



Tom Carpenter

Why am I standing?

I am the Archdeacon of Chichester. It is an Archdeacon's job to care for the parish clergy, and to delight in their lives and work. I am standing as a candidate in this election because I see how hard life can be for parish priests, and I am certain that the General Synod is responsible for much of that hardship, and, therefore, that it can be used to make life

better for them.

What is the problem?

The parish church is the means God has given us to worship him, to live the Christian life, and to incorporate more and more people into that life. The character of a particular parish is made of many things, but mostly the parish priest. For a parish church to flourish it is vital for that parish's priest to flourish.

Recent research shows that many clergy are not flourishing. I was not surprised to hear at the recent Save the Parish conference that a third of incumbents show symptoms of depression and forty percent report chronic loneliness. The clergy make an heroic commitment to the Church, and many are being rewarded with miserable lives. In 2025 379 priests resigned, rather than wait for retirement to escape. The fall in the number of ordinands is largely attributable to those who may have a vocation walking away from it because they fear for their health and happiness if they follow it. The Church of England cannot go on like this.

What is answer? Save the Clergy!

I think the single biggest thing making the parish clergy unhappy is the weight of their responsibilities. Too much is being asked of fewer and fewer parish clergy. We are blessed in this diocese that the grouping of parishes has been much slower than elsewhere.

Nevertheless, here, as everywhere else in the Church of England, that is the inevitable end if the Church Commissioners continue to spend their money as they do now. Instead of using their resources for the purpose for which they were given – paying for priests in parishes – the General Synod has allowed the Commissioners to designate only 8% of their spending for parish ministry.

The first thing, then, that the Synod can do is to change the National Church Governance Measure so that the Church Commissioners' money is used for its proper purpose: supporting parish ministry. This will mean that dioceses are not forced to group parishes, and that the parish clergy are not given impossibly large jobs.

The second thing the Synod can do is to restore the dignity of traditional parish ministry. Too much money has been spent on, and too much attention given to, alternative forms of ministry. The Strategic Development Fund spent £176 million on such schemes, which, we

were told, would result in 89, 375 new disciples. Only 12, 704 were actually reported. Whilst these new initiatives multiply even as they fall short of their objectives, parish clergy can be made to feel guilty about their own attendance figures. Priests are not responsible for the drift of Western Civilisation away from the Church, a drift that has been noticeable all over Europe for a century. It is wrong in this context that the Church of England should use numbers as the only metric to judge the ministry of parish clergy. Real numerical growth does, thank God, happen, but in assessing the fruitfulness of a parish priest's ministry what they do and how they do it matters more to God, and, I believe, should matter more to the Church.

Save the Clergy! - Save the Parish! – Save the Church!

Even in the fairly short time I have been ordained, I have seen the job of a parish priest change in many ways, and not for the better. In the last few years, Save the Parish have stood up for clergy and their parishes in the General Synod, and that is why I thought I might be able to support them. My motive in offering myself for election is my belief, in the words of their manifesto, **that the parish system, properly resourced, remains the right way for the Church of England to be present in every community in this country.**

Save some other things!

Although my reason for standing for election is my desire to see the Save the Parish agenda carried out, it would be daft to pretend I have no other views that I would take with me. I am particularly concerned to protect the settlement by which women are ordained to the episcopate, and space is found for those of us of a different integrity, the Five Guiding Principles. As urgent is the task of preserving the Seal of the Confessional from well-intentioned but misguided attempts to qualify it. In this, I hope all sacramental Anglicans, of whatever view on other matters, will work together to keep such a powerful channel of God's mercy flowing through the Church of England. I hope that the whole Church can unite around its current teaching on marriage, but, if that proves impossible, that proper provision will be made for those that continue to teach it. The next Synod may also be the last chance to save full-time residential training Colleges. I owe so much to my time at Mirfield, and I hope that all who would benefit from the training I had will continue to receive it.

Above all, I would like the Diocese to be represented in the Synod by a Save the Parish candidate. If you think I might be able to help further their agenda, then I would be very grateful for your vote. If you would like to discuss any of this, do let me know by email.

archchichester@chichester.anglican.org