



The Consultations of the International Anglican Family Network

Opportunities for mutual learning, inspiration, and lifting up the family as a source of thriving relationships, identity, belonging, discipleship and reconciliation

IAFN consultations on family life and mission have taken place over several decades. Thirty years ago, a series of ten mini-consultations highlighted an inspiring range of family-related work happening around the Anglican Communion. Whether focussing on the causes and consequences for families of rural-urban drift in Kenya or the challenges of high-rise living in Hong Kong, these meetings provided an invaluable learning experience for those involved, and beyond.

Such consultations provided rare opportunities for experts involved in the Church's family ministries, whether in a diocese, country or region, to meet. They proved a rich investment. They highlighted that there were many effective grassroot initiatives that, although changing the lives of families and communities for the better, were often unknown or unsung outside the local area. Those participating appreciated the recognition and affirmation received. Sharing of their ideas, experience of 'models that worked' and contextual theology often provided fresh stimulation and cross-fertilised initiatives in other areas. Often working in isolation, these front-line church workers, whether staff or volunteers, were quick to recognise the benefits of such sharing and mutual support and established informal, local or regional 'family networks' to further enable this.

Visitors or facilitators from different cultures elsewhere in the Anglican Communion were deliberately involved in these mini-consultations. This helped in the processes of discovery, affirmation and sharing, and highlighted that although the local churches might vary greatly in their engagement with family matters, many of the major challenges to family life were remarkably similar around the world. Indeed, many of these modest local initiatives were found to be applicable and replicable on the wider stage.

These key discoveries, and more, were strongly endorsed when local and visiting representatives from all ten mini-consultations met together in Singapore to evaluate the project. The importance of promoting practical sharing, support and cross-fertilisation was readily recognised. So was the potential of this specialist grassroot ministry as an authentic 'bottom-up' resource to foster understanding, change and growth in the hierarchical 'top down' institution that is the Church. Out of the meeting came the proposal to establish the International Anglican Family Network (IAFN), subsequently accepted and welcomed by the 1988 Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Consultative Council.

Throughout its 25-year history, IAFN has stayed true to these early discoveries. Through Newsletters sharing theology, briefings and stories on specific issues, together with front-line knowledge, 'ideas that work' and contacts, the Network has sought to invest in the spread of informed and successful family ministries. Inevitably, the Network is most alive and at its most productive when members, male and female; young and old; project workers, project managers and involved church leaders, meet together to share knowledge, ideas and experience. Four regional consultations – in East Africa; South-East Asia; Oceania and, most recently, in Central Africa - carefully planned between the host diocese and the Network Committee, have more than repaid the preparatory work and cost involved, in the consequent benefits to the local Church and the wider Communion and, ultimately, families being helped by the Church.

IAFN's knowledge and credibility are firmly rooted in these grassroot stories, reports and consultations. They provide a powerful resource from which to inform and influence the Church's priorities, programmes and leadership. For example, the Oceania consultation, with participants and church leaders from peoples across the Pacific Region, with inputs from local and visiting experts, experienced a rich and exciting exploration of cultural approaches to the challenge of violence in the family. This resulted in the publication of a practical action plan to tackle this issue at parish,

diocesan or provincial levels, with equal relevance for the Church regionally and elsewhere. It also influenced the agenda for subsequent meetings of Anglican church leaders to the highest levels.

Reports of IAFN regional consultations in Oceania, Korea and Africa are on-line at <https://iafn.anglicancommunion.org/consultations.aspx>.

