

Supporting Statement for Election to the General Synod

August 2021

I have attended the Church of England since the age of three and fulfilled various roles from the age of seven: choir boy; altar boy, and then organist and tenor singer, from my early teenage years.

As far as my professional life is concerned, I initially trained to be a singer and teacher. I sang professionally, mostly in oratorio and opera for seven years and then, wanting to be based at home, I changed my career to teaching. I always taught in the east end of London, this being my preference and served for approximately 17 years as a headteacher of three schools (and seconded headteacher to two schools experiencing challenges, which were without a permanent head).

At this time I auditioned for, and was successful in becoming, a Gentleman in Ordinary to Her Majesty at St James's Palace. With James Bowman (counter tenor) and Graham Trew (bass) I was one half of the six Gentlemen, with ten scholarship boys, who, incidentally, came from inner London schools, including my own and who came from different religions.

After headship I became a senior school inspector ('support'). There were enormous pressures on headteachers at this time which led me to consider my third career as a psychotherapist. I completed the Master of Science degree at Metanoia Institute and began my private practice, at the same time starting the counselling department at Trinity College of Music, where I had once been a student. I then amalgamated the counselling departments of Trinity and Laban Conservatoire of Dance when the two institutions joined.

I moved with my partner to Llanfair Waterdine, South Shropshire, in 2002 and soon became involved in church life. I began to play the organ, became a deputy churchwarden and was elected onto the newly-formed Local Ministry Development Team which subsequently became the Vision and Strategy Group. I joined the PCC, the Benefice Council, the Deanery Synod and the Diocesan Synod.

I have been responsible for a number of developments within the parish including Welcome Packs and Welcome Parties for new residents; a permanent display of all who contribute to the life of the church, however peripheral –

this has been important as far as inclusion and 'growing the church' is concerned; the wilding of certain parts of the churchyard and the Reflection Gatherings which take place on some Wednesday evenings and which attract a large number (for such a small place) usually almost 40 people. The Reflections: prayers, a hymn, a gospel reading and importantly, silence, seem to be an important part of how people wish to worship now and I wholeheartedly support this.

In addition to the above, in normal times I share home communion services with the elderly and have elderly worshippers to a Christmas Day luncheon in my house. I have also developed a Benefice Organists Group with the organists of all seven churches involved. This actually had an original dual purpose: to support the then Vicar as she expanded the Benefice from four to seven churches and also, by encouraging all organists to be willing to travel, to enable all services to have live accompaniment. Quite differently, I have researched St Mary's Llanfair Waterdine Church's organists and priests and am about to begin researching churchwardens, their deputies and Parochial Church Council secretaries from the beginning of records. The only paid positions within the Diocese which I have held has been as a consultant to groups of priests in order for them to be able to process and to gain mutual support from each other as a working group, which took place in Leominster and as a counsellor to priests and their families.

I see my life-long experience as giving me knowledge and insight into the development of the Church of England. I feel that the next few years are going to be a challenging time as we look for a greater use of lay-leaders of worship and also begin to address the inconsistencies within the Church of England, such as sexuality and real equality for women priests who regrettably continue to experience covert prejudice. I see my teaching life in the East End (and in my final headship of the only 100% Muslim school in the country); as a gay man, in an exclusive relationship for almost 50 years since we met at college, and periodically experiencing horrid homophobia, as giving me valuable insights into the enormously important issue of equality. I would hope to be able to contribute creatively to a positive outcome of the discussions of 'Living in Love and Faith', perhaps the most important publication for some time and one which will enable the church to develop its inclusivity enormously. I would relish being part of these discussions.

Richard Lewis