

General Synod House of Laity

Dear Elector,

While the previous five years of the General Synod were dominated by the issue of appointing women to the episcopate, the next five years will have two major themes: human sexuality, and "reform and renewal". It seems to me that both present an evolutionary challenge to our church: adapt, or die. A church which discriminates against homosexuals commands neither respect nor influence among the young; one which notices our long-running decline but fails to respond will become extinct.

You can read something of my biography to the right, and of my views on the Church of England and the agenda which will be before General Synod overleaf.

There are five places for lay members from Rochester on the General Synod. The election will be conducted by a proportional method, known as Single Transferable Vote. You cannot damage the prospects of your first-choice candidate by expressing further preferences. I should be grateful for your support (especially, of course, for your first or second preference vote).

I hope to meet you at the election hustings on Saturday 26th September.

Do please feel free to contact me directly if there's anything you'd like to discuss.

Yours truly,

Philip C. French

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Philip French

Philip, his wife Elaine and teenage children, Michael and Jennifer, live in Five Oak Green (near Tonbridge).

Philip worships with the Local

Ecumenical Partnership of Tudeley, Capel and Five Oak Green, which includes the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. He has served variously as churchwarden, treasurer and as URC elder and church secretary.

After studying natural sciences and mathematics at Cambridge, and an early career in science and engineering, Philip represented The British Council in India. His subsequent career has been mostly in the field of Information Technology. He now works as Chief Technology Officer for Shared Services Connected Ltd, providing back-office services to government departments. He is also Chair of Trustees at Eduserv, a not-for-profit IT and digital services business.

Philip has travelled widely, particularly in Asia, and has a lasting interest in global economic, social and environmental development, especially in India. He is currently Chair of Trustees for Hands of Compassion, a small Kent-based charity supporting primary education in Zambia.

Within the Diocese of Rochester, Philip is Lay Chair of the Diocesan Synod, a member of the Bishop's Council, director of the Diocesan Board of Finance and trustee of the Bishop's Fund for Mission.

Philip has represented Rochester on General Synod since 2005, speaking on topics including gambling, technology, church tourism, ecumenism, women bishops, justice policy, the synod's workings and finance.

Other interests include singing (jobbing tenor for various choirs in Kent and London), and recreational walking.

God made us all, loves us all, and has the power to save us all. We're in the great mystery of life, His gift, together.

- Man and woman, straight and gay.
- Rich and poor, urban and rural.
- Each faith and every denomination.

I hold that for the Church of England to grow into the Body of Christ which it should be, we need to take each of these aspects seriously. That means being:

A church that is open to the Holy Spirit

One that is called to proclaim the faith afresh in each generation. This includes embracing new ways of being church (Fresh Expressions, Messy Church etc.). It also involves the "reform and renewal" programme, attending to such matters as finance, ministerial education and the simplification of arcane ways of working.

A church that values women

One in which women's gifts and service are given equal weight to men's. One which will now be transformed by the distinctive ministry of female bishops.

A church that affirms homosexual people

One that welcomes gay men and women into fellowship and ministry, celebrates faithful, loving partnerships, and fights against persecution and discrimination.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has written: *"I can't for the life of me imagine that God will say, 'I will punish you because you are black, you should have been white; I will punish you because you are a woman, you should have been a man; I will punish you because you are homosexual, you ought to have been heterosexual.' I can't for the life of me believe this is how God see things."*

And yet, some Christians read the Bible carefully and conclude that homosexual relationships are always sinful and that there is no place for gay marriage.

This is difficult territory: theologically, sociologically - and personally for many of our brothers and sisters in Christ. It touches on what it means to be made in

the image of God. It is a major cause of contention within and between many provinces of the Anglican Communion.

The process of "shared conversations" around the Church of England will be key to our dealing sensitively with this matter. Please pray for those involved.

A church that welcomes young people

One which nurtures children and challenges young adults, regarding them as a vital part of today's church family.

A church that engages other faiths

One which is not ashamed to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ: but which respects and befriends Muslims, Jews and others; which takes trouble to learn about their beliefs and practices; which defends their humanity in the face of prejudice, suspicion and vilification.

A church that strives for unity

One which does not just aspire to the unity for which Jesus prayed to the Father, but which works actively for it: both structurally, and locally. Hard decisions are called for, in some places, about patterns of ministry and cherished buildings. This is an opportunity to work enthusiastically with our sister churches.

A church that fights poverty and despair

One which defends the interests of the poor and the excluded. One which is offended both by inner-city deprivation and by rural isolation and neglect. One whose comfortably well-off members are ready to support the less fortunate in society at large (through taxation and also by charitable giving). One which is engaged in civil society, and which seeks to reduce inequality in church and state.

A church with global reach and value

One which works for economic and social development around the world. One which argues for trade justice and debt relief. One which champions sound environmental and development policy. One which encourages Britain, the United Nations and major powers to defuse conflicts and establish peace.