

Charlie Bell

Proposer: The Revd Canon **Roxanne Eversley**, Dean for Cultural Diversity and Canon Librarian, Southwark Cathedral
Seconded: The Revd **Hannah Gordon**, Rector, St Margaret's Chipstead



About me:

I'm a non-stipendiary priest in the diocese, coming to the end of my curacy at St John the Divine, Kennington. In my 'day job' I'm a forensic psychiatrist, treating patients who are usually sentenced prisoners or who are on license for previous criminal activity. These are people society so often forgets about or chooses to ignore, and **the thing that gets me out of the bed as a priest and as a doctor is to spend time with people who might otherwise be forgotten, ignored, vilified, or abandoned**, helping in my own small way to point towards the **fulness of life that we are all promised in Christ Jesus**. My faith was nurtured by so many others at a young age, and I am passionate and committed to doing my bit to make the Gospel known to those of all ages and backgrounds.

I have a strong interest in ecumenism and ecclesiology, and the interface of science, medicine, and theology. I trained for the ministry part-time at St Augustine's College, and continue to teach there and at Sarum College, whilst also keeping myself busy teaching medical students as a Fellow at Girton College, Cambridge. I have some links with The Episcopal Church in the United States, particularly the Cathedral in New York where I am a Scholar in Residence (although, of course, not resident!). I've written a couple of books on the current debates around sexuality and gender identity in the Church of England, together with others on doctrine and one upcoming on the meaning and importance of unity in the Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion.

Despite my being only relatively recently ordained, I have been heavily involved in the current work of the Living in Love and Faith implementation process (including the first Pastoral Guidance Group), the Shared Conversations in 2015, and have previously served on the Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod in the Diocese of Ely whilst also serving two years as a Churchwarden. I'm also a Board Member of Affirming Catholicism and involved in the setting up of Together for the Church of England, a group seeking to find a welcoming, inclusive, and expansive future in the wake of our divisions on sexuality and gender identity.

What I believe:

I believe in a holy church – one that is able to embrace profound difference and seeks communion and companionship rather than humanly created purity – and long for us to find a way back to being the chaplain to the nation, walking alongside all of society as wayfarer and friend, preaching the Gospel and bringing people to Christ. Our church is called to a **reinvigorated mission, to the seeking out of the Kingdom of God, and to the proclamation of the life-giving Gospel of Jesus Christ**.

I'm straightforward in what I believe and say, am willing and have a good track record in finding ways to engage fruitfully with those with whom I profoundly disagree, and am committed to a church that faces up to its mistakes and owns them, that repents and addresses not only the symptoms but the cause. I grew up in the United Reformed Church but was entranced by Anglicanism as a chorister in Chichester Cathedral, and **find great beauty and holiness in the creative and constructive diversity that is found where the Church of England is at its best**.

I love this diocese and its people, and want to play my part in helping it continue to move forward as **a place where the Gospel is proclaimed, the sacraments are celebrated, and the people are loved, nurtured, and listened to**. As your Synod representative, I would see it as my duty to **advocate on your behalf**, and this means being **open to your concerns**, hopes, fears, and joys, and representing them to the wider church.

I believe and hope that I have the experience, vision, and passion to be a helpful and compassionate voice on General Synod, and I hope you might agree to give me a chance to serve the parishes and Diocese of Southwark, and the wider church, in this way. **I commit to listening to you, learning from you, and representing you in the best way I can** to help equip us all for the work of ministry, to play my small part in building up the body of Christ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

My vision for General Synod

Decision-making and structures

I am totally supportive of the centrality of parish life in the life of the wider Church of England. Like many, I've been concerned by how powerless parish clergy can feel in the wake of decisions that the national church is seen to make and the failure of communication, accountability, and lack of on-the-ground experience that too often seems to permeate these decisions. At times, the church's various constituents seem to have been at loggerheads with one another, speaking over each other and failing to hear what the other is saying. A change is long overdue, and as your representative I would commit to trying to find ways to enable us to have proper adult conversations, and engage in decision-making which is accountable and transparent, not least when it comes to the spending of our money. Synod is called to hold our leadership to account, and I commit to playing a full part in doing so.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is a fundamental part of my clinical and church work: effective, sensitive, and careful safeguarding is central to my professional life and I would be very pleased to make use of my skills in this area to help inform and shape the debate in this area. As a church, we have gotten it wrong too many times. The current situation is deeply disappointing – reticence to implement the Jay Report and the fiasco in recent Synodical sessions suggesting an ever-deepening lack of confidence in the Archbishops' Council and its workings. We need – urgently – to get our house in order, and I am committed to listening to those we have wronged, and doing what I can to restore some trust in the church's processes in this area.

Transatlantic slave trade

The Church of England has a shameful history of subjugating and denying the dignity of beloved children of God. Every so often, we have been woken from our slumbers, and reminded that the God of love can neither tolerate this nor abandon God's children. Our involvement in the architecture of the Transatlantic slave trade, and our profiting from it, is surely a sin that cries to heaven for vengeance – and for justice and restoration, too. I am totally committed not only to careful listening to the voices of Black clergy and laity and others from Global Majority Heritage backgrounds that we have far too often ignored but ensuring that these good intentions are translated into concrete, demonstrable action such as arguing for increases in the Impact Investment Fund.

Living together in communion

I believe that our future as a church lies in moving beyond 'inclusion' towards a recognition that those we have othered for generations are already Christ's guests at the Eucharistic table, including LGBTQIA/queer people, like me. I am therefore strongly committed to ensuring that the previously agreed Synodical decisions on LLF are implemented without delay, and in the medium term to a church that embraces equal marriage in church. This includes a cessation of the structural violence currently perpetrated against clergy in same-sex/gender relationships (including a removal of *Issues in Human Sexuality*, an end to the cruelty of enforced celibacy, and opening the option of civil marriage), and the introduction of standalone services without further delay. I have no wish to exclude people from the church, and I am also acutely aware of the damage that 'structural provision' can do to the unity of Christ's church. I am therefore committed to working in good faith with others from different theological perspectives to find a way to a unified church in which different theological perspectives are held with integrity. This is a Gospel imperative, and our mission and evangelism rely on our finding a way to preach a Gospel that can be heard, and to be a church that people can believe in.

Intersectionality

I firmly believe that all those historically and currently excluded and othered by the church do better when we work together, amplifying and privileging the voices of the unheard, and standing alongside one another in solidarity with allies. I am acutely aware that there are plenty of white middle-class men on General Synod, and if I am to join them, I will do my best to promote the voices and views of those who are too often ignored or unheard. The church is the Body of Christ – and it is our duty to ensure all its members, whoever they are, are valued and welcomed. I am, therefore, absolutely committed to equality for everyone, at all levels and roles within the church, regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, mental health, or sexuality.

Clergy wellbeing

It is clear to me that many clergy feel overstretched, overburdened, isolated, burnt out, unsupported, overloaded, underpaid, and frankly rather unloved by the church. This is a matter of deep sadness, and should be a matter of concern for all those who want the church to flourish and thrive. Clergy wellbeing must therefore be a priority of this Synod and beyond, and is linked to many of the other issues I have mentioned here. I come with expertise in mental health and would fully intend to make use of this to ensure our clergy are empowered to serve the people of God.

Please give me your number 1 or high preference vote! I would love the chance to serve as your clergy representative on General Synod!

Cb561@cam.ac.uk

07962 021067