

From time to time in the history of the Church there are seminal moments, moments when the identity of the Church hangs in the balance and we are forced to confront those ontological questions, 'Who are we?' and 'What is the Church of England?' I believe that now is one such moment.

I'm Andrew Swift, Team Rector of the North Potteries Team Ministry in Stoke on Trent. I was born, raised, and have spent the majority of my life and ministry in the Diocese of Lichfield.

In 2015 I was appointed as Interim Minister of Smallthorne, and Catholic Parishes Mission Partner for the North Stoke Deanery. I was 28 and coming out of a London curacy and practically unemployable through lack of experience until a parish took a punt and invested in me. In the intervening six years the two deaneries of Stoke have merged, my three year post was extended, I became Priest-in-Charge of Smallthorne, and a second parish whilst continuing as Mission Partner. Finally, during the course of the 2020 lockdowns, and following pastoral reorganisation, I became the Team Rector of the newly formed North Potteries Team Ministry, which added a third parish to my remit. It is a challenge, but a joyous and wonderful one in which I am supported by laity and retired clergy; however, despite the joys of expanded friendship, fellowship and support, there has been real loss. The amount of worship in each of the church buildings has been slashed, and more heart-breakingly as a parish priest I am no longer able provide the level of presence, spiritual and pastoral care that my people have a right to expect. I feel that clergy are increasingly expected not to be parish priests but simply chaplains to congregations; mass priests who dip in and out of communities without any root or stability.



As someone in the catholic tradition of the Church of England I am often asked why it is I am not Roman Catholic, all the more so following the Bishop of Ebbsfleet's departure. Simply put, the reason I am an Anglican is because of the inspired changes to our ecclesial structure and life following the Reformation, changes which have recently come under fire:

- A well-educated clergy.
- Clergy holding one benefice and not several in plurality that they may be known, rooted and grounded; living amongst the people whom they serve.
- A decentralised Church which is nimble and responsive to local need, run from the ground up where decisions are made by those best able to know what will work or what is needed, local people; local people who love their churches even if they only come for Christmas and Easter or hatches, matches, and dispatches.

I do not stand for General Synod as a 'Catholic Candidate' others will do that, I do not seek to re-litigate the battle of the past rather, I look to the future and stand as an 'Anglican Candidate' as someone who loves our Church, who is committed to mission, and to seeing more and more people come to Christ. I stand to Save the Parish as the bedrock of the Church of England, to affirm and invest back into the system that has enabled me and my ministry to flourish, and should I be elected to represent this Diocese I will do my utmost to:

- 1) Support the archbishops in keeping their pledge to support the parish as the best means of evangelism.
- 2) Put the "frontline first", ensuring that resources that properly belong to and are generated by the parishes remain at parish level, freeing up laity and clergy for mission.
- 3) Ensure that law and projects which initiate from the centre all support and enhance the parochial system by integrating the Strategic Development Fund into the parish and opposing the revision to the Mission & Pastoral Measure which would make it easier and quicker for the dioceses to close churches, make priests redundant, and throw priests out of their homes.
- 4) Encourage the belief that effective mission requires the prioritisation of spending on good theological education as a crucial investment.

- 5) Join the call for a Church-State commission to agree a national plan to protect and preserve historic parish buildings.

There are times we have to lay aside traditional differences and stand up for what supports us all, to be the Church of England for every man, woman, and child in this land, for those of all faiths and those of none. Now is the time to reflect, to pray, and to act, not simply out of emotion, fiscal fear, or a desire to be relevant, but in the Spirit. Now is a time for theology, for openness to the Spirit of God speaking to us.

I would like to see a General Synod which reflects theologically on every issue; which seeks the advice of those trained in, and devoted to the study of theology and God's Word, before making a decision, that the Church may not be, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians 'tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine' (Eph 4.14). A General Synod which is humble enough to recognise that it is the custodian of the Church's tradition not for this generation alone but also for each to come, with respect for what has gone before and made us who we are.

As we clergy ask ourselves who and what we are, and what the Church is and who it is for I hope with me you will say it is for all; but above all for God, to be a means and channel of divine grace, not a club, or social enterprise, but a powerhouse of prayer, conversion, and true liberation for our nation and the global Communion of which we are a part.

Join with me to Save the Parish, and to reaffirm the glories of the Anglican tradition in the Church of England.

For more information about the Save the Parish Network in general please see the website:

savetheparish.com

For more information or to get in touch with me to talk about your hopes, needs, or how I could be of service to you on General Synod please see my page on the North Potteries Team Ministry website:

nptm.org.uk/generalsynod

With my prayers for you and your ministries, and in love in the Lord,

Andrew

