

General Synod – Election Address

Revd Mark Barker

Two years ago I wrote my first election address as there were two vacancies to represent Rochester Diocese on General Synod. I will admit to being quite surprised, humbled and daunted to find myself elected, as I have always been someone who is quite content serving in the local parish and community, and never really saw myself as a Synod sort of person. And so the last two years have been an enormous learning curve but they have also been a great privilege.

It has been a learning curve as the General Synod is a “strange beast”, with many rules, procedures and foibles that take time to learn, and joining half way through a 5 year term meant that I had missed out on the induction which follows the election of a new Synod. It was helpful to know one or two members of Synod who have been serving for a few years who could explain and guide me through some of the intricacies. Feeling that I am just getting to know my way around and feel more confident, it seems right to offer to serve a full 5 years, so that I can begin to put some of what I have learned to greater use.

It has also been a great privilege to have been a member of General Synod at such a historic time in the life of the Church of England with the Women Bishops legislation. But I have been delighted that this has not been the only matter under discussion, and have been pleased to be part of the discussions about the “Reform and Renewal” programme covering such matters as evangelism, discipleship, ministerial education, leadership development and resourcing the future.

But who am I?

- After leaving school, I spent 12 years working for Barclays Bank in branch banking and then in the City, where I trained as a manager and therefore have some financial understanding and also management skills that I have continued to develop in leading a church staff team. This helps me understand some of the business and financial aspects of General Synod.
- I am married to Miriam, who trained and worked as a GP, until God changed her direction and she trained for ordination. She has just finished her curacy in the Southborough Team Ministry, and after discussion with Bishop James, has begun a community chaplaincy role in West Kent part time, as well as being an SSM at St. Stephen’s Tonbridge. I am therefore a strong believer in all orders of ministry being open to women as well as men, as well as the different ways this can be lived out in our communities.
- We have two children in their 20’s. I believe strongly that we should be equipping and enabling young people and young adults to take leadership roles within the church. This is a missing generation within the church.
- I trained at St. John’s College, Nottingham, served my curacy in the Barking Team in East London, before moving to Cranham in Upminster to lead a church plant. I have therefore had experience of a multi-cultural UPA parish, a suburban parish and now a market town parish.
- I am presently Vicar of St. Stephen’s Tonbridge, where I have been for 11 years. This is an exciting parish to be part of, with a vibrant youth and children’s work, and a passion to serve the local community. We have been through a major redevelopment and have recently taken responsibility for a mission chapel that is situated within the parish.
- If I had to put a label on myself, I would probably say that I am an “open evangelical”, who believes that the Bible is inspired by God and is therefore the basis of all our teaching & mission; that we are called to live Christ-like lives in our world; and that we

are empowered by the Holy Spirit and should strive to join in with what He is doing in our world. I hope though that I have an open mind, and am willing to listen to people with different views to me and have my mind changed if appropriate.

- I believe in visionary-leadership and am a “big picture” person, but also someone who manages processes and likes to see things done well, and I hope these will be useful in a time of change within the Church.
- I have a passion for the church as the hope for the nations, and believe we have good news to share with our world. I therefore want to see people coming to faith, the church grow stronger and be more effective in our God-given mission and ministry.
- I believe in working with the broader church and ecumenically in seeking to build the Kingdom of God, as none of us have got it all individually, but together we can be so much stronger. I have therefore chaired the Tonbridge and Area Churches Together for the last few years. I am also committed to learning from the church in other parts of our world, and have helped St. Stephen’s develop mission partnerships with communities in Romania and Tanzania.

The next General Synod will probably be focussed on two key areas:

- Issues around human sexuality. I hope that all our time is not taken up on this, and that this is not all that the media report, for it so often comes across that the church is hung up on sex and gender. Whilst I would hold an orthodox view of marriage, I am looking forward to hearing different sides of the debate and to being open to learning from others, but am conscious that the discussion, and how Synod conducts itself through it, will be hugely important for the church, not least in how the world will view us.
- More significant for me will be the positive business that will flow from the “Reform and Renewal” programme, and I hope that through this mission and ministry in parishes, chaplaincies and other settings will be fostered and supported better, and that we will see the steady decline in numbers within the Church of England reversed as we meet the real spiritual hunger that people have within this nation.

Having served this Diocese for two years on General Synod, I would welcome the opportunity to use this short experience for a further 5 years, believing that I have a wide experience of the church and lots to offer. I would therefore count it a great honour and privilege to be elected to the new General Synod.

Mark Barker
24th August 2015