

Questions to candidates for General Synod House of Laity

Q1. Do you fully support the equality of women at all levels of ministry, including ordained and episcopal ministry?

The question of women's ordination and episcopacy in the Anglican Church was resolved by synod in 2014 and is not going to be re-visited. Within that decision, it was recognised that continuing to hold the view that the role of elder/presbyter is only for qualified men remained within the spectrum of Anglican teaching and tradition, and that people of either view should be encouraged in mutual flourishing. My experience, as one who agrees with the *Five Guiding Principles** and believes that women and men are equal and complement each other, is that this ambition has been achieved. I see within the Church of England thriving congregations of both varieties including my own church, where there are a range of deeply held views, yet where we love each other, serve and worship together. My hope is that will continue to be the case for Christ's glory.

*see *The Five Guiding Principles*:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/general-synod/structure/house-bishops/house-bishops-declaration-ministry-bishops-and-priests-and-five-guiding-principles>

Q2. In July the General Synod was asked to "affirm that all baptised, believing and faithful persons regardless of sexual orientation are full members of the Body of Christ" and that "recognise a legitimate range of theological perspectives, held in good conscience, across the Church of England, on the right ordering of committed, faithful, intimate same-sex relationships". If you were on Synod, did you vote in favour of this. If you were not on Synod, how would you have voted?

Following the comprehensive eight-year LLF process, it was finally concluded in February that the doctrine of marriage would not be changed. The purpose behind Professor King's motion*, was to start with this affirmation in the hope that doctrine might still eventually change over time so effectively perpetuating the LLF process indefinitely. I hold to the Church of England's inherited doctrine, that people of all sexual orientations are welcome in the church and equal in standing before God but that the place for sexual union is only between one man and one woman within marriage.

Professor King rightly highlights the pain the LLF process has brought to LBGTQI+ people, and to that I would add the pain it has brought to those who hold the to the orthodox view of marriage, therefore I would have no appetite for continuing it. The wording of the motion was also unclear and open to wide interpretation, so I would have agreed with the majority of Bishops and voted against this motion.

* see GS 2455A:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/gs-2455a-same-sex-relationships-compatibility-with-christian-discipleship.pdf>

Q3. Parish share is intended to support all churches across the diocese. Has your church ever applied restrictions on who can benefit from receiving parish share, for example through making use of the Ephesians Fund to prevent your contribution supporting the majority of clergy in the diocese?

Under church and charity law, all individual church financial decisions are a matter for each PCC and not the General Synod. The PCC are answerable directly to their church members who donated the money, so if they decide in good conscience to restrict its use then I believe that is a matter for them.

Q4. To what extent do you consider the decreasing number of stipendiary clergy and increasing lay-led congregations to be an issue that needs addressing across the Church of England?

As a Reader in training, I am very positive about lay ministry, but not at the expense of stipendiary clergy. Lay ministry, when done well, can be a tremendous asset to a church and I would be behind any efforts to increase its reach and effectiveness (see Q5). But churches also need a dedicated leader who is focused on the needs of the church without distraction, and I think that is almost always best served by a full time, paid minister.

Over this last Synod, we have lost 900 full-time stipendiary positions (see Q6). This is something we should all be mourning. The decline needs to be halted and reversed.

In Matt. 9:37-38 Jesus says, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few". He then teaches that there needs to be prayer for more workers.

We need to start with earnest, nationwide church repentance and prayer and then we need to act with a comprehensive, long-term recruitment programme.

Q5. Do you agree that the Church should commit fully to training and ordaining local leaders as self supporting priests?

I am currently training as a Reader alongside candidates for self-supporting ordained ministry and I think it is an excellent pathway. It is my observation (at least within Carlisle Diocese) that the limit on the number of candidates is not primarily financial, but on the availability of willing and suitable candidates (the discernment process is and should however remain thorough). So, I think that our efforts firstly need to be directed towards reaching and encouraging people towards this ministry while making sure the appropriate resources are available.

I think there are people in our churches who would make excellent leaders and ministers, but who have no idea that opportunities are available and what those opportunities entail. It wasn't at all obvious to me when I started down the path of lay minister training.

Q6. What do you consider to be the Church of England's priorities for the next 5 years?

I would like to see these three things at the top of the agenda:

Mission:

The final instruction Jesus gave his followers was to "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). The previous Synod has (by necessity) been occupied with difficult internal issues such as recovery from Covid, historical Safeguarding issues and LLF. I think the new Synod is an opportunity to have a fresh

approach. To look outwards again and offer this country a strong, confident, healthy national church that points people to Jesus.

Ministers:

Congregations tend to grow in churches that have faithful, mission-oriented ministers who are not overstretched yet:

- Over the period of the last Synod, the number of stipendiary ministers fell by 12%.
- In the next 5 years, about 30% are likely to retire.
- Only 16% are under 40 years old.

You may have heard that a 21-church benefice has recently been approved in the diocese of Truro and, while this is at the extreme end of the scale, it represents the current direction of travel. I want to see the Church of England make sure that every resource available is being used effectively to turn this around. This is not just about money; there are just not enough candidates. The role of Anglican minister must be made into one to which mission-hearted young people once again aspire. Clergy well-being, remuneration and a clear vision are things that need to be addressed, and young people need to be encouraged and offered opportunities to be formed into future Ministers (e.g. apprenticeships, mentorships, short term missions etc.).

Making the most of the opportunity:

There is a different mood in the country. People are once again seeking meaning and truth.

Statistics show that people are returning to churches.

The Minister recruitment and training crisis will not be resolved overnight so what can we do now?

How can the central church help parishes on the front line to seize the opportunities that are already here?

Q7. Do you feel that the Bible's teaching on sexuality and marriage is still relevant for the Church in 2026?

I think the issue at the root of this question is: Where should we get our beliefs from? Or, more technically, whether Scripture is the primary source of doctrine. So, the question equally applies to any issue in life, not just sexuality and marriage but also to money, work, how we treat our neighbour etc.

I agree with the Church of England's position which is that there are three/four sources of doctrine (our beliefs): Scripture, reason, tradition and experience, each of which has its own value, but Scripture always has the final say. And that is because history has shown that the other sources are all liable to be distorted by our sin, but the Bible is the fixed standard given to us by God.

So, the simple answer to the question is yes.

The Bible's teaching is relevant in any age as we carefully approach the complex issues of life and listen to God's Spirit and each other.

Q8. What are views in taking forward the Living in Love & Faith (LLF) process, which appears to have come to a natural ending?

Last year, the Church of England's theological advisers (The Faith and Order Commission) wrote two documents for Synod considering the matter of same-sex blessings and the doctrine of marriage*. They are long but worth reading in full for anyone seriously interested in why the formal process has been ended.

In a careful study of Scripture and of theological thinking down the ages, they argue that doctrine does not “develop”. We are custodians of the faith passed down to us, and we are to pass it on to others (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:2). Thus, the formal process ended following a decisive vote in February 2026, without the prospect of a change to the biblical doctrine of marriage.

The two new groups established to consider the pastoral implications of this decision and the legal implications of the Prayers of Love and Faith/clergy in same-sex marriages seem to be an appropriate and necessary response to resolve and advise on outstanding matters. I hope however, that these groups are not seen to prolong the LLF process, because clergy recruitment has suffered during the uncertainty**. Potential candidates on both sides of the issue have been put off committing to a church that might come down on the opposite side of the argument to them.

The ending of the process will clearly be a disappointment to some, but hopefully bring certainty to all, and allow the church to move forward again.

*See GS Misc 1429 *“The nature of Doctrine and the Living God”*

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/gs-misc-1429-the-nature-of-doctrine-and-the-living-god.pdf>

and GS Misc 1430 *“The Doctrine of Marriage and the Prayers of Love and Faith: Texts and Contexts.”*

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/gs-misc-1430-the-doctrine-of-marriage-and-the-prayers-of-love-and-faith-texts-and-contexts.pdf>

**In a 2024 survey by the Church of England National Vocations Team, LLF uncertainty was the 5th highest factor affecting vocations and was more influential than the stipend package.

Q9. What personal qualities do you have that you feel are suitable for serving on General Synod for the next 5 years?

Firstly, I'd say that whatever personal qualities I might have been gifted with, I believe they are not as important as having a heart for Jesus, experiencing his Spirit working within, and being a person of prayer: *“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty”* (Zechariah 4:6).

I spent 26 years leading a customer service business; I went to work every day to serve people. And my main role was to serve my staff who were on the front line either dealing directly with customers or working on their cars. I never literally washed my team members' feet like Jesus (I did wash many cars though!), but I made sure they had every resource needed to look after our customers. But, as a managing director, I also had to make complex and tough decisions, with prayer, with grace and with perseverance to see things through to the end.

So, I want to exercise that same kind of humility in Synod, in order to support Parishes on the front line, partnered with a rugged determination to get things done that will further God's kingdom on earth through the Anglican church in England.