

General Council Elections 2024

Access and Inclusion (Disability and Neurodivergence) Portfolio Nomination Form

Name: Sorrel Eyres

Why are you standing for election to GC?

SCM has been part of my life for a few years now, and I would like to contribute to the organisation and direction of the movement so that we can continue to provide a welcoming yet challenging space for all Christian students and to those who are exploring faith.



What portfolio are you standing for?

Access and Inclusion. As a multiply disabled Christian, I've sometimes felt othered or excluded in church. Whether it's due to access issues or down to ableist assumptions that mean disabled folk are not seen as competent, it's rare to see people like me in leadership roles. And that needs to change. At SCM events, I've always been able to be a fully participating member of the group. My access needs aren't seen as a burden, and I've been encouraged to use my own skills and experiences to serve others. I would like every disabled student to have that experience, and so, I want to listen to disabled members and work with them to make SCM as inclusive and accessible as possible, for everyone.

Tell us a bit about yourself:

I'm a modern languages student, so I've always had a particular interest in communication, how different societies and cultures work, and in literature and writing. I find disability theology and queer theology fascinating (would highly recommend the book "At The Gates: Disability, Justice, and the Church"), so I like to weave some of that into my essays when I can. In term time I volunteer at The Gathering at New Road Baptist Church, which is an inclusive space created for students in particular to learn about and discuss questions of faith, and last term I gave a talk entitled "God Made Me Disabled (?)" as part of a meeting. I'm also a member of the United Reformed Church, and at the moment my church and a couple of others are working to appoint an ecumenical student outreach worker; I'm very glad to be part of this process.

I don't have a lot of spare spoons (energy) after all that, but I love orchestral music, so I'm currently trying to teach myself a slightly adaptive version of playing the viola, so that I can restart orchestral performing, since double basses and wheelchairs don't really get on.

What skills would you bring to General Council?

I am experienced in listening to disabled students and implementing changes based on this feedback. As Disabled Students' Representative at my university college I created a survey to establish what was working well and what wasn't in terms of accessibility, and then successfully took the combined responses to the relevant staff committees, which lead to changes being made in how some of the

support for disabled students was organised. I also implemented some changes myself, including making examples of accessibility best practice more easily available to students.

I also enjoy working collaboratively; for example I have worked with another SCM member to contribute to part of an information pack on supporting neurodivergent people in the church.

I have developed my communication skills through teaching experience and through the natural advocacy work that happens when living life from a wheelchair, and I hope to use these skills to work with other members of General Council to advocate for the needs of our disabled members.

How have you been involved in SCM as a member?

I am a member of the Trans Theology Group, which has given me the opportunity to lead a session exploring the intersection between trans and disabled embodiment in a Christian context. A highlight of the last two summers has been the National Gathering, and in 2023 I was very happy to lead a craft session based around the idea of "mapping experience", as well as contributing to the session working on the Affirming Christianity resources. Also last summer I was very lucky to be able to go on the Bonhoeffer in Berlin trip, which enabled me to learn more about the theology Bonhoeffer and Niemoller, as well as really humanising the history of WWII and the Berlin Wall. This inspired me to take more action in solidarity with those currently suffering from conflict and violent oppression.

Through SCM I have also had the opportunity to write for Via Media on the topic of "Young Christianity Today".

What would you like to achieve if you are elected?

First, I would like to survey the needs and feelings of all those members who consider themselves to be disabled in any way, in order to establish any barriers to participation. I would then work with General Council to address any concerns raised.

I would be interested in creating resources for churches to use to make their worship more accessible, and in increasing understanding of the diversity of disability in faith communities.

Finally, I would like to increase visibility of the disabled access we provide on SCM's promotional materials, as in my experience that where disabled access is not made explicit, it is often the assumption, based on experience, that an event won't be accessible, which leads to people with disabilities not joining a group.