

The Revd. Preb. **Rosie Austin**, Team Rector of Shirwell Mission Community, Rural Dean of Shirwell Deanery, member of Diocesan Synod Triennium 2018-21



Nominated by the Revd. Preb. **Giles King-Smith**, Acting Archdeacon of Barnstaple and Vicar of Coast and Combe Mission Community, and the Revd. Preb. **Jackie Taylor**, Dean of Women in Ministry for Exeter Diocese and Rector of the Kingsbridge Estuary Churches Mission Community.

**I imagine you'd want your General Synod representatives to be people with a variety of experiences and from different contexts. Let me talk you through some of my experiences which inform my views and a little of my context.**

I live in North Devon with my family. After starting out as a Primary School teacher, God led our young family to North Devon over 25 years ago to live and work as assistant managers at St. George's House, a Christian Outdoor Centre; I still love working with young people in God's good creation. After eight years there, believing God was calling me as a midwife, I went into healthcare where I started out as a community care worker, spending time with people in need of care and listening to their stories. This also gave me a window into the life of a carer. I have huge respect for carers of all types, many working for shamefully low wages.

*Conversations about all our **wellbeing** are overdue. As people of God we should be leading the way with balanced working practices which allow space for family, creativity and rest. We should stand against abusive gig economy patterns of life and properly value all those who work or volunteer in our churches as well as our communities. The Clergy Discipline Measure needs reform to care for clergy and complainants.*

After a little time in the NHS (as manual handling trainer) I discovered my call to be a "spiritual midwife" (rather than a medical one) and began the road to ordained ministry. I trained at SWMTC, served my curacy at Fremington, Instow and Westleigh and now minister as Rector of eight rural communities on the edge of Exmoor. I am also Rural Dean to a wider area including the coastal towns of Ilfracombe and Lynton, and am a Training incumbent. While I have worshipped in both urban and rural churches, my call to ordained ministry came while I was worshipping within a rural church and for now that's where God calls me to speak out for, longing for small communities to be encouraged and supported in their mission. I was involved in early pilots for the SDF funded *Growing the Rural Church* project, and in discussions which produced the '*Lightening the Load*' resource which began by a group of us being invited to dream dreams about ministry which flourishes. ([www.growingtheruralchurch.org](http://www.growingtheruralchurch.org))

***Small churches*** are often incredible, reaching deep into the heart of their communities with long lasting relationships. But many are also fragile. Communities which value the presence of the church need opportunities to be invited into the life of the church not as guests but joint custodians of history, heritage, environment and community, working together in partnership. Some of the churches in our Mission Community have started along this road and festival churches are being imagined. Congregations and clergy together need releasing from burdens of bureaucracy to be energised into this missional partnership. We need to explore creative ways to engage with people beyond Sunday morning church, and re-think our structures to make room for that.



I was fortunate to be able to visit Exeter's companion Diocese in Thika for a curacy placement in 2013 and then for a visit in 2016 alongside Bishop Robert and others. This gave me a valued perspective on developing healthy links with our global church partners, with the potential to talk about our differences and learn from one another. It was good to serve for a time on our Diocesan companion link committee.

*These visits meant I was able to meet communities in Kenya being directly affected by **climate change**. These changes are being felt by millions across the globe increasingly today, often with the worst consequences on the poorest and most vulnerable communities. The climate emergency needs to be prioritised for the sake of the poor, and this will involve some courageous sacrifices from those of us who are materially rich. The new synod has a responsibility to speak out and act urgently to make changes.*

I have been welcomed into the parishes where I now serve as their first woman priest. I am grateful for those who went before me and laid the foundations to enable me to serve as God calls.

*Many people still experience discrimination within the church and I would like to be one who helps lay foundations for other people to minister as they are called by God, in **a church which includes all** regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, mental health or sexuality. I support equal marriage within our churches. I am aware of many who disagree, and pray that the LLF process helps us to listen well to one another so we can move forward in love and respect for one another. I am a Supported Candidate with Inclusive Church and a member of WATCH.*

I've tried in this election address to avoid 'code' and to be clear about my beliefs and passions. At General Synod I would hope to contribute from within my own experience, but I am also keen to learn and listen to those with experiences and in contexts different from my own. I hope to be able to be a voice for Exeter Diocese within General Synod – but also for those whose voices are too often ignored. I am happy to be contacted by email or direct message on FB or twitter. Thank you for taking the time to read this. **Please consider giving me your first preference vote.**

I close with one of my favourite Bible verses, I hope known by heart by our PCCs in our Mission Community, which describes the church of which I want to be a part:

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:12-14)*

## **Rosie**

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