

Mark Womersley

Bath & Wells Diocese

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General Synod Elections 2021 – House of Laity



Dear Elector

It is my pleasure to ask you to consider my candidacy. I do so after a good deal of careful thought and prayer, knowing that this is a very responsible role to fulfil at a critical time for the Church of England. While I therefore approach the task with a sense of humility and even some trepidation, I assure you that, if elected, I will do all I can to represent the laity across the full theological spectrum.

In this election statement I aim to set out my credentials and suitability for the role. On that basis, I hope you will agree that I have the necessary skills, time and Christian commitment to attract your vote, at the highest level of preference you are able to give me.

To assist, I have set out immediately below some background details about me, after which I will address some questions which are relevant to my candidacy.

Personal background:

I am 62 years old and have lived with my wife in Monkton Combe, near Bath, for 22 years. Our 4 children are all independent adults.

Throughout our time in Bath we have worshipped at Holy Trinity, Combe Down. I have served on the PCC for 9 years, and on the Deanery Synod for 3 years. I regularly lead services, preach and fulfil other roles at Holy Trinity. But mostly I simply enjoy being part of a warm and supportive local Christian community.

Apart from being immersed in the pleasures and challenges of our large family, my interests include maintaining our beautiful garden, reading (and listening to audio books), exercising our lockdown puppy, and following the local rugby team.

I enjoy classical music, particularly sacred and choral works. I'm a rather average but enthusiastic bridge player.

Relevant skills and experience:

After 30 years as a solicitor in an international law firm I retired at the end of 2020. I was a partner for over 20 years, holding various senior management roles.

My specialism was pensions law. This involved advising major UK pension funds (including the C of E Pensions Board on its green investments) and large companies. As a lawyer I developed skills required to deal with highly technical law, and also to provide clear and accurate legal opinions.

My style is to nurture a collaborative and supportive working environment for everyone. I obtain the most pleasure from contributing to the successes of others.

I was a school governor for over 10 years at a local Bath school, and have been a trustee of several pension funds.

I'm a graduate of St John's College at Cambridge University, where I read History. My legal studies were completed in London.

Why am I standing for election?

Fundamentally, I care very much about the Church of England, with its rich heritage and its broad and winsome welcome for Christians of all traditions and from all walks of life. With that in mind, I feel called to offer my skills, time and enthusiasm to serve on General Synod.

By any measure, the current times throw up very considerable challenges, and to navigate these will require great humility, wisdom and courage. I dare to hope and believe that I can bring such attributes to bear. Furthermore, with my professional skills and experience, in particular my legal background, I am drawn to working with others in the legislating and debating environment of General Synod. Our common goal will be to discover the best outcomes for the Church at this time.

In summary, this all points to my being ready and equipped to take on the role, and in that sense, it comes down to a question of obedience to an inner prompting to serve.

How will I seek to contribute at General Synod?

General Synod is, ultimately, a decision-making body with legislative powers. As an Anglican, when making key decisions and framing legislation I will draw on the God-given resources found in:

- scripture (namely, the Bible as the ultimate source of divine revelation),
- tradition (the solidarity we have with our predecessors in faith), and
- reason (as redeemed and guided by the Christian mind).

From Bishop Richard Hooker in the 16th century onwards this threefold formula has delineated the Anglican source of authority. As an active and engaged member of General Synod, it will be my guiding light, undergirded by prayer.

Of course, the specifics of any particular decision will turn on many competing factors and may elicit strongly held views. As a result, consensus remains elusive in several key areas of our common life. Yet, all we can do, and all I will aim to do on General Synod, is to search for the truth on any matter through the careful and mutually affirming application of the God-given resources described above.

What do I consider to be the key items ahead for General Synod?

Given the nature of our incarnational ministry to the world, several of these key items reflect the current times. As such, addressing them is both our burden and our calling. They include:

- finding instruments of unity in the face of increasing cultural disintegration and conflict,
- achieving the long-term economic sustainability of Dioceses in a post-covid world,
- resolving deeply held differences about human sexuality and gender, and
- rising to the challenges of environmental degradation in a way which is achievable and fair.

Additionally, there are big decisions to be made about current plans for resetting the future “Vision & Strategy” of the Church. How can the parish system be revitalised for the task of mission? How can we better reflect the communities we serve? How can we simplify our governance structures for the tasks ahead? Addressing these questions has the potential to be the most far-reaching item for General Synod, and in that sense the stakes are high. As an elected member, I would bring my legal skills to bear on the substance and detail of any proposals. I would want to test such proposals in debate to see if they preserve the fragile yet precious continuity between the past, present and future life of the Church – avoiding therefore the perils of a damaging and sudden rupture.

On such matters General Synod will need wisdom, grace and foresight. To govern is to choose, and we must choose well. I believe my experience, skills and abilities are well suited to what this requires.

Anything else about me?

I said earlier that I enjoy reading! To give some hints of how I would approach my role on General Synod, here is an insight into my recent reading as a Christian:

My most influential book of the past decade	“Exclusion and Embrace” by Miroslav Volf. A profound examination of how we must live with difference – reaching across boundaries.
A book of Church history read recently	“Thomas Cranmer” by Diarmaid MacCulloch. A wonderful treatment of the man and the dramas of his time – knowing our Anglican inheritance.
A book which I have most enjoyed of late	“Dominion” by Tom Holland. A reminder of how Christianity has shaped our world – appreciating the transformative power of the Gospel.
A book I value on human sexuality issues	“A Conversation Waiting to Happen” by Oliver O’Donovan. Theology at the heart of the debate – patient reflection leading to a new consensus.
A book I am currently reading	“On Augustine” by Rowan Williams. Brilliant, rich, challenging – remaining alive to the sheer majesty and substance of our faith.

Thank you very much for reading my election address. I do hope I can attract your support.

Mark Womersley

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