

This blog is written by a member of the independent Commission. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Archbishops' or the Church of England.

This Families and Households Commission is "The Archbishops'" commission. It flows out of Archbishop Justin's book, 'Re-imagining Britain'. It seeks to be deeply rooted in the Christian faith. It also emerges from the Church of England's specific calling as the 'established church' of England as a Christian presence across the nation.

This is why theology is the first work stream underpinning the work of the Commission. Whilst this will include theology that is academically researched, the commission wants to help everyone recognise that they 'do theology' whenever they think about life and its purpose and what it means to be human; whenever they think about God. So, the insights and reflections of people from all walks of life, and thus every type of family and household, must be of interest to the commission. The earlier Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community rooted its thinking in a theology expressed in the values Sustainability, Safety, Stability, Sociability and Satisfaction. They also reflected on the place of Sacrifice. One of our earliest steps will be to explore these values as they relate to what makes for the flourishing of families and households in society today. Everyone should anticipate that this Commission's final report will have God and Jesus Christ at its centre in offering proposals that can better support the wellbeing of all families and households in the future.

Yet this already poses a conundrum. The Bible is full of a very wide variety of family and community life throughout its pages. Christian history has shown a breadth of understanding of the family. Across the world in the Anglican Communion family and household life is expressed in very varied ways depending on different cultural settings. Indeed, within England there are wide variations of the composition of families and households.

Then Jesus' attitude to family can appear conflicting. He spent the first thirty years of his life in a family and the community of Nazareth. Yet in his public ministry, when his mother and brothers came to talk with him (Mark 3.31-34), he remarked that his brother, and sister and mother are those who do the will of God, which could be seen as deprioritising his own mother and brothers. But then, as he hung dying on the cross, he made sure that his mother was cared for in the future. (John 19.26-27). His disciples noted that in choosing to follow him they had 'left everything and followed you'. Jesus supported them in this rather than judging them (Mark 10.28-31). He both upheld the place of the marriage union, and warned that his teaching would lead to division amongst families as not all would support a decision to follow Christ. (Matthew 19.3-9; 10.34-39). Unusually for his time he remained single, and apparently endorsed singleness for some (Matthew 19.10-12). When small children were brought to Jesus by their parents he blessed them and returned those children to their parents' care (Mark 10.13-16). He creates a new community around himself. This new community describes itself as 'the household of God' (Ephesians 2.19; Hebrews 3.6; 1Peter 4.17). It develops its own 'Household Codes' (Ephesians 5, Colossians 3). So, developing a theology of families and households that is Jesus Christ-shaped is not simple or straightforward. When the disciples want to create ranks of greatness amongst themselves Jesus places a child in the midst and makes it clear that the child is the model for this reign of God. So what happens to all our thinking about God, life, humanity, society, if a child is placed in the midst? What happens to a church's or nation's policy on a variety of matters if that policy begins with the child at the heart? What might the voices of children and young people themselves have to say about families and households? As a Commission, we will be listening to children and young people to gain their insights into what makes for good families and households.

We embark on the work of the Commission determined to listen, observe, reflect and then draw ideas together. Through the diversity of the

Commissioners, and the many ways we will glean evidence, what will emerge is genuinely unknown. We deeply trust that it will be of real value to the future wellbeing of families and households throughout church and nation.

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