



COMMENT

Church parishes are on the verge of being lost for good

Anyone who loves parish churches needs to stand up and be counted now. Write to your MP and stand for General Synod on the elections

EMMA THOMPSON

20 July 2023 • 2:03pm



The Church of England's General Synod meeting finished last week. Synod is the body which governs Church legislation and approves the budget – in theory. In practice, it is choreographed by a ruling group on the Archbishops' Council.

The day before Synod, the "Save The Parish" (STP) movement held a conference reasserting the value of parish churches "in action" in local communities. Senior Church representatives joined over 100 STP supporters from around England to hear compelling speakers. Church leaders are moving from chucking brickbats at STP to dialogue and describing it as a force for good, appreciating its committed voluntary effort to analyse the CofE's actions.

Parish churches provide spiritual and pastoral care with huge social and financial value. So why continue to pour central funding into alternative projects with dismal outcomes? STP founder Revd Marcus Walker notes Einstein's definition of insanity: "doing the same thing over and over expecting different results".

STP, less than two years old, unites supporters from varying traditions, ages, backgrounds and political standpoints. It has brought the future of the parish onto a Synod agenda from which its absence was conspicuous. This Synod included a debate on “revitalising the parish” and discussed the parish under several agenda items. Still, this also showcased the tokenness of support for the parish. In Monday’s revitalising parishes debate, an amendment proposed by Marcus Walker to reroute central funding from projects to poorer parishes lost.

In 2021 there were many objections to an infamous paper numbered GS2222, dubbed the “Church Closers’ Charter”. Some feared that it would fast-track the process of parish closures. Following the outcry, the CofE declared that it had listened. It asked STP for trust and help to improve this legislation anyway – and it seemed churlish to refuse. Forming a review panel provided an opportunity to rebalance the process to benefit parishes. They could have been offered advice, mediation, even travel expenses to hearings on their Church’s future. But no. Shortly before Synod, a new paper GS2315 emerged.

GS2315 sounds worse than the hated GS2222; but, sadly, it has not been stopped. If converted into legislation, it destines the CofE to the sad results of delocalisation, which it could have learned from in the Church of Scotland and the Church in Wales.

This Synod showed the Church’s hand. Protestations of love for the parishes ring hollow. Central funds are channelled to perpetuate bloated bureaucracy. Bureaucrats produce unAnglican, upside-down schemes to reduce rooted local parish clergy. The risk is that clergy become manager-supervisors, while lay people take services: a potential safeguarding nightmare. This Dunkirk style flight is not necessary; there is the money and resources to rebuild the Church in the parishes’ purpose-built buildings.

Is the CofE listening? Sadly not. Ordination applications are bound to fall rapidly, with few feeling called to become itinerant managers. Vicars are increasingly brave about supporting STP publicly. Anyone who loves parish churches needs to stand up and be counted now. Support movements dedicated to saving the parish. Write to your MP. Stand for General Synod in the next elections. Help to determine whether the Church Commissioners can properly spend funds on schemes which now undermine parish ministry.

Related Topics

Church of England, Justin Welby



The Telegraph values your comments but kindly requests all posts are on topic, constructive and respectful. Please review our [commenting policy](#).

Show comments ▼

More stories



Britons bin their copies of Prince Harry’s memoir on holiday



The sleepy Berkshire village that’s overrun with A-listers



Nigel Farage latest news: Jon Sopel apologises for 'getting it wrong' over Coutts account closure



Argentina claims diplomatic ‘triumph’ over the Falklands



Coutts boss who handled Nigel Farage’s bank account is a staunch Remainer



Head of NatWest embroiled in Nigel Farage bank scandal

More from News



Ukraine-Russia war: Ukraine launches first cluster bomb attack on Russian troops

By Maighna Nanu
20 Jul 2023, 3:09pm



♦ Live | Nigel Farage latest news: Jon Soper apologises for 'getting it wrong' over Coutts account closure

By Dominic Penna
20 Jul 2023, 3:06pm



Joe Manchin and No Labels are a looming disaster for Biden and the Democrats

CHRISTOPHER BEDFORD
“ 20 Jul 2023, 2:52pm



The US Navy is preparing for war in the Persian Gulf. The Iranians just never learn

DAVID AXE
“ 20 Jul 2023, 2:35pm



Female IT boss sues for sex discrimination after male colleagues had Nerf gun wars in office

By Telegraph Reporters
20 Jul 2023, 2:33pm



Town left with 'crazy paving' after workmen replace stones with tarmac



By Telegraph Reporters
20 Jul 2023, 2:23pm

Sponsored



Explore the wilderness of America's national parks



This seaside city is waiting to be discovered by the UK



Joie de vivre in Louisiana's cultural attractions



Houghton Hall: one of Britain's finest examples of Palladian architecture

More from The Telegraph



Self-righteous Coutts has created a PR nightmare over Farage



Dogs bred for fighting are causing carnage on Britain's streets



Find out what your bank thinks about you



Nigel Farage is the latest victim of Britain's chilling new state ideology



Just Stop Oil meet their match in Just Stop P---ing Everyone Off counter-protesters



Ashes live: Zak Crawley scores swashbuckling century for England against Australia



[Tax Strategy](#)

[Broadband and Mobile Deals](#)

[Wine Cellar](#)

[The Chelsea Magazine Company](#)

[Manage Cookies](#)

© Telegraph Media Group Limited 2023