

Steve Summers

for General Synod



*Proposed by Jo Winn-Smith - Chaplain to the Bishop of Guildford
& General Synod member*

*Seconded by Barnaby Perkins - Rector of East & West Clandon
& General Synod member*

My background:

I began working in the Church of England in 1995, running a homelessness project in Southsea, Portsmouth diocese. This experience was formative, prioritising my understanding that social justice is a vital expression of the gospel message. It was a project that emerged from a parish church committed to serving those in its immediate environs, and the project remains as an example of the Church operating at its best. I was drawn to the Church of England's diversity and ability to model tolerance variety and collaboration. I found in its welcome and hospitality (to each other within the church, as much as to those outside it) a compelling reason to become a priest and work initially as Rector in a large parish, then as Principal of LMP Guildford, and for the last three years in Staff Wellbeing for the NHS.

Why stand for General Synod?

Since I value the Church of England's diversity and capacity to hold unity amidst diversity, it is no surprise that I want to do what I can to contribute to its thriving. Our current drift towards division is saddening and an unwitting sacrifice of one of our greatest assets, however I don't believe that fracture is inevitable. Choosing to respect each other, and hold together despite varied opinions and passionately held beliefs, brings a richness and an ability to serve our increasingly diverse communities. My belief is that agreement is not a primary requirement for the Church, but a loving and compassionate response is. I therefore stand for inclusion, welcome and diversity, seeking to hold the door open for all who seek to belong. Specifically, there are some topics currently under General Synod debate that need close attention:

- National Safeguarding concerns are perhaps the most pressing. From the local church to the national church, safeguarding is everyone's business. General Synod needs to continue to work towards the enthusiastic embrace of fully independent oversight required to restore public confidence. On this matter, the building of trust seems to me to be crucial, since the treatment of victims and survivors is a matter of justice.
- We are facing a real-world challenge to the welfare of clergy in retirement - a theme consistent with measurable low clergy wellbeing in general. The dual challenges of a move to a lower full pension, baselined on half, rather than two-thirds of national minimum stipend, combined with an unrealistically long service term, is placing clergy in retirement in a precarious financial footing. I want this to be addressed as a matter of urgency. I wonder if this is a contributing factor in the current vocations challenge in

recruiting young, talented clergy, which in any sector are going to bring energy and creativity to the workforce?

- The ongoing maneuvering around the Living in Love & Faith measures is a cause for great sadness. Anything that can be done to shift the debate towards recognising and prioritising our shared unity is going to be more aligned with God's Kingdom than the theological sparring that leaves the watching world, not confused, but worse - baffled and irritated. I am therefore standing as an inclusive candidate. Related to this, my work to provide pastoral care in a secular context allows a valuable insight that some church-based clergy can miss.

Why does this matter to me?

I am committed to try to keep two things in focus at the same time: (i) attention to the detail of how individual people experience the Church of England, and (ii) the overarching big picture of how we are perceived as a national church. Being the national church is a privilege that brings a responsibility to address and engage with the people of our parishes, regardless of what we think of social trends and patterns. We have wonderful opportunities to engage with our population, even if we have to learn a new language in order to be understood.

When I took on the role of working with Staff Wellbeing within the NHS, the challenge I set was: if I didn't use the 'Church language' of healing, restoration & salvation, how might I share and experience of the Kingdom of God with those who work in the NHS under highly stressful conditions? Experiencing the Kingdom of God is certainly necessary, and I believe that the Church of England still has something to contribute: schism and disintegration are not inevitable. We have so much shared commonality.

My perspective:

It is easy to speak of inclusion and welcome without it meaning much, but I have demonstrated a commitment to working across traditions and boundaries. In my 13 years as LMP Course Principal, I welcomed and trained candidates from across the range of church traditions. Unlike Theological Colleges that can attract students with a particular theological flavour, Local Ministry Programmes are charged with training all those brought forward within their diocese. In this context I have significant experience of treating people from a variety of beliefs and backgrounds equitably and with respect, seeking to nurture a Learning Community that valued and celebrated its diversity. This role required an understanding of the Church of England's processes and systems at the highest level, so I bring highly relevant experience. And in many years of contributing to the national discernment process, I have a good grasp of the vocations process and its importance for the future.

As someone now working as a priest and theologian in a secular setting, I have a crucial appreciation of how the Church is viewed by those outside it. This perspective is perhaps the most useful for retaining an overview of what really matters, the broad national, social context that we lose sight of at our peril. I can commit to being a diligent and transparent representative for Guildford diocesan clergy.

Thank you for taking the time to read my address, I would be grateful for your vote.