



Making Christian Marriage Possible
www.engage-mcmp.org.uk

**How to lead a gender balanced church
supporting healthy singleness, dating,
marriage and youth**

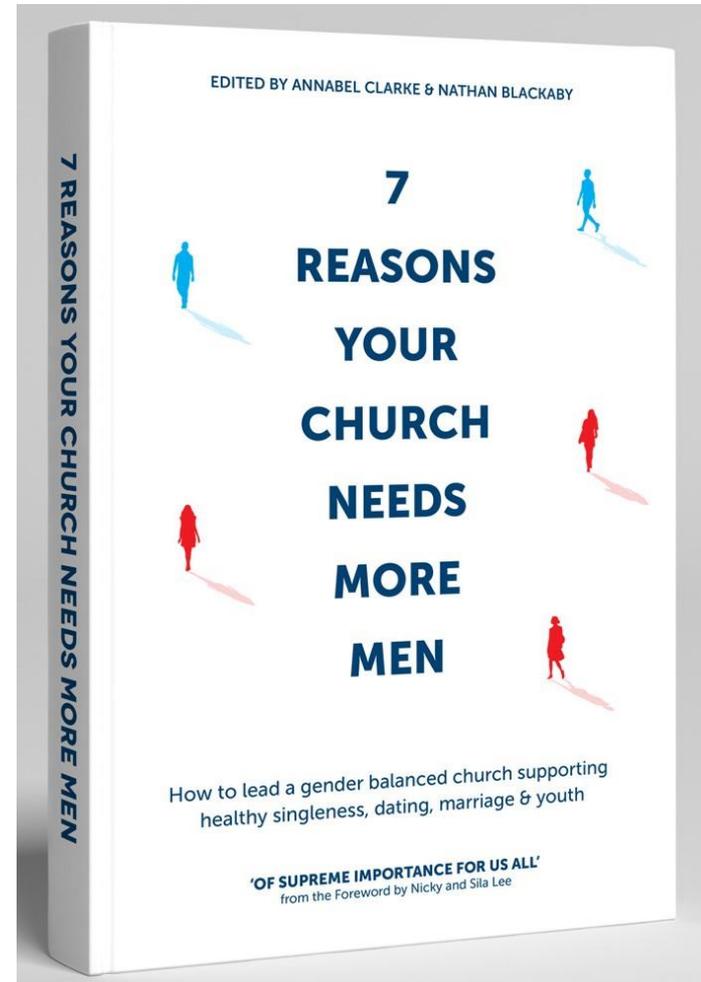
Summary information for leadership teams



This summary is based on The Engage Network book...

7 Reasons Your Church Needs More Men:
How to lead a gender balanced church supporting healthy singleness, dating, marriage and youth

(All research is fully referenced in the book.)



Overview of this summary

Background

Problems

Consequences

Solutions



Background: Key principles

- “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 28.19-20) – ENGAGE is about evangelism and discipleship.
- Relationships, marriage and family are key discipleship issues for every individual, family, church, community, society, nation.
- Biblically, singleness is good, and marriage is good (1 Cor. 7).
- Most single Christians want to marry another Christian (YouGov, 2014).
- ENGAGE is about making Christian marriage ‘possible’ (not ‘compulsory’!) in this, and future generations



Background: Key principles

CONTEXT & BALANCE is crucial

Context

- Everyone understanding the issues in the contexts of biblical teaching, social trends, church trends, intergenerational perspectives – issues cannot be addressed in isolation, or contexts ignored.

Balance

- Intentionally acting on the issues in a balanced way, not seeing one as more important/valuable than another.



Background: Key principles

- ENGAGE is looking at the impact of the church gender imbalance, and so by 'Christian marriage' is focusing on marriage between a Christian man and a Christian woman, and all this involves.
- It is best for a Christian to marry another Christian:
 - Biblical teaching (1 Cor 7.39 ; 2 Cor 6.14).
 - Research e.g. Evangelical Alliance (2012) report.
- ENGAGE is about working together so that everyone benefits. It's about men and women equally supporting and encouraging each other.





Problems

Barriers to Christian marriage

Why is Christian marriage often not possible?

1. The church gender imbalance.
2. Lack of relevant teaching.
3. Lack of awareness of the current situation.

Barrier 1: Church gender imbalance



2 men: 3 women ratio in the church overall.

1 man: 2 women

for single people for most (62%) churches.



Up to about 2.5 million more women than men (varies between studies).

The Engage Network (2018), *7 Reasons Your Church Needs More Men*

Barrier 2: Lack of teaching on...



- **Socio-cultural trends and how these affect Christians, e.g.**

Lowest rates of marriage since records began in 1862 (ONS, 2010)

40% of UK adults are single

Protracted singleness is now often the norm in society (increased individualism) and often in churches

At current rates, a child born today has a 50/50 chance of living with both its birth parents when it is 16 (Marriage Foundation)

Britain has highest rate of family instability in the developed world.

Barrier 2: Lack of teaching, on...



- **The church gender imbalance and what to do about it.**
- **Relationships teaching in churches/amongst Christians:**
 - A) Singleness - very rarely teaching on singleness.
 - B) Marriage - sometimes teaching on marriage
(if you've already found someone to marry).
 - C) How to get from A to B in a godly way (dating & relationships)
- never taught?



Barrier 3: Lack of awareness

Many Christians are unaware of the church gender imbalance and how it makes Christian marriage impossible for so many Christians (e.g. our sisters, daughters, nieces, female friends).

“...Our understanding (is) that the enemy will seek to destroy Christian marriages, yet we do not seem able to make the tiny logical leap required to realise that it’s an even better strategy for him to prevent these marriages from happening in the first place.

No ‘godly children’ to worry about then either.”

(Letter to *Christianity* magazine, October 2007)



7 Consequences of the church gender imbalance

Consequences for

1. Men
2. Women
3. Children and Young People
4. Singleness
5. Dating & Relationships
6. Marriage
7. Parenting/Youth work

Consequence 1: Men



- Massive need for more effective evangelism, discipleship/mentoring and ways of doing church.
- How often do men intentionally disciple other men re. relationships with women?
- Passive not proactive: generally less need to be mature, responsible, committed in forming/developing relationships .
- Paralysed by choice/anxious about being proactive in dating/relationships
- Christian men keep their lives on hold more than women, waiting to be married (YouGov, 2014).
- Married Christian men/fathers often unaware of the implications for them and their families (especially their daughters) of the imbalance.

Consequence 2: Women



The choice: Single and childless vs marry a non-Christian ?

- Affects up to 1/5 of the adult church, up to 1/3 of the women.
- Spiritual/emotional difficulties and damage for many women
 - caused by the Church because of unwanted singleness.
- Reconciling the suffering of unwanted singleness and childlessness resulting from faithful sacrifice, with a God of love.
- Infertility: The agony of unwanted childlessness is rarely recognised and effectively supported for married couples, and never for single people? (Can also affect men.)
- The needs of Christian women (who may have become Christians after marriage) who are married to non-Christians are often ignored.



Consequence 3: Children and young people

- “It is common for high levels of Christian commitment to flow down the generations”...but...“The biological replacement rate of committed Christians is only just over 50%.” (EA 2012)
- **If current trends continue, only 16% of today’s church’s grandchildren will have two Christian parents.**
- The intergenerational impact of the church gender imbalance needs to be addressed.



Consequence 4: Singleness

- **61% of Christian adults under 35 are single** (EA, 2012)
- **7.5% of over 55s**
- **1 in 7 live alone**

church gender imbalance (not enough men)

+ societal influences (marriage decline)

= more single Christians now

‘Spiritual re-framing’

- resulting singleness is simply often deemed ‘a God-given gift’ whether wanted or unwanted...with no further questions asked...
- Single people often feel isolated, not valued, understood or supported in church (EA, 2012; YouGov, 2014).

Consequence 5: Dating & relationships



- Christians are now less likely to meet potential partners at church, or in usual social circles, especially as they get older.
- Often unhelpful psycho-social dynamics between single men and single women due to the gender imbalance.
- Dating frequency amongst UK Christians is unhelpfully very low.
- 54% single Christian adults said they haven't dated for at least a year, or it is many years since they last went on a date (YouGov, 2014).
- Impacting on meeting and marriage/family possibilities.



Consequence 6: Marriage

- Most single Christians would like to marry another Christian one day.
- If churches teach that it's best for Christians to marry another Christian, what are church leaders going to do to make this possible for those in their congregation?



Consequence 6: Marriage

- Women are more often the Christian partner in a mixed marriage (a Christian married to a non-Christian): 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?*

Consequence 7: Parenting & youth work



- 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 > spiritual fatherlessness.
- If Dad's not a Christian, children miss out on whole family discipleship on all issues, including modelling of Christian relationships, marriage and parenting (same if Mum's not a Christian) – need for role models in the church family.
- Need for parenting support.
- Need for teaching/discipleship on healthy wellbeing, singleness, dating & relationships for young people.



Engage: Making Christian Marriage Possible



What?

- A national network of Christian organisations, collaborating to 'join the dots' between ministries and make Christian marriage possible in this and future generations.

The 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.



Engage:

Making Christian Marriage Possible

Aims

- To facilitate action amongst Christians that raises awareness of the church gender imbalance and addresses the resulting issues for men, women and children/young people.
- 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.



Engage:

Making Christian Marriage Possible

Context AND Balance

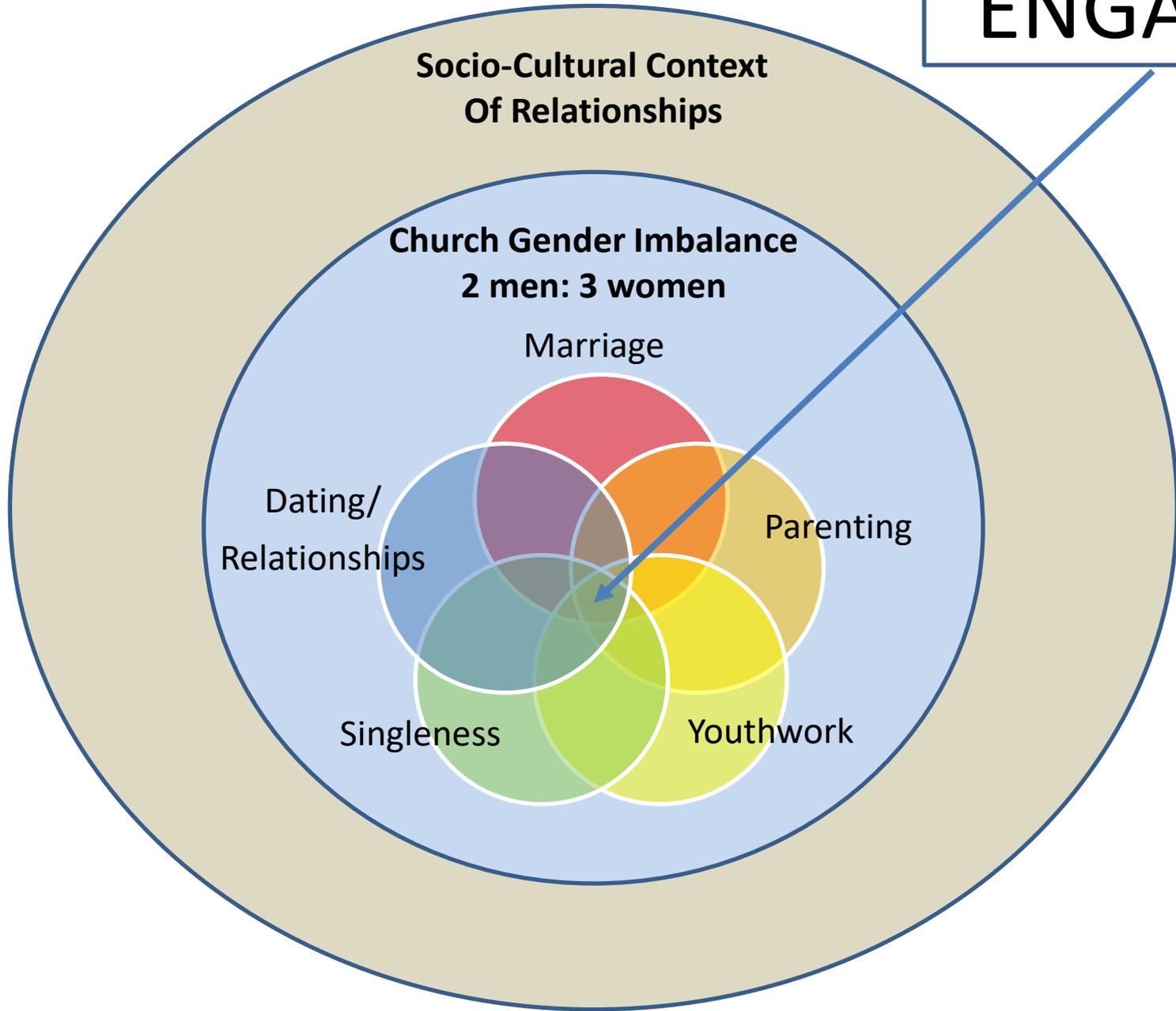
We need to see all the issues in context and take a balanced approach to them all.

The next slide is a diagram showing how the issues and contexts all interact and affect each other...

- The socio-cultural context of how wider society views relationships (not always helpful).
- The church context of the gender balance.
- Then everything that's happening in churches around marriage, parenting, youthwork, singleness, dating & relationships (NB. not that everyone has to go round that cycle, it's just that that's usually what happens for the majority of people).

Engage is working to draw together ministries that have previously not necessarily connected.

ENGAGE



**Socio-Cultural Context
Of Relationships**

**Church Gender Imbalance
2 men: 3 women**

Marriage

Dating/
Relationships

Parenting

Singleness

Youthwork

Engage: Making Christian Marriage Possible



Who (see website for more details)
Steering Group



NewWine
Local churches changing nations



Engage 





Solutions

- ENGAGE held a series of solution-focused consultations with experts in their fields.
- Very practical approaches from these are given in the book *7 Reasons Your Church Needs More Men*, to show “what it would look like if things were working well in the church.”

Short-term and longer-term practical ideas for

- Individuals
- Local churches
- The national church



Solutions

The book's solutions focus on these areas:

- Men's ministry.
- Singleness.
- Dating and relationships.
- Marriage.
- Parenting and discipleship around young people's dating and relationships.
- Youthwork and discipleship around young people's dating and relationships.

Solutions

(drawing on relevant research)



To address the church gender imbalance:

- Prayer.
- Church leaders recognise, understand and address the problems, even if they're in the majority 'male, married and had children' group who are often least personally affected.
- Church leadership and congregations involve a wider range of people, personalities and activities, including more extravert male role models.
- Church leaders support men's ministry - and obviously women's ministry equally too.
- Church includes activities that involve more risk/challenge/adventure.

Solutions



We also need church-wide teaching on healthy Christian...

- Singleness and single-friendly churches.
- Dating and relationships.
- Marriage (whether both spouses are Christians or just one is).
- Parenting and discipleship around young people's dating and relationships.
- Youth work and discipleship around young people's dating and relationships.

Solutions



To discuss
+ action



Suggestions:

1. Pray.
2. Read and discuss 7 Reasons Your Church Needs More Men.
3. Use the practical solutions in the book and create an Action Plan together to strategically address the issues, and regularly monitor this.

See www.engage-mcmp.org.uk 'For Christian Leaders' page for example Action Plan template