

Sam Wilson

General Synod 2021 election address

Proposer: Jo Oughton, Parish of Bramhall (Cheadle Deanery)

Secunder: Mike Duncombe, Parish of Bowdon (Bowdon Deanery)



Dear electors,

I am standing in the **2021 General Synod elections**, and I would love to have your support and your vote to be able to represent our Diocese on the national stage!

About me

I'm 23 and I work as Parish Missioner for Youth for the Parish of Bowdon here in the Diocese of Chester. I have been involved in youth work since I first became a Christian at 16 and I am blessed to have it as my full-time job after several years of volunteering. I previously worked in computer repair where I helped a wide range of people struggling with major problems - in many ways, my job has not changed!

Bowdon Parish is a very vibrant church with a real mixture of the modern and the traditional, bringing people together of many different backgrounds - young people included! From messy church to BCP, I have loved being involved in every part of our worship, including personally leading many services, and seeing how these different styles all praise God in different ways.

Throughout my journey of faith, I have loved worshipping in churches of all shapes and sizes, from the inner-city to the rural, and the high to the low, which has helped me to recognise that although there is one path to God through Jesus, that path can look and feel different to different people. I have spent much of my time as Bowdon Parish's youth worker working alongside local churches, including those not from an Anglican background, and if my time as a Christian has taught me anything, it's that no one church has all the answers.

Having been on our PCC for many years, I have helped deal with a wide range of issues, as well as being a key part of organising events and groups, outside of my job as youth worker, that have helped our parish remain a thriving, multi-generational church. This experience has given me an insight into exactly the sort of problems churches across the diocese face and I would love to bring this perspective to the General Synod.

Why am I standing?

- † I believe that for our Church to thrive, **young people** must be at the forefront of the big decisions we face. As a young person who works with even younger people, I believe I can bring a perspective that is often not seen or heard enough at a national level. For our Church to grow over the next five years, we must do more to help parishes reach out to young people, especially those parishes which cannot afford paid youth or children workers. If elected, I would be one of the youngest members of the General Synod.
- † I support an **inclusive** church whose doors are open to all. The Church of England faces big challenges over the next five years, and throughout we must welcome people of all backgrounds and sexual orientation and be a place of sanctuary, not judgment. I hope to be a part of this welcome at the General Synod, and would like to see our Church doing more for LGBT+ Christians and those from a working-class background.
- † The pandemic has reinforced **inequality** across the country, including within our Church, and I would like to see the General Synod raise this issue and ensure poorer parishes receive more support to help the most vulnerable.

What do I believe?

A Missional Church

- † **Looking beyond parish boundaries** - different parishes have different skills and by coming together and working towards shared goals we can pool our gifts and talents to help further God's mission. Not every parish can afford children, families, or youth workers, nor well-equipped buildings and materials. I believe the Church should do more to support the sharing of materials, experience and guidance that already exists throughout our parishes so that poorer or smaller parishes aren't left behind. It is often the parishes with the smallest numbers on the electoral roll that have the hardest-working people, and they should be equipped and supported, not left to burn out.
- † **Working more with young people** - with three-quarters of practising Christians today reporting that they came to faith before the age of 18, for our Church to grow, we must look outwards to young people who have a deep desire to explore the big questions of life yet feel they have nowhere to go. I believe the Church should use its wealth to invest in the next generation and promote more young people into visible roles within the Church.
- † **Supporting the most vulnerable** - the pandemic saw nearly 80 per cent of churches involved in running or supporting a food bank or other similar services such as food clubs and hot meals and our parishes were at the forefront, responding to the deep need throughout the country. I believe the Church should push for this work to continue where it is badly needed and equip parishes that want to help but might not know how to begin.
- † **Using our church buildings** - many beautiful churches across the country sit empty for the majority of the time. I believe our churches should serve as tools for mission and be set free to equip themselves with the resources needed to make this happen.

An Inclusive and Safe Church

- † **Creating accessible spaces** - disabilities come in many different forms, but all of us are created in the image of God and no one should feel excluded due to challenges that arise from a disability. I believe the Church should help parishes be more accessible not just in the physical world, but also through our preaching and our youth and children's ministry.
- † **Promoting ministers of different backgrounds** - for our parishes to welcome people of all backgrounds, our parishes ought to be led by people of all backgrounds, especially those of working-class backgrounds or from minority ethnic groups. I believe the Church should help more clergy candidates and lay leaders who have a calling to minister feel free to step forward.
- † **Improving safeguarding** - the reports over recent years have demonstrated that we have a huge way to go in ensuring all children and vulnerable adults are protected within our Church. I believe we should place oversight of our safeguarding procedures into a fully independent body that has the power to step in where needed.
- † **Supporting LGBT+ Christians** - as a youth worker, I have unfortunately seen many young people under the assumption that the Church of England today continues to see LGBT+ people as sinful and irreversibly broken and that the Church is no home for them. It is hard to reassure people of our willingness to welcome them fully when our view as a Church on this issue can be cold and convoluted. Often LGBT+ issues are seen as an academic topic for argument rather than an issue of identity that is incredibly personal. I believe the Church could do more to support parishes exploring the *Living in Love and Faith* material and help LGBT+ people feel loved and supported whatever specific parishes may believe.

If you would like to talk to me further, please email me at s.wilson989@gmail.com.