

Electoral Address of Pauline (Paula) Susan Pitman

Everyone knows me as Paula. I am married with a daughter living locally, a married son and grand-daughter based in London and two step-sons.

I care very much about people and the many pressures confronting present-day society, as well as how to sustain our Christian faith and make it more relevant and vital in peoples' lives. I have always felt strongly about equality of opportunity; particularly equality for all lay and ordained men and women, as well as concerns such as youth unemployment, homelessness and poverty in modern-day Britain, and how the church can support communities and nourish a spiritual life. The particular problems facing rural parishes are very evident to me as I live in the village of Cornworthy; a small parish that is part of the Totnes Team Ministry. Here the challenges are typically not only financial, but how to provide new forms of worship that are accessible for people who are unchurched, and to be relevant in a community where the price of milk and bovine tuberculosis can seem more important.

I have been a member of the Parochial Church Council since our retirement from international development work and move from Washington, D.C. to the village seven years ago. I give my support in any way I can to the church and village. I have recently joined the group taking the Open the Book project into local primary schools, which is proving very popular.

I have maintained Christian Fellowship in many diverse contexts, from my earliest days growing up on a farm on the borders of the New Forest, then at university in Aberystwyth, then for nearly twenty years in the parish of Fen Ditton near Cambridge and, more recently, fifteen years at Christ Church, Alexandria, Virginia, USA before coming to St. Peter's, Cornworthy. I have gone full circle, rural to rural! However, times spent in several countries of the Middle East, Africa and south-east Asia have, I feel, given me a good insight into other religions, at the same time strengthening my own belief, and enabled me to work with diverse cultures over many years. Thus while living in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s, I learned not to take Christian fellowship for granted given that Christian services were barely tolerated by the authorities.

My professional background is in public relations. At the Centre for African Studies, University of Cambridge, I organised high-profile VIP visits and international conferences on cutting-edge issues in the developing world. In Washington, D.C., I was Director of Communications for a firm of international development consultants preparing and implementing projects in developing countries over a whole range of disciplines. I also arranged and led Study Tours, for example, senior government officials from Bangladesh on fact-finding missions to Thailand, Vietnam, and the USA, as well as international conferences in Africa for United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

I have experience of what war and poverty mean and the importance of faith and community to survival. Thus, while living in Cambridge in the mid-1980s, I was a founding member of a charity, "Friends of Ethiopian in Need (FECIN)" that was formed to support orphans of the long civil war in Makelle, Tigre Province where I had lived for three years in the early 1970s before and during the revolution. I also saw at first-hand the effects of war and drought and the consequent famine, pauperisation and starvation among the vulnerable population. Fifteen years ago I coordinated the start-up of Camfed USA Foundation, the US part of the Cambridge, UK charity, Camfed, which supports girls' education in sub-Saharan Africa.

I feel very fortunate in life to have experienced so many cultures and faiths the world over and I have learned that it takes time and great patience to listen and understand differing views. At this stage of my life in my mid-60s, while I have time, energy and life experience, I feel I could be an effective member of the General Synod and make a valuable contribution to its role. I think it is vitally important that the voice of small country parishes (of which there are many in this diocese) is represented and heard at the top level.

I would very much appreciate your vote and, if elected, I will make certain that I justify your confidence in me.