

In this blog, Commission Member The Rt Revd Bishop Sophie Jelley highlights some themes emerging from the Children and Young People’s workstream.

Working on the 'Children and Young People' workstream over the past eight months, has been a privilege as we explore the area of 'church engagement' with families and households. Reading widely and listening carefully, I have been honoured to hear of the sheer scale and scope of this work, about which I thought I knew quite a lot.

However, I can honestly say that I was not prepared for the level of commitment I found among diverse groups, charities, churches, and individuals. Each in their own way and sometimes together, they are regularly wrestling with enormous complex problems and systemic issues affecting families and households across our nation.

This blog simply highlights some of the emerging themes of the conversations so far and should, I hope, whet your appetite to stay involved with the work of this Commission as we work towards the publication of our findings.

### **Intergenerational spaces and relationships**

The notion of intergenerational spaces and relationships are key to the life of the church and community. From church plants like St Luke's, Preston (a new church developing, on a housing estate in the Diocese of Blackburn, innovative ways to come together as church across the generations) to resources like 'Lectio for the Family' (an app specially designed by 24-7 Prayer to help families and households engage with the bible together in discussion and prayer in a simple daily rhythm), there is great need for every generation to know that they have a stake in community. The emerging message is that everyone wins when no single generation is prioritized at the expense of another.

### **Parents need support**

So much of the support available (and it is often patchy at best) relates to intervention when things go wrong. However, there are organisations like 'Care for the Family' (a charity helping to support families, whatever their circumstance or situation) and Daniel's Den (a 25 year old network of toddler groups with a vision to ensure there's a group within walking distance of, or short car journey from, every family in the nation) which are there for the everyday life of a family. They have seen significant impact across many nationalities throughout Britain, flourishing through ongoing low-level support, usually from volunteers. The message seems to be, the earlier, the better. (The couple relationship workstream are looking at how adult relationships are key to this.)

### **Play and creativity are vital**

In an age where many face social isolation, mental ill health, and financial instability, values such as play and creativity are easily eroded. Messy Church - a way of being church for families and others, which is Christ-centred, for all ages, based on creativity, hospitality, and celebration - recognises just how much people thrive when they have an invitation into creativity in a safe space where hospitality is offered to all faiths and none. Mill Grove - home of a unique extended family and residential community that began as an informal foster family in 1899 - is another example of how intergenerational lives are positively affected by being in a place where the values of play and creativity are an inherent part of

daily life.

### **Young people are brilliant, and they want community!**

The negative messages surrounding children and young people has often made for a difficult season of life, especially for teens. In an education system in which measuring and testing have been so dominant, familial imagination has been hard to find. Just what kind of families and households will they want to form? Hearing from a range of young voices, not least the community of St Anselm among others, we have heard first-hand how the challenge of living with and among those who are very different from ourselves, is a gift that the church can and should be offering. The quality of relationship that these young adults look for following on from their community experience testifies to the desire to combat the epidemic of loneliness with a quality of relationship that can rightly be expected among people of faith. Particularly striking was the theme of faithful and fruitful singleness, raising questions about the vital category of friendship so often overlooked in society today. Jesus readily speaks of friendship; the church should surely prize this highly too.

So, does the church have anything to say about how church communities support families and households? The answer is a very clear: “Yes!” In wide and creative ways that demonstrate deep commitment.

Jesus said: I come that you might have life in abundance. (John 10:10) Surely ‘Families and households included’!

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