

Questions for lay candidates

Answers from Andrew Farley

Are you optimistic about the future of the Church of England? Briefly state your three top reasons for your view

Good question! I am indeed optimistic about the CofE's future—but with some caveats. The three top reasons for my optimism are:

1. Christ's word can be relied on. He said "I will build my church" (Matt 16:18). So as long as the CofE remains faithful in proclaiming to the nation who Jesus is (as Peter did, prompting that statement from Jesus) we will remain part of the worldwide church He is building.
2. Our parish system. It emerged through the Middle Ages but, paradoxically, it seems tailor-made for the anxious times we currently live in. It provides (or should provide) a pathway for every person in the country, whatever their circumstances and concerns, into a place where they can find friendship, support and, above all, that *true peace that passes understanding* i.e a pathway into a local Christian community. See also my answer to the last question.
3. The faithful vicars we have. The negative press the CofE often gets can easily obscure the fact we have many excellent, faithful vicars who are giving their lives to serve Christ and draw people to Him. Being on General Synod these last 5 years has really brought this home to me.

What are your views on gender and human sexuality? Do you think that the Church of England should carry out same sex blessings? Do you think the church of England should change its teachings on marriage?

Sadly, this is such a divisive issue. Briefly:

- (i) The CofE's teachings are biblically-rooted. Male-female marriage and sexual immorality are central themes of the Scriptures and so, likewise, are they in BCP and the 39 Articles.
- (ii) Arguments for revision based on the church's revision to the ordination of women fall down. The two are not analogous.
- (iii) In our sex-preoccupied society it is assumed that only a person who has sex can be fulfilled. This is untrue, as a large number of single Christians can attest. It is in a relationship with Jesus and experiencing His love through life's ups and downs that true fulfilment is found.
- (iv) Some of the impetus for same-sex blessings may come from those who have not yet experienced real, deep Christian fellowship. The need for the Church to be family has probably never been greater.
- (v) To cast those who, like me, support the historic teachings of the church as "homophobic" or "bigoted" is unfair. One of my 4 sons recently entered a same-sex marriage. This causes me pain but I love him dearly, as he knows, and he respects me and my views. I know he would not describe me in those terms.

What are your views on the church's decision to spend £100 million on "reparations" for historical slavery when there are over 50 million people currently held in slavery (UN figures) who could be helped instead?

See my statement for my views on this. Project Spire (PS) is a tragedy. True racial "justice"—equality and harmony between all races—is a gospel imperative. The glorious biblical vision of people drawn from every tribe and tongue united before God is one that surely inspires us all to realise this "on earth as it is in heaven". But PS has set this back. Its flawed historical analysis of the profits supposedly made by Queen Anne's Bounty from the trans-Atlantic slave trade (incontrovertible evidence shows QAB did not even invest in it), with the bishops then closing ranks behind PS, has had the effect of making several disinclined to believe there are any racist attitudes in the CoE that need to be taken seriously, or that efforts in that direction are based on the gospel rather than politics. This is tragic.

True racial "justice" in the CoE mainly depends on each of us, in all our dealings with those of another race, to take every opportunity to display empathy, grace, generosity of spirit—and humour! For our leaders to make grand, expensive gestures to get headlines does not help. The words of Jesus in Matt 6:1 come to mind.

Many of the debates in Synod have good arguments on both sides. How would you decide which way to vote?

I find this a difficult question to answer since it is expressed in general terms without reference to any specific issue, so I feel I can make only the following general comments by way of reply:

1. Scripture, the word of God, would be my primary guide. Of course with some issues of a purely practical nature Scripture will be silent on the matter.
2. I would use my experience as a lawyer which equipped me to weigh contrary arguments carefully and objectively.
3. I would seek the Lord's guidance through prayer, trusting in Jesus' promise in John 10:4b and in Romans 12:2

Although the question is general I have to say I would view favourably any motion which promoted any of the 5 changes listed against the bullet-points in my election statement, or which simplified the immensely complex structures of the central CoE with its seven National Church Institutions (not just the Church Commissioners and Archbishop's Council) and innumerable committees. The National Church Governance Measure addresses much of this but it has been temporarily blocked by Parliament and so, if elected, I would look forward to the Measure returning to Synod for further debate.

Do you see the current climate crisis as a key priority for the Church of England and why? How do you demonstrate your concern to care for God's creation in your own church life?

God entrusted us with the care of our planet with the command to "work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). It is therefore clearly a priority.

The Eco-Committee of my own church is very active. It is arranging to show the People's Emergency Briefing (following the National Emergency Briefing last November). It is also finalising an environmental policy to shape our teaching ministry and to encourage us in

practical ways to reduce our adverse impact on the environment eg in what we buy and sell, how to avoid single use plastic packaging, and the use of low energy lighting.

I am slightly cautious about the implementation of the motion passed by General Synod in 2020 calling on churches to reach net carbon emissions by 2030. I like the boldness of the ambition but I wonder whether Synod thought through the implications for local churches, particularly those with historic buildings. An analysis in 2022 of a series of church court rulings and comments made by ecclesiastical judges showed that green heating systems, such as electric boilers, under-pew heaters, heat pumps, are often too expensive for parish churches under financial pressure, or they cannot be fitted into their historic buildings.

What is your perspective on “Save the Parish”? Is it a viable manifesto when so many rural parishes have dwindling congregations?

I support STP's manifesto. We can however be stuck with the image that the local “church” = vicar + building, whereas in the New Testament the “church” (*ecclesia*) did not mean either of these things. Nor did it mean an institution such as CoE. It meant the local community of Christians. So for STP's manifesto to be truly viable for the revitalisation of the parish “church” a greater emphasis has to be placed on the laity's role, not just as volunteers to do the unpaid social work the manifesto refers to, essential though that is, but as “the church's missionary disciples” (as one report described us) to tell our friends and neighbours the good news of Jesus. And we laity need encouragement and equipping by the clergy for that! I certainly do. But that is essential if those we live amongst are to come to know Jesus for themselves as their personal Saviour and Lord and enter into the new life He offers all. For it is usually us, not the clergy, who they know and talk to day to day. But we need encouragement! I referred to this more in my postcard which I hope you have received.