

ELECTION ADDRESS OF THE REVD PAUL BENFIELD

Standing as a Proctor for the clergy in the Diocese of Blackburn



Proposed by

The Revd Canon Fleur Green
Vicar of Broughton St John the Baptist

Seconded by

The Revd Andrew Holmes
Rector of Burnley St Peter and St Stephen,
Area Dean of Burnley

I am pleased to offer myself for a further term as a member of General Synod. My experience of parish ministry in the Dioceses of Newcastle and Chichester, and 18 years as Vicar of St Nicholas, Fleetwood mean that I am grounded in the pastoral, financial and practical realities of parish life. My time as Diocesan Registrar enabled me to understand further the complexities of clerical life. Since June this year I have been serving as a house for duty priest in Burnley, covering vacancies, sickness, holidays and sabbaticals in East Lancashire and beyond. I hold a practising certificate as a direct access barrister and spend much time helping clergy and parishes with legal problems – usually on a *pro bono* basis.

Although I am a traditional Catholic and a trustee of Forward in Faith, I want the Church of England to remain a broad Church with high, middle and low, catholic, evangelical and liberal, all engaging in mission. 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. That 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. As Dean Inge said, 'The church that is married to the spirit of this age, becomes a widow in the next'.

Synod is primarily a legislative body and my experience as a lawyer means that I can scrutinise complex measures and canons to ensure that they achieve what they aim to do. Since being elected I have attended all sessions of Synod and contributed to many debates and served on many committees and boards. An early success was my amendment which prevented dioceses from taking ownership of parsonages from incumbents.

STV Elections are won on first preference votes so please give me your first vote.

Thank you.

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PASTORAL REORGANISATION

We are fortunate in Blackburn that there is an emphasis on keeping parishes and benefices of a manageable size, but in many dioceses there is pressure to group them into large mission or oversight areas. The Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 is being replaced by a new measure. It is essential that this new measure preserves the rights of clergy and parishes to appeal against unworkable schemes to the Church Commissioners and Privy Council. I have made submissions on these matters to the Revision Committee and will further press these points when the new measure is revised on the floor of Synod.

CLERGY DISCIPLINE

I served on the Revision Committee for the new Clergy Conduct Measure which will replace the discredited Clergy Discipline Measure. I will monitor closely its implementation and raise questions or seek to amend the Rules or Code of Practice if necessary.

CLERGY WELLBEING

I served on the Pensions Board for many years, during which time we eliminated the significant deficit in the fund, enabling the restoration of pensions to their pre-2011 levels from April this year. However, there are still questions to be addressed about the remuneration package for stipendiary clergy. I hear too many stories from other dioceses of clergy (both stipendiary and SSM) being bullied by diocesan officials or laity in the parish. I will urge Synod to progress legislation on the conduct of laity, an idea which Synod supported in passing a motion brought by Mark Ireland when Archdeacon of Blackburn.

MARRIAGE

I will oppose any change to canon B30 which affirms that 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.

SAFEGUARDING

The Church of England has failed in its duty to children and vulnerable adults and I will support the creation of an independent charity to oversee safeguarding. The Crime and Policing Act 2026 creates a duty of mandatory reporting of abuse, but this only applies to regulated activities. The hearing of confessions (a practice mentioned in the Book of Common Prayer) is not such an activity, and I will resist any attempt to change the canon which upholds the seal of the confessional.

FINANCE

Church Commissioners' funds derived from Queen Anne's Bounty should be used for providing clergy for parish ministry. Lowest Income Community Funding should go to the parishes where it is needed (as it does in Blackburn). Better monitoring of this is necessary in many dioceses where it goes into general diocesan funds. I do not support the proposal to spend £100m on Project Spire in an attempt to address past connections to slavery, based on dubious historical evidence.

CONTACT ME

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