

# Sheila Bissell M.A.

Lay Vice Chair, Bedford Deanery

Standing for the House of Laity of General Synod 2021

Nominated by:

Pauline Kendall, Chair of Laity, Bedford Deanery

Seconded by:

Ann Mason, Bedford Deanery



## Who am I?

I am a widow having been married for 41 years to Chris, a professor at the Open University. I am a mother to four children and have two grandchildren. I worship at St Andrew's Church Bedford where I sing in the choir, have been chair of our Outreach Committee and treasurer of our very successful Fairtrade shop. I have been a PCC member since 2006 and became Parish Safeguarding Officer in 2010. In addition, I became the Equality and Diversity Officer in 2019. I was elected to the Bedford Deanery in 2014 and the House of Laity of St. Alban's Diocesan Synod in 2015. I recently became Lay Vice Chair of the Bedford Deanery.

## My Professional Background

I was born in the West Midlands and my Christian background was originally Methodist. I trained as a primary school teacher at a Roman Catholic college in Kingston upon Hull. My professional life was in education, first as a Roman Catholic primary school teacher in inner city Birmingham before moving to Bedford with my husband where I taught in different schools. I have been a Special Needs coordinator and later became an Advisory Teacher for Bedfordshire working with Minorities Support Service. I worked in schools across Nursery, Primary and Secondary phases advising how to teach pupils who were learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). I supported and trained teachers to increase access to the curriculum, have greater understanding of cultural diversity and the breadth of inclusion issues which are present in schools. As such, ensuring inclusion has always been a high priority to me, and I would like to bring this experience and knowledge of inclusive practice to the General Synod.

## Why vote for Sheila Bissell?

- I have extensive professional experience of working with people from a wide range of backgrounds facing very real challenges within our society.
- I am a good listener, with strong intuition about people's concerns, an ecumenical background and I will endeavour to represent the views of the laity of the diocese in a democratic manner.
- I will work hard, speak up and use my vote wisely.

- I stand for an inclusive church that celebrates and supports healthy, loving relationships, based on a modern understanding of what it means to be human and the diversity of sexuality.
- I believe Jesus Christ is asking us all to think again – to reassess and bring about necessary change to create a more equal and just society.

## Why am I standing for election?

I feel called to stand for General Synod at this significant time in history as we emerge from the pandemic of Covid-19, because our individual and collective lives will not be the same again. The Church of England has a key role to play in our country as we face the challenges of inequality and discrimination in our society. As communities in England become more diverse in ethnicity, ability, age and sexuality, I believe the Church of England should be leading the way in accepting and celebrating difference. This will require a process of transformation across society and therefore also within the Church.

As quoted at the beginning of *A vision for the Church of England in the 2020s: 'Christ centred and Jesus shaped'*, "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5.17). We are now in a time of new creation. Emerging from a pandemic which has made social injustices all the more visible, we have an opportunity for the Church of England to use its voice to facilitate positive social change. We face a complexity of pertinent issues like wealth inequality, racism, xenophobia, the ecological and climate crisis, and societal breakdown of trust. All of these concerns have an impact on mental health. The Church has an important role to play, and duty to God, in standing up for justice and inclusion – both locally in communities and nationally through its political platform. We need to respond and rise to these challenges by becoming more relevant to all sections of society.

To achieve this new creation, we can build upon the tangible efforts that have already started. For the **environment**, the Church of England has set 2030 as a net-zero carbon target. It is recognised by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York that 'we need a new radical **Christian Inclusion**'; in their foreword to **Living in Faith and Love**. Likewise, the Archbishops' anti-racism report **From Lament to Action** sets out 47 recommendations to tackle racism. We can also increase our interfaith dialogue, towards a shared vision with other places of worship. A welcoming and inclusive church enables people to be seen and loved for who they are, supports their mental wellbeing and creates space for healing from harm, discrimination, and trauma. We can encourage all parishes to become safe places for conversation and connection, and welcome new people into church buildings as part of our **Mission and Outreach**. This will build a movement that brings growth among younger people, which is essential for our future.

The Church of England should be leading the way for a more equal and inclusive society, shining God's light of radical love. Since the General Synod is the forum to discuss important issues and bring about change, I hope you will give me your first preference vote. It would be much appreciated.

*Thank you for reading my electoral statement. If you would like to discuss any of these issues, please get in touch through email ([sheila.bissell62@gmail.com](mailto:sheila.bissell62@gmail.com)) or phone (07715625319).*