

General Synod Election Address

Revd Catherine Pickford

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Stannington



Thank you to Paul Scott and David Hewlett for proposing and seconding me to stand as a member of the House of Clergy for Newcastle Diocese on General Synod. I think I am ready for the challenge, and here are some reasons why I think I would represent you well.

Experience

Despite being born in Oxford, I consider myself very much a Northerner. I grew up in Yorkshire and have spent the 15 years since my ordination in the Newcastle diocese. I served my curacy at All Saints Gosforth, where I learned about life in a busy suburban church, from the challenges of paying a substantial parish share to the opportunities of working with talented and able lay people. From there I moved to be first team Vicar and then team Rector in the multi-cultural, inner city parish of Benwell, where I spent 11 years in total. In Benwell I learned the importance of the church's role in creating and sustaining community in deprived areas, through supporting local organisations, running projects and the foodbank, and opening the churches for a wide range of community activities in addition to worship. As the Methodist and Roman Catholic churches in the local area closed, I saw how vital the parish system is in funding a church presence in areas which can't afford to pay for a vicar themselves.

The Church of England is able to grab headlines with its views, and has the opportunity to speak in the public square for those living in poverty. I would take to General Synod recent and extensive experience of the church in one of the most deprived areas of our diocese, and a clear insight into the issues faced there.

In Benwell, I also gained extensive experience of working with funders, from English Heritage to the Church Urban Fund. I learned how to navigate the complex and often very creative relationship between the funder and the funded. As Reform and Renewal means that we will be increasingly seeking funding from the central church for specific projects, I think my experience will enable me to be part of helping the central church to be a good funder, by listening, asking good questions, and expecting attainable results.

While in Benwell I was privileged to be part of the development of local vocations, two to the priesthood, and two to reader ministry. I was also training incumbent to

two curates. My relationships with those six very different people has helped me to understand and appreciate the breadth of vocations within the Church. I would like to be part of a national church with the flexibility to train and develop people in accordance with their talents and the task to which they are called.

Current Role

I am now the Continuing Ministerial Development Officer for the diocese, and priest in charge of the parish of Stannington. I think that being CMD officer puts me in an excellent position to be able to listen to the needs, concerns, and vision of clergy and readers over the next 5 years, and represent them to the General Synod. I am particularly interested in the Green Report, about how clergy training and development will happen in the future. I welcome the senior leadership programme, but my main concern is that there is relevant and good quality CMD available to all clergy and readers.

Skills

I have a track record in communicating with the national church about the diocese of Newcastle. In the last 18 months I have had 6 articles published in the Church Times, 4 of which were specifically about the faith and story of the church in our diocese. As Reform and Renewal is rolled out, being able to tell our story as a diocese to the wider church is going to become increasingly important, and I think I would be good at helping that to happen.

Parenthood

I am married to John, and we have three children of primary school age. Helping them grow as people and as Christians is very much part of my vocation. Since having children, I have been very appreciative of messy church and creative ways of worship which involve and engage them. Many of the parents I meet at the school gate believe in God and think that church should be involved somewhere in their children's lives, but that often does not translate into actual church attendance. I think that as a parent, I will be able to make helpful contributions to debates in Synod about children and modern family life.

Age and Generation

I am (just) under 40, and whilst my children don't think I am young, I will still be very much at the younger end of General Synod's age profile. I think it is important to have people of my generation and younger involved in General Synod now. During the 30 or so years before I retire (yikes), there will be deep and lasting changes in the church. We will need people with a strong sense of the identity of the Church of England at a local and national level to serve it in the future.

I hope you will feel able to vote for me in the election!

Catherine Pickford