

Election Address from Nigel Robson

I put myself forward for election to General Synod in order to contribute to and support our Church of England. The next five years will be critical to its future evolution with many issues crystallising. I hope that I can bring a background of faithfulness, expertise and experience to the next stage of the mission. Jesus Christ is central to my life, and should be at the front of everything we as a Church do and say, but sadly that is not always the case. When Jesus is first, the tone, nature and quality of decision-making is transformed. Our Church is facing extraordinary challenges, and yet both the imminence and scale of impact is not reflected in the urgency or quality of response.

Areas of Support.

- 1) Mission - we have seen a fundamental shift in conditions for faith, where the default position which was once of religious faith has now moved to what is known as the 'neutral space'. This pivot places the 'religious world view' as being decidedly 'odd'. This is rather better expressed by Charles Taylor - " The change which takes us from a society in which it is almost impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others....belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives. And this will mean that at least in certain milieu, it may be harder to sustain one's faith. There will be many others to whom faith never even seems to be an eligible possibility." Some say that instead of defending the margins the response should be to reinterpret the gospel so that it aligns with our societal values, presuming we can agree them? That cannot be right. Christ's earthly teaching was certainly in a more hostile environment than ours, and we should not fashion our approach to these times. The Gospel has not changed. But the way to communicate it has if it is to reach the next generations.
- 2) Challenges post Covid – the full impact of the pandemic has yet to emerge. Most Churches have engaged in an extraordinarily successful response within and beyond their parishes. There is a sense however that, in general, attendance and finances have suffered. Realities cannot be ignored. There has been speculation as to some 'alternatives'. Short term 'fixes' will not survive a generation, and the structures, once abandoned, will never be re-created. One of the central lessons of Covid has been the centrality of our Churches anchored within our communities, especially in our rural parishes.
- 3) Living in Love & Faith – this excellent and thought provoking document, together with the resources, enables the Church to discern a way forward in relation to matters of identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. This process will be regularly reviewed by Synod. In addition the recent decision by the Methodist Conference to permit same-sex marriage means that this issue will probably come up for a decision during the forthcoming Synod. The definition of marriage in England and Wales is a matter of law determined by Parliament. But Christian marriage is distinctive, and is based upon the gospel.
- 4) Climate Change – this issue represents a massive existential threat to the nature of our future existence, and is a matter of justice. It should dominate our personal agendas, as well as the national/international ones. Our Church needs to be an advocate for change, as well as for those who will be hardest hit as a consequence of the displacement activities.
- 5) Schools/Academies – one of the most enduring legacies, and opportunities, of our Church is around 4,600 church schools, and in particular about 25% of all primary schools. Our primary duty is to provide the best possible education. But we must also

talk about Jesus. I believe that it is through schools that we can reinvigorate a Christian vision that “enables life in all its fullness”.

- 6) Ministerial Training – the future of our Church as we know it depends upon the quality of formation for ministry. The Church is reviewing this again, but must hold on to what is both good and essential. Training for lay ministry is underdeveloped, and inadequately funded. I am a trustee of two theological colleges, and as a result have insight into this subject.
- 7) Governance and Safeguarding – the Church is depressingly failing to set up the systems and procedures to address both historic allegations of abuse, as well as more recent ones. It is simply unacceptable for victims and accused to have to await years for reviews to be completed and actioned.
- 8) Church Buildings - the Church of England has 16,000 historic buildings including nearly half of all Grade 1 listed buildings. These are a vital part of our local, regional and national heritage, community, memory and environment. As we pray and reflect upon the future shape of ministry what is missing is an urgent and parallel discussion about a realistic strategy for church buildings.

About me

I am a former lawyer in an international law firm, and my positions included International Head of Engineering and Construction, Global Head of Energy, and Managing Partner. I was an accredited Mediator, and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. I have been a trustee and Chair of many organisations, bringing legal support, governance expertise, financial awareness, safeguarding, HR and educational experience.

When Chair of the Chamber of Commerce in the North East I focussed upon the issue of historic underperformance of many of the regions LEA schools. In addition to the issue of social injustice, I believe that education is one of the keys to breaking the cycle of social and economic deprivation. In 2003 I first joined the Board of an Academy with a Christian ethos. My involvement grew as it took on more schools, and I became Chair of the Multi Academy Trust. I was invited to join the Board of United Learning Trust, a Christian Foundation, in 2010, and was elected Chair. During this time the Trust grew from 16 Academies to over 60. The Trust concentrated upon taking over failing schools in areas suffering from the greatest disadvantage. After completing the maximum three terms in 2019, I continue as Chair of challenging secondary academies in the North. I am a Member of the Good Shepherd MAT and of the Emmanuel Schools Foundation MAT. I am Chair of the Western Excellence in Learning and Leadership in Cumbria. I am a trustee of St John’s and Cranmer Hall, Durham University, of the newly formed Emmanuel Theological College (sponsored in part by the Diocese of Carlisle), and of the Churches Trust for Cumbria.

I have been an active participant in the Dioceses of Carlisle and Newcastle, holding numerous responsibilities at Parish, Deanery and Diocesan levels. My first real step to commitment to Jesus came at a Billy Graham rally at Earls Court. I am married to Elizabeth, with five married children (one of whom is a Rector in Northamptonshire), very many grand-children, and my interests include fell walking, mountain biking, (now watching) rugby, Newcastle United and Falcons, and almost all things Italian.

*Nigel Robson
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