



# WHAT WE LEARNED BY LISTENING TO BLACK AND LATINE COMMUNITIES

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**SOJOURNERS**  
**SojoAction**

THE DATA AND METHODOLOGY BEHIND  
*Flourishing Futures: Early Childhood  
Development in Black and Latine  
Churches and Faith Communities*

*“Clergy are well-informed and positioned to engage with and advocate for early childhood policies. We must live out the Lord’s calling to end social injustice and advocate for the policies that will build a better world for our communities today and for future generations.”*

– REVEREND ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR, SOJOURNERS PRESIDENT

Early childhood development is an essential part of the church’s work. When we support our youngest members and their families, both at the systems level and in our own church communities, we are living out our faith and commitments to each other.

At Sojourners, we see first-hand the many ways that churches have supported young children, families and communities. We also see first-hand the challenges that faith leaders face when it comes to not only designing and building early childhood development programs, but making systemic, lasting change in their communities. That is why we worked to build *Flourishing Futures*.

We must work to build a better world for our youngest congregants today, and for future generations – and that starts with this report. Led by Sandra Ovalle – Sojourners’ Senior Director of Campaigns and Mobilizing – Sojourners has begun the process of this deep listening through *Flourishing Futures* so that we can truly understand our communities. The information shared in this report from clergy, parents and caregivers is essential as we work to understand the challenges that families face supporting their young children. When we have this level of deep understanding, we, as clergy, can create supports that align to our communities’ needs, our values and our faith. Through Sojourners’ workshops, surveys and focus groups, it is our hope that *Flourishing Futures* gives clergy the information they need to make their church a cornerstone in their community.

RESEARCH AND DATA BY MONICA CURCA, ACTIVATE LABS.

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FOUNDATION

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**T**he church works hard to support young children and families. **The Lord calls us to end suffering and build abundant lives for all.** That's why the church provides many essential day-to-day supports that help young children develop and thrive.



Clergy's **church-based early childhood development supports are important.** From diaper banks, child care to pre- and post-natal support for birthing people, these supports and resources are critical to families and helping young children grow. While these supports are essential, **they don't always address the root cause of their faith communities' key needs.**

In order to fully support young children and their families, clergy must not only be providing support at their individual churches, but they must also be **engaged and advocate for large-scale societal change.**

As revealed in *“Flourishing Futures: Early Childhood Development in Black and Latine Churches and Faith Communities”*, parents face many challenges in supporting their young child and their development. **By listening for the systemic issues underlying these challenges, clergy will be better able to identify the systemic social injustices that may prevent their supports from helping young children develop.**

**Sojourners has begun the process of this deep listening.**





***Flourishing Futures*** asked parents, caregivers and faith leaders in Black and Latine communities about the church's role when it comes to supporting families and young children.

**The findings and data that are detailed in this methodology document are the basis for the recommendations in the full report.** This data and methodology document gives readers a fuller picture of the research and helps shape the way clergy can best support and advocate for early childhood development moving forward.

Too often, children and their families in congregations across our nation face significant challenges accessing the essential support that churches provide. At Sojourners, we know that when clergy advocate, they tear down social injustices that help young children and families access the critical support and resources they need to develop and thrive.



# METHODOLOGY

## Our Research Approach

**107**

Participants in the focus groups, listening sessions and workshops

**933**

Respondents for our nationwide online Early Childhood Development survey that specifically targeted Black and Latine parents, caregivers and clergy

**7**

Workshops in Latine and Black faith communities in urban and rural regions, including:

Lancaster, CA  
Palmdale, CA  
Santa Ana, CA  
Whittier, CA  
El Paso, TX  
Washington, DC  
Baltimore, MD

SOURCE: DATA COLLECTED BY MONICA CURCA, ACTIVATE LABS.





# DATA

## What Black and Latine Parents Shared About The Support They Receive at Their Individual Churches

The church works hard to support young children and families. The programs and resources that churches provide to their faith communities are essential.

Our research reveals that many participants agree that churches offer some early childhood development opportunities.



**Clergy** frequently share messages about early childhood development.

Clergy say they frequently **address the topic of early childhood development** from the pulpit during sermons (**46.27%**) and **at special events** such as weddings, child dedications and baptisms (**61.19%**).

Early childhood development is **discussed informally in conversations and interactions** within the faith community about a third (**28.36%**) of the time, and clergy say they **discuss ECD with close friends or family members** a bit more (**32.84%**).

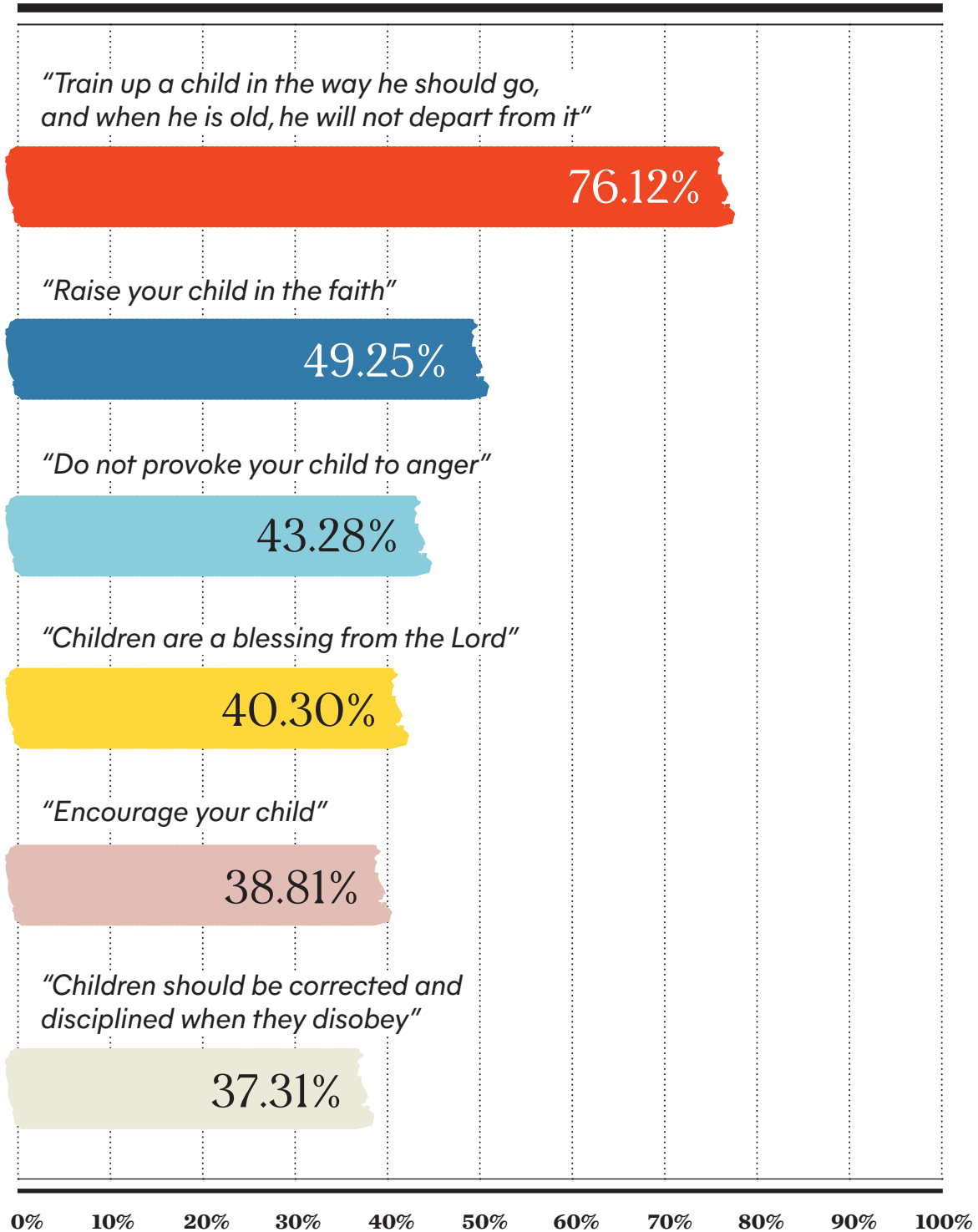
**38.81%** of clergy say they have **parent-centered small group settings** where parenting young children is discussed.

Only a tiny percentage of clergy (**1.49%**) indicate that their **church does not address early childhood during sermons or at special events**.





The top messages that **clergy** share about early childhood development, in order, are:



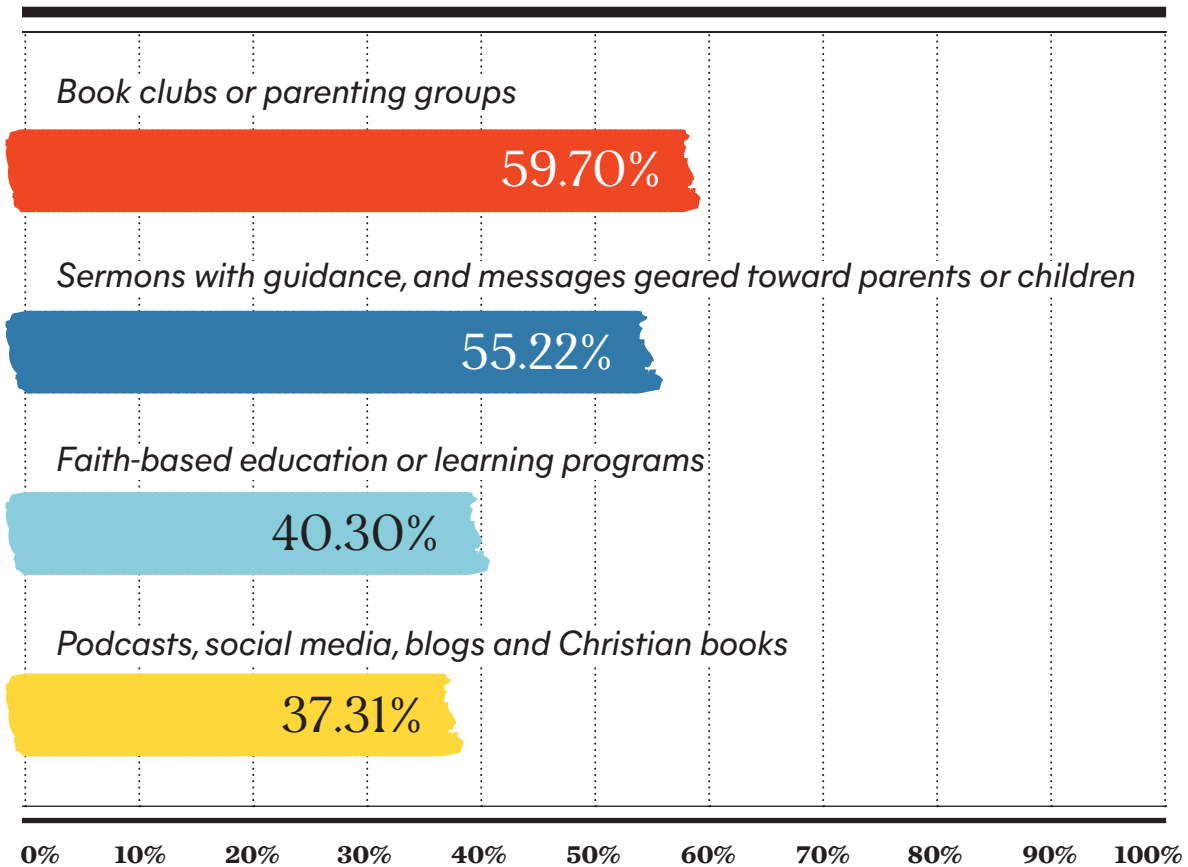


**Parent respondents** reveal that churches provide essential, tangible supports for young children and families.

More than half of research participants (**59.70%**) say their churches offer **group-based information gatherings**, such as book clubs or parent groups, as well as **welcoming messages geared toward parents or children**.

Forty percent (**40.30%**) of respondents say their church has **faith-based education and learning programs**.

The top resources that churches offer to parents and caregivers are:




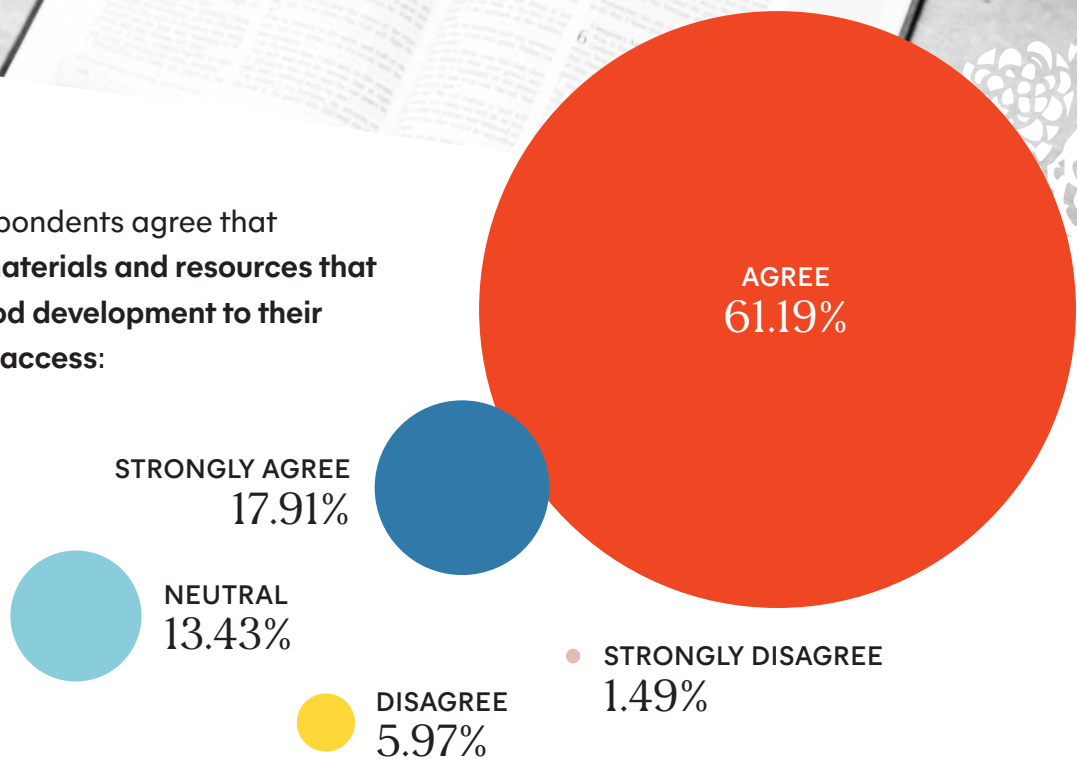
Only a small number of respondents (**2.99%**) report that their **churches do not offer any resources for parents**.





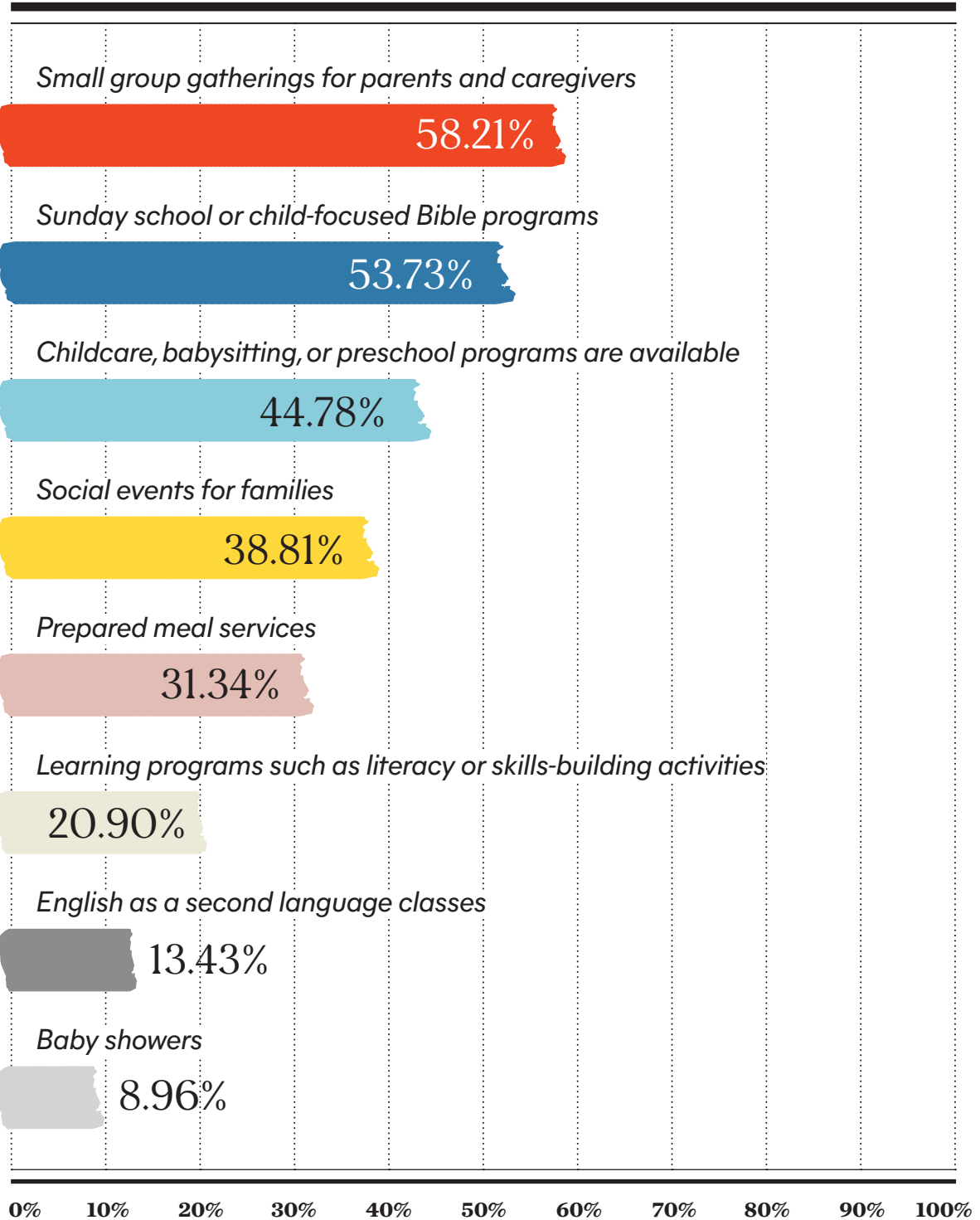


 Most respondents agree that finding materials and resources that tie early childhood development to their faith are easy to access:





Churches offer a variety of support activities and programs for children aged 0-3 and their families. The top support activities are, in order:





In urban, suburban and rural areas, ‘small group gatherings to build relationships among parents and caregivers’ is the most common type of support provided by the church.

... In urban areas, ‘a foodbank’ is slightly less common compared to suburban and rural areas.

... ‘Meal trains’ are more common in urban areas.

Support Activities	Rural Respondents	Suburban Respondents	Urban Respondents	Total Respondents
Small group gatherings to build relationships among parents and caregivers, such as mom’s groups, parent groups or church-based reading groups	111	190	223	524
Child care, babysitting or preschool programs	75	201	127	403
Sunday School, child-focused Bible programs or Vacation Bible School	65	128	119	312
Social events for families	29	88	90	207
Foodbank	31	100	51	182
Literacy or skills building activities	16	59	69	144
English language services	15	53	70	138
Baby showers	18	49	52	119
Prepared meals or meal trains	15	29	65	109





## The Perception Gap for Church Supports

While clergy and ministers feel that preaching, blessing children or conducting a church service meet families' needs, parents and caregivers report that, despite what exists, they still want more tangible support, such as small group gatherings, food security efforts, and childcare support during the week.

Our research shows significant gaps in how parents and caregivers experience early childhood development opportunities in the church and how clergy and ministries do.

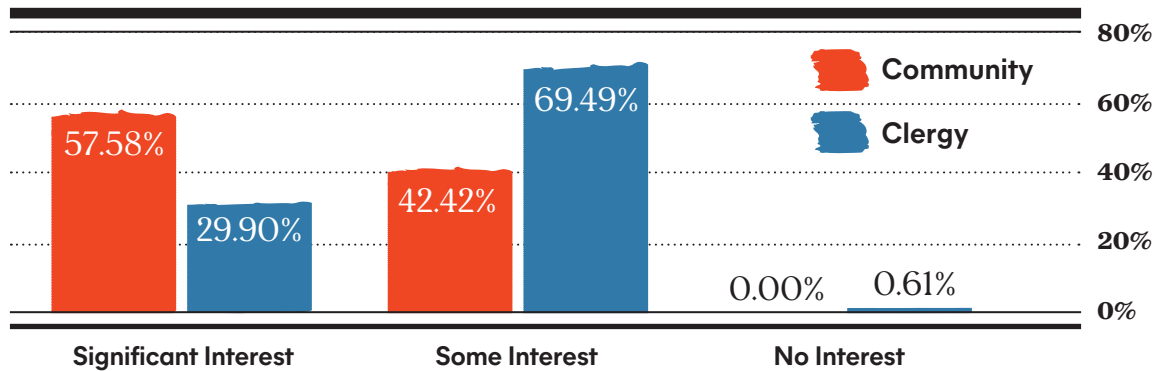
Our research shows that early childhood development is frequently not prioritized in church budgets, with financial resources often directed towards non-early childhood development funding priorities. Participants in the workshops feel that the church's lack of prioritizing early childhood development programs, staff or resources, reflected a lack of interest or engagement from the church. Clergy may view low attendance as a sign of low interest, which isn't always the case. Instead, parents may simply feel disconnected from the church.





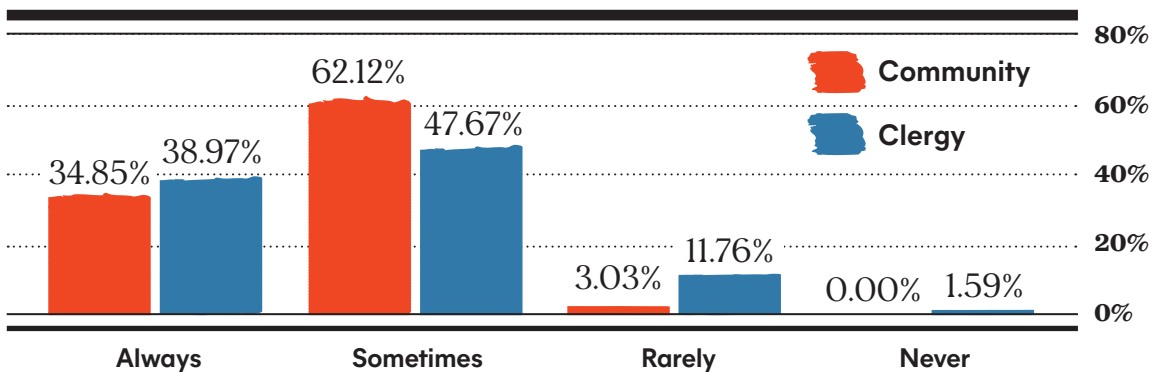
When asked about the level of interest parents and caregivers have shown in the church's early childhood development supports, a majority of clergy report that parents show interest in the supports offered.

Parents report a **higher level of significant interest (57.6%)** than clergy (**29.9%**).



There is a similar perception related to **how often the church supports and helps families with young children** between clergy and community member respondents.

However, a higher percentage of community members perceive that the church only sometimes supports families with young children.






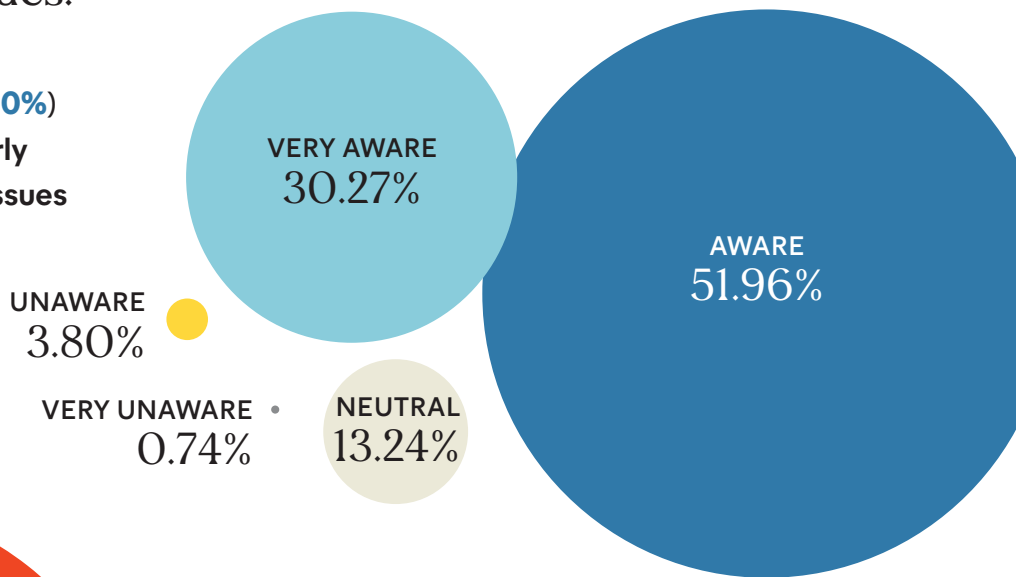



# What Black and Latine Parents Shared About The Support They Receive in their Communities

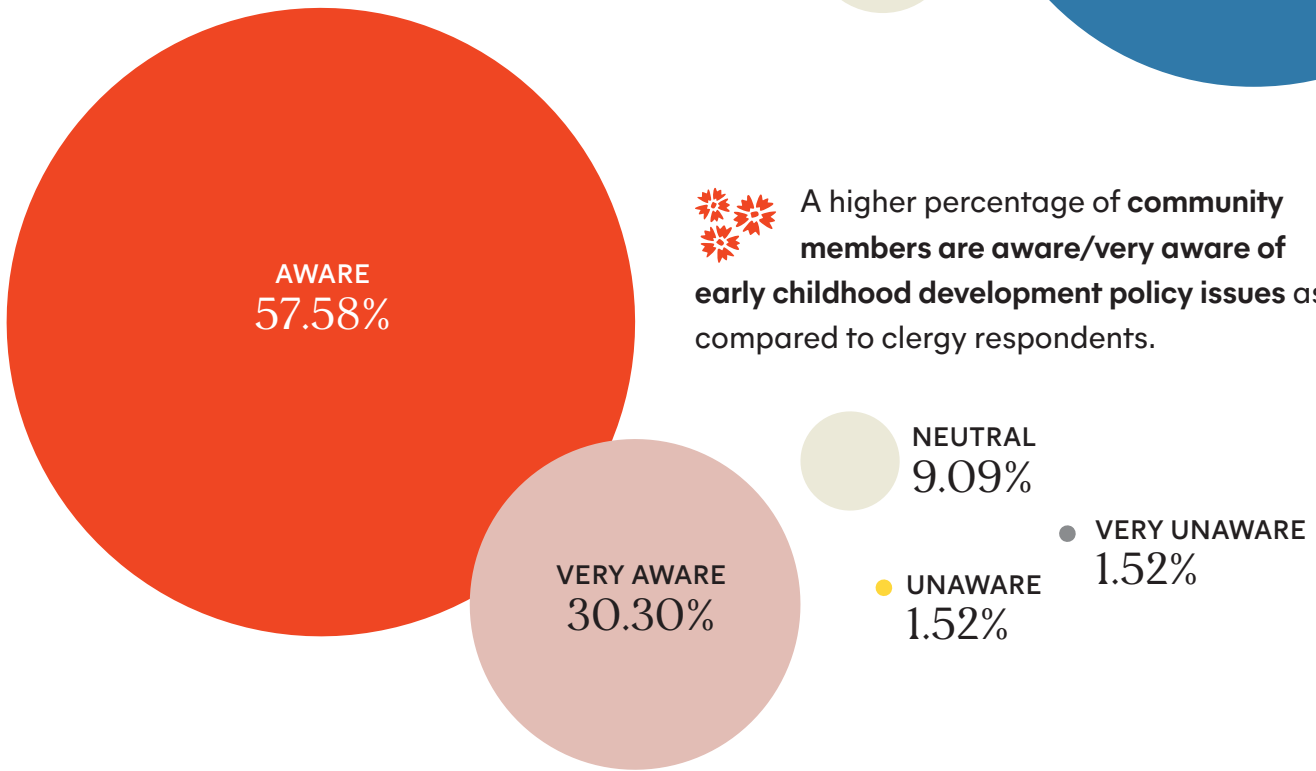
We know early childhood development doesn't just live in a single church – one of the most impactful ways to support young children is by engaging with the larger community and social systems, such as housing and healthcare, that can impact a child's success.

Clergy and community members are aware of early childhood development policy issues.

 Most clergy (**more than 80%**) report being **aware of early childhood development policy issues and conversations.**



 A higher percentage of **community members are aware/very aware of early childhood development policy issues** as compared to clergy respondents.





## Clergy support early childhood development policies and reform efforts.

Parents and caregivers – specifically families from urban areas and families who were less economically stable – feel that the church could do much more to support early childhood development.

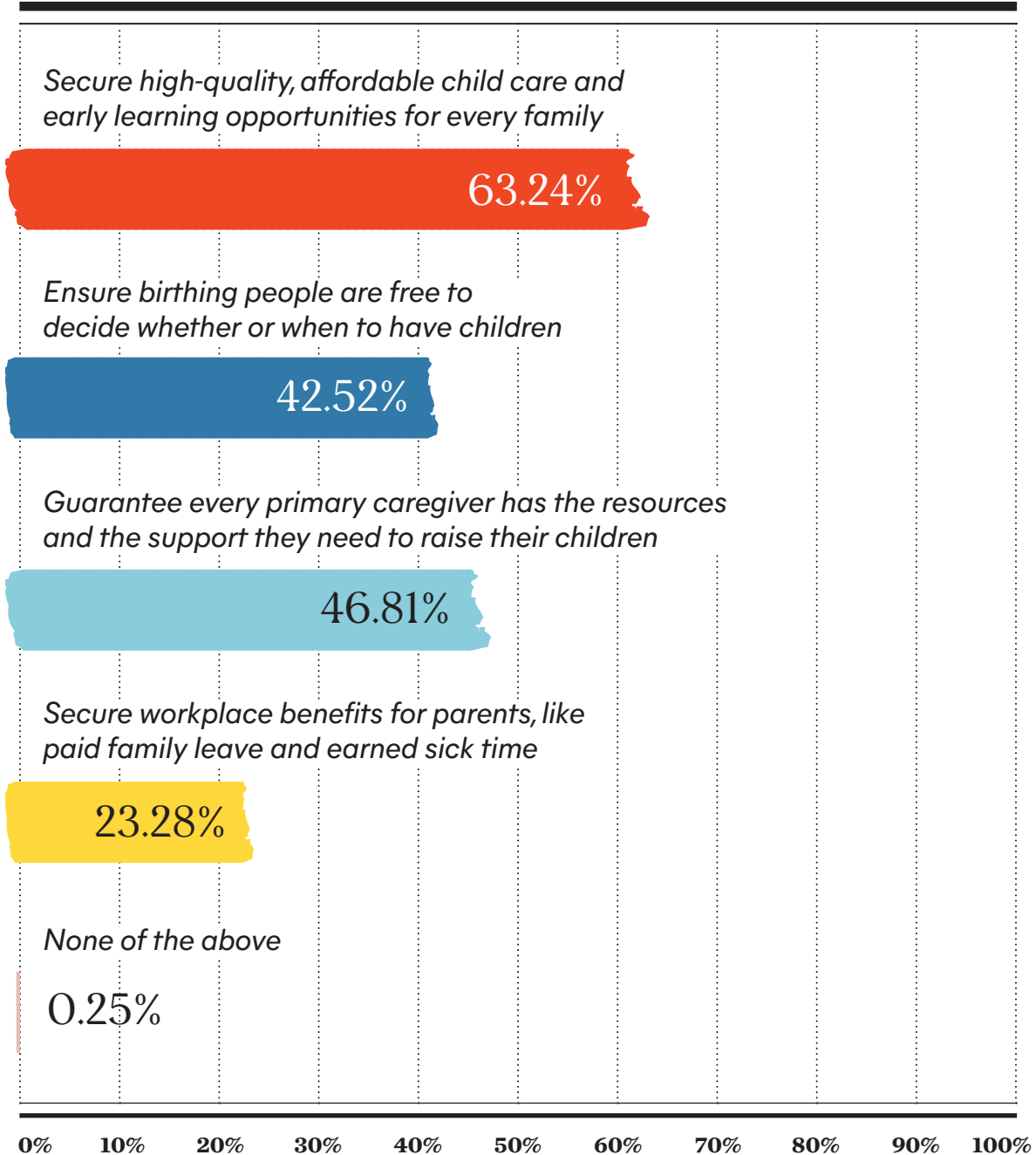
As church and community leaders, clergy are well-positioned to represent and advocate for their congregations. These transformative policy reforms can lead to large-scale and long-term changes for families.







When clergy were asked which policy proposals and critical issues regarding early childhood development they believe their church or faith community should support, the responses were as follows:





Overall, across all possible advocacy issues across races, early childhood development ranks as a top issue clergy should advocate for.

Race	Climate Justice	Democracy, Voting, and Governance	Early Childhood Development	Economic Justice	Human Rights	Global Poverty	Immigration	Nonviolence and Peace	Racial Justice	Women and Girls	Other
African	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	0.00%	33.33%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Asian	14.29%	14.29%	19.05%	0.00%	14.29%	9.52%	9.52%	9.52%	9.52%	0.00%	0.00%
Black or African American	10.03%	17.20%	23.64%	10.03%	10.58%	6.44%	3.22%	5.06%	8.92%	4.51%	0.37%
Latino/a or Hispanic	9.46%	16.89%	19.26%	6.42%	11.15%	9.80%	7.77%	9.80%	6.08%	3.38%	0.00%
Middle Eastern or North African	0.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	16.00%	2.00%	2.00%	0.00%	20.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Multi-racial or Multi-ethnic	5.00%	10.00%	15.00%	15.00%	10.00%	0.00%	10.00%	5.00%	20.00%	5.00%	5.00%
Native American or Alaska Native	10.00%	15.00%	40.00%	10.00%	10.00%	5.00%	0.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Native Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%
White	7.71%	16.04%	20.21%	15.00%	12.71%	1.88%	7.29%	7.08%	6.88%	4.17%	1.04%

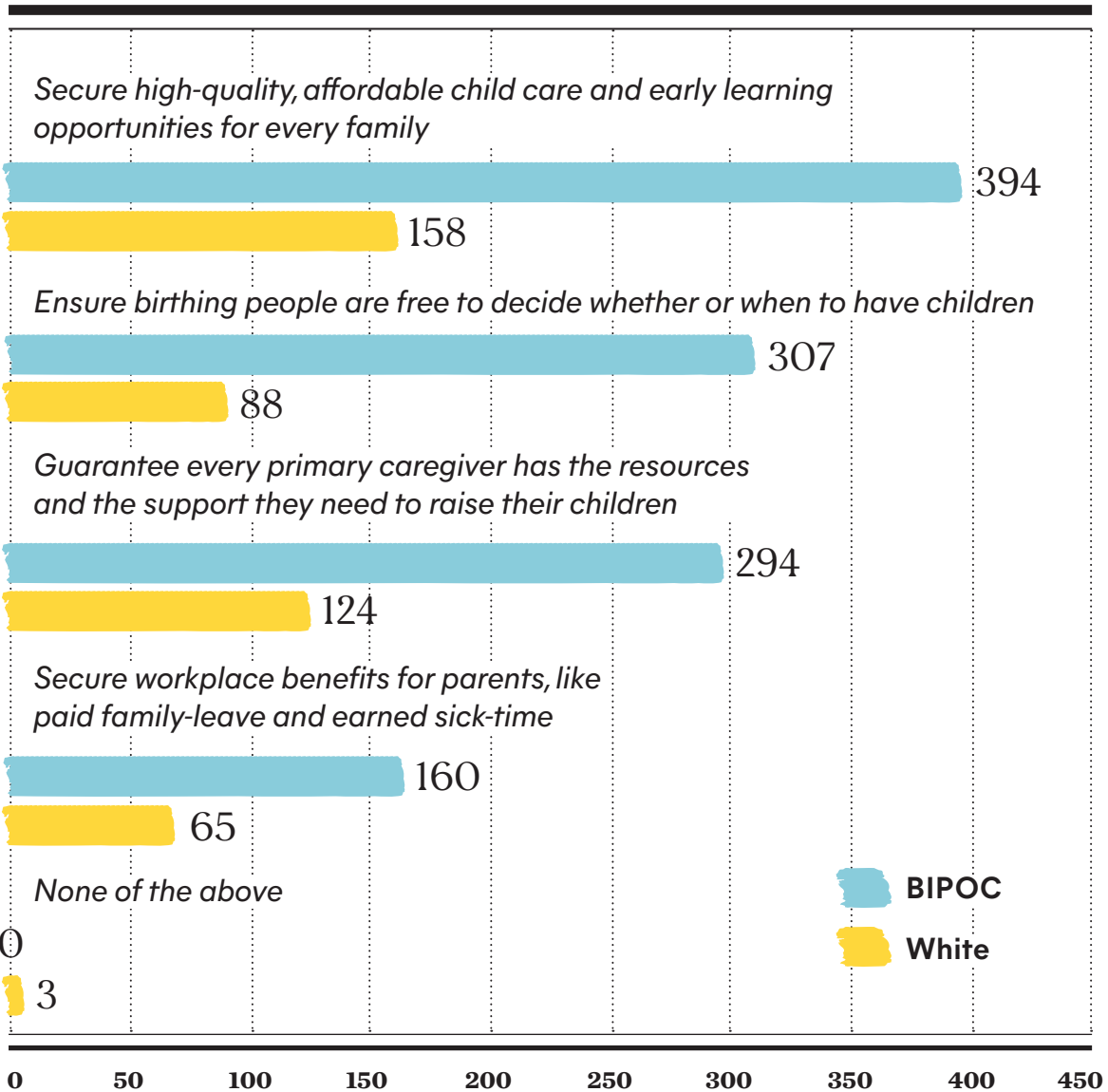






## What community members believe churches should advocate for:

Across all races, clergy and community members believe the number one policy priority the church should support is **securing high-quality, affordable child care and early learning opportunities for every family**.



Taking into account respondent roles:



**Clergy** respondents expressed that they believe the main policy proposal that church should support should be “secure high-quality, affordable child care and early learning opportunities for every family”.



**Community member** respondents indicated that “ensure birthing people are free to decide whether or when to have children” should be the main priority.

Policy Proposal	Clergy	Community Member
Secure high-quality, affordable child care and early learning opportunities for every family	516	36
Ensure birthing people are free to decide whether or when to have children	347	48
Guarantee every primary caregiver has the resources and the support they need to raise their children	382	36
Secure workplace benefits for parents, like paid family-leave and earned sick-time	190	35
None of the above	2	1

Every respondent who reported that the church should support none of the proposed policy proposals identifies as white.

In **rural and suburban areas**, “ensure birthing people are free to decide whether or when to have children” is the third priority, while in urban areas, it is the second priority.

For respondents **aged 31-40**, the second priority is “ensure birthing people are free to decide whether or when to have children,” while for other age groups it is the 3rd priority.



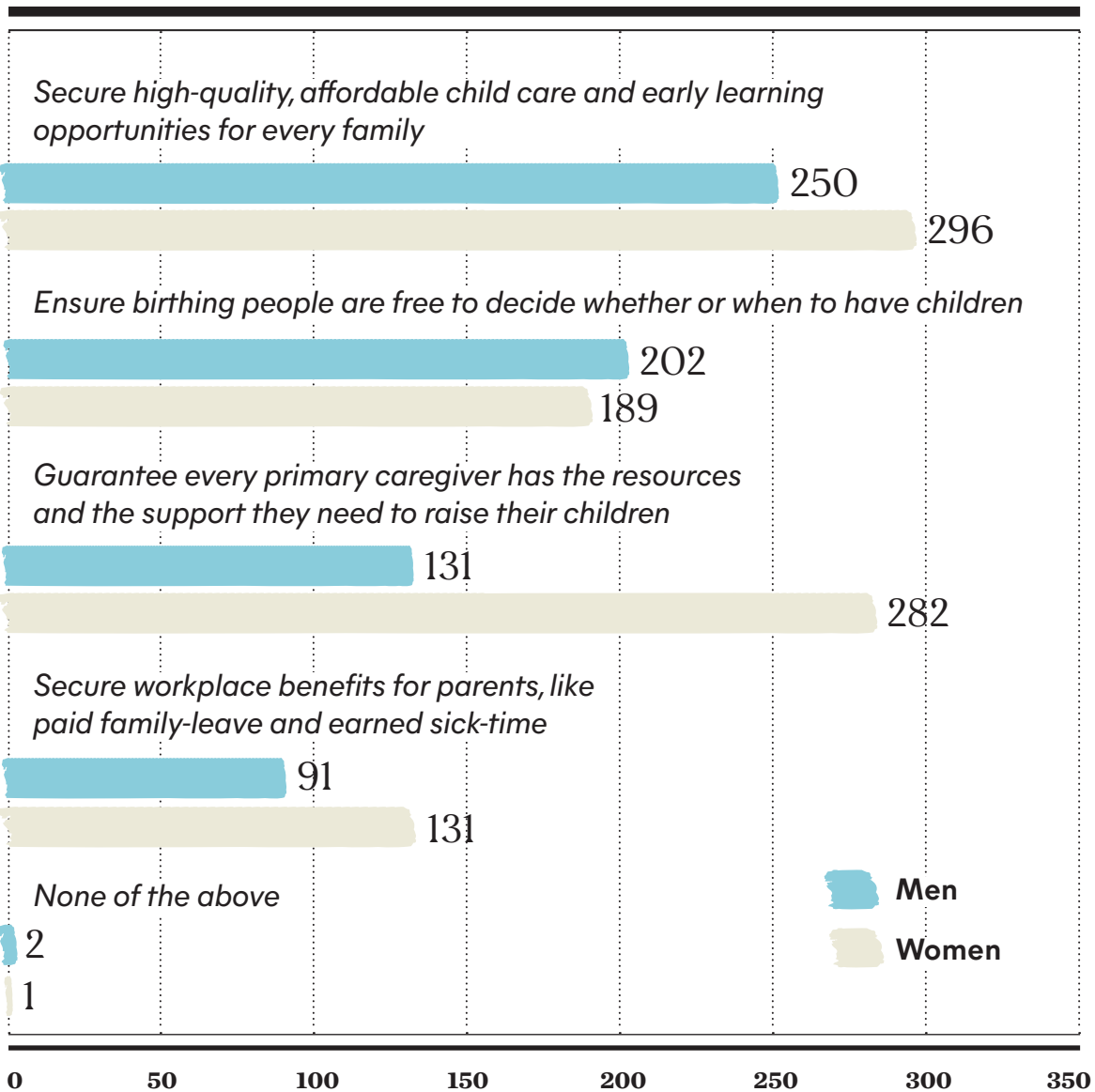


Policy priorities across all provided options also varied by gender.



More women support "guarantee every primary caregiver has the resources and the support they need to raise their children" compared to men.

More men emphasize "ensure birthing people are free to decide whether or when to have children" compared to women.







# FREE RESPONSE

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Participants in each early childhood development workshop expressed their resiliency and agency in answering the question, *“What is in your hands to work with the Black and Latine church to build flourishing futures for Black and Latine birthing people and their young children?”* through various actions and qualities.

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Here are their answers written as a poem by Monica Curca, Activate Labs.





*Volunteer to support, extend a hand, In Black and Latine families, make a stand. Be a part of early childhood development's embrace, In my church, we'll find our place*

*Support Birthing Persons, ensure their peace, Create bonds that never cease. Guide with mentors, inspire the youth, Build strong networks to reveal the truth.*

*Strengthen ties, community bonds, Integrity is kept where purpose responds. Take responsibility, contribute with grace, Discipline and dedication set the pace.*

*Respect others, self-love to show, Model positive paths where children grow. Better habits, both personal and wide, Promote early childhood development; let education be our guide.*

*Lead with heart, inspire and teach, Understand needs and offer support within reach. Say yes to help, be a guiding light, Influence positively, hope is in sight.*

*Promote health through active play, Dance and create; let joy be our way, Give my time, connect the dots, Share resources and fill in the slots.*

*Strengthen ties, build resilience strong, Unity in spirit, where hope belongs. Organize power, prenatal care, Birthing Personing wisdom, insights to share.*

*Create programs, young children to uplift, working together, finding resources and solutions will be swift. Communicate with love, resolve the strife, Resources shared enrich community life.*

*Interdependence, drive the change, Teach and educate, knowledge exchange. Support networks, spiritual care, Hope and love, a nurturing air.*

*Faith to stay positive, compassion to show, Connections shared, and opportunities to grow. Invite, build, and sustain the drive, Fundraise, learn and keep skills alive.*

*Organize, structure and creativity is key. Share talents contribute uniquely. Drive to appointments, practical aid, Passion to motivate, justice displayed.*

*Fight for rights, ensure the fair, Inspire action and lead with care. Be intentional, confident, and bold, In early childhood development's embrace, let our stories unfold.*







# NEXT STEPS

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This data is a snapshot of the supporting community listening behind the full *“Flourishing Futures: Early Childhood Development in Black and Latine Churches and Faith Communities”* report. We encourage you to read the report to learn more about how to act on these findings and elevate early childhood development in your individual church and faith communities.

As the data demonstrates, programs, resources, goods and other tangible supports can help combat discrimination and empower communities to create a more supportive environment for early childhood development.

**Yet, this can only be realized when social justice barriers are removed and children can access these supports.**

At Sojourners, we see first-hand how social justice advocacy efforts make a difference in our communities. When clergy advocate, they repair and restore the harms caused by systemic social injustices.

Together, we work to build a better world for our youngest congregants today, and for future generations.



**Get involved with SojoAction.**  
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