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Sustaining churchgoing young Anglicans in England and Wales:  
Assessing influence of the home

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### **Abstract**

Responding to the problem facing the Church of England, as identified by the Church Growth Research Programme, regarding sustaining churchgoing young Anglicans, and also responding to the Renewal and Reform agenda to address this problem, the present study discusses the roles of three agencies in delivering effective Christian education and Christian formation: local churches, local schools, and the home. Building on a fruitful stream of research within Australia and the UK, the present study drew on two samples of young Anglicans: 2,019 9- to 11-year-old students attending church primary schools in Wales, and 2,323 13- to 15-year-old students attending church secondary schools mainly in England. The data demonstrated that young Anglicans who practised their Anglican identity by attending church did so primarily because their parents were Anglican churchgoers. Moreover, young Anglican churchgoers were most likely to keep going to church if their churchgoing parents (especially mother) talked with them about their faith. The implications from these findings, for an Anglican Church strategy for ministry among children and young people, is that alongside resourcing local churches and promoting deeply Christian schools, it may also be wise for the Church to invest in the education and formation of churchgoing Anglican parents.

*Keywords:* Anglican, churchgoing, schools, churches, parents

## Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to examine the empirical evidence for the claim that the decisive influence on supporting and sustaining churchgoing among young Anglicans attending church primary and secondary schools in England and Wales resides within the home, family and parents. The thesis is tested by drawing on new data generated from one study conducted in church primary schools in Wales, and from one study conducted in church secondary schools mainly in England. First the context for the present study is set by the discussion of four issues. The first issue concerns evaluating the theoretical and empirical discussion of the relationship among the three primary agencies within Christian education and Christian nurture (home, school, and church). It is argued that both theoretical and empirical debate is currently pointing to primacy of home, family and parents. The second issue concerns locating and assessing the research evidence regarding the importance (and urgency) of giving attention to the situation of young people within the Church of England. It is argued that the Church Growth Research Programme and the Renewal and Reform agenda have both highlighted the urgency of this matter.

The third issue concerns noting and applauding the response made so far by the Church of England Education Office. Attention is drawn to two key reports published in 2016. *Rooted in the Church* gives clear analysis, based on empirical data, of the contribution that can be made by local churches. *Deeply Christian, serving the common good* gives clear analysis, based on sound theological reflection, of the contribution that can be made both by church schools and by the Church engaging more widely in education. These two key reports were followed by a paper to General Synod in February 2019, *Growing faith: Churches, schools and households* that focuses on home, family and parents, alongside churches and schools. The fourth issue reflects on a recent stream of research, partly informed by the Australian National Church Life Survey, that has listened to young churchgoers and

consistently identified the key importance of home, family and parents in sustaining their connection with church life and the Christian faith. It is argued that there is value in building on this stream of research by focusing specifically on young Anglicans attending church schools in England and Wales.

### **The three agencies**

The Catholic Church has consistently spoken of the partnership among three primary agencies in the Christian education and the Christian formation of the young. In this partnership, home, church and school stand side-by-side. The case is clearly made in primary documents from the Second Vatican Council (Tanner, 2012), including *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic constitution on the Church) and *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education). The priority among these three primary agencies may emerge differently in different social and educational contexts. Evaluating the situation within modern plural and secular societies, John Paul the Second (1981), in *Familiaris Consortia* (The role of the Christian family in the modern world), was clear in prioritising the family and drew on the terminology of *Lumen Gentium* that spoke of the family as ‘the domestic church’. Building on the foundation in *Familiaris Consortia*, John Paul the Second (1981) commented as follows:

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are ‘by word and example ... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children’. (*Familiaris Consortio* 1656)

Elsewhere in *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul the Second (1981) writes that:

parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children.

Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their

failure in it. The right and duty of parents to give education is essential. (*Familiaris Consortio* 36)

This case is also clearly argued in the *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997) in the following way

Indeed, in the same way as the Church, the family ‘is a place in which the Gospel is transmitted and from which it extends’. The family as a locus of catechesis has a unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values. On this human base, Christian initiation is more profound: the awakening of the sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father, the Creator. It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured into periods. (*General Director for Catechesis* 255)

None of this should be taken to imply that the Catholic Church is undervaluing the agency of schools, or of local churches, but within modern, plural, secular societies, it is the family, the home, and parents who are seen to hold primacy.

The primacy of family in the Christian education and Christian formation of the young has been emphasised by two reports published in England in 2016 from a very different ecclesial background. The first of these reports, *Faith in our families*, commissioned by Care for the Family (2016), was based on three sources of data: a quantitative web-based survey among 983 parents, 175 church leaders and 479 children’s workers recruited through Care for the Family’s database; qualitative research among 21 parents and 6 children’s workers who responded to open questions and kept a diary of anything that related to faith with their children over a week; and a focus group held in Northern Ireland. The data indicated that 95% of parents considered that it was largely their responsibility to teach their

children about the Christian faith. However, at the same time 92% of parents felt that they should be doing more in this regard. One of the children's workers in the qualitative survey commented that:

To encourage parents to nurture their children in the faith within the home is a new concept and the churches need to help to understand why this is necessary and why it is their responsibility. (p. 16)

In the second of these reports, *Passing on faith*, Mark (2016) reviewed the findings of 54 published studies concerned with various aspects of faith transmission. She concludes that 'research reveals that high quality relationships in the home are key to successful faith formation' (p. 12), the faith commitment of both parents matters, that grandparents play an important part too, and that modelling is key in the sense that parents need to be people of faith as well as to practise faith.

### **Young people and the Church of England**

The problem facing the Church of England regarding sustaining young churchgoers has been visible for a number of years and highlighted by several serious research studies. For example, Francis (1984) reported on a project sponsored by the British Council of Churches that conducted a survey among a sample of 1,328 young churchgoers between the ages of 13 and 20 years. The first striking conclusion from this study concerned the way in which interest in church quickly and consistently declines during the teenage years. Roughly speaking, for every group of 24 13- or 14-year-old churchgoers we could expect there to be 22 15-year olds, 19 16-year olds, 15 17-year olds, 11 18-year olds, 8 19-year olds, and 7 20-year olds. In other words, 71% of the teenagers who went to church at the age of 14 would have stopped going by the time they reach the age of 20.

This study also found that the likelihood of young teenage church attenders drifting away from the church during the later teenage years is much higher in the Church of England

than in either the Roman Catholic or the Free Churches. The best way of illustrating this point is to compare the number of 18- to 20-year olds with the number of 13- to 15-year olds in the different churches. In the Church of England there is drop of 74% between these two age groups, compared with 55% in the Roman Catholic Church and 49% in the Free Churches. In other words, it looks as if half of the young people who attend Roman Catholic or Free Churches and three quarters of those who attend Church of England churches between the ages of 13 and 15 would have stopped going to church by the ages of 18 to 20.

As part of the wider background research preparing for the report *Children in the way* (Church of England, 1988), Francis and Lankshear (1991, 1995a, 1995b) conducted a detailed survey into the contact between the Church of England and young people up to the age of 21 years. A questionnaire was sent to every church or habitual place of worship between February 1986 and July 1987 throughout 24 whole dioceses and the archdeaconry of the Isle of Wight. All told this involved 9,909 places of worship from which 7,157 completed responses were received, giving a response rate of 72.2% among the participating dioceses and representing 42.8% of all the churches in the dioceses of the Church of England. One part of this survey mapped the overall contact of the Church of England with young people through the following provisions: initiation (baptism and confirmation), pre-school provision (parent and toddler groups and play groups), Sunday schools, service participation (through choirs, serving, and bell ringing), uniformed groups (Scouts, Guides, Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Church Lads' and Church Girls' Brigade), and youth groups (including Girls' Friendly Society).

A second part of the survey mapped the contact of children and young people with these churches on a normal Sunday. Working on the assumption that the responding churches provided an accurate picture of the Church of England as a whole, the figures given by this sample were employed to furnish an estimate of the number of individuals in touch with the



Church of England throughout the 42 dioceses (rounded to the nearest fifty). These estimated national figures demonstrated that on a normal Sunday just over one church in three (37%) had contact with infants under the age of 2 years; 57% have contact with 2- to 5-year olds, and nearly two in three (65%) have contact with 6- to 9-year olds and 10- to 13-year olds. After the age of 13 the graph moved in the opposite direction, with 57% of churches reporting contact with 14- to 17-year olds and 43% reporting contact with 18- to 21-year olds. All told, on a normal Sunday the Church of England had contact nationally with over 22,000 under 2-year olds, or 1.8% of that age group; nearly 73,000 2- to 5-year olds, or 3.1% of that age group; over 152,000 6- to 9-year olds, or 6.8% of that age group; nearly 138,000 10- to 13-year olds, or 5.9% of that age group; over 93,000 14- to 17-year olds, or 3.2% of that age group; and nearly 52,000 18- to 21-year olds, or 1.7% of that age group.

A new urgency was given to the Church of England's concern for sustaining young churchgoers by the findings from the Church Growth Research Programme. The summary of the findings from this programme, published by Church of England (2014) in *From anecdote to evidence*, put the case quite starkly:

The church is declining because generations of churchgoers are not being replaced and because the church is not keeping young people in their teens and into adulthood.

(p. 23)

This conclusion was supported by data drawn from the UK household longitudinal study 'Understanding Society' 2009-2011 (see [www.understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk)). These data appear to show that 1.4% of those aged between 20 and 24, and 1.7% of those aged between 25 and 29 regard themselves as self-identified Anglicans who attend church at least monthly, compared with 10.6% of those aged between 70 and 79. *From anecdote to evidence* also cites evidence from the European Values Survey showing that even among Anglicans who say that religion is very important in their lives, 'only 36% listed religious faith as an especially

important quality that children can be encouraged to learn at home' (p. 23). The conclusion drawn from these statistics is that:

There is an urgent need to focus on children, young people and their parents and a challenge to identify how the church can best invest in people, programmes and strategies which will encourage young people actively to continue exploring faith. (p. 24)

In a fuller account of the research underpinning these headline findings, Voas and Watt (2014) make the following claims:

We know something from previous research about the impact of parental practice, affiliation and belief on the religiosity of their children. Two non-religious parents successfully transmit their lack of religion. Two religious parents have roughly a 50/50 chance of passing on the faith. One religious parent does only half as well as two together ... . What these results suggest is that in Britain institutional religion now has a half-life of one generation, to borrow the terminology of radioactive decay. The generation now in middle age has produced children who are only half as likely as they to attend church, to identify themselves as belonging to a denomination, or to say that belief is important to them. (p. 19)

### **Responding to the challenge**

Responding to the challenge posed by the Church Growth Research Programme concerning the sustaining of churchgoing young Anglicans and stimulated by the Church of England's Renewal and Reform agenda, the Church of England Education Office commissioned a study to find answers to the following question:

What helps to root young people in the worshipping life of the Church of England so that they continue to engage with the Church as a place of spiritual nurture and growth into their adult years? (Church of England Education Office, 2016a, p.1)

In this study the emphasis was on identifying the characteristics of local churches that sustain the engagement of young people. The data on which the report drew were provided by both quantitative and qualitative strands. The quantitative strand involved two surveys: one completed by 641 young adults between the ages of 16 and 30 years, and the other completed by 878 parents of young people between the ages of 11 and 30 years. The qualitative strand involved telephone interviews with 14 young adults and 16 parents selected from the surveys. Properly consistent with the research question being addressed by this study, the research evidence was evaluated to address six key recommendations for shaping local churches to sustain churchgoing young Anglicans. The report, *Rooted in the Church* (Church of England Education Office, 2016a) argued that churches should: aim to build a culture of intergenerational relationships; be inclusive of all ages in both leadership and worship; recognise young people and young adults as equal members of the Body of Christ; be encouraged to explore the possibility of admitting baptised children to communion before confirmation; become unconditionally welcoming places for young people; and do more to support their youth workers and leaders (p. 3).

A second report from the Church of England Education Office published in 2016 focused on education and church schools, under the title *Church of England vision for education: Deeply Christian, serving the common good* (Church of England Education Office, 2016b). This report begins by recalling that 26% of the state-maintained primary schools are provided by the Church of England, offering 19% of the state-maintained places for primary school students; and that 6% of state-maintained secondary schools are provided by the Church of England, offering 6% of the state-maintained places for secondary school students. Then the report offers a fresh articulation of the Church of England's vision for education through schools that are both deeply Christian and committed to the common good of the whole human community. The report offers a vision of human flourishing for all that is

inspired by four basic elements: wisdom, hope, community, and dignity. This vision is encapsulated in the following aspiration

We want pupils to leave school with a rich experience and understanding of Christianity, and we are committed to offering them an encounter with Jesus Christ and with Christian faith and practice in a way which enhances their lives. (p.13)

### **Reflecting on parents, family and home**

While continuing to value properly the roles of churches and schools in the Christian education and Christian formation of the young, as documented and advocated by the two reports published in 2016 by the Church of England Education Office (2016a, 2016b), the report presented to General Synod in February 2019 under the title *Growing faith: Churches, schools and households* (General Synod, 2019) also focused attention on the agency of the home. This report states that ‘research shows that parents have the largest influence on their children in matters of faith’ (paragraph 11).

Evidence supporting this claim can be derived from several sources, including one stream of research that has been listening systematically to what young Anglicans themselves have to say about the relative importance of factors that sustain their church attendance. This stream of research has been influenced and shaped by the Australian National Church Life Survey, in which young churchgoers have been invited to complete a survey alongside the surveys completed by adult attenders. For example, in their report on the survey conducted among 10,101 10- to 14-year-old attenders within the 2001 Australian National Church Life Survey, Bellamy, Mou, and Castle (2005) found that parents have a central role in the development of faith. They concluded that the practice of family prayer times, the encouragement of a personal devotional life for children, and parents simply being prepared to talk with their children about faith are all aspects that are positively related to higher levels of belief and a more positive attitude toward and involvement in church life.

In their report on the survey conducted among 10,153 8- to 14-year-old attenders within the 2001 Church Life Survey designed primarily for use in England (Churches Information for Mission, 2001), Francis and Craig (2006) drew attention to two key findings. The first finding is that having friends attending the same church is important to tweenagers. The second finding is that parents play a crucial role through what they do and what they model outside their pattern of church attendance. The maintenance of a positive attitude toward church during the tweenage years is associated with having parents who support the faith in conversation and example at home.

In their report on the survey conducted among 6,252 8- to 14-year-old attenders within the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey, Francis, Penny, and Powell (2018) found that these data confirmed the power of parental example on frequency of church attendance. Frequent attendance among young churchgoers occurred when *both* parents attended as well. The most positive attitude toward their church was found among young churchgoers who had the opportunity to talk about God with their parents and who did not feel that their parents made them go to church. Young churchgoers responded to parental encouragement better than to parental pressure. Although peer influence within the church did not make much contribution to frequency of attendance, it made a contribution to shaping positive attitude toward church.

Building on these three studies shaped by Bellamy, Mou, and Castle (2005), Francis and Craig (2006), and Francis, Penny, and Powell (2018), Francis (in press) drew on data collected within schools in England and Wales (half of the schools were church schools within the state-maintained sector and half were schools without a religious character within the state-maintained sector) to identify 13- to 15-year-old students who identified as Anglicans. This method allowed research to be undertaken among non-churchgoing Anglicans as well as churchgoing Anglicans. From a total sample of 7,059 students, 645

identified themselves as Anglican (Church of England or Church in Wales), that is fewer than one in ten of the sample. This study employed multiple regression to take into account the effects of personal factors (sex and age) and psychological factors (extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) before testing for the effects of peer-related factors and parental factors. These data demonstrated that young Anglicans who practise their Anglican identity by attending church did so primarily because their parents were Anglican churchgoers. Moreover, young Anglican churchgoers were most likely to keep going if their churchgoing parents also talked with them about their faith. Among this age group of Anglicans peer support seemed insignificant in comparison with parental support.

### **Research focus**

Against this background, the present study drew on data generated by two recent studies conducted within church schools, one within the primary sector and one within the secondary sector, in order to identify the students who self-identified as Anglican. Following the model adopted by Francis (in press) the present study also took into account the effects of personal factors and psychological factors. The study then examined the effects of home-related and parental factors on sustaining churchgoing among young Anglicans.

### **Study 1: Primary schools**

#### **Method**

##### **Procedure**

All Church in Wales primary schools were invited to participate in a three-year project designed to access the student voice across the three domains of attitude toward Christianity (Francis, Lankshear, & Eccles, 2017a, 2017b; Lankshear, Francis, & Eccles, 2018), spiritual wellbeing (Francis, Fisher, Lankshear, & Eccles, 2018) and school ethos (Lankshear, Francis, & Eccles, 2017; Francis, Lankshear, & Eccles, 2018). From the total of 149 Church in Wales primary schools catering for key stage two students across the six

Anglican Dioceses, 88 schools participated in the student survey conducted during the third year of the project (2016-2017). The schools were asked to administer the questionnaire in normal class groups to all year-five and year-six students throughout the school. Students were asked not to write their name on the booklet and to complete the instrument without discussing it with their peers. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Although students were given the choice not to participate, very few declined to do so. All told 3,142 year-five and year-six students participated in the survey.

### **Instrument**

*Religious affiliation* of students was assessed by the question, ‘What sort of place of worship do you go to?’ followed by a list that included none and Church in Wales.

*Church attendance* of students, mothers and fathers was assessed by three questions, ‘Apart from special occasions (like weddings) how often do you/does your mother/does your father attend a place of religious worship (e.g. church, mosque, temple, etc...)?’ followed by the options: never (1), once or twice a year (2), sometimes (3), at least once a month (4), and weekly (5).

*Personality* was assessed by the Junior Personality Scales in Three Dimensions (JPS3D; Francis & Lankshear, in preparation). This instrument proposes three six-item measures of extraversion, emotionality, and toughmindedness. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), not certain (3), agree (4), and agree strongly (5).

*Family support* was assessed by the Lankshear Index of Religious Conversation (LIRC). This instrument proposes three four-item measures of religious conversation with mother, with father, and with grandparents. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), not certain (3), agree (4), and agree strongly (5).

### **Participants**

The present analyses were conducted on data provided by the 2,019 students who self-identified as Anglicans (64% of the total 3,142 students who completed the survey). Of these 2,019 Anglican participants, 977 were males, and 1,042 were females; 52% were in year-five classes and 48% were in year-six classes.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Mapping church attendance**

- insert table 1 about here -

The first step in data analysis involved mapping the church attendance profile for the 2,018 Anglican students and for their mothers and for their fathers. These data, presented in table 1, show that weekly attendance was reported by 19% of the students, by 10% of the mothers, and by 5% of the fathers, while 10% of the students, 32% of the mothers, and 47% of the fathers were reported as never attending.

### **Mapping family conversation**

- insert table 2 and table 3 about here -

The next step in data analysis involved mapping the responses to the 12 items of the Lankshear Index of Religious Conversation. Table 2 presents the extent to which the students perceive themselves as often talking about God, prayer, church, and Jesus with their mother, with their father, and with their grandparents. A higher proportion of students reported talking about these matters with mother than with father, while grandparents occupied a position between mother and father. Table 3 confirms that all three scales achieved a high level of internal consistency reliability in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951).

### **Testing the measure of personality**

- insert table 4 about here -

The third step in data analysis involved testing the psychometric properties of the Junior Personality Scales in Three Dimensions (JPS3D). Table 4 presents the alpha



coefficients (Cronbach, 1951), together with the means and standard deviations. The alpha coefficients for all three scales are satisfactory for such short instruments (DeVellis, 2003).

### **Examining correlations**

- insert table 5 about here -

The fourth step in data analysis involved exploring the bivariate correlations between the frequency of the students' church attendance and the range of predictor variables assembled in the analysis. These correlations are presented within the first column of table 5 grouped within the four fields of personal factors, psychological factors, parental church attendance, and family conversation. In terms of personal factors, the correlation coefficients indicate a small but statistically significant association with sex (females recording a slightly higher level of church attendance than males), but no significant effect of age (comparing year-five with year-six students). In terms of psychological factors, no significant associations were reported with any of the three personality factors included in the model (extraversion, emotionality, and toughmindedness). In terms of parental church attendance, strong and significant correlations were reported between students' church attendance and both mothers' church attendance and fathers' church attendance, with the relationship with mothers' attendance stronger than with fathers' attendance. In terms of family conversations, all three measures (conversation with mother, conversation with father, and conversation with grandparents) were relatively strong.

### **Engaging multiple regression**

The fifth step in data analysis involved exploring the cumulative impact of the four groups of predictor variables (personal factors, psychological factors, parental church attendance, and family conversation) on individual differences in students' levels of church attendance. Table 5 presents the series of four regression models, in which fixed order entry was employed. In model one, just personal factors were entered (sex and age). In model two,

psychological factors were added (extraversion, emotionality and toughmindedness). In model three, parental church attendance was added. In model four, family conversation was added in order to examine whether this factor added additional predictive power after parental church attendance had been taken into account.

It is model four that is most revealing when all four sets of predictor variables are taken into account. This model confirms that parental church attendance provides the strongest predictor of church attendance among young Anglicans. More frequent attendance is associated with mother attending church ( $\beta = .34$ ) than with father attending church ( $\beta = .07$ ). These two factors operate cumulatively with the stronger influence being when both parents attend church, although the effect of mother is much stronger than the effect of father. Moreover, family conversation offers an additional positive influence on church attendance frequency of young Anglicans, although in this context the effect is carried solely through conversation with mothers. In summary, the single most important factor in sustaining churchgoing among 9- to 11-year-old Anglicans attending church schools in Wales is the church attendance patterns of mothers. The effect of maternal example is, however, augmented when mothers take the opportunity to talk with their children about God, Jesus, prayer, and church, and when fathers are also seen to support mothers' pattern of church attendance.

## **Study 2: Secondary schools**

### **Method**

#### **Procedure**

Ten church secondary schools agreed to participate in the survey as part of the longer mixed methods study reported by Casson, Cooling, and Francis (2017). These ten schools included eight Church of England schools, one joint Anglican-Catholic school, and one school operated by a Christian foundation. These ten schools represented a range of

admissions policies. During the school year 2015 to 2016, the schools were asked to administer the questionnaires in normal class groups to all year-seven, year-eight, year-nine, year-ten, and year-eleven students throughout the school. Students were asked not to write their name on the booklet and to complete the instrument without discussing it with their peers. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Although students were given the choice not to participate, very few declined to do so. All told 6,749 students participated in the survey conducted during the second year of the project (2015-2016).

### **Instrument**

*Religious affiliation* of students was assessed by two questions. The first question, ‘What is your religion?’ was followed by the checklist: none, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and other (please specify). The second question, ‘If you ticked Christian, with which group do you identify?’ was followed by a list of options including none and Church of England.

*Church attendance* of students, mothers and fathers was assessed by three questions, ‘Apart from special occasions (like weddings), how often do you/does your mother/does your father attend religious services (e.g. at church, mosque, or synagogue)?’ followed by the options: never, occasionally, at least six times a year, at least once a month, and nearly every week.

*Personality* was assessed by the abbreviated form of the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (JEPQR-A: Francis, 1996). This instrument proposes three six-item measures of extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism. Each item is assessed on a dichotomous scale: yes and no.

### **Participants**

The present analyses were conducted on data provided by 2,323 students who self-identified as Anglicans: 1,040 males and 1,283 females; 528 from year seven, 532 from year eight, 494 from year nine, 408 from year ten, and 361 from year eleven.

### **Results and discussion**

#### **Mapping the profile of young Anglicans**

- insert table 6 about here -

The first step in data analysis involved mapping the profile of the 2,323 students who self-identified as Anglicans. Table 6 presents the frequency of church attendance reported for the students themselves and for their parents. The data show that weekly attendance was reported for 32% of the students, 43% of the mothers, and 24% of the fathers, while 12% of the students, 15% of the mothers, and 35% of the fathers were reported as never attending.

#### **Testing the instruments**

- insert table 7 about here -

The second step in data analysis involved testing the psychometric properties of the abbreviated form of the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised. Table 7 presents the alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) together with the means and standard deviations. The alpha coefficients for the extraversion scale and for the neuroticism scale are satisfactory for such short instruments (DeVellis, 2003). The weaker alpha coefficient reported by the psychoticism scale is consistent with the known difficulties involved in operationalising this dimension of personality (Francis, Brown, & Philipchalk, 1992). The mean scale scores are in line with the data reported by the foundation paper for this measure (Francis, 1996).

#### **Examining correlations**

- insert table 8 about here -

The third step in data analysis involved exploring the bivariate correlations between the frequency of the students' church attendance and the range of predictor variables

assembled for the analysis. These correlations are presented in table 8. While sex is a routine predictor of frequency of church attendance in general populations (Francis, 1997, Francis & Penny, 2014) in terms of higher frequency associated with being female, this is not the case among young self-assigned Anglicans either in the present study ( $r = .01$ , ns) or in the earlier study reported by Francis (in press). Age has served as a routine predictor of frequency of church attendance during childhood and adolescence (Kay & Francis, 1996) in terms of lower frequency associated with growing older, and this general finding is supported by the present study ( $r = -.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In terms of personality factors, higher levels of church attendance are significantly correlated with lower psychoticism scores ( $r = -.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but independent of extraversion scores ( $r = .02$ , ns) and almost independent of neuroticism scores ( $r = .04$ ,  $p < .05$ ). This finding is consistent with the view advanced by Francis (1992) that psychoticism is the dimension of personality fundamental to individual differences in religiosity and supported by a large number of subsequent studies (see Lewis & Francis, 2014). In terms of parental religious practice, levels of church attendance are significantly correlated with both mother's ( $r = .67$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and father's ( $r = .54$ ,  $p < .001$ ) levels of church attendance.

### **Engaging multiple regression**

- insert table 9 about here -

The third step in data analysis involved exploring the cumulative impact of the three groups of predictor variables (personal factors, psychological factors, and parental religious practices) on individual differences in students' levels of church attendance. Table 9 presents the series of three regression models, in which fixed order entry was employed. In model one, just personal factors were entered (sex and age). In model two, psychological factors were added (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion). In model three, parental religious practice was added (mother's church attendance, and father's church attendance). The three

regression models presented in table 4 build up an incremental picture of parental influence after personal factors (age and sex) and psychological factors (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion) have been taken into account. It is model three that is most revealing when all three sets of predictor variables are taken into account. This model confirms that parental church attendance provides the strongest prediction of church attendance among young Anglicans. More frequent attendance is associated with mother attending church ( $\beta = .52$ ) and with father attending church ( $\beta = .29$ ). These two factors operate cumulatively with the stronger influence being when both parents attend church.

### **Conclusion**

Building on the earlier study reported by Francis (in press) on parental and peer influence on church attendance among 645 self-identified 13- to 15-year-old Anglicans, the present study drew on two further samples of young Anglicans specifically attending church schools: 2,019 9- to 11-year-old students attending church primary schools in Wales, and 2,323 13- to 15-year-old students attending church secondary schools mainly in England. The data from all three independent studies generate similar findings. What sustains churchgoing young Anglicans is largely rooted within the home. In all three studies the data demonstrated the key importance of parental religious practice on levels of church attendance among young Anglicans. Among young Anglicans those who stay in church are those whose parents are there also. In this case the influence of mother is stronger than the influence of father, but the strongest influence is when both parents are there in church. The idea of parental religious practice supported by the regression models confirms that the example of parental church attendance is even stronger when parents (especially mother) talk about religion with their young people at home.

Cumulatively these research findings may carry important implications for the way in which the Church of England and Church in Wales conceptualise ministry among young

people. The major implication is that those young people who feel connection with the Anglican Church (by self-identifying as Anglicans) seem to do so because their parents see themselves as Anglican. Young Anglicans who practise their Anglican identity by attending church seem to do so primarily because their parents are Anglican churchgoers. Moreover, young Anglican churchgoers are most likely to keep going if their churchgoing parents talk with them about their faith. Peer support seems insignificant in comparison with parental support. The implication from these findings for the Anglican Church in England and Wales to develop and to strengthen its ministry among children and young people is that it may be wise to invest in the education and formation of churchgoing Anglican parents in order to enable them, in turn, to nurture the Christian education and the Christian formation of their young.

The present findings and the present conclusions do nothing to detract from the important conclusions and recommendation made by the report *Rooted in the Church* (Church of England Education Office, 2016a) that strengthens the vision for local churches working with children and young people, or from the conclusions and recommendations made by the report *Deeply Christian, serving the common good* (Church of England Education Office, 2016b) that strengthens the vision for local schools (church schools and all schools) working with children and young people to offer an encounter with Jesus Christ and with the Christian faith. However, what the present findings and the present conclusions do emphasise is that within modern, plural, and secular societies the two agencies of local church and local school are not themselves adequately equipped to support the Christian education and Christian formation of young Anglicans without the proper engagement of home and of parents.

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Table 1

*Frequency of church attendance*

	Self %	Mother %	Father %
Never	10	32	47
Once or twice a year	21	26	25
Sometimes	47	26	18
At least once a month	14	7	4
Weekly	19	10	5



Table 2

*Frequency of family conversation*

	Mother %	Father %	Grandparents %
I often talk about God with	28	18	23
I often talk about prayer with	24	16	21
I often talk about church with	28	19	24
I often talk about Jesus with	25	17	23

Table 3

*Scales of family engagement with conversation*

	N Items	alpha	Mean	SD
Mother	4	.96	10.25	4.95
Father	4	.97	9.17	4.69
Grandparents	4	.97	9.75	4.97

Table 4

*Scale properties of personality measures:*

	N items	alpha	Mean	SD
Extraversion	6	.66	23.95	4.02
Emotionality	6	.77	16.63	5.51
Toughmindedness	6	.76	9.89	4.13



Table 5

*Regression models on student church attendance*

	r	model 1	model 2	model 3	model 4
<i>Personal factors</i>					
Sex	.05*	.06**	.06**	.04*	.04
School Year	.02	.02	.02	.01	.02
<i>Psychological factors</i>					
Extraversion	-.02		-.02	-.02	-.03
Emotionality	-.01		-.00	.00	-.01
Toughmindedness	-.03		-.01	.02	.04
<i>Parental church attendance</i>					
Mother's attendance	.43***			.39***	.34***
Father's attendance	.29***			.07**	.07**
<i>Family conversation</i>					
Mother	.23***				.17***
Father	.19***				-.05
Grandparent	.18***				.01
Total R <sup>2</sup>		.00	.00	.19	.21
Δ		.00*	.00	.19**	.02***

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 6

*Frequency of church attendance*

	Self % (N = 2313)	Mother % (N = 2299)	Father % (N = 2236)
Never	12	15	35
Occasionally	29	20	22
At least six times a year	8	7	8
At least once a month	19	14	12
Nearly every week	32	43	24

Table 7

*Personality measures: Scale properties*

	N items	alpha	Mean	SD
Extraversion	6	.74	4.51	1.69
Neuroticism	6	.72	3.23	1.88
Psychoticism	6	.51	0.65	0.98

Table 8

*Correlation matrix for religious variables and attitude toward religious diversity*

	Sex	Age	Psy	Neu	Ext	Fath	Moth
Attendance	.01	-.24***	-.13***	-.04*	-.02	.54***	.67***
Mother (Moth)	-.06*	-.15***	-.08***	-.06**	-.02	.46***	
Father (Fath)	-.08***	-.09***	-.04*	-.05*	-.01		
Extraversion (Ext)	.02	-.14***	.09***	-.22***			
Neuroticism (Neu)	.28***	.12***	.01				
Psychoticism (Psy)	-.22***	.08***					
Age	.02						

Note \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 9

*Regression models on student church attendance*

	model 1	model 2	model 3
<i>Personal factors</i>			
Sex	.01	.01	.05**
School Year	-.24***	-.24***	-.13***
<i>Psychological factors</i>			
Extraversion		-.05*	-.03
Neuroticism		-.02	-.00
Psychoticism		-.11***	-.06***
<i>Parental religious practice</i>			
Mother's attendance			.52***
Father's attendance			.29***
Total R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.07	.54
$\Delta$	.06	.02	.47

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$