

Rev'd Virginia (Gini) Williams

General Synod Election Address 2021



Who am I?

I am in my third year of curacy in Sancroft Benefice of Churches in rural North Suffolk and I am married with two teenage boys. I grew up in a small village not far from here, and although I spent many years in Manchester, London and overseas, rural life is in my blood. Not the idyllic Beatrix Potter version, although I appreciate that, but the reality of living a long way from goods and services, working with people from all walks of life and being closer to the natural world, which has a habit of reminding us that we are not in control.

What experience do I have?

The work I did before I was ordained, was itself a calling. I was a nurse and health visitor and, in the early 1990s, specialised in tuberculosis. I initially worked in London, then Russia, and for the last seven years all over the world as the Tuberculosis (TB) Project Director for the International Council of Nurses. TB most often affects the poorest and most vulnerable in society with the least access to care and treatment.

I campaigned continually for improvement in patient care and investment in nursing, speaking at conferences and participating in strategic events and working groups. This should stand me in good stead for the meetings of the General Synod. Negotiating solutions across various parties with different opinions and priorities has been a significant part of my working life. I am prepared to speak up for myself but more importantly I am compelled to speak up to ensure all voices are heard.

What am I standing for?

- **A tangible church presence in every parish**

Having grown up with a strong faith, I sadly fell out of love with the Church as a young adult. It took many years before I was drawn back in, being no longer able to resist the call. Over the years I have worshipped in churches of various shapes, sizes and traditions as I always prefer to worship in the church closest to where I live.

I would bring with me to General Synod a commitment to ensuring the Church of England continues to have a presence in every parish and strengthening the relationship between Church and community to provide sustenance to all, within and outside the church building.

- **A well-prepared and supported workforce serving Church and community**
The pandemic has shown us the resilience within local communities to pull together and look out for their neighbours. Indeed, it has given many of us the opportunity to work with others of all faiths and none. Following the challenges of the last few years and undoubtedly more heading our way, we need resilient communities with churches playing their part with strong local ministry – both lay and ordained.

The move to mixed ecology of worship traditions and communities has great potential but requires strong leadership and team-working. These teams need to be able to discern locally the best way forward. What will work in an urban or semi-urban setting may completely miss the mark in a rural area. As our diocese is largely made up of rural parishes, I want to see any Church strategy taking full account of the rural context both in terms of worship and of social concerns such as transport, poverty and isolation.

We need to find a balance between making Church attractive and making it relevant to God's purpose. If it is relevant to God, it will be relevant to everyone seeking a closer relationship with God.

- **A church open and welcome to all**
There will be some important votes coming up over the next term of the synod and I would see it as my responsibility to ensure that people in our local synods are kept aware of the debates coming up.
I have been giving careful thought to the House of Bishops' report on same-sex marriage and the publications around Living in Love and Faith. Personally, I struggle to be convinced of our right to deny faithful people access to marriage in church. I appreciate that some people have strongly held opinions to the contrary and no-one should be forced to participate in anything they feel would compromise their integrity. However, I currently feel that my own integrity is being compromised by not being able to offer people equal rights in a Church which proclaims its welcome to all comers.

Summing up

At a time of so much upheaval, conflict and concern for times to come, we need to be a Church with a banner of hope flying high - trusting in God and a better future where anything is possible. That is faith not naivety speaking: that is God's promise to us all.

Thank you for reading my address.

With every blessing

Gini

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