

The Revd Dr Sara Batts-Neale

Proposer The Ven. Ruth Patten, Archdeacon of Colchester

Secunder The Revd Canon Tom Page, Vicar, Chelmsford Ascension w All Saints, who says:

“May I warmly commend Sara to you as a candidate for General Synod. She is an intelligent, thoughtful and articulate priest with an open heart and mind. Synod would be improved by her contribution.”



Who am I?

I'm Anglican Chaplain to the University of Essex, and licensed as associate priest to Wivenhoe St Mary the Virgin, Greenstead with St Anne's, and Colchester New Town.

I am co-chair of Colchester Citizens, an alliance of civic institutions that is re-forming to tackle issues of injustice. I am developing a ministry of spiritual accompaniment. In 2020 I completed an MA in Systematic and Philosophical Theology.

I live in Wivenhoe, and am relatively recently married to Tim, a town planner for Transport for London. Bunter, the dog, has been an invaluable chaplaincy assistant during the pandemic. The cat Charles Parker keeps us all in our place.

I find creativity in cooking, learning lino printing & have loved lockdown piano lessons. I have been a regular contributor to the Bible Reading Fellowship's *Day by Day with God* devotionals.

What experience do I bring?

I have experience of ministry in urban, rural, estate and town contexts, and of church life in different ecclesiological traditions. I completed my title post in Coggeshall, having begun in Chingford. I grew up in an evangelical church, finding a home in a more Catholic tradition after returning to faith 15 years ago (it was a long teenage rebellion). I was an active lay member of St Margaret's, Lothbury for a number of years whilst I worked in the City.

My PhD investigated church websites & social media use, and my BTh dissertation examined pastoral care online. I therefore offer knowledge of the use of IT in mission and ministry – something that has become an integral part of church life in the past two years.

I served on Diocesan Synod from 2018-2020 and have been re-elected for the next session.

Spiritual direction and community organising both demand excellent, but different, ways of listening and reflecting on what is happening around us. Listening well is, I believe, fundamental to finding any resolution to contentious issues.

My role as chaplain to a secular institution means I daily reflect on the challenges that the Church faces in bringing our good news of God's unconditional love to the wider society. I enjoy work ecumenically and interfaith to support staff and students.

Why am I standing?

I felt called to stand for election after a summer of being quite cross. Not just with the conversations around the idea that parish priests are 'limiting factors.' Not just with the indifference or suspicion with which the LLF process has been commented on. And not just the first drafts of the replacement for the CDM.

Collectively, these issues form much of the agenda for the next Synod and it seemed to me that the crossness was a prompting to action, to work towards the kingdom values I preach being lived out in our institutional life. How do we ensure that our attempts to talk about the love of God, the salvation we find in Jesus and the life abundant are not overshadowed by our disagreements? How will the simpler, bolder, humbler vision play out for our church?

Chaplaincy in a secular university – working alongside young people on a daily basis - has been incredibly instructive in understanding the challenge we have as a church merely to be heard.

How do I see the key issues?

Climate change: This isn't just an issue of careful stewardship of God's creation. Are we prepared to alter our habits and lifestyles, to lobby and campaign for institutional and industrial change, in order to protect the livelihoods and lives of unknown neighbours? How can we inject the necessary urgency into our decision making? What does a net zero carbon target for the C of E mean if we all can only get to church by car?

Clergy discipline: We need accountability as fallible clergy. We also need a Church that understands the toxic nature of some parishes and provides mechanisms for disputes to be fairly resolved. I have seen first-hand bullying of clergy. I have witnessed the trauma the threat of CDM creates and the poor mental health that can result from fractured relationships.

Replacing the current CDM with a compassionate, timely and fair process is of paramount importance. Current proposals appear to be merely tweaking a flawed system and will not improve outcomes for any participants.

The Church also needs to continue to build robust, trustworthy and transparent approaches to safeguarding – and to commit to listen deeply and compassionately to survivors of abuse.

Inclusivity: I am committed to equality for everyone, at all levels and roles within the church, regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity, socio-economic status, mental health or sexuality.

Ignoring racial injustices not only hinders the flourishing of all brothers and sisters in Christ but diminishes our experience of collective church life.

We must ensure that the Living in Love and Faith baton is picked up prayerfully, sensitively and carefully, understanding that people we disagree with love God and trust the Bible too. A formative moment in chaplaincy was making someone cry by merely affirming that God really does love them and that Psalm 139 is as much their scripture as it is mine.

Thank you for taking the time to read this address. Please do consider giving me your first preference vote. Please do get in touch if you would like: revdrbatts@gmail.com.