

Jo Winn-Smith

General Synod Candidate Statement



I have served Guildford Diocese as a member of General Synod since 2021. It has been a privilege to represent friends and colleagues and contribute to the shaping and direction of the Church of England. I offer to take on this role again, to build on the considerable experience I have gained in that time – contributing to debates, leading a debate, being Pro Prolocutor of the House of Clergy, Province of Canterbury, and chairing parts of its sessions.

Who am I?

When first elected to General Synod, I was a curate in Thorpe but had been teaching on the Local Ministry Programme (now St Martha's) since 2015. I have now been Chaplain to the Bishop of Guildford for almost 4 years, though shortly I will be leaving to be Rector of Esher, in Emly Deanery.

My background provides a broad range of knowledge and expertise regarding how the church works, and the issues it faces. Before ordination, I worked for the National Church Institutions in a variety of policy and governance roles. I worked in Mission & Pastoral, Central Secretariats for both the Church Commissioners and the Archbishops' Council, the Diocese Commission and Mission & Public Affairs (supporting bishops in the House of Lords on matters relating to marriage, children and families). General Synod involves a considerable amount of canonical, ecclesiastical and governance work, and I have a strong working knowledge of policy and procedure enabling me to participate fully in the necessary discussions, in order to find ways of making this huge and complex institution to function!

Since serving as Bishops' Chaplain, I have been involved in many of the behind-the-scenes operations of our diocese, and, I hope, supported many of you in a variety of matters, from joyful celebrations through to serious topics requiring judgement, wisdom and understanding. I believe I have both the knowledge required and nuanced and pastoral thinking needed to engage well in the matters Synod considers.

Hot Topics

Safeguarding – I am passionate about the gospel imperative to protect the vulnerable. In my diocesan role, I participate in clerical safeguarding case management groups and know what the necessary work looks like on the ground. Having trained in counselling and psychotherapy, I am also able to contribute pastorally to seeking to achieve the best outcome in very difficult situations. I am committed to building a safer church and encouraging a culture that supports victims and survivors, and deters perpetrators.

Inclusion and diversity – I chair the Guildford Together network and am committed to an inclusive church where God's radical welcome to all is shared, irrespective of gender, sexuality, race, age, ability. In this quinquennium, I was appointed to the national Living in Love and Faith working groups, participating in the Pastoral Guidance sub-group. This, I believe, reflects my commitment to open dialogue and working together to honour our differing convictions on ethical Christian living, whilst recognising our unity in Christ, through faith in the gospel. I also lead the Guildford Diocesan synod motion on online age-verification, bringing about one of the few moments of consensus across synod on a topic related to sex.



Parish Life – I am very sympathetic to the concerns of Save the Parish. I believe in our ecclesiology of providing the sacraments and pastoral offices to all in our cure of souls. Diocesan and national initiatives have their place in inspiring ideas and providing resources, but the parish clergy know their flock! I am keen to develop missional activities that discover and engage with where God is at work in our communities. I also believe in doing traditional ministry passionately and well!

Encouraging Children & Families – Absolutely! My first Sunday in church in London after university, I volunteered to help run the youth group (and, of course, ended up leading it!). I believe in making faith accessible to young people, without dumbing it down, but engaging in their awe and wonder. Children often have profound questions and sometimes articulate what adults have been socialised to internalise and not dare to ask! I enjoy bringing to life and sharing bible stories with young people. Post-Covid, and in a world of social media and AI and global instability, I believe society is longing for meaning and purpose, and we have the joy and compassion of the gospel to share with them and their children.

The Environment – I am convinced of the need to address climate change, and the part that individuals and church communities can play.

Clergy Wellbeing – I have seen the importance of this from different angles – confidentially supporting clergy through my diocesan role, experiencing the same but different stresses and strains of being non-stipendiary, and I am going into incumbency with my eyes wide open to best practice, and hoping to create good habits and wise boundaries – we shall see!

Theological Tradition

These days I would describe myself as mildly charismatic catholic. I came to an active faith in the evangelical tradition, and remain passionate for the gospel, particularly influenced by the Magnificat and the Beatitudes. I am creedally orthodox and progressive ethically, trusting all to the grace and abundant love of God in Christ, expressed and achieved through the cross and resurrection.

I have always worked across the traditions – as a church bureaucrat it was necessary, but I always found common ground with colleagues and enjoyed finding ways for the goodwill of all to be expressed. As a theology lecturer, my role is to present information and a range of views, as well as to argue my own and be clear which is which. Supporting the work of the Bishop's Leadership Team, I like to think of myself as bilingual, engaging well with evangelical friends and colleagues, whilst also bringing in other ideas and perspectives to ensure conversation is enriched and not monochrome.

Thank you for considering me for your vote.

Yours in Christ,

Jo

Nominated – Ben Cahill-Nicholls, Parish Priest, Tilford and Chief Executive, Clergy Support Trust
 Seconded – Noelle Coe, Chaplain, Guildford Town Centre Chaplaincy and Associate Minister, Holy Trinity & St Mary, Guildford