

Having spent 30 years serving on PCCs, from inner city to rural, often as Treasurer, I have a passion to help grow our churches and congregations.

As a youth leader for many years and having hosted Sunday school for 10 years I understand the need for and passion of our young. I take a weekly informal service at St Stephen's, Baughurst, Nr Basingstoke, where I worship.

I have volunteered with and served on the boards of several charities, including Home-Start, Mencap, The Vavengers (to end FGM), Cure UK International (faith-based hospitals in Africa) and Burma Churches Trust.

I worked in industry for 10 years before running my own business (Property Agents & Construction) for 25 years as well as investing in the stock market (40 years) and property (30 years).

Business & Engineering BSc (Hons) Leicester Poly & MSc Cranfield Uni. MPhil at Warwick University Business School.

I enjoy worship in all its forms, from sung Evensong to services with a full band — as long as there's a clear, focused, biblical sermon or talk at its heart.

CONTACT

The Old School House, Baughurst, Tadley, RG26 5LP

0701 868334

SteveBushell.Synod@Gmail.com

Steve Bushell

Balancing Diocese & Parish - Mission not Money

I want to see a healthier & more supportive relationship between diocese and parish; one that starts with proper investment in vicar wellbeing; through training, emotional, spiritual and practical support. Having clergy in every parish is needed more than ever with increases in loneliness through more single living, social media and working from home combined with cost of living pressures. In 2025 35% of active clergy showed signs of depression[1] and 36% ***more clergy resigned*** than retired[2]. Clearly more needs to be done to support our parish vicars, the church's lifeblood, 'an increase in clergy is associated with growth, while decrease is associated with decline'[7].

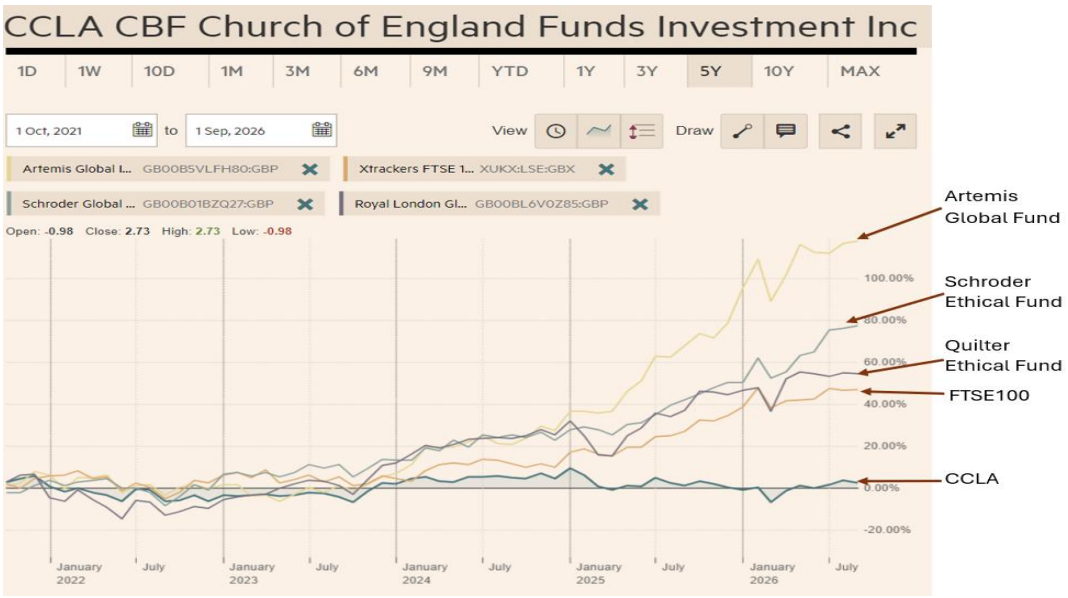
A functioning, proactive and professional HR department that *regularly* check-in and supports vicars and is equipped to build teams and resolve disputes, is clearly needed.

Despite the lack of vicar support, average diocesan and central costs have grown by 29% over the past three years[9], i.e. higher CMF for less vicar support. This cannot continue; I will press for proper control of central and diocesan overhead costs. Winchester Diocese has a ratio of 1:2.4 of staff to stipend vicars; 45 overhead staff for 110 stipend vicars[6].

Each year Winchester Diocese receives about £2m for 'strategy'[6], from central Church funds, with no discernible outcome or benefit. This could be used to fund 29 fulltime stipendiary parish roles, which would increase community outreach and congregations[7]. Nationally, since 2017 an eyewatering £176m was spent on Strategic Development Funding, that gained just 12,704 congregants, against the planned 89,375[10].

Equally important is how our reserves are managed. Total Church stocks and shares investments, — worth around £3.3 billion — managed by CCLA, have flatlined over the past five years despite a rising stock market. If managed even averagely well, they would now be worth over £6 billion[3] – that's a lot of vicars and youth workers forgone, 1714 to be precise[5]. **Mission not Money.** This is not due to caution; it is burying a talent in a field, during which time, inflation has eroded 28% in purchasing power[4]. If a performing fund manager had been used Winchester Diocese would be £10m better off, or 28 more vicars, over the same period[8], we had neither.

That's total 54 more vicars sustainably in Winchester diocese, for no extra CMF.



"Over the last 12 months, the Fund returned -0.28% compared with the comparator return of 25.28%" - CCLA's own commentary, June2026 😬. Ethical funds, (see above) and ones I manage privately added 22% in the same period, largely without US tech stocks. Winchester's Diocesan Stipendiary Fund (DSF) worth £23m, has also flatlined the last 5 years[8], income at 5% would have provided another 17 vicars for free, or more vicarage upgrades. Our benefice had to buy our new vicar's PC, washing machine etc, despite the vicarage being sold for £1m!! Winchester's accounts provide no breakdown of DSF funds, despite it being one of their biggest assets, I will champion ***greater transparency and performance***.

Rather than predominant reliance on one under performer, CCLA, I will press for two or three Investment Firms to be used and not have all our eggs in one bad basket. The Investment Firms will be required to:

- target growth before their own fees
- publish performance against competitors and our set targets
- match those targets
- maintain ethical investments

Central and Diocese Investment committees need to have ***and use*** clear performance guidelines for their fund managers, and have this performance properly audited.

Better stewardship of these resources means more vicars and youth workers, (1714 more[5] churchwide and 54 more for Winchester[6]) so more parishioners are reached and the dominant narrative between diocese and parish is ***mission not money***. The additional vicars would represent **49% increase in parish stipendiary roles**[2] for Winchester. My 40 years of successful investing and 30 years in business, position me well to champion this.

I will also work to get more stipendiary clergy back into front-line ministry — currently only 37% of vicars nationally are in front line parishes roles[2].

It's imperative the income from Church Commissioners Funds is returned to its agreed and original purpose; "with particular regard to the cure of souls in parishes where such assistance is required"; i.e. ***stipendiary vicars in parishes.***

Safeguarding and Clergy Recruitment

Safeguarding is paramount. My experience with charities, working alongside vulnerable adults and church youth work, has taught me the importance of a clear and transparent recruitment process.

I want to see an end to Bishop-to-Bishop referencing in clergy appointments. Receiving parishes, when interviewing prospective vicars, should have the right to see their; **Safeguarding summary, DBS checks and References.**

At present receiving parishes and congregations are prevented, as a matter of policy, from viewing these, despite these being the single most important selection criteria. The potential for error or misuse is obvious. We can and should do better.

Supporting Our Overseas Partners

Despite Dioceses and Church Commissioners holding billions in assets, sometimes being spent on maintaining buildings, support for our overseas brothers and sisters is too often woeful — especially given how far a small amount can go in less well-off countries. I want to see better, more consistent support for Christians in linked Dioceses by tithing of Church Commissioners income to our poorer linked Dioceses and bringing the Church Commissioners ***back to their original purpose of supporting stipendiary vicars***.

If you share my concerns & vision for a better run church with more vicars on the ground, I would be grateful for your support with your first or a high preference vote.

References

[1] Lord of the Years, Clergy Wellbeing survey 2017-25, Living Ministry Survey, Church House.

[2] Church of England Ministry Statistics, 2025 https://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#ministry-statistics

[3]CCLA Church of England Performance comparisons, Financial Times 2026.

[4] Bank of England Inflation Data, 2026

[5] 4% return on £3bn (current C of E CCLA funds) is £120m, which would provide for 1714 vicars at fully loaded cost of £70,000 each, in perpetuity.

[6] Winchester Diocese 2025 Annual Accounts

[7] Going Deeper Report 2016

[8] Winchester Diocese 2023, 2024 & 2025 Annual Accounts

[9] Summary of 42 Diocesan Accounts, Save The Parish Network, 2024

[10] Archbishops Oversight Committee, 2022, Sir Robert Chote report.