

Timothy Payne – candidate for General Synod

I am a gay Christian, very happily married to the love of my life, Boris. I am deeply saddened that, unlike other western Christian Churches, the CofE has not yet been able to fully welcome Boris and I into its structures and practices, despite the extensive debates over Living in Love and Faith (LLF). I believe with all my heart that full acceptance of LGBT+ Christians is essential if we are to reflect the true love and compassion shown by Jesus Christ to all those he met, especially minorities and those considered 'outsiders'.

I know that some traditionalist believers will disagree, even on the question of 'same-sex blessings', which is a minimal step. I appreciate their beliefs are sincerely held, even though I profoundly disagree with them. Their reliance on a very narrow interpretation of doctrine is highly debateable and probably biblically insecure; and in any case, to quote Pope Leo, 'Doctrinal rigour without mercy is empty talk'.

We must surely also, as a synod, condemn those Anglican provinces which support their countries' legal measures against gay people, imposing harsh prison sentences and even death penalties.

I believe strongly that we must be, first and foremost, a pastoral Church, reaching out into our communities with warmth, wisdom and affection, wherever we live, reflecting Jesus Christ's own eclectic ministry. As an experienced churchwarden I am a strong supporter of the local parish and I know the health of parishes is vital for the overall flourishing of our Church. I also warmly support the substantial recent progress by individual churches on environmental issues and applaud the way this is being led by Bishop Graham in our own Diocese of Norwich. While I believe firmly that social justice is at the heart of the Gospel and that, where necessary, the CofE should adopt a bold political stance, I also know that local issues are invariably the key to successful local mission.

I firmly believe that to grow our congregations, to raise the Christian profile and presence within the local community and for the CofE to be relevant to those who are younger or feeling sidelined, that collectively we need to place our people and buildings back in the centre of our communities. At St Nicholas, Swafeld we are successfully doing this for North Norfolk by incorporating an extremely popular community arts centre in the nave and hosting live plays, concerts and talks. We also stream a wide variety of the best of modern cultural entertainment (Royal Opera, Royal Ballet, National Theatre, cinema etc) and offer friendly, accessible, inclusive events, often with supper, helping drive social cohesion. This transformation has been achieved while retaining our Christian identity – and maintaining our buildings: restoration of our medieval bells, rewilding our churchyard, conservation of our rare chancel screen. Putting 'St Nicks' at the centre of the North Norfolk community has enabled us to be highly successful at obtaining grants for restoration and expansion of the local church's mission within the community.