



## Archbishops' Commission on Families & Households Stakeholder Update April 2022

### Activities

The Families and Households Commission marked the beginning of spring with its latest full Commission meeting, with the usual range of activities around the main event.

### *Spark2Life*



A number of Commission members were welcomed by one of their own, Dez Brown, who delivered a tour of Spark2Life, an organisation that seeks to reach, relate to, and equip young people to make positive and informed life choices. Commission members heard about Spark2Life's work with medium to high risk young people through mentoring, its detached work which takes services to young people who are disengaged from institutions, and casework for young people who have been referred from a service, aiming to affect the young person's values and beliefs.

Dez explained that whilst Spark2Life is a faith-based organisation, having evolved out of youth ministry, it is not faith-biased. Spark2Life employs many people with lived experience, enabling them to build authentic relationships with young people who find themselves in similar situations as the staff members. Commission members had the privilege of meeting with many of the staff members, who shared powerful testimonies of their experiences and their motivation for working with young people.

As always, a number of Commission members spent the evening before the main meeting by gathering with a group of young people to hear their views about family life. These young people, based in Pentecostal churches in East London, shared their perspectives about the challenges raised by depictions of what it means to be a young person in the media, the reality of peer pressure, and the advantages and disadvantages of social media.



## Government policy

The Commission Chair and Co-Chair, Professor Janet Walker OBE and the Rt Revd Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham, have been engaging closely with politicians and policymakers in recent weeks, including the Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi; Baroness Stedman-Scott, Minister at the Department for Work and Pensions, and Dame Rachel de Souza DBE, Children’s Commissioner for England. Building on these meetings, the Commission invited Jenny Ballantyne, Head of Family Policy Team at DWP, and Patrick Spencer, Senior Policy Adviser to the Education Secretary, for a breakfast meeting about strengthening and supporting families through government policy. The speakers focused on DWP’s Reducing Parental Conflict programme, and the Government’s investment in childcare and the children’s social care system. Commission members engaged the officials in a lively discussion of issues including the need to shift cultural attitudes about parenting, the difficulties faced by children and young people when parents separate, and the political choices to solve challenges relating to family life.

## Call for Evidence

The Commission has been continuing to analyse the 391 responses received from members of the public and organisations to the Call for Evidence. Professor Walker and Will Fremont-Barnes delivered presentations about the main findings to date, with much fuller descriptions available on the Commission’s website through individual [briefing papers](#). The responses reveal a number of fascinating insights, many of which are consistent with trends identified by others, and some of which reveal new insights through testimonies and examples of what family and household life is like today, as well as making helpful suggestions as to how the Church of England can help families and households to flourish.



## Identifying key themes



It was a pleasure to welcome not only Commission members but several of the Commission's expert advisers – Katharine Hill (*middle picture above*), Dr Jane McCarthy, and Professor Adrian Thatcher – to assist the work streams with their deliberations during the day. The Commissioners also participated in a speed-dating exercise (most appropriately given the Commission's focus on how intimate relationships are formed and maintained!), which enabled Commission members focusing on different areas to compare notes and identify areas of overlapping interest.

Each of the four work streams delivered a presentation about their activities – including personal research, visits, and round tables – and shared their emerging thinking. The Commission is continuing to gather evidence into the summer, so please get in touch if you would like to engage with any of the work streams, which are focusing on:

- 1) theology of families and households;
- 2) social history of families and households;
- 3) children and young people; and
- 4) couple relationships.

## Working with other Commissions

In addition to meeting with Dr Anna Dixon MBE, the Chair of the Archbishops' Commission on Reimagining Care, Professor Walker and Bishop Paul have been engaging with the Archbishops' Commission on Racial Justice.

It was a privilege to welcome Lord Boateng (*pictured*), who served as a Cabinet Minister in the Labour Government from 2002-05 and now sits in the House of Lords, to hear about his involvement in the Church's ministry as Chair of the Archbishops' Commission on Racial Justice. Lord Boateng (*pictured*) emphasised the





importance of the CofE making progress in the pursuit of racial justice and that this process must involve everyone, not just church leaders but everyone in the pews and wider community. Despite all of the focus on racial justice in society, it can be hard to call out racism because we live in a world that would rather not dwell on evil and sin. With all the zeal one would expect of a Methodist lay preacher, Lord Boateng urged the Families and Households Commission to remember the Church's calling to bring people to Christ and manifest his kingdom on Earth. Whilst there are some who believe that the CofE is irredeemable on the issue of race, Lord Boateng urged the Commissions to remember that we share a bigger identity as followers of the risen Lord, and the Church must therefore fashion a Christ-centred identity. The Commissions left the meeting with a renewed sense of purpose to work together on issues of racial justice, particularly as they relate to family and household flourishing.

### Upcoming events

The Commission will be meeting again in Birmingham at the beginning of May. A number of webinars, round tables and visits are taking place in the coming weeks. From Monday 25<sup>th</sup> April – Monday 6<sup>th</sup> June, the Commission will be running a Call for Reflections, focusing on the views of children and young people. As always, we are keen to hear from as many young voices as possible from around England so please do amplify the Call for Reflections in your networks. More information and the downloadable resources can be found [here](#) split into age groups 7-11; 12-15 and 16+.

### Commission News Updates

We have two guest blogs this month: [Dr Gabriela Misca](#), Senior Lecturer in Psychology, University of Worcester and one of the Commission's expert advisers, introduces current research into how lockdowns have impacted families in ways not seen before. [Martin Dickson](#), Director of Church Relationships at Safe Families UK, describes the immense damage that loneliness causes to thousands of people and suggests that intentional proximity, hospitality, and reciprocal friendship enable churches to address the problem.

We welcome your thoughts and comments about the topics we are exploring – please contact us via the secretariat email: [familiesandhouseholds@lambethpalace.org.uk](mailto:familiesandhouseholds@lambethpalace.org.uk)