



Revd Toby Crowe

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2026 General Synod Election Address

Proposed: Bekah Clark
Seconded: Nejib Boumenjel

About me

I was a happy atheist until January 2004 when I had an experience of God I could not ignore. I started full-time church work 18 months later. I married Emma in 2007 and we have two children. We came to Birmingham in 2012.

Since 2021 I have been a parish priest in Sparkhill and Sparkbrook: two wonderful but deprived parishes, serving areas reputed to contain the highest proportion of people of other faiths anywhere in the Church of England. Five years here have taught me what the parish system is for and what it costs to sustain.

I am Chair of the House of Clergy of Birmingham Diocesan Synod, and I sit on Bishop's Council and the Environmental Board. I chair Narthex, a community project running foodbanks, food pantries and advice work across our part of the city. I sit on the boards of two church schools (one of which I chair). I am a trustee of The Feast, MyTrust and the Forum for the Discussion of Israel and Palestine.

Why I am standing

The Church of England is the only denomination I have ever belonged to, and I have been part of liberal, catholic, charismatic and evangelical expressions of it. I rejoice in our global communion and in the Anglican commitment to be in every place, for all people. This is the commitment which I want to defend.

We face real difficulties: a looming sense of decline, an apparent lack of money, sincere but seemingly incompatible convictions, and a hard reckoning with ways in which the institution has fallen short. An anxious institution is tempted to restructure in haste, to centralise by default, and to let the local church carry the cost. General Synod is where this temptation is either resisted or accelerated.

What I would bring

- **A diocese-wide mandate, already tested.** Chairing the House of Clergy is the closest thing this diocese has to the work of a proctor. It means representing clergy of every tradition, not only those who agree with me; chairing debates so that minorities are heard; pressing questions at Bishop's Council; and knowing the difference between speaking for myself and speaking for a whole house. I have done this work in Birmingham, and I would do it at General Synod too.
- **Ministry where the Church of England meets the country as it now is.** Being the vicar of largely Muslim neighbourhoods has taught me that confident Christian faith and real friendship across deep religious difference are not in competition, and that the parish is the only structure that keeps the Church present in places like mine. Synod legislates about mission, cohesion and relations between faiths; and I would bring to those debates a view from parishes where this is daily life.
- **A parish priest's instinct about what money is for.** Between Narthex, our church schools and two parishes in areas of real deprivation, I spend a good deal of my time watching what happens when resources reach the ground, and what happens when they do not.

What I would work for

- **Structures that serve churches, not the reverse.** Simplifying national governance is worth doing where it makes the national Church more accountable to the parishes that fund it, and a mistake where it moves decisions further away. I would press on how the Church Commissioners' funding and historic assets are distributed, and on the buildings, housing and stipends that sustainable parish ministry actually requires. Clergy are not a limiting factor on growth, and mission areas and minster communities are worth only what they do for the individual churches and communities within them.
- **Safeguarding we can trust.** After the failure of the Independent Safeguarding Board, the Church needs scrutiny that is independent in fact and not only in name, and a Redress Scheme which works for victims and survivors without delay. Clergy discipline must be fair to complainant and respondent alike: the new Clergy Conduct Measure has to be made to work in practice, not only on paper.
- **Clergy who last.** Morale, recruitment, housing, pay and pensions are not welfare afterthoughts. They determine whether there is anyone left to send into the harvest field. In other words, they matter!

Where I stand

I am for the parish. Not out of nostalgia, but because the cure of souls is exercised in a place and extends to everyone living within it, whether or not they ever come to church. In parishes like mine the congregations will never be large or wealthy, and no plan built on attendance or growth potential would ever put a priest here. The parish system is the reason there are churches in Sparkhill and Sparkbrook at all. Clergy are not a limiting factor on growth, and mission areas and minster communities are worth precisely what they do for the churches and communities within them, and no more. Where the Church withdraws a stipend or closes a building in a poor community, it should be candid that it is choosing absence – in places where so many other things have already been stripped away.

I am also for a Church confident in the gospel and honest about what it believes. I hold the doctrine of marriage as this Church has received it and as Canon B30 states it: a union permanent and lifelong, of one man with one woman. This doctrine is not ours to revise quietly. If it is to change, it should be done openly. This would mean following the Canon B2 process and seeking the majorities which our Constitution requires - and not by routes that avoid that scrutiny.

And I am for a church that extends a welcome to all. I hold that every person I serve is made in the image of God and is owed the same dignity, the same honesty and the same care.

In my parishes I have not found these two latter commitments to be in competition, and I would not trade either for the other, ever.

What you can expect of me

Synod exists to serve the whole Church, and a proctor represents every clergy elector in the diocese, including those who did not vote for them. If elected I would consult before contested debates and report afterwards on how I voted and why, to all of you and not only to those who agreed with me. We have enough echo-chambers in Church and society already!

For now, I would be glad to talk about any of this - please just ask me. You can reach me at toby.crowe@outlook.com or on 07792 812 484 (text or WhatsApp are best). If you email, please include a phone number too.

Thank you for reading. I would be grateful if you would give me your first or highest available preference.

Blessings from Toby