



MARCUS WALKER

Rector, Great St Bartholomew | House of Clergy | Founder, Save the Parish



Who am I?

I am the Rector of Great St Bartholomew in the City of London. Having been baptized and confirmed in Jerusalem and raised across the Middle East and the former USSR, I am a child of the Anglican Communion and have made supporting persecuted Christians one of my personal priorities. I was a curate in North London and then Deputy Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome. Having worked in politics prior to ordination, I use those skills to scrutinise legislation, build cross-party coalitions, and ensure the voice of the local parish is heard clearly in General Synod.

As the founder and chair of Save the Parish, this statement is (unsurprisingly) going to focus on that campaign and why our voice is so important in Synod right now.

Five years ago we were told that "a building, a stipend, and long costly college-based training" were the "key limiting factors" holding back church growth. Over these five years we have discovered the exact opposite: that it is buildings, stipends, and deep theological education that are the key *amplifying* factors of Anglican mission. This isn't just my theory. The Church of England's own studies show this.

EVIDENCE FOR THE PARISH SYSTEM

- "the Church of England's parish system offers a '**CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN EVERY COMMUNITY**': often, the Anglican church is the only (or at least the only visible) Christian presence in a community, leading people to gravitate towards it" (*Understanding Young Adult Journeys to Faith*, 2026)
- "**AN INCREASE IN CLERGY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE LIKELIHOOD OF GROWTH** in attendance, while a decrease in clergy is associated, on average, with a decline in attendance." (*Going Deeper*, 2016)
- "Amalgamations of churches are **MORE LIKELY TO DECLINE**. The larger the number of churches in the amalgamation the more likely they are to decline." (*From Anecdote to Evidence*, 2013)

THE CHURCH'S EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

27%

Fall in full-time stipendiary positions

40%

Church closures in top 10% deprived parishes

35%

Incumbents exhibiting signs of clinical depression

78%

Churchwardens would resign if anyone would take their place

25%

Decrease in new ordinands (2020-2025)

20-30

Churches in new mega-benefices with few clergy

The Church has total endowments of **£17 billion** and spends **£653m a year**.
Only £85m of that is spent on parish ministry.

OUR SIX COMMITMENTS FOR THE 2026-31 SYNOD

Parish

Priest

People

1 **Restore the Commissioners' £11.6bn endowment** to its original purpose: to fund "the cure of souls in parishes where such assistance is most required."

3 **A Clergy Charter of Care** that commits to support priests' mental health, limits benefices to manageable sizes, ends destructive managerial metrics of success, and puts a stop to clergy cuts.

5 **A Churchgoers' Charter** to show we value the hard work and love of our volunteers, limiting managerial demands, making their life and ministry easier.

2 **Front-line first:** Cap ballooning diocesan bureaucracy (which grew by 29% in three years) and move toward a 1:8 ratio of support staff to parish clergy by 2031.

4 **Theologically-rich, ordinand-centred training** to reverse the loss of institutional confidence and ensure ordinands are supported as they need not as budgets dictate.

6 **Reform the Mission & Pastoral Measure** which sounds deathly dull but defines in law how parishes are merged and churches closed; this is a big task of the next Synod.

Full details can be found in our manifesto: www.savetheparish.com/general-synod-manifesto-2026/

FIVE YEARS ON GENERAL SYNOD

✓ WORKING TOGETHER

Our work crosses church traditions and one of the joys of the last five years has been working with High, Low, Middle of the Road; Tories, Labour, Green; Liberal, and Traditional; it's a truly cross-church coalition.

✓ REVIEW OF NATIONAL FUNDING

We persuaded Synod to launch a comprehensive review of how all church money is distributed, which will report next year. This could transform the Church, putting parishes back at the heart of church funding.

✓ PUTTING THE PARISH BACK IN LAW

Our biggest win was a massive effort to put back into law the rule that Church Commissioners' money must be spent on poorer parishes. I proposed the amendment, which was strongly opposed but our coalition won the day.

✓ CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

A decade ago the national church stopped direct funding of parishes to 'stop subsidising failure'; parish ministry was never mentioned in strategies. This has completely changed now, especially under Archbishop Sarah.

✓ LOWEST INCOME COMMUNITIES FUNDING

Church figures showed that only 60% of money reserved for the poorest parishes actually got to them, and that money was frozen for 5 years. We made a successful targeted pitch for a 36% rise & direct payment to parishes.

✓ CHALLENGING LONDON'S £6.5M DEFICIT

The Diocese has more than doubled its employees in a decade while running a deficit. It allowed its fund managers to mismanage our £100m+ portfolio, *losing* 0.6% in a year the FTSE rose 18.7%.

If you want mission spoken about, get a vision strategist
If you want mission done, pay for a priest

For a strong voice for the parishes in Synod, give your first preference to

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