

Rev Rachel Noël

Vicar, St James Church, Pokesdown

Proposed by The Reverend Canon Professor Liz Stuart
Seconded by The Reverend James Pitkin

Summary

I've been part of this Diocese since 1997, as an unpaid youth leader, a PCC member, and now as a parish priest in Bournemouth. My pre-ordination working life was spent in organisational change and strategy; more recently I've served on the Diocesan Board of Finance and Bishop's Council.

Why am I standing for Synod?

Every priest I know is being asked **to do more with less**. Parish share goes up, buildings need money we do not have. At the same time, trust in the national Church has been badly damaged by our failures in safeguarding. **Rebuilding trust is not optional – it is the work.**

Our Church's vision: **Jesus-centred; simpler, humbler, bolder**; a church of missionary disciples where mixed ecology is normal, that is younger and more diverse. I believe that vision is right. I also think we are further from it than we like to admit, and that saying so plainly is the first useful thing anyone can do.

Good governance is not an optional extra to our mission. It is how we actually care for each other – inside the Church and beyond it. Get it wrong and people get hurt; we know that now, at considerable cost.

The challenges are significant yet we also have the **deep hope of abundant life**, the promise of light that Jesus offers.

What would I bring?

I know how the money works. I spent three years on the Diocesan Board of Finance and Bishop's Council. I have read real diocesan accounts and sat in the room for hard decisions — and I know how much of a parish priest's week gets eaten by processes designed by people who never had to run them.

I know how large organisations change. After an MBA, I worked across Carnival UK on organisational change and process improvement, and spoke internationally on it. Structural and cultural change is slow and takes detailed, long term commitment.

I know how to get something through. I am part of the Church of England's national Neurodiversity Working Group whose motion was unanimously endorsed by General Synod in July 2026. Thirty years on PCCs and 15 as a school governor have taught me that patience and paperwork achieve more than indignation.

I think differently - and that is useful. I am neurodivergent. It is why I read a set of papers differently from most people in the room, and why I notice what is missing from them.

I am pleased to support Rachel and encourage you to vote for her. Rooted in her love for Jesus and his Gospel, she has the vision of an artist, the perception of someone with years of experience in governance, and the pastoral heart of a seasoned parish priest.

Reverend Canon Professor Liz Stuart, Associate Priest, St Matthew's & St Paul's, Winchester. Area Dean, Winchester.

I would welcome your first preference vote

GOVERNANCE EXPERIENCE

- Winchester Diocesan Board of Finance, Bishop's Council 2021-2024
- CofE national Neurodiversity Working Group — motion reached General Synod July 2026 - 2023 +
- Member of Winchester Diocesan Synod 2014 +
- Diocese of Winchester Clergy Wellbeing review group 2022 +
- 15 years of school governor experience (ongoing)
- Trustee, Modem — a hub for leadership, management and ministry 2015-2024
- Trustee, Sarum College and STETS; helped take STETS through merger 2012-2018
- 30 years' experience serving on PCCs

SPEAKING & TEACHING

- BBC Radio and television on neurodiversity, mental health, faith and the Church
- Training & theology for Cuddesdon, Westcott House, and the national DDO conference
- Disability Conference at St Martin in the Fields
- Dioceses of Winchester, Gloucester and St Albans re neurodiversity & faith
- … and others

KEY SKILLS & ATTRIBUTES

- **Neurodivergent**
- **Prayerful**
- **Enthusiastic**
- **Creative**
- **Strategic**
- **Optimistic**
- **Analytical**
- **Passionate**

INTERESTS

- **Creative pursuits including: crochet, stitched textiles, fused glass, origami, drawing & painting, photography**
- **Strategic board games, logic puzzles, online games**
- **Walking by the sea, or from pubs with friends!**



My painting of the woman at the well statue at Chester Cathedral

What can I offer you?



- A promise to **listen** to you and to **pray with you**, and to pray for the Church.
- My willingness to **challenge** and to **listen**.
- Insistence that our values are **built into our governance**, not bolted on.
- I am committed to **equality for everyone**, at all levels and roles within the church, regardless of disability, economic power, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, learning disability, mental health, neurodiversity, or sexuality.
- **Enthusiasm** for the **local church**, and for people to encounter God wherever they are.
- Commitment to **clergy wellbeing**, to supporting parish priests and funding local parish ministry.
- **Safeguarding** never treated as box-ticking, but as central to our gospel witness. I fully support the move to independent safeguarding structures and mandatory compliance, ensuring that **victims and survivors are heard**.

How will I work with you?

- There are things this Church disagrees about that better process will not solve. So: **I will not coerce anyone's conscience**, I will not sideline people whose convictions differ from mine, and I will say plainly what I am doing and why.
- **I would rather be trusted by people who disagree with me than admired by people who already do.** If you disagree with me, I will still listen to you, still pray with you, and still tell you the truth.

Who am I, and what is my background?

I grew up in South London, was deeply involved in the Baptist Church, and preached my first sermon at seventeen. I am an **accidental Anglican**: I turned out to be allergic to the floor polish at my Baptist church, so started going somewhere new — and fell in love with the Anglican liturgy, **its rootedness across time and place**.

I read Maths and Philosophy at Nottingham, married, and settled in North Baddesley, Romsey Deanery in 1997. I found silent prayer in a Julian prayer group, take an annual silent retreat at St Beuno's, and am a member of the Community of Hopeweavers, where silence, prayer and creativity are part of my rule of life. I trained at STETS and have served parishes in Christchurch, Lyndhurst and now Bournemouth deaneries.

At a time when the Church of England is navigating complex national questions, Rachel offers a refreshing, collaborative, prophetic and inclusive voice. She will be an exceptional advocate for the clergy. I strongly encourage you to give your first-preference vote to the Revd Rachel Noël.

Rev James Pitkin Rural Dean of Romsey, Rector of Thorngate & Blackwater Benefice, General Synod Member 2015-2026