

Rev. Roger Widdecombe

Proposer: Rev. Rob Aitken

Seconder: Rev. Fay Price

Who am I?

- I currently serve as Team Vicar for St Paul's in Cheltenham. We serve a deprived local community in the centre of quite a privileged town and seek to show the love of Jesus in as many different ways as possible. I am also Assistant Area Dean for Cheltenham.
- I'm married to Hannah and we have three children, two of whom are off at university.
- Before ordination in 2003 I was in sales for 13 years whilst leading our church youth group.
- I grew in a clergy family which has given me an insight into church leadership from a family perspective, although some might question why I still ended up a clergy person!
- Over the last 20 years St Paul's has grown from nearly closing to being sustainable and able to maintain some exciting mission especially to young people and families.
- Over the last 6 years, we have sent a good number of young leaders off to train for both the ordained ministry and lay church planting.
- Until recently, I was chair our local community primary school governing body. In this role I navigated the doubling in size of the school and a change of headteacher.



Why am I standing for General Synod?

Under the Gospel imperative of transforming the world through the saving grace of Jesus, my hopes in standing for General Synod are threefold; **leadership**, **representation** and **unity**.

Leadership

The Church has come a long way in its care of clergy since my own childhood growing up in a clergy home. However, there remains important work to be done, both in preparing clergy for the demands of leadership as they lead churches in mission, and in supporting their wellbeing so that they can sustain long, healthy and effective ministries.

Recent high-profile examples of leadership failure have brought into sharp focus the consequences that can arise when unhealthy patterns of ministry, leadership and accountability are allowed to develop. More broadly, clergy wellbeing is an issue we cannot afford to overlook.

The pressures of ordained ministry, and the way in which clergy are supported and cared for, are surely among the factors contributing to the vocations challenges the Church currently faces.

My own experience has given me insights into these issues which I believe would enable me to make a thoughtful and constructive contribution to discussions at Synod level.

Representation

The church has a long way to go in ensuring it is representative of everyone, especially those we serve and those in the margins of society. We have a Gospel mandate to ensure that people only stumble over Jesus and thus we need to remove the obstacles that stop them making a decision based on Him and only Him. This means having churches and leadership structures that represent the people and communities we serve. Having lived and led in a deprived and marginalised community for some time now, I believe I am well placed to work with others in reforming our structures so that we can reach every people group, especially the poor and marginalised.

Unity

We need to work together as the whole Church- locally, nationally, globally and ecumenically- as we seek to see God's kingdom come. The past five years have been particularly challenging for the Church of England as we have sought to navigate the questions raised through Living in Love and Faith.

I personally hold to the traditional Christian understanding of marriage, while recognising that others hold different convictions. I believe it is vital that we listen carefully and graciously to one another, seeking to understand the experiences and perspectives of those with whom we disagree- to "walk a mile" in one another's shoes- even where significant differences remain.

My background has taught me the importance of listening: listening to God, listening well to people, and working constructively with others towards shared goals. I believe these skills would be valuable at Synod as, together, we seek a faithful and gracious way forward for the Church.

What can I offer General Synod?

- Experience in growing church
- Experience in ministry to the poor and marginalised
- Highly relational and ready to listen
- Experience in attaining financial sustainability
- Skills in setting priorities to achieve outcomes e.g. EcoChurch, chairing governors etc

If elected I will endeavour to represent all our clergy in Gloucester and lead in Synod with diligence, and so request that you consider giving me a high preference vote.

Thank you for reading and I pray you will know God's leading as you vote.

If you would like to talk to me about these or any other issues, please call me on 07989354640 or email me at vicar@stpaulscheltenham.com