

## **Abstract**

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The increasing age profile of Parishes in the Church of Ireland points to a trend whereby children and young people are increasingly disassociating themselves from Christian faith and worship. Research shows that this process of disassociation begins around the age of six years of age. This dissertation contends that a significant factor in this trend stems from how the church engages in the process of faith formation with children from this early age. Critical examination of established faith formation models will show that Christian educators are largely working with an outdated assumption about the capabilities of young children, particularly regarding their capacity to process and utilise imagery and metaphor in their daily lives. Examining experiential educational practices will lead to an assertion that engaging with faith formation in such a way, particularly focusing on biblical engagement and sacramental expressions within the Irish Anglican tradition, can create more opportunities for children to connect the world of Christian faith to their lived experience. The undertaken field research will test this hypothesis and discover if, rather than forming faith through a dogmatic, information-transfer approach, the creation of environments that are sensory, exploratory and engaging will offer children significant opportunities to create meaning in their faith formation processes. Finally, reflecting on the research, the question to consider is what can be done with this research in creating exploratory and engaging environments in our churches, Sunday schools and other areas of Christian education.