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Age 42

I have been on General Synod since 2007 when I was elected following a bi-election. For the most part I have enjoyed my time on General Synod and seek your help in being elected for the next five years though I am very aware of the worthiness of other candidates.

The most important issue facing General Synod in the immediate future is the culmination of the process leading to the arrival of women bishops, hopefully by 2014. I, like many, rejoice that we are now well down the road on this process. In my view, the Church of England should have been one of the first provinces of the Anglican Communion to have women in the episcopate and the fact that we still do not have women bishops is a source of deep shame. However, we also need to be aware that not everyone in the Church of England agrees with the direction of travel, and that is what the recent debates in Synod have all been about.

You may be aware that I spoke at the recent General Synod meeting in York in favour of the creation of dioceses for those unable to accept women bishops. This for me was the most generous and caring solution for those unwilling to accept women bishops as it would have created a clear structure and identity for that group, and honoured their own requests for such new dioceses, whilst allowing the vast majority of dioceses to have a completely egalitarian policy between men and women in every area of church life. In my ponderings before synod, I realised I felt uncomfortable with the idea of belonging to a diocese where a woman bishop is effectively obliged to delegate to a male bishop. Instead I wanted a system for the vast majority of dioceses where there would be a completely level playing field between men and women. Whereas with separate dioceses only 7% of dioceses would have had gender based practices, now 100% of dioceses will have some form of arrangement which effectively bypasses the power of a woman diocesan bishop, something I find very hard to swallow as a passionate egalitarian. I also thought separate dioceses was the wisest solution as I find it hard to understand how a parish could remain in a diocese when it could not accept the authority and status of its diocesan bishop, whatever provision may be made for its immediate episcopal needs, as a diocesan bishop sets the tone and identity of a diocese.

As you will no doubt be aware, Father Simon Kilwick's and my amendment was defeated by a two thirds majority and we are now left with a code of practice and a system of delegation within a parish under terms drawn up by each diocesan bishop. After much prayer and reflection, whatever my misgivings above, I have decided to support fully this direction of travel from now on. I realise this will disappoint some of you who were pleased with my stand on separate dioceses, but I feel that the time has come for us all to get behind the synod's decision. We have debated the various ideas, including the Archbishops' amendment, transferred jurisdiction, separate dioceses, and various other options, not just once, but three times in the last three years over several days and we have voted several times as a synod. However close the vote, we now need to come together and make the code of practice as acceptable as we can to all parts of the Church of England. A challenge I know, but you have my word that I will now back it in Diocesan Synod and at General Synod if I am re-elected. We cannot delay the arrival of women into the episcopacy any further and this must now be the absolute priority.

Away from this topic, you will be aware that the Anglican Communion is gravely split over the issue of human sexuality and there is no doubt we will see these tensions rising further to the surface in the Church of England over the coming ten or twenty years. I am sure we will need to face these issues in General Synod, even in the next five years, in some form or another. I come from an evangelical background and would now describe myself as open evangelical with charismatic and catholic sympathies. Theologically I am still very conservative on a number of issues, and certainly have a charismatic evangelical spirituality and understanding of key doctrinal beliefs.

However, on the issue of how the church ministers to gay (LGBT) people I believe my evangelical background has been far from helpful and I am only just now in recent years beginning to learn from other approaches within the church about how to help LGBT couples on their journey of faith. Pastorally I have real experience of relating to gay couples who attend both All Saints and St Peter's churches where I am team vicar. Indeed, the fact that I never encountered such couples in evangelical churches speaks volumes for the church's mission to that segment of our community. These couples have often felt that the church has not fully accepted them for who they are, and yet they clearly show forth the love of God through the way they live their lives. Both in terms of mission, and in terms of simply witnessing Christ's love, the Church of England has much further work to do in

this area in the coming years and I promise to use my own pastoral experience to good effect if I were to be re-elected onto General Synod. As the LGBT culture is such a sizeable part of British culture these days, these matters constantly need re-evaluating and discussing whatever your theological perspective might ultimately be.

Over the weeks leading up to the September and the deadline for this paper I have changed my wording on my own views on homosexual practise several times. This is because I am still in the process of working out my own theology on the issue after many years of study and reflection. I now believe I have come to a view about which I am happy to expound on further at the hustings. I believe there is sinful homosexual practise, just as there is sinful heterosexual practise. Sinful homosexual practise is where sexual gratification is the prime expression of that relationship and where there is a spirit of promiscuity, carnality and the worship of sex above the worship of God or love for each other's real needs within that relationship. However, I believe sexual practise within a covenanted and sober and committed relationship, where is it an expression of genuine self-giving love, is not sinful from either a homosexual or heterosexual point of view. It is not then the expression but the intention that makes sex sinful or not. On careful study of the important Pauline texts, I am convinced that Paul's experience or reading of homosexuality was of the carnal and flesh driven expression of sexuality that one would find with male prostitution and other such sinful practises. Therefore we need to draw the line not on orientation, but on how sex relates morally to each individual and how much the "flesh" is dwarfing the "spirit" in that expression. As a church then we need to do more work on sexual expression in both heterosexual and homosexual expressions and explore when sex is self-serving, rather than self-giving, and when sex is short-lived and temporary, as opposed to an expression of a covenanted relationship built on long-standing and lifelong commitment. To me, whether this is hetero or homosexual sex makes no difference, and all understanding about blessing of same sex partnerships and actively gay clergy must then flow from that study.

On other matters; I think General Synod is a little too self-important in tone and is probably not fully focussing on the massive financial and missionary challenges that I believe will affect the Church of England in the next ten years or so due to the age profile of many churches. Now is the time to face the serious challenges that lie ahead in the coming decade. I welcome Bishop Trevor's vision of having a third Archdeacon in this Diocese as it is sign of the clarity with which he, and now Diocesan Synod, see the gravity of the situation. I do not sense the same sense of focus in General Synod. We spend too much time poring over worthy reports and too little time reflecting on how to make Christ known to our nation and to keep our incarnational presence fully alive. In my view General Synod should use its talents far more to be the thinking brain that undergirds the work of the Archbishop's Council and the House of Bishops, especially in this field of mission. I will do whatever I can to continually help the Synod to keep its eyes focussed on mission during a time in the church's life which will test it like no other will. This is an urgent time calling for urgent focus.

I have enjoyed many of the debates at Synod. I welcome the new Clergy Terms of Service and, although those debates were often long and sometimes tedious, I believe Common Tenure is a great step forward. Like many other clergy I welcome the new marriage residency/non-residency rules which the last synod brought in. Bishop Mission Orders were also a really healthy development from the last synod, making church planting much easier than had previously been the case. So the synod does do things that are really of note, however long the debates may sometimes feel. Much of the synod's work is slow and laborious, but if you trust me and like what I say, I would be grateful for your vote. Thank you. It is not an easy calling, but I would be honoured if you entrusted me with it.

A little about myself. I am married to Cathy and have been ordained 16 years. I have a degree in BA Theology from Cambridge University, later translated to an MA, as well as a BA degree in English Literature from London University. I was ordained at the age of 26, having spent the previous three years at Ridley Hall. Before that I worked in inner city London for Simon Hughes MP. I have travelled widely throughout the world and came to faith when working in Jerusalem for six months in my Gap year. Since being ordained, I served two curacies, one in Paddock Wood in the Rochester Diocese and one in Ormskirk in the Liverpool Diocese, before becoming vicar of Aylesford, near Maidstone for seven years from 2000 to 2007. Then I felt called to Whitstable and to team ministry, which I believe in as the most servant-hearted model for mission in the Church of England. At All Saints I have helped set up a new congregation with a different style of worship to run alongside the weekly traditional Sung Eucharist, and the diversity of choice is working very well. Offering informal and formal styles of worship is key to mission in today's society I believe.

For details of my present responsibilities, to hear my sermons, and to get a flavour of my ministry, please visit www.allsaintswhitstable.com and www.stpeterswhitstable.com. I am a singer songwriter and also Spiritual Director of Canterbury Cursillo. My hobbies include hill-walking and tennis and squash. I gave up driving eighteen months ago for ecological and financial reasons and now cycle round my parish, which is a great improvement for mission. Do email me if you have any questions at tillotsons@googlemail.com I will do my best to faithfully serve the Canterbury Diocese whilst staying close to my keen convictions about respect and love for those I disagree with. Email me or write to me at The Vicarage, Church Street, Whitstable CT5 1PG . Your servant in Christ. Rev Simon Tillotson