

General Synod statement – Rev Charles Henry Hope

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Ordained deacon: 1990, Newcastle Diocese

Ordained Priest: 1991, Newcastle Diocese

Curate, Tynemouth St John Percy (Percy Main, Meadow Well, Royal Quays areas of North Shields, North Tyneside), 1990-1994

Vicar, Tynemouth St John Percy, 1994 – 2003

Army Reserve Chaplain, 1994 – 2024 (deployed to Iraq 2004)

Vicar of Prudhoe, 2003 – 2016

Priest in Charge, then Vicar of Keswick St John and Borrowdale 2016 –

Priest in Charge of Threlkeld, St John in the Vale with Wythburn, 2017 –

Rural Dean of Derwent, 2017 –

DBF Trustee 2025 –

I have served in the Diocese of Carlisle for the past ten years. This builds on a wealth of parish experience gained in market town, urban and inner-city parochial contexts since my ordination in 1990. I have also served as a Reserve Army Padre and was mobilised for active service in 2004. Over this time, I have gained extensive experience in diverse situations of what it means to be 'rooted' and 'local', whilst still being 'an off-comer'. I am married to Kathryn with three grown up daughters in varying states of independence with a delightful dog who loves visitors who have dog treats in their pockets.

We know that the Church of England and all dioceses face huge challenges. One response to the level, nature and complexity of these challenges is to panic. It often seems that much coming out in the central church pronouncements has been, either implicitly or explicitly, of that ilk. Yet ever since Archbishop Temple's report 'Towards the Conversion of England', 1945, (and probably before that too) the CofE has been panicking about its long-term survival.

People talk of how churches will have to close, clergy will have to cover more parishes, how the parochial system is under threat. But the principle of the parish which expresses the idea of a parson committed to serving the people of a locality has been at the heart of Anglican ecclesiology since before the Reformation. The nature of the parish changes over time, but that local rootedness has been crucial to our identity and our mission. It reflects the theological notion that God's mission is to all people and to every aspect of their lives, that God's love is for everyone and we play a part in that mission.

The LLF discussions have been deep, extensive, painful and unresolved. Some of us will remember the older debates on the ordination of women and remarriage of divorcees which all now seem old, historic and, with hindsight, rather tame – but at the time, for those of us living those debates they could be as vicious as the current

debates. And there is still diversity of views on those topics, and we still largely hold together. The LLF process is now over and we have started with the new Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group – I will prayerfully consider what emerges – but will do so in context of my own theological reflection whilst also listening to colleagues through chapter, deanery and synodical processes.

If I were to be elected, then I would also be responsible to my electorate – taking time to listen and to feed back to colleagues on matters of importance so I can learn and faithfully represent; taking time to read the copious quantities of paperwork that synod now creates; taking time to attend meetings. It also means adjusting workloads so that being on synod can be managed whilst also being a husband, father and a parish priest!

Through my church roles, school, charity and voluntary sector roles, I have extensive experience of dealing with complex issues, reports and paperwork, thinking on my feet and sometimes seeing the wood from the trees! I also enjoy theology and God-talk and think we should be doing more of it!

If, in this context, I were to be elected to the General Synod what sort of principles would I be advocating?

- A church that takes God seriously – in worship, in faith, in the life of the other.
- A church that wrestles theologically, that seeks to wrestle with complex issues without politicising certain positions, that seeks where God is at work and delights at how God can be surprising us in situations we least expect.
- A church that is committed to the local expression of the church.
- A church that is prepared to take the risk of holding within its membership, people with whom it disagrees on some matters but delights in their faithfulness and fruitfulness in other areas.
- A church that strives to encourage and support all people to find their vocations, in the church and outside the church, serving God to the best of their abilities – and can cherish their best as good enough – so fostering as inclusive a church as possible.
- A church that, at a time of change, aims in its legislation, policies and organisational strategies to ensure that jobs and roles for clergy and lay officers are life-giving (missional) and possible (organisational), be that in terms of pastoral or faculty legislation, safeguarding or health and safety policy, the list could go on.

A motif that has underpinned my ministry is a quote from an old report, Partners in Mission, 1977:

“The missionary task of the church of England is reconciliation between God and humankind, person and person, and people and the environment.” (using inclusive language it was not written in.)

Those three dimensions of reconciliation have been fundamental to my ministry and would underpin what I would seek to bring to my time serving on General Synod.

I prayerfully offer my candidacy to colleagues in the diocese.

Rev Charles Hope.