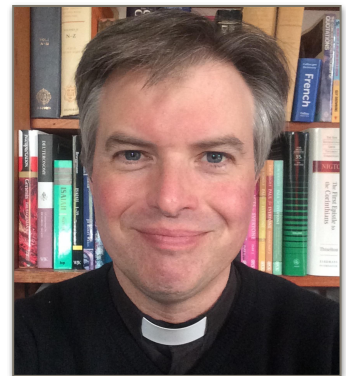


Revd Stewart Fyfe

General Synod Election Statement 2021

Who am I?

I am Rector of the North Westmorland Benefice, a group of eight rural parishes in Appleby Deanery and am also Rural Dean and Mission Community Leader. I am married with two teenaged children. I was ordained in Carlisle Diocese in 2005 and served my curacy in the Barony of Burgh before taking up my current appointment in 2010. I served as an Assistant DDO from 2016-2019. I also teach as a visiting lecturer on Rural Ministry and Rural Mission at St Mellitus, North West and am a ReSource Minister, working with Kevin Roberts (former Archdeacon of Carlisle) to promote the work and person of the Holy Spirit in "little, local, ordinary churches". I have a particular passion for vocations, youth work, Biblical studies and practical theology.



What do I offer?

I have now served one term on General Synod (from 2005) and am seeking re-election. In my 2015 election statement, I committed myself to helping the Church's simplification process and so I have been involved in a number of pieces of legislation aimed at simplifying and speeding up our administrative processes and decision-making, including sitting on various Revision Committees. I also committed myself, in 2015, to speak up for the Rural Church and throughout the last term, I have served on the Rural Affairs Group of the Mission & Public Affairs Council, which ensures that the rural Church is considered in national strategies and spending priorities, as well as scrutinising government legislation and policy, having direct input to the House of Lords. My concern has also widened to include marginalised communities in urban areas, who face many of the same issues. I have spoken in a number of debates, notably: in ecumenical relationships with the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church; the Remote Meetings Measure, the new Church Representation Rules, the Evangelism strategy and environmental issues.

My professional background began as a financial investigator at the Serious Fraud Office, before spending around 8 years as a litigation lawyer. My secular qualifications include a BSc in Economics and a post-graduate diploma in Law. I have a Certificate in Theology from Ridley Hall, Cambridge and an MA in Practical Theology from the University of Cumbria. I have completed the Germinate course in rural church leadership.

Where do I stand?

I am an open Evangelical, with charismatic leanings and a central Anglican spirituality. I draw deeply from John Wesley, whose strange mix of Catholic truth, Evangelical rigour and charismatic passion mirrors my own, and I am inspired by his vision of "a vital, practical Religion" worked out in the transformation of lives. I am an unashamed devotee of N.T. Wright and the theological school gathered around his insights into the historical Jesus.

I work well with Christians of other traditions, respecting different viewpoints and seeking to be as generous as possible with my own. I have a genuine love of the Church in all its breadth and diversity and believe that generous distinctiveness is better than bland consensus.

Why would you vote for me?

This is a critical time for the Church of England, particularly as we emerge from Covid. It's not just the looming issues of sexuality and marriage, though they might grab the headlines. There is a wider debate going on about the nature of Church, the way we invest our resources, the nature of leadership in the Church, and the approach we take to mission and our relationship with the nation.

These are all issues I care about deeply, having studied them in depth and addressed them in my own ministry. I would offer my analytical and theological thinking and my prayer to these discussions on our future, applying the following when wrestling with the key issues we face:

1. We need to **commit to the local** in our mission and ministry. Our local presence and engagement is central to our identity as the Church of England. If we are to be truly the Church for the whole of England, it is important that we continue as a family of local churches, reflecting the communities in which we live.
2. We need to **re-energise with hope**. Covid has had a dramatic effect on confidence for clergy and congregations alike. A number of significant issues, particularly around ministry funding and the size of our missionary task, have led to a narrative about our future that has left a number of parish clergy feeling undervalued, at the very moment when they have given so much. There is a danger that we pit pioneers against parish clergy, mission against pastoral ministry and the new against the traditional. Creating such artificial divisions is unhelpful, but there is a danger that it affects our national strategies and rhetoric. I do not under-estimate the challenges we face, but we need to face them with hope and a vision of good news that values the contribution of everyone as we seek to serve as one Church. I will speak up for local clergy, traditional and pioneering, and seek a more hopeful way forward that will re-energise us all.
3. We need to **speak up for marginalised communities**. In the last term on Synod, I became aware of just how narrow the focus of much Church thinking is. It is geographically focussed on London and theological focussed on the Churches that have shown the most dramatic growth. However, marginalised communities matter, both rural and urban. They may not be capable of the same headline-grabbing growth, but they matter just as much and often need a different approach to help them to thrive. One size does not fit all.
4. We need to **disagree well**. That doesn't mean we need to avoid making big decisions or accept the bland middle ground - there are several nettles that need to be grasped, and some quite urgently. However, how we make decisions matters as much as the decisions we make. We live in a society that is increasingly adamant in its opinions. Free speech is under threat and respect for differing views is not always conspicuous. We have an opportunity to model a different and more Godly approach that allows us to resolve our disputes without the need to diminish our neighbour. I commit myself to (1) listening actively and with concern, encouraging others to speak - particularly those who are reticent; (2) expressing my own views with clarity and with care for the other; (3) praying and thinking deeply about every issue, taking into account as many factors as possible; (4) seeking solutions that care as much for those who do not agree with our decisions as those who do; and (5) exhibiting love and openness, demonstrating that we remain God's family, even when we disagree.
5. We need to find a **new language**. We need to express God's eternal truths in a language that connects with people today. Too often, we speak in worn out phrases or lofty words that no longer speak the language of ordinary people. Too often, we focus inwardly on the needs of the Church and not outwardly on the will of God or the needs of our neighbour. Too often, we speak as a middle-class institution occupying the moral high ground, rather than as fellow-strugglers who have discovered a hope beyond ourselves that allows us to stand and face our troubles. Too often we have tried to portray ourselves as virtuous protecting our reputation, rather than as sinners who can face the truth about ourselves with honesty because we have known Grace. Too often we are pragmatic and learned, rather than Godly and self-sacrificing. I believe that our society does not need a powerful institution, or a moral police authority, or even a successful growing Church! But our society does desperately need to know how the great Gospel themes of forgiveness, sin, judgment, liberty and God's love can set us free and offer us life, purpose and hope. And our neighbours desperately need to know that there is a branch of God's family near them who is like them, facing the same struggles they are, but with a hope and glory that is for them too. But to help them hear these precious things, we need to speak in ways that sound a lot more like Jesus than we currently do.

If you want to elect someone who will take that sort of approach to our big issues, please pray and consider whether you might vote for me. And please pray also for all our candidates. We cannot do this in our own strength alone. Thank you for taking the time to read this. God bless you.

Stewart