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Living in Wiltshire, I am privileged to be able to attend the Edington Festival of music within the Liturgy. When the long procession of priests and choir enters the church for the Eucharist and the first hymn is sung by a church packed with believers, I don't know whether to rejoice in the inspiration of the worship, or to be saddened that this experience is so rare. Let's work to bring back inspirational worship to our churches.

I am a lay member of my congregation. As a member of the General Synod, I would represent the views of committed Anglican Christians from the grassroots who are increasingly worried and upset about the path the church has been taking and is intending to take in the future.

As a young mother I worshipped in a large parish in Cheshire, where I was on the PCC and helped with the Sunday school. I also taught full time in a comprehensive school in Warrington. Later in my career I taught English and worked as a house mistress in a girls' public school with a strong Christian ethos and tradition of daily worship. I was responsible as a house mistress for the pastoral care of forty-five 17 and 18 year olds. I now live in a rural parish where I have served on the PCC, I am a bell ringer and am involved with village organisations.

I became aware of 'Save the Parish' quite recently and was delighted to find an organisation which had at its heart the desire to strengthen the parish. As a result, I found myself called to do what I could to help, and so to stand for election to the General Synod. On the Synod I would stand up for whatever strengthens the parish and its ordained ministers. As an ex secondary school English teacher, I am confident that I can speak up for what I believe in without being intimidated, and I intend to do so.

My main concerns are as follows:

- 1) The growing size of Benefices
- 2) The shrinking numbers of ordained and trained priests in the parishes
- 3) Shrinking resources in the parishes – money much needed in the parish sucked from there to the central organisation
- 4) The danger of more and more parish churches being closed, ripping out the heart from their communities

As an example of my concerns, in my own country parish in Wiltshire we have, in the last few years, lost two members of our clergy team. There seems to be no prospect of replacing them, and as a result the number of services in the Benefice on a Sunday has shrunk.

The Benefice now has one full time Vicar, one semi-retired priest and one LLM. Our parish has one church warden, but no PCC secretary or treasurer, though our diocesan website lists 40 administrative posts. Consequently, the church plays little or no part in the village community and its low profile means that the congregation is gradually reducing and so are its finances.

Without more manpower the parish no longer offers any youth services or a Sunday school; though there are children in the village, the church offers nothing for them. With our congregation aging, we ask ourselves where the parishioners of the future are to come from. We need to bring the village into the church, for example by offering services like a computer club in the church building. Ideally, the Benefice should employ a youth worker to fill the gaps in youth provision.

We see little or no benefit from the large organisation of our Diocese. When our parish has seriously needed help recently, though we have asked for assistance little or nothing has been forthcoming. We are bleeding money to the centre, while receiving little practical help in return. We rarely receive visits from the Bishops or the Archdeacons, and they show little concern for what is going on in our parish.

How long before the Diocese decides our church is no longer viable and decides to close it?

Where is Christ in our Parish?

What should happen?

- 1) The parish should be central to the church organisation
- 2) The diocesan bureaucracy should be culled, and the numbers of Bishops and Archdeacons cut
- 3) The resulting freed resources should be returned to the parishes to allow the opportunity for mission, especially to children and young people
- 4) The parish share should be minimised
- 5) Theological education should be prioritised

There is a plethora of committees at Diocesan level taking up clergy time. The Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) is an example. Why is it necessary for there to be three clergy, some from parishes, on the Diocesan Advisory Committee in addition to the four area Archdeacons and usually the Chair? Sixteen specialist advisers from the professions and four or five senior clergy should be able to manage and the remaining clergy be directed back to the parishes. There is today a wealth of qualification and experience in the Laity quite equal to that of the clergy and greater in many professional areas. They should be preferred to clergy where possible.

I believe that our problems in rural Wiltshire are replicated across the country and need addressing urgently. As a member of the Synod, I would offer an understanding of a classic rural parish and its situation. I would bring a practical view of life at the grassroots both as an individual and as a member of a congregation. Communication, both orally and in writing, is my forte, and I would hope to offer whatever skills I have to the Synod. I am motivated by a strong wish to see the church rejuvenated.