

OLIVER ILIFFE



The next five years will be a critical period for the Church of England. The trends are bad. More parish clergy resigned last year than retired. The pay, conditions and mental health of clergy bring shame on all of us. **The Church Commissioners, having once spent its entire distributable income exclusively on stipends, accommodation and pensions for parish clergy now spends virtually nothing on those objects.** Even LInC funding, introduced in 2017 to support poorer parishes, is at a record low in real terms and is spent at the discretion of the dioceses rather than being restricted to meeting stipends. If only half the £500 million total return from 2025 was spent on parish clergy it would pay for over 3,000 extra stipendiary posts (at £80,000 each).

Instead, the Church Commissioners is distributing hundreds of millions **from its £11.6 billion endowment** towards time-limited grants – funding an army of staff at diocesan level to implement ideologically-driven policies on net zero and racial justice – as well as more staff to help complete more grant applications. The Diocese of Carlisle, for instance, now has more staff (82) than stipendiary clergy (77). Sheffield, Manchester and Chelmsford are going the same way. Project Spire, the plan to endow a new charity with £100 million of Church money as “slavery reparations” epitomises this futile thinking.

The good news is that there is still time to rescue the situation, but it will require determination – and your votes. The centuries-old model of ministry, the cure of souls in parishes, is being quietly but steadily dismantled. This is now accelerating and your parish could be next. In our diocese, benefices are routinely left vacant so that parsonages can be rented out, while PCCs continue to pay Parish Share. While I managed to persuade our diocese to withdraw a policy of making the filling of parish vacancies conditional on paying Parish Share, other dioceses are pushing similar initiatives. **The plan is to make parish churches pay for themselves while spending central Church money on pet projects.**

I want to challenge this plan and build a campaign of “double honour” for parish clergy (based on 1 Timothy 5:17). We need policies and legislation which prioritise the nation-wide deployment of well-trained, well-resourced parish clergy, promote their well-being and honour their life-long commitment to serve God and their parishioners (in particular, the policies outlined in the Save the Parish manifesto).

As for my credentials, I am a farmer in Ogbourne St George and a non-practising solicitor (having previously practised law at a City firm). I can bring a critical and constructive, legal and business mind to General Synod. I was baptised in the parish where I now live and confirmed at Milton Abbey, having turned to Jesus Christ on a Christian summer camp as a teenager. I serve as a PCC secretary, a diocesan synod member and a foundation governor at our local CofE primary school, where I am also rostered to lead collective worship.



Email: oliver@poolefarming.co.uk Mobile: 07971 530505