

Engage



Making Christian Marriage Possible

www.engage-mcmp.org.uk

**“The biggest barrier to Christian marriage is ...
the Church?”**

Summary information for leadership teams



(see accompanying notes on Engage webpage 'For Christian Leaders')

Overview

Rationale/background

Barriers to Christian marriage

why Christian marriage is so often not possible

Consequences

for Christian singleness, dating, marriage, women, men, children

Ways forward

action to address the issues



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
- Most single Christians want to marry another Christian (Christian Connection survey, 2012)
- ENGAGE is about making Christian marriage ‘possible’ not ‘compulsory’!

Key principles



- Marriage in this context as the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others
- ‘Christian marriage’ defined here as a Christian man married to a Christian woman
- It is best for a Christian to marry another Christian
 - biblical teaching (1 Cor 7.39 ; 2 Cor 6.14)
 - recent research e.g. EA (2012) report
- Issues relating to homosexuality are very important, however they are outside the remit of this work



Barriers to Christian Marriage

Why is Christian marriage often not possible?

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



Barrier 1: Church gender imbalance

- 7.6 million attend church regularly in the UK
- 2.6 million of these are men
- 1 man : 2 women ratio in the church

(Tearfund, 2007, *Churchgoing in the UK*; Evangelical Alliance, 2012, *How's the Family?*)



1 man : 2 women



Barrier 1: Church gender imbalance

Which list do you or others most associate with 'church'?
(see accompanying notes)

A.

Power

Competency

Achievement

Success

Accomplishment

Targets

Goals

B.

Love

Relationships

Support

Nurture

Harmony

Community

Sharing



Barrier 2: Lack of teaching on...

- **Socio-cultural trends and how these affect Christians**

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

1 in 3 neither married or co-habiting – numbers increasing

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)

The church needs to be much more 'pro-marriage' than the rest of society, to nurture and model God's way of doing things – but it also needs to understand and be supportive of single Christians



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):
Never taught?



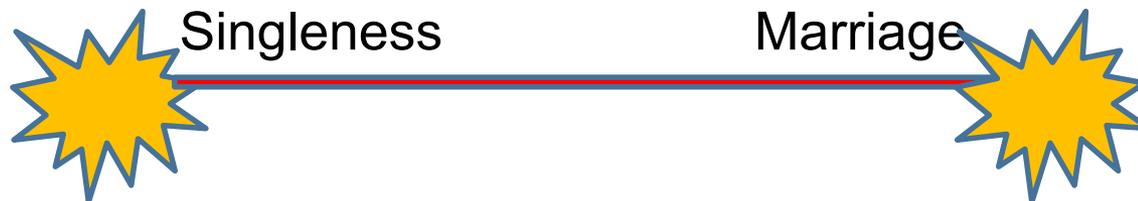
Barrier 3: Lack of awareness

Many Christians are completely unaware of the church gender imbalance and how it makes Christian marriage impossible for so many Christians (mostly 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)

Battle for Christian marriage on different fronts





The current result

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 social norm).

The “1-generation behind” church



- Value singleness/single people (‘remember Jesus and Paul’); be content with singleness; don’t pressurise re getting married. Increasing focus on singleness (increasingly a social norm). Assume people will marry if they want to. Don’t intentionally address unwanted 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, some (perhaps uninformed) young adults wondering ‘what the fuss is about’, massive gender imbalance now....
- Over 1/2 single Christians say church doesn’t know what to do with them...(Christian Connection Survey, 2012)



Consequence 1: 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 feel isolated, not valued, understood or supported (EA, 2012; Christian Connection, 2012)



Consequence 2: Dating

- Christians are now less likely to meet potential partners at church, or in usual social circles, especially as they get older
- Dating frequency amongst UK Christians is unhelpfully very low. Christian Connection (2012) research respondents said:

| | |
|--|-----|
| I go on dates quite often | 5% |
| I have been on a few dates in the last year | 36% |
| I haven't dated for at least a year | 22% |
| It is many years since I last went on a date | 32% |
| (5% not looking to date/don't agree with 'dating') | |

Influence of American teaching about dating being ungodly?
...all impacts on meeting, dating, relationships and marriage

Consequence 3: Women



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

- Affects up to $\frac{1}{3}$ of the adult church (50% of women = up to 2.4 million)
- 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 4: 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 or anxious about being proactive?
- Men keep their lives on hold more than women, waiting to be married (Christian Connection survey, 2012)
- Married men/fathers often oblivious to the implications for them and their families (especially their daughters) of the imbalance

Consequence 5: Children and young people



- 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)





Consequence 5: Children and young people

- “It is common for high levels of Christian commitment to flow down the generations” (EA 2012, p13), but
- “The biological replacement rate of committed Christians is only just over 50%” (EA 2012, p12)
- “Need for conversion growth...need for church to provide practical help for Christian parents as they seek to nurture their children into spiritual life and Christian discipleship” (EA 2012, p13)



Consequence 6: Mixed marriages

- 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?”



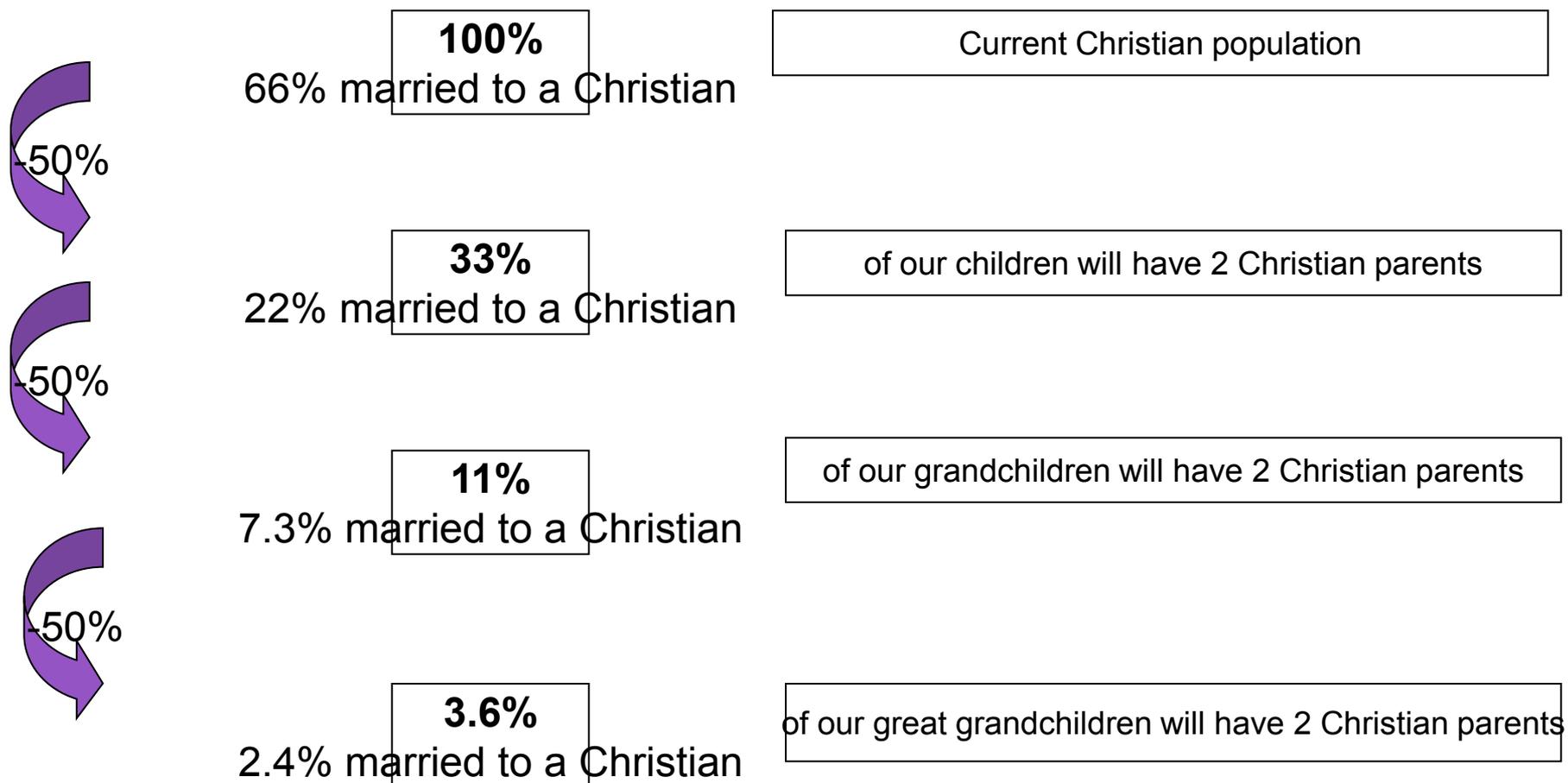
Consequence 7: Christian marriage - present

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

How many Christians know that the biggest current barrier to Christian marriage is the church itself?



Consequence 8: Christian marriage – the future





Engage:

Making Christian Marriage Possible

What?

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

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:

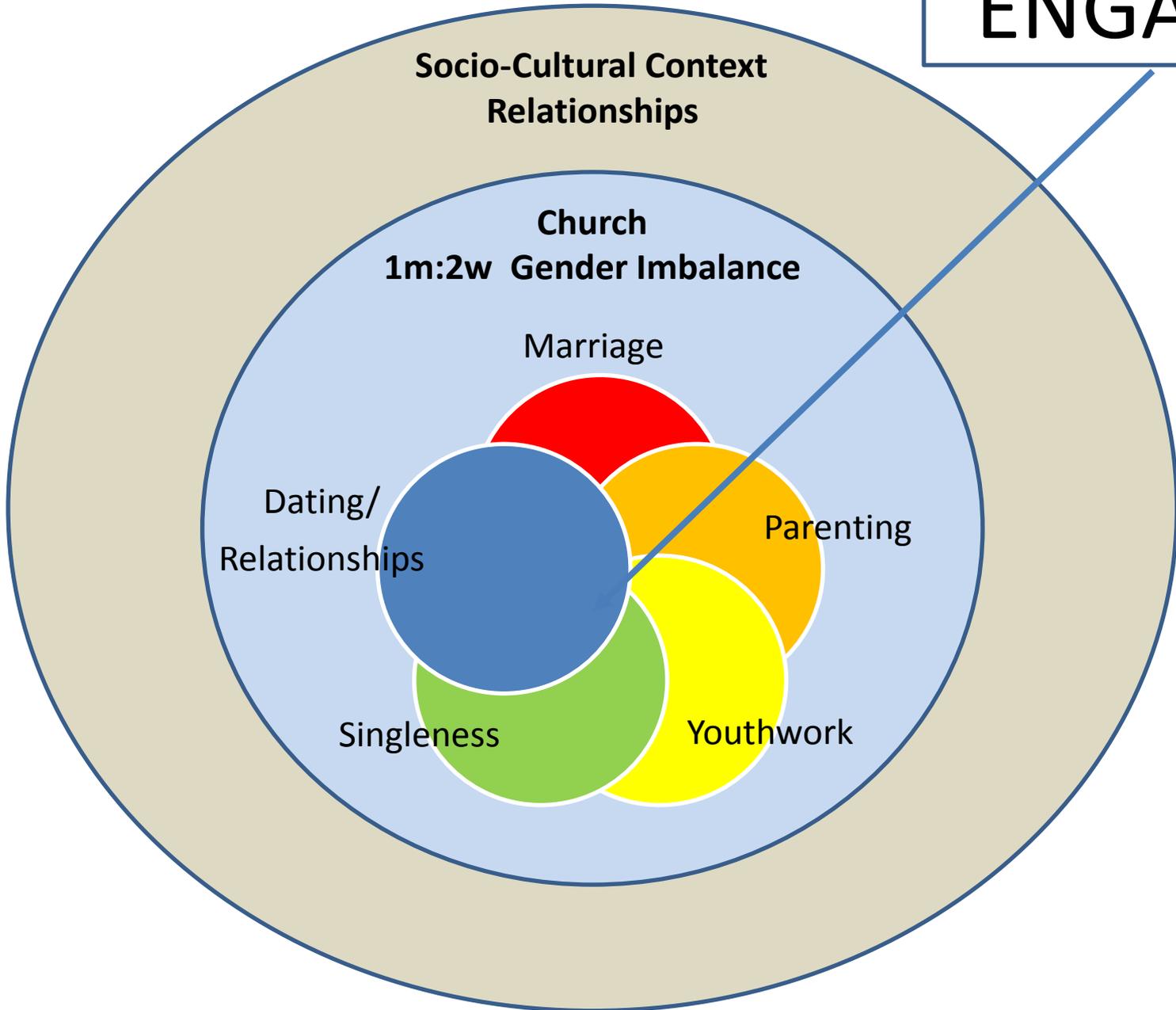
Making Christian Marriage Possible



Aims

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



**Socio-Cultural Context
Relationships**

**Church
1m:2w Gender Imbalance**

Marriage

Dating/
Relationships

Parenting

Singleness

Youthwork

Engage: Making Christian Marriage Possible



Who (see website for more details) Steering Group



Ways forward...



To discuss
+ action



Suggestions:

- Nominate a key person from your leadership team to lead your involvement in addressing the issues raised by Engage.
- Discuss the Engage website Audit Tool together, which offers lots of practical solutions.
- 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 the Audit Tool and Action Plan