

General Synod Election Address 2021

Revd Barry Hill

*Team Rector of the Harborough Anglican Team
and Diocesan Resourcing Church Enabler*

Proposed by Revd Elaine Sutherland, Vicar of Holy Trinity, Leicester

Seconded by Revd Sue Willetts, Vicar of The Good Shepherd, Loughborough

I'd be delighted to discuss any part of this role, to hear your thoughts on the priorities of Synod or to answer any questions you may have of me:

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“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” *Romans 15:13*

Current roles

Team Rector of the Harborough Anglican Team (half-time)

The Team comprises five parish churches, in and around Market Harborough, varying in size and including both market town and two village churches, across (pre-covid) 14 congregations & 650 regular worshippers. All churches are broadly in the central Anglican tradition. Together we are responding to a call to better serve all in our parishes by looking at all we are through the lens of those not yet part of a worshipping community as well as those who are, in short to be fully for the parish & not just for the congregation. This has led to the formation of a number of new worshipping communities so as to add the diversity we need to serve and connect with all.

As we have focused on seeking to be healthy churches who are more guest and less host, so God has blessed us with some growth. I love serving with others as a Parish Priest, consider it a huge privilege, as well as, at times, a brutally challenging call and so am passionate about proper support for lay and ordained leaders and the importance of taking wellbeing challenges seriously, especially with the additional demands of leading in a covid era.

Diocesan Resourcing Church Enabler (half-time)

The other half of my role is focused on serving, supporting and overseeing our diocesan network of Resourcing Churches so as to better serve and reach all in our parishes through a network of new worshipping communities, including leading a successful funding bid (£5.3m) to support this. Unlike elsewhere (where the focus has been on church planting around student populations, often moving into very small churches or starting afresh), in Leicestershire our focus has been on developing existing churches and teams, each committing to give away people and resources through forming fresh expressions of Church and supporting neighbouring parishes in revitalisations. In total we have seen 42 new sacramental worshipping communities either already start (with some amazing stories of God at work) or be envisioned to start in the coming years. This can't be a tactic for growth or an anxiety ridden strategy to survive, it is focused on seeing lives and communities transformed by God's grace and love, with a focus on Kingdom not Church alone, on health not growth alone.

Alongside these roles, I have served, or currently serve, in various other roles, such as

- ❖ being part of the board for Thy Kingdom Come, in which I have been closely involved since its inception
- ❖ a Diocesan Peer Reviewer for the Church Commissioners (to help other Dioceses reflect on their calling & practice)
- ❖ a member of the Archbishops' Evangelism Taskgroup
- ❖ a Trustee for Learn-AT Multi-Academy Trust (covering a mix of church and community schools)
- ❖ a passionate member of the Mothers' Union, for whom I have worked nationally on various projects
- ❖ a member of the Ecclesiastical Law Society and of New Wine

For the past six years I have also served as an elected member from this Diocese on General Synod, a responsibility I have taken very seriously. During this time I've spoken on a variety of issues from the centrality of our parish calling, the wellbeing of leaders, the formation of fresh expressions of Church, the importance of prayer and service, the vision and strategy of the Church of England, lobbying for additional financial support for churches and was invited, on behalf of the Archbishops' Evangelism Taskgroup to lead the General Synod debate on evangelism and witness.

Previously I served for eight years as Diocesan Mission Enabler. Part of the Mission and Ministry team - this was a broad role focused on serving, resourcing & encouraging local churches in mission, being the day-to-day lead for the Diocesan vision *Shaped by God* and co-authoring then leading the diocesan vision for fresh expressions of Church (inc a

successful bid to the Church Commissioners for almost £1m in supporting this by serving parishes and pioneers in realising God's call). Prior to that I was a Curate in Loughborough, worked in flight simulation and youthwork.

I am a clergy spouse, have two teenage children, and try hard to prioritise rest and wellbeing through cooking, board games, gardening, musical theatre and supporting Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club (sorry Foxes!).

To help you discern who should represent you, below is a brief sense of five vision and priorities for the Church of England which are especially important to me. Whilst not exhaustive, it hopefully gives you a sense of my heart and beliefs. If elected I would hope to continue to seek your input into how General Synod best serves you in these:

1. A hope-full future

Times are hard, Covid has made challenges more acute, we never have enough, are never ready for the future to which we're called & there are dangers in every direction. Yet I'm hugely excited and hopeful for the future of the Church for England. We are navigating new terrain without the safety of familiar maps, but we are not empty handed. When we pause long enough to receive, God has given us more than can appear at first glance and, in Christ's grace, in each other all we need. The terrain is new, but plenty of the landmarks are familiar & crucially we're not travelling alone.

2. The Redemption of 'Parish'

For decades the Church has articulated a clear theology of serving & seeking to reach all peoples in a Parish but acted institutionally with clear preference for maintaining existing congregations. Congregationalism is, for me, the great institutional sin of Anglicanism from which most other sins flow (including the horrific response of the Church over many years to survivors of abuse). I rejoice in the progress towards being more for all in recent years, in large part due to the wonderful & sacrificial priestly leadership of those reading this, but recognise we have a long way to go and have been working locally, within the Diocese and nationally to encourage this change, mindful our call is to focus on health (and, in God's grace & power, growth takes care of itself), that such growth is multi-faceted (service, depth of discipleship, numbers of disciples of Jesus Christ & reproduction of new communities - the four dimensions of growth in the story of the mustard tree) and that most things in God's Kingdom start small & vulnerable.

3. Open all hours

For many years it feels as God has been trying to shape us to be a Church which reflects a lively seven day a week faith, where all know they are called & sent, needed & known and yet often the Church of England has been tempted by external and internal factors to a Sunday-centric faith. In Harborough during lockdown, we've sought to encourage growth as much in our 'theology of household' as we have inherited a 'theology of temple'. As articulated in reports such as *Towards the Conversion of England*, *Setting God's People Free* and *Kingdom Calling*, we can never fulfil our calling until we live out in action an equality of calling for all, focused not on our needs but the wider world. In contexts where, I suggest, most people are not Christians not because they think it untrue as if they have weighed on cosmic scales, but because they believe it trivial, we're called to show the difference faith makes to every part of life.

4. Changed by all

For a range of reasons we have, for many years, paid insufficient focus to better seeing, honouring, including and being changed by the gifts of all God has called. Experiences of inclusion and exclusion have shaped me from childhood onwards, but are also all coupled with the inherent & significant privileges I know, at times, I have received because of such as my gender or ethnicity, with doors sometimes open to me shut to others. This is a cause of great pain. In different ways, people have been overlooked leading to the Church being immeasurably diminished. A desire to be diverse without habits of inclusion, participation & space to allow the Church to be shaped by all, will only further harm. The chorus of scripture, for me, is God going to those who feel unseen & saying 'I see you' (e.g. Acts 3). This chorus has found new depths for me as my wife has suffered with Long Covid for the past 17 months, like so many with disabilities or additional needs in a world which values life differently to Christianity, so many feel people unseen.

5. Simpler & humbler

Pope Francis challenges us to be a *Poor Church for the Poor*. Systems thinking, which has influenced my ministry, talks of finding solutions to complex problems on the margins. The existential risk of climate change, of which I am passionate (in Harborough we are working towards or having been awarded eco-church status) requires new approaches. Yet my experiences working with different parts of the institution of the Church has appeared to underscore a reliance on power, money & buildings which I suggest is neither healthy or helpful. A simpler, humbler church appears to be God's enduring call. If everything that grows in God's Kingdom starts small and vulnerable – how do we square that circle if we are to live well and grow?! It is a question we can not afford to ignore albeit one without easy silver bullet answers. I wonder if it starts in drawing out the very best we see in those different from us, honouring the many ways God is at work amongst us?

Please be assured of my prayers as you discern who the Spirit of God is guiding you to vote for & in all you are & do