

# General Synod Election Address 2021

**Candidate:** Revd Neil Andrew Austin Barber,  
Vicar of St Giles' Church, Normanton by Derby, since 2001.

**Proposer:** Revd Lynn Hayler,  
Team Vicar of Wingfield, North (St Lawrence), Clay Cross & Pilsley.

**Seconder:** Revd Matt Barnes,  
Director of Discipleship, Mission & Ministry, Diocese of Derby.



Dear Colleague

Thank you for taking the time to read this address.

## About me

58 years old and married to Sarah with two grown-up children aged 18 & 22.

I came to personal faith in Jesus as a teenager and God has faithfully sustained me by His grace ever since. His Spirit continues to lead me, challenge me and change me.

## About where I minister

I am the Incumbent of an inner-city multi-ethnic parish, on the south side of Derby City. The local population is 38% Muslim/Sikh, with one mosque directly opposite the church building and another three doors down. The parish is also in the 10% most deprived in the Diocese and the country. The parish is diverse, as is the congregation. In common with 'local church everywhere', we want to be known in the local community and strive to do what we can to serve its needs in the name of Jesus. If you want a flavour of what my own church gets up to through the week with all ages, please visit <http://www.stgiles-derby.org.uk>

## About the Church of England

We have the amazing privilege of proclaiming Christ afresh everywhere in every generation. I believe the traditional parish system has been a gift of God to England and the principles of covering the entire country and the cure of all souls are worth working to preserve. However, it has limitations in twenty-first century England so a mixed economy of different styles of churches, both neighbourhood and network, for different settings is necessary and we must make them work. We should widely encourage initiatives such as those in *Mission Shaped Church* and instruments such as Bishop's Mission Orders. As the church's national parliament, the General Synod is there to support and enable the work of local churches all over the country; it sets the tone and context for all of our work and we hope and pray it might provide the lead that the whole church needs.

## About the pandemic

The world and the church have experienced a severe shaking in the last eighteen months and true healing and recovery has barely started. For many it has been an incredibly difficult time - certainly in my church and local community - but the balm of 'Christ with us' has been an immense comfort and strength. I have been struck again by how vital and urgent it is for the church to remember and hold out the Christian hope in a fallen and hurting world.

## About my thinking

In an ever-changing world I am drawn to John Stott's idea of "double listening": *"We listen to the Word with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand. We listen to the world with crucial alertness, anxious to understand it too, and resolved not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathise with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it."* [The Contemporary Christian pg 28]. I have much to learn but, were I to be elected, I would endeavour to employ double listening in all of Synod's business not least in consideration of the *Living in Love and Faith* project.

## About what the Lord has taught me in ministry

Spiritual growth is granted as the Lord wills. The role of the pastor and teacher who gently shepherds the flock of the Lord's people is crucial in any context, whether town, countryside or city. It is a privilege to be amongst those called to this task and we need many more: cutting clergy numbers is not the answer.

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## About what the Lord has taught me in private

I have grown through the difficult and humbling experience of being a parent to our son who has additional needs. I would not have sought this but I am grateful for the experience. When big stresses and griefs have threatened our family, I have known the blessing of dependence on God in my immense weakness; gained a fresh insight into the wonder, complexity and fragility of humanity and felt the deep joy of seeing our church family looking out for the vulnerable, welcoming and including all.

## About some of what is important to me in church

Having become a Christian in my youth, I am committed to mission and ministry to all ages and feel a burden to serve children and young people in state schools in addition to our CofE schools.

I thank God for the blessing of racial and social diversity and, ministering here in this area, I look forward to the perfect, heavenly church gathered from every nation, tribe and tongue around the throne of Jesus. I rejoice in the vibrant influence of the wider Anglican Communion and the benefits of our partnership in mission internationally.

I am painfully aware of the serious failings in the current Clergy Discipline Measure. Wholesale reform of the way in which both clergy and lay discipline is upheld is surely long overdue? ...for the sake of the whole body of Christ and God's glory.

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## Personal & biographical details

### Education & theological training:

BA (Hons) in Business Studies from ECHE (part of what is now University of West London)  
Advanced Diploma in Theological & Pastoral Studies from Oakhill MTC/North Thames Ministerial Training Course

### Pre-ordination employment:

IBM UK - Systems Engineer & Project Manager 1986-95

### Previous ministry appointments:

Curate: St Mary's Basingstoke, Winchester 1998-2001  
Lay Associate Minister: St Mary's Basingstoke, Winchester 1995-1998

### Other posts & responsibilities held:

General Synod member 2010-15  
Diocesan Synod Member 2003-21 & Deanery Synod Member 2001-21  
Member of Deanery Standing Committee and Deanery Mission and Pastoral Committee 2005-10  
Member of Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee 2005-10  
Member of Vacancy in See Committee 2010-21  
Trustee of BCMS Crosslinks 2010-19  
Training Incumbent 2003-21  
Member of steering committee of Derby Bible Week 2002-21  
Co-leader of Urban Saints holiday for young people, Madness and Mayhem 1998-2015  
Member of the Normanton Neighbourhood Board in Derby City 2010-21

Having served on General Synod 2010-15 I have experience of the workings of the Church of England's governing bodies and have been encouraged to offer myself again at this crucial juncture in the church's life. I therefore invite your prayerful consideration of whether you would like me to serve you as one of the clergy representatives.

Please do get in touch if you'd like clarification on anything or to talk. I would be grateful for your prayers and support and especially your first or a high preference vote!

## Contact:

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Neil