

Rebecca Cowburn



I very much welcome this opportunity to introduce myself. I am standing in this election having been encouraged to do so by others, and after reflecting prayerfully and testing this calling with a number of trusted Christian friends and Ministers.

I desire to serve God in all parts of my life and I long to see our churches thriving, filled with people seeking to follow Jesus and exploring the Christian faith. I believe that my church experience and scientific background can be of use on General Synod, as Synod considers key issues such as climate change, declining church attendance and the challenges faced by small rural churches.

Serving Christ and the Church of England on General Synod is a formidable task and is one that I would approach with energy, commitment, excitement and prayer.

Email: rc2standrews@gmail.com

Thank you for taking the time to read this address.

Church:

My husband and I have been members of St Andrew's, Caxton for the past six years. It is a small rural church with fewer than 20 regular attendees and is part of the Papworth Team Ministry of 15 churches, in the Bourn Deanery.

Since joining our local church, it has been my privilege to serve on the PCC (since 2015), as a churchwarden (since 2017), on Bourn Deanery Synod (since 2016), as Secretary to the Deanery Synod (since 2017), and on the Diocesan Synod (since 2018). I am also a reserve organist at church.

The church congregation is very active and caring. I've worked closely with church members to introduce a number of church-led activities which can help to tackle loneliness in our small rural community and give people the opportunity to ask questions about the Christian faith. They include the reintroduction of coffee mornings at church, a Bible study/Home group (previously in our home, now combined with other groups online), and a monthly Walking Group for local churches and their communities, with a Christian 'thought for the day' and prayer at the start and finishing with coffee, cake and hopefully new friendships.

At the start of Covid-19, I jointly established (with our PCC Treasurer), and have helped run, a church-led village volunteer group that delivers shopping, prescriptions and other support to local residents.

Relevant work experience:

During my 20+ year career in the Civil Service, I worked for a number of Government Departments on a wide range of issues, both as a scientist and as a policy maker. Much of that work focussed on **climate change** and ways to mitigate it:-

I specialised in renewable energy, in particular bioenergy from forestry and agriculture - I acted as Technical Advisor to the UK Government's Biomass Task Force on the use of biomass for energy; led a cross-government team to implement the Task Force's findings; contributed to the development of sustainability legislation; analysed renewable energy options; drafted strategies; briefed Government Ministers; and participated in European meetings.

I also worked on research/policy programmes aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and at improving environmental sustainability. For several years I led a team to support senior policy makers and scientists in the co-ordination of marine science research across the UK Governments, that should help our understanding of the effects of climate change and human impacts on the marine environment.

During my career I also led a regional team that worked with partner organisations to help address the challenges faced by remote **rural communities**. Many of these challenges are similar to those experienced by communities within the Market Towns' initiative.

A bit about me:

I spent much of my childhood in rural Yorkshire. After university in Edinburgh, where I studied biological sciences, I worked and travelled abroad. On returning to the UK, I joined the Civil Service and worked as a scientist and then on policy issues, in London and the regions, for over 20 years. I left the Civil Service when we were preparing to move back to Cambridgeshire, and have since become self-employed.

I'm married and my husband is also a scientist and a Christian. We live in a small rural village with two cats, and countless wild ducks, pheasants and rabbits that have decided to share our garden with us!

Faith:

In terms of my faith, I remember realising, when I was around 9 years old, that God existed. I also realised that if He existed and was God, I needed to commit my life to Him. I didn't, however, understand why Jesus was so important. So that night I committed my life to God's service and asked Him to show me, over the coming years, who Jesus was.

And God, mercifully, answered my prayer. He showed me that Jesus is His dear Son who brings us forgiveness from our sins. Since then, I have sought to share the good news about Jesus and to do so 'with gentleness and respect' (1 Peter 3 v15). I have co-led Bible study groups and have helped to lead courses for people exploring the Christian faith.

Diversity and Unity:

The Church of England encompasses a wide range of views and traditions, that are held together in the unity of the Spirit. While I've mainly attended evangelical churches, I have also, over the past 40+ years, been blessed to worship in churches with other traditions, from high to low churches, from charismatic to a church that met in a shop front in an outback town in Australia. Some were large growing churches and others small rural parishes, such as our local church, where members come from a wide range of traditions. God has continued to hone my faith in each, as I've learnt more about Him, His holiness and His love, and more about the people He calls us to be.

Key issues facing the Church of England:

There are a number of critical issues that are likely to be addressed during the next 5 year session of General Synod, including:

- **climate change & environmental sustainability concerns** – the need to strengthen the Church's response to the world-wide challenges of climate change, to show leadership and to identify practical ways that the Church can meet its own target, of becoming net carbon zero by 2030, without placing an unsustainable burden on local churches;

- **science and faith discussions** – the Archbishop of Canterbury has recently established the Anglican Communion Science Commission (ACSC) to examine how the church currently engages with and understands science. A misunderstanding of science and faith hinders our mission to many currently outside of the church.

- **stopping the decline in church attendance and encouraging local church growth** – overall, weekly church attendance across England is continuing to fall. *Statistics for Mission 2018* reported that 'most key measures of [church] attendance fell between 10% and 20% from 2008 to 2018'¹. At the same time, the church is experiencing financial pressures, has fewer paid clergy, an increasing lay-leadership (that will need clergy oversight) and a parish system that is under pressure. More encouragingly, over the same period, 10% of parishes saw an increase in attendance. Clear sighted, prayerful, godly decisions will be required by Synod to help the church to flourish, to continue to share the good news about Jesus and to provide a safe community for all in this new environment.

- **responding to theological initiatives, such as Living in Love and Faith** – it is important that all views are heard with understanding and respect, and that Synod comes together to seek positions on issues that honour God above all.

¹https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-10/2018StatisticsForMission_0.pdf

If elected to General Synod, I would seek to serve the whole Diocese and the wider church to the best of my abilities. I long to see the Church of England and its congregations flourishing.

What I believe I could particularly contribute to General Synod are:

- my knowledge and understanding of renewable energy and environmental sustainability, to support and help inform the Church's response to the Climate Change crisis;
- my experience, from having been a member of growing churches, of factors that can contribute to church growth, by God's grace - to help the Church as it seeks to increase weekly attendance;
- my scientific background, when issues of science and faith come before Synod;
- my understanding and appreciation of the breadth of the Church and of its traditional teachings; and
- my commitment to working for loving, biblical decisions in Synod that are pleasing to God.

I should be very grateful if you would prayerfully consider voting for me. Thank you!

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- Please do contact me with any questions at: rc2standrews@gmail.com