

Professor Helen King



Nominated by Professor Amy Smith, St Mary-le-More, Wallingford
Seconded by Gordon Gill, Lay Chairman, Wallingford Deanery Synod

In some ways I may be the typical Church of England member in this diocese – average age, a woman, middle class – but that doesn't mean I am happy with the status quo! I have served on General Synod before, when I was one of the youngest members. I've attended as a visitor since then: I know what's involved, and what the current issues are. Back in 1985 when I first offered myself as a candidate, I noted that I couldn't say how I would vote on every issue, because if I knew that already there'd be little point in holding a debate: I want to listen as well as to speak. But I have some fixed points: above all, full inclusion, as modelled by our God who lived among us in Jesus, an inclusion covering not just gender and sexuality, but also age, disability, race and class.

Church and church roles

I've worshipped in a range of churches, from a gathered evangelical church when I was a teenager, to a flagship Anglo-Catholic church, to Anglican churches in Paris and Vienna when I was working there. Most of my life, however, I have simply gone to my parish church, and done what's needed – from serving coffee to polishing the brasses. I believe in the parish system with all its openness and fuzzy edges. I've had moments when I have felt God's presence very strongly in a range of church settings, and – after some years not attending church – when walking down the road at night.

I am currently an authorised lay preacher, server and intercessor, and am on the team running a weekly online contemplative service in my parish; as a Chapel Homilist at Corpus Christi College, Oxford I also have a chance to engage with young Christians and enquirers about the Christian faith. In my parish, I've also been a sidesperson and Deanery Synod rep, and led Emmaus groups, specialising in the introductory level, 'Nurture', which is aimed at those wondering what the church believes, or who are new to faith. I have represented the Church of England on the British Council of Churches and at the European Council of Churches. I was an Oxford Diocese participant in the Regional Shared Conversations and then was asked to join the national team preparing *Living in Love and Faith*, working with the History sub-group.

I fully support the ordination of women and their flourishing in churches of all traditions. My stepdaughter is a priest in secular employment. I'm concerned about the flourishing of women in dioceses where the bishop does not recognise them as priests, and about inequalities in selection which mean that only a third of ordinands under 35 are women. I'm a former member of the Movement for the Ordination of Women and currently belong to Women and the Church.

Education

It's my career - and my passion.

Trained in ancient history and social anthropology before moving into the history of medicine and of the body, I have worked full-time in higher education all my life, teaching, researching, writing and managing people, in Cambridge, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Reading and at The Open University. I've held visiting roles in Europe and the USA. I also worked in Liverpool for 7 years at Liverpool Institute of Higher Education, for 5 years as a resident tutor. LIHE was formed from Anglican and Roman Catholic teacher-training institutions; our little chapel was where I first served and preached.

At LIHE I particularly enjoyed working with returners to higher education - often young men made redundant from Ford Halewood - so it was a real pleasure to end my formal career at the OU, where such students are the norm. To encourage more people into learning, I was invited to design a free online course on Health and Wellbeing in the Ancient World which is on the FutureLearn platform; this encourages interactive learning as a community from all over the world.

I continue to work with the Quality Assurance Agency and the OU on quality review, including supporting a college in Leeds for which the OU validates their degrees. I have been a Church of England reviewer, for theological colleges and lay training schemes. The future of theological education is under debate and I think I can make contributions here.

Safeguarding

I haven't experienced sexual abuse in the church, but I know those who have. The terrible experiences of abuse, secrecy and failure to believe reports are something for which we should all repent. Safeguarding training is essential - no excuses. So is proper recompense for those whose lives have been affected. At the same time, the process of reforming the Clergy Discipline Measure has begun, so that the lives of innocent clergy and their families are not destroyed.

Marriage and sexuality

I didn't marry until I my late 40s, and I'm an enthusiast for it! We met online, through Christian Connection and we've run The Marriage Course together. My husband was widowed, remarried and then divorced before we met. In my youth, divorced people weren't allowed to take communion - not permitted until 1981 - but even in 2005 my husband's divorce still meant interviews with our vicar before we could be allowed to make our vows in church. I feel for those whose legal civil partnerships and marriages can't even be blessed in their churches, and support equal marriage while accepting that some priests would not feel able to preside at these marriages. I also believe in and will work for full inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in ministry. I'm on the steering group of Changing Attitude England and belong to Inclusive Church, OneBodyOneFaith and the Campaign for Equal Marriage.

The gospel on the streets

I've been a Street Pastor in my town since my husband helped set up this scheme locally, and I love it. The depth of theological discussion that happens with young people in the early hours of the morning can be wonderful, but they are quite clear that they have no urge to enter our buildings. We sometimes talk about 'taking the gospel to the streets' but I find that God is already there, ahead of us as He usually is, in the support people are showing to each other when things are tough for them.

Older people

While we work to make sure that children are aware of the stories of the Bible, for example through the 'Open the Book' project in schools, I worry that we are forgetting the older members of our society. I was the main carer for my mother during her final years and both of us often felt very isolated. I now support (mostly) older people in various voluntary roles: accompanying our vicar to take communion into care homes, working with the Home Library Service, as a digital helper in the local library, and recording for the Talking Newspaper. I've also helped run 'Grave Talk' locally.

I tweet on @fluff35; I have written articles for the blogs of Modern Church and Via Media, and have my own blog on church issues, <https://shared-conversations.com>. I would love to have your first preference vote: and please feel free to contact me now or if I'm elected, with any questions, by email (profhelenking@gmail.com), phone (07799535179) or post (35 Croft Road, Wallingford, OX10 0HN).