

GENERAL SYNOD ELECTION ADDRESS OF DAVID ROBERTS 2021



Dear Friend in Christ,

It is the General Synod's task to equip the Church of England with the tools - administrative, legal, and financial - to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to this and future generations. I believe that my highly relevant experience would be of use to the General Synod, to the Diocese of St Albans, and to the wider Church. As it would be an honour and a privilege to serve you, I should very much welcome your first (or a high) preference vote.

A LITTLE ABOUT ME: I live in the parish of St Albans Abbey, and worship regularly at the Cathedral, usually at the 11.15 am Sunday Sung Eucharist. I am a member of the St Albans Deanery and Diocesan Synods. I have served as a Parent Governor of the Abbey Church of England Primary School here. While previously involved in a Central London parish, I took part in the governance of the Diocese of London. There I chaired the Diocesan Audit and Risk Committee, and deputised for successive Bishops of London as the Chair of the Central London Area Bishop's Council (Pastoral Committee). I also served as a member of the Diocesan Bishop's Council and of its Finance Committee.

CLIMATE EMERGENCY: *The plight of Planet Earth is the most desperate issue facing us.* In my view, the Church does nowhere near enough to address (or persuade others of) the facts of catastrophic global warming, climate change, pollution, waste, and the destruction of natural habitats. I am a keen gardener and allotment holder, and strive to grow as much of our food as naturally as possible, and to travel in ways avoiding waste. I would bring our experience of a greener lifestyle to bear on the way in which the Church operates and earns its money, and on the Synod's planning of its work and meetings.

SAVE THE PARISH - GOVERNANCE AND DISCIPLINE: Sadly, the Church remains excessively clerical. The Archbishops' hasty purported direction to clergy, at the outbreak of the Covid pandemic, not to stream services from their churches exceeded, in my view, both the Archbishops' own powers and the Government's legal requirements. It has led to a serious and continuing loss of momentum in the Church's ministry and outreach. We could well do without a managerial and authoritarian approach to Church life. *The rights and duties of clergy and laity largely to run their own parishes in a spirit of co-operation, shepherded by their individual diocesan bishops, should be safeguarded in preference to the creation of new structures and posts.*

I would press for far better use of lay expertise in the decision making and governance of the Church. The General Synod continues to revise our governance, regulations and structures in an attempt to help the Church to concentrate on its evangelistic and missional tasks. This must not become an excuse to dig up the Church by the roots to assess its growth. It is not that Church law is bad; there is simply too much of it, and some people just make it up as they go along. Given recent scandals, we need a responsible and disciplined Church, not least in the field of safeguarding. Our safeguarding and discipline need to be fair to all, clear, effective, and speedy, and not an excuse for job creation schemes. I would also work to manage unnecessary and avoidable conflicts of interest in the governance of the Church, of which there

are many, often unrecognised. It has been said that the last General Synod had too few members with a legal background. I can offer the following relevant experience:

- **Working career:** on the staff of the Church Commissioners and of the General Synod; then the Deputy Diocesan Secretary for St Albans, getting to know Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire well; later Retail Property Controller, Cancer Research; then an Investigator for the Local Government Ombudsman, specialising in complaints about State and Faith school admissions and appeals.
- Law Degree from Worcester College, University of Oxford.
- Occasional correspondence in the *Church Times* on Church governance, discipline, and safeguarding.
- Previous voluntary service in the Diocese of London.

INCLUSION AND EQUALITY: I am committed to equality for everyone, at all levels and roles within the Church, regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, mental health, or sexuality. I would work towards a Church which is generous, welcoming and open, and I fully support further discussion and study of *Living in Love and Faith*.

CHURCH SCHOOLS AND LEARNING: I support our excellent Church schools in their promotion of Christian values and teaching. Exclusive or excessively complex admission arrangements can be counterproductive. I would press for straightforward, objective, and clear admission criteria in Church schools. I offer the following additional relevant experience:

- Served as a Governor of two Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary Schools.
- Served as a trustee of several educational charities (including Anglican charities).
- Sitting as a member of independent panels hearing appeals against the refusal of admission to Faith and State schools in Hertfordshire.

As the Church needs to maintain and promote academic standards among both clergy and laity, I urge a more reflective and accessible approach to the Church's historic books, manuscripts, and libraries.

ECUMENICAL: The disunity of the Christian Church remains a scandal requiring a remedy. I serve on the Executive Committee of the Nikaeian Club, which helps to receive the Archbishop of Canterbury's ecumenical guests. Our common faith and humanity demand that we relieve the plight of our Orthodox and Catholic sisters and brothers in the Middle East and appreciate their theology. Nearer to home, visits to Geneva and elsewhere in Switzerland have renewed my understanding of the Reformed tradition.

PERSONAL INFORMATION: Born in Liverpool, and educated at Church and State schools there. Married to Margery, a self-employed Church and charity executive, and author. My proposer is Mr Nigel Challis (Rickmansworth Deanery), and my seconder is Mrs Lis Cummins (St Albans Deanery), valued colleagues from the respective spheres of Audit & Risk, and school admission appeals.

CONTACT DETAILS: If you have a question about all this, I shall do my very best to answer it. My address and contact details are: 7 Nunnery Stables, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL1 2AS (Tel: 01727 856626) robertssopwellnunnery@btinternet.com

Declaration of interests: I declare the following additional interests: Member, the Ecclesiastical Law Society; the Friends of Lambeth Palace Library; the Anglican & Eastern Churches Association; the Court of Assistants of the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks; Friends of the Anglican Centre in Rome; the Society of the Faith, a moderate Anglo-Catholic society; a Governor of the Clergy Support Trust; Secretary & Treasurer, Royal Martyr Church Union.

*Yours in Christ,
David*