

Revd Dr Rowan Williams: Anglican Chaplain, University of York.



I have lived and worked in York Diocese since March 2010, when I was appointed Anglican Chaplain to the University of York. I became a member of General Synod in 2013, after seeing it at work on the university campus every July, and I have surprised myself by really enjoying it! During that time I was appointed by Synod to sit on the national Board of Education and its successor, the Higher Education Development Group. I was also part of the committee which rewrote the Church's safeguarding legislation; as someone who works primarily with the 18-25 age group (and whose background prior to ordination is in residential care work with adults with learning disabilities, mental health problems and dementia), I feel I have a particular responsibility to speak up for better provision for vulnerable adults, so it was a great privilege to take part in this work and see it pass into law.

I am standing for Synod again because I have daily contact with a generation of gifted, committed young Christians who often feel that their preoccupations are not represented, or even understood, in Church. In a recent report on chaplaincy by the theological think-tank Theos, I was shocked to see the following quote from a university student: 'I would expect a vicar to be sexist, racist and homophobic'. There is an urgent mission priority here, which we need to grasp: even if we know that assumption is wrong, it is shared by a huge percentage of the student age group who have no contact with the Church, and my chaplaincy colleagues and I cannot break it down on our own.

The Church of England is facing a time of profound change in the way we relate to wider society. My experience on Synod so far has shown me that we actually have an enormous gift to offer the rest of the world, if we choose to use it: the ability to live maturely with difference. As a female priest, I rejoice that we now have women bishops and it was a huge joy to be on Synod to vote for that; but I also voted for the Five Guiding Principles, which ensure that those who are unable to accept women's ministry on theological grounds are still able to flourish within Anglicanism. In this set of sessions, Synod will be facing an even bigger test of how Christians deal with difference, when it looks in detail at the Pilling Report on Human Sexuality. Some time ago, the Church made a commitment to listen to the experience of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people within the life of the Church. Alongside a deep and honest engagement with Scripture and theology, I believe that we urgently need to honour that commitment. We may well still find ourselves divided on an appropriate response, but we will do so with a greater understanding and respect for each other as Christians and as human beings.

More generally, I want the Church to have a stronger voice on issues of poverty and injustice, both in the UK and elsewhere; on access to healthcare, quality of life and how we face the reality of death; on the need for high-quality education, available to everyone, at all levels; on better communication between Christians and those of other faiths, and of no faith. Most of all, I want the Church to have the confidence to be the generous, loving, dynamic community I know it can be, proclaiming by word and action that the Gospel really is Good News for all. I don't always agree with the decisions made in Synod, but I *am* always open to having my mind changed. If re-elected, I will continue to do my best to represent the breadth of views within the Church and within the diocese, and I will vote as my God-given integrity directs.

If you have any questions about anything I have said, please do contact me on rowan.williams@york.ac.uk and I will do my best to answer them.