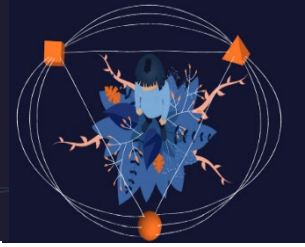


FAITH IN THE NEXUS



September 2023
Issue 9

A very warm welcome back to the new academic year. Since our last update, the Nexus team have been busy in active research for the two following projects

1. Spiritual Flourishing in the Home
2. Spiritual Flourishing of Very Young Children

Updates on both projects will form the main content for this newsletter.

We are delighted that our Nexus resources continue to be popular, as indicated by our download figures on page 5. If you have used them, we would really love to hear how they are being utilised to inform and support your work. Please do let us know by contacting us via nexus@canterbury.ac.uk

The Nexus resources can be found via the following link: <https://nicer.org.uk/faith-in-the-nexus>

Should you wish to have hardcopies of any of the PDFs, please contact us at nexus@canterbury.ac.uk

Further information can be found at the end of this newsletter.

Project Updates

1. Spiritual Flourishing in the Home

The two main strands of this research project are:

1. The development of a Nexus animation produced by Ministry using children's voices. We believe adults need to listen closely and hear children's voices expressing their understanding of spirituality.



2. A research study looking in greater depth at children's understanding of spiritual nurture in the home and parents' perception of how to nurture faith and spirituality in their family life.

Progress & Reflections

During the spring term 2023, the Nexus team carried out research visits to 7 church primary schools, and our initial analysis of the data gathered has identified four interesting areas in children's responses:

- Children spoke frequently about prayer in school and at home,
- Again, as in the original Nexus, we found children discussing spaces for reflection in school and at home,
- Children spoke about connection with God, for some, a relationship with Jesus. This is an exciting line to explore further, raising many questions about how they express and interpret this connection.
- The fourth theme is the way children express encounters with faith at home.

The next stage has been unpacking these themes. We have started by analysing the ways children talk about prayer. For example, some children will talk about how different religions pray, what Christians do in prayer, and the knowledge and understanding they have gained in RE or through school.

However, our primary focus is identifying when children talk about how they pray or how they feel when they pray.

When I pray a weight has been lifted off my shoulders because I've shared it out in the open with God and it makes me feel I can share it out with other people

If you believe in God and you believe he is always going to be with you, then you don't have to go anywhere special, you can pray where you are because you know his going to be with you at these times.

The Next Steps

- **The Animation**

Kieran O'Brien, the Director of Ministry is working with us and is currently producing a short animation, using the children's voices of them talking about prayer. This is the first of a few short animations we are planning to do, which can be shared with practitioners to use as a stimulus for discussion with parents, teachers, and children.

- **The Research Processes**

In September and October, we plan to

- Analyse the data in greater depth to identify key quotes of children talking about their need for reflection space and how they express their connection to God.
- Undertake a complete analysis of the adult interviews, parents, school, and church leaders, focusing on how they nurture faith and spirituality at home.

- Design and administer a short survey to the participating schools. This will repeat the most fruitful questions from the initial Nexus (2019) survey.
- Undertake return visits to four of the participating schools to investigate further perceptions of faith at home. In addition, we hope to share with them a draft of the prayer animation for feedback.

2. The Spiritual Flourishing of very Young Children.

In the summer and autumn term of 2022, the Nexus research team investigated Church Toddler Groups to find out what we could learn the spiritual flourishing of young children in these groups. The investigation consisted of four consecutive visits to three separate groups (12 visits in all). The visits and the initial analysis of the data generated provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of research methods trialled in the study. Further details of this can be found via <https://nicer.org.uk/toddlers-in-the-nexus>

We are continuing this year with a short project to:

- Undertake a detailed analysis of the data gathered in the pilot project
- Conduct a rapid survey of a professional network of toddler group leaders
- Liaise with potential partners regarding the development of resources to address the gaps and opportunities identified.
- Visit a small number of Church Toddler Groups, which intentionally and effectively nurture spiritual flourishing of young families.



What have we found out so far?

Focusing on adults' perspectives within the groups is important as very young children cannot be viewed independently of their carer. The analysis of the adult perspectives has revealed interesting insights into how adults view their roles within the Church Toddler Group.

1. For the parents there was a focus on the social side, they come for the company for themselves as much of the children. When pressed as to why this church toddler group, many shared how welcoming they found the group, appreciated the care and hospitality shown to them, and spoke of a feeling of community and a sense of belonging.
2. Many volunteers saw their role as a service to the church, and often prefaced their reply to us with 'I just' make the teas, do the washing up, put the toys out. Many of these mainly older ladies offered an invaluable 'service' to the

young families, welcoming them, chatting about their children, developing relationships, and engendering a sense of belonging.

3. The Clergy & leaders often focussed on the pastoral care. They offered a listening ear and signposted parents to local support such as Foodbanks. For some clergy, and leaders the toddler group was a missional opportunity, they regularly offered invitations to church events – the Teddy Bears picnic in the park, a family Sunday worship service, or Messy Church.

4. The leaders & volunteers, clergy tended to focus on faith encounters through scripture. There was a routine of stopping for a Bible story in two groups. Initial reflections from researchers on the Bible input in these groups are that:

- it was the time the children were least engaged,
- a message most of the adults transmitted was that this was the time of the faith/spiritual nurture of the child. The rest of the time was described as free play, time to chat,
- it also reinforced the perception that faith/spiritual nurture must be undertaken by 'experts'/ professionals.

For all four groups, parents, volunteers, and leaders there was a focus on relationships and the engendering of a sense of belonging.

Next Steps

- An in-depth analysis of the data captured to identify evidence of activities, and behaviours that contribute spiritual flourishing of the children.
- The research team will administer a short survey of Toddler Group Leaders and church leaders, to obtain feedback on findings and suggestions of examples of best practice to nurture the spiritual flourishing of young families.
- We are working with dioceses, parachurch organisations such as the Bible Society and the Gather movement and others such as Out-of-the-Box stories to learn from them and support their work.

Faith in the Nexus Resources

Just a reminder that we have built up a substantial library of Nexus resources that can be downloaded from our website <https://nicer.org.uk/faith-in-the-nexus/the-nexus-toolkit>



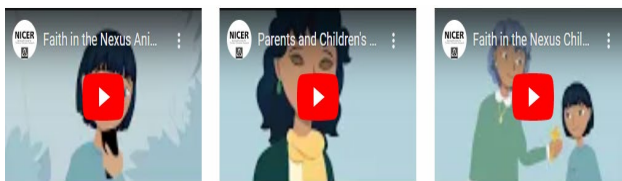
These are some of our most popular pdfs useful for a home, church, school context

Also available is our Teachers' Action Pack



This includes a fully resourced assembly with teacher notes for primary school children.

We have three animations



The first animation focuses on the main findings of the Nexus report, the second has a focus for parents and the third has been created for primary school children.

For your information, here are the latest download figures:

RESOURCE	TIME SPAN	NUMBER OF DOWNLOADS
The Faith in the Nexus Report	Nov 2020 – Sept 2023	827
The Animation	Nov 2020 – Sept 2023	2 600
The PDFs	June 2021 – Sept 2023	4 555
The Parents' Animation	June 2021 – Sept 2023	2 300
The Childrens' Animation	Jan 2022 – Sept 2023	798

Resources for Staff INSET

If you are leading an INSET session for staff at your school focusing on the spiritual flourishing of the child, we have CPD packages for the Church of England and Roman Catholic primary school contexts. Should you wish to receive this resource, please email nexus@canterbury.ac.uk. This tool kit offers an explanation of the Nexus research and practical ideas that will help nurture the spiritual flourishing of children in your school in collaboration with the home and the local church or parish.

With much support from our network of consultants, we are continuing to create new resources, that offer practical ideas of what the Nexus looks like in practice so please visit our website regularly.

UPCOMING EVENTS

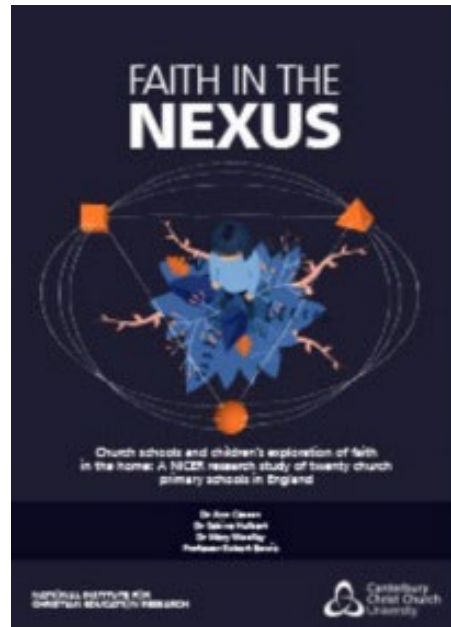
As part of the NICER online seminar schedule Nexus will be hosting the following

- NICER Seminar 15th November 3 -4pm: How do adults nurture children's spirituality in church toddler groups?
- NICER Seminar Spring 2024 (Date TBC): Nexus - How do children express faith and spirituality at home?

Should you wish to attend, please email gill.harrison@canterbury.org.uk

If you would be interested in finding out how a Nexus resource could support your work or have suggestions of your own, please do contact us.

For general enquiries, please contact:
nexus@canterbury.ac.uk



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