Sarah Vinson, Diocesan Synod case study

Sarah Vinson is the first to admit that she only initially stood for diocesan synod because no one else came forward but that doesn’t mean it has been a chore.

Sarah is just coming to the end of her first full three-year cycle on synod and is looking to stand again in the elections planned for this year.

Sarah, who lives in Launceston, said: “There was an opportunity to stand and no one else put their hands up. Living in Launceston, Truro seems a thousand miles away and there’s always this view that there is this place in Truro that takes all our money and doesn’t do much for us. I was interested to see what actually happened.”

While noting that for some the distance to attend meetings might be a barrier, Sarah does feel that things have improved.

“A lot of people from around our deanery just never go down to Truro. We have very poor public transport here, you can’t just jump on a train or bus and go. Recently, with things being online and other changes, Truro seems a lot closer and I think synod needs to build on that. The bishop has become a person they now recognise and the internet has shown there are real people doing real things in Truro.”

Sarah is keen to highlight the unexpected benefits she has discovered from being on synod. “I had not expected the opportunities for networking and the wonderful worship sessions with people from all over the diocese that are available at synod. The fellowship and the opportunity to worship together has given me a sense of belonging to the diocese and I can share that with others.”

Reflecting on the perception some have about diocesan synod being a talking shop obsessed with the finances, Sarah says: “There is a sense that money has determined things for several years but it is so much more than that and the bigger message now is how are we going to grow the church and what does that look like.

“There has been tough messaging in past years around the financial situation and being on synod has allowed me to understand it and go back to my deanery and parish and explain that the biggest costs are the things we benefit from each week. I also try to help people to understand that it is not just another level of bureaucracy. We do now have a lot more information to make informed decisions and it is an important two-way communication. There is an opportunity for us as representatives of our parish to feed things into discussions. It gives our area of the diocese a voice and it is all very well complaining that people don’t understand but you have to create opportunities to share and talk.”

Sarah says that she views her role on diocesan synod as another form of her Christian service. “I have found opportunities to grow personally as a Christian by being part of synod and being the communication link between the diocese and my parish.

“I run the community debt advice centre in Launceston and at synod I have been able to have conversations about poverty. I was invited to join the poverty forum and I have spoken to bishops about debt and the centre.”

Through her diocesan synod role, Sarah has also been able to bring more to her deanery. “We have done a lot more to invite people from the wider diocese to come and speak to us at deanery synod which has helped to join the deanery and diocese together. It helped to make people aware there are a lot more resources available to us. We’ve also had a couple of quiet days where people from the wider diocese came and that’s because I was able to talk to people about these things at diocesan synod.”

Sarah says the current move to online meetings because of Covid has made a difference. “What I really enjoy about diocesan synod is just meeting people and while that hasn’t been the same, there are still break-out rooms which have been good and it’s definitely easier to remember names because they are on screen!”

Her advice to anyone considering standing is plain. “Everyone has skills to share and use. I know a lot of people might feel they are too old, they don’t know anything about church laws or they will be overwhelmed by paperwork. You don’t need to know it all and we need people of all ages to give ideas. Plus, you don’t need to do it the same way your predecessor did it, there is the opportunity to make the role your own.”

If you are interested in becoming a member of diocesan synod you can find out more information on the diocesan website here or by contacting ….