



Ben Franks



Inclusive Church
Coalition

Proposer: Anna Pitt - St Peter, Maney (Sutton Coldfield)

Seconder: Alison Paris - Birmingham Cathedral (Central Birmingham)

Who am I?

I am aged 30, and have lived in Birmingham since 2003 when I moved to Birmingham for university. My working background and university studies were focussed on retail management in which I enjoyed a successful career until 2012. Since 2012 I have worked at Birmingham Cathedral where my role sees me resourcing the worship life of the cathedral through its liturgical and prayer rhythm, acting as a main point of enquiry for those contacting the cathedral, and assisting with projects to further the mission and ministry of a city centre parish which is also the diocesan mother church. My worship life is centred at St Paul's in the Jewellery Quarter, although I attend other churches occasionally to share in the breadth of traditions which are present in the Church of England in Birmingham. My own natural churchmanship is liberal catholic charismatic, but I am enthused when I encounter other styles of worship. I represent my church on the Central Birmingham Deanery Synod, and have been elected to Diocesan Synod for the forthcoming triennium. I am a supporter of Inclusive Church, Affirming Catholicism and Changing Attitude.

What can I Offer?

I have a great love for the Church of England, its ministry and tradition and rejoice in its diversity. I am committed to a united and inclusive church which values all its members, treats their individual beliefs with respect, and promotes positive debate and disagreement. I have attended church since my childhood, and was C of E schooled. More recently, further involvement at church and the privilege of working for the church has given me a first-hand insight into the struggles that are faced by churches in their ministry, but also the transformations they can make to people and communities. Also, I am the youngest candidate standing for election in Birmingham, I feel that it is important to show that younger people can, and should be represented in church governance; especially given our commitment in this diocese to 'growing younger.'

Inclusivity

I am absolutely committed to equality for all irrespective of gender, age, disability, tradition, race, socio-economic background, sexuality. I support the full inclusion of lesbian and gay people in all areas of the church, and its sacraments, including the threefold ordained ministry. Whilst we must try to understand and be sympathetic to those who find the full inclusion of women and LGBT people in the Church a real challenge, it is not right that inequality for those groups should be enshrined in law; accommodating the differences between our traditions on trust is far more consistent with our faith. I believe that a lot more can be done to promote the full inclusion and especially the representation of minority ethnic Anglicans throughout the church, from church membership through to clergy appointments. The ethnic make-up of the church does not reflect the communities it serves, and this can only hinder our work in God's mission. Great improvements have been made in recent years to make our worship and buildings accessible to those with physical impairments. We must ensure this continues, and also direct efforts to assist those with mental and psychological health issues to be ministered to effectively, and raise awareness among all congregations to break down barriers.

A view of the Church

General Synod undoubtedly sets the tone of the church in the country, and indeed internationally - mostly because of its fairly high media profile. But, what is heard is not the church's gospel values; people hear that we don't do equality, we are locked into an archaic system of leadership, and there is still a considerable lack of transparency.

But, you might want to say *'we are all equal in the church'* – well, yes -so long as you are white, middle class, heterosexual, male and preferable with at least one degree. Whilst this remains the case our integrity is severely compromised in that the unchurched and de-churched, the very people we are trying to reach out to in order to build God's church, struggle to take us seriously. There is a need for the Church to stop fostering enmity and be a model of unity, while accepting and celebrating diversity. The good news is that we can change all this. We can preach a gospel that is good news for everyone. We can become 'grown up' about the way we govern ourselves and we can begin to put our passion and energy into what the Lord requires:

'to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.' - Micah 6.8

The church, I believe, has a duty to set an example of God's love to the rest of society. Sadly, it seems that society is setting the positive example and the church is seen as an anachronism in today's world. How wonderful it would be to see the negative press attention received by the church turned into positive, by the church speaking out with its gospel message in relation to the social injustices taking place in the country and world.

There are fantastic fresh expressions of 'being church' going on at local level, with parishes rising to the challenge of being active and facilitating focuses at the centre of lives and communities, which is a great way of showing the world who we really are and what we are about. We need for all our churches to grow in our commitment to work cooperatively, beyond the parochial boundaries, to help our communities, and show God's love, as we have received it, to the world. The many multi-faith and ecumenical partnerships in Birmingham that we enjoy are an example for the rest of the country to see how well fostered community relations promote the common good.

If I am elected

I will faithfully attend Synod during my term of office and will continue to work towards full inclusion of all in the Church and will support those measures which seek to help the most vulnerable in our society, and promote the gospel message to the furthest reaches of society. I would also appreciate the ability to communicate the important issues discussed and debated on at synod to people in parishes, and for them to know what contributions have been made by their elected representatives.

I would like take my passion for the church, her tradition and gospel, to synod — respecting what has gone before, forward looking, a bit radical whilst realistic, and full of faith that God will continue to build his church. To do that I need your vote, please!

Please do contact me if you wish to discuss anything!

email: benjamin.franks@me.com

telephone: 07722 556494