

# HELEN SMITH

## **Candidate for General Synod**

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Proposed by: Barbara Varley, Easington Deanery

Seconded by: Barbara Chambers, Auckland Deanery



## **Personal details**

My name is Helen Smith, I am sixty-two years old and have served on General Synod for eleven years – an extra one added on due to COVID. I am recently widowed but have two daughters and three grandchildren who keep me busy and bring me much joy. I currently work as a Parish Nurse two days a week looking after the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of two parishes and communities – Bowburn and Spennymoor. I really enjoy this job as, after forty-four years in nursing, I feel I am still able to make a difference to people's lives. Most recently, along with a friend and colleague, we have set up a Sit-a-Cise class in each parish which has been very successful and attracted both members of the congregation and members of the local communities. Nothing too strenuous takes place but it's lovely to hear the banter and laughter that goes on throughout the class. I am church warden at St Andrew's church Spennymoor and also sing in the choir and serve when needed. A privilege of being a Parish Nurse is taking part in the laying on of hands at the service of anointing and healing and also taking home communion to members of the congregation unable to attend church.

## **Why am I asking for your vote?**

I am asking for your support to return to General Synod because I believe that the Church of England is at a critical point. I believe that the Church of England needs people on Synod who will listen carefully, speak honestly, work constructively with others and above all keep Christ and the mission of the Church at the heart of what we do. Serving on General Synod is both a privilege and a responsibility and during my time on Synod I have seen the strengths of our Church but also the considerable challenges facing our parishes, our clergy and our communities. I would like the opportunity to continue to represent you and bring the experience I have gained to the next quinquennium.

## **Supporting our clergy and lay people**

Having grown up in a clergy household and also having a grandfather and brother as priests in the Church of England, I would like to see the General Synod address the considerable pressure on clergy and lay readers. We cannot expect to see churches grow if their leaders are exhausted, overstretched or burdened by bureaucracy. I want to continue to support clergy wellbeing, recruitment and retention, training and realistic workloads. We must also remember that the church does not belong to the clergy alone. Lay people are essential to the life of the church and their voices must be heard.

## **Safeguarding and rebuilding trust**

For nineteen years of my nursing career, I was a school nurse and heavily involved with safeguarding. I worked with vulnerable families and their children, attended child protection conferences, wrote reports and ensured that “every child matters”. Subsequently I am passionate in ensuring the Church gets safeguarding right after all the past mistakes. They need to recognise their responsibility to protect children and vulnerable adults, to listen properly to victims and survivors and to ensure safeguarding is properly managed and resourced. Hopefully this will be addressed early on in the next quinquennium and will provide an opportunity to rebuild confidence and trust. We need a culture where safeguarding is embedded in every part of the church. Trust has to be earned through action and I would value the opportunity to be involved with this if I am lucky enough to be re-elected.

## **Disagreement without division**

The Church of England contains people with deeply held and sometimes very different theological convictions. This has been particularly evident in our debates about sexuality, same sex relationships, the sanctity of marriage and the Five Guiding Principles. I believe strongly in the importance of the Five Guiding Principles and see it as a way of living with disagreement without allowing disagreement to become division. Mutual flourishing must mean mutual respect and I hope that I can be a voice of respectful debate and principled decision making.

## **What I will bring to General Synod if re-elected**

If I am successful in being re-elected, I will bring:-

- Experience – an understanding of how General Synod works
- Independence – I will not simply follow the prevailing view, I will listen, think and vote according to my convictions
- A parish perspective – having grown up in a clergy household I am well aware of the pressures of parish life
- A willingness to listen
- Try to challenge constructively

The Church of England faces serious challenges: - financial pressures, safeguarding, clergy wellbeing, disagreement over theology, caring for God’s creation and the need to reach the next generation of worshippers. If re-elected I will listen, challenge where necessary and work with others to seek the best future for our Church and the communities we serve.

Thank you for taking the time to read this address. I would be grateful if you would consider giving me a first or high preference vote in this election. My prayers are with all those standing for General Synod at this time.

***Helen Smith***

