

**Proposer**

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After first making a commitment to the Christian Faith as a teenager, I spent many years being active in my local church before feeling called to ordination. As Churchwarden I saw a small country church (in a village of 200) grow to a membership of a dozen local families and a Family Service with 30+ local people. As a minister, my aim was always to be Self Supporting as I am able to make a living from my IT skills. I currently run an IT business which aims, among other products, to assist churches in fund-raising from visitors.

For the last 16 years I have been a Self-Supporting Minister (SSM) – initially as curate, then Assistant Curate, then Priest in Charge and now Team Vicar “House for Duty” at Widecombe-in-the-Moor (with the 40% stipend that comes with the post). Without my secular work the finances wouldn’t add up. I believe this balance of ministry and employment gives me a great perspective on the dilemmas the church is facing. Parishioners often say that they value my experience in the world as well as in the church.

### **Who represents the interests of SSMs at General Synod?**

- The **7,790** Stipendiary Clergy are represented by **212** SMs
- The Laity are represented by **194** Laity
- The **3,230** Self-Supporting Clergy are represented by **1** SSM (down from **3** in the last Synod)

**Can this be right?** With the ever increasing cost of Stipendiary Clergy pushing up Parish Share, surely the SSM resource should be better represented?

**I wish to speak out against this imbalance.**

For SSMs the balancing of ministry and secular work raises a host of specific challenges that Stipendiary Ministers (SMs) don’t have. These are the sort of issues that are rarely acknowledged e.g.

the definition of a day off; the assumption that one isn’t “deployable” (hence SSM posts are never advertised); the use of Chapter Meetings – often SMs are “too busy” to find time to attend and support their SSM colleagues; SSMs have no role in the selection of a new Incumbent (with whom they will have to work), unlike Churchwardens and Laity. I will raise these sorts of issues because they need addressing at the highest level.

This, my second candidature for General Synod, has been driven by my desire to contribute to a new vision for the Church of England, in particular in rural areas, starting with a new vision for priestly rural ministry.

### **Paying Parish Share when there’s an SSM Incumbent**

For a number of years I was incumbent of two rural churches in Somerset on a “House for Duty” basis. This shows up the issue of what Parish Share is for when paid by a benefice run by an SSM.

- The Diocese paid **£6,000** a year for me to live in my own house (which was near both churches), in lieu of using a Diocesan House
- The Parish Shares were £19,000 and £22,000 respectively, making **£41,000** total
- The parishioners often asked why they had to pay the Parish Share in full?

**General Synod needs to come up with better plans for optimising the use of SM and SSM ministries. Both are needed, but affordability is a major issue.**

### **The wind is changing, at least in this Diocese**

Following a motion proposed by Cadbury Deanery at October’s Diocesan Synod, the latest Bishop’s Council draft minute on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2017 says:

The Bishop of Exeter reminded members of the debate at Diocesan Synod in October 2017 and noted that there was a **particular need to see an increase in the number of Self-Supporting Ministers (SSMs)** being ordained in order to compensate for the anticipated reduction in stipendiary clergy.

... in discussion, it was suggested that changes to the context in which SSMs worked, including a greater range of **flexibility in models of ministry**, could assist in increasing the number of people willing to step forward. Issues were thought to be both cultural and organisational, for example around the timing of Chapter meetings for those with other employment during the working week and also **perceptions of SSMs having a ‘second class’ status**. On balance it was felt that the group should focus specifically on SSMs.

## Some of the other issues I will raise at General Synod

### Rural Ministry – a neglected priority

I have a passion for rural ministry, and believe that the Church of England is immensely privileged to have churches in almost every village and town. But this wonderful legacy is in great danger of being neglected by increasingly harassed stipendiary clergy being stretched ever more thinly. The current focus is on retreating from villages and creating ever bigger groupings. But people cannot easily relate to a team. Instead I believe every village really needs a well-trained church leader/pastor (probably unpaid) – be they churchwarden, reader, SSM or SM. Such people in each community will be a focus for Christian commitment and action. This will bring enormous benefits:

- It will engage people on the ground with more enthusiasm
- It will benefit and empower the community
- It's affordable!

### Simplification Agenda

I see no local impact from this major General Synod Project. It appears to be focussing on a few Diocesan issues, and not on the parish. I will push for national thinking about these sorts of issues:

- **Church Buildings Insurance.** Why can't the Diocese (or Church House) arrange appropriate insurance for every church. As well as being cheaper this would save Treasurers and PCCs hours of wrestling with how to make sure they are adequately covered at the cheapest cost.
- **Parish and Benefice Accounting.** There would be immense advantages of the C of E commissioning and providing a Cloud-based accounting solution to all churches, where the work of treasurers would be dramatically reduced, mostly to having to identify bank transactions and enter budgets.
- **Policy templates.** No PCC should ever have to appoint a member to write a new policy, templates should always be available – they are not!

### I am also passionate about...

- The inbuilt institutional inequalities affecting women and LGBTs. These are still needing

movement and progress. I am very pleased that the issue of transgender people was debated positively this year, but, to my mind, the church has a long way to go before it regains any moral authority in this area – glib talk of “fighting popular culture” belies the integrity and joy of people at last being released from condemnation and stigmatisation.

- I observe that the general public have lost trust in the church as an institution and as moral guardian. A recent poll shows that only 29% of 18-24 year olds think the clergy can be trusted. This is tragic, yet I believe the church has only itself to blame. This issue needs to be tackled head on – the causes identified and dealt with.

### My personal situation

I am married with three grown-up daughters and I am also fully engaged in the community:

- Parish Councillor
- Trustee of Shallowford Farm Trust, which has inner city children coming to stay on its Dartmoor farm
- Project Leader for “Moor than Meets the Eye” (a £4m Heritage Fund on Dartmoor)
- Active Committee Member for Widecombe Fair
- Bell-ringer still learning the ropes

### My personal history

I will contribute actively to debates about the future of the Church of England, just as I have been actively engaged in debates at National and Diocesan level over many years:

- One national task which I was instrumental in initiating was the long-overdue “Dignity at Work Policy” – the C of E's bullying and harassment policy, which I co-authored (published in 2008).
- First elected to Exeter Diocesan Synod in 1985 as a lay representative from Okehampton Deanery.
- Following ordination in 2000 as an SSM in Bath and Wells, I was elected to their Diocesan Synod, as well as serving on the Bishop's Council and the Diocesan Finance Committee.
- Moving back to Exeter Diocese, I am once again active in the Diocesan Synod here, making contributions to many debates.
- I have no affiliations to any church grouping. Liturgically I am equally comfortable with the BCP, Common Worship, Taize and the noise and bustle of Messy Church!

## ***Please will you give me your First Preference Vote?***

Coming second on every ballot paper counts for nothing. When I stood in 2015 I discovered that I had no chance unless a large number of people put me first. The most successful candidates were the best known – so how does a part-time SSM stand a chance? I leave it to you to decide!