

# Revd Toby Crowe for General Synod

## Priest-in-Charge, St John's Sparkhill & Christ Church Sparkbrook

### WHO am I?

I was a happy atheist until I had an experience of God which I couldn't ignore. I became a Christian and, shortly afterwards, met Emma. We married in 2007, and have two children. We came to Birmingham in 2012, and I'm parish priest for a wonderful but deprived area which is reputed to contain the highest proportion of folk from other faiths in the whole Church of England. (One Conservative MP recently described us as "a no-go area", which is ridiculous). As well as my church work, I sit on three school boards, including our two church schools. I'm Chair of Narthex, a community project which provides foodbanks, food pantries and advice work across our bit of Birmingham. I'm a trustee of The Feast interfaith youth charity, the Yardley Great Trust and the Forum for the Discussion of Israel & Palestine. I'm also Chair of the House of Clergy and sit on the Bishop's Council and Environmental Board.



### WHY am I standing for General Synod?

The Church of England is the only denomination I've ever been part of. I've belonged to liberal, catholic, charismatic and evangelical expressions of it. I rejoice in our global communion, our diversity, and our Anglican commitment to being in every place, for all people. These are things I want to hold on to. We do, however, face challenges. There's a looming sense of decline and an apparent lack of money, both of which can breed a debilitating sort of anxiety. We're divided over sincere but seemingly incompatible moral commitments. We're aware of at least some of the ways in which the institution has fallen short over many years. These are things I want to help us overcome.

### So WHAT are my priorities?

**BUILDING UP the Church together** – The pandemic clearly wasn't caused by the Church, though I think we learned a lot about ourselves in how we reacted to it. Living in Love and Faith was launched for excellent reasons, as the CofE tried to navigate societal changes, theological insights and what, for many, felt like clear Gospel imperatives. Neither has served to soothe our divisions. But I believe that now is the time to bring our Church back together and, if elected, I'd take every opportunity to promote this, in consultation with you - the people I'd represent.

**STANDING UP for the local church** – We minister within a fearful organisation. The temptation to respond with strategic plans and structural change is understandable, but these things have to be approached with care. Clergy aren't "limiting factors" to growth (in fact, research indicates the opposite); and my own experience suggests that people generally favour things that are local over things more abstract and distant – their local parish over wider 'minster communities' and 'mission areas'. This means that these approaches may be fruitful, but only to the extent that they help individual churches and parishes be more fully themselves. If elected, I'd take every opportunity to stand up for 'traditional', individual churches and relatable fresh expressions as the primary units of mission in the life of the Church.

**SPEAKING UP for justice, and putting it into action** – In principle, the Church of England wants to see a world transformed. I'm in favour of responsible investment policies and (properly paid!) Racial Justice Officers. But I'm aware that, too often, national and diocesan discussions aren't sufficiently joined up with local parish life. I'm privileged to serve a church whose members largely come from a Global Majority Heritage. If elected, I'd take every opportunity to speak up for justice of many kinds as I listen carefully and often to myriad different voices – but most especially **yours!**

*This means that I'd love to talk to you about anything – just ask me! You can contact me on [toby.crowe@outlook.com](mailto:toby.crowe@outlook.com) or on 07792 812 484 (texts or Whatsapp are best). If you email, please include a phone number too :-)*