

**Dr John Appleby, Tynemouth Deanery,**

- **standing for re-election to the House of Laity, General Synod elections 2021**

**Proposed by:** Simon Harper, Corbridge Deanery and Chair of Diocesan Finance Committee

**Seconded by:** Carol Griffiths, Secretary of Bamburgh & Glendale Deanery

### **Biography**

I live in Whitley Bay and attend St Mary's, Monkseaton. I'm 64, married to Rev Janet Appleby with three adult children. I grew up in London and have worked at Newcastle University since 1984, where I teach mathematics, and was formerly Head of Mechanical Engineering.

I've been a lifelong member of the Church of England, and I've attended (and played music at) several churches (one ecumenical) in East, West and Tynemouth Deaneries (as Janet took up different posts). I've served on PCCs, Deanery Synods and Diocesan Synod, and I've served on Bishop's Council and Finance Group since 2012. I'm also a member of the Diocesan Environmental Group.

I was elected to General Synod in 2015, where I've contributed to a number of debates including those on the environment, women's ministry, school inclusion, and 'Conversion Therapy', and submitted questions on environmental and other issues. I also contributed a successful amendment to an important motion on Downs Syndrome. I've also been an elected member of the Mission & Public Affairs Council, which addresses ethical, environmental and medical issues. I have been part of the discussions on sexuality and relationships, and published articles on sexuality in Christian Today and in the Church Times.

From 2004-7 I was the local councillor for the Woolsington ward of Newcastle City, including a fairly deprived area, and I have also stood as a candidate in local, regional and parliamentary elections, where I try to bring respect and honesty to the debates. I am Chair of Trustees at the Cedarwood Centre in North Shields, I was a Governor of All Saints College in West Denton, and I've been a trustee of several other local charities. I'm strongly committed to environmental action, and use a car-club rather than own a car. During the lock-downs I have been working at home, but I'm fortunate to enjoy walks on the beach, in the nearby farmland, and in the hills when that's possible.

### **What's happening in General Synod 2021-2026?**

The last session of General Synod lasted six years instead of five because of the pandemic, but it's likely that we'll be meeting normally from November 2021. The crisis made our problems of finance and decline still worse, constrained what churches could do, but also encouraged us to explore what we could do on-line with services, meetings and personal contact – something we might continue. The contentious issue of Brexit also occupied some of our time and thoughts.

I think the biggest issues we're likely to be discussing and debating can be grouped under five headings; I expand on some of these below:

- Decline in attendance and finance, ideas for growth and on-line worship, lay leadership
- Sexuality and relationships, diversity and inclusion
- Climate change, biodiversity, and especially how these might affect the poor
- Nationalism, social division, employment, housing and poverty
- Procedures for Safeguarding and for Clergy discipline



Declining numbers and income, and hence a decline in paid clergy numbers, challenge us about what the Church of England is for and how to maintain and develop its role in the future. These discussions have raised fears about whether we value the traditional parish clergy and buildings. Those fears are understandable, but surely the point is that we should not limit our vision to what we can currently afford? On-line worship and resources have led to some new contacts and possibilities, but also to greater inclusion of the housebound. How can we best use a smaller number of paid clergy to lead and support the range of worship, teaching and pastoral work that we are called to? Are we sufficiently inspired by a shared vision to support this work by giving our time, talents and money?

The three-year project of Living in Love and Faith has produced a book, and a course that we are all encouraged to attend. Sexuality and relationships is an area where we are in conflict between a changed view of human nature and a traditional view of male/female relationships. I think our aim is that we should respect and try to understand the views of others, not force our views on them.

My own belief is that the Church should affirm and bless all committed, respectful and loving relationships, but I recognise that others disagree. As with the role of women in ministry, I believe we can find a workable 'solution' that keeps us together in our Christian mission to all people. I hope that the Holy Spirit can guide us into a new way of living together with our differences, recognising our imperfect understanding but also the many areas where we agree and share a mission. (I'm a member of 'Inclusive Church' which encompasses race and disability as well as gender issues.)

No-one can now doubt that climate change and loss of biodiversity are of enormous significance for us all, but especially for our children and grandchildren. I'm glad the CoE has committed to reducing the carbon footprint of our own buildings etc, and is taking a lead in persuading major companies to reduce their impact. However, I think we must all be willing to adapt and accept some level of sacrifice in our stewardship of God's wonderful creation, as well as persuading our Government and Industry to change things on a larger scale.

Nationalism, division, and loss of trust in government and institutions have all been a worry in recent years, with a sense that we do not share a common vision for our own country. Poverty and inequality have increased, with increasing foodbank use (often church-led), and our society seems to take a position driven by self-interest. Our unique position in every community gives us both opportunity and responsibility to address some of these issues. Perhaps we can be really helpful in rebuilding trust and a common purpose.

## **Summary**

General Synod is an important part of the governance and decision-making of the Church of England. With about 450 members, each one of us plays only a small part in discussion and voting, but if re-elected I shall try to contribute as I have since 2015. I shall also continue to report back to two or three Deanery Synods on what we do.

Please feel free to contact me directly with any questions about what I've said or any other matter of interest. I am also happy to send you (by email) copies of the reports I've written on previous Synods if they interest you. I would also be willing to attend a deanery meeting if requested.

John Appleby, August 2021

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