

Revd Brenda Forrester

Vicar of St. Francis of Assisi, Ingleby Barwick
IME2 Formation Advisor for Cleveland Archdeaconry



Proposed by: Revd Canon Richard Carew, St Edward the Confessor, Dringhouses, York,
Associate Area Dean of the Deanery of York (York West)

Seconded by: Revd Canon Tessa Stephens, Benefice of Nunthorpe, Area Dean, Stokesley

Please vote for me as a new and fresh voice on General Synod, a fellow parish priest with a real heart to represent the clergy voice. I understand clergy wellbeing and long to see all God's people flourish. Thank you for reading.

Bio

Living in Co. Durham since the age of one, I moved south of the Tees for my current post. Married with two grown children, we share our house with rescue cats and dogs. I have three degrees (BSc. Agricultural and Environmental Science, MA Counselling, BA Theology, Mission and Ministry). My first occupation was with adults with autism, before retraining as a counsellor. I worked with private clients, then specialised in addictions, set up and ran a substance misuse department in a youth offender's secure unit. A career break came with the advent of children, additionally supporting my husband's business as company director and selling my art in shops around the northeast. I became a practising Christian at age 36. There shortly followed a most unexpected calling into ministry!

Ordination year was 2018 at Durham Cathedral. I served my curacy with a wonderful TI, Revd Canon David Glover at Holy Trinity, Washington. David moved to be rector of Hexham Abbey in the imminence of the pandemic, which left me curate in vacancy for the next year, in the most stretched and saddest of times.

My first (and current) incumbency began April 2022. 2023 added a new role as Vocations Advisor before moving to the IME2 team as Formation Advisor for Cleveland Archdeaconry in 2024. In that year, I was a participant in the annual Clergy Consultation Conference at Windsor Castle, hosted by St. George's House.

In 2025, I filmed a year's worth of spiritual reflections for a national news channel. Serving on Diocesan Synod in both Durham and York, this is my first application for General Synod, again following an unexpected call to stand for election. It is fitting to serve here at St. Francis of Assisi; this particular saint is someone I have long admired, along with St. Cuthbert of Holy Island and St. Hilda of Whitby. If I were a biblical character, it would probably be a mash-up of Elijah, Jonah, Peter and Mary. Standing for synod feels a minor miracle in itself, but also firmly of God.

In spare time I still create, writing poetry and learning portraiture. Sea swimming is a favourite, as is reading, gardening and spending time with family and friends.

My Heart is for...

Honestly? Christ, Christ's people and God's Creation. I am a simple beggar, helping other beggars find bread. I believe there is a place for all under God's wing and among a church family. The bible is my inspiration, not just for preaching but also for every action plan.

Particular areas of passion include...

Seeing all God's people flourish I follow with interest the Save the Parish movement. Whilst not a signed-up member, I agree in placing the focus back with place, people and priest; transforming funding structures to enable parishes to thrive. When a parish is sufficiently resourced, works of deep discipleship, mission and evangelism can be the focus and the local body of Christ released to thrive and increase. This is happening here in my own parish, where the laity and I have grown the ministry of God's people, maximising every available resource and encouraging the gifts of all God's people who worship with us.

Since moving here, we have more than doubled in number, deepened greatly in discipleship and almost doubled our FWO. We now work with 7 out of 8 schools and have a SALT (Spirit Awake Leadership Team) planning meeting 8 months of the year, with 18 team leaders and role holders from the congregation. SALT is the hub of our discernment and decision making. We are a transformed parish, silver eco church, home groups, a sending parish for vocations and excited to expand further missionally into the town in 2027. This experience I bring to synod.

Clergy Wellbeing Since called into ministry, I have been regularly and gravely concerned with the experiences of fellow clergy. With a background in counselling, I am acutely tuned to the many internal challenges and ministerial strains clergy hide from their flocks. There is immense need for more support for clergy: vocationally, financially, in parity and compassion of treatment, practically and in pastoral and training support, including for underrepresented demographics. The National Vocations Crisis is very real. The clergy role is increasingly impossible to do in a healthy way. I will be a voice for the unseen and under-resourced system we find ourselves ministering within. I will champion your voice at synod.

Transforming Systems I believe our USP is in being disciples. 30% of adults are currently seeking greater spiritual meaning in their lives, an even higher percentage among the youth. When we focus overly on current hobby horses, our missionary discipleship is diminished. I will bring to synod a Christ focussed voice, advocating our unique place in society as the Church of the land, whilst also promoting ecumenical work with our Christian brothers and sisters in other denominations. Teesside enjoys astonishing levels of ecumenical unity, which has attracted £0.4M investment in Bible Society mission support this autumn. I realise not all areas are as supported, which can feel isolating, at times. We live in the book of Acts, with Christ's mission continuing on! Whilst it is vital we are safely and responsibly governed, surely our main job is to stand at the door, showing Christ to this hurting world. If we continue to fragment our focus, how will these 30% of adults (and even more youth) find Christ? I will advocate keeping a Christ-centred focus in this time of spiritual seeking.

'...the fields are ripe for harvesting.' Jn. 4:35.

Get in touch

If you have any questions, please email me on: forresterbrenda06@gmail.com. I am also really keen to hear your priorities for the new Synod. Thank you for reading, please consider voting for me '*a new and fresh voice on the scene*'. With every blessing, Brenda.