

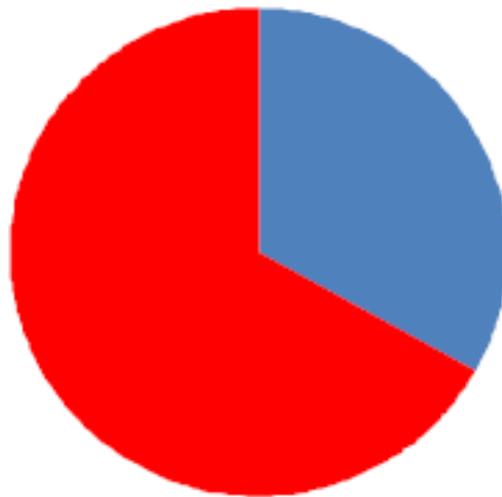
Making Christian Marriage Possible

The challenge to men and teaching in the church

Consultation held at

Ridley Hall Theological College, Cambridge

5th June 2013



Summary Document



Aim of the Symposium

**To bring relevant Christian organisations together;
to collaborate, find and implement effective solutions to issues around gender
imbalance/singleness/teaching in the church,
so that barriers to Christian marriage and family life are removed.**

Contents	Page
Foreword	3
1 Symposium participants	4
2 Executive summary	5
3 Input 1: Background, summary of eco-systemic perspective, themes and work so far <i>Annabel Clarke, Senior Chartered Psychologist, Cambridge</i>	8
4 Input 2: The Big Picture: Marriage trends in society & the church <i>Jonathan Tame, Director, The Jubilee Centre</i>	19
5 Input 3: The Big Picture: Gender imbalance in the church and ways forward <i>Carl Beech, Director, Christian Vision for Men</i>	24
6 Input 4: The Big Picture: Current Christian views on singleness and relationships – the Christian Connection Survey 2012 <i>David Pullinger, Independent Researcher and Author and Jackie Elton, Founder, Christian Connection dating website</i>	29
7 Input 5: The Big Picture: Need for teaching/resources – Pilot Relationships Course at HTB and observations relating to marriage and parenting <i>Nicky and Sila Lee, Directors, Relationship Central, Holy Trinity Brompton London</i>	38
8 Summary of solution-focused consultation and agreed actions	45
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ways to redress the church gender imbalance• Ways to make the church aware of how it is affected by secular approaches to relationships• Ways to value and promote healthy Christian singleness amongst young people and adults• Ways to promote healthy Christian dating/relationships amongst young people and adults• Ways to meet the pastoral needs of Christian women who are single and childless, and Christians in 'mixed relationships'• Ways to resource balanced teaching for Christians to address issues raised today• Ways to promote awareness, training and action amongst church leaders• Further ways to raise national awareness of our joint work	
9 Getting involved to help further address the issues	54



Foreword

How is the church gender imbalance affecting you, your family and friends?

We face a major missional challenge. The age imbalance is often reported and commented on, and the absence of men from our churches is also noted. What has not been so strongly discussed is the social and spiritual implications *of these* for the church and for our Kingdom task.

The biggest threat to Christian marriage (marriage between Christians) is currently - the church itself. There are at least half as many men as women in the Church. There is a massive need for widespread, biblical teaching around healthy Christian singleness, relationships and marriage. These are key barriers to Christian marriage.

The Making Christian Marriage Possible network held an initial Symposium in June 2012, and this year's Consultation makes us more aware than ever that there are acute trans-generational needs which together we must continue to address.

These needs affect every Christian, although many are unaware of the situation. Please prayerfully consider the information and action points in this Summary Document, to inform how you will help to Make Christian Marriage Possible.

Adrian Chatfield
Annabel Clarke
Ridley Hall Theological College, Cambridge



Participants

Organisation	Name	Role	Organisation/Information
Amani Consultants	Bev Thomas	Consultant	Diversity and Equality Trainer. Tutor for Cambridge Theological Federation. Former Evangelical Alliance Council member and contributor to the report 'Singularly Significant: The role of single people in the church and society today' (1987).
Care for the Family	Katharine Hill	UK Director	Promotes strong family life and helps those who face family difficulties.
Christian Connection	Jackie Elton	Founder/Director	The largest and longest established subscriber-based UK Christian dating site. Also operating branches overseas.
Christian Research	Dr Rob Powys-Smith	Acting Head	Provides research and insight to the Christian world in order to inform and improve strategic decision making.
Christian Vision for Men	Rev'd Carl Beech	Director	Connecting Men to Jesus and the Church to Men. Evangelism and resourcing. Also operating branches overseas.
Evangelical Alliance	Daniel Webster	Parliamentary Officer	Bringing Christians together and helping them listen to, and be heard by, the government, media and society.
Family Life	Mark Daniel	Director	A network of people who care about and want to do something to help strengthen relationships and support marriage.
Independent	Dr David Pullinger	Researcher/ Author	Recently analysing results of Christian Connection Survey/research. Author of book 'A Desire to Belong: Thinking About Single People in Church'.
Jubilee Centre	Jonathan Tame	Director	Encouraging Christians to shape society according to biblical principles. Christian social reform organisation that offers a biblical perspective on social issues and trends. Research and resources. Sister organisation of the Relationships Foundation which recently launched the Marriage Foundation (Judge Paul Coleridge).
Mothers Union	Reg Bailey	Chief Executive	An international Christian charity that seeks to support families worldwide.
Network Christians	Sue Ashman	Director	The largest provider of Christians Events and Holidays for Christian singles in the UK.
Relationship Central, Holy Trinity Brompton Church	Rev'd Nicky Lee	Director	A ministry of Alpha International. Develops and produces resources to help support family life through the local church (marriage and parenting). Recently piloted a course on singleness/relationships and related issues.
	Sila Lee	Director	



Organisation	Name	Role	Organisation/Information
Ridley Hall Theological College/Independent	Annabel Clarke	Senior Chartered Child and Educational Psychologist	Co-facilitator of Making Christian Marriage Possible. Supporting children/parents/families/professionals/organisations/policies as part of a Local Authority Psychology Service.
Ridley Hall, Cambridge Simeon Centre	Rev'd Dr Canon Adrian Chatfield	Tutor Christian Life and Thought, Director of the Simeon Centre	Co-facilitator of Making Christian Marriage Possible.
	Rev'd Canon Jane Keiller	Chaplain, Ridley Hall and Simeon Centre	Ridley Hall: Evangelical Anglican theological college, training for ordained ministry and youth ministry, post-graduate study and research.
	Rosemary Kew	Administrative Assistant	The Simeon Centre: Nourishes and further strengthens the spiritual life of the College, while at the same time resourcing the wider Church for faithful and prayerful discipleship.
	Ruth Norris	PhD Student	
Romance Academy	Jason Royce	Director	A nation-wide sex and relationships education initiative run by youth workers licenced to use R.A. material. Unique 14-week intervention project addresses the underlying causes of risky youth behaviour, such as poor self-esteem, low aspirations and lack of positive family life, by promoting the value of stable relationships.
Relationships Dilemma	Andre Adefope	Founder/Author	MA Theology thesis on a biblical approach to modern Christian dating. Author (with Rachel Gardner, Founder of Romance Academy) of the book 'The Dating Dilemma: a Romance Revolution' – biblical and practical advice on Christian dating. Founder of charity Relationships Dilemma.
Salt and Light Churches	Hazel Marchment	Leadership Team	National network of churches.
SmartStep Coaching	Tina Southgate	Life & Business Coach, Founder of Smart Step Coaching	Business/Executive Coaching, Leadership training, Life Coaching (including around Christian singleness/dating/relationships), Christian life-purpose/vision coaching. Working in UK and USA.
United Reformed Church	Rev'd Elizabeth Caswell	Convenor, Human Sexuality Task Group	Group advises United Reformed Church on relevant issues.
Wycliffe Hall, Oxford	Rev'd Will Donaldson	Tutor	Evangelical theological college within the University of Oxford, and an international centre for the study of theology.



Executive Summary

Making Christian Marriage Possible

50% less men than women: growing and teaching the church

Over the last year, the Simeon Centre (Ridley Hall Theological College, Cambridge) has been working with other national organisations on issues of Christian discipleship around singleness and marriage in UK churches. We held an initial Symposium in June 2012 (see summary document from that for more details). Together, we sense an urgent need to continue to take the work further.

Summary of current situation

- 50% less men than women: the current church gender imbalance.
- 1/3 of church members (50% of the women) face sacrificing marriage and parenthood for Jesus and for singleness if they want to marry a Christian.
- Lack of widespread biblical teaching around healthy singleness, dating, relationships, marriage and parenting for all young people and adults in the church.
- Lowest marriage rates in society since 1862.
- Younger generations more fearful of commitment generally, and working through issues from their parents' marriage or their own previous marriage.

Implications

- Spiritual and emotional difficulties/damage caused by the church: lack of pastoral action.
- Infertility: Christian women choosing singleness and childlessness rather than marriage to a non-Christian.
- Christians marrying non-Christians.
- Many of our children (especially daughters) will not be able to bring up their children in a family with two married Christian parents.
- Fewer children with 2 Christian parents: many 'spiritually fatherless'.
- Fewer role models of Christian marriage and family in the church and society.
- The Church itself is currently the biggest threat to Christian marriage being possible.

Vision for the 'Making Christian Marriage Possible' network

- To make singleness or marriage a genuine choice for all Christian women and men, through a church which is gender-balanced and teaches about healthy Christian singleness, dating and marriage.

Aims of the network

- To facilitate action amongst Christians that raises awareness of the church gender imbalance and the resulting issues for men, women and children.
- To connect men to Jesus and the church to men (see www.cvm.org.uk), creating a gender-balanced church.
- To promote teaching for the whole church about healthy Christian singleness, dating, relationships, marriage and parenting.

Aim of Consultation

- To bring relevant Christian organisations together to collaborate, find and implement effective solutions to issues around gender imbalance/singleness/teaching in our churches, so that barriers to Christian marriage and family life are removed.



Key inputs at the Consultation

1. Background, summary of eco-systemic perspective, themes and work so far (Annabel Clarke, Senior Chartered Psychologist, Cambridge)
2. The Big Picture: Marriage trends in society & the church (Jonathan Tame, Director, The Jubilee Centre, Cambridge)
3. The Big Picture: Gender imbalance in the church and ways forward (Carl Beech, Director, Christian Vision for Men)
4. The Big Picture: Current Christian views on singleness and relationships – Christian Connection Survey (David Pullinger, Independent Researcher and Author; Jackie Elton, Founder, Christian Connection dating website)
5. The Big Picture: Need for teaching/resources – Pilot Relationships Course at HTB and observations relating to marriage and parenting (Nicky and Sila Lee, Directors, Relationship Central, Holy Trinity Brompton London)

Consultation and agreed actions

A solution-focused consultation framework was used with participants to elicit current concerns, positives, action ideas and specific next steps for action, addressing the following 8 key issues:

1. Ways to redress the church gender imbalance and spiritual fatherlessness.
2. Ways to make the church aware of how it is affected by secular approaches to relationships.
3. Ways to value and promote healthy Christian singleness amongst young people and adults.
4. Ways to promote healthy Christian dating/relationships amongst young people and adults.
5. Ways to meet the pastoral needs of
 - Christian women who are single and childless (because they don't want to marry a non-Christian)
 - Christians in 'mixed relationships' (where one partner is a Christian and the other is not – usually Christian women).
6. Ways to resource balanced teaching for Christians to address issues raised today.
7. Ways to promote awareness, training and action amongst church leaders.
8. Ways to raise national awareness of our joint work (including setting up a resource website).

Biblically, both singleness and marriage are good. But most/many single Christians want to get married to another Christian one day, and as the years go by, many wonder why this doesn't happen. If the Bible teaches that it is best for a Christian to marry another Christian, what is the church going to do to make this possible?



Talk 1

“Making Christian Marriage Possible: The challenge to men and teaching in the church – Background, summary of perspective, themes and work so far”

Annabel Clarke
Senior Chartered Psychologist

Chartered Psychologist: British Psychological Society
Registered Child/Educational Psychologist: Health Professions Council
Member of British Association of Christians in Psychology
Member of St Barnabas Church PCC, Cambridge



Welcome!

Making Christian Marriage Possible

the challenge for men and teaching in the church



**Consultation
5th June 2013**

Ridley Hall Theological College, Cambridge

Background / Overview



- Growing national awareness of needs around singleness, dating, relationships, marriage/family - amongst different organisations separately, e.g. Ridley, HTB, Christian Connection, others. God's timing.
- Vision for a 'small conference at Ridley', leading to June 2012 Symposium (see summary document of that event for more details).
- Significant interest from diverse national organisations.



Key Principles: Biblical perspective



- We're here to love and serve God and others, 'Your Kingdom come, your will be done'
- "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Mt 28v19-20)
- Relationships, marriage and family are key discipleship issues for every individual, family, church, community, society, nation

Key principles



- Biblically, singleness is good, and marriage is good
- Marriage = voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others
- 'Christian marriage' defined for today's purposes as a Christian man married to a Christian woman
- It is best for a Christian to marry another Christian
- Marriage and family as God intended are the best 'pattern' of marriage and family for individuals and society
- Issues relating to homosexuality are very important, however outside the remit of the current consultation/work



Why

“Making Christian Marriage Possible”?



“Possible”, NOT “Compulsory”!

However, not currently possible for all Christians to marry another Christian:

- Statistical church **gender imbalance** at least 1 man: 2 women*
50% less men than women
1/3 of the church (50% Christian women) unable to marry a Christian if they want to marry
> Choice: single and barren vs marry a non-Christian?
- Lack of widespread balanced **biblical teaching** for the whole church around healthy Christian singleness, dating, relationships, marriage/family – emotional/social/spiritual/discipleship needs

* e.g. Tearfund (2007) “Church Going in the UK”

Christian marriage: past/present



The “2-generations behind” church

- Everyone should/will get married – there’s no reason not to; if you’re single, there’s something wrong with you; single people feel isolated/undervalued. More focus on marriage.

The “1-generation behind” church

- Value singleness/single people; be content with singleness; don’t pressurise re getting married. Increasing focus on singleness.

The “current generation” church

- Mix of the above: confusion, massive impact of marriage/family breakdown over last generation, fear of commitment, fear of admitting you want to get married, massive gender imbalance now....
- Need balanced biblical teaching on A) singleness B) marriage C) how to get from A to B in a godly, healthy way



Christian marriage: present



- Women are more often the Christian partner in a mixed marriage (32% women compared to 13% men).
- “This probably reflects more than anything else the comparative absence of eligible men in churches”.
- “Having a Christian spouse is a significant factor for a happy marriage. Over 90% of Christian couples expressed happiness with their marriage, while only 66% of those in a mixed marriage did so”.

Evangelical Alliance, (2012) “How’s the Family?”

Christian marriage: present



Most single Christians would like to marry another Christian one day. If the bible teaches that Christians should marry another Christian, what is the church going to do to make this possible?

The church has created a situation which leaves many of its members

“eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others” (Mt 19v12)

How many Christians know that
the biggest current threat to Christian marriage
is the CHURCH ?

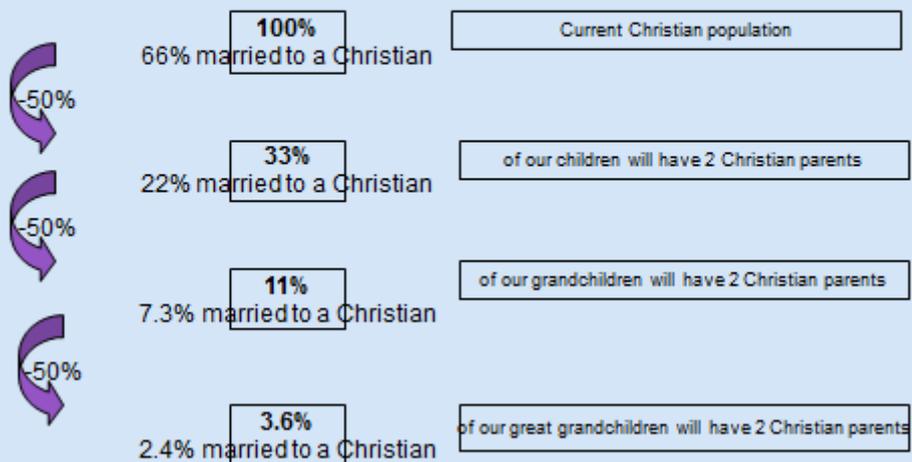


Christian marriage: future



- Fewer children now born to Christians in the first place (more Christian women not having children because they are single)
- Fewer children now able to grow up in a Christian family with 2 Christian parents.
- “The biological replacement rate of committed Christians is only just over 50%” (EA 2012, p12)
- Lack of modelling/discipleship
- Intergenerational needs perpetuated

Christian marriage: future





At the same time...



Win the child...the rest of the family follows...3.5%

Win the mother.....17%

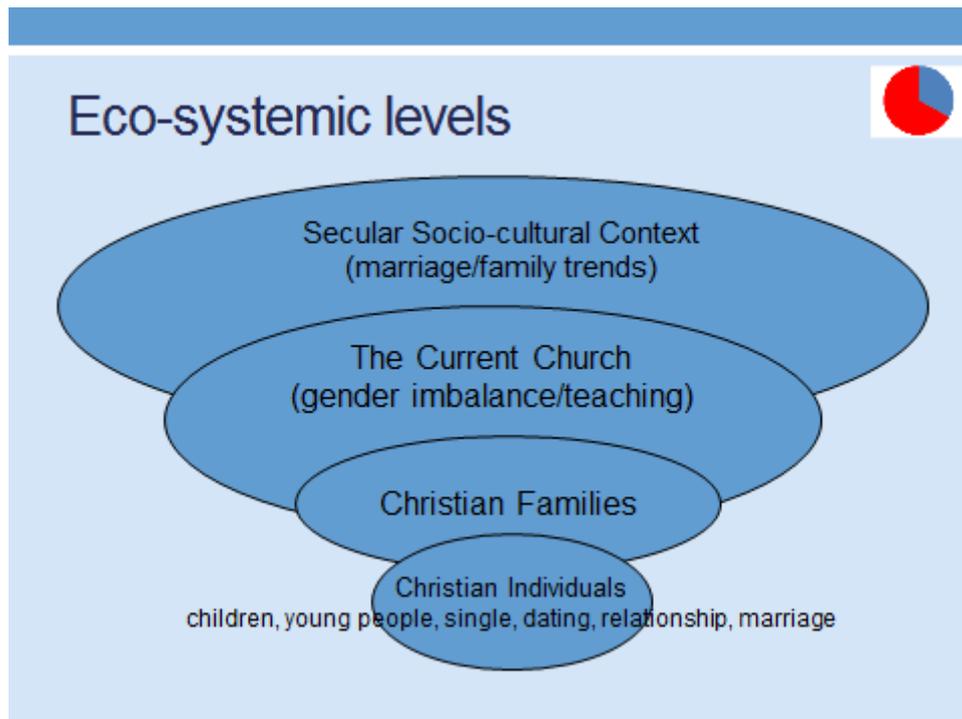
Win the father.....93%

Focus on the Family (US) 1996
Evangelicals Now, July 2003

Essential eco-systemic perspective



- Essential to see issues and individuals in relevant contexts
- Ecological/eco-systemic/systemic interactionist view (after Psychologist Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Ecological Systems Theory)
- Essential work being done nationally on Christian singleness, dating, relationships, marriage, parenting
- Essential to work on how these intergenerational issues inter-relate, and affect individuals and the whole church
> more effective meta-perspective



Making Christian Marriage Possible

**50% less men than women:
growing the church, addressing the issues**

What?

- A network, facilitating collaborative work that takes a meta-perspective, looking at how the involved eco-systemic factors interact and affect each other.

Vision

- To make singleness or marriage a genuine choice for all Christian women and men, through a church which is gender-balanced and teaches about healthy Christian singleness, dating and marriage.



Making Christian Marriage Possible



Aims (how)

- To facilitate action amongst Christians that raises awareness of the church gender imbalance and addresses the resulting issues for men, women and children.
- To connect men to Jesus and the church to men (see www.cvm.org.uk), creating a gender-balanced church.
- To promote teaching for the whole church about healthy Christian singleness, dating, relationships, marriage and parenting.

Making Christian Marriage Possible



Who?

- Network of Christian organisations with expertise in different areas around relationships (broad sense).
- Significant interest from people working in diverse fields, including: young people/youthwork, singleness, dating/relationships, marriage, family/parenting, Christian leadership training, church denominations, para-church organisations, socio-cultural analysis, theology, psychology, research and statistics, others....



Work so far



Symposium June 2012 (see summary document from this for more details)

Raising awareness: linking with relevant organisations and people (c. 60) to raise awareness of the work

Steering Group set up

- Purpose: To advise on, facilitate and monitor awareness-raising and actions arising from the aim of the work
- Perspective: Meta-perspective of eco-systemic factors
- People: Carl Beech (Christian Vision for Men), Jackie Elton (Christian Connection), Nicky and Sila Lee (Relationship Central, Holy Trinity Brompton), David Pullinger (Researcher/Author), Daniel Webster (Evangelical Alliance) co-chairs Adrian Chatfield (Ridley Hall) and Annabel Clarke (Psychologist)

Ongoing



• **Raising awareness**

• **Website under construction:** central resource site for church leaders and members with links/signposting to further resources and summary (1 page) articles by key authors/experts. Topics/issues grouped by eco-systemic levels, with information about how they inter-relate.

• **Considering research options** re good longitudinal data on the church gender imbalance, and church leaders views on what is needed to further support them and members to make the MCMP vision a reality.



Aim for today



- **To bring relevant Christian organisations together, to collaborate, find and implement effective solutions to issues around gender imbalance/singleness/teaching in the church, so that barriers to Christian marriage and family life are removed.**
- Key summary inputs from people working on different relevant systemic factors
- Structured solution-focused consultation to find ways forward



Talk 2

“The Big Picture: Marriage trends in society & the church”

Jonathan Tame
Director, The Jubilee Centre, Cambridge

<http://www.jubilee-centre.org>

“Encouraging Christians to shape society according to biblical principles”



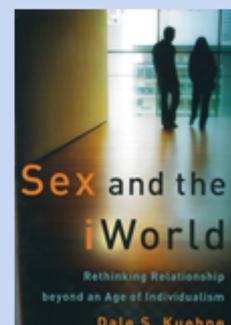
Making Christian Marriage Possible

The Challenge of the i-World

Jonathan Tame, June 2013

The Three Worlds

- t-world: Traditional relationships, stable families, predictable social structure
- i-world: based on individualism: autonomy and freedom of the individual
- R-world: focused on good and right relationships





The road to the i-World



1. **Sexual revolution:** contraceptive pill + legal abortion = sex separated from reproduction
2. gradual shift in gender roles --> more economic independence for women
3. Parallel growth in prosperity & **consumerism**
Choices empower us & define our identity
Cultural phenomenon: Product of materialistic philosophy + commercial strategy
4. **'Consumerisation'** of relationships/sex/marriage

Individualism

- Before individualism there was *individuality*:
 - prerequisite for relationality
 - 'not good to be alone'
 - identity via relationships
- Individualism: people uprooted relationally
 - ultimate source of authority re truth, morality
 - autonomous freedom & independence
- Impossible 'brand' burden





The i-World

Main narrative

- freedom (from nature, from authority, from want)
- fulfilment (be myself, find myself, create myself)

Main taboos

- criticizing someone else's life choice or behaviour
- coercion or causing harm
- sex without mutual consent

Main challenges

- weaker families
- insecurity
- loneliness / isolation



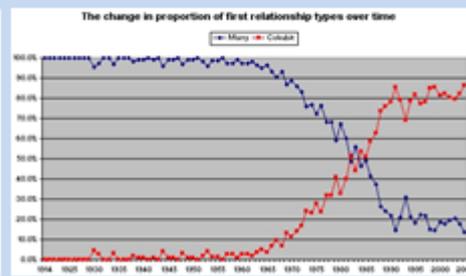
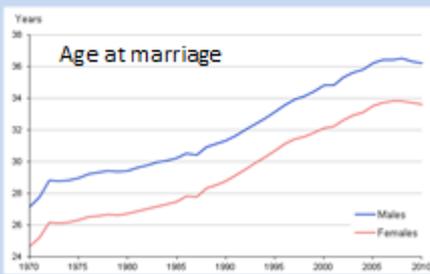
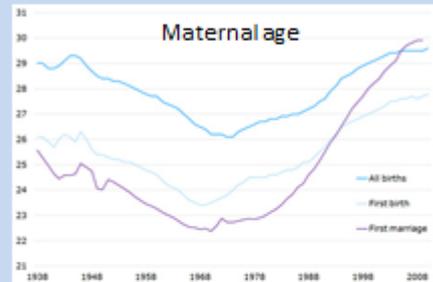
Consequences

- Equating intimacy with sex
- 'Compound' family breakdown
- Ambivalence regarding commitment
- Rise in cohabitation
- ££ pressures – house prices, working hours
- Delayed family formation





Impact on marriage, family



Relational impact of the iWorld

- 45% of US children are born outside of marriage
- 78% of African-American children born outside of marriage
- Over 50% of women 18 and older are not married.

Causes

- Implosion of Marriage in Middle-Class Families with High School Education
- Recasting the purpose of marriage from family to soul-mate
- Loss of faith in marriage by under 30s





Talk 3

“The Big Picture: Gender imbalance in the church and ways forward”

Carl Beech
Director, Christian Vision for Men

<http://cvm.org.uk>

“Connecting men to Jesus and the church to men”





Excluding weddings and funerals 60%
of men have never been to church



Total UK Adult Population
3% Upper class

Church UK Adult Population
22% Upper Class

Tearfund 2007 survey





10% of people in well off areas go to church

5.9% of people in deprived areas go to church



CHURCH VALUES

Male	Female
* Power	* Love
* Competency	* Relationships
* Achievement	* Support
* Success	* Nurture
* Accomplishment	* Harmony
* Targets	* Community
* Goals	* Sharing

Source: Men Are From Mars, Women From Venus







Talk 4

“The Big Picture: Current Christian views on singleness and relationships – the Christian Connection Survey 2012”

David Pullinger
Independent Researcher and Author

Jackie Elton
Founder, Christian Connection dating website

www.christianconnection.co.uk

“The UK's leading Christian dating site exclusively for UK Christians”



Towards marriage between Christians

Data from the Christian Connection 2012 Survey
Summary for Making Christian Marriage Possible seminar 5 June 2013

David Pullinger

The Christian Connection 2012 survey focused on the Single Christian and Church. 3,000 responded. Many questions give us data that shed light on the questions implicit in making Christian marriage possible. Apart from the quantitative data, there were also 9,500 textual comments.

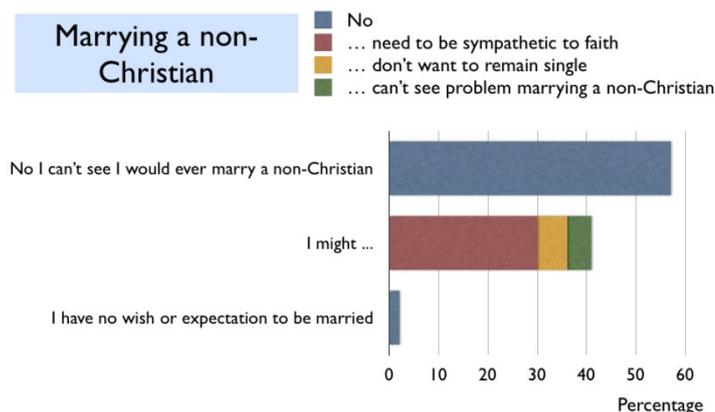
The qualitative data was analysed by standard tests using SPSS and significant results to the stricter significance level of $p \leq 0.001$ recorded. Any differences noted hereafter are the result of this statistical analysis.

Relevant data is summarised under the following sections:

- Being Single
- Meeting
- Dating
- Attitudes about and by single adult Christians

There are clear differences in some areas between men and women in expectations, attitudes and behaviours. There are also changes between ages which we discovered happened at three key points: 30, 45 and 60 (the survey did not address those below the age of 18).

The survey was run by a Christian online dating site and over 80% of respondents had used a Christian online dating site. The respondents were active in pursuing a potential Christian partner. Over half wanted specifically to find a Christian partner.

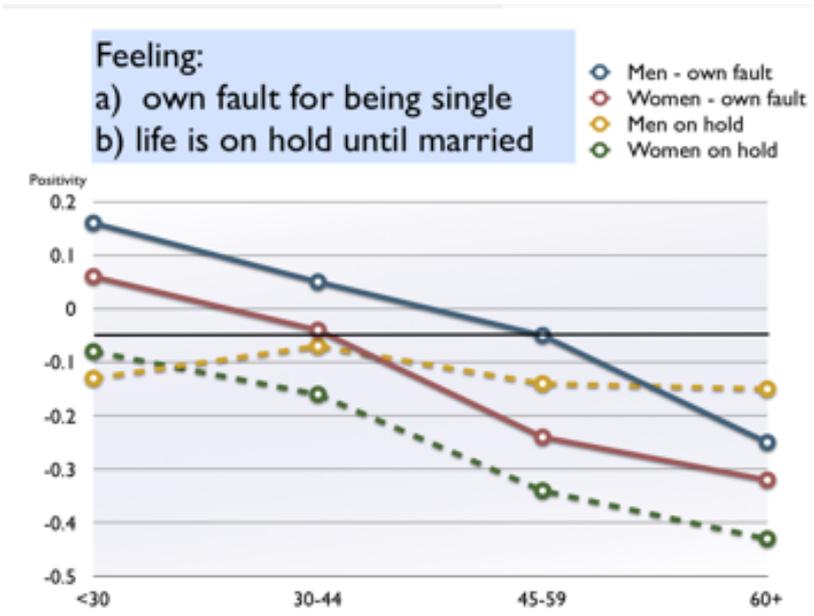
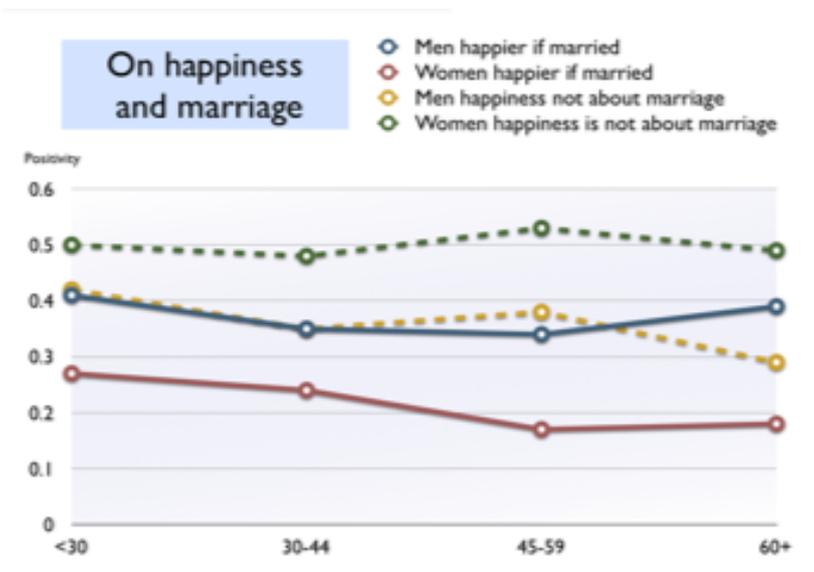




Men handle being single less well than women.

Men manage being single less well than women, in terms of happiness, acceptance of being single, management of their lives day to day, and their faith. They believe they will be happier when married and keep their lives more on hold than women, waiting to be married.

They also seek more support. More men (68.1%) than women (58.7%) state that a member of the church leadership should be specifically accountable for singles ministry.

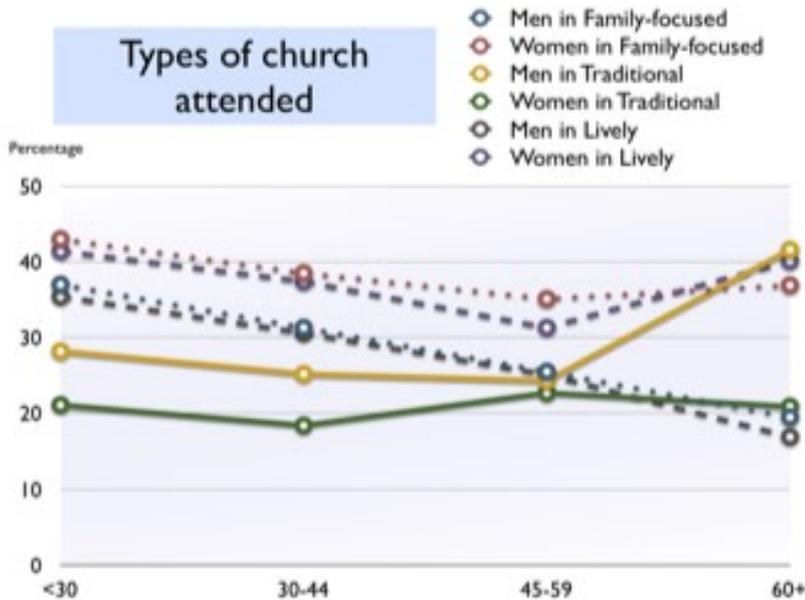




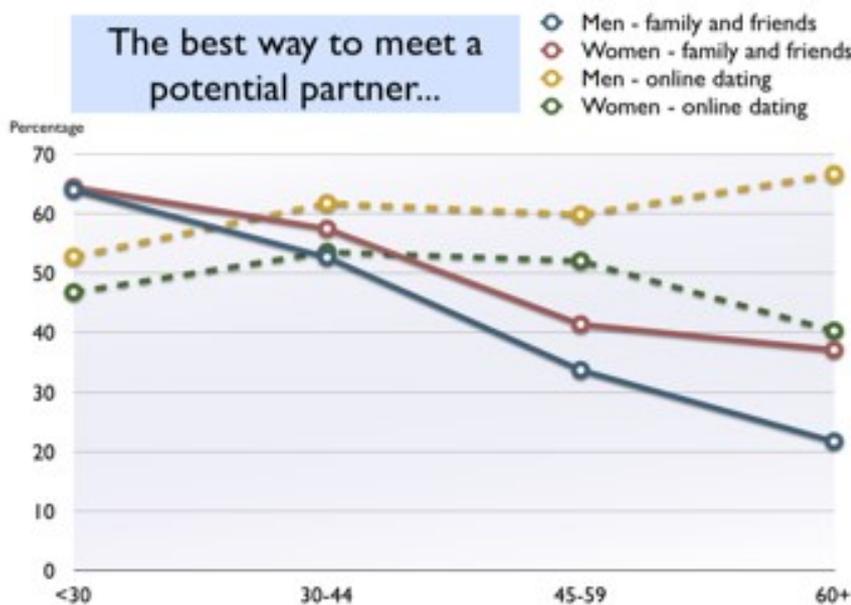
Men and women need to meet before dating, but there are uneven numbers, uneven distribution and men and women look in different places

Difference in where they are located in churches (although no difference in evangelical and charismatic churches).

Relatively more men attend a traditional kind of church and more women attend family-focused and lively churches in all age groups and particularly in the 60+ age group.



Men and women look in different places for a potential partner. 57% of both list church and church-related events being the place to look, but they differ in the next major two ways:





Making Christian Marriage Possible: The challenge to men and teaching in the church

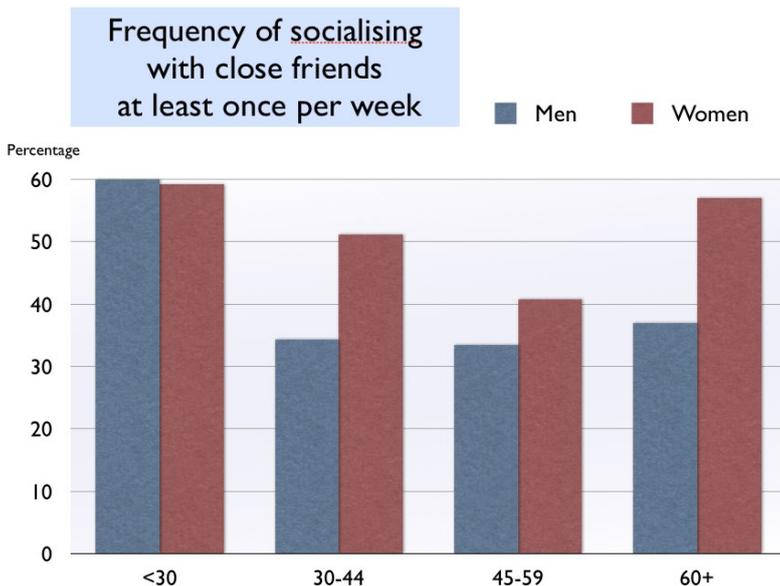
But looking for a potential partner among family and friends is harder with uneven numbers because men become relatively less sociable

Men are less likely to attend social functions

Women (56%) say that they enjoy or don't have problems going to social functions alone more than men (49%). The under 30 and over 60 are very similar and show an increase. It is 30-60 men that say that have most problems or enjoy it least (with a 10% difference to the women). If we were to take the national UK reported average, 2 women to every man among the single adults that attend church, and apply the percentages (assuming those who don't enjoy or have problems going to social functions don't go), then for the 30 – 60 age group the proportion becomes close to 4 women to every man.

Single women (44%) say that they enjoy or don't have any problems in being among married couples and children, compared to single men (37%). The age differences are striking. For men, there is a sharp decline at 60, whereas for women there is a decline at 45 continuing at 60. Although speculation, this may well be the age points at which the different genders accept they will not have children and find it harder being around them.

Men of age 30+ socialise with close friends less frequently



From comments, there is very little acceptance or direct encouragement by churches for organisations seeking to support single adult Christians:

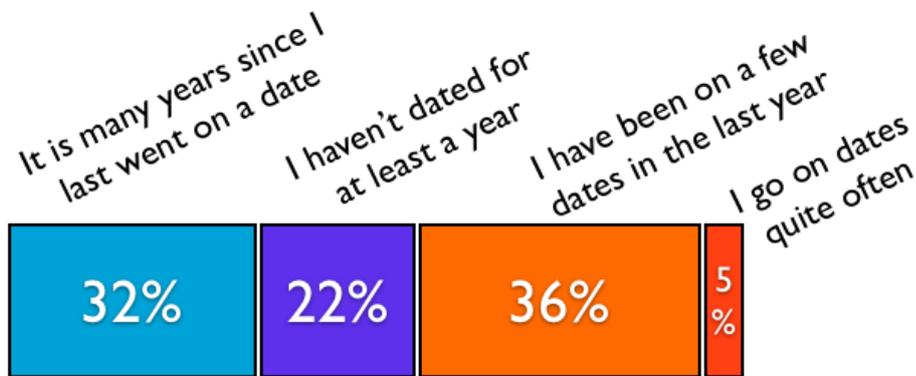
- either in their singleness (a single Christian life lived well), e.g. Network Christians
- or in their wanting to find a partner, e.g. Christian Connection

Yet Christian marriage cannot happen if Christians don't have opportunities to meet.



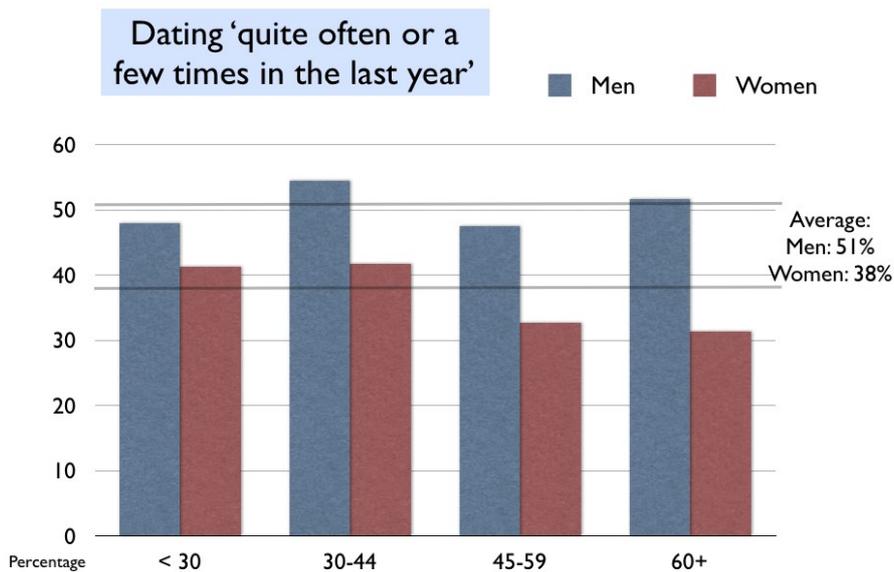
Dating frequency is very low. There isn't a dating culture.

Those in the survey are actively looking for a partner, with over 80% having used a Christian online dating site. Yet, dating frequency is very low.



5% are not looking to meet anyone or 'don't agree with the concept of dating'

Men date more and older women have fewer dates:

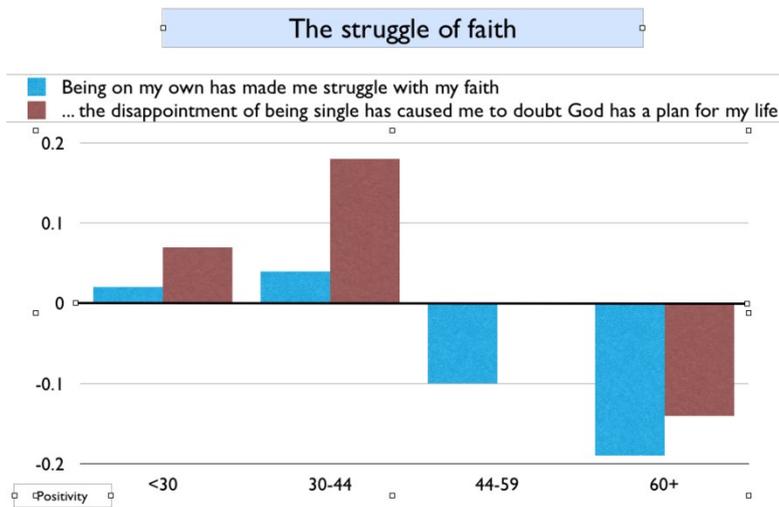


From comments, part of the problem is the avoidance of fraught relationships in church resulting from seeking to or actually dating. So although single Christians think that they might meet potential partners at church, they also seek to avoid relationships there as possibly affecting the fellowship of the community.

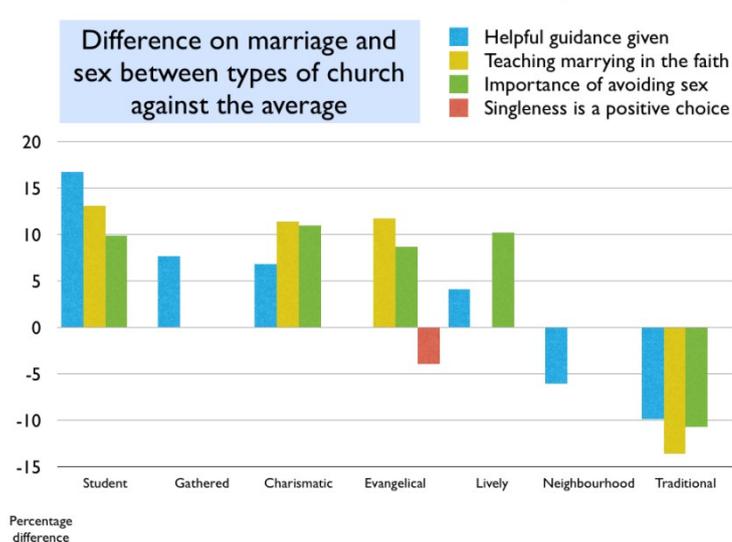


The desire for Christian teaching

Single Christians rated their church leaders highly when they addressed relationships and singleness through sermons, talks or special courses. It was the number 1 thing that they appreciated from their leaders and wanted. In the qualitative data this can be seen in the impact that singleness has on faith, with more than half up to age 45 say their experience has made them struggle and doubt God has a plan for their life.



Evangelical churches don't teach as much on the topic as other types of church from which they receive the expectation of marrying a Christian or avoiding sex before marriage. This results in a distinctive pattern of not considering their singleness as a positive choice. (68% said that their church was 'evangelical'.)



However, we need to acknowledge that this kind of singleness is a modern phenomenon and that 1st century AD life did not have a large percentage of single older adults seeking marriage in this way and so was not addressed specifically in the Bible (Barry Danylak, Lily A Arasaratnam and Kathryn Wehr).



Attitudes about single adult Christians

With the majority being married in most UK churches, naturally some wonderings arise about why single people who desire to marry are not.

Nearly 1 in 3 <30 year old men, say that they have been assumed gay, true also for 1 in 7 30+ year old women

More than half 45-60 year olds expressing an opinion agreed that they feel there is a presumption there is something wrong with them

... you must be gay

...there must be something wrong with you

You should be married, so ...

...you must have the gift of singleness

1. No such expression in Bible

2. Recipients are self-determining.:

- it is not for everyone - people will still marry
- it is given to them - it is a gift
- it is for those who can accept it

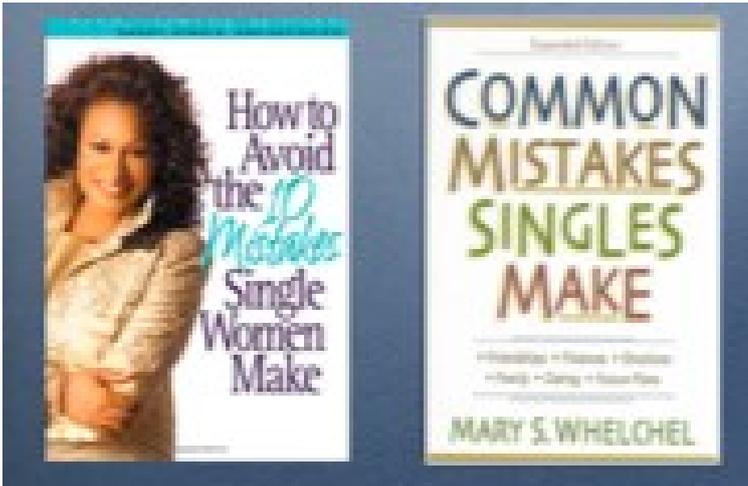
- it is chosen, not forced upon you

Matt 19: 11-12

Single people feel this presumption, especially between the ages of 30 and 60.

		most say they are not treated as church 'family' members	
		least feeling part of church community	
	most feel there is a presumption that something is wrong with them		
	socialise less than others		
most say the disappointment of being single causes them to doubt God has a plan for their life			most stop being worried about the future
most struggle with faith issues because single			most stop doubting God has a plan for their lives
most say they have problems with self-esteem			
< 30	30 - 44	45 - 59	60 +

There are many Christian books promoting the stereotypes about single people with a burgeoning numbers of US Christian and secular books trying to 'fix' the single person's flaws usually around the areas of single people being immature, selfish, emotionally illiterate and need to overcome childhood traumas (a list provided by Bella dePaulo, a social scientist).



Social psychologists however argue that these stereotypes are wrong (except in a very few cases). There is no social scientific evidence that single people in general have any more difficulty in maintaining close and personal relationships than those who are married. There is nothing wrong. Single people are not flawed. They are simply not married or cohabiting. I consider this to be a problem of lack of alternative markers of adulthood.

Attitudes adopted by single adult Christians.

Many single adult Christians in the survey expressed their doubts about *actively* looking for a potential spouse and at the same time were concerned to meet the right kind of Christian so that they could be 'equally yoked'.

Equally yoked (2 Cor 6:14) Many made comments about being 'equally yoked'. This is another phrase that does not appear in the Bible and the verse is heavily debated, but in general scholars come down to saying that only Christians choose to take on Jesus' yoke, so 'marry in the faith'.

Waiting on the Lord misinterpreted as passivity, as opposed to alertness as a watcher in the watchtower in connection **God having a Plan for my life** (Jer 19:11)

Seems to be a real dilemma between getting teaching in the churches that suggests God has a plan for your life (including a possible partner) and then we need to wait on Him versus dating websites where you need to try and 'sell' yourself to potential candidates. Takes a lot of energy and courage (506)

I [when using online dating sites] feel I'm looking for someone and not trusting God to find me a life partner (415)

Waiting for the One Nothing in Bible about there being a One. This comes from Aristophanes' story, as discussed by Plato. It now appears to be the dominant cultural myth.



Talk 5

“The Big Picture: Need for teaching/resources – Pilot Relationships Course at HTB and observations relating to marriage and parenting”

Nicky and Sila Lee

Directors, Relationship Central, Holy Trinity Brompton London

www.relationshipcentral.org



PILOT RELATIONSHIPS COURSE at HTB

*'Then you will know the truth, and
the truth will set you free'*

(JOHN 8:32)

Vision for the Relationships Course

The need :

- Regular relationship education in the church for engaged and married couples and parents, but none for unmarried people
- Many single people in the church
- Comments from The Marriage Preparation Course that the teaching would have been helpful earlier in their relationship
- A forum for those who are unmarried to address topics covered on the course, enabling the formation of more relationships in the church

The objectives :

- To encourage the pursuit of spiritual and personal wholeness; including signposting other courses or ministries
- To affirm that both singleness and marriage are good
- To encourage relationship building, particularly with the opposite sex, that might lead to marriage



Pilot Relationships Course

- 60 people by invitation
- 50/50 male/female
- 5 Sunday afternoons from 4pm – 6pm
- Mixture of speakers – male/female; single/married

THE PILOT RELATIONSHIPS COURSE

Content

- Session 1 – Singleness and friendship
- Session 2 – Marriage – the myths and the truth
- Session 3 – Gender – male and female –
creation versus culture
- Session 4 – Sex and sexuality
- Session 5 – Dating



Structure of the Sessions

- 3.45 pm Tea/coffee
- 4.00 pm Worship
- 4.15 pm Talk(s) + testimonies
- 5.10 pm Discussion in groups
- 5.50 pm Prayer ministry
- 6.00 pm Feedback forms and finish
- Homework (optional)

Session 1

Singleness and friendship

- Building friendships
- Finding our identity in God's love and faithfulness
- Exploring the biblical tension of the value placed on marriage and singleness
- Facing the struggles of singleness
- The importance of community
- Testimonies



Session 2

Marriage – the myths and the truth

- Myth 1: Marriage is only a piece of paper
- Myth 2: Marriage is for my personal fulfilment
- Myth 3: Cohabiting is a good test for marriage
- Myth 4: A marriage only works if we're compatible
- Myth 5: If he means me to get married, God will bring me 'the one'

Session 3

Gender – male and female

- Affirming differences without stereotyping
- Four biblical paradigms
(taken from *Constructed or Created* by Elaine Storkey)
 - Sameness
 - Difference
 - Complementarity
 - Union



Session 4 Sex and sexuality

- Creation: made for relationship and intimacy
- We reflect the image of God through our physical bodies
- Importance of the body in glorifying God
- New creation: we are fulfilled, not through marriage or sexual relationship, but through relationship with Christ
- Informing our imagination: the distorting effects of pornography

Session 5 Dating

A practical condensed guide to dating

(taken from *The Sense and Nonsense about Dating* course, Crossroads International Church Amsterdam, based on *How to get a date worth keeping* by Dr Henry Cloud)

- Balancing our responsibility and God's provision
- Take a look at yourself - are you a date worth keeping?
- To be empowered to break out of misconceptions and unproductive cycles
 - Be proactive
 - Change 'traffic patterns'
 - Don't commit yourself to a type
 - Date anyone once, and date them again
 - Take care of your heart
 - Be yourself
 - Deal with brokenness and rejection
 - Learn to live with your fears



Conclusion

- Feedback from the pilot
- The way forward



Consultation and agreed actions

A solution-focused consultation framework was used with participants to elicit current concerns, positives, action ideas and specific next steps for action, addressing the following 8 key issues:

1. Ways to redress the church gender imbalance and spiritual fatherlessness.
2. Ways to make the church aware of how it is affected by secular approaches to relationships.
3. Ways to value and promote healthy Christian singleness amongst young people and adults.
4. Ways to promote healthy Christian dating/relationships amongst young people and adults.
5. Ways to meet the pastoral needs of
 - Christian women who are single and childless (because they don't want to marry a non-Christian);
 - Christians in 'mixed relationships' (where one partner is a Christian and the other is not – usually Christian women).
6. Ways to resource balanced teaching for Christians to address issues raised today.
7. Ways to promote awareness, training and action amongst church leaders.
8. Ways to raise national awareness of our joint work.

The grids on the following pages summarise the consultation discussion and actions.



Issue 1: Ways to redress the church gender imbalance

Concerns	Positives	Action Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current data suggests 2-3 times more women than men in church. • Men not coming to faith. • Men coming to faith but then being put off by church. • Current evangelism and discipleship often inappropriate for men - many approaches to evangelism not starting where most men are at. • Passivity of church culture/services; boring, disempowering. • Romanticising and subjective nature of church worship. • Lack of friendship patterns for men – need action rather than talking/thinking. • ‘Demonisation of masculinity’ – men portrayed as evil/useless, rather than as good news for society. • Lack of opportunity for Christian women to marry a Christian man. • Often see women alone in church, but not men. • Lack of role models of Christian marriage and family to the next generation. • National breakdown of family and fatherhood crisis affecting the church. • If men come to faith, rest of the family come to faith more quickly than if women come to faith first. • Youth and children’s work more female-oriented e.g. more craft or sport? Many boys leaving church when aged 10-13. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentional men’s work/groups in churches. • Consultancy offered by CVM for churches. www.cvm.org.uk • CVM resources e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Codelife discipleship movement - The Code Bible for Men - The Manual (bible notes for men) - Manmade (Making Men out of Boys) - Men. (resource DVD for helping churches to reach men) • Churches that give men causes to live/fight/die for. • Focus on male-friendly events, e.g. large-screen for sports events. • Christians In Sport resources (www.christiansinsport.org.uk) • Empowering language used (e.g. “Men, let’s destroy the porn industry – how can we do that?” vs “Don’t use porn”). • Men’s purity/discipleship groups to build deep connections. • Monastic disciplines to engage with faith, e.g. Ignatian retreat week for schools by Romance Academy. • Programmes where there are equal numbers of men and women (e.g. marriage/parenting courses). • wholetthedadsout.org 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to raise awareness that the gender imbalance is a crisis issue in the church for men, women and children. • Link with CPAS re leadership training. • CVM Audit Resource re-launched. • Theological Colleges working together to address these issues through their curriculum and work. • CVM now working with Alpha Innovation – ongoing. • Addressing church leaders through conference forums. • CVM speaking to Anglican Diocesan conferences and missioners. • CVM offers consultancy to other organisations re how to make their current resources/materials more appropriate for men (e.g. Tearfund/Compassion literature). • Promote on-the-ground men’s groups (can link with CVM network). • Joint work between organisations on taking porn industry down, as key discipleship issue. • Promote Mentoring Programmes for men/boys (e.g. CVM, HTB work with ex-offenders, ‘Regenerate’ work with boys). • Need for more awareness of ‘good practice examples’. • Link with http://cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/ • Promote sports ministries – link with CIS. • Encouraging new expressions of church. • Dads’ involvement in baptism services. • Media links when appropriate.



Issue 2: Ways to make the church aware of how it is affected by secular approaches to relationships

Concerns	Positives	Action Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church unaware of current secular approaches to relationships and how it is affected by these. • Burden of i-world individual choice. • Emphasis on independence rather than interdependence in society that affects relationships and how children are brought up. • Secular worldview of marriage as contract rather than covenant – hence high divorce rates in church. • Secular view of maleness impacting church thinking. • Maslow’s hierarchy of needs – people try to meet Self-esteem needs but ignore the more foundational need for Belonging. • Lack of proper understanding of friendship and sensuality. • Society emphasises that having a partner is essential for fulfilment. • Church embraces society’s dating norms whilst endorsing abstinence. • Church embraces society’s norm of having life/travel/career/settle and marry, and then women find the men are not there when they are ready to settle. • Married Christian women afraid of single Christian women being near their husbands, due to social norm of unfaithfulness. • Marrying for love and ‘finding the one’ relatively recent phenomenon which church accepts uncritically. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information/resources on Jubilee Centre website and others. www.jubilee-centre.org www.relationshipsfoundation.org www.marriagefoundation.org.uk • Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking relationship beyond an age of individualism (Dale Kuehne, 2009). • Just Sex: Is it ever just sex? (Guy Brandon, 2009) • The Dating Dilemma (Rachel Gardner and Andre Adefope, 2013) – new UK book based on theology MA and practical work around Christian dating. <p>More info at: www.relationshipdilemma.com and www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWUwJ7t7Yuk</p> <p>EA Report: How’s the Family?(2012) http://eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/how-the-family.cfm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Emotionally Healthy Church (Peter Scazzero, 2003) • Churches where sermon series and other teaching intentionally addresses issues around relationships, sex, singleness, marriage – for all young people, students and adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collating current research reports and resources so easily accessible to inform church teaching. • Identify any needs for new research on ways to make the church aware of how it is affected by secular approaches to relationships. • Promote Romance Academy Roadshow work for parents/young people. www.romanceacademy.org/content/lets-talk-about-sex-roadshow • Promote available resources.



Issue 3: Ways to value and promote healthy Christian singleness amongst young people and adults

Concerns	Positives	Action Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single people feel isolated in church cf Christian Connection survey – church lacks understanding, nurture and encouragement. • Need for stronger message of value and inclusion of all church members, whether single, married, divorced, widowed. • Negative attitudes/insensitivity towards singleness/single people from church leaders. • Single people seen as second-best. • “If you’re not in a relationship there’s something wrong with you”. • Element of blame, especially on guys – “What are you doing wrong if you’re not married? Just pick someone!” • Sexuality questioned if single. • Lack of role models of a single Christian life lived well – lack of church leaders who are single. • Few good markers of adulthood now other than marriage and family. • Preaching examples often relevant for married, not single people. • Most Christians clueless about gender imbalance being main cause of Christian singleness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churches that are honest about the positives and real pain of singleness. • Churches that intentionally support divorced and widowed people – e.g. Bereavement and Divorce Recovery groups. • Churches that facilitate social activities for single and married people. • Churches that have leaders who are single. • A Desire to Belong: Thinking about single people in church (David Pullinger, 2011) • Cherished: Boys, Bodies and Becoming a Girl of Gold (Rachel Gardner, 2009). For teenage girls. Short course materials available. • Katy Wehr (Singleness and the Early Church, Grove Books) for those who feel called to celibacy as a vocation. • We are Created by God (Mothers’ Union resource) www.themothersunion.org/resources_faith.aspx <p>Supporting Personal and Spiritual wholeness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alpha www.alpha.org • The Beta Course – Multi-media pastoral care course (Sarah Savage, UK Christian Psychologist) www.beta-course.org • Freedom in Christ course (materials for young people and adults) www.ficm.org.uk • http://www.cloudtownsend.com/video-advice By Henry Cloud and John Townsend, US Christian Psychologists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote list of local organisations and volunteer groups – Network Christians to share. <p>Network Christians Holidays/Events www.networkchristians.com</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to encourage church leaders to appoint single and married people to staff and leadership teams. • Promote available resources.



Issue 4: Ways to promote healthy Christian dating/relationships amongst young people and adults

Concerns	Positives	Action Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-dating culture in church. • Church/leaders lack awareness and understanding of how to address issues. • No social structures for facilitating relationships. • Deliberate 'un-support' by churches for people dating. • Lack of Christian teaching re how to date and end relationships well. • World's approach (date everyone) or outright rejection of that (no dating) (influence of some US Christian anti-dating thought). • People too frightened to act in case they fail. Unrealistic expectations and pressure if show any interest in someone. • Need Christian teaching on relationships and commitment, not just sex. Otherwise people may know more about what church stands against than what it stands for and opt for society's value structure which seems more cohesive and accessible. • People finding it hard in a relationship think they "can't be 'the one'" because it's not easy – instead need teaching on conflict resolution. • Message that 2.4 children is the meaning of life. • Celibacy until marriage correct but can pressurise young people to plunge into marriage too early. • Need UK teaching not just American. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HTB recent pilot course. Very positive feedback received. Continuing to be developed. • Romance Academy has had a very positive response to 'Let's talk about sex' roadshow for parents. • The Dating Dilemma (Rachel Gardner and Andre Adefope, 2013) www.relationshipsdilemma.com • Books e.g. How to get a date worth keeping; Boundaries; Boundaries in Relationships by Drs Henry Cloud and John Townsend (US Christian Psychologists) www.cloudtownsend.com • Pilot material about active intentional dating rather than passivity by Tina Southgate (Christian Business and Life Coach) www.smartstepcoaching.com • Marriage course material is useful for those dating (e.g. material on communication). • http://moralrevolution.com (American resource website) • Speed dating events run by various Christian organisations. • Dating websites e.g. www.christianconnection.co.uk • Social events e.g. www.eventsforchristians.co.uk • www.networkchristians.com 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise awareness amongst Christians/church leaders of the resources that are available (e.g. Dating Dilemma book). • Intentional teaching for whole congregation on these issues – issues need to be 'normalised', and openly discussed/taught from the front of church and in other contexts. • Intentional support given to individuals, and the need for people to (with permission!) sensitively and tactfully put single people in touch with other single people. • Churches to provide natural contexts in local churches for single people to meet, e.g. group Sunday lunches/summer balls - where there are married and single people. • Churches to create a culture where married people do not have to do everything together. • Romance Academy Roadshow work for parents/young people. www.romanceacademy.org/content/lets-talk-about-sex-roadshow



Issue 5: Ways to meet the pastoral needs of

A) Christian women who are single and childless (because they don't want to marry a non-Christian) and

B) Christians in 'mixed relationships' (where one partner is a Christian and the other is not – usually Christian women)

Concerns	Positives	Action Ideas
<p>A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “My God, why have you forsaken me” – faithful Christian women struggling with years of unanswered prayer for a godly husband. • “You can't even try for children and don't have a partner to share the pain of childlessness with”. • Tremendous pain (not acknowledged or understood by others), especially age 35-50 - 'biological timebomb'. • Thousands feel forced to choose between their greatest desires: loving obedience to God, or having marriage/children. • Women lose their faith in God - some blame the church, sometimes with justification (gender imbalance ignored and continues). • Mothering Sunday often handled insensitively. • Theological college accommodation policy can discriminate unfairly between married and single people. <p>B)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More guilt-inducing judgement than pastoral care, especially from people unaware of church gender imbalance. • Being thought less committed to church if stay at home with non-Christian partner. • Couples not welcomed by church. • Inaccurate biblical exegesis (e.g. 2Cor 6) unhelpful. 	<p>A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Red Tent' support group at Ridley for childless women (single and married). • Women being encouraged to pursue their other dreams and live a full life, rather than putting things on hold until marriage (also makes people more attractive). • Social support from peers (e.g. Christian Connection walking group). • Groups where women pray and fast together and pray for men. • Acknowledgement that often single men want children too. <p>B)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing church differently to include non-Christian partners – good social engagement and genuine welcome without pressure or judgement. • Running a marriage course – e.g. one woman told her non-Christian husband that she would like him to try and understand more about why her faith is important to her. He did the Alpha course and became a Christian. • Can be positive that one partner is a Christian (rather than neither). • Book: How women help men find God (David Murrow, 2008) • www.abigailministries.org.au (Australian ministry supporting Christian women married to non-Christian men.) 	<p>A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for serious prayer, for the church and for/with individuals, and serious working together to redress the church gender balance. • Other support/action ideas – conspicuous by their absence...this area needs more thought and action. <p>B)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic organisation has some material re marriage with a non-Christian partner. • Annabel Clarke to contact Abigail Ministries Australia for more information. • Other resources/support/action ideas – conspicuous by their absence...this area needs more thought and action.



Issue 6: Ways to resource balanced teaching for Christians to address issues raised today

Concerns	Positives	Action Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current lack of widespread biblical teaching which is balanced to cover all issues, rather than focusing on one/two. (e.g. church teaching often focuses on marriage/parenting but not singleness and dating). • Lack of good Christian teaching on dating and associated issues. • Lack of teaching on pastoral theology and its articulation – for dealing with (painful) reality, not just doctrinal theology. • Lack of teaching on appropriate pastoral care that engages with deep issues – silence/platitudes/ judgement not helpful. • Confusion of views re divorce and remarriage – lack of grace, serving and caring for divorced or remarried people. • Misuse of scripture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Churches where leaders are aware of need to teach all issues in context (e.g. context of secular influences on relationships, context of the church gender imbalance). <p>Some materials are available, but need wider use of these, e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jubilee Centre/EA resources • CVM resources • Dating Dilemma (Rachel Gardner and Andre Adefope, 2013) • A Desire to Belong: Thinking about single people in church (David Pullinger, 2011) • Romance Academy material. • Christian Connection survey results. • HTB Pilot Course – is continuing to be developed. • Tina Southgate’s coaching material. • Catholic teaching on the Theology of the Body (John Paul II) is helpful. • Founder of the World Youth Alliance is doing useful work on sex education, women’s health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to collate useful resources and make more accessible to a wider audience so that issues can be addressed practically. • HTB pilot course - looking at feedback from participants, later aiming to run this on a long term basis at the church, so that it becomes ‘normalised’ for all those single and dating. • HTB link with helpful Catholic teaching on the Theology of the Body (made more accessible by Christopher West).



Issue 7: Ways to promote awareness, training and action amongst church leaders

Concerns	Positives	Action Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of issues amongst church leaders. • Busy church leaders who are aware but don't know where to start with addressing these massive issues. • Busy Christian organisations. • Struggle to get these issues onto the agenda in bible colleges and Christian leadership training. • Congregations expect leaders to do everything – need every Christian aware of issues and involved in addressing them. • Churches reluctant to change. • Challenge of reaching appropriate people within organisations to empower others towards change. • Church leaders unaware that the biggest current threat to Christian marriage is the church itself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing contact list of Church leaders and organisations who are interested in the Making Christian Marriage Possible work – currently around 60 organisations. • Some links with Christian training colleges and church leadership networks. • Changes in missional approaches provide key opportunities to address issues around evangelism (especially of men) and discipleship of key life issues. • Grassroots work happening in some places/organisations, e.g. Mothers' Union, internationally. • Theological students who are wanting to do dissertations on these issues – can inform theological thinking and practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate task – organisations continuing to join up to resource and serve church leaders. • Identify leadership networks to link and work with. • Promoting awareness of the wider issues and how they inter-relate. • Promoting awareness of tangible resources to help church leaders address the issues. • Train leaders to empower their congregations. • Link with denominational leadership conferences. • Anglican Theological training curriculum being drawn together and based in Durham. Opportunity to link between training establishments. • Link with Conference Organisations: these issues need to be 'main stage issues', not just 'optional seminar issues'.



Issue 8: Further ways to raise national awareness of our joint work

Action Ideas

In addition to those identified under other issues....

- Communicating clear vision and aims – contact Marriage Foundation.
- Further work on Making Christian Marriage Possible website, as this can be a central point to raise awareness and resource people for action.
- CPAS is changing its leadership training – opportunity to include teaching and resources around issues addressed by Making Christian Marriage Possible.
- Investigate use of CPAS roadshows for raising awareness.
- Summary document from the Making Christian Marriage Possible Consultation 2013 emailed to relevant contacts and organisations.



Please do get in touch if your organisation can contribute to addressing the issues raised in this summary document. You may want to copy the grid below and use it to send us your thoughts and responses.

Issues	Concerns What's not working well	Positives What's working well and where /effective practice /useful resources	Ideas for action
Ways to redress the church gender imbalance and spiritual fatherlessness			
Ways to make the church aware of how it is affected by secular approaches to relationships			
Ways to value and promote healthy Christian singleness amongst young people and adults			
Ways to promote healthy Christian dating/relationships amongst young people and adults			
Ways to meet the pastoral needs of >Christian women who are single and childless (because they don't want to marry a non-Christian) >Christians in 'mixed relationships' (where one partner is a Christian and the other is not – usually Christian women)			
Ways to resource balanced teaching for Christians to address issues raised today			
Ways to promote awareness, training and action amongst church leaders			
Ways to raise national awareness of our joint work			