**The Venerable Stewart Fyfe**
**Resonse to 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 am familiar with this guidance and I certainly intend to respect, uphold and follow it – both the Supreme Court ruling that terms like "man," "woman," and "sex" in the Equality Act 2010 mean biological sex at birth and the affirmation that transgender individuals remain protected against unlawful discrimination. We already take the guidance into account in DAC decisions over the installation of toilets in churches and it would need to be taken into account in any business coming before General Synod.*

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?

*This question is dear to my heart. It has been the subject of my of my work on General Synod and is one of the main reasons why I am seeking re-election. I founded (and currently Chair) the Rural Interest Group on General Synod (RIGGS) and we have campaigned hard on this. There are two specific things the Church can (and should) do:*

1. *It can shift the balance of Church Commissioners' funding from strategic development funding to simple 'no strings attached' funding to diocesan stipend budgets. This came up in the Hereford Diocesan Synod Motion in July 2025 and the ongoing work of this needs to be carried through. By way of background, in 2015, General Synod agreed to remove all Church Commissioners' disbursements to Dioceses (for funding ministry under the old Darlow Formula) and divided the disbursements into two halves: half distributed direct to dioceses as Lowest Income Community Funding (LInC) and the other half used to set up a Strategic Development Fund (SDF) for which Dioceses had to apply. Both of these have significantly disadvantaged the rural church. Rural poverty is often hidden, so LInC money often does not reach them and SDF funding (now replaced by the Diocesan Investment Programme – DIP) favours investment in larger population areas. I am not against the strategic investment principle – we need capacity to innovate – but the balance of funding is wrong and needs to be readjusted in favour of 'no strings attached' payments to Dioceses allowing them to fund local ministry at at time when we know that the capacity of many local churches to fund ministry is decreasing critically.*
2. *We can introduce legislation to allow the Church Commissioners to make disbursements from capital. Current legislation restricts the disbursemsent they can make in order to insure intergenerational equity (i.e. to ensure that each generation will have equal disbursements from Church Commissioners capital).*

*There is, however, a real and present danger that we underfund ministry in the present to such an extent that there are no future generations to benefit from intergenerational equity. I recognise that it would be reckless to blow all Church Commissioners capital now to prop up the institution in its current form, but it does not make sense to starve the church artificially of resource when it is desperately needed now. This would require legislation to change the permissions we give to the Church Commissioners and I would support a measured, limited additional release of capital to fund ministry capacity now.* *Personally, I would prefer that additional capital released should fund the Strategic development element of funding. In principle, capital should fund strategic growth and all income from capital should be spent without strings on our core charitable aims - local mission and 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 recognise the serious issue that this question addresses. However, we need to understand how central funds operate and why. Central funding comes largely from the Church Commissioners. They are bound by legislation which dicates the terms on which they can make disbursements – both the amount and the the purpose of their disbursements. That legislation currently restricts them from diminishing their capital so that disbursements can be made on a principle of inter-generational equity (i.e. to ensure that each generation will have equal disbursements from Church Commissioners capital). To release more money from capital would require a change in legislation allowing the capital to be diminished and for buildings, rather than mission. Whether or not we release additional capital, therefore, releasing more resouces for church buildings would come directly at the expense of money available to fund local ministry and I would not be in favour of this. Indeed, even were we to change the law to release capital to fund our buildings, the scale of the problem is such that those assets would be rapidly depleted and the problem would still remain.*

*The scale of the problem does, however, make this an urgent concern, one we need to address with a broader, bolder vision. Our church buildings represent important national heritage and their future is the concern of the whole nation, not just the Church. The current crisis is not caused by a lack of Church Commissioners investment (that has never been higher), but the withdrawal of the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme from the National Lottery and the recent decision of the government to end VAT relief for places of worship. The focus of our attention in addressing this crisis should therefore be in conversation with the government, the National Lottery and the heritage industry, all of whom have a shared moral responsibility with us and far deeper pockets.*