

Proposer: Sarah Poole

Seconder: Estelle Woodcock

My email: [billyjooleary@gmail.com](mailto:billyjooleary@gmail.com) My contact number: 0208 304 9218

### **Billy-Jo O'Leary born 1979**



- A Christian since 2008
- Mother and Wife
- Living in Welling Kent
- Licensed Lay Minister 2017
- Attends St John's the Evangelist Welling
- Works with Home for Good (Christian Charity)
- Avid lover of films, theatre and Big Church Day Out!

Dear elector, it is nice to meet you. I am Billy-Jo O'Leary. I'm married to Dominic, we have been together for 20 years and are gifted with the privilege of parenting two wonderful, teenage children.

In a past life, I was so far from knowing the truth of love, that I never thought I would be here writing to you for this vote. God's grace is sufficient.

I know from my own personal experience that many find faith and church a real struggle. I was a person like that for 28 years. But I encountered Jesus in 2008 via Alpha and went on to become part of a caring house group which I am still a member of today.

My life story is one of adversity and triumph. I grew up living in a dysfunctional family, in and out of the care system. I believe that the Church of England has a huge role to play as the hands and feet of Jesus. I have experienced this myself in 2008. It was through St John's Welling, my husband, Alpha and others, that I had chance to take my very long journey towards discovering Jesus.

Over these years, I had many different opportunities to explore Jesus' death and resurrection. I came to see that if it is not true, as one friend put it at the time, we might as well shut all the churches! If it is true... well, I discovered that it is, and I have encountered real, ongoing healing and transformation. I know that He longs for us to offer everyone the chance to have this encounter.

As part of my career, I have worked with children and young people having been a childminder for 10 years. I successfully attained an **'outstanding' grading from OFSTED** on an unannounced inspection. God called me out of this role and into Licenced Lay Ministry which has been a transformation journey and is the beginning of where I am now today in my walk with discovering Jesus.

I have served on the PCC at St John's for five years and in other ministries, but I have wider experience across the diocese through my work with Home for Good. I am Regional Lead for London and the South East for this Christian Charity. It aims to 'find a home for every child who needs one in the UK. I am passionate about this work and can relate to those vulnerable children who are in the care system. My personal story and my involvement with Home for

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Good has shown me what a difference the church can make in the lives of people who feel excluded.

**Being a mother to two teenagers**, I get to hear about the world they are growing up in and speak into situations from their experience. I think this is another vitally important perspective for General Synod to have in mind.

This next Synod will have to wrestle with lots of issues that have a direct impact on how well the Church of England reaches out to ordinary people, especially to those who feel excluded. I bring insight into the Emerging Church of England strategic work strands and feel that it is urgent for governance to be simplified to help us reach out more effectively to the most vulnerable members of society.

If I am elected, I would bring an understanding of important aspects of safeguarding, having experienced vulnerability as a child myself. This would be important in the next General Synod as it continues to respond to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

The church exists for those who are not members yet. My heart is for those distant from the church and who feel they have no gifts for the Kingdom. Jesus has brought healing and transformation in my life, one day I might be able to share more of this journey with you, but it is how I have grown to this moment and offering myself to serve you at General Synod for the time God has called me to serve (if elected as it is still in God's hands).

With my life experience and the strength, I have gained in both my faith and overcoming deep adversity I am ready to listen and contribute in upcoming General Synod decisions about the Archbishop of York's Vision and Strategy Initiative, about Living in Love and Faith, and about possible changes to the Clergy Discipline measure.

**I am standing for General Synod because I want to be a credible voice in the Church of England's legislative body for people who are in the place I used to be.** Those of faith and those with none are watching us as Christians to see if the way we live as a church member matches up to what we say. I think it is important to listen and communicate well together on secular conversations and values, which includes learning to relate to others as Jesus would. I have been praying and seeking advice on applying for General Synod for some time, I know this will be a hard task, painful even. But I am committed to the Diocese and the calling of Jesus. I hope to serve you and represent you as well as I can.

**2 Thessalonians 3:5** May the Lord direct your hearts into Gods love and Christ's perseverance.

I hope you will support me with your vote.

In my prayer with a thankful heart

Billy-Jo 😊