

Dr Francis Hugh Sansbury

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 have stood because of a combination of positives and negatives. I love the Church of England deeply. I have been on Christianity Deanery Synod since 2009, and Exeter Diocesan Synod since 2015 and take an active part in them both. I have just retired and can give the time that General Synod requires. At the same time, I have profound concerns about the direction the Church of England is taking. I see increasing centralisation and bureaucratisation, with loss of parish clergy and merging of benefices. I also think the CofE has departed from its roots. God calls us to love him and our neighbour - both each other and the lost. I want to see the preaching of the biblical gospel of Jesus again in every parish. For General Synod to facilitate that will require God's strength. I mention four commitments in my election statement that come from the Save the Parish manifesto: funding parish ministry, and restoring parish ministry, restoring clergy wellbeing and restoring vocations. Supporting these will challenge my capacity and capabilities, and of others, but I trust that doing so will put sharing the gospel back at the heart of every parish.

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?

The Church of England (CofE) should prioritise funding, providing and supporting parish clergy, as in the Save the Parish (STP) manifesto and my election statement. We want ministers of the word in every parish. That requires funding parish ministry, and restoring parish ministry, restoring clergy wellbeing and restoring vocations. Too often funding requires specific bids that require resources to make, and if successful, more resources to monitor and implement. (See the STP manifesto for more background). Make the faithful preaching of God's word the marker of success, and support ministers to give themselves to prayer and the work of preaching, not least by removing administrative burdens. The charity sector as a whole has 8 frontline roles for every backroom role. The CofE has 3.5. One diocese has less than 1. Reducing administrative and other burdens on volunteers is also key; including making it clear what are legal requirements and what are not. Mandating shorter vacancies would reduce the burden that falls on the congregation during them.

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?

To recover trust, the House of Bishops should follow (and publish) its own legal advice. There should be no attempts or appearance of attempts to circumvent canonical procedures, as happened with the LLF (Living in Love and Faith) / PLF (prayers of love and faith) process. Jesus's call to us all is to repent and believe the gospel. General Synod did not indicate

repentance for the destruction of trust the LLF / PLF process has caused. “Recognise and lament” is not the same. The new synod should start with repentance for past failures, and not try to say that incompatible views are compatible.

We have had many abuse scandals, and failure to support victims of abuse. We are to have Independent oversight of safeguarding, with the dioceses remaining responsible for providing it. The new synod needs to ensure that this system works, and ensure support for victims that fits their needs.

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

Intentional investment in mission and growth should mean investing in disciple-making disciples, who preach the gospel. It should not require strategic grants systems. The Save the Parish manifesto highlights the input required for these: a grant of £450000 to Hereford Diocese required an estimated 500 working hours. It also showed the disparity between the 89375 expected new disciples that the first phase of Strategic Development Funding was supposed to bring in and the 12704 actual new disciples. We want to see investment going to frontline evangelists and pastors / teachers, not support staff or enablers, and on a parish basis. Where parish congregations grow as a result of gospel preaching, there should be scope for funding for more stipendiary staff to pastor them. That should also include specialised ministries such as to youth and children, but that should still be on a parish basis. Good intentional investment in ministry and growth means resourcing parish ministry. It includes pastoral care for the clergy to enable them to give a lifetime of service in the parish, including freeing up time for bishops to pastor their clergy. That care also means giving clergy habitable homes – they cannot choose where to live.

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?

The debate at the last meeting of the last synod highlighted the disagreements of that synod. One speech highlighted that the two sides would not agree and would not meet in the middle. There are issues on which it may not be possible to agree. My first response to this would be to listen to those with whom I disagree. I suspect that more people, including me, might change their mind in a conversation than a debate. My hope would be to converse with them and seek to understand their perspective. I have to come willing to rethink my point of view and the grounds for it, and be curious about the other person’s viewpoint. I would hope that we could find some grounds for agreement even if we disagree about the main issue. Finally, many debates in General Synod go to a vote. I have to respect the votes, whether or not a vote goes against my preference. I have been on the losing side for many votes in Diocesan Synod and have accepted the outcome.