

General Synod Election Address: Mr Malcolm Thorne

Candidate to become a Lay representative for the Bristol Diocese for General Synod, starting in November 2026.

My personal background

I have been a regular worshipper in my parish church - St Luke's Brislington, for upwards of 30 years. I was confirmed many years ago as an adult and have enjoyed being part of a worshipping community. I have served on the present PCC for many years and have chaired our church Fabric Committee, of which I'm still a member. I also have served as a church warden for 7 years - three of which were during a vacancy. I understand about the joys and challenges of family life having been married for fifty years, and my wife is an LLM. I have two children and four grandchildren. I quite understand the challenges facing new Christians who come to faith later in life, being one such person who found God in adult life.

My working life

After leaving school at 15, I started work as a motor mechanic and eventually co/owned and ran a small local garage. In 2002, for various reasons, I made a significant career change when I joined a small team that set up and ran the first Emmaus Community in Bristol. Emmaus exists to provide work and accommodation to those who were formerly homeless. My skills and experience were put to good use in the setting up and running of workshops and a sales showroom. During my very rewarding time with Emmaus, I undertook various roles, including that of business manager and subsequently operations manager. This part of my working life I enjoyed until my retirement from full-time employment in 2013. My working-class background has enabled me to work sensitively alongside those who are marginalised by society due to a lack of education, opportunities and various other difficulties.

My vision

There are various reasons why I feel called to put myself forward for election to the General Synod, which I outline below.

I am a passionate supporter of the upholding and continuation of parish life and ministry. I can see and have heard at firsthand about the sad loss of so many churches and vicarages due to financial constraints. I feel that as a member of General Synod, I can explore and question how investments of

£11.1 bn held by the Church Commissioners are managed and distributed. It is my understanding that these monies are intended to provide ministry for parishes that struggle to afford an incumbent due to the ever-increasing burden of meeting the required parish share. I feel that General Synod needs to work to ensure that any present or future legislation does not have a detrimental effect on parishes, both on clergy numbers and Church buildings.

The parish church in this country was historically set up to be at the heart of the community and, in my opinion, that vision should still prevail. Due to this important and significant vision, I became actively involved in the organisation called 'Save the Parish', which seeks to implement and maintain that vision – hence my involvement. If we lose our parish church, we lose a major part of our precious community identity. I realise that falling numbers of church goers has a detrimental effect on local church finances, but if we lose our Parish church, we stand to lose the very heart of the community. Once lost, it becomes almost impossible to retrieve and re-establish.

The vision of the Church of England is that of ministry and pastoral care being available to all parishioners as well as other members of the community when required, such as times of bereavement, weddings and funerals etc. This becomes harder to carry out when an incumbent's duties are spread too thinly across multiple churches. Whilst I value our traditions, I also realise that we must keep moving forward. We are all aware that we now live in a more secular world than was the case. However, we must try to adapt to these changes without losing our identity yet still fulfilling the mission of the church.

To conclude

I would hope to be a Synod member who listens to their church family and the community voice. I would work towards social inclusion, as I feel strongly that all people should be made to feel welcome in our places of worship, especially those who feel marginalised such as the LGBTQ community, those with mental health issues and the currently un-churched. As the hymn we sing in church says "All are welcome in this place" – surely this is the teaching of Jesus – the Jesus we follow.

I would welcome the opportunity to be a part of the system that brings about change - not for the sake of it but change for the good of all.

I would welcome feedback or questions on any aspect of my address at **malcolmjohnthorne@gmail.com**

