



Cynthia Bishop

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If you had told me even 6 months ago that I would be standing for General Synod I would not have believed you!

However, I was lucky enough to be one of a group who were invited to attend General Synod at York in 2014. I was not sure what to expect or even if I would enjoy the experience but enjoy it I did. I found the whole thing extremely interesting and exciting and it opened my eyes to what actually happens during a gathering. While there we observed the general meetings, saw how they voted on various issues, and we were privileged enough to meet with the Church Commissioners and learned about the finances of the Church. The sessions of Synod dealt with all sorts of issues, the main one being the acceptance of women as bishops; but they also deal with the smallest details just as thoroughly.

At the time I felt something nudge me to thinking about being on General Synod but I put it to the back of my mind and ignored it, that is until someone kept saying that I should stand so here I am, having gone with an intuitive nudge and gut feeling!

I am 62 years old and retired, having been a teacher and Education Welfare Officer in my working life. I am on my own now but have been married and I have two grown-up sons, the eldest one lives in Newcastle and is married with three children and a fourth on the way! My other son runs his own business and is Newcastle United mad!

I was born in Portsmouth, moved to Bath when I was 10 years old and then came to Alnwick teacher training college when I was 18 years old. I lived in Alnmouth for 30 years before moving to Shilbottle where I have been for 14 years.

I was licensed as a Reader in 2003 and serve in St James Church, Shilbottle. I have also been one of the Churchwardens there for the past four years and I am now the Parish Safeguarding Officer too. At the moment I am helping to organise Messy Church which has just started.

As part of my ministry as a Reader I am into my second term on the Readers Executive, helping with the recruitment and selection process. Another part of my ministry sees me volunteering as Cathedral Chaplain at St Nicholas' Cathedral at least twice a month. I also take my turn along with colleagues at taking assemblies in the local first school.

We have a local ministry team of which I am part and I have also started on the Diocesan Task Group for ministry development.

I am a member of the Deanery and Diocesan Synods and am a member of the Diocesan Board of Education.

I am excited at the prospect of being part of the General Synod, being able to make a difference to the Church of England which will be taking place through Reform and Renewal and very aware that there are issues in the Church that are divisive and hurtful to many people.

There are big changes coming for all of us and I welcome the chance to have a part to play in those changes and to help those who find them difficult and hard to accept.

The Church of England is at a crossroads and will eventually die if the challenges are not addressed and changes not made. The number of priests is declining rapidly so everyone needs to be better equipped for mission in the future and we need more ministers of every kind who are highly trained and know how to work collaboratively and with flexibility.

Reform and Renewal is all about making more disciples for God and making his kingdom grow on earth. This is not going to happen just from the top down but at grass roots level in every parish. The structure of the Church of England needs to change and training senior leaders is an important part of this too.

Finance is another big issue that gets most people hot under the collar but that is what the General Synod is trying to do; make the deployment of available funds more accessible to the areas needing it most.

Another issue is the bureaucracy that we all have to endure at different times from complex legislation to never ending form filling for faculties. All of this distracts us from what we should be about and that is the mission of the church so there needs to be more simplification and quicker ways of getting things done.

Apart from Reform and Renewal another big issue is that of same sex marriages in Church. I have to admit to being guarded about this issue but feel that eventually they will be allowed. Again it is acceptance of change that is so difficult and for some, the interpretation of the Bible on the subject. Just as with the idea of women priests and bishops, it will divide people and the whole issue needs take into account everyone's feelings. However, and this may seem simplistic to some, the main thing to remember is that we are all human beings being asked to love generously and inclusively, not only by Jesus but by Archbishop Welby too. One of the questions I often ask myself in difficult situations is 'What would Jesus do/say/think if he was here with us now? That can often help me.

The Church is the people, not the buildings, and it is the people who decide what kind of church we are by their words and actions. So even though the idea of General Synod is daunting, and I am just an ordinary person, I want to play my part in making it a church for the 21st century and beyond, especially in the Diocese of Newcastle where we are 'generous, open and engaged.'

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