

The Revd Matt Gorton

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 am standing because I want the experience of ordinary parish ministry to have a strong voice in the decisions the Church makes nationally. Too often there can be a gap between a good idea nationally and the reality of implementing it locally.

Serving four rural parishes, after eleven years in youth ministry, has made me passionate about a Church which trusts and resources local ministry, takes clergy wellbeing seriously, removes unnecessary bureaucracy, and gives local communities freedom to be creative and courageous in mission.

I do not want simply to complain about things I think should change. Standing for General Synod means being prepared to take responsibility, listen to other perspectives and contribute constructively to finding better ways forward.

It will challenge me. I am relational and practical by instinct; Synod involves complex legislation, detailed papers and procedures which will stretch me. Balancing it with parish ministry and family life will require discipline too.

But I am comfortable asking difficult questions, including of established systems, and I am equally willing to discover that I am wrong. I would bring independence, curiosity, humour and a determination to keep asking: how will this help the Church fulfil its mission locally?

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 should prioritise creating the conditions in which local Christian communities can flourish, rather than assuming that one model of church will work everywhere.

That means properly resourcing parish ministry, particularly in rural and deprived communities, while continuing to encourage church planting, fresh expressions and new worshipping communities. These should not be competing visions. A healthy parish can

contain different worshipping communities, meeting different people in different ways, while remaining part of one Christian family.

We must also take children, young people and families seriously. My years in youth ministry convinced me that young people do not simply need programmes provided for them; they need relationships, belonging, opportunities to encounter God and permission to participate fully in the life of the Church.

Alongside this, we need to invest in discipleship. Growth cannot simply mean attendance figures. We should be helping people discover faith, deepen it and live it.

Finally, we must care for those who lead our churches. Clergy and lay leaders who are exhausted, isolated or overwhelmed by administration will struggle to lead flourishing communities. Mission depends upon healthy people, trusted relationships and space for local imagination.

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?

A safer Church requires more than policies: it requires a culture in which concerns are heard, power can be challenged and accountability is real.

I support greater independence and consistency in safeguarding. Those affected by abuse or poor practice must be able to trust that concerns will be handled professionally and fairly, without institutional reputation taking priority. Reform must also be tested against experience on the ground. A national system only succeeds if parishes, dioceses and cathedrals understand it, trust it and can actually operate it.

However, accountability should not automatically mean more bureaucracy. We need clear processes, clear responsibilities and proportionate requirements. Volunteers and clergy should spend their time creating safe, healthy communities rather than navigating unnecessarily complicated systems.

Trust also depends upon how we treat people when things go wrong. Processes should be transparent, timely and humane, with appropriate pastoral support available without compromising independence or accountability.

General Synod should therefore scrutinise not only whether reforms have been implemented, but whether they work: listening particularly to survivors, safeguarding professionals, clergy and parish volunteers. A safer Church will ultimately be built

through good systems combined with healthy cultures, courageous leadership and genuine accountability.

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

Investment in mission and growth is essential, but we should resist creating a false choice between investing in new initiatives and sustaining parish ministry. Often the strongest platform for new mission is an existing local church with trusted relationships, committed people and a long-term presence in its community.

Strategic funding should encourage experimentation and calculated risk. Not every initiative will succeed, and a Church unwilling to risk failure will struggle to discover new ways of reaching people. But investment should be judged by more than easily measurable short-term growth.

We also need to recognise the very different contexts in which ministry happens. Rural churches, deprived communities and small congregations may never produce the numbers possible elsewhere, yet their Christian presence can be enormously significant. Four small rural churches cannot simply be assessed by the same measures as a large urban church.

I would like to see investment which releases local imagination rather than imposing models from above, alongside sustainable funding for the clergy and lay people who maintain the Church's presence in communities across England.

Mission funding and parish ministry should reinforce one another. We should invest boldly in growth without undervaluing faithful Christian presence simply because it is difficult

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?

Good disagreement begins by recognising that the person across the debate is not the problem to be solved. They are a fellow Christian whose convictions may be held just as sincerely as mine.

I would come to Synod prepared to say what I believe clearly and honestly. I do not think unity requires us to pretend our disagreements are smaller than they are. But neither should disagreement prevent us from listening carefully, building relationships or recognising Christ in one another.

My instinct is relational: conversation is usually better when we know the person behind the position. I would therefore try to listen particularly carefully to people with whom I disagree, while expecting the same freedom to express my own convictions.

There will also come a point when Synod has to decide. Good disagreement cannot become an excuse for permanent indecision. We should debate thoroughly, make decisions clearly and then work hard to maintain our common life even where some remain unconvinced.

The Church has always contained difference. Our challenge is to demonstrate that conviction and generosity can coexist, and that disagreement need not distract us from our shared calling to worship Christ, make disciples and serve our communities.