

Mrs Karen Silcox

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?

On a very basic level, we need people to stand for General Synod (GS). GS is part of our governance structure. We need it to work and if it doesn't that will have implications for everyone.

Decisions get made by the people who turn up. So, people like me who are passionate about seeing the gospel preached need to be part of GS, so the decisions made reflect these priorities. Also, the timing of this election works well with my own personal circumstances.

GS will challenge my capabilities as I will be applying the professional skills I have developed working with small charities on a bigger scale. Also, there will be more diversity of opinion than I am used to when working with my trustee boards, and the more formal use of debates will be a new experience for me.

Being able to travel to London and York will bring some logistical challenges though with my children being the age they are, they will relish the independence these weeks will give them. However, the online voting system will provide a backup if I am not able to travel due to my caring responsibilities.

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 first disciples were a diverse group who probably has differing views on many of the issues of their day. However, they were all united in love for Jesus. The Church of England (CofE) should prioritise its core mission: The worship of the Lord, the teaching of the Word and helping people grow in their discipleship. To do that, we need local ministers making connections with their communities, teaching the Word faithfully so that people grow in their knowledge and love of Jesus. We need to see administration as a paid ministry, so those workers are freed from the need to find alternative employment and can give their full energy to the governance work. I don't think you can expect volunteers to take on an increasingly professional workload in their spare time.

We should keep going with excellent initiatives such as the Everyday Faith App and the Diocese of Exeter Week of Prayer

If these things are prioritised, then other noble causes as such creation care and social justice might need to be left for other organisations to champion. Mission creep is a risk for any organisation. The CofE would do well to avoid this.

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?

I want to acknowledge the massive commitment shown by churches over the years to improving their safeguarding practices and culture. This change has been driven by the hard work and dedication of our local safeguarding volunteers. Things are already safer, more accountable and churches are a trusted body in many communities. In any safeguarding question, this needs to be acknowledged alongside the terrible actions of some who have made this work necessary.

However, we need to recognise there has been a significant decrease in volunteering. One cause is the increased administrative burden. Continually asking more without recognising what has already been given is not helpful and discourages the volunteers who contribute already significant amounts of time and energy to make the system work.

The Church of England needs to recognise the limits of what volunteers can offer. The decrease in volunteering highlights the risk that local churches will not be able to sustain the level of safeguarding that is required; not because local church members don't care about creating a safe culture – we all do - but because they simply cannot resource the significant administrative workload that goes with it. Churches need funding to enable paid support for this work.

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

This question implies that mission and growth is one type of activity and then there is some type of activity which needs resourcing too. I believe everyone would consider their church activities to be missional in nature.

So, when we consider intentional investment, the question this is not about funding two different types of activity – mission & growth and something else -but how we spend the money we have on the single activity that everyone does - mission. Mission can be simple. It's one person telling another about Jesus or showing God's love to their neighbour. That is how the church grows. However, Christians need other Christians to encourage them and to share life with.

Consequently, we need to prioritise creating and maintain vibrant congregations that meet weekly in their location with at least one full-time minister per congregation. Funds may need to be reallocated to provide this level of ministerial provision. Things may need to be organised in a different way to reduce the administrative, financial and practical burdens on congregations and ministers. Reorganisation also has the potential to release funds for grass roots ministry, and this is where our focus needs to be.

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?

Honest and respectful debate helps us learn and challenges our own understanding. However continually debating the same issues is unhelpful as it just reinforces division rather than helping us to focus the huge amount we have in common - our love of the Lord. In these cases, we need to move on from debate to dealing with the practical question we need to resolve.

I would seek to understand the decision-making process. You cannot get anything done unless both sides agree to and stick to the process. In some cases, the process might need to change but this needs to be agreed first.

I would then want to identify what role I am playing in that process. To borrow a strategy from Walt Disney - Am I the dreamer describing a new proposal, am I the critic looking at the logic and the why of any proposal or am I a realist looking at how these things can be implemented.

Once a proposal is decided upon, I would then commit to implementing that decision even if I didn't vote for it (unless I felt it was illegal or immoral). Effective decision making is debate decide and then do.