

CHRIS PHILLIPS

PARISH OF ALL SAINTS', BENHILTON

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Nominated by Sean Gilbert

Vicar of St Alban's, South Norwood

Seconded by Sarah Alexander

Associate Vicar, Holy Trinity, Redhill



Who am I?

- Arrived in the Diocese two years ago, having previously served as an incumbent at St Mary's, Willesden - a diverse and challenging parish in North West London.
- Served my curacy in West Yorkshire, and before ordination was a housing professional in the North East of England working with students and the homeless.
- Extensive experience of the challenges faced by young adults starting out in life, not only through my professional background but also as a husband and father of three young adults.

What are my priorities?

1. Supporting parishes

A great deal has been said and written about the state of the parish system. Too many clergy and lay people are over-worked and under-resourced. Often, the response from the NCIs has been to speak warm words while appearing to do little to set parishes free for mission and ministry in their community. My own parish faces a huge challenge to restore our historic building while continuing to proclaim Christ as Lord and administer the sacraments, and I know that we are not alone. In Southwark, we have been able to retain the 'one priest, one parish' model for far longer than many other dioceses. While finances across the whole church are increasingly constrained, I am keen to find creative ways to ensure that traditional links between parishes and their churches are not eroded. I am supportive of the manifesto of the "Save the Parish" movement and would work in Synod to return more of the Church's income to the parishes so that proper pastoral care, and the church's mission, can be deployed by the people who know their communities best - those who live there.

2. Generosity

I am a traditional Catholic serving a Society parish, and am fully committed to the doctrine of marriage as we have received it. Yet I am passionate about working across theological and ecclesiological boundaries. I want mutual flourishing to work for everyone - men and women, progressive, conservative, and everywhere in between. I am confident articulating a catholic vision for the church because I believe the church's historic teaching, found in scripture and tradition, is good news for everyone. I would defend this with passion.

3. Safeguarding

This seems to be an area that the church is struggling to get right, despite broad agreement about its importance. I believe we need genuinely independent oversight of diocesan and national safeguarding teams, to give survivors and others confidence that the church is a safe place.

4. Confident Disciples

This sounds like a slogan from a diocesan vision statement, but it really matters. We all know that church attendance has been in decline, and that many places have not recovered since Covid. If we are to draw new people to Christ, we must begin by ensuring that those we already have are adequately catechised. I'd like Synod to take steps to improve the quality of theological and biblical education for lay people, ordinands in training, and clergy.

What experience do I have?

- Born in 1982 to a family with a strong commitment to the Church of England (my father and grandfather were Diocesan Secretaries, and my mother was on General Synod). We worshipped at our local parish church for many years, before becoming part of Cathedral life where we lived. As well as singing in the parish choir, I began serving at the altar.
- Lived in North-East England for ten years in early adulthood. My wife and I became parents at an early age (while still at university), which means we experienced a great deal of personal challenge. This period of my life has left me profoundly grateful for the pastoral care of the church's clergy.
- After university I worked for Durham Students' Union running the Accommodation Office, then for Centrepont helping to run a Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme supported by funding from the Northern Rock Foundation.
- I trained for Ordination at Ripon College Cuddesdon, while reading for the BA in Theology in Oxford University.
- I survived cancer as a child, and have lived with profound high-frequency hearing-loss ever since. This, as well as having close family with chronic illness, makes me a keen advocate for inclusion for disabled people, particularly those with hidden disabilities.
- As a parent of three neurodiverse children (all now adults), and as someone who has done much work with young people professionally and through my priestly ministry, I am a passionate advocate for the voices of young Christians.
- Since ordination I have served as a Chapter Clerk in my local deanery, which also involved serving on the Mission and Pastoral Committee. I have also served on the Area Council of my previous episcopal area (in the Diocese of London), as well as being a member of the Diocesan Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod.
- I am a very active governor in our parish's Church of England Primary School, having been Vice-Chair until recently. We have just appointed a new headteacher and I have had a central role in this process. During my time as a governor I have been involved in two OFSTED processes and a SIAMS inspection. The role of the Church of England in education is a precious responsibility and a privilege which we must continue to take seriously without diluting the Gospel message.
- During the course of the last year, a group of parishioners and I have become trustees of our local community centre, established for the benefit of the elderly but providing services to all ages. As Chair of the CIO, I manage the staff team and work with our users and trustees to ensure this special place continues to serve our community. Our vision is for our parish as the local church to demonstrate our commitment for the wider community, and in so doing to be a microcosm of what the wider church should be. I hope to offer something of this vision on General Synod if elected.
- We are currently in the process of raising substantial funds to safeguard and repair our historic church building, which means I am all too aware of, and experienced with, the work of DACs, Heritage England, architects, structural engineers, surveyors, Archdeacons, Area Deans, and funding organisations.

I promise to work hard for you in Synod if elected. Please do vote, and if you are able to give me a high preference I would be most grateful.