

General Synod Election Address – Rev'd. Sam Lees

It is my intention to stand for election to the House of Clergy of General Synod for the approaching term, in the body of this address I aim to set out the reasons I feel called to stand, the matters close to my heart, and my pledge to represent the wider Diocese of Norwich as well as the views and experiences of my own parish.

For the sake of introductions, my name is Sam, I am the Vicar of Crossroads Church, Earlham and have been in post here for just over a year. Before coming to Norwich Diocese, I served a group of housing estates in the Diocese of Chelmsford for a little over half a decade. As the announcements of the new term of Synod were made, I felt a strong sense of call to stand, and having not found anyone to talk me out of it – I have thrown my hat into the ring.

My heart is for those on the margins; 'the least, the last and the lost' as we like to brand it in the Church. For me this epitomises the ministry here in Earlham where our parish consists of low-income housing estates and the University of East Anglia making this a broad context with a complex mix of needs and opportunities. Since beginning ordination training, I have always noticed a lack of people coming forward from working-class backgrounds – and those who have been called from such are met with various hurdles in a system built around a very different demographic. Synod has begun a great work in this area with the report 'Let Justice Roll Down Like Waters' and I have a real heart to see this continue and flourish in the life of the Church, with a foundation that supports and values ministers from low income, low education backgrounds I believe we would see more people following a call to ministry from areas like Earlham and similar places across the nation.

Urban and estates contexts I realise are a minority in the Diocese of Norwich and I don't pretend to speak for everybody's lived experience, but in a diocese as wonderfully varied as ours it is important that we see as broad a spectrum of tradition and experience represented as possible. Poverty, of course, is not limited to social housing estates, and having witnessed first hand the challenges facing those living in 'hidden deprivation' in both rural and coastal areas I commit to bring awareness and missional-focus to those living in poverty of all kinds in our Diocese, be that financial, food or infrastructure based.

Another focus that has been put on my heart is that of Christian unity – remembering Jesus’ plea to the Father “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you”. It would be bonkers to ignore or side-step the fact that in recent times division has been sown among us in the Church, and as the outgoing Synod did the often-painful work of embarking on discussions and walking through disagreements around such matters, I think it falls to the next synod to walk the path of reconciliation and restoration – something I would be committed to. It could be far too easy to allow schism or separation to have the last word – but we are called as the Church of Christ to honour the other members; “for if the foot should say “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body... it would not for that reason stop being part of the body.”

Though for some in these times, reconciliation may seem a pipe-dream - I truly believe that it is possible to travel well together even in our difference, not just because it would be ‘nice’ but because Christ explicitly calls us to unity, noticing that we are not then called to uniformity.

Finally, I am committed to supporting and expanding Synod's work on neurodivergence across congregations, volunteers, and clergy. As a neurodivergent minister, I have lived experience of navigating training and ministry with these dynamics. In Earlham, I am blessed to see neurodivergent members not just included, but thriving. In worship, we are called to ‘come as we are,’ and I want to see a Church of England where everyone feels safe to be fully themselves in their local church.

I bring no desire to "swing for the fences" on who is right or wrong on the issues that divide us. Instead, I will channel that same energy and tenacity into pulling us toward peace, practical mission, and mutual flourishing. I ask for your vote so I can advocate for a church that is safe, united, grounded in real parish life, and actively present in every community across our Diocese and nation.