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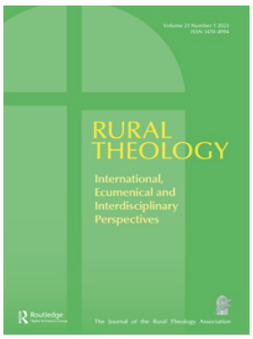

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Prioritising a Sense of Belonging Within the Rural Nexus: An Empirical Study of Five Rural Church Primary Schools

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ABSTRACT

The rural church primary school exists in a nexus of connections between school, home, and the institutional Church (parochial, diocesan, and national). This article applies Walker's model of belonging to God through church to the sense of belonging expressed by families whose children attend a rural Church of England primary school. The data drawn from the Faith in the Nexus project undertaken at Canterbury Christ Church University, consists of 24 semi-structured focus group interviews, and 8 individual interviews with school and church leaders from parents, school staff, clergy, and governors across five rural Church of England primary schools. The findings highlight how rural church school families develop and sustain a sense of belonging through events, people, place, and activities. The discussion considers the value of Walker's model of belonging, the fragility of the rural nexus and a need to acknowledge the relational nature of belonginess expressed by parents and pupils.

KEYWORDS

Sense of belonging; church schools; rural parish; Christian education; Church of England

Introduction

Church of England primary schools situated in the nexus of home, school and church generate nuanced, multi-faceted connections between individuals within the school community and the local and institutional Church. These connections, albeit fragmentary and fragile, offer individuals a sense of belonging to the Christian faith tradition. The Church of England has a strong presence in rural education: two-thirds of Church of England parishes are rural (Church of England, 2015) and around half (53%) of all Church of England primary schools are in rural areas (Church of England Education Office, 2018). Many of these rural Church of England primary schools have fewer than 210 pupils, often fewer than 100, with a substantial minority of fewer than 50 (Church of England Education Office, 2018). They face a continual threat of closure due to questions concerning their economic viability, rather than judgment on their quality of education (Rolph & Rolph, 2012).

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Church of England primary schools, founded by the Church in the nineteenth century (Parker, Allen, & Freathy, 2020), offered an education to all children in the local parish. Today, rural Church of England primary schools are popular with parents because of their size and location. Parents often cite the family feeling of the school or a sense of a nostalgia for a 'rural idyll' (Walker & Clark, 2010). Where there is choice, the school's religious character is not necessarily the predominant factor (Levitt, 1996). Davie (2007) argues that even when parents cite a religious reason, what they seek for their child is a form of vicarious religion. Hemming and Roberts (2018) confirmed Davie's perspective in an empirical study conducted in two Church of England village schools. They found evidence that parents focused on a caring ethos, and on a sense of cultural heritage and nostalgia. Rural Church of England primary schools are schools with a church foundation and religious character rather than faith schools.

Rural Church of England primary schools vary in character, ethos, and governance. Following the 1944 Education Act, church schools were able to opt to become voluntary aided (VA) or voluntary controlled (VC). VA schools are state funded, but the Church of England contributes to building costs and has a substantial influence in the running of the school. In contrast, VC schools are state funded, but the Church of England has less formal influence in the running of the school. Increasingly church schools are becoming an academy, often as part of a diocesan sponsored multi-academy trust, or a local or national non-faith based multi-academy trust (Long & Danechi, 2019). The governance of the school will influence the nature of the ethos, but all Church of England schools have continually sought to balance a general function of education, a theology of service, and a domestic function, a theology of nurture (Francis, 2000). *The Fourth R* (Durham Report, 1970) stressed the former function, recognising that in many rural areas, the church school was the only school available (Francis & Lankshear, 2001). This is still the case: despite increased marketisation within education, parental choice is limited within rural communities (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2011). In the twenty-first century there is a move to hold the two functions of service and nurture in balance; the Christian ethos is influenced and shaped by the Church of England's (2016) vision for education, and the SIAMS inspection framework.[1] Inevitably there is tension between being inclusive of all and offering a theology of nurture.

There is little research into rural Church of England primary schools. More general empirical research into church schools has focused on school leadership (Branson, Marra, & Buchanan, 2019; Holmes & Pratt-Adams, 2021) and community cohesion (Francis, Penny, & ap Siôn, 2017; Hemming & Roberts, 2018). A strand of research pertinent to rural Church of England primary schools is concerned with studies of church school ethos. In this context, the Student Voice Project in Anglican primary schools in Wales (Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, & McKenna, 2021, 2022) has revealed some interesting insights into the ways the students' implicit collective values, beliefs and behaviours generate church school ethos. This is significant as it reinforces the notion that a Christian ethos is not imposed by the institutional church, but rather is engendered by the students and their families within the school community.

The question to be explored in this paper is to what extent involvement in a rural Church of England primary school community engenders a sense of belonging to church, not quantifiable in Sunday church attendance. Research studies (Francis & Casson, 2019; Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, & McKenna, 2020) investigating the

influence of church schools on a connection to the faith tradition have generally focused on church attendance as a measure of belonging to church. These studies have revealed that the family, the parental example, is the main influence on church attendance. There is limited research on the influence of the church school on other ways of belonging to a church.

The fragile rural church

Rural Church of England primary schools sit within a rural parish that has the potential to contribute to the Christian distinctiveness of the school. However, the rural parish may now be in a precarious or fragile state. The well-documented decline in church attendance in the Church of England (Village, 2018) has had a significant impact on the ability of the rural church to flourish. Lawson (2019) identified five key factors that she characterised as the marks of the 'fragile rural church': overworked clergy with a lack of time and energy to innovate, financial pressure, inability to replace key personnel in the church, lack of volunteers, and absence or minimal number of children. Each of these five factors has been further negatively impacted by the lengthy closure of churches in the pandemic (Francis, Village, & Lawson, 2020, 2021). Lawson's (2020) research with nine rural clergy acknowledged the challenges of a lack of children within church, but it was in children's ministry that she could see potential hopeful signs of growth. The vulnerability of both the rural church and the rural church school presents a challenging picture. This is concerning as strong connections and positive relationships within the nexus of home, school, and church can engender a sense of individual spiritual wellbeing and the flourishing of local community. If the rural church school could engender a sense of belonging to church, this could be mutually beneficial, but also importantly nurture children's exploration of faith in the home.

Do rural church schools engender a sense of belonging to church?

The question explored in this study is whether rural Church of England primary schools engender a sense of belonging, and in what ways this is expressed. The reason for focusing on the sense of belonging, rather than other dimensions such as practice, or beliefs, is that belonging is a useful marker of a connection to faith tradition and it assumes an understanding of faith as relational and as communal, rather than as individual.

Belonging may appear an unusual marker to choose as much of the statistical evidence of church attendance and religious affiliation (Village, 2018), the traditional visible measures of a sense of belonging or commitment to the Christian church, appear in decline. The notion that belonging is not so important because people may still be believing without belonging (Davie, 1997) is now also contested. Davie (2007) herself suggested a more accurate description was that of a vicarious religion. Voas (2009) argues that, while people may notionally identify as Christian without a wholehearted commitment to Christian beliefs and practices, and express a fuzzy fidelity, this will weaken over time. There is little evidence for individuals continuing to hold on to beliefs when they no longer 'belong' to a church (Stolz & Senn, 2021).

A sense of belonging is beneficial for individuals and communities. It contributes to 'collective self-esteem, and social support' (Krause & Wulff, 2005). It is about 'about

emotional attachment, feeling at home' (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 197). Engendering a sense of belonging with people who express belonging to a church in various ways can benefit local church communities. At a communal level a sense of belonging to church benefits the whole community, 'connectedness, not merely faith, is responsible for the beneficence of church people' (Putnam, 2000, p. 67), although, previous research has shown that there is little evidence for immediate benefit to the church in terms of weekly attendance figures (Francis & Lankshear, 2001). Researching a sense of belonging to church is relevant but requires a lens other than that of church attendance, because, if rural church schools engender a sense of belonging, it is not being manifest in increased church attendance. The question is whether it is being expressed in other ways. One model which provides a valuable lens for looking at this within the context of the Church of England is that developed by Walker (2011).

A model for ways of expressing a sense of belonging to the Church

Walker's model is built on Francis and Robbins' (2004) concept of belonging and was developed from a quantitative research study of people attending rural harvest festival services and cathedral carol services in Worcester and Lichfield (Walker, 2010, 2012). Walker (2011, 2017) identified four ways people belong to God through the church: belonging through activities, events, people, and places. The first way is characterised as belonging through activities. This captures a way of belonging, as traditionally understood, through engagement with activities that require a regular commitment, such as Sunday services. The second way is through events, such as Christian festivals or rites of passage. This is a common way that many people understand their connection to the church and one which is often overlooked or underestimated. Research in cathedral studies (Francis, 2023) has highlighted that events such as significant festivals reach people not found in regular Sunday activities. These events contribute to people's sense of belonging and well-being (Francis, Jones, & McKenna, 2021). A third way people express a sense of belonging is through relationships with individual people in church or school, a network of relationships which weave through the local community. The fourth way is a sense of belonging to a place, to the church building or the churchyard, a sense of it being 'my church' because it is where the family are buried or simply because it is the local church. Walker's model does not suggest that some of these ways of belonging are of greater value than others. Moreover, these ways of belonging are not mutually exclusive, and may well overlap. Walker's four ways of belonging resonate with the work of Ammerman (1997) on 'lived religion' whereby the sense of belonging is different in kind.

Walker (2011) argues that belonging to church is experienced more widely than just by weekly attendees, and that the church community is potentially enhanced by those who belong in different ways. The benefits for individuals focus on spiritual wellbeing (Francis et al., 2021); Saroglou et al. (2020) concluded that 'life satisfaction was predicted positively by the bonding and belonging dimensions [of religion]'. Studies of Christian congregations (Krause, 2016; Krause & Wulff, 2005) have revealed the importance of interactions, emotional support and feeling valued.

Walker's model of belonging through activities, events, people, and place has been applied in several recent research studies, especially in cathedral studies. For example,

ap Siôn (2017) employed this model when looking at the reshaping of congregational space in an Anglican cathedral and it has been fruitfully applied to quantitative studies of people attending Christmas services in a cathedral (Francis, Jones, McKenna, Pike, & Williams, 2021). One limitation of the model concerns the limited number of applications in empirical research. It does, however, offer a valuable lens to investigate how a sense of belonging is engendered and expressed by those on the margins of a rural church community, such as the families connected to church through a church school. Observing and understanding how people communicate their sense of belonging to church is critical to enabling school and church communities to flourish together. Walker's model offers the potential to illuminate the different ways in which individuals express belonging to church.

Methods

Sample

All the schools in the Nexus research project have been anonymised, so in this paper, pseudonyms have been given to the five rural schools. Castle School was the only voluntary controlled school within the sample, with just under 200 pupils. The school was situated across the road from the church and the local vicar was very active in the school, leading worship and attending RE lessons. Like Castle School, Hill School, a voluntary aided school, had a good relationship with the local vicar and the church was close by. It was smaller with only 100 pupils. Valley School, part of a diocesan multi-academy trust, was a small school with less than 100 pupils on the same site as the church. However, what had previously been a very active connection with church, was lessened as the parish was in vacancy. Moor School, a voluntary aided school with less than 100 pupils in a remote area, was across the road from the church. At the time of the research, the vicar was not involved with the school, but the school was well supported by churchwardens and foundation governors. Dale School, part of a diocesan multi-academy trust, was undersubscribed and situated in an area of deprivation (45% of the pupils received free school meals). In addition, the local church was closed. The vicar who had several churches within his remit was heavily involved in the school as chair of governors and offered pastoral support to parents and staff. The five schools, although unique in their context, are representative of rural church schools across England. The headteachers argued that, where parents had expressed a reason for their choice of school, the main factor was size and the sense of 'family' rather than faith.

Procedure

This paper draws on 24 semi-structured focus group interviews with 43 pupils, 19 parents, 16 staff, and 8 individual interviews with senior leaders, foundation governors, and clergy in five rural Church of England primary schools (pupils aged 4–11 years). The data forms part of the Faith in the Nexus empirical mixed methods research project undertaken by the National Institute for Christian Education Research (NICER) investigating how church primary schools in England collaborate with the local church and parachurch organisations to facilitate opportunities to explore faith, and spiritual life in the home (Casson, Hulbert,

Woolley, & Bowie, 2020). Interview transcripts were coded with the support of the NVivo12 software package. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty of Humanities, Arts, and Education at Canterbury Christ Church University.

Interviewing individuals about matters of faith or spirituality is challenging. In this research the boundary between faith, religion, and spirituality was left open, since in everyday life the distinction between religion and spirituality is often fuzzy (Knibbe & Kupari, 2020). Participants' interpretations of practices as religious or spiritual was sought rather than applying institutional interpretations. When listening with intent to the child's voice, the research process must also begin with the child's understanding of religious belief and practices (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019). This principle was extended to apply to all adults within the project as well. The first questions in the interview process were 'what does spiritual, or faith mean to you?' followed by the question 'what happens in this school that helps you explore the faith/spiritual side of life?' The added challenge of conducting focus group interviews with children required a recognition that although children's experience and expressions of religion are different from adults (Ridgely, 2017), they are no less complex.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis (Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015) of the data was undertaken. Continual reflection, close reading and re-reading of the transcripts revealed common threads expressed by individuals within each school community. Often the way school leaders framed the school values or Christian ethos was echoed in interviews with all members of the school community. The detailed analysis also revealed common themes expressed by children and parents across all schools, for example, parents struggle with engaging in conversations about faith with children, children's seeking out of space and time for quiet and reflection, and a sense of belonging to a Christian community.

Results

Early in the research process, the interviewer became aware of the different interpretations of belonging to church expressed by interviewees. The research visit would often start with interviews with groups of pupils. During the day, staff teaching and non-teaching, governors and the local clergy would also participate in individual or small group interviews. Clergy and many staff would point out that, although they were a church school, most parents did not attend the local church. At the end of the day or beginning of the next day as parents came to collect or drop off children, parent focus groups were held. In these parents' focus groups, individuals often talked about 'their' church, described going to church for services, and how they knew and were known by the local minister. The contrast between the two views results from different interpretations of church belonging. For many of the staff and clergy belonging is measured in regular Sunday attendance, while for many parents and pupils there was a more fuzzy, flexible, and perhaps fragmented sense of belonging. The following section offers an analysis of the findings, applying Walker's model of different ways of belonging, looking at the four aspects in order of frequency and importance as reported by participants: events, relationships, place, and activities.

Belonging through events

For the church school families, some key events in the school year marked a sense of belonging to church. There was a precise rhythm to the year, punctuated by the major Christian festivals: Harvest, Christmas, and Easter; others included by the children were Remembrance Day services, welcome and leavers services. One parent explained these were 'the types of things you'd expect. You know nice dates in the calendar' (Parent in Hill School). These were seen as whole community celebrations, usually involving the entire school attending a service in the local church, often with pupils playing a leading role in the service. An invitation for parents to attend was commonplace, and sometimes this was extended to local parishioners. Parents highlighted that these celebrations were a vital connection with the Christian faith tradition. Some parents mentioned that they had then attended other services, particularly at Christmas, such as the crib service or midnight Mass.

> Just for me, for our faith … services like Easter and we always go on Christmas Day which is nice … [We've] come to midnight Mass. (Parent in Hill School)

The research revealed that these were times when children and parents were more likely to do something at home connected with faith. These events also allowed church school families to connect with the local congregation. The vicar in Castle School explained that he always sought to involve the community, letting them know when the school would be in church and inviting them to attend. He argued it was essential to get the message across.

> These [families] are part of our community. Yes, a lot of the children don't live here but it's really good that they come and see that you're interested in them and I think that's one of the great things. We feel really privileged in that because we have a church that can cope with that number of children.

Three issues became apparent in analysis: first, for parents, attendance at the services at Harvest, Christmas, and Easter was seen as essential for or part of 'our faith'; second, the church school is a gatekeeper, offering a way for parents to connect with Christian celebrations in church; third, it was notable that the rhythm of the Church's year in school is present in a school shaped format, re-imagined into a child accessible format, for example there was little or no mention of other key Christian festivals such as Pentecost. One question that needs further investigation is whether this pattern in school reflects a more secular understanding of Christianity, focusing on the festivals marked in secular life. For many families, the church school offered a way of belonging to church through an invitation to celebrate key Christian festivals.

Belonging through people

The second most common expression of a sense of belonging was through relationships. Parents and pupils often focused on the person of the minister, whose presence in school they saw as a visible sign of the connection between school and church. The ministers recognised that connections needed to be sustained with the school leaders and families. A fruitful relationship with school leaders was seen as critical to a perception of robust connection. The vicar in Castle School described the importance of having a

close working relationship, planning the 'significant events', and working together to involve the church community. One consequence of an active connection with school is that the minister can develop a strong relationship with the church school families; it was both a pastoral and spiritual relationship with the families. Some ministers who were active in school insisted that it was essential to recognise that school families constitute part of the parish. The vicar in Hill School reflected that most of the families in his church school were 'not religious', but he argued that they 'might slowly be engaged with Christian faith put another way'. He described his model of ministry portrayed as the Parable of the Sower:

> however, it is poured out a lot of it is wasted but some bears fruit and I've always thought it's a good model for any sort of Christian minister. And that's true in the school. Some of it, the seed does fall on problematic ground but some of it bears fruit.

School leaders and clergy argued that it was easier to build the connections in a rural setting, 'because of this smaller nature of things and therefore the vicar or whoever is a known figure'. However, this advantage was being eroded as parishes merged. When the number of primary schools for which clergy were responsible increased, it became harder to maintain a presence in each school. It is problematic as some ministers explained their congregations were resentful of time spent in school and do not see evidence of parents, children, or staff in church on Sunday.

A key factor to note was the importance of a perceived strong relationship by church school families. In Moor School where participants spoke positively of the relationship with church, according to the headteacher the school did not have a robust active relationship with the vicar. However, the school leaders had worked round this through a strong connection with the churchwardens and engaging closely with other denominations. A neighbouring Methodist minister explained the need to be flexible in a rural community.

> Farmers are busy in the morning in my most rural church … I have a service at 3pm better time for farmers … maybe the families think they get enough religious education in school – they do go to church with school.

Other issues that impacted the connection were when a local church no longer had regular services, and the local church community dispersed so there are no local active parishioners. In Valley School, several parents reported on the absence of a vicar during the vacancy period, when they missed the regular presence in school of the previous vicar. Few parents or pupils spoke of the impact of relationships with other church community members. Several schools looked at ways of engaging with the local church community. For example, involving them as volunteers in school was highlighted by staff, but parents were often not aware that the volunteers were connected to church. There is a need for further research on the value of lay members of the church community nurturing relationships with school and with the church school families, including the critical role for foundation governors often well placed to connect school and Church.

Belonging through place

For some church school families, there was a strong connection to the local church through family heritage, and the local community. As the vicar in Castle School explained

> [It] is a very loose affiliation, but there is particularly in rural communities, there is a strong affiliation with the church building. This is their church, and they may not go and, as you say, they may say 'Oh yes, I do go because I go on these days', but it is still their church and very much it's our church.

The rural schools tended to use the church building more than the urban schools in the Nexus research study, perhaps because of easier access. One school shared their site and hall with the church, and for three others the church was across the road. The church was used not only for worship, but also for displays of school artwork, drama, and other activities.

The data revealed various ways in which pupils and parents expressed their connection to the local church. However, the data from one of the schools did not reflect this positive picture. The sense of connection was missing in Dale School, where the local church was no longer in use. Here, parents and pupils expressed a strong connection to a church school, and to the school values, but did not express a sense of belonging to church. In conversations with pupils, parents and staff, there was little awareness of a local church community. The vicar was very active in the school, in his capacity as chair of governors, and had frequent meetings with the pastoral staff, the family liaison officer. The experience of this school was echoed in one of the urban schools in the project whose local church had also closed, and interestingly this school was also characterised by having a high number of pupils receiving free school meals. This is an area of concern, and there is a need for a wider study focused on church schools in areas of acute deprivation, to investigate whether this is a common experience.

Belonging through activities

Messy Church was the only regular church activity in which church school families spoke of being involved. In Hill School, the headteacher, governors and clergy had worked together to develop Messy Church, and the vicar suggested that a wider sense of church community was developing as a consequence.

> So, it is very slow, but it happens, and people are engaging and recognising it's their church and not just the church of the gathered congregation on Sunday. (Governor, Hill School)

There was little mention of regular activities in school that could contribute to a sense of connection to church. In Valley School pupils spoke of a club that used to be held on a lunchtime in the church, where 'we could go up [to the church] and pray and could just express our feelings without anybody else bothering you'. This was the only time pupils mentioned the use of the church for personal prayer and reflection time. In contrast, when asked what helped their faith or spiritual development within school, most pupils spoke of the reflection spaces developed in school, either in the classroom or outside.

A sense of belonging to a worshipping community is often enhanced by active participation in shaping and informing the regular worship activities. Indeed, the experiences of school worship that pupils most frequently shared with the researcher were those in which they or their peers had a leading role in organising. Pupils enjoyed developing worship activities for their peers.

> It was so good because our teachers weren't telling us what to do. We just had to think and use our imagination and knowledge of RE to make this [worship]. (Pupil, Valley School)

The church schools encouraged and empowered the pupils to become peer leaders in this area. Interestingly, pupils did not mention the role of children in leadership or active participation in worship activities in the local parish church.

Discussion

These findings illustrate a sense of belonging to the rural church, to the Christian tradition defined in terms beyond regular church attendance. Three issues have emerged from an analysis of these findings: first, the value of applying Walker's (2011) model of belonging to illuminate the importance and variety of connections between church school and church; second, the importance of rhythm, routines, and relationships in the rural community and the critical importance of relational belonging for sustaining connections; third, a need to recognise the diversity of ways that individuals interpret and express their sense of belonging to church, and to pay attention to the needs of those who express belonging in different ways.

Applying Walker's model to data gathered from rural church schools confirmed evidence of the four different ways: through, events, people, place, and activities. However, the data also revealed that the emphasis was on connections through events, namely, the Christian festivals, and through people, such as the person of the minister. The sense of belonging was sustained by invitations from the church school to participate in the Christian festivals. In the diversity of the rural context, including isolated moorland, picturesque villages, and areas of rural deprivation, the celebration of the Christian festivals provided crucial markers in the pattern of the year. The relationship between school and church leaders contributed to a sense of belonging to a Christian community, rather than solely a church school community. There was only occasional reference to sense of place and rarely any mention of connection through regular activities. A fruitful area of exploration would be to look at ways of enhancing the value of activities such as Messy Church or church toddler groups as a way of belonging. In this article, Walker's model was applied retrospectively to the Nexus data. A future study could investigate more deeply the behaviours and attitudes of church school families: what aspects of religion do they prioritise. There is a need for a quantitative research study applying Walker's model to include a wider sample of church school families.

Second, this small sample revealed that the rhythm, and relationships underpinned the sense of community in the rural nexus. The study has illuminated the relational nature of the sense of belonging. Parents and pupils emphasised the relationships with the local clergy. As previous research (Krause, 2016) within congregations has shown, a sense of belonging is engendered by regular interactions and a feeling of value. This small study suggests that the ministers' interactions in school were a contributory factor to a family's sense of belonging to church. A critical area to be addressed and explored further, particularly in light of the declining number of clergy, was that although many encountered members of the local Christian community in school, neither parent or pupils recognised them as such whether they were volunteers or foundation governors. There is a need to make these connections more visible. This research also highlighted the critical role of the church school as 'gatekeeper' to a sense of belonging

to church. This raises concerns about the sustainability of a connection that lasts solely for the years in primary school.

There is a need for attention to the context of each rural parish, and community. Sustaining a sense of a community within the nexus is challenging, as the nature of the rural school community changes; for example, three of these schools sat in rural villages with few children and drew their catchment from the edge of nearby towns. Neither school nor church were near home. Connections become brittle and fragile when sustained only by the church school. The research also revealed the fragility of connections, the clear sense of loss of connection in the community amid a long vacancy, or the community where the church is part of a large group of parishes or is no longer in use. Sustaining or restoring these connections can have a positive impact on the flourishing of the local Christian community.

Third, it is essential to recognise the importance of sense of belonging: prioritising belonging and nurturing relationships is fundamental to the flourishing of individuals and the community. Acknowledging that there are various ways through which individuals express a sense of belonging and focusing on enhancing a variety of opportunities to connect through events, people, places, and activities can also benefit the church community. As Francis (2023) noted regarding cathedral studies, different approaches reach different groups of people, and their importance should not be underestimated. Participation in the Christian festivals and in relationships with the local church community were the ways in which these school communities were linking with the chain of memory of the Christian tradition. Reference to these individuals as occasional belongers may come from a church perspective, but it is not an understanding held by the church school families. There is a real sense of belonging – different in kind, not just on occasions or infrequently. It is important to recognise the contribution that church school families as belongers can make to the flourishing of the school and church community.

Conclusion

This article has offered an analysis of how families within church schools express their sense of belonging to God through the church. It has been found that Walker's model of belonging is of value in illuminating the different ways that individuals express belonging. The fruitful influence of the rhythm of the church's year and relationships within the nexus has been evident, but also an awareness of the fragility of school and church connections. The study suggests a need to understand the local context, listen intently to the needs of church school families, and value the variety of ways individuals express their sense of belonging.

Note

1. https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/church-schools-and-academies/siams-inspections

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