

General Synod Elections – House of Laity, Ely Diocese

Dr Jonathan Chaplin – Election Statement

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Introducing myself

I am a public theologian and political theorist, most recently serving as Director of the Kirby Laing Institute for Christian Ethics (KLICE), based at Tyndale House, Cambridge, from 2006-2017. Prior to that, I taught at a Christian graduate school in Toronto (1999-2006), worked at Sarum College, Salisbury (1997-8), and tutored at a Catholic college in Oxford (1990-1997). I have lectured widely internationally, including Europe, the USA, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and New Zealand. From 2017 and 2019 I participated in the 'Building Bridges' seminars for Christian and Muslim scholars. I am a member of the Cambridge Divinity Faculty, where I supervise students.

I am an Associate Fellow of the think-tank [Theos](#) and Senior Fellow of [Cardus](#), a Canadian Christian think tank. Since 2017 I have devoted most of my time to writing on issues of faith and politics. I have published in a wide variety of public and academic outlets, including the *Guardian's* Comment is Free Belief section. Recent publications include [Faith in Democracy: Framing a Politics of Deep Diversity](#) (SCM, 2021), [The Future of Brexit Britain: Anglican Reflections on National Identity and European Solidarity](#), co-editor (SPCK, 2020) and [God and the EU: Faith in the European Project](#), co-editor (Routledge, 2016).

I have been a member of St Paul's Church, Hills Road, Cambridge since 2014. I served a brief term on Cambridge South Deanery Synod and was elected to Ely Diocesan Synod early in 2021. At St Paul's, I chair the [Eco Church](#) committee – we earned the Arocha Silver Award in March 2021.

I am married to Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, a specialist in theological aesthetics, and we have two children, both married, and one grandchild. Our son works for CAFOD and our daughter is a psychiatrist. Both are members of Anglican churches.

My contribution I think the main contribution I could bring to the work of General Synod is to support and enhance the Church's constructive engagement in public life. For that engagement to be both faithful and effective, the Church needs a robust and attractive public theology to undergird its involvements. Its official interventions can sometimes be reactive, ad hoc and hesitant. I would like to see them be more coherent, consistent and courageous. To that end, they need to be more theologically grounded and 'radical', in the sense of speaking to deeper questions beneath the surface of politics – as was the bishops' 2015 election letter, *Who Is My Neighbour?* (on which I wrote a [commentary](#) for *ABC Religion & Ethics*). They also need to challenge the Church itself to live up to its own vision of the common good – as does *Coming Home: Tackling the Housing Crisis Together* (2021). I was part of a team headed by Malcolm Brown (the Church's Director of Mission and Public Affairs) which in 2014 produced [Anglican Social Theology: Renewing the Vision](#). I have also

served on the Church of England's Further Education/Higher Education Development Group since 2017, contributing to reports on [higher education](#) (2020) and [further education](#) (2021).

I am eager to support the Church taking bold steps in response to climate change. I represented 'theology' in the Coordinating Group of an interdisciplinary project, 'In Search of Good Energy Policy', hosted by Energy@Cambridge from 2017-2019. I co-edited, and published two chapters in, [the book emerging from the project](#). I strongly endorse Synod's 2030 net-zero target and would call on the Church Commissioners to [review their own 2050 net-zero investment target](#).

My commitments I am passionate about the unity of the Church. My formative background has been in the evangelical wing of the Church (I have written for [Fulcrum](#)) but my theology and liturgical inclinations have become increasingly **ecumenical**. I am aware of Synod groups such as EGGs, Open Synod and Catholic Group in General Synod and would be open to networking with any that would welcome me into their conversations.

I am fully committed to the '**Living in Love and Faith**' process. I profoundly hope that the dialogues it seeks to enable will build trust and respect among divergent wings of the Church and make possible a unity-in-diversity in which as many as possible can retain their integrity on questions around same-sex relationships. I realise this will be extremely difficult: the Church today stands on the precipice of a painful schism that would be profoundly damaging for its mission.

St Paul's joined Inclusive Church in 2021 and I see it as part of my role to represent many of this movement's concerns, not least fuller inclusion for people of colour and with disabilities. I am not myself a subscriber to the 'Campaign for Equal Marriage in the Church of England' as such but I am open to exploring whether and how to permit the blessing of faithful same-sex relationships, or same-sex marriages, in parishes that request it. I respect those who feel bound in conscience to resist any moves in this direction, just as I do those who feel bound in conscience to campaign for fully 'equal marriage'. Given that this Synod will likely have to confront difficult compromises on the matter, I think there is value in having members who are not pledged in advance to either position and thus, perhaps, available to serve as bridge-builders when the time for decision comes. The questions are as much ecclesiological as ethical and hermeneutical and I would hope to bring insights from my work on issues of political and cultural pluralism to bear in the debate.

I believe we should do whatever we can to 'Save the Parish', although I am not a member of that particular campaign. I am convinced that the Church must continue to move towards a '**mixed ecology**' of mission in which it is more discerning of where the Spirit may be leading it and more nimble in responding to that leading. But as it does so, the parish should remain the anchor of its presence and outreach.

I am currently writing a book arguing for the progressive **disestablishment** of the Church of England. I argue that the pastoral and missional opportunities secured by 'earthed establishment' – the Church's embeddedness in its parochial and local civic contexts – would remain unaffected by ending the Church's constitutional ties to the state. The matter will thrust itself on the Church's agenda soon, as it confronts issues such as the next Coronation, the reform of the House of Lords, and growing tensions between religious liberty and equality rights. In a context of deepening secularisation, growing religious pluralism and yet surprising re-awakenings of Christian faith, for the Church to review its relation to the state would allow it to renew its spiritual identity and national vocation.