

Mark Mawhinney

Proposed by Canon Michael Hampel (Durham Cathedral)

Seconded by the Reverend John Livesley
(Vicar of Bowburn and Tudhoe Grange)

We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses

I was elected to the General Synod back in 2021 at a time when we were still experiencing some of the restrictions which were required because of the Covid Pandemic. I am seeking election again to represent the Diocese of Durham at a national level. I currently serve as the Vicar of St Hilda's and St Michael's Churches in South Shields and as I leave home for Church each day, I am greeted with a beautiful view of the mouth of the Tyne, and with Tynemouth Priory just across the river to the north-east. I believe I am blessed in ministering in a region where the inspiration and influence of the Northern saints remains strong, and where we are surrounded by the heritage of Cuthbert, Aidan, Hilda, and Bede.

But as I look at the ruins of Tynemouth Abbey, I am reminded that religious foundations which were once strong and seemingly invincible can perish. The daily round of prayer – so much a part of the monastic houses of the north of England in previous centuries were brought to silence.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed

Do we live in such a time when the future of Christianity is at risk in our country, and is the Church of England in peril, as so many commentators believe it to be? While there is much to concern us, there is also much to celebrate. While for many in our region poverty, unemployment, and addiction is part of daily experience, this is countered in many places with a gritty resilience and determination, tempered with good humour and positivity.

Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into Christ

Looking back on the last Quinquennium of the General Synod, there were many areas where there was fractious debate, and where division and distrust played a large part in our deliberations. The noble aim to disagree well has often not been achieved. Some of these difficult debates and disagreements in the last Quinquennium will no doubt be carried forward into the new Synod. Among the many important issues which will arise, I would highlight:

- Safeguarding
- Trust
- Mission and Pastoral Measure
- Fair distribution of the Church's considerable financial resource

Jesus interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures

At the heart of our churches and chaplaincies there is a longing for engagement with each other, with those on the margins, and with God through Jesus Christ his Son, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Increasingly young people are exploring the Christian faith who come with no prior knowledge of the Church or of Scripture and tradition. Part of that attraction is the rich history of our inheritance of faith which it is our duty to proclaim afresh in each and every generation.

Some have entertained angels without knowing it

My experience of attending General Synod since 2021 is that there is often a marked disconnect between parish life and the proceedings of the Synod; and this can be reflected in other ways sometimes within our Diocese. Some of the Safeguarding failures with which we have grappled in recent years at a national level have reflected badly on the excellent work which goes on in our parishes and communities. Often those who work hard to keep the doors of our churches open and our buildings maintained to provide a warm welcome to all, feel that the central bureaucracy of the Church is hindering, rather than helping the mission on the ground.

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Long vacancies often take their toll on volunteers, and this burden of responsibility is sadly effective in reducing the numbers of those who are prepared to give freely of their time. The crisis which we see in the numbers of vocations must be urgently addressed, both in terms of nurturing new vocations and supporting those in leadership roles. Save the Parish has outlined a commitment in its manifesto for 'A Clergy Charter of Care' to protect frontline clergy from mental and physical exhaustion, and I am in support of this initiative to improve the ways in which we are equipped together to proclaim the Gospel in our land.

As workers together with him

I believe it is important that voices from our Diocese and region are heard more widely in the Church of England and that the experiences of our worshipping communities contribute to the direction in which the Church is moving. I would like to continue to play a role in the work of the General Synod in the next Quinquennium, and I put myself forward as a serving Parish Priest, but one who has also served this diocese in a lay capacity in both parishes and schools. Please do consider giving me your first-choice vote.

Mark Mawhinney Vicar: South Shields, St Hilda with St Thomas, and South Westoe 0191-454-8060 fathermarkmawhinney@gmail.com
