

GENERAL SYNOD ELECTION ADDRESS OF PAUL BENFIELD

Proposed by Canon Fleur Green

Vicar of Darwen St Peter,
Area Dean of Blackburn with Darwen,
Sometime Dean of Women's Ministry,
Sometime member of General Synod

Seconded by Andrew Wilkinson

Vicar of St Helen's Churchtown and
St Michael's on Wyre
Area Dean of Garstang



Dear Elector,

Since I was elected to General Synod in 2005, I have attended every session and taken an active part in its proceedings, taking with me the concerns of the clergy of this diocese.

Synod is principally a legislative body and my training as a barrister, and my experience as Diocesan Registrar from 2018 to 2020, means that I am able to scrutinize draft legislation to ensure that it is workable and achieves its aims. I have proposed numerous technical amendments to revision committees on matters as diverse as marriage law, clergy terms of service and parish fees, many of which have been accepted. On more fundamental issues, it was my amendment on the floor of Synod that stopped parsonages being transferred from incumbents to the diocese, where they would have been at risk from creditors if a diocese became insolvent.

Some of the matters to be discussed by the next Synod will have far-reaching impact on parishes and clergy. The parish church is for most people in England the starting point for their engagement with the Church of England. Parish clergy are essential. They are not 'key limiting factors'!

I want the Church of England to remain a broad Church with high, middle and low, catholic, evangelical and liberal, all engaging in mission and mutual flourishing. The Church is called to proclaim afresh to each generation the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds. Proclaiming afresh to the present generation should not involve adapting the Church's teaching to fit in with the current fashions of society, but rather showing that Christ's message is one with different and better priorities and emphases than those of the world.

I was ordained deacon in 1989 and have a wide experience of full-time parochial ministry in urban, suburban, market town and rural situations. I am currently a half-time assistant priest in Burnley and a direct access barrister. I married in 1994 and so know some of the pressures of Vicarage life on a famil. It is important that we do not forget the contribution made by SSMs and the additional pressures on them.

Please give me a high preference vote. And remember, only by giving me your first preference vote can you be sure that I will be elected!

With thanks and best wishes,
Paul Benfield

continued overleaf

SAFEGUARDING

The safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults is crucial. However, the way that core groups operate and, without any reference to the accused clergy, find allegations ‘substantiated’, is a breach of natural justice. Such a finding can mean that clergy cannot move to new a post because of a decision of a kangaroo court, outside the clergy discipline system.

Should IICSA recommend ‘mandatory reporting’ (whatever that may mean) I would oppose any change to the 1603 canon which provides that whatever is disclosed to a priest in sacramental confession cannot be divulged, even after the death of the penitent.

CLERGY DISCIPLINE

The much-criticised Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 is to be replaced. I support the suggestion that there should be separate processes for grievances and for allegations of serious misconduct. The proceedings must be fair to both complainant and respondent. Bishops should be removed from the process altogether – most have neither the skill nor impartiality to act in a quasi-judicial capacity.

CLERGY PENSIONS

From 2011 stipendiary clergy were contracted in to the Second State Pension. This was abolished in April 2016 and all will now receive the new Basic State Pension. For people of my age this will not make too much difference to their total income from Church and State pensions combined. However, calculations suggest that someone starting ministry in their twenties now is likely to be more than £2,000 worse off each year in retirement. It is General Synod (and not the Pensions Board) which makes the rules determining benefits, and I will continue to seek to persuade Synod that it must make good this shortfall by increasing the Clergy Pension.

WORSHIP

We must resist all attempts to make streamed worship the new normal. Christ is truly present when the Eucharist is celebrated – word and sacrament shared by people *together*. This cannot be done online.

LIVING IN LOVE AND FAITH

I will oppose any change to canon B30 which affirms that Christian marriage is in its nature a union permanent and lifelong, for better for worse, till death them do part, of one man with one woman.

PASTORAL REORGANISATION

There are proposals to amend or replace the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. This will reduce the rights of parishioners and clergy to object to pastoral reorganisation and put more power in the hands of dioceses, with fewer opportunities to appeal to the Church Commissioners or Privy Council. The rights of patrons are under attack, with diocesan bishops seeking to gain more control over appointments.

This is even more important now that compensation paid to dispossessed clergy has been reduced to one year’s stipend, pension contribution and housing.

RACISM

In April the Archbishops’ Anti-Racism Report ‘From Lament to Action’ was published, which proposes a suite of changes to change the culture in the Church of England. The report has never been debated by Synod yet Synod is being told to co-opt 5 lay and 5 clergy UK ME members with full voting rights. I cannot support such a move, particularly until we see what the elections produce in terms of minority membership. And if UK ME minorities are to be co-opted with voting rights why do Deaf Anglicans only have speaking but not voting rights?

CENTRALISATION

There is a growing tendency to try and by-pass Synod and make decisions and legislate elsewhere. I will resist all such attempts which remove proper consultation and decision making. The latest attempt (to reconstitute the Church Commissioners by a Legislative Order of the Archbishops’ Council) has backfired because there is now a motion in parliament to annul the order.

CONTACT ME

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