



When I was confirmed in the Church of England, I felt a profound sense that I had come home: that I had found the place where I was called to be as the person — and, in time, the priest — that God was calling me to be. Since then, through ministry in a variety of contexts, I have had the privilege of learning from and ministering alongside friends and colleagues from the many traditions that make up the contemporary Church of England.

One of the great delights of my time teaching at St Mellitus was discovering that, despite our particular tribes, one of the shared distinctives of Anglicanism is precisely the way we inhabit our particular traditions. We can be Anglican Catholics, Anglican Evangelicals, Anglican Liberals, and so on — while sharing a certain humility, and an ability to celebrate difference, in the face of the more overarching claims made by traditions that do not share this Anglican charism.

After more than thirteen years in ministry, however, it seems that the Church of England is in something of a crisis. Not primarily a crisis of money, resources or even numbers, but a crisis of **confidence and flourishing** — not only among those we serve, but also, and especially, among those upon whom we rely to sustain a Christian presence in every community.

I have lost count of the number of friends who have entered ministry full of energy, hope and excitement, only to find that the burdens placed upon them by ministry and incumbency have ultimately led them to leave ministry altogether.

The reasons for this are complex. One feature seems clear: an increased centralisation of agency alongside an ever-growing proportion of compliance being held at incumbency level. Too many lines of responsibility are centred at incumbency level. Safeguarding, fundraising, human resources, mission and growth, buildings, finance and governance sit alongside all the ordinary and extraordinary tasks of Christian ministry for which we believe we were primarily called and ordained.

We have created a role in which the priest is expected simultaneously to be pastor, theologian, evangelist, line manager, fundraiser, safeguarding lead, HR professional, compliance officer, and chief executive; and we wonder why people struggle to flourish.

Shortly after I was ordained, I used to enthuse to others about discerning vocation. I would tell ordinands that the adventure of Christian ministry and priesthood was one of the most exciting journeys upon which you could embark. I still believe that the diaconate and priesthood are extraordinary and privileged vocations. But I now find myself reminding ordinands that they must really be sure they are called to this particular ministry — because, in the face of the pressures of contemporary ministry, that deep assurance of vocation may be all that can sustain us in the increasing burdens of ministry.

It should concern us that a vocation which ought to be life-giving and life-long is so often experienced as unsustainable. And it should concern us that an institutional anxiety about the future of the Church has increasingly been channelled down to those on the frontline of Christian ministry.

I am standing for General Synod because I am convinced that it does not need to be this way. I believe that the Church of England in which I, and so many others, have found a calling home can be celebrated today with full confidence for what it is, rather than anxiously managed towards something it may never be.

Sunday by Sunday, day by day, up and down the country, in parishes, schools and chaplaincies; in workplaces, open churches and coffee mornings; in youth groups and warm hubs; at baptisms, weddings and funerals; in worship and the celebration of sacraments, and beside the hospital bed; in conversations on high streets and in small acts of pastoral care — the Church of England displays the glory of its myriad witnesses to Jesus Christ. In small and magnificent ways, the love of God in Christ is made known to all those who encounter the ministry of the Church of England.

This daily reality should be celebrated. It should be named, cherished and given a renewed confidence that enables attractive, sustainable missional and numerical growth.

Too often, we celebrate what appears successful in secular terms and fail to celebrate the hundreds of thousands of small pearls of great price that are brought about every week in the many and varied places where the Church of England makes the love of God known.

And if we want that ministry to flourish, we as ministers need to flourish too. Ministerial wellbeing is not a luxury, and it is not an afterthought to successful ministry. It is part of the Church's mission.

We need a culture in which clergy can flourish without the constant sense that they are failing to meet an ever-expanding list of expectations. Flourishing ministers enable flourishing congregations. When we encourage one another to flourish, we model something of the life in all its fullness that we proclaim to those we serve. When we create forms of incumbency and ministry that enable clergy to flourish, we also create greater space for lay ministry and lay vocation to flourish.

The Church of England should be a place in which the vocation of each and every individual can flourish — for clergy and laity alike — because a Church confident in its vocation is better able to offer an attractive witness and be nourished to grow.

Through priestly ministry and, if elected as a member of General Synod, I want to play my part in helping to recover that sense of a Church of England confident enough to enable its clergy and ministers to flourish in the daily realities of ministry, confident enough to celebrate what God is already doing in all the places served by the Church of England each and every day, and confident enough to grow in faith, hope, love and number without making growth itself the measure of our faithfulness.

My ministry so far has combined serving in parish contexts alongside teaching and communicating theologically in a number of contexts and publications. I would bring to General Synod a commitment to theological reflection and rigour, a passion for the common good, and a particular concern for the flourishing of each person called by God to find in the Church of England a place they too can call home.

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