

THE ARCHBISHOPS OF
CANTERBURY & YORK

LOVE MATTERS

Summary Report of the Archbishops'
Commission on Families & Households



To read the Commission’s full report, please go to:
churchofengland.org/families-and-households

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Foreword

by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York



It is appropriate that the third in a trilogy of reports we have commissioned since 2019 – the first on housing, the second on care and support – should conclude with a focus on families and households. Our flourishing as a society depends on the flourishing of our families and households, the base unit of our communities. We can only solve the most intractable policy challenges of our times by ensuring that families and households are at the heart of our collective thinking and actions.

‘Love Matters’ focuses on issues to which we can all relate in some way, for good and ill. Whether it is those we live with, are related to, or the people we choose, family is usually the source of both our greatest joy and deepest sorrow. It is the place where we find our most profound fulfilment and most intense disappointment, where we experience the messiness and wonder of life.

As its title suggests, this report reminds us about the force that has an almost unique power to transform lives and communities: love.

Love is what must bind us together if we are all to flourish. We are not referring here to love as an emotional feeling, but rather that which takes us into the realm of deep, sacrificial, enduring commitment to the flourishing of one another. This kind of love is at the very heart of the Good News: for God so loved the world that he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to live among us, to demonstrate a radical new way of relating to one another, to show abundant care, grace and mercy to the least likely people.

We pray ‘Thy Kingdom Come’ in eager expectation that Jesus will return to establish a perfect new creation, but also in the knowledge that its realisation feels distant for many families and households. The pandemic touched every aspect of our family life and relationships. The cost-of-living crisis means that life can become a perpetual struggle for survival. Too many children and young people grow up in the midst of conflict. Discrimination, division and deep inequality are pernicious barriers to those seeking life in all its fullness.

‘Love Matters’ delivers a powerful, deeply compelling call to action for all of us: put families first – place the hopes, needs, priorities and aspirations of families at the very centre. The Government must be attentive to the material and relational needs of families and households. The Church of England must lead by example, witnessing to the love of God, seeking the common good, providing a place of safety and welcome for everyone. As individuals, whether married, single, in a couple, or any other form of household, we are called to commit to relationships of all kinds that build up one another.

For the sake of our families and households, this report asks us to reimagine a kinder, fairer, more forgiving society: kinder, because we all need the support, care and love of others; fairer, because we are all diminished when any are held back; more forgiving, because we all make mistakes and are all dependent on the mercy of one another and of God.

We thank the Commission Members for their work, which is the product of deep thought, care and vision. They have asked us to do something radical: to prioritise family; to say loudly and boldly that love-in-action is the foundation of all human life.

Archbishop Justin Welby & Archbishop Stephen Cottrell



Key Messages

We must...

Support relationships throughout life,

ensuring that everyone is able to develop and maintain loving and caring relationships, manage conflict well and promote the flourishing of individuals and families.

Value families in all their diversity, meeting their basic needs by putting their wellbeing at the heart of Government policymaking and our community life, including religious communities.

Honour singleness and single person households, recognising that loving relationships matter to everyone.

Empower children and young people, developing their relational skills and knowledge, recognising their value and agency, protecting them from harm, and giving them the best start in life.

Build a kinder, fairer, more forgiving society, removing discrimination, division and deep inequality for the sake of every family and household.

Key Priorities for Action

We must...

Maximise
the protective
effect of
family.

Ensure that
all loving
relationships
matter and
are valued in
everything
we do.

Give every
child the
best possible
start in life.

Tackle the
societal issues
which limit
people's ability
to flourish.





Report Summary

A STORY OF HOPE, OPPORTUNITY AND LOVE

The key messages from the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households are unambiguous: families matter, relationships matter and love matters.

The Commission's report, *Love Matters*, tells a powerful story of hope, opportunity and love at a time when families and households are facing many challenges. Loving relationships are crucial to our health and wellbeing, whatever our age, background, faith or gender. They enable us to live in community with one another. They increase our capacity to care for one another. They enrich our lives and help us to enrich others. Everything we have seen and learned has emphasised the importance of loving relationships in our daily lives. Living in community is at the very core of who we are. Our vision, which puts relationships and families at the centre, is relevant to people of all faiths and none.

The Commission's story began in 2018 when the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, encouraged people to reimagine Britain.¹ He recognised that family life in the twenty-first century is fluid and diverse. This is true whether we live alone, with family members, with a group of friends, or with others in a shared household. Family is the unifying factor across geographical, cultural and socio-economic boundaries. Ensuring that families and households of all shapes and sizes are places where people of all ages, cultures, faiths and no faith are best supported to flourish is a moral and practical imperative.

Archbishop Justin recognised that family life can be the greatest source of contentment and hope, and also the main place of despair and the cause of unhappiness and trauma. He drew attention to the inequalities in society as the most unjust and destabilising feature. So, in

¹ Welby, J (2018) *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope*, Bloomsbury

2021, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York established the Commission on Families and Households to answer two key questions:

1. **How can we best support every individual and every family to flourish in our complex and ever-changing society?**
2. **What kind of society do we want to live in?**

These are big and challenging questions. Members of the Commission,² each with deep personal experience of the sadness, delights, challenges and joys associated with family and household life, spent two years meeting with and listening to children, young people and adults. They came from a variety of cultural backgrounds, some with faith and others with none, living in different kinds of family and household structures across England. We discovered what matters to them, their hopes, dreams and concerns for the future. Commissioners had the privilege of sharing a moment in time with people who welcomed us into their homes and communities. They enabled us to pause, reflect and re-evaluate what it means to seek the common good, and understand the factors which assist everyone to thrive.

'Love Matters' describes our activities and offers answers to the questions posed to us. It uses the rich and varied words of the young people and adults who spoke to us openly, movingly and inspirationally about their lives. It exposes the thorny issues facing families and households in England today, and looks at how these can be tackled. It talks about the visits we made and programmes designed to assist families and households.³

Drawing on the evidence, our report offers recommendations to the Church of England and to government. We list these at the end of this Summary. We are aware that some recommendations will require resources to be allocated. Where appropriate, we have indicated in the full report how the recommendations to the Church of England might be taken forward. We hope that other churches, faith communities, and organisations in the public and private sectors, particularly those working with children and families, will find them relevant and thought-provoking.

Our story has been guided and enriched at every stage by an in-depth exploration of Christian theology and learning from Scripture and tradition. We share this learning at appropriate points throughout the report. The Bible tells a story which speaks to the very heart of what it is to be human – the questions, hurts and struggles; the joys, blessings and hopes – offering inspiration and challenge. Our conversations with leaders and members of different faiths revealed many shared concerns, aspirations and values, and highlighted the enormous power of inter-faith collaboration in a society which so often is fragmented.

In this Summary Report we refer to the wealth and richness of the Commission's evidence. We offer a short guide to our vision for a kinder, fairer, and more forgiving society in which every individual, family and household is enabled to flourish. The full Commission Report provides the evidence and learning from our activities over the last two years, and celebrates many wonderful initiatives taking place across the country.

² Information about the Commissioners can be found at the end of this report.

³ Briefing papers about the Commission's activities and the evidence we collected can be found on the Commission's website <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/families-and-households/briefing-papers>

Understanding Families and Celebrating Diversity in Family Life

What is family?

We began by examining what we mean by 'family'. While the terms 'family' and 'household' are frequently used interchangeably, the Commission adopted the definitions used by the Office for National Statistics in line with official documents. We use 'household' to refer to individuals not living within a family group, living on their own or in houses of multiple occupancy with shared spaces. We use 'family' to refer to people identifying themselves as living in a family group primarily, but not exclusively, under the same roof. Everyone will experience different kinds of family or household during their lifetime: from the early years, throughout adulthood and, potentially, into old age, reflecting the greater choice we now have about how we conduct our relationships.

We asked children, young people and adults what 'family' means to them. While most people described close family members, many also described friends, work colleagues, neighbours and members of faith communities as being 'like family'. This was especially so for children and young people not living with their birth family, who had built close relationships with their friends and carers. To be considered as 'family' does not necessitate a certain type of relationship or a specific family form. What matters is the depth of the connections and the support which can always be relied upon. Our evidence shows that it is in our families where people of all ages should be able to:

- give and receive love
- grow and be themselves
- be confident in their identity and their place in the world
- find belonging and security
- receive stable and consistent care
- feel safe
- make mistakes and be forgiven
- forgive others
- learn about trust, respect, commitment and values
- learn to manage conflict well and understand the power of reconciliation
- learn about appropriate boundaries

For people of faith, their family is where they learn about and grow in faith together. Family is where children should feel safe, be fed, nurtured, protected, cared for and loved. We refer to these characteristics as the ingredients of 'family-ness'.

The need for love

The vast majority of adults and young people referred to love as the central and most important feature of being a family. Yet, as the Children's Commissioner for England has pointed out, despite frequent portrayals of 'love' in popular culture, love is rarely referred to in any analysis of family life, nor in policies and services which aim to support families.⁴ We want this to change.

⁴ Children's Commissioner for England (2022) *Family Review Part 1: Family and its protective effects*.

Unconditional love provides a blueprint for strong relationships and human flourishing. The Bible helps us here. In the New Testament we have a vivid yet simple understanding of love in its purest form, setting the principles for how we should relate to each other. The Apostle Paul writes that love is not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude. It does not insist on getting its own way, is not irritable or resentful. Rather, love is patient, kind, seeks the truth, believes, hopes, puts up with all things, and is never-ending. This passage frames love not as an unattainable ideal, but something which is deeply practical. It is a commitment to give to – and promote the flourishing of – another person. We concluded that if every family and household could aspire to this kind of loving as the foundation on which flourishing can be achieved, then our society would be stronger, kinder, fairer, more forgiving and more just.

As most of us know from experience, family life can be messy, difficult and painful. It is our love for one another which often gets us through the bad times. A loving family can provide a strong protective effect when circumstances are tough. Without love, loneliness, isolation and poor mental health may make it even more difficult to cope. We might have been tempted to conclude that all we need is love, but however deep our love for others, it is unlikely to be sufficient on its own to ensure that everyone can flourish.

What else do we need to flourish?

One dominant theme emerged: for an individual and a family to flourish, each person must have their basic needs met as a pre-requisite. These include shelter, water, food, clothing and having enough money to live on. Without a roof over our head, without food, and without any money, daily life becomes a huge struggle for survival.

True flourishing also requires a sense of belonging, being part of a social group with

friendship, intimacy and affection. Learning to communicate well and deal with conflict constructively are also key aspects of being able to flourish. These characteristics create a supportive structure of loving relationships, belonging and connectedness. We can say with confidence that unless each individual is able to flourish, whether living with family members, in an unrelated group, or as a single person, each family and each household will not flourish.

How can we foster loving relationships and promote stability in family life?

In order to reimagine a society with a firm foundation based on 'family', we traced the changes in family life over several hundred years. Now, increasing numbers of children are growing up without both biological parents being present. They often experience a range of family structures during childhood. Cohabitation is increasing as the number of couples who choose to marry decreases. The number of relationships that end in separation and divorce has increased. These shifts have led to serious concerns that the values associated with more 'traditional' family life are under threat and in decline.

Having talked to many young people and adults, we concluded that neither the importance of family and marriage nor the values that surround them are in decline. Most young people told us that they expect to be married at some time in their life, but it might be some way into the future after they have established a career and pursued other interests. There is a clear distinctiveness about marriage. It represents an important rite of passage and publicly recognises statements of life-long commitment between the partners. In the last ten years this rite of passage has been extended to include the legal recognition of committed, loving relationships between partners of the same sex.



Despite the societal recognition of same-sex partnerships, however, differences between civil and religious approaches to marriage remain. The deep divisions in the Church of England were played out in our Call for Evidence.⁵ We heard a strong endorsement from many people of the importance of marriage as it has been traditionally understood within the Church of England, and an equally strong call for the Church of England to recognise the legitimacy of all committed couple relationships, to be more inclusive and more accepting of diversity. We reflect these different views in our report.

The Commission looked carefully at the increasing dislocation of sexual acts and behaviours from marriage and from the social commitments within which sexual intimacy was previously understood. Pressure, especially on young people, to engage in sexual intercourse, often before either partner has considered the implications, has encouraged a belief

that sex is simply a leisure activity, rather than an expression of love in a committed relationship. This highlights a huge shift in cultural expectations of marriage as the primary setting for sexual intimacy and commitment, to marriage being just one setting among others for intimate sexual relationships and raising children.

Marriage is still a valued goal and a positive option for many. Marriage embodies core values which bolster committed couple relationships and family stability, and encourages the unconditional love which individuals and families need to flourish. The choices about marriage vary by ethnicity, religion and economic status. Religious beliefs are significant for couples who would not be comfortable living together and having children outside a partnership sanctioned by their faith. Families with no religious beliefs have the highest percentage of cohabiting partners, twice as many as Christian

⁵ Presented in full in the Commission Briefings on our website

families, and considerably more than those from other religions. Faith groups have a significant role to play both in promoting and supporting marriage, and in drawing on the beliefs and values of Christian and other faiths to support couple relationships to flourish.

Entering into a faithful, committed couple relationship is one of the most significant things that any of us will do. Yet there is little emphasis in society on preparing us for this, except in the Roman Catholic faith. We heard many calls for marriage preparation to be a requirement for couples intending to marry in the Church of England, as happens in the Roman Catholic Church. The focus of preparation should be on understanding and thinking about the reality of sustaining a long-term loving relationship. The Commission argues for relationship preparation and support to be available to all couples planning to marry. Ideally this would also be available to couples planning to cohabit and those planning to marry in a civil ceremony.

Funding for relationship support has been the responsibility of different government departments over the decades and the scope has been gradually narrowed. We urge the Government to invest in accessible and affordable relationship support. This should be available for all couples facing relationship difficulties, long before the relationship breaks down. This would best be established in a strong cross-government approach to all aspects of relationship support. The Commission also urges the Church of England, in partnership with others, to find ways to offer relationship and marriage preparation and ongoing pastoral support to all couples. Our collective focus should be on enhancing relationships and addressing the stressors that challenge them. Society benefits when relationships flourish and bears the cost when they fall apart.

When love is not enough

Some relationships will end, especially when trust and communication have broken down and when the relationship is unhealthy or abusive. Neither marriage, civil partnership nor cohabitation can guarantee a happy and contented long-term partnership. The ending of a couple relationship is often a slow and painful process. Relationships usually deteriorate over time and the decision to separate is rarely taken lightly or without a great deal of soul-searching, especially if children are involved. We heard the distress caused by unresolved conflict, especially when it extends into months and sometimes years after parents have split up. Extensive research shows that conflict between parents is most damaging to relationships and to children's wellbeing, rather than separation itself. So the focus must be on reducing conflict and enabling parents to co-parent in the very best interests of their children.

The Commission welcomes the introduction of the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020, which removes the need for one partner to allege fault against the other. The end to an adversarial approach to separation and divorce offers a golden opportunity to do more to enable parents to consider carefully the serious step they are taking. The Commission recommends that the 20-week period of reflection after a divorce application has been made must be used well, and high-quality support should be freely offered to parents and to children as early as possible.

The Commission urges the Church of England to adopt a culture of openness, encouraging couples to talk in confidence about struggles they are having in their relationship without fear of being judged or alienated from the church family. Churches can offer kindness, comfort and pathways to peace. Love matters whatever circumstances people find themselves in, and offering God's love can be both healing and restorative.

Valuing singleness

As the Commission affirmed the importance of love as an essential ingredient in all relationships, we thought about the growing number of people who do not live in a couple relationship or with family members. Singleness can be a deliberate choice – sometimes the right partner has not been found, and sometimes separation, divorce or death has resulted in the loss of a partner. Inevitably, singleness does not necessarily imply celibacy, although this is the choice some single people in faith communities make.

The Commission believes strongly that single people must be valued at the heart of our society. Jesus' own singleness should ensure that the Church of England celebrates singleness and does not regard it as lesser than living in a couple relationship. Loving relationships and being able to give and receive love matter to everyone. We have an amazing opportunity to reimagine a diverse society in which all families and loving relationships are valued and strengthened, promoting the stability that enables us all to thrive in a variety of family constellations, including being single.



Every Child Matters

We believe that every single child should be valued, loved and supported to flourish from the moment of conception, through childhood and beyond. We recognise that every child is unique and deserves to have the very best start in life. Our example is Jesus himself, who overtly welcomed children, making it clear that the Kingdom of God belongs to them.

In *'Love Matters'* we celebrate the resourcefulness, strength and capacity of young people to talk about difficult and sensitive issues. Together with the Children's Commissioner for England and the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood we underline the importance of the first 1,000 days in a child's life.

Children and young people want to live in happy homes. However, *The Good Childhood Report 2021*,⁶ undertaken by The Children's Society, showed that children's mean happiness scores for life as a whole, their friends, appearance, and school were significantly lower in 2019/20 than ten years earlier in 2009/10. We looked carefully at the adverse child experiences (ACEs) which are associated with poor child outcomes, and noted that these are more prevalent among families who are poor, isolated or living in deprived circumstances. Family functioning is negatively impacted by parental conflict, domestic abuse, mental illness, substance abuse and poverty.⁷ These difficulties often come in multiple, cumulative clusters that further inhibit the protective effect of family and render it increasingly difficult for children to flourish.

The evidence suggests that some 27 per cent of children in the UK live in poverty. About one-third of children live with at least one parent experiencing anxiety and depression. Some half a million children live with a parent who is dependent on alcohol or drugs, and substance abuse often links with other family stressors including housing and financial instability, mental health problems, and crime. Children who witness domestic abuse at home are more likely to have difficulty in school, abuse drugs or alcohol, act aggressively, suffer from depression or other mental health problems and engage in criminal behaviour as adults. While it is difficult to measure the prevalence of ACEs with any precision, we need to give children a good start in life by taking a number of steps. We must find ways to reduce parental conflict. We need to provide children with the skills and coping strategies that increase their resilience to stress and adversity. We have to improve children's mental health and wellbeing, and enhance the protective effects of family. Finding remedies is urgent.

Every parent matters

The protective effect of family depends on the quality of family relationships. They need to be loving, strong and enduring, irrespective of family structure and parenting arrangements. Interventions need to be embedded within holistic public health policies and strategies. This implies investment in parenting support so parents can nurture children in their early years.

⁶ The Children's Society (2021) *The Good Childhood Report* <https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/good-childhood-report-2021>

⁷ References to all our evidence are available in the full Commission report.



The need to protect children from cruelty and harm and to support parents who are struggling remain paramount. Mental health conditions, substance misuse, domestic abuse and poverty may combine to make parental relationships unstable and put children at risk of abuse and neglect. Certain groups of children are more at risk than others, including children born prematurely, those with a disability or complex health needs, children in care, and asylum seekers.

We heard a clear call for the Church of England and faith communities to be alert to the needs of parents who are finding parenting difficult. There needs to be more openness to talk about difficulties, offering support in a kind, non-judgemental way, and working in partnership with others. Awareness of the signs of possible child abuse and neglect is essential. We are very concerned that more children were in

care in 2019/20 than in 2009/10, and numbers are predicted to increase. These children need caring, loving homes where they can develop a sense of security and belonging. Some children experience repeated moves and disruptions in their care. This can result in poor outcomes in terms of health, education, unemployment, criminal behaviour, and homelessness in adulthood.

We agree with the review of children's social care⁸ which argues for a complete reset of the system. Loving relationships hold the key for all the children and young people who come into care. This can often be provided by kinship carers. We welcome the publication of the Government's implementation strategy and consultation.⁹ Investment in a new approach to Family Help and a more integrated child protection response will take forward the Government's ambition to 'put love, relationships

⁸ MacAlister, J., (2021) *The Case for Change: The Independent Review of Children's Social Care*.

⁹ Department for Education, (February 2023): *Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation* CP 780

and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care.’ The Commission calls on the Government to implement all the recommendations of the MacAlister review as quickly as possible and to improve radically the experience of social care, the outcomes for children and the recognition of carers.

The Commission encourages the Church of England, other churches and faith communities to talk openly about difficulties in parenting which most families face at some time. Faith communities can help to de-stigmatise these issues by recognising that parents’ own mental health is critical in their being able to nurture and support their children. In our Commission report we shine a light on some of the exciting initiatives that are supporting parents and children. Daniel’s Den, Safe Families, Children North East and the Mill Grove Community, to name but a few, all offer strong templates for cooperative working between faith communities, charities and local government.

Recognising and
supporting young carers

Children who are exposed to abuse and neglect are often hidden from public view. So, too, are many of the 800,000 young carers who look after a family member, often a parent or a sibling, with a mental or physical health issue, who is disabled or has an addiction. Young carers may become exposed to criminal gangs or commit crimes if they need money. We are aware that young carers can be very adept at making themselves invisible, taking their caring responsibilities seriously and quietly, and not making a fuss. In order to support and come alongside young carers we need to be especially vigilant and spot when a young person is hiding in plain sight.

Learning and Listening

Our attention increasingly focused on how children and young people learn about relationships. We explored how to enable them to build relational capability. We want their voices to be heard and their wishes, feelings and concerns to be understood.

Babies begin to relate as they develop in the womb. From birth, they relate to those around them, especially parents. As they grow and spend time in a playgroup, nursery, faith community, and at school, children relate to a variety of other children and adults across social, cultural, ethnic and faith boundaries. Christian teaching puts emphasis on starting children off on the right path in life, respecting their vulnerability and enabling them to put their trust in the adults around them. One obvious way to build relational capability in children is to strengthen parents’ ability to nurture and to foster a strong relationship with each other so that children learn to relate well by experiencing stable, loving relationships in the home.

In 2020, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) was put on a statutory footing alongside Health Education in England. The Commission welcomes the focus on helping children and young people to develop personal attributes such as kindness, integrity, generosity and honesty. We recommend that the focus must always be on instilling the importance of love and respect in all relationships, and helping young people to understand fully the implications of engaging in sexual activities at a young age. We formed the view that the ethos and culture of the school in promoting healthy, caring, kind relationships between pupils in all aspects of school life teaches far more than any structured programme.

The Commission agrees with The Royal Foundation that parents cannot do everything on their own, and that learning about loving relationships requires input from all those who

have contact with children from an early age. This requires close collaboration between home, school and the community.

The Church of England’s *Growing Faith* movement¹⁰ seeks to put children, young people and families at the heart of the mission and ministry of the Church through a partnership between the three communities of ‘Church, School and Household’. We visited schools, talking with pupils, teachers and school pastors who ‘walk alongside’ young people when they are worried or stressed, modelling kind, caring relationships while listening to children. Children who are encouraged to build the foundations for forming effective relationships in their early years will continue to develop their relational skills. Information about our school visits and the impressive initiatives we saw in action are discussed fully in our Commission report.

Pornography

We heard much about the prevalence of pornography, which demeans and damages human beings. It provides a distorted view of sexual intimacy, and fuels misogynistic attitudes and behaviours. Pornography shapes what children and young people believe is appropriate behaviour when they are groomed and coerced into filming themselves naked or engaging in sexual acts which are subsequently posted on pornographic websites. We learned that a third of ten-year old children have looked at pornographic material online, and that racism and sexism are both implicit and explicit in a large amount of this material.

In *Love Matters*’ we share our conversations with *The Naked Truth* Project and the extremely alarming stories and statistics about how pornographic material is accessed and its

damaging consequences. The Naked Truth Project has released a new resource for churches and faith communities. If children and young people are to develop healthy, loving relationships and build relational capability, it is essential that they learn about the harmful impacts of pornography and sexual behaviours that are not grounded in love, mutual respect and trust.

Listening to children
and young people

Finding time to listen to children and young people, taking their wishes, dreams, views and concerns seriously, is essential if they are to be at the centre of the Church of England’s vision for a younger and more diverse Church. Listening to children and young people empowers them, builds their resources and develops their skills and their knowledge.

We listened to the personal, often harrowing, stories of children and young people who had experienced both the family and the criminal justice systems in England. The Commission is firmly of the view that listening to children and young people should encourage better understanding of these experiences from a child’s point of view, alongside their reflections on the support and interventions that protect the integrity of family relationships. Our conversations with members of the Family Justice Young People’s Board (FJYPB) confirmed our recommendations to government in respect of the support that must be available when parents indicate they are planning to divorce. The Commission asks the Government to address delays in the family justice system as a matter of extreme urgency.

¹⁰ The Growing Faith Foundation / The Church of England: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/education-and-schools/growing-faith-foundation>

Solving youth violence and tackling gang culture

While the number of young people involved in the youth justice system has fallen since the pandemic, of considerable concern is the disproportionate representation of black children at all stages in youth justice. Black children are more likely to be stopped and searched than children from other ethnicities and over four times more likely to be arrested than white children. We took evidence from two organisations working specifically with children and young people from Global Majority Heritage backgrounds living in socially deprived inner-city areas. Staff seek to empower young people and support their families. We describe these impressive programmes in the Commission report.

Our discussions with police and other agencies have revealed that of the young people involved in youth violence, 50 per cent have witnessed significant domestic abuse, and 66 per cent are not in full-time education. Moreover, children,

some as young as six or seven, are involved in carrying drugs as part of county lines activities. While children from any community can be groomed into county lines, those from poor households, those who regularly skip school or have problems at home, and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, may be more at risk.

Agencies working with young people suggest that there are a number of ways in which the Church of England can support them. It starts by understanding where harm occurs and the triggers that drive young people into crime. It explores the provision of safe environments where young people can socialise, relationships can be built and their stories listened to. It means not turning away if they look, seem or are threatening. When talking to a young person involved in criminal activities, instead of pointing the finger of blame we should be asking ourselves how society has failed this child. At the heart of the Christian faith is the offer of forgiveness and fresh beginnings.



Living in our Time

In our story we have focused on the centrality of strong, stable, caring relationships in our lives. We have explored the factors which enable children and adults to thrive and those which limit their opportunities. Throughout history the ability to flourish has been influenced by the world in which people live. For example, the Bible is full of stories of people facing disasters – resolving social problems has never been easy. Today's challenges often seem overwhelming, but in order to provide hope for the future and suggest ways for everyone to flourish the Commission took a long hard look at the issues currently facing us and at the actions the Church of England and government must take to address them urgently. This was a sobering experience and the Commission report does not flinch from laying bare the current situation. In this Summary we refer briefly to the most serious issues.

Emerging from the coronavirus pandemic

The COVID-19 virus brought a major health and social care crisis. In Spring 2020, normal life came grinding to a halt. Everyone was told to stay at home, schools and places of worship were closed, weddings were cancelled and we were restricted in our interaction with other people. The country fell silent while large numbers of people contracted the deadly virus, many of whom died. Although repeated periods of lockdown and a highly successful vaccination programme allowed us to return to some kind of normality in 2022, we continue to count the cost. By the beginning of 2023, COVID-19 had been recorded on 211,000 death certificates in the UK and the virus had not gone away.

Some individuals and families coped fairly well and enforced lockdowns provided time to reassess their lives, enjoy new past-times, spend quality time with the family members they live with, and take life at a slower pace. However, for many others life became increasingly intolerable. In 2023 we are picking up the pieces relating to isolation and loneliness, deteriorating mental health, self-neglect and a huge amount of unresolved grief. Family members and close friends not being allowed to be with loved ones as they died or participate in normal end of life rituals was a key cause. It will take years for some people to work through these impacts. Moreover, children and young people lost some two years of regular education and contact with friends. Catching up can be hard.

By looking in more depth at the various responses to the pandemic, the Commission uncovered some deep-seated issues and some of the more worrying aspects of life today, all of which need to be tackled. There is evidence of heightened depressive symptoms and negative health trajectories. Pre-existing problems were exacerbated, especially around mental and physical health, domestic abuse and poverty. Moreover, the pandemic shone a very bright light on the levels of inequality, disadvantage and discrimination in England today.

Racial inequalities and discrimination

During the pandemic the interaction of racial, socio-economic, and health inequalities, and an increase in the risk of mortality among COVID-19 patients from Global Majority Heritage groups, became more obvious. The risk of

mortality resulted from inequalities in the social determinants of health, including conditions in which people live and work. Inequalities between racial or ethnic groups are considered one of the most serious forms of inequality in Britain. People from Black and Asian backgrounds accounted for disproportionately high numbers of critically ill COVID-19 patients and deaths.

Concern about racial inequalities and perceptions of their causes have been influenced by our increasing awareness and understanding as a society about systemic disadvantage. This is long overdue. As we complete our work in March 2023, the Metropolitan Police in London has been described as institutionally racist, misogynistic and homophobic.

While looking at ways to reduce inequality the Commission concluded that it is essential to be specific in our understanding of difference. We must recognise that new patterns of racial inequality are emerging in the UK, while persistently disadvantaged groups such as Black Caribbean youth, Muslim men and women, and Gypsy, Traveller and Roma peoples are still being ‘left behind’. Addressing inequalities in society requires a clear view of the various aspects that influence them, most significantly the racism which affects and hinders our whole society. The existing socio-economic inequalities mean that any attempt to promote the protection and wellbeing of families and households cannot succeed without dealing with these issues.

Health inequalities

In addition to cultural inequalities associated with the pandemic, people with underlying

health conditions were at particular risk. Since 2010 life expectancy in England has stalled, and the decade to 2020 was marked by deteriorating health and widening health inequalities.¹¹ The social determinants of health include conditions in which people are born, live and work, and inequities of power, money and resources. An increase in poverty, deteriorations in education, and the increased life expectancy gap between rich and poor, indicate the need for different policies to tackle health inequalities, including a gap of almost 19 years in healthy life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas in England. People with mental health conditions are among the least likely of any group with long term health problems to find work, be in a steady long-term relationship, live in appropriate and acceptable housing, and be socially included in mainstream society.

In order to address the increase in mental health challenges, structural inequalities must be urgently addressed. Mental health services need to be bolstered, in particular, to ensure that young people can access support readily.¹²

Poverty

The Nuffield Foundation has reported that more than one in three children in families with a child under five are living in poverty. This is a barometer of social injustice in the UK today.¹³ Families living in poverty often lack the stable environment children need. The greater the deprivation the greater the frequency of children experiencing adverse childhood experiences. Rates of child poverty are generally higher for children from some Global Majority Heritage families, and for children living in a family with a child or adult who is disabled. Moreover,

¹¹ Marmot, M., (2020) *Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On*. The Health Foundation
¹² Fancourt, D., and Steptoe, A., (2022) *Tracking the Psychological and Social Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic across the UK Population Findings, Impact, and Recommendations from the COVID-19 Social Study* (March 2020 – April 2022) UCL and Nuffield Foundation
¹³ Oppenheim, C., (2021) *Changing Patterns of Poverty in Early Childhood*. Nuffield Foundation



children living in the poorest neighbourhoods are at least ten times more likely to be in care than children in the richest neighbourhoods. Family poverty and inequality are key drivers of harm to children, and the numbers living in deep poverty or destitution have been rising rapidly over recent years. Parenting in poverty is highly stressful and this in turn impacts adversely on family relationships.¹⁴

The Cost of Living Crisis

The Commission’s concern about the high level of poverty in England has been heightened by the cost of living crisis, hot on the heels of the coronavirus pandemic in 2021. We see all around us that the increase in the cost of living is causing serious difficulty for many individuals and families as gas, electricity and food prices soar. Families on low incomes struggle to make ends meet. Many families will go without or fall behind in their payments for rent and domestic bills.

The choice between heating and eating is a daily misery for many families. Food banks have experienced increasing demand and a reduction in donations since the price rises began and continue to impact everyone. The risk of being food insecure is worse for younger people, single parents, social renters, people in poor health, and members of Global Majority Heritage groups. Food insecurity has dramatic impacts on chronic health conditions for adults and children. Furthermore, being hungry has significant negative impacts on children’s ability to learn, hence pressure on government to provide hot meals for school children at lunchtimes. There are increasing calls for welfare benefits to be increased to disrupt the downward spiral of debt and even more families experiencing poverty.

What the Commission has seen is the pernicious relationship between deprivation, ill-health, poverty, stress and anxiety which reduces life outcomes, wellbeing and the opportunity to flourish. Going hungry and feeling cold put an enormous strain on parents, on older people and those caring for others.

¹⁴ Bywaters, P. and Skinner, G et al (2022) *The Relationship between Poverty and Child Abuse and Neglect: New Evidence* Nuffield Foundation



Housing

The pandemic exacerbated health issues associated with poor housing. The longer people are exposed to poor conditions, including cold, the greater the negative impact on health. Overcrowding and unsuitable housing can cause stress, depression and anxiety. Children living in these conditions are likely to have poorer physical and mental health, do less well at school and exhibit behaviour problems. The Archbishops’ Commission on Housing, Church and Community¹⁵ highlighted in 2021 that around 8 million people in England were living in overcrowded, unaffordable, or unsuitable homes. The Housing Commission’s report emphasised that those caught in poverty bear the brunt of overcrowding. Older people, lone-parents, low-income families and people from Global Majority Heritage backgrounds are more likely to live in cold or damp homes.

The lack of suitable social housing to meet the demand, especially when single people are looking for somewhere to live as a result of separation, divorce, or after serving a prison sentence, often causes homelessness. We believe that housing is more than bricks and mortar – it is where we should all feel safe.

Isolation and loneliness

The coronavirus pandemic increased the loneliness and isolation of many people, especially young people and those living alone. Depression can cause loneliness and loneliness can cause depression. We heard many graphic descriptions of the impact of loneliness as people experienced being lonely in new ways during the pandemic. Calls for action emphasise the importance of personal relationships, support services that focus on

¹⁵ Archbishops’ Commission on Housing, Church and Community: (2021) *Coming Home: Tackling the Housing Crisis Together* Church of England

reducing isolation and feelings of loneliness, and access to counselling to deal with depression and bereavement. Living alone does not make someone lonely or isolated, especially if people are well supported and connected. Strong, caring, and loving relationships matter for everyone. It is all too easy to sink into a downward spiral which results in further isolation. Progress in implementing the Government’s loneliness strategy is essential to combat the impacts of loneliness and reduce the stigma associated with it.

Ageing, health and caring

Loneliness and isolation are often associated with ageing. The Commission found that Scripture affords us perspectives on ageing which have the potential to inform our reflections as an ageing society grappling with caring responsibilities. Commissioners heard moving evidence from people who had experienced the ‘loss’ of loved ones, not just as a result of COVID-19, but also as a result of conditions such as dementia and Alzheimer’s. One in three people born in the UK in 2023 will develop dementia in their lifetime.

Caring for someone with dementia is demanding and stressful. Many carers have health issues of their own. Dementia is a growing challenge: as the population ages and people live longer, it has become one of the most urgent health and care issues facing us today. The Archbishops’ Commission on Reimagining Care¹⁶ has put forward a bold strategy to rethink attitudes to care and support, rebalance roles and responsibilities, and redesign the care system through a National Care Covenant.

¹⁶ The Archbishops of Canterbury and York (2023) *Care and Support Reimagined: A National Care Covenant for England*.

Looking beyond our shores

Other global issues impact our ability to flourish and to build a more loving society. These require us to be sensitive to the needs of others, offer appropriate aid and care for our planet.

War in Ukraine

Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine in spring 2022 has brought untold death and destruction in Ukraine and led to many women and children fleeing their homeland to find safety in England and other European countries. The Russian invasion shows no sign of ending as we conclude our Commission’s work and we pray for wisdom, peace and reconciliation before many more thousands of Ukrainian and Russian lives are lost.

Conflict and political unrest

Ongoing conflict and civil wars result in people attempting to find a new, safer life elsewhere, often risking their lives at the mercy of human traffickers to seek asylum.

Natural and humanitarian disasters

The earthquake in Turkey and Syria in February 2023 has resulted in a vast humanitarian crisis, demonstrating clearly how families and friendships are an abiding source of strength and enduring love in the midst of total devastation.

Climate change and global warming

We live with the uncertainty and worrying effects of global warming – an issue which has particularly captured the attention of young people and motivated them to take action. It is a major issue of our time.

All the challenges of our time that we have catalogued in our Commission report are far too serious for any of us to ignore.

Creating a Kinder, Fairer, More Forgiving Society

During the life of our Commission we have seen how families and households are facing an interconnected set of personal and societal challenges threatening their ability to flourish and live the best possible life. The Commission believes that there are numerous opportunities to be creative, to think radically and imaginatively to envisage how individuals and families can flourish. This requires effort from every sector of society, including the Church of England.

In *'Love Matters'* we share our learning and our hopes for a better future. We consider the steps the Church of England and faith communities can take to mitigate societal challenges and make the most of the opportunities to contribute to a flourishing society. We highlight the roles that government and civil society must play to drive necessary change. We describe many

innovative programmes offering support to families and households.

We can build resilience through small acts of kindness which touch the hearts of those receiving them. Churches around the country have developed ways to ensure support is available. Many host food banks and provide warm spaces for people to find friendship and fellowship, and small initiatives designed to meet the needs of families with young children. We recognise, however, that we must tackle the reasons why these needs exist in the first place with committed action from the Government to address their root causes.

The Church of England and faith communities have a long tradition of offering care and support to its community members and, often, to the wider community. Now more than ever, faith



leaders are called on to offer support in response to crises, tragedies and unexpected events. We have seen the power of interfaith-collaboration and the power of community as the Church of England, other churches and faith groups, charities and local organisations work together. Our visits to Slough, Portsmouth, Oxford, York, Birmingham, Newham and Bradford have inspired and humbled Commission members. In our report we describe the amazing work that is being undertaken, with a special focus on Newham and Bradford.

The Church of England and faith communities are spearheading a range of exciting and much-needed initiatives in their local communities to address serious personal and societal challenges facing families and households today. Without systemic change at the highest level in government, large numbers of families and households will go without the support they need and will not be able to flourish. Our main message from the

Commission, in concert with the Children's Commissioner, is that 'family' must be central to the priorities of every government department.

The Commission welcomes the ambitions within the Levelling Up agenda, including a new Youth Guarantee, investment in education and a digital education service, a focus on tackling health inequalities, regenerating local communities, building more affordable social housing and help with buying quality homes, and tackling crime, anti-social behaviour and drug abuse – all of which would appear to be addressing some of the Commission's concerns.

Initiatives are needed to address the vast inequalities which go beyond health and include discrimination, racial prejudice, deprivation and poverty, and discriminatory attitudes and language. A fundamental understanding of what individual and family flourishing looks like and how to promote it requires a substantial change in attitudes to focus on the protective

effect of family. The kind of society we should aspire to is one which values every single human being, recognises the protective effects of loving, caring relationships within families and friendship groups, and builds on everyone’s strengths. It is about social justice and it means putting the needs and priorities of families at the heart of policy-making.

Creating a new,
stronger, Family Test

The Commission argues for a stronger Family Test, first introduced in 2014, to ensure that, at every level of design and application, policy-makers ‘think family’, focusing on supporting lasting, nurturing relationships within families, whatever their shape, size or make-up. An updated test should support the whole family, include wellbeing as an indicator on which policies are assessed, and consider the impact of every policy on the ability of individuals and families to flourish. The Commission suggests that local government, other agencies and the Church of England should apply a Family Test when they are formulating new policies and services.

Family Hubs

Designed to be a one-stop shop where families can receive support and advice, Family Hubs should be places for families to go without fear of stigma. The Government expects Family Hubs, working with local authorities, and local agencies, to improve health and education outcomes for all, reduce inequalities in health and education for children and young people, and build the evidence-base for ‘what works’ in order to share best practice. Good initial work for faith communities working as partners in Family Hubs has been undertaken by the ChurchWorks Commission.

In our Commission report we list a number of ways we believe Family Hubs could be strengthened, working with local churches and faith communities.

Engaging with
the digital world

The world in which children and young people are growing up today is very different from the world in which Commission members grew up. The world tomorrow will look different again. We have argued that listening to the voices of children and young people is essential for their wellbeing, and also for ours as we learn from them. Digital is so integral to a child’s life that we must rethink how best to communicate in new ways. Building trust between the generations and harnessing the power of digital is a challenge for all faith communities.

Looking ahead

All our recommendations seek to put families and relationships at the heart of the Government’s agenda. There is much work to do, but the Commission is heartened by the Prime Minister’s commitment to family in his 2023 New Year message, in which he urged us not to be shy about talking about family, and spoke about love as the common bond. Family must be a central part of our vision. We are at our best in relationship. It is this vision, relevant to people of all faiths and none, that drives the Commission report and its recommendations. It is a vision of a society in which everyone discovers life in all its fullness, where everyone can flourish to be the best that they can be.

Reimagining
the Future

We imagine a society that:

- is kind, fair and forgiving, in which every individual, every household and every family is able and supported to flourish
- values everyone for who they are and celebrates the rich diversity in our society
- seeks the common good and rejects discrimination and inequality

A kinder society puts relationships at the heart of everything we do, recognises the importance of living well together and working through difficult issues.

A fairer society removes discrimination, division and deep inequalities.

A more forgiving society recognises that no-one is perfect, we all make mistakes and need to forgive and be forgiven.

In this society:

- love will permeate our relationships and our daily lives
- each of us will be able to love and be loved
- children and young people will learn how to relate well, receive the loving care that they need to thrive, and have every opportunity to reach their potential
- adults will be encouraged and supported to develop and sustain strong, stable, loving and committed relationships however they choose to live their lives
- the Church of England will strive to enable everyone to flourish and live their best life, working in partnership with other churches

- and faith groups, the public and private sectors, and government
- all government policies will have the wellbeing of families and households at their heart.

We believe that our vision is not idealised, fanciful or unattainable. It is achievable, but some of our recommendations to the Church of England and to the Government will need to be adequately resourced.

Promoting a strong vision
of hope and opportunity:
learning from a trilogy of
Commissions

Ours is the third Archbishops’ Commission to report in the last two years. In our Commission report we bring the key learning together and indicate how it promotes a strong vision for transformative change. If the messages and recommendations of all three Commissions are implemented then we will indeed be able to reimagine a kinder, fairer, more forgiving society in which everyone is able to flourish. Together, the three Commissions present a powerful promise of hope.

By placing love, hope and faith at the heart of a reimagined society we can support everyone who is in need, including the less advantaged and marginalised, regardless of culture, creed or background. Love, which is the greatest gift of all, can enable us all to flourish. Love Matters.

To read the Commission’s full report, please go to:
churchofengland.org/families-and-households

Recommendations to the Church of England

Celebrating Diversity

The Commission urges the Church of England

Love Matters Chapter 3

Through all its members:

To:

1. Reaffirm the value and dignity of every human being.
2. Honour and celebrate singleness, whether through choice or circumstance, and recognise the full place of single people within the Church and society.
3. Enable and support people to talk openly and honestly about sensitive and difficult issues, including domestic abuse, separation and divorce, mental health, and relationships.
4. Challenge attitudes and behaviours anywhere in the life of the Church which undermine the value and dignity of every human being.

Building Loving Relationships and Supporting Families

The Commission urges the Church of England

Love Matters Chapter 4

Through its, parishes, deaneries and dioceses:

To:

5. Offer high-quality preparation for marriage and other forms of committed adult relationships to every couple planning a religious or civil ceremony.
6. Commit to a culture of invitation for couples, and place renewed emphasis on ongoing relationship support after a wedding ceremony, baptism and other church-based celebrations and services.
7. Pool resources at deanery level to focus on different aspects, and the delivery, of pastoral work, including marriage preparation and relationship support.
8. Work collaboratively with relationship support agencies to support families at all life stages continually to build relational capability.



Love Matters Chapter 5

- 9. Renew its focus on supporting families whose relationships are in difficulty.
- 10. Encourage a pastoral response to separation and divorce with a message of grace and a call to peace for families experiencing a stressful process.

Love Matters Chapter 6

- 11. Explore ways to provide loving, caring and non-judgemental support for mothers, fathers and carers to combat adverse childhood experiences

Love Matters Chapter 9

- 12. Work in partnership with professionals to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for people experiencing loneliness, mental health challenges, and dementia.
- 13. Partner with statutory and other agencies supporting individuals, families and children, ensuring that clergy and laity have the support they need in their pastoral work.
- 14. Work in partnership with community organisations, other churches and other faith groups to provide coordinated support to enable local families and households to flourish.

Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People

The Commission urges the Church of England

Love Matters Chapter 5

Through the National Church and its Institutions:

To:

- 15. Engage closely with government and organisations working with separating families to ensure that children at risk of harm from parental conflict are supported.
- 16. Continue to work through the Church of England’s presence in Parliament to press for greater awareness of, and resourcing for, the support of children at risk of harm in separating families.
- 17. Encourage the church to explore the use of The Parents Promise and partner with the Positive Parenting Alliance.

Love Matters Chapter 6

- 18. Share awareness across the Church of the needs of all new parents, including adoptive parents, and ensure that care and support is offered in a non-judgemental way.
- 19. Advocate for children and young people in the care system, supporting them to find genuine permanency solutions to the age of 18, and relational and accommodation support for young people leaving care.
- 20. Advocate for young people whose custodial sentences have ended to find genuine permanency solutions.
- 21. Work with government and organisations supporting children and parents to use family-friendly language.

Love Matters Chapter 7

- 22. Bring forward proposals which will enable the voices of children, young people and their families to be heard within the church at local and national levels.
- 23. Advocate for a greater understanding of the drivers that draw children and young people into the criminal justice system and challenge negative attitudes towards children and young people involved in criminal activities.
- 24. Encourage the work of the Growing Faith Foundation to put children, young people and families instinctively at the heart of the Church’s ministry and mission.

Love Matters Chapter 6

Through its parishes, deaneries and dioceses:

To:

- 25. Encourage and support current and prospective kinship carers, foster and adoptive parents, and honour, celebrate and offer practical support to those who are caring for children and young people.
- 26. Consider ways to offer accessible and affordable activities for young people within their community, in partnership with local organisations, local authorities and other faith communities.
- 27. Be especially vigilant in respect of young carers in each community and find ways to support and walk alongside them and their families.
- 28. Provide parenting support through: quality parenting courses, for all stages of childhood, including in partnership with schools; the provision of high quality toddler groups.
- 29. Take the opportunity when infants and children are brought in for baptism to encourage good parenting, and to support parental relationships, and to consider promoting The Parents Promise.
- 30. Explore ways to provide loving, caring and non-judgemental support for mothers, fathers and carers to combat adverse childhood experiences.

Learning about Relationships

The Commission urges the Church of England

Love Matters Chapter 7

Through its dioceses and diocesan boards of education:

To:

- 31. Work in partnership with schools and statutory agencies to develop ways to support families in which young people are not thriving in school, are excluded, or getting into trouble.
- 32. Encourage learning about relating well to each other as early as possible in a child’s life.
- 33. Make its buildings and open spaces available for children and young people as safe places to be, working in partnership with community organisations, sports, creative arts and youth clubs.

Promoting Positive Family Policies

The Commission urges the Church of England

Love Matters Chapter 9

Through the National Church and its Institutions:

To:

- 34. Encourage an understanding of spirituality in health interventions.
- 35. Advocate for the extension of Family Hubs, ensuring that faith communities are regarded as partners in delivery, as promoted by the ecumenical ChurchWorks Commission.
- 36. Mirror the use of the Government's Family Test in the development of all policies and practices in the Church of England that affect families and children.

Recommendations to the Government

Building Loving Relationships and Supporting Families

The Commission urges the Government

Love Matters Chapter 3

To:

- 1. Recognise and value the diversity of families and households, and reflect this in policy and decision-making.

Love Matters Chapter 4

- 2. Ensure that registrars are required to signpost couples to marriage/relationship preparation available in their community when the couple give notice of an intention to marry or form a civil partnership.
- 3. Invest in relationship capability and relationship support for all couples to build and maintain strong, stable families and, when necessary, enable them to separate well. This should be done in partnership with specialist charities, community groups, statutory agencies and faith communities.
- 4. Ensure that relationship support is routinely offered at life transitions, especially at the transition to parenthood and when assuming caring responsibilities.

Love Matters Chapter 5

- 5. Develop a cross-departmental relationships strategy, which:
 - provides a coordinated approach to parental separation
 - keeps the child's best interests and wellbeing at the centre
 - is culturally specific
 - promotes a shift from the language of hostility to the language of peace
 - brings together the strands of policy that currently sit with several government departments
- 6. Ensure that the 20-week waiting period within the Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 is used effectively to support families, by:
 - offering a range of information and support services as soon as an application to court is made
 - ensuring that the Separated Parents Information Programme is made available to all parents free of charge at the earliest opportunity during the 20-week waiting period
 - ensuring that appropriate levels of resources, information and support are available across the Family Justice System when parents separate

- 7. Encourage businesses to partner with The Parents Promise, in order to support better outcomes for children when parents part and reduce the number of days lost when parents take time off work due to stress.

Protecting and Supporting Children and Young People

The Commission urges the Government

Love Matters Chapter 6

To:

- 8. Develop a clear cross-government strategy to end child poverty.
- 9. Ensure that all prospective parents, including adoptive parents and guardians, have access to and receive comprehensive information about the support available from professionals working with new parents.
- 10. Portray adoption as a way for children to find the family they need in order to enjoy the security and stability of a loving home in which their wellbeing and happiness is the paramount consideration.
- 11. Implement at pace all of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care.
- 12. Encourage the imaginative development of different forms of relational and accommodation support for young people leaving care, ensuring that every young person leaving care should have consistent, loving relationships to help them flourish.
- 13. Encourage the imaginative development of different forms of relational and accommodation support for children and young people leaving custodial sentences.
- 14. Ensure that children and young people are protected as far as possible from harmful material online, in conjunction with supporting parents and carers, and to ensure that children and young people are able to navigate social media confidently and appropriately.
- 15. Reduce waiting times in the family justice system and the youth justice system.
- 16. Ensure that every child and young person is offered the opportunity to be heard in the family and youth justice systems and kept informed of decisions which will impact on their lives.
- 17. Work with community groups and statutory agencies to urgently address the disproportionality of black children within the criminal justice system, improve relationships, call out discrimination, and ensure appropriate support is available for young people affected.
- 18. Deliver the National Youth Guarantee by guaranteeing shared safe spaces for every child and young person to gather, play and engage with their peers, with a renewed vision for the place and role of sports, creative arts, community service and youth clubs.
- 19. Include a statutory definition of child criminal exploitation in the Modern Slavery Bill.
- 20. Bring forward proposals to offer specialised help as quickly as possible to all children and young people who are victims of traumatic experiences, whether public or behind closed doors.

Learning about Relationships

The Commission urges the Government

Love Matters Chapter 7

To

- 21. Ensure that Relationships and Sex Education is delivered well, consistently, and its effectiveness monitored.
- 22. Encourage learning about relating well to each other as early as possible in a child’s life.
- 23. Promote education on the primacy of the early years, supporting parents and carers to promote their own and their child’s wellbeing during the first five years of life.

Promoting Family Policies

The Commission Urges Government

Love Matters Chapter 9

To:

- 24. Ensure that building strong and stable relationships in every family and household is central to the priorities of every government department, with a designated Cabinet-level Minister holding responsibility for the implementation, oversight and publication of a family review.
- 25. Prioritise tackling poverty and reforming the social security system so that it better reflects the complex reality of family life.
- 26. Address inequality and widen opportunity by working in partnership with all faith communities.
- 27. Review the Family Test to increase the focus on children and wellbeing; require completion and publication of the assessments to increase transparency and learning across government; and to be reviewed every three years and updated as appropriate.
- 28. Encourage local authorities and organisations to apply a family test when developing policies and practices that will impact on families and children.
- 29. Develop Family Hubs in such a way that they:
 - are co-created at a local level in consultation with all relevant parties, especially families who will draw on their services
 - work to an agreed set of principles, values and standards to ensure high-quality services across the country, and conform to a national system of oversight to ensure that those standards are consistently met
 - have a core offer of universal services for families with children and young people, to be adequately resourced to support the agreed principles and values
 - are accessible in every community in the country
 - design their services in consultation with children and young people, mothers, fathers and carers from all kinds of family, including extended and wider family members

- ensure that they are welcoming, open to all, responding to local demand
- include the provision of counselling support for all parents whose relationship is in difficulty
- include the provision of services for parents and children going through separation and divorce
- are integrated into wider services to ensure seamless transitions at the interface of other services
- work in partnership with the Church of England, other churches and other faith groups
- ensure that these priorities are delivered as soon as possible

Acknowledgements

Chairing the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households has been a completely unexpected gift, a huge privilege and a great joy. My sincere thanks to Archbishop Justin and Archbishop Stephen for trusting me to lead a Commission which has taken us to the heart of the Christian story – a story of unconditional love. I have had the enormous pleasure of leading this Commission in partnership with the Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler, as my Co-Chair. We have talked at least weekly, sharing our thoughts, our plans and our learning. Thank you, Paul, for being by my side every step of the way.

Together with a wonderful group of talented Commissioners and with the support of cheerful, dedicated colleagues at Lambeth and Bishopthorpe Palaces, we have explored many topics in the quest to understand how everyone can be supported to thrive, and to describe the kind of society in which we would like to live. Our discussions have been enlightening and hugely enjoyable. My deep thanks go to every member of the Commission team for your commitment and care.

During the last two years we have spent many hours in conversation with inspirational leaders from many different faiths, and dozens of kind, selfless people whose main aim in life is to help others to flourish. It would be impossible here to name everyone who has contributed so generously to the Commission. People from all walks of life and a wide variety of cultures have welcomed us into their communities and allowed us to spend precious moments learning about their everyday lives, the highs and the lows. We have been humbled by the honesty and openness of the many children and young people around the country who have been willing to share their dreams, aspirations and concerns. Their stories have been moving and occasionally painful to hear. We have seen amazing

organisations at work providing much-needed, generous support to individuals and families, often given in love by volunteers.

We offer our heartfelt thanks to everyone we met, all those who responded to our Calls for Evidence, those who wrote papers for the Commission (available on the Commission website for all to read), and many, many others who engaged in debates and round tables and provided expert advice. I have endeavoured to reflect faithfully in the Commission report – *Love Matters* – the wisdom and knowledge they all shared with us.

I hope that our report will inspire, encourage and challenge the Church of England, the Government and many others to take our recommendations forward. '*Love Matters*' tells a story of hope, opportunity and love. It invites us all to pause for a moment and remember that loving relationships are essential if we are to create a kinder, fairer, and more forgiving society. We have witnessed the deep and enduring power of community and inter-faith collaboration. There is so much more we can do by working together.

We believe passionately that we all need loving relationships, that supporting every child and every family to thrive should be central to all government policies and to the work of the Church of England, and that love is the greatest gift of all.

I have learned a great deal in the last two years and am undoubtedly wiser and spiritually richer as a result. Thank you to everyone for teaching me so much.

May we always walk humbly, act kindly and value everyone we meet on life's journey.

Emeritus Professor Janet Walker OBE
April 2023

Appendix 1
Commission Members*



Emeritus Professor Janet Walker OBE
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Appendix 2

The Aims of the Families & Households Commission

The Aims of the Families & Households Commission were:

1. To articulate and address the pressures and challenges facing families and households, drawing on Christian theology and tradition, whilst also highlighting the good and the positive in terms of what works well and how that can be built on. Families and households were considered in the diverse variations in which they exist today.
2. To offer practical and deliverable ideas on what enables families and households of all shapes and sizes to flourish as the 'fundamental nuclei' or the cornerstones of every community in our society.
3. To make proposals to shape the trajectory of public policy relating to families and households across all government departments.
4. To look at what actions the Church of England could take, on its own or in partnership with others, to help support families and households, and to explore radical new pathways that contribute to family and human flourishing.

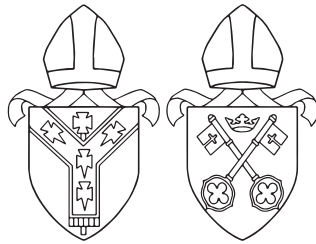
Work-streams

The Commission structured its work and allocated Commissioners to specific work-streams focusing on key aspects of family life and household living arrangements, including the following:

1. The theology underpinning our understanding of family life and relationships – exploring the learning and relevant debates in Christian and other faith traditions that can guide policy-making.
2. The social history of families and households – exploring the diversity of family life and household composition, including singleness, lone-parent households, extended families and community living.
3. Children and young people – exploring how children and young people can flourish and meet their potential within stable, supportive loving homes.
4. Couple relationships – exploring ways to build and sustain strong couple relationships and the support needed to strengthen marriage and civil partnerships, and to reduce conflict in families and households.

Families and households are where children are nurtured in all cultures, and the quality of parenting is a critical determinant of the wellbeing of children and young people. Parenting practices shape their emotional, educational and health outcomes, and their ability to flourish and develop their own healthy relationships in adulthood. Because of the centrality of parenting in family life and within households, each of the work-streams considered parenting issues within their specific remit. These included variations in parenting and the roles played by mothers, fathers, grandparents and other kin, fictive kin, carers and others who have responsibility for raising and nurturing children and young people. Working with a wide range of individuals and organisations, the Commission sought to gather examples of good practice and has proposed innovative areas of action to further support the work the Church of England undertakes with families and households, and has offered proposals to shape the trajectory of public policy relating to families and households in a holistic way.





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To read the Commission's full report, please go to:
churchofengland.org/families-and-households

