

Dr Richard Davis

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 personally prompted to stand for two reasons. Firstly, I have followed the deliberations of General Synod and the pronouncements of its members in the media, and noticed at times an absence of love, tolerance and respect which tarnishes the good name of the Church of England and puts people off seeing the Church as a good organisation. Secondly, I have recently retired and want to use my time and experience in this final active phase of my life to contribute to shaping the mission of the Church as it addresses profound issues and challenges such as populism, poverty, artificial intelligence and its deteriorating church buildings. My working life in other organisations has equipped me for contributing to the debate on these matters in the Church.

One challenge for me will be to understand the Church thoroughly enough for my contributions in Synod on matters about which I know something, to be well grounded in the context of the national Church, about which I know less. Another challenge will be to resist the temptation to parade the prejudices and biases I like everyone has, unfeelingly or unempathetically, and in so doing prevent relationships with other members flourishing.

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?

I see many local churches declining for lack of support from their own communities and from their diocese and the national Church. I think that the support provided by the Church to parishes needs to be more comprehensive, greater in scale and given in a more proactive way. In supporting mission, Christian discipleship and the flourishing of parish and other worshipping communities, I believe the Church of England should prioritise maintaining a presence in as many local communities as possible in order that people can experience the Church's witness and have available to them a fellowship that they can easily join. In addition, the national Church and dioceses need to facilitate partnerships with local government and the charity sector that enable local churches to address local needs on the ground in a joined-up way with other local organisations. In this way the local church would flourish as more relevant and stronger, and have access to more sources of income.

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 was right to take decisive action to become safer and more accountable after having, to its shame, ignored the welfare of vulnerable people in its community for far too long; I have personal experience of one such case. General Synod should now hold the whole Church to account for ensuring that the reforms work effectively.

However, inertia could be a problem now in a different way. Having now faced up to the depth of the problem and instituted reforms, the Church now needs to shift its focus onto other issues or it will miss the opportunities to influence positive change in other areas. Because safeguarding was a real priority at the time the need for it was realised does not mean that it should dominate church business beyond the point of need. The Church urgently needs to address maintaining the parish network, inclusion, artificial intelligence, poverty, sustainability, international conflict as well and show Christian leadership to the Nation on them.

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

The financial requirements of mission and parish ministry are not competing demands but complementary to each other. Parish ministry is the soil in which mission is planted and then will either be fruitful or not. The Church must therefore invest in both. The correct balance will be found by understanding how resources can best be employed in each case to provide the all-round support that that parish needs to grow. If thriving parish ministry is the vision then the support each individual parish needs will determine the resources required and be the criterion when choices have to be made. National and diocesan initiatives are only helpful when their application is shaped by the distinctive needs of individual churches. Currently, my sense is that teaching and growth are being prioritised over community service and church buildings.

I also think that we should think more broadly about the resources which are available. With the right support, some churches are developing new income sources from using their buildings for purposes additional to worship. And whilst many churches are now entirely run by volunteers, there is a noticeable lack of volunteers working at diocesan level across multiple churches to assist them.

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?

As I wrote in my election address, it is important to me that General Synod exemplifies God's love in its counsels and so Synod should exemplify God's love in the way its members work with each other. The issues General Synod addresses are complex, not simple, and members are bound to take differing views of them because of their distinctive individual experiences of the issues. Difference is normal and does not inevitably signal disunity.

I would actively promote a Synod in which members influence each other from a standpoint of humility, listening carefully to other members, reflecting on their own views, acknowledging their prejudices and biases, holding firmly to God's given truth and lightly to positions that are less certain and not shared by all Christians. Members should recognise that their fellow members are not just people to be persuaded to their own view, but together form a group that can find the richest answers when everyone contributes to them.

Once decisions have been made, people need to get behind them and work together as teams to make them a reality. Members should not be sounding off and being divisive because they did not get their own way.