

April 2023 marked the publication of the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households, *Love Matters*, and the start of our work to promote the key messages and implement the wide-ranging recommendations for the Church of England and the Government. Since our last Commission update in summer 2023, we have been extremely busy continuing this work through numerous meetings, running workshops, holding debates, and developing more resources. We have been encouraged by the very positive feedback we have received on the Commission's work and the report, as well as the willingness and support of so many to see the recommendations followed through. In this update we reflect on the work undertaken with government departments, the Church of England, and organisations working with families and households.

Progress with Government

Much of our work since the Commission's publication has involved engaging with different Government departments.

Department for Education

Together with the Archbishop of Canterbury, we met with the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, the Secretary of State for Education, to discuss the development of Family Hubs, the importance of relationship education and our planned resources for children and young people for use in schools and youth groups. She particularly welcomed these resources and the focus on promoting loving relationships. In our discussion about Family Hubs, we referred to our own recent research on the roll-out of Family Hubs which revealed a lack of cooperation/liaison with faith organisations, despite the Government's Family Hub guidance to Local Authorities which strongly recommends this. In a subsequent meeting with Lord Farmer, founder of the Family Hubs Network, we raised our concerns regarding this and reemphasised the potential opportunities to be gained through greater cooperation between Family Hubs and faith organisations.

Ministry of Justice

We have pursued the recommendations in *Love Matters* regarding the family justice and youth justice systems through conversations with Lord Bellamy, the DWP Minister in the House of Lords, Ministry of Justice officials, and Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division. All are extremely supportive of our recommendations to ensure parents are given information about the needs of children when parents separate and to make effective use of the opportunities in the new Divorce, Dissolution and Separation legislation to support families to reduce conflict and promote cooperative parenting.

In June 2023 we made a submission from the Commission to the Ministry of Justice consultation paper 'Supporting Earlier Resolution of Private Family Law Arrangements'. We highlighted the importance our report placed on the child's voice being central in family court proceedings, and the need to offer parents information and advice about parenting after divorce with a focus on maintaining loving relationships with their

children. The Government response to the consultation was published in February 2024 laying out an ambitious programme of reform which takes account of many of the Commission’s recommendations. We believe that the Church of England and other faith groups can usefully support the reforms to be introduced during 2024.

We hope to continue conversations with Lord Bellamy and the Ministry of Justice to pursue our recommendation to encourage Registrars to signpost couples applying to marry or enter a civil partnership in a Registry Office to marriage preparation and relationship support services.

DWP

Fruitful conversations have continued with Viscount Younger and DWP officials in respect of the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Programme and the review of the Family Test. Recently, Jan Walker met with key officials to share understanding and thoughts about how the RPC policy might be taken forward and the contributions the Church of England can make to the ongoing cross-departmental review of the Family Test. As the Family Test is refined and re-focused we will look to adapt it for use by the Church of England as it develops its own policies.

We are heartened by the increased cross-departmental focus on supporting relationships and families. We welcome the opportunity and invitation to help shape the government policies relating to reducing parental conflict and the Family Test, and look forward to continuing conversations with Viscount Younger and government officials.

Archbishop’s debate in the House of Lords

In December, *Love Matters* was brought to the attention of Parliament in the Archbishop of Canterbury’s annual debate, which several members of the Commission attended. The debate involved valuable contributions from 18 members across the House on all sides of the benches on various topics raised in the Commission’s report. This was followed by a positive response from the government minister, Viscount Younger of Leckie. The Commission’s focus on the importance of loving relationships was widely welcomed (see [Hansard House of Lords, Vol. 834, No. 19](#) and [House of Lords Library: ‘Strengthening family life in England: Archbishops’ Commission on Families and Households’](#), published 30 November 2023).

Progress within the Church of England

Sharing the Commission Messages

In addition to engagement with government, we have been engaging in different ways with the Church of England. We have been delighted to hear members of the church community around the country refer to ‘*Love Matters*’ in church services and broadcasts and we are grateful to them for spreading the key messages.

Members of the Commission, including Julie Gittoes, Bishop Sophie Jelley and Mary Hawes, have given presentations in local dioceses, deanery synods and PCCs, sharing the report at every opportunity, and including with the Faith and Order Commission. Engagement with Single-Friendly Church has continued. Bishop Sophie presented a paper based on our report at the January meeting of the College of Bishops entitled *Towards a Common Vision of Family Life*. This paper is available from the [Supporting Papers](#) page on the Families and Households Commission website.

Since April 2023, Jan Walker and Bishop Paul have attended a number of church meetings including the College of Bishops, two meetings of the Archbishops' Council and two meetings of General Synod. In September 2023, we ran workshops at the College of Bishops meeting in Oxford on how dioceses and parishes can promote the key messages from the Commission. The feedback we received was extremely positive, and it was exciting to see such an enthusiastic response to our plans. We were urged to produce a booklet/leaflet which could be used locally and we have followed through with this request.

Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop of Canterbury has continued to follow up the messages in Love Matters, looking specifically at the needs of children in families where a parent is in prison and those of children with a parent in the Armed Forces. He has had a number of high-level and confidential conversations focused on how the church can support the work with these families and, especially, with children whose lives are challenged by different circumstances. The discussions may have opened opportunities for the Church of England to engage more closely with those responsible for supporting these groups of families and promoting policies in key government departments. Jan Walker was privileged to be part of some of these discussions and is following up on the themes which emerged, especially with Bishop Hugh Nelson as Bishop to the Armed Forces.

‘Love Matters’ new resources for use in parishes, schools and youth groups

We were delighted and grateful to receive additional funding at the end of 2023 from the Archbishops' Council to produce two sets of resources to further the work of the Commission.

1. Resources for children and young people

The funding has been used to produce two videos, work sheets and lesson plans for schools and youth groups with children and young people to explore the key messages in the report, and to learn about loving relationships. The resources for primary-aged children and secondary-aged young people have been developed by and produced with pupils from the Gosport and Fareham Multi-Academy Trust, some of whom spoke at the launch of *Love Matters* last April. We are hugely grateful to the schools and the pupils for their enthusiasm and their commitment to ensuring that the report's key messages are readily accessible for children and young people. All the resources for children

and young people will be available on the [Commission website](#) in March 2024 and will be circulated widely to schools.

2. **Resources for use locally in parishes deaneries and dioceses**

In response to the request for a briefing booklet, we have developed an 8-page discussion booklet. This enables churches to discuss and engage with the Commission's work through thinking more deeply about how they can further the love exemplified by Jesus Christ and put it at the centre of their local mission and pastoral work. The booklet explores six different themes: family; loving relationships; singleness; children and young people; forgiveness and kindness; and diversity. Each theme has a short introduction, a Bible passage for reflection, suggestions as to what the church can do locally, and a question to encourage discussion about how to implement the key messages in *Love Matters*. These booklets are available in hard copy on request via the Commission email address: familiesandhouseholds@lambethpalace.org.uk.

The booklet is accompanied by six THINK cards each with the key question on the reverse. A template for the THINK cards is available online for download along with the Love Matters booklet. The resources have been piloted in Jan Walker's parish leading to new initiatives for work with young people and their families locally. We will be distributing resources to dioceses across the country during the coming months.

General Synod in February 2024

Since the New Year, we have been planning a fringe event to introduce the production of the new resources and a debate on *Love Matters*, both at the meeting of General Synod. We showcased our new resources at the fringe event and were grateful for the constructive feedback we received, especially about ensuring that these resources are circulated and made available at the local level.

At a debate on *Love Matters*, Bishop Paul moved the motion that this Synod:

- a. welcome the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households' Report, "Love Matters";
- b. commend the Report and the Recommendations for consideration in dioceses, deaneries and parishes;
- c. encourage the Archbishops' Council to develop practical responses in line with the vision and priorities to be a 'younger, more diverse; mixed ecology and missionary discipleship church' believing that the recommendations in "Love Matters" will aid the implementation of this vision; and
- d. urge HM Government to implement the recommendations made to Government, and look forward to receiving a full Government response to all the recommendations.'

A thoughtful debate followed with considerable support for the motion which was passed in all three Houses. We look forward to the further

engagement with the recommendations this will bring within the Church.

The fringe meeting and the debate mark the last events which Bishop Paul will host as Bishop of Durham. At the end of Synod, he received a standing ovation following a beautiful and moving tribute from the Archbishop of York for Paul's amazing work and ministry.

Progress within the Community

Since the launch of the Commission report we have engaged with organisations and individuals whose work we featured in *Love Matters*.

Coram

Archbishop Justin and Archbishop Stephen launched the Commission report at Coram's headquarters – a fitting venue for a report that talks about the need to protect and support children and young people, giving them the best start in life. We have continued to work with [Coram](#), who have been particularly supportive of the Commission and enthusiastic about finding new ways to take our recommendations forward, linking them with other organisations and encouraging greater cooperation with the church. In April 2024, Jan Walker will be speaking at their conference in Leamington Spa.

The Parents Promise

One of the Commission's recommendations was to promote the use of the *Parents' Promise* wherever possible in the church and in government. It encourages parents to make a promise to ensure that their children are supported and loved if at any time in the future parents decide to separate. We regard this as an important resource tool for the church to use at baptisms and for agencies working with couples at the transition to parenthood. We have held several meetings with James Hayhurst, the founder of the *Parents' Promise*, and linked him with other organisations in the community, with government and with members of the Church of England. This will hopefully enable James to further promote the importance of prioritising the needs of children in situations of parental separation.

Safe Families

We have continued to promote the work of [Safe Families](#) with the Secretary of State for Education, in local authorities and with developing Family Hubs. Since our report was published Safe Families has launched its [Belonging Course](#) which we have been promoting. Working in local communities we have successfully linked Safe Families with parish churches, other faith groups and a local MP to ensure that faith communities and Safe Families have a seat at the table when Family Hubs are being set up locally. As more churches engage with Safe Families they are able to offer increased support to local families in a variety of ways, harnessing the human resources that churches can provide.

Grow Baby International

Having featured the charitable work of Growbaby International in the Commission's report, a member of the Commission, Carole Kaplan, was invited to present the Commission's work at the Annual Growbaby conference in September 2023. Growbaby International have expressed an interest in assessing the impact of their work as we suggested in our report, and we will continue to support them to promote and evaluate their work and to create opportunities for local churches to engage with them.

Relationships Alliance

Jan Walker held meetings with members of the Relationship Alliance to consider how our recommendations relating to relationships support and marriage preparation might be taken forward in collaboration with the Church of England, and to foster links with other organisations such as the Parents Promise.

The Children's Commissioner for England

Our ongoing engagement with Dame Rachel De Souza DBE, the Children's Commissioner for England, and her staff has been encouraging. She has continued to express her support for the messages and our recommendations, particularly as many of the recommendations in *Love Matters* are aligned with those in her own *Family Review*. We are awaiting the publication of a joint response from the Government to both reports and we look forward to continued dialogue and partnership with Dame Rachel.

Sarum College

The Commission explored the importance of wellbeing and relational intelligence and how children can develop relational capability. Since our report was published, a member of the Commission, David French, has progressed the thinking about teaching and learning about relationships and relational intelligence. To that end, fruitful conversations with the Principal of Sarum College have resulted in the proposal for a residential meeting at Sarum College in July this year. This is an exciting platform for focusing on how church schools might take this idea forward in



Looking ahead

With this update, we bid farewell to Bishop Paul as the Co-Chair of the Commission as he retires as the Bishop of Durham. His enthusiasm for and commitment to the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households has been tremendous. We are much indebted to him for his wisdom, insight and energy. While he intends to move home and take a break over the next six months, we are in no doubt that he will continue to support and take a lively interest in the implementation of the Commission's messages and recommendations. Every member of the Commission wishes Paul and Rosemary every happiness for the future. We look forward to continued dialogue in the autumn.

We also bid farewell to Becky Plummer, Bishop Paul's Parliamentary Researcher, who has worked with us and supported us in our work since the launch of Love Matters. We thank her for all her help and wish her every success in her career going forward. Our thanks go also to Will Fremont-Brown and Clare Williams who have continued to provide their advice and support.

We will continue to liaise with government, stakeholders and the Church of England to implement our recommendations and share the key messages of Love Matters. We look forward to working closely with Bishop Jonathan Frost and Bishop Martyn Snow as we do so, and welcome the support of the Archbishops and other members of the Church of England.

Emeritus Professor Janet Walker OBE

March 2024

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/families-and-households/news/stakeholder-update-archbishops>