THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

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Shakeel Nurmahi, Ordinand at Cranmer Hall, Durham, speaking at the launch in March of the Archbishops' Commission on Families & Households addressed the question:

"As a young adult training for ordination, what do you hope this Commission will address regarding Families and Households?"

I am an ordinand based at Cranmer Hall, Durham. In June I will be undergoing three significant life events. Firstly, I will be getting married to my fiancée Cecily, who is also an ordinand. Secondly, we will be moving to Rutland, where I will be taking up the role of Assistant Curate in the Oakham team. Thirdly, I will be ordained deacon at Peterborough Cathedral at the end of the month. There is a lot of new change ahead for me this year, but the most significant is that Cecily and I will be getting married and starting a family. As someone in their mid-twenties and about to start their own family, the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households has come at a significant stage in my life. Given this, I hope as I share some of my hopes for this commission that they will offer a glimpse into the hopes of a young family.

Recognising and responding to the diversity of the family

As I start my own family, I find myself feeling both excited and anxious. A family is a place of great flourishing, but the changing nature of what a family is, both as a unit and as a part of society, leaves me confused about the best way to shape my family. With every household down the street looking different to mine, I lose access to reference points of what works well within my own family set-up. I am scared that I will not know how to be a good husband, a good father, and a good priest in a world that I increasingly do not understand. 'The nature of families has changed enormously, and family setups do not fit the traditional mould of the nuclear family. Many in the UK still form nuclear style families, but there is an increasing range of family setups, including single-parent households, same-sex couple families, households with step-parents, and many single-person households. This diversity within UK families has shaped the culture in which I have grown up and paints a picture of what family life will probably look like in my lifetime. One of my hopes is that this Commission will learn to understand the nature of family life in the UK today with all its diversity. Archbishop Justin observes that, 'Households come in all forms, from single people to large and numerous groups,' and says that 'All need to be valued and esteemed.' I hope that the commission's efforts to understand and value the various types of households will enable the commission to make informed and family-centred approaches for ensuring their individual and collective flourishing. Additionally, I hope the Commission will learn to recognise each family's different needs across the different types of households. Whether their needs be similar or contrasting, I hope the Commission can establish courageous approaches to enable the best flourishing across all families and then share these approaches so that families, including myself, can feel more equipped for building healthy family life in the 21st century.

Protecting the family whilst reviewing it

The idea of the family itself sometimes comes under attack in our society. In an everchanging world, the notion of family, particularly in an individualistic society, is increasingly labelled as an archaic institution out of touch with the modern world. Yet, this rejection of the family as an outdated institution often fails to recognise and give credit to the family's great benefits. There is a risk of throwing out the baby with the

bathwater. We must recognise a shift in the nature of the family in our society today, for failure to do so would be leaving the church unaware of the realities of the people it serves, the people to whom I will be ministering. However, if we reject the notion of the family entirely, we will lose the benefit that it brings both to individuals and wider society. Archbishop Justin says that 'Household and family, and the expressions of love within them, are the basic foundational communities of society.' The family brings immense value to our society, and it serves as one of the key stabilising pillars of our nations and our local communities. My own family life has been very positive, and my life so far has taught me that my strong and stable family life has been the most defining influence on my life and character. Through its research and new insights, I hope the commission can highlight the benefits and fruitful qualities of the family whilst also recognising that there is a new diversity of family in the UK for us to learn about and support. The family is not perfect, and so often is the place of our greatest hurt as well as our greatest joy. I hope that a greater understanding of the nature of families across the UK will encourage the retention of the family as a part of our society, holding on to what is good, learning about what is new, and letting go of what is bad.

Rebuilding local community as a part of family life

I hope that this commission can help to find ways to rebuild the local community as a part of family life. The world we live in, through its greater means of communication, has in some ways lost the art of communication, especially with one's neighbours. I see this as being a more significant problem for the younger generations. We are seeing trends of younger generations feeling increasingly lonely and disconnected from others. Ironically, social media has "de-socialised" us, taking away our power of communication to draw us to one another. This has been made worse over the past year with its lockdowns. The world has been learning to become more insular, and people spend more time at home and on their own. More people are living on their own than previous generations. This shift in society creates more of a diaspora of people rather than a united local community. This separation and alienation from one another requires attention from society. I hope that this commission can develop ways in which the family can unite people across a community. The family is a place of love and selfless giving to one another. The love and flourishing in the family possesses an overflowing creative element that spreads out across communities, uniting them as a group of families - in some ways, these communities are just one big family. I want to raise a family that flourishes in the gift of local community, the incredibly valuable gift of a family structure.

To conclude, I want to say that I am very excited that this commission is being launched today and that it is continuing the research into British life that the Coming Home report has started. The family is such a core part of our society, and I think we should give it the proper due attention that it deserves. As we launch this commission today, I implore the commission to question how we can use this commission to generate

courageous plans to address and support UK families in all its different shapes. The family is an essential part of society, and I believe it will continue to be. As the church, we must recognise the importance of the family to our society. To collectively seek the betterment of families and households now and in the years to come. I pray that God will bless this commission and that it will work towards the flourishing of families and households.

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