

## **Revd Stewart Fyfe**

### **General Synod Election Address**

#### **Who am I?**

I am the Priest-in-Charge of the Leith-Lyvennet Parishes, a group of six rural parishes in Appleby Deanery and am also Rural Dean. I am married with two teenaged children. I was ordained in Carlisle Diocese in 2005. My church background is in the Church of Scotland, via evangelical Anglicanism, now ministering in an eclectic bunch of parishes ranging from liberal to evangelical, and from Cumbrian (very) low to medium-high Anglican.

#### **Am I qualified?**

My professional background began as a financial investigator at the Serious Fraud Office, before spending around 8 years as a litigation lawyer. My secular qualifications include a BSc in Economics and a post-graduate diploma in Law. I have a Certificate in Theology from Ridley Hall, Cambridge and an MA in Practical Theology from the University of Cumbria. I have also recently completed the Creative Leadership in the Rural Church course via the Arthur Rank Centre. In ministry served my curacy in the Barony of Burgh and also sat on the Ministry Strategy Feedback and Advisory Group.

#### **Where do I stand?**

I am an open Evangelical, with charismatic leanings. Although not affiliated to or a member of any group, I am in sympathy with the New Wine movement. I draw deeply from John Wesley, whose strange mix of Catholic truth, Evangelical rigour and charismatic passion matches my own, and I am inspired by his vision of "a vital, practical Religion" worked out in the transformation of lives. Although I have sincere affection for the full range of Anglicanism (I value different styles of worship and will wear anything I'm asked to wear) I am devoted to a generous, but committed orthodox theology.

I am an unashamed devotee of N.T. Wright and the theological school gathered around his insights into the historical Jesus. I am open in the sense that I always listen sincerely to Christians of other perspectives and recognise that orthodoxy is a broad meadow, not a narrow line. Nonetheless, it has its boundaries. I have studied these things deeply and carefully and am by nature a thoughtful person. The combination of my legal and theological training means that I think in a structured and theological way about every issue. I am prepared to be surprised by new thinking and the Holy Spirit's guiding, but ultimately I stand under the authority of scripture and the Creeds and Formularies of the early church.

#### **Why would you vote for me?**

I am motivated to stand for this synod because I believe this is a critical time for the Church of England. It's not just the looming issues of sexuality and marriage, though they might grab the headlines. There is a wider debate going on about the nature of ministry, the way we invest our resources for church growth, the need to simplify the Church's structures, the nature of leadership in the Church and the need to foster missionary discipleship. The Church has formed 5 Task Groups looking at those key issues and their preliminary reports (published earlier this year) propose genuinely radical changes which will form key agenda items for the next synod.

These are all issues I care about deeply, having studied them in depth and addressed them in my own ministry. I feel called to offer my learning and insights to the Church as it looks to its biggest change in 100 years. I would offer my analytical and theological thinking and my prayer to these discussions on our future. Although I would approach them with an open mind, I would apply some key principles to my thinking on these subjects:

1. We need to **simplify** our message and our structures. Anglicanism's strength is in its depth of thought and I would uphold that, but too often our thinking gets expressed in too many words. Whether it's our liturgy, our structures or the way we present to the media, too often we are unhelpfully long winded. We don't have to become monochrome or simplistic but we can

express ourselves more clearly and concisely so as to convey a sincere passion for Christ and connect with the world we are living in now, not the Victorian world we inherited.

2. We need to **re-think our ministry**. By accident of history, we have developed a professionalised clergy that is neither Biblical nor Anglican. The strain of maintaining this is draining our resources - financial, emotional and spiritual - and we need to re-imagine our ministry radically. In particular, we need to return to the key Biblical (and Anglican) principle that ministry is collaborative at every level - between clergy and laity, between ministerial orders (bishops, priests and deacons) and between congregations. As well as being truer to God's purposes as revealed in scripture and to our Anglican identity, this is important from a practical point of view: the leadership scholar Ron Heifetz observes that when an organisation is going through adaptive change - adapting to new circumstances - it needs every member of the organisation involved in scouting out the land, seeking creative solutions and finding a way to move together to new pastures. Simply relying on an expert technician, won't work. We are facing such a period of change and the old professionalised single-person model of clerical ministry, which tended to act as the expert technician, needs to be replaced by a collaborative model fit for purpose in the future we are facing.
3. We need to **speak up for rural communities**. In the last synod, two Bishops warned that we have less than a decade to address the issues facing the church or else we will see the church wiped out of large parts of rural England. Contrary to stereotype, rural communities are often vibrant, adaptive and ahead of the curve when facing change. Their problem is simply one of resources. Rural congregations, in particular, require structures to help them bear the weight of responsibility that comes from being the established church and ministering to every soul in their communities. Rural parishes are under-represented in national discussions, but they are vital to our ministry to every soul in England. We need a voice to help the church understand these problems and to find new structures to release our rural congregations to be church.
4. We need to **think clearly** and listen. We have to make decisions based on evidence and insight, not just the knee-jerk reactions of well-worn tribal positions. For this, we need to listen to our society and look honestly and closely at empirical evidence. We also need to listen to each other, however uncomfortable we might find that. But ultimately we must listen openly to God. A clear and theological approach to our thinking can help us to find fresh divine insight to inspire a new generation in the liberating power of the orthodox Christian Gospel. If truths are eternal, they cannot belong solely to the past - they must also have an application now. That may not look like what we're used to, but it will still be the same eternal Word of God.
5. We need to find a **new language**. We need to express God's eternal truths in a language that connects with people today. Too often, tribal allegiances have led to worn out pat phrases that no longer speak the language of today. Too often, they lead to narrow, closed positions and confrontation, which is both unattractive to the world and contrary to Christ's commands. This all gives the impression of an academic talking shop, arguing over a lifeless set of doctrines rather than a group of inspired disciples embodying a lively practical faith - and I speak as one who cares deeply about our doctrines. People in our society still need to consider the great Christian themes of forgiveness, sin, judgment, liberty and God's love. I disagree with those who say we need to abandon some of those themes in order to connect with a world that no longer believes them. God still has something important to say about them all, but we do need to find a new way of communicating them, so that they can hear God speak to them in their own tongues and transform their lives. John Wesley did this powerfully in his day and we need to do the same again now.

If you want to elect someone who will take that sort of approach to these big issues, please pray and consider whether you might vote for me. And pray also for all our candidates. We cannot do this in our own strength alone. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Stewart