

General Synod Election Address 2026

Ven. Phelim O'Hare, Archdeacon of Aston



Why I am standing

It is important that our diocesan representation at national level comes from as broad a perspective as possible, and that as many parishes and individuals as possible have a sense of belonging to the national conversation and that their interests are accurately represented from the very diverse contexts within the diocese and especially within the Archdeaconry of Aston. The legislative work of General Synod has a significant impact on the life and work of parishes, clergy and, increasingly so in recent years, archdeacons. Only one archdeacon from each diocese can be elected and it would be good for me to be there representing the whole breadth of missional and parochial life of the diocese.

Who am I?

My hope is that my background, formation and experience will add something important and positive to Synod as it debates and engages with the many issues facing our national church. I was born and brought up in Northern Ireland during the 1970s when the troubles divided society and, even then, a desire for unity and peace was at the forefront of many Christian traditions. I trained for ministry from 1991-1998 in Maynooth, Belfast, Louvain and Rome and was ordained in 1997 and became curate in South Belfast. I spent 10 years as teacher and chaplain in FE and a Cathedral School and was received as an Anglican in 2012. I was Team Vicar in a large multi church benefice in West Cardiff before becoming Vicar of two inner city parishes in East Cardiff. From 2021 I was full time area dean of Kings Norton, Mosley and Shirley and have been archdeacon of Aston since 2024. I am also the West Midlands rep and convenor of the College of Archdeacons.

What I hope to offer to General Synod

Coming previously from another Christian tradition and also previously from another Anglican province, I am still full of wonder and delight at what is good, beautiful, true and *avant garde* about how the Church of England seeks to honour the great commission of Christ through breadth, parochial life and engagement and missional commitment. I want to bring this positive appreciation to synod - which in recent years has been deeply wounded by division and increasing polarisation. I am clear sighted about many of our church's failings at every level and most of my day to day work engages with these failings: finance, vacancies, safeguarding, racial justice, clergy and lay misconduct, yet still the work of Jesus continues resolutely in our congregations, great and small, and their work and voices need to be represented.

The General Synod **debates** of the past five years whilst exhausting and draining of energy are still not resolved and there is much work still to do. I hope to contribute well but with a fresh perspective and significant local experience on:

Safeguarding - learning the lessons from the past as we transition to a new national and diocesan structure that ultimately makes our whole church more safe for children and vulnerable adults

Vision and Strategy: as recipients of a significant funding bid we are seeing how the national church is actually helping us in real ways on the ground to support our own mission and strategy: growing churches and flourishing schools at the heart of each community. I am open minded about how this equips parishes from across all our traditions and localities but especially those struggling deeply with poverty and deprivation, both urban and rural.

Environment - I believe this has to be kept fresh for each generation, and for each new general synod quinquennium, no matter how much vocal and voting support has gone on in the past.

Clergy well being - this conversation is also live and ongoing and I would support this strongly if elected and especially in making sure that we develop a good culture where clergy and everyone else are properly supported and cared for in the midst of ever increasing demanding vocation. Linked to this is also the work that will come to this new synod on a new Laity Code of Conduct which I would support, in bringing our own experience from the diocese and archdeaconry to those debates.

Why vote for me?

If I was elected, I would represent the whole diocese and as previous Area Dean of Kings Norton, Moseley and Shirley and current Archdeacon of Aston, I bring good and detailed knowledge of the life, joys, struggles and stresses of all of those parishes into whatever future debates synod will focus on. I am especially keen to ensure that the Archdeaconry of Aston also has a strong voice advocating for it at synod as it has its own gifts and wisdom to offer the national conversation e.g. from Rural North Warwickshire and outer estates in Aston and Sutton Coldfield ad Colesworth and Polesworth deaneries, and a different kind of rural and also highly diverse inner city presence and engagement parishes in Yardley and Solihull.

I hope too that if elected, I would be a reconciling and unifying representative and member who is not afraid to speak out and advocate where the need of our parishes is greatest and that this would be helpful to the national church as it navigates and adapts to a rapidly changing society, whilst holding on to our spiritual and ecclesial treasures in obedience to God and loving service of the world and its peoples.

Finally, I enjoy synod and observing the action of God's Holy Spirit inspiring people in different ways and sometimes with great passion and energy in their conviction. I especially enjoy how the many different traditions, theological and otherwise, can come together to discern the will of God for a large and complex (and sometimes dysfunctional) church. My heart and focus and preferences do remain with those people and places that are suffering the most from injustice and exclusion, poverty and isolation. I love the breadth and ongoing inclusion of the Church of England and pray that it can become more so, and in so doing rediscovered its unique identity and integrity as part of God's One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

If you intend to vote for me I would be honoured and grateful if you felt able to put me first or high on your list.

Thank you to Archdeacon Jenny and to Geoff Lanham for their support in my election submission.