

I wish to serve the Diocese of Exeter and the wider church by standing for General Synod.

**About me:**

- I am married with four adult children, and four delightful grand-children. I was raised in Liverpool, studied Classics at Oxford and served for 10 years in the Royal Navy as a Seaman Officer, mostly on ships based at Devonport.

- I was sponsored for ordination training by Exeter Diocese, and have stayed here throughout my ministry. After a curacy in Ivybridge, I have ministered in Bovey Tracey (<http://www.pptbovey.church>), a market town on the SE corner of Dartmoor, and Hennock, a village on the moor itself, for the last 21 years.

- I have learned the value of taking time to nurture relationships with families across the generations: I am starting to conduct marriages for children I baptised 20 years ago!

- With the help of a team of clergy and laity we have built trust with the community by supporting a food bank and launching a clothing bank, and hosted election hustings, climate change conferences, civic services and drama and music performances, but the heart of our church life is found in prayer and worship and the patient teaching of the faith. We value expository preaching and careful catechising of new Christians with courses like *Alpha*, *Christianity Explored*, and now a local course drawing on the *Pilgrim* material.

- We have tried to keep the best of the older traditions, developed new patterns of worship alongside them and developed a new congregation of families and young people with the help of locally employed youth and family workers. I love working with people of all ages, especially teenagers, and I hope that I am not a 'limiting factor'! It has been a joy to send young people out on mission with YWAM and to see vocations develop in the parish.

- I am currently the chair of Churches Together in Bovey Tracey, which includes Baptist, Methodist, Catholic and community churches. During the first lockdown, we worked together to provide a weekly online service until churches were able to gather in person.

- I am an active member of Deanery and Diocesan Synods, regularly asking questions, and I sponsored a deanery motion on Common Fund.

- I have served with *Through Faith Missions* on evangelistic walks around the country, and as chaplain to a cottage hospital. I am now a chaplain to the *Devon Army Cadet Force*.

- I am a committee member of the Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship. I also attend the local New Wine Leaders' network, and am a member of Church Society. I have represented CPAS as patron in some appointments in the region.

- In my spare time I enjoy walking, tending our allotment and garden, playing piano and reading, especially history.



**Why am I standing for General Synod- again?**

Jesus loves his Church, and he will not let the light of the gospel be extinguished. I believe that "the local church- when it stewards the message of Christ- is the hope for the world". The last two years have been exhausting for us all, but I see green shoots of recovery. The church grows locally: the national church can help, or hinder, that growth. We cannot ignore the fact that the Church of England has been in steady decline for decades,<sup>1</sup> and the pandemic has accelerated the problems. The **'Save the Parish'** campaign is a heartfelt cry of dismay at this decline, mixed with distrust that the national leadership of the Church of England is trying to centralise power and resources. I have much sympathy with their manifesto, but some of their criticisms of the national leadership are unfair.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/2021/09/03/whither-the-church-of-england/>

The Archbishops summarised their plan for renewal in 3 words: *Simpler, Bolder, Humbler*.

**Simpler:** I heartily agree that the Church of England needs structural reform at every level. General Synod needs to focus on its core legislative task rather than commenting on social policy. Clergy cannot be loaded with ever more parishes, and parish councils with more legislative responsibilities without a radical simplification. I want us to maintain a worshipping Christian presence in every community, but not every congregation can sustain a PCC, or support a clergyperson. Clergy need to have confidence that the new Clergy Discipline measure will treat them fairly and without undue delay.

**Bolder:** I welcome the renewed focus on mission and evangelism, especially on outer estates, rural areas and among children and young people, where I believe I have valuable experience. The national church has produced some excellent digital resources, and invested in new initiatives. These need to be evaluated, for sometimes new plants have weakened surrounding churches. But we need to take risks, and to recover confidence in the unique gospel of Jesus Christ which offers hope and forgiveness to all. We must graciously and firmly defend the value of all human life, from beginning to end, as made in the image of God, while providing practical options to help those in crisis.

**Humbler:** Decline is a symptom of spiritual weakness, and cannot simply be cured by structural reform through General Synod. Our bishops have often apologised for historic scandals, but seem reluctant to call the church or nation to penitence or prayer. Our divisions reflect an increasingly polarised society, but they damage our witness. I participated in the synodical Shared Conversations, and have led a Deanery *Living in Love & Faith* course. We need to recognise the pain that some have suffered, but I am not yet persuaded that a case has been made to overturn the traditional interpretation of scripture on human sexuality. I pray that the next Synod will come to a decision that does not leave one side claiming victory over the other. Perhaps the new Synod should undertake its own version of LLF in small groups, so that we may listen humbly to different voices, understand the integrity of those with whom we disagree, and find a way to create the space that may be needed to prevent even deeper fractures. There are lessons to learn in this regard from the experience of Mutual Flourishing and the five guiding principles since 2014.

I personally have learned much about the inner workings of the Church of England in my last six years on General Synod. I have been impressed by the dedication of the Exeter Diocesan Team, and have enjoyed working with other representatives and learning from those in very different contexts. The national team at Church House work hard to produce carefully researched papers, and I have learned how to cope with the vast amounts of reading!

I hope that I will be able to use this experience on your behalf in the crucial decisions over the next five years.

Thank you for reading my election address; please phone or email me if you want to know more. I ask for your vote, preferably first preference, in the forthcoming election.

Graham Hamilton

13 September 2021

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Nominated by Rev Stephen Beach (St Budeaux Plymouth)  
and Rev Tim Buckley (St Michael & St Barnabas with St Aubyns Plymouth)