

The Reverend Oliver Coss

Vicar of All Saints, Small Heath



Proposer:

*The Reverend Peter Sainsbury
Vicar of Christ Church, Summerfield*

Seconder:

*The Reverend Dr Josephine Houghton
Priest in Charge of The Ascension,
Stirchley*

General Synod Election Address

Dear elector,

I'm writing, ahead of the Elections to General Synod in 2015, to ask you for your vote to send me to the Synod to represent Birmingham Diocese to the wider Church of England.

About me

I'm 33 years old and am married to Eleanor, who is a member of the Religious Society of Friends and a PGCE student at Birmingham City University. We have two young daughters, aged four and one, and are enjoying all the excitements and challenges of bringing up children in the youngest, and most lively, city in Europe. I began work in Small Heath 4½ years ago in January 2011, leading a vibrant and diverse congregation with a Catholic tradition and a charismatic culture. It's a privilege to be serving my first incumbency here, as we have developed sincere and warm friendships across the community we exist to serve, and as we have started and persisted with efforts to meet the real social needs we live among. I'm also an Officiating Chaplain to the Royal Navy, County Padre to Birmingham Royal British Legion, a Diocesan Synod Nominee to the DAC, and a member of the Independent Advisory Group (Birmingham West & Central) of West Midlands Police.

If you send me to Synod, what would I be taking?

- The heart of a (relatively) young cleric advocating the needs of a young city, and of a church striving to grow younger, more faithful, and more numerous.
- A commitment to parochialism which serves the communities in which we're set. In my own

context, this means my belief in establishing confident worshipping communities of Christians who can witness to the blessedness and the sheer humanity at the heart of our churches. We have great stories to tell of the faith in Birmingham, and the wider nation should hear them and value them.

- A passion and commitment to urban Birmingham. The bold objectives the city sets itself should be exceeded by the bold objectives and investment the church makes in our communities.
- An activist who has persistently criticized the lack of action on child poverty in our city, where many parishes see 1/3 to 1/2 of children growing up with manifold and serious symptoms of deprivation. The church should be mixing action, designed to alleviate those symptoms, with speaking truth to power. We should never tolerate the most vulnerable becoming the easiest to target.
- A 'traditional catholic' with a belief in the mutual flourishing of the whole church, strengthened by the Five Guiding Principles contained in the House of Bishops Declaration.
- A desire to make partnerships across seemingly divisive difference, of tradition, faith, prosperity, and ethnicity – something the Church of England is well positioned to initiate in our city. It should, and does, do this sacrificially, and never for our own gain. I would take to Synod not merely the diverse voices of Church of England – Birmingham, but the voices of our communities, where many faiths and none are equally respected and valued.

As your member of General Synod, what would be my priorities?

- Sharing, amid the Church's witness across England, the distinctiveness of Birmingham's Christian life. It is time our city and region stopped being forgotten in a London-centric church.
- Encouraging the church to engage in inter-faith partnership: not just conversation for conversation's sake. Investments like 'Near Neighbours' give us the opportunity, and obligation, to be hospitable and be the ones initiating conversation and partnerships that can transform our neighbourhoods. The good news that was the 'Birmingham Conversations' needs to be shared widely. I will always support work that aims to transform communities and alleviate crippling levels of poverty, and will especially advocate Credit Unions at the heart of our social action.
- I'll continue to endorse the Five Guiding Principles that were part of the House of Bishops Declaration, following the vote to permit women to be ordained bishop. Recognizing my own dissent from that decision I will, nevertheless, work for the good of all the church, and the mutual flourishing of everyone – not just those I agree with.
- As one half of an inter-church marriage, I'll take a key interest in ecumenism as the Church of England continues to build towards the visible unity that Jesus prayed for.
- I will be a firm advocate for the Church's support of poorer parishes, and providing Christian ministry in parts of the country that others have abandoned long ago. I'll also want to make sure that those whose resources are underwriting ministry in fragile areas is properly valued. I will advocate the proper resourcing of parishes everywhere, and the welfare of their clergy and lay leaders.
- I will ensure that the Church of England's decision to become a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant is honoured, especially through making it possible for parish clergy to join the reserve forces. Our commitment to offer ministry among people who decide to serve in the military is an essential contribution to the nation's moral compass.
- As much as shared conversation can transform our communities, it should also transform our Church. Facilitated conversations broke the deadlock over Women in the Episcopate, and brought the Church of England back from a terrible moment: I'm committed to the same conversations about human sexuality. Whatever our views, we need the opportunity to speak and be heard, across a myriad of differences. This should be done carefully and proportionately.
- Our church buildings should be an opportunity and not a burden. I'll always vote for proposals that make this a reality, whether through simplifying the faculty system or helping the church to use its voice to point to the glory of, and the challenges that face, our buildings – both ancient and modern.
- As someone who was ordained deacon aged 24, I'll always want the church to do more to attract ordinands that are young, diverse, well trained, and well-resourced. My church has had a healthy Afro-Caribbean community for decades, but has never had a priest from that community. The numbers of BAME clergy need to rise, and we must do more to foster vocations there.

I hope that when the election comes, that you will consider giving me the highest voting preference you can. I will endeavour to be a big voice for Birmingham, its churches, and its people. If you have any questions or queries you'd like to put to me, please do be in touch on 0121 772 0621, or vicar@allsaintsonline.co.uk, or 07917 391017.