

General Synod Elections House of Clergy Candidate: Revd Neil Patterson



If re-elected to General Synod, I would work for you and the whole Diocese by bringing my patience with complex problems to bear on these and other issues that come up. As in the past, I will be ready to take issues to Synod and to explain and report from it, taking care to attend to the whole agenda and not only matters of popular interest.

Please do give me your first-choice vote.

My Record on Synod

I was first elected to General Synod as a result of a vacancy in 2012, and so my first session was that of November 2012 when the original legislation for Women Bishops ran into the buffers. It was a powerful learning experience about the likelihood of deadlock in the Church when there is not sufficient consensus.

It was a joy to be part of the Synod as we overcame the obstacles and passed the necessary legislation for women bishops, and to observe the (slowly) changing culture as gender equality has become increasingly normal in our leadership as a church.

You were so good as to re-elect me in 2015, and throughout my time on Synod I have been a reasonably active participant, speaking regularly on a range of issues, proposing useful amendments and working to keep up the profile of the rural church, sadly seen as marginal by many nationally.

I have served on Revision Committees, most recently for the Cathedrals Measure, and am part of the leadership of the Gender and Sexuality Group, working within the Synod structures for greater equality and inclusion.



I have regularly and enthusiastically provided feedback to the Diocese from General Synod, both at Diocesan Synod and by reports to deaneries, and would look forward to doing so again.

Background

I have served in Hereford Diocese since ordination in 2004, my curacy at Cleobury Mortimer in Ludlow Deanery, and from 2008-15 as Rector of Ariconium, in Ross & Archenfield.

Since 2015 I have worked across the Diocese as Director of Vocations & Ordinands, adding various responsibilities at different times: for 18 months Rural Dean of Hereford, and now responsible for IME2 (curate training) and acting Warden of Readers.

Although now without parish responsibilities, the call for cover in particular need has taken me to new and delightful corners like Clun Forest deanery, and in supporting curates I have worshipped with a great variety of parishes across the diocese.

Work with vocations has renewed my appreciation of our breadth of theologies and spiritual traditions, and the need to work together and not against one another.

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Thoughts on some current issues

Sexuality

The headline issue for 2022 is of course sexuality, with debates scheduled on the outcome of the Living in Love & Faith process. I stand by the motion passed by Hereford Diocesan Synod in 2017 calling for approved services for same-sex couples with clear conscience provision, which I drafted. It may or may not get debated in our wording, but I believe something of that nature remains the most helpful proposal on the table, and that when others finally come to see it, we shall be able to say that Hereford led the way.

Climate Change

The urgent issue of our time is climate change: I supported the amendments to bring forward the divestment dates in fossil fuels for the national bodies responsible to Synod to 2030, and believe the (independent) Church Commissioners should not shirk their responsibilities. I believe as well as these high-level changes we need a broad campaign for all Christians to lead the way in decarbonising our lifestyles and treading more lightly on God's earth.

The Church of England Structure

There is a wide-ranging debate emerging about the shape of national and diocesan structures in the Church of England, though many dioceses seem to be agonising over a move to the sort of multi-parish ministry which has been the norm for us in Hereford for at least a generation. It will be important to keep articulating how the rural church is alive and good to resist the danger of resources being further pulled away from places like Hereford Diocese.

The Future for the Clergy

A recent review under our own Bishop Richard has concluded that now is not the time to change the basic financial/housing/pension settlement for stipendiary clergy. However, the pressure will remain, and I am committed to maintaining and if possible improving standards to help sustain the morale of the incumbent body.

As DDVO I have supported the growing range of self-supporting ministry, including Pioneer, and believe we need greater flexibility about the ways in which this can be enabled and supported in future.

The financial pressures on the Church mean that theological education is being challenged in some quarters as an expensive luxury. My experience with ordinands and curates convinces me that we need more, not less, thorough investment in theology and formation for the challenges of the future. We need to be able to proclaim the richness of the Gospel to a complex world, and not merely repeat 'JESUS' with good graphic design.

Reform of the Clergy Discipline Measure is now very much on the agenda. Whilst there is agreement on the need to improve especially timetables, there has been more heat than light about how to reform an unavoidably difficult system. Having written about the history of discipline in the Church and served on the CDM tribunals, I believe that I can contribute to the process of reform and the avoidance of unintended consequences.