

Stephanie Whitehead

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I have been part of the Anglican Church throughout my life and truly believe it to be a significant place of hope and transformation through the power of Jesus. It is a church that influences culture locally, nationally and internationally. Like any human institution, it has its faults, but I remain hopeful for its future and feel called to offer what I have for election to General Synod.

I worship within Chilwell Parish, predominantly at Christ Church. I am currently on the PCC, and alongside previous PCC experience in Bristol in my late twenties, this has given me significant parish governance experience to draw on.

Volunteering in different contexts outside the Church has enabled me to come alongside others, including working with refugees both in the UK and abroad, adults with additional learning needs, and the bereaved and dying in a hospice. These experiences have deepened my conviction that a key priority of the Church is its welcome, public witness, and care for those who are vulnerable or displaced.

I trained as a scientist and then as a medical doctor. Not long after qualifying, I developed a chronic illness that meant I could no longer serve as a doctor in the way I initially planned. However, God does not waste his gifts, and as I continue to recover, I believe he may now use those gifts in a new context.

As a woman in my mid-thirties, I would bring the perspective of an emerging generation of lay leaders. I have led life groups and served in worship, prayer ministry, Alpha and welcome. My experience, though, is not only that of study, work and volunteering. I have also lived with significant disability and life-limiting illness, and know what it is to depend on mobility aids, benefits, and the practical care of church family. This is a common experience for many within the Church, and I would hope to advocate for those whose voices are not always easily heard.

My training and lived experience have shaped in me both skills and character that I believe could be useful in the work of General Synod: careful listening, weighing evidence, ethical reflection, safeguarding awareness, and empathy, enabling me to advocate for others.

Safeguarding is very important to me. There has rightly been a significant overhaul in safeguarding policy and process. The Church needs to be a place of trust and

accountability, with clear processes in place. Although much work has been done, restoring trust in the Church remains important. As Synod continues to work on this, I believe my training and experience within the Church, healthcare and the charity sector would help me contribute thoughtfully and carefully.

Across the country, many people are struggling with their mental health, and this is reflected in our churches too, among both lay people and clergy. I am grateful for the work General Synod has done in recent years to encourage better pastoral care and mental health support. There is more to do, however, as increasing numbers of people seek spiritual and pastoral help in times of distress. I would want to help the Church grow as a safe, supportive and hope-filled community, from local parishes through to national decision-making. Drawing on my own experience and training, I would seek to advocate especially for those who cannot always easily speak for themselves.

General Synod, like any human environment that encourages debate, will often be a place of disagreement. Being united in Christ gives Synod the opportunity to debate prayerfully with kindness, consideration, understanding and humility. Ethical and political debate is common within medicine, where empathy for others and their standpoint, while weighing the evidence presented, is essential to bringing about the best outcomes. If elected, I would hope to use my experience to disagree well, remembering that we are all created and loved by God.

My confidence in the Church of England is rooted in its commitment to Scripture, the historic Christian faith, and the Anglican formularies. I believe the Church is healthiest when it receives God's word with humility and courage. At the same time, I would want to bring those convictions to Synod with gentleness, careful listening and a desire to serve the unity and mission of the Church.

I feel led to stand for election to the House of Laity in General Synod because I believe these experiences and gifts may be useful in serving the Church at this time. Decisions made nationally have real-life implications and significance at parish level. If elected, I would seek to listen carefully, represent lay voices faithfully, and contribute thoughtfully to Synod's work. If you believe I would serve well as one of your representatives, I would be grateful for your first or a high preference vote.