

“Love Matters” Update

Introduction

The paper (GS 2321) circulated to Synod members was produced for the Synod meeting in July 2023. This acts as an update so that Synod members are aware of what has taken place since then.

Detail

Last April may have marked the final publication of the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Families and Households, *Love Matters*, but it was only the start of our work to promote the key messages and implement the recommendations featured in the report. Since our last Commission update, we have continued this work through numerous meetings, running workshops, holding debates, and developing more resources. We have been encouraged by the feedback we have received on the Commission, as well as the willingness and support of so many to see the recommendations followed through.

Much of our work since the Commission's publication has involved engaging with different Government departments. This most recently included a fruitful meeting with the DWP, who has extended an invitation to Jan Walker to contribute to their current review of the Family Test, as well as a commitment to explore the possibility of registrars signposting couples to marriage preparation courses.

We have also met with Gillian Keegan, the Secretary of State for Education, with whom we discussed Family Hubs and the importance of relationship education. Our own research on the roll-out of Family Hubs revealed a lack of cooperation between Family Hubs and faith organisations, despite the Government's Family Hub guidance to Local Authorities strongly recommending this. When meeting with Lord Farmer, founder of the Family Hubs Network, we raised our concerns regarding this and expressed the potential opportunities to be gained through greater cooperation between Family Hubs and faith organisations.

We have also pursued the recommendations made in *Love Matters* regarding the family justice system and youth justice system through conversations with Lord Bellamy, Ministry of Justice officials, and Sir Andrew McFarlane, President of the Family Division. All were extremely supportive of these recommendations, and particularly highlighted the importance the report placed on the child's voice being central in family court proceedings.

In December, the Commission was brought to the attention of Parliament through being the subject matter of the Archbishop of Canterbury's annual debate. The debate involved valuable contributions from all sides of the benches on various topics raised in the Commission's report, followed by a response from the government minister.

Our work has not only involved Government engagement, but also working within the Church of England. In September, we ran workshops at the College of Bishops 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.

We are looking forward to hosting a fringe event and a debate on the Commission at the upcoming General Synod at the end of this month, and the further engagement this will bring to the Commission within the Church.

We were delighted to receive additional funding at the end of the year from the Archbishops' Council to produce resources to further the work of the Commission. The funding is being used to produce videos to be used in schools for children and young people to explore the key messages in the report, and to learn about loving relationships. We are also developing discussion booklets that will enable churches to discuss and engage with the Commission

through thinking deeper about how their churches can further put the love exemplified by Jesus Christ at the centre of their mission. The booklets explore six different themes, and we look forward to receiving and distributing them to dioceses and parishes within the coming weeks.

Other organisations who we have met with include Coram, who have been particularly supportive of our work and have agreed to take forward some of the recommendations. Our meetings with James Hayhurst from the *Parents Promise* have been constructive and will hopefully enable James to further promote the importance of prioritising children in situations of parental separation.

Our ongoing engagement with Rachel De Souza, the Children's Commissioner, has been encouraging. She has expressed her support for the Commission, 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 to from the Government to both reports.

Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham

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