

General Synod Election Address 2015

Philip BROWN, Biggleswade Deanery



Nominated by Mrs Hannah of Bedford Deanery; seconded by Mrs Elizabeth Overfield of Ashwell & Shefford Deanery

I worship in Dunton, a small "commuter-rural" parish within a 3 parish benefice. Thus I have direct experience of the problems of rural ministry, the stresses of multi-parish benefices and the difficulties of integrating the traditional rural community with the influx of new faces, for which the rural village is an idyllic dormitory retreat. I see this right across Biggleswade Deanery in my role as Deanery Lay Chair, and by contact with others, across the deaneries in rural northern Bedfordshire. I was pleased to be nominated as the Board for Church and Society board member for rural ministry, taking an active part in the work of its Rural Strategy Group. I work with others across the Archdeaconry to ensure that the particular needs of Bedfordshire parishes are not overlooked by the various Diocesan committees. My nomination has support from across Bedford Archdeaconry.

The Environment is forecast to be a major topic for the new General Synod as it discusses the Church's response to climate change and the issue of man's relationship to God's creation. I joined the Board for Church and Society in 2009 because of my concerns for the environment. I believe that my scientific training enables me to differentiate between the scientific facts and the emotional statements in this highly controversial area. Furthermore, my background in engineering has taught me the need for pursuing efficiency and minimising the use of energy and the Earth's resources. I have an interest in the relationship between science and theology and during my previous time on General Synod (2008-10) I spoke in a debate on the subject.

The other major area of work for the new General Synod is to implement the proposals contained within the 5 reports in the "Reform & Renewal" programme. By background I am a bureaucrat and am confident in working on committees and working groups so will be able to take an active role in the work of General Synod to turn these reports into practice. I have been on Deanery Synod since 2002 and subsequently was elected to Diocesan Synod, and have been on Bishop's Council since 2009. I have taken an active role in setting the work of Diocesan Synod as a member of the Agenda Group. As a member of the Board of Finance, and its General and Parish Shares Committees I have upheld the needs of the rural parishes with their smaller congregations. Working with the Diocesan Mission Resources Officer I have ensured that parishes have advice on appropriate fundraising methods.

After I took early retirement I was conscious of the need for a better grounding in theology to support my Church activities. I first took the "Growing Together in Christ" course then moved on to the Interactive Christian Extension Studies course, graduating in 2009. At this time I was contemplating moving to Reader ministry, but was advised to concentrate on using my skills in committee work.

I started serving in a church with an anglo-catholic tradition at the age of 10. Although I was not very aware of this at the time, it probably influenced my views on liturgy. My style of worship is quiet and contemplative. I am more comfortable in a formal liturgy, with an ordered and familiar structure. Whilst preferring a simple, said form of worship, I value the great hymn

singing tradition - one which uses the sung word to educate the congregation and one where the music helps the singer to remember the instruction contained within the words. Maybe this comes from strong Methodist convictions within my family background. I always find it a pleasure to join our Methodist cousins for worship and I was instrumental in inviting the local Superintendent Minister to be an observer at our Deanery Synod meetings. When travelling on holiday I always try to join the local Anglican church on a Sunday. This has taken me to a variety of churches both in UK and abroad and I have used the experiences gained to help my work in St Albans Diocese. For several years I was the link with the members of the German Evangelical church in Biggleswade's twin town of Erlensee in Germany. During my travels across the USA I met the congregation of the Episcopal church of St James in West Hartford, Connecticut, USA, and was asked to assist in their worship during one visit. One visit to California saw me jumping on a moving cable car to worship at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco!

In summary, I believe that I have the experience and skills to both represent the Diocese of St Albans at General Synod and to further the work of Synod as it renews the Church of England over the next 5 years.

Phil Brown