

The Revd Dr Emma Loveridge

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?

I love our parishes, I love that we do not turn people away, I love that we serve a whole nation, that our membership is everyone. I think we have reached an important moment in the life of the Church. With the continuing closure of churches and reorganisation of parishes, it feels important to help the church's task to offer the presence of God in every corner of the land. I would like to bring that concern into the place where strategy and policy are made. Coming from a business and theology and clinical background, I know that the speed of movement in a large organisation can sometimes be frustrating. This in itself is a challenge, but I can also dig deep into policy to find the detail that matters and creates a domino effect. I would like to offer my capacity to think strategically, financially and theologically in that arena. I have 20 years' experience in the clinical consultancy world of mental health and wellbeing in top-heavy organisations and am able to listen carefully to those whose experience is different from my own. I expect Synod to bring new information to assess and analyse alongside my own experience. The

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?

There seems to be a movement to take the Church forward and with the looming parish crises, any of us who can, need to step up and speak about the direction of strategic travel. The parish is not the edge; it is the whole. Our role in parliament is not an optional extra, it's a responsibility. We are in danger of losing a nation whose love and trust has been the very essence of our being. With the growth of AI there will be an intergenerational challenge, particularly for my own children's generation. We must embrace this challenge, and think through how to navigate the next stage, like the church has since the time of Paul. Otherwise we risk missing the Holy Spirit whispering through the trees. Our minds have become cluttered by too much bureaucratic noise and not enough understanding that Christianity has to exist within the everyday experience of being human *now*. Parish and Parliament are the places where faith is lived naturally in everyday life and where we have true Christian influence – the rest is noise.

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?

Having largely lost the freehold in the Church of England, I think the Church should consider moving towards a clearer employment-law framework for clergy within the national employment laws. The present mixture of ecclesiastical and employment protections created an enormous bureaucracy and some significant gaps, which can be less safe for laity

and clergy alike. The Church should reduce its bureaucracy while strengthening clarity, accountability and oversight.

Safeguarding should be professionally led, properly independent and nationally consistent. Years ago we had a system with specialist advice available for parishes and sector ministry, engaging with the independent police and statutory safeguarding agencies. Now we are building our own internal structure. This is not a safe way forward. Advice and then engage with the national presence is a far safer route than internal systems with institutionalised blind spots.

We also need careful and responsible communication, perhaps returning to a model of bishops as 'first amongst equals'. Rather than allowing an increasingly top-heavy hierarchy (some in response to the internal employment structures created long ago for clergy), we need to look at how to change the direction going forward. We need to be listening to our experienced and skilled people in the pews.

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

The parishes should receive all our resources — people, talent and finance — while minimising bureaucracy. Administrative savings should be made before disposing of assets, and recruit more people into key positions who genuinely understand planned, long-term investment, rather than relying on short term resourcing. Glebe and other church assets are long-term resources for building in the locality, not simply sources of short-term income.

My generation has deliberately, silently, withdrawn its resources and expertise from local parish churches. Many don't believe that their contributions will be well spent, or that they and their experience will be valued by the wider church. They feel written off. We should understand why a whole generation feels this way, and listen with care. Time to leave the fold and seek those who love God, and the Church of England but feel despairing.

The parishes are the foundation of the Church; without flourishing local churches, our national structures have little purpose. The Church's presence in public life, including its role in Parliament, depends upon its continuing life and credibility in the nation. Owen Chadwick reminded us that we have a responsibility to be part of the making of our laws to keep them Christian at heart.

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?

I would go back to Christ's first principles: live and let live, do not throw the first stone, and keep talking. We should not be seduced, or intimidated by the loudest voices, from any side. We need to make room for people to speak honestly and to listen carefully to one another. But we also need to step forward and stay relevant in a world where the young are asking if they will be able to marry a robot. We are 20 steps behind, time to catch up. It

is how the Christian faith has travelled across the world, and flourished, by embracing the old and new within its parameters of Christian mercy and generosity.

The Church of Sweden offers an interesting example of a different route. In 2009, it decided that marriage could include same-sex couples, while retaining space for individual priests who could not, in conscience, conduct a particular wedding. Whatever our own conclusions, we would do well to consider how other churches have found ways of living with deep difference.

Above all, we should remain a broad Church: one that represents and serves every single parishioner, rather than judging them.