

The Revd Paul Hutchinson

Rector of St Neots Team Ministry

St Neots Deanery

August 2021



With roots in Durham and other parts of NE England, I came to St Neots & Eynesbury in January 2020 from near Teesside. My two sons are students, whilst my wife Alison, an assistant priest in various rural parishes when they were young, is now a full-time chaplain.

All my ordained ministry has been inside the parish system (and mostly in team ministries): in the former mining communities of Stanley (NW Durham); at Sunderland Minster (while University Chaplain); then in market town & rural ministry for 7 years at Penrith (Carlisle Diocese) and then 10 at Stokesley (York Diocese). Whilst welcoming new and maturing initiatives in the mixed church (including within my current parish), my heart remains with parochial ministry as the bedrock of our vocation to be the church of the nation.

I was elected to represent York Diocese at General Synod in November 2013; and had the pleasure of being part of the Synod that made it possible for women to become Bishops. I continued into the next Synod for a further four years, until my move here. I learnt much, wrestling with the wide variety of issues that come before Synod; and reported back regularly to Diocesan Synod and to several deaneries and local parishes – in person and by written reports aimed at curious ordinary churchgoers.

Before ordained ministry I was a solicitor in central Newcastle (in civil litigation), having read Law at Trinity Hall Cambridge (worshipping regularly then in chapels, at St Edward's and GSM, and as a member of university Ecumenical Fellowship Groups). Alison and I trained together at Cuddesdon (in what might be labelled a broadly catholic view of ordained ministry) and were ordained together at Durham in 1997.

Ministry since ordination has, in addition to its general challenges, developed four particular interests:

- **Music & Liturgy.** A choir member and organist since my teens, I have been active with: RSCM areas; Praxis regions; Diocesan liturgy committees and conference planning; and various church and chamber choirs (with some cathedral contact). I made submissions and spoke at Synod on the new Baptism texts and was regularly one of those contributing to Synod worship.
- **Education.** I came to the two church primary schools at St Neots and Eynesbury having previously been a governor of my local non-church secondary school, a director of its academy trust when that was formed in 2015, and for several years Chair of its Local Governing Body. Further back, my years as Sunderland University Chaplain led on to part-time chaplaincy at Newton Rigg, Penrith; there was earlier church school governance; and I served on the Durham and Carlisle Diocesan Boards of Education. I've found that the Church occasionally needs to be reminded that there is an educational world beyond the direct connections of Church Schools and the former Church College universities.
- **Ecumenism.** St Neots is, of course, a town with a wide palette of Christian traditions. In York Diocese, I was Ecumenical Adviser for Cleveland Archdeaconry for five years, connecting into a variety of regional ecumenical networks, as well as nationally. Other ecumenical contexts before that included those of Higher Education chaplaincy and Durham Board for Mission and Unity, but also charring Churches Together in Penrith, and being part of the Cumbria Churches' Rural Forum.
- **Law.** I have been an Ecclesiastical Law Society member for nearly 30 years, helping me to stay informed about some of the thornier legal issues that assail parish life and the Church in general. It's been invaluable in helping to cope with volume of legislation that General Synod tends to generate (particularly through the 'Simplification' part of recent Synod agendas). Law has also allowed me to take an interest in Synod's Criminal Justice Group and other work of the Mission and Public Affairs division of the Archbishops' Council. I recently became a surrogate for marriages.

Ministry has also brought me to other chaplaincy roles; to Diocesan Synods and pastoral committees; to fair-trade, disability, rural and asylum seeker networks; active contact with NSM/SSM ministries and readers;

some contributions to BBC Tees (and recently to Black Cat Radio at St Neots); work as a training incumbent (with colleagues from various settings); and happy working relationships with neighbouring parishes.

I hope that I have been an effective Synod member who engages with the full breadth of Synod's concerns: I have not frequently made big set-piece speeches, but have more often given time to questions, to points otherwise missed in debate, to being one of those who attends to the legislative work, to effective group work and to fringe discussions (such as on safeguarding, cathedrals, and ecumenical issues).

I am conscious that – though I have had connections with the Diocese for much of my adult life – I am still quite new to serving in Ely Diocese, having arrived not long before the first lockdown. As the incumbent of one of the Diocese's most populous parishes, in the A1 and East-West corridors, but set in a largely rural Deanery, the greater part of a town that straddles the Diocesan boundary and has been the latest to join the Changing Market Towns project, I already have natural connections to many of the Diocese's varied contexts. I hope that I can serve the Diocese well alongside those candidates who are of much longer standing here and those who bring fresh passion to Synod work.

In every Synod election, candidates ought to be open about their basic convictions on a variety of key issues. I am someone who listens carefully and is open to being persuaded on the rightness of positions other than my own, but among my basic presuppositions are:

- Safeguarding is a matter of paramount concern, and the Church has rightly transformed its approach to Safeguarding in the years I have been part of General Synod. But the question of the “seal of the confessional” and whether it should hold firm in cases where there are safeguarding concerns is one that remains. I came to that question with an open mind but, as I have heard the contributions of those who are more regular practitioners than I am, I have come to the view that the seal of the confessional remains an essential part of the Church's ministry, and that the removal of the seal is certain to cause far more harm than its retention.
- Through “Renewal and Reform” and now “Vision and Strategy” and “Transforming Effectiveness” the Church has been trying to find a simpler way of bringing the Gospel to a new generation. I have been broadly in favour of much of it (not least the work that has so far been painstakingly done to simplify aspects of the Law), but not without substantial questions about some of the underpinning assumptions. We have learnt along the way that details continue to need to be tested, and the first word is rarely the last: much of the work of the coming Synod term will still, rightly, be the working through of things chewed over in the last six years. I agree, for example, with those who believe Clergy Discipline needs a ‘three-track’ approach and not simply a dual track that leaves many clergy unduly and unnecessarily worried when a complaint is lodged.
- Finally, on the wide-ranging set of questions that gather around issues of human sexuality and identity, I begin from the theological conviction that same-sex relationships are no more sinful in themselves than those between people of the opposite sex, and that creation is more diverse and complex than a simple binary divide on sex and gender. I was one of those who was not prepared to take note of the House of Bishops report in 2017, a vote which catalysed the creation of the Living in Love and Faith process immediately afterwards, a process which will certainly inform Synod debates in the coming term. I hope that the Church can find its way to a position which is more boldly inclusive than its current official stance, as well as being humbler in its claims about the nature of marriage.

A decade ago, I would not have imagined myself as a General Synod member. When local colleagues encouraged me in 2013 to stand, I was grateful to those current members – and the Diocesan Secretary and Registrar – who helped me find my bearings and understand some of the issues and processes: and to the fresh insights of those who joined in 2015. I hope that in due course, even representing somewhere that is a new Diocese for me, I can be of help to others, as they too find their feet.

Paul Hutchinson

St Neots with Eynesbury

(Proposed by Revd Nicki Bland & Revd Annette Reed)