

Ven. Simon Heathfield



One of my core convictions is that we do not own the church, and thankfully neither does General Synod! It's God's church. So I don't offer easy answers or narrow slogans for our complex challenges. For me theology and discipleship must have Jesus Christ as the centre of thought and prayer, mission and ministry. In my personal formation scripture is at the heart. So alongside Jesus' proclamation that *he* will 'build' the church, Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonians gives me hope for the kingdom both within and beyond the CofE because, *'the one who called you is faithful, and he will do it.'*

Over the next few years we will need to focus on the faithful grace and generosity of God like never before. Amidst difficult issues we must keep the central focus on our core calling to respond to God's faithfulness through authentic worship and compelling witness for the common good. In our complex society straddling the end of Christendom I don't want to settle for managed decline. I believe our core task must remain the re-evangelisation and blessing of communities and networks across the UK, whatever our tradition or style.

My energy, if elected, would focus on:

Courageous Vision: 'Business as usual' cannot continue: we change or die. I am encouraged by ++Justin's three priorities and some of the Reform and Renewal (R&R) agenda. But R&R needs more focus not just in senior leadership, but serious resources directed to supporting and shaping local leadership. Lay and ordained roles 'at the coal face' are increasingly complex and ministerial formation and training resources must better reflect that. Simplification needs to be faster and further, especially around BMOs and Church Planting. The Church Commissioners' new focus in resourcing criteria around poverty and mission need encouragement and delivery. In all this our vision must be more than management or systems, but rooted in a prayerful, people focused church. Where we have made courageous decisions, we must ensure any arrangements seeking unity, such as the Five Principles, continue to be inclusive, realistic and workable (to me as yet unclear).

Deep Listening: it has been a privilege to be part of the West Midlands Shared Conversations. The moving, difficult and necessary pain of that listening is needed throughout the church. Prioritising such processes challenge our often shrill debates and wounding encounters, on sexuality and other issues. Personally I am not yet persuaded about suggested changes to marriage. However I am even more persuaded that we must practice and experience much deeper listening and compassion to voices from all perspectives, in and beyond the church and global as well as local. Without that our discernments will always be partial and inadequate. 'Good disagreement' is not, for me, a sufficient end point but a necessary process towards the future.

Transformative Partnerships: In our distinctive mission I believe healthy churches are ever more 'blended' into communities through partnerships engaged well beyond our walls and beliefs. Across CofE Birmingham we have good experience of this, but we need more. Our mission is prophetic good news when we are engaged: refugees, personal debt, education, social justice, community cohesion, the housing crisis, super-diversity and more need Synod to enable an informed voice, with clear agenda and resources. It would be a disaster for church and society if the next Synod was wholly consumed by internal issues and I would want to advocate for a wider focus in the service of God's mission.

Inspiring Living: perhaps most importantly, we must enable the vocations of all people, not just for ordination or church activity, but at home, work and across our communities. I continue to remain deeply concerned about the dearth of BME leadership, lay and ordained, across the church. Most recently a priest of a church with 27 nationalities, Area Dean and now Archdeacon I have sought to address this with some success. But we need national action to intensify *Turning up the Volume* and spread and implement more of the excellent BME vocations work here in Birmingham. 'Developing Discipleship' and lay leadership is at the heart of R&R, this is our biggest challenge but as yet has fewest resources or clarity. The complex answers will involve formation, training, deployment and time for people of all ages and stages, but it must be prioritised. My long experience in vocation and ministry formation, for lay and ordained, will help me contribute to these issues. Ultimately, we need to recover proper confidence in the story of Jesus, living discipleship joyfully for God's world.

My role as Archdeacon gives me a uniquely broad perspective serving across the whole church. Committed to the kingdom growth of our whole diocese across Birmingham I remain passionate about supporting communities facing deprivation, wanting the national to serve the local, and that vision, listening, partnerships and living will be a path of faithful, gospel, flourishing. I hope my comments and experience might find your support, confidence and prayers. Thank You.

Before ordination I studied Music in Birmingham, working as an RAF Pilot, Auxiliary Nurse, Insurance Manager, and Youth Worker in 2 different parishes. My curacy was on the Wirral, before leading CPAS national vocations ministry, co-writing 'Growing Leaders' and other resources. For the last 10 years I have been Team Rector of Walthamstow, a complex parish in urban East London and Area Dean of Waltham Forest. I have been Archdeacon of Aston since Nov 2014. Along the way I have been a Governor in a range of schools, serving on community partnerships, including the Olympic Park, helping Citizens UK on several campaigns in community power and organising, Min Div Advisory Board, worked with theological education and youth ministry and a director of Grove Books and various Community and Christian charities and missions.

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