

The Rev'd Canon James Blandford-Baker

Candidate for General Synod



I have enjoyed being part of the Diocese of Ely for the last 15 years...it is an exciting place to be with lots going on and many good challenges for the followers of Jesus Christ! I am offering myself for election to General Synod because I am

passionate about the Church and its role in society at a critical time in our history.

I believe the calling of the Church of England is to live out and communicate the Good News of Jesus to our nation in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Kingdom of God not only transforms the lives of individuals but whole communities; this perspective is deeply biblical and Anglican!

My experience in the parish, in the Diocese of Ely and the wider Church has given me a broad perspective on the hopes and fears of many clergy colleagues. I enjoy listening and talking to others, whatever their background, and hope to make a positive contribution in representing the clergy of the Diocese in the discussions of General Synod.

Who Am I?

I grew up in a Christian home in South East London, studied mechanical engineering in Scotland and worked in university research (on projects including climate change and vibration in complex rotor systems). My background in research has given me an eye for detail and a concern for properly informed conversations and decisions.

I trained for ordination in Nottingham and was ordained in 1993, serving my curacy in suburban Birmingham (Quinton) before a first incumbency in West London (Acton).

While in London I also served as Director of Ordinands for the Willesden Episcopal Area of the Diocese of London, was a Director of Post Ordination Training and taught New Testament to trainee Readers (LLMs).

Since 2006 I have been incumbent of Histon and Impington and, from 2007, Rural Dean of North Stowe.

I strongly believe in clergy having a healthy

hinterland and I enjoy making fine furniture, repairing clocks and gazing at the night sky through my telescope.

I am married to Katharine (a copy editor) and we have two grown up children.

What are the Issues Facing Synod?

Today, the Church of England faces a number of challenges (none of which are insurmountable with prayer, attentiveness to Scripture and wise counsel!):

- *Declining numbers*: children, young people and young adults are simply not hearing about Jesus Christ or seeing the life he gives in action. It is good to see that the recent Vision for the Church of England prioritizes the need for us to 'grow younger' but we need to think and act wisely to make this happen. One of my parishes has a lively and flourishing work among children and young people—the other doesn't, despite several false dawns. With the significant differences in church size and context in our Diocese we need to look at solutions to these mission challenges that support local parish clergy and laity in ways which are relevant to their situation (rather than importing 'big' church solutions).
- *Racism, Sexism and Inclusion*: the church continues to struggle to live out the big vision of the multi-ethnic people of God in the New Testament; this profoundly undermines the message of Jesus Christ and harms our mission. The recent decision not to replace the Church of England's National Disability Advisor raises serious questions about our credibility. This kind of disconnection between what the church says publicly and how it acts needs to be addressed by General Synod urgently. Having promoted and encouraged the ministry of ordained women, I hope that we can still press on to grasping God's bigger vision for the Body of Christ. I have a particular, personal, interest and concern for the inclusion in the church of those with autism, ADHD and similar conditions.
- *Sexuality*: the LLF process is currently the best hope we have of a respectful and informed debate on a difficult topic which is, for many, also personally painful. LLF emerged at a challenging time in the aftermath of Brexit (with all the division that exposed in our society) and during the

pandemic; we need to make sure there is enough time, energy and opportunity to allow us to engage with the LLF materials properly. How we wholeheartedly welcome, love and listen to our LGBTI+ brothers and sisters, while remaining faithful to Scripture, is of vital importance. I believe clergy need ongoing support in all these areas.

- *Clergy Wellbeing*: the wellbeing of the clergy was a significant problem before the pandemic; it has now only got worse. The Covenant for Clergy Care and Wellbeing is yet to be implemented; I want to see this taken forward and supported both nationally and locally. As a Diocese we have some good research in this area and significant funds available to help those in need (some years ago I was instrumental in negotiating a substantial legacy of funds restricted for the 'wellbeing of the clergy' in the Diocese, and this area remains a special interest for me). The CDM process is broken and causing harm to too many colleagues; it needs radical reform and proper accountability.
- *Parish Ministry and Church-planting*: The recent controversy over parish ministry (the 'Save the Parish' campaign) has, as Frog Orr-Ewing put it, articulated a 'heart cry' by the church that something valuable and precious is being lost. We need to retain the best of the parish system while finding the capacity to discover new ways of making Jesus known against the backdrop of very significant financial challenges. My own experience is that in order to grow we must plant new congregations whether they be churches in new housing areas (like Northstowe), or fresh expressions in existing parishes. These actions must be done sensitively with careful listening to those on the ground. With parishes now able to apply for SDF funds directly, the relationship between the national church institutions and local congregations is more important than ever.

What Do I Bring?

That's a good question! Why would you vote for me? Here are a few suggestions:

- **A Commitment to Parish Ministry**

I bring a deep commitment to parish ministry in its many forms and across traditions, having worked as a Rural Dean for over 14 years. I have 25 (joyful!) years' experience in training curates (10 and counting!) and LLMs. I love working in teams and with others in the parish and believe that the coal face of the parish is the highest calling of the ordained ministry.

- **A Desire to Learn and Grow**

I am deeply conscious of God's call on my life to keep listening and growing as a follower of Jesus Christ. The Church belongs to Him and not to anyone else, wherever they come from! I recognize that courage, humility and prayerfulness are essential if I am to make a worthwhile contribution to General Synod. If elected, I will greatly value your prayers; please pray for me.

- **A Concern for Colleagues**

It has been my privilege to serve in a Deanery where I love meeting with clergy colleagues, praying, laughing (the banter is legendary!) and sharing ministry together. If elected I hope to remain accessible and available to listen to your concerns (so please don't hesitate to get in touch) as well as keeping you informed about the proceedings of General Synod.

Questions? How to Contact Me

I'd love to hear from you with any questions or comments you may have:

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