

Dr Kerry Gilbert

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 had been asked previously if I might stand for election to GS – to which I answered no! When the election was announced, I was asked independently by several people if I would consider standing. For me this constitutes a prompt that I should consider prayerfully to determine whether this was a calling, and after a period of discernment, I decided to stand. In particular, I am drawn to ensure the voice of the laity is heard when considering mission and ministry. I am a busy person – but the old adage, if you want something done, ask a busy person is apt for me. I thrive on busy-ness and work all I have to do into my schedule effectively. There's no doubt it will stretch my capacity, but the importance of standing outweighs the extra work it produces. I will be committed to the business of general Synod as one of your lay representatives. In terms of my capability, my broad experience of the diocese and the Church of England more generally through a lifetime of participation through school and broad worship contexts gives me a firm foundation for meaningful and considered contribution to debate and discussion.

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?

Society has changed and populations have grown since the Church of England's conception. Mission, discipleship and parish life are continuously developing. As someone who has lived and worshipped across traditions, communities and contexts, I believe that one size does not fit all and as a synod, it is important to recognise that one set of priorities will not work in each and every context. It is important that we maintain a Christian community at the beating heart of every village, town and city across all parts of the country. Therefore, the priority is to understand the needs of each community in order to make decisions. This is best done by broad representation from as many contexts, traditions and communities as possible. The Church of England will then be better placed to understand its needs and make decisions accordingly. Resources do need to flow towards the parishes, but equally Christian communities need to consider how they can grow themselves to tap into the resources around them, which requires investment in ministry, lay and ordained to tap into God's mission in each place. God's economy is one of abundance and understanding God's economy in each place will be key to survival.

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?

The Church of England has a lot to think about with respect to its safeguarding record. Reforms in how we address safeguarding must be carefully discerned. It is important for us to retain the ability to understand who is joining the church's army of paid workers and volunteers, whilst also being more broadly accountable. The Church of England is not a single entity organisation but a group of large and small charity trusts with their own policies, governance and accountabilities, in considering what happens next with regard to safeguarding it is important to consider how national regulations can be scaled to dioceses, benefices and individual parishes to ensure all are protected in a way that works at all levels – I do not think there is a simple answer to this and much work needs to be done.

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

Investment with respect to mission and growth is another complex matter. Through working as a diocesan officer, I am beginning to understand the machinations and nuances of the funding of the broader church. That is not to say that I agree with what is going on, but to say that decision making at this level is complex and difficult to navigate. It is absolutely critical to the flourishing of the church that this is done equitably across all dioceses and consequently down to parish level and it requires much thought and prayer to get it right. It is not always possible to get it right for all of the people all of the time and I will do my best to engage in debate and decision making to improve the transparency and understanding of how resources are distributed to benefit mission in as many places and in as many places as possible.

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?

At the heart of the Christian faith, we are commanded to love one another and to refrain from judging each other. I believe in the Church of England as a broad church that offers access to God through the love of Jesus Christ to people across broad contexts throughout the country and beyond. When dealing with a diverse group, not all will agree on every single matter raised. What is important is that voices are heard and perspectives taken into consideration when big decisions are made. To have honest debates, grace, love and courtesy is paramount and for me, listening, discerning and working towards understanding is an absolute requirement of anyone who finds themselves in a position of representation of the broader church as a General Synod member. I love the Church of England, because for all its failings, it does make decisions after thorough debate, where all perspectives are considered before a vote is taken. Although this means we won't always get our own way, we know that the broader perspective has been considered and decisions are not made to go with the flow of popular opinion, only to be revisited 6 months on as opinions change.