

General Synod Election Address : Mike Stallybrass



I am a LLM (Reader) (PTO), having ministered as a Reader for over 45 years in three different dioceses (Derby, Worcester, York). Prayer is an important aspect of my daily life, and I now lead a weekday on-line morning prayer group, and also a weekly on-line group for Compline. As a Reader, I regularly take services in both Northern and Southern Ryedale, including bringing communion to care homes on a fortnightly basis.

I have been married for over 50 years and now have four daughters and five grandsons. My wife is Catholic, and we are both very active in each other's churches. As a professional railwayman, I have worked as a consultant with many railways around the world.

Although nominally retired, I continue to work with railways in Scandinavia and am active on several international committees. As a result of my travels, I have had the privilege of being involved with a wide variety of Christian communities in other parts of the world.

I was brought to faith through music; the musical side of worship is very important to me, and I regularly sing in many different contexts including Catholic and Orthodox as well as Anglican. I have developed a deep interest in church art and architecture and have given many talks about the rich heritage that we have. I am also an early mediaeval reenactor, with a special interest in the development of the church in this country, and in that context, as a mediaeval pilgrim, I helped with the launch of the St Aelred Pilgrim Trail in 2024.

What am I seeking to achieve?

I strongly support the aims of the Save the Parish Network. From my experiences, not just in the Anglican church but also with other churches at home and abroad, I am convinced that the Parish system that we have inherited is a very precious asset of the Church of England. I believe that the Queen Anne bounty, administered by Church Commissioners, should be restored to its founding purpose – the cure of souls in parishes where such assistance is most required.



My railway career has shown me how a contracting organisation can result in over centralisation and top-heavy management. At present across the country, Dioceses employ on average one member of staff for every 3.5 parochial clergy, a very high HQ to front-line staff ratio for any organisation. I will be pushing for a more disciplined staffing structure that reverses the current trend towards greater levels of diocesan staff compared with parochial ministers.

I have a particular concern for the rural church, both in terms of the ministry of the church, and in terms of our national architectural heritage. Large rural benefices, combining a dozen or more widely spread parishes are a recipe for loneliness, depression and burnout if the only ministry resource is a single priest. Yet forty percent of all churchgoers are in rural parishes. The Bishop of Hereford recently spoke about the crisis in vocations for ordination, linking this to the deterrent effect of “undoable jobs” whereby priests are given too many parishes. Many parishes have great problems in

finding churchwardens, treasurers, and other necessary officers, and over 20% of parishes currently have no churchwarden. National and Diocesan leadership needs to place a greater emphasis on rural ministry, to bring a renewed sense of hope and on finding ways of reducing the administrative burden that is borne by both the clergy and lay volunteers.

Two thirds of our church buildings are in rural areas, and these contain a disproportionate number of Grade 1 listed buildings. Only 2.5% of all listed buildings are Grade 1, but our rural churches include around 30% of that total. I will be seeking innovative ways to help support the financial burden, which represents a real struggle for many small parishes, of maintaining our rich heritage for the benefit of future generations. I will also try to get *A Church near You* enhanced to support the same sort of pilgrimage itinerary planning that the Norwegian equivalent supports.

At present, only churches with an annual income of more than £100,000 have to be registered individually with the Charity Commissioners. However, this is changing – by the end of the new quinquennium of General Synod, every PCC will have to be individually registered to be able to benefit from charitable status, including being able to receive Gift Aid. This will place yet another administrative burden on small, and especially on rural parishes. We must find new ways of supporting both the lay volunteers and the clergy in parish administration.

Lay ministry is an important pillar of our shared church life. In the past, Readers, and now LLMs, are a uniquely deployable resource. As a Reader, I have seen how this can be used to great advantage when the diocese has appropriate mechanisms to support it. However, when I travel around the country, I see big differences in the way that Lay Ministry is encouraged and supported. If elected to General Synod, I will do my utmost to promote Lay Ministry, and to see that the best practices are shared and implemented across the country.

What can I bring to General Synod?

We are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves – whoever our neighbours are, regardless of race, age, sexuality, or disability. For me, that would mean working with goodwill with all members of Synod whatever their position on other matters vexing the Church. As matters are debated in Synod and decisions are taken, it is vital that General Synod hears the voices of “critical friends” who are unafraid to test and (at times) contest proposals from the central Church. I have done this in the past, and should I be elected will continue to do so.

I already have considerable experience in church governance, from parish through to national level. I have initiated and driven forward changes, such as the reinvigoration of Deaneries within the Diocese of York, a process that I kick-started 15 years ago. I have already served one term on General Synod, from 2015-2021, during which time I was a member of one of the legislative revision committees. At present, I am a member of Lastingham PCC, the Northern Ryedale Deanery Synod, the Diocesan Synod, the York Archbishop’s council, and the HR Reference group for the council.

Contacting me:

I can always be contacted by email (mostallybrass@aol.com) or by phone (07540 824941) and am very happy to hear your views and discuss with you issues affecting our church.

If elected to General Synod, I will be happy not just to liaise with selected Deaneries, but also to come as a visiting preacher, sharing my experiences of the Synod and my vision for Lay Ministry within the body of the church.