

## Martin Shakespeare MBE RD BPharm MCGI



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Dear Elector,

I am standing for General Synod, as a supporter of the Save Our Parish campaign, and as a committed Christian. As PCC secretary of my parish, I have become very frustrated by the demands made on my, and other parishes within our local area, by the level of Parish Share demanded by the Central Church, and its subordinate dioceses, to fund its expensive and burgeoning bureaucracy. I fear that if this is not addressed, in concert with other major issues, that the Church will fail in its purpose of nurturing Christian values and belief, whilst also making itself irrelevant in the future.

### **Parish Churches**

Of concern is the current lack of transparency, and honesty in the Shaping for Mission project which makes me worry that one of its implied aims is to so alter the pattern of worship in rural areas that many parish churches will close as a result, with some already facing imminent closure.

A reduction in the geographic reach of the Church of England through its current network of parish churches impacts not only current worshippers, but also limits the primary contact opportunities for those wishing to experience Christ and Christian fellowship in a local Anglican context. This should surely be the core aim of an established national church.

The closure of parish churches also erodes local social networks, will ultimately further reduce overall church attendance, and by forcing those committed enough to attend a church a distance from their home, force people to increase their vehicle usage at a time when we are all being asked to consider the environmental impact of our actions, by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Church is not just its buildings, however parish churches, many of historical and architectural value merit protection as part of our national heritage, and measures need to be agreed to protect and preserve these for future generations.

### **Diversity of Worship**

If the current direction of travel is not halted or reversed, the diversity of worship within the Church of England will also suffer. Much focus, both in terms of money and effort has been deployed in recent years to try and expand church attendance. That has left many regular church goers feeling uncomfortable, or excluded, especially those Anglicans who prefer traditional and less evangelical forms of worship such as the Book of Common Prayer, or Series 2. We are encouraged to celebrate diversity in every other aspect of our lives, so to maintain and expand the ways in which Christians can experience God through worship needs to be central to the Churches future.

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## **The Central Churches compact with its clergy and parishioners**

The Archbishops and Bishops need to be reminded of their pledge to support parishes and also to focus on the “Frontline First”, as it is here that the battle for Christian faith is being fought, not in diocesan offices. To this end, clergy require sound theological education, reasonable pay and conditions, and employment security. There needs to be an end to the unedifying spectacle of committed clergy being made redundant, and forced from their homes in a way which is incompatible with Christian values.

This forms the basis of the compact between church and congregation, if faith and moral values cease to be central to the Christian mission then the whole edifice will fail.

## **The Parish share and Church funding**

I also believe that at a parish level finance, rather than belief, has become a focus for much effort. Much of this is related to the issue of the Parish Share. The demands made upon parishes to raise money to meet annually increasing contributions toward the costs of the Central Church, are putting many parishes at risk of bankruptcy. This takes place against a background of a proliferation of dioceses, bishops, suffragan bishops, administrators, media relation officers, mission co-ordinators and other posts, all of which require increasing funding for no significant benefit discernible at parish level. Justification is needed for this expenditure when staff are being hired for newly created posts, at the same time as churches are being closed and deconsecrated.

The Central Church and all of the dioceses should be directed to produce annual audited accounts, open to public scrutiny like any other public body; accounting for and explaining, in detail, where expenditure is made and what those sums have been used for and what has been achieved.

The Church Commissioners provide funding to the Central Church and dioceses, and proudly declare in their annual report for 2020, that they are managing a portfolio worth £9.2 billion, and have achieved an average annual return of 9.7% per annum every year for the last decade.

It is puzzling why during a financially challenging period for parishes, exacerbated by the restrictions associated with COVID-19, that rather than disbursing more of their income to support the wider church and its ministry, that they have chosen to retain much of this money to enhance their reserves by a sum of just under £600 million.

## **Personal Statement**

An Agricultural and Veterinary pharmacist with a specific interest in zoonotic diseases, I have also been a Naval Reservist for the last 40 years. My employment has been varied, both in the UK and abroad, in multi-national and multi-disciplinary organisations. I have a wide experience of both organisational, managerial, commercial and ethical issues.

If I am elected to the General Synod, then I would do my utmost to ensure that I

- Work to prevent decline and closure of parish churches, and their associated Christian ministry
- Question and challenge the current organisational and financial operating model of the Central Church, dioceses and the Church Commissioners.
- Support development of arrangements that ensure diversity in worship is preserved
- Seek agreement that clergy are properly supported and protected by personnel procedures which reflect embedded Christian and moral values