

General Synod Election Address from **Charles Read**

Associate Priest at St. Catherine, Mile Cross, Co-ordinator of LLM training and Eastern Region Ministry Course (ERMC) core staff member

Dear colleagues,

I'd like to give you some information about me and what I think and also why I think I would represent you well on General Synod over the next five years.

The Importance of Parish Ministry

It is time to value parish ministry and support it properly. We have had over a decade of national church resources being directed to mission initiatives other than parishes with the result that parish ministers have been made to feel marginalised and parish ministry underfunded. We have not embodied all the marks of mission and only valued certain ways of being church. Fresh expressions of church and church planting are essential, but need to flow from the work of our parishes and chaplaincies. There are lots of good examples of this in this diocese. I'm very keen to share this at national level so everyone can learn from our experience. Meanwhile, we need to release national resources so that parishes can be supported better.

This includes looking at how we can reduce the burden of administration which parish clergy and wardens have to contend with. General Synod has already begun to do this but there is more that we could do.

I value chaplaincy ministry and I think that we should promote this more than we do. Ministry where people work as well as in places like colleges, prisons and hospitals is an important expression of the incarnation - we go where people are whether that is our local community or the workplace.

Safeguarding

I am the safeguarding lead for ERMC and in this capacity I have tried to listen to survivors of abuse. I am acutely aware of the failings in the Church of England in this regard even though things have improved dramatically in the last 20 years. Safeguarding at local and diocesan level is generally very good but at the national level there is much more still to do, especially concerning learning from past mistakes which we do not seem very good at doing. I would support some measure of independent safeguarding oversight and I would support Synod in holding senior leaders to account over safeguarding.

Same Sex Partnerships

In 2023, along with six friends, I co-founded the group Inclusive Evangelicals to give a space for evangelicals to express support for same sex marriage. The church where I worship, St. Catherine's Mile Cross, has become a welcoming spiritual home for a number of gay people, many of whom are in long term partnerships. Our congregation has grown in numbers as a result of us taking a clearly supportive stance with regard to same sex partnerships.

I fully support the introduction of the Prayers of Love and Faith and would vote in favour of allowing Church of England clergy to conduct same-sex marriages if they wished to do so, while leaving clergy free not to do so if that is their conviction- much as we do at the moment with the remarriage of divorced people. This is, however, not the full story because there are a whole range of ways in which gay people have been marginalised and made to feel unwelcome in the Church of England and we have more work to do, above and beyond same sex marriages, to turn this around. I want what we have found at St. Catherine's to be true for all Church of England congregations: namely that gay people as well as straight people find themselves accepted and welcomed for who they are and helped to grow in discipleship as they follow Jesus more closely.

Women in Ministry

I have been a life long campaigner for the ordination of women and voted in favour of the women bishops legislation when I last served on General Synod. However, the issues go much wider than matters of ordination. I hear many instances of women clergy facing discrimination and being on the receiving end of poor behaviour. People with reservations about the ordination of women generally would not be happy with this situation either. We need to revisit the way in which the settlement around the ordination of women as bishops is working out to see where it needs some adjustment. We need to make the Church of England a safer place in which women can minister. I teach a good number of women ordinands and many of them are concerned about whether they will face difficulties in ministry on account of their gender.

The Church and Public Life

The Church of England is well placed to speak into the life of our nation but has sometimes been

rather slow to do so. We need to take the lead in addressing such issues as the rise of right-wing populism and the Christian nationalism that is currently aligned with it as well as addressing the issues which lead to people feeling unheard. As a Christian Church, we have a great many resources to draw on here. The doctrines of creation and incarnation lead us to a valuing of every individual as well as valuing of the life of local communities. Our local churches and chaplaincies are very good at being places of welcome and at being instrumental in building community. The national church should do more to support and resource this as well as speaking into key debates at national level - for example to explain why a Christian approach to immigration leads us to be welcoming of those who are fleeing violence and persecution.

Vocations and Training

We currently have a crisis in terms of numbers coming forward for ordination. There is no plan nationally to address this. This situation means there is also a crisis in training since we have far more college places than we can fill and the residential colleges are in a very fragile position. There is no plan nationally to rationalise theological training which means that market forces will lead to some training institutions closing. We need to have a clearer plan both to increase vocations to ordained ministry and to provide training institutions which deliver the training which we need as a church for our new clergy. Clearly this is one of my key interests and I am committed to preserving the best of our current training provision, whether that is residential colleges or regional courses.

And this is me....

I represented the clergy of this diocese on General Synod between 2010 and 2021 which was a great privilege. Prior to this I had served two shorter periods on Synod representing Manchester and then Northern Universities. I am an experienced person who can hit the ground running on day one of the new Synod since I understand quite a bit about how it works and how to make it work. I still have vision and energy to come back and serve you again in this capacity.

On previous Synods I've played a full part, including serving on a Steering Committee (where the real work often gets done!). I nearly always asked my quota of two questions in the Question Time as this is the chief way of scrutinizing how the Church of England is run.

I've given a brief biography of myself at the end of this address. I have a lot of experience in parish ministry across different sorts of churches and places. I take a regular part in preaching and leading worship and in other aspects of parish ministry such as weddings and funerals. I think it's vital for those of us who train new ministers to do this, but I also do it because I enjoy it and it is what God called me to in the first place. I also do quite a lot of Sunday cover and other events around the diocese so I think I have quite a good view of what is happening in the parishes and chaplaincies all around our diocese. I understand the concerns of parish clergy as well as chaplains and sector ministers and can represent you all well. I see my work in ministry training as being as expression of Eph. 4:11-12 – equipping God's people for the work of ministry. In addition, I have trained (and worked in parishes with) self-supporting ministers and I reckon to understand their concerns too – not least the concern I often hear that they are not valued. I'd aim to speak up for all our clergy in General Synod, stipendiary and non-stipendiary, parish based and workplace based and also those involved in various forms of Fresh Expression of Church and pioneering.

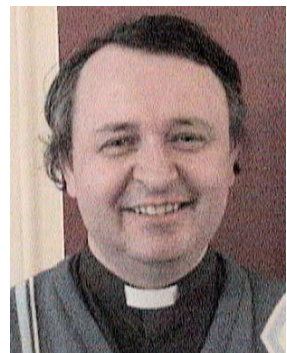
I hope you will feel able to vote for me, and to give me your first preference vote. You can contact me to discuss any of this by emailing me:

charles.read@dioceseofnorwich.org

Yours in Christ,

*Charles
Read*

*Proposed by Liz
Jump, Rector of
Wroxham and
James Stewart,
Rector of Thorpe St.
Andrew*



Charles Who?

Born in Birmingham in 1960; grew up in a village near Lichfield; came to faith in Christ through youth group in local church; read Theology at Manchester University; felt call to ordination; became a Reader; taught RE in secondary school in east Manchester; trained for ordination at St. John's Nottingham; curate in Oldham (town centre team ministry) then minister in charge of daughter church in Urmston, south Manchester; spent a year looking after two rural parishes; helped set up Team Ministry in inner city Salford; appointed to staff of Cranmer Hall Durham; involved in St Nicholas Church and later St John's Neville's Cross; made redundant; did some supply teaching; came to Norwich diocese (2007) as Vice-Principal of Norwich Ministry Course and joined St Catherine's Mile Cross. In 2013 I was reorganised into being responsible for Reader training and working with ERM. Stayed at Mile Cross!