

Candidate for General Synod

Revd Dr Ian Paul

I would like to offer myself to serve the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham—and the wider Church—in standing for election to General Synod. I believe that, over the last 35 years, I have been fortunate enough to gain a wide range of experience in parochial ministry, theological education, and diocesan and national roles which could be of service to the Church. I understand how the church works, and I am not afraid to ask questions.

We are still in a very challenging moment as a Church. On the one hand, there are some real signs of growth, and God doing something new, on the ground, and we see that in our diocese and in other churches in the area. Yet, at a national level, we appear to be out of step with that, and are getting drawn into more needless controversy. As someone once said ‘The local church—when it stewards the message of Christ—is the hope for the world.’ This is what Synod needs to be focussing on, supporting and enabling—learning from what is fruitful rather than making controversial proclamations ‘from on high’.

I would be grateful for your support in the election—and if I am not your first choice candidate I would ask you to consider giving me your 2nd or 3rd vote.



Who Am I?

- Originally from London, I studied Maths at Oxford and Southampton and worked in business before training for ordination in Nottingham.
- I completed a PhD on metaphor in the Book of Revelation, and was then in church ministry for 10 years in Dorset before returning to Nottingham to teach at St John's theological college for nearly 10 years.
- Since 2013 I have worked as a freelance theologian and Managing Editor of Grove Books Ltd. I am Associate Minister at St Nic's, Nottingham, and engage in ministry, teaching and writing in a wide range of contexts, including supporting churches in vacancy.
- I am married to Maggie, a GP in Ilkeston, and we have three grown-up children and a dog called Barney. We share our house in Chilwell with Maggie's mum as well as offering hospitality to others.

What are the Issues facing Synod?

- **Clergy wellbeing** continues to be the most important challenge, and I have been frustrated that most in national leadership still don't make this a priority. On Archbishops' Council, I repeatedly challenged the decisions being made about stipends and pensions, and in the end decided the only way to change this was through a Private Members' Motion in Synod. This was unanimously supported, and has led to an **increase in the national stipend of 10% and a restoration of 40% of the value of clergy pensions**—which I hope you are aware of! But there is more to be done, and if re-elected I will be contributing to a fuller review of the pension package, as well as other issues connected with clergy wellbeing. We cannot be a healthy church without flourishing, confident and well-supported local clergy and congregations.
- **Church Growth** continues to generate controversy! Some question whether we should be thinking about this at all—but numbers are people, and surely we want to see more people encounter the love of God in Christ for themselves? I have some sympathy with the 'Save the Parish' concerns, and I am delighted that in this diocese we are committed to maintaining our stipendiary numbers. Much of the debate has taken the form of false dichotomies; whatever their form, churches are always 'local' in some sense, and parishes need to engage in new initiatives if they are to thrive, not just survive. We need a both/and approach: we need to treasure our inheritance; but we also need to listen carefully to the experiences of those, within the C of E and elsewhere, who are seeing healthy growth. Synod can encourage and give permission, though leadership most often needs to come from dioceses and parishes.

- **Theological Training** continues to be a vital but neglected issue in national debate. Another review is being undertaken; it needs to avoid the serious mistakes of past reviews, and ensure that depth theological training is available for all. In a culture and a church which has less and less grasp of Scripture and Christian theology, we need seriously to invest in training our future leaders.
- **Structural change** is still urgently needed. It makes no sense to be a church where congregations and clergy numbers have declined—but we still have the same number of senior leaders. And we are still in need of much greater transparency in senior leadership and the rebuilding of trust.
- **Safeguarding** now rightly has a high profile in all local churches. I am concerned that some practice has become overly bureaucratic and burdensome, and that historic failures push us into overcompensation. It is vital that clergy are protected from vexatious complaints which undermine genuine best practice in safeguarding.
- **Participation and responsibility.** The debate about race and ethnicity in the Church is vital—but it needs to be rooted in a theological vision of the multicultural people of God that we find in scripture. There are some great examples of multicultural church in this diocese which we could learn from—including at St Nics, where we use four languages in our services. I regret that this debate has somewhat eclipsed the concern for full participation of those with disabilities; I was delighted in my last meeting of AC to support a major initiative in this area. And the biggest group currently excluded from the C of E is the working class. Our approach to the environment also needs to be rooted in a proper theological understanding of creation before anything else.
- **Marriage and Sexuality.** The House of Bishops made clear that there is going to be no change in the doctrine of marriage ‘according to the teaching of our Lord’ as part of drawing line under the damaging and divisive LLF process. We now need to work within that as we continue to listen to each other. We need to ensure we are a church which is welcoming to all—and shares with all the good news of God’s design for human flourishing that we find in Scripture.

How could I help?

1. I have previous experience on Synod from 2000 to 2005 (with Salisbury Diocese) and from 2015 to 2026. As a member of the Archbishops’ Council and the Audit Committee for ten years I have been very active in engaging with and contributing to debates at every level. I have also sought to consult and communicate as widely as possible, in local churches, in deaneries and through my blog.

2. I bring significant experience of ministry. During my 10 years in Dorset, 8 were on the staff of St Mary’s, Longfleet, where we saw significant numerical growth. This doesn’t mean I have all the answers, but does mean I have learnt some important insights into mission and ministry in our current cultural context. I continued to be actively involved in local church ministry during my time in theological education, and as Associate Minister at St Nic’s I also support other churches, especially those in vacancy. I seek to serve the local church through my blog, including offering commentary on Sunday lectionary readings, and through the ministry of Grove Books.

3. I also bring significant experience of the ‘real world’ to ministry and Synod processes. I have been a Personnel Manager and worked in production planning and market forecasting, and have managed a small publishing company (Grove Books) for a number of years.

4. One of my central concerns is to engage issues of ministry with issues of theology. The temptation in our current situation is either to focus on the pragmatic or retreat into the academic. But renewal of the Church and mission must involve renewal both of our encounter with God—our spirituality—and our thinking about and understanding of God—our theology. Through my speaking, writing, and my blog www.psephizo.com my aim is to make use of the best of theology and scholarship to serve, equip and renew approaches to ministry.

Want to know more?

You can find out more about me at my blog <http://www.psephizo.com/about/> Please also feel free to be in touch by email if you have any further questions editor@grovebooks.co.uk