

Revd Matt Gorton

Priest-in-Charge, Coast & Country Benefice | Diocese of Exeter

I am standing for General Synod because I believe we need a Church which cares for its clergy, values its parishes and is brave enough to change the things that get in the way of mission.

Clergy wellbeing must be a priority. Recent evidence about clergy morale and the numbers considering leaving ministry should concern us all. We cannot continually ask clergy to carry more while simply encouraging them to become more resilient. We need to address the structures, expectations and cultures within which clergy are being asked to minister.

Clergy should also have access to genuinely independent pastoral support, particularly during personal crisis, conflict, complaint or disciplinary processes. The people managing a situation cannot always also provide pastoral care within it. A Church which speaks so often about pastoral care should model it well in the way it cares for its clergy.

Part of improving wellbeing means tackling unnecessary bureaucracy. Safeguarding, accountability and good governance matter enormously, but we have accumulated layers of regulation and administration which consume hours that could be spent on ministry. We should distinguish between essential protections and unnecessary red tape, simplifying processes and removing hoops which add little value.

I am passionate about rural ministry. As Priest-in-Charge of four rural parishes in South Devon, I know its extraordinary strengths and particular pressures. Small congregations are not simply unsuccessful large congregations. Rural churches are often deeply embedded in their communities and maintain a Christian presence where few other institutions remain. National strategies must take seriously the different realities of rural ministry.

Before ordination I spent 11 years as a youth minister in an Anglican church in inner-city Plymouth. That experience continues to shape my conviction that children, young people and families must be at the heart of the Church's mission. If we want children and young people to grow in faith, we need churches in which whole families can belong, participate and flourish. Families should not simply be the recipients of children's ministry, but part of the worshipping and missional life of the Church.

That means being more imaginative about what a parish church can be. One parish does not have to mean one congregation, meeting at one time, worshipping in one way. Within the same church family we can grow different worshipping communities - traditional and contemporary, sacramental and informal, intergenerational and age-specific - each with its own identity while belonging to something bigger. Renewal does not require us to abandon what we have inherited; it means creating space alongside it for new communities through which people can encounter Jesus.

That commitment to a broad and welcoming Church shapes my support for the ministry of women and the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ people. I welcome the Church of England's movement towards marriage for same-sex couples and want all people to know that they are valued, welcomed and able to flourish.

Above all, I want Synod to remain connected to what its decisions mean on the ground. Strategies, legislation and policies eventually land in dioceses, deaneries and parishes, where real people have to make them work.

The words which shape my ministry are relational, experiential, audacious and loving. I want a Church which is relational rather than institutional; where faith is encountered and lived; courageous enough to try, fail and try again; and rooted in the radical love of Jesus Christ.

If elected, I will listen to clergy across the Diocese of Exeter, represent the realities of parish ministry, think independently, disagree well and speak candidly - helping us become a Church which spends less energy maintaining unnecessary systems and more energy enabling people and communities to flourish.