

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?’

I am familiar with the guidance, and fully welcome it, although I am saddened by the distress it has caused amongst the trans community. I believe we are all made in the image of God, and that no-one should be made to feel unsafe in any space, which is, I believe, from whence the guidance stems. I think the best solution, in all ways, is to encourage such spaces to be individually cubicled and unisex, for the safety and privacy of all users. This is very much something that I believe PCCs and individual churches should consider, with reference to the guidance, in their own unique circumstances.

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?

Ministering now, and throughout my curacy, in small, rural, aging congregations, I recognise that times are difficult. I think generosity is really important, and that those churches who can afford to make a ministry offer which is greater than their ministry costs should be heavily encouraged to do so. (And I note that these aren’t always big, urban, young congregations). I really believe that if we are going to be ‘a Christian presence in every community’, it requires the whole church pulling together to fund and resource ministry. We need to steward wisely the resources we do have nationally, and I think General Synod’s scrutiny of how and where money is spent is vitally important.

I think these are our rainy days; it’s no good holding too tightly to our resources for ‘rainy days’ where we are already facing them. There’s been a lot of discourse over the last few years about this being an anxious time for the church, with many bleak outlooks. As someone who has only relatively recently trained for and begun ordained ministry, I recognise a hopefulness; I’ve offered for ministry in a church I still believe has life and hope.

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?

As per the previous question, I think this is our rainy day, and now is the time to spend the savings we have to ensure the ministry of the church for the future. However, I also think we need to ask careful questions of our buildings, including whether the capital

investment required is wise stewardship of the resources we have. Once we've spent the money we have, it is gone along with any interest it would've previously brought in. The situation we find ourselves in with our buildings, across the Church of England, is not tenable long term. I have absolutely not come into ministry to close buildings down (no-one wants to be that person), but I also think that we need to be pragmatic as we explore our future.

All this being said, I also recognise the mission potential of our buildings, particularly in my corner of the church in the Lakes. Our buildings are places of peace and sanctuary, where visitor books speak of experiences of the numinous. Releasing resources to fund buildings means taking funding from a different pot, and the question, of course, is which pot? The Church Commissioners last year completed a £40 million pound refurbishment of Lambeth Palace to ensure it reaches the net zero target (amongst other things). As above, I think one of Synod's roles is to ask questions and hold to account those making such spending decisions. As a parish priest, I cannot in good conscience affirm such resourcing of one building whilst facing building projects in local churches which are urgent but unreachable. This is a complex question, and one to which there are no easy answers.