

St John's in the City

Report on the 2015 Children's, Youth and Families Survey

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Executive summary

St John's in the City has a strong ministry with children, young people and their families. In 2015, St John's Session agreed to survey the church community about how the progress made in this area over many years could be maintained and supported. A small steering group developed an open-ended, online qualitative questionnaire to gather information on what is currently valued and where future opportunities may lie.

There were 73 responses to the survey. Demographic information was tabulated and graphed. As expected, the open-ended questions provided the richest data. A thematic analysis was used to analyse and report on this information.

Many respondents had first-hand experience of Sunday morning worship service, St J's kids, Epic and Thrive. A small number identified themselves as actual children or youth.

Survey results reinforced the significant commitment many have made to St John's child, youth and families ministries – of those who responded, approximately 60% had been involved for three years or more.

Respondents were asked to what extent the three main goals for the St John's community are being met in the St John's community as a whole and in relation to specific ministries. (The three goals are growing faith, encouraging participation, and building community, both within St John's and outside.)

- Respondents felt that all or most goals were largely being met within St J's Kids activities, Music and Movement, the young adults home group, and church camp.
- They were positive about Thrive and Epic, while indicating that Friday nights were somewhat more successful than Sunday morning.
- Up to a half of respondents felt that St John's community as a whole, Sunday morning creche, and the morning and evening worship services were only meeting some goals.

The two major sections of the report are 'The Current Situation' and 'Looking to the Future'.

'The Current Situation' presents respondents' views on what St John's is currently doing well in its ministry for children, young persons, and families, and what they would like to see done differently. The major themes to emerge were:

- the involvement in, and relevance of, church services for children and youth; many respondents expressed concern that the first part of the service does not truly engage children and youth
- the strong sense of community and belonging at St John's
- how Christian education at St John's caters for all age ranges
- the balance of faith-centred studies and discussions vs fun activities in programmes, with some wanting to see a greater focus on bible studies, prayer, and faith
- links between those who remain in the service and the children and leaders who leave for programmes; most comments reflected a wish for the two groups to be better connected with a stronger understanding of what each other are doing
- the openness and attractiveness to visitors of St John's programmes for children and youth
- the quality and commitment of St John's leaders and teachers.

'Looking to the Future' presents respondents' views on their likely future involvement with St John's and their vision for St John's ministry for children, young persons, and families. The major themes to emerge were:

- a vision of St John's as a place where faith is both developed and demonstrated
- St John's being open to transformation and change, so that it remains relevant and engaged with real issues in people's lives
- a wish to see genuine practical and social support being available for one another, through friendships and the St John's church family, and extended to the wider community
- a vision for growth and for a multi-ethnic and inclusive ministry to children, youth and families
- a need to review the current format of the morning service, to make it more relevant for young people in particular
- St John's community members being able to lead, help, support or contribute in a wider range of ways.

The findings from the survey show that there is a great deal of celebration and positive support within the St John's community for the current children, young people and families ministry. There are also the following areas that have emerged from the survey as opportunities for further exploration and improvement.

Opportunities for further exploration and improvement

- To investigate ways of engaging children and youth in worship services, so they are more relevant for them
- To improve links between those who remain in the service and the children and leaders who leave for programmes; there is a sense of a 'disconnect' that needs addressing
- To take more 'risks' in St John's morning services, to allow for a stronger experience of God and to let God work through them
- To explore faith development for children, youth and adults in way that are relevant and meaningful and engage with real issues in people's lives
- To improve connections between the different children's and youth groups of St John's, particularly to support transitions to adulthood
- To expand the vision and focus of what we do to include the Wellington community more explicitly in our mission, taking advantage of St John's central location and facilities
- To develop broader opportunities for St John's members to participate and serve, taking advantage of their diverse knowledge and expertise

The survey

Background

St John's in the City has a thriving ministry with children, young people and their families. This has been built up over many years through the combined efforts of a dedicated ministry team staff, committed volunteers, and an engaged wider congregation who believe that young people are a vital component of the St John's Church family.

Session agreed with a suggestion by St John's Christian Education Committee to engage with the St John's community at a deeper level about how the hard work and progress made in this area over many years could be maintained and supported. A small steering group was established to develop an anonymous survey to gather information on what the community currently values and appreciates and where future opportunities may lie. This information would then be used to inform leadership, planning, and decision making in future.

Survey development

The steering group consisted of Nicola Read, Geoff Troughton, Kathryn Ojala, Heather Walker, and Fiona Purchas (leader), with external advice provided by Bronwyn Wood. They decided an open-ended, qualitative questionnaire would best allow people to share their ideas and result in the richest information. Respondents would complete the survey online, with hard copies available for those who preferred a paper copy. The final survey was reviewed by Bronwyn Wood and then brought to the Ministry team for comment and input before distribution.

Nature of the survey

The text of the survey is provided in Appendix 1.

- The introduction explained the background and intent of the survey and how the information gathered would be used.
- The opening and closing questions (numbers 1 and 7) asked for demographic information from respondents – the groups and roles they had first-hand experience of and how long they had been involved with St John's.
- Question 2 listed the three main goals Session has prioritised for the St John's community and asked respondents to evaluate how well the goals are been met for the St John's community as a whole and within specific initiatives (e.g., St John's kids, Epic, Music and Movement etc).
- Questions 3–6 were broad, open-ended questions asking respondents what they thought St John's was doing well in relation to children, youth, and families; what they would like to see done differently; what role they saw St John's playing in their lives in the future; and what their vision is for children, youth and families ministry at St John's in the future.

Data analysis and reporting

There were 73 responses to the survey.

The demographic data resulting from questions 1 and 7 is summarised in the next section of this report.

- The information on how long respondents had been involved with St John's was straightforward to produce, as response categories did not overlap (i.e., respondents could only choose one answer).
- The data on respondents' first-hand experiences of roles and groups was much more complex, as respondents could choose multiple answers, and most did. Respondent numbers in each category therefore included both those currently involved and those who had been involved at some time in the past. For this reason, the analysis was very limited in its ability to look at subgroup responses to a particular question and in relation to particular themes (e.g., how youth feel about Thrive activities compared to Thrive leaders).
- Because of this constraint, the analysis has not attempted to tease out subgroup responses, unless it was apparent from a respondent's answer to an open-ended question what subgroup they currently belonged to.

Respondents' evaluations of how well the three main goals for the St John's community are being met were tabulated and then graphed. Because the question did not distinguish between the three goals, each graph covers the achievement of all three goals in relation to a specific St John's initiative (e.g., Epic or Music and Movement).

As expected, the open-ended questions provided the richest data. In order to analyse and report on this, a thematic analysis was undertaken:

- The analysts worked through all the written responses, noting down the themes that emerged. They then met to discuss the themes and to organise them into logical groups (e.g., 'Children's and youth's experiences').
- As a result of this exercise, two coding frameworks were developed, one for questions 3 and 4 ('The current situation') and a second for questions 5 and 6 ('Looking to the future'). These are included as Appendix 2.
- Every response was then assigned to the most appropriate code, and major and minor themes identified by looking at the numbers of responses under each code.
- The data was then written up using the coding framework's structure and quotes from respondents to illustrate and evidence the themes. Some reporting is given in percentages to give an indication of the 'weight' of themes (i.e., how many people's responses related to them).

Reading and responding to this report

In analysing and presenting the information from the survey, we as writers and reviewer were conscious that some of it could possibly be challenging for members of the church community. While it was tempting to remove such information, we felt that doing so would compromise the evaluative and reflective purpose of the survey.

As you read this report, we suggest you bear in mind that the survey provided a rare opportunity for people to give anonymous responses, and so some people have perhaps been more frank than they would be in face-to-face discussions. Also, remember that some of the comments are from just one individual (where this is the case, it has been indicated).

For these reasons, we suggest you read the report with an eye for the bigger picture and the key messages about what is going well, and what we could do differently.

Respondent demographics

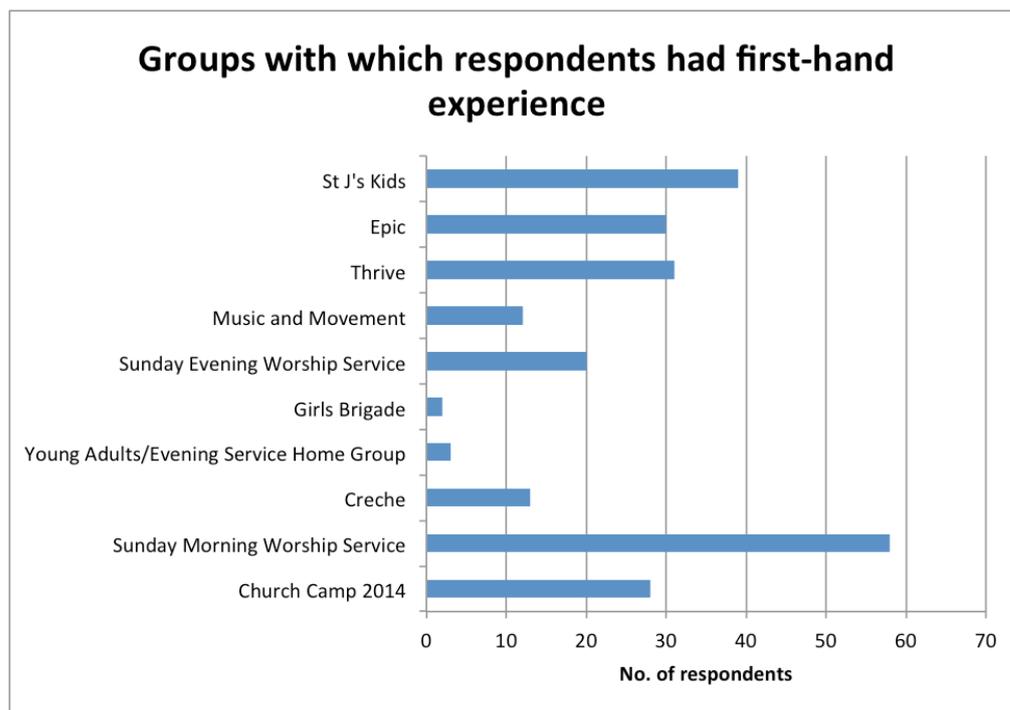
Figure 1 shows the groups with which respondents had first-hand experience and Figure 2 shows respondents' roles. As explained above, respondents could choose multiple answers, and most did. Therefore many respondents will be counted in two or more categories (e.g., for Figure 1 'Morning service' and 'St J's Kids'), and the numbers in each category include both those currently involved and those who have been involved at some time in the past.¹

Appendix 3 provides the raw data from which Figures 1 and 2 have been derived.

From Figure 1, we can see that the groups many respondents had first-hand experience of were the Sunday morning worship service, St J's kids, Epic and Thrive. Only a small number of respondents had first-hand experience of Girl's Brigade or the Young Adults Home Group.

From Figure 2, we can see that a large number of respondents (40 or more) were or had been morning service attendees, parents, or leaders, with smaller numbers (20 or less) identifying themselves as evening service attendees or children or youth.

Figure 1: Groups with which respondents had first-hand experience



¹ An attempt was made to calculate response rates, but this proved too difficult. Response rate is calculated as sample size divided by the total population. In the survey, people were able to tick a category if they were currently involved or had been in the past. So the sample size for most categories included current and historical numbers. For the population of each category, it was not possible to obtain the data for all who'd ever been involved in each programme, and, even if we could, it would distort the response rate if we used it.

Figure 2: Roles of respondents

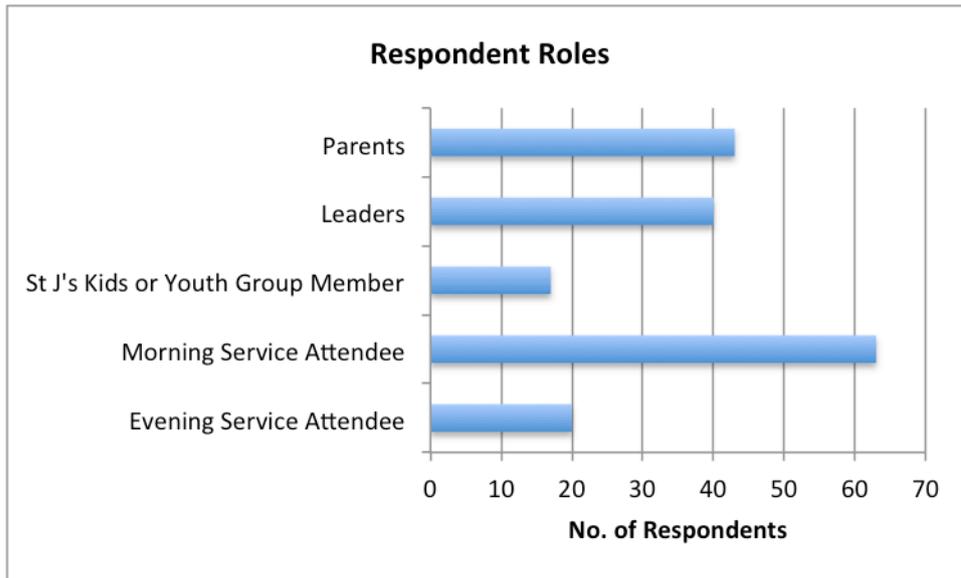
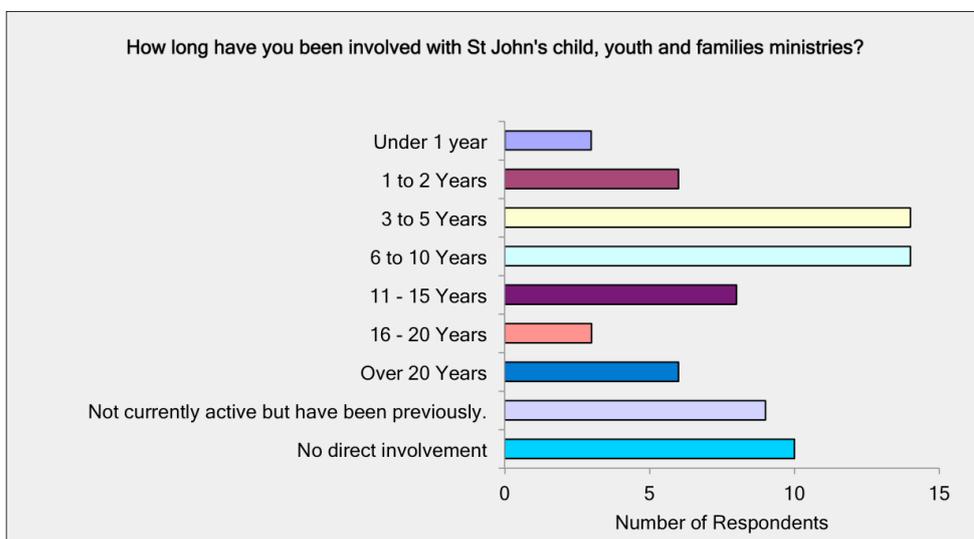


Figure 3 shows the length of time respondents had been involved with St John’s child, youth and families ministries.

- Approximately a tenth (10%) of respondents fall into the first two categories, having been involved for up to two years
- Approximately a fifth (20%) had been involved from three to five years, and another fifth from six to ten years
- Approximately a tenth had been involved from eleven to fifteen years, and another tenth for over sixteen years (i.e., 16-20 years and over 20 years)
- Approximately a quarter (25%) were not currently involved, with about half of these having been involved in the past.

It is worth noting (and celebrating) the significant commitment that many people have made to St John’s child, youth and families ministries – of those who responded, approximately 60% had been involved for three years or more.

Figure 3: How long respondents had been involved with St John’s child, youth and families ministries

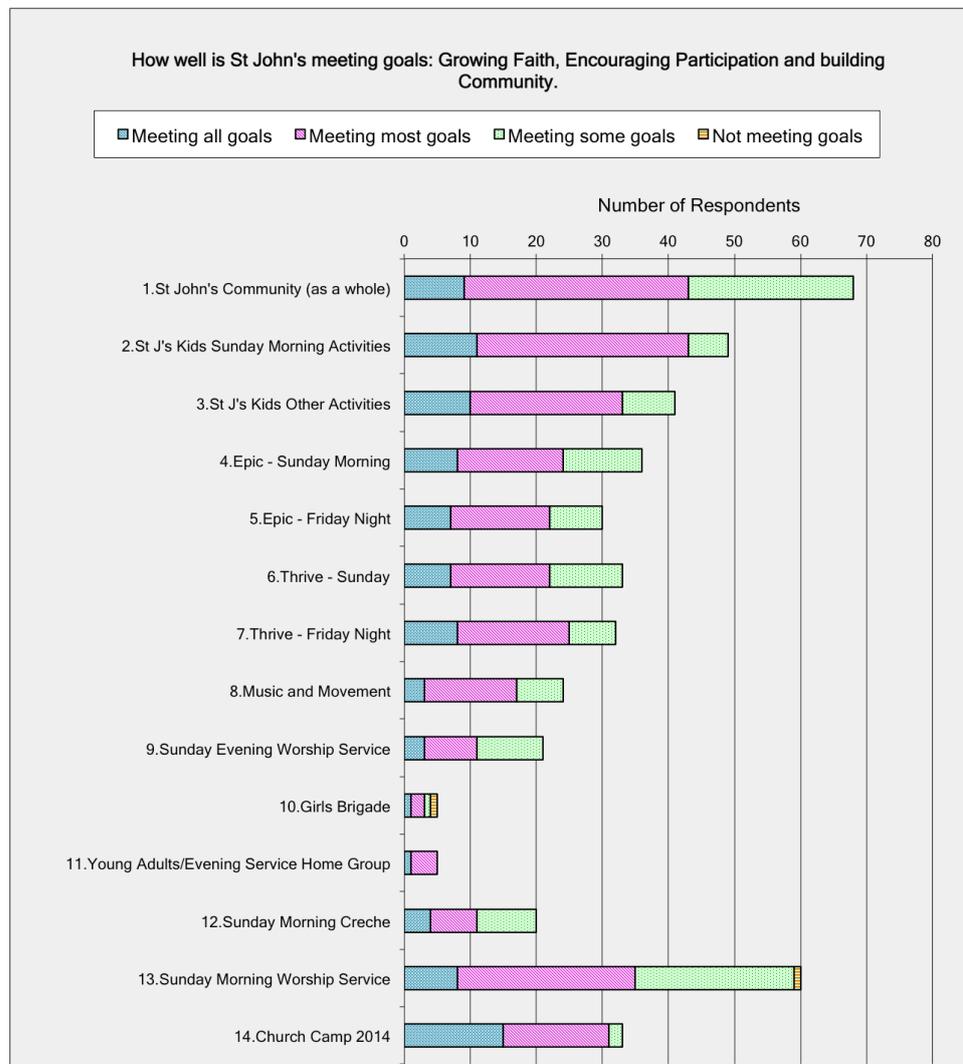


Goals for the St John's community

In recent years Session has prioritised three main goals for the St John's community: growing faith, encouraging participation, and building community, both within St John's and outside. Figure 4 shows the extent to which respondents felt these goals are being met in the St John's community as a whole and in relation to St John's specific ministries to children, youth, and families.²

- Respondents felt that all or most goals were largely being met within St J's Kids activities, Music and Movement, the young adults home group, and church camp.
- While respondents were positive about Thrive and Epic, they indicated that Friday nights were somewhat more successful than Sunday morning in meeting all or most goals.
- Between a third and a half of respondents felt that St John's community as a whole, Sunday morning creche, and the morning and evening worship services were only meeting some goals. (Some of the themes identified in the next two sections also reflect some concerns about St John's community as a whole and morning services.)

Figure 4: The extent to which respondents felt St John's goals are being met



² Appendix 4 provides an equivalent graph for Figure 4 that also includes respondents who had no experience of the ministry and who therefore couldn't comment on the extent to which the goals were being met for it.

The current situation

This section summarises the responses to questions 3 and 4 of the survey, under headings from the framework used to analyse responses (see Appendix 2). The answers reflect what respondents thought St John was **doing well** in relation to children, youth, and families and what they think **needs to be done differently**.

Some of the themes are also apparent in responses to question 6 of the survey ('Think big! Go crazy!'), which are discussed in the next major section ('Looking to the future').

Children's and youth's experiences

Involvement in, and relevance of, church services for children and youth

By far the most frequently occurring theme in responses to questions 3 and 4 was the **involvement in, and relevance of, church services for children and youth**. With no prompting, over a third of respondents for each question made comments that related to this theme, always in relation to the morning (rather than evening) service. Many comments were positive and reflected a belief that children are well catered for in the first part of the service – for example:

I like how the main Sunday morning service gives out to children a little kids focused newsletter. They feel special as they enter church. The fun aspects like finding the pukeko. The blessing is very special. I love how a child walks a bible into church.

I like that children are considered an integral part of the family of St John's. I like that we worship together at the start of the service.

However, comments from a large number of respondents³ reflected the opposite – a concern that the first part of the morning service does not truly engage children and youth. Hence there were many suggestions for making music more engaging, involving children and youth more, and so on – for example:

Greater involvement in service-children and youth prayers, children and youth telling about God's presence in their week, language of sermon simpler and more practical for young people to access.

I'd like us re-evaluate the why of the time we spend together. It's the point of most resistance to get my kids to church is to "sit through big church". If it's to experience corporate worship, I'd love it to be in a way that encourages them to enjoy church, take part (rather than sitting disconnected in youth pews, or patiently colouring in their orders of service), and teaches them about community worship in a positive rather than a we must "endure" sense ... why spend so long together? Let's keep it really short as a regular thing, 3-5 minutes - and have the time they are together led by the youth and kids. This could give us focus in our teaching on a Sunday morning with them to teach the tools of our faith- how to lead prayer, which lyrics/songs do we like and why. Let's let them practise with us. Or, if it's minister led for the 5 minutes we're there together, please let it be focussed on lighting the kids fire. If it's messy, the congregation might cope if it's short, and the kids will get better at leading.

And there was a diversity of views on specific practices – for example on the children's talk:

³ The content of respondents' comments suggested strongly that those who commented positively were often older St John's members not directly involved in children's Christian education, and that those who had reservations were current parents or leaders. However the data has not been examined to confirm this impression.

... as an adult I also love the children's talk. That is often extremely meaningful and well put together by ministers taking the service. They seem to give it as much priority and preparation as the sermon, which acknowledges the children's worth.

... children's talks are hard - some have been excellent, but overall the standard is a bit mixed (many start well, but finish less well ... sometimes I wonder whether we are too keen to impart a "moral" etc. rather than identifying an issue, or offering something - a story, or whatever - that fires imaginations).

Two obviously young respondents argued for not coming to morning service before their classes:

they have to do what a church does - so nothing really other than I'd like to go straight to EPIC. We can get to know other people over morning tea or my friends' parents.

Maybe no big church because I don't learn anything from it and it makes me unengaged. Mum asked how I would meet the other adults in church - but I don't meet them anyway in big church so nothing would change if we didn't go there at all.

Sense of community and belonging

Another theme that emerged from a large number of respondents' comments was the **sense of community and belonging** at St John's. Almost all comments were positive – for example:

Within the St J's Kids ministry (Sunday morning programme and activities with St J's Kids families), I feel there is a good sense of community.

Epic and Thrive Youth programmes have been consistently really great inclusive groups and built community really well, reach out to others and involved kids in the wider community through BGI.

One person made specific reference to the value of the Music and Movement programme for building a sense of togetherness. Another respondent described how their personal experience of community and belonging depends on having a small group size and people knowing one another well.

Catering for all age ranges

Over 10% of respondents for question 3 observed that a strength of Christian education at St John's is how it **caters for all age ranges** – for example:

St J's children's programme caters well for age range.

There are so many children engaged that you can break groups down by age and have age appropriate groups.

One respondent, however, argued for a different structure for Epic and Thrive:

There's also a big discrepancy between Yr 9-10 and the Yr 11-13 due to age. I think that Yr 7-10 should be a youth group and the older group being Yr 11-16.

A sense of fun

Similarly, over 10% of respondents felt that there is a **sense of fun** at classes and activities. Responses appeared to come from both adults and youth – for example:

Fun.

They are all friendly and doing fun stuff.

They get children to work together to achieve learning through fun activities.

There is a great focus on joy and fun for the kids on a Sunday morning.

Other themes

Three other less dominant themes emerged in relation to the experiences of children and youth. Firstly, three respondents commented on the **encouragement for them to participate and contribute** – for example:

Certainly there is encouragement to participate, with a varied programme, good solid teaching and fun activities to bring the group together. (Uptake can vary from week to week, but the encouragement to participate is there all the same.)

Secondly, two respondents commented on the programmes' **support for new friendships between children**. And thirdly, two respondents' comments reflected a concern about transitioning between groups – for example:

The transition to Epic and Thrive both need attention. Multiple children drop off at both points. It's worth putting in some serious time and resources to this area.

Programmes

The second group of themes relates to the programmes at St John's for children and young people.

Amount and depth of bible studies, faith discussions, prayer experiences

Approximately 20% of respondents made comments that related to this theme, often in relation to **the balance of faith-centred studies and discussions vs fun activities**. Most respondents felt that the balance is about right and that there is a commitment to growing faith and exploring Christianity – for example:

There has been a commitment to spiritual formation not just baby-sitting.

St J's Kids must be doing it right as our grandchildren have all enjoyed attending Sunday School.

However, ten percent of respondents for question 4 wanted to see a greater focus on bible studies, prayer, and faith discussions – for example:

For youth and Thrive, examining more current issues through Christian eyes.

I think the ministry does an amazing job. In the 5-6 and 8-9 year old groups, would be great to have a little more bible focus and start and finish with prayer.

Range of activities and catering for diversity

Several respondents commented positively on the broad appeal of **the range of activities and learning experiences** St John's provides for children and youth – for example:

Provides a wide range of activities and learning experiences for all ages.

Where there were suggestions for improvements, they tended to be around the suitability of the programme for girls vs boys (or vice versa) – for example:

Epic/Thrive seem (from observation at pick-ups etc) to be fairly blokey at the moment. Are the girls catered for?

Activities are often craft based which doesn't always suit the learning styles of our boys.

Other suggestions for improvements

Two minor themes⁴ emerged in relation to how St John's could improve its programmes for children and youth. The first suggested there was a need for **more proactive contact and follow up with youth** – for example:

Maybe some proactive contact from group leaders about upcoming activities - but not pressuring contact. Especially for middle son who is not so keen.

Better follow-up on those young people who are struggling with attending Sunday mornings for whatever reason, and also Friday nights.

The second was a desire to see **stronger connections across different age groups** and class groupings – for example:

I would like to see a buddy system with older children matched to younger kids so that different age groups get to know each other even if they don't have siblings or family connections.

I would like to see the teenager-young adult groups have more connection with each other. There is a disconnect once the young adults leave college - they have been part of the morning community of St John's but their age group now meets at night. If they go to the evening service they lose the connection with the children, teenagers and adults that have formed their St John's community for so long. And the younger ones at Epic and Thrive lose them as role models. There is a disconnect. We as a church lose. This has been a known problem for years but nothing has been done to address it.

Relationships and interactions beyond programmes

Connections between those who stay in the service and those who leave for programmes

Approximately 20% of respondents made comments that related to **links between those who remain in the service and the children and leaders who leave for programmes**. Several respondents talked about the significance of the sung blessing and other experiences that bridge the children and adults of St John's – for example:

I like that the children try to serve the adults, e.g., for morning tea, and singing the blessing to us. It brings us together.

However the majority of the comments reflected a wish for the two groups to be better connected and to have a stronger understanding of what each other are doing – for example:

I would like to see more interaction between the 'older' members of the congregation and the kids. For example, I think it would be nice if they could be introduced to each other at some of the outdoor morning teas we are so good at.

I don't think the congregation know enough about what the young people are being taught. Perhaps it doesn't matter so long as the parents and session know, but I am interested (as an "ex-parent" of past participants in both groups).

Building community across St John's, between the adult congregation and the St J's Kids families can be tricky. We do have occasions such as involvement in the first part of the service, morning teas, sausage sizzles, All Age Worship and other things that get the two areas together, but I think it can still be difficult to get to know the adult congregation when involved in St J's Kids.

⁴ That is, reflecting a small number of respondent comments (3 to 5).

Several respondents commented very positively on church camp and how it provides a mechanism for overcoming the 'silo-ing' that can happen in a church community – for example:

Church camp - BRILLIANT! So so brilliant. A time for real community, real faith building, teaching, worship and seeing everyone altogether as families (so often we are all split up on Sunday services, as families are all helping out in various different areas of the church's function!)

On a related note, one individual recommended that St John's should make more of an effort to **keep in touch with young adults when they move away from Wellington**, in order to support them to find a new church community and to feel part of St John's whenever they return to Wellington.

Involvement of and connections between parents

Three respondents talked about the positive relationships that have resulted from their and their children's attendance at a St John's initiative – for example:

The Music and Movement group is great! It is something I have enjoyed taking my children to over the past 9 years and it has been consistently good. I have made some good friends and got to know a lot of people who are a part of St John's.

Leaders and teachers

Quality of teaching and leaders

Over a quarter of respondents made comments that related to this theme. With just a few exceptions, all respondents were positive and full of praise for St John's leaders and teachers – for example:

There's a deep resource of volunteer leaders in St J's kids, and great mentors in youth.

Observing from the outside, the young people seem to have a good relationship with their leaders ... and regard their leaders as both someone to admire and someone to have fun with.

Several comments that related to this theme obviously came from children and youth – for example:

Awesome leaders.

I haven't been to the Youth Group for a couple of years so it's a bit hard for me to comment on that. However when I went to the EPIC youth group in 2009–10 I loved it! Having caring, fun youth leaders I felt like I could talk to about lots of stuff made such a huge difference to my youth group experience. These leaders have since moved on; that was really what made youth group special for me.

Some respondents also commented positively on the variety of ages and gender in St John's teachers and leaders, and on the benefits of having some paid positions.

Importance of being inclusive and accepting

When asked what they would like to see done differently, two respondents made comments that suggested they feel there is room for improvement in St John's leaders being accepting and inclusive of all children and youth:

Would like leaders to be inclusive and accepting of young person's views.

I would like all areas of St J's Kids and Youth to be accepting, no matter religion, race, gender, sexual preference, gender identification.

On a related note, one respondent said that there needed to be more attention to youth's individual needs from leaders:

As the children progress from St J's Kids to Youth the leaders need to take / make more appropriate individual contact with the youth themselves, as well as the parents. Despite feedback on this issue multiple times to people on all levels, this is only happening at the Thrive level, not the EPIC level and appears to be an individual response to feedback rather than an institutional requirement. This is critical and WAY more important than the actual activities run on a Friday night.

St John's adults' learning and growth

There were only a relatively small number of comments in relation to adults' learning and growth, despite the inclusion of the word 'families' in the survey's questions. When asked what they would like to see done differently, three respondents talked about **the need for a stronger experience of God in St John's services and initiatives**:

Worship services (particularly thinking of the morning here) that are more engaging and where there is a more evident expectation that we are gathering to meet with the living God, to enjoy doing life together, and reach out to others = a little bit less dour and proper - not only for children and young people, but also families. Musical elements could be more lively, with a better mix of well-known hymns and contemporary music; preaching could more consistently speak to people's life situations and help them to find themselves in the biblical text.

That we experience more of God. That services are a place where we are led to God, sermons connect with reality for people (there is something relevant to life), and prayer is offered.

Less predictable / more spontaneous. Let God work through our (sometimes) rigid structure and plans.

One respondent commented very positively on the marriage course and suggested that St John's could do much more in **supporting adult family members' learning and growth** through 'marriage counselling, prayer for marriage, parenting skills, and workshops'.

Another felt that there is a missed opportunity for developing parents:

As a community of faith we don't get the chance to address how our faith and our families connect ... We don't know each other (particularly the older kids' parents), we don't know each other's faith stories, so it's very hard to meaningfully be there for kids or families having a hard time ... Rather than loading elders with pastoral care lists, it would seem GREAT to be able to organically connect with other parents and care for each other spiritually and pastorally. Lives are full. Let's use our Sunday morning worship time ... Let's feed the adults' community as well as the kids.

Another respondent felt that St John's needed to provide **broader opportunities for participation and service**:

More participation from a wider pool, in terms of services - preaching, music, etc., but also in other areas of ministry and outreach. We need to develop and exercise the many giftings we have within the church - nurturing them in younger people as much as possible. I think there is a lot we could do in better utilising what we already have.

Mission

Over a quarter of respondents made comments in relation to the **openness and attractiveness to visitors** of St John's programmes for children and youth – for example:

I like that both Epic and Thrive have a social night where the learning from the bible is not as large a part. This is because it allows the members to connect with each other and invite friends. This can be a great way to build community within the youth group and also to reach out to the community outside of the church and introduce them to the church culture.

I love the fact that Music and Movement invites church and non-church alike - it's set up like a real living community where church people can share the love of Jesus to non-churchy people. Personally, I've seen this as one of the most successful outreach tools of St John's ... St J's children/youth/families tends to be something that parents who aren't Jesus-followers are attracted to as they may have "values of Christianity" that they think would be nice for their kids to learn about so might as well take them to a Sunday school . St J's kids is not confrontational for parents like this, it doesn't challenge them too much. Then who knows what Jesus does to these parents when they come through our doors ;o) I love His transformational ways.

Three respondents made comments in relation to improving St John's **outreach into the community**. One asked if older members of the congregation could become involved in 'bible in schools' programmes, and two made a more general plea for reaching and welcoming in the diversity of Wellington's community.

Supporting one another

When asked what they would like to see done differently, two respondents commented on the need for **pastoral support for families**, especially those 'on the edge':

More pastoral input with families: more effort to strengthen relationships with families on the 'fringe', and to welcome in folks with 'messy' lives (and create environments that are warm and transformative for them); a greater sense of mission to those already connected to the church, and vision & strategy for reaching beyond these too. I sometimes think that we assume that if people are at church all is well (spiritually and in other ways), when often that is far from the case.

Similarly, two respondents suggested St John's could provide more **practical support for parents**. One person suggested regular retreats for parents and establishing a system for matching babysitting needs with babysitters. Another thought St John's could do better in supporting new mothers.

Looking to the future

This section summarises the responses to questions 5 and 6 of the survey, under headings from the framework used to analyse responses (see Appendix 2). The answers reflect respondents' views of the **role of St John's** in their lives in the coming years and their **vision for the future** for children, youth and families ministry at St John's.

Some of the themes are also apparent in responses to question 4 of the survey ('If you could change any thing/s about ministry to children, youth and families at St John's, what would it be?'), which were discussed in the previous section ('The current situation').

Anticipated future involvement

Level of participation

When respondents were asked about the role St John's would play in their lives in future, their most frequent response related to their future **levels of participation** and what would impact this. Over a quarter of respondents foresaw having some form of continued involvement in St John's, or Children, Youth and Families ministry. Many spoke positively about the role St John's has played in their and or their families' lives and "hope" that this will continue. A number foresaw their children carrying on to youth group as long as there were friends of a similar age attending. However, a level of uncertainty was a significant theme with a handful of respondents identifying changing circumstances, family members attending other churches, and engagement as their children become older as key factors in whether they would remain involved. As one person said:

A lot will depend on the kids as they go through the transition years.

A number of people described sadness at their children no longer being involved in any form of church activities.

Importance of St John's in respondents' lives; Level of enjoyment

A small number of respondents explicitly indicated St John's played a vital, important, or major role in their lives. A few expressed a hope that for their children it would be a place where they could go to "have fun", "celebrate" and "play with other Christians".

When considering the future, respondents used the following words to describe what they hoped St John's would become:

*amazing, a happy environment, everyone having a good time,
being somewhere where kids and families feel excited to attend*

We would like our kids to enjoy being part of a faith community and actively wish to be there (rather than us forcing them to be there).

Faith

Developing faith

The most common response to the question about the role of St John's in respondents' lives in the future was that it could be a place where **faith is developed**. Over a quarter of respondents anticipated St John's being a place where their (or their children's) faith and spiritual dimension of life can grow, be encouraged, challenged and stimulated within a supportive church environment.

A significant number (20%) had a future vision for St John's Children, Youth and Families ministry that was around **faith development**; many respondents indicated support for the current programmes:

Continue the fantastic joyful and grounded faith teaching to the kids and youthies that is currently happening.

Many also indicated that they hoped St John's would be a place where they would be taken on a life time journey of deepening commitment; where they become "more hungry for God" and where discipleship, sound teaching, learning, and equipping enable the development of mature, joyful, strong and God-centred people.

Demonstrating faith

In relation to the role St John's would play in respondents' lives in future, a significant number indicated St John's would be a place that **demonstrates faith, worship, and fellowship**, that it doesn't just speak or teach about faith but lives it. This sentiment is summed up well by the following comments:

if we believe God is real and it really matters, we should be experiencing more of what God offers. It is very important to me that our family 'tastes and sees' that God is good. The culture of the church as a whole impacts the experience of the children and families.

Hopefully it will be the place that teaches them how to live the Kingdom of God rather than just thinking about it on a Sunday morning.

20% of respondents to question 6 indicated some outward action or demonstration as important in their vision for the future. They used the expressions "showing God's love", "seeking Christ", "sharing hospitality", "serving others", and "living out God's values".

Some gave specific example's of how this could be done – for example:

Not in Church/St J's Kids every Sunday but out in community activities/witnessing adventures. Have our morning tea and sausage sizzles on Willis Street and include passers-by. The Church will need to be seen in the Community.

Effecting transformation and change

For 12% of respondents, their vision of the future was linked to **transformation and change**. This view was summarised well by these responses:

I think it's too complacent, too inwards. There are a lot of things we can do to improve the Wellington community outside of St John's.

I believe St John's is in an incredibly powerful position with regard to having influence over so many children and families (due to the volume of them).

Let's make 'doing' the bringing heaven to earth by having us all involved in a project together to make meaningful change.

Transformation and change was not just seen as an external, outside of the church need, but also as an issue for the community within:

If change can be managed without compromising the basic tenets of the Christian standards and laws/rules. Then I think that the future is very bright, I am excited by it. Yes there needs to be "lines in the sand" but many of these lines have been drawn by man, not God.!!! We need to evolve, work through issues continuously. Young people today will not blindly accept traditional teachings of the Church. We need to work with them. For example homosexuality, same sex marriage, women priests etc etc.

A caring community

Practical support for one another; Connected together

The second most important role respondents felt St John's would play in their lives was to provide **genuine practical and social support to one another** through friendships and the wider St John's church family, and then to extend that to the wider community. A fifth of respondents saw the church as a place to meet and make new friends, to meaningfully connect with peers and across the generations.

For a fifth of respondents, their vision for St John's included a future where children, youth and adults feel a strong sense of connection, togetherness and community. Respondents talked about young people having

... meaningful connections with other non parents adults, and

... where families know each other at a personal level and can respond to each other's need.

Some also indicated a desire for the community to extend these connections beyond St John's to other churches, and to encourage children to participate in their local communities.

There were also some calls for an increased focus on practical help and sharing information and experience in future – for example:

I'd love to see the church reach out to families in crisis - through the practical assistance and care and support to individuals. Such as meals, second-hand clothing bank, homework assistance, mentoring and being grandparent-like figures for children. Helping them with issues regarding computer and financial literacy. I would love us to support families to stay together. Support for couples is vital in this. How do we do this so we make a difference in the lives of young people through supporting their parents through the tough times towards enduring, loving marriages?

I would love to see us supporting parents in whatever ways they need to cope with the pressures of living. This might involve sessions discussing the hard stuff, such as teen suicide, internet safety, pornography and how it affects young people, communication in families etc.

A couple also talked about the church running regular coffee mornings and encouraging more hospitality between families.

Demographics and growth

Comments by a fifth of respondents related to a vision for **growth**. Respondents expressed sentiments such as "I'd love to see St John's' children, youth and families ministry bursting at the seams" or "Double the number of children and families".

One respondent made the point that we also need to be thankful:

I believe that St John's is blessed to have a healthy number of young families. Many churches have so few. I know we shouldn't sit on our laurels and that we should endeavour to keep improving/growing but we need to be thankful too.

Multi-ethnic and Inclusive

Being multi-ethnic and inclusive was also a common vision respondents had for St John's children, youth and families ministry. Being accepting of all people regardless of background, ethnicity, or age was important. Respondents wanted to see a greater reflection of the multicultural and diverse nature of the community, including greater visibility of children, reflected in programmes, song choice and services – for example:

More children and leaders, children and youth having a bigger role in the life of the church and planning of events.

More all-age services and alternative ones like the picnic church.

Two respondents wondered how we might reach out more effectively to ESOL students and refugees.

Authentic, real, and relevant

One respondent indicated the role of the church is to be relevant:

I think the church needs to reach out to connect with where people are at rather than the people trying to understand and adapt to the old-school Presbyterian ways. I'm not saying chuck out everything, but some substantial revamp needs to happen.

This sentiment was backed up by 12% of other respondents who talked about the St John's of the future needing to be

... relevant to kids, youth and families of today.

They argued for the 'future St John's' to be known for engaging in real issues that affected people's lives – for example:

We would all be able to engage with the current issues and have some ways to respond in our personal lives and in and out of relationships with people outside church.

We could show people we are real & acknowledge these are issues for families. There are plenty of experts out there; we don't have to know everything but acknowledge that people need wisdom and help them find it.

Minor themes

Four themes were identified in comments by four or less people.

St John's fulfils the role of a **spiritual home** for some people, who described it as a place they would always feel they belonged or would want to return to.

It will always be a church I consider home, especially as it has been the start of my faith journey.

Some respondents also mentioned the **family connections** they have with the church and the hope they have for their children to continue being involved as they, or their parents have been.

We have been married, kids baptised etc in this church and want the same for my kids.

For three people, **connecting locally, nationally and internationally with other individuals, churches and organisations** via visits, Skype, retreats, or other events was something to aspire to.

Worship

Morning service

The **morning service format and content** was also of interest to respondents when considering the role St John's would play in their lives in future. As has already been discussed in the section 'The current situation', some respondents questioned the current format and relevance of the morning service – for example:

The format of worship is less engaging as time goes on because our society is changing but the worship is not.

I think that often the services are spiritually quite limited and can be dry. It seems that our services are 'safe'.

It may have reached its capacity without a radical overhaul of the morning service.

A fifth of respondents' answers to question 6 mentioned the morning service. A number made suggestions for the future and what it could look like:

Another Sunday morning service aimed at [the] younger age group to [keep] growing the ministry to the 30-50 age group

Every second service is run for young people in [a] style [that suits them]

Services are appropriate for teenagers. That sometimes they stay in for the sermon and it is aimed at everyone. (A way to transition to church after leaving school.)

Morning services would engage with youth and probably be more meaningful for the rest of us as a consequence. We would have a time of praise and thankfulness that we would all participate in.

One was very creative:

We all have iPads and Skype in from bed on a Sunday morning. I would love that.

Music

Music was mentioned explicitly by 8% of respondents as important to their vision of St John's in future. Song choice, appeal, and connection to their wider faith experiences (e.g., Easter camp) were seen as important by youth:

When I first started, we sung songs such as Hillsong songs that really appealed to the youth. Now it seems we mostly sing hymns or slower songs. It's very hard to get the younger people (the future of the church!) interested in worship on a Sunday morning (when the youth group is in) if there are no songs featured that they might know from things like Easter Camp etc.

We would have different types of worship and mix it up more. That's not going to work for everyone every week but overall it should engage all or us better in the long run and provide an environment that engages with people outside the church too.

Training and skill development; Exploration of talents and creativity; The evening service

These three areas were each mentioned by three or less respondents. Giving young people a chance to explore musical, creative or preaching gifts was thought important in future, as was making better connections with the local student population who may be interested in attending the evening service.

Programmes

Action based activities

A number of respondents (12%) envisaged having more action-orientated activities, and a few suggested using technology more to engage young people.

Much more on-line, learning how our kids like to learn, less felt pens, more apps and interactive games.

10% of respondents also envisaged a future with more sport-based activities – for example:

It could have sports programmes, trekking experiences study programmes, music camps, overseas pilgrimages.

One child respondent thought:

... swimming pool and pool tables and inside archery with a little forest.

One-off Events, Scheduled Regular Activities, and Camps

Respondents also thought that, in future, St John's could host more events (e.g. musical occasions) that are of interest to a wider community, and explore working with other churches to take turns at running specialist events for kids and youth and parent youth/child retreats. Having more camps was mentioned by 12% of respondents.

Youth

Small numbers of respondents thought that, in future, youth programmes could include: development of more intentional discipleship for youth, more dynamic youth speakers at some services once a month, youth alpha, and activities that would engage youth and parents together.

The built environment

The use of the city location, resources and building

The utilisation of space, building resources and the prioritisation of people was another theme mentioned by a small number of respondents when considering the role of the Church and its future.

We have a good venue that's down town and underutilised. The cafe, youth venue thing with Spinks would be great. Perhaps we should look at that again or some variation.

Leadership

Contribution and participation

When asked about what role they see St John's playing in their life in future, 10% of respondents spoke about being able to lead, help, support or contribute in various ways. They saw St John's as a place where their contribution would be helpful to the community and enrich it.

I understand that the minister on duty each week currently picks the songs. I have a suggestion: How would it be if the worship leader for each week was emailed the sermon content or the theme of the service and then chose the songs for the team to play? I think the worship leader might have access to a wider range of music and be able to mix it up a bit.

Characteristics of leadership

A handful of people explored characteristics of leadership that would be helpful in future – for example:

Things are always evolving ... and our teaching staff have to be forever adapting and evolving their methods in order to stay relevant.

Respondents were also supportive of current leadership with regards to the future:

I think Monika (along with the Ministers and other staff) have some wonderful new ideas and we are excited to see what happens in the future.

Encourage the ministry lead (currently Monika) to trust in what God is telling them to do...there doesn't have to be a formula, or a certain method of doing things. A leader is equipped with God's anointing. Be encouraged with the knowledge of that, and just seek a few wise counsel to help you along the way with that vision.

Conclusion – Opportunities for exploration and improvement

The findings from the survey show that there is a great deal of celebration and positive support within the St John's community for the current children, young people and families ministry. In other words, we are doing a lot of things right, and we are doing them well.

While it is important to keep this in mind, it is also important to identify the key areas that have emerged from the survey as opportunities for further exploration and improvement. We believe the results from the survey suggest the opportunities below.

Opportunities for further exploration and improvement

- To investigate ways of engaging children and youth in worship services, so they are more relevant for them
- To improve links between those who remain in the service and the children and leaders who leave for programmes; there is a sense of a 'disconnect' that needs addressing
- To take more 'risks' in St John's morning services, to allow for a stronger experience of God and to let God work through them
- To explore faith development for children, youth and adults in ways that are relevant and meaningful and engage with real issues in people's lives
- To improve connections between the different children's and youth groups of St John's, particularly to support transitions to adulthood
- To expand the vision and focus of what we do to include the Wellington community more explicitly in our mission, taking advantage of St John's central location and facilities
- To develop broader opportunities for St John's members to participate and serve, taking advantage of their diverse knowledge and expertise

Appendix 1: Online questionnaire used in the survey

Background

Session (the leadership group of Elders) is seeking feedback about ministry to children, youth and families at St John's in the City. It would love to hear your thoughts so St John's can keep building upon the great work that has been done in the past, and continue in ways that meet current and future needs.

Your Contribution

Everyone in St John's is encouraged to complete the survey. We want to hear as many different voices as possible; children, youth and adults. It does not matter if you come to church every week, or attend music and movement or youth group once a month, we still want to hear from you.

The survey can be answered as an individual, family group, or both. Before you complete the survey we encourage you to talk about your experience of children, youth and families at St John's within your family, the wider church community, or group you attend. We also encourage you to think broadly i.e. not just formal programmes, but worship services, relationships, faith development and community life.

We value each contribution and encourage you to answer questions openly and honestly. If you are a caregiver, you may need to guide/assist children or young people through the survey, while ensuring their authentic voice comes through.

Data Collection

Our preference is for the survey to be completed online. However, there will be hard copies and a box in the church foyer for those who wish to submit a paper copy, or it can be returned to church office during office hours.

The survey may be completed from the same computer multiple times by different respondents. You will not be able edit your answers after submitting the survey. **Answers will not be retained if you Exit the survey before submitting.**

Due Date

The survey deadline has been extended to November 21st.

Confidentiality

You can answer the survey anonymously, or have it attributed to you by filling in Question 8 with your contact details. Question's 2 and 7 are compulsory as this helps us to analyse the results from different perspectives. We may, or may not contact people who provide their details in Question 8. We **will** contact those people who write YES in the section requesting follow up.

Reporting Back

The information you provide will be seen and analysed, but remain confidential to, Fiona Purchas, any research specialists called upon for assistance, and other members of the steering group: Nicki Read, Kathryn Ojala, Heather Walker, Geoff Troughton, Bronwyn Wood. Information will be analysed according to common themes, and the content of individual responses may, or may not, be used in the final summary report. **Survey respondents names will not be used.** The summary report will be given to Session, and will be published and available to the church community.

For Further Information

If you have any questions about the survey, please email Fiona Purchas, cfpurchas@clear.net.nz or phone Fiona on 021 771 913. If you have any questions about this process, please contact the Session Clerk, David Galt, email: david@galt.net.nz.

1. Please tick the group/s and role/s you have first hand experience with:

- St J's Kids - Parent
- St J's Kids - Leader
- St J's Kids - Group Member
- Epic - Parent
- Epic - Leader
- Epic - Group Member
- Thrive - Parent
- Thrive - Leader
- Thrive - Group Member
- Yr 11,12,13 Homegroup
- Evening Service - Attendee
- Evening Service - Leader/helper
- Morning Service - Attendee
- Music and Movement - Group Member
- Music and Movement - Leader/Helper
- Sunday Morning Creche - Helper
- Sunday Morning Creche - Parent
- Girls Brigade - Parent
- Girls Brigade - Leader
- Girls Brigade - Member
- Young Adults/Evening Service Home Group
- Church Camp 2014
- No current involvement

2. In recent years Session has prioritised three main goals for the St John's community: growing faith, encouraging participation, and building community, both within St John's and outside. Within the context of ministries to children, youth and families how well are these goals being met?

	Not meeting goals	Meeting some goals	Meeting most goals	Meeting all goals	No experience of this group
1. St John's Community (as a whole)					
2. St J's Kids Sunday Morning Activities					
3. St J's Kids Other Activities					
4. Epic - Sunday Morning					
5. Epic - Friday Night					
6. Thrive - Sunday					
7. Thrive - Friday Night					
8. Music and					

Movement

9. Sunday Evening
Worship Service

10. Girls Brigade

11. Young
Adults/Evening
Service Home
Group

12. Sunday Morning
Creche

13. Sunday Morning
Worship Service

14. Church Camp
2014

Provide additional comment if needed.

3. Thinking about children, youth or families, what does St John's do well? What do you like? Please state the area and group you are speaking about if specific to one.

4. If you could change any thing/s about ministry to children, youth and families at St John's, what would it be? Please state the group and area you are speaking about if specific to one.

5. What role do you and/or your family see St John's playing in your, your children's, or family's lives in the coming years?

6. Think big! Go crazy!....What could children, youth and families ministry at St John's look like in future?

7. How long have you been involved with St John's child, youth and families ministries?

- Under 1 year
- 1 to 2 Years
- 3 to 5 Years
- 6 to 10 Years
- 11 - 15 Years
- 16 - 20 Years
- Over 20 Years
- Not currently active but have been previously.
- No direct involvement

Please state which areas if more than one and indicate length of time for each:

8. You may contact me for further information. By filling in this section I recognise that my responses are no longer anonymous. They will remain confidential to those analysing the data. I also understand I will not be automatically contacted unless I request this.

Name

Street Address

Suburb

City/Town

Phone Number

Email Address

I wish to be contacted about my responses. Write YES in space provided.

Appendix 2: Codes for analysis of qualitative data

Codes for 'The current situation'

(Covering Question 3 ('Thinking about children, youth or families, what does St John's do well? What do you like?') and Question 4 ('If you could change any thing/s about ministry to children, youth and families at St John's, what would it be?'))

1. Children's and youth's experiences

- 1.1. Involvement in, and relevance of, church services for children and youth
- 1.2. Sense of community and belonging
- 1.3. All age ranges catered for
- 1.4. Sense of fun
- 1.5. Encouragement of participation and contribution
- 1.6. Support for new friendships between children
- 1.7. Transitioning between groups

2. Programmes

- 2.1. Amount and depth of bible studies, faith discussions, prayer experiences
- 2.2. Range of activities/learning experiences
- 2.3. Proactive contact with youth (e.g., about upcoming activities)
- 2.4. Catering for diversity
- 2.5. Connections between different age groups
- 2.6. Church leaders & members taking part in SJ children's morning programme
- 2.7. Ensuring clarity of purpose and keeping to it

3. Relationships and interactions beyond programmes

- 3.1. Connections between those who stay in the service and the children and teachers who leave for programmes
- 3.2. Involvement of / connections with parents
- 3.3. Whole family engagement
- 3.4. Keeping in touch with young adults when they move town

4. Leaders and teachers

- 4.1. Quality of teaching and leaders
- 4.2. Leaders' individual relationships with young people, including/accepting their views
- 4.3. Variety of genders and ages in teachers
- 4.4. Benefits of having paid workers/leaders

5. St John's adults' learning and growth

- 5.1. Experience of God in services
- 5.2. Broader opportunities for participation and service
- 5.3. Support for adult family members' learning and growth
- 5.4. Sharing of faith stories [in what context? Not clear]

6. Mission

- 6.1. Openness and attractiveness to visitors

6.2. Outreach into the community

7. Supporting one another

- 7.1. Pastoral support for families, especially those on the edge
- 7.2. Support for parents
- 7.3. Prayer for youth ministry areas

Codes for 'Looking to the future'

(Covering Question 5 ('What role to you and or your family see St John's playing in your, your children's, or family's lives in the coming years?') and Question 6 ('Think big! Go crazy! ... What could children, youth and families ministry at St John's look like in future?'))

1. Anticipated future involvement

- 1.1. Level of participation
- 1.2. Importance of St John's in respondents' lives
- 1.3. Level of enjoyment

2. Faith

- 2.1. Developing faith
- 2.2. Demonstrating faith
- 2.3. Theology
- 2.4. Effecting transformation and change
- 2.5. Passing the baton on
- 2.6. A spiritual home
- 2.7. Local, national, and international connections with others

3. A caring community

- 3.1. Welcoming, friendly and a place to bring friends
- 3.2. Multi ethnic and Inclusive
- 3.3. Connected together
- 3.4. Hospitality and Fellowship
- 3.5. Shared values
- 3.6. Being Intergenerational
- 3.7. Demographics and growth
- 3.8. Practical support for one another
- 3.9. Sharing experience and knowledge
- 3.10. A place to contribute
- 3.11. Authentic, real, and relevant
- 3.12. Safe

4. The built environment

- 4.1. The use of the city location, resources and building

5. Programmes

- 5.1. St J's Kids
- 5.2. Youth
- 5.3. One-off events
- 5.4. Scheduled regular activities
- 5.5. Action-based activities

6. Worship

- 6.1. Morning service
- 6.2. Evening service
- 6.3. Music
- 6.4. Training and skill development
- 6.5. Exploration of talents and creativity
- 6.6. Planning and communication

7. Leadership

- 7.1. Contribution and participation
- 7.2. Leadership development
- 7.3. Continuity
- 7.4. Characteristics of leadership

Appendix 3: Raw data for groups and roles with which respondents had first-hand experience

Respondent Type	% of Respondants
St J's Kids - Parent	42.5%
St J's Kids - Leader	32.9%
St J's Kids - Group Member	16.4%
Epic - Parent	30.1%
Epic - Leader	5.5%
Epic - Group Member	12.3%
Thrive - Parent	28.8%
Thrive - Leader	4.1%
Thrive - Group Member	12.3%
Yr 11,12,13 Homegroup	5.5%
Evening Service - Attendee	27.4%
Evening Service - Leader/helper	12.3%
Morning Service - Attendee	79.5%
Music and Movement - Group Member	16.4%
Sunday Morning Creche - Helper	13.7%
Sunday Morning Creche - Parent	11.0%
Girls Brigade - Parent	0.0%
Girls Brigade - Leader	1.4%
Girls Brigade - Member	1.4%
Young Adults/Evening Service Home Group	4.1%
Music and Movement - Leader/Helper	11.0%
Church Camp 2014	38.4%
No current involvement	1.4%

(Note: Percentages add up to more than 100% because individual respondents appear in multiple categories.)

Appendix 4: Evaluation of goals for St John's programmes (including those with no experience of the ministry being considered)

