little son. She said, he appeared to have a continual fear of God, and an awful sense of his presence; that he frequently went to prayers by himself, and prayed for his father, and many others by name; that he had an exceeding great tenderness of conscience, being sensible of the least sin, and crying and refusing to be comforted, when he thought he had in anything displeased God . . . . When the Holy Ghost teaches, is there any delay in learning? This child was then just three years old! A year or two after he died in peace. (Wesley 1986a, 16)

Wesley believed that children were capable of a real relationship with Christ at a young age, and was so serious about this matter that he required that his ministers “preach to and instruct children, whether or not they felt gifted to do so” (Stonehouse 2004, 134).

### **Second-Generation Christians**

Children who grow up in strong Christian families often have unique conversion experiences. Gordon Smith, dean at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, and professor of spiritual theology, refers to children who are reared in Christian families as “second-generation Christians” and believes that their spiritual status is unique. This uniqueness occurs because these children are reared in a family that at their center is a relationship with Christ. Smith is adamant that “conversion for first- and second-generation Christians is *not* the same; it *is* possible to ‘grow up in the faith’” (Smith 2001, 207). He is concerned that there has been undue pressure on these children to “become” Christian, in large part due to a misunderstanding of the conversion process in the life of these second-generation Christians. He notes that one common characteristic of these second-generation Christians is that they often have difficulty identifying the date and time of their conversion (Smith 2001, 212). This may be in part because their journey often begins at birth and continues on into adulthood without a clear distinction of a “salvation moment.” Smith notes that commonly heard phrases from these children include “I have always believed in God” or “I have always loved Jesus” (Smith 2001, 212). Walter Brueggemann supports this understanding when he states, “It is clear that there is no single, decisive meeting which will suit such children . . . . But an ongoing conversation, whereby the child-en-route-to-adult begins, a little at a time at one’s own pace, to affirm and claim the ‘news’ which defines the community” (Brueggemann 1993,



94). Often these children have significant events; stakes that have been driven down in their life, that identify significant moments of response to God's promptings.

### ***Authentic Conversion Process***

The conversion process in second-generation Christians often occurs as life is lived out within the Christian community. Children that are reared in a faithful Christian community often make what appears to be a natural decision to follow Christ. It is as if the child says, "What else would I do? I have loved Jesus since I can remember. I must give my life to Jesus and accept his gift of forgiveness and salvation." It seems that this process, in many cases, is a natural movement for these children and Smith proposes that "for both theological and developmental reasons we should avoid pressing young people to make a decision, or be baptized, or acknowledge adult faith before they are intellectually, emotionally and socially ready to do so" (Smith 2001, 211). This does not mean that children should not be trained in the faith, or as Bushnell implies, immersed in the faith (Bushnell 1953, 4). In fact, Smith argues just the opposite. He believes that rather than pressuring children about what they should experience, adults should be in conversation with children about what they are experiencing as they encounter God. Adults should nurture children in the faith and allow them to respond in their own time thereby allowing for an authentic conversion that will be demonstrated by the faith of their parents becoming their own faith, and their faith experience leading them to life that is transformed (Smith 2001, 207-11). This conversion may occur in a moment in time, but in the case of many second-generation Christians, conversion is an affirmation and confirmation of a life already lived in relationship with Christ. This does not preclude a need for a confession of sin at the time that sin becomes known to the child. Dallas

Willard, a professor at the University of Southern California, a Southern Baptist minister, and one of today's leading Christian thinkers, reminds the church that the goal is not to get people forgiven and into heaven, but to lead others to "put [their] confidence in Jesus and, out of that confidence, live with him as his disciple now in the present kingdom of the heavens" (Willard 2004). This view raises questions about the need for a specific conversion moment and allows for a gradual growth in a personal relationship with God that includes many significant moments of confession, commitment, and consecration to God. Children have the capacity to enter into this personal relationship, and in the case of second-generation Christians the process may be less formal than is often mandated.

### **Cognition and Conversion**

If a child is not capable of a cognitive understanding of the need for repentance and recognition of Christ's sacrifice on the cross for their sin, does this mean that the child is incapable of a relationship with Christ? What exactly did Christ mean when he said, "Let the little children come to me"? Was it a polite way to include the children in the conversation? Was Jesus just being nice? Or was he demonstrating that even though the children were limited in their understanding of all that was taking place, they had the ability to enter into a relationship with him? Could it be that many children that grow up in strong Christian homes, where Christ is the focus of the life of the family, that these children have the ability to enter into a relationship with Christ long before they understand their need for forgiveness and salvation? Could it be that as these children become cognitively aware of their sin and need for forgiveness, and they repent of their sin, that this act is the next step in an already established relationship with Christ?

Take for instance, Rachel. Rachel has loved Jesus from a very early age. She prayed to Jesus, played with Jesus, and included Jesus as a part of her everyday life. When she would play with her toys she often included Jesus by name. At the age of 7, Rachel attended a children's revival service where she became more aware of sin and asked Jesus to forgive her. Was this the moment in which she was saved? Is this even the correct question to be asking? Should the question focus more on the relationship she had with Christ? Was this a significant moment? Yes, but was this the moment she became a Christian for the first time or was this act of obedience an affirmation and confirmation of a relationship that previously existed? Perhaps this is the next significant step in an already established life-long journey with Jesus. Ratcliff reminds adults that they must recognize that the level of the spiritual journey of children may be immature when compared to their own journey; this is the result of the lack of cognitive development, but such recognition should not cause adults to wait in affirming their children's journey with Christ as significant (Ratcliff 2006d, 10).

### ***Ecclesiology***

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments are duly administered. (Wesley 1986c, 396)

The doctrine of the church identifies the church as more than an organization; it is a breaking in of the kingdom of God. As recipients of God's saving grace, Christians have been called into a new community, a new family. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in the community with Christian brethren" (Bonhoeffer 1954, 20). This grace-receiving new family and community is the church.

The church is both catholic and local. Alister McGrath notes that the tension that exists between the church as catholic and local “is resolved through arguing that there is one, universal church which exists in local communities” (McGrath 2004, 106). The catholic church is both righteous and sinful. It is righteous because of the redeeming work and transforming power of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is sinful because it is made up of flawed and sinful humans (McGrath 2004, 116-19). Though Luther’s famous phrase *simul iustus et peccator* (“at one and the same time righteous and a sinner”) was made in reference to humanity, the truth can also be applied to an understanding of the church (McGrath 2001, 423). As a community of faith that is righteous and sinful, a community of faith that is past, present, and future, and a community of faith that is guided by the Holy Spirit, it must fulfill the purposes for which it was created.

### **The Role of the Church**

The purpose, or activity, of both the catholic church and the local church is clearly defined in both the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40). The Great Commission identifies the purpose of the church as “making disciples” and “teaching them to obey.” The Great Commandment identifies the purpose of the church as “love God” and “love others.” Theologians have taken these passages and developed usable, descriptive purposes for the activity of the local church. Robert Pazmiño has described these purposes as proclamation, community formation, service, advocacy, and worship (Pazmiño 2001, 114). In like manner, Rick Warren has described the purposes in a more friendly presentation as: fellowship,

discipleship, worship, ministry, and evangelism (Warren 1995). Chuck Lawless agrees with Warren's purposes but proposes adding a sixth purpose; prayer (Lawless 2002).

Included in the purposes of the church is an understanding that the church community is to support parents of children in the church and local community. The local church should ask the question, "What can we do to help parents understand their role in the spiritual development of their children and how can we come along and support them in accomplishing this task?" Marcia Bunge affirms this responsibility of the local church, but also recognizes that churches often neglect this call. Bunge states, "Many congregations offer weak religious education programs and fail to emphasize the importance of parents in faith development. . . . There is little coordinated effort between the church and the home in terms of a child's spiritual formation. . . . Nor are parents given the sense that they are primarily responsible for the faith formation of their children" (Bunge 2006, 54). A church that effectively impacts the lives of children recognizes the importance of providing training and support for parents.

As members of the body of Christ, ministry *to*, and *for*, children should be designed around the purposes of the church. Ministry *to* children should include opportunities to be involved in worship, fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship. Ministry *for* children should include opportunity for them to minister to others through the use of their gifts and evangelism to friends and others in the community. These purposes should be the focus of ministry with children as the church determines to be a support to parents in equipping their children to follow after God.

## **The Role of Parents**

Parents are to be the primary teachers in the spiritual development of their children. The church's responsibility in the spiritual development of children is important, but God holds parents accountable for the spiritual growth of their children. The spiritual development process occurs through formal and informal teaching opportunities as life is lived together. As very young children observe their parents they begin the process of forming their image of God (Downs 1994, 115). Children observe and imitate the actions of their parents in many areas of their lives including their understanding of faith (Downs 1994, 157). Faith development is not something that primarily happens at designed moments, but occurs as life is experienced together. Though the church has often attempted to take the place of parents in this process, parents can never be replaced as the primary nurturer of faith in children. Parents are to take responsibility for teaching their children in such a way that they develop spiritually; and according to Wesley, they are to do so "early, plainly, frequently, and patiently" (Wesley 1986b, 81). At best, the church can come along side parents in support, and hope to fill gaps when parents fail to fulfill their responsibilities, but the church can never replace them.

Spiritual development that takes place in the parent-child relationship is not only beneficial to the child, but is part of the growth process in parents. Stonehouse recognizes this truth and rightly notes that the process of teaching children is as important to the adult as it is the child. It gives the adult a chance to retell the faithfulness of God and "our love is rekindled as we remember God's acts" (Stonehouse 1998, 28). The authors of *Children Matter* affirm this process in the following observation: "The family

is the spiritual formation crucible not only for children but for parents as well; spiritual formation is not a one-way street. When we are tired and impatient with our children, yet they love us anyway, we see God's grace. Our children also show us our need for continued transformation" (May et al. 2005, 153). As the child and adult experience God together, in everyday moments, spiritual growth occurs in each individual and in the community called the family.

### **Summary**

While the church's role in the spiritual development of children is significant, parents are to be the primary teacher in the faith development of children. The church's role is to help parents understand their role and to support parents in the process of teaching their children; with the goal of spiritual growth. The church is to be a community that helps parents and children fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment in their lives as individuals, as a family, and as a community. As members of the church, children are to be recognized as valuable and fully immersed in the life of the community.

### **History of Psychology and Developmentalism**

The field of psychology has had significant impact in an advanced understanding of the spiritual growth and development of children. From its earliest days, a little over one hundred years ago, the field of psychology has been interested in the religious education of humanity (Bredfeldt 2004, 52). The level of interest has spanned in extremes from a consuming interest to little-to-no interest. Beginning with the first published systematic study of religious experiences of children in 1892, interest

in the spiritual and religious development of children has ebbed and flowed with the development of the field of psychology (Barnes 1892, 442-48). In the past thirty years there has been a heightened interest in the study of children's spiritual and religious development among many scholars.

At the Children's Spirituality Conference held on the campus of Concordia University on June 4-7, 2006, Don Ratcliff, Price Lebar Professor of Christian Education at Wheaton College and Graduate School, presented a workshop titled "The History of Children's Spiritual Development: Research in Religion, Spirituality, and Theology," where he presented what he has identified as five phases in the scholarly study of children's spiritual and religious development (Ratcliff 2006a). These phases are distinguished by the major focus of each period in its approach toward children's spiritual and religious development among leading psychologists of the day. Ratcliff originally proposed five phases of development, but in his latest unpublished manuscript has changed the five phases to four phases with one trend (Ratcliff 2007a). His continued study of the subject has led him to believe that the fifth phase, as originally proposed, does not have enough active support to constitute a phase (Ratcliff 2007b). These four phases and one trend will be used as the model for evaluating the varying approaches to children's spirituality of each period and for the purpose of identifying the change that took place as movement from one phase to the next occurred. These phases, while identified by beginning and ending dates, are loosely structured and may overlap at some points, including the overlap of significant contributors. The four phases and one trend offered by Ratcliff are as follows:

1. Undifferentiated Period (1892 to 1930)
2. Quantitative Sophistication Period (1930 to 1960)



3. Cognitive Religion Period (1960 to 1990)
4. Child Spirituality Period (1990 to Present)
5. Child Theology: a recent trend movement. (Ratcliff 2007b)

Each phase and trend will be described in detail and the major contributors to the thought of the period will be presented. The reason for the particular thought of the day and the changes that led to the following phase will be discussed.

### ***Background Information***

A rather new understanding of the spiritual capacity of children has led to an intentional focus on the spiritual development of children. Gary Bredfeldt notes that “only during the last one hundred plus years that attention has been given to the developmental process and the distinctive characteristics of children, youth and adults” (Bredfeldt 2004, 52). Prior to this time it was believed by most Christians that children are “miniature adults” (Bredfeldt 2004, 52) and that “the child is to grow up in sin to be converted after he comes to age” (Bushnell 1953, 4). This view that one must experience sin in order to appreciate conversion was challenged, seemingly for the first time, by American theologian and “father of modern religious education,” Horace Bushnell in *Discourses on Christian Nurture* publishing in 1847 (Bushnell 1953, xxv). Bushnell fought the traditional belief of the day by making the radical claim “that the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise” (Bushnell 1953, 4). These two seemingly contradictory belief systems of the day, that children are little adults and that children should grow up living sinful lives before they can experience conversion, were challenged by Bushnell, which was likely unbeknownst to psychologists that would soon follow after him.

One might ask what caused a change in thinking that led Bushnell and those who followed after him in the field of psychology to challenge the traditional way of thinking and to propose a new perspective. Bredfeldt proposes that the reasons for the sudden interest in the developmental process, which led ultimately to an abandonment by scholars that children are “miniature adults,” is due to “increased life expectancy . . . , the birth of the adolescent sub-culture . . . , the emergence of the baby-boom generation. . . , the development of the scientific world . . . , and emerging social problems” (Bredfeldt 2004, 52-53). Whatever the causes for change it seems only fitting that as interest in the developmental process of children, youth, and adults progressed there began to evolve an interest in the spiritual development of children, youth, and adults. The study of the spiritual development of children began from what many would consider to be an unexpected source; the field of psychology.

### ***Phase 1: Undifferentiated Period (1892 to 1930)***

With the emergence of developmental psychology, a minimal interest in the religious development of individuals began to appear. G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) is a significant figure in that developing conversation. Hall, the first psychology professor in the United States, is known by many as the founder of organized psychology (Grezlik 1999). He founded the first psychological journal in America, the *American Journal of Psychology* in 1887 (Beins 1999). In 1889, he served as the founding president of Clark University (Grezlik 1999) and in 1891 he founded the journal *The Pedagogical Seminary*, which appealed to child developmentalists and teachers in general (Beins 1999). In 1892, he served as the first president of the American Psychological Association (Beins 1999). With the founding of *The Pedagogical Seminary*, his attention turned toward the study of

children, probably because he knew it would win public support, which he needed (White 1992, 29). He developed a program of questionnaire studies of child development which was new to the field in the United States, but was consistent with the work of Charles Darwin, Gustav Fechner, and Francis Galton in Europe (White 1992, 29).

*The Pedagogical Seminary* (known today as the *Journal of Genetic Psychology*) often included one or more articles on religious education in each issue. The articles that did not focus on a religious nature often included “spiritual and religious dimensions of children, youth, and adults” (Ratcliff 2006a). One of the groundbreaking articles from the journal was a study titled “Theological Life of a California Child” that “intended simply to show the theological atmosphere in which California children live, and their mental attitude towards this theology at different ages” (Barnes 1892, 442). The study has become a landmark study of religion and children.

Hall’s main interests focused on child development and evolutionary theory (Beins 1999). Though Hall would not be considered a Christian in the Evangelical sense, he “felt religion should be studied when it naturally emerged in research, and sometimes intentionally studied” (Ratcliff 2006a). In possible response to his respect for, and belief in, religion he created the *Journal of Religious Psychology* in 1904 which was short-lived (Beins 1999). While many of Hall’s theories regarding the evolutionary development of children must be rejected and did not greatly influence education, “he paved the way for future scholars such as Piaget” (Grezlik 1999).

In addition to the journals that brought the issue of religious child development to the surface, several books were written on the topic. James Sully wrote *Studies of Childhood* in 1895, William Koons wrote *The Child’s Religious Life* in 1903, and Edwin

Starbuck wrote *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness* in 1911 (Ratcliff 2005). These books contributed to the interest in the subject of the child's religious life, but by the late teens and early twenties the number of articles relating to religion and the church, and the number of books written on the religious life of the child began to decline and disappear entirely by the mid 1920's (Elkind 1978, 2). With few exceptions, such as *The Child's Religion* by Pierre Bovet (1928) and *Studies in Deceit* (1928) by Hugh Hartshorne and Mark May, the influence of World War I, the Scopes "Monkey" Trial (1925), and the rise of behaviorism in America seemed to have had a significant impact on the decline that led to the virtual denigration of religious development of humanity, especially children (Elkind 1978, 2; Ratcliff 2005 and 2006). By the 1920s even the number of articles addressing religion and church in *The Pedagogical Seminary* declined significantly with only a handful appearing after 1930 (Ratcliff 2004, 409). This decline set the stage for the emerging period which found little use for the study of religion and children.

***Phase 2:  
Quantitative Sophistication Period (1930 to 1960)***

By 1930, the teachings of Sigmund Freud and behaviorists such as Ivan Pavlov, John B. Watson, Edward L. Thorndike, and B. F. Skinner influenced psychology in such a dramatic way that the study of children's religious development was apparently non-existent. Psychology was no longer open to religion or the study of religion and children, especially within the United States (Downs 1994, 71-72). Outside the United States there continued to be some interest and research in religion, but most research

seemed to be influenced by Freudian theory as demonstrated in *Religion and the Growing Mind* by Basil Yeaxlee (Ratcliff 2006a; Yeaxlee 1952).

### **Jean Piaget**

As the years of the Quantitative Sophistication Period advanced a new interest in religion within the field of psychology began to immerge in the 1940s and 1950s. While religious interest developed, any emphasis on children was mostly forgotten, that is, until Jean Piaget's *genetic epistemology*, a description of interplay between body and mind, began to gain prominence (Downs 1994, 83). "He [Piaget] was convinced that intellectual development and how we come to know are 'firmly rooted in the biological development of the individual, as expressed in the term 'genetics'''" (Downs 1994, 83).

While working for Benet Laboratories in 1919, Piaget worked on standardizing a modern intelligence test that had been developed by Alfred Benet and Theodore Simon (Pulaski 1980, 3). As Piaget studied the results of the test, he discovered an interest in the incorrect answers and the qualitative difference between age groups. Bybee and Sund note, "By applying his scientific training, he recognized patterns of wrong answers among children of approximately the same age" (Bybee and Sund 1982, 6). This was the beginning of Piaget's interest in how children thought about issues and the beginning of his genetic epistemological journey.

It seems that through the publishing of articles in *The Pedagogical Seminary* interest in Piaget's genetic epistemology began to grow (Ratcliff 2006a). Piaget published his thirty year study on genetic epistemology in a three-volume series in 1950 under the title *Introduction a l'Epistemologie Genetique* (Bybee and Sund 1982, 11).

### ***Adaptation and Equilibration***

Piaget believed in two significant concepts that contributed to his theory; adaptation and equilibration (Downs 1994, 83-84). Adaptation occurs “when the organism is transformed as a function of the environment” (Battro 1973, 7). It is also described as the basic tendency of the organism to adjust to the environment” or in other words, “experience has an effect on the cognitive structure” (Bybee and Sund 1982, 35). Downs describes adaptation as “the capacity to organize the sensory stimuli we receive into some sort of order and then to adapt ourselves to our context” (Downs 1994, 83).

The concept which Piaget calls “equilibration” plays a significant role in his theory. Equilibration is somewhat unclear in much of Piaget’s writings, but scholars believe it to be understandable and essential to applying his theory (Bybee and Sund 1982, 190). A simplistic understanding of the process of equilibration has been explained as the balance between what one knows and what one experiences – the process which brings about development (Bybee and Sund 1982, 196). When there is unbalance between what one experiences and what one knows a process called “disequilibration” takes place. Piaget believed that as these inner conflicts are resolved equilibration is restored and in this process learning takes place (Bybee and Sund 1982, 191; Downs 1994, 84).

The significant work of Piaget became the backdrop for those that would be trained in his teachings; in addition, many would begin applying his thoughts to children in a religious context. The change from a Quantitative Sophisticated Period, when most of psychology ignored religion, to a period of new interest in the development of religion in children, became the catalyst of a fifty year study of children and religion.

### ***Phase 3: Cognitive Religion Period (1960 to 1990)***

The Cognitive Religion Period, which began with an intentional emphasis on children's religious development, was led by two significant researchers: David Elkind in the United States and Ronald Goldman in Europe. Building on the discoveries of Piaget, these two men, as well as many that would follow after them, set out to better understand the religious development of children and to provide implications for Christian education that would be consistent with the teachings of Piaget.

#### **David Elkind**

In 1961, David Elkind published an article in the *Journal of Genetic Psychology* based on extensive research with Jewish children titled "The Child's Conception of his Religious Denomination: I, The Jewish Child." Subsequent studies in 1962 ("The Child's Conception of his Religious Denomination II: The Catholic Child") and 1963 ("The Child's Conception of his Religious Denomination: III, The Protestant Child") also contributed to significant discoveries by Elkind that the way in which children understand religion is consistent with Piaget's understanding of developmental theory. Elkind discovered uniformity in ideas at a given age no matter the religious background and the same uniformity that Piaget discovered in such subjects as science and mathematics was at work in areas of religion (Hyde 1990, 18). One of Piaget's great discoveries was confirmed and restated by Elkind as a result of his research; "while adults believe children and adolescents are most like them in their thoughts and least like them in their feelings, it is the reverse that is true" (Hyde 1990, 20). Affirmation of Piaget's discovery that adults and children think differently and that they share the same

emotional feelings has had significant impact on the understanding of the development of children.

Elkind conducted further study in 1967 and 1968 on children's conception of prayer with an analysis of the results showing "distinct age clusterings" in similar fashion to what was discovered in previous studies (Long, Elkind, and Spilka 1967, 105).

Research discovered that a child's understanding of prayer is consistent with other children in the same age clustering. Replicated studies by McGrath (1974), with Catholic children, and Worten and Dollinger (1986) confirmed Elkind's analysis of children's conception of prayer (Hyde 1990, 23). Elkind's work was the beginning of a serious focus by scholars on children's understanding of religion based on the conclusions drawn by Piaget.

### **Ronald Goldman**

In 1962, and continuing through the 1960s, Ronald Goldman conducted studies in Europe that were similar in style and format to those of Elkind. Goldman confirmed the cognitive findings of Piaget through his own research and concluded that "children's religious ideas followed a stage development" (Hyde 1990, 24). Goldman discovered that age and mental ability were major factors in the development of religious thinking (Hyde 1990, 25). Goldman's research was replicated by MacCuish (1970) with no significant differences in the findings and many others have replicated his research from around the world with consistent confirmation (Hyde 1990, 25-32).



### ***Goldman's Conclusions***

Goldman's conclusions, which were not without controversy, were published in 1964 in *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*. In an attempt to be faithful to the findings of his own research and that of Piaget, Goldman concluded that formal instruction in religion should not begin until one's early teen years and that teaching of religious ideas before then could do more damage than good to the child's religious understanding and development (Goldman 1964, 232-33, 41-42; Hyde 1990, 33; Ratcliff 2006a). Goldman added that "the Bible is not a children's book" (Downs 1994, 81-82) and should "not be taught until children have developed a proper 'readiness for religion'" (Downs 1994, 89). His findings had immediate impact upon the educational system in Europe, while in the United States his findings brought hostility from educators, parents, and the media (Downs 1994, 89; Ratcliff 2006a). While the hostile response is understandable, Ratcliff notes that Goldman has been inappropriately criticized for rightly recognizing that one's religious development progresses in much the same way as one's cognitive development and that it makes good sense to honor a child's abstract and concrete limitations as well as other cognitive limitations (Ratcliff 2006a). Goldman's conclusions were an attempt to recognize and respect children's cognitive limitations and an affirmation that teaching religion should only be done with a respect to their cognitive abilities. He expresses this concern in the preface of his book when he says, "To know what a child is able to grasp intellectually is a surer foundation for education than to know only what adults feel the child ought to grasp" (Goldman 1964, xi). An attempt to be faithful to the developmental process of children led him to his conclusions.

### ***Goldman's Contribution***

A superficial look at Goldman's conclusions may lead some to abandon his thoughts all together, but a closer look acknowledges his significant contribution. Understanding that Goldman's liberal theology led him to believe that the Bible should be understood metaphorically further explains why he believed that foundations for theology should be built in a child's life and formal theology should wait until the teen years (Ratcliff 2006a). Though many evangelical Christians would disagree with Goldman's conclusions one must be careful not to write him off too quickly. Ideas that are offensive or contradictory to one's views of theology and child development theory can further research in the right direction if serious study is conducted and known bias is set aside. Ratcliff wisely recognizes that "his [Goldman's] research is interesting and influenced much subsequent research, including studies of religious thinking that tried to refute his arguments" (Ratcliff 2006a). Goldman's conclusions may be questionable, but his findings are significant to a further understanding of the developmental process of children and consistent with those of his time and theology.

### **E. Paul Torrance**

Research in children's cognitive abilities flourished in the United Kingdom during the Cognitive Period. As the state provided funding for the study of religious issues many researchers took advantage of the opportunity to advance the study (Ratcliff 2006a). In the United States, E. Paul Torrance, a Southern Baptist, was conducting research in creativity. His research led to the development of the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) which has become a standardized test for measuring intelligence and creativity through the use of pictures and verbal puzzles. The TTCT has

gained worldwide fame, has been translated into 32 languages, and has been used in over 2,000 research studies (Speirs Neumesiter and Cramond 2004, 179). Torrance believed humans are wonderfully complex creatures that have been made in the image of God and that the learning process has been oversimplified by learning theorists (Torrance and Torrance 1988, 224). His view of the potential of children is summarized in the following:

Individuals fundamentally prefer to learn in creative ways. Teachers at all levels of education, both religious and secular, have generally insisted that it is more economical to learn by authority. It seems now that many things, though not all, can be learned more effectively in creative ways rather than by authority. It also appears that some persons have especially strong preferences for learning creatively, learn a great deal if permitted to learn in creative ways, and make little progress when we insist that they learn solely by authority. (Torrance and Torrance 1988, 224-25)

Torrance's sixty years of research in creativity not only distinguished him as the "Father of Creativity," but also played a significant role in setting the table for researchers that would implement creativity in their approaches to religious development of children (Speirs Neumeister and Cramond 2004, 179). Though he is rarely mentioned, researchers such as Robert Coles, John Westerhoff, Jerome Berryman, Marcia Bunge, Catherine Stonehouse, and Scottie May (to name a few) must be indebted to Torrance for affirming that God created humans as creative beings and for discovering that alternatives to traditional ways of teaching tend to be more effective in bringing about life change (Downs 1994, 25; Wilkinson 1988) or application (Hyde 1990, 49). Interestingly enough, the curriculum that Torrance developed and field tested as a creative approach to teaching was turned down by his denomination (Ratcliff 2006a).

### **John Peatling**

An Episcopalian, John Peatling, became interested in the religious development of children and, in 1973, wrote a 668-page dissertation that discovered similar findings as those of Goldman. He, too, felt that concrete and abstract abilities should influence the way children are taught about religious truths (Ratcliff 2006a). Later, Peatling made several significant contributions to the field: published the journal *Character Potential* that focused on character and religious development; published a summary of children's religious research; and created the Character Research Press that "published a significant bibliography of children's God concepts (51 pages of mere references!)" (Ratcliff 2006a). In spite of the good work done by Peatling, in the 1980s his dissertation was found to be theologically skewed in that children received lower scores when they understood biblical stories literally (Ratcliff 2006a).

### **James Fowler**

As Peatling and others began to question Piaget's stages, James Fowler entered the scene with a new way of approaching the subject of spiritual development; instead of focusing research on the development of religious concepts, he proposed that the development of faith itself should be researched. This significant change in approach raised a new interest in spiritual research among American scholars (Ratcliff 2006a).

Following the lead of Bushnell, who believed it was important to match religious education with children's mental abilities, Fowler's research led him to believe that faith development could be categorized by stages in much the same way as cognitive development (Fowler 1981; Downs 1994, 115). Fowler's discovery of faith development has caused him to be referred to as the "father of faith development," but researchers

must recognize that Fowler was more concerned with how faith developed and less concerned with what faith included as demonstrated in the introduction of his book,

Or you may be thinking, ‘I’ve got this matter of faith settled. By virtue of my conversion experience (or through more gradual growth I’ve experienced in a religious community) my faith is clear and firm and tested. Why should I risk potential confusion by opening myself to look at faith as a human universal? Why should I take seriously the faith experiences of people from religions other than my own? Or even stranger, why should I consider the faith patterns of people who don’t even claim to be religious? What have they to do with faith?’ To you I want to affirm the largeness and mystery of faith. So *fundamental* that none of us can live well for very long without it, so *universal* that when we move beneath the symbols, rituals and ethical patterns that express it, faith is recognizably the same phenomenon in Christians, Marxists, Hindus and Dinka, yet it is so *infinitely varied* that each person’s faith is unique. Faith is inexhaustibly mysterious. Liveliness and continuing growth in faith require self-examination and readiness for encounter with the faith perspectives of others. Any of us can be illumined in our efforts to relate to the holy by the integrity we find in the faith stances of others, whether they are religious or nonreligious. . . . I believe faith is a human universal. (Fowler 1981, xii-xiii)

Though evangelical Christians are likely to have issue with Fowler’s definition of faith, his faith developmental theory should not be overlooked. Fowler’s stages of faith, not including the infancy pre-stage, are identified as follows:

1. Intuitive-Projective Faith
2. Mythic-Literal Faith
3. Synthetic-Conventional Faith
4. Individuative-Reflective Faith
5. Conjunctive Faith
6. Universalizing Faith (Fowler 1981, 119-211)

These stages of faith development can help Christian educators move from an overemphasis on content acquisition, which is a common approach to Christian education

in many churches today, to a more balanced approach that recognizes the need for content acquisition for the purpose of Christian maturity (Downs 1994, 121).

### **David Heller**

In 1986, Heller, a significant contributor to the Cognitive Religion period, gained public attention with the publishing of a book based on his research that asked the question, “What are children’s conceptions of God” titled *The Children’s God* (Heller 1986, 2-3). Heller’s unique contribution focused on children’s religious concepts among a variety of religions. He discovered a degree of common “God conception” that cut across religious lines (Heller 1986, 129). His work served as the catalyst for future research in the area of comparative religions in child spirituality (Ratcliff 2006a).

### **Kenneth Hyde**

The Cognitive Religion period seemingly came to an end with a significant publication by Kenneth Hyde in 1990. His publication titled *Religion in Childhood and Adolescence* is a 500-page summary of about 1800 research studies, most of which were published between 1960 and 1989 (Hyde 1990, 400-83). This massive work is a fitting and timely conclusion to this period, and by narrowing and summarizing the focus of past research, it nicely transitions the Cognitive Religion Period into two new research phases that were soon to follow.

### **Summary**

Each of the developmentalists studied in this research made a significant contribution to the understanding of child spirituality. In Figure 1, the major contributors

to the Cognitive Religion Period, and their developmental theories, are compared to Piaget's Cognitive Development theory (Ratcliff 2006a, adapted). Each of the

Age 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

Piaget: Cognitive Development

Preoperations	Concrete Operations	Formal Operations
---------------	---------------------	-------------------

Elkind: Religious Identity [Denomination] and Concepts of Prayer

Vague	Concrete/Outer	Inner
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Goldman: Concepts of God, Prayer, and Church

Intuitive	[trans.]	Concrete Thought	[trans.]	Abstract
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Peatling: Concepts of the Bible

Concrete	[transition]	Abstract
----------	--------------	----------

Fowler: Faith Development

Intuitive-Projective	Mythic-Literal Faith	Synthetic-Conventional
----------------------	----------------------	------------------------

Heller: Concept of God

Self-focus	I'm special, fantasy	Doubt
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Figure 1. Developmentalist comparison chart

developmentalists that followed Piaget relied upon his theory as a foundation for the development of their own theory and most of them remain close to his stages.

## **Doubts about Developmental Theory**

While developmental theory plays a significant role in the understanding of education and religion, there is a growing voice of dissenters who believe that developmental theory is not the answer to understanding how learning occurs. In his book *Getting It Wrong from the Beginning*, Kieran Egan proposes that Progressivists such as Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget have built their theories on a “flawed foundation” that has been passed on to an unsuspecting world. This flawed foundation is exposed in three myths of developmentalism; knowledge progresses from simple to complex, knowledge progresses from concrete to abstract, and knowledge progresses from known to unknown (Egan 2002, 60-62). Adding to the concern about the acceptance of the “simple to complex” concept among developmentalists, Dawn DeVries notes that the “dark side” of this belief is the logical conclusion that early phases of development are relatively less valuable than later phases of development (DeVries 2001b, 162). DeVries rightly identifies that value levels increase as movement is made from lower stages to the greater stage. The implication is that lower, or early, stages of development are of lesser value, and therefore, children are of lesser value than adults because they occupy lower stages.

Many scholars have expressed concern about the application of developmentalism to the process of spiritual growth. Concerns arise around the idea that spiritual growth is limited by the cognitive ability of the child. David Hay and Rebecca Nye note the concern of many researchers that a primary focus on developmentalism when studying spiritual development reduces children’s spirituality to “a form of immaturity and inadequacy” (Hay and Nye 2006, 57). Religious development



researchers such as Kalevi Tamminen, Henri Bissonnier, and Jean-Marie Jaspard have discovered in their research that spiritual awareness is not limited to cognitive development and that often spiritual awareness exceeds cognitive development as in the case of the mentally handicapped (Hay and Nye 2006, 59-60). Lorelei Farmer makes a bold and convincing argument that depending on the developmental theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erikson for understanding spiritual development is an error. She argues that “religious knowledge” and “knowledge about religion” are entirely different knowledge experiences and that “we must be willing to permit the possibility that religious knowledge may be independent of the growth of cognitive abilities and/or emotional capacities” (Farmer 1992, 260).

### **Distinction between Spiritual Development and Spiritual Growth**

In the definition section of chapter one it was determined that for the purposes of this study many terms relating to the concept of spiritual maturing, including spiritual development and spiritual growth would be used interchangeably. Perhaps the concerns about developmental theory cause one to reconsider this approach and acknowledge a distinction between “spiritual development” and “spiritual growth.” These two terms are usually used interchangeably. Perhaps Ratcliff’s observation that there is a significant distinction between the two terms, addresses many concerns about the apparent depth of spirituality among children who have not achieved the cognitive levels of abstract thought that cognitive developmental theorists require for faith development. Ratcliff’s distinction has to do with a recognition that “spiritual development” is directly linked to “age-related stages” while “spiritual growth” is unrelated to age and more focused on the

process (Ratcliff 2006d, 8 and 11). It seems clear that as a child's cognitive abilities develop, his/her ability to understand spiritual concepts also develop. A more developed cognitive ability does allow for a deeper knowledge of God, doctrine, and other faith-related topics, but does this knowledge necessarily translate to spiritual maturity? The question remains: Is it possible that children are capable of a spiritual maturity that exceeds the limitations of their cognitive abilities? Is it possible, as Fowler seems to imply in his first stage of faith development when he notes that young children are influenced by images, stories, and symbols, that young children are capable of abstract thought when applied to Christian faith (Fowler 1981, 123-28)? Jerome Berryman, in *Godly Play*, tells stories of children who make abstract application to their own lives after contemplating stories such as the Parable of the Good Shepherd and the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Berryman 1991, 46-53). Could it be that developmental theory has an important place in the understanding of spiritual growth, but it is "not the final word" (Ratcliff 2006d, 10)?

#### ***Phase 4: Spirituality Period (1990 to Present)***

In the same year that Hyde published his summary of the extensive research to-date on the subject of children's spirituality, Robert Coles, a Harvard University professor, published *The Spiritual Life of Children* which functioned as his summary of thirty years of work (Coles 1990, xi-xviii). Coles observed a "natural overlap between the moral life and the religious life of children, as is the case with grownups. There is certainly an overlap for many children between their religious life and their spiritual life" (Coles 1990, xvii). The focus of his book, and the Spirituality Period, is not on children as practitioners of a particular religion, but "on children as soulful in ways they

themselves reveal: young human beings profane as can be one minute, but the next, spiritual” (Coles 1990, xvii-xviii). For Coles it was not necessary that spirituality be religious, in fact, he introduced in a formal way the idea of non-religious spirituality (Ratcliff 2007b). Coles initiated a shift from a focus on how children understood spirituality to the actual spiritual experience of children whether religious or not. A move was made from a “stage-centered or highly structured view of spirituality” to a more “exploratory, narrative, and descriptive [process] . . . that is filled with awe and wonder” (Ratcliff 2006b). In addition to Coles’ writing, David Hay and Rebecca Nye wrote a significant work titled *The Spirit of the Child* that addressed, among other topics, ways in which adults often discourage and are destructive of spiritual experiences in children and acknowledgment that research of spirituality does not necessarily include religion (Hay and Nye 1998, 23 and 33).

### **Jerome Berryman**

Jerome Berryman, taking his lead from the research and teachings of Maria Montessori and Sofia Cavalletti, continues the tradition of education through play in his book *Godly Play*. Berryman’s major assumption is “the importance of the imagination-in-action, the creative process” (Berryman 1991, xi). He believes that play is more than a “superficial or trivial act, but . . . a life-giving act” that when combined with structure provides opportunities for children to experience God (Berryman 1991, 1). Berryman believes that children develop spiritually as they are given opportunities to encounter God through a variety of experiences. He also believes that the limitations of language contribute to children’s inability to express their experience, and that play is one of the ways they are able to encounter God and express their response to such an encounter

(Berryman, 1991, x). One must wonder what impact the discoveries of E. Paul Torrance in the area of creativity may have had on Berryman's concept of play.

### **Children in Service**

Ratcliff notes that one of the areas that need to be addressed in the move to a focus on the spiritual experience of children is the apparent neglect of the child's ability to minister to others (Ratcliff 2006a). In many cases focus is on what is done for the child to help them grow in their knowledge of spirituality and little effort seems to be made in helping children apply the knowledge in action through service to others. Perhaps this problem can be traced to a culture that emphasizes putting children first and "doing" for them rather than having them learn to "do" for others.

### **Development of the Spirituality Period**

Significant organizations were developed to support the growing interest in children's spirituality. The International Journal of Children's Spirituality was published in the United Kingdom as a journal that discussed children's spirituality in a variety of religious settings, including non-religious. The first International Conference on Children's Spirituality took place in Winchester, England in 2000. At the conference a group of American evangelicals, recognizing that the Spirituality movement was pluralistic at best and anti-Christian at worst, met to discuss the possibility of a conference in the United States that would include those who held to the "historic Christian faith" (Ratcliff 2006a). The first Children's Spirituality Conference was held in River Forest, Illinois, on the campus of Concordia University in June, 2003, with the

focus on an evangelical Christian perspective to children's spirituality. A subsequent conference was held on the same campus in June, 2006.

***Trend 1: Child Theology Movement (2000 to Present)***

The Child Theology movement, which is both an extension and alternative to the Spirituality Period, is in its infancy and its future is somewhat uncertain. Don Ratcliff, who has contributed to the discussion in Child Theology circles, notes his uncertainty about Child Theology's connection with children's spirituality. He asks, "Is Child Theology an aspect of children's spirituality? Or is children's spirituality an aspect of Child Theology? Are they parallel movements?" (Ratcliff 2007d). The lack of certainty regarding the role of Child Theology in children's spirituality is due in part to it being a new movement without a history. It is often difficult to define and evaluate a movement while it is still in its development phase. In an attempt to clarify the purpose of Child Theology, its own website describes it as follows: "In *Child Theology* we are invited to take good note of the child in the midst as we think about, for, to, from and with God in Christ. As we do that, we expect our theology to change for the better. In *Child Theology* we embark afresh on the journey with Christ into the open secret of God in the world" (Child theology movement 2006).

One of the distinctions between the Spirituality Period and Child Theology is the debate over original sin (Ratcliff 2006b). Within the Child Theology movement there are a variety of perspectives on original sin and its significance; some go as far as denying the existence of original sin (Bunge 2001, 17). Marcia Bunge was seemingly the first within the movement to address this issue, and while she believes in the existence of

original sin her views would not be consistent with most evangelicals (Bunge 2001, 13-18; Ratcliff 2006b).

A second distinction can be seen in the approach to doing theology. Scholars that function within the Spirituality Period include children in the theologizing process, while those in the Child Theology movement focus on theologizing about children. Ratcliff says that it is “the adult theologizing about children, which is particularly emphasized by organizations working with at-risk children overseas and in deprived areas of the United States” (Ratcliff 2006b). Child Theology focuses on social issues that involve children. Ratcliff is concerned that by not including children in the theologizing process the Child Theology movement tends to marginalize children (Ratcliff 2005 and 2006a).

### **Marcia Bunge**

Marcia Bunge is one among several scholars of varied backgrounds that have contributed to the ongoing development of Child Theology. A historical theologian, Bunge has contributed a significant work, *The Child in Christian Thought*, on the history of Child Theology. By charting the history of this movement back to the New Testament, Bunge attempts to provide credibility for this approach to child spirituality. In a statement about the Child Theology movement, Ratcliff says the following, which could have easily been used as an introduction to Bunge’s book,

Child theology is a very old and very new movement. Theological perspectives of children are included in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and many theologians throughout history have commented on children. Yet over the last century or so children have been marginalized by theology, overlooked by most theologians as apparently irrelevant to their main concerns. Beginning in the early Twenty-First Century, a few theologians have again begun to give children attention in their work, either commenting on theological topics in reference to children, or

considering what difference it might make to place "a child in the midst" of any theological topic. (Ratcliff 2006c)

The future of the Child Theology movement is uncertain and will only be clarified as scholars contribute to the conversation and as time allows for further evaluation. At present, there are significant contributors to the conversation of Child Theology which include: Jerome Berryman, a scholar who is placed in the Spirituality Period and contributes to the conversation in the Child Theology movement; Don Ratcliff, a children's spirituality historian; Keith White, a sociologist who teaches theology in the United Kingdom; Sunny Tan and Rosalind Lim-Tan, professors at Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary; Haddon Wilmer, research tutor at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies; Dan Brewster of Compassion International; and John Collier, M.D. (Ratcliff 2006a).

### ***Conclusion***

The field of psychology has played a significant role in uncovering ways to understand the spiritual development process of children. Each period, that has been researched, has provided a unique perspective in the history of spiritual development. Each psychologist has developed a unique understanding and in doing so has provided opportunities for other researchers to build on their thought. Much of what is understood today about the ways children mature spiritually is due to a little over one hundred years of exploration and research.

### **A New Approach**

Two typologies emerge from the research that provides models for classifying unique approaches to ministry with children in the local church. Urban Holmes and

David Kolb each propose distinct typologies that provide an opportunity to combine spiritual formation with learning theory. Michael Anthony proposes that by combining these typologies a new model emerges that functions as a means to distinguish unique ministry approaches with children in local churches. This new model will be used as a tool for designated ministry style in the following research.

### ***Urban Holmes' Phenomenology of Prayer***

Urban Holmes' unique approach to spiritual formation through prayer provides the foundation for an understanding of spiritual formation in children. In eulogizing Urban Holmes (1930-1981), Loren Mead describes him as "one of the most influential Episcopal thinkers, teachers, and theologians of the twentieth century" (Holmes 1982, vii). Dean of the School of Theology at the University of the South, he wrote *A History of Christian Spirituality* in response to a lack of introductory material available to his students on Christian spiritual experience (Holmes 1980, ix). Holmes believed that "it is important to have a way of describing what patterns of Christian spirituality 'look like'" (Holmes 1980, 3). In this book he proposes a typology of spiritual formation that utilizes prayer as the means by which growth occurs (Anthony 2006, 30). Holmes describes the process of Christian spirituality in the following portrayal.

All the spiritual masters say that it involves a relationship between God and humanity that we call prayer. For us, to pray is to intend to hear God and to respond to God. God is absolutely present in *all* people. Prayer does not 'make' him present. Prayer is not a work. It begins with our consent to enter into a relationship to which God invites everyone. Prayer is a consent that is grounded in the expectation that God speaks to us and we can hear. This expectation is what is meant by faith. (Holmes 1980, 2)

Holmes used descriptive terms that were common to theologians and psychologists to design a typology using a horizontal and vertical axis that resulted in



four quadrants that he believed were representative of every period of Christian history (Ware 1992, 44). Holmes' unique contribution to the field was organizing the concepts together to form a functional typology. In Figure 2, Holmes' Phenomenology of Prayer is replicated (*italics added*) (Holmes 1980, 4). In discussing Holmes' Phenomenology of

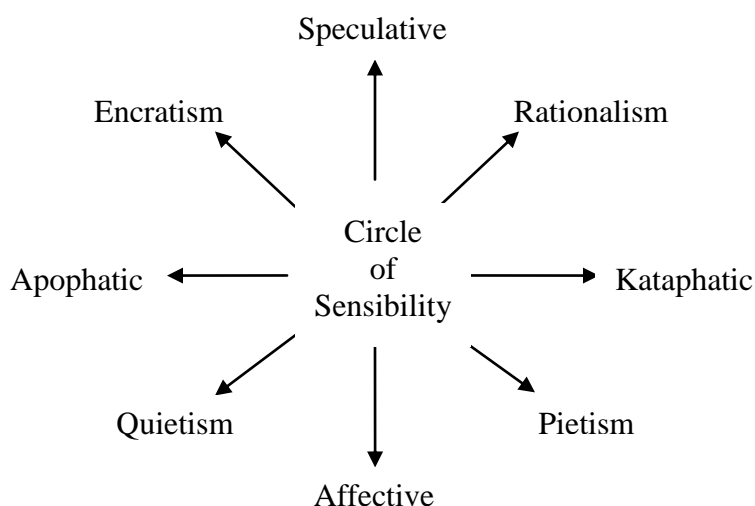


Figure 2. Holmes' phenomenology of prayer

Prayer, Paul Bosch notes that "this is what Christian spiritual traditions have looked like through the ages. And within the circle it is possible to locate almost every Christian spiritual sensibility" (Bosch 1999). Sheldrake adds that the development of spiritual typologies helps to preserve "specific spiritual traditions and to appreciate the rich plurality at the heart of Christian spirituality" (Sheldrake 1992, 209). Bosch and Sheldrake support of Holmes' approach to spiritual formation through a phenomenology of prayer provides validation to the decision to use Holmes' typology as a means of studying the spiritual formation of children.

## Apophatic Scale

The horizontal axis identifies what Holmes refers to as the apophatic/kataphatic scale (Holmes 1980, 4). Apophatic (from the Greek “*apophasis*,” meaning “a thing away from another, exclusion of a thing”) is contrasted with kataphatic (from the Greek “*kataphasis*,” meaning “affirmation, affirmative proposition”) (Liddell and Scott 1983, 225 and 918). Apophatic is the belief that God is beyond any spoken description or thought. Sheldrake describes apophatic as an emphasis on “silence, darkness, passivity and the absence of imagery” (Sheldrake 1992, 191). In its extreme one would say that God is not knowable because he is beyond all limitations of humanity. “In the *apophatic*, one is totally forgetful of oneself with one’s attention riveted solely on the Lord’s existence” (McLeod 1986, 54). Pseudo-Dionysius, believed to be the “Monophysite” Patriarch of Antioch, Severus (ca. 465-538), wrote in one of his quasi-apostolic letters to Timothy the following words that serve as an example of apophatic thought (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 13).

When we say anything about God, we should set down the truth “not in plausible words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the power granted by the Spirit” to the scripture writers, a power by which, in a manner surpassing speech and knowledge, we reach a union superior to anything available to us by way of our own abilities or activities in the realm of discourse or of intellect. This is why we must not resort to words or conceptions concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being, apart from what the sacred scriptures have divinely revealed. Since the unknowing of what is beyond being is something above and beyond speech, mind or being itself, one should ascribe to it an understanding beyond being. (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 49)

Holmes further describes apophatic as an “emptying technique of meditation” (Holmes 1980, 4). This approach to Christian spirituality is demonstrated by mystics such as Quakers and Mennonites, as well as by the “desert fathers” (Bosch 1999) and is modeled in the book *The Cloud of Unknowing* (Johnston 1973).

## Kataphatic Scale

In contrast to apophatic, the kataphatic scale is a spiritual tradition that is “comfortable with forms, such as ritual gesture, hymns, ‘prayers from a book’; it is a tradition that cherishes doctrine and creedal statements, and liturgical forms of worship” (Bosch 1999). Described by Holmes as “an imaginal technique of meditation” this form of spirituality honors the self-revelation of God and sees God as one who is knowable (Holmes 1980, 4). Many Christian theologians, from both evangelical and mainline traditions, would subscribe to a kataphatic understanding of faith experience.

## Apophatic vs. Kataphatic

In discussing the relationship between apophatic and kataphatic, McLeod confirms Holmes placement on the horizontal scale by noting that they are “in a sense complementary or perhaps better described as being at opposite sides of the prayer spectrum” (McLeod 1986, 52). Liddell and Scott note that in the Greek these terms are opposites (Liddell and Scott 1983, 225). McLeod also notes the following regarding the relationship between apophatic and kataphatic.

They aim at producing different kinds of faith experiences: *apophatic* at provoking an experience of union with the Lord beyond conscious awareness, and *kataphatic* at evoking experiences of God’s merciful and salvific love in which one is aware of a dynamic movement towards conversion as well as aiming at intimate experiences in which one seeks to know more who Christ is so as to be able to love and serve Him more and in which one sensibly feels an at-one-ment with Him. As is evident, *kataphatic* prayer does not necessarily lead to *apophatic* prayer or vice versa. But by choosing one method over the other, a person will influence the kind of experience that will result. (McLeod 1986, 52)

These two terms rightly represent the two extremes of understanding of faith experience, and accurately placed on Holmes’ horizontal axis.

### **Speculative and Affective Scales**

The vertical axis of Holmes' model is identified as the speculative/affective scale (Holmes 1980, 4). The speculative approach to prayer is described as an "illumination of the mind" while the affective approach is described as "illumination of the heart or emotions" (Holmes 1980, 4). The distinction between these two poles is the method by which one grows spiritually. Acquisition of knowledge and focus on the intellect becomes the preferred form of spiritual growth for the person who subscribes to the speculative approach. Relying on the one's emotions and feelings is the preferred form of spiritual growth for the affective person.

### **Bringing the Axes Together**

The bringing of these two axes together provides a typology by which spiritual formation through prayer can be studied. Holmes believed that "by the use of these two scales [horizontal and vertical] it is possible to make comparisons among spiritual masters of the church and to define spiritual practice and its immediate objectives with some clarity—the assumption being that in all methods the goal is union with God" (Holmes 1980,4). The bringing together of one pole from each axis identifies a quadrant that represents a preferred approach to prayer. Holmes also noted that the model serves as a way to distinguish certain "dangers of exaggeration" (identified in the model by the words in *italics*) within each dimension of prayer (Holmes 1980, 4). The circle of sensibility in the model reminds the reader that an overemphasis on any one approach to prayer while neglecting other approaches leads to a danger of excess.

### ***David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory***

David Kolb, former Charles A. Dan Professor of Philosophy at Bates College, developed a learning cycle model that has had significant impact on the understanding of learning theory. Kolb's Learning Cycle model is strongly influenced by three well respected models of experiential learning presented by John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget (Kolb 1984, 20). While there is uniqueness to each of the three models there is also a great deal of similarity in the design and movement of each (Kolb 1984, 25). Kolb's contribution to the subject is a description of how individuals come to experience and process new information.

Kolb defines learning as the "process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it" (Kolb 1984, 41). This definition recognizes four key similarities among the three previously mentioned models and experiential learning in general;

1. Adaptation and learning are the focus rather than content and outcomes.
2. Knowledge is a transformation process that occurs through creation and recreation rather than through acquisition and transmission.
3. Learning transforms experience.
4. The nature of knowledge is key to understanding learning and to understand and vice versa (Kolb 1984, 38).

Kolb's model is similar to Holmes' model in that it too uses a double axis typology. The vertical axis identifies "modes of grasping experience" and the horizontal axis identifies "modes of transforming experience" (Kolb 1984, 58-59). Kolb believes that the combining into one dimension of the grasping and transformation identified in

these two “dialectically opposed adaptive orientations” has caused confusion in understanding the learning process. It is Kolb’s contention that it is necessary to keep these dimensions “analytically separate even though in some circumstances they are empirically correlated” (Kolb 1984, 59). Kolb’s model separates these two axes while recognizing that they are often experienced together.

### **Grasping Experience**

The vertical axis of the model identifies what Kolb refers to as the “grasping” of experience or the prehension dimension (Kolb 1984, 43). Grasping via apprehension, identified as concrete experiences, is contrasted with grasping via comprehension, and identified as abstract conceptualization (Kolb 1984, 42). Apprehension, as described by Kolb, addresses senses and feelings making it difficult to communicate the experience. It can be described as “what you see, hear and feel around you . . . those sensations, colors, textures, and sounds . . . and many others you know instantaneously without need of rational inquiry or analytical confirmation” (Kolb 1984, 43). At the opposite end of the axis, comprehension is the introduction of order into the randomness of apprehended sensations (Kolb 1984, 43). Comprehension may provide order and communication of apprehended experiences, but at the expense of raw apprehended experience and nuance (Kolb 1984, 43-44). As new information is perceived it is processed through a range of prehension from “intuitive feeling” (concrete experience) to “cognitive reasoning” (abstract conceptualization) (Anthony 2006, 32).

### **Transforming Experience**

Whereas the vertical axis identifies how one perceives new information, the horizontal

axis, identified as the transformation dimension, describes how one processes new information (Kolb 1984, 51). Transformation via extension, identified as active experimentation, is contrasted with transformation via intention, identified as reflective observation (Kolb 1984, 42). Extension, as used here, is defined by Kolb as an “active external manipulation of the external world” (Kolb 1984, 41) or an active involvement in the information that has been grasped. Intention focuses on the “internal reflection” (Kolb 1984, 41) or observation of an object. Kolb gives the following image as an example of extension and intention being applied to a concrete experience.

Take, for example, the rose lying on my desk. I *transform* my apprehension of the rose *intentionally* by deploying my attention to its different aspects, noting the delicate pink color that is not solid but alternates subtly from white to a deeper rose. I sense its delicate fragrance and experience a blossoming of brief reminiscences. Here I cannot resist the impulse to *transform* the experience *extensionally*, to pick up the rose and hold it to my nose. In so doing, I prick my finger on the thorny stem and extend my apprehension of this rose still further. Now this new extended apprehension further stimulates my internal reflections and feelings. (Kolb 1984, 52, italics added)

This description of interaction with the rose provides a vivid picture of the distinction between intention, the observation and contemplation of the object; and extension, the active, physical involvement with the object. The overlapping of these axes creates a model that addresses both the experiencing and the knowing of learning (Figure 3) (Kolb 1984, 42).

### **Critics of Experiential Learning**

As with any theory Kolb has his critics. Scholars from a variety of backgrounds have individual issues with application of Kolb’s theory as it relates to their specific fields of study. In many cases the concerns are not significant enough to dismiss

his thoughts. Kolb acknowledges that the relationship between apprehension and comprehension has been a concern among philosophers for some time (Kolb 1984, 44).

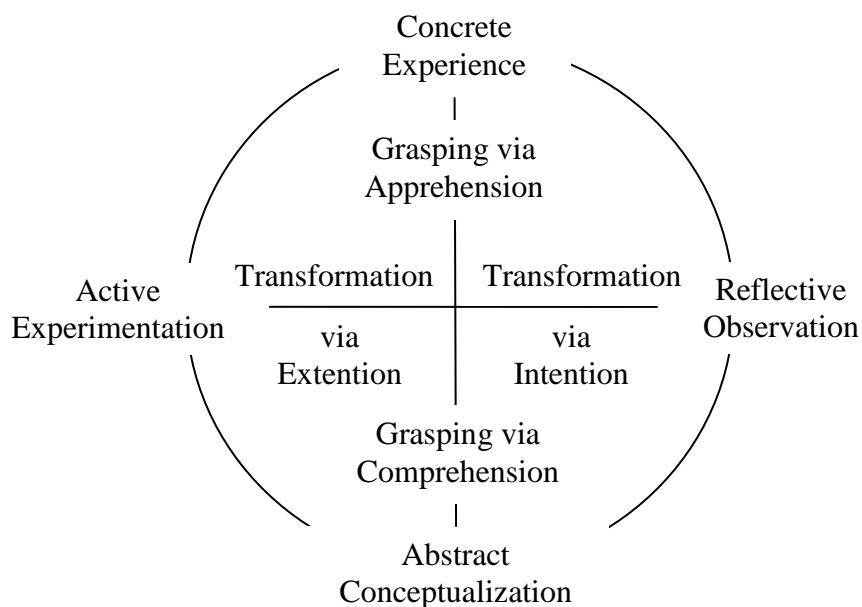


Figure 3. Kolb's experiential learning theory

In spite of those who have issue with his experiential learning theory, Kolb's theory continues to be widely accepted among learning theorists. One of Kolb's critics concluded his article by saying, "Nonetheless, Kolb's contributions cannot be underestimated. Whatever their limitations, by presenting a model of experience in a scientific form, he has helped move educational thought from the locus of the instructor back to the learner" (Kelly 1997, 4). It is also believed by the researcher that Kolb's theory can contribute to a better understanding of the spiritual developmental process of children.



### ***Combining Two Typologies***

Whereas Holmes' typology addresses how one develops spiritually from the perspective of prayer, David Kolb's typology investigates how one learns. Michael Anthony believes that when these two typologies are viewed as complementary, when they are integrated, a new typology emerges that provides a basis for understanding children's spiritual formation (Anthony 2006, 33). Human spirituality and learning styles are both highly personal and are somewhat unique to each person (Anthony 2006, 31) and while the uniqueness of each individual is important, with any system that is based on developmental theory, as is Kolb's Learning cycle, there must be a recognition that among "essential attributes human beings are more similar than dissimilar" (Downs 1994, 73). Anthony explains his choice to combine these two typologies when he says, "Since spiritual formation is a learned process and requires considerable time developing across the life span, it stands to reason that a comprehensive look at how one develops spiritually should include some consideration of the learning cycle" (Anthony 2006, 32). It is for this reason that the typologies of both Urban Holmes and David Kolb are able to be combined to develop a model for identifying ministry models used in local churches to assist children in their spiritual formation.

### ***Michael Anthony's Children's Spiritual Formation Typology***

In his most recent book, *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation*, Anthony proposes that an overlapping of the typologies presented by Holmes and Kolb provides a model for assessing the spiritual formation of children. Anthony makes his case for integrating these two typologies when he states, "One typology provides useful

insights as to how one develops spiritually while the other provides beneficial understanding regarding how one learns cognitively” (Anthony 2006, 33). The implication being that the way one grows spiritually is closely connected to the way one learns (Figure 4). Anthony’s model is based on an understanding that spiritual formation

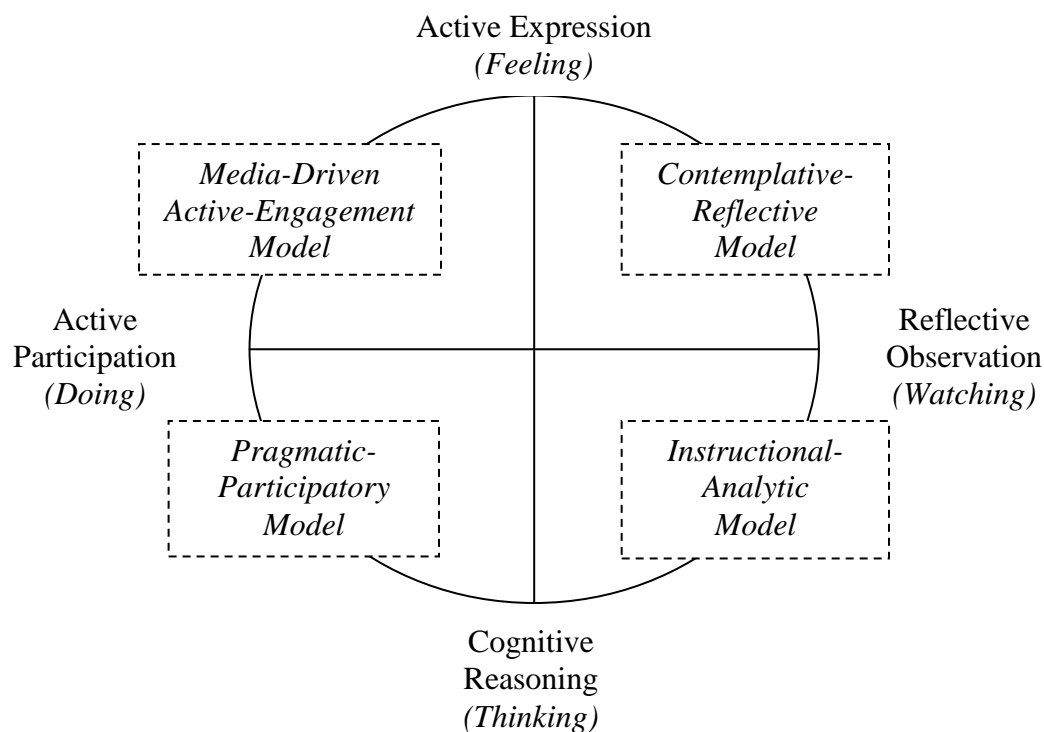


Figure 4. Anthony’s children’s spiritual formation model

includes both experiencing and knowing God (Anthony 2006, 33). How we experience God is demonstrated by the vertical axis that at one end focuses on “affective expression” such as emotions, impressions, and feelings and at the other end focuses on “cognitive reasoning” which includes thinking and reasoning. How we learn or know about God is demonstrated by the horizontal axis that at one end involves active, hands-on experiences

known as “active engagement” and the other end focuses more on watching the faith in others and contemplating the biblical story which is known as “reflective observation” (Anthony 2006, 33-35). By inverting and rotating Holmes’ model 180 degrees and overlaying it on Kolb’s model, Anthony has developed a new model that can be used to categorize differing approaches to children’s ministry praxis. Each resulting quadrant of the typology represents a different approach to ministry that functions as a means of helping children grow in their spiritual development. While all of the quadrants include a multitude of similarities, and often ministries include an overlapping of these quadrants, there is enough specific uniqueness of each quadrant that can be used to determine the preferred approach taken by a ministry to help children grow spiritually. Stonehouse expressed support of this approach and noted that by focusing on the uniqueness of each model her concerns about the overlapping of the quadrants is addressed (Stonehouse 2007a). Carlson and Crupper also warn that “it’s probably good not to push the taxonomy beyond what it’s intended to do” by forcing ministries to be squeezed into one particular model (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 86). The following sections will focus on specific uniqueness of each quadrant as presented by leading scholars in each school of thought, while also recognizing that in practice there may be overlapping of quadrants by practitioners.

### ***Uniqueness of the Models***

Before looking at the specifics of each model, it is important to first recognize that while each of the four proposed models seems to have its specific uniqueness, identifying the uniqueness of each model has been a difficult task. In a phone conversation with Catherine Stonehouse she described what she considered to be unique

characteristics of the Contemplative-Reflective model. The following are her list of distinctives:

1. God focused: The atmosphere, the approach to telling the story, and the quiet opportunities for reflection are all designed to help the child focus on God.
2. Scripture: Overview of the whole Scripture with time for reflection
3. Teacher: The Holy Spirit is to function as the teacher while the adults move to the fringe.
4. Intuitive Knowledge: Recognition that God comes to children before they can explain it by the use of language.
5. Experience: Even young children are capable, easily and naturally, of experiencing God. Once experienced, the experience is brought into life through the biblical narrative and further experience (Stonehouse 2007a).

While Stonehouse accurately described her understanding of the specific uniqueness of this model, the researcher began to recognize that although these seem to be unique to this model, the reality is that leaders from the other models would often say that they believe the same. In many cases it seems that it is “the *means* by which the material is taught that differs, not necessarily the *material* itself (Graves 2006, 153) or in May’s words, “focus would be on the ‘delivery system’” (May 2006, 148). Herein lays the difficulty in developing a survey that clearly identifies the uniqueness of each quadrant.

Another example of the difficulty in identifying the uniqueness of each model is found in Anthony’s summary of the Contemplative-Reflective model. He says, “Those in this quadrant believe that Christian spirituality must go beyond simple transmission of biblical information” (Anthony 2006, 37). While this statement is true, for the purposes of this study, the question must be asked if the statement is unique to this model. Based on previous engagement with scholars from each quadrant the researcher chose to email each scholar and ask for their response to the statement “Christian spirituality must go

beyond simple transmission of biblical information.” The following responses were received:

Christian spirituality may include the transmission of biblical information providing there are time, space, and a place for the Holy Spirit to work within the spirit of the person. Christian spirituality is God's Spirit transforming the spirit of the person/child into the image of Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Often a transmissive approach can interfere with somewhat ‘mystical’ work of the Spirit by reducing spirituality to mere ‘cognition’ and by not providing opportunity or encounters with the living God through reflection, contemplation, and a sense of awe at the transcendence of God. (May 2007e)

I think our view would be to let Scripture shape as well as ground the spiritual formation of children. If the youth has not believed and obeyed, then teaching has not become complete. I agree that teaching toward application is essential. (Carlson 2007d)

While it appears on the surface that distinguishing the uniqueness of each model would be a simple task, it has proven to be an arduous one.

### **Contemplative-Reflective Model**

The Contemplative-Reflective Model is the quadrant that results from the vertical pole of active expression (feeling) and the horizontal pole of reflective observation (watching) (Figure 5). Scottie May, Associate Professor of Educational Ministries at Wheaton College, co-author of *Children Matter*, contributor to *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Application*, and practitioner and advocate of what she calls the Reflective Encounter Model, wrote the chapter on the Contemplative-Reflective Model in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation* edited by Michael Anthony (May 2006, 45-102). In describing the model she writes, “The aim . . . [is] to help children encounter God in ways that result in a sense of awe and wonder, to help them consider things of God with continued attention. The model seeks to assist them in finding the quiet place within themselves—a place that all children

have—where they can sense the presence of God and hear his voice” (May 2006, 46).

The focus of the model is to provide a quiet environment that is centered around the gentle telling of the biblical story that includes an opportunity for the child to reflect on the story through a variety of activities that helps the child to know God. Characteristics

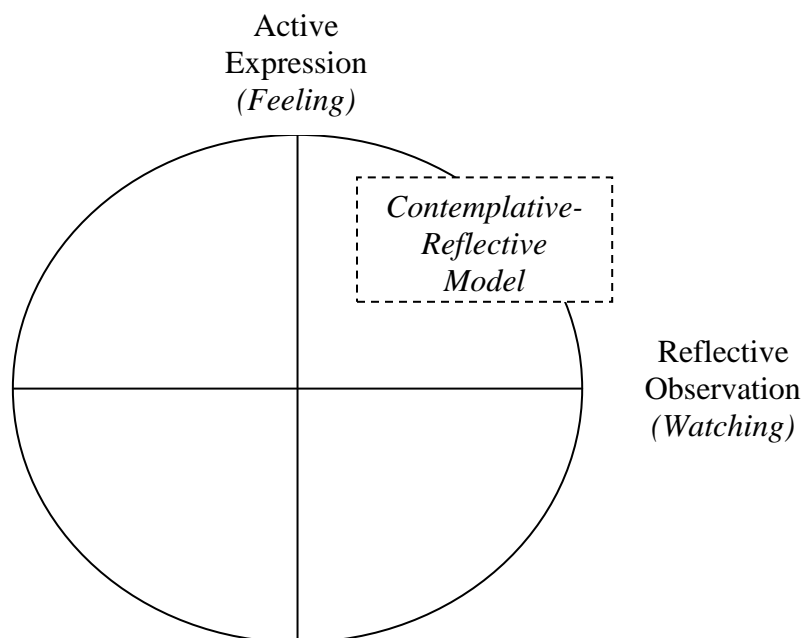


Figure 5. Contemplative-reflective model

of this model include a special space that communicates reverence, elimination of frills and fluff, a slow pace, quietness, worship, ritual, repetition, experience through active learning, liturgy, and statements of wonder (May 2006, 70). This approach to spiritual formation finds its roots in Italy beginning with Maria Montessori in the early 1900s and is further developed by Sofia Cavalletti in the 1950s. Cavalletti’s, “Catechesis of the Good Shepherd,” curriculum is still used in several countries, including the United States (Center for children and theology 2007). The concepts of Montessori and Cavalletti were

further developed and used by Jerome Berryman to create the “Godly Play” curriculum which “extend[s] what she [Cavalletti] has already achieved” (Berryman 1991, vii).

### *Example of the Model*

An example of this model is presented by Catherine Stonehouse in a Godly Play video in which she tells the story of the Parable of the Good Shepherd to a class of children using simple flannel graph props (Stonehouse 2007b). Her intention is to cause curiosity in the children and to allow the simple telling of the story to pique the imagination of the children. Her responsibility is to move aside as the teacher and allow the Holy Spirit to become the teacher that applies the truth in the lives of the children as they enter into the story and engage in a variety of quiet activities that follow (Stonehouse 2007a).

This approach is an affirmation that children develop spiritually through the sharing of rituals and symbols (Stonehouse 1998, 154), through the telling of faith stories (Stonehouse 1998, 157), and through Godly play (Berryman 1991). Berryman and Stonehouse believe that “play is the child’s work” and that as adults engage children with biblical stories in ways that are appropriate for children, they discover “meaning and direction for their young lives” (Stonehouse 1998, 186-87). The leader must recognize that the goal, according to Berryman and Stonehouse, is not to give the children “prepackaged answers,” but to help them experience the truth of Scripture with the help of the teacher (Stonehouse 1998, 187). This approach to spiritual formation is supported by studies conducted by scholars of children’s spirituality, such as Robert Coles and Rebecca Nye, which have revealed that children are spiritual beings and as such are capable of connecting with God as they contemplate the story. May believes that

“spirituality is an aspect of all children . . . therefore, a Contemplative-Reflective Model enables the spiritual aspect of the child to be nurtured.” The environment that is created by moments of contemplation enables children to focus on God himself (May 2006, 50 and 52).

### ***Warnings of Excess***

This model, when taken to an extreme, leads to concerns of relativism and an overemphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding the child to accurate understandings and application of the text. Without a sense of direction it would be easy for a child to misunderstand and/or misapply the text. In Holmes’ typology (Figure 2), the circle of sensibility is a reminder that an overemphasis on one approach to prayer while neglecting other approaches leads to a danger of excess. Perhaps this is also applicable when attention to one quadrant, or model, within Anthony’s typology is focused upon exclusively with neglect to the other quadrants, or models. Further research is needed to verify this assessment.

### ***Concerns Regarding the Contemplative-Reflective Model and Response***

Critics of this model point to a lack of intentional focus on salvation moments. Greg Carlson and John Crupper say, “Presenting the gospel and allowing children to respond to the prompting of the Holy Spirit is one of the most significant roles a children’s ministry may have in impacting the future of Christ followers” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 213). Showing agreement with Carlson and Crupper, Trisha Graves notes that “it appears that the renewal and rebirth that Dr. May speaks of involves more of a child’s ongoing faith process of discovery versus a personal decision of faith and ongoing



spiritual growth” (Graves 2006, 89). Carlson and Crupper go on to say that those in the Instructional-Analytic, Pragmatic-Participatory, and Media-Drive Active-Engagement models are in strong agreement that children need to respond to the Holy Spirit by a personal decision of faith. The implication is that the Contemplative-Reflective Model, and supporters of it such as May and Stonehouse, would not agree that children need to respond to the Holy Spirit by a personal decision of faith. In response, May notes that there is no doubt that children need to respond to the Holy Spirit; however, “there is considerable difference of opinion as to when and how the Holy Spirit works in the soul of a child” (May 2007e). Supported by several studies that suggest that a child’s relational experiences precede a developmental knowledge of faith, May believes that children who have “consistent early experiences *with* God may allow the desire to know *about* God to grow” (May 2006, 59). The emphasis here is allowing children to experience God prior to a developed cognitive understanding. Supporters of this model believe it is important to allow the process of salvation to happen naturally as children experience God and learn about him without being prompted by adults. In what appears to be a response of frustration, May says, “It’s just that sometimes I think we get in the way and make it hard for the child to respond to the Spirit rather than to us” (May 2007e). The difference in these models, with respect to an intentional focus on salvation moments is due, in part, to issues of theology. Each of the four models recognizes the importance of a child’s decision to follow Christ; the issue of contention is the manner by which this takes place.

### Instructional-Analytic Model

The Instructional-Analytic Model is the quadrant that results from the vertical pole of cognitive reasoning (thinking) and the horizontal pole of reflective observation (watching) (Figure 6). Gregory Carlson, Global Training Director and Director of

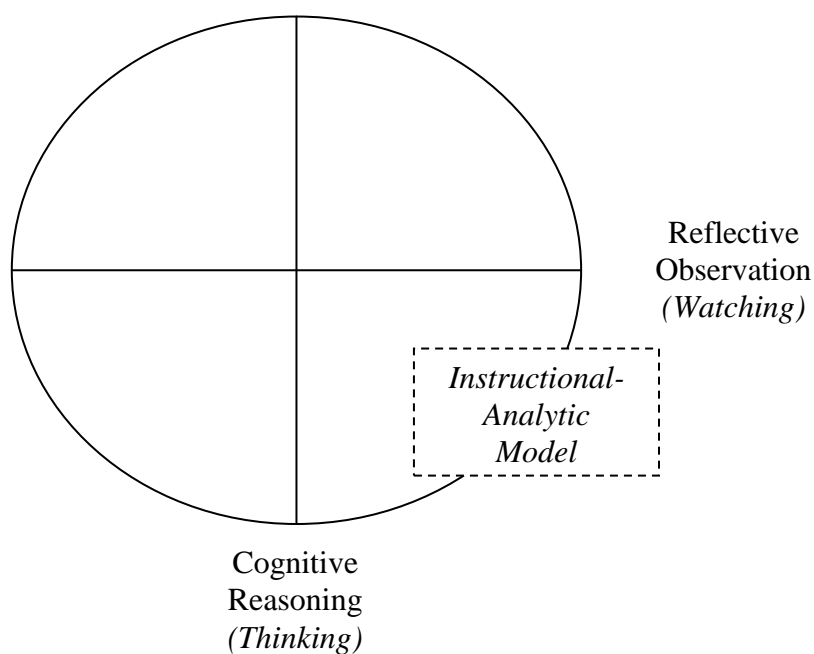


Figure 6. Instructional-analytic model

Rorheim Institute, AWANA Clubs International; and John K. Crupper, Director of Rorheim Institute Development, AWANA Clubs International, wrote the chapter on the Instructional-Analytic Model in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation* edited by Michael Anthony (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 103-63). In describing the model they wrote, "This [model] is defined as God working through the instruction of his Word and human agency whereby he creates an environment where the young person comes to know Jesus at an appropriate age and then grows in that relationship. This environment

features four dimensions: Scripture memory, biblical instruction, a graduated award system, and a systematic structure for training” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 104).

Carlson adds that spiritual formation of children is “the developmental learning of the foundational truths of Christ so that a child/youth may begin a relationship with Christ through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit (salvation), and then subsequently grow in Christ (sanctification)” (Carlson 2007a). Appropriately placed in the lower half of Anthony’s typology model, each of the four dimensions identified by Carlson and Crupper as features of the model and Carlson’s understanding of spiritual formation focus on the cognitive process.

### ***Word of God***

Advocates of this model believe that focused instruction on the Word of God is what distinguishes it from other models and is the starting point for spiritual formation (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 104). Focused instruction on the Word of God results in “the most significant step in spiritual formation [which] is receiving Jesus Christ as Savior” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 105). Leading a child to Christ is the primary emphasis of this model (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 104). While other models may agree with an emphasis that leads a child to Christ and take a variety of approaches to accomplish this goal, the Instructional-Analytic model makes this the priority through the teaching of Scripture. This point is emphasized when Carlson and Crupper write, “The Bible is the content of education which prompts spiritual formation in children—not reflection (contemplative-reflection), experience (pragmatic-participation), or activity (active-engagement)” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 126).

An intentional focus on leading children to Christ has lead critics of this model to accuse proponents of neglecting developmental concerns. Some say that children are often “forced to perceive, think, and act like adults” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 105). In response, Carlson and Crupper note that they stand with Lawrence O. Richards when he says, “We are not to try to force children into adult modes of learning or into modes that demand cognitive processes beyond their abilities. Instead it is our task to translate the great truths of Christian faith into terms that can be both understood and experienced by boys and girls as they grow up in the Christian community” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 105).

Carlson and Crupper note that based on Richard Foster’s six spiritual traditions found in *Streams of Living Water*, the Instructional-Analytic Model originates in the evangelical tradition. They place the Contemplative-Reflective Model in the contemplative tradition which is based in Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran faith traditions. (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 82-83). The placing of the Contemplative-Reflective Model is due mostly to the religious backgrounds of Maria Montessori, Sofia Cavalletti, and Jerome Berryman. The placing of these models with certain theological traditions implies a tendency to gravitate toward models that are consistent with that particular tradition and that those within the evangelical tradition should use the Instructional-Analytic model.

### ***Concerns Regarding the Instructional-Analytic Model and Response***

Carlson and Crupper imply in their chapter that focus on Scripture is limited to the Instructional-Analytic and Pragmatic-Participatory models. May disagrees with this

assessment and believes that the distinction is the “delivery system” and not the role of Scripture. She notes that each model puts a high value on the role of Scripture. May also expresses concern that this model proposes that “instruction in Scripture is *the* means to spiritual formation” and not *a* means. She proposes that centuries of church history show that spiritual formation occurs in a variety of ways; one of which is instruction in Scripture (May 2006, 148-49).

**Focus on biblical facts.** Critics of this model are concerned that Bible facts become the central focus of teaching while application of the truth of Scripture and a personal relationship with God are relegated to lower priorities. Jim Wilhoit notes that “Bible facts are useful to the extent that they help us come to know God more fully” (Wilhoit 1986, 39). Wilhoit continues as he quotes Lois Lebar, well-known Christian education professor at Wheaton College from 1945 to 1975, “nothing will take the place of sound doctrine and the facts of the Word of God. But it is possible to starve people with Biblical facts, to make doctrine a substitute for spiritual reality, to fail our people by denying them the intimate personal experience with the Lord Himself who alone will satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart” (Wilhoit 1986, 40). Trisha Graves adds that learning Bible facts and memorizing Scripture is important, but more important is that children understand and comprehend Scripture. Carlson and Crupper address these concerns when they discuss the role of the teacher in this model. They note the following: “The teacher’s role is to use discipline to cause the student to learn, not just to be rewarded for behaving in a certain way with no heart change” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 134). The authors make it clear that the ultimate focus is the changed heart of the

child and this is best accomplished through the memorization, or “learning by heart,” of the Scriptures.

While declaring that this model is more than Bible memorization alone, the authors are clear to point out that special focus on Scripture is essential. They propose the following steps be used by those who subscribe to this model: read the Scripture, study the Scripture, and memorize the Scripture (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 130). Noticeably absent from these steps is obey the Scripture; however, “conformity to Christ,” a phrase proposed by Carlson and Crupper in their chapter, is described as the purpose of spiritual formation and, therefore, is understood as the overarching goal of reading, studying, and memorizing (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 121).

**Concern about incentives.** There is growing concern among scholars in the fields of education and human behavior, that a focus on rewards and incentives may do more harm than good when teaching for long term results. According to Alfie Kohn, rewards and incentives only produce temporary compliance and is a form of “control through seduction” (Kohn 1996, 33). Rewards and incentives cause the child to produce the desired results, but when the rewards are gone so is the desire to continue the desired behavior. The long term result is that the child is not changed as a result of the reward or incentive (Kohn 1996, 35). May agrees with Kohn and says that incentives and rewards are effective for the short-term but not for “long-term life change” (May 2006, 151). The goal of Christian education is a changed life and rewards and incentives; bribes as described by Kohn, will not cause this to happen in children. Kohn recommends doing away with incentives and rewards with children in the classroom (Kohn 1996, 34-36).

**Propagation of AWANA.** Carlson and Crupper believe that the Instructional model (a title they prefer to Instructional-Analytic Model) is more than a particular program. In response to statements made by critics that this model is about propagation of AWANA Club curriculum, the authors are clear to note that there are various programs that function from a philosophy based on this model (Carlson 2007a). “Pioneer Clubs, Child Evangelism Fellowship, Bible Centered Ministries, [and] most Sunday school publishers have held to an instructional model (hence, the “school” idea). The reflective and dynamic models are recent and rare” (a reference to the Contemplative-Reflective and Media-Drive Active-Engagement Models) (Carlson 2007a). Caravan and Quizzing programs in the Church of the Nazarene would also function from a philosophy based on this model.

**Appeal to certain learning styles.** It appears that each model may appeal to particular learning styles among children. Graves notes that this approach to spiritual formation tends to appeal to children who are most comfortable learning in a classroom environment and those that do not learn well in a formal classroom environment tend to be left behind (Graves 2006, 154-55). Children who do not do well in school are likely find this approach to ministry overwhelming and defeating. This observation begs the question: Is a formal classroom setting the best environment for helping children to grow in their walk with God. If Steinaker and Bell’s Taxonomy of Learning Outcomes is accurate then only the lowest levels of learning are possible in this environment which means that children can learn the information but it may not be applied to their lives. The ultimate goal is to help children apply the truth of Scripture to their lives so they can have

an intimate relationship with God. Downs concludes that “the classroom is not a very effective context for touching lives in deep ways” (Downs 1994, 38).

### **Pragmatic-Participatory Model**

The Pragmatic-Participatory Model is the quadrant that results from the vertical pole of cognitive reasoning (thinking) and the horizontal pole of active participation (doing) (Figure 7). Trisha Graves, Pastor of Children’s Ministry at Mariners

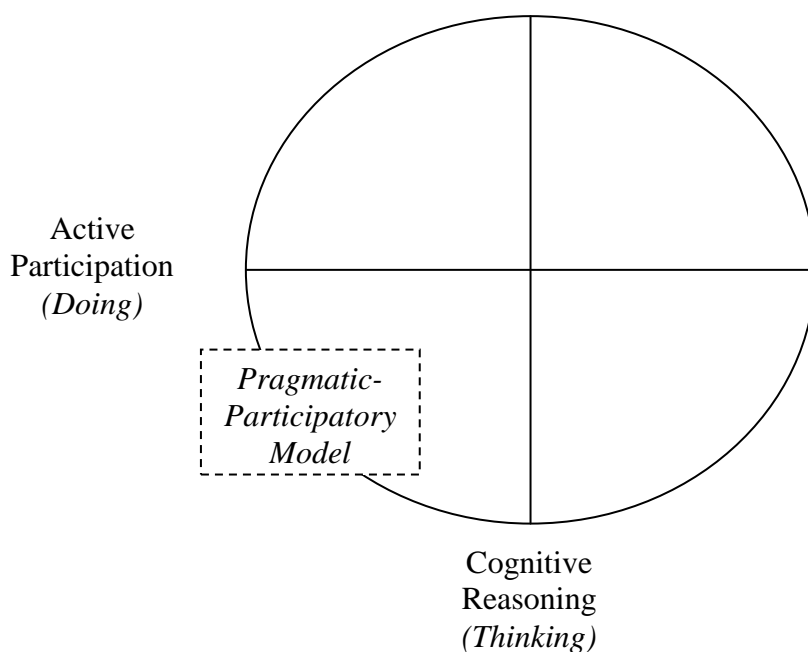


Figure 7. Pragmatic-participatory model

Church in Irvine, California, wrote the chapter on the Pragmatic-Participatory Model in *Perspectives on Children’s Spiritual Formation* edited by Michael Anthony (Graves 2006, 165-223). In describing the model she writes, “The Pragmatic-Participatory Model is a ministry model that is dependent on a child’s thought process that is formed through



active participatory learning. This model is known for engaging the children in learning while using a variety of different methods to teach them with practical and relevant application” (Graves 2006, 165). Graves notes that approaches to ministry that fit in this model are multifaceted, often including “choreographed singing, dramatic presentations of Bible stories, application-oriented games and discussions” (Graves 2006, 166). “The goals of this model are for children to discover and learn who God is, make a personal decision to accept him as their Lord and Savior, and continue to grow and walk by the Holy Spirit as they mature in their faith” (Graves 2006, 166).

### ***Curriculum***

Curriculum that is used in this model is designed to engage children intellectually and to encourage them to apply the learned biblical concepts to their everyday lives. Examples of this curriculum include, but are not limited to, Willow Creek’s Promiseland Curriculum (Children’s ministry 2007), Groups’ Hands-On Curriculum (Group 2007), and 252 Basics, a virtue-drive curriculum produced by the reThink Group (Rethink 2007). Teaching of the lesson in this model includes both large-group and small-group gatherings and includes a variety of teaching methods which often include “video, references to pop culture, games, and appealing worship music” (Graves 2006, 166).

### ***Role of Scripture***

A key phrase in the process of making Scripture applicable to children is “age appropriate and culturally relevant” (Graves 2006, 171). It is important to present Scripture in a way that can be understood by children while at the same time helping to

make it applicable in their daily lives. A high regard is placed on children's ability to hear, understand, and respond to Scripture and, therefore, the reading of Scripture to children is "one of the most basic methods to assist the spiritual formation of children" (Graves 2006, 171). Unlike the Instructional-Analytic Model which is apt to present an opportunity for a child to accept Christ as Savior on a regular basis, the Pragmatic-Participatory Model provides opportunity for a response at strategic times throughout the year or as God prompts (Graves 2006, 177-78). This approach results in the need to save difficult to understand Scripture for a later date to be taught when cognitive ability makes comprehension more successful (Graves 2006, 171).

***Concerns Regarding the Pragmatic-Participatory Model and Response***

In their critique of the Pragmatic-Participatory model, the authors of the other three models being studied are quite complementary and support many of the concepts described within this model. May notes that this model "might possibly be the most common approach used for the church education that takes place on Sunday mornings...[and] this model is time-tested" (May 2006, 206). She also adds that she has used this model for many years of ministry to children, but she believes it is important to add contemplative-reflective activities in order to make it most effective (May 2006, 212). Carlson and Crupper note that much of the theology and philosophy found in the Pragmatic-Participatory model can also be found in the Instructional-Analytic model (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 212-13). Overall, it appears that the majority of the authors are somewhat comfortable with this traditional approach, but along with their support several concerns are expressed.

**Concerns expressed by May.** May expresses three concerns about the Pragmatic-Participatory model as described by Graves. May recognizes that “fun” seems to be an important part of this model and expresses concern that “fun” may be placed at a higher level of value than making experiences “meaningful.” She notes that children are responsive to meaningful learning experiences that may not necessarily be considered fun but are important in contributing to spiritual nurture (May 2006, 209).

Graves notes that in the Pragmatic-Participatory model the teacher is responsible for applying the text for the children. May recognizes the importance of application of the text, but believes that the children are capable of making application themselves if given the chance. When the teacher makes the application for the children it becomes generalized, but when children make application themselves they are able to make detailed and specific application. May believes that children can be trusted with the text if the story is presented in a meaningful way (May 2006, 209).

One focus of this model is an emphasis on topical lessons. May expresses concern that a focus on topical lessons and not on the biblical stories themselves likely results in a loss of the meta-narrative. The overarching story of God’s word that begins with creation and continues through the Revelation is often lost when the focus is on topics (May 2006, 211). Scripture often becomes a series of moral lessons when the meta-narrative is lost.

**Concerns expressed by Carlson and Crupper.** Graves writes that opportunities for salvation decisions are strategically planned several times throughout the year (Graves 2006, 177-78). Carlson and Crupper express concern that curricula such as Promiseland present the gospel message only three times a year. While they believe

the gospel should not be pushed on children, they also believe that the opportunity to respond to a salvation message should be made available to children more than a few times a year (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 216).

The most serious issue that Carlson and Crupper have with the Pragmatic-Participatory model is that “it’s oriented toward a large church staff and context” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 217). Carlson and Crupper rightly note that the majority of churches are considered small churches which have few children and limited resources. They propose that a team-teaching approach be used with this model in order to make it practical for the smaller church (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 117).

**Concerns expressed by Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper.** There are many similarities between the Pragmatic-Participatory model, as described by Graves, and the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model. Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper acknowledge these similarities and note that the Pragmatic-Participatory model has evolved out of the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 222). While the Pragmatic-Participatory model may use terms that represent characteristics found in Media-Driven Active-Engagement model, it seems unlikely that the prior model evolved out of the later model since the prior model has existed longer than the later. These authors believe that the goals of the Pragmatic-Participatory model, which include a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and building relationships with other children and adults, are the same as those of the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model but are accomplished more naturally in this later model. They also believe that Graves identifies as unique, several issues that in actuality are similar to those of other models (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 223).

### Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model

The Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model is the quadrant that results from the vertical pole of active expression (feeling) and the horizontal pole of active participation (doing) (Figure 8). Tim Ellis, executive producer of KIDMO and Lil' K productions; Bill Baumgart, president of Orbit Church; and Greg Carper, children's pastor at Carmel Presbyterian Church collaborated to write the chapter on the Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation* edited by Michael Anthony (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 225-77). In describing

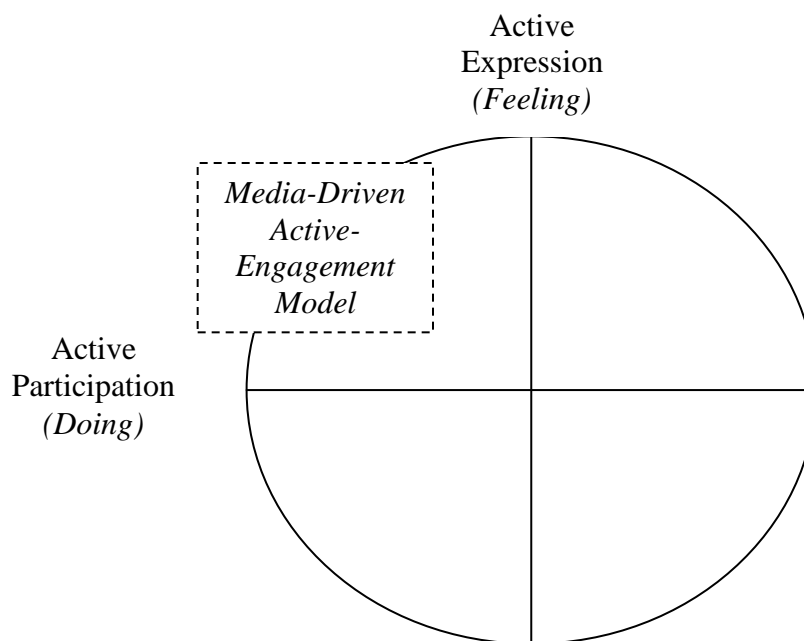


Figure 8. Media-driven active-engagement model

the newest of the four models they write, "The Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model uses technology and interactive media to emphasize discovery-based and cooperative learning. . . . Rather than relying solely on lecture, which appeals to only the analytic

learner, the Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model employs a variety of methods in its instructional design to facilitate and maximize learning for all learners” (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 225). Multimedia is used to provide a quality program that engages children and allows for relationship building between leaders and children. The four major outcomes of this approach are as follows:

1. Conceptual understanding of the lesson
2. An introduction to teamwork and collaborative learning
3. Deeper retention and integration of a biblical worldview into daily living
4. Ability to engage in independent learning on a daily basis. (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 225-26)

Glaringly absent from the major outcomes of this approach is a focus on conversion.

While the four major outcomes are worthy goals, the ultimate purpose of any ministry to children must include an opportunity for them to enter into a relationship with God.

Though not mentioned within the chapter on the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model, Johnny Rogers, host of KIDMO, notes in a workshop at the Children’s Pastors’ Conference that the purpose of the small group time is to allow children to make personal decisions. This need for small groups is recognition that personal “heart-to-heart” contact with the children is necessary and is not accomplished in the “media-driven” portion of this model (Rogers 2008).

### ***Cultural Focus***

For those who subscribe to the Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model understanding the culture in which today’s child lives and responding to that culture is of utmost importance. Often labeled Generation M, or the Media Generation, today’s child is bombarded by, and immersed in, media (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 228). For today’s child media includes “online gaming, music, instant messaging, blogs, Xbox,

PlayStation, portable handheld games, and computer-based interactive games” (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 228). This approach to ministry recognizes that media, along with parents, is the greatest agent of influence among children in American culture today and chooses to take advantage of this reality (Barna 2003, 58). A program such as KIDMO uses the appeals of the culture in which today’s children live and uses its influence to spiritually form children. Cultural relevance is a key to this model, but the authors are quick to point out that any model or approach to ministry must be analyzed in light of Scripture (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 230). While no specific reference to multimedia is made in Scripture, it is noted that in Scripture ministry is always culturally conditioned and that God revealed himself through a variety of multimedia mediums; written and spoken word, signs and wonders, smells and tastes, and touch and movement (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 233).

### ***Relationship Building***

The building of relationships is a critical component of the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model and is achieved by releasing teachers from the responsibility of preparing lessons and freeing them to focus their attention on children. The interactive multimedia involves engagement of children as they talk-back to characters on the screen and participate through a variety of vocal responses, motions, and hand gestures. The presentation of the lesson through video or DVD allows leaders to focus on relationships with children as they interact in small-group discussions, prayer time and competition. Their investment of time during the week includes “prayer time, phone calling, note writing, e-mailing, and personal visits” rather than spending time preparing a lesson (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 245-47).

***Concerns Regarding the Media-Driven  
Active-Engagement Model and Response***

While it is not surprising that in most cases proponents of a particular model are most critical of models on opposite sides of Anthony's typology, strong opposition to the approach of the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model have been presented by leaders of the Contemplative-Reflective and Instructional-Analytic models. It is also not surprising that a rather new model such as the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model would receive initial concerns by those of more traditional approaches.

While many of the model leaders see value in media and technology, many are concerned about making media the driving force for the spiritual nurture of children. May expresses her concern that this model appears to discount the ability of children. "This model appears to lack an awareness of children's ability to encounter God and experience his presence and the inherent attraction that children have to awe, wonder, reverence, and mystery. . . . There is an insidious assumption that children are no longer capable of deep thinking and challenging, reflective engagement" (May 2006, 262-63). Carson and Crupper have similar concerns when they note that children do need to be active, but they also need time of quiet before God. Variety in learning methods is important and that includes quiet times (Carson and Crupper 2006, 268 and 270). They also express a significant concern when they ask, "Are we developing in our children a dependency on media that is almost enslaving instead of helping? It is possible that we want to help our kids, but in reality we are introducing them to the inability to distinguish truth from falsehood" (Carson and Crupper 2006, 270). May notes that in Neil Postman's book *The Disappearance of Childhood* he identifies several norms of society that parents must be reject for the sake of their children (May 2006, 265). Postman feels that perhaps



the greatest area of concern is the impact that media has in shaping children (Postman 1982, 153). While Postman's concern is presented to encourage parents to limit the impact of secular media on their children, supporters of this model might agree in principle with Postman and use his concern as a reason for using media in a positive light—it shapes children.

Carlson and Crupper are impressed by the fresh approach and creative techniques of teaching children proposed by this model, but they do not believe it to be a fully developed model (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 266). The model “proposes methods but not a methodology...it does not have a comprehensive understanding of the issues of spiritual formation or of a philosophy of Christian education” (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 266).

**Whatever is helpful is biblical.** The authors present three principles that drive this model; ministry is culturally conditioned, God reveals Himself in multimedia, and whatever is helpful is biblical (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 231-38). May expresses concern about the third principle; whatever is helpful is biblical. “This principle presents pragmatism as the highest value” (May 2006, 263). May's argument is that pragmatism leads to doing whatever works which has the potential to ultimately replace our dependency on God and the work of the Holy Spirit (May 2006, 263). “I cannot accept that whatever is helpful is biblical, but I can accept whatever is biblical is helpful—helpful for knowing our God and his story” (May 2006, 263). Carlson and Crupper express similar concerns when they comment that just because something like multimedia is appealing to children does not necessarily make it helpful or beneficial (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 269).

While Graves agrees in theory with the idea that whatever is helpful is biblical, she does have concern that this approach goes too far in its willingness to “change the story to make it a contemporary adaptation.” The biblical text at times may need to be modernized, but changing the story is taking this freedom too far (Graves 2006, 272).

**Styles of learning.** While this model addresses the concern that not all children are analytic learners, perhaps it is also guilty of only reaching children with particular learning styles (Graves 2006, 274). Graves expresses concern that this approach may lose its ability to engage children week after week as the methods become dull or mundane (Graves 2006, 274-75). She also expresses concern that “elaborate video production can hinder a child’s ability to receive and process information” (Graves 2006, 273). Is it possible that the children can be over stimulated and therefore leaders fail at communicating the spiritual message? Graves believes this to be the case.

### ***Spiritual Disciplines and Relationship to Four Milestones***

Faith is the ultimate goal of teaching (Stonehouse 1988, 25). How this faith is measured is the question at hand. Many attempts have been made to measure spirituality in children with poor results. For one, there are ethical barriers that must be confronted and overcome whenever children are the subject of research. Another contributor to the poor results of research is that children, who have limited vocabulary, have difficulty communicating and describing what is happening within them. It is for these reasons that David Elkind has chosen to use creative means for surveying children that include picture drawing and verbal explanations to direct questions such as “What does God look like” and “Does God talk to you when you pray” (Elkind [1986?]). David Heller took a similar

approach through the use of drawings, story telling, play scenarios, and letters to God to identify children's religious understanding (Heller 1986, 3). While Elkind's and Heller's approaches have resulted in insight that has contributed to an understanding of how children think about God and how that understanding is impacted by cognitive development, it has only scratched the surface in explaining how children develop spiritually. The approach taken in this research is to look at four key milestones in the lives of children that are outwardly expressed. Some correlation of these outward expressions can be made to spiritual disciplines.

The study of the outward expressions of children is proposed as an approach to better understand the spiritual development of children. While the purpose of this study is not to discover a fool-proof system for measuring children's spiritual development, Morgenthaler is correct in noting that "the development of spirituality is difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty because one is limited to outward observation of an internal phenomenon" (Morgenthaler 1999, 6). By using outward expressions as representative of potential inward spiritual development, a relationship of these expressions to ministry praxis will be available for analysis.

### **Measuring Outward Expressions**

What is taught to children and how we worship, in the context of Christian faith, should impact what they believe and what they believe should govern how they live. This fifth-century concept is expressed in part in the Latin phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (literally, law of praying, law of believing) and has been used in a Roman Catholic context as liturgy proving or validating matters of doctrine (Wainwright 1980, 251 and 517). Geoffrey Wainwright, a Methodist theologian and professor of systematic

theology, proposes that in this phrase is found interplay between worship (defined as rituals and practices of the community) and doctrine (Wainwright 1980, 219).

Wainwright notes that when Protestants understand doctrine as primary over worship the result is what we believe informing how we worship (Wainwright 1980, 251). A logical addition to this phrase has been proposed by some scholars so that the Latin phrase reads, *lex orandi, lex credenda, lex vivendi* (literally, law of praying, law of believing, law of living), which demonstrates the theological concept that how we worship and what we believe determines how we live (Fournier 2005). When understood in its completeness, not only does what we believe impact how we worship, but our worship impacts what we believe. The result of a cyclical view of relationship between doctrine and worship is a life lived that is consistent with both. This ancient church concept gives credence to the approach used in this research project. As beliefs of the church are taught to children and these beliefs impact the rituals and practices of the church community, the result should be children who practice these truths in their daily lives. By looking at these outward expressions of children, a glimpse of what the children believe is possible. It could be said, “How we worship reflects what we believe and determines how we live” (Fournier 2005).

These outward expressions provide a glimpse into the hearts of children.

Downs rightly recognizes that outward expressions do not necessarily demonstrate Christian maturity because inward motives for the outward expressions are often ignored, but he also acknowledges that “patterns of reinforcement do shape attitudes [and] because children are whole beings, the shaping of behaviors will also shape attitudes” (Downs 1994, 143). While it is possible to have outward signs without any inward change, and

even possible to have inward change without outward signs, it seems, due to limitations of children that have already been discussed, the best way of measuring what is happening inwardly in the life of a child is to look at what is happening outwardly. This approach to understanding what is taking place within a child is supported by the Social-learning theory that proposes that some things, such as faith, are more “caught” than “taught” and the demonstration of what is “caught” is expressed outwardly as children observe and imitate the behavior of others (Downs 1994, 156-58).

### **Spiritual Disciplines**

Spiritual disciplines are outward expressions that represent what is taking place in the heart of the individual. In his classic book *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster proposes that through the practice of spiritual disciplines; not in a ritualistic or legalistic way, but in a way that brings liberation, the door is open “to allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us” (Foster 1998, 7-11). Transformation is the goal of helping children to grow spiritually. The four spiritual milestones that have been chosen for this research project are somewhat unique to children, but are consistent with Foster’s understanding that the purpose of spiritual disciplines is to make us available to God for transformation.

### ***Confession of Faith: Conversion***

An understanding of the process of conversion seems to be somewhat dependent upon the model by which one functions and one’s theological view. The Instructional-Analytic (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 135) and Pragmatic-Participatory (Graves 2006, 177-79 ) models interpret conversion as the one-time act of asking Jesus to

forgive one's sins and to come into one's heart. The focus of ministry within these models is to provide opportunities, on a scheduled or regular basis, for children to make a profession of faith. These opportunities are provided in Sunday school, children's church, Wednesday night programs, and most any time the children gather together. In some traditions, following a confession of faith, baptism soon follows.

The Contemplative-Reflective model allows for a growing into faith that may or may not necessarily require an identifiable single moment of conversion (May 2006, 74). The understanding of conversion as a progressive growing into faith is identified by Gordon Smith as occurring in what he refers to as "second-generation" Christians. Smith believes that children of Christians who are raised in families where the faith is taught consistently are likely to "grow up in the faith" (Smith 2001, 207). This growing up in the faith may involve loving God and serving Him at an age well before the understanding for a need for confession of sin. Smith acknowledges that eventually the faith of the parents must become the faith of the child, but he also notes that "to take children seriously we need to take seriously the process, structures and means by which they come to adult faith" (Smith 2001, 208). The supporter of the "second-generation" Christian concept would say that the relationship developed with Christ at a young age is as significant as a later moment of confession.

The Media-Driven Active-Engagement model does not address the issue of conversion within its chapter in Anthony's book and as a result is difficult to identify their perspective of conversion. An assumption can be made based on personal engagement with leaders of the model and the history from which this model is

developed that they would support a similar belief as the Instructional-Analytic and Pragmatic-Participatory models.

Though there may be differences in the understanding of conversion within the four models of ministry, the leaders of these models agree that there comes a point in a child's life that he/she is held accountable before God for personal sin. There is also agreement that this time varies for individual children and is closely linked to their cognitive development. However one identifies conversion, the goal of Christian education of children within the Church of the Nazarene is to lead children into a personal relationship with Christ that grows as they continue to walk with Christ. It is for this reason that the first milestone that was used to measure spiritual development of children is conversion.

### ***Believer Baptism or Confirmation***

Believer baptism is an act that has roots that go back to the early church and occurs subsequent to a commitment to Christ. In some churches the age of the child being baptized is insignificant as long as the child has made a profession of faith. In other churches, children must reach a particular age before they are allowed to be baptized. Willow Creek Community Church believes that a child must have the cognitive ability to understand the significance of baptism and therefore requires that a child must be at least 12 years old to be baptized (Graves 2006, 181).

In some churches, children are baptized as infants in recognition of God's prevenient grace at work in their lives. This act goes back to the oldest traditions of Christendom (Staples 1991, 200). As these baptized children grow in their relationship with God, they are given training and eventual opportunity to participate in confirmation

where they confirm their infant baptism. In other churches, children are dedicated to the Lord as parents and congregation express their intention to raise the child in the training of the Lord in the hope that they will choose to follow God at a later time in their lives and then be baptized (Staples 1991, 199).

For the purpose of this study, acknowledging that the Church of the Nazarene recognizes infant baptism followed by subsequent confirmation and infant dedication followed by subsequent believer baptism (Manual 2005, 234-241), the focus of this milestone was on the commitment that the child has made to follow Christ. Therefore, believer baptism or confirmation of infant baptism will qualify as meeting this milestone.

### ***Evangelism***

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) is God's call to the church to share his love with the world. Children play an important role in this call, not only as those who need to hear the message of redemption, but also as those who deliver it. Children in the church are to be evangelized, but for the purpose of this study the third milestone, evangelism, will focus on children evangelizing children. It is the belief of the researcher that children are not only capable of a real, intimate relationship with God, but that they are also called and capable of sharing their love for God with others. Barna notes that the church is responsible to not only lead children into a personal relationship with God, but they are to challenge children to share that love with their friends (Barna 2003, 72). Measuring evangelism by asking children if they have shared Jesus with their friends would be a difficult endeavor so for the purpose of this study, evangelism was identified as occurring when a child who invites another child to church to hear the Good News.



*Service*

The church generally understands the concept of serving children, but many do not recognize the importance of teaching children to serve others. Barna notes that it is unhealthy for Christians to be served without serving others. He also expresses the importance of helping children build habits of serving others (Barna 2003, 74). Not only does this help them be more productive adults, but more importantly it helps them to grow in their relationship with God. The fourth milestone in this research was children serving others. This may occur in the church or outside the church.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLIGICAL DESIGN

In the midst of a desire among children's pastors to help children grow in their walk with Christ, there is confusion about what exactly it means to help children grow spiritually and how to measure outcomes. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the children's ministry praxis in Nazarene churches and four significant spiritual milestones in the lives of Nazarene children. The following are the research questions that were addressed in this research:

1. What model(s) of children's ministry do Nazarene children's pastors use in their ministry praxis?
2. What are the differences between each ministry model and the attendance growth rate among children?
3. What are the differences between each ministry model and the conversion rate among children?
4. What are the differences between each ministry model and the baptism rate among children?
5. What are the differences between each ministry model and the evangelism rate among children (children bringing their friends to church with them)?
6. What are the differences between each ministry model and the service rate among children?

### **Research Design Overview**

The research design used a mixed methods approach to determine the relationship between the children's ministry praxis in Nazarene churches and four significant spiritual milestones in the lives of Nazarene children. Three hundred twelve Nazarene children's pastors were surveyed using the Children's Spiritual Development Survey, which was designed for the present study. All three hundred twelve Nazarene children's pastors had valid email addresses; therefore, the survey was delivered via the use of the internet. In addition to the survey, two focus groups of six to eight persons each who completed the survey were interviewed to glean descriptive information about their interpretation of the data.

### **Population**

The population of the current study included full-time and part-time paid, male and female, Nazarene children's pastors in the United States who are identified through the Nazarene Children's Pastors Database as children's pastors.

### **Sample**

For the purposes of the present study, and due to the limited number of children's pastors that make up the population, the population and sample was one and the same.

### **Delimitations**

The study was delimited to children's pastors in the Church of the Nazarene in the United States. This is to say that only Nazarene children's pastors were included in the survey.

### **Limitations of Generalization**

The results of this study were not generalized to churches outside of the Church of the Nazarene denomination. Neither were the findings necessarily generalized to Nazarene churches that do not employ full-time or part-time children's pastors. Neither were the findings necessarily generalized to any churches, Nazarene or otherwise, outside of the United States.

### **Research Method**

The proposed study used a mixed methods approach to determine the relationship between ministry praxis, as identified through four ministry models, and spiritual development milestones, as identified through four key outward expressions. The use of a mixed method approach was endorsed by Boyatzis and Newman and allows for research to be conducted and data to be collected and analyzed at multiple levels, thereby providing the opportunity for thorough conclusions (Boyatzis and Newman 2004, 166). Creswell notes that the advantage of a mixed method approach that involves a sequential process is a detailed exploration of the data (Creswell 2003, 17).

The mixed method approach began with the quantitative process which included research questions and statements that were presented in the form of a survey, designed by the researcher, which was used to gather data for analysis (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 261). The purpose of the survey instrument was to study the relationship between four models of ministry praxis, as proposed by Michael Anthony, and four key outward expressions of children's spiritual development. The qualitative process involved the assembling of two focus groups of six to eight persons who completed the survey and identified their willingness to be interviewed. The purpose of the two focus

groups was to gather descriptive information in response to the findings of the quantitative data.

### ***Development of the Quantitative Instrument***

The survey instrument was divided into three sections; biographical information, information about spiritual milestones, and information about ministry model preferences. The first two sections included a series of questions that were answered by Nazarene children's pastors followed by twenty-four "agree/disagree" statements that were answered on a Likert scale. The responses that were provided to these questions and statements provided data for analysis that ultimately led to answering the research questions.

#### **Part I: Biographical Information**

Part I of the survey instrument posed a series of questions for the purpose of gathering biographical information of both the children's pastor and the local church. The biographical information was of a general nature and included such questions as age, gender, education level, location of the church, title, denomination, and attendance figures. Careful attention was given so the questions did not ask for personal information that would raise ethical concerns. The data gathered from the biographical information provided the opportunity to expand the depth of analysis.

#### **Part II: Four Spiritual Milestones**

Part II of the survey instrument asked four questions that related directly to the four spiritual milestones that were identified as significant events in the lives of children who are growing spiritually. These questions sought to discover the number of children

that have participated in each of the four spiritual milestones in the past year. Definitions of each of the four spiritual milestones can be found in Chapter 1 and a full description of each can be found in Chapter 2. The four milestones are conversion, baptism, evangelism, and service.

### **Part III: Four Ministry Models**

Part III of the survey instrument presented twenty-four ministry praxis statements for evaluation. Children's pastors were asked to rate each statement for its applicability to their particular ministry. The Likert scale was used for responses as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = somewhat agree, 5 = agree, and 6 = strongly agree. The twenty-four statements represented uniqueness found in each of the four ministry models proposed in Chapter 2. Six statements of uniqueness from each of the four ministry models were randomly ordered in this section of the survey instrument.

Scores were tallied based on responses to each of the twenty-four statements and each children's pastor was assigned to his/her preferred ministry model based on the model with the highest score. A reproduction of Anthony's model (Figure 9) and a summary of each of the ministry models as presented in Anthony's Children's Spiritual Formation Model will follow.

#### ***Contemplative-Reflective Model***

The Contemplative-Reflective Model is the quadrant that results from the vertical pole of active expression (feeling) and the horizontal pole of reflective observation (watching). Scottie May, Associate Professor of Educational Ministries at

Wheaton College, co-author of *Children Matter*, contributor to *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Application*, and practitioner and advocate of what she calls the Reflective Encounter Model wrote the chapter on the Contemplative-Reflective Model in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation* edited by Michael Anthony (May 2006, 45-102). In describing the model May writes, "The aim...[is] to

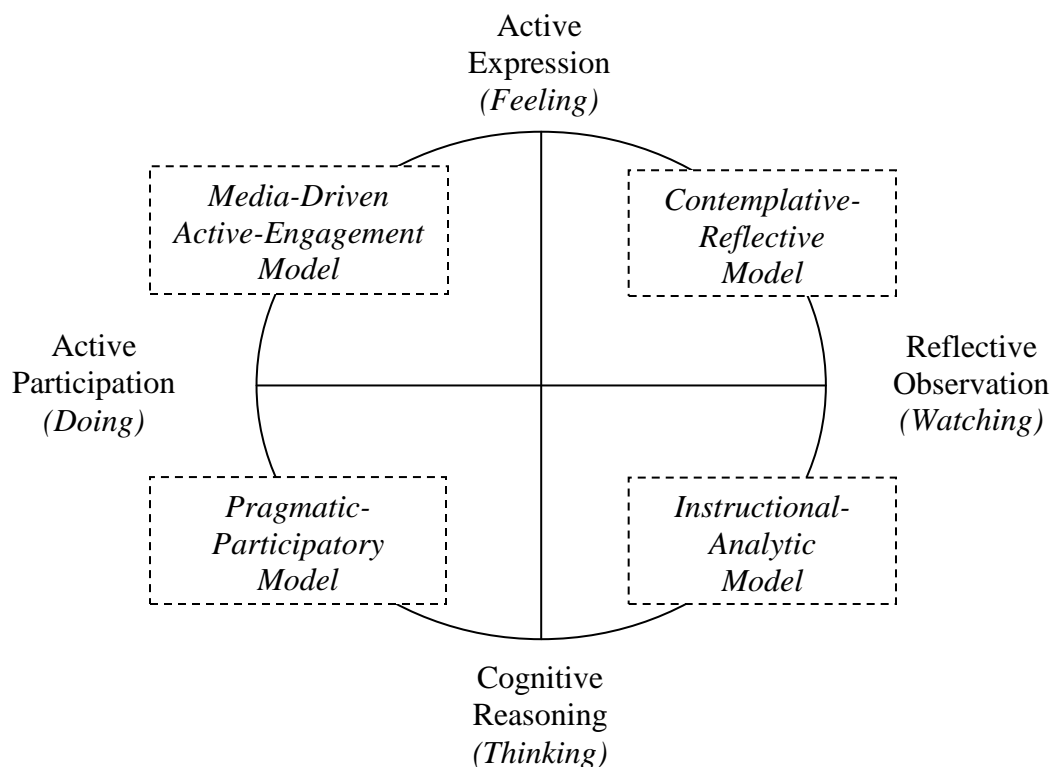


Figure 9. Anthony's children's spiritual formation model

help children encounter God in ways that result in a sense of awe and wonder, to help them consider things of God with continued attention. The model seeks to assist them in finding the quiet place within themselves—a place that all children have—where they can sense the presence of God and hear his voice" (May 2006, 46). The focus of the model is

to provide a quiet environment that is centered around the gentle telling of the biblical story that includes an opportunity for the child to reflect on the story through a variety of activities that helps the child to know who God is. Characteristics of this model include: a special space that communicates reverence, elimination of frills and fluff, a slow pace, quietness, worship, ritual, repetition, experience through active learning, liturgy, and statements of wonder (May 2006, 70). This model of ministry has been referred to by some as a Christian education approach to Montessori approach to teaching.

### ***Instructional-Analytic Model***

The Instructional-Analytic Model is the quadrant that results from the vertical pole of cognitive reasoning (thinking) and the horizontal pole of reflective observation (watching). Gregory Carlson, Global Training Director and Director of Rorheim Institute, AWANA Clubs International; and John K. Crupper, Director of Rorheim Institute Development, AWANA Clubs International, wrote the chapter on the Instructional-Analytic Model in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation* edited by Michael Anthony (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 103-163). In describing the model they wrote, "This [model] is defined as God working through the instruction of his Word and human agency whereby he creates an environment where the young person comes to know Jesus at an appropriate age and then grows in that relationship. This environment features four dimensions: Scripture memory, biblical instruction, a graduated award system, and a systematic structure for training" (Carlson and Crupper 2006, 104). Carlson adds that spiritual formation of children is "the developmental learning of the foundational truths of Christ so that a child/youth may begin a relationship with Christ through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit (salvation), and then subsequently grow



in Christ (sanctification)” (Carlson 2007a). Programs that appropriately fit in this ministry model include AWANA, Caravan, and Bible quizzing.

### ***Pragmatic-Participatory Model***

The Pragmatic-Participatory Model is the quadrant that results from the vertical pole of cognitive reasoning (thinking) and the horizontal pole of active participation (doing). Trisha Graves, Pastor of Children’s Ministry at Mariners Church in Irvine, California, wrote the chapter on the Pragmatic-Participatory Model in *Perspectives on Children’s Spiritual Formation* edited by Michael Anthony (Graves 2006, 165-223). In describing the model she writes, “The Pragmatic-Participatory Model is a ministry model that is dependent on a child’s thought process that is formed through active participatory learning. This model is known for engaging the children in learning while using a variety of different methods to teach them with practical and relevant application” (Graves 2006, 165). Graves notes that approaches to ministry that fit in this model are multifaceted, often including “choreographed singing, dramatic presentations of Bible stories, application-oriented games and discussions” (Graves 2006, 166). “The goals of this model are for children to discover and learn who God is, make a personal decision to accept him as their Lord and Savior, and continue to grow and walk by the Holy Spirit as they mature in their faith” (Graves 2006, 166). Programs that appropriately fit in this ministry model include Willow Creek’s Promiseland Curriculum ([www.promiselandonline.com](http://www.promiselandonline.com)), Groups’ Hands-On Curriculum ([www.group.com](http://www.group.com)), and 252 Basics, a virtue-drive curriculum produced by the reThink Group ([www.rethinkgroup.org](http://www.rethinkgroup.org)).

### ***Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model***

The Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model is the quadrant that results from the vertical pole of active expression (feeling) and the horizontal pole of active participation (doing). Tim Ellis, executive producer of KIDMO and Lil' K productions; Bill Baumgart, president of Orbit Church; and Greg Carper, children's pastor at Carmel Presbyterian Church collaborated to write the chapter on the Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model in *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation* edited by Michael Anthony (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 225-77). In describing the newest of the four models they write, "The Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model uses technology and interactive media to emphasize discovery-based and cooperative learning. . . . Rather than relying solely on lecture, which appeals to only the analytic learner, the Media-Driven Active-Engagement Model employs a variety of methods in its instructional design to facilitate and maximize learning for all learners" (Ellis, Baumgart, and Carper 2006, 225). Multimedia is used to provide a quality program that engages children and allows for relationship building between leaders and children.

### **Validation Process**

After the questions were developed they were sent to the authors of each chapter in Anthony's book, *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation*. These authors, who are considered scholars and leaders in each of the methods represented, were asked to read and validate the content of each statement by agreement that the statements accurately represented the uniqueness of the model or to provide modifications to the questions for a more accurate representation (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 98). Upon receiving content validation a pilot study of six non-Nazarene

children's pastors was conducted to provide construct validity. (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 99 and 116).

Upon receiving construct validation of each statement the instrument was given to a statistician who applied Cronbach's alpha to measure the correlation coefficient. This process provided internal consistency reliability (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 98; Meltzoff 1998, 281). These steps strengthened the validity and reliability of the instrument.

### ***Implementation of the Quantitative Instrument***

The surveys were delivered to 312 part-time and full-time, male and female, Nazarene children's pastors in the United States via an online survey using snapsurvey.com following approval from the ethics committee. The responses were recorded through the software reporting system followed by analysis of the data by the researcher.

### ***Qualitative Process***

In the second phase, qualitative interviews with two focus groups of six to eight persons each who completed the survey was conducted to explore their perceptions of the data. The researcher specifically sought descriptive information from each focus group and that interpretation was compared and contrasted with the interpretation of the researcher. The qualitative process added credibility to the research and supplemented the interpretation of the data by the researcher.

### **Research Procedures**

The Children's Spiritual Development Survey was distributed to 312 part-time and full-time, male and female, Nazarene children's pastors. Using a database of registered children's pastors provided by the International Church of the Nazarene headquarters, the researcher sent information explaining the nature of the survey and requested the participation of each children's pastor. The following steps were taken to solicit their participation.

1. On June 9, 2008, an email letter from Lynda Boardman, Director of Children's Ministry for the International Church of the Nazarene, was sent to each children's pastor listed in the Children's Ministry database. The letter explained the potential contribution the dissertation may have in better understanding how the Church of the Nazarene may impact the spiritual development of children. The letter also requested each children's pastor's participation by completing the survey that would be sent to them via email (Appendix 5).
2. Three days later, June 12, 2008, an email letter from the researcher was sent explaining the purpose of the dissertation and what the researcher hoped to discover from the data that would be provided by completion of the survey. The letter included a link to the survey instrument which was available through [snapsurvey.com](http://snapsurvey.com) and administered through the Instructional Technology department at Olivet Nazarene University. The letter also requested that the survey be completed within five days (Appendix 6).
3. One week later, June 19, 2008, a follow up email was sent to all children's pastors who had not completed the survey. [Snapsurvey.com](http://Snapsurvey.com) provided a list of those who had and had not responded, but anonymity of responses by each individual remained confidential (Appendix 7).
4. One week later, June 26, 2008, a follow up email was sent to all children's pastors who had not completed the survey. This email requested an urgent reply (Appendix 8).
5. One week later, beginning July 3, 2008, personal phone calls were made to all children's pastors who had not completed the survey. This process continued for several weeks until approximately 64% of the children's pastors had completed the survey.

The responses to the survey were recorded by [snapsurvey.com](https://snapsurvey.com) and compiled by the Instructional Technology department at Olivet Nazarene University. When the data collection phase of the study was complete, the raw data was sent to the researcher and downloaded to SPSS for statistical analysis. The following statistical procedure were used to analyze the data and answer each of the research questions.

1. Research question #1: Children's pastors were categorized into one of the four models of ministry based on their highest score determined by frequency distribution of their answers to twenty-four statements in Part III of the survey instrument.
2. Research questions #2-6: An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine any difference between the four models of ministry in relation to each spiritual development milestone, as well as the amount of variance within each model of ministry.

### **Summary**

The methodological design was used to determine the relationship between the children's ministry praxis in Nazarene churches and four significant milestones in the lives of Nazarene children. Three hundred twelve full-time and part-time, male and female, Nazarene children's pastors were surveyed using [snapsurvey.com](https://snapsurvey.com). The surveys provided data from the answers to questions and statements about biographical information, four significant spiritual milestones, and four ministry models. The quantitative data was gathered from the surveys and the qualitative data was gathered from the two focus groups. The analysis of the data was used to answer the six research questions posed at the beginning of the chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The findings in this chapter were produced by two methodological approaches described in preceding chapters. The data was collected through the Children's Spiritual Development Survey (CSDS), an online survey instrument that was completed by Church of the Nazarene children's pastors in the United States. Analysis of the data was the result of statistical procedures described in the previous chapter and personal interviews of two focus groups of Church of the Nazarene children's pastors who completed the surveys. This chapter will address the compilation protocol and conclude with an analysis of the findings.

#### **Compilation Protocol**

An email was sent to 312 Nazarene children's pastors, requesting their participation in the CSDS. Snap Survey Software was used to deliver the CSDS and collect the data from the 201 respondents. Snap Survey Software collected the raw data from the responses and provided individual responses, as well as a summation of responses, for each question. The raw data was sent to the researcher and analyzed using SPSS Statistics software. For each of the 24 Likert scale survey statements a mean, mode, and standard deviation was determined followed by a figure that displayed the responses using a bar graph. In addition, research question 1 was answered through

frequency distribution testing, and research questions 2 through 6 were answered through the use of ANOVA testing with the intention of conducting the Sheffé and Tukey HSD post hoc tests; however, these tests were not necessary.

### **Analysis of Findings**

The following pages provide an analysis of the data gathered from the Children's Spiritual Development Survey. Responses to each of the 24 ministry model statements were evaluated and the analysis follows. In addition, interpretation of each research question will be presented through analysis of the data.

#### ***Periods of Quiet Reflection***

Item 1 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to provide periods of quiet reflection for its children. The mean score of 4.24 shows that the responders believed periods of quiet reflection as an intentional part of their ministry is important (Table 1). Those who responded positively to the statement in Item 1 support a philosophical element that is found in the Contemplative-Reflective model.

Table 1. Scores for Item 1

Mean	4.24
Mode	4
Standard Deviation	1.15554

Figure 10 shows that there was significant disagreement about the importance of quiet reflection as a contributor to spiritual growth. Nearly one-quarter (23%) of the

people surveyed disagreed at some level that quiet reflection is important, while more than three quarters (78%) agreed at some level that quiet reflection is important.



Figure 10. Periods of quiet reflection

### *Learning in the Context of Fun Activities*

Item 2 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to focus on learning in the context of fun activities. The mean score of 5.27 and the mode of 6 indicate a very high level of agreement among those surveyed that fun activities are an important element in the spiritual development of children (Table 2). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Pragmatic-Participatory model.



Table 2. Scores for Item 2

Mean	5.27
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	.79984

Figure 11 shows a significantly positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of fun activities as a contributor to spiritual growth. Nearly 9 out of 10 (86%) responded by agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement. Only 3% disagreed at some level with the statement. This indicates that most children's pastors surveyed believe that making the ministry environment a fun place for children is important to successfully helping them grow spiritually.

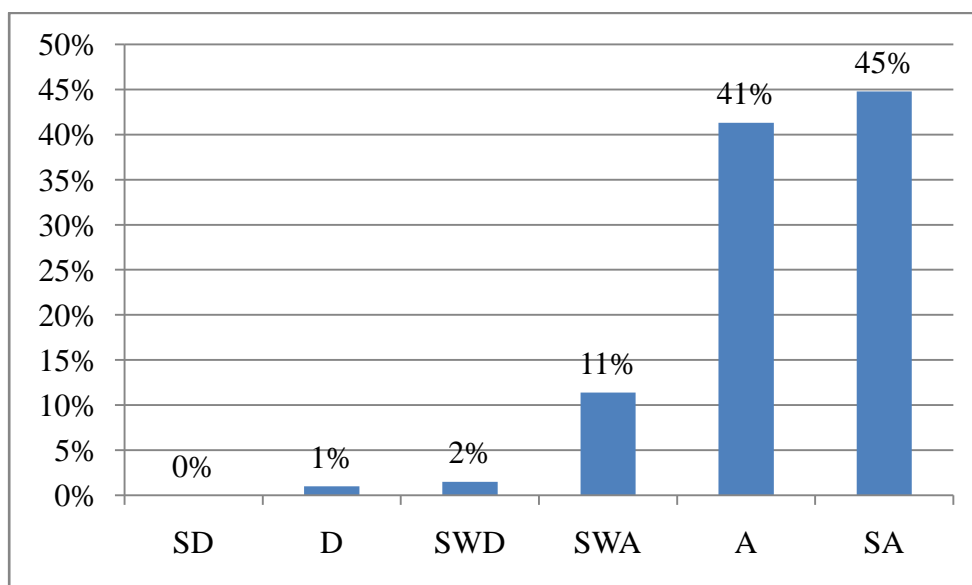


Figure 11. Learning in the context of fun activities

### ***Active Engagement with the Lesson***

Item 3 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to focus on active engagement with the lesson. The mean score of 5.54 and the mode of 6 indicate a very high level of agreement among those surveyed that active engagement with the lesson is an important element in the spiritual development of children (Table 3). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model.

Table 3. Scores for Item 3

Mean	5.54
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	.60017

An overwhelming level of agreement in the significance of active engagement in the lesson is shown in Figure 12. Nearly everyone that was surveyed (97%) responded by agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. Only 1% somewhat disagreed with the statement. This indicates that almost all of the children's pastors surveyed believe that providing lessons that include active engagement on the part of the student to be an extremely important element in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

### ***Awards in Recognition of Meaningful Accomplishments***

Item 4 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include awards in recognition of meaningful accomplishments of children. The mean score of 4.69 indicates a strong level of agreement among those surveyed that providing awards when children have meaningful accomplishments is an important

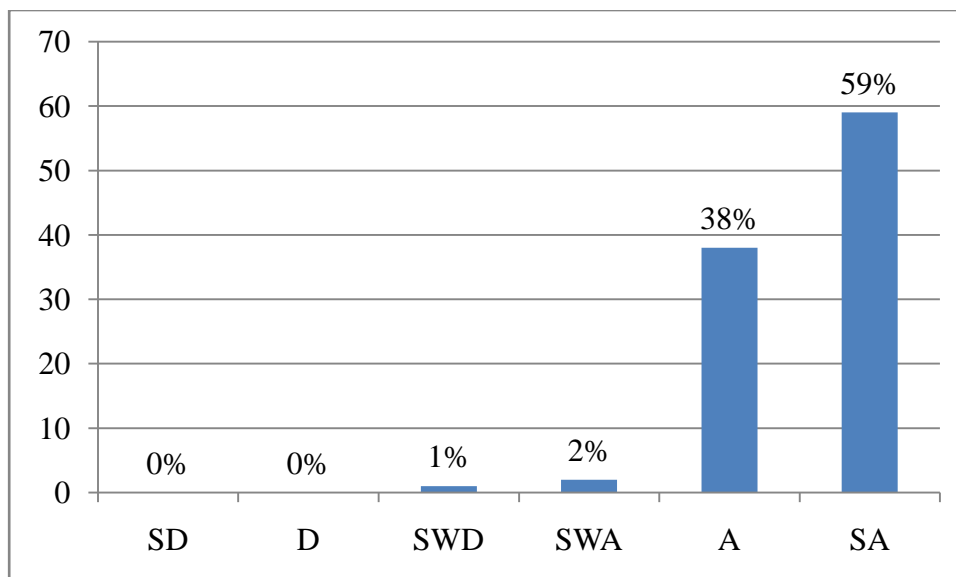


Figure 12. Active engagement with the lesson

element in the spiritual development of children (Table 4). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Instructional-Analytic model.

Table 4. Scores for Item 4

Mean	4.69
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	1.12445

Figure 13 shows a significantly positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of fun activities as a contributor to spiritual growth. Nearly 9 out of 10 (86%) responded by agreeing at some level with the statement. Only 14% disagreed at some level with the statement. This indicates that a majority of children's

pastors surveyed believe that awarding children when they achieve meaningful accomplishments is important to successfully helping them grow spiritually.



Figure 13. Awards in recognition of meaningful accomplishments

### ***Environment Designed to Reflect a Child's Culture***

Item 5 of the CSDDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include an environment that is designed to reflect a child's culture. The mean score of 5.01 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed that providing an environment that is culturally sensitive to children is an important element in the spiritual development of children (Table 5). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model.

Table 5. Scores for Item 5

Mean	5.01
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	.93473

An strong level of agreement in the significance of being culturally relevant is shown in Figure 14. Nearly everyone that was surveyed (94%) responded by agreeing at some level with the statement. Only 6% somewhat disagreed or disagreed with the statement. This indicates that almost all of the children's pastors surveyed believe that designing a ministry with an environment that reflects a child's culture is an extremely important element in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

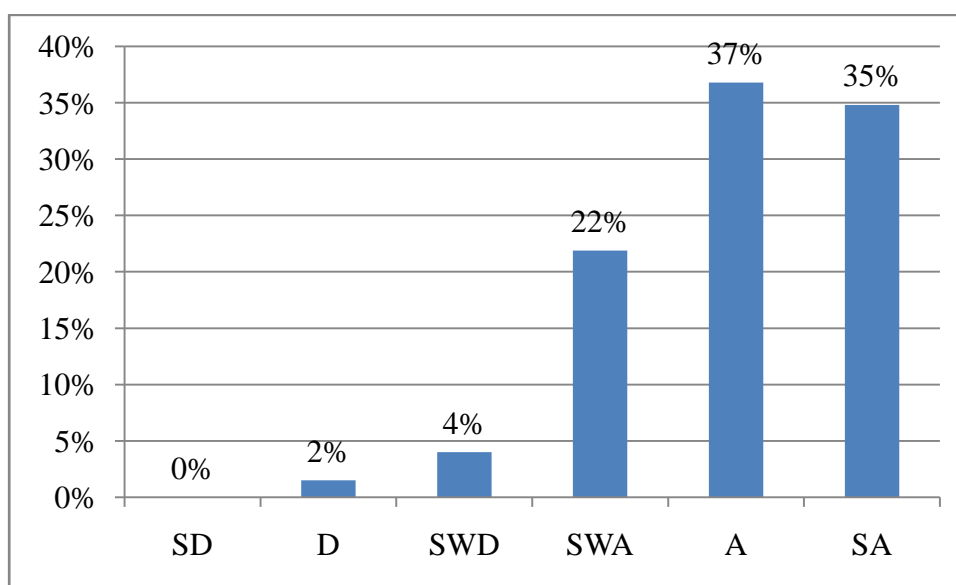


Figure 14. Environment designed to reflect a child's culture

***Simplified Lesson Preparation for Focus on Relationships***

Item 6 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to simplify lesson preparation so leaders may focus on relationships with students. The mean score of 4.69 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed that providing lessons that require little preparation so time can be spent building relationships with children is an important element in the spiritual development of children (Table 6). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model.

Table 6. Scores for Item 6

Mean	4.69
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	1.04942

Figure 15 shows a significantly positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of simplifying lesson preparation so leaders may focus on relationships with children. Nine out of 10 (90%) responded by agreeing at some level with the statement. Only 1 out of 10 (10%) disagreed at some level with the statement. This indicates that a significant majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that freeing teachers of preparation time and allowing them opportunity to focus on relationships with children is important to successfully helping them grow spiritually.



Figure 15. Simplified lesson preparation for focus on relationships

### *Moments of Quiet Contemplation Guided by Adults*

Item 7 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include moments of quiet contemplation that is adult guided. The mean score of 4.19 and a mode of 4 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed that providing adult guided quiet moments of contemplation is an important element in the spiritual development of children (Table 7). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Contemplative-Reflective model.

Table 7. Scores for Item 7

Mean	4.19
Mode	4
Standard Deviation	1.11219

Figure 16 shows a positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of providing quiet reflective moments that are guided by adults. While more than three-quarters (77%) responded by agreeing at some level with the statement, only 10% strongly agreed with the statement. Nearly one-quarter (23%) disagreed at some level with the statement, with 14% somewhat disagreeing. While there seems to be some disagreement about the importance of providing moments of quiet contemplation that is guided by adults, the majority of children's pastors surveyed believe it is important to successfully helping children grow spiritually.

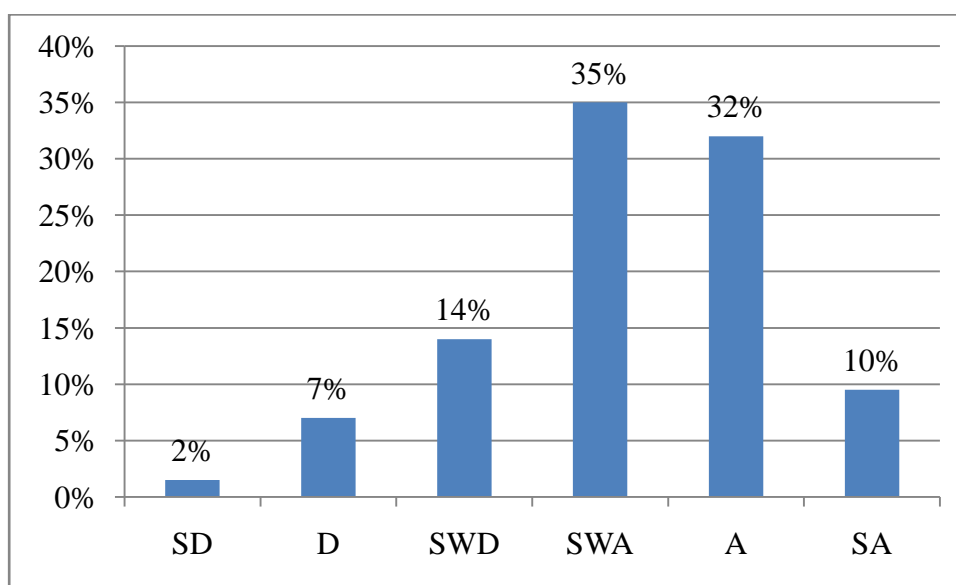


Figure 16. Moments of quiet contemplation guided by adults

### *Gospel Presentations at Strategic Times*

Item 8 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include the presentation of the gospel for a salvation response at strategic



times throughout the year, or as the Holy Spirit prompts, rather than every Sunday. The mean score of 5.29 and a mode of 6 indicate a very strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 8). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Pragmatic-Participatory model.

Table 8. Scores for Item 8

Mean	5.29
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	.91565

Figure 17 shows an overwhelmingly positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of providing the presentation of the gospel at strategic times during the year. Nearly all of the respondents (94%) agreed at some level with the statement, while 50% of those surveyed strongly agreed with the statement. Only 6% disagreed at some level with the statement, with 0% strongly disagreeing. There is overwhelming agreement that presenting the gospel message at strategic times throughout the year, rather than every Sunday, is important to successfully helping children grow spiritually.

### ***Liturgy that is both Individual and Communal***

Item 9 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include liturgy (worship) that is both individual and communal. The mean score of 4.48 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed, but the standard deviation of 1.16885 indicates that the responses are fairly scattered

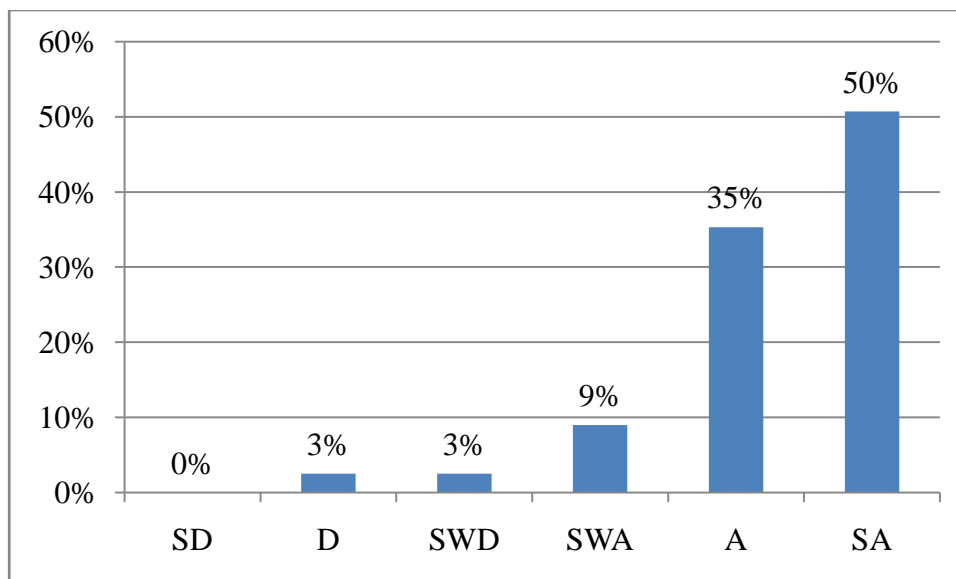


Figure 17. Gospel presentations at strategic times

around the mean (Table 9). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Contemplative-Reflective model.

Table 9. Scores for Item 9

Mean	4.48
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	1.16885

Figure 18 shows a positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of providing a liturgy that is both individual and communal. While more than three-quarters (82%) agreed at some level with the statement the level of agreement varied among the three options. Nearly one-fifth (18%) disagreed at some level with the statement. There is strong agreement that liturgy should be both individual and

communal to successfully helping children grow spiritually, but there is some disagreement as to the level of importance.

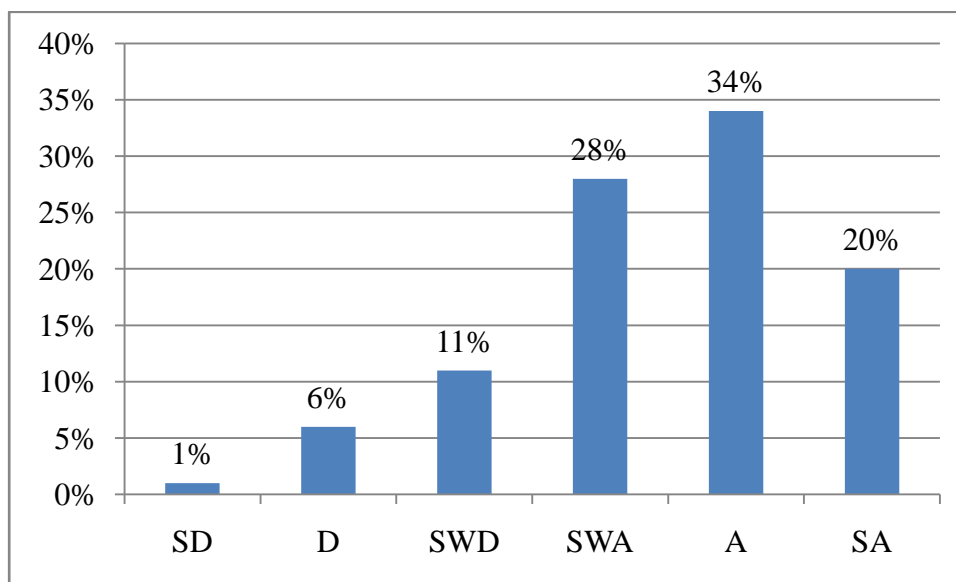


Figure 18. Liturgy that is both individual and communal

***Values, Virtues, and Behaviors Rather than  
Learning Information***

Item 10 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include a focus on values, virtues, and behaviors rather than a focus on learning information. The mean score of 4.90 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 10). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model.

Table 10. Scores for Item 10

Mean	4.90
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	.92031

Figure 19 shows an overwhelmingly positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of focusing ministry on values, virtues, and behavior rather than a focus on learning information. Nearly all of the respondents (94%) agreed at some level with the statement. Only 6% disagreed at some level with the statement, with 0% strongly disagreeing. There is overwhelming agreement that a focus on learning values, virtues and behavior rather than learning data is important to successfully helping children grow spiritually.

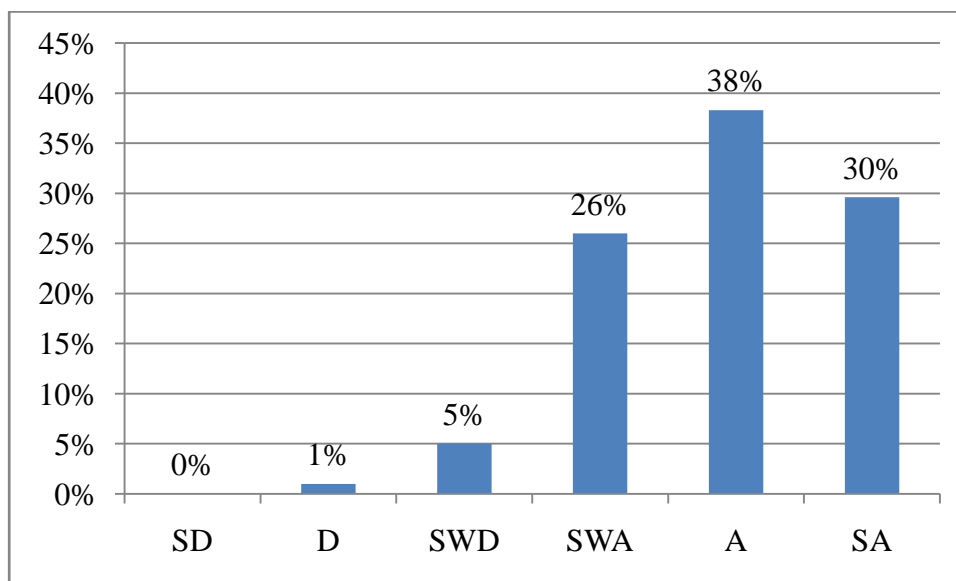


Figure 19. Values, virtues, and behaviors rather than learning information

### ***Systematic Study of God's Word***

Item 11 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include a systematic study of God's Word. The mean score of 5.02 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 11). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Instructional-Analytic model.

Table 11. Scores for Item 11

Mean	5.02
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	.91595

Figure 20 shows a significantly positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of a systematic study of God's Word. More than nine out of ten (94%) responded by agreeing at some level with the statement. Less than one-tenth (6%) disagreed at some level with the statement. This indicates that a majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that providing a systematic study of God's Word is important to successfully helping children grow spiritually.

### ***Spiritual Conversion of Children at any Age***

Item 12 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include a priority on spiritual conversion of children at any age. The mean score of 5.14 and a mode of 6 indicate a very strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 12). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Instructional-Analytic model.

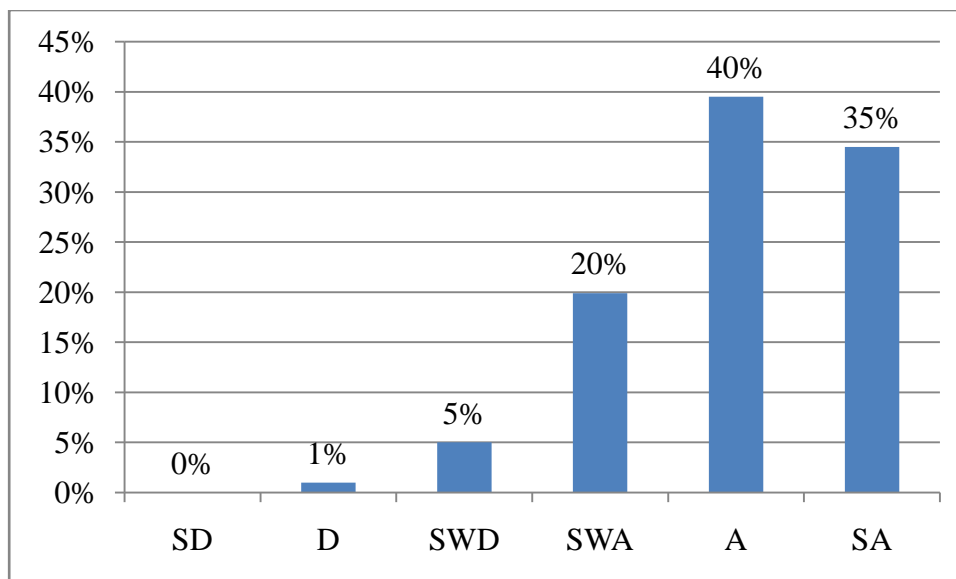


Figure 20. Systematic study of God's Word

Table 12. Scores for Item 12

Mean	5.14
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	.90133

Figure 21 shows a significantly positive attitude among those surveyed with regard to the importance of a priority on spiritual conversion of children no matter the age. Almost all of the respondents (96%) agreed at some level with the statement. Forty percent of the responses agreed and 40% strongly agreed. Only 4% disagreed at some level with the statement with 0% strongly disagreeing. This indicates that a majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that children should be given the opportunity to respond to the gospel message at any age.

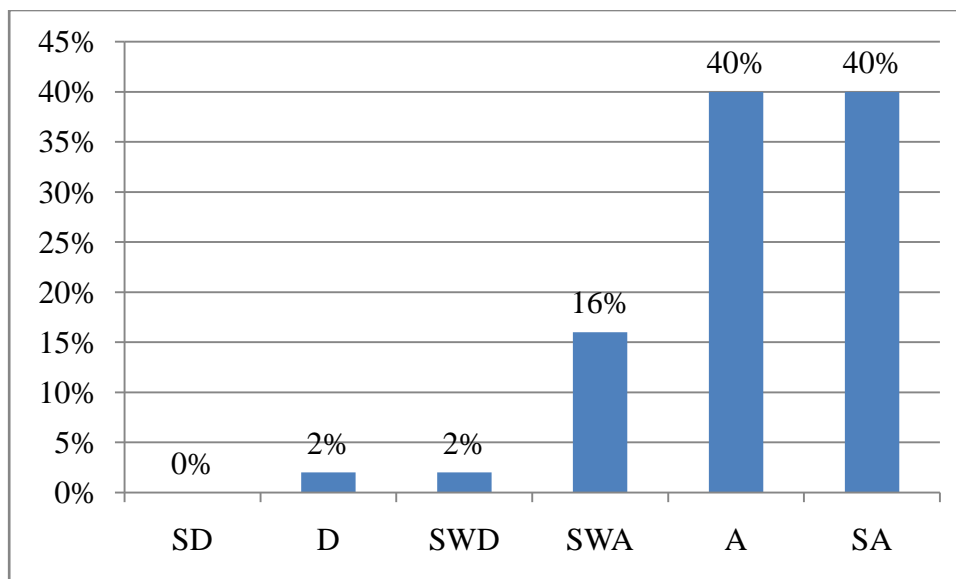


Figure 21. Spiritual conversion of children at any age

### *Curriculum that is Media Driven*

Item 13 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include curriculum that is media driven. The mean score of 4.33 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed; however, the standard deviation of 1.26684 indicates that the responses are fairly scattered around the mean (Table 13). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model.

Table 13. Scores for Item 13

Mean	4.33
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	1.26684

Figure 22 shows a positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of a priority on curriculum that is media driven. More than three-quarter (77%) responded by agreeing at some level with the statement. Less than one-quarter (23%) responded by disagreeing at some level with the statement. This indicates that while a majority of children's pastors surveyed believe curriculum that is media driven is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually, there are a significant number of children's pastors that do not believe curriculum that is media driven is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.



Figure 22. Curriculum that is media driven

### ***Allowing the Holy Spirit to Bring Meaning to the Story***

Item 14 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include storytelling presented in a way that allows the Holy Spirit to bring meaning to the story when the child is ready. The mean score of 5.02 and a mode of 5



indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 14). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Contemplative-Reflective model.

Table 14. Scores for Item 14

Mean	5.02
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	.79513

Figure 23 shows a significantly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of a priority on allowing the Holy Spirit to bring meaning to the story. Almost all of the respondents (96%) agreed at some level with the statement. Only 4% responded by disagreeing at some level with the statement, while 0% strongly disagreed. This indicates that a strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that allowing the Holy Spirit to bring meaning to the story is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

### ***Participation of Children in Ministry Roles***

Item 15 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include participation of children in ministry roles. The mean score of 5.09 and a mode of 6 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed that providing an environment that including children in ministry roles is an important element in the spiritual development of children (Table 15). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Pragmatic-Participatory model.

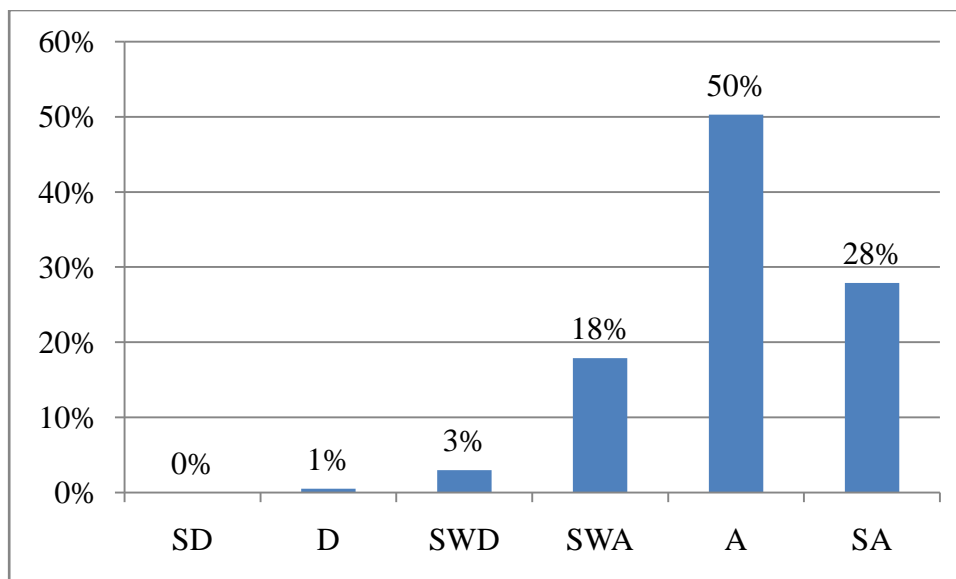


Figure 23. Allowing the Holy Spirit to bring meaning to the story

Table 15. Scores for Item 15

Mean	5.09
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	.90884

Figure 24 shows a significantly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of including children in ministry roles. Almost all of the respondents (96%) agreed at some level with the statement. Only 4% responded by disagreeing at some level with the statement. This indicates that a strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that including children in ministry to others is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

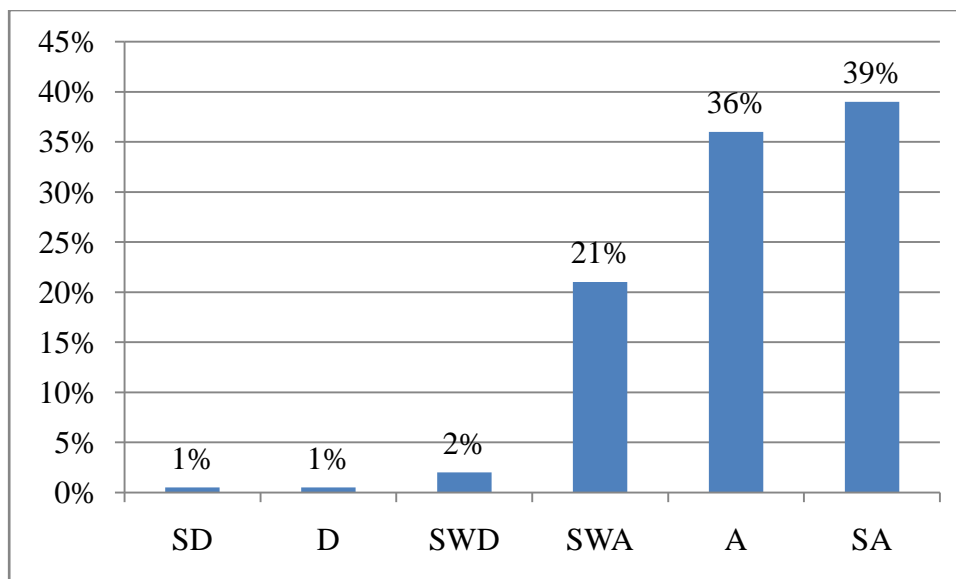


Figure 24. Participation of children in ministry roles

### *Application-oriented Games or Activities*

Item 16 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include application-oriented games or activities. The mean score of 5.23 and a mode of 6 indicate a very strong level of agreement with the statement among those surveyed (Table 16). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Pragmatic-Participatory model.

Table 16. Scores for Item 16

Mean	5.23
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	.81243

Figure 25 shows a significantly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of including application-oriented games or activities in ministry. Almost all of the respondents (98%) agreed at some level with the statement, with 83% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only 2% responded by somewhat disagreeing with the statement. This indicates that a very strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that application-oriented games or activities are important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.



Figure 25. Application-oriented games or activities

### ***Priority on Memorizing Scripture***

Item 17 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to place a priority on memorizing Scripture. The mean score of 4.89 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement with the statement among those surveyed.

(Table 17). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Instructional-Analytic model.

Table 17. Scores for Item 17

Mean	4.89
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	.97330

Figure 26 shows a significantly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of including application-oriented games or activities in ministry. Ninety-three percent of the respondents agreed at some level that memorizing Scripture is a priority in their ministry. Only 7% responded by disagreeing with the statement at some level. This indicates that a very strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that placing a priority on memorizing Scripture is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

### ***Age-Appropriate Worship Divided into Learning Sessions***

Item 18 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include age-appropriate worship experiences that are divided into a variety of learning sessions. The mean score of 5.01 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 18). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Pragmatic-Participatory model.

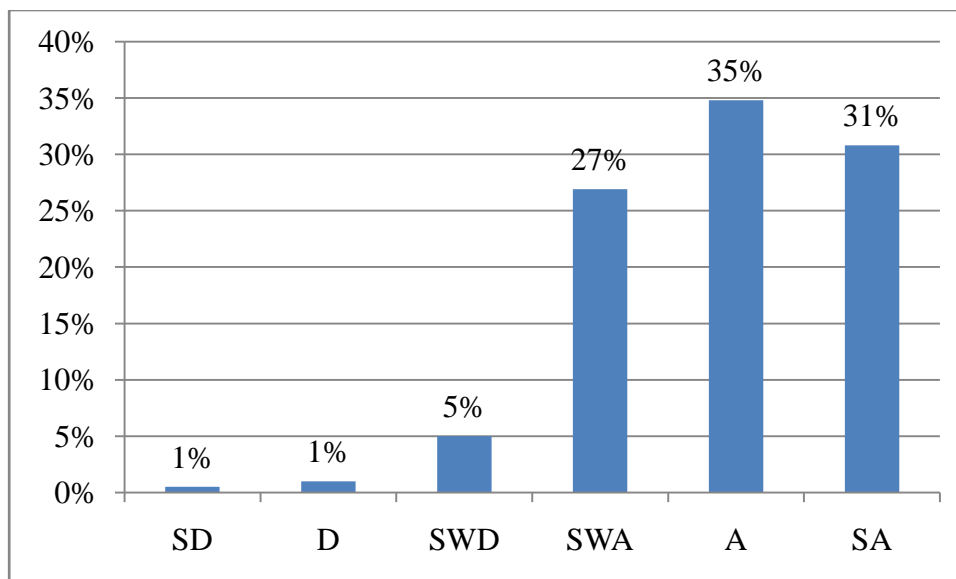


Figure 26. Priority on memorizing Scripture

Table 18. Scores for Item 18

Mean	5.01
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	.91327

Figure 27 shows a significantly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of including age-appropriate worship experiences that are divided into a variety of learning sessions. More than 9 out of 10 respondents (93%) agreed at some level with the statement with 79% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only 7% responded by disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing with the statement. This indicates that a very strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that age-appropriate worship experiences that are divided into a variety of learning experiences is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

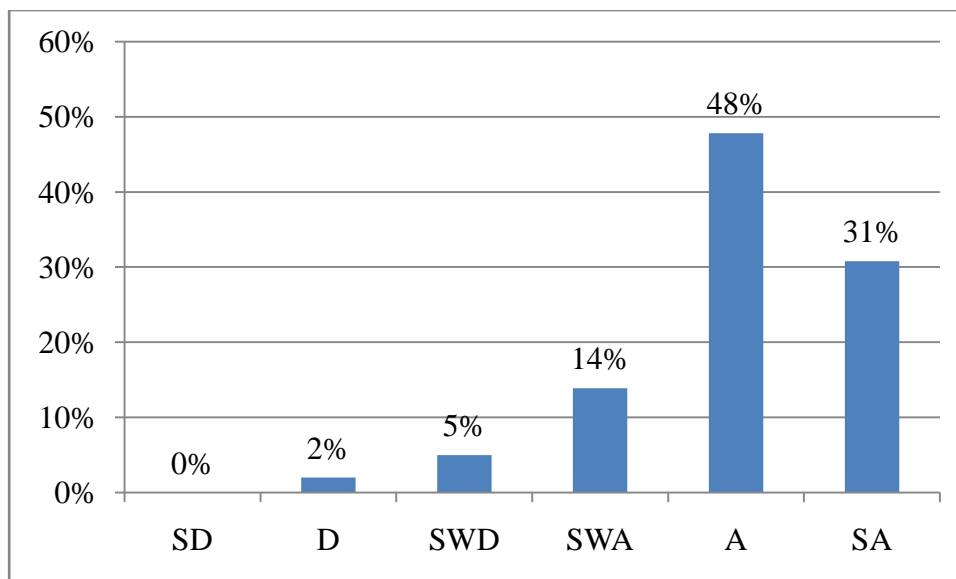


Figure 27. Age-appropriate worship divided into learning sessions

### *Instruction in Scripture as THE Means to Spiritual Formation*

Item 19 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to include instruction in Scripture as THE means to spiritual formation. The mean score of 4.99 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 19). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Instructional-Analytic model.

Table 19. Scores for Item 19

Mean	4.99
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	.92963

Figure 28 shows a significantly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of instruction as THE means for assisting children in their spiritual formation. More than 9 out of 10 respondents (94%) agreed at some level with the statement with 75% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only 6% responded by disagreeing with the statement at some level. This indicates that a very strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that instruction in Scripture is THE means to spiritual formation of children.

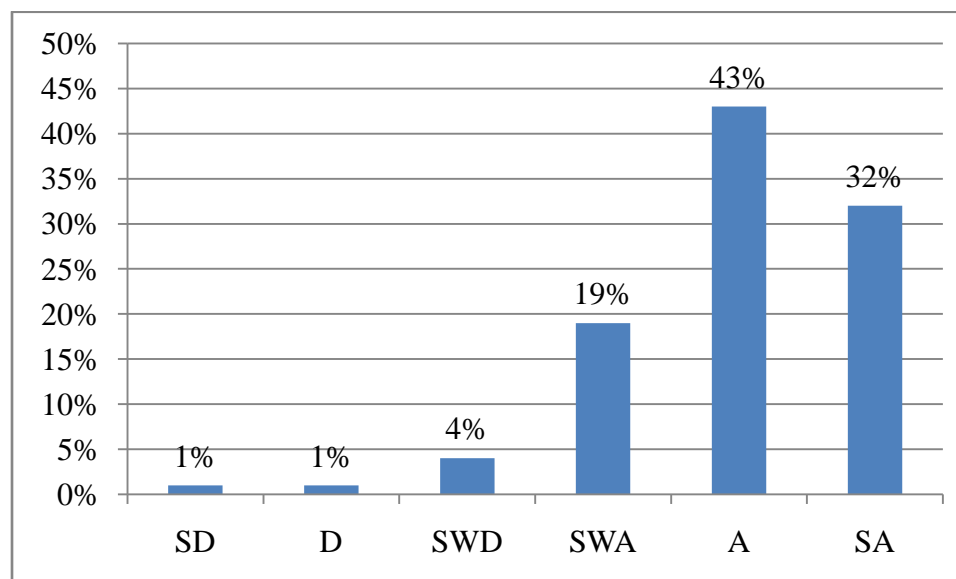


Figure 28. Instruction in Scripture as THE means to spiritual formation

### *Use of a Variety of Multimedia Experiences*

Item 20 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to focus on the use of a variety of multimedia experiences. The mean score of 4.91 and a mode of 6 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table



20). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model.

Table 20. Scores for Item 20

Mean	4.91
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	1.03792

Figure 29 shows a significantly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of using a variety of multimedia experiences. Nine out of 10 respondents (90%) agreed at some level with the statement with 68% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only 10% responded by disagreeing with the statement at some level. This indicates that a very strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that the use of a variety of multimedia experiences is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

### ***Atmosphere of Worship that Promotes Reverence for God***

Item 21 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to focus on including an atmosphere of worship that promotes reverence for God. The mean score of 5.08 and a mode of 5 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 21). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Contemplative-Reflective model.

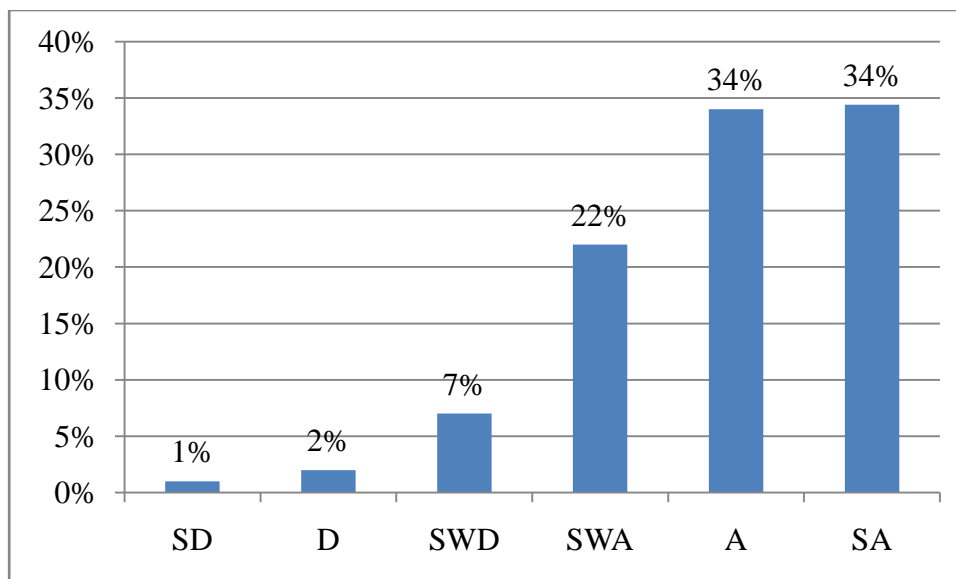


Figure 29. Use of a variety of multimedia experiences

Table 21. Scores for Item 21

Mean	5.08
Mode	5
Standard Deviation	.82682

Figure 30 shows a significantly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of an atmosphere of worship that promotes reverence for God. Almost all respondents (96%) agreed at some level with the statement with 79% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only 4% responded by disagreeing or somewhat disagreeing with the statement. This indicates that a very strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that an atmosphere of worship that promotes reverence for God is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

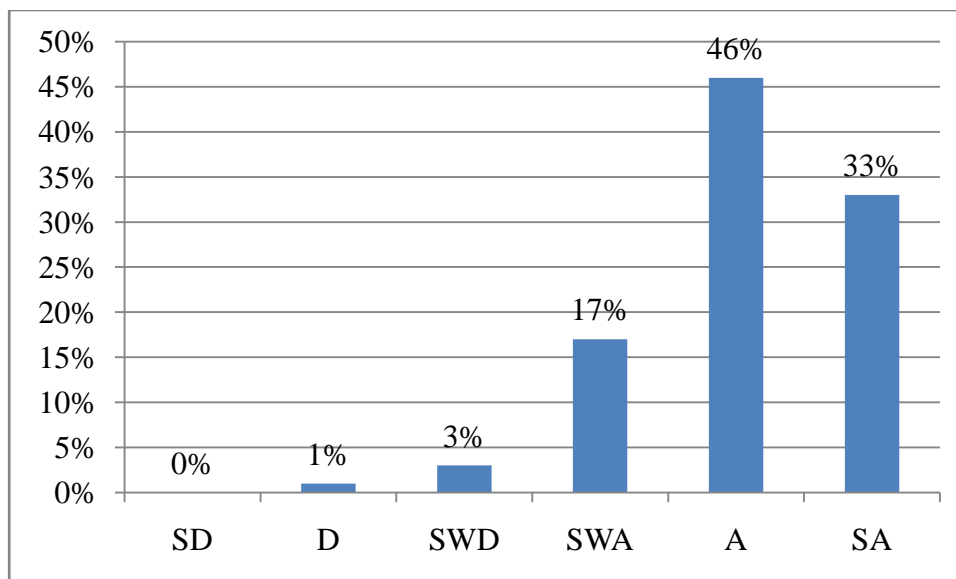


Figure 30. Atmosphere of worship that promotes reverence for God

***Healthy Competition that Focuses on Improvement or Task Accomplishment***

Item 22 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to focus on the use of healthy competition that focuses on improvement or task accomplishment. The mean score of 4.37 and a mode of 4 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 22). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Instructional-Analytic model.

Table 22. Scores for Item 22

Mean	4.37
Mode	4
Standard Deviation	1.08861

Figure 31 shows a positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of healthy competition that focuses on improvement or task accomplishment. Eighty percent of all respondents agreed at some level with the statement with 64% either somewhat agreeing or agreeing. A significant number (20%) of respondents disagreed with the statement at some level. While a majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that ministry to children should include healthy competition that focuses on improvement or task accomplishment, there is a significant number of children's pastors that do not believe healthy competition is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

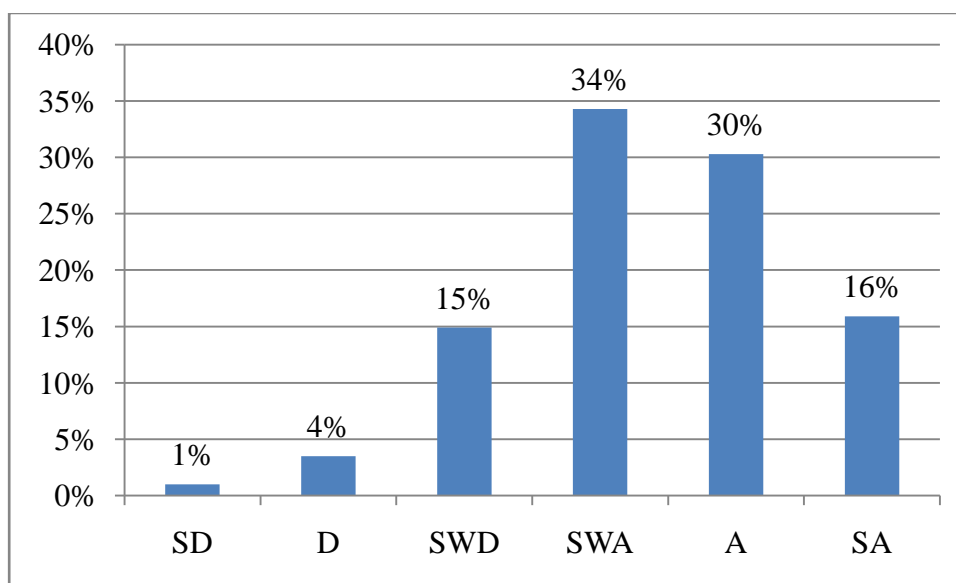


Figure 31. Healthy competition that focuses on improvement or task accomplishment

***Focus on Small Groups to Reinforce Large Group Lessons***

Item 23 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to focus on small groups to reinforce lessons learned in large groups. The mean score of 4.64 and a mode of 6 indicate a strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 23). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Pragmatic-Participatory model.

Table 23. Scores for Item 23

Mean	4.64
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	1.20174

Figure 32 shows a strongly positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of small groups to reinforce lessons learned in large groups. More than eight out of ten (83%) responded by agreeing at some level with the statement. A significant number (17%) responded by disagreeing with the statement at some level. While this indicates that a majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that ministry to children should include a focus on small groups to reinforce lessons learned in large groups, there is a significant number of children's pastors that do not believe small group reinforcement of lessons is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

***Imparting a Deep Sense of "Awe and Wonder of God"***

Item 24 of the CSDS sought to determine the level of intentionality of each ministry to focus on imparting a deep sense of "awe and wonder of God" as a significant

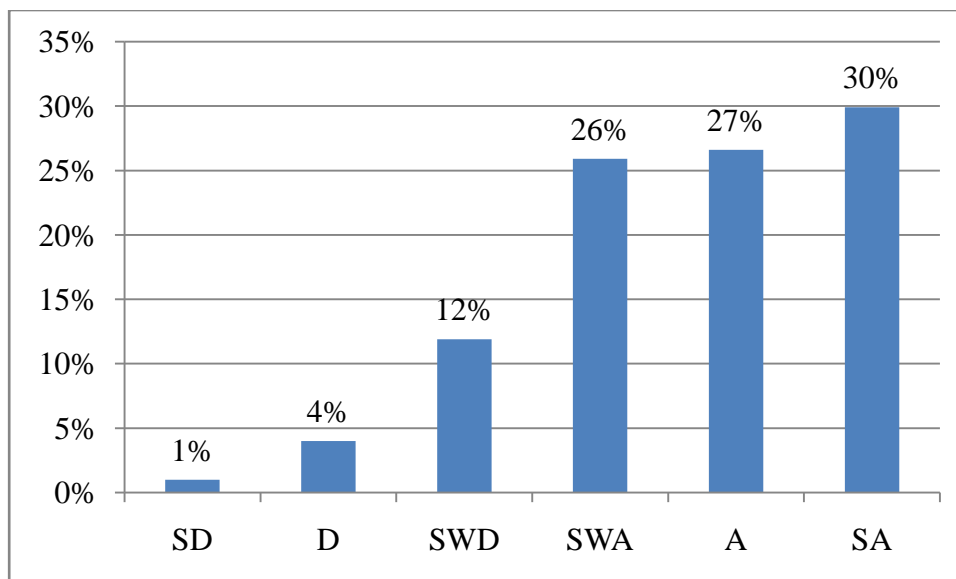


Figure 32. Focus on small groups to reinforce large group lessons

goal. The mean score of 4.99 and a mode of 6 indicate a very strong level of agreement among those surveyed (Table 24). Those who responded positively to the statement support a philosophical element that is found in the Contemplative-Reflective model.

Table 24. Scores for Item 24

Mean	4.99
Mode	6
Standard Deviation	.97200

Figure 33 shows an extremely positive attitude among the majority of those surveyed with regard to the importance of imparting a deep sense of “awe and wonder of God” as a significant goal. More than 9 out of 10 (94%) responded by agreeing at some level with the statement with 70% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Only 6%

disagreed with the statement at some level. This indicates that a strong majority of children's pastors surveyed believe that imparting a deep sense of "awe and wonder of God" as a significant goal is important in successfully helping children grow spiritually.

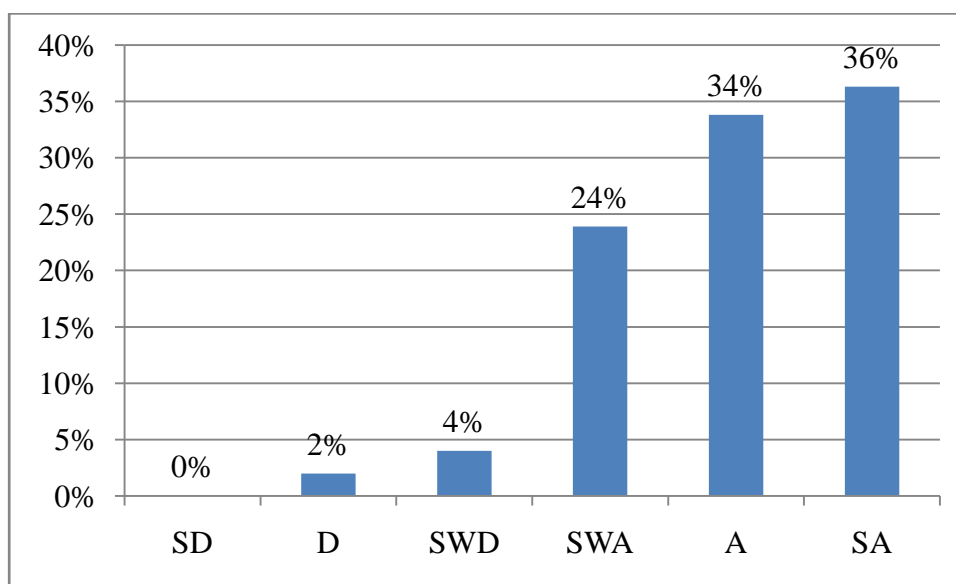


Figure 33. Imparting a deep sense of "awe and wonder of God"

### ***Research Question No. 1***

Following completion of all surveys, each children's pastor received a score for each ministry model that is determined by their responses to the 24 Likert statements. Frequency distribution analysis was used to determine the percentage of respondents that fall in to each ministry model. The highest score determined the preferred ministry model of each ministry. In the case of a tie in highest score, the total number of similar responses was counted and divided by the number of responses. The results were evenly distributed to each response with an uneven response being eliminated. An example of

the process follows: Thirteen respondents' highest score is 25 in both Contemplative-Reflective and Pragmatic-Participatory. The first 6 respondents were assigned to the Contemplative-Reflective model and the next 6 were assigned to the Pragmatic-Participatory model. The final respondent was eliminated. This approach allowed for even distribution of responses whereas a random distribution may have skewed the distribution. The preferred ministry approach among Nazarene children's pastors is distributed as shown in Figure 34.

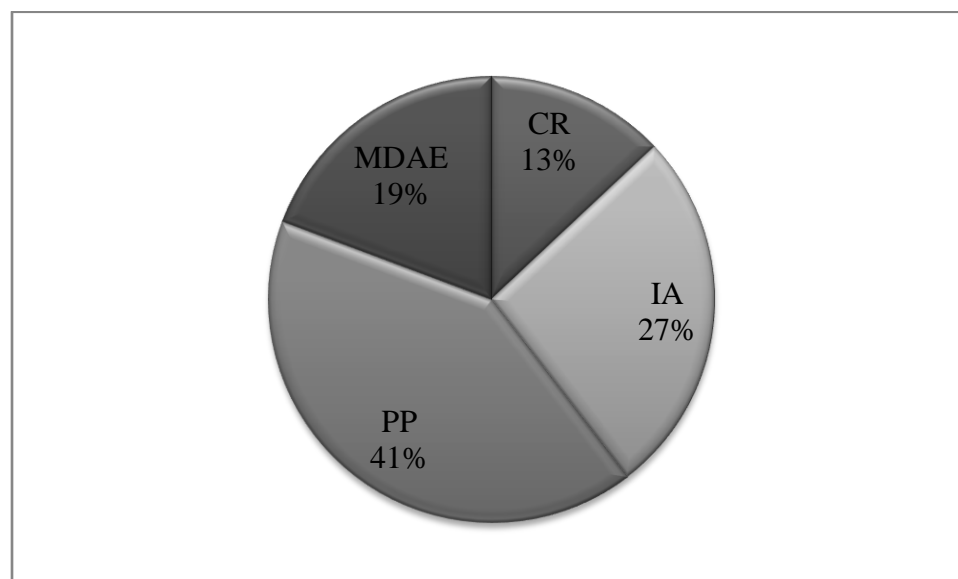


Figure 34. RQ No. 1: Frequency distribution of ministry models

### ***Research Question No. 2***

Following completion of each survey, the Decadal Growth Rates (Appendix 1) formula was applied to the data supplied by answers to the following questions:

1. How many years have you been the children's pastor of your current church?



2. What was the attendance of the children's ministry (kindergarten – 6<sup>th</sup> grade) when you began as children's pastor at your current church?
3. What is the current attendance of the children's ministry?

An example of this process follows: The children's pastor has been at her current church for 4 years. The attendance when she began her ministry was 50 children. The current attendance four years later is 70 children. Using the Decadal Growth Rates (DGR) formula ( $70/50=1.4$ ) for four years, the number identified as the Average Annual Growth Rates (AAGR) in Table A is 8.78%. The corresponding DGR in Table B is 132%. This formula allows for comparing growth rates among ministries in each ministry model with a variety of years of service at a particular church among children's pastors. Following completion of the Decadal Growth Rates calculation ANOVA was applied to the data. Table 25 shows the degree of freedom, square score, mean score, F distribution variable, and probability determined by ANOVA calculations for Decadal Growth Rates (RQ2). Four of the reported scores for DGR were extremely high and well beyond two standard deviations from the mean so these four outlier scores were eliminated from the statistics. In spite of the extremely large percentages in the SS and MS, the probability (p) that there is a difference in DGR between the four ministry models is 0.454, which indicates that there is no significant statistical difference at a 95% confidence level in DGR among the four ministry models defined in this research (Table 25).

Research question number 2 asks, "What is the difference between each ministry model and the attendance growth rate among children." The probability (p) that there is a difference in Decadal Growth Rates between the four ministry models is 0.626, which indicates that there is no significant statistical difference at a 95% confidence level in attendance growth among the four ministry models defined in this research (Table 25).

Table 25. Research Questions No. 2-6

Source	df	SS	MS	F	p
DGR (RQ2)					
Between groups	3	377079.02	125693.01	0.585	0.626
Within groups	178	3.825E7	214903.22		
Conversion (RQ3)					
Between groups	3	0.564	0.188	0.850	0.468
Within groups	184	40.710	0.221		
Baptism (RQ4)					
Between groups	3	0.145	0.048	2.053	0.108
Within groups	184	4.344	0.024		
Evangelism (RQ5)					
Between groups	3	0.840	0.280	1.885	0.134
Within groups	184	27.324	0.148		
Service (RQ6)					
Between groups	3	0.954	0.318	2.315	0.077
Within groups	184	25.288	0.137		

### ***Research Questions No. 3***

Following completion of each survey, the number reported by each respondent to the question, “In the past year of your church ministry how many children have prayed to ask Jesus to be their Savior?” was divided by the current attendance in order to produce a conversion rate. The conversion rate was then assigned to the proper ministry model, as determined by the highest score from the 24 Likert statements, for statistical analysis. ANOVA testing was applied for statistical analysis. Table 25 shows the degree of freedom, square score, mean score, F distribution variable, and probability determined by ANOVA calculations for Conversion (RQ2).

Research question number 3 asks, “What is the difference between each ministry model and the conversion rate among children.” The probability (p) that there is a difference in conversion rate among the four ministry models is 0.468, which indicates that there is no significant statistical difference at a 95% confidence level in conversion rate among the four ministry models defined in this research (Table 25).

#### ***Research Questions No. 4***

Following completion of each survey, the number reported by each respondent to the question, “In the past year of your church ministry how many children have been baptized?” was divided by the current attendance in order to produce a baptism rate. The baptism rate was then assigned to the proper ministry model, as determined by the highest score from the 24 Likert statements, for statistical analysis. ANOVA testing was applied to the data for statistical analysis. Table 25 shows the degree of freedom, square score, mean score, F distribution variable, and probability determined by ANOVA calculations for Baptism (RQ4).

Research question number 4 asks, “What is the difference between each ministry model and the baptism rate among children.” The probability (p) that there is a difference in conversion rate among the four ministry models is 0.108, which indicates that there is no significant statistical difference at a 95% confidence level in baptism rate among the four ministry models defined in this research (Table 25).

#### ***Research Questions No. 5***

Following completion of each survey, the number reported by each respondent to the question, “In the past year of your church ministry how many children have

brought at least one friend to church?” was divided by the current attendance in order to produce an evangelism rate. The evangelism rate was then assigned to the proper ministry model, as determined by the highest score from the twenty-four Likert statements, for statistical analysis. ANOVA testing was applied to the data for statistical analysis. Table 25 shows the degree of freedom, square score, mean score, F distribution variable, and probability determined by ANOVA calculations for Evangelism (RQ5).

Research question number 5 asks, “What is the difference between each ministry model and the evangelism rate among children.” The probability (p) that there is a difference in conversion rate among the four ministry models is 0.134, which indicates that there is no significant statistical difference at a 95% confidence level in evangelism rate among the four ministry models defined in this research (Table 25).

### ***Research Questions No. 6***

Following completion of each survey, the number reported by each respondent to the question, “In the past year of your church ministry how many children have been involved in service to others (this may include ministry roles in the local church or in the community)?” was divided by the current attendance in order to produce a service rate. The service rate was then assigned to the proper ministry model, as determined by the highest score from the twenty-four Likert statements, for statistical analysis. ANOVA testing was applied to the data for statistical analysis. Table 25 shows the degree of freedom, square score, mean score, F distribution variable, and probability determined by ANOVA calculations for Service (RQ6).

Research question number 6 asks, “What is the difference between each ministry model and the service rate among children.” The probability (p) that there is a

difference in conversion rate between the four ministry models is 0.077. While the probability level is above the .05 level of probability, it is close and therefore indicates that there is a marginal significant statistical difference in service rate among the four ministry models defined in this research (Table 25). In spite of the marginal significant level it can still be said that there is no statistical difference at a 95% confidence level in service rate among the four ministry models defined in the research.

### **Evaluation of Research Design**

The following is an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the research design. It is the intention of the researcher to be honest and candid about the adequacies and deficiencies of the research design in hope that the information will benefit future researchers who endeavor to build upon this study.

#### ***Strengths***

One of the great strengths of the research design was the relationship between the population and sample, and the high survey response rate. There are currently 312 Nazarene children's pastors that serve on a full-time or part-time basis. As a result of a small population, the sample and population were one and the same. Of the 312 people that made up the population, 201 responded to the survey (64.4%) and 185 respondents figured into the statistical analysis (59.3%). A total of 16 surveys (5.1%) were eliminated from analysis due to incomplete responses of all questions posed or due to the need of evenly dividing responses with multiple high scores in the model assignment process (this process was described earlier in this chapter). The use of an online survey contributed to the highly successful response rate.

Secondly, the four models that were used in this research were not designed by the researcher, but instead were the subject of *Perspectives on Children's Spiritual Formation*, edited by Michael Anthony (Anthony 2006). Each of the models was described in great detail by recognized scholars and practitioners of each model. These scholar/practitioners authored chapters in Anthony's book that directly related to their area of expertise. In addition to the information provided in each chapter, the researcher identified the uniqueness of each model with the validation of each model author. This process of identifying the uniqueness of each of the four ministry models was a strength of the research design.

In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis was conducted through the use of two focus groups for the purpose of obtaining insights of respondents from two geographical regions. This process added to the reliability of analysis. Each focus group was asked a series of open-ended questions that were designed to gather deeper insight into the analysis of the data. The perspectives of these respondents of the surveys added invaluable information that contributed to a more full understanding of the statistical analysis. A list of these participants can be found in Appendix 8.

### ***Weaknesses***

While there were significant strengths in the design of the four ministry models, there were also some weaknesses associated with the models. One weakness was the significant similarities of each ministry model. During conversation with the authors of each model, it became clear that the similarities of each model would require the researcher to modify the original intent of the research and to focus on the uniqueness of each model. The decision to focus on the uniqueness of each was a strong decision

and one supported by the authors of each model, but in doing so there still appeared to be overlapping of concepts. This realization was discovered in conversation with the two focus groups.

The wording of some of the questions in the survey instrument may have not adequately communicated the intent of each of the ministry models. The survey statements, which were read and validated by each ministry model author as accurately representing the given model, appear to have not clearly communicated the intention of each question in all cases. One children's pastor, Mike Murphy, wrote a response email to the researcher explaining his reason for not completing the survey. Murphy felt that some of the questions had room for interpretation of the intent of the questions. He wrote,

A couple of statements refer to “periods of quiet reflection” and “moments of quiet contemplation.” For me, both of these phrases conjure up images of a room full of kids in silent meditation. Are we talking about meditation, moments of silence, public prayer, small group prayer, or a children's sermon? How you interpret these phrases dramatically affects my answers. (Murphy 2008)

Another children's pastor, Marlene Webster, who was a member of the Midwest focus group, noted that she understood statement 14 differently than the researcher intended. She interpreted the question as allowing the Holy Spirit to help in the interpreting of the story, the telling of the story, and the comprehension of the story by the children (Webster 2008). The actual statement originated as a representation of the Contemplative-Reflective model and was intended to mean that the story is told without explanation and the storyteller allows the Holy Spirit to teach and apply the truth to each child. These examples demonstrate that it was possible for respondents to misinterpret or misunderstand the terminology or intent of some statements in the survey

instrument. Perhaps the use of a focus group before the survey was distributed would have been helpful in critiquing the statements and making sure they communicated accurately.

Another weakness of not only this research design, but any research that addresses children's spirituality is the inability for outward expressions to always adequately represent inward faith. The four measures of spiritual growth that were used in this research; conversion, baptism, evangelism, and service, are limited in fully describing what is happening spiritually in the life of a child. Both the West and Midwest focus groups supported the use of these four measures, while confirming that it is difficult to measure spiritual growth in general.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

The research problem as stated in chapter 1 produced six research questions related to four approaches to ministry praxis and four significant spiritual milestones in the lives of children. Chapter 2 reviewed the available literature relating to the research problem and explored the topic from a biblical, theological, and historical perspective.

Chapter 3 provided the methodological design that was used to carry out the research, including the development of the research instrument. Chapter 4 provided the protocol for statistical analysis of the data and the statistical procedures applied to the survey statements and research questions. This final chapter will restate the purpose of the research, identify the implications of the findings, research applications, and recommendations for future research.

#### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between the children's ministry praxis in Nazarene churches and four significant spiritual milestones in the lives of Nazarene children.

## **Research Implications**

The implications of this research on the understanding of effective ministry practices in assisting children in their spiritual development are numerous. The researcher has reviewed all of the statistics and has identified significant findings from analysis the Children's Spiritual Development Survey (CSDS) statement responses and research questions in light of the precedent literature and focus group interviews. These key findings will be discussed in the section that follows.

### ***Responses to CSDS Statements***

The cumulative responses to a number of CSDS statements stood out as significant due to the high level of agreement or disagreement with the statements. Whereas the high level of agreement was extremely high, the high level of disagreement was comparatively low. Of the 24 statements in the CSDS, 6 statements had a high level of agreement of 96-99%, and 6 statements had a high level of disagreement of 17-23%. The 12 highest percentages for both agreement and disagreement with the statements on the CSDS will be addressed. These statements and responses, along with the implications of the findings, will be the focus of this section.

#### **Item 1: Periods of Quiet Reflection**

With 23% of respondents disagreeing at some level with the statement that periods of quiet reflection are important in the spiritual growth of children, this statement represents a tie with two other statements as the highest level of disagreement. Those who responded by disagreeing with the statement seem to fear the accepted developmental truth that children's attention span is directly connected to their age and to

allow moments of quiet in a group setting would lead to confusion and chaos. In an interview of the Midwest focus group several members expressed their passion on the subject. Marlene Webster noted that one reason children's pastors may not include periods of quiet reflection in their ministry is fear of losing control of the group due to a wide variety of behaviors (Webster 2008). Dave Foshee agreed with Webster and added that "there is a lack of quiet in our own lives" and many adult leaders are as uncomfortable with quiet moments as children. We live in a culture that is not use to being quiet (Foshee 2008). Troy Snyder reiterated the fear of confusion and chaos during moments of silence when he said, "I have 250 kids in my elementary service. To have everyone quiet for thirty seconds—God love your heart" (Snyder 2008).

While there was serious concern among the Midwest focus group with the response of children to moments of quiet and silence, members of the West focus group had a different understanding of the issue. Bill Coker observed that quiet contemplation and reflection are not a part of Nazarene tradition and for these reasons adults may not recognize the need for these quiet moments and they may not be sure how to direct the children into periods of quiet reflection. Coker added that the attitude seems to be "if it doesn't work the first time" then the idea is tossed away (Coker 2008).

In spite of a relatively high percentage of respondents who disagreed with the statement, more than 75% agreed at some level that including periods of quiet reflection in children's lives is beneficial to their spiritual growth. Webster noted that there may be some children in the ministry setting that are capable of having periods of quiet reflection, but in some instances there will be a percentage of children that will not be able to handle the quiet, yet this should not be a reason for avoiding these quiet moments

(Webster 2008). Webster added that maybe the concept of reflection should be redefined. She believes there are times where children are given opportunities to reflect without the requirement that it be done in quiet or silence (Webster 2008). Coker added that children sense the presence of God in moments of quiet and in the busy world in which they live it is important to provide moments of reflection (Coker 2008). The implication is that periods of quiet reflection should be included in ministry to children, but there needs to be creative ways in which it is done so that confusion and chaos are not the outcomes.

## **Item 2: Learning in the Context of Fun Activities**

Ninety-seven percent of respondents of the CSDS agreed at some level that fun activities play an important role in the ministry practice of Nazarene children's pastors. While members of both focus groups were clear to note that fun activities must not be the focus of ministry to children, they also clearly stated that ministry to children should include elements of fun. Dana Spaite, a member of the West focus group, noted that "we need to make church a place they want to come." The church is in a position where they are competing with many activities in a child's life and making church a place children want to be is important in reaching them (Spaite 2008). If children are to encounter the Gospel at a level that challenges them to walk with God the ministry environment needs to be a fun place for children.

The literature review reveals that children must be viewed as holistic beings and in order to meet their spiritual needs ministry to children must also meet their physical, emotional, and social needs (Downs 1994, 75). An assumption of

developmental theory, in general, is that human beings must be seen as integrated wholes and therefore ministry to children must take into consideration their entire being. This includes recognition that children learn differently than adults and fun activities in Christian education environment provide significant opportunities for children to learn (Downs 1994, 86). By allowing children an opportunity to engage in fun activities, the children's pastor is honoring the developmental process of the child. The implication is that ministry to children needs to include fun activities that allow children to experience the truth in a context that they enjoy.

### **Item 3: Active Engagement with the Lesson**

In the study, 99% of the respondents agreed at some level that active engagement with the lesson was an intentional part of their ministry. This statistic is consistent with the research done by E. Paul Torrance that says learning is most effective when teaching is creative (Torrance and Torrance 1988, 224). Engaging children in the lesson requires a creative approach to teaching that includes involving them physically, but more importantly engages them intellectually. Coker noted that active engagement is more than just physical engagement. He said, "It is possible to be physically involved and not be actively engaged. Parroting back is not active engagement. Thinking, considering, and contemplating about the truth is active engagement" (Coker 2008). Karen Romines added that active engagement must "stimulate their senses" (Romines 2008).

Providing an environment where children can engage with the lessons in a active way affirms the church's responsibility to partner with parents by coming along

side them and supporting them through strong educational programs (Bunge 2006, 54).

As the church builds strong educational programs that recognize the importance of

engaging the child in the biblical story, they faithfully fulfill their role as defined in the

Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40).

The Great Commission calls the church to “make disciples” and “teach them to obey.”

The Great Commandment calls the church to “love God” and “love others.” As children

are engaged with the stories of God’s Word they are challenged to be more than hearers

of God’s word, they are challenged to live out the principles found in the Great

Commission and Great Commandment which is the goal of spiritual growth.

#### **Item 7: Moments of Quiet Contemplation Guided by Adults**

There is significant similarity between moments of quiet contemplation guided by adults and periods of quiet reflection (Item 1). Both of these statements support an

approach to ministry that is found in the Contemplative-Reflective approach to ministry.

Both of the statements received 23% disagreement with the statement at some level. The

explanations for the scoring and the implications that come from the research can be

found in Item 1.

#### **Item 9: Liturgy that is Both Individual and Communal**

Eighteen percent of respondents of the CSDS disagreed at some level that liturgy that is both individual and communal is intentional in their ministry to children.

Liturgy is generally associated with churches that are formal in their worship style, but

liturgy can also be understood as order that is brought to the worship experience. Scottie

May, author of the Contemplative-Reflective model, identifies liturgy as “words, acts, and gestures [that] point to the reality that the faith community is celebrating. . . .” (May 2006, 71).

Someone has said that children are liturgical beings. The intention of the statement is to recognize that orderly worship in the lives of children needs to be both individual and communal. Most churches provide worship experiences that are communal, at least at the level of children worshiping together, but one can easily question if individual worship takes place in the lives of many children. The responses seem to indicate that in most worship environments provided by the church, children are given the opportunity to worship as a community and to worship as an individual – possibly in the same worship experience.

#### **Item 12: Spiritual Conversion at Any Age**

Ninety-six percent of those surveyed agreed at some level that spiritual conversion at any age is an intentional part of their approach to ministry with children. There is no more important experience in the spiritual growth process of a child than to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Some might say that a child should wait until they reach an age that allows them to fully understand such a decision. This was the stance of Ronald Goldman (Downs 1994, 89). Horace Bushnell was perhaps the first American theologian to say that it should be expected that children grow up knowing God (Bushnell 1953, 4). Bushnell believed that children should be taught in such a way that it becomes very easy for them to respond to Jesus because they had been immersed in that belief. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 teaches that parents and the community are to immerse

children in the faith. It is for this reason that the Jewish community has always been intentional about teaching their children their beliefs.

Those that responded to the survey also believe that children should be given the opportunity to have spiritual conversion at any age. The theological affirmation that all people are created in the image of God demands that children have the capacity to have a real relationship with God and it is the church's responsibility to provide opportunities for children to respond to the Good News of the Gospel. Members of the Midwest focus group explained their affirmation of this truth and noted that the statistics support an approach to ministry that intentionally focuses on nurturing children beginning at birth and continuing through childhood with the expectation that at some point in their journey they will make an intentional decision to accept Christ as their personal Savior. By providing opportunities at any age for children to respond to God's grace, churches allow children to make real, life-changing decisions when they are ready and not in an atmosphere where they are forced. The implication of these truths is that children are capable of entering into a relationship with God at any point in their childhood years.

### **Item 13: Curriculum that is Media Driven**

Ministry that intentionally uses curriculum that is media driven tied as the highest disagreement level of any statement in the survey. Twenty-three percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement at some level. It seems that while media driven curriculum is easy to use and entertains children, many Nazarene children's pastors are suspicious of the curriculum at some level. Spaite expressed concern that using media



driven curriculum removes control over what is being taught. When other curriculums are used, leaders can pick and choose what they use. This is not the case with media driven curriculum. She also expressed a concern that this type of curriculum lacks depth (Spaite 2008). Coker added that media driven curriculum does not allow for concern about theological issues to be addressed (Coker 2008).

An interesting concern was raised among the West focus group that was not mentioned as a concern among the Midwest focus group. Perhaps conversation did not lead in that direction or perhaps the issue is a unique concern of the western part of the country. The concern addressed the overloading of children with media. Enola Leonard, member of the West focus group, noted that her children are “media-ed out” when they come to church (Leonard 2008). There was further discussion that connected the overloading of children with media with the recognition that media tends to allow for babysitting. There was concern that the time that children spent at church needed to be spent building relationships, not sitting in front of a video or DVD. While some media driven curriculum provides small group moments and other adult interaction with children, this still remained a concern for the West focus group.

In spite of the concerns expressed in the focus group interviews, 77% of the respondents agreed at some level that media driven curriculum contributed to the ministry praxis of Nazarene children’s pastors. The extent to which media driven curriculum is used in these churches was not discovered in this research.

#### **Item 14: Allowing the Holy Spirit to Bring Meaning to the Story**

The intention of the statement presented on the CSDS related the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing meaning to the biblical story was perhaps misleading or misunderstood. The intention of the researcher was to ask if the respondent agreed that the role of the teacher was to tell the story without interpretation or application and to allow the Holy Spirit to expose the truth to the child while helping them make application. Both focus groups agreed that they did not interpret the statement in this way, and understood it instead as allowing the Holy Spirit to work in both the teacher and student as they worked together to interpret the text and make life application. Spaite described her understanding of asking the Holy Spirit to bring meaning to the story by an example. “I’m always reminding myself and my teachers to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide the lesson in thought and deed” (Spaite 2008). However the question may have been understood, 96% agreed at some level with the statement and this level of agreement is significant.

The power of the Holy Spirit in the teaching experience is often underutilized and forgotten. The Holy Spirit not only functions as One who brings meaning to the biblical story, but is involved in the study of the text, preparation for teaching, and transformation of both the teacher and the student. We must always acknowledge that we are not only ineffective without the blessing of the Holy Spirit, more importantly, it is impossible to lead children into the transformed lives God desires without the Holy Spirit at work in them. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit plays a necessary role in the interpretation and application of the text in the lives of both the children and the teachers.

### **Item 15: Participation of Children in Ministry Roles**

The literature review noted that Jesus made it very clear that children were to be seen as important and significant in the Christian community (Matthew 19:14, Mark 10:14, and Luke 18:16). The responses to the statement regarding the participation of children in ministry roles overwhelmingly supported the mandate made by Christ. Ninety-six percent of the respondents agreed at some level that it is important to allow children to participate in ministry roles. Children are an important part of the community and allowing them to be involved in ministries that are consistent with their developmental abilities is critical.

In some instances the purpose of children's involvement is to train them to be faithful followers of Christ when they grow up. The focus is on the future of the children much like education is designed to help children become good, productive adults. Coker remarked that involving children in ministry roles is very important. These roles become moments that develop a love for ministry and serving God. It also gives children opportunities to engage in worship rather than being observers (Coker 2008). Romines added that teens and young adults in her church are leaders now because they were involved in leadership roles when they were young (Romines 2008).

While there is truth to the effectiveness of training children at early ages in any area of their lives so that they will be productive in later years, the focus needs to at least include recognition that children are valuable to God's Kingdom at their current age. Catholic theologian Karl Rahner reminds the church that children are not to be seen only as humans that have value in the future as they develop and become adults, but rather children are to be seen as fully human and as such have "value and are worthy of dignity

in their own right” (Bunge 2006, 61). As the church recognizes the value of children to both God and the church and honors the *imago dei* in which they were created, faithful faith communities will begin to allow them opportunities to be involved in the ministries of the church. Their contribution and place in the church is significant at their current age.

#### **Item 16: Application-Oriented Games or Activities**

Ninety-eight percent of respondents agreed at some level that providing application-oriented games and activities in their ministries is an important element in helping children grow spiritually. On the surface it may seem counter-intuitive that games or activities would play a significant role in the spiritual growth process. The Cognitive Theory of Jean Piaget, and developmental theory in general, reinforce an understanding that children do not think the same way as adults (Downs 1994, 82). By providing games and activities that apply to lessons that are taught, the Christian educator honors the developmental process of children. The implication is that application-oriented games or activities play a role in the spiritual growth of children.

Members of the focus groups noted that the understanding of games and activities was interpreted in a very broad way. Leonard said that any activity that reinforces the lesson fell into this category (Leonard 200). The emphasis in the discussion with the focus groups centered on the “application-oriented” portion of the survey statement. Leonard added that the purpose of application-oriented activities is to find out “did they get it.” These events serve as a reminder to the children of what was

learned and provides the leader an opportunity to make sure that the children are able to apply the truth and not just regurgitate the details (Leonard 2008).

The ultimate purpose of any children's ministry should be to help children grow in their relationship with God – life-change. In the *7 Laws of the Learner*, Bruce Wilkinson explains the biblical imperative that teaching only happens when students learn (Wilkinson 1988). Teaching should always be evaluated by the answering the question, “Did my students learn?” The implementation of application-oriented games and activities gives the leader an opportunity to evaluate the level of learning that has occurred. If the focus of the evaluation is “did they understand?” rather than “do they know the details?” then the leader knows if true learning has taken place. Wilkinson recommends that if the students did not “get it” then the new lesson should be scrapped and the previous truth should be re-taught until it is understood (Wilkinson 1988). Application-oriented events effectively provide opportunities for this level of assessment and evaluation.

**Item 22: Healthy Competition that  
Focuses on Improvement or  
Task Accomplishments**

Twenty percent of the respondents disagreed at some level that healthy competition that focuses on personal improvement or task accomplishments assist in helping children grow spiritually. While this percentage of disagreement is not a significantly large number it is relatively large when compared to responses to other survey statements. As the second highest level of disagreement among the twenty-four survey statements the negative responses deserve serious evaluation.

There has long been debate about the role of competition of any kind in ministry to children. The proponents say that competition is good for children. They learn team work and are motivated to do well. Closely connected to the debate is the use of rewards as part of the competition. Those who support competition and rewards support their opinion by noting that all of life is about competition and rewards. By providing opportunities for competition in a Christian context it allows the leaders to help children understand good sportsmanship and healthy ways to compete. Some competition, such as many quizzing programs, is designed so that children compete against themselves (Romines 2008). But in many cases the children that participate in these quizzing programs still feel a sense of competition with others. However the competition happens, those who support competition in ministry believe that it has the potential to help children grow spiritually.

Others believe that competition of any kind is not good for children especially when it comes to competition in a Christian education context. Coker clearly stated that he has concerns about competition in the church and feels that it is not consistent with what is trying to be accomplished in spiritual formation (Coker 2008). The consistent opinion among the West focus group was that leaders should try to avoid competition as much as possible. Instead, they suggested that focusing on supporting each other and developing a sense of community was a much more important endeavor. Perhaps these concerns explain the relatively high level of disagreement among those who responded to the survey.

**Item 23: Focus on Small Groups to Reinforce Large Group Lessons**

A trend in children's ministry in the twenty-first century is to conduct lessons that are taught in large group settings and provide small groups that allow for reinforcement of the lesson and relationship building. The literature review indicates that this is the approach of Media-Driven Active-Engagement curriculum such as KIDMO. With a seventeen percent disagreement at some level with the statement, a number of respondents have determined not to use this approach in their ministry.

The strength of this approach is that it allows large churches to conduct well-organized large group events, such as a children's worship service, and still address the concern of many children's pastors regarding relationship building, by providing small group ministries.

None of the children's pastors that participated in the focus groups had a philosophical problem with a focus on small groups that reinforce large group lessons, but it seemed that few of them actually used the format in their own ministry. According to Spaite, some of this can be attributed to the logistics of recruiting many more adults to lead the small groups (Spaite 2008). While others expressed a concern that usually churches who use this format rely upon Media-Driven Active-Engagement curriculum that removes control of what is being taught out of the hands of the children's pastor. Other children's pastors, such as Romines, made the comment that they use both large and small group ministries in their church, but not necessarily integrated together with one supporting the other (Romines 2008). This sentiment was supported by those who participated in the conference call. The consistent opinion was that the use of small

groups to support large groups can be effective if used intentionally, but it was not commonly used by the focus group members.

### ***Responses to Research Questions***

The responses to the individual statements in the CSDS provided data that answered the research questions. This section of the research implications will address each research question and will provide implications of the findings.

#### **RQ1: Ministry Models**

The frequency distribution of the scores reported by the respondents from the CSDS identified the preferred ministry model of Nazarene children's pastors based on their highest score in the four ministry models. According to the analysis, 41% preferred the Pragmatic-Participatory model, 27% preferred the Instructional-Analytic model, 19% preferred the Media-Driven Active-Engagement model, and 13% preferred the Contemplative-Reflective model (Figure 34).

#### ***Pragmatic-Participatory Model***

Focus group participants were asked to share their opinions as to the reason that the Pragmatic-Participatory model was the most preferred ministry model. Amy Davis began by stating that the Pragmatic-Participatory approach seems to be the "big push" among many curriculum publishers (Davis 2008). Sheila Slone concurred and added that the "current trend" within most children's ministry publishers is to create curriculum that happens to fit within a Pragmatic-Participatory approach to ministry (Slone 2008). When publishers create curriculum there seems to be an attempt to make it



as flexible as possible so it appeals to many ministry styles. As a result, it seems that much of the current curriculum falls into this model.

It was also noted that many of the characteristics of the other three models can be included in a Pragmatic-Participatory approach to ministry (Webster 2008). The focus group members noted that it is easy to include an activity in a Pragmatic-Participatory worship service that may be considered a characteristic of one of the other models. It is possible to have a moment of quiet reflection during prayer time, review activity that focuses on memorizing the details of the lesson, and use a video clip to reinforce the lesson. Kim Marks noted that she writes her own curriculum and in doing so includes elements of all of the models in most of her services (Marks 2008). In doing this, each of the models has been represented while focusing mainly on the Pragmatic-Participatory approach. The implication being that those who subscribe to a Pragmatic-Participatory approach to ministry can include characteristics of the other ministry approaches; thereby, providing a balanced approach to ministry that includes all four models.

### ***Instructional-Analytic Model***

The ministry model with the second highest level of preference was the Instructional-Analytic model. Foshee noted that perhaps the reason this model was the second highest score is because traditionally this has long been the approach to ministry with children (Foshee 2008). Churches that function under a “school” model of teaching tend to focus on acquisition of knowledge. For generations this seemed to be the acceptable approach. The philosophy that said if the children know the information they are more likely to live by it was proven to be false as evidenced by the “scholastic” period of history where the focus was acquisition of knowledge. At its extreme, the

“scholastic” approach leads to “dead orthodoxy...faith devoid of compassion and soul” (Downs 1994, 59-60). While modern approaches to the Instructional-Analytic model recognize that spiritual growth is more than knowledge acquisition and intentionally focuses on “learning leading to doing,” perhaps tradition is in part responsible for the Instructional-Analytic model being the second most preferred model.

### ***Media-Driven Active-Engagement and Contemplative-Reflective Models***

The Media-Driven Active-Engagement model had a 19% preference among respondents, while the Contemplative-Reflective model had a 13% preference among respondents. A few reasons for the low level of preference were proposed by the focus groups. The first reason, which was proposed by Coker, applied mostly to the CR model but would also apply to the MDAE model. He said these models of ministry are “not much a part of the tradition of the Church of the Nazarene” (Coker 2008). The more liturgical approach that seems to be a part of the CR model is foreign to most Nazarene children’s pastors as well as an approach that focuses extensively on media. Coker added that personally he uses the lectionary in his preaching and that seemed to make him comfortable with the CR approach (Coker 2008).

Another reason for the low preference rate was proposed by Webster. She said the MDAE and CR models “exclude anything but themselves” (Webster 2008). Webster went on to explain that the previously mentioned models could be used while dabbling in other models (Webster 2008). It seems that the MDAE and CR are exclusive and require strict adherence to the characteristics that are unique to that model. It also seems that

these two models are closely connected with specific curricula. To be faithful to these two models it becomes difficult to include characteristics of the other models.

The final reasons for the low preference rates may be that they are either costly or require a strong commitment to the approach. Several focus group members mentioned that MDAE curriculum tends to be expensive and not affordable for many churches. The CR model requires significant training for the leader and a committed facility that is used for nothing other than the teaching experience. These special circumstances may contribute to the low preference rate of these models.

### ***Balanced Scores***

While the high scores of each respondent determined the preferred approach to ministry, there was a surprising balance among the four models for many respondents. Each survey respondent received four scores, one for each of the four ministry models. Seventy-one percent of the scores for each ministry model differed by 6 points or less between the highest and lowest scores. Twenty-six percent had differing scores between their highest and lowest of 7 to 12 points. Only 3% had 13 or greater points between their highest and lowest scores. The recurring theme in response to many of the questions posed to the focus groups was balance. The explanation for balance among the ministry models seems to be that philosophy drives the choice of which approaches to use in ministry. Most children's pastors seem to recognize that a variety of approaches keep the ministry fresh and keep kids excited. It is also a recognition that not all approaches reach all children; therefore, and ministry that has a variety of approaches is more likely to reach the children and help them to grow spiritually. While each respondent was

assigned to a ministry model based on their highest score, there was significant balance in responses within each of the ministry models.

**Philosophy vs. programs.** Both of the focus groups were adamant that the choice of ministry model was not driven by a focus on programming, but rather a focus on philosophy. When asked if choices were based on an intentional understanding of one's philosophy or if it was accidental they were unable to answer for sure. They made a point to express their confident belief that ministry is, and should be, driven by one's philosophy. To further the point, Romines said, "This doesn't mean you compromise your philosophy, but you are driven by your philosophy" (Romines 2008). It is for this reason that many children's pastors had balance in their scoring.

## **RQ2: Ministry Growth**

The second research question addressed the growth rate of each ministry model. The DGR formula was used to allow for statistical analysis on similarly based data. The question that was posed asked, "What are the differences between each ministry model and the attendance growth rate among children? Statistical analysis showed that there is no significant statistical difference at a 95% confidence level in DGR among the four ministry models defined in this research.

The implication of the statistics shows that when it comes to growing a ministry to children numerically it is not significant which model is preferred. This can be attributed to several factors. The first factor is the balance among the scores of each model. Seventy-one percent of the ministry model scores were within 6 points between the highest and lowest scores. The similarity in model scores may explain in part the

similarity in growth rate. If the research would have revealed overwhelming preferred models for each respondent perhaps there would have been a difference in growth rate, but this speculation is a mute point due to the balance in scores among the models.

A second possible explanation for the balance in growth rate among the models is that perhaps there truly is no difference between one model and the next. Intrinsically, it seems that perhaps the MDAE model might produce greater growth because of the high energy, media focus of the model. It also seems that the CR model might produce lesser growth because of the foreign nature of the model to most Nazarenes. When serious consideration is given to the role parents play in determining where a family attends church these too seem mute points. Therefore, there seems to be no certain explanation for the balance in growth rate among the models except to accept that there is no statistical significant difference.

### **RQ3-6: Ministry Praxis**

The four ministry praxes proposed in this study are each unique, yet the final statistical analysis produced the same results. After application of ANOVA testing on the data, the results showed that there is no significant statistical difference at a 95% confidence level in conversion rate, baptism rate, evangelism rate, and service rate among the four ministry models defined in this research. Basically, what this says is that it does not matter the preferred model. Discovering reasons for the lack of difference between each of the four praxes and the four ministry models is a difficult challenge. It seems that perhaps speculation is the only option.

When it was explained to the focus groups that there was no statistical difference in the four praxes and four ministry models, one person replied, “That’s

interesting!” When they were asked to explain what it means that there is no statistical difference, there was a pause and then Leonard responded, “This says to me that no matter what method is used churches are being successful” (Leonard 2008). Spaite almost interrupted and added, “The goal is to see kids’ lives transformed no matter what model is used. This is not indicative of one model” (Spaite 2008). The common theme in these and other responses is that the transformed life transcends the ministry models. It appears that for lives to be transformed there may be another factor at work other than ministry models.

In response to the same question, Snyder responded, “I don’t intend to discount the models, but perhaps the issue is more about relationships. I can have horrific curriculum in the hands of the best teacher and the outcome is beautiful. Or I can have the best curriculum . . . it comes back to the person presenting and instructing the child (Snyder 2008). Webster added, “I’ll take it further, you can have the worst curriculum and the worst teacher . . . and great spiritual growth rate. It’s relational. Loving kids makes a difference” (Webster 2008). While the research did not explore the role relationships play in the spiritual growth of children, the literature review did address the topic. Scripture is full of passages that address the importance of relationships in the spiritual growth process. The *Shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, addresses the importance of the relationship between parent and child. Ephesians 5:21 introduces the household code that addresses family relationships. Ephesians 6:1 addresses parent-child relationships. In Colossians 3:20-21, Paul demonstrates the importance of the father-child relationship. In 2 Timothy 3:10-17, Paul sets himself as an example who models for Timothy a relationship with Christ and then instructs Timothy to be a model to others. Even the

Trinity itself is a beautiful demonstration of a perfect relationship. Perhaps the focus groups are correct. Maybe the issue is more about relationships.

### **Research Applications**

A number of research applications have been discovered from analysis of the CSDS statement responses and research questions in light of the precedent literature and focus group interviews. The applications will be presented in three categories based on the six research questions in the study. The categories are ministry models, ministry growth, and ministry praxis.

#### ***Applications of the Findings Regarding Ministry Models***

The ministry models serve an important function in assisting children's pastors to better understand their philosophy of ministry. By evaluating current practices within one's ministry, it is possible to determine if the practice of ministry is consistent with one's philosophy of ministry. Ministry approaches must be driven by one's philosophy, not by programming or curriculum.

It may not be important which model a children's pastor prefers, but understanding the importance of conducting ministry with the desire to transform children's lives is important. Many children's pastors have a healthy balance in the types of ministries they provide for children, and as these ministries are planned and designed the underlying focus must always be the transforming of children's lives. Whatever one's preferred approach to ministry it must be done with excellence and come from a heart of love for God and children with the desire to help them grow spiritually.

A healthy, effective ministry requires opportunities for children to be influenced by characteristics from all four ministry models. While this study specifically looked at the uniqueness of each model, there are numerous similarities among the models as well. Recognizing one's preferred model provides insight into characteristics of other models that may not be preferred, but are important to meet the spiritual needs of all children. Children's pastors should use this opportunity to begin to use characteristics of models that may not be naturally comfortable.

### ***Applications of the Findings Regarding Ministry Growth***

The question of ministry growth is dualistic in nature. Numeric growth reveals trends and opportunities for evaluation of current ministry practice. Spiritual growth reveals the heart of the intention of the ministry and allows for evaluation of current ministry practice. Both areas of growth play a significant role in understanding spiritual growth of children.

While numeric attendance should not be the focus of any ministry to children, it does function as a gauge to see how one is doing. The research indicated that attendance growth is not determined by one's preferred ministry model, so what does determine attendance growth? It appears that intentionality in ministry is a significant factor in attendance growth. An organized ministry that supports parents in the rearing of their children, provides training for workers, and desires to see children grow in their walk with the Lord is a ministry that will grow numerically. Parents want to be a part of a church that loves their children, so if a church loves children it will continue to grow.



Numeric growth should not be the focus of ministry to children, but it should be used as a gauge to measure the effectiveness of ministry.

Spiritual growth should be the ultimate goal of any ministry to children. While this seems an obvious point, it also appears that this is not always the case. It is very easy to become focused on entertaining children through programs and activities that appeal to children. Sometimes numeric growth becomes a priority over spiritual growth. It is therefore important for the children's pastor to be intentional about designing ministry programming that intentionally asks the questions, "Does this approach to ministry fit within my philosophy of ministry? Will this program assist children to grow spiritually? What must be done to make sure children are challenged to walk with God?" If these questions cannot be answered in intentional ways then the ministry may not be appropriate.

The word "intentionality" has come to the surface quite often during the research. In both the literature review and interviews with the focus groups the reoccurring theme was the importance of intentional ministry. In many instances, the focus groups responses to questions returned to the theme of intentionality. In one conversation Coker noted, "Intentionality has been a critical component of ministry for a long time...everything has a purpose and so intentionality is looking at what is it that we are really trying to accomplish and how do we effectively do it? We're not just doing a program, we are doing ministry and that needs to be the intention" (Coker 2008). Concurring with Coker, Leonard added, "I am always asking myself two questions: What am I trying to accomplish and why am I doing this?" (Leonard 2008). These comments

and many others emphasize the importance of ministry that is intentional about focusing on ministry that will transform the lives of children.

### ***Applications of the Findings Regarding Ministry Praxis***

Each of the four ministry praxes are key moments in the lives of children who are growing spiritually. The most important moment in a child's spiritual life is the moment that he/she makes a decision to accept Jesus Christ as Savior. It is important that regular opportunities be provided for children to make decisions to follow Christ. The leader must recognize that first-generation Christians are likely to become Christians in a more traditional way and the plan of salvation needs to be clearly stated on a regular basis. It is also important that the plan of salvation be presented in a way that is understandable to the child without compromising or watering down the process. The leader must also recognize that second-generation Christians have grown up in the faith and their experience may be more of loving Jesus from very early days in their lives, and the cognitive decision to accept Jesus Christ as Savior is a significant moment in a life already lived for God. Leaders must be careful to recognize that the love for God many second-generation Christians have before their confession of faith is real and should be honored.

Baptism is another key moment in the spiritual growth journey of children. As an outward sign of an inward grace, the sacrament of baptism should be a part of the child's life following conversion. It is important that the child understand the significance of the act of baptism based on the cognitive ability of the child. The children's pastor should provide educational material that assists the child and parents in

understanding the sacrament. It should ultimately be the parents' decision when the child is ready to be baptized.

Involvement in evangelism is a sign that spiritual growth is taking place in the lives of children. Children should be taught the importance of sharing their faith with their friends. The act of sharing one's faith can be accomplished by inviting a friend to church to hear God's Word. Usually, personal evangelism takes place in spiritually mature children and sometimes not until they are much older. While this is typical, some special children will desire to personally share their faith with friends. In either case, training should take place that teaches children how to share their faith.

Children love to serve. It is important for children's pastors and other leader to provide intentional opportunities for children to serve inside and outside the church walls. Helping children move from being hearers to doers is an important transition for children. Training children and providing them an opportunity to serve at a young age will help them to grow spiritually. Young children should be teamed with an adult or older child so ministry can be modeled. Older children can take on certain ministry responsibilities themselves. An intentional service program should be developed that allows children to sign up for areas of interest. Training should be a part of the program and discipline and order should be maintained.

These four spiritual milestones are significant moments in the life of a child that is growing in relationship with God. Children's pastors must be intentional in providing opportunities for all children to experience these milestones. While a response from each child to these milestones is completely their decision, every effort should be made to provide many opportunities for these decisions to be made.

### **Research Limitations**

Several limitations of this research are identified below.

1. Each respondent was assigned to a particular ministry model based on their highest score on the twenty-four statements in Part III of the CSDS. It is possible that the ministry is equally balanced among a number of models. It is also possible that the scores among a number of models are similar but not equal. Assigning these ministries to a particular ministry model may have an impact upon analysis of the data.
2. Four spiritual milestones were used in this research to determine the level of spiritual growth among children in each of the models. Several limitations are possible here. When children's pastors completed the surveys they may not have known exact numbers for each of the four milestones, so they provided estimates. It is also a limitation that inward workings of the Holy Spirit in the life of a child are not always accurately displayed by outward expressions such as these spiritual milestones.
3. Every statement presented in the CSDC survey received a 77% or greater level of agreement at some level. While earlier implications highlighted relatively high disagreements to certain statements the overall response to all statements was in agreement with the statement. Care should be taken when making evaluation of the relatively high disagreement statements.
4. Every statement presented in the CSDS survey was supported by authors of each of the models. In spite of the accuracy of the statements, it is possible that the children's pastors who responded to the surveys were not aware of the intention of each statement. It is, therefore, possible that certain responses may be skewed by interpretation of the statements.

### **Further Research**

The research has led the researcher to question the impact of healthy adult relationships on the spiritual growth of children. Scripture describes the importance of relationships to bring about maturity in the faith community. Perhaps the relationship of the children's pastor and other key lay leaders with children has a significant impact on the spiritual development of children. A study of the impact of adult relationships on the spiritual growth of children would be a worthy project.

The research has also led the researcher to question the impact of preferred learning styles on the spiritual development of children. Perhaps children's pastors teach their children in the way they themselves prefer to learn. With a variety of learning styles represented in any children's ministry, a teacher who only uses one learning style is likely to not have a significant impact on children outside this learning style. Perhaps there is a connection between preferred learning styles and the way children best develop spiritually. A study of the relationship between learning styles of children and the learning styles of children's pastors would be a worthy research project. A study of learning styles and these four ministry models also has the potential to contribute to the conversation.

This research project has identified four spiritual development milestones in the lives of children. Perhaps there are other milestones that deserve attention. A parallel study that uses the same ministry models, but changes the spiritual milestones would also be a worthy research project.

This research project has focused on Nazarene children's pastors. A similar study could be conducted that studies children from other denominations to determine if the results of this study can be generalized to other denominations.

APPENDIX 1  
DECADAL GROWTH RATES

“Divide the latest year’s membership by the beginning year’s membership. This will give you the ratio of ‘latest’ to ‘beginning’ (L/B) for the number of years. Go to Table A in the appendix and locate the number (or number nearest to yours) in the left hand column ‘L/B’. Then in the column under the number of years, locate the AAGR (Average Annual Growth Rate). Now turn to Table B and locate the AAGR nearest to your AAGR. Read the corresponding DGR” (Waymire and Wagner 1984, 16).

APPENDIX 2  
FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS

West Focus Group:

Coker, Bill  
Spaite, Dana  
Leonard, Enola  
Romines, Karen

Midwest Focus Group:

Davis, Amy  
Foshee, David  
Marks, Kim  
Webster, Marlene  
Slone, Shiela  
Snyder, Troy

Each focus group originally had eight members who agreed to participate. Due to a variety of circumstances only four participated from the West group and only six participated from the Midwest group.

## APPENDIX 3

### PROPOSED DEFINITIONS OF SPIRITUALITY

'Spirituality' is thus about the life of faith—what drives and motivates it, and what people find helpful in sustaining and developing it. It is about that which animates the life of believers, and urges them on to deepen and perfect what has at present only begun. (McGrath 2006, 51)

Spirituality represents a belief in this nonmaterial dimension, a dimension seen as permeating the physical world and creating other levels of being accessed in mystical experience and in the afterlife. (Fontana 2003, 11-12)

Perhaps the best description of the spiritual life is *the sum total of responses which one makes to what is perceived as the inner call of God*. (Groeschel 1988, 4)

Van Ness concludes that one ought to distinguish between spirituality that is religious and a secular life that acknowledges a spiritual dimension. (Meehan 2002, 292)

This is a word which has come much into vogue to describe those attitudes, beliefs, practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards super-sensible realities. (Wakefield 1983, 361)

A conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and in the context of the community of believers. (Sheldrake 2000, 40)

The child's development of an awareness of the relationship which has been initiated by God in and through baptism . . . , the role of the child's social community in fostering that relationship . . . , and the child's understanding of, and response to, that relationship. (Morgenthaler 1999, 6)

Children's spirituality is the child's development of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, within the context of a community of believers that fosters that relationship, as well as the child's understanding of—and response to—that relationship (adapted from Sheldrake, 2000, p.40, Morgenthaler, 1999, p.6). (Children's spirituality: Christian perspectives 2007)



In its Christian sense, 'spirituality' is about the process of renewal and rebirth that comes about through the action of the Holy Spirit, which makes us more like Christ. It is about spiritual growth and development, and includes the development of just about every aspect of our life of Christian faith. (McGrath 2001, 218)

The way we understand our religious and ethical commitment, and the way we act and react habitually to this understanding. (Staples 1991, 13-14)

A process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others. (Mulholland 1993, 15)

APPENDIX 4

DEVELOPING A THEOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD

Six perspectives for developing a theology of childhood:

1. Gifts of God and Sources of Joy
2. Sinful Creatures and Moral Agents
3. Developing Beings who Need Instruction and Guidance
4. Fully Human and Made in the Image of God
5. Models of Faith and Sources of Revelation
6. Orphans, Neighbors, and Strangers in Need of Justice and Compassion (Bunge 2006, 58-62).

## APPENDIX 5

### INSTRUMENTATION: INITIAL EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

June 9, 2008

FR: Lynda T. Boardman  
Children's Ministries International Director

RE: Children's Spiritual Development Surveys

There are many options and approaches to walk with children on their spiritual journeys. We, who are in Children's Ministries, desire to touch the lives of children in our frame of references in the most significant ways. It would increase our effectiveness to determine relationships between ministry approaches and four significant spiritual milestones in the lives of Nazarene children.

This is the subject of a paper by well-known, veteran Nazarene children's pastor and professor, Leon Blanchette. This paper will help adults understand the relationship of different approaches on the spiritual development of children. Leon has developed this survey for children's pastors. The survey will take just a few minutes, but it will help Leon understand how Nazarene children's pastors think about this relationship.

Professor Blanchette has selected you to complete this survey because of your work with children. Your information will be held in confidence, unless you give permission to use your information and name. Reports will summarize group responses.

You will be receiving an additional email from Professor Blanchette tomorrow with details of how to access the online survey. If for some reason you do not receive a follow-up letter from Professor Blanchette, please check to see if it was placed in your "junk mail" bin. Thank you for your willingness to complete the survey. We appreciate your time and your insights. God bless you in your continued ministry to some of His "little ones."

## APPENDIX 6

### INSTRUMENTATION: CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT SURVEY (CSDS)

June 12, 2008

(Cover Page E-mail)

Dear Friend,

Yesterday you should have received an email from Lynda Boardman, Children's Ministries International Director of the Church of the Nazarene. In the email, she introduced you to the research I am doing for my doctoral dissertation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The title of my dissertation is "The Relationship between Ministry Praxis and Spiritual Development Milestones in the Lives of Children." The research is designed to look at four different approaches to ministry and their relationship to the spiritual development of Nazarene children through four particular milestones of spiritual growth.

You play a significant role in the success of this research. Not only will your participation in the survey help me complete this research, but your involvement may ultimately lead to helping Nazarene children's pastors better understand how to help children grow in their relationship with God.

I appreciate Lynda Boardman's support of this research and earnestly request your support as well. The survey will only take approximately 10 minutes and can be completed online. Would you please take time right now to go to the link below where you will have the opportunity to complete the survey? If for some reason you cannot complete it right now, would you please make it a priority to complete it in the next few days?

<http://surveys.olivet.edu/surveylogin.asp?k=121319166761>

Thank you for your willingness to help me in this research process. Your participation will help me bring to a conclusion this four year process and provide valuable information that will assist in the way we minister to children in the church. If you have

any questions or would like to know more about my research, you may contact me at any time.

May God richly bless your ministry.

*Leon Blanchette*

Researcher

Rev. Leon M. Blanchette

Ed.D. Candidate, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Associate Professor of Christian Education, Olivet Nazarene University

Research Advisor

Dr. Michael J. Anthony, Ph.D., Ph.D.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Biola University

## **Children's Spiritual Development Survey**

### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine relationships between ministry approaches and four significant spiritual milestones in the lives of Nazarene children. This research is being conducted by Leon Blanchette for the purpose of dissertation research. In this research, you will provide basic autobiographical information, answer basic questions about the children in your ministry, and evaluate twenty-four statements by your level of agreement or disagreement. Any information that you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

**Note:** For the purpose of this survey, “children” will be considered kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **PART I**

**Please provide the following autobiographical information.**

Age: *(drop down menu)*

Gender: *(drop down menu)*

Highest education level: *(drop down menu)*

Location (state): *(drop down menu)*

Title: *(drop down menu)*

Denomination: *(drop down menu)*

How many years have you been the children's pastor at your current church?

What was the attendance of the children's ministry (kindergarten – 6<sup>th</sup> grade) when you began as children's pastor at your current church?

What is the current attendance of the children's ministry?

### **PART II**

**Please answer the following questions with your best estimate if exact numbers are not available.**

In the past year of your church ministry how many children have prayed to ask Jesus to be their Savior?

In the past year of your church ministry how many children have been baptized?

In the past year of your church ministry how many children have brought at least one friend to church?

In the past year of your church ministry how many children have been involved in service to others (this may include ministry roles in the local church or in the community)?

### **PART III**

**Please answer the following questions by reflecting on the intentionality of the ministry your church currently provides to children.**

*Rate each statement on the following scale:*

*1 = strongly disagree    2 = disagree    3 = somewhat disagree  
4 = somewhat agree    5 = agree    6 = strongly agree*

1. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes periods of quiet reflection

1            2            3            4            5            6

2. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** focuses on learning in the context of fun activities

1            2            3            4            5            6

3. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** focuses on active engagement with the lesson

1            2            3            4            5            6

4. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes awards in recognition of meaningful accomplishments of children

1            2            3            4            5            6

5. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes an environment that is designed to reflect a child's culture

1            2            3            4            5            6

6. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** simplifies lesson preparation so leaders may focus on relationships with students

1      2      3      4      5      6

7. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes moments of quiet contemplation that is adult guided

1      2      3      4      5      6

8. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes the presentation of the gospel for a salvation response at strategic times throughout the year, or as the Holy Spirit prompts, rather than every Sunday

1      2      3      4      5      6

9. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes a liturgy (worship) that is both individual and communal

1      2      3      4      5      6

10. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes a focus on values, virtues, and behaviors rather than a focus on learning information

1      2      3      4      5      6

11. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes a systematic study of God's Word

1      2      3      4      5      6

12. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes a priority on spiritual conversion of children at any age

1      2      3      4      5      6

13. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes curriculum that is media-driven

1      2      3      4      5      6

14. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes storytelling presented in a way that allows the Holy Spirit to bring meaning to the story when the child is ready

1      2      3      4      5      6



15. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes the participation of children in ministry roles

1      2      3      4      5      6

16. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes application-oriented games or activities

1      2      3      4      5      6

17. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** places a priority on memorizing Scripture

1      2      3      4      5      6

18. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes age-appropriate worship experiences that are divided into a variety of learning sessions

1      2      3      4      5      6

19. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes instruction in Scripture as THE means to spiritual formation

1      2      3      4      5      6

20. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** focuses on the use of a variety of multimedia experiences

1      2      3      4      5      6

21. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes an atmosphere of worship that promotes reverence for God

1      2      3      4      5      6

22. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes healthy competition that focuses on improvement or task accomplishment

1      2      3      4      5      6

23. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes a focus on small groups to reinforce lessons learned in large groups

1      2      3      4      5      6

24. Our church ministry to children **intentionally** includes imparting a deep sense of “awe and wonder of God” as a significant goal

1      2      3      4      5      6

**PART IV – Select One**

\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am willing to be interviewed, either by phone or in person, about my responses. (By providing this information you are waiving your right to anonymity, however, every precaution will be made to protect your identity in any reporting.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ @ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ No, I am not willing to be interviewed about my responses

APPENDIX 7  
FOLLOW UP LETTER No. 1

June 19, 2008

Dear Friend,

A week ago, I sent you an email letter that explained the doctoral research I am conducting, accompanied by a request to have you complete a survey that would assist me in my research. As of this morning, your completed survey has not been received.

I know that you are busy and the thought of completing the survey may have slipped your mind. Maybe you have been busy at camp or conducting Vacation Bible School. Or perhaps you thought your participation in the survey to be unimportant. Let me assure you that your participation is important. I am only surveying Nazarene children's pastors, and as you know, there are not many of us out there. In fact, my research shows that there are approximately 350 Nazarene children's pastors, both part-time and full-time. Because there are so few of us, I need everyone's participation. Would you please take the time right now to spend 10 minutes completing the survey?

<http://surveys.olivet.edu/surveylogin.asp?k=121319166761>

Thank you for your time – I know it is valuable. If you have any questions or concerns you can reach me at 815-928-5474

May God richly bless your ministry.

*Leon Blanchette*

Researcher  
Leon Blanchette  
Ed.D. Candidate, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary  
Associate Professor of Christian Education, Olivet Nazarene University

APPENDIX 8  
FOLLOW UP LETTER No. 2

June 26, 2008

Dear Friend,

Two weeks ago, I sent you an email letter that explained the doctoral research I am conducting, accompanied by a request to have you complete a survey that would assist me in my research. As of this morning, your completed survey has not been received.

I know that you are busy, but I would really appreciate it if you would take 10 minutes to complete the survey. Your participation is critical to the success of my research. If I do not receive a survey from you, I will contact you by phone next week to make sure you have not had any technical problems.

<http://surveys.olivet.edu/surveylogin.asp?k=121319166761>

Thank you for your time – I know it is valuable. If you have any questions or concerns you can reach me at 815-928-5474

May God richly bless your ministry.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MINISTRY PRAXIS AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT MILESTONES IN THE LIVES OF CHILDREN

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The assumption of the study was that children are capable of an intimate and real relationship with God. The question that is often asked is, “How does the church best help children to grow in that relationship?” The lack of an agreed upon definition and understanding of spirituality and the need for a sound and practical approach to helping children develop spiritually was the catalyst behind this research. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between ministry praxis and spiritual development milestones in the lives of Nazarene children.

The literature review began with an examination of the history of spirituality, the biblical call to children’s spiritual nurture, and the history of psychology and developmentalism. Attention was given to the typologies presented by Urban Holmes and David Kolb culminating in analysis of Michael Anthony’s Children’s Spiritual Formation Typology.

A mixed methods approach was used to gather data. The process for development of the research instrument and the procedures used for implementation were

clearly explained. The online instrument was completed by 201 (64.4% of the population) Nazarene children's pastors and analysis of the data was conducted using ANOVA testing.

The respondents were assigned to one of the four ministry models based on their responses to the 24 statements on the survey instrument. By determining one's preferred ministry model and analyzing a variety of self-reported data, analysis of the relationship in the four spiritual development milestones was possible. In addition to the four spiritual milestones, growth rate of each of the ministry models was analyzed.

The research was completed by conducting two focus group interviews to provide qualitative analysis of the data gathered from the survey instrument. Open-ended questions were presented to each focus group which further validated the analysis of the data.

The statistical analysis of the data concluded that there are no significant statistical differences in the four ministry models and the four spiritual development milestones.

Key words: child, children, development, formation, growth, milestones, ministry, nurture, praxis, spiritual, spirituality

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