

## **Jeremy Sheehy, Rector, Swinton and Pendlebury**

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I am standing for election for the General Synod for the first time in this by-election and am asking for your support. I am grateful to my proposer, Dot Fair, and John Armstrong, who is seconding my nomination.

My parents both hail from inner South London but my father's job meant that we moved around a lot and I moved primary school twice and secondary school twice. So to this day I find it hard to answer the question "where do you come from?" It was from just outside Birmingham that I went off to Oxford to read Law and with sponsorship from the diocese of Birmingham that I went to a selection conference in 1977. I trained at Saint Stephen's House, and took a second degree in Theology. I served curacies in Birmingham – first in middle-ring car factory dominated Erdington (in the shadow of Spaghetti Junction) and then in inner-ring Small Heath (where we received a visit from the Faith in the City team). Out of the blue I was asked to consider going back to Oxford as a Fellow and Chaplain of New College, and after taking advice it seemed too special an opportunity to refuse.

Whilst at New College my main goal was to grow the worshipping community in the chapel, and I also taught some Law, some Theology, and wrote a doctoral thesis. From there I went to be incumbent of a parish in Chelmsford diocese, but sociologically in London's East End – Leytonstone, just across from where the Olympic Park would later be built. I also acquired a second parish as priest-in-charge and had a great time in Leytonstone. But in 1996 I returned to Oxford as Principal of Saint Stephen's House and was there for a decade, with all the challenges of developments in university life and developments in training for ordination. Inspectors and Quality Assessment exercises came and went and after a decade I felt I needed a move and someone who knew that sounded me out about a move to Swinton. That came to pass and I have been in this large urban parish with its three churches and three church schools since 2006. The parish grew up in the Tractarian and later Anglo-Catholic traditions and remains much influenced by them. We are under the care of the Bishop of Beverley, but endeavour to play a full part in the deanery and the diocese with clergy and laity active in diocesan and deanery synods and committees.

I myself am an elected member of both the Diocesan Synod and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee and I have taught for about the last eight years on one of the doctrine modules for the All Saints' Centre. I am also one of the Bishop of Manchester's Examining Chaplains and have filled a variety of roles connected with ordination selection and training and continuing education. I am a Guardian of the Shrine at Walsingham (the Guardians are the nearest thing to the governing body).

Like many I hope that the Five Guiding Principles that went alongside the legislation for the consecration of women bishops will lead to the culture of mutual flourishing of which they speak. I am pleased with the position reached, and I believe that the legislation that was eventually passed was a great deal better than that which failed to get the necessary majorities. In this diocese we have good working relationships but across the Church of England I suspect we still need to do a good deal of work together to establish what the mutual flourishing needs. Whilst I myself come from the so-called “traditionalist” Catholic constituency I hope that the support of my proposer and seconder who do not is some sign of the breadth of involvements I have had and continue to have in this diocese and across the life of the Church of England.

Meanwhile, the Synodical programme has moved decisively on. Let me give a few indicators of my views, whilst encouraging anyone who wants to hear more on a particular issue to contact me. On matters of human sexuality I am committed to the teaching witnessed to by *Issues in Human Sexuality* and other such reports. I do think our Christian ethics has been a relatively unexplored area and have commented that it is perhaps significant given the current travails of the Anglican Communion that the Lambeth Quadrilateral has no ethical or moral theological content. I fear lest *Reform and Renewal* whilst tackling matters of vesture and making parish boundaries easier to change does nothing to ease the burden of regulation and rule on parish ministry. I know myself how many parishes find it impossible to fill the lay officerships they are required to fill and I wish we could do something to ease the official requirements about notice of meetings and the like. I hope the follow-up to *Setting God’s People Free* will bring this about. I admire the challenge of the vocational targets the Archbishops’ Council has set, but simply to set a target does not indicate a strategy to meet it, and I would like to be more convinced that we will work to see vocations spring from all the Church of England’s life – across region, ecclesial tradition, educational background, and socio-economic setting – and will make the necessary changes to our paperwork and procedures to enable this.

But all of this is likely to prove irrelevant if the decline in the number of people involved in our churches continues. Our loss of numbers year by year according to most indicators means that even if the Church of England gets everything else right (whatever we variously think that might look like) if we cannot do some growing in number the future is bleak. I know that growth in prayer and discipleship and service and financial capacity are all valuable to the Lord, to say nothing of growth in faith, and hope, and love. But my particular desire and commitment is to see worshipping communities grow in size, and I often feel we are too coy and insufficiently intentional about this. At the District Church Council meeting for which, with the secretary, I completed the agenda this morning we will have a discussion retrospectively on our Christmas worship and one of the issues, faced fairly and squarely, will be about numbers. I’d like to see the same at every level in the Church of England.

With best wishes. Jeremy Sheehy.