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7 REASONS YOUR CHURCH NEEDS MORE MEN

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

Engage 

“Men’s ministry: what would it look like if things were working well in the church?”

Engage consultation vision grid

An individual man	A local church	The national church
<p>Evangelism</p> <p><i>A non-Christian</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has genuinely good friendships with a Christian/Christians, feels accepted and loved. • Is introduced to other Christians, so has opportunity to build several key relationships and be part of a group. • Feels listened to – Christian friend(s) meeting him where he’s at and going at the pace he is going – on a spiritual journey over time. • Able to have real-life, honest conversations about real stuff – straight talking – say it like it is, with love (comes out of relationship) – nothing’s taboo in conversations. • The Christian is ‘real’ about imperfections and struggles – so non-Christian sees similarities with themselves. • Non-Christian feels Christians are non-judgemental, un-shockable, helpful and have some answers to tough situations. • Knows the Christian will give ongoing friendship and support over time whether or not the guy comes to faith. 	<p>Evangelism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money and time is invested in men’s ministry. • Men’s ministry is publically supported by women (and women’s ministry by men, likewise). • Church leaders encourage men to develop deep non-Christian friendships around their interests out in the ‘real world’ – and male leaders model this. • Everyone is actively participating – a culture where men feel confident and competent about opening faith conversations. • Church culture celebrates steps on the journey to faith – the small steps early on are valued, prayed for, and highlighted through e.g. testimonies. • Personal testimony – honouring each other’s steps in faith, wherever people are on the journey. • Church leaders model that it’s not about ‘success and failure’. • Men are involved in social justice projects – and involve their non-Christian friends. • Church holds events – though doesn’t need to involve bacon or curry! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CORPORATE PRAYER! • Agreed and accepted strategy for men’s ministry that is based on theology and research. • Joined-up solutions between those working to develop men’s ministry and between them and others. • A united approach to praying for men – grass-roots level work – the church is equipped to pray together for men. <p>Theological Colleges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central positioning of ‘why and how’ of men’s evangelism and discipleship on the core curriculum – understood and promoted by Principals, staff and students. • Use of a cross-denominational module (e.g. the CVM Theological College week-long short course). • All students leave knowing how to effectively create a gender balanced and growing church (in numbers and spiritual depth). <p>Denominational Leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong links to raise awareness of the issues and solutions, and provide ongoing training for church leaders.

An individual man	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities arise to comfortably talk about spiritual stuff without a sense that there's a hidden agenda. • Christians come alongside and ask whether they have any faith background – what the guy believes, but also about what they want their kids to believe (if relevant). • Can see that there are rational answers to questions that he has (including e.g. science/religion, other apologetics questions), Christian friends discuss or can signpost to answers. • Faith is seen to have practical implications/ applications – it feels uncomfortable – it involves challenge and risk. • Sees that Christianity is part of something bigger and beyond themselves/the individual – individual life transformation and also transformation of the world around them. • Hears stories of God working in Christian friends' lives. <p>Discipleship</p> <p>A Christian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of a small group of men, with close, safe, intimate, trusting relationships that provide encouragement, challenge and accountability. • He has an in-depth understanding of all that discipleship means. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church culture around events is fun, light, easy-going, e.g. watch the rugby match at the pub, rather than in church/ elsewhere. • Men's ministry intentionally works towards the socio-demographics of the church reflecting society as a whole. • Church is intentionally reaching out to non-Christian husbands of Christian women. • Church has a specific focus on reaching unpartnered or single men. • Church is reaching men from different backgrounds (working class and middle class) with different interests (not all men are 'hunting/ shooting/fishing' outdoors types). <p>Discipleship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All men are involved in lifelong intentional spiritual fathering – groups of 3 (for challenging honesty), groups of 7-8, and larger groups – membership of different group sizes for different purposes. • Leaders model and encourage the need to intentionally, regularly meet with a 'spiritual father'/mentor and also be a spiritual father/mentor to others – relationships that intentionally encourage and challenge in all key areas of life and spiritual walk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership networks promote effective men's ministry. • A church leaders survey could be done, including asking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do you feel you have healthy male engagement in your church? • Investigate differences between rural and city contexts – needs and solutions. <p>National Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men's ministry is positioned centrally within mission/ evangelism and discipleship so that it is a 'main stage' issue literally and metaphorically. • Opportunity to address other individual issues more deeply in seminars. • All major national Christian conferences include input on how to develop effective men's ministry. • Stories/testimonies are shared about what it looks like when it is working well – from church leaders on the ground.

An individual man	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is involved in spiritual fathering – is a spiritual father to others, has spiritual fathers himself – covering all areas of life honestly. • Is involved in both learning and also leading. • Feels safe and able to be honest with other Christians and in church. • Discipleship involves patterns that are relevant to him. • He is able to encounter God in his own ways – exploring different ways of a life of devotion within freedom. • Is pursuing Jesus increasingly whole-heartedly. • Knows discipleship involves cost and is willing to make appropriate sacrifices, e.g. time, money. • Is aware of his key strengths, gifts, callings/ purpose and is using these – both within and outside of the church. • Knows he is called to bring justice where there is injustice. • Free from destructive behaviours and addictions, e.g. porn/ alcohol/anger/other things. • Has been trained to, and can confidently pray for and reach out to other men effectively. • Feels able to facilitate non-Christians to take another step towards faith – doesn't feel it's all about one moment of decision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentional discipleship around relationships: healthy singleness, dating, marriage, friendship, loneliness, sex, porn, the way millennials do relationships virtually – encouraging 'real relationships' too. • Also addressing issues around fathering, food, money, power, dealing with guilt and shame, identity labels (e.g. 'Provider'), all passions moderated except passion for Jesus. • Church has good male role-models leading children's work and youth work – spiritual fathering (for boys and girls). • Church services/sermons are relevant to everyday life and work, e.g. prayers for work not just missionary work, sermon examples, testimonies of God at work – at work. • Groups are set up to work for the church's particular setting/ context, e.g. rural/city life, e.g. at lunchtimes. • Going away together – allows honesty/ vulnerability at another level sometimes. • Church is involved in networks empowering people in business or other fields to meet together and support each other. • Men are equipped to reach out to their friends (see 'Evangelism' above). 	

An individual man	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is involved in evangelism which is relational, based on genuine friendships, is intentional and visible, and jargon-free.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Church recognises and values other activities – e.g. sports teams on Sundays – church service times are changed to take these into account – Sundays are most people's lie-in or sport day?• Involved in inter-church sports teams.• Involved in raising money for charity e.g. through sport.	

“Healthy Christian singleness: what would it look like if things were working well in the church?”

Engage consultation vision grid

An individual	A local church	The national church
<p>Spiritual and emotional flourishing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep and contented relationship with God. • Continually developing spiritually, emotionally, socially, psychologically – confident to seek help if needed to deal with current/past issues including those to do with relationships/ parents’ relationship. • Feels and is treated like a complete person as an individual. • Feels that singleness is do-able/plausible. • Free from pressure to get married – from family/ church. • Feel they have a purpose – not ‘waiting until marriage’. • Sees own sexuality as a positive thing. • Aware of and grateful to God for the advantages of being single. • Aware of the reality of being married. • Clear on what the Bible teaches about singleness/marriage/ celibacy/sex. • Supported to consider how they feel about singleness and why. • Free from bitterness. • Healthy attitude to Christian dating. 	<p>Language and representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language is completely balanced between ‘singleness’ and ‘marriage/family’. • People are treated the same without regard to their marital status. • Church leaders are aware of the balance/ proportion of their congregation (single/ married). <p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The views/needs of single people are proactively sought, listened to, and understood – whatever their circumstances. • Thriving, flourishing single people are very visible in the church community (a sign of a healthy community), and a witness to the difference between single Christian people and those who don’t know the Lord. • Widowed/divorced/ others supported effectively – not viewed as a victim or patronised. • Leadership team has mix of single and married people. 	<p>Initial theological training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for ministry involves input on singleness, supporting single people, and evangelism to single people (a key demographic not effectively reached yet). • College staff enabling support for single people who are in training. • Leaders are trained to confidently teach what the bible teaches – including a positive vision of singleness. • Training includes basic socio-demographic information about society and the church around singleness/ marriage, psycho-social dynamics and other related issues. <p>Continuing training for leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing regular training on the issues. • Continuing Ministerial Education – widespread input on issues covered by Engage. • Leadership networks have regular input. • People are trained to share in the Christian and secular media about what it’s like being a single Christian.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and embracing willingly that a key part of the Christian life is sacrifice – may include giving up the 'right to sex' (in contrast to sex-obsessed society). • Knowing and experiencing that Jesus understands – Jesus and Paul model how to be fully human and single. • A sense of humour around singleness as appropriate. • Being confident to seek help with the grief of childlessness. • Help to consider issues around fostering/ adoption as a single person with balanced, realistic and detailed information. • Feel free to ask questions about issues around singleness. • Able to raise the issues around singleness with church leaders. <p>Inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience truly deep friendships. • Healthy 'accountability and encouragement' relationships. • In 'iron sharpening iron' relationships rather than superficial relationships or isolation. • Feels part of a community/family. • Feels fully integrated socially in church life. • Feeling genuinely understood by others regarding their age/ stage/circumstance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively promotes a culture that has balanced proportion of single people in congregation and leadership – actively avoids 'couples' culture. • Creates an emotionally safe environment to talk about issues honestly – whether single or married. • Church promotes healthy friendships between men and women whether single or married. • Co-leading between men and women whether single or married (not just married people leading with their spouse). • A named key leader in the church to support single people and representation of single people. • Single people quickly and fully included in the church if they're new, as well as married couples. • Staff acknowledge and address the challenges of encouraging a church culture that is welcoming for everyone. • Healthy Christian single role models are evident – without a need to be 'outstanding'. • Church culture is free from assumptions about single people's time availability or skills. • The importance of spiritual heirs and not just biological heirs is highlighted. • Churches take proactive steps to be 'single-person friendly' as well as 'family-friendly'. 	<p>Denominations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportional representation of singleness on leadership teams. • Churches within denominations are well connected, and with other churches in the community. • National debates and initiatives about singleness e.g. Church of England Synod. • Money/resources/staffing given to developing better evangelism and discipleship of single people. • Actively promote a theology of healthy Christian singleness. <p>National conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference leadership teams have single members. • Speakers – balance between men/women, single/married. <p>Mission organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training/conferences include input about singleness on the mission field.

An individual	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free from the impact of stereotyped ideas of men/women and what they may/may not find difficult. • Free to be honest about joys and struggles about singleness. • Has role models around of healthy Christian singleness, and is also a role model to others. • Is a spiritual parent to others (whether adults, children or young people). • Has people to spend time with – whether a ‘normal day’, holidays, special times of year, difficult periods of life. <p>Gifting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual gifts are fully used. • Able to take part in all opportunities for church involvement, ministry and leadership – does not encounter a glass ceiling of gifts being used because they are single. • Single people aren’t over-worked/exploited. • Has the courage to pioneer rather than just fit into what’s currently going on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church culture is free from assumptions about why single people are single (e.g. that healing is needed), but offers pastoral support and grace for those who do have particular spiritual, emotional, social, psychological needs. <p>Teaching/discipleship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church leaders read and use good quality UK books and resources about singleness. • Preachers are aware of the powerful impact (positively or negatively) of what they say. • Teaching involves as many examples about singleness as about marriage. • Teachers acknowledge if they are teaching on singleness/marriage and it is not their particular experience, and are sensitive. • Churches have a planned structure for teaching/discipleship that regularly and specifically covers singleness – and other issues – from the front as well as in other contexts. • Regular teaching around biblical perspectives on singleness/dating/sex before marriage. • Leaders apply biblical teaching to today’s current social reality (not a rose-tinted bygone era). • Leaders provide a robust critique of a sex-obsessed world – including the challenges for everyone. 	

An individual	A local church	The national church
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fact-based information is used to change thinking e.g. mental links/false attributions about single people.• Front-stage interviews of single people.• Everyone is happy that the church is teaching in a balanced way about singleness, dating/relationships, marriage – even if it's not directly applicable to them.• Short stories/interviews about singleness as well as 'sermons'.• Teaching is not just a one-off event, but there are ongoing illustrations/ input about singleness.• The church addresses the issues that single people sometimes face, but which can also affect others in the church (e.g. loneliness).	

“Dating and relationships: what would it look like if things were working well in the church?”

Engage consultation vision grid

Foundations

An individual	A local church	The national church
<p>Spiritual/emotional/social wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rooted and growing in relationship with God. • Clear sense of identity. • Positive understanding of healthy boundaries. • Good self-esteem. • Positive body image. • Sense of purpose/destiny/calling in life. • Understanding that you and everyone is on a journey of personal growth. • Being comfortable having healthy intimate relationships with people of the opposite sex. • Freedom from baggage from previous relationships. • Free from shame/unhealthy habits. • Choosing rather than needing a relationship. • Knowing and owning your values. • Being open about emotional needs and desire for relationship. • Bringing God into all relationships. • Pursuing wisdom, grace and discernment in all areas of life, including relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church leaders understand that it is their responsibility to actively and intentionally work to make their congregation gender balanced so that healthy dating and relationships are possible. • All churches regularly collect and monitor data on numbers of male and female attendees of different ages to inform action. • Church leaders understand that it is their responsibility to promote a healthy culture of dating and relationships in their congregation so this is ‘normalised’. • Church leaders regularly speak about the relevant issues from the front, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A positive view of marriage between Christians. - A positive view of sex only within marriage. - How to overcome issues resulting from previous relationships. - Freedom from shame. - Freedom from porn. • Single and married people are all included and part of the community – not segregated. 	<p>Church leader initial training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes input on how to promote and create a gender balanced church. • Includes information on how to support healthy Christian dating and relationships. <p>Church leader continuing training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church leader networks run regular training so all church leaders take responsibility for making their churches gender balanced and know how to do this. • Church leader networks run regular training so all Church leaders know how to support and signpost to relevant resources to promote a culture of healthy Christian dating/relationships. <p>National conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All annual national conferences provide equal opportunities for teaching through having seminars each week on healthy Christian <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Singleness. - Dating and relationships. - Marriage. - Parenting.

An individual	A local church	The national church
<p>Support/accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good community and healthy friendships around you who give honest feedback. • Role models of healthy dating/relationships/ marriage. • A small 'support team' of people (e.g. close friends/family/mentor) for encouragement, discipleship and accountability who talk/pray/listen/feedback specifically around dating (though might not meet as a group). <p>Healthy male-female psycho-social dynamics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to being clear, kind and honest, with ongoing 'DTR' conversations when appropriate (Define The Relationship). • Treating each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. • Gender equality rather than stereotypes. • Partnership, respect for each other and for marriage. • Men guarding the hearts of women, and vice versa. • Respectfully responsive (no 'ghosting'!). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church leaders and others model healthy relationships between men and women. • Men and women involved in reaching and discipling men. • Church leadership teams are intentionally diverse and include single men and women, and married men and women. • Church leaders explicitly encourage and facilitate systems of discipleship/ support/accountability. • Mutual conversations – leaders listen in depth to current experiences of those in their congregations and take supportive action. • Joint leadership responsibility for changing things – between church leaders and those who know from experience what the current Christian dating/relationships scene is like. • Church leaders identify the people in their congregation who could be key in leading/ inputting in the area of dating/relationships, and facilitate this. • Healthy attitudes and teaching about it being OK to want to get married, empathy, practical help (not "it's a sin to want to get married because that means you're not content with your singleness"). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All annual national conferences provide good quality, non-cringey, facilitated events for single people to meet others if they're looking to date. <p>Denominational leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All denominations regularly collect and monitor data on the numbers of male and female members of different ages in all their churches. • All denominations run regular training so all church leaders take responsibility for making their churches gender balanced and know how to do this. • Church leader networks run regular training so all Church leaders know how to support and signpost to relevant resources to promote a culture of healthy Christian dating/ relationships. • Take responsibility for making their churches gender balanced – and explicitly lead the way in this. • Understand the current national Christian context around dating and relationships. • Explicitly promote and facilitate healthy Christian dating and relationships. • Promote high positive values around self and relationships (not defining people by their marital status).

An individual	A local church	The national church
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouraging single people that it's OK to look outside their own church for dating/relationships. Divorce recovery support is available e.g. the Holy Trinity Brompton 'Restored Lives' course. 	<p>National resourcing/ networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model sermons/outlines are available online around healthy Christian dating/relationships. Church leaders have somewhere to go for advice – online forum/ Facebook page/network/ coaching? Divorce recovery support widely available e.g. Holy Trinity Brompton 'Restored Lives' course.

Dating: “getting to know someone with a view to seeing whether or not we want to be in a relationship” i.e. meeting up with someone (once to a few times)

An individual	A local church
<p>Beginning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intentionally thinks and prays (alone and with others) about dating in a godly way. Knows how/where to intentionally find good people to date. Intentionally active about meeting lots of new people and 'potential eligibles'. Confidently asks people on dates. Confidently accepts date invitations and says 'yes' unless there are appropriate 'red flags' (and knows what are/are not appropriate red flags). Is resilient if people say 'no thanks' and keeps asking others. 'Intentional but not intense' approach: honest, up front. Open-minded, not looking for a 'type'. Sees dating as an opportunity to learn about yourself and others. Comfortable with own attractiveness. Realises that attraction might not be there to start with but might grow. Choosing fun activities to do together. Comfortable with asking someone if they'd like to meet up again, either at the end of the date or afterwards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Church leaders understand what a vision for healthy Christian dating looks like and teach and promote this from the front. Church leaders and congregations know what resources are available to support healthy Christian dating, and use and promote these for all who are looking to date – including good Christian online dating. Church leaders explicitly and actively address the barriers to dating: societal influences, church gender imbalance, increased numbers of single Christians, unhealthy male-female psycho-social dynamics, 'don't date' messages, need for teaching on healthy dating, spiritual battle around Christian marriage. Church leaders explicitly encourage and facilitate systems of discipleship/ support/accountability which address dating. Planned, ongoing, regular teaching and discipleship about healthy Christian dating including developing prayerful wisdom and discernment.

An individual	A local church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wisdom and confidence to use good quality online dating approaches, e.g. see Hopeful Girl list "The science of online dating": https://blog.christianconnection.com/the-science-of-online-dating • Comfortable with either accepting a second date invitation or saying 'no thanks' in a clear, kind, honest way. <p>Middle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentionally continues to think and pray (alone and with others) about dating in a godly way. • Being willing to go on another date unless there are appropriate red flags. • Fun dates involving activities, rather than just talking over coffee/meals. • Intentionally getting to know the other person beyond a superficial level. • Making dating a positive experience for the other person. <p>End</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear, kind, appropriately honest. • Ending by building up, with positive feedback for them as a person along with any general reasons given which are 'owned' by the giver e.g. "at the same time, I don't feel we have as much in common as I'd be wanting/I feel that I'd rather not pursue things further", rather than needing to give specific justifications unless this is particularly appropriate. • Communication of ending method is appropriate to how long you've been dating and how you met. If met in 'real life' – face-to-face best. If met online, it may vary, e.g. by text/email OK if just 1 date, phone call if 2/3, face-to-face if several dates. • Resilient and comfortable with rejection and being rejected. • A good ending, with discussion to agree boundaries around friendship after dating if are in the same social circles/ church. • Using wisdom and discernment (with input from support team) to be pro-active in either ending dating or moving onto a "going out" relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church leaders give permission and affirm healthy dating, from the front and to individuals. • Promote a culture of encouragement. • Promote a culture of people asking others on dates, and people saying yes. • Training for group leaders on dating/ relationships. • Promote a culture of sensitive match-making between mutual friends – with education on how to do that. • Promote social events that are connected with dating or dating teaching – networking between different churches to increase their effectiveness and widen people's social circles. • Church leaders and congregations understand and proactively meet the needs of those in their congregations (e.g. some older/divorced/widowed people may have specific needs).

Relationship/'going out' (UK): "getting to know someone with a view to seeing whether or not we want to get engaged" i.e. an exclusive, romantic relationship

An individual	A local church
<p>Beginning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear, kind and appropriately honest.• Defining boundaries e.g. social, time, physical. How are we going to help each other with holiness/purity in our relationship, or set and maintain appropriate boundaries? e.g. Henry Cloud and John Townsend's book <i>Boundaries in Dating</i>.• Graciousness. <p>Middle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Talking about the future – hopes, dreams about marriage and other things.• Understands that the level of intimacy matches the level of mutual commitment.• Having fun!• Intentionally getting to know the other person's heart, character, values.• Understands why God's way is for sex only within marriage, and both intentionally supporting each other to honour that in the relationship – spiritually, emotionally, physically, practically. <p>End</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear, kind and honest, courageous.• Input from support team to help make wise decisions, whether you're taking the initiative to end the relationship, or propose, or knowing how to respond when the other person does either of these.• Not waiting too long to make a decision (support team may need to challenge about this).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Church leaders understand what a vision for healthy Christian relationships looks like and teach and promote this from the front.• Church leaders give permission and affirm healthy relationships, from the front and to individuals.• Planned, ongoing, regular teaching and discipleship about healthy Christian relationships, including developing prayerful wisdom and discernment.• Provide support and accountability – mentoring available with older couples.• Church leaders and congregations know what resources are available to support healthy Christian relationships, and use/promote these.• Teaching and resources are provided on attachment, commitment, how to resolve conflict.• Practical positive teaching about healthy relationships is 'normalised' – including a positive view of sex only within marriage which enables an understanding of why this is God's way.

An individual	A local church
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If considering engagement:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Use pre-engagement and engagement questions/books.- Attend an engagement course together (even if not yet engaged) to help make wise and informed decisions.• If ending the relationship:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Carefully and prayerfully done.- Face-to-face.- Involve your community.- Not ghosting/ignoring.- Clear-cut, agree boundaries, clear signals.	

“Christian marriage: what would it look like if things were working well in the church?”

Engage consultation vision grid

Foundations: A gender balanced church that teaches about healthy Christian singleness, dating and relationships for young people and adults

A couple where both spouses are Christians

A couple	A local church	The national church
<p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentional period of preparation for marriage, not just the wedding. • Understanding the value of engagement – richness in waiting. • Discussing, and managing shared, realistic expectations around marriage. • Making intentional decisions to be different from the ‘world’. • Understanding and living out God’s design for sex within marriage. <p>Marriage preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering it normal to do a marriage preparation course. • Freedom to make a clear decision (about whether to get married or not). • Talking about and addressing issues needing emotional wholeness and healing (from previous experiences, or ongoing addictions, e.g. porn). • Understanding and valuing each other’s differences. • Healthy self-identity. 	<p>Pre-engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping couples to explore marriage, e.g. through using marriage preparation resources/ going on a course. <p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating engagements. • Running regular engagement courses. • Teaching on understanding and living out God’s design for sex within marriage. • Mentoring, support and teaching in place for engaged couples. <p>Marriage preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running regular marriage preparation courses. • Expectation that couples will attend marriage preparation courses. • Mentoring, support and teaching in place for couples. 	<p>Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulating the vision for Christian marriage. • Support portal/‘map’ of all resources available. • Marriage ministry members working together to promote the uniqueness of Christian marriage. • Marriage Week. • Churches and organisations being seen to be working together. • Openness within the Church – through building relationships between the leaders. <p>Denominational leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National leaders role-modelling healthy marriage. • Denominational leaders encouraged to attend marriage retreats if they are married. • Denominational leaders promoting marriage support as normal in all churches, including for church leaders. • The Church removing rather than creating barriers to God’s plan for marriage.

A couple	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being 'real' and honest. • Establishing boundaries – physical, emotional, spiritual. • Having a clear vision of Christian marriage. • Understanding what a covenant contract means. • Establishing life aims. <p>Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God at the centre. • Lifelong commitment. • Praying together daily. • Reading the Bible together regularly. • Unconditional love. • Forgiveness. • Hospitality – open-hearted in practical ways. • Missional. • Openness and transparency. • Vulnerability. • Sacrificial, unselfish giving. • Fun! • Understanding of equality. • Mutual submission and absence of control. • Continuing and deepening intimacy; emotional, spiritual, physical. • Comfortable with sexuality. • Commitment to personal and emotional growth. • Commitment to growing together. • Commitment to ongoing investment in the marriage. • Accountability to each other, and to identified, trusted others. • Countercultural. • Increasingly reflecting the fruit of the Spirit. • Reflection of the gospel and the church. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to talk about and address issues needing emotional wholeness and healing (from previous experiences, or ongoing addictions, e.g. porn). • Teaching and support for children of blended families. <p>Weddings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaged couples are welcomed in church. • Missional opportunity (marriage support). • Church community involvement. <p>Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders modelling healthy Christian marriage. • Leaders regularly attend clergy marriage retreats. • Training for leaders on how to support marriages. • Expectation that couples will be followed up by mentors after the wedding. • Ongoing support from marriage mentors – e.g. meeting six months later. • Regular marriage courses. • Mentoring, support and teaching systems in place. • Promoting and providing a variety of resources (including online). • Marriage (and singleness) talked about freely and sensitively by ministers. • Providing social activities – for couples and single people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Church leaders accepting appropriate responsibility for what's gone wrong. <p>Initial and ongoing ministerial training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theological/training colleges train future church leaders on how to support marriage. • Ongoing training provided for church leaders to know how to support marriage. <p>National conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always have an accessible marriage seminar. <p>Communication promoted by national leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaching the topic of marriage – knowing when to speak out and what to say. • Have a positive pro-marriage message that doesn't marginalise others. • Respected spokespeople for marriage. • Academic and secular world encouraged not to be threatened by marriage – supportive and enthusiastic instead. • Positive messages about 'natural' marriage (instead of 'traditional'). • Taking opportunities (e.g. royal wedding) to talk about marriage. • Promoting positive messages in media. • Influencing culture.

A couple	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being family to other people. • Mentoring the next generation. • Sharing stories and demonstrating the benefits of godly marriage. • Going somewhere for help with the marriage when either or both feel this would be useful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing additional practical support and care at times of particular stress, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meals for new parents. - Lifts for elderly/infirm spouses etc. - Babysitting. • Church/'rest of life' balance promoted for leaders and congregation. • Enabling couples to serve together. • Celebrating anniversaries. • Aware and explicitly talking about challenges and opportunities of marriage. • Supportive environment for all couples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - whatever the circumstances. • Named contact person within the church – for those seeking help. • Clear signposting for further expert support. • Understanding and support for infertility. • Support for being countercultural. • Acknowledgement and practical support for those dealing with issues around porn (and other addictions). • Understanding of domestic violence and abuse – and how to deal with it appropriately. • Acceptance and support for step families/blended families. • Support and resources for children of step families. • Support for those separating, divorced or widowed. 	

'Mixed' marriages where one spouse is a Christian and the other isn't

A couple	A local church	The national church
<p>Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation of how the spiritual difference will be handled. • Planning ahead around what the potential implications of the difference might mean. <p>Marriage preparation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring and understanding each other's beliefs and values. • Counting the cost of not being able to share faith (for the Christian). • Being aware of both potential difficulties (reality check) and potential opportunities (celebration of coming to faith). • Awareness that things may or may not change. • Planning around scenarios e.g. how our beliefs and values affect our approach to children, finances, time etc. • Understanding and managing values around generosity e.g. tithing and giving. • Explore potential churches for both to attend if the non-Christian is open to going to church (e.g. one that is more suitable for them which may be different from the type of church the Christian is used to attending). • Open communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church knows which couples fall in this category. • Openness and both welcomed. • Welcomed for who they are. • Welcome the whole family – reach them where they are at. • Plenty of social activities to build relationships. • Involvement in projects that relate to their interests. • Hospitality in small groups. • Recognising 'church' is in weekday activities, not just attendance on Sundays. • Treated as a married couple rather than one person feeling 'spiritually single'. • Recognising the tension the Christian may face – e.g. regarding time with family/church commitments. • Prayer support for the Christian. • Signposting to supporting resources. • Marriage support. • Support for Christian parent to pass on faith sensitively to children. • Involve children in Church activities. • Mentoring (either or both). • Awareness of other potential spiritual similarities and differences of religion. 	<p>All national leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normalising this as a common issue and churches addressing it relevantly. • Recognising the evangelistic opportunity. <p>Initial and ministerial training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clergy training addresses this issue (theological/ training colleges). • Ongoing training for church leaders. <p>Networks that need to be set up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National support networks/inter-church networks for Christians who are married to non-Christians. • National support networks for those in inter-faith and/or inter-cultural marriages <p>Resources that are needed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More resources available, e.g. websites, podcasts, books etc. – practical advice.

A couple	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledging that there is potential for change in the future.• Both being aware of biblical teaching on marriage. <p>Marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christian would know where to go for support.• Having a support network that's welcoming of both.• Christian sharing, modelling and being a channel of God's love.• Ability to cope with other's opinions.• Christian being strong and secure in their own faith.• Spiritual humility (not superiority).• Ongoing guidance from Holy Spirit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resources and understanding for those with spouses of other faiths.• Valuing the marriage regardless of where the non-Christian is faith-wise.• Equipping all church members – not just leaders to do the above!	

“Parenting and discipleship around young people’s dating and relationships: what would it look like if things were working well in the church?”

Engage consultation vision grid

Parents	A local church	The national church
<p>Spiritual/emotional/social wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentionally develop their own spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing. • Model a growing personal relationship with God and encourage that in children and young people – parenting for faith, so that children/young people know faith is authentic. • Pray for their children/young people. • Model prayer, understanding and applying the Bible to life, engagement in church. • Model how relationships are done well. • Are disciplined themselves – including those new to faith who haven’t seen good Christian parenting modelled. • Have an understanding of attachment and how to develop healthy attachments. • Provide warm and structured parenting. • Provide love and freedom within realistic boundaries. • Parents able to articulate their values and reasons for them. 	<p>Spiritual/emotional/social wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A culture, lead from the front, of intentionally encouraging spiritual, emotional and social growth for everyone. • Intentionally encourages a culture where everyone is learning about relationships from each other. • Promotes and encourages conversation amongst parents – parenting in community. • Supports parents to be able to articulate their values and reasons for them. • Intentionally proactive in addressing issues that parents need support for, signposting to resources. • Vibrant, godly modelling of effective parenting. • Church practically enables parents to get involved, particularly single parents. • Addresses holistic needs of children/young people – effective teaching about all areas of development. • Modelling by godly youth leaders of spiritual, emotional and social growth, and positive relationships to support parenting. 	<p>Initial training of church leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students understand the issues people are actually facing. • Practical training (e.g. from acet UK). • Practical pastoral aspects (e.g. Care for the Family Bereavement Care) not just theological only. • Understanding how you set the culture of your church (e.g. Care for the Family doing 3 days training on parenting for students, also developing similar for marriage support). • Understanding how to support blended families and parents in different circumstances, including single parents. • Input around sexuality follows through to parenting. • It’s put on the agenda – 72% of churches are not engaging with young people – go and find them! <p>Ongoing training for church leaders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good quality courses/support is available to develop the culture outlined in ‘parents’ and ‘local church’ columns.

Parents	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive about issues children/young people are facing, rather than judgemental. • Focus on questioning rather than telling. • Open communication. • Take and retain responsibility for discipling their own children and young people. • Are in Christian community. • Understand the challenges their children/young people are going through. • Feel and are capable and confident to disciple their children/young people (see <i>Gen Z: Rethinking Culture</i> Youth For Christ research report). • Are confident and faithful about having a long-term view of children/young people's spiritual development. • Encourage involvement in church groups and youth groups. • Involvement of youth workers/youth work to support discipleship by parents. <p>Discipleship around dating/relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer! • Age-appropriate support/discipleship for pre-teens as well as teenagers. • Bring their children/young people up to be God-connected, with a heart wanting to please him. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on developing healthy youth ministries in churches – welcoming and innovative, relevant, in different church contexts. • Church recognises that God can use children and young people as much as adults. • Opportunities for growth in gifts and leadership for children and young people in different contexts in the church. • Intergenerational discipleship encouraged within church – young people want a grandparent figure in their life. • Those who are older in faith are willing to be flexible in 'how we do church' – and this is modelled by church leaders. <p>Discipleship around dating/relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders are interested in young people and these issues! • A culture of honesty led from the front about needing to learn and develop in addressing these issues. • Helping parents have a healthy relationship between themselves (marriage enrichment). • Normalising use of support, courses and resources for marriage and parenting. • Teaching and signposting parents to relevant resources. • Age-appropriate support/discipleship for pre-teens as well as teenagers. 	<p>Heads of denominations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that these issues need to be addressed by all leaders. • Church to be clear on what its message is in terms of how to develop healthy spiritual, emotional, social and relational wellbeing. • Leading on how to articulate values and reasons for these. • Set up systems to ensure these things happen. <p>National Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run a parenting stream/seminars.

Parents	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have thought through their understanding of biblical teaching on relationships and sexuality and how it's applied to today's experiences. • Support young people to be countercultural, recognising relativism, how to understand the importance of authenticity of scripture. • Can explain biblical teaching on marriage – the 'why' as well as the 'what'. • Address question of relationships/marriage with non-Christians. • Encouraging good Christian peer friendships with both sexes. • Model relationships/communication/clear expectations and boundaries. • Teach an understanding of commitment, to faith and people, rather than 'random dating'. • Aware of what the context is for this generation – starting from their world. • Understand the impact of the digital world and the influence of porn/drink/drugs. • Have clear expectations and talk about issues openly and constructively. • Hold young people accountable – ask clear and direct questions. • Know what to say in certain situations. • Know about resources on relationships and sex education for young people, and share these with their young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parents to have confidence to effectively parent in this area. • Church is a place of support for parents – it's OK to have difficult conversations, even if a young person is going 'off-track'. • Culture of grace and love, vulnerability, don't have to be perfect to be accepted. • Churches liaise with and use organisations that provide support and training e.g. Romance Academy/acet UK/Youth for Christ. • Churches work/group together to support and resource each other and parents. • Churches are in relationship with local schools to support young people and adults who support them. 	

“Youth work and discipleship around young people’s dating and relationships: what would it look like if things were working well?”

Engage consultation vision grid

Foundations: A gender balanced church that teaches about healthy Christian singleness, dating and relationships for young people and adults – including all other aspects of discipleship and wellbeing

A young person	A local church	The national church
<p>Spiritual, emotional and social foundations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A safe network of people in church to talk to, so experiencing emotional safety and grace-filled relationships, meaning that they are confident about talking to relevant people honestly. • Intimate relationships in the body of Christ with people of various ages, and through participation. • Positive sense of self, and self-identity whether single or in a relationship. • Strong sense of belonging and healthy friendships of both sexes. • Feeling a complete and valuable person whether single or in a relationship. • Healthy understanding of self-control and how it can be freeing, and why it's a good thing. • Intentionally disciplined by healthy single adults, including seeing singleness as a positive option. 	<p>Spiritual, emotional and social foundations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key church leader who facilitates a discipleship culture that speaks to every area of people’s lives, including around dating/relationships. • Intentionally facilitating a safe network of people in church to talk to – need at least five key relationships with people of different ages/stages (<i>Sticky Faith</i> research, US). • Intentionally facilitating a culture of honesty, vulnerability, emotional safety. • Church leaders are freed up to do the above by a mobilised congregation. • Youth are being taught to disciple younger youth. • Empower young people to have a voice in church, so they are involved and sharing input, leadership, thoughts, testimonies. • Frequent opportunities for all congregation members to interact with, engage with, and get to know young people, e.g. visiting the youth group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national church has, and is articulating a clear and inspiring vision for relationships/sex. • Sacrificial giving to organisations that are working to support church leaders/young people. • Every church in the country is linked with and is supported by a relevant expert. <p>Church leaders initial training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theological colleges teach future church leaders to be confident to teach on these issues. • They invite RSE experts to speak to ordinands as a core part of the curriculum. <p>Church leader ongoing training/resourcing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for clergy from acet UK, Romance Academy and others. • Church leadership conferences/networks intentionally train church leaders on how to implement culture and solutions.

A young person	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing that a romantic, intimate relationship is not the answer to loneliness. • Confidently handling growing self-awareness, self-acceptance and sexuality. <p>Dating & Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to think theologically about dating/relationships/sex and for that to affect conversations, feelings, motivation, behaviour. • Knowing there isn't a set way of doing things, or a silver bullet, but their imagination has been captured by an alternative vision of teenage relationships. • Able to talk about why Jesus' way is better. • Understanding healthy boundaries, why these are helpful, and how to put them in place, including around abstinence. • Realistic understanding of healthy Christian dating, relationships and marriage. • Being selfless in dating/relationships. • Flourishing in dating relationships through recognising each other's gifts. • Intentionally discipled by very honest, healthy married couples (ideally would be parents). • Around married adults who are continuing to grow in faith and model this. • Free from taking on and acting out adult anxieties around relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching transparently talks about real life. • All teaching has practical, positive next steps – a proactive focus. • All church leaders have mentoring/discipleship support from someone who isn't their line manager, who addresses issues around dating/relationships/sex/marriage. <p>Dating & Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for adults about how to talk about issues around dating/relationships from a biblical perspective, so they are confident to do this. • Frequent teaching from the front stage about relationships/dating/sex so it's obvious that the issues are addressed, intentionally planned and integrated into teaching. • Adults clearly live out healthy, honest Christian marriage. • Adults of all ages are modelling discussion around dating/relationship issues. • Adults intentionally help young people to think through the nitty gritty of theological teaching around dating/relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All denominational leaders and national network leaders are aware of resources that are available to support them. <p>Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National conferences all have seminars for young people addressing issues around relationships, masturbation, dating, sex, same-sex attraction. • Panel Q & A. • Seminars for church leaders around how to teach issues around the above, based on biblical, theological teaching. • Seminars for parents on how to address the above.

A young person	A local church	The national church
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free from the sexual prosperity gospel.• Free from addictive behaviours.• Free from legalism.• Free from society's obsession about relationships.		