

General Synod Election Statement

Simon Friend

Proposed by Anne Foreman – General Synod Member

Seconded by Keith Rushforth – Lay Chair Tiverton and Cullompton Deanery



Dear Elector

Thank you for taking the time to read this and whether you vote for me or not – please do vote in this important election.

I am not standing for any political wing of the church (and I would advise that you ask each candidate to be very clear if they are), although I am from a traditional evangelical / charismatic background. I would describe myself as generous orthodox and am attracted to the new wave of emerging church which seeks to build bridges across theological divides.

When two elephants fight, it's the grass that suffers.

When I stood for General Synod in 2015, I said that perhaps the major issue facing General Synod would be - should the church accept and bless same sex marriages? It has of course not been the only issue – but when the debate has arisen it has caused much angst and hurt on both sides.

This African saying best describes my perspective on this - we must find another way which does not divide us into camps or partisan wings of the church, with defended positioning – which at the end of the day, simply presents the church as deeply unattractive to those outside the church looking on. It's those on the margin, the edge, the voiceless, the quietly getting on with it faithful people in our many rural parishes who suffer when the big beasts argue over their theological positions.

I was privileged to be chosen to take part in the church-wide initiative of '*Conversations*' inviting all dioceses to look at our response to society's changing attitude to issues of human sexuality and especially same sex unions. It was humbling to listen to people's stories and spiritual journeys from many perspectives.

I have noticed that discussions often settle around two sides of the debate. Those who want to be true to the authority of Scripture and those who are also deeply faithful but do not read St Paul's references to 1st century homosexual practice as equating to contemporary, faithful same sex relationships.

It's the grass...the powerless, excluded and marginalised that suffer or get lost in the debate

With fiercely held views on both sides, it's easy to lose the voice of those on the margins. I don't want to argue or insist that I'm right. I want to try and accept each person in the way Christ has accepted me – with unconditional love.

Radical grace and non-judgement – a different narrative?

This current Synod is an opportunity to demonstrate that, as Jesus was, the church can be radically inclusive. We can have vigorous debate without argument; hold the tensions, differences and pain without defaulting into divide and split.

I long for Synod to act in a manner which inspires society to sit up and take notice with renewed hope. The alternative is a repeat of the Women Bishops' debate, when by the time a decision was made, many outside the church were thinking 'Who cares?' The grass roots of humankind are not interested in our theological in-fighting.

A bridge to hope and true destiny

If elected, my aim would be to build bridges of hope, built on an economy of grace and acceptance that any notion of an idealised pure-self is an illusion. I am in no position to cast stones. It is my very desire to be true to scripture and endeavour to live a Christ-centred life, which motivates me to want to include and welcome all.

"Our life and death is with our neighbour"

I am inspired by this saying of the 4th century Desert Fathers. This debate is as much about our own identity as about the sexual identity of others. Christ taught us that when we judge another – something within us is diminished too.

When we die to our own agenda and power over another – we affirm and enrich life on both sides.

Other Issues:

The Rural Church: The issues facing rural churches are enormous. As one vicar said to me recently - "its difficult to grow and put on events to attract people to church when none of my churches even have a loo!". Sometimes synods make all sorts of assumptions about how the church might be kept going in rural communities without taking on board basic things like this that many just take for granted. I was born in North Devon and am from a farming family. I was Lay Chair of the Tiverton &

Cullompton deanery until last year and believe I understand and can be a voice for rural communities.

Finance: We must find new ways of financing the church so that we can keep as many stipendiary clergy in post as possible. The current projections do not look good and the burden of Common Fund is great for many. There are not easy solutions to this. But my own experience of project managing and helping to fundraise for the new £1.7m Community Centre at St Andrew's Cullompton has given me experience and insight into different approaches. There are funds out there that we as the church can tap into.

Mini Biog:

I am 54, married to Judy with four sons all currently studying at university. I am a property developer and I try my best to do that differently and bring integrity and I hope, a Christlike mind into a world of business activity not usually known for those things.

I am a Lay Reader and was Lay Chair of Tiverton & Cullompton Deanery for 4 years. I have been part of the Bishops Scrutiny Panel for the Mission and Growth Fund helping to oversee distribution of some £250,000 of grants.

I just missed out on one of the four lay places on General Synod in 2015 coming 5th. I would so appreciate your vote this time round.

Yours faithfully



Simon Friend

sfriend@red-earth.org

07970 100 846

