



Rev. Mike Smith – Candidate for General Synod

These are trying times for the Church of England we love, and I'd be grateful if you would consider putting me first on the ballot to represent you on General Synod.



I am standing on behalf of the ad-hoc steering group of the Chester Diocesan Evangelical Fellowship. One of the real joys of the last year or so has been the rekindling of friendships and mutual respect in the wider evangelical family in the diocese – charismatic and conservative, complementarian and egalitarian. I am delighted to be proposed by

Hennie Johnston, Vicar of St Mark's Saltney, who is a fellow member of the steering group.

Who am I?

I'm a child of God by faith in Jesus, the husband of Sarah, father of four teenagers and I've been Vicar of Hartford for 20 years this April. And I'm Australian! But who am I theologically? An evangelical, obviously. None of us like labels, so instead let me tell you about four of my heroes that I've had the privilege of naming rooms after in our Church Centre in Hartford, and why they inspire me.

Thomas Cranmer is top of the list: flawed, yet faithful – and ultimately willing to be martyred rather than to deny the biblical gospel and the particular entailments of it that were fought over in his day. I wholeheartedly believe the biblical doctrine he and the other reformers enshrined in the Prayer Book and 39 Articles. *Cranmer reminds me that we are only truly faithful to Scripture if we hold to the word of God at precisely those points where it is most costly to do so.*

George Whitefield is one of the greatest evangelists in history, with a deep love for the Lord and his word combined with lifelong passion to reach all kinds of people with the gospel. He was a loyal and principled Anglican who pursued peace and gospel collaboration across the divides of his own day, both inside and outside the Church of England. *If I could have a fraction of Whitefield's evangelistic zeal and just a glimmer of his humble and irenic heart, that would be enough.*



You probably won't know the other two. **Jack Wardle** was the first evangelical Incumbent of Hartford in 1969, and was faithful under great opposition, much of it from friendly fire. Authentic, Jesus-focussed parish ministry is often unobserved, sometimes unappreciated, usually costly – and there is no more joyful calling! *The parish is the true centre of the Church of England: synods, hierarchs and dioceses primarily exist to enable the flourishing of local ministry.*

Lee Appleby was a fellow Australian and 40-year missionary to Butere in SW Kenya in the mid 20th century (and the first female deacon of the Church of Kenya, irregularly ordained in 1963). She went blind out of love for the Luhya people and the Scriptures, working night after night by hurricane lamp to translate the Bible. Her legacy meant that a generation later, I could travel to Butere regularly for some years to train gospel preachers.

That, our current mission links in Uganda and attending three of the four GAFCONs have given me a deep sense of our belonging to a worldwide Christian family. *The Anglican Communion, not just the Church of England, is a true foretaste of the "great multitude" of Revelation 7.9: it is in this wider communion that we must locate our true gospel unity.*

I am not in the same league as any of these, but I aspire to their tenacious biblical faithfulness, deep evangelistic passion, profound and practical love for people and unwavering Anglican loyalty.



With Dan Zoreka, Bishop of Kinkiizi (Uganda) at Gafcon in Kigali, April 2023

What are my passions?

Let me give you just two by way of example. First: **ministry to younger generations**. I grew up in an atheist home and first heard the gospel as a completely unchurched teenager in my Sydney comprehensive school. I doubt that those who shared Christ with me thought it made much difference – and I'm looking forward to meeting them in heaven! In Hartford, we have as many students in our 10 schools as we do residents, and serving, reaching and keeping young people for Jesus in both church-based children's and youth work and school outreach is an enduring, central mission priority. It was a joy to start a Church of England high school in the parish, but a greater one seeing young people coming to faith through the work of the chaplain.



It's not just about evangelism: I have worked with the author of the national *No Outsiders* programme to help shape the material used in hundreds of primary schools (including across Cheshire) to ensure that inclusion in schools really means that – and doesn't marginalise Christians or others with traditional views on marriage and family life.

In the 20 years I've been in Hartford, our diocese has lost 2/3rds of its young people. I hope that grieves you and leads you to cry out to the Lord. Most people become Christians in the earlier part of their lives. Unless we radically prioritise the engagement of young people with the full biblical gospel which alone can change lives, the Church of England will cease to exist in the next few decades.

Second: **marriage**. Apparently we haven't changed the church's doctrine of marriage as the union of one man and one woman for life. So now we need to preach it, celebrate it and make it as accessible to as many as possible. If marriage is indeed "a gift of God in creation ... signifying ... the mystical union ... betwixt Christ and his Church", then it is outrageous that the wealthy are four times more likely to marry than the poorest in our nation. When even the secular Marriage Foundation can say that the Church of England has "surrendered on marriage" (in the light of the awful 2023 *Love Matters* report), we have work to do!

'Grand' wedding deal offered



We must promote, defend and sustain God's design for marriage: it is a biblical, evangelistic and social justice imperative. One couple's story shows the difference a local church can make – our then curate was briefly famous on the One Show through our Grand Wedding initiative: <https://youtu.be/y3ffqtMtRaU!>

Why should you vote for me?

I have been in full time parish ministry for 30 years and involved in the wider life of the Church of England throughout that time. I've lost count of how many years I have served on Diocesan Synod and Bishops' Council! I have been on the diocesan Central Services Committee for 10 years, and was on the Committee for Ministry before that. Although we have been in Hartford for a long time, we came here from an estate parish in Hastings to plant what is now Christ Church Greenbank – a thriving young church that has grown from a team of 17 to a weekly congregation of 120-150, and I have been involved in establishing two other church plants more recently.

In the last few years, our church has become significantly multi-cultural with the arrival of many from Hong Kong. It's been our privilege to serve them as the informal receiving centre for our town, and to witness to them. A number have become believers and been baptised. We have taken on a lay minister for Cantonese speakers, and accidentally planted a Chinese church in Crewe which enjoys the hospitality of Fr Ralph Powell at St Barnabas' Crewe who I'm thankful has seconded my nomination.

In short, if you want someone who is experienced in both parish and wider contexts, passionate to make disciples from all nations and ages, longs to plant churches everywhere, sees the parish as the centre of the Church of England and who loves her reformed, biblical doctrine, vote for me!