

Giles Emerson, Hopesay Parish, Clun Forest Deanery

Introduction

What follows is some background about me, in brief biographical terms, and something to show how firmly I believe in the increasing power and real need of the Church of England and Anglican Communion in difficult times, particularly as the Church positions itself in the post-Covid years. By being elected to the General Synod I sincerely believe I can add my voice, as a laymen with significance experience of rural church affairs, to a forum tasked with shaping the future direction and vision of the Church of England.

Personal

I am a professional writer with many interests and, as a professional freelance, I have established my name and built my experience working predominantly for government departments and agencies; also for business corporations and companies across the gamut of commerce and industry. For example, I helped write/edit the UK's first Human Rights report, for Robin Cook who was then Foreign Secretary. For the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, over a period of 12 years, I researched, wrote, edited and vetted, many booklets about different aspects of British life, attitudes and industries, including two different publications about the nature and aspirations of young people in Britain. Later, I wrote all the copy for the FCO's first ever portal giving access to information about Britain for individuals and companies abroad. I edited and sometimes rewrote the top-level sections of several major reports for the Committee on Standards in Public life, including the report on MPs' Expenses. I have worked for the Bank of England, Visa Europe and Shell. There are many others. This work, over more than 35 years, and still going, has given me privileged and confidential insight into people and companies as they have changed and continue to change. More broadly, it has fed my accruing interest in people, politics and society at a time when media and social media spatters comment and opinion in a way that too often reflects a society in which there seem to be only two types of people: the confused and the confusing.

I am married to Rai and have three daughters, aged 23, 24 and 29. I live in Ludlow, Shropshire and share family homes with my siblings in the Western Highlands, also in London. In Ludlow, I am the artistic director of a theatre company called Two Score which since 2014 has established a good reputation for the production of classic plays, predominantly but not exclusively by Shakespeare. South Shropshire's countryside offers a continual respite from a generally busy schedule. I run in and around the hills surrounding Ludlow six days a week. More than a means of maintaining a good level of fitness, this is a time to be alone (plus dog) to think and often to restore my spiritual batteries.

Churchwarden at St Mary's Hopesay

It was actually the beauty of St Mary's setting in Hopesay, a little way up the Clun Valley, that ensured I attended church with my then young family. One day the sacristan/organist/and general heart of the church asked me if I would consider becoming a churchwarden. I said I would, although I wondered what this might entail. I still wonder at the compass of this role, even in a small country church with a respectable number of regular worshippers. Initially, I felt I was a fraud because I was not sure what might be demanded of me as a Christian, brought up by atheist parents, who came to faith slowly but steadily and mostly from the vantage point of a kind of humanist with bells on. I should add that now, well over a decade later, you couldn't cut my faith from me without removing a beating heart. Needless to say, weekly services at St Mary's Hopesay are a source of solace and sharing. I usually leave the church feeling the pot of possibility is refilled.

Why do I wish to stand for General Synod?

I want the Church's voice to be heard not just about matters concerning the organisation and mission of the Church but about matters affecting the whole of society because the Church's role has a direct bearing on and within the society in which it has roots. For surely, at a time when the political contusions caused by Brexit has been swiftly followed by the water-filled balloon of Covid-19; in a society whose very identity and wellbeing is so often lost in confusing language struggling to reflect diversity, sexual identity, ways of addressing the rich, the poor, the mentally and physically unwell and so on; a society that seems to have lost its sense of itself as a nation and as a culture and one in which its elected leaders appear to be no more than puppets of a rapacious and fickle media ...surely in the frenzy of these pressures, and the blown thistle-seed of social media, the Church of England should have an authority and a distance to add a strong voice about social and human issues, also to offer clear moral guidance and to make interventions when it is clear that they are needed.

I see the General Synod as a Parliament of people who I hope will have passion in their hearts and can bring a some very different experience to bear on the work of Synod. I think the message brought to us all in the Gospel, enriched by the Old Testament, should fan the embers of good sense and ethical grounding into a flame, igniting a common call and building the arguments that will support church leaders everywhere to make a difference and to be heard above the crowd.

It may well be that this kind of imagery, this hope for inspired change, is misplaced and that General Synod is inured in its own protocols so that any such energy and conflagratory voice is easily confined and doused. If this is the case, I still wish to put myself forward in the hope that I might occasionally be heard in a forum of 300.