

Questions to candidates for General Synod House of Clergy

Q1. Are you familiar with the recently published Equalities and Human Rights Commission guidance that single-sex spaces such as changing rooms and toilets must be used on the basis of biological sex and do you intend to respect, uphold and follow it, or if not why not?’

Yes I do intend to uphold and follow the guidance. On a very practical level, within the Heart of Eden Benefice, I will be supporting the existing practice of having all our toilets as unisex.

I do feel that this question is maybe pointing to something else – a response that is more about human identity, about how we, as God’s children, reflect God’s image within us. St Paul calls us to look beyond our physical nature (Gal 3:28), our role in life and our background. This above guidance is very focused on the physical (biological) element of our existence. I think as Christians we are obliged to look deeper than the intent of this guidance, to see beyond just the physical, we are called to be sensitive to the emotional and mental state of an individual (never mind the spiritual). I am not convinced that the above guidance takes that into account, whereas we are obliged to do so in our interactions with those who enter our church.

As for the the role of Synod, I believe, it is called to encourage open, respectful dialogue on these challenges. It needs to be sensitive to all the pain that comes from these conversations and to encourage and put in place ways to engage the body of the church (in all its facets) to act out the love of God; a love that is patient, kind... (1 Cor. 13)

Q2. Parish ministry is becoming increasingly difficult to fund locally. What do you believe the Church of England should do to ensure that the cost of stipendiary ministry does not fall disproportionately on small, rural and ageing congregations?

As a priest in charge of a benefice of 10 parishes (13 churches), I can only say that I will do my utmost to support and voice (I imagine sometimes quite passionately) how the national church needs to support the church in small rural communities. I believe that the church has a vital role to play in ensuring that, not just as a church but as a nation, we are aware of our country's diversity in populations. For us to survive as the church of ALL England this role must be taken very seriously.

I believe passionately that the national church has much to learn from the way small parishes interact with local communities at a deep and meaningful level. This is shown in many ways, but for me most profoundly through the occasional offices, which are a vital obligation that has a profound impact and is Christ -cantered in the traditional responsibility as stated in the Ordinal and at our licensing as a priest, namely, the cure of souls.

Our churches are not just a group of like-minded religious people coming to gather to pat each other on the back. They are an extension and a reflection of the villages and small towns we spiritually support. And this is utterly priceless for pastoral and missional work.

To carry out this pastoral and missional work, the stipendiary ministry is essential, and at Synod I will work tirelessly to articulate my comments above -stressing that the support of this role cannot fall on the shoulders of an ever-decreasing group of utterly committed, loving parishioners. Synod not only needs to reflect on the financial support but also on how the church nationally supports small rural parishes, down to processes and the ever-increasing requirements of governance. We need to think a new how to support parishes in administration as much as ministry!

Q3. There are churches with urgent needs for roofs, heating, accessibility, structural repairs and other capital works, but grants can be extremely difficult to access and often require significant match funding. What would you do to release more Church of England resources for capital investment in parish churches?

I will continuously advocate for Synod to urge the Church Commissioners to allocate funds for capital investment in parish churches. I believe we should explore creative and innovative approaches instead of merely maintaining the existing structure of the Church, as we have done for hundreds of years. Additionally, I will encourage Synod to collaborate with the national government to protect our local churches, as they play an essential role in our culture and national heritage. I believe that we need to articulate much better the demands of maintaining physical buildings and the church's pastoral and missional work. The Synod needs to better support these demands.

I also feel very passionately about the wonderful work that small and ageing Parochial Church Councils (PCCs) are doing to keep our churches functioning. However, I strongly believe that the church needs to review its current management policies. There is an increasing amount of complex work required to manage our buildings, and this issue demands serious attention.

As a Synod member, I will vigorously challenge both existing and proposed policies. If these policies are to be implemented, I will also advocate to ensure that any tools used are well-funded for their users. Additionally, I will encourage the church to invest in the timely deployment and management of these resources.

This question highlights a fundamental issue regarding how our buildings and their maintenance impact the environment. It is crucial that we receive support to ensure we meet the church's targets for becoming carbon neutral. While setting targets is a positive step, it only matters if churches are given the resources they need to achieve these goals. I believe the national church, in collaboration with both national and local

governments, must continue to increase its support, particularly for small rural churches that simply do not have the resources to meet these vital targets.

In the end, we must stand together as responsible stewards of our churches/environment/communities. This is very beautifully illustrated in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30).