



Revd Paul Hutchinson

*Rector of Stokesley with Seamer
Cleveland Archdeaconry Ecumenical Adviser
Stokesley Deanery
paul.hutchinson5@btinternet.com*

August 2015

With deep family roots in Durham and Cleveland, I came to Stokesley in 2009. My two sons are now both in secondary education here, whilst my wife, Alison, has been the NSM assistant priest and/or cover for two multi-parish benefices nearby, as well as contributing to other work.

I was elected to General Synod in November 2013, and so have served on Synod for two full years. It has been a pleasure to be part of the Synod that made it possible for women to become Bishops (on equal terms with men, yet maintaining space for those who cannot accept the change). It has also been a great learning experience to wrestle with the wide variety of issues that come before Synod, and to report back on them to Diocesan Synod and to several deaneries – both in person and also by written reports.

Before ordained ministry I worked as a solicitor in central Newcastle (in civil litigation), having read Law at Cambridge and Chester. Alison (a Ripon ordinand) and I trained together at Cuddesdon (in what might be labelled a broadly catholic view of ordained ministry), and were ordained together at Durham in 1997.

All of my ministry has been inside the parish system (and, until Stokesley, in team ministries): in the former mining communities of Stanley (NW Durham); at Sunderland Minster (while University Chaplain); in market town & rural ministry at Penrith; and now in similar vein at Stokesley. Whilst welcoming new initiatives in the 'mixed economy church', my heart remains with parochial ministry – despite its strains – as the bedrock of our vocation to be the church of the nation.

Ministry since ordination has developed four special interests:

- **Music & Liturgy.** A choir member and organist since my teens, I have been active with: RSCM areas; Praxis regions; Diocesan liturgy committees; and various church and chamber choirs (with some cathedral contact). I was part of the worship team for the 2013 Diocesan Clergy Conference; and I have made submissions and spoken at Synod on the new Baptism texts.
- **Education.** I am currently a governor of Stokesley School (a non-church secondary), becoming a director of its academy trust when that was formed earlier this year. My years as Sunderland University Chaplain led on to part-time chaplaincy at Newton Rigg, Penrith. I've been a church junior school governor, and served on the Durham and Carlisle Diocesan Boards of Education.
- **Ecumenism.** I have been Ecumenical Adviser for Cleveland Archdeaconry for three years, which has put me in contact with a variety of regional and national ecumenical networks. I have, of course, been active in the ecumenical field both before and since ordination: most obviously in chaplaincy contexts and Durham Board for Mission and Unity, but also charring Churches Together in Penrith, being part of the Cumbria Churches' Rural Forum, and now being part of the York Anglican-Methodist Covenant review group. I have made ecumenical questions another of my Synod foci.
- **Law.** I have been a member of the Ecclesiastical Law Society for over 23 years, and have used membership to stay informed about some of the thornier legal issues that assail parish life and the Church in general. This experience has been invaluable in helping to cope with volume of legislative paperwork and procedure that General Synod tends to generate: and helped me focus on key issues in a debate about the funerals of those who have taken their own life. My education in Law has also allowed me to take an interest in Synod's Penal Affairs Group and also the Mission and Public Affairs division of the Archbishop's Council: I would like to hope that the Church may become a strong voice in support of Human Rights, should these come under challenge.

Ministry has also brought me to: other civic and sector chaplaincy roles; service on Diocesan Synods and pastoral committees; fair-trade, disability, rural and asylum seeker networks; active contact with NSM/SSM ministries and readers; some contributions to BBC Tees; work as a training incumbent; and happy working relationships with neighbouring parishes during vacancies.

I hope that I have begun to be an effective member who engages with the full breadth of Synod's concerns: I have mentioned above some of the small ways in which I have played an active part; and I was sad to have been unwell on the last day of the July Synod when the Environment took centre stage. I am standing again hoping that I can be of service to our Diocese and the wider Church on a wide range of issues, and that I can be a confident voice from the North of England on questions where, from time to time, a South-Eastern perspective tends to prevail.

I am conscious, however, that the ground was laid during the last Synod for work on some very specific issues being discussed in the coming five-year term, and that a candidate should be open about his or her basic convictions in these areas.

- On the question of the “seal of the confessional”, and whether it should hold firm in cases where there are safeguarding concerns, I would be very sad to see it put aside: but I also recognise that the Church has a duty to protect the most vulnerable, and many beyond the Church would see the maintenance of this “seal” as a sign that the Church continues not to be serious about dealing with abuse. I look forward to some thorough scholarly work coming before Synod to help the Church think further, and I shall also be interested to see whether any ecumenical discussion – particularly with the Roman Catholic Church – can help to clarify the issues.
- On the question of the package of “Reform and Renewal” measures, I have been broadly in favour of what has been suggested so far in the areas of senior leadership, ministerial education, and the redistribution of central funds, although I have also noted that there are concerns around the proper weight to be given to church growth statistics. In the area of “Simplification” (the area to which I have so far given most attention), there are promising signs in what has already been done, but there will need to be a care for detail in the next phase. A thinner rule book doesn't automatically make a simpler church: and during the last term of Synod, a proposal to simplify PCC rules came to grief because it had been insufficiently tested before reaching the legislative stage.
- Finally, on the wide-ranging set of questions that gather around issues of human sexuality, I begin from the theological conviction that same-sex relationships are no more sinful in themselves than those between people of the opposite sex. I hope that, when the Synod comes to wrestle with the complexities of recent developments in marriage, and the difficulties of an Anglican Communion that has the widest possible range of perspectives, the Church can find its way to a position which is more inclusive (and, arguably, more coherent) than its current official stance.

Three years ago, I would not have imagined myself as a General Synod member. When local colleagues encouraged me in 2013 to stand (and I was appointed to the second vacancy that arose), I was grateful to those current members – and the Diocesan Secretary and Registrar – who helped me find my bearings and understand some of the issues and processes. I hope that in due course I can be of help to others, as they too find their feet.

**Paul Hutchinson
Stokesley**

(Proposed by Revd Jeremy Fletcher & Revd Linda Shipp)