

The Revd Jo Stobart

📍 **Archdeacon of Wells** (designate)

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Standing for the House of Clergy of General Synod

Proposer: The Venerable Charlie Peer,
Archdeacon of Bath

Second: The Reverend Rob Eastwood Dewing,
Team Rector of Portishead and Co-Area Dean of
Portishead Deanery



Dear Colleagues,

I am seeking re-election to General Synod to represent the clergy and wider Diocese of Bath and Wells. It has been an honour to fulfil this role during the last quinquennium, and I am confident that the experience I have gained during this time, and the relationships I have made across the whole Synod and its diverse traditions, will be invaluable in the work before us. General Synod is a complex organisation and knowing more about how to navigate that complexity will help me to make an effective contribution from the outset. I stand this time as Archdeacon designate of Wells (I currently hold PTO for Bath and Wells) and will be representing my archidiaconal colleagues in providing scrutiny, challenge and creative engagement with the legislative work of Synod that affects the day-to-day ministry of our parishes. These may not be the debates in Synod that grab the headlines, but they are fundamental to enabling our churches, chaplaincies and worshipping communities to respond with confidence to the challenges and opportunities they face sharing the love of Christ in their contexts.

A key contribution I have made during this last quinquennium has been to serve as a Central Member of the Crown Nominations Commission, alongside my 'pair' The Revd Canon Claire Lording. It has been an enormous privilege to play a part in the discernment process for the appointment of diocesan bishops since July 2022. This role has enabled me to make connections with the National Church and with faithful disciples throughout the country who represent the full breadth of the Church of England. Through my experience of the process, I have seen in practice the positive results reaped when individuals are true to their own convictions but also hold as precious the convictions of others and the unity of the Church. That combination of one's own deep-seated convictions held in tension with love for our sisters and brothers in Christ is how I try to inhabit my own ministry, and which I will continue to do as the next Archdeacon of Wells, and as one of your General Synod representatives if I am elected. I long to see the body of Christ, in all its diversity, built up, cared for and strengthened. Please consider giving me your first-choice vote and do be in touch if you have any questions about my candidacy.

As your clergy representative, my Synod priorities will be:

To support frontline parish ministry

The parishes of the Church of England are precious – its beating heart. The ministry of our clergy, lay minsters, office holders and volunteers needs to be prioritised. Bishop Michael has argued powerfully in Synod for this frontline ministry to be better resourced by the Church Commissioners and to move away from the current system of financial allocation via SMMIB that has been the recent paradigm in our church.

To be an advocate for rural ministry

I served as Area Dean of Somerset South, a largely rural deanery, and over the last 18 months I have covered services every Sunday across rural Devon. I have seen firsthand the challenges faced by clergy with large multi-parish benefices, as well as lay people continuing to enable imaginative and faithful worship, mission and ministry during long vacancies. The challenges our rural communities face in their care of buildings and in managing governance are significant. Synod needs to provide new ways to address the structures that can hinder the growth of God's Kingdom in rural Somerset.

To act as a bridge

I will share the work of Synod at diocesan and deanery levels, and in the Chamber ensure that the voices of the amazing clergy and laity of Somerset are heard. Some of the most powerful debates over the last quinquennium were diocesan synod motions, bringing the local to the national. For example, the Worcester Diocesan Synod Motion, which discussed the role of faith in the rehabilitation of offenders, inspired me, in partnership with the Exeter Diocesan Safeguarding Team, to run an event for all those involved in ministry to prisons leavers. It clearly demonstrated the power of connecting debates in the Chamber and the Gospel work of our parishes.

To keep climate emergency at the forefront of our debates

I'm old enough to remember walking to collect water from standpipes in London during the drought of 1976. This summer's drought has affected us all – but most especially our farmers and all involved in food production. Our churches need to be encouraged and helped to take all measures possible to work for the care and stewardship of creation. Synod needs to recognise this as a priority that cannot be ignored.

To support changes that enable the ministry of all God's people

My husband is a Reader and as a former lay chaplain myself, I am a passionate supporter of the ministry in all its forms. Throughout my own ordained ministry I have been involved in vocations work and am encouraged by the steps Synod has taken towards enabling the ministry of disabled people and those from working class backgrounds. I will continue to speak out for the greater diversity of our church as it seeks to share God's love with the widest audience possible.

To be a voice for clergy

Our clergy, stipendiary and self-supporting, need to be valued and cared for. Clergy wellbeing should be a priority. The changes made in the last quinquennium on clergy pensions showed the impact Synod can have when it works together in this arena. Caring for those who give so much to others can be helped or hindered by Synod. I will be a powerful voice for the former!