

The Revd Dr Patrick Gilday

Rector of Benson with Ewelme

Proposed by the Revd Dr Michael Lakey, Vicar of Chalgrove & Berrick Salome

Seconded by the Revd Skye Denno, Vicar of Marston & Elsfield



Background

I've lived most of my adult life in the Oxford Diocese. I'm a musicologist by training, having served as organist in an urban Oxford parish before becoming an Oxford ordinand. I served my title in Berkshire and have been incumbent of five mostly rural churches in South Oxfordshire for almost seven years now. Alongside that, I serve as Co-Chair of Governors at a local church school, as a trustee of a large almshouse charity, and as an IME2 Assessor for the Diocese.

Theologically I don't really belong to any tribe or party. I was brought up in rural Hampshire, where one of the first women to be ordained priest came to be vicar when I was ten years old. As an adult, my heart's instincts have led me to a modern catholic expression of faith; but I was trained among conservative evangelicals, and I now minister among parishioners who span the full breadth of the CofE's churchmanship and opinion. As such, I am sensitive to the ways in which God has chosen to weave us together as Christians in the Church of England; with good friends in every "camp", I believe I'm well attuned to the ways in which synodical decisions (and their tone) can play out in people's and churches' lives.

Priorities for synod

I'm also (relatively) young – at least, young for a CofE incumbent, being still under 40. That, together with the fact that I'm dad to two primary-age children, gives me a particular set of concerns for synod.

First, for clergy of my generation, evangelism and teaching the faith are going to constitute the main thrust of our ministry. The days of cultural Christianity are gone now, even in villages like mine. The principal work of the Church in our day has to return overwhelmingly to proclaiming and teaching the faith. **I will support decisions that enable the Church to better proclaim the faith to those who do not yet know Christ**, as well as making existing evangelism and outreach more robust and distinctively Christian.

Second, the shape of ordained ministry is changing on account of the realities faced by working families today, but policies and national ministerial expectations are yet to catch up. **I will strongly support efforts to improve the financial security of those clergy families (serving and retired) on the lowest incomes, to codify support for clergy who have additional responsibilities as parents or carers, to make disciplinary processes fairer and less hostile, and to clarify parochial expectations about clergy work/life balance.**

Third, I am a strong believer in our church schools' ministry. As Co-Chair of Governors at a church school attended by my children, **I am committed to strengthening the Christian witness in schools** in ways that do not just promote excellent education, but also clearly promote the Christian worldview as the best framework in which the world around us can be understood.

Parishes first

My own experience is that those three priorities – proclaiming the faith afresh, making ordained ministry sustainable, and promoting a Christian vision for schools – are most achievable when clergy are deeply rooted and connected within their communities. Whilst I acknowledge that this is not universally true, in the vast majority of cases I believe that the parish and the parish church constitute the best engine-rooms for ministry, not to mention the best context in which the mutual submission between believers who make up the Body of Christ can be revealed. For that reason, **I will be sceptical of all moves to diminish the parish as the basic unit of the Church's life**, and supportive of moves to further promote parishes' autonomy and capacities to respond to local needs.

LLF

I myself am committed to the traditional teaching on marriage, and do not think the Church's teaching on marriage should change. At the same time, I've spent many years ministering to and among LGBT Christians – both those who agree with me on the Church's teaching and those who do not – and hence have some understanding of how vulnerable many people are feeling as a result of the way in which the LLF process has played out nationally and in our diocese.

Finding a way forward that does the least harm possible to the Body of Christ will require great prayer, and I commit myself to that; it will also require realism, honesty, and the pursuit not of agreement but of consensus. We need to find a way to wish one another well in our different understandings, but also to be clear about our own integrity. I think we need to pray for nothing short of a miracle from God, but to take seriously the possibility mentioned in recent LLF communications, that, for everybody's sake and for the gospel's, we are probably going to need to reach some kind of settlement in the longer term.

Making sustainability sustainable

As a rural rector, I see the effects of climate change starting to bite here in England: it's several years in a row now that my farmers have described the weather as "unusual" or "troubling", and we all know things are likely to get harder, not easier.

I believe deeply that stewarding God's creation is a primary responsibility given to us by God in the Garden of Eden. My curacy parish started the divestment movement eventually agreed by Synod in 2015 and again in 2020. Since then, Synod has promoted a very ambitious agenda for reducing the Church's overall carbon footprint; but as a practicalities-minded priest I'm interested in working out how it can actually be done in parishes where money is short and people resource is slim. I wonder whether we are failing to identify our principal spiritual duty in relation to the climate crisis – coming to God in repentance, and learning to lean on his grace for forgiveness and reformation – in favour of proposing the kind of bold action we are not likely to achieve under our own steam. I would strongly support the development of prayer resources for contemplation and repentance which help Christians to bring the whole crisis, and our place within it, before God in contemplative prayer.

I would be grateful for your first or high vote. If you wish to ask me any questions, please do get in touch via rector@sthelensbenson.org.uk, or on (01491) 838535.