Candidate for the House of Laity – General Synod 2026–2031

Dear General Synod Lay Elector,

I am standing for General Synod because I believe God has given me an opportunity — and responsibility — to help the Church of England move forward into more of what he has for us.

My life has increasingly been about **helping people and organisations move forward**: as a foster carer, church leader, teacher and school leader, charity trustee, and COO of HOPE Coventry. At the heart of all I do is a conviction that **prayer must come first**. We cannot simply plan our way into the future God has for us. We need to listen to God, pray together, discern his leading and then faithfully act, whilst continuing to pray His Kingdom come. Prayer precedes and changes things.

My story

I am married to Susie and we have three boys, aged 4, 13 and 14. We are foster carers and have welcomed **15 children** into our home. It is a privilege to play whatever part we can in their journeys and has helped shape my understanding of calling: sometimes our role is simply to help someone take their next step - invest, nurture, help grow and then release into what is next for them.

I am the **Lay Leader of St John's Westwood**. Before joining St John's, I led Hope Springs Church, a non-denominational church with a particular calling to be "a church for churches" — using what God had given us to resource and encourage others. Just over two years ago, following prayer and a strong sense of God's leading, we planted the "seed" of Hope Springs into St John's, guided by Jesus' words in John 12:24. Hope Springs ceased to exist as a church, and we became part of St John's - believing that the DNA of Hope Springs would fuse with that of St Johns leading to multiplication!

We fell in love with St John's. It felt like home and, importantly, we discovered a very similar calling: **to resource, enable and encourage others so that the wider Church can flourish.** Serving as Lay Leader has given me the privilege of seeing what can happen when lay leadership is trusted, empowered and properly accountable within the Church of England. Over the last two years we have seen:

- around **30 additional students**, with student numbers increasing at least threefold;
- a new **football ministry**, with more than 50 young men, many with no previous connection to church, involved and showing a hunger for community and to discover more about Jesus;
- **multiple baptisms**; and **people returning to faith and church after many years away;**
- many missional events such as our Easter Adventure, Christmas Quiz, Summer Festival and Fireworks community event**, which saw a combined attendance of around 1000 people**; and
- St John's having the privilege of increasingly supporting other churches with worship, mission and practical resources.

I do not claim these as personal achievements. They are the fruit of many people faithfully playing their part and, ultimately, God's grace. What they have demonstrated to me is the potential of **lay and ordained leadership working together in partnership**. This growth has happened with the accountability to, support and empowerment of ordained clergy.

For me, empowered lay leadership is not about replacing ordained ministry. It is about **releasing the gifts of the whole people of God**, with appropriate oversight and accountability, so that there is a mutual support and enabling of clergy and lay. I believe this has real potential across the Church of England, particularly as more people appear open and hungry for the Gospel. We need structures that provide safety and good governance while also being **agile enough to respond to missional opportunities,** which includes the growing and releasing of leaders (lay and ordained), to meet the God inspired missional opportunities proactively. I hope modelling empowered lay leadership myself will help inspire others to step forward as well.

What I hope to bring

Prior to my current roles at St Johns and with HOPE, I spent **15 years teaching and leading in three secondary schools**, including as a Director of Sixth Form. I have served as a governor of Templars Primary School and as a trustee of **Street Pastors** and **Coventry City Mission**, giving me experience of governance, accountability and working through complex structures.

Alongside my current role at St Johns, I am the **COO of HOPE Coventry**, where I work with churches, denominations and communities across the denominational spectrum. I am passionate about church unity and about helping each part of the Church be all God has called it to be. Within this role I have the joy to help facilitate spaces for churches to **pray, worship, build relationships and work together**, including involvement in leading City Praise & Prayer, HOPE Leaders gatherings, youth initiatives, Youth Leaders and Wellbeing Hubs, and projects such as Good Neighbours, CAP and Healing on the Streets.

I am particularly excited by what God is doing among young people across our city and nation. Through initiatives including Youth City Praise & Prayer, Coventry Youth Conference and No More Knives tours, I have seen the Church work together to create space for young people to lead, pray and encounter Jesus. I have also worked with churches across Coventry to see almost **5,000 Gospels of Mark** placed into people's hands, alongside partnerships with organisations including Lighthouse, Foodbank, Feed the Hungry, Hope into Action and Embrace.

Why General Synod?

General Synod carries significant responsibility as the Church of England's national legislative and representative body. I want to bring a perspective shaped by experience **across the church spectrum**, with a particular commitment to:

Prayer and mission — keeping prayer and listening to God at the heart of our national life, and ensuring our structures serve our calling to proclaim Jesus and serve our communities.

Empowered lay leadership — releasing the gifts of lay people and leaders alongside strong ordained leadership, accountability and good governance.

Unity — building relationships across theological, denominational and cultural differences, seeking consensus where possible and learning to disagree graciously where necessary. I also believe that people with differing convictions must be treated with dignity, listened to carefully and engaged with graciously and truthfully.

Children, young people and families — ensuring they are not simply the future of the Church but an important part of its life and mission now.

Healthy governance and safeguarding — ensuring that good structures protect people and create the confidence in which healthy mission can flourish.

If elected

I will seek to represent **all lay people across Coventry Diocese**, not simply those who share my views. I will listen, be accessible and communicate regularly about what is happening at Synod. I will seek your views and be willing to attend Deanery gatherings and meet with electors. I do not have all the answers. I do bring a willingness to pray, listen, learn, work hard, build relationships and help the Church move forward. I believe God has given the Church of England an extraordinary opportunity in this season. I would be honoured to serve you and the wider Church on General Synod.

Many thanks

Steve Elton