

Embargoed: Monday 22nd December 00.01

Eight out of ten parents want their children to believe in the nativity story

A survey of parents has raised concerns that the church needs to do more to support families in the spiritual nurture of their children. The data reveals parents want to foster their children's spirituality but shrink from mentioning God.

The research, carried out by Christian family charity Mothers' Union, shows that whilst an overwhelming majority of parents (81%) teach their children about the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas, only four percent plan to go on to attend church services more with their children in 2009.

Three-quarters of parents believe the spiritual nurture of their children to be important. However, according to the survey just 7% are talking to their children about God as an avenue to lasting security in the credit crunch. Despite this desire to look after their children's spirituality, parents are seven times more likely (49%) to cite family as the vehicle most likely to provide happiness and security to their children than God.

Reg Bailey, chief executive of Mothers Union said "It is encouraging that parents see connecting children with Jesus as only a little less important [14%] than the belief in Father Christmas. In these times of financial insecurity, it is clear that parents are thinking about the spiritual side of Christmas. This gives all Christians a challenge. Parents are telling us they have a desire to nurture the spiritual life of their children, but that they lack the confidence to talk about God. The church needs to connect with that hunger and get across the message that in times of both adversity and prosperity, it has a universal message which enables people to connect with something outside themselves.

The research of 1,005 parents of children aged 11 or under was carried out by the family charity, Mothers' Union in an online survey last week. Mothers' Union has 3.6 million members who are committed to supporting parents as they nurture their children spiritually. To this end they have produced a series of five leaflets *Children in Church* designed to help parents and congregations engage with the spirituality of children. Leaflets cost 25p for a set of five. Email mu@mothersunion.org

ENDS

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NOTE TO EDITORS:

Mothers' Union is an international family charity with 3.6 million members dedicated to promoting marriage and family life. It realises that the well-being of the family cannot be separated from the welfare of wider communities and therefore undertakes groundbreaking community development work in over 78 countries.

Within the UK and Ireland, the Mothers' Union has 96,000+ members and a growing supporter

base. Members actively support families through training parent facilitators, school support work, provision of holidays for those in need. Many volunteer to work with families facing adversity in programmes assisting refugee and asylum seekers, teenagers and school children, family contact centres, hospitals and in 90 prisons.

Other subjects of recent concern are Mothers' Union's *Flexible Families Campaign* which advocates the passing of laws to give parents of all children under 18 the right to request flexible working; representation at the UN on the Commission on the Status of Women; promoting marriage and gender equality in marriage and education.

Mothers' Union employs over 300 part-time local development workers in countries across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and works to alleviate poverty through literacy and development training, community health education programmes, income-generation and entrepreneur training and its Family Life Programme. During times of conflict or natural disaster Mothers' Union provide emergency relief through international funding to local volunteers best placed to help their neighbours and communities. Often this emergency relief is, therefore, the first to reach those in need.