



Save The Parish

savetheparish.com

The parish is at the heart of the Church of England. Your deanery synod is a collection of your beloved, individual local parishes. The idea of the parish informs every aspect of our mission and our vision of ourselves as a church. It is prized well beyond those who attend church on a Sunday, and is spoken of passionately by both bishops and archbishops.

And yet, over many decades our parishes have increasingly been starved of priests and money, their assets used to make good the mistakes of others...

“The C of E is ignoring the evidence (including its own official growth policy, ‘From Anecdote to Evidence’, which makes it clear that amalgamating parishes drives decline) that growth comes from paying parish priests to serve real people in real places. Instead, it is trying to impose a top-heavy bureaucratic structure that saps talent and money away from the local to the centre. This must be resisted before it is too late.” (Angela Tilby, Canon Emeritus Christ Church Oxford, Canon of Honour Portsmouth Cathedral, Church Times columnist)

“There can be no excuse for the increase in bishops from 26 to 112 over the last 200 years, while the number of parish priests has been falling from 25,000 to fewer than 7,000.” (Donald Clarke, retired Finance Director of 3i and Kent parish treasurer)

“The 42 dioceses employ over 3,000 people in their head offices. Many are paid more (some much more) than clergy in the front line. Several dioceses actually employ MORE people in their head office than there are stipendiary priests in their parishes (which they claim to oversee; in reality, they interfere, with endless paperwork, and, year on year, they gradually plunder parish assets to fund the bloated diocese). This has to stop. A major rebalancing is needed between the beleaguered parishes and the dioceses which are sucking the life out of them.”

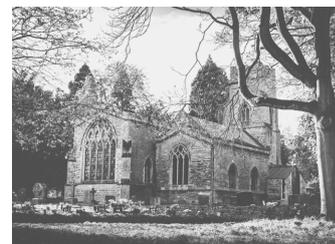
(Admiral Sir James Burnell-Nugent KCB CBE, former Second Sea Lord and Commander of the Fleet, Devon churchwarden, STP Steering Committee member)

What is Save The Parish (STP)?

“STP’s task is to liberate the Parish clergy from the shackles of bureaucracy and bad governance, to enable them to carry out their pastoral and missional work (not to give them advice on how to do it). We are not tied to a particular theological outlook.

Our most urgent task is to try to slow down the currently accelerating process of church closures, parish amalgamations, clergy reductions, increasing parish shares, expanding bureaucracy, mindless central initiatives and general bad governance that are strangling mission at the grassroots level. We want Parishes to be allowed to get on with their job. The hierarchy of the CofE has been messing up for 40+ years, and we – at last – are holding them to account.

In terms of a more positive message, we are working on a proposal for how the CofE could and should be deploying its resources better and investing in clergy (while still making the sums add up). We are researching the policies of the few dioceses which are sensibly adopting the positive approach of investing in clergy in Parishes, in order to promote increased giving and growth.” (Prudence Dailey, former chair of the Prayer Book Society and STP Steering Committee member)



“This is your church.

This is not the Archbishop of Canterbury’s, nor the House of Bishops’s, not even the General Synod’s.

It belongs, in a broad sense, to the people of England and very specifically to the whole of the Church of England. You have a say.

Join us if you want to Save The Parish, because these are your parishes and this is the only important question for the next few years.

Over the last 40+ years, money and authority have ebbed away from our parishes and coagulated in centralised pots. This started in 1976, when the parishes’ glebe land and endowments were transferred to the dioceses, in return for the promise to use the income always to provide a priest in each parish. It continues today.

Join Save The Parish because this might really be the last chance to save the church we love.”

Revd Marcus Walker, Rector of St Bartholomew the Great

STP Manifesto



1 We welcome the commitments of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to the parish system

We offer to support the Archbishops in measures which will strengthen the parochial system, return money from the centre to the local, and re-resource parish, laity, and clergy across England in their mission to serve Christ in our communities.

We believe that the parish is the best means of Evangelism

The Church of England is local or it is nothing. While central and diocesan functions should be limited to those things which they can perform best and cut to reduce duplication and waste – minimising the parish share, leaving the parishes more time and money for lay ministry and church growth.



3 Front-line First

We need a reconsideration of the settlement reached in 1993 after the disastrous £800 million loss by the Church Commissioners in the 1980s, and for pensions after 1998, where parishes were asked to pay a 7% additional charge on their pension contributions to fill the Pensions Board black hole.

Scrap the proposed revision to the Mission & Pastoral Measure 2011



If the Archbishops want to be taken seriously in their claims to love the parish, they must drop this enormous power grab, which would deny local churches and communities the power and right to contest plans to close their churches, make their priests redundant, or throw their priests out of their homes. Trust the local; decommission the revision.

4 A church-state commission should be established

to look into how we can fund, in the long-term, the maintenance and repair of the architectural treasures of the nation entrusted to the church



5 Good theological education is at the heart of the revitalisation of the church's mission

and will support such measures as will protect and enhance the academic and theological rigour of the courses taken by ordinands



“It puzzles me that the Archbishops and some of the Bishops are so defensive. The Church’s problems started long ago and no one is blaming them for what happened in 1976. Yet they personally attack those who criticise their policy, although these are people who love the Church and want it to endure. When I wrote a Spectator article, the Archbishops called me ‘a rascally voice seeking to destroy the Church’; my children found this hilarious, knowing how hard I have worked for our village church over 26 years. CofE volunteers are an amazing, free resource, and are the donors in a privately-funded charity. Yet there seems such determined deafness to the views of volunteers and donors that people are voting with their feet and their wallets.

I want this to stop. I love the CofE; or rather I love my local church and don’t want it to close.” (Emma Thompson, rural parish volunteer and journalist)

“Our parishes are slowly suffocating under increasing managerial feudalism. For example, millions in new funding so that Dioceses can create Racial Justice Officers is merely emblematic of good intentions that do not result in effective solutions. Meanwhile, it calls into question the priorities of our leaders; where are the millions in funding to train and deploy new clergy - clergy who could be racial justice champions - in our struggling parishes?” (Robert Zampetti, Associate Partner, Ernst & Young LLP, General Synod representative for London Diocese)

“Dioceses are taking more and more money from parishes and their generous donors to fund their ever-growing bureaucracies. Some are even raiding the Diocesan Stipends Fund to pay for initiatives of dubious value; these are funds that legally can only be used to pay clergy stipends. This malfeasance has to be stopped.” (Stephen Billyeald, former Managing Director of Ryman)

The Vital Work of Our Parishes

“The parish and its priest speak powerfully of a God who is stable, trustworthy and dwells among us. In all the crises that now face us as a nation, local parishes are key assets, but I fear we will wake up to their value too late.” (The Rev’d Canon Professor Alison Grant Milbank, Professor of Theology and Literature, University of Nottingham)

“The Church’s surveys all show the same results – spread vicars over too many parishes and the congregations decline, as they do with long interregnum, team ministry, ‘super parishes’ and, I might add, duff priests. So what is the answer? Stop hurling cash at Transformation churches and instead fund parishes in each diocese. Give them the cash to support a top-notch priest living in the community with no more than two parishes to cover. Sit back and watch the results for maybe three years. Frankly, dammit, this would work. And, at the same time, get rid of the ‘70s style management-speak of the bishops and replace them with humble, holy, pastoral priests. St. Francis would do nicely.” (Churchwarden, Cornwall)

Are you...

Struggling to pay your Parish Share?

Weighed down by central initiatives & Diocesan requirements?

Worried about the future of your Parish Church?

Do you believe that Parish Churches are the fundamental unit of mission, and should just be allowed to get on with the job?