

General Synod Elections 2021

David Brooke

Hub Leader for the Chapelfields Hub,
Church Wigan



In one sense it is easy to underestimate the significance of General Synod. In another sense it is hard to overstate it. I have often heard it made the butt of jokes, or the universal focus of blame, but in 11 years as a clergy member (or more properly a Proctor in the Northern Convocation) I have come to respect the work it does deeply, and to take it with complete seriousness.

If you don't know me, let me introduce myself very briefly, and then say a little about my candidacy and how I see the next quinquennium of the General Synod.

I was ordained in St Alban's Diocese in 1999 after 15 years in the IT industry, and moved to Durham Diocese in 2004 where I served until 2018. My parish experience spans inner-city Luton, post-industrial urban ministry in Wigan, leafy suburban Hertfordshire, and rural parishes in Durham. I served as an Area Dean for ten years, and I have held diocesan roles in Durham working to support deaneries, and to enable mission. I am married to Kate, who is Managing Chaplain of a large men's prison, so my interests extend to chaplaincy as well as parish ministry.

I moved to Liverpool Diocese in 2018 to lead a large and complex 'hub' of seven churches in the Transforming Wigan project as the transition to becoming Church Wigan approached. Alongside the role in Wigan I am an Assistant Bishop's Planning Officer in Phil Saltmarsh's team, and I serve on the Diocesan Synod and Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. I am also a Trustee of the Parish Giving Scheme in service of the wider church.

I was elected to General Synod 11 years ago and have just completed a second term – technically still for Durham Diocese. (Don't ask. The rules are complicated.) I am not a General Synod geek or groupie, but I have found it extremely fulfilling and a profound privilege, and have made new and enriching friendships through it, right across the spectrum of the church. Those relationships have frequently informed my thinking and prayer as I have weighed knotty issues, and carefully (even cautiously) registered my vote.

Of course the process leading up to the consecration of women as bishops and the Five Guiding Principles was significant for me, just as it has been humbling to be part of the shared conversations and Living in Love and Faith. However, what I believe the General Synod needs is members who value not just the headline issues but the mundane ones, the complex (but vital) legislation, and the initiatives that emerge from the grassroots of the church. That is where the thrilling moments and surprises have often been for me.

I did not first stand for election on the ticket of any campaigning organisation, and I am not affiliated with one. I believe the work of General Synod is far too important to approach debate with a fixed goal rigidly in mind. What I can promise you, if elected, is to continue to be an attentive listener to all viewpoints, weigh every issue with care, and not to duck the tough issues.

Clearly the upcoming quinquennium is a crucial one. There are expectations and fears on all sides around the Living in Love and Faith process, and there is no question about its key place on the agenda. I remain committed to seeing the process through with an open mind and an open heart - with sufficient urgency, and with the utmost care.

We do not have concrete proposals in front of us at this time, and I struggle to envisage what shape they will take when they come. But that is exactly where we were a few years ago in the debate about women's ministry, and though tensions remain, ultimately a new way was imagined. We continue to journey together with a high degree of unity, and an increased respect for diversity. I live in confident hope that the same unity and respect can break out once more.

Alongside that headline issue, though, I believe there are many others with which we will need to wrestle. The vision for the 2020s, in which the Archbishop of York has been a leading voice, has been mocked and derided in some quarters, usually without engaging with the thinking in any real depth or seriousness.

But I for one long for a simpler, bolder, humbler church. I do not think mockery helps any of us, and I am ready to roll up my sleeves and engage with the detailed plans and enabling legislation that will be needed to make transformation possible.

I believe this is a vital moment, where the work of General Synod will have a profound bearing on the next stages of Fit for Mission in Liverpool Diocese, and where our learnings here can help shape the future of the whole church. Perhaps this is where I can best contribute.

I will be honest with you. I wondered whether to stand again to serve on behalf of Liverpool Diocese. I reasoned that it was time to let someone else step up. I reasoned that I wasn't well enough known in the diocese. I reasoned that I had plenty of other things to focus on.

However, colleagues asked me to stand, and I value the call of others in processes of discernment. They told me that General Synod needs experienced voices, they scolded me that being known by everyone wasn't the biggest issue, and they reminded me that the past experience I bring, and the other things I am involved in now, might be just what is needed for the upcoming work of Synod.

And so here I stand – ready to serve, if you so wish.

Faithfully yours,

David