

CHRISTOPHER SMITH

St Alban's Holborn

General Synod Elections 2021



Looking back

Colleagues in the Diocese were kind enough to elect me to General Synod in 2015, and I hope and pray that I have been able to make a meaningful contribution over the last six years. I have always been prepared to speak in debates—when I’ve got something meaningful to say!—and I’ve contributed to the drafting of legislation through the relevant steering and revision committees, and through the tabling of amendments. I’ve been elected as a Church Commissioner and appointed a Clergy Discipline Commissioner. So I’ve been busy, and the substantial majority of the work has not divided along ‘party’ lines. There is a genuine desire on General Synod to pull together for the furtherance of the work and mission of God’s Church.

Looking ahead

There is a sense of coming to a crossroads in the Church of England at the moment, and clergy need advocates who will not only celebrate the positives, but also be watchful of what is coming, and urge caution where appropriate.

The Clergy Discipline Measure is likely to be replaced by a new Clergy Conduct Measure, and forthcoming legislation will need careful scrutiny to avoid replicating the mistakes of its predecessor. Having been on the Commission, and having supported a number of clergy through the system, I want to watch this very closely indeed, and contribute to the process. There is more at stake here than first meets the eye: ‘there is a need to review again the role and nature of ordained ministry’, said the Bishop at Lambeth in his report!

[PTO...]

The place of the parish is becoming contested territory. The belief that parish clergy are a block to mission ('Key limiting factors' as we have recently been described) is surprisingly pervasive at the moment. We ought to contest this, and will have to do so on a number of fronts. It will be hard work, as many in the hierarchy seem convinced that the parish is not an effective mission unit. We see that in the deployment of Strategic Development Funding. The 'Save the Parish' network are right to point out that this money needs to be accessible at parish level and more evidently available across the range of churchmanship. It is good that 'Save the Parish' has been set up and is working at this, but it strikes me as astonishing that these points should need to be made.

The Emerging Church Programme warrants careful scrutiny. There is a huge amount of potential change under this banner, including the Vision and Strategy work-stream. 'Simpler, humbler, bolder' may not be a bad slogan, but parish clergy will want to know what is tucked away in the phrase 'A church where mixed ecology is the norm'. All the talk is of fresh expressions, pioneer ministry, church planting and cell churches, but how does that balance with the parish system, and who is advocating better support and funding for parish life? I'd hope to carry on contributing to that discussion. Also under the Emerging Church umbrella is Transforming Effectiveness, which has the potential to introduce sweeping changes to the National Church Institutions which I worry may result in the concentration of power in a far smaller and less diverse group of people.

Mission in Revision is heading down the tracks too: a review of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. This is still at a very early stage, but I would hope to carry on making a contribution as a Church Commissioner, which is where the review sits, and on Synod. There is plenty of good stuff in the report, but there is pressure to make it easier to dispossess clergy through pastoral reorganisation (possibly by removing the Commissioners' role of deciding whether contested pastoral schemes can proceed, which is a check on the power of the diocesan bishop), and a move to downgrade the rights of private patrons.

The Clergy Remuneration Review is coming up for discussion soon, and I would like to press for more serious consideration of the matter of retirement housing, which I think is hugely important to many of us, and which is not adequately addressed by the 'RACSC' report.

Then there's Living in Love and Faith, which continues with a high degree of sensitivity, and the next stage of the proposed Anglican-Methodist Covenant is about to begin. Training of ordination candidates is in the air too, and those of us who believe in the value of residential training will need to work hard to put that case.

Looking for the City that is to come

To sum up, I am keen to carry on offering what I've been doing, and bring the experience of one quinquennium into the next as a committed parish priest of 26 years in orders, as well as to bring to debates and legislative scrutiny some 'extra-parochial' skills, educational and legal, and many years' experience of diocesan bodies. For pleasure, I play the piano and am a bit of a cricket nut. I am a cat owner (or does she own me?). I would be very grateful for your first choice vote, and feel free to call if you have any questions: 020 7405 1831.