

REVD DR CHRISTIAN SELVARATNAM



Proposed by: Revd Canon Dominic Black, Hull Minster

Seconded by: Ven Sam Rushton, Archdeacon of York

I hope you will re-elect me as a representative of the Diocese of York for General Synod. I am an experienced member of General Synod, having served in this role from 2010 to 2015 and 2020 to 2021, which has included additional involvement as a member of the Ministry Division Pioneer Panel and the Ordained Vocations Working Group.

A little about me

I was born in London in 1968, which makes me a young 53-years old! I grew up in Hull—a city I still love—and I have lived in York for the last 22-years. My wife, Amanda, works at the University of York, my eldest daughter is married and living in London, my son has just finished university and is working for a church in Nottingham and my youngest daughter is a nursery nurse in York.

For the last two years, I have been the Director of Church Planting and Parish Revitalisation at St Hild College. In this role, I am working to support the Northern Dioceses in their work to revitalise existing parish ministry in all church traditions as well as starting new churches. This work has included founding a Church Planting Track for ordinands who are designated by their bishop as church planters or 'revitalisers', and a Centre for Church Planting that serves the Dioceses of the Northern Province. Much of this work is shaped by my recent doctoral research which looked at apprenticeship forms of training clergy.

My ordination was 15-years ago, I was also one of the first pioneer ministers in the Church of England. Since then, I have been part of the clergy team at St Michael le Belfrey and I have completed for 14-years as the (part-time) ordained leader of 'G2', a fresh expression of church in York Deanery that particularly connects with families and people under the age of 30. Many of the members of G2 have come to faith, or come back to faith, through mission and social action projects run by our church. At G2, I worked particularly hard to develop the involvement of lay-leaders. As a result of this, 12 members of G2 have gone forward for ordination and more than 40 others have gone on to work for dioceses, churches or other Christian organisations. G2 has always been self-resourcing and has not needed to ask the Diocese for financial support.

Recently I finished 15-years working for Alpha (the Alpha course), which included 3-years as the National Director. During my time in this senior role, my team and I increased the number of people outside of the church who attend Alpha by more than 50%, to approximately 386,000 per year. This included engaging with parishes across the spectrum of church traditions, connecting individual churches to more than half of the UK prisons, working with Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic churches in the UK and Europe in partnership with a Roman Catholic initiative called 'Divine Renovation', developing marriage and parenting resources, and opening offices in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

I have spent the last year working with the Archbishop of York as part of his small team developing the vision and strategy for the Church of England for the next decade. Through this group, I have seen afresh the challenges and opportunities that are before us. I love the Church of England and have great hopes for its future, even though the challenges are great. I would value the opportunity to use my skills and experience—particularly in nurturing vocations, leading mission, engaging with the younger generation, revitalising churches and church planting—to make a positive contribution to our church's future.

Challenging Issues

You know as well as I do that the Church of England is facing many challenges and has important decisions to make in General Synod and elsewhere. I think the decisions made over the next ten years will prove to be critical to the long-term future of the Church of England. I have picked out below just four topics (out of the many subjects of importance) for some personal comment.

Training and Care of Clergy

Clergy are often over-worked and under-valued, nevertheless they are vital to the future of the church. I consider it a privilege to be involved in training the next generation of clergy through St Hild college. In the challenging steps ahead, I hope we can be kind to and supportive of all our ordained leaders. The vocation we share is not always easy and many clergy don't feel adequately supported or encouraged, particularly as we come out of the pandemic. There is still a need for further simplification of complexity and more support is needed for clergy so they can continue to be effective in their ministry.

Growth of the Church

I believe that part of my calling is to play a role in helping the church to be more effective in its mission. Through my work, at both a national and local level, I have gained some understanding of what it takes to be an effective and missional church. This often feels like a jig-saw of wisdom—I have some of the pieces, you have some others, and together we can build a fuller picture of how to be effective in mission.

Race and Diversity

I am proud of my mixed-race heritage (a white-English mother and a Sri Lankan father) which perhaps gives me a distinctive insight into some of the current thinking around racial justice and the church. Sadly, but perhaps very understandably, BAME promotion in the past has sometimes had an unhelpfully angry tone—I prefer a different approach. Just like you, I want the church to be seen as a place of love and justice, and more representative of the diversity of society. Like every other institution, the Church of England lacks diversity in its senior roles and key decision-makers. Although some churches are wonderfully diverse, the general membership of our congregations has this weakness. By electing me you help other UKME and GMH clergy and laity to see someone like them in a high-profile context serving at General Synod, this may perhaps inspire them to think they too could do this. I would love to have a positive impact on our church diversity in this way.

Human Sexuality

Human sexuality will be one of the key discussions in the next quinquennium of General Synod. It will take grace, wisdom, diplomacy and a lot of listening to find a way forward for the whole of the Church of England. I modelled this approach for 14-years in local church ministry, where I was genuinely welcoming to LGBT+ people and where together the whole church wrestled with the high calling of being a loving community learning to follow Jesus in every area of our lives.

If you would like to ask me any questions about my opinions, or the reasons why I am asking you to elect me to General Synod, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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