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Welcome to the latest update from the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households.

In this edition you can find out what happened at the July meeting, links to more information and news on the website, and what Commission

Members will be doing during August and September ahead of their next meeting in Oxford.

Please tweet about the Commission using #FamiliesHouseholds and #ChurchOfEngland. You can [contact the Commission on this page](#).

Lively discussions at the second meeting of the Commission Members



The second meeting of the Families and Households Commission was held on Tuesday 13 July at St Matthew's, Westminster. The meeting began with a reflection from the Commission Co-Chair, the Rt Revd Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham. Building on [his recent blog](#), Bishop Paul reflected on Mark chapters 9&10, which have been described as a mini gospel for children. In this Commission, we must seek to put children at the centre of our deliberations and listen to the voices of children and young people.

Following on from the agreed actions of the May meeting, time was spent focusing in greater detail on the plans of the four work streams. Each work stream had an hour to present their priorities for the coming months and provide more definition on the key areas and issues they want to address. Here's a flavour of the resulting very lively discussions.

The work stream on theology underpinning our understanding of family life considered the literature review that would be required and the need to draw upon the different perspectives of a diverse range of theologians to ensure diversity in terms of race, sexuality, nationality, and theological viewpoint. There would also be the need to understand the extent to which other disciplines are considered by theologians, especially fast-moving sciences such as neuroscience. There was recognition that the theology work stream would draw on a wide range of influences, whilst acknowledging the distinctiveness of viewing families and households through a theological framework. Welcoming the stranger may not be a normal narrative for most people but is completely normal through a theological framework.

The workstream on the social history of families and households will consider how families and households have changed through history and the influences that have shaped them to the present day. The work stream will explore how to ensure that the rights of the child are not lost within our legal structures and in family life. This is particularly important in the context of the care system – how have we reached the point we

find ourselves in today? Examples from other countries would need to be included as well as consideration of models of family and households within other faiths, and the benefits and challenges of these variations in our multi-cultural society. One of the main issues to explore will be the impact of housing and support structures for families and households.

The children and young people work stream noted the extensive remit of their agenda and have taken a child-centred lens as their starting point. In so doing, they noted that family, friendship groups and school are consistently identified by young people as the most important issues for them. How should the Commission consider the engagement of the church and society generally with the priority areas identified by young people? Understanding how the church provides interventions, what is successful and what is less good, particularly with regards to long-term work with children and young people and understanding the context within which children are raised and nurtured will be part of this work stream's agenda. The intergenerational aspects of people's lives, of young people as they become adults, and the challenge to the church of measuring success other than by attendance at services and Sunday School would also need to be a part of their evidence gathering.

The workstream on couple relationships, marriages, civil partnerships, cohabitation, and conflict resolution is considering the question "What are couple relationships for?" Looking at relationships through a wider lens: there are societal shifts taking place, with young people asking different questions and holding different expectations about what couple relationships will look like. Understanding these shifts will require exploring why people get married, how they are supported into marriage and afterwards, and including views from the third of households made up of single people (never married or divorced) - the pandemic and the establishment of 'social bubbles' has highlighted issues facing this group.

Reflection

The meeting ended with a reflection by Mary Hawes, the Church of England's National Children and Youth Adviser. Taking Zechariah 8 as her guide, Mary posited that families and households are like infinity puzzles, which look different each time we look at them, depending on where they are positioned on the puzzle-board; but the pieces need to fit together, despite lacking edges, for there to be a society that flourishes.

Next Meeting & Next Steps

The Commission will next meet on 20 September in Oxford, and in the interim work progresses on drawing up the final plan of activities, which will include preparation of a Call for Evidence to be circulated widely to gather experiences and evidence from as many groups, stakeholders, and individuals within the church and across society as possible.

Keeping in Touch

We are always adding to [the Commission website](#) and will be posting blogs monthly. To date you can hear from the Chairs, Professor Jan Walker and Bishop Paul; coming up in August, Professor Kwame Akuffo reflecting on the diverse nature of families in England today.

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