

My name is Vuyelwa Nkomo and I am a 27-year-old Biomedical Scientist originally from Zimbabwe and South Africa. I am part of St John's Church Bishops Hatfield, and I am standing for the House of Laity as I believe I could serve St Albans Diocese well as your Synod representative.

Being a Biomedical Scientist at Public Health England, the response to COVID throughout the pandemic has been a significant part of my work. This experience has helped me comprehend both the implications of the current interplay between faith and science question as well as giving me greater insight as to how the Church of England could best navigate a post COVID world.

As a young woman from an ethnic minority, I know what it's like to encounter and navigate challenges of gender and ethnicity, both of which I've had to face in getting to where I am now. My journey has allowed me to gain experiential insight into areas of inclusion, meaning that I have gained a first-hand understanding of what is needed from the church in order for it to become fully diverse, inclusive and representative of today's England.

Being in my twenties, I believe that my recent experience allows me to be able to speak on behalf of the emerging generation as to how we best address the pressing issue of the decline in younger generations attending the Church of England. I have seen, for example, that moving to university is one of the main life stages where young people, who have been brought up in the church, either begin to lose their faith or lose it completely. As a Student, I worked as a university warden, looking after first-years. Here I saw first-hand the struggles young Christians had as they left their usual routines of going to church with their families and found themselves having to make decisions and think through faith for themselves. The challenge of being presented with many options, with church often not being a priority, contribute to the statistics which show that 1 in 9 young people lose their faith completely, 4 in 10 leave the church (but still call themselves Christians) with only 3 out of 10 staying involved within the church. Fortunately, I was part of that 3 out of 10. As the church seeks to "grow younger," I believe that we need to take urgent action on how we address the Gen Z and Millennials. It is clear that this important demographic is currently not being reached by the Church of England, and I believe my experience can contribute to how we can best tackle this.

Finally, I believe that to address its current problems, the Church of England needs to work together toward inclusivity and equality in a united way. I am convinced that working together, could bring about true equality regardless of age, ethnicity or gender. There is a real need of nurturing the relationships between the older generations currently within the church, and the younger generations we are trying to reach. This would allow the older generation to pass down, wisdom, life skills and resilience to the younger generation, thus honouring of all generations and embodying Christ's vision of true Church with love being expressed in our togetherness and unity.