



Stephen Corbett

Proposer: Canon Alistair McHaffie
Seconder: Revd Chris Anderton

Vicar: St Gabriel's, Blackburn since 2009. An increasingly ethnically diverse parish. According to the Church Urban Fund, the parish is relatively deprived.

Family: Married to Jo, who works for a local authority. We have four adult daughters, two of whom are ordained in another diocese. Another is a social worker, and the other works for a national charity. We have four grandchildren.

Current Non-Parochial Responsibilities:

- Member of General Synod since 2019
- Member of Blackburn Diocesan Synod since 2010
- Member of the Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee since 2015

Previous Ministry: I served a curacy and an incumbency in the Diocese of London, followed by sixteen years' parish ministry in Birmingham (where I served on the Bishop's Council and several other diocesan bodies, as well as a spell as Area Dean) before coming to Blackburn.

ELECTION ADDRESS

General Synod 2021

First, let me say "Thank you" to those who voted for me in 2019. I hope that you (and even those of you who didn't!) will consider voting for me this time – hopefully as your first preference.

The range of matters within the remit of the Synod is huge. All are important, but no individual member can cover a brief across them all. Therefore, let me outline.....

Some Key Priorities for 2021-2026.....

Clergy Well-Being: My first intervention in a debate was about the replacement of **The Clergy Discipline Measure**. This will continue to be a major matter in the upcoming new Synod. Although the House of Bishops (Synod was informed) have voted for this in principle, what seemed to be emerging, as the last Synod drew to a close, looked more like reform rather than replacement. This needs monitoring in the new one. The current measure is simply not fit for purpose. It requires replacement.

Linked to this is the emerging need for a parallel measure aimed at good **Lay Discipline** -ie holding accountable that minority of lay members and officers whose conduct, on occasions, makes church life a little unpleasant for the majority. I heard voices suggesting support of this in the last Synod. But clearly there's further work to be done.

PARISH FINANCE: I'm sensitive to the growing concern expressed through the recent initiative **Save The Parish**. It's a network which spans church traditions. I read their manifesto the other day and found myself in general agreement. I say this as someone who for years has been enthusiastic about fresh expressions and new initiatives (and still am, by the way!).

The recent direction of travel in the church has, however, led to unrealistically high and unsustainable parish share askings.

We've reached (or nearly reached the tipping point. The newly elected Synod needs to call a halt to this trend, to enable some sensible and prayerful reflection aimed at rebooting how we run. This reboot would take the form of a pause to, then gradual reversal of the processes of centralisation which have taken hold over recent decades.

FUNERAL POVERTY: In February 2020 a (little-publicised) private member's motion (PMM) reached the floor of Synod. It concerned the social injustice of growing numbers of households finding themselves unable to fund a basic funeral in the wake of an unexpected bereavement, resulting in "paupers' funerals". This was debated, amended and carried. This work was to be taken forward by The Life Events Advisory Group (and other groups) and progress reported back by the end of 2021. Well, we've had covid since then; so, some time in 2022 may now be more realistic.

If re-elected, I'll contact that group with a suggestion.... I'd like to see the Church Commissioners fund a small number of pilot projects, establishing a network of 'not-for-profit' church-run funeral services. Among other things, they could re-purpose "redundant" church premises (I can think of a few) to provide services that undercut the current 'for-too-much-profit' operators. Earlier this year, my elderly mother died. Fortunately, my family were in a position to fund the high funeral costs; but what if we were not?

ISSUES IN HUMAN SEXUALITY: This has been debated for the entirety of my ordained ministry (which is not short). It is now time to conclude the conversation. When the House of Bishops, following a process of "shared conversations", brought their report to the floor of Synod in 2017 (to be "taken note of"), it gained a majority, but failed to get through! [Synod as a whole voted in favour of taking note of their report; but a motion for voting by houses (which was carried) led to it narrowly failing in the House of Clergy]. Once the LLF process concludes in 2022, I am looking beyond that to the House of Bishops to give wise leadership in line with Scripture, Tradition and Reason. They can be assured of my prayerful support.

CLIMATE CHANGE: A motion (for which I voted) was presented by the Bishop of Salisbury in February 2020. In essence, it committed the CofE "in all its parts" (ie. church buildings, houses, offices etc) to becoming carbon-neutral by 2045 at the latest. During the debate, an amendment to the effect that the target date be 2030 was carried. In his response to the amendment, the Bishop of Salisbury appeared a little taken aback at Synod's "ambition". I agree with the Bishop's skepticism about 2030! Nevertheless, it points us in the right direction.

CHILDREN & YOUTH: We all know the realities here. A Report moved by a member of the Archbishops' Council last year provided some sobering statistics vis a vis the rapid decline in numbers of younger people in recent years - even in larger churches. Essentially, it called for urgent action by dioceses. Some recent research suggests that the largest percentage of people who come through church into adult discipleship put their experience down not to church, not to Sunday School (or other youth groups), not to attending a church school, but to their Christian family. This brings me back to my comments above about finance. Let us leave as many parish resources in parishes, so that they can invest in creative ways in Christian family education.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. If you'd like to ask any questions about what I've written, please get in touch.

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