

Mark Chapman

Election Address for General Synod

I am standing for re-election to General Synod to represent the Diocese of Oxford. I have been privileged to serve for the past five years and have found the experience both extremely illuminating, highly rewarding and occasionally frustrating. It has been a momentous period in the life of our church. It was a great honour to vote for the legislation to enable women to be appointed bishops. I was particularly pleased with the final outcome which was achieved after a period of facilitated listening. I was part of this formal process and found it immensely helpful in getting to understand those with whom I disagreed. I am thoroughly committed to the diversity of the Church of England and to continuing to allow those of different opinions to flourish within the one church united in common mission.

I have spoken regularly over the past five years and have been able to make a distinctive contribution which draws on my long experience of training clergy as well as my writing and research on church history and theology. I feel that I have been able to help Synod take account of the wider historical perspective and of the deeper theological issues, both of which are sometimes lost.

I have been involved in theological education for 23 years, first as Lecturer and then as Vice-Principal of Ripon College Cuddesdon, which now trains about 130 people at any one time for ordained ministry, who come from all traditions of the Church of England. We have a very close relationship with the Diocese of Oxford through the Oxford Ministry Course. I am also Professor of the History of Modern Theology at the University of Oxford. I have a particular expertise in Anglicanism and modern theology. I have frequent contact with clergy across the diocese and beyond – I have now seen well over 800 clergy through their training for ministry and into curacies. I keep in touch with large numbers and understand their hopes, frustrations, and anxieties for the future. My experience gives me probably a unique insight into clergy life and conditions, which I would do my best to represent. In addition to my College responsibilities I am also Associate Priest in the benefice of Garsington, Cuddesdon, and Horspath, where I work closely with the vicar. I am fully involved in the life of the parishes and take services almost every Sunday through the year as well as occasional offices. I know from my long experience of 21 years in rural non-stipendiary

ministry of the pressure faced by Self-supporting Ministers, as well as rural multi-parish benefices.

The challenges for the next quinquennium

I am well aware that we are facing a difficult time in the Church of England at the moment with declining numbers of people and clergy. I am deeply sympathetic with the aims of the Reform and Renewal agenda. But I am also quite sure that as a church we must not fall prey to any 'quick-fix' solutions or get carried away by apocalyptic rhetoric. Instead, I feel that it is Synod's duty to act as 'critical friend' to the church leadership as it seeks to develop a sensible strategy for growth into the future. This needs to be based on solid evidence, a deep appreciation of tradition, as well as a realistic idea of what might be possible. I feel that as a historian and theologian I am well placed to help the Church look beyond its immediate problems and to place everything in a wider perspective. I sincerely hope and pray that by the end of the next five years the Church of England will have been able to develop an effective strategy for mission and growth that does not lose sight of the glories and riches of the past.

I am currently a member of a working party on Diversity in the Church for the Faith and Order Commission and am involved in writing resources for the Synod as it prepares to move into facilitated conversations about issues in human sexuality. We are seeking to work at ways of disagreeing well. While at a personal level I am committed to the full inclusion in the church of all people who seek to live in faithful and loving relationships, I am also aware of the diversity of views on the issue of same-sex relations in the church and that there is no clear consensus. I would be very keen to help the church to find a way ahead where people who hold very different views can continue to live and pray together in the church united by a common mission to the wider society.

I do hope and pray that I will continue to represent the clergy of the Diocese of Oxford with integrity, openness and a sense that God is calling us all to discern his will for the future.

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