

The Reverend Prebendary Cate Edmonds, General Synod Election Address



I am honoured to have been encouraged to stand for election to General Synod, particularly having just taken semi-retirement from full-time ministry in the Diocese, which has given me the experience and time to serve on General Synod, if elected. During the past eleven years I was as Diocesan Adviser for Education Chaplaincy and Vicar in the Otter Vale Mission Community. In semi-retirement I will be Chaplaincy Consultant to the Education Team and Assistant Priest in the Axe Valley Mission Community.

My role as Diocesan Adviser involved support, training and recruitment of Chaplains in Higher and Further Education as well as in our Church Schools. I was chair for a number of years of The National Executive of HE Anglican Chaplains and am still a member of the National Society FE and HE Development Group. My work with the Education Team of the Diocese also required working with schools on Spiritual Development, Prayer Spaces and Christian Ethos and for a short time I was a SIAMS Inspector.

In the Otter Vale Mission Community, I was responsible for the parishes of Escot, Feniton and Payhembury; three rural parishes in East Devon, each with a very distinctive character. During my time in these parishes I have developed children and youth work; I was a governor at both church schools in the parishes and Chair of one. These were wonderful opportunities for growth as these schools have developed into successful Federations. I also developed ministry amongst our farming communities as well as being involved in community developments in the villages; a key role, I believe, of a rural parish priest. Prior to retirement I served a term as Rural Dean for the Ottery Deanery. In May 2016 I was installed as a Prebendary of the Cathedral and elected this summer as one of the College of Canons representatives on the Cathedral Council.

Before moving to this Diocese, I served in Bath and Wells and Winchester Dioceses as Chaplain and parish priest. My first post in this Diocese was as full time Residential Chaplain from 2001 to 2006 at Plymouth, Marjon, University; a challenging and exciting role. During that time I was part of the Diocesan Safeguarding Team and on a subcommittee of the Board of Education.

If I were to be elected as a member of The House of Clergy my priorities would be; Inclusion, the Environment and Education. All I believe, underpin the Mission of the Church being aligned with our three Diocesan Priorities of Prayer, Discipleship and Joy.

INCLUSION

In all my ministerial positions I considered inclusion to be a priority; to draw in those who feel for some reason that they are on the margins both of the Church and Society. Serving as a Chaplain as well as a parish priest I have worked with people with mental health issues, those who have been rejected by church and those who feel they have no voice. Christ spent time with those on the margins and I feel that this is the vital work of the Church; at times we need reminding of Christ's teachings. Christ didn't differentiate between age, gender, sexuality, race or disability; an example to each one of us. I feel passionately about inclusivity and am keen that these issues are kept on the agenda of the Church and addressed appropriately.

Geographical inclusion is another area which needs attention; since there are many in our rural areas who feel neglected and over looked. There is much potential in our rural communities and this need to be highlighted and utilised. Our Diocese is a very rural one and the needs of the rural communities should be constantly brought to the fore but without overlooking our very significant and, in some places, deprived urban areas. This Diocese has many challenges, from rural and urban deprivation to an increasingly aging population. It is vital to have a strong national voice. I believe I can help by bringing my experience to providing that “voice”. Raising issues of a Diocese that can sometimes feel out on a limb is one reason why I have served several terms on national bodies.

I served as a member of the Devon Faith and Belief Forum Executive, which gave me additional understanding of those of other faiths and beliefs and the issues that they face in this part of the country. We live in a multi faith society and an understanding of those with other views and beliefs is vital for successful community living. Whilst holding firmly to our beliefs it is possible to build successful and fulfilling communities with all.

ENVIRONMENT

Living in this part of England and in this part of the world we can be complacent about the effects of climate change. I believe as Christians we are called to be good stewards of God’s creation. My strong links with the Melanesian Mission have given me the opportunity to experience firsthand the effects of rising sea levels and the destruction of livelihoods on island populations in the South Pacific. In this Diocese we are proactive in engaging with Green issues. The Church can be a vehicle for promoting care of creation through work in our schools and the wider community, giving the Church a more outward looking focus. There are challenges, however, on the horizon for our world, the promotion of Eco-Churches/Congregations and Green Action is vital both in the Diocese and nationally. Hence I feel suitably experienced to contribute effectively to the ever increasing debate on such matters.

EDUCATION

Education in the broadest sense is a vital priority; education for discipleship and spiritual growth has been a priority for me in my ministry. The creation of accessible courses at the seasons and online “Nudges” specifically has been a useful medium for encouraging a range of people to engage with the Gospel within my communities. My development of Prayer Space materials has proved a success in engaging people in prayer and reflection both within the community, in church buildings and in schools. My extensive ministry in schools, colleges and universities has taught me as much as I have shared with them. These experiences I believe will be extremely useful if I were to be elected to General Synod, being able to reflect upon the views and experiences of many people of different ages and at different points in their spiritual journey.

My three priorities are of course fundamental to the whole mission of the Church and thus the proclamation of the Gospel. If the Church is to be fit for the 21st Century and beyond, the Mission must be focused and adaptable, resilient and reactive and, of course, deeply rooted in prayer. If I am fortunate to be elected to General Synod I pledge that I will do my utmost to represent the views of the Diocese and make sure that our concerns are considered appropriately.