

## **House of Clergy General Synod Election Address**

My name is Greg Bannister and for the last four and a bit years I have been ministering down in the south of the diocese at St John the Baptist Church in Spalding. I am married to Sophie who is also a priest in the Church of England. We have two children, Lucy (8) and John (4).

My background is complex. I am mixed-race: half-British, half-Chinese and much of my childhood was spent living in mostly Islamic countries overseas. This has taught me about how much of how we view the world is culturally conditioned and how much there is to learn from other perspectives. I was born into an agnostic/very nominally Christian home. As a child I was sent to boarding school in England where I became a convinced atheist thanks to the arguments of Richard Dawkins. Later at senior school I was invited to attend the school Christian Union by a friend where over time my atheism deconstructed, and I converted to Christianity. Since then I have been evangelistically and mission-minded wanting to help others find Christ and a thoughtful personal faith for themselves.

Encountering Christ at boarding school enabled me to learn that I could meet God through both the conservative evangelical Christian Union and also the Anglo-Catholic school chapel services: I ended up being on the staff-student CU committee and also serving as an acolyte and server in chapel. At university I encountered the charismatic movement and that too has remained a significant part of my own spiritual DNA. Upon graduation I spent a year working as a parish assistant for a small church in the suburbs of Hull and was then a psychology teacher. A long and wiggly path through to ordination then followed including studying at both Wycliffe Hall and Ridley Hall. I served my title post in North London before being a full-time house-husband whilst my wife completed her curacy in Central London. Although I would place myself in the evangelical tradition I know I have been enriched by the breadth of the Church of England, not only seeing how different dioceses work, but also learning about faith, life and ministry in a variety of traditions and contexts. I continue to learn a lot in this diocese, not least through my participation in the Theology Reference Group for Time To Grow Together.

Many of my convictions are reflected in the ministry I am trying to establish at St John's where the relatively new informal and charismatic evangelical service we have started sits between the 8am spoken communion service and the main Sunday eucharist with robed choir. Growing up multi-culturally means that I am (I hope!) good at listening to others and fairly representing them even if their experience is outside my own (e.g. I only have a comparatively little, experience of rural life and ministry).

The elephant in the room is that General Synod continues to debate where and how far the Church of England will proceed regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion, PLF, equal marriage etc... My own position is that with the understanding of marriage that I hold I cannot in good conscience use the Prayers of Love and Faith. That said, I recognise that there are many people of good faith on all sides of the debate and I do want to belong to a church that truly welcomes all people (notwithstanding disagreement on what welcome looks like). I would hope that for the sake of clarity, catholicity and to be above reproach the big issues would be debated, conclusions reached, and decisions made using the Canon B2 route.