

Richard Pratt

Archdeacon of West Cumberland

Election to General Synod

From the far North West, and especially from Workington (where Carlisle, Kendal, and Barrow, seem a long way away), London and General Synod and the national Church feel very distant indeed. In addition, General Synod often appears to be a bureaucratic talking shop for those with plenty to say. But General Synod, Diocesan Synod, Deanery Synod, and PCCs are what we have. They make decisions which affect the future of the Church here, and those decisions can help or hinder as we work at being Church.

Just as we need a strong Diocesan Synod with really good links to the parishes, we also need to engage well with General Synod. Experience across the whole country shows that Archdeacons have a lot to offer in this respect, alongside laypeople and parochial clergy. So although I remain a bit sceptical, I am honoured to stand in this election.

As for me: I have been in the Diocese for over 18 years – 11 years at St Cuthbert’s and as Diocesan Communications Officer, and now nearly 7 as Archdeacon in the West. Sometimes I feel I know the Diocese pretty well, and at other times I realise how little I know – especially as an offcomer, though my wife is from the Eden Valley and has family across North Cumbria.

Labels are difficult but I guess the simplest, not too inaccurate, one is “liberal Catholic”. I believe passionately that there are no simple answers to complicated questions, and indeed most of the questions we face are truly complicated. I believe that above all God wants us to think hard, to use the minds and experience and Bible and Church (with its history) He gives us.

A second strand is the pragmatic one of making what’s already there work as well as it can. I am much keener on mending than on changing, and on evolution rather than revolution. I am also really keen on parishes and local churches. Some of the changes we are working at may feel like an erosion of this, but actually they are about securing the sustainable future of local churches for the next few decades.

A third strand is that of listening. (I don’t think the Church is very good at listening – neither clergy nor laity.) I think that putting this into practice as an institution means devolving decisions as ‘low’ as possible and the “Simplification” which General Synod is working on is therefore really important – though there is a balance between this and doing things properly. It also means that if elected I would do my best to continue to listen to you, and to help you and General Synod listen to each other.

Do please be in touch if you have any questions before you vote.

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