



A manifesto

The parish is at the heart of the Church of England. It informs every aspect of our mission and our vision of ourselves. It is prized well beyond those who attend church on a Sunday, and is spoken of passionately by bishops and archbishops. And yet, over many decades parishes have been starved of priests and money, their assets used to make good the mistakes of others. Matters are reaching a critical point and therefore we offer this manifesto from the grassroots. We are a collection of candidates, lay and clergy, drawn from across the country and the church's theological spectrum.

- 1) We welcome the commitments of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to the parish system. As Archbishop Cottrell said, “At the centre of this and as the means whereby we will serve and reach our nation is a parish system revitalised for mission.”

As candidates standing to Save the Parish, we offer to support the Archbishops in measures which will strengthen the parochial system, return money from the centre to the local, and re-resource parish, laity, and clergy across England in their mission to serve Christ in our communities.

- 2) We believe that the parish is the best means of Evangelism. The Church of England is local or it is nothing. While central and diocesan functions should be limited to those things which they can perform best and cut to reduce duplication and waste – minimising the parish share, leaving the parishes more time and money for lay ministry and church growth.
- 3) Frontline First.
 - a) The appropriation of parochial assets and endowments by Diocesan Funds and the Church Commissioners from 1976 has not been matched by wise stewardship nor have the commitments to fund stipends and pensions out of those assets been fulfilled. We will campaign for
 - The parishes to receive all the fees for occasional offices regardless of where those offices take place. That 100% of the fees for non-church cemetery and crematorium fees goes to the Diocesan is unjust and must be reversed.

- A prohibition on dioceses linking the payment of parish shares in individual benefices to the provision of clergy. The churches least likely to be able to afford their share are the poorest churches; they should not be the first target for diocesan rationalisation. Parish shares should be a free gift from one charity to another and should not be given under compulsion.
 - Dioceses to provide clear value to their parishes in exchange for their donations to Diocesan funds. Clear guidelines on how parish shares should be drawn up and transparency in diocesan spending would allow parishes to know what it is that they are funding and encourage each community to assess what they can give freely and fairly.
- b) There needs to be a reconsideration of the settlement which was reached in 1993 after the disastrous £800 million loss by the Church Commissioners in the 1980s, and for pensions after 1998, where parishes were asked to pay a 7% additional charge on their pension contributions to fill the Pensions Board black hole.
- When that black hole has been closed, the additional charge must end. This would free up considerable money for parishes.
 - Since 1993 the assets of the Commissioners have grown from £2.4 billion to £9.2 billion. Last year their assets grew by £500 million. The spending commitments and priorities of the Commission can be changed by legislation, towards a greater level of support for parochial ministry, and we hope that proposals to this effect will be brought forward during this Synod.
 - We will propose a repeal of s.14 of the Endowments and Glebe Measure 1976, which would allow parishes to build up endowments again. This is not to reclaim any of the endowments taken up to now, but to allow churches to build up assets again (for example in legacies).
- c) We would like to see proper integration of the Strategic Development Fund into the parochial system. SDF has to be
- Easily accessible
 - Fairly distributed across the church traditions
 - Only spent on projects which enhance parochial ministry (including, of course, the church revitalisation projects where church planting has been such a success)
 - Available to fund necessary ongoing support for frontline clergy to be freed from administration for mission in their parishes, especially for those parishes where no other support is available.
- d) Scrap the proposed revision to the Mission & Pastoral Measure 2011. If the Archbishops want to be taken seriously in their claims to love the parish, they must drop this enormous power grab, which would deny local churches and communities the power and right to contest plans to close their churches, make their priests redundant, or throw their priests out of their homes. Trust the local; decommission the revision.

- 4) A church-state commission should be established to look into how we can fund, in the long-term, the maintenance and repair of the architectural treasures of the nation entrusted to the church.
- 5) Good theological education is at the heart of the revitalisation of the church's mission and will support such measures as will protect and enhance the academic and theological rigour of the courses taken by ordinands.