



Martin Thorpe – General Synod

Who am I?

Ordained 27 years – all stipendiary
All service in Liverpool Diocese
Disabled (2 'invisible' disabilities)
Not wearing any church tradition label
Active in working for justice for clergy
Church of England Clergy Advocate
Currently Pioneer Team Vicar

What am I passionate about?

A fully Inclusive Church
Justice and Fairness
Love and Mercy
Realistic Expectations
Promoting Physical and Mental Well-Being
Properly Supporting all Clergy
Properly Resourcing SSMS
Clergy/Lay Shared Ministry
Freedom and Creativity

What am I against?

Intolerance and bigotry
Unrealistic Expectations on Clergy
Abuse of Power
Unfair and Unsafe Working Practices
Unjust disciplinary procedures
Stifling pressure to conform

As a disciple of Jesus Christ and a follower of his Way I want our Church of England to model the love and service that he showed in his life and ministry. Seeking and including the marginalised and despised. Challenging injustice and defending the weak and vulnerable. Proclaiming the Kingdom of God with its values of love, justice, forgiveness, mercy, radical inclusion and wholeness.

Despite much good work being done in our parishes: meeting practical needs, building community, proclaiming the good news of God's love by what we say and what we do, the national Church of England sometimes feels like it is constantly losing ground in society and shooting itself in the foot.

Despite it being getting on for 30 years since General Synod voted to ordain women to the priesthood there is still plenty of work to be done to gain radical equality and a proper functioning accommodation of such things as maternity and parental leave and good understanding of work-related issues around the menopause as I know from my voluntary work as an Equalities Rep within the Faithworkers section of UNITE the Union.

There has been some progress on supporting the mental health and well-being of clergy, but still there is the fear of being open about struggles with depression and anxiety because of fear of being seen as incapable of doing the job, with all the fears for job and home and family that that entails.

Despite being sold as something that would safeguard and support clergy, the introduction of Common Tenure has seriously weakened the rights and security of clergy. The attendant procedures such as the opprobrious Clergy Discipline Measure have been used to unjustly harass and bully clergy causing great stress and suffering to clergy and their families. The radical reform of this Measure must be an urgent priority for General Synod.

The mood music needs to change from Clergy being the problem, to Clergy being a valuable, skilled and trained resource who need to be properly resourced and supported to do the job that we were called and ordained to do.



Martin Thorpe – General Synod

I want to offer myself to serve on General Synod because I want to help our Church of England to be as inclusive as possible. I also want the pressures that clergy are under to be properly recognised and for us to be fully supported in our demanding roles. In my national work as a Church of England Clergy Advocate I have seen first hand how clergy can feel intimidated and bullied by lay people, senior staff and peers often using the flawed Clergy Discipline Measure and similar procedures to pressurise clergy to the detriment of their health, ministry and sometimes at the cost of their lives. The recent case in the national church press of a priest who committed suicide a year after being told he was under investigation but never being told what he was under investigation for, who was making the allegations or what the allegations were, demonstrates that there is much work to be done by the Church of England and General Synod to deal with issues in a much more transparent, compassionate and fair way. <https://www.sheldonhub.org/resources/topics/cdm>

Over the last 10 years or so I have been very open in the diocese about my struggles with poor mental health, suffering from chronic depression and anxiety which is successfully treated with medication. I know many colleagues who have similar struggles but fear negative judgement and repercussions if they are open about what they are suffering. I was a founding member of the diocesan clergy mental health group which worked with senior staff to create a much more positive and open climate around mental health issues, supporting better information and signposting around these issues on our diocesan website, seeing the introduction of Reflective Practice (peer support) groups and being part of the discussions around EAP programmes for diocesan staff and clergy for those that want to access them. Some specific sources of support for clergy and their families which you or others you know may find helpful are: www.sheldonhub.org
<https://interdiocesancounsellingservice.org.uk/>

In my voluntary work as an Equalities rep within the 2000 strong FaithWorkers Branch of UNITE the union I have supported and represented many clergy and church workers subject to unfair dismissal or other unjust pressure. There has been a steep recent rise in the threat of clergy redundancies in some dioceses and it will be important that the revisions to the Mission and Pastoral Measure coming before General Synod fully protects the rights of clergy and ensures we are treated fairly in processes of parish reorganization and 'diocesan downsizing'. As an elected member of the national executive of the Church of England section, Church of England Clergy Advocates (CECA), I actively work for a fairer deal and better treatment for clergy and am often in meetings with national Church of England officers from the Board of Ministry and HR flagging up concerns and issues and trying to work together to find good solutions which are beneficial for all concerned. The best way for us to be able to effect change and address injustice in the Church of England is for us to work to get these issues properly and transparently debated and rectified through General Synod.

It is really important that SSMs and all those with PTO are properly supported and valued alongside stipendiaries. I know that in Liverpool their main concerns are ministry/family life balance, the MDR process (some having not had a review for some time), the wide range of experience and ministry and whether this is appreciated and fully utilised together with the timing of clergy training days. In the last year or so the National Network of SSMs that John Lees has established has begun to raise the profile of this important and distinctive ministry which needs to be properly resourced.

It is important that our Church of England continues to advocate for the poor and vulnerable and marginalised, lobbying for support for refugees such as those caught up in the Afghanistan crisis. On important global issue too such as the environmental crisis our Church can stand together with other faith communities for the care and good stewardship of creation, strongly advocating a longer term solution which elected politicians with their eye on the next election often struggle to do effectively.

If like me you want to see a fairer Church which supports its Clergy to do the job we were ordained and called to do and is more inclusive and relevant to people's lives, please give me your vote.