

Ian Flintoft - General Synod Election Address 2021

Candidate: The Rev'd Canon Ian Hugh Flintoft
Vicar of Newsham and Horton and interim priest-in-charge of Cowpen,
Bedlington Deanery

Proposed by: The Rev'd Helen Savage
Vicar of Slaley, Healey, and Whittonstall; Rector of Blanchland with
Hunstanworth and Edmundbyers and Muggleswick, Corbridge Deanery

Seconded by: The Rev'd Canon Christine Lilian Brown
Associate Priest, Parish of Ponteland, and Area Dean of Newcastle West
Deanery

Why I am standing for election:

I am standing for election because I wish to be a strong advocate for the mission and ministry of our local parishes and chaplaincies and for the interests of the Diocese of Newcastle on a national level. I would bring to this role my 17 years of experience as a parish priest, Bishop's Chaplain, DDO, and Director of Ministry, an ability to listen carefully, as well as strategic and analytical skills, and a conviction that the Church of England continues to have a vocation to 'proclaim afresh in each generation' the Gospel of Christ.

Some of my convictions:

My thinking and practice in the areas of Christ's mission in the world and the Church's ministry as part of that mission have been strongly influenced by the work of Sam Wells. He speaks about the nature of the 'paroikia' in the time of Jesus, from which we get our word 'parochial' (in its proper sense). Wells says that the 'paroikia', literally meaning those beyond or outside the household, was the area of a city reserved for 'non-citizens,' those who contributed to the city's welfare but had no voting rights. In missional terms, this means for me that the Church of England has a vocation to be here to welcome those who feel, or have been told, that they don't belong (and that might include some of us), who don't feel worthy enough to approach God, who don't yet know that they have a place in the heart of God. For me, this conviction about the nature of Christ's Church has profound and challenging implications for many areas of church life considered by General Synod.

Representing the local church and the Diocese:

I love this Diocese and its people and parishes, having served here since ordination in 2004. As well as significant ministry in suburban, outer estate and post-industrial settings, I have had the privilege of working with parishes and leading worship in many communities across the breadth of the Diocese during vacancies. All this, together with my time on Bishop's Staff, has given me a good understanding of our contexts and of the needs, hopes, and challenges of local church communities here. As we will be without the voice of a Diocesan Bishop on General Synod for the first part of the next quinquennium, we will, I think need to be represented by people who know this Diocese well and who are unafraid to speak on its behalf.

Remaining outward-looking:

I sense that organisations under threat can easily turn inwards, becoming consumed with their own interests and survival. If we are a Church here for those who are outside the household (which has until now been a key part of the vocation of the Church of England), then we need to keep looking outwards and reaching out in love and service. My work with the Church Urban Fund in establishing Together Newcastle and my service as Chair of the West End Refugee Service have given me valuable experience in this field and I would use my voice on General Synod to advocate for the outward-facing mission of the Church.

Keeping God and God's priorities at the heart of decision-making:

My ministry as a spiritual director and as DDO convince me of the need for careful discernment as we seek God's way forward for the Church of England. I accept the urgency of the missional and evangelistic task facing us, but sense that at times we have been too impatient in our search for quick fixes to apparent problems, without always weighing fully what God might be saying to us and asking of us. As the General Synod considers in its next sessions the vision of a 'simpler, humbler, and bolder' Church, we will need the patience and discernment of God's Holy Spirit, as well as courage and boldness.

Working to bolster clergy morale, as well as proper accountability:

Some of us may feel as clergy that we too are beyond the household: we may doubt our worthiness, and the recent turmoil created by the description of us as 'key limiting factors' in the growth of the Church has exacerbated this sense of fragility. I am very concerned about clergy morale at the present time, and would work hard on Synod to ensure that the key role of clergy, alongside lay members, is properly recognised, cherished, and promoted. The ongoing work of the General Synod on clergy discipline and on wellbeing will be significant in creating the right culture to enable us all to flourish.

Inclusivity and differing convictions:

As I hope is obvious from what I say about the nature of the Church as 'paroikia' (and from what many of you know of me), I am firmly convinced that the Church of England has a considerable way to go before it can claim to be demonstrating the 'radical Christian inclusion' spoken of by our Archbishops. For me, this inclusion is certainly concerned with the ongoing debate on 'Living in Love and Faith' but is much wider – and it is key because it is about individual human beings, loved and cherished by God, and not about 'issues'. As a trustee of the Northumbria Deaf Mission and as a parish priest in some of our most deprived communities in the North East, I see many others who feel they are beyond the household, who may have been told they don't quite belong, and I long for them to feel fully included too. But being inclusive also means living with those with whom we disagree, and ministry as a liberal catholic in two traditional catholic parishes gives me first-hand experience of the joys and challenges of this.

For the parish and chaplaincy:

Returning to full-time parish ministry has helped me see more clearly than ever the opportunities the parish system gives us for creative and incarnational mission, and I see this lived out in many of our chaplaincies too, whose work is often hidden and unrewarded. Yes, there are hard decisions to make as we live with new realities about stipendiary numbers and financial challenges. But in many communities, the parish church, with its vocation to be here for all, is still the best place from which to 'put out into the deep and let down the nets.' Ministry in parishes and chaplaincies needs investment, financial and otherwise, and if elected, I would use my voice on General Synod to be a strong advocate for such resourcing.

Thank you for reading this address: may I ask you to consider giving me your first or second-preference vote in this election. If you would like to discuss further anything I say here, please feel free to contact me:

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