

*The Triple 'A' Formula for Flourishing  
Ministry Families: An Analysis of the  
Ministry/Family Journey of Credentialed  
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Australian Christian Churches*

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# The Triple 'A' Formula for Flourishing Ministry Families: An Analysis of the Ministry/Family Journey of Credentialed Ministers and their Spouses within the Australian Christian Churches

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## Abstract

Although there have been some recent studies regarding the impact of the ministerial vocation on families, there has been little investigation of the Australian setting, particularly Pentecostal denominations. This gap needs attention given the historically high attrition rate of clergy in Australia. This research explores how credentialed ministers and their spouses from the Australian Christian Churches (ACC; formerly the Assemblies of God in Australia) perceive that their involvement in ministry affects their family lives. The overarching research question was to explore the components that contribute toward or work against the spiritual well-being of the family while fulfilling the unique responsibilities associated with the ministry vocation. In response to findings in my research data, the author developed the “triple A” theory of ministry function and family fulfillment, which asserts that ACC clergy are more likely to experience satisfaction in regard to the spiritual well-being of their family if they enter the ministry with measured Aspirations, have a resolute Awareness of the advantages and adversities associated with the ministry/family journey, and give continual Attention to their family by responding intentionally, spiritually, and protectively while drawing upon sustaining resources and establishing reliable support structures.

**Keywords** Ministry · Clergy family · Clergy spouses · Pastor’s kids · Ministry stressors · Family stress theory · Australian Christian churches

I confirm that this manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration by another journal. It has been approved by me being the sole author for submission to the Journal of Pastoral Psychology. There are no conflicts of interest of any kind in regard to this manuscript and ethical approval has been sought and received by both the HREC of the institution that awarded my PhD and the National Executive Leadership of the Australian Christian Churches.

Signed: Daryl Potts Date: Thursday, 29 August 2019

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In general, Christian ministers have two great passions in their lives—their family and their ministry. Balancing time and attention for these can be a challenge. An illustration of the extreme tension that can arise in a minister's home was evident when a pastor in Tennessee was shot dead by his wife in 2006 after a build-up of stress in the family had erupted into an altercation over finances (Christian Century 2007). Although there have been some recent studies regarding the impact of the ministerial vocation on families (Darling et al. 2004; Darling et al. 2006; Lee and Iverson-Gilbert 2003; London Jr. and Wiseman 2003; Payne 2009; Tanner and Zvonkovic 2011), there has been little investigation of the Australian setting, particularly Pentecostal denominations. This gap needs attention given the historically high attrition rate of clergy in Australia (Blaikie 1979; Randall 2004).

This research explores how credentialed ministers and their spouses from Australian Christian Churches (ACC) perceive that their involvement in ministry affects their family lives. The overarching research question was to explore the components that contribute toward or work against the spiritual well-being of their family while fulfilling the unique responsibilities associated with the ministry vocation. In response to findings in the data, I developed the “triple A” theory of ministry function and family fulfillment.

## Method and theory

This research builds on family stress theory in light of the ongoing stressors experienced as a result of the ministry vocation (McCubbin et al. 2014). I selected ACC (formerly the Assemblies of God in Australia) because it is the largest Pentecostal denomination in Australia. A qualitative critical analysis of semi-structured interviews with 30 ACC-credentialed ministry couples (60 individuals) explored the components that contributed toward or worked against the spiritual well-being of their family while fulfilling the unique responsibilities associated with their ministry. The interviews for this thesis were recorded and transcribed in full, with the average time for each interview being between 45 and 50 min.

I applied a critical realist epistemology that informed an interpretivist theoretical perspective. This perspective then informed a grounded theory methodological process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The system of analysis called open coding was undertaken to identify concepts and then categorize these into properties or subcategories (Creswell 2013). Open coding, according to Barney Glaser (1978, p. 56), “involves coding the data in every way possible. .. for as many categories that may fit.” Strauss and Corbin (1990) define open coding as the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data.

Axial coding is a set of procedures whereby data are put back together after open coding in new ways by making connections between categories (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (Strauss and Corbin 1990). John Creswell (2013) explains that axial coding is followed by selective coding, where the researcher may write a story line that connects categories. Using this process, I examined and categorized the data (open coding) and then placed the data into categories (axial coding) and connected the relationships of those categories (selective coding) to ground my triple A theory. The findings of this research offer insights into ‘actual’ and ‘real’ layers of experience (Creswell 2013) that contribute to knowledge regarding pastoral praxis in order to enhance the experience of pastoral families.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of 22 participant profile questions followed by 10 semi-structured open-ended interview questions that allowed the participants to consider and express their thoughts. The profile data led to two distinct groups of interviewees. Group one—the satisfied—indicated they were satisfied with their children’s spiritual outlook and that all their children were still attending church. Group two—the unsatisfied—indicated that they were not satisfied with their children’s spiritual outlook and that at least one of their children was no longer pursuing faith in God. Participants were also classified into the following categories: “male credentialed ministers and their spouses” (MCM and MCMS); “female credentialed ministers and their spouses” (FCM and FCMS); and “both credentialed ministry couples” (BCMh and BCMw). Each participant was coded in their category with a number. Thus, MCM-1 identifies the participant as male credentialed minister number one, FCM-2 identifies the participant as female credentialed minister number two, and so forth. This code protected anonymity and helped present combined findings. The category codes are illustrated in Table 1.

The theoretical framework for this study was modeled on the double ABC-X model of family adjustment and adaptation, which has proved beneficial in addressing the unique longitudinal stresses and demands on clergy families (Amfani-Joe 2012; Frame and Shehan 1994; Lee 1999; McCubbin and Patterson 1983; Peterson and Hawley 1998; Roer-Strier and Sands 2001; Weber 2011; Williams and Williams 2005). Just as the double ABCX model has three stages (pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis), the ministry/family journey also has three stages. These are pre-ministry (aspiration), present ministry/family advantages and adversities (awareness), and ongoing ministry/family challenges and solutions (attention).

As a result of this research, I developed the triple A theory of ministry function and family fulfillment, which demonstrates that ministers and their spouses that enter the ministry with a measured aspiration, have a resolute awareness of the advantages and adversities associated with the ministry/family journey, and give continual attention to their family by responding intentionally, spiritually, and protectively while drawing upon sustaining resources and establishing reliable support structures will more likely experience satisfaction in regard to the spiritual well-being of their family as they function in their ministry calling (see Fig. 1).

A total of 90% of BCMh and BCMw stated in the profile questions that they were satisfied with their children’s spiritual outlook; only 10% stated that they had at least one child in their family who no longer attended church. This is compared to 60% of FCM and FCMS who stated they were satisfied and 40% of MCM and MCMS. The exclusion of same-sex couples from the research is in light of the code of conduct within the ACC Ministerial Code of Conduct (Assemblies of God in Australia 2014) regarding marriage and ordination. The limitations of this study, such as potentially guarded responses, limited sample size, and single-denomination sampling, do not nullify the value of the findings and, indeed, open the way for further research.

**Table 1** Category codes

MCM = Male Credentialed Minister	MCMS = Male Credentialed Minister’s Spouse
FCM = Female Credentialed Minister	FCMS = Female Credentialed Minister’s Spouse
BCMh = Both Credentialed Ministers— Husband	BCMw = Both Credentialed Ministers— Wife

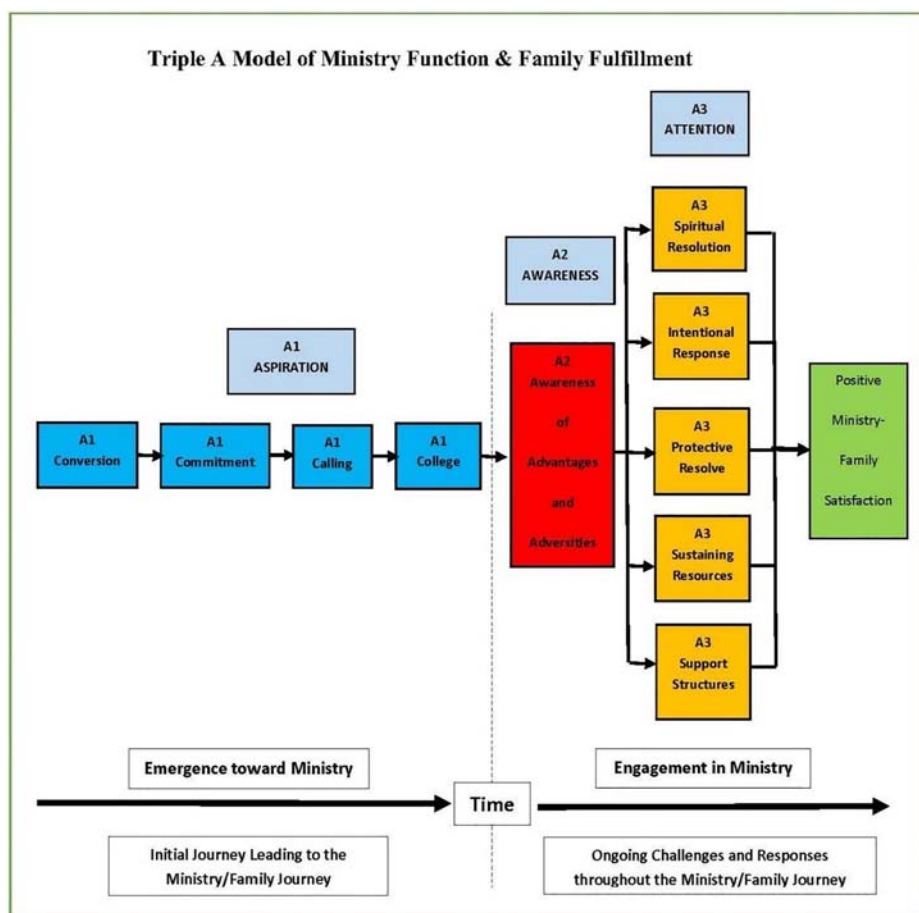


Fig. 1 The “Triple A” model of ministry function and family fulfillment

## Results

### Aspirations: The aspirational journey from conversion to credentialed ministry

Scholars have found a noticeable Pentecostal tendency toward triumphalism (Courey 2015; Vondey 2013, p. 57). The perception of a divine ‘call’ into vocational ministry adds another level of expectation, responsibility, and self-legitimization (Bickerton 2013; LaMothe 2012; Pitt 2012). The eschatological urgency of Pentecostalism also mobilizes an intense fervor (Hall 2003). Beaumont (2011, p. 224) agrees that Australian Pentecostalism has tended to “emphasize salvation of souls rather than care of souls.” Although these Pentecostal foci have contributed to the growth and strength of the ACC, there have also been pitfalls when taken to extremes. These potential pitfalls are addressed in the triple A model by those who have measured aspirations regarding ministry. Respondents in my study demonstrated (by the frequency of their comments seen in the percentages of those who commented in this regard in Fig. 2) that emphases on conversion, commitment to the church, belief in the divine ‘call’ to

vocational ministry, and theological training paved the way for either a realistic or unrealistic approach to the ministry vocation (see Fig. 2).

Participants revealed that their journey to become ministers commenced before they enter credentialed ministry. MCM-8 stated, “I was a bit of a wild character when I came to the Lord [conversion], and I grew very quickly in God, and before long I was a deacon and then an elder [commitment]. Then we went to a country town and pioneered a church [call].” Over half of the participants explained that while they were committed to serving God in their local church setting, they sensed a divine call into vocational ministry. Most commented on this almost twice as frequently as their conversion and Bible college experiences. The frequency of their comments are displayed in the percentages of those who commented in this regard as seen in Fig. 3.

As Fig. 3 illustrates, there is not an extreme variation between the ministry classifications overall. However, there was a higher frequency of mention of the commitment and calling stages across all classifications. For MCM and MCMS, their commitment to their local church and their call to ministry received their highest ranking of importance in the frequency of their comments. BCMH and BCMW made the most frequent comments regarding calling. FCM and FCMS highlighted their commitment to their local church as a very important part of their ministry journeys.

FCM-3 from group one (the satisfied), when referring to her conversion and immediate sense of call, explained: “I became a Christian when I was 15 going on 16 and had a very dramatic conversion. I was the first Christian in my family. I probably had a very strong sense of the call of God on my life from the moment I was saved.” The main focus of participants from group one was on their commitment to their local church and their sense of calling. A typical response came from MCM-4 from group two:

I became a Christian in 1979 and married in 1981, we went to a Church of Christ for two years. So, I went to an interdenominational Bible college for two years, and we had our first child while we were at Bible college. It wasn't necessarily a good experience, as it was a high-pressure situation with a lot of demands and very little in the way of resources.

London Jr. and Wiseman (2003) reveal in one study that 90% of pastors feel they are inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands. Such a statistic confirms the need for ministers to have a measured aspiration that celebrates conversion, encourages commitment to the local church, and seeks quality training for the ministry/family journey.

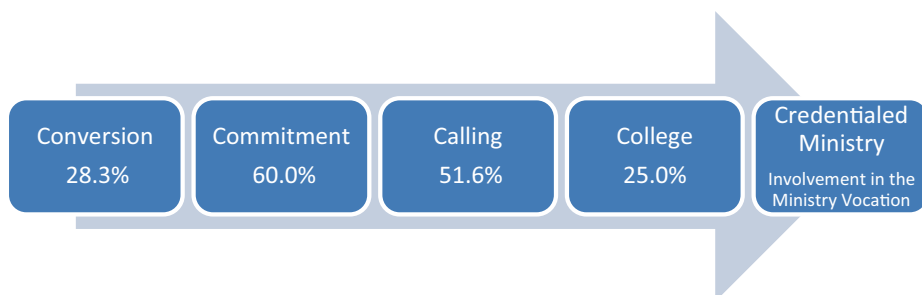


Fig. 2 The emerging pattern from conversion to credentialed ministry

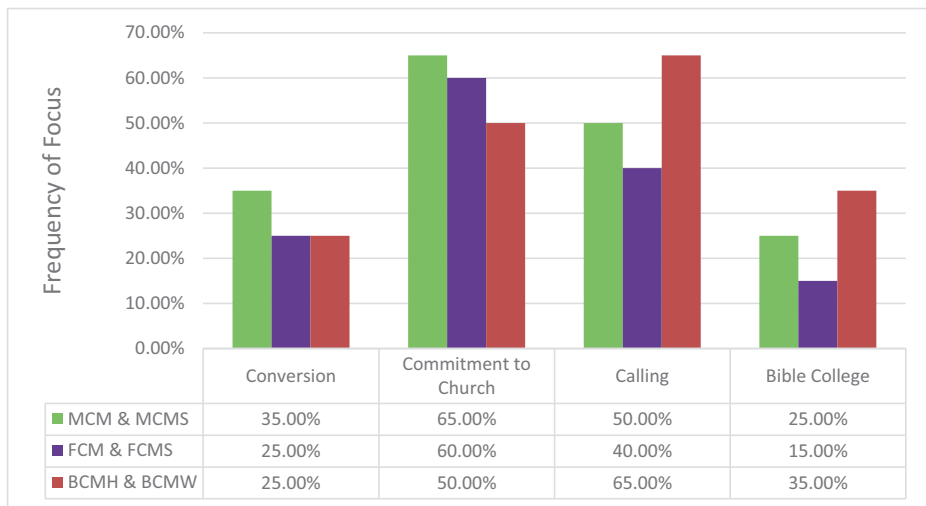


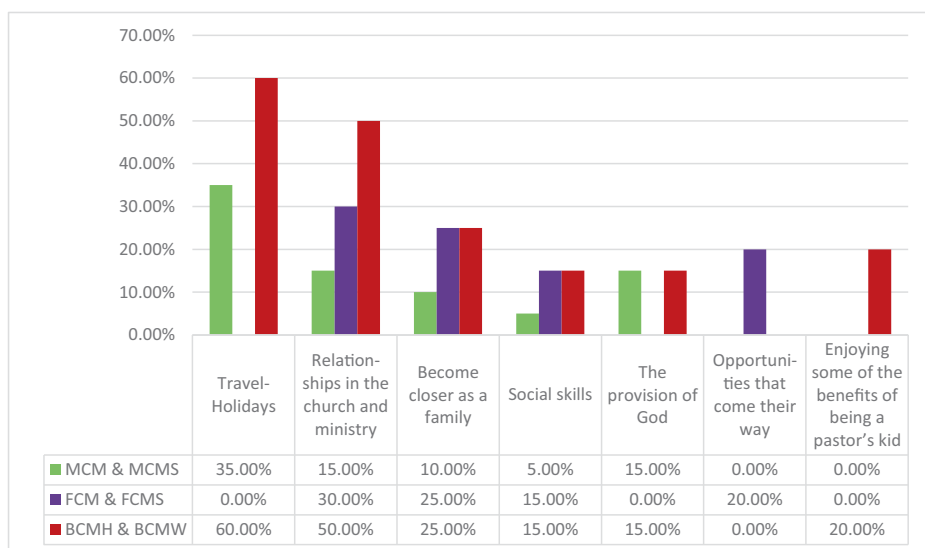
Fig. 3 The emerging call—ministry classifications

### Awareness: Advantages and adversities of the ministry/family journey

There is no doubt that there are both positive and negative aspects to being in a clergy family. Kinnison (2016, p. 8) states, “[T]here seem to be few other professions where a person can be as highly trained as a pastoral leader and be so maligned by her or his clients for being so well trained.” Wilson and Darling (2017, p. 14) add, “Perhaps the best hope for dealing with the stressors of clergy life and their impact on clergy children is that clergy need to become more aware of how the demands of their jobs affect their families.” Congregational expectations are often the highest stress factor (Cattich 2012; Frame and Shehan 2005). Resistance to women in ministry can also be a high stressor for female clergy (Hamman 2010; Lyons 2013; Stephenson 2012; Tackett 2016). Nevertheless, the overall experience of pastors’ children (‘pastors’ kids’ or PKs) can be positive (Francis et al. 2018; Hetzendorfer 2000; Strange and Sheppard 2001).

A common theme among the interviewees was the impact that the ministry vocation had upon family members. An awareness of clergy family benefits, such as travel, close church relationships, social skills, financial provision, and leadership opportunities, helped families appreciate the benefits of the ministry/family journey. BCMH-1 commented: “We’ve tried to make sure that our kids saw the benefits of being a pastor’s kid.” Participants from BCMH and BCMW highlighted these benefits more than the other ministry classifications. This group also expressed the highest level of ministry/family satisfaction regarding their children’s spiritual outlook, with only 10% indicating that one or more of their children no longer attended church. Comparatively, members of group one (the satisfied) were much more expressive overall regarding the benefits and blessings of their ministry upon their family compared to participants from group two (the unsatisfied). This indicates a possible causal connection between an awareness of the benefits of ministry and an atmosphere of appreciation that assists families to flourish.

Overall, BCMH and BCMW were more aware of the benefits of the ministry/family journey than MCM and MCMS and FCM and FCMS (see Fig. 4). Furthermore, BCMH and BCMW had a 90% satisfaction factor regarding their children’s spiritual outlook. Therefore, having an awareness of the blessings that ministry bestows upon the family confirms the



**Fig. 4** Awareness of benefits of ministry by ministry classification

second component of the triple A theory, the benefit of having a resolute awareness of the advantages and adversities that the family experiences as a result of their involvement with the ministry vocation.

As participants discussed the issues that they wrestled with regarding their ministry/family journey, the most frequently emphasized ministry challenges were time constraints (50.0%,  $n = 30$ ) and unrealistic expectations placed on family members (48.3%,  $n = 29$ ). The spouse of MCMS-2 stated, “Ahhh, it was hell on wheels. Some of it was great and some of it was ‘get me out of here.’” BCMW-2 spoke about the pressure of self-imposed expectations: “For me as a pastor’s wife, and just out of Bible college, I really felt the pressure that I had to just be smiley and trusting God, even though my baby had a major problem and people really didn’t understand... So, I think that right from the very beginning I set myself up to wear a mask.”

Unrealistic expectations placed on family members of ministers received the majority of comments from group two (the unsatisfied). The wife of a pastor (MCMS-8) lamented:

Our son had some major issues in that he had people putting expectations upon him to behave like a pastor’s kid and didn’t allow him just to be a normal child and grow up in the church. People would often point the finger in a negative way at him and put things upon him that were too much for him as a child.

The greatest challenges for MCM and MCMS groups were time constraints, unrealistic expectations, and the difficulties of relocation. Limited finances (38.8%,  $n = 23$ ) was highly emphasized, along with competing priorities (23.3%,  $n = 14$ ) and the demands of ministry upon the credentialed minister (23.3%,  $n = 14$ ). Church conflict (21.6%,  $n = 13$ ) was stressed as quite a painful issue, as were the difficulties of relocation (11.6%,  $n = 7$ ). The final issue consisted of small church challenges (6.6%,  $n = 4$ ). The reflections of a wife of MCMS-6 illustrates the adverse effects of relocation: “When we moved to the next church, which was a suburban church in another state, those were really difficult years I have to say. Because the kids were so little, and we didn’t have any family support around us at all.”

FCM and FCMS commented the most on time constraints and unrealistic expectations upon their family. Church conflict and the demands of ministry also received a notable number of comments. The issue of limited finances was not as significant because many of the female ministers were not the main breadwinners in their family and generally had husbands that were very successful in their own employment who were paid well.

The second component of the triple A model, that of having a resolute awareness of the advantages and adversities of ministry involvement upon the family, is of critical importance for pastors and their spouses to enjoy fulfilled family lives that enhance the spiritual well-being of their family.

### **Attention: An attentive focus on the family while engaged in ministry**

There have been many studies on mental health support for clergy and the importance of making wise life choices for sustained harmony in the home (Weaver et al. 2002). Research demonstrates that, in addition to the issues of non-standard work schedules, long work hours, the helping nature of the profession, and the numerous but varied responsibilities, clergy experience boundary ambiguity between the domains of work and family (Wells et al. 2012). Little wonder that ordained ministers are at a high risk of burnout (Parker and Martin 2011).

Throughout the semi-structured interviews, a third theme emerged regarding an attentive approach to the family while engaged in ministry. The comments of participants from group one (the satisfied) most frequently regarded intentionally spending more time with the family. These statements were followed by frequent comments about putting their family first above everything else and being more present with their family. Further comments were made concerning the desire to communicate with the family better. In regard to being more present with their family, FCM-3 from group one, who was also a senior pastor of a church, stated:

There are times where physically you might already be home, but emotionally you've already checked out. So, maybe if I could have somehow pulled back the number of work hours or somehow received some assistance in my head, so that my family didn't get the leftovers. I think I would at times be at home with the family, yet in my mind was dealing with some of the stuff that I had to deal with at church.

The desire to be more intentional about planning and doing things with their spouse and planning and taking holidays was equally commented on by participants from group one. Participants from group two (the unsatisfied) also had the highest frequency of comments on the focus on intentionally spending more time with the family. The second highest frequency of comments by participants from group two were about communicating with their family better. The intention of putting their family first above everything else and making Saturdays a day when they didn't do church-associated activities in order to spend Saturdays with the family was also expressed by participants from group two. MCM-5 from group two stated, "I would target the weekends to spend more time with my family, on Saturdays in particular when the children are at home."

When comparing the comments from participants from group one (the satisfied) with group two (the unsatisfied), group two made twice as many comments regarding intentionally spending more time with the family as group one. Comments regarding the desire to communicate with the family better were also more than twice as frequent in group two compared to group one. Group one commented on putting their family first above everything

else as well as being more present with their family, with more than twice the frequency of the comments made by group two.

There were a similar number of comments made by both groups regarding being more intentional about planning and doing things with their spouse and planning and taking holidays, whereas comments regarding making Saturdays a day when they didn't do church-associated activities in order to spend Saturdays with their family were only made by participants from group two. Overall, participants from group two expressed a stronger desire to be intentionally devoted to their family by having more time and better communication. Such evidence is emphasized in hindsight reflections of ministry couples who would do things differently if they had it to do over again. The participants from group two would have liked to have devoted more time to their family while they were engaged in their ministry vocation if they had another opportunity and possibly might have had a satisfied response regarding the children's spiritual outlook as a result.

As participants discussed the things that work for them in their ministry/family journey, a spiritual focus for their family surfaced. Concepts such as maintaining spiritual health in the family, making church a very special thing, involvement in ministry together, modeling appropriate behaviours, and being content and satisfied with their circumstances were discussed. As participants made recommendations for those starting out in ministry, there was again a clear spiritual focus. They made recommendations such as to prioritize God in their life and family, make sure that they had heard from God, prioritize God's house, keep reminding themselves that they had been called by God, and stay authentic.

While discussing things that worked for them in their ministry/family lives, participants also spoke about how they protected their family from the negative issues of ministry while they were serving God. They did not allow other people to place expectations on the family, and they protected the family from unhealthy church matters. They also kept their home as the family home rather than an extension of the church office or church auditorium, and they mentioned that they developed the skill of saying no and of protecting Saturdays for time with the family. In regard to what participants would do differently if they had it to do over again, further protective measures were revealed. Participants stressed that they would protect their family from church issues, would learn to say no more, would avoid the expectation scenarios (where people place expectations on them and their family), and would manage people's demands better.

As participants spoke about the recommendations that they would make to a couple beginning their ministry/family journey, they gave some further insights about intentionally protecting their family while fulfilling their ministry vocation. Recommendations proposed included suggestions such as don't become trapped by other people's expectations, protect at least one day off per week with your family, don't bring the church into the home, allow the children to be children, and set some protective boundaries around your family before you go into ministry.

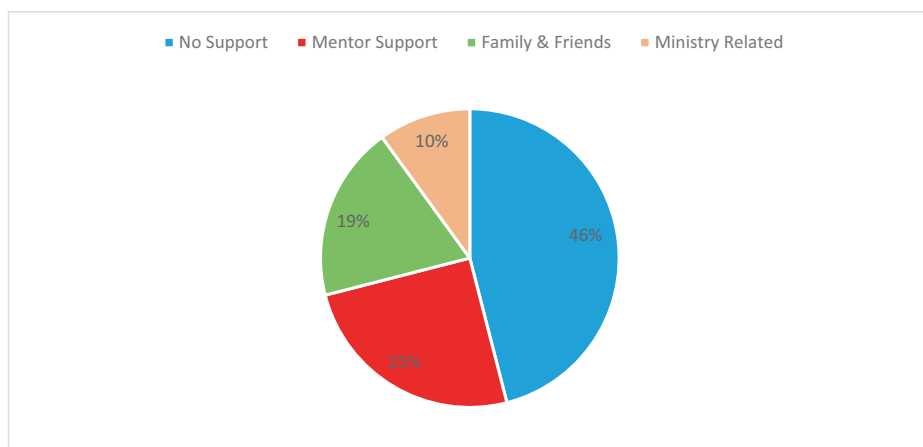
A list of "I" statements were made by respondents regarding making better life decisions for the family when reflecting upon what they would avoid or do differently in their ministry/family lives. In regard to the perspective of the three ministry classifications, the highest frequency of comments regarding making better decisions for the family came from FCM and FCMS, who stated that they would seek more guidance in regard to time management. The highest comments of MCM and MCMS were that they would make better financial decisions. BCMH and BCMW had an equally high frequency of comments about their desire to make better financial decisions and avoid being isolated and seek support when needed. Overall,

FCM and FCMS were more expressive than the other ministry classifications in regard to making better decisions for their family.

A comparison of the comments of participants from group one (the satisfied) and group two (the unsatisfied) reveals that group one's highest frequency of comments was three times the frequency of comments that were made by group two in regard to making better financial decisions. There was not a great difference between the number of comments from group one and group two in regard to the desire to seek more guidance in regard to time management, although these comments were less than two-thirds of the frequency of comments regarding making better financial decisions. Overall, participants from group one were more expressive in regard to intentionally making better decisions for the family than participants from group two. Such an awareness of making better decisions would obviously lead to greater attention to their family.

### Attention to support structures

In her fascinating study of the needs of clergy families, Hileman (2008, p. 121) observes that “demands of the ministry, unlike almost any other profession, impact the whole family.. .. There can be great joy, a sense of fulfillment and purpose, and also loneliness, frustration, and pain.” The challenge comes when clergy are also faced with the very real dangers of secondary traumatization in the line of professional duty, which can significantly alter the life direction of a minister (Hendron et al. 2012). Having appropriate support structures in place is a very important element for credentialed ministers on their journeys. Research has found that poor support networks are a major reason that ministers face burnout (Grosch and Olsen 2000). Social isolation, as well as interpersonal or relational difficulties, are major reasons for high levels of anxiety in clergy (Trihub et al. 2010). Furthermore, Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell et al. (2014) argue that spiritual health is central in providing meaning to life. As the participants reflected upon the support structures from which they drew strength and wisdom on their ministry/family journeys, several concepts were identified within the interview data: No Structured Support; Support from Family and Friends; Ministry-Related Support; and Support from Mentors. Figure 5 displays the percentages of the participants' comments regarding where they received support.



**Fig. 5** Sources of ministry/family support

It is alarming to discover that almost half (46.6%,  $n = 28$ ) of the participants indicated that they had no structured support available to them, which further highlights the need to give attention to developing reliable support structures for the ministry/family journey. Inzer and Crawford (2005) argue that mentoring of the protégé in a nonthreatening environment is vital to vocational success. Yet, few participants indicated that they had had reliable support structures in place for their family while they engaged in their ministry. FCM-5 lamented the lack of a mentor, explaining that “someone a little bit wiser, that is a little bit more ahead of me, that I could go to and receive wisdom from. ... is something that I really need.”

A total of 55% of BCMH and BCMW stated that they had no structured support, 50% of MCM and MCMS stated that they had no structured support, and 35% of FCM and FCMS stated that they had no real structured support. Morris and Blanton (1994) found that although the majority of denominations were aware of the stresses that clergy and their spouses experienced, only a minority provided professional support that was adequate for their needs.

When comparing those who were satisfied with their children’s spiritual outlook with those who were unsatisfied regarding the support structures that they had in place for their ministry/family journey, 44% of participants from group one (the satisfied) indicated that they had no structured support available to them. BCMH-5 stated: “I didn’t have a lot of mentors growing up in the ministry, I probably didn’t have a lot of mentoring or coaching in that regard.”

A total of 54% of the participants from group two stated that they had no structured support available to them. Overall, one-quarter of participants mentioned the support of their friends (28.3%,  $n = 17$ ), and over 20% stated that they received support from family members (21.6%,  $n = 13$ ). They also commented that the male spouses received support from their female spouse and vice versa (16.6%,  $n = 10$ ). The satisfaction factor that ministers and their spouses indicated regarding the spiritual outlook of their children largely depended on their having reliable support systems in place for each member of the family. An analysis of responses regarding the ministry family journeys of group one (the satisfied) and group two (the unsatisfied) sought to reveal whether there were any indicators of how ministry-related support systems, or the absence of such, had any influence on the satisfaction factor regarding the spiritual outlook of their children.

Within the various ministry classifications, it appears that the importance of good friends was a recurring theme. A total of 35% of those within the BCMH and BCMW classifications recommended finding good mentors. They also recommended finding good friends in ministry. A total of 30% of those within the MCM and MCMS classification also recommended that couples find good mentors. Because ministry is not meant to be conducted alone, the need for mentors was revealed in the recommendations in the data. BCMH-1 spoke about the support that his credentialed wife received from a counselor/mentor:

Since the church where we were at for 8½ years, my wife has maintained a relationship with this counselor that I was particularly getting help from during a period after my mum’s death, for a couple of years there. I know that my wife has really fostered that relationship so that she actually keeps in relationship with this woman, and they’ll kind of debrief each other in life and so she is that sounding board, that sort of outside any of the current context of ministry person. She has heard all that there is to say, and there is nothing that can shock her, and you know that if you say anything to her, that it’s not going anywhere and it’s safe.

When discussing informal support structures, MCM and MCMS expressed that the majority of their support came from family members. FCM and FCMS and BCMH and BCMW received

the majority of their support from their friends. Group one (the satisfied) indicated that they received more informal support than those from group two (the unsatisfied). Sources of ministry-related support were pastoral peers (other pastors and their spouses), attending conferences for ministry support, the ministers' church eldership and board, the state executive members, regional leaders, and ministry networks. Participants from group two emphasized the benefits of ministry-related support more than participants from group one. Perhaps this emphasis on the benefits of ministry-related support reveals that those who depend on this mode of support do so out of convenience rather than initiating supportive structures and supportive relationships beyond what is conveniently available.

From a satisfaction perspective, it is important to analyze the comments of those who indicated that they were satisfied with their children's spiritual well-being and those who indicated that they were not satisfied due to at least one child in the ministry family no longer attending church and pursuing their faith. Trihub et al. (2010) found that many denominations provide insufficient support and training for clergy regarding personal and health issues. A number of respondents in group one in my interviews indicated that the major recommendation they had for others was to find good mentors. This was followed by the recommendation to have good friends in ministry.

### **Attention to support structures for pastors' children**

As the participants discussed the support structures that they had in place regarding their ministry family journey, a theme defined as intentional support for their children was identified. Some credentialed ministers and their spouses tend to receive support from their peers and other pastors, or possibly their church denomination in more serious church matters. However, building support structures for their children's ministry/family journey also needs to be addressed in an intentional way. The evidence also shows that those who establish no support for their children are more likely to experience an unsatisfactory outcome regarding their children's spiritual outlook. Participants from group one emphasized that they tried to put some support structures around their children. One pastor (BCM3-3) stated:

We certainly tried to make sure that our kids had support. There were times when there were some people that were de facto grandparents for our kids. And when they grew up a little bit more, if we did find a person or a couple that we believe would speak into their lives positively, and as it were, echoing our values, we would expose them to those people so that they would hear that from other people and not just from mum and dad. Rather than say this is what you want, mum and dad, they would say this is what these other people are saying. So, we would look for people that would have similar values as our own to speak into our kids' lives.

BCM3-1 stated:

I think we've tried to really put some support structures around our kids, so that as they have been growing up, we've always tried to connect them and help them form friendships that are going to be healthy. We encouraged them to pursue good friendships with good families that we know.

BCM3 and BCM4 made the most comments regarding their intentional support structures for their children. MCM and MCMS also made a number of comments regarding their intentional support structures for their children. FCM and FCMS expressed no intentional focus of support

for their children. When comparing the three ministry classifications, the BCMH and BCMW commented on their intentional support structures for their children twice as often as MCM and MCMS, whereas FCM and FCMS made no comments in this regard. Participants from group one (the satisfied) made the only comments regarding intentionally establishing support structures for their children, whereas participants from group two (the unsatisfied) expressed no comments on this. Giving attention to the support structures for the children is very important in regard to having a satisfied outcome regarding their children's spiritual outlook. BCMW-1 from group one commented:

I think that our children have handled the ministry/family journey really well. But I also think that we have set them up to handle it really well. We have planned very deliberately for that. There were many times over the years when we have kept pressure away from our children, because it wasn't their burden to carry, and we have tried to allow them to stay pure in heart and not take on any of the negative side. . . . We have been deliberate to set a positive experience for them.

The children of the credentialed minister and spouse often face adverse situations that they cannot necessarily handle on their own. The triple A theory encourages attention to be given to the ministry family regarding building reliable support structures for the family. The value of this is again evident in the data as group two (the unsatisfied) gave no evidence of have given attention to support structures for their children, in contrast to group one (the satisfied), who intentionally built reliable support structures around their children.

### Further recommendations from participants

Participants discussed some further general principles of ministry/family life in their recommendations. The wisdom of establishing some sort of financial budget early (8.3%  $n=5$ ), counting the spiritual, emotional, physical, and time costs of being in ministry (6.6%,  $n=4$ ), and taking charge of their own life (6.6%,  $n=4$ ) were equally recommended. Being committed to the wider body of Christ (6.6%,  $n=4$ ), being patient when building a church (5.0%,  $n=3$ ), being realistic in their expectations of ministry (3.3%,  $n=2$ ), and holding ministry lightly (3.3%,  $n=2$ ) were also recommended by participants.

MCM and MCMS offered the most recommendations out of the three ministry classifications. Their most frequent comment was the recommendation that clergy establish a financial budget before they start their ministry. The second highest frequency recommendations were to count the cost (spiritual, emotional, physical, and time costs) and also to take charge of their own life. The suggestion that couples have good friends in ministry was somewhat recommended by FCM and FCMS and BCMH and BCMW. Developing a church/family compatibility assessment was also marginally suggested by MCM and MCMS.

A comparison within the three ministry classifications reveals that MCM and MCMS made the highest frequency of recommendations for those starting out in ministry, which resulted from their many and varied experiences within their ministry/family journey. The fact that the MCM and MCMS had had their own ministry/family challenges, where they reported a 40% satisfactory rating regarding their children's spiritual outlook and where 60% stated that at least one of their children no longer attended church or was pursuing their faith, gives rise to a need to pay attention to the recommendations of these participants because they are speaking from their own experiences and disappointments.

This study has clarified the importance of making better life decisions with an intentional focus in their ministry/family journey as well as analyzing the sustaining resources they have available to them. The support structures that ministers and their spouses relied upon were also analyzed, with some practical recommendations provided for those starting out in ministry. The need to have support structures in place, particularly family members, peers, and personal mentors, was a key focus for credentialed ministers and their spouses as they traveled on their ministry/family journey.

## Theological reflections on the family

The foundation of the ministry couple's calling is a strong commitment to the Bible. In this light, an article regarding ministers and their family calls for biblical and theological reflection on the family, where the center of the covenant activity of God is acknowledged. The statement "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord" from Joshua 24:15 (NKJV) is a motivational verse for many ministers and spouses who desire to see their children continue in the faith that they proclaim to those whom they minister to.

Stephen Barton (1996, p. 6) states that "when taken as a whole, the Bible is for Christians a book which reveals the true nature of human identity under God, an identity which is explored in the predominantly social-economic-political-religious idiom of marriage and the family." Healthy relationships between parents and children further strengthens a closer relationship with God (Deddo 2015). In fact, those who follow God are called God's *children* (John 1:12; Eph. 3:14). Stanley Grenz (2001) notes that humans are created in the image of a relational Trinitarian God of love. In light of this, Deddo (1999, p. 36) holds that family relationships "are analogous in human form" to the divine Trinity. Jürgen Moltmann (1979) explains how creation serves as a theological mandate for the family system.

Much of Christ's instruction concerning the family is simply a restatement of the creation ordinances (Matt. 5:27–32). The apostles emphasized the concept of the family in their preaching (Eph. 5:22, 6:1–4; 1 Cor. 7:1–28, 11:3; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 5:8; 1 Peter 3:7), highlighting the importance of closeness, openness, sacrifice, and relationship. The scriptures emphasize that believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit to empower others, such as those within their family. The biblical mandate in Proverbs 22:6 is for parents to train up their children in the way that they should go so that when they are old they will not depart from it. Such empowering allows each member of the family to grow and reach their full potential as they are encouraged and empowered by their parents and siblings. This empowering also has ramifications for ministers and their families. David J. Feddes (2008) states that qualifications for becoming a church leader appear to include having a healthy and balanced family life (Titus 1:6; 1 Tim. 3:4).

The desire to connect future generations of the family with an intrinsic relationship with their creator is clearly emphasized in the book of Deuteronomy 6:4–9, known as the Shema by modern Jews. The New Testament further describes the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, stating, "... the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off" (Acts 2:39, NKJV). Ephesians 6:4 instructs fathers to bring their children up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord, again displaying an aspiration for generational transformation. The New Testament gives some examples of how the faith of a parent was passed down to the next generation, such as Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9) and Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5).

By way of contrast, the Old Testament demonstrates the dangerous ramifications of ministers who display poor parenting. The high priest of Israel, Aaron, compromised God's standard of worship (Ex. 32:1–6), and his sons Nadab and Abihu later followed the same example (Lev. 10:1–3) and experienced God's wrath. Another example of poor parenting is the high priest Eli's lack of disciplining his sons Hophni and Phinehas, who treated their spiritual responsibilities as a career that would benefit themselves rather than as a call that was for the benefit of others (1 Sam. 2:22–25).

Hezekiah, king of Israel, is another poor example of a leader and father who was not concerned for the generations that followed (2 Kings 20:16–19). Here, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that the descendants of Hezekiah would be taken in captivity to the palace of Babylon due to Hezekiah's pride and boasting. Hezekiah's response is found in 2 Kings 20:19: "The word of the LORD you have spoken is good" (NLT), for he thought, "Will there not be peace and security in my lifetime?" Hezekiah's lack of responsibility for the generations that were to follow him is obvious, as his only concern was for his own comfort and security during his lifetime. This is not the heart that Christians and ministers are to have for the future generations of their children and grandchildren. Christian parents and ministry parents have a responsibility for the generations that follow and pass on their faith by word and example in love.

Throughout my interviews regarding the ministry/family journey, many participants stated that their greatest desire was the spiritual well-being of their children. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament affirm God's transformational strategy for future generations. The triple A theory of ministry function and family fulfillment presents a model that will assist ministers and their spouses to engage in their ministry function and at the same time safeguard their family's spiritual well-being.

## Conclusion

The data from the participants who volunteered for the study were classified into the following groups: "male credentialed ministers and their spouses" (MCM and MCMS), "female credentialed ministers and their spouses" (FCM and FCMS), and "both credentialed ministry couples" (BCMh and BCMw). The analysis of this research was conducted from three different perspectives: an overall perspective, the various ministry classifications perspective, and the satisfaction perspective of those who indicated that they were satisfied with their children's ministry outlook and those who were not satisfied. Throughout the analysis, several key components became prominent in the interview data: aspiration, awareness, and attention.

In summary, there are three distinct components that contribute to a flourishing family life while engaged in a fulfilling ministry life. The first component is in regard to having a measured ministry aspiration. Those who develop a realistic and progressive aspiration from their conversion to their credentialed ministry begin their ministry on a solid foundation. The second component is awareness. Those who have a sound awareness of both the advantages and the ongoing adversities of the ministry/family journey continue their ministry/family journey along a steady path. The third component is attention. Those who give attention to their family while engaged in ministry via an intentional focus on their family, giving a spiritual focus to their family, and implementing a protective focus for their family while drawing on sustaining resources and establishing solid support structures will more likely experience a flourishing family experience while engaged in a fulfilling ministry vocation.

## Recommendations to ministry/family stakeholders

There are several stakeholders to whom this research has relevance, such as those starting out in ministry, current ministers, families of ministers, congregations of ministers, and the leadership of denominations. The recommendations for those starting out in ministry suggested by the participants in this research are worth considering. Recommendations such as to prioritize God in personal life and family, make sure that there is a clear divine calling, prioritize God's house, and prioritize your family are valuable in assisting those starting out to do so on a secure footing.

Understandably, many current ministers have already traveled their aspirational journey from conversion to credentialed ministry. Whether their journey was affected by an idealistic distortion or advanced with a realistic aspiration, the journey is now where it is. However, the awareness and the attention components of the triple A model developed from this research still have relevance for those currently functioning in their ministry vocation. Having an awareness of the advantages and adversities that are experienced by a family whose spouse/parent(s) are in ministry lays the groundwork to give the appropriate attention to the family to mitigate these challenges and assist them to flourish as a family collectively and as individual family members. When discussing what the minister and spouse would do differently if they were to do it over again, many stated that they would communicate with their family better. Communication is not just a one-way conversation; it takes more than one person to have good communication. Open and honest communication between the minister and spouse as well as between the parents and children can create a pathway for resolving the imposed difficulties and celebrating the blessings.

Recommendations for congregational members include to encourage their pastors and the pastor's families, respect their pastor's time with their family, be careful not to place unrealistic expectations upon the non-credentialed family members of the pastor's family, be willing to help ease the load of the pastor, and pray for the pastor and their family while they are in the frontline of ministry.

Some final recommendations are to the leadership of denominations. Establishing formal support structures for the ministry/family journey would be a significant service for pastors and their families. Another recommendation is to include the ministry/family journey in the training for minister's professional development days to prepare ministers and their spouses for success in this vital area. A further recommendation is to conduct ministry/marriage retreats for couples, whether they are new to ministry or have been in ministry for some time. Furthermore a church/family compatibility assessment could be developed for pastors when they are considering taking on a new church to pastor. This would help to eliminate mismatches of pastor's families and churches. In the light of this assessment, developing a manual providing guidelines for pastors and churches when appointing a new pastor would be very helpful.

The triple A model for ministry function and family fulfillment is an essential model for those involved in ministry, whether they are employed in the ministry vocation or related to a minister who is. Having a realistic aspiration, an awareness of the advantages and adversities that the family encounters as a result of the ministry engagement of a family member, and giving attention to the family while engaged in ministry will assist those in ministry to conduct their ministry in a way that will help their family to flourish and strengthen the spiritual well-being of each family member.

## Future research

Future meaningful research on this topic is extensive. Research regarding the perceptions of spouses of clergy in regard to how their spouses' involvement in ministry impacts their marriage or themselves personally could be undertaken. Research could also be undertaken in regard to the perceptions of the adult children of clergy. Studies utilizing the same research structure as presented in this research project could be conducted beyond the ACC movement, perhaps cross-denominationally or among other individual denominations or movements, to assess any similarities or cultural variables from across the wider church. The possibilities for further research are limitless in regard to the potential findings regarding ministry and family within the Australian Christian context (if not globally).

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