

Portia Crees

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About me...

Hello, I'm Portia. I'm 53, married to Mike, and we've lived in Cumbria for the last 22 years. It'd be an honour to serve God on General Synod and represent you & our Diocese, as well as the people of Cumbria.

- We live in **Kendal**, and we've had four children here, all with **disabilities** (my two sons are alongside me in the photo above!). Our younger daughter died in 2011. I also have a brother with a brain injury which has caused severe physical and mental disability. These experiences have inevitably shaped me, and have given me **a particular concern for people and families whose lives don't always fit neatly into the boxes that society, or sometimes the Church, creates.**
- Mike & I met at university in Birmingham where we spent seven years as **teachers living and working in the inner city**, before moving to Cumbria 22 years ago.
- **I don't come from a religious family.** When I was 14, I came across a Bible in a hotel room and what I read changed my life. I committed my life to the Lord and ever since I've had **a passion for God's Word.** It remains the bedrock of my faith and my guidebook for life. As I open this book with others, from church or non-church backgrounds, I love introducing people to the God who has changed my life.

About my experiences...

Over the years I've been involved in quite a range of aspects of church and community life:

- While we lived in Birmingham I was involved in **homeless ministries** through Birmingham City Mission and The Big Issue, and Mike and I ran a Christian support group and food bank for refugees and asylum seekers.
- At previous churches I have also looked after **finances and wages** and served as a **trustee**, so I am comfortable with some of the more **practical and organisational sides of church life** too.
- Here in Cumbria, I set up and ran a **baby and toddler group for seven years.** I'm now involved with the toddler group at St Thomas', our daytime **Alpha course** and **Warm Welcome**, which provides a safe place each week for people to drop in for cake, conversation and the occasional jigsaw puzzle (at which I am not very good!). More widely, I also facilitate a Women's Fellowship group **which includes those with lived experiences of domestic abuse, disability and loneliness.**
- Outside of Christian settings, I also facilitate a weekly **peer-support group for mums and grandmas of children with autism, ADHD and other disabilities.** Through that group and our WhatsApp network, I've had the privilege of walking alongside families facing all sorts of challenges around disability, mental health, relationships and family life.
- One thing that runs through much of what I do is asking how we can make **church genuinely accessible and welcoming**, holding out **the gospel of Christ**, particularly for people with physical or hidden disabilities, those who are **neurodiverse**, and others who can easily find themselves **on the margins.**

Why stand for General Synod?

A number of people have **encouraged me to stand for General Synod** over the last few years. To begin with, I was **surprised**. But the more I have thought and prayed about it, the more I have realised that **the things I care about are also some of the big questions facing the Church of England:**

- Ultimately I care passionately about the Church of England, and I hope that is because I care passionately about the **Lord**, the **Bible** and about **people**.
- I want our churches to be places where people can discover the hope of the Christian faith, including **those who may never have imagined that church was for them**. I want us to be particularly attentive to children and young adults, many of whom are **facing anxiety, loneliness, poor mental health and uncertainty** about their future. And I want us to think carefully about people with **disabilities and additional needs**, not simply ensuring they can get through the door, but enabling them to belong, participate and flourish as part of the life of the Church.
- I also believe that **trust matters**. At a time when trust in institutions, including the Church, can be fragile, I want the Church of England to be known for **integrity, consistency, openness and genuine care for people**.
- My own life has given me particular experience of **physical and hidden disabilities, neurodiversity, bereavement and mental health challenges**, as well as the privilege of walking alongside many people experiencing vulnerability or isolation. I would hope to bring some of those voices and experiences into the conversations of Synod.
- As I see in Kendal and across our county, **the local church is so important**. Beautiful, ordinary, faithful, everyday local church communities are the hope of the world, because we're the body of Christ. So I think **local churches and parishes should be at the forefront of our minds in our bigger decisions** - and General Synod should be enabling and encouraging this 'local' work.

"I certainly *wouldn't* come to General Synod thinking I had all the answers. I would want to listen carefully, ask questions, and represent the lay people of our diocese as faithfully as I can. If elected, I would try to speak honestly, be prayerful, and remember those whose voices can easily go unheard. And I would always be very happy to hear from people across the diocese, whether over a coffee or by WhatsApp, daytime or evening."

Thanks you for considering my candidacy for **House of Laity on General Synod for Carlisle Diocese**.

Your vote in these elections is important. Please feel very welcome to call, Whatsapp, or email me (contact details overleaf) if you have any questions, or would like me to **share anything further on any particular issues**.

If you felt able, I would **very much value your first preference vote** or, failing that, the highest preference that you are able to give to me.

Portia