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SHEFFIELD

***'Love Matters'* - Presenting the Final Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households**

30th November 2024



The Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households launched in April 2021 to:

1. **Articulate the pressures and challenges facing families and households today.**
2. **Offer practicable ideas on what enables families and households in all their diversity to flourish.**
3. **Make proposals to shape public policy relating to families across all government departments.**
4. **Look at the actions the Church of England could take, either alone or in partnership, to support families and households and contribute to human flourishing.**

***'Love Matters'* was published in April 2023.**



How the Commission worked:

Twelve Commissioners with a range of expertise worked in 4 work streams: **theology; social history; children and young people; and couple relationships.**

- **The Commission had no set agenda**
- **Commissioners did not choose the topics for investigation**
- **Commissioners set out to establish the challenges facing individuals and families from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, and what they need in order to flourish**
- **The Commission could not investigate in depth every aspect of family life so focused on the issues which were of most concern to people**
- **The Commission did not seek to promote any specific family form or make judgments about different living arrangements**
- **Commissioners were guided throughout by an in-depth exploration of Christian theology and learning from scripture and tradition**



As an Independent Commission, this approach required us to:

- understand the varied lives of individuals, families and households
- develop a bold vision of how they can be assisted to flourish
- engage with sensitive issues, and respect strongly held beliefs and convictions about matters such as:

- Child abuse
- Domestic abuse
- LGBTQI+ issues
- Marriage and divorce
- Social and economic inequality/deprivation/poverty
- Race/racism and cultural diversity
- Human rights



Collecting the Evidence

- **Call for Evidence:** from children and adults (aged 13-90; from a range of cultures and faiths, and those with no faith) and organisations working with children and families.
- **Visits to different communities**
- **Inter-faith engagement:** with faith leaders, children and young people from faith schools, and learning from experts about how family life is valued, nurtured and developed in our multicultural society.
- **Evidence days/webinars/round tables/focus groups.**
- **Deep dive in 10 Dioceses.**
- **Engagement with government:** including Ministers for Education, Children and Families, Social Security, and Family Law, the Children's Commissioner and other leading experts on family issues
- **Review of research literature about families, human needs and flourishing**



LOVE MATTERS



Archbishops' Commission on Families & Households

‘Love Matters’ argues for a society that puts loving relationships at the heart of everything we do, recognises the importance of living well together and working through difficult issues.

It offers

- **five key messages**
- **four priorities for action**
- **36 recommendations to the Church of England and 29 to the Government**



Our aim following the report is to:

- Encourage engagement with the report and its recommendations.
- **Share the five key messages.**
- Refer to some of the recommendations to the Church of England in support of families and households.
- **Consider some questions for the Church of England.**
- Emphasise the four priorities for action.





Messages We must...

Value families in all their diversity,

meeting their basic needs by putting their wellbeing at the heart of Government policymaking and our community life, including religious communities.

Support relationships throughout life,

ensuring that everyone is able to develop and maintain loving and caring relationships, manage conflict well and promote the flourishing of individuals and families.

Honour singleness and single person households,

recognising that loving relationships matter to everyone.

Build a kinder, fairer, more forgiving society,

removing discrimination, division and deep inequality for the sake of every family and household.

Empower children and young people,

developing their relational skills and knowledge, recognising their value and agency, and protecting them from harm.

1. Value and celebrate families in all their diversity : what we know

(i) Families matter

- Families comes in all shapes and sizes; there is no 'ideal' family; to be family does not necessitate a particular relationship or form; friends/work colleagues/church members can be like family.
- There are essential ingredients to family-ness: Family is where we give and receive love, can grow and be ourselves, can be confident about who we are, experience belonging and security, make mistakes and be forgiven, feel safe, receive consistent care, learn about trust, commitment and values.
- Families change over time.



(ii) 'Loving Relationships matter'

- Everyone, regardless of age, gender, marital status, family experience or structure, and with or without faith, talked about the importance of family and loving relationships as crucial to our health and wellbeing.
- **Loving relationships enable us to live in community with one another; increase our capacity to care for one another; enrich our lives and help us to enrich others.**



(iii) 'LOVE matters'

- LOVE is hugely important to adults and children alike, it is the most important feature of being a family.
- Love is rarely talked about in policy-making.
- Our recommendations focus on the need for this to change.



The Commission's evidence is clear - we must do everything we can to support families because:

- Families are central to our psychological, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing.
- **Strong, stable, loving families provide protection and stability for their members, enabling them to thrive.**
- The key to living a flourishing, stable family life is not a specific family form, but the quality of the relationships between family members.



2. Support relationships throughout life: what we know

- There is more choice than ever before about how we live our lives, the kind of couple relationship and family form we want to develop.
- Fewer people are choosing to marry, and even fewer in a Christian ceremony.
- Cohabitation as a life-style choice has increased, and civil partnership is available to all.
- The increasing dislocation of sexual behaviour from marriage has resulted in a huge shift in the expectation of marriage as the primary setting for sexual intimacy and raising children.

Does that mean that marriage is no longer relevant or important? NO!



What the Commission learned

- Marriage is a valued goal for many people: it embodies core values and a public commitment which bolsters committed relationships and family stability, and encourages unconditional love.
- Young people talk about getting married but not until they are older.
- Family life is messy, every relationship has its ups and downs, and lots of every day stresses can put pressure on relationships.
- Continuing conflict in the family is most damaging to relationships and to children's wellbeing...the focus must be on supporting family members to reduce conflict and manage it well.
- Neither marriage, civil partnership, nor cohabitation can guarantee a loving, stable, family life.
- Rather than being critical or judgmental when relationships are under stress, we should be doing our best to meet basic needs and support relationships to flourish.
- Entering a faithful, committed relationship is one of the most significant life events but most couples receive little preparation for this.



In order to support relationships throughout life

- A fundamental shift is required to recognise the enormous impact of the quality of couple relationships on our wellbeing.
- Faith communities and Government are well placed to support relationships to flourish at all life stages.
- Our recommendations focus on the need for greater investment in marriage preparation and relationship support for all couples at all life stages.



3. Honour singleness and single-person households: why?

- One-person households accounted for almost 1 in 3 (30%) UK households in 2022, 8.3 million households
- Singleness is a wide-ranging category, which can lead to different opportunities and pressures.
- Most people living alone are members of a family and enjoy loving relationships: being able to give and receive love matters to everyone.
- Our recommendations focus on the need for the Church and society to honour singleness, not viewing it as being *lesser* than living in a family with children.



Key Recommendations ... the Commission urges the Church of England to

1. Offer high quality preparation for marriage and other forms of committed adult relationships to every couple planning a religious or civil ceremony; focus on different aspects of pastoral work, including ongoing relationship support after a wedding ceremony, baptism and other church-based celebrations.
2. Work collaboratively with relationship support agencies to support families at all life stages, ensure that clergy and laity have the support they need in their pastoral work, and ensure appropriate support for their own relationships.
3. Support families whose relationships are in difficulty, encouraging a pastoral response to separation and divorce with a message of grace and a call to peace for families experiencing stress



Key Recommendations continued... the Commission urges the Church of England to:

4. Enable and support people to talk openly and honestly about sensitive and difficult issues, including domestic abuse, separation and divorce, mental health, and relationships.
5. Honour and celebrate singleness, whether through choice or circumstance, and recognise the full place of single people within the Church and society.
6. Reaffirm the value and dignity of every human being and challenge attitudes and behaviours anywhere in the life of the Church which undermine this.



Question for discussion

What steps should be taken by the church to:

- **offer high quality preparation for couples entering into a life-long committed relationship**
- **support loving relationships throughout life?**



4. Empower children and young people: every child should be valued, loved and supported to flourish and have the best start in life: the challenge -

- adverse child experiences such as domestic abuse, mental illness, substance abuse, parental conflict and poverty are associated with poor child outcomes.
- children witnessing domestic abuse more likely to have problems at school, abuse drugs or alcohol, act aggressively, have mental health issues and end get involved in crime.
- 33% children live with a parent experiencing anxiety or depression.
- 500,000 children live with a parent dependent on alcohol or drugs.
- 50% of young people involved in youth violence have witnessed domestic abuse.
- the numbers of children in care are increasing.

The protective effect of family depends on the quality of family relationships: loving relationships hold the key for all children including those in care



Key Recommendations...the Commission urges the Church of England to:

1. Be aware of the needs of all new parents, including adoptive parents, talk about challenges and difficulties and offer care and support in a non-judgemental way to parents who are struggling.
2. Encourage the work of the Growing Faith Foundation to put children, young people and families at the heart of the Church's ministry and mission.
3. Enable children to learn about relating well to each other as early as possible in life.
4. Advocate for children and young people: support children in the care system to find genuine permanency solutions; and promote relational and accommodation support for young people leaving care and leaving prison.
5. Be especially vigilant in respect of young carers in each community and find ways to support and walk alongside them and their families.



Key Recommendations continued: the Commission urges the Church of England to

6. Enable the voices of children, young people and their families to be heard within the church at local and national levels.

7. Consider ways to offer accessible and affordable activities for young people within each community, in partnership with local organisations, local authorities and other faith communities. Make church buildings and open spaces available for children and young people as safe places to be.

8. Improve understanding of the drivers that draw children and young people into the criminal justice system, and challenge negative attitudes towards children and young people involved in criminal activities/gang culture.

9. Use resources such as the *Parents Promise* and the *Naked Truth* (to address pornography)



The Parents' Promise

The Parents' Promise:

- launched in 2021
- encourages parents to make a promise when they have children to ensure the long-term wellbeing of children if parents separate
- helps parents make a positive commitment to their children when they are born in case parents subsequently decide to separate and divorce while their children are still growing up
- parents sign a promise to put their children's needs first, ensure that both parents will work together as partners to provide for the children, including not saying bad things about the other parent, keep them safe, and create the best conditions for them to thrive
- the promise can be revisited if parents subsequently split up
- promoted by *The Positive Parenting Alliance*, a group of parenting organisations, including the Relationships Alliance, and individuals who believe that all children deserve the most positive experience possible during parental separation or divorce



Questions for discussion

1. What can the church do to ensure that all children have the best start in life?
2. How should the voices of children and young people be heard within the church at local and national levels?



5. Build a kinder, fairer, more forgiving society, removing discrimination, division and deep inequality

Living in our time - the challenge:

- Picking up the pieces – recognising the personal, social and economic cost of the coronavirus pandemic: isolation, loneliness, deteriorating mental health, self-neglect, poor housing and unresolved grief.
- Inequalities in the social determinants of health – since 2010 life expectancy has stalled; inequalities between racial or ethnic groups are a serious form of inequality.
- Poverty is experienced by more than one in three children in families with a child under five.
- Cost-of living crisis: food and heat insecurity impact chronic health conditions for adults and children.
- Pernicious relationship between deprivation, discrimination, ill-health, poverty, stress, anxiety, and homelessness reduces wellbeing.
- Dementia is an urgent health and social care issue.



The Commission re-imagines

A multicultural society that

- is kind, loving, fair and forgiving, in which every individual, every household and every family is able and supported to flourish
- values everyone, meets their basic needs, seeks the common good and rejects discrimination and inequality
- understands the importance of love

'The cure for all the ills and wrongs, the cares, the sorrows and crimes of humanity, all lie in one word 'love'. It is the divine vitality that produces and restores life. To each and every one of us it gives the power of working miracles, if we will.'

Lydia M Child (1802-1880) Native American Rights activist and abolitionist



Key Recommendations: the Commission urges the Church of England to

1. Work in partnership with professionals to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for people experiencing loneliness, mental health challenges, and dementia, and encourage spirituality in health interventions.
2. Harness the power of interfaith engagement in the community to provide coordinated support to enable local families and households to flourish and tackle the issues which limit people's ability to flourish.
4. Advocate for the extension of Family Hubs in every community, ensuring that faith groups are delivery partners.
5. Mirror the use of the Government's Family Test in the development of all policies and practices in the Church of England.



Question for discussion

What actions can the church take now to build a fairer, kinder, more forgiving society?



We must...

Maximise the protective effect of family.

Ensure that all loving relationships matter and are valued in everything we do.

Give every child the best possible start in life.

Tackle the societal issues which limit people's ability to flourish.



'Love Matters'



- offers a story of hope, opportunity and love
- discusses the evidence in detail, using the words of those who contributed to the Commission
- explores the challenges facing individuals and families today
- provides examples of good practice for supporting families and households
- lists all the recommendations to the Church of England and to government

www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/families-and-households-commission

[Full Report](#)

[Summary Report](#); [Easy Read Version](#)

[Supporting Theology Papers](#)

[Supporting Practice Papers](#)

[Briefings and Think Cards](#)

[To Follow shortly: Resources for children and young people](#)

Families matter, relationships matter, love matters