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Francis, L.J., MacArthur, A.L., McKenna, U., Fawcett, B. G. and Pyke, D. (2024) *Assessing the influence of the home on sustaining churchgoing among young Baptists in Canada: a replication study*. Journal of Religious Education. ISSN 1442-6200

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Accepted 25.9.24: *Journal of Religious Education*

Assessing the influence of the home on sustaining churchgoing  
among young Baptists in Canada: A replication study

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the influence of the home on sustaining churchgoing among young Baptists in Canada. Data provided by 126 young Baptists between the ages of 12 and 18 years attending a week-long youth mission and service programme demonstrated that neither personal factors (age and sex) nor psychological factors (extraversion, sensing, thinking, and emotionality) were statistically significant after taking parental church attendance into account. Moreover, these data confirmed father's attendance as a statistically significant factor augmenting the effect of mother's attendance. The implications of these findings are discussed for pastoral practice. Within the current social context, Churches concerned with recruiting and retaining young members may need to concentrate on nurturing and resourcing Christian households (including fathers as well as mothers) in supporting the religious faith and practices of their children. The support and example of both mothers and fathers is important for boys and for girls across the teenage years.

*Keywords:* Baptist, parental influence, church attendance, Canada

### **Introduction**

The Baptist Church in Atlantic Canada, like many other Churches in the western world is needing to reflect seriously on strategies for ministry and mission among children and young people. Among other things this means targeting scarce resources in ways that may be effective. In an earlier study, conducted among 299 participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years attending a summer youth programme sponsored by the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021) identified fathers' religious attendance as a statistically significant factor augmenting the effect of mothers' religious attendance for sustaining young Canadian Baptists in their faith. Reflecting on this finding, Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021) suggested that the key to an effective strategy for ministry and mission among young people may be in investing more intentionally in work among fathers rather than concentrating too intensively in work among young people themselves.

Against this background, the aim of the present study is first to contextualise this practical recommendation within the wider research literature addressing the issue of sustaining young churchgoers in their faith, and then to report on a replication study among young Canadian Baptists. It is good practice within scientific research not to rest content with the outcome of a single study, but to test whether the same findings may emerge at another time, within a different setting, and among different participants. What needs to remain constant within this kind of replication study is methodological consistency. In this case the data will be collected in the same way among another cohort of young participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years attending a summer youth programme sponsored by the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada.

**Reviewing the wider literature**

The foundations on which Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021) constructed their original study among young Baptists in Canada were established by the Australian National Church Life Survey. This survey was originally designed to listen to adult churchgoers, as reported on surveys conducted in 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, and 2011 by Bellamy, Cussen, Sterland, Castle, Powell, and Kaldor (2006), Kaldor, Bellamy, Correy, and Powell (1992), Kaldor, Bellamy, Moore, Powell, Castle, and Correy (1995), Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Hughes, and Castle (1997), Kaldor, Bellamy, Powell, Castle, and Hughes (1999), Kaldor, Dixon, Powell, Bellamy, Hughes, Moore, and Dalziel (1999), Kaldor and McLean (2009), and Powell, Bellamy, Sterling, Jacka, Pepper, and Brady (2012). By 2001 there was a parallel stream of research conducted among children and young people. In their analysis of the 2001 data provided by 10,101 10- to 14-year-old attenders Bellamy, Mou, and Castle (2005) pointed to the central role of parents in sustaining the faith of young people. In particular they found that higher levels of belief, more positive attitudes toward church, and greater involvement in church life were associated with family prayer times, parental encouragement of a personal devotional life for their children, and parents talking about faith with their children.

The conclusion drawn by Bellamy, Mou, and Castle (2005), on data gathered in Australia in the early 2000s, that affirmed the central role of parents in sustaining the faith of young people, clearly echoed the findings of Kay (1981) on data gathered in England and Ireland in the late 1970s. Drawing on data provided by 3,116 secondary school students recruited from within 33 schools, Kay employed multiple regression models to compare the effects of three sets of variables on faith outcomes: personal factors, school factors, and home factors. From these three sets of variables, he found the home factors to be most influential. Clearly this line of research is worth developing and extending.

Building on Bellamy, Mou, and Castle's (2005) analysis of data from the 2001 survey, Francis, Penny, and Powell (2018) turned attention to data provided by 6,252 8- to 14-year-old attenders gathered during the 2011 National Church Life Survey. This study, too, pointed to the central role of parents. In particular they found that frequent attendance among young churchgoers occurred when fathers as well as mothers attended church. The most positive attitude toward church was found among young churchgoers who were able to talk about God with their parents and who felt that their parents encouraged them to go to church but did not make them go. By comparison, peer influence within the church did not make much contribution to frequency of attendance.

Employing data from the 2016 National Church Life Survey, Francis, McKenna, and Powell (2020) concentrated on responses from 2,131 8- to 14-year-old participants who completed surveys while attending Catholic churches. These data demonstrated that young Catholics are more likely to attend church frequently if both mother and father also attend frequently. Moreover, after taking maternal and paternal church attendance into account, the attention given to religion in the home added further predictive power. Young Catholics are more likely to attend church frequently if both churchgoing parents also support faith within the home through family encouragement and religious engagement. In this study the notion of family encouragement was operationalised by four activities: family who read the Bible or pray; family who have discussions with their children about God or Christian faith; family who ask their children what they have learned about at church; and family who talk with their children about doubts or worries about the Christian faith. The notion of religious engagement at home was operationalised by nine activities: saying thank you to God or Jesus; asking God or Jesus to help others; saying sorry to God or Jesus; asking God or Jesus to make the world better; praying on your own; reading Christian stories or books; listening to Christian music (outside church); reading the Bible on your own; and talking to your friends

about God or Jesus. After maternal and paternal churchgoing, family encouragement, and religious engagement had been taken into account, neither engaging with online religious resources nor attending a Catholic school added further predictive power in sustaining churchgoing among young Catholics.

The Australian National Church Life Survey gave rise to the 2001 Church Life Profile designed for use in England under the management of Churches Information for Mission (2001). Within this project a strength of the survey intended for completion by churchgoers between the ages of 8 and 14 years was that it included measures of attitude toward church and indicators of appreciation of components of church services. A weakness, however, was that the survey did not include a measure of frequency of attendance. Other measures included in the survey concerned belief in God, frequency of personal prayer, experiencing closeness to God, peer group support, and (of crucial importance) three core questions concerning the involvement of parents. The first question, 'Do your parents often come to this church?', was followed by four options: yes, mum and dad both come; yes, dad does; yes, mum does; no. The second question, 'How often do you pray with your family?', was followed by four options: a few times a week or more often; once a week; not very often; never. The third question, 'Do you ever talk with your parents about God?', was followed by four options: often; sometimes; hardly ever; never. The sample comprised 10,153 young people (60% female and 40% male).

In their analysis of these data from 10,153 8- to 14-year-old attenders, Francis and Craig (2006) drew attention to the influence of parents on the development and maintenance of a positive attitude toward church among young churchgoers. Alongside the importance of parental church attendance, these data highlighted the crucial role that parents play through what they do and what they model outside their pattern of church attendance. The maintenance of a positive attitude toward church between the ages of 8 and 14 years is

associated with having parents who support their faith in conversation and by example at home.

A second strand of research on which Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021) constructed their original study among young Baptists in Canada was shaped by a series of five studies conducted among students in England, Wales, and the Republic of Ireland that explored the place of the home in sustaining churchgoing among young Anglicans and young Catholics. This method allowed research to be undertaken among non-churchgoing Anglicans and Catholics alongside those who attended church. In the first of these studies from a sample of 7,059 13- to 15-year-old students in England and Wales, Francis (2020) found 645 who self-identified as Anglicans (Church of England or Church in Wales). 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.

In the second of these studies, Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, and McKenna (2020) drew on data provided by 2,019 9- to 11-year-old students attending 88 Church in Wales primary schools who self-identified as Anglican. These data demonstrated that the single most important factor in sustaining churchgoing among these young Anglicans was the church attendance patterns of mothers. The effect of maternal example is, however, augmented when fathers support mothers' pattern of church attendance and when parents talk with their children about God, Jesus, prayer, and church.

In the third of these studies, Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, and McKenna (2020) drew on data provided by 2,323 11- to 16-year-old students in England and Wales who self-identified as Anglican. Once again these data confirmed that parental church attendance



provides the strongest prediction of church attendance among young Anglicans. More frequent attendance is associated with mother attending church and with father attending church. These two factors operate cumulatively with the stronger influence being when both parents attend church.

Two other studies in this series focused on 13- to-15-year-old students who self-identified as Catholics. Francis and Casson (2019) employed data from 2,146 students who self-identified as Catholic from among 9,810 participants to a survey conducted in England, Scotland, and Wales. Byrne, Francis, Sweetman, and McKenna (2019) employed data from 1,942 students who self-identified as Catholic from among 3,000 participants to a survey conducted in the Republic of Ireland. In both studies multiple regression analyses were employed to assess the predictive power of five sets of factors: personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion), parental religious identity (treating mothers and fathers separately), parental religious practice, and peer-related practice. The data suggested that young Catholics who practise their Catholic identity by attending church do so largely because their parents are Catholic churchgoers. Moreover, young Catholics are most likely to keep going if both mother *and* father are Catholic churchgoers, and if they discuss faith with their mother. Peer-related factors and psychological factors added little additional predictive power to the model.

### **Research question**

Against this background, the aim of the present study was to build on the research tradition initiated by Fawcett that has begun to compile a systematic profile of the Christian experience of Baptist youth in Atlantic Canada who engage with the Tidal Impact mission and service event. This research tradition has led over the years to a series of publications, including Fawcett and Francis (2009), Fawcett, Francis, and Robbins (2009, 2011a, 2011b), Fawcett, Francis, Linkletter, and Robbins (2012), Fawcett, Francis, Henderson, Robbins, and

Linkletter (2013), Francis, Fawcett, and Linkletter (2013), Francis, Fawcett, Robbins, and Stairs (2016), Francis, Fawcett, Linkletter, Robbins, and Stairs (2016), and Fawcett, Francis, Linkletter, Robbins, and Stairs (2017), Fawcett, Freeze, Francis, and Embree (2020), Francis, Fawcett, Freeze, Embree, and Lankshear (2021), Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021), and Francis, Fawcett, and McKenna (2023a, 2023b). The 2023 survey was completed by young participants engaged in the Tidal Impact event based in Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada. The survey was designed to focus on moral and religious issues, including the effect of parental religious attendance on sustaining their personal practice of church attendance.

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

All the young people attending the week-long Tidal Impact summer youth mission and service programme sponsored by the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, held in 2023 were invited to complete a detailed questionnaire following the completion of a worship service. Following an explanation of the nature of the survey and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, the questionnaires were distributed to the young people. Participation was voluntary, but the overall level of interest in the topic meant that few young people failed to complete the exercise. A total of 126 questionnaires were returned by participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years, that provided data fully completed for the analyses reported in the present study (that means with no missing data).

### **Participants**

Of the 126 participants who provided full data, 50 were male and 76 were female; 17% were 12 years of age, 22% were 13, 18% were 14, 21% were 15, 11% were 16, 9% were 17, and 6% were 18.

### **Measures**

*Church attendance* of the young participants, their mothers and their fathers was assessed by three questions regarding frequency of attendance followed by the options: nearly every week (5), at least once a month (4), sometimes (3), once or twice a year (2), and never (1).

*Psychological factors* were assessed by the Adolescent form of the Francis Psychological Type and Emotional Temperament Scales (FPTETSA; Francis, Fawcett, & McKenna, 2023a). This is a 50-item instrument comprising five sets of 10 forced-choice items related to each of the four components of psychological type theory: orientation (introversion and extraversion), perceiving process (sensing and intuition), judging process (thinking and feeling), and attitude toward the external world (judging and perceiving) and augmented by emotionality (calm and volatile). In the foundation paper, Francis, Fawcett, and McKenna (2023a) reported the following alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) for these scales: orientation,  $\alpha = .78$ ; perceiving process,  $\alpha = .71$ ; judging process,  $\alpha = .73$ ; attitude toward the external world,  $\alpha = .74$ ; emotionality,  $\alpha = .75$ .

### **Data analysis**

The data were analysed by the SPSS package using the frequency, reliability, correlation, and regression routines.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Mapping the religious profile of young Baptists**

- insert table 1 about here -

The first step in data analysis involved mapping the religious profile of these 126 young Baptists in terms of their personal church attendance and the attendance of their parents. The data presented in table 1 show that weekly attendance was reported by 75% of the young participants, compared with 74% of their mothers and 66% of their fathers. While 6% of the young participants reported either never attending church or attending only once or twice a year, the proportions rose to 14% among their mothers and to 22% among their fathers.

**Testing the measures**

- insert table 2 about here -

The second step in data analysis involved testing the psychometric properties of the psychological measures included in the study. Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the four measures of extraversion, sensing, thinking, and emotionality, together with the alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) as a test of internal consistency reliability.

These data demonstrate that the measures of extraversion, thinking and emotionality each reported satisfactory internal consistency reliability above the threshold of .65 (DeVellis, 2003), while the measure of sensing is performing less well. Table 2 also reports the means and standard deviations for the measures of personal church attendance, paternal church attendance, and maternal church attendance.

**Examining correlations**

- insert table 3 about here -

The third step in data analysis involved exploring the bivariate correlations between personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (extraversion, sensing, thinking, and emotionality), the participants' church attendance, and parental church attendance. Three main features from this correlation matrix deserve comment. In terms of sex differences, females recorded higher scores on emotionality, while males recorded higher scores on thinking and extraversion. These findings are generally consistent with previous research. On the other hand, there were no sex differences in frequency of church attendance, a finding consistent with previous research among young Canadian Baptists (see Fawcett, Francis, & McKenna, 2021). In terms of age, there were no significant differences. In terms of frequency of personal church attendance, there were strong correlations with both maternal attendance and paternal attendance. Maternal attendance and paternal attendance were also strongly correlated.

### **Engaging multiple regression**

- insert table 4 about here -

The fourth step in data analysis involved exploring the cumulative impact of the three groups of predictor variables (personal factors, psychological factors, and parental religious practice) on individual differences in the participants' levels of church attendance. Table 4 presents a 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 (extraversion, sensing, thinking, and emotionality). In model three, parental religious practice was added (fathers' church attendance and mothers' church attendance). These models demonstrate that neither personal factors nor psychological factors have a part to play in sustaining churchgoing among these young Canadian Baptists. What counts, however, is the influence of their home. The young Canadian Baptists who sustain frequent church attendance are those whose parents also attend. The beta weights suggest that paternal attendance and maternal attendance carry similar weight in sustaining church attendance among young Canadian Baptists, but that what really counts is the cumulative impact of *both* mothers' attendance and fathers' attendance.

### **Conclusion**

In the spirit of scientific replication this study set out to test the findings advanced by Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021) regarding the importance of parents (and especially fathers) in sustaining young Canadian Baptists in the faith. New data from 126 young Baptists between the ages of 12 and 18 years attending a week-long youth mission and service programme supported this general finding.

Taken together the present study and the earlier study reported by Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021) focus specifically for Canadian Baptists a conclusion that is also emerging across other denominations on other continents, as demonstrated in Australia, in

Britain and Ireland. This conclusion points to the centrality of the home for faith transmission within cultures that no longer confidently sustain the Christian narrative. In such cultures the Christian way of life is counter cultural, and local churches are counter cultural. For something so counter cultural to be sustainable for children and young people, it needs to be rooted and lived out within the home, not merely visited and enjoyed for a few hours at the weekend.

The challenge apparently facing the Baptist Church in Atlantic Canada is the same challenge that is now facing the Anglican Church in England and the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland. Growing and nurturing a new generation of young Canadian Baptists may no longer be within the grasp of the local congregation or even within the grasp of week-long summer mission and service programmes. The key allocation of resource may now need to be directed toward equipping households to be growing in faith in ways that facilitate faith transmission to the next generation.

The recommendation to direct resources toward equipping households to be growing in faith is consistent with the report by Penner, Harder, Anderson, Desourcy, and Heimstra (2011) on a national study of 2,886 Canadian young adults entitled *Hemorrhaging faith: Why and when young adults are leaving, staying and returning to the church*. Penner, Harder, Anderson, Desourcy, and Heimstra (2011) reported that the faith commitment of parents strongly influences the faith and church engagement of children into their adult years. They found that young adults raised by parents who attend church regularly, pray regularly, and read their Bible regularly are far more likely to attend church regularly than their peers with parents who do not engage in these spiritual practices. Penner et al. (2011) found that young people benefited from parents who were intentional about passing on their faith through both modelling and instructing.

The recommendation to direct resources toward equipping households to be growing in faith is also consistent with the report by Powell (2018) on data from 33,898 Australian Baptists who participated in the 2016 National Church Life Survey, *A generational profile of Australian Baptist church attenders*. Powell (2018) reported that parents participating in the survey indicated that 96% of their children aged 14 or younger regularly attended church, compared with 53% of their children aged 15 or over (including adult children). Cronshaw (2019a) called this development a ‘generational drift away’. From these data, Powell concluded that a key factor in sustaining faith transmission among Baptists as children aged was the influence of family members, especially mothers. In light of this, Cronshaw (2019b) suggested that Baptist churches and parents abandon the model of faith transmission that focuses on delegating faith formation to the church and instead focus on ‘partnering with parents’ to encourage parents to engage their children in meaningful conversation about Christian faith while sharing a family meal and at other times.

Viewed through this lens, perhaps the agenda for future research now needs to shift from ‘Sustaining churchgoing young Baptists in Canada’ to ‘Sustaining and nurturing Baptist households in Canada’.

## **Statements and Declarations**

### **Conflict of interest**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### **Funding**

The research was funded in part by the Stephen and Ella Steeves Research Scholarship.

### **Data availability**

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### **Ethical approval**

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Crandall University on 31 May 2023.



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Table 1

*Frequency of church attendance*

	Self %	Father %	Mother %
Never	5	17	9
Once or twice a year	1	5	5
Sometimes	16	8	10
At least once a month	3	5	3
Nearly every week	75	66	74

N = 126

Table 2

*Means and standard deviations and reliability*

	alpha	Mean	SD
Extraversion	.80	5.29	2.88
Sensing	.59	6.32	2.28
Thinking	.70	4.79	2.64
Emotionality	.75	5.61	2.51
Personal attendance		4.44	1.09
Mothers' attendance		3.98	1.57
Fathers' attendance		4.29	1.32

Table 3

*Correlation matrix*

	Emot	Thi	Sen	Ext	Mot	Fat	Self	Age
Sex	.50***	-.19*	-.14	-.20*	.04	-.13	-.00	.08
Age	.07	-.09	.05	-.11	.05	-.04	-.08	
Self	-.06	-.12	-.14	.10	.54***	.52***		
Father (Fat)	-.21*	-.16	-.10	.13	.54***			
Mother (Mot)	-.01	-.10	-.08	-.03				
Extraversion (Ext)	-.30***	-.18*	-.13					
Sensing (Sen)	-.06	.13						
Thinking (Thi)	.17*							

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

Emot, Emotionality



Table 4

*Regression models*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Personal factors</i>			
Sex	.00	-.02	.01
Age	-.08	-.08	-.06
<i>Psychological factors</i>			
Extraversion		.05	.05
Sensing		-.12	-.10
Thinking		-.11	-.02
Emotionality		-.02	.02
<i>Home factors</i>			
Fathers' attendance			.31***
Mothers' attendance			.37***
$r^2$	.01	.04	.39
$\Delta$	.01	.04	.34***

Note: \*\*\*  $p < .001$