

The Ven. Douglas Dettmer

1. What has prompted you to stand for election to General Synod in particular, and in which ways do you think it will challenge your capacity and capabilities?

Having been a member of General Synod since 2012, with the encouragement of many of you I am standing for re-election for three principal reasons:- (a) Like the parliamentary system on which it is modelled, a new Synod needs experienced members as well as new ones, especially given the complexity of the legislative work which is at the core of the Synod's business. Legislation must be framed well if the work of the church (i.e. all of us) is not to suffer. (b) I am often reminded by other Synod members how important it is that the Synod includes a sufficient number of archdeacons, given that in the Church of England, archdeacons have a key role in implementing what the Synod decides and therefore speak from a perspective the Synod needs to hear in order to make good decisions. Unlike in the past, there are no automatic places for archdeacons, and not every diocese is represented by one. (c) Knowing the ropes and having the experience to operate effectively behind the scenes has enabled me to contribute that experience back into the life of this diocese, which has been helpful in shaping our own diocesan work.

2. What do you believe the Church of England should prioritise over the next five years to support mission, Christian discipleship and the flourishing of parish and other worshipping communities?

Just as Christian faith involves us as disciples of Christ in turning outward from self toward God and others, so the church as a community needs to be outward- rather than inward-facing so as to reflect God's self-giving love in our corporate life and enable others who have not yet crossed the threshold of Christian faith and discipleship to do so. All this is the work of God's grace, so the first priority of the Church of England must be to enable the worship and spiritual life of local churches as places of encounter with God. There follows the need to maximise the diversity of expressions of Christian life and worship in our local communities, so that diverse human ways toward God can find a pathway in. I am thankful to serve in a diocese in which this is one of our diocesan priorities, as we seek to encourage new expressions of church life alongside healthy, growing parish churches on the traditional model. In all this, a crucial factor for health and growth is a sufficiency of gifted, dedicated clergy and lay ministers; so a third key priority must be the investment addressed in Question 4 below.

3. What should General Synod do to help the Church become safer, more accountable and more trusted, ensuring that national reforms work effectively in parishes, dioceses, and cathedrals?

One of the biggest risks to the safety and trustworthiness of our local churches and the Church of England as a whole is fragile governance at the local level. Parishes in our own diocese frequently have marginally viable PCCs, with dedicated members longing to retire but finding few successors; many parishes have only one churchwarden or none, and clergy too often have to take an inordinate share of the PCC's administrative burden onto themselves. A helpful step forward has been the General Synod's legislating for Joint PCCs as corporate entities, one example of the 'simplification agenda' which needs to be continued in the next quinquennium. Another key risk mitigation not entirely under the Synod's control but subject to its influence (see Q. 4) is stemming the downward spiral of stipendiary clergy numbers with the consequent stretching of local oversight and time for parish ministry. In relation to safeguarding, the Synod in the last quinquennium made significant progress toward greater independent scrutiny of local safeguarding practice and redress for survivors, seeking to strike the right balance between national accountability and diocesan responsibility; this work will need to progress in order to maintain the confidence of society generally.

4. How should the Church prioritise good intentional investment in mission and growth whilst also resourcing parish ministry in all its forms?

The crucial factor for effective mission and growth is effective ministry, ordained and lay. Christian ministers are called out of the larger body of Christian disciples. It is essential that the downward spiral of clergy numbers is reversed, both in order to ensure that mission and ministry are not only sustained but extended, and so that the numbers of those hearing God's call to ministry can start to spiral upward again as the number of disciples in our churches grows. This requires multiple expressions of Christian community, including parish ministry which is at the heart of the Church of England's mission in every sense. Over recent years, the Church Commissioners have made welcome funding available to resource diverse expressions of church life. What is now imperative at a critical moment for the Church of England's parochial system is for substantially greater investment from the national church endowment held by the Church Commissioners to be directed to the foundation of the system, the core stipendiary parochial ministry exercising the cure of souls. The General Synod does not control the Commissioners but in the next quinquennium must ramp up its engagement with them through the ongoing funding review process.

5. General Synod must address issues on which faithful Christians hold deeply differing views. How would you contribute to honest debate, good disagreement and clear decision-making while helping the Church maintain its common life and mission?

As indicated in my election address, this has been a key concern for me throughout my time on the General Synod. My own conscientious view is that for the sake of Christian mission as well as social justice, the Church of England needs to move in a progressive direction in the areas of teaching and practice around human relationship which have been the particular focus of debate in the past quinquennium, with the proviso that a deeper level of theological and scriptural engagement is needed than has often been present in the dialogue. At the same time, it is of cardinal importance for me that this is done in a way which avoids clergy and lay colleagues whom I deeply value and respect feeling the conscientious need to distance themselves from the Church of England and its ministry. The detail of how this is done really matters, and for me a top priority in these matters is getting the detail right. As one who has had the responsibility for chairing recent Synod debates on these subjects, above all of course my priority is impartiality and open, respectful, loving dialogue with one another.