

## REVD CANON CHARLIE CLEVERLY

### RECTOR OF ST ALDATES

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Diocesan Synod • Churches Together in Central Oxford • Founder of ACT (charity serving and re-integrating ex-prisoners in Oxford) • Member of Council of Trinity College Bristol • Former Member of New Wine conference leadership team and current leader of Prayer Venue • Leader of ASK Europe Prayer Network • Leader of 'Love Oxford' (interdenominational community of Oxford Churches) • Author of several books, most recently 'The Song of Songs' (Hodders) which seeks to unite evangelical and contemplative spirituality • In 2015 I was made an Hon Canon of Christ Church Cathedral.

### HOBBIES AND FAMILY

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Gardening, walking, ideally on the coastal path in Wales, all things French including politics film and food. Married to Anita, with four children and eight grandchildren who are extraordinary and exhausting.

### INTRODUCTION

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I became a Christian after four years at Oxford University, during which I never attended Church or any Christian meeting. My parents divorced when I was 14. As a result I rejected Christianity and went through my education assuming Christianity was finished. Becoming a disciple through the testimony of friends and research into the New Testament was a complete turnaround that changed everything.

### MINISTRY

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Ordained in 1982 and served 10 years in a suburban parish in Essex on the edge of London: as curate, church planter, and then as incumbent. I served 10 years as Crosslinks Missionary in the French Reformed Church in inner city Paris.

For the past 13 years, I have been Rector of St Aldates, the city centre Church at the heart of Oxford where we welcome many clergy for refreshments after the Cathedral Maundy Thursday service.

### WHAT CAN I BRING TO GENERAL SYNOD?

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I was introduced to a senior politician who was speaking at Christ Church recently and as the minister of a church of hundreds in city centre Oxford. He immediately asked: 'What's the secret?' I found myself replying: 'Orthodoxy and Community'.

I am standing to represent you on General Synod for these two values: Orthodoxy for me means all the glory and the suffering of New Testament Christianity. Community includes generous welcome. There are now so many broken or disturbed relationships, so many children who are angry with their parents, so many people who have not been faithful to their promise to love each other that 'more and more communities need to be born as signs of fidelity' (Jean Vanier). At St Aldates we have the privilege of welcoming families, children, students, internationals, single people, the elderly, ex-prisoners and the vulnerably housed. We welcome people generously in all their diversity of gender, sexuality race or creed. I bring some experience in all these areas. The Church can grow as she is creative and imaginative in leading into them. Whether in villages or towns or cities, there is a hunger for God today. The novelist Julian Barnes once said: 'I don't believe in God, but I miss him'. In our country there is a nostalgia for God, and an opportunity for the Church for which we need wisdom and leadership.

## THE ISSUES OF THE DAY

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The Church needs to consider: How we in the Church can show welcome and loving care to the migrant oppressed of this world may become a burning issue of the day in the life of the next synod. 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me'. Climate change and the way it affects the world's poorest is something the synod has debated. The role of women has rightly preoccupied the Synod. For many years now women have served among the ordained leadership at St Aldates.

Issues concerning human sexuality will be a subject of careful consideration for the next synod. I grew up in a liberal home. Gay people were welcomed as friends into our home. Welcome and friendship with people who are gay is for me a completely normal part of life. The welcome offered by the Church must be extended to include everyone. I have applied to participate in the facilitated conversations and look forward to taking part carefully during this process. I believe orthodoxy asks homosexuals in the Church to embrace celibacy. This is the Church's call to many heterosexuals as well. I will listen carefully to the debate on this and hold an orthodox and lovingly welcoming view.

## INTERFAITH RELATIONS

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In Oxford, I have been involved in organizing regular 'Meetings for better Understanding' with the Muslim community, with a view to build friendship and hence a better understanding in our multi-cultural city. Promotion of community cohesion is crucial if the church is to respond well to the challenges of extremist ideologies, racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. We need to be able to work effectively alongside the rich diversity of communities in our parishes.

## COURAGE, HUMILITY...AND WISDOM

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This new world context requires the virtues of wisdom, humility and courage. Some years ago I wrote 'The Passion that shapes Nations', a book which attempts to call forth the courage that shaped the Church in the past. Beginning with the Apostles, the Church's story is one of extreme courage and I dare say this is needed again today, with humble wisdom. To see Christianity flourish in the UK and beyond, we need to recover the courage of those who have been prepared to give up their comforts, their safety, even their lives for Christ. In the global Church and in the global Anglican family, are stories of great courage. May we be attentive to and learn from those with whom we are in communion.

Interestingly, extremism is a great leveller. The fanatical Isis terrorists do not ask before beheading their victims whether they are catholic, protestant, or orthodox, if they believe in women's ministry or what they think about homosexuality. They simply want to know: Are you Christian and if you are, will you renounce it. This may put some of our debates into perspective.

## THE NEXT GENERATION AND SPIRITUALITY

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As the minister of a Church that welcomes hundreds of students, I have confidence that young people can love God and follow him in a way that is stunning. The contemporary Church must create contexts where young people can hear about Christ, encounter God and create community. Young people are often hungry for a restoration of prayer. If we make our churches a 'House of Prayer for all nations', then it may be that young people will find Him but also lead the way in recovering Church at the heart of our culture.

## BELIEFS

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Goethe once said: 'Don't tell me about your doubts, tell me about your beliefs. I have enough doubts of my own'. In the first days of Christianity there were many things not yet worked out. But there were huge beliefs about the resurrection of Christ, the call to follow him and to live out his teachings of holy living, love and mercy. In our day, many things are still being worked out and this next synod will work on them. But these must not deflect the church from her great task of speaking about Christ to our generation and living holy loving lives full of mercy.

**Charlie Cleverly**  
**Oxford, September 2015**

NOMINATED BY | Richard Coombes, Vicar of St John the Baptist Burford  
SECONDED BY | Revd Dr Megan Daffern, Chaplain of Jesus College Oxford