***Diocesan Synod elections 2021: Current members share their experiences***

With elections for the diocesan synod coming up this year, current members share their experiences of being part of the diocesan decision making process.

Revd Elly Sheard has been a member of the House of Clergy for the last three years. Chaplaincy, education and a desire to connect led Elly to the diocesan synod.

As a public preacher and working in college chaplaincy, Elly found herself without a church base and missing support from fellow clergy. “I spoke to someone I knew in Powder deanery and asked about joining the deanery’s Chapter. Once there, I found myself welcomed to take services as a stand-in on Sundays and also had the opportunity to join the diocesan synod.”

This gave Elly the chance to highlight the role of chaplaincy to the wider diocese and opened doors into education. “I’ve been in teaching all my life and a school governor for several years. As a member of diocesan synod, I was then in a position to be selected to sit on the diocesan board of education.”

Elly has welcomed the opportunity in synod to fly the flag for chaplaincy as ‘a kind of one woman lobby group’.

“Within the church, my experience as a chaplain has been of being a bit marginalised. Sometimes I feel like I might be putting a disruptive oar into a synod debate and talking about something that a lot of the people don’t know anything about but I believe that chaplaincy should be much more part of the core of what is church.”

Elly’s desire is to see chaplaincy find a more central place in the church. “I’d like to see formal chaplaincy representation at all levels. Currently there is no designated role for us within the decision-making structures of the church, and yet the church has paid to train many of us and our outreach role in a society where most people have no links with the church is becoming ever more important. I would like to see a more central place for chaplaincy in the thinking of the church and being a member of synod is my way of working towards that. I would like to think that my talking about chaplaincy within synod debates has raised the profile of chaplains in people’s consciousness and helped make them aware that there is more to Church than just a parish church.”

For those considering standing for diocesan synod, Elly says they need to go prepared to speak up. “People need to have the courage to contribute (either in plenary or small groups) and be willing to have their say. Membership of synod doesn’t come with a huge amount of paperwork to read but it is important that people read and consider what they do receive.

“One of the most important aspects of your membership is to act as a conduit to inform your parishes and deaneries about what is going on in the decision making places of the church. The synod is the place where it is clear that all of us are part of the Church of England, not just part of isolated parishes, and communicating that to our fellow church members is a vital part of the role.”

Elly highlights that being part of the process is one of the areas she most enjoys. “I’m a political animal, but also someone who cares deeply about the future of the gospel in our land, so I enjoy seeing what goes on and being a party to the papers and discussions. It makes me part of the decision making process; I would rather be someone who does things than be someone to whom things are done. Plus I enjoy the social catch-ups at meetings and with only three meetings a year, I feel it is a good use of my time. I enjoy being ‘in the know’ in terms of how the church is governed.”

Elly will soon be made a canon at Truro Cathedral. If she remains eligible, Elly is hoping to stand again for diocesan synod in 2021.