

Tom Woolford

Candidate for the House of Clergy in General Synod

Proposed by the Rev'd Lesley Hinchcliffe, Seconded by the Rev'd Hannah Boyd

About me

I have been Vicar of All Saints', New Longton since 2020 and was recently appointed Assistant Area Dean, working with the Rev'd Hannah Boyd. Alongside parish ministry, I'm a tutor in theology at Emmanuel Theological College, and a training incumbent for a curate-in-charge at Leyland. Before ordination I completed a PhD in history and taught political philosophy at Cambridge. I'm married to Julie and we recently welcomed our sixth daughter into the world. Outside church and family life, I remain a keen (though very average) cricketer and a keen (and slightly more proficient) pub quizzer!



I was elected to General Synod in 2021 and served for the first half of the quinquennium, before resigning my seat to spend a year as Theology Advisor to the House of Bishops. I therefore have experience both as an elected member of Synod and of the structures of the National Church Institutions, working with bishops and others across different traditions and viewpoints on some of the most difficult questions facing us.

Why I'd like your vote

I love the Church of England: its reformed and catholic heritage; its Scriptural, liturgical and sacramental worship; its commitment to pastor and evangelise through the parish system; and its place within the worldwide Anglican Communion. I want to help preserve and renew this precious inheritance while helping the Church respond faithfully and imaginatively to a changed and changing world.

During my previous time on Synod, I sought to make a practical difference. Among other contributions in debates and committees, I led Blackburn's Diocesan Synod Motion seeking to abolish wedding fees, successfully amended legislation to strengthen PCC control over the disposal of parish land during vacancies, and represented the Church of England at the Church of Ireland's General Synod.

If elected, my particular priorities will be:

- **The Parish.** I am standing as a *Save the Parish* candidate and support its manifesto pledges. Blackburn is blessed with bishops, senior clergy and a DBF committed to parishes and maintaining clergy numbers; nationally, the picture is less encouraging. I want much more of the Church Commissioners' available resources directed towards sustaining ordinary parish ministry, relieving pressure on parish share and reducing the financial incentive to create ever-larger benefices. This matters because the parish is fundamentally missional. In New Longton I have seen flourishing work among children and young people and baptism families bring the Church into relationships with people beyond



our regular congregations. Weddings, funerals, baptisms, schools and everyday pastoral ministry remain extraordinary opportunities to serve our communities and share the Gospel.

- **Safeguarding.** As Theology Advisor I prepared papers for the House of Bishops and General Synod on safeguarding and the episcopal office; and have subsequently participated in a series of national seminars on safeguarding and theology. I want arrangements which improve safety, transparency and accountability, while ensuring that pastoral responsibility is not simply outsourced and that the proper scope of safeguarding policy and procedure remains clearly defined. 
- **Sexuality.** I remain personally committed to the Church's doctrine of marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman. I am just as committed to ensuring all people, no matter their sexuality and relationship status, feeling and being fully welcomed and included in the life of the church. As Theology Advisor, I worked extensively on LLF and the Prayers of Love and Faith, earning the trust and respect of people with very different convictions to my own. The uncertain and unsatisfactory conclusion to the LLF process late on in the last quinquennium seems, in retrospect, to have been inevitable: the doctrinal, legal, and ecclesiological questions and constraints, and the lack of a clear majority in any House in either direction made real progress intractable. I do not know what is likely to be brought to Synod in the next five years: I can only promise to judge future proposals carefully on their theological, legal, ecclesiological and pastoral merits. 
- **Mutual Flourishing.** I personally hold a traditionalist understanding of holy orders and want a vibrant future for clergy, ordinands and parishes who share it. I also sincerely want ordained female colleagues to thrive in their ministry as priests and bishops – as I hope my friendships, working relationships and commitment to the formation of female ordinands have demonstrated. I therefore want to ensure that the 2014 settlement remains in place, while hoping that modest changes could be made to improve the experiences of ordained women and traditionalist catholic and complementarian evangelical clergy within its provisions. 
- **Vocations and formation.** My experience as a theological educator, supervisor of ordinands, and training incumbent has deepened my heart for calling, forming, and retaining priests. Sustaining the parish system requires enough well-formed and well-supported clergy to serve it. I will be closely interested in matters related to discernment and theological education. 

The next Synod will face serious choices about money, ministry, safeguarding, and the structures of our common life. Some things in the national Church need to change, but my experience in Blackburn gives me confidence that when parishes and clergy are trusted, supported and properly resourced, much can flourish.

Since first standing in 2021, I have gained considerably more experience of Synod, the House of Bishops and the workings of the national Church. I would like to put that experience at the service of the clergy and parishes of Blackburn Diocese and of the wider Church of England.

Please feel free to contact me by email (tomwoolford@gmail.com) or phone (01772 613347) to discuss anything I have mentioned here or to ask any further questions. I would be very grateful for your **first preference** vote, and almost as grateful for your second or third!