



Revd Gareth Howles

Some people, talking about the Church of England, would take a similar line as Private Frazer in Dad's Army and say:

We're doomed!

I am not convinced this is true and it is my desire to play my part in changing that narrative. This is why I am standing to serve as a member of General Synod. Most of my working life has been spent in parishes within the Church of England, firstly as a Children and Youth Leader and now as an ordained priest.

Despite the doom and gloom and the recorded decline, I am convinced that there is a way in which God can bring about His growth. As a visionary leader, I have been able to use different strategies to see first hand that growth is possible, and possible with all ages, even in the North of England.

If selected, I hope to draw on my experience, to be an encouraging and optimistic member of Synod. Below, I will address some of the areas that I am keen to help Synod to focus on. If you, like me, think there is still hope then please do give me a vote. Thank you!

Who am I

I grew up in a vicarage over in Lancashire and then married a vicar's daughter from Yorkshire. Naomi and I have five children, two at university, one in secondary school and two in primary school. Two of our children are autistic and we are having to learn new strategies to enable them to meet their potential.

I worked as a Children and Youth Worker, first in an estate in Blackburn, then in a village in North Worcestershire and then for nine years in Pudsey.

At the age of thirty I was diagnosed with Dyslexia which went a long way in explaining some of the challenges I had throughout my school life.

I trained for ordination at Ridley Hall in Cambridge and was ordained in 2017. I have worked in Farsley for four years and have just been installed as Priest-in-Charge at Pudsey Parish Church.

Children and young people

Last year Synod passed a motion that said they welcomes the voice of children and young people as part of the church of today. Synod committed to intentionally hearing and responding to young people and welcomes the work being done across the whole church

to become 'younger and more diverse', ensuring every child in every parish has access to a flourishing youth, children and families' ministry.' I have vast experience in this area both as a parent and professionally. I hope to use my wisdom in this area to help Synod keep to these commitments. I have a specific interest in how the Church responds to the growing number of people with neurodiversity, especially young people.

Passion for the north

I love living in the North of England and am constantly trying to persuade more and more colleagues of the joy of ministering in the North. Despite my best efforts it still seems like God calls quite a lot of them to the wealthy south. I say this a bit tongue in cheek, but I do believe that there is an underlying unfairness between parishes in wealthy southern dioceses and the poorer northern dioceses.

Bishop Phillip North asked a question in Synod that got to the heart of the matter, "How can it be fair that estates parishes in the North are paying more in parish share than wealthy communities in the South-East simply because of the historic endowment of their dioceses?" I will be a voice to stand up for fair distribution of the wealth of the Church.

Unity

Unity is being discussed a lot within Synod, especially when it comes to the hot topic of human sexuality. We know from the votes on prayers of love and faith that Synod is divided and that is also true for me in my context. I am charged with the challenge of remaining faithful to scripture whilst offering a loving welcome to all people. I do this by listening, recognising there are different views and remembering that it is Christ Jesus that we are united in. As Synod continues to discuss the way forward, I would want to be using these same qualities.

Growth

The thing that makes me most excited in ministry is to look at how God may use us to grow His church in all our different contexts. If elected I will be a member of Synod that will want to make sure that strategies for growth are kept on the agenda, talking about how our churches need to be welcoming, praying for growth, rooted in their communities and practising evangelism. Churches in our country can grow and synod needs to help all our churches to have a culture of growth.

If selected I will be a voice for growth, a voice for young people, a voice for the churches in the North and voice for being united in Christ Jesus.