

General Synod Election Statement

Proposed by Anne Foreman – General Synod Member
1999 – 2021.

“Simon has already become a voice that is listened to at General Synod having made significant debate contributions in the areas of Living in Love & Faith, Safeguarding, Housing and Youth Evangelism during his first few years. Re-electing Simon will ensure Exeter Diocese continues to have well informed and theologically grounded representation.” Anne Foreman.

Seconded by Annie Jefferies – Chair of House of Laity,
Diocesan Synod.

“It has been a pleasure to work with Simon in my capacity as Lay Chair and former member of the Mission and Growth Fund Scrutiny Panel. Simon brings his professional knowledge and thoughtful yet decisive views which are based on sound research, thorough understanding of background papers, committed love of God and desire to see our communities flourish.” Annie Jefferies.

Dear Elector

Thank you for taking the time to read this and whether you vote for me or not, please do vote.

WHY I AM STANDING

I am standing for my potential second term on General Synod at this critical time for the church. This pandemic, tough as it has been, gives the church an opportunity to journey to a new place. I am longing for something new to emerge and am hopeful that with courage, we can respond and find fresh vision.

I believe my skills are contemplative listening; encouragement; love and acceptance across theological divides; strategic thinking honed after 25 years of running my own business; an ability to sense what is required and needed in difficult situations; a letting go of my own agenda as far as I can see it; wisdom and forbearance; and a healthy realism of how the church is perceived in the “real world”.

WORK AND CHURCH EXPERIENCE

I am a Chartered Surveyor running my own property development business having completed over £30m of housing on brownfield sites in the southwest. Currently I am leading a multi-disciplined team of designers, engineers,

Simon Friend

and quantity surveyors on a £25m regeneration project in Bideford North Devon.



I particularly enjoy the public consultation process and engendering a vision for transformation; helping people to believe that change is possible in their community.

As a Reader, I have enjoyed leading worship, preaching and until recently, have had an active role on PCC for many years. I am part of the Diocesan Exploring Spirituality Course team and am a spiritual director. I also integrate my property skills when needed and voluntarily project-managed for my local church a £1.7m community centre development.

MY OWN SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

My parents were farmers in North Devon, and I became a Christian aged eleven as part of an evangelical Brethren Chapel, which gave me a love of scripture. Whilst studying at Oxford Polytechnic I ventured into St Aldates Oxford and was bowled over by the vibrancy and sense of presence of the Holy Spirit. This was my introduction to the Church of England.

In my mid-twenties I spent a transformative year in Uganda. A deeply impactful time, I discovered that God loved me for who I was, not what I did. I continue to have very close ties with Uganda and charities there.

In my late twenties I did a second degree in Theology at Spurgeon’s whilst working as a pastoral assistant at Holy Trinity Brompton.

For the last 15 years or so, I have been on another spiritual journey into the writings and practices of the catholic contemplative tradition. Finding new perspectives has led me to a fresh spiritual outlook on the nature of God.

I have moved to an including and accepting position on LGBT+ issues; beginning to glimpse the pain of those who have suffered so much from being excluded.

On General Synod I have found that my evangelical background, but radical inclusion perspective, has opened many fruitful conversations.

I am married to Judy, and we have two sets of twins, boys, now in their twenties. Another huge spiritual journey!

If elected, I want to be on the very edge of the inside, listening and reflecting the voice of those on the margins. I want to be part of a church that welcomes everyone, unconditionally – as Jesus did, which is why I am happy to align myself with Inclusive Church.

SYNODICAL, DIOCESAN EXPERIENCE

- General Synod Lay Member 2018-2021
- Diocesan Synod Member since 2015
- Reader with BD in Theology
- Ministerial Development Review Panel
- Exploring Spirituality Course team member
- Former Deanery Lay Chair
- Former Diocese Mission and Growth Fund Scrutiny Panel
- Former Diocese New Housing Areas Panel member
- 2015 Shared Conversations participant as lay representative for Exeter Diocese
- Chair of Trustees of CHAT Mid Devon - Homelessness, Debt Advice and Food Bank charity with 8 staff & £250,000 budget.

WHEN TWO ELEPHANTS FIGHT, IT'S THE GRASS THAT SUFFERS.

When I stood for General Synod in 2018, I said that perhaps the major issue facing General Synod would be; should the church accept same sex marriages? It has of course not been the only issue, and I am very aware that for many of our rural churches, getting running water to the church building and a loo would be a great step forward!

But we can't ignore this debate which when it arises can cause much angst and hurt on both sides.

This African saying best describes my perspective on this. We must find another way

which does not divide us into camps or partisan wings of the church, which



unfortunately presents the church as deeply unattractive to those outside. It's those on the margin, the edge, the voiceless, who suffer when the big beasts argue over their theological positions.

With fiercely held views on both sides, it's easy to lose the still small voice that often arises from the grass roots of the church.

As electors, I believe it is important that you have clarity on this from your candidates and that none of us dodge the issue with less than plain speaking. Sadly, we should be realistic about church politics and my firm view is that all candidates should be completely transparent on their stance on LGBT+ issues.

I do believe, that in the same way Jesus lived, the church should find a "*radical new inclusion*" as ++ Justin has called for. I would contend for a change that would allow same sex marriages.

But I also believe that clergy should not be forced into acting against their moral conscience and that appropriate protections are put in place that enables mutual flourishing for differing traditions.

It is my hope that we can have vigorous debate without argument; hold the tensions, differences, and pain without defaulting into divide and split. If we go down that route it will be deeply damaging for the church with many outside thinking "*Who cares what the church says – the world has moved on*". The grass roots of humankind are not interested in our theological in-fighting.

Please give me your first or high preference vote if you believe my statement resonates with how Exeter Diocese should be represented at General Synod. Feel free to contact me on 07970 100846 or sfriend@red-earth.org. I am also taking part in the online hustings on 21st September.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon'.