

The Revd Preb. Rosie Austin

1. What has prompted you to stand for election to General Synod in particular, and in which ways do you think it will challenge your capacity and capabilities?

I first stood for election for General Synod in 2021. Having served as Rural Dean and elected to Exeter Diocesan Synod, I began to appreciate the wider picture and sought to explore common issues affecting many of us in parish ministry – and felt the nudge of God to prayerfully put myself forward.

I have enjoyed the two way Synodical process... listening carefully to those ministering around me while trying to communicate concerns to those with power to make change. That may be through a speech in a debate or a yes/no vote but also importantly through conversations away from the Synod floor. I have also attended wherever possible the four Deanery Synods which I report back to, communicating decisions made at General Synod and the debates which preceded them.

I am beginning to find my 'voice', gaining confidence in speaking in a debate – while also making connections with a variety of people from different contexts with very different views. While there is much that challenges me, my gifts are in connecting with people.

I am very grateful for those who put their trust in me for that first quinquennium and I ask for your trust once again.

2. What do you believe the Church of England should prioritise over the next five years to support mission, Christian discipleship and the flourishing of parish and other worshipping communities?

For our church to flourish every place needs to be valued, and every leader needs to feel resourced and supported.

Over the next five years I pray for a church which ...

- a. values the small, not just the strong and powerful. We can learn much from small churches who are innovative and creative through both new and inherited forms of church. When we fret over decline we focus our resource on quick growth and large numbers while Jesus reminds us the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed.
- b. treasures the roots as well as the fruits. Discipleship is an everyday calling, often unseen, which needs prioritising.
- c. looks outwards as well as inwards, remembering God's call to serve our communities not just grow our congregations.
- d. Is a place of true welcome and belonging for young and for old, giving things up or doing things differently even when that is uncomfortable for us.

- e. is a non-anxious presence in a fearful world. We need to use our voice to call out injustice, to have courage to speak out for the most vulnerable - and show humility when we get it wrong.

3. What should General Synod do to help the Church become safer, more accountable and more trusted, ensuring that national reforms work effectively in parishes, dioceses, and cathedrals?

Firstly, the voices of victims and survivors need to be heard and prioritised. As church we have much to repent of, and much needs to change.

We have seen already some steps forward in the culture of the church, and our parish safeguarding representatives are to be valued for their work. Safeguarding is more likely to be talked about and accepted as an important ministry of the church – but so much more is needed for this to become something everyone in our congregations take ownership of, and where there are safeguarding concerns that people in our parishes know where to turn.

For culture to continue to change we need good communication about why it is so important, accessible training that fits our different contexts, safeguarding experts with manageable workloads – and the funding to provide that.

In our last General Synod quinquennium we faced the difficult question of making our safeguarding practice and oversight independent. But this is no simple task, the Church of England is not one charity with a head office in Lambeth Palace, but hundreds - each Diocese, Cathedral and PCC is a separate charity. The complexity of change must be understood as well as faced.

4. How should the Church prioritise good intentional investment in mission and growth whilst also resourcing parish ministry in all its forms?

The mission of the church (joining in with God's mission) rightly belongs at 'ground' level – in every conversation or contact where God's love is communicated. But it needs to be supported well. More investment is needed from the Church Commissioners for Dioceses.

As in politics, there is such a thing as too much devolution as well as too little.

Too much devolution means the smallest of PCCs and clergy with multiple parishes hold the weight of running and growing a church without sufficient support. In rural contexts this is isolating – when important posts are left unfilled wellbeing is affected as well as mission.

Too little devolution means that people in the parishes are disempowered. Decisions are made without them and are unsuitable for each context. Working together can lighten the load of governance but this needs investment and systems of organisation to be reimagined to work at each level.

Our buildings inheritance is also a part of the story but currently feels is a low missional priority for the national church. A children's event can't take place without a toilet. Churches need to become accessible places. Missional investment is needed for **places** in order to reach **people** with God's love.

5. General Synod must address issues on which faithful Christians hold deeply differing views. How would you contribute to honest debate, good disagreement and clear decision-making while helping the Church maintain its common life and mission?

One of the best things which emerged from LLF were the six 'pastoral principles', to acknowledge prejudice, speak into silence, address ignorance, cast out fear, admit hypocrisy and pay attention to power. These remain good foundations for facing up to disagreement.

Honesty and transparency are important, we often need courage to speak clearly about what we believe, founded on our understanding of Scripture. I have signed up to the 'Together' statement making clear my belief in a church which should be fully inclusive of all, reflecting God's incredible creation.

I hope I have been clear about where I stand with topics such as racial justice and prayers of love and faith. If not, please feel free to ask me (and other candidates) about specific issues.

We also need kindness and understanding, and I am sorry that this has often been missing in the debates at General Synod. We need to listen well to those we disagree with and remember always that the decisions we make affect real, beloved, people.

I have learned so much in my time at General Synod – especially from those with different views. In our difference (because of our difference) we are one body in Christ.