the Secularised Child

...erstanding of the church's role of mission with
children in a post-Christendom society (with special reference to Scripture Union)

by

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This dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted previously in support of any qualification or course.

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the MA in Evangelism Studies, University of Sheffield at Cliff College.

For some time there has been a spread of opinion and practice in relation to children, mission and the church. As we get to grips with a different culture in a post-Christendom age, how should evangelism with children feature as part of the mission of the church? Should it hold any priority in terms of our immediate and long-term thinking? What does any of this have to say to a mission movement such as Scripture Union?

Research shows that evangelism with children has the potential for a life-long impact; that significant numbers of people start their journey of faith in their childhood years. Recent statistics of 0 . 15 year olds points to a steady drop in church attendance over the last century, with massive decline over the last two decades. Further reading into the place of the child in theology and mission reveals that little work, if any, has been done with regard to the radical shifts in society, the emergent church and the place of children as a focus in mission.

An exploration was undertaken into the perceptions and understanding of those engaged in Christian leadership or in ministry to children in the UK, or both. This was undertaken at a national level and also through an example of local ministry, where Scripture Union is working with churches across the community. Also analysis was undertaken to identify trends and projections, examining a changing culture and the resulting impact for the church.

The discussion of the results examined implications for those involved with children's ministry in the UK, those involved in church leadership and also for Scripture Union. The conclusions seek to identify opportunities and explore what can be done to bridge any gap between the thinkers and the doers and national and local leaders.

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"Do the simple things well." This advice offered to the Church of England by a retiring bishop is not an earth-shattering discovery perhaps. The expansion that followed is straightforward enough too. "Offer worship which can draw and nurture both the committed and the seeker… linked to such worship has to be effective preaching and teaching… help the next (generation) to discover the gospel… love our community neighbours as we love ourselves…"[2] and finally, "the promotion of prayerfulness."[3]

I'm sure that there are few who would argue with the principles that Gavin Reid offers for the fundamentals of parish ministry. What appears to cause more disagreement, in practice if not in mental assent, is the emphasis given to the third simple thing . helping the next generation to discover the gospel. It is referred to as the first responsibility of any generation of Christians, with Reid's position clearly stated, "I am convinced that passing on the faith to children is the most fundamental ministry of all."[4]

1.1 Children included?

Whilst Reid may be convinced, it looks as though someone may need to tell the church! At a time when we appear to have gone into statistical freefall as far as children and young people in the church are concerned, this apparent simple thing would appear to be eluding us. The combination of church attendance statistics, together with reports such as the recent *The tide is running out*[5] point to the harsh realities of the dramatic decline in church attendance by under 15s during the last

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by Francis Bridger who pointed out in 2002, ±he

±an parishes now have no children's or youth

work[6]. Whatever Reid and others are calling us to act on; there is a severe problem

of haemorrhaging[7] to be addressed as part of that challenge to move forward. It may

be a question of ensuring that when we turn the taps on, the plug is securely in

position!

The place and priority of children in the mission of the church appears to be an area

of mixed opinion and even more mixed in terms of practice. With regard to its

significance, it does appear to be something of increasing prominence, however, as

the recent report on tweenagers suggests, ±a key reason is the falling percentage

of those who respond to the Gospel message as they get older; the key age used to

be in a person's teenage years, now it is in their childhood years[8].

It is perhaps unusual to come across those who would speak in an outright manner

against children's ministry, but there is considerable diversity when it comes to

choosing what makes it up into the top priorities. This diversity is something that I

encounter as part of my work with Scripture Union, within the enquiries and dialogue

that arises from individuals and churches. The unapologetic directness of Reid's

assertions does not appear to be widely embraced in the thinking and practice of

these encounters . something that is not dissimilar to Reid's experience ±ö this was

not a message that met with much enthusiasm[9] A further concern that I share with

Reid is that this understanding needs to take a much more significant role in shaping

both our missiology and ecclesiology if we are to be effective in the long-term in

building the church.

to resonate with those who have taken time to

d significance of children – both those inside and outside of the church. Ron Buckland provides a sobering insight from the researcher Margaret Mead, who declared "the society that neglects its children is one generation away from destruction"[9]. The theologian William Strange takes this perspective and apportions specific responsibility on those who follow, and indeed obey, Christ, "so there must be for Christians a particular focus of concern for children; and not merely the children of their own household, nor just the children of the church community, but children simply as children, wherever they are and in whatever need they find themselves"[10]. Francis Bridger continues with this mission imperative and makes explicit his hope in writing *Children Finding Faith* "so that it will enlarge our vision for relevance of the gospel to the millions of children… they need the love of Christ every bit as much as the rest of us and the evangelistic task is urgent"[11]. How far does that understanding extend to the church futurists as well as the actual local practitioners today?

1.2 Church of tomorrow

There is much "out-of-the-pew thinking"[12] in Christian circles at present, Michael Moynagh suggests, about the nature of Christian ministry and new forms of church in the light of a post-modern world. This is brought to light through the proliferation of books such as Gavin Reid's and Michael Moynagh's that present us with a spectrum of challenges. These arise out of a range of discernable shifts away from how we have perhaps previously related to our culture. Amidst the challenges are scattered numerous opportunities for exploring what these new forms of church could be like

uid new perspectives such as those found in Pete

Church[13].

At this stage I can only admit to a hunger for seeing the church move more into a form that better engages with the world around it, rather than any expertise, though as part of the body of Christ, it may be that the way I should look at it is as having more of a vested interest. However I do stand alongside the emphasis that Reid puts across (as a practitioner and one who stands both in local church and parachurch ministry) that there is an importance here to be grasped. It is reflected perhaps even in the simple fact of having personally taken up a role within a movement such as Scripture Union, an organisation where there is a priority of emphasis placed upon ministry with children, young people and families and perhaps an unusually high level of emphasis in relation to children. It is important to state, for the benefit of any reader coming to this study, that this balance would reflect my own personal approach as well.

This project will draw also on some of the 'prophetic' voices that are calling the church forward, those who are dissatisfied with the inherited pattern or structure of the church in the light of the world as it is today. Research into the perspectives and practices of a sample of those engaged in children's ministry will be taken at both a 'micro' or local level as well as those with opportunity to influence and inform at more of a 'macro' or national level. Importantly, the project also provides a valuable opportunity to look at the relationship between both the local and national perspectives in the light of Scripture Union's ministry and what can be learned. If we believe something to be true, then that belief informs our thoughts and should affect

e, there are implications for Scripture Union and

hom we seek to work and/or the church at large, which will be a key strand of thinking in the discussion of results and conclusions.

1.3 What it is not about

It is worth being clear about the areas that are not seen as being brought under the microscope,as far as this piece of work is concerned. There are many areas of great value that warrant further study and are worth bringing to the attention of those in positions of influence, but they do not fulfil the demands made here. That does not mean that these areas will not cross over into or inform some of the discussion, but it does mean that they are not central themes to the investigation of this particular thesis.

Such areas would include the ongoing dialogue about the theology of the child, exploration of the child's status and their standing before God and position within his kingdom. Much work exists already in the whole arena of faith development and that is not evaluated here, although understanding and application is sought from it.

Further work would be valuable to research the journey between ministry with children and the impact of that work in the long-term, especially to identify any trends regarding where the most significant and lasting benefits remain from that ministry. The intention of the research is not to collate a top ten of people's priorities in mission and to see in what way children feature, rather the thesis takes the starting point of assuming a level of significance and then assessing wider opinion and practice

...gible that impinges on that understanding in some

...e and any move from acknowledgement to action?

What I do hope to explore, though, is the understanding of what goes on in peoples

thinking . their perceptions and understanding of how we take seriously this

supposedly significant ministry with children. I would wish to explore what knowledge

exists about the major influences on our children today and how that should inform

our resultant practice. I hope to discover what exists within that thinking on a local

level and at a national level and where the responses agree or disagree with each

other; and to try to ascertain where, if any, there are identifiable gaps between verbal

assent and the actual outworking.

The world is changing and the speed of that change is accelerating. One writer

suggests that we must wake up to and embrace that reality, ±the future I was hurtling

towards has come to meet me head-on, and I must learn to live with it nowq[15]. So

what might a greater emphasis on children have to do with meeting that need?

Douglas Rushkoff, a secular American futurist, lays one agenda before us:

> Our kids are undoubtedly younger and less experienced than us, but they are
> also less in danger of becoming obsolete. They are the latest model of human
> being, and come equipped with many new features. Looking at the world of
> children is not looking backwards at our own past ·   itq looking ahead. They
> are our evolutionary future[16].

At a time in the church when there is a great degree of exploratory thinking about our

identity and purpose, it may be that there is something of value that can be learned

through a greater study of children. A Christian Australian childrenq practitioner adds

a further dimension to provide food for thought:

the year 2030 are alive and well, and about 10 ... do now in ministry with children has the potential ... by his Spirit, will bring about any change that lastsõ God has chosen to allow us to be partners in the gospel, co-workers, giving to us a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 18)[17].

[Finally, as a note of clarity, the use of the word ±hildrenqin this study is used generically. It is intended to embrace those who are dependant, to some extent vulnerable and unable to speak out for themselves. Where an age definition is needed or useful, then unless otherwise stated, it would be equated with pre-teenage years].

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1 Reid G, To Canterbury with Love (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2002) p.280
2 ibid p.280-1
3 ibid p.282
4 ibid p.281
5 Brierley P, The Tide is running Out (London: Christian Research, 2000)
6 Dallow G, Touching the Future (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002) p.7 (Foreword)
7 Brierley P, Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers (London: Christian Research, 2002) p.4
8 ibid p.192
9 Buckland R, Perspectives on children and the gospel (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 2001) p.29
10 Strange W A, Children in the Early Church (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996) p.113
11 Bridger F, Children Finding Faith (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union 2000) p.8
12 Moynagh M, Changing World, Changing Church (London: Monarch, 2001) p.3
13 Ward P, Liquid Church (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002)
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15 Kelly G, Get a Grip on the Future without Losing Your Hold on the Past (London: Monarch, 1999) p.29
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17 Buckland R, ibid p.16

2.1 Models of handing on the faith to the next generation

±If you plan for a decade, plant trees; if you plan for a century, nurture children[18]. There are limited historical writings about the means used to pass on faith from one generation to the next. The early church fathers made a passing reference in the writings of Clement and Polycarp[19] (who interestingly is recorded as having ±clearly experienced God at the age of 9q[20]). There are some secular books that cover the education and upbringing of children but, according to Irene Smale when she wrote in 1998, there were very few sources with any spiritual information on which to draw.[21] Bill Anderson suggests ±o it is as though the theological ostrich has buried its head in the ±too-hard basketqq[22] More recent study from Marcia Bunge, three years on, concurs that ±until very recently, issues related to children have tended to be marginal in almost every area of contemporary theologyq[23]. Bunge, however, does perceive that there is a growing interest in children, expressed across a range of academic disciplines[24]. A perception held too by William Strange who suggests that ±children are on the churchesqagenda in a way in which they have not been in previous agesq[25].

Scripture points us to a variety of models and perspectives from the Old Testament, in the gospels and as part of the early church. The Mosaic writings outline three principles of ministry to children . modelling, participation and instruction[26]. Modelling puts the onus on the whole community to live out their faith; participation invites children to share with adults those experiences that give meaning to faith; instruction

experience. A good example can be found in ⋯⋯ commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you rise and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get upq (v.6-7) The principle is echoed a few chapters later in Deuteronomy chapter eleven. The elements that appear significant are for a strong example to be set, for involvement to be encouraged for the children themselves, and the role played by the family and community. The emphasis of instruction, particularly parental, is picked up again in Proverbs (22:6).

What is most intriguing in the picture we then encounter in the gospels is the way that much of this is turned on its head. Jesus went out of his way to emphasise the significance of children in the Kingdom of Heaven[27]. As William Strange points out, ±children were models for discipleship in the kingdom of God. In Jesusqview, they both pointed the way for adults to enter the kingdom of God, and showed how adults were to follow Jesus in the kingdom of Godq[28]. For the first time we encounter a possibility that faith development could be learnt from, as well as taught to, children. John Westerhoff suggests that ±to speak of being childlike is to speak of the spiritual potential in each of usq[29]. In addition to this upside down-ness we are challenged by the aforementioned modelling and instruction, with the onerous responsibility of ensuring that our own example is beyond reproach (Matt 18: 6, Mark 9: 42, Luke 17: 1-2). All this is intriguingly set against a complex backdrop of Greco-Roman antiquity where children could be appreciated on the one hand and, on the other, viewed negatively with a status at the low end of the social ladder[30].

as been done with models developed to help us

passing on faith. Educationalists Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg have researched a framework for children's moral development[31]. Most notable of the faith development theorists are James Fowler and his stages of faith[32] and John Westerhoff's alternative tree-trunk analogy of rings of development[33]. Both models chart a stepped progression of change and are valuable in informing our understanding through differing emphases; Westerhoff stresses attitudinal change whilst Fowler stresses content[34]. Helpful as each theory is, for the most part it is understood that this process of development takes place incrementally over time. Finney's research in the early nineties, with adults reflecting back on their faith development, points to the majority of people having a very gradual coming to faith[35].

2.2 Mission with children, within the overall mission of the church:

"If Jesus had so much to say about children, why did the early church have so little to say about them?"[36] There is a relatively small, yet growing, range of published accounts looking at how the subject of children in the mission of the church has been and is being addressed in the church at large. From all accounts it would appear that this increase is, in part, a panic-induced response to the stark realities made evident in recently released church attendance statistics[37]. The main growth point across the board with regard to children has been the development of child protection guidelines and procedures. This is rightly valid, but is a shameful reflection if that is all we have managed. It would be fair to say that up until very recent discussion, in mainstream missiology (e.g. Bosch or Lausanne etc.), children have been largely invisible.[38]

of recording, the Church of England provides us

data. Although this does not reflect the breadth of

the church scene in the UK, it does provide a reasonable amount of insight into the

emerging dialogue over recent years. There is little to suggest that the story is vastly

different across other parts of the church.

Around the time that the decade of evangelism began, there were stirrings that

started to raise the profile of evangelism with children, together with increased

recognition of the scale of the task. The 1988 report *Children in the Way*[39] started to

energise the discussion about the place of children in the church. It was amended

when it was debated at General Synod, which then led to a further report covering

the place of children not in the church - *All God's Children?*[40] - that came as a

response to address the specific need for children's evangelism, under the subtitle of

Children's Evangelism in Crisis.

The report highlighted the findings of the 1989 English Church Census, which stated

that "only 14 percent of children under 15 years of age are in a church-related activity

on a typical Sunday"[41] It made explicit the sense of urgency, urged the church to

take children seriously and called for concerted efforts at all levels of the church to

develop radical new strategies.[42] The report was debated at General Synod in

November 1991 and accepted by a near unanimous vote.[43]

The response to the report was not overwhelming. One notable significant step came

in 2001 with the appointment of the Archbishop's Officer for Evangelism among

Children, though it took more than a decade after the publication of the report itself

Frank, one of the original members of the working years later, ±Why, seemingly, has so little taken place? Do we have a church that has no heart for children?q[44] She goes on to suggest an answer to the questions by highlighting the gap between those who are the central ±talkersqof the church and those who are the local ±doersq[45] The picture painted points to a stark reality, but one with possible renewed hope arising from the new appointment made by the Archbishop.

There have been a number of areas of research during and since the decade of evangelism that have highlighted the enduring significance of positive work done with children and the potential life-long impact of such work. At a basic level of understanding this would certainly seem to resonate with the wisdom from Proverbs mentioned earlier of ±õ when he is old he will not turn from itq(22:6 NIV). Gavin Reid speaks plainly of the ±need to build on a previous awareness of the story of Jesus Christq[46]

John Finneyqs report into how people find faith today alluded to this a decade earlier. ±The importance of early encounters with the church can be seen in the figuresõ 76% of those who became Christians as adults had reasonably prolonged contact with a church during childhoodq[47] On the whole, the people in the survey had a ±reasonably positive experienceq[48] with Sunday school; it was perceived as ±generally pleasurableq[49] Finney goes on to note that 70% left, with most of them between the ages of 10 and 14.[50]

...tions of not meeting that challenge, when he wrote

> Very few adults without a Sunday school background become worshippers in later life. Most people who begin churchgoing as adults are returning to the church of their childhood. The massive missionary challenge posed by generations growing up without childhood involvement has so far not been met. The age structure of congregations today, and in particular the absence of children, therefore appears to have future decline already built into it unless this missionary challenge can be met.[51]

Some analysis of this 'exiting' has been picked up and brought to our attention in the more recent research *Reaching And Keeping Early Secondaries (RAKES),* subsequently referred to as Tweenagers.[52] In Peter Brierley's report he states that 'tweenagers decide for the church while they are still children, mostly when 7 to 10 years of age'.[53] In evangelism terms too, Brierley's analysis reveals an increasing significance of childhood years, rather than teenage years, in identifying those who respond to the gospel message.[54] The message is quite clear in pointing to the importance of children's evangelism and nurture as a critical area for the church to be addressing.

There are no straightforward means for assessing the responses to these challenging trends. One strategy that Brierley advocates is for a generation of children's workers or child and family ministers, just as much as we need youth ministers. He states that 'in 1998 the Baptist Union reported 123 full-time youth specialists employed by local churches, but only 10 full-time children's specialists'.[55] It is anticipated that this figure will change dramatically as the squeeze is felt on a diminishing pool of possible volunteer workers.[56] One writer suggests that it would be

edicated children's workers to increase four-fold

Further afield in 2001 saw George Barna researching adults in America to determine the impact of work with children. Despite the church culture being significantly different to that of the UK, the findings resonate with both those of the church attendance findings and of Finney's nearly ten years earlier. Barna states that "there is a significant generational decline taking place in church involvement, but the decline is especially evident among those who were unchurched as children" and that "adults who attended church regularly as a child are three times as likely to be attending a church today as their peers who avoided the church during childhood"[58] Broadly speaking, it would appear that the situation in the States is mirroring that of the UK, both in terms of long-term influence and potentially in terms of numerical decline.

More recent research from the same organisation has picked up on comparative themes to those of the Tweenagers report. This report, *Teens Evaluate the Church-Based Ministry They Received as Children,*[59] focused on what American teenagers say they received from the church when they were young. One conclusion that Barna drew was that "children get some very helpful and valuable experiences from church involvement, but often do not receive sufficient training in applying biblical content to their decision-making process"[60] This led Barna to challenge the priorities of where many churches were at and to grasp the significance of applying a more deliberate strategy when it comes to work with children. "The data show that churches can have a very significant impact on the worldview of people, but they must start with an

people at a very young age. Waiting until someone
 ears misses the window of opportunityq[61] It begs the
question, how intentional are we? The intentional process that Barna refers to makes
explicit the need for an early start, but that is only the start; culturally appropriate
continuity is needed.

The findings from all of these reports begin to flesh out a clearer picture of the impact
of work done with children, in terms of mission and nurture, before they reach their
teenage years. What is equally significant, however, is the fact that all these reports
have emerged within the last 15 years. That points us towards a sense of the
immediate need, together with a possible momentum and growing knowledge that
ought to be significant for those interested in the long-term building of Godœ church
here on earth.

2.3 Mission and evangelism

In the interests of clarity within this report, it is important to be explicit about what is
meant by mission and evangelism. Many see mission as non-negotiable. ŒThe
Christian Church is called to mission, but there can be no mission without a
messageq[62] Mission is seen therefore as the broad sweep of Godœ agenda for us as
his people (missio Dei), and within that inclusive definition, evangelism exists as a
core function. Both David Bosch and Andrew Kirk identify evangelism to be a
process, with an emphasis on communication and the main thrust of that
communication being the proclamation of the good news of the gospel.[63]

be value in exploring further the hermeneutical

of understanding. Verkuyl reminds us of the need

to revisit this in every age.[64] Bosch suggests that "it is of little avail to embark upon a

discussion of the biblical foundations of mission unless we have first clarified some of

the hermeneutical principles involved"[65] For simplicity, this piece of work takes the

understanding, as William Abraham did from the International Review of Missions,

that "Evangelism is the spreading of the good news by proclamation, whereas

mission is the outflow of the love of God in and through our life, word and deed"[66]

Within "mission" there have been two distinct approaches for centuries, in the form of

social action and evangelism. John Stott, in his book Evangelical Truth, points us to

the conflict between the two that has existed for evangelicals for much of that time[67].

Even as recently as 1978, four years after Lausanne when "The battle for world

mission" was published, there was considerable pressure to place evangelism as a

priority over social action.[68]

We are helped to relate to both in the report from Grand Rapids (1982), where social

activity was stated to be a consequence of, bridge to and partner of evangelism.[69]

Here, we are encouraged to hold on to three distinct and yet inter-related aspects of

the dynamic between the two methodologies. There remains an assertion that

evangelism retains a certain priority, but that practice should resemble that of Jesus,

where there was no sense of competition but that "they mutually support and

strengthen each other in an upward spiral of increased concern for both"[70] Both,

therefore, are important for addressing the long-term needs on any agenda for

children in the UK.

the nature of the church implicitly embracing both:

…nd sense of identityõ is inherently bound up with its call to share and live out the gospelq[71] Here we find the essence of church being outlined as mission, with any further understanding of that mission simply helping to reinforce the whole purpose and identity of the church.

2.4 The national context: church as a verb

There is a growing momentum of discussion in certain circles of the church in the UK. The focus of the discussion is about the nature of church and the process of evolution that is needed in order to fulfil Godœ mission more effectively in the way that church relates to a changing world. As Michael Moynagh puts it, ±f we remain as we are we face near extinction in the years ahead. It is time for a church makeover, time to become a fresh church for an it-must-fit-me worldq[72]. The emphasis here needs to be on the process of responsive change, rather than change for changeœ sake. A more organic approach, perhaps, along the lines of Pete Wardœ conversation with Stuart Murray ±õ the shift from church as a noun to church as a verbõ for too long we have seen church as something that we attendq[73]

George Lings of the Sheffield Centre addresses this in a way that resonates with Jürgen Moltmann[74] and Kirkœ description at the end of the previous section, ±we are coming closer to a view that says the church does not do mission as an activity, rather it *is* missionq[75]. It is helpful to temper this with Stephen Neilœ now famous adage ±f everything is mission, nothing is missionq[76]. The continuance of dialogue itself, in all this, is important, as Bosch concludes ±õ mission is to be understood as

…and that there is a constant need for mission itself to

This realisation is important, as part of the background to this study, because we can see a greater convergence of missiology and ecclesiology than has been in the church for a long time. The thesis places an emphasis on the significance of this present time and how within this convergence there needs to be a theology of children. This needs application both in terms of our responsibility to help the next generation discover the gospel and also in terms of having a child in the midst'to point the way for adults to enter the kingdom of God. Ironically Lings comes close to doing just that in the analogy he uses to encourage the nurture of emerging churches – 'those who treat professing Christian children, as actually Christian, find that those children often rise to expectations and even exceed them. If we did the same with emerging forms of church we might receive equally pleasant surprises'[78].

2.5 The local context: Aylesbury

The research location for the micro survey in this study was the county town of Aylesbury, a town that can trace its roots back to Saxon times and which thrived for a long time as a market town serving the outlying community. Today it is a rapidly growing community where the population has increased by 11.2% (18,500) since 1991 to 165,748 at the time of the census in 2001. This comprised of 49.7% male and 50.3% female with 21% of the population under 16 and less than 13% over 65 (and only 6% over 75).

[A more detailed age demographic can be found in Appendix 1.]

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of single, separated or divorced and widowed dingly the 56.3% of the population who are married is a higher proportion than nationally (50.9%). Only 24.3% of households are one-person . well below the national average of 30% and with an average household size of 2.51 persons.

In the region of 95% of the population are in white ethnic groups, with Pakistani as the only significantly represented ethnic minority group. Under the section on religion in the census, 74% of the population indicated they were Christian, 2.7% said they were Muslim, 16% of the population said they did not have any religion and a further 7% did not specify any choice.

A large proportion of the population is employed; Aylesbury district ranked as 21st amongst the 376 authorities in England and Wales. Three-quarters of households are owner-occupiers, compared to the national average, which is nearer two-thirds. The majority (86%) of households have a car, with nearly half (46.7%) of all households owning two or more cars, as against a national average of just under 30%. Almost 60,000 (69%) of people travel to work by car . more than 8% above the national average. Only 5,404 people travel to work by public transport . 8% below the national average[79].

The church scene in Aylesbury is typically diverse. The ministry with children and young people is relatively localised to each of the churches, with work across churches coming through YFC, a Scripture Union mission and through the South Aylesbury Anglican Zone (the zone itself has subsequently dissolved). The majority

-based and through church families. Regular

comes through: a large ‑Kidz Klubqstyle programme based on the Southcourt estate; links between churches / YFC and local schools; uniformed programmes; mid week clubs; and various parent and toddler groups. In addition, there are at least three churches running holiday club programmes plus, informally, one through an estate-based coffee/bookshop.

[A full list of all the churches in the Aylesbury district can be found in Appendix 2.]

2.6 Summary

The Bible speaks clearly of an intentional and progressive responsibility to pass on the faith to the next generation. Research has shown that in the majority of instances this is a gradual process over many years, but that the key to it is an early start in childhood years. There is little evidence to suggest that the significance of this is reflected in either historical or theological writings, yet scripture and experience both underline it.

Stark findings from recent surveys show that the church has plunged to a dramatic low in terms of the number of children with whom it now has contact. Over the last twelve years there has been some increase in response to these trends, though it would appear quite disproportionate. Further research has made evident the increased likelihood of people responding to the gospel or being found in church when they have had a positive childhood experience of the church.

church as a verb, rather than a noun, is leading to ... gard to the church's agenda for mission. The changes in our society, the statistical trends and an increasing dissatisfaction with the current status quo are presenting the church with significant challenges for the way forward. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that a high priority should be placed on how we perceive children and on our resultant practice to reach them with the gospel. There has been little evidence to show that this is likely to become a reality in the near future, though the apparent current acceleration of writing and dialogue may point to a possible different reality.

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[18] Origin unknown: Quoted from Dallow G, Touching the Future (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2002) inside front cover
[19] Richards L, A Theology of Children's Ministry (Grand rapids: Zondervan, 1983) p.37
[20] Dallow G, *ibid* p.79
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In March 2002 the draft proposal outline was drawn up to begin discussion with the course tutors. From this point onwards, a collation process began in order to gather articles, books and supporting information that related to the overall subject area. There were several early stages of exploration within the subject area, to help crystallise the focus of the thesis. The proposal was revisited during the following July in order to take on board comments received from the tutorial team. In particular, this meant narrowing down the field of research, as the potential for the survey data to get out of hand was very real. It was at this point that the necessity of a case study became apparent, in order to give a more focussed field of vision. This would become the micro survey, although the location had yet to be determined.

During 2002, other opportunities arose for exploring the subject matter further. In May I was able to attend and provide some input to the ±Hope for Europeq consultations in Budapest. Here for the first time was a stream specifically for those ministering to children, which in itself contributed to confirm my choice of thesis subject, as it reflected a growing awareness of the need to develop more of a specific focus for children. This children-specific stream provided informative background data identifying cultural distinctives and the breadth of ministries that were active or under development across Europe. This consultation was largely informative in its value and provided a context for defining our own response to the culture.

Also in May 2002, I attended the first of two sessions led by Dr. Martyn Atkins from Cliff College at a conference for our staff team at Scripture Union. These focussed on

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...ning where change needs to take place in order to ...particular what, at the present time, it might mean for a mission movement such as Scripture Union. Here, some of the broader ecclesiological and missiological implications began to define where aspects of the surveys needed to be addressed. The dimension of the church's missiological response within a changing culture was researched further during a training seminar led by Tom Sine in June. This helped to explore in more detail, areas within the culture that are significant in shaping what we think about the role of the church in mission.

There were two steps that proved to be significant during the early part of the autumn in 2002. The residential module at Cliff College provided time for reflection and further dialogue on the subject area with course tutors. The importance of the changes in society and increased secularisation were instrumental in shaping part of the field of research. Time was spent examining where the ideal community for a case study would be. Important factors in determining this were an existing link to Scripture Union, ease of access and at least one local individual who could relate well to the context. Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire stood out and was chosen as the best match to those criteria.

October provided the second valuable step with an opportunity for theological reflection on children during a Viva Network working conference for those in ministry with children at risk. The programme here was focussed on understanding God's heart for children. Within this focus, it addressed areas relating to the strategic role of the church for children, helping to identify a number of common themes. These

...pacity issues, theological issues, awareness issues ...elp to define the limits of the research.

During the latter part of 2002 and through the first half of 2003, work was undertaken to review existing literature and research. Particular attention was paid here to recent church attendance statistics plus data relating to contact with children and the accompanying reports that discuss findings and advocate strategies. In addition, secondary research strands were investigated: exploring the world of today's child and also the world of today's church, paying particular attention to new forms of church and anything explicit in their ministry that related to children. In parallel to these explorations was the evaluation of research methodologies, and the value of both qualitative and quantitative information. This was important to bring in alongside other research in order to assess not just what the focus of the research should be, but also the appropriate means to obtain original data to then evaluate against the existing research literature.

In January, the first steps into the micro survey were taken. A meeting was set up with Carolyn Edwards, the mission leader of Scripture Union's mission in Aylesbury, and also an accomplished lecturer and children's ministry specialist. Through this meeting it was possible to start piecing together the background and local context for the micro survey. Information was gathered regarding the current dynamic of local church relationships and support, together with an initial summary of the area, its profile, size and socio-economic structure. In addition, the beginnings of the sample group were drawn up.

...ructure were revisited in the light of the background ...s. It was decided that a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data would be needed, in order to satisfy the desire to seek out both an assessment of current practice, together with the more informal assessment to understand peoples perceptions. It was felt that the use of questionnaires would be a best fit as the backbone of the research, with supplemental interviews among those with a particular sphere of influence or level of experience.

A pilot questionnaire was drawn up around Easter time. It was sent with an introductory note and request for feedback during May and was formative in developing the main survey. Four individuals were involved in this pilot stage, together with two others who were consulted as part of the refining process for what would become the final stage micro survey questionnaire.

This questionnaire was then sent to church leaders and workers plus the team members from the Scripture Union mission. This took place in the early part of June and there were 96 participants in total who were sent a questionnaire and who were from a range of backgrounds. One flaw in the sample group was that the inclusion of the whole Scripture Union team meant that there were a number of individuals who were not from the immediate area of Aylesbury. They came from around the UK but were supportive and active in the ministry at Aylesbury. All of the questionnaires were coded as they were sent, in order to keep a log of the returns.

developed through this time period and drew on

der research in order to hone the questions and the

areas upon which they focussed. It was decided that the data needed for collation

would be designed to be as close to a conversational format as possible, and would

provide valuable supplementary responses to relate to when the results were

eventually discussed. A smaller sample group was therefore appropriate and a total

of 48 questionnaires were sent, emailed or handed out. This included the group of

staff from Scripture Union who were the final step in the questionnaire process and

whose questionnaires included two supplemental questions. They were contacted at

the end of the summer, when things had quietened down slightly after the various

residential programmes and mission activities had concluded.

The interviews for both the micro and macro surveys took place during July and

August. These ran in parallel with the first stages of analysis of the questionnaire

responses and some of the initial writing up. The interviews were a combination of

stand-alone conversational format and second stage follow-up discussions. The

Scripture Union mission ran in Aylesbury during August, which provided the

opportunity to be around for about half of the programme to see the work in action

and also talk with team members, local church members, local families and have

further discussion with Carolyn. A total of five interviews were undertaken together

with a large number of informal conversations with those involved directly or indirectly

with the mission programme.

The final stage of the study took place during September and October, where the

analysis, reflection and evaluation could be given suitable attention. Conclusions

and then compared and contrasted against the

was overall coherence and clearly supportive

evidence.

3.1 Summary

The research dissertation was drawn together over a twenty-month period from March 2002 to October 2003. It involved a multi-stage process that began with thesis exploration and refinement. To some extent this has continued through the life of the project at each stage of research and analysis. The key steps that were undertaken included conference and consultation input; literature and research collation and review; methodologies exploration and development; questionnaire design, refinement and deployment, interviews and follow up dialogue; analysis and reflection; evaluation together with writing up and future action recommendations. The format of the traditional empirical study was used as a framework for presenting the study. It was determined to be the simplest model, providing the structure for clear and logical presentation.

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ch Methodology

4.1 Rationale

The emphasis and direction within the first two chapters is based upon the idea there is an undervaluing of mission to children within the actual practice of the church. The argument is drawn from a combination of previous survey data together with theological and missiological perspectives. What remains outstanding, however, is a more immediate and comparative analysis of peoples perspectives and understanding. What actually shapes peoples beliefs, and therefore practice, in relation to any prioritisation of children in mission?

In order to begin making an assessment about peoples understanding, and to subsequently draw any pertinent conclusions for developing future practice, a clearer understanding of their viewpoint was needed. It is necessary to survey sample groups in order to gather first hand information about their perspectives and practice. The focus or context for these groups needs to be based on actual practice, understanding and perceived need, using a local case study in order to assess what is reality at grass roots level. In addition, to help provide further means of comparison, a smaller selection of sample groups at a national level should be chosen, in order to ascertain what was perceived to be significant at more of an influencers level.

The chosen methodology was a combination of questionnaire and interview, with the majority being through mail and email questionnaire format to allow for greater

this is known for having a lower response rate[81] it

enough connection with the subject matter by those invited to respond to encourage a sufficient data pool with which to work. Additionally, with the emphasis geared towards people's perceptions; then, to a large extent, this was felt to be deducible from the written responses. Questionnaires are perhaps the most widely used and therefore familiar forms of research techniques[82]. It was hoped that their familiarity would also act as a favourable factor in people's attitudes towards making a response.

In addition to this main method, it was felt that a small selection of supplemental or stand-alone interviews would add a valuable depth to the type of data being worked with, as well as added personal interest. These were taped, to ensure accurate collation of data. As with so many things, a certain amount of compromise is involved here. In an ideal environment it would perhaps have been preferable to interview each individual from the sample groups and also to experience first hand each area of practice referred to. However, the restraints of time would not permit such an approach.

The selection of sample groups was derived from both strategic and pragmatic influences. The community of Aylesbury was chosen as a case study for gathering localised data for the micro survey. For the macro survey, where there was a focus of national or regional knowledge and influence, personal contacts were used, together with a selection of individuals from across the Scripture Union movement.

The choice of Aylesbury was perhaps the most pragmatic one, simply on the basis that it is the nearest local community where there is a Scripture Union led mission programme. Perhaps an additional value is the short history of the mission. Those questioned would most likely have a relatively fresh perspective (as opposed to some missions that could include individuals who could have been part of that particular work for all of their lives), including a good number who would know the community both before and after the mission began. The sample group was made up of local church leaders, Scripture Union team members and members of local churches, totalling 96. The inclusion of the mission team members did mean that the community upon which their responses were based might not be specifically Aylesbury. This would be identifiable in a section at the end of the questionnaire. This approach was felt to be acceptable, as the significance here was more to do with a response focussed around a local emphasis, than a thorough investigation into every detail of Aylesbury itself.

4.2.1 Aims

- To identify perceptions about children and mission from people looking at a local context
- To find out some examples of personal local involvement and motivation
- To ascertain personal understanding of priorities regarding children and mission
- To identify any cultural trends
- To identify needs for development of ministry

...ormation regarding perspective on Scripture Union

...ies

- To collate personal and church background information

4.2.2 Development

Production of the questionnaire, or at least the content of the questionnaire, had

begun even before the locality for its use was chosen. The aims outlined above

developed out of three broad areas for investigation. The first was largely about

identifying knowledge and motivation. What was the understanding and perception of

those involved directly or indirectly with mission to children? How significant was that

work perceived to be and was there a sense of urgency or renewed vision for the

task? Were there any themes of strategic priority that shaped peoples

understanding?

The second area for investigation was the way in which those motivational factors

manifested themselves through actual practice. What was the nature of any existing

work and to what extent were the people involved themselves? Was there, in fact, a

connection with the first two areas, with comparative levels of motivation and

identifiable ministry? Did there seem to be any response to a changing culture with

new forms of ministry emerging to meet a shifting society?

The third area emerged out of the other two in many ways, with an emphasis on

development and needs analysis. Where should the church be at work, in order to be

most effective in reaching children in todays world? What were the hurdles that

needed to be overcome in order to be more effective in engaging in any particular

context? What lessons could be learned for those working alongside the church to

dren? In particular where and in what ways could

as a mission organisation working alongside the

church?

Additionally, the collation of personal data was considered beneficial to the overall project for a number of reasons: to ascertain any patterns within churches / denominations; to allow greater transparency with regard to peoples backgrounds; and how that may influence their responses etc.

The fact that the questionnaire was already in development before the location of Aylesbury was chosen meant that during that time there were a number of stages that the questionnaire itself went through. Early on there were significantly more questions which would have been good to explore, such as greater investigation into the changing culture, perspectives of ministry now and its long-term impact and length of time in ministry etc. All of this extended the length of the document and made it feel somewhat unwieldy. The consequent length meant that it was potentially off-putting to the recipients, and so began a process to shrink the overall content and size of the document. The resultant two-page layout was decided upon in order to ensure that the actual scale of the questionnaire would appear palatable and therefore would be unlikely to deter people from responding.

This second version formed the basis of a pilot survey that was sent out to four willing / coerced volunteers. Although refined already, this was a very valuable stage to further hone what would become the final version. One key area that was addressed in this phase was to amend wording where it was felt it could be too

...ctory paragraph on the top of the questionnaire

...couraged in people's answers.

Perhaps the most significant development that came about at this point was to reduce the closed answer responses from a choice of five to a choice of four. This move was made to ensure that people opted for one side or the other in their responses to the choices, and were not given any middle ground on which to sit. This was deemed important because of a natural human tendency to go for a 'safe' option, which could have an unhelpful influence on the final analysis. The only other areas that were adapted in any way were on emphasis between personal and corporate and one aspect of the order in which the questions progressed.

The integration of these changes led to the final version of the questionnaire. An element of confidentiality was offered for those who so wished. Generally speaking those on the sample group chosen were not known to me personally. There were some whose paths would have crossed with mine at some point since the inception of the mission programme, plus there were a small minority who would know me through various interactions as part of Scripture Union. Making the name question optional provided an opportunity for anonymity. As recommended[83] the questionnaire closed with a note of thanks, together with an invitation for further comments and questions should that be any of the respondents.

4.2.3 The questions

The questions themselves were intended to allow people as much scope in their responses as possible, but without creating additional complications in the collation of results. The combination of both closed and open questions throughout much of

The intent with the first question was to get a broad-brush perspective on where work with children was at and its perceived priority within the community. Question two explored the emphasis on connections into the surrounding area and into families outside the church community. This was further picked up in the next question which seeks to ascertain the perceived priority for this aspect of mission, as well as where the gaps were in the current format of ministry. Question four picked a different emphasis to offset this, by seeking to establish a backdrop of understanding in relation to the changing world of the child.

In order to find out more of the specifics of the churches' mission and ministry to children, questions five to eight sought to explore this in some breadth and depth. Firstly, question five established the starting point in people's knowledge and experience. The next two questions asked where the perceived priorities lay in terms of specific contexts and then to what extent their church was thus engaged in them. The depth that was involved in identifying the gaps was then picked up through question eight, in a section on needs analysis. This began to move us into areas that established potential future agendas for Scripture Union, and this was then explored further through questions nine and ten. The second section of the questionnaire moved into the personal data areas and included, in closing, a check for identifying the number of individuals / percentage that responded with Aylesbury as the focus for the local context.

...ld with a number of the sample group who were local to Aylesbury. These included both clergy and lay people. The emphasis in the interviews was to go deeper than the questionnaire would allow, and to give greater freedom to each individual to steer the dialogue. The basis for the interviews was largely conversational in approach, but loosely connected to the themes in both questionnaires to allow for ease of analysis and for greater continuity.

4.3 Macro level survey

This aspect had potentially more difficulties when compared to the micro level survey, as it had the potential to be far more nebulous. The significance of the macro level survey was the scope of what could be gathered for the benefit of comparison from a number of people with different, broader perspectives. Therefore, the selection drew intentionally from a variety of groups: those who would hold children as their prime focus, and have a perspective that spoke informatively into the broad agenda of the thesis; alongside them others who held a variety of forward-thinking positions of influence within the church. Finally, in order to determine appropriate conclusions that could provide some insight into Scripture Union's ministry, a further selection was taken from among the staff team. For a more balanced response, a sample group was drawn from each group. This brought the total sample group for the macro survey to 48 people.

4.3.1 Aims

- To identify perceptions about children and mission from people with more than a local experience or with a national / 'big picture' perspective

...erstanding of priorities regarding children and

- To explore where spheres of influence lie and through what channels

- To identify needs for development of ministry

- To gather supplemental information of significance to Scripture Union and/or other mission agencies

4.3.2 Development

The process for the development of the macro questionnaire was more complicated than the micro version. The potential here for the breadth of the sample to get out of hand was very real. It would have been far simpler to take a very specialised group from across as broad a range of churchmanship as possible, such as those whose prime focus is on children. However this would not provide the broad, rounded view that would be hoped for within the analysis. There was also deliberate inclusion of a sample response from those around Scripture Union in order to ascertain a level of individual perceptions, alongside that which might be deemed to be a £corporate perspectiveq

So it was that three distinct groups came to have some inclusion in the sample group . those with a focus on mission, those with a focus on children and a selection from around Scripture Union. One significant difference between this macro sample group and the micro sample group was that most of those invited to respond to the macro questionnaire were known to me in some way. Naturally, all of those in Scripture Union were known to me and the other two sample groups were made up of those who I contacted personally, or who were recommended to me by those that I knew. The relational link at this point was felt to be significant in order to elicit a good

s a consequence, at the macro level, the personal

People were invited to add their name, but this

was primarily for monitoring returns, or providing a route to follow up on any

responses.

4.3.3 The questions

The questionnaire development was driven in part by one key factor: brevity. In order

to elicit a good response, it was considered that the compromise in areas of

questioning that could be explored was valid and was necessitated by the need to

draw a simple response from those invited. Again a combination of open and closed

questions was adopted in order to allow for a breadth or depth of response as

appropriate, although the way that the questions approached the subject matter were

different here compared to the micro survey. The main themes being drawn out were

knowledge, motivation, resulting action and implications: what actually shaped the

thinking behind those in positions of influence and how did that manifested itself in

the way they worked.

The starting point was very up-front in seeking a direct response to any perceived

connection between evangelism with children and the church's long-term mission.

From that initial closed response a further explanation was sought in order to grasp

the nature of people's understanding. Question two sought to address the issue of

increasing secularisation and the resulting impact on the church, with a particular

slant on how mission with children might be of consequence.

The third question continued this flow of thought, applying it to the resulting impact (if

any) on their work and its direction. Finally the likely wider impact was explored in

and to where the ±ipplesqmight extend. How much ...ence might reach were felt to be issues that were out of the reach of those invited to respond.

The sample group from Scripture Union was offered a further two questions that would have potential significance for the movement as a whole. Questions five and six posed a ±o whatqemphasis at the end, for people to identify implications for both the church and also for Scripture Union in the light of their previous responses. The aim here was to explore what thinking existed already within Scripture Union and, in the light of that, any influence it had on the way that people work. One of the expectations was to identify common areas both from their thinking and the resulting implications for the church and for Scripture Unionq role as a result.

It was hoped that the data drawn from those inside and outside of Scripture Union would make for interesting reading when compared to the other in order to ascertain where parallels or variants existed. This would in part determine what reinforced or went against the thesis and it also allowed the results to speak into one aspect of Scripture Unionq ministry.

As with the micro questionnaire, both versions of the macro questionnaire ended with the recommended[84] note of thanks together with an invitation for further comment or questions.

questionnaire format, interviews were held with some of the sample group. The interviews allowed greater freedom with the potential to go deeper than the questionnaire. The basis for the interviews was largely conversational in approach, but directly connected to the themes in the macro questionnaire to allow for ease of analysis and for greater continuity. Those who undertook interviews were able to fit within the timeframe offered and were accessible geographically within the confines of my own personal travel and availability.

4.4 Summary

As a means to evaluating the thesis, research into two differing contexts was undertaken. One area of research meant working through a case study to provide a local focus, the other seeking to sample something of the national perspective. A survey model was adopted, with a combination of mail questionnaire and interview, exploring a range of issues, including personal perspectives on the place and priority of mission with children; current practice and influence, where the greatest needs lay and the possible role of an organisation like Scripture Union in today's world.

The surveys were developed, piloted, revised and then sent out to the local group, with its mix of church members and leaders alike; to those with a national perspective, which included those directly involved in children's ministry and those outside it; together with those inside and outside of Scripture Union. A combination of open and closed responses was used to allow for sufficient freedom in people's replies, without over-complicating the process of evaluation. The data was collated

mailed responses or by interview and in the case of

combination of the two.

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[81] Blaxter L, Hughes C & Tight M, How to Research (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001) p.179
[82] *ibid*
[83] *ibid* p.183
[84] *ibid*

What do people involved at various levels of the church think about the importance of ministry and mission to children? What understanding is there about the needs and current practice relating to such ministry? Where might the role of organisations such as Scripture Union fit within that picture? What perspective do those involved as part of Scripture Union's ministry hold and how does that inform their work?

5.1 Micro survey results

A total of 40 completed questionnaires were received, giving a response rate of 41.66%. The majority of those who responded did so within a fortnight of the questionnaire being sent out (60%). This was the same proportion as those whose responses actually focussed on Aylesbury. As a significant level of response to the survey was from Scripture Union mission team members, their backgrounds varied more considerably. A number of follow-up interviews were subsequently held with those who expressed particular interest, or who had specific responsibilities within one of the local churches of Aylesbury.

5.1.1 Section 1: Personal perspectives (Questions 1-10)

The nature of the first four questions allowed for a breadth of response; an open response with an opportunity to expand on a particular theme, or in some instances, a simple response to the closed part of the question.

Perceived significance

The initial enquiry as to the perceived significance of the work with children in their church pointed to a high value response. There were 80% who opted for the 'very'

...outlining the nature of that work can be summarised

as follows:

Table 5.1

Sunday / Bible class	26 (65%)	Mid-week clubs	18 (45%)
Under five's ministry	14 (35%)	Holiday clubs	6 (15%)
Seasonal specials	6 (15%)	Youth cells	2 (5%)
Family centre programme	4 (10%)		

Level of contact

Here the level of contact that the represented churches had with children varied

considerably. There were only six (15%) who claimed that their church had a lot of

contact with children outside of church families. Half of the responses stated that

contact was considered to be quite a bit and a further fourteen (35%) said that it was

only a little. The nature of the contact can be summarised as follows:

Table 5.2

Mid-week club	18 (45%)	School	16 (40%)
Mums and tots	13 (32.5%)	Friends	8 (20%)
Holiday club	8 (20%)	Brownies	4 (10%)
Dance / music group	4 (10%)	Camps	2 (5%)
Bookshop	1 (2.5%)		

se when respondents were questioned on their perception of the importance of developing contact with children outside of the church. In total 36 (90%) said that they saw it as very important, with the remaining 4 (10%) stating that it was quite important. Respondents suggestions for where this development should take place ranged from the all embracing to the specific:

*Table 5.3*

School	8 (20%)	Social outreach	4 (10%)
Cut down stereotypes	4 (10%)	All areas	2 (5%)
More people	3 (2.5%)	Detached work	2 (5%)
Accepting children	2 (5%)	Through age groups	1 (2.5%)

ught the greatest variance in terms of where any perceived significant change had occurred in the world of children. There was consensus in terms of the level of change with 32 (80%) stating that perceived change was a lot, with the remaining 8 (20%) split equally between a little and not much. The causes for change are laid out proportionately below:

Figure 5.1a Identified change in the world of children
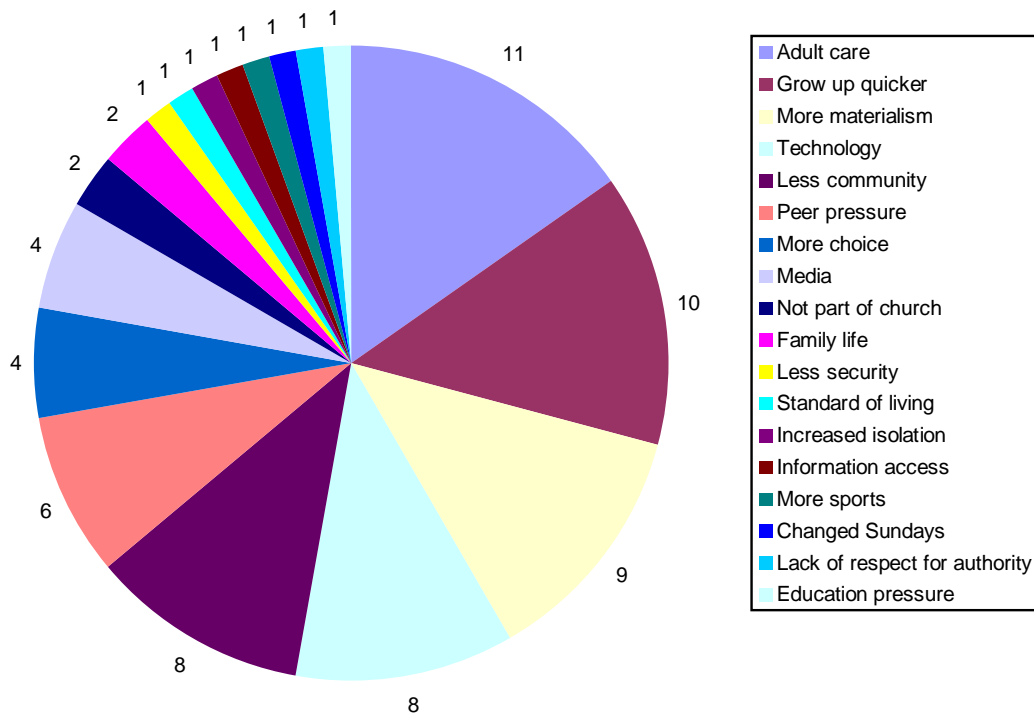
Knowledge of mission to children

The question about personal involvement or knowledge of mission in their community was totally open for people to respond to. Intriguingly there was a significant clustering among the results. There were two front-runners with an equal response of 35% for clubs and local missions. At the other end were 10 (25%) who stated little or no involvement of mission. Other examples offered included 2 (5%) who were full-

f their work in a mission context; 4 (10%) who

...cality and 2 (5%) who stated their involvement as a

support role to others who were engaged in mission to children. Overall there were

75% of respondents who could identify with a specific area of mission to children in

their community.

Perceived priorities

The next two questions allowed respondents to go beyond their immediate situations

to offer their own personal perspectives on where the church should be addressing

work with children. Each of these questions is assessed in terms of the extent to

which their church engages effectively in each of those areas. Schools and families

dominate the responses with varying degrees of perceived effective engagement on

the part of the churches.

Figure 5.1b Prioritised contexts
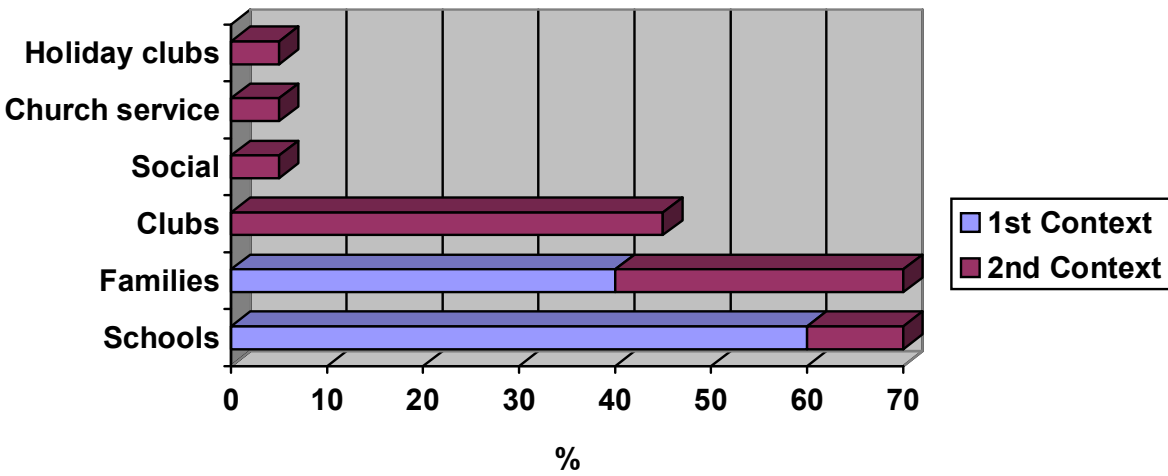
Perceived effective engagement
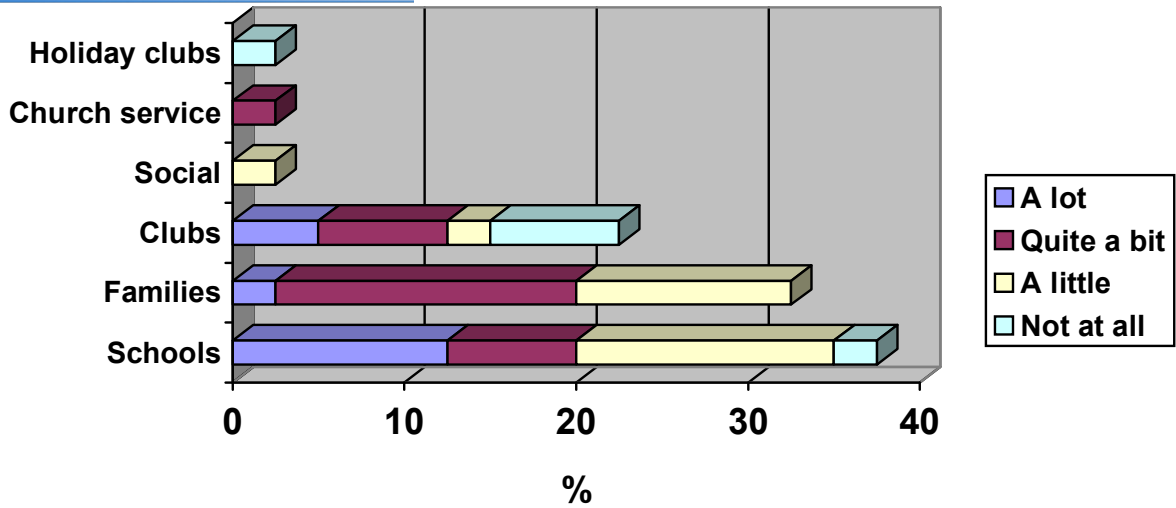
Needs analysis

In order to increase effectiveness in the areas suggested, responses were sectioned into four areas for identifying needs: knowledge and information, skills, resources and support. Not all responses utilised all four sections. The table below contains the collated responses in the areas most befitting to the definitions.

Table 5.4

Knowledge / information			
How to reach out effectively	8 (20%)	Leadership/Advocacy	4 (10%)
Cultural awareness	3 (7.5%)	Felt needs	2 (5%)
About different age groups	2 (5%)	Council data	1 (2.5%)
Visible models	1 (2.5%)	Legal	1 (2.5%)

	6 (15%)	Play skills	2 (5%)
Listening / counselling	3 (7.5%)	Teaching	2 (5%)
Building relationships	2 (5%)	Wisdom	1 (2.5%)
Helping difficult children	2 (5%)	Pastoring	1 (2.5%)
Resources			
Teaching materials	10 (25%)	Time	9 (22.5%)
Full-time worker	6 (15%)	Money	5 (12.5%)
Group-size related ideas	2 (5%)	Indoor / outdoor ideas	1 (2.5%)
Non-gender specific crafts	1 (2.5%)		
Support			
Volunteers	10 (25%)	From leadership	2 (5%)
Formal / accessible training	5 (12.5%)	Prayer	2 (5%)
Liaison between churches	1 (2.5%)		

Value of a mission organisation

There was a breadth of response to this question. Although the sample group was not asked directly about the nature of their relationship (if any) with Scripture Union or any other mission organisation, it would appear on the surface that there is a connection between the level of their involvement and their response to this question. Four people (10%) did not answer the question.

Those that responded placed the most emphasis on ±quite a bitqfor the level at which a mission organisation can help them to meet the challenges . 16 (40%). The

een ±a lotqand ±a littleq with 10 (25%) a piece. No

that could be provided.

For those that stated any supplemental information, the areas that were offered as examples of where that help would be most beneficial were:

Table 5.5

Training and support	10%
Modelling work	7.5%
Loaning resources	5%
Initiating ministry and support	5%
Providing resources	5%
Small group / wide age range ideas	2.5%

Further comments:

Only two additional comments were received here, both directed specifically towards Scripture Union. One was from Graham Arnold, a local minister (for the full interview transcript see Appendix 8), who simply stated that for a mission organisation to be effective locally then the relationship with the churches is key. The other stated simply that their perception for moving mission forward would necessitate Scripture Union raising its profile more than it had done in recent years.

Further interview transcripts can be found in Appendices 8 -10.

Questions 11-17)

...sample group were female in the majority (70%). It would not be appropriate to read too much into this, as the original sample group itself had a female majority (58%). The age range of those who responded was from around 16 to over 60, with precisely half falling in the 45 to 59 years bracket.

Question 11: Occupation

There was a good response to the question on occupation, with all but one of those who responded completing entering something.

Table 5.6

Education	14 (35%)	Church leader	8 (20%)
Administration	4 (10%)	F/T church worker	4 (10%)
Retired	3 (7.5%)	Housewife	3 (7.5%)
Medical	2 (5%)		

The level of response from those in church leadership was considered reasonable, with nearly 45% of those in the sample group responding. Other than a small selection of individuals working for a church, the backgrounds of others were not known until the completed questionnaires were received.

tend?

Table 5.7

Anglican/Episcopalian	14 (35%)	Baptist	8 (20%)
Independent	7 (17.5%)	Roman Catholic	4 (10%)
House / New Church	3 (7.5%)	Presbyterian	1 (2.5%)
Ecumenical	3 (7.5%)		

Question 13 asked about leadership responsibility in church to which a clear majority

of 28 (70%) responded positively to say they had a responsibility in leadership

themselves.

14. Which of the following best describes your responsibility in your church? (For

those who responded positively to question 13.)

Table 5.8

Minister / pastor	8 (28.5%)	Sunday school teacher	8 (28.5%)
Worship / music leader	4 (14%)	Elder / deacon	2 (7%)
Church council member	2 (7%)	Church secretary / administrator	2 (7%)
House / cell group leader	2 (7%)	Employed children / youth leader	2 (7%)
Other (preaching)	2 (7%)		

Due to the opt-in nature of this question and the opportunity to respond to more than

one area, the proportions vary for this question compared to others.

A total of 21 people took part in the macro survey, split almost down the middle, with 9 (43%) coming from outside Scripture Union and 12 (57%) from Scripture Union staff. Of those who took part from outside Scripture Union there were 5 (55.5%) who had a specific focus of children as a priority within their ministry and 4 (44.5%) who had mission or extension as theirs. Those invited to respond were approached through personal contacts and all except one gave their thoughts, making a response rate of 90%.

Those within Scripture Union were given a fairly quick respond-by-date, working on the basis that the majority of those who were likely to respond would do so within a short timescale. A small number of those with a publishing responsibility for childrens resources were included, but the vast majority of those invited to respond were time-pressured field workers (in evangelism and schools ministry). Given those factors, the level of response is the lowest here out of all the survey areas, with a 31.6% response rate from the total of 38 in the sample group.

5.2.1 Results

Perceived connection between children and the mission of the church

The responses indicated there is a strong connection between the two, with 19 (90.5%) declaring that the two were connected. 1 (4.75%) stated that they were not sure and 1 (4.75%) responding no, they did not perceive that there was a connection. However, as they went on to explain their response, it became apparent that they had established their response upon the basis of what had been visible in reality

worked alongside. I have seen little evidence of

as long term mission‚

This understanding was mirrored in part by another respondent who expanded on their initial response, wanting to answer both ‚yes‚ and ‚no‚ basing their perception on the varying degrees of effectiveness by churches in their practice of evangelism with children. Effective evangelism becomes integral to the churches mission; ineffective evangelism can ‚create a barrier and actually hinder the work‚ Both of these respondents were field workers with Scripture Union.

The explanations that were offered to support peoples‚ perceptions were extensive and a précis of the arguments is tabled below:

Table 5.9

Work with children has an influence for the whole of their lives / 62-85% start Christian life as children	6 (28.5%)
Route to future self-existence (of the Church)	5 (23.75%)
Key to long-term influence / developing tomorrow‚s leaders	5 (23.75%)
Part of the church‚s mission to the whole world	4 (19%)
Struggle to see . little evidence in practice	3 (14.25%)
Children are instruments / agents of God	3 (14.25%)
Influence through what is modelled / visible vulnerability	3 (14.25%)
Children are at the core of the church	2 (9.5%)
86% of our psyche shaped during childhood	1 (4.75%)
Through inter-generational strategies	1 (4.75%)
Doorway to families	1 (4.75%)

of the life of Jesus	1 (4.75%)
...chings	1 (4.75%)
Yes and no! Depends on the church	1 (4.75%)

Perceived implications for the church, with statistical downturn in numbers of children

There was consensus in response to the point that there are implications for the church from the changes that we are seeing in terms of contact with the church or understanding of the Bible. There was a considerable range of implications that were given in explanation. These implications had an impact on the church's missiology and ecclesiology and also through to the resulting impact upon society. The majority of the responses listed negative implications, though not all. Some picked up on the theme in question 1 about the harm that can be done through ineffective evangelism and so stated the scope of working without preconceptions and introducing new challenges to previously held assumptions.

A summary of the findings is tabled below:

Table 5.10

Missiological implications	
Church / Jesus is considered irrelevant	4 (19%)
More to do when adult and now	3 (14.25%)
Need to meet them where they are at	2 (9.5%)
Be more creative / learn how to communicate more effectively	2 (9.5%)
Has direct link to extension work	2 (9.5%)
Difficulty in explaining basics	1 (4.75%)

...ceptions	1 (4.75%)
...nceptions	1 (4.75%)
Ecclesiological implications	
Church may be non-existent	4 (19%)
Need to lay good foundations	4 (19%)
Change the way that we ±do churchq/ not just Sunday	3 (14.25%)
Leaders need to be extra clear on teaching / have to rethink teaching	2 (9.5%)
Congregations shrinking	1 (4.75%)
Lacks input of children	1 (4.75%)
Need long-term commitment	1 (4.75%)
Few parents in church	1 (4.75%)
Lack of modelling of believing families	1 (4.75%)
New challenges to assumptions	1 (4.75%)
Societal implications	
Rise of paganism	2 (9.5%)
Smaller church = less influence in society / church at the margins	2 (9.5%)
Erosion of childhood	1 (4.75%)

How these implications affect current practice

This question largely follows on from the previous one, however in order to

distinguish between different areas of work they are listed by respondent groupings.

(Percentages relate to that specific grouping.)

Get children onto agenda / raise awareness / nag!	4 (80%)
Improve the work of the church for children/ resource the church	2 (40%)
Call the church to take action for children	1 (20%)
Commitment to reversing the trend	1 (20%)
Care regarding jargon	1 (20%)
Informing training / products	1 (20%)

National – mission focused

Table 5.12

Teaching adult learners / through teaching	3 (75%)
Increased use of stories with understanding	1 (25%)
Informs observation and analysis	1 (25%)
Maybe I should change and include them (children) as a deliberate focus	1 (25%)

Scripture Union focused

Table 5.13

Start with low expectations / Back to basics	3 (25%)
Apply gospel to culture	2 (16.66%)
Build relationships to model the gospel	2 (16.66%)
Long-term view	2 (16.66%)
Equipping people	2 (16.66%)
Church is largely unfamiliar	1 (8.33%)

	1 (8.33%)
	1 (8.33%)
Being faithful to God	1 (8.33%)

Ways to inform and influence others

This question is the closest to gathering any personal data within the macro survey and identifies routes through which the gathered perceptions can be outworked. The vast majority (95.25%) saw that they had opportunity for informing or influencing others, though one of those expressed difficulty in quantifying to what extent. One respondent stated that they did not believe that they had much influence because of an apparent ±lower statusqvalue of childrenq workers, than those who work with adult or youth.

The tables below provide a summary of the responses received and utilise the same groupings structure as in question 3.

National – children focused

Table 5.14

Through working collaboratively / networks	3 (60%)
Conferences / resource the church / writing	3 (60%)
Training / speaking engagements	2 (40%)
In own family / local church	2 (40%)
Through influencing organisational practice	1 (20%)

Teaching adult learners / lay leaders	4 (100%)
Consultancy / mentoring	3 (75%)
Writing	2 (50%)
Sharing stories	2 (50%)

Scripture Union focused

Table 5.16

Training / teaching	7 (58.33%)
Modelling good practice	3 (25%)
Leading teams	2 (16.66%)
Long-term relationship building	2 (16.66%)
Resourcing and equipping people	1 (8.33%)
Mentoring	1 (8.33%)
'Not easy to quantify'	1 (8.33%)
'Limited influence because of perceived lower status of children's workers'	1 (8.33%)

Perceived implications for the church and Scripture Union

These final two questions seek to draw attention to the 'so what' factor in the light of what has been shared so far. This was used with the questionnaire for Scripture Union staff and also through the conversational dialogue of those interviewed, allowing for two-thirds (66.66%) of the respondents to comment.

Need to get their act together!	4 (28.6%)
Engage with local communities / families	3 (21.4%)
Prioritise work with children	3 (21.4%)
Be creative	3 (21.4%)
Understand the culture	2 (14.3%)
Be relevant	2 (14.3%)
Address the decline	2 (14.3%)
Develop vision / passion	2 (14.3%)
Develop good Bible teachers	1 (7.15%)
Recognise evangelism as a ±body‚ activity	1 (7.15%)
Recognise that it is increasingly at the margins of society	1 (7.15%)
Look for support	1 (7.15%)
Recognise mission as ±cross-cultural'	1 (7.15%)

/ Parachurch organisations

Raise the profile of the ministry	5 (35.7%)
Keep going!	4 (28.6%)
Model good practice	4 (28.6%)
Be creative	3 (21.4%)
Take risks	3 (21.4%)
Raise the profile of the movement	2 (14.3%)
Understand the culture	2 (14.3%)
Be clear on the gospel	2 (14.3%)
Create vision / passion	2 (14.3%)
Encourage the church forward	1 (7.15%)
Be more aggressive	1 (7.15%)
Pray	1 (7.15%)
Hold to structures lightly	1 (7.15%)
Recognise role and keep to it	1 (7.15%)
Take advantage of the vantage point	1 (7.15%)
Network people together	1 (7.15%)
Share resources	1 (7.15%)
Tell stories	1 (7.15%)
Explore / advocate 'all-age church'	1 (7.15%)
Focus on 'why to' more than 'how to'	1 (7.15%)
Perhaps invest more in doing fewer things better	1 (7.15%)
Recognise mission as 'cross-cultural'	1 (7.15%)

6.1 Perceptions

6.1.1 Perceived priorities

It is clear from the data received that, amongst those who responded, there was a very high level (90% in both surveys) of perceived significance placed on ministry with children. This was reinforced at a number of levels in the questioning, across groupings of those working with children in the church and those connecting with children outside of the church, and in exploring the connections of bringing the gospel to children and the long-term mission of the church. In some ways, though, there is no surprise here. In the introduction I mentioned that the verbal assent from people was usually of a positive note, which is reflected in the findings of both surveys. Indeed what was noticeable, particularly during the interviews, was the way that perspectives appear to become more formed as people reflected on and responded to the subject matter of the questions. Perhaps most noticeable here was a comment made by George Lings during the course of our conversation as he reflected on the scope of his own role. õI dong have any brief to offer training particularly on the importance of children or working with them; maybe that should change, maybe I should be deliberately including them as a legitimate and specific focusõ ö[85]

It is interesting to note that the sample group from Aylesbury did respond with greater conviction on the subject of developing contact with children outside of the church,

ng it as very important, compared to 80% placing

s very important. It appears clear that the area of

contact with children outside of the church is a much lesser known area than that of

the work with children in the church. A total of 76 separate strands of ministry were

noted in relation to the descriptions of work with children in the church. When asked

about where the work could be furthered in terms of contact with children outside of

the church, the total was 26, around a third of the previous total. Allowance must be

made for the comparison of a current scenario to seeking possible developmental

steps, but, nonetheless, the variance here is considerable.

6.1.2 Current ministry in Aylesbury

The response to the development of outreach work reflects a more nebulous pattern

of thinking. There are a number of very general statements about how the nature of

such work should be, such as addressing stereotypes or developing the ±value of

accepting children and particularly the all embracing ±needs to be developed in all

areas Some of the respondents did specify contexts where that work could be

developed, with schools and social outreach coming at the top and detached work

further down. Interestingly, work in schools was the only area mentioned that had any

direct link to the existing work outlined in the previous question, suggesting that

either there was a lack of connection with that work, or else there is little more to be

developed. What is clear though is the degree of emphasis placed on the relationship

between church and school. This was reinforced time and time again within the

current nature of the church work and the areas where it could be developed.

...einforced the long-term significance of this ministry; ...the lives of the children and in terms of the corporate dimension and the future of the church itself. A thought that is echoed by Penny Frank ±they are the foundation of all that is to comeq[86] This missiological imperative was significant in over 75% of the responses and was also reflected in further comments such as the scope for developing links with families through evangelism with children or through intergenerational strategies. A not insignificant 19% saw the connection with children to be as important as any other dimension of the churchɣ mission to the whole world; suggesting no greater or less a priority than anything else.

There were important ecclesiological connections too, that reinforced the immediate value of bringing the gospel to children. These identified children as being significant through what they model in the life of the church (14.25%), also as instruments or agents of God (14.25%), and at the core of the church (9.5%). Again Frank reinforces this assessment . ±if it (the church) is exclusively adultõ it has no future. What we invest in the young vitally enriches todayɣ churchq[87] The importance of involvement in todayɣ church is reinforced elsewhere,[88] particularly with the emphasis that has been placed upon the priority of belonging first and believing second.[89]

6.1.3 Changing context

There was a fascinating response to the theme of todayɣ world for children. I had anticipated that there would be a number of issues raised, but I was genuinely surprised at the breadth of the response. It came as no great surprise that there was

respondents on the significant change in the world

ications for the church as a consequence.

The identification of 18 separate aspects of change in the world of children is bound to have implications for the way the church thinks about ministry . provided, of course, that the context for its mission is given due consideration. What is important here from the data received is not so much the broad world of the child, but the immediate influential environment in which they are found. ±Adult careq ±ess communityqand ±amily lifeqall featured within the responses and account for a third of all the areas identified. Intriguingly there was very little to back this up from any of the responses in the macro survey [3 (21.4%) in response to the penultimate question on implications for the church].

If our mission to reach children with the gospel is going to be fruitful then it is essential that the significance of the childos environment is recognised and that any ministry to reach children is done with understanding, as far as possible, of their home background. Peter Brierley reminds us of the importance of a parentsq example[90] and urges us to think in terms of ±child and familyq To this he adds the importance of grandparents who may well be ±holders of the storyq[91] and recognises the strategic role that they often play.

Whatever our perceived understanding of a typical family, the reality is that there is a very noticeable variance between the childhood families of the older generation and that of todayos children. Nick Harding highlights this in his recent exploration into kidsq culture. He points out the reality that ±up to 50% of children may experience their

divorcing[92] quoting an increase of more than five-

period of less than 40 years, from 1961 to 2000,

with 147, 721 children under the age of 16 involved in 1999.[93] That is a dramatic

change, whichever way it is looked at, and brings with it a specific set of needs to be

addressed.

6.2.1 For the church

In assessing the possible implications for churches, there were two major themes that arose through the macro survey. The first, and perhaps farthest reaching, was in terms of impact on the overall infrastructure of the church and the perceived potential for extinction! The same words used by Michael Moynagh.[94] Part way along the spectrum, the concern of shrinking congregations was noted. This was also echoed in the micro survey, with the recognition that children are no longer part of church as was once the case.

If the rate of decline continues at the pace highlighted by the church attendance statistics in 2000, where a 21% decline in church membership over the preceding 20 years was identified,[95] then that potential could be realised within the current century. Within that 21% the greatest drop was seen in the under 15s, where the percentage of the English population attending church fell from 26% (from a total of 5.4 million churchgoers) in 1979 to 19% (from a total of 3.7 million churchgoers) in 1998. In real terms, this represented a drop of virtually 50% or 701,000 children. Brierley predicts that if these trends continue, by 2020 it will be 4% from a total of 1.8 millionq[96] Living up to the description as a haemorrhaging of its young people.[97]

The second major theme was drawn out of changes in our society and how we determine a suitable structure for meeting together as church, particularly with regard to the pattern of our weekly worship. Both surveys picked up on the issue of Sunday and the different position it now holds within a typical week. Penny Frank wrote in

...ught a challenge to the church's traditional Sunday ...stry.[98] The perceived implication for the church is that a fairly radical rethink in the way that we 'do church' is needed. Underlining the importance of recognising church as a verb, not a noun.

This is a reality that is having an impact on all around us. I meet regularly with a group of other fathers, one of whom was previously in church leadership and who spoke recently of the very real struggle that he has in order to make Sunday work for their family demands. He has a 'tweenage' son who is a very able footballer and therefore has the all too common call for Sunday practice and matches. A compromise has been found, which involves the two of them going off occasionally on a Sunday morning for matches. Nurture for his son has now a greater reliance upon the family and mid-week clubs. The fathers' mid-week meetings have subsequently become more significant to him in terms of being 'church' too and the prayer focus during those times has occasionally broadened to include his witness on the touchline to the other fathers fulfilling their support roles.

This story is but one of a growing number that bring challenge to the long-standing Christendom-based model of church that we continue to sustain. The many practicalities that arise from the changing pattern of Sundays is one area, but the more exciting area is the very real scope for thinking through afresh what it means to be God's people in today's world. What is our identity? What are we here for? And into what context has God placed us? The results seem to be pointing us to a number of key issues that stimulate the need for that rethink; strong perceptions of

e church; our teaching practices; the need to meet

), are some examples.

What is clear is that in asking both groups about perceived significance with regard to children, there was no actual question about the *level* of significance. What emerged in the responses was the understanding that there would be consequences for as far as you could extend your vision of not responding sufficiently to an agenda for children. Perhaps the greatest difficulty lies in sifting through the breadth of possible implications to determine what is of greatest consequence and what should therefore take priority in any subsequent action.

Effective sifting for either the church or for Scripture Union is something that will need to extend beyond the scope of this piece of work. However, what is heartening when comparing the two surveys is that there is a good deal of common ground in the area of felt needs and their implications. There are some fundamental areas raised in table 5.4, for example, the desire to see greater effectiveness in outreach, through a better understanding of the age/culture groups with which the participants are seeking to work. Add to that a recognition of the value of effective leadership and an ±advocacy for change±agenda and you have, in a local example, a significant crossover with the issues raised nationally in tables 5.10 and 5.17. In addition, a need for creativity was identified in both the communication of the message and the outworking of church.

Perhaps predictably is the overwhelming recognition of the practical need for people and materials. This came top in table 5.4 and identifies a need that has been

a long period of time. This will always be one of the

on . how do you most effectively, as a national

movement, pick up on the myriad of needs within distinct local and cultural

groupings? How do you ascertain priorities from what may be generalised as

potentially reactive needs in a local context, to possible proactive programmes on a

national agenda? Part of the challenge within this is the difficulty of measuring

=successqwhen you are seeking to establish as long-term an agenda as was

described earlier. The recently proposed (and accepted) Church of England¢

Children¢ Strategy Paper . =Sharing the Good News with Childrenq- identifies with

this challenge: =The principle objective is to enable children to õ discover the gospel

in a way that is appropriate to their age and culture. This is long-term work and may

not show immediate resultsq[99]

The perceived implications in table 5.10 extend to beyond that of the church¢

domain. There are several participants who identify points of impact upon society that

will go further and deeper should the current trends continue along the same lines.

These explore the potential impact on three very different areas; the spirituality of our

society; the influence of the church; and the personal loss or erosion of childhood. All

three were perceived as very real outcomes through a linear progression of the

current trends. In some ways there are similarities with the emphases advocated by

the Social Gospel Movement at the turn of the 19th Century, particularly where the

movement attempted to shift the perspective away from individualism in evangelism

and mission.[100] Perhaps the striking difference between the two lies in terms of

direction. Where the Social Gospel Movement seeks to initiate change to bring about

a different society, this initiation is based upon a recognition of the church being an

...ses that responsibility it will find that the society it is ...ved on. In the light of some of the responses, the question is begged whether that has happened already?

6.2.2 For Scripture Union

To some extent the implications for Scripture Union are parallel to those for the church. As far as statistical decline and the changing culture go, the implications hold significance whichever way you come at them. Understanding what they tell us is particularly important in helping inform Scripture Union of the opportunity it has in its ministry to the church and the influence and responsibility that come with that.

There are some distinctive themes within the responses, though, that have something to say to Scripture Union regarding its role. The current provision of resources, support and training, together with modelling good work, were all high on the needs list of those working locally. This reinforcement of a number of existing key areas of Scripture Union's ministry is encouraging, though perhaps is to be expected. Also familiar are the requests for more people and more time. Both featured quite highly on the 'wish list' of needs identified.

Within the macro survey responses are a variety of implications that are significant for both the church and Scripture Union arising out of the statistical and cultural backdrop. Two that stand out from the rest are the need for increased creativity and for long-term commitment. Throughout 2002 we were, as a movement, involved in a prayerful review that has led to a creative and ambitious strategic plan for the next five years (see appendix 3). Within the heart of the plan is a strong drive towards

...ms of training and ±year outqopportunities, new ...ularly beyond the current scope of local churches, plus new initiatives among families.[101] The ±long-termqis self-evident within the values of Scripture Union[102] and there are 136 years that provide some reinforcement of that reality.

It is not too great a leap to take these two implications, creativity and long-term, and interpret them as ±movementqand ±relationshipq Creativity suggests a moving from a point of relative familiarity through varying degrees of risk to arrive at somewhere new, though not to put down roots when you get there. The aspect of movement is crucial in relation to mission and can be seen in key times of growth of the Christian faith. John Finney provides us with a good example of this in Recovering the Past with the ±plantingqmonasteries in Ireland during the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries. ±The Celts saw movement as the essence of the gospel... Todayos church often wants mission without movement, and it becomes no more than a polite request to the world to come and hear the gospelq[103] What was central then remains central today, as suggested by Pete Ward in his latest book, Liquid Church. ±The church of God must not stand still. In every age, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Godos people have found new ways to express their fellowship and missionq[104] Therefore, if we are to see growth, then creativity and movement will be implicit. It will be essential for Scripture Union to allow the essence of this truth to transform our thinking and grow our expectations beyond simply that which is familiar.

The relationship between Scripture Union and the church is really what is key for us today, as made explicit by one of the church leaders in Aylesbury in their response

point at which this movement, or creative

The comment was made about the role of

encouraging the church forward, together with a need to create vision and passion.

Perhaps the challenge for Scripture Union is not so much recognition of the value of

building relationships but more to do with an ability to seek out those who are equally

inspired by the Holy Spirit and are actively attempting such new ways.

The role of training should not be undervalued in this section. Various forms of

training arose as being significant through all sections of the responses; whether out

of a specific knowledge gap, (e.g. how to reach out effectively), or a recognition of

the role that Scripture Union can play through its example of modelling practice.

However there is a two-fold strategic dimension to this aspect of ministry. Firstly, as

mentioned earlier, is the scope for influence. Much of the research related to this

thesis has focused on perspectives. Training is significant as part of the toolkit for

informing or even shaping perspectives and therefore the work done, particularly

among leaders, can have a cumulative effect on bringing about change.

The second strategic possibility comes through collaborative exploration and more

'global' thinking. How might different agencies and organisations work to best effect

among the various denominations in order to see God's kingdom established in a

way that brings him glory and honour? Reid suggests from an Anglican perspective

that there needs to be a radical rethink, with a slimmer central organisation, for

certain areas of ministry training, as they can no longer afford to maintain some of

the previous diocesan staff posts. Instead they may well have 'to see how much

we could contract out'[105] With the recently published Church of England Children's

training õ is patchy in quality, content and most common subject is child protection; the least common are evangelism and using the Bibleq[107] we have a long way to go yet.

The final area that took me by surprise in the way that it kept reappearing was that of promotion and advocacy. I had not expected it to come through in the results as explicitly as it did, especially as it arose in both of the surveys and in both cases as a specific implication for Scripture Union. There were two facets that came out in the responses. The majority were rooting for an advocacy agenda, to raise the profile of the specific ministry with children; the other could be described more as a promotional agenda and focused on raising the profile of Scripture Union. It has to be said that the majority of these responses came from within the movement, so in part may have been influenced by the strategic plan.[108] The two strands are held together here, as the intent within the strategic plan is to raise the profile of the movement with the direct intention of seeing more ministry develop as a result of drawing peopleqs attention to existing good work.

Some individuals went as far as saying that we should ±make known the relationship between childrenqs ministry and (a) church attendance and (b) attitude to Christianity as a matter of high urgencyq others said that there needs to be more ±joined up thinkingq George Lings highlights the level of challenge for Scripture Union in all this, ±õ people say %oh yes, well of course Scripture Union is children+, so to blow that trumpet will convince some but others will marginalize the comment because you are expected to say itq[109] George continues, adding that there is a serious case that needs to be heard more widely. Perhaps to a large extent that sums up the

in the first place. Almost irrespective of whether

g, the reality needs to be told, in order that some

might take note and move on it. Furthermore, it is essential for Scripture Union to

continue to assess, which areas inform the mandate of our mission and where

greater impact needs to be made, irrespective of the scale of the challenge.

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[85] Interview with George Lings (Appendix 6)
[86] Frank P, Every Child . A Chance to Choose (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2002) p.119
[87] *ibid*
[88] General Synod Board of Education and Board of Mission, All God's Children? (London: National Society/Church House Publishing, 1991) p.82
[89] Bridger F, Children Finding Faith (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union 2000) p.174
[90] Brierley P, Reaching and Keeping Tweenagers (London: Christian Research, 2002) p.194
[91] *ibid*
[92] Harding N, Kids Culture (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 2003) p.56
[93] *ibid* p.58
[94] Moynagh M, Changing World, Changing Church (London: Monarch/Administry 2001) p190
[95] Brierley P, Steps to the Future (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, 2000) p.17
[96] Brierley P, Reaching … p.16
[97] *ibid* p.4
[98] Frank P, *ibid* p202
[99] Church of England's Children's Strategy Paper, 'Sharing the Good news with Children' Key Area 2: Evangelism among Children (London: Church House, 2003)
[100] Verkuyl J, Contemporary Missiology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) p.196
[101] Scripture Union, More than we can imagine, Special briefing of the strategic plan (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, January 2003), p. 3 (Appendix 3)
[102] Scripture Union, More than … p. 2 (Appendix 3)
[103] Finney J, Recovering the Past (London: DLT, 1996) p.66
[104] Ward P, Liquid Church (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002) p.1
[105] Reid G, To Canterbury with Love (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 2002) p.272
[106] Church of England's Children's Strategy Paper, 'Sharing the Good news with Children' Key Area 4: Training for Ministry among Children (London: Church House, 2003)
[107] *ibid*
[108] Scripture Union, More than we can imagine, Special briefing of the strategic plan (Milton Keynes: Scripture Union, January 2003), p. 3 (Appendix 3)
[109] Interview with George Lings Appendix 6

±So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.q(1 Cor. 3:7)

If we focused solely on the findings of recent surveys relating to outreach and nurture and church attendance, it would be quite easy to become introspective and downhearted. The true reality, regardless of how difficult it may be for us to visualise, is that God remains sovereign and is the one who will ±make things growq David Smith reminds us, in *Mission after Christendom*, that there is a sense in which ±the *missio Dei* õ the divine wisdom confounds human intentions and expectationsq[110] As we confront the daunting challenges ahead we must trust God and continue to hope and pray that his kingdom will come and that his will may be done on earth, as in heaven.

The way that people are thinking about church and about mission is changing. The realisation is sinking in, perhaps a little late, that our world has moved and as a church we are no longer keeping pace with it. What we do next is critical. There are, of course, challenges, but there are great opportunities as well. Again, Smith reminds us ±at this point the distinction between *mission*, as the abiding obligation and mark of the church at all times and in all places, and *missions*, signifying specific, historically conditioned institutions created to advance the kingdom of God in particular cultural situations, becomes vitally importantq[111] We must be looking for the things that are specific to the particular cultural situations that we face, whilst exercising trust in the Holy Spirit.

...vels, this reinforces the position in which Scripture ...ne. Externally, we are seeing the work of missions evolving to become a much more integral part of an ongoing evangelism ministry of local churches throughout the whole year. The shape of future strategies appears to need, at its heart, a commitment to building a long-term relational work and the freedom to allow creativity to take us into new areas. Internally, we have shifted the emphasis of how we are structured from a focus on methodology and of the structures themselves to one emphasis on mission and ministry.

As part of this mission, there are distinctive functions that Scripture Union can bring into emerging local ministry. The value of modelling good work was highlighted a number of times within the findings and should act as a means to encourage creativity. The need here is to ensure that effective inroads are made into bridging the increasing culture gap, bringing closer together the world of the church and the world of the child. The sharing of our expertise in schools ministry is also affirmed here, as is the ongoing provision of training. The findings suggest that for this to have any significant impact, the key to being effective will be dependent upon the nature of the relationship established between Scripture Union and the churches; there needs to be shared vision, a commitment to experimentation and as within any developing ministry, an expectation towards long-term relationships being established.

Perhaps the finding that intrigued me most was the clearly stated perceived value of Scripture Union developing an agenda for advocacy. First and foremost this would be a role to champion a cause, and to bring to the attention of the church the validity of and need for this agenda; imparting a sense of confidence to respond and move

, possibly tying in with the more global thinking mentioned stronger collaboration for the work of building the kingdom[112]. This may well have a compound effect on fulfilling the advocacy role, as churches and organisations join forces. The other dimension arising from this was for the movement as a whole to explore how to raise its own profile, resulting in greater awareness of the ministry taking place at =grass rootsq level and in time leading others to take steps forward for themselves in that ministry.

Perhaps the combination of developing relationships with churches and others, and the role of advocacy, may be of significance. As opportunities were allowed for dialogue to develop during the course of the research, and as the interviews reflected, a greater identification with the need arose, together with the beginnings of possible action to follow. It suggests that the coming together to explore areas of need and mutual interest can be part of a productive strategy for bringing about influence. This will be proved in the fullness of time, but goes some way to underline the detail in the strategic plan regarding developing effective mutual relationships with churches.[113]

The assessment regarding mission with children and any understanding of their significance in mission has been the source of most fascination during the course of the study. I had been keen to examine what existed in peopleqs understanding and where influence and practice followed. A very positive identification with the value of childrenqs ministry arose from every part of the survey representing a wide spectrum in relation to influence and practice. There was a very strong emphasis on the need for growth to take place, both in terms of local practice and national influence.

strongly identified as needing to be active in leading

to take place.

There is clearly a gathering momentum in both verbal and written discussion about the response and responsibility of the church with regard to children. In part, the momentum would appear to be fuelled by the stark realities that are faced by the church, and by the inertia that appears to be linked to a sense of guilt about where we have failed.[114] There is momentum nonetheless and any means for people to look afresh at mission in a creative way should be encouraged. It may well be that what we are talking about here is akin to steering an oil tanker, in terms of the time it takes for reaction to follow action. If that is the case then I hope there will be due cause to hold on tight in the not too distant future as the movement takes effect.

The facts are very clear. Children have not seemingly needed much creative thought given to them over the last century. Generally they were present in church and there was plenty of scope for teaching them and passing on the gospel to them as the next generation. The start of the last century saw more than half (55%) of the children in our population present in Sunday schools, developing educationally and benefiting spiritually. At the close of the century that figure was down to 4%, with dramatic decline preceding it for two decades.[115] The models of mission that we have employed over the last century have seen great numbers of people turning to Christ at various ages, although many are effectively "returning to Christ"[116] because of that previous investment in their childhood years. The knock on effects of this are going to have an impact on both how we think about and how we do mission for a long time yet to come.

ly. The way that we engage with children needs to

responsibility to help the next generation discover the gospel for themselves needs to become fundamental in every part of the church in the UK. Yes, in order for the long-term mission of the church to be effective, it has to be addressed with intention and determination from the earliest and most important start point; thus allowing every child to have the opportunity to know Jesus and have life in all its fullness.

In the introduction, we closed with the perspective of an undetermined future which nonetheless can be influenced by ensuring that we invest in, rather than neglect, our children. Having watched the much-acclaimed recent version of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, there was a moment when Frodo was fearful of the challenge ahead of him and Galadriel was heard to bend down and whisper to him 'Even the smallest person can change the course of the future.'[17] We could speculate endlessly about what is yet to come and the scope that lies therein. In closing, perhaps we can do no better than to return to what we do know and ponder on the reality of Jesus's topsy-turvy challenge to the disciples in Matthew 18 after he had called a little child and had him stand among them: 'And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me' (v.5)

(c. 18,940 words)

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[115] Brierley P, UKCH Religious Trends (London: Christian Research, 2001) p.2.15
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