



Archbishop Stephen's speech as delivered to the Reimagining Care Commission launch

24 January 2023

Sisters and brothers, thank you very much.

As I've heard Anna say, social care is everybody's business. All of us, probably, at some time in our life will be people who need care, and every one of us has the opportunity and capacity to give and share care.

I think the idea of a Care Covenant is a game changer, because it's about focusing first of all on the values of flourishing and mutuality, that we all long to see in our homes, our communities, our families, and in the life of our nation.

And then recognising that we all have responsibilities and rights, where we need clarity; and when we have that clarity, we can build the better, fairer society that we long for.

When I first met with the Commission, I shared with them a little analogy that goes around my head, and I'll share it with you again, as a way of thinking through how we understand how we work together as a society to make these things happen.

It's a cold day today and it might snow. If it snows, what do we do? Well, I reckon it's the Government's responsibility to grit the roads. But I also probably reckon it's my responsibility, if I'm able to, to clear the snow on my driveway. But what about the pavement outside of my house? Is that my responsibility? Or is that my neighbour's responsibility? Is that the Government's responsibility? I'm not sure. What about if my neighbour is elderly or housebound or disabled in some way? Who clears the snow off their driveway?

So, I'm a simple soul, I look at it simply. I think: wouldn't it be good if we had a proper grown-up conversation about this? So that we can agree: What are my responsibilities? What are the Government's responsibilities? What are the community's responsibilities? How can churches and other faith groups and other local groups contribute so that together we can build a fair and just society where everyone can flourish?

That's the other bit of genius about this Commission. It starts not with "oh, there's this very difficult problem to be solved". It starts with a big vision of human flourishing, and says these are the values that we want to live by, and if we did live by them, it would make a difference. Yes, it's going to cost something. Of course, it's going to cost something. But muddling along as we are, sticking plasters over problems here, there and everywhere, that is costing an awful lot more, not just financially, but in people's lives that are not flourishing in the way that they can.

It's been very, very moving to hear stories from those whose lives are flourishing, and from people who get great joy through caring and being cared for. On your behalf I want to give a huge, huge thank you to the Commission and particularly to Anna and Bishop James for their leadership.

With regard to the question about housing, this Commission is part of a suite of Commissions, where we're looking into some of the big issues facing our nation. One of them is on housing, and I'd recommend that that's read alongside of what we're doing here.

I'm a storyteller, so let me finish with a story. I think we need to be more generous. I think one of the ways forward is for us to recognise the parts that we have to play, individually and collectively in churches, in government and in other community groups. And so my story about how to learn to be generous is this.

There was once a man who longed for great wealth, and in a dream he was told to go to a bend of the river at sunset, where he would meet a holy man who would give him a precious stone that would deliver him untold wealth and riches.

Faithful to the dream, he went to the bend of the river at sunset, sure enough there was a holy man. He knelt before the holy man and said to the holy man, "give me the stone, give me the stone". The holy man rummaged in his pocket and pulled out the most enormous diamond you could imagine that filled the palm of his hand and said, "Why, you must mean this. I found it on the forest path earlier today. Of course, you can have it."

The young man clutching onto the precious stone runs home absolutely overjoyed, except that night he cannot sleep. He tosses and turns on his bed, deeply troubled in his spirit. At dawn, he returns to the bend in the river, he finds the holy man, he kneels before him for a second time and, returning the stone says to him, "please give me the wealth that enables you to give this away for nothing".

We have a part to play in building a better, fairer world, and this Commission and this Care Covenant could be an incredible beginning. Thank you for being here and finding out more about it.