

Questions to Candidates for General Synod — House of Laity

Answers from Nigel Orchard

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

Yes. I fully support all positions of leadership in the Church being open equally to women and men, including ordained and episcopal ministry.

I would, however, distinguish leadership from authority. Holding a position of leadership does not confer unrestricted personal authority. Christian leadership is exercised in service to others, under the ultimate authority of Christ.

I also recognise that, within the breadth of the Church of England, some continue in good conscience to hold a different theological understanding, and I support appropriate pastoral provision for them.

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?

I would have supported the affirmation that all baptised, believing and faithful people are full members of the Body of Christ.

My own position is orthodox: I believe the Church's teaching on marriage and sexual relationships remains grounded in Scripture. But I want to hold that position generously, recognising both the sincerity of those who reach different conclusions and the reality that Christians experiencing same-sex attraction are no less part of the Body of Christ than anyone else.

I therefore support recognising that faithful Christians hold different theological perspectives in good conscience. That does not require me to regard all those perspectives as equally correct, nor to pretend that the underlying theological disagreement has been resolved.

My concern is that we have allowed sexuality increasingly to become an issue of identity and consequently made theological disagreement much harder to resolve. Our primary Christian identity is in Christ. All of us bring our desires, relationships, temptations and imperfections to him.

I want General Synod to move beyond repeatedly rehearsing the same arguments and work urgently towards a generous and durable settlement: one which enables the Church to maintain its orthodox teaching, treats those who conscientiously disagree with generosity and respect, and allows us to remain together and refocus our energies on worship, mission and service.

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?

Not to my knowledge. However, I would not make a blanket judgement about parishes which do so.

Much depends on the circumstances of the particular parish, whether its theological position and conscientious concerns are being properly represented within the wider Church, and on the actions of the clergy concerned.

Our mutual financial support is an important expression of being one Church, but that relationship carries responsibilities in both directions. Where a parish believes those responsibilities have broken down, its concerns need to be heard and addressed rather than simply dismissed because it has chosen to express them through its financial arrangements.

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?

It is a significant issue, particularly in rural areas where several parishes may have to share one stipendiary priest. However, we should not see the solution simply as trying to provide every parish with its own vicar.

Larger and better-resourced churches, particularly in our cities, can do more to support smaller churches and parishes which share clergy. That need not be primarily financial. They can share experience and practical resources and, importantly, help encourage and train lay people for greater involvement in worship, mission and the life of their local church.

Some larger churches are already very effective at developing lay leadership. I would like to see that experience shared more widely, so that smaller congregations are strengthened rather than simply expected to manage with less clergy.

Lay ministry should be developed positively as a ministry in its own right, while recognising the continuing importance of accessible ordained ministry.

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

Yes, where there is a genuine vocation and appropriate selection and training. Self-supporting ministry can be particularly valuable in rural communities where several parishes may share a stipendiary priest.

However, there are particular challenges of accountability in both directions. Managing and supporting volunteers is different from managing paid staff, and we should guard against treating self-supporting clergy differently simply because their ministry is "free". They are ordained clergy giving substantial time, commitment and responsibility to the Church and deserve proper support, recognition and respect.

Equally, self-supporting ministry depends upon the priest recognising and respecting the appropriate authority and accountability of the Church and its hierarchy. The absence of an employment relationship should not mean the absence of mutual obligations, discipline or accountability.

I would therefore strongly encourage self-supporting local ministry, but as a genuine partnership involving vocation, mutual respect and accountability in both directions — not simply as an inexpensive substitute for stipendiary clergy.

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

I would identify six closely connected priorities:

Renewing confidence in parish ministry; reversing decline through mission to children, young people and families; developing sustainable ordained and lay ministry, particularly in rural areas; finding a durable way of living with our theological differences; making the Church's structures and resources serve local mission more effectively; and rebuilding a constructive relationship between Church and State.

As the Established Church, we have a particular opportunity and responsibility to contribute to national and local life. That should not mean seeking privilege or becoming aligned with any political party, but offering an informed and independent Christian voice and working constructively with government and public institutions.

I would also like to see more Christians encouraged to participate personally in secular civic and political life — joining political parties, standing for public office and becoming involved in the institutions which shape our communities. Christians of different political persuasions can bring their faith, experience and commitment to service into the wider democratic process without expecting the Church itself to become party political.

Finally, we should value our church buildings and our musical and liturgical inheritance as assets for mission rather than burdens inherited from the past.

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

Yes. My own position is orthodox: I believe the Church's historic teaching that marriage is between a man and a woman remains grounded in Scripture and continues to be relevant in 2026.

I am concerned that identity politics has confused aspects of this debate. Christian theology should begin with our common identity in Christ rather than categorising people principally according to sexual attraction. I prefer to speak of someone experiencing same-sex attraction rather than making that attraction itself a defining identity.

There is also an important distinction between respecting how another person describes themselves and being required to adopt that description myself. A personal identity is, by its nature, something an individual declares about themselves; another person cannot experience that identity for them. We should be able to respect people's chosen descriptions without requiring theological agreement about what those descriptions mean.

Speaking instead about experiencing same-sex attraction places sexuality within the wider context of Christian discipleship. All of us experience desires and temptations of different kinds and need God's grace in discerning how we respond to them. Same-sex attraction should not be treated as though it places someone in a uniquely different category of Christian.

We need to uphold what we believe Scripture teaches while treating those who interpret it differently with love, generosity and respect.

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

My priority for LLF is now resolution. I do not want another five years in which sexuality

consumes a disproportionate amount of General Synod's attention. The present LLF process has largely run its course, and continuing indefinitely to revisit the same arguments risks diverting energy from worship, mission and ministry.

We now need a generous and durable settlement which acknowledges that genuine theological disagreement remains, enables the Church to maintain its orthodox teaching, treats those who conscientiously disagree with generosity and respect, and enables us to remain together.

The objective should not be for one side eventually to defeat the other, nor should resolution depend upon everyone immediately reaching the same theological conclusion. We need sufficient clarity, space for conscience and mutual respect to live together despite the disagreement that remains, while continuing to seek ways of reducing it through serious theological engagement, better understanding and growing trust.

I would bring to that task a genuine passion to find a resolution. General Synod needs to move from repeatedly describing the disagreement to addressing the practical question of **how we live with it and how we reduce it**, so that much more of our attention can return to proclaiming the Gospel and serving the communities entrusted to us.

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

I am independent-minded, practical and persistent, but prepared to listen and to change my mind when persuaded. My background in engineering, technology and business has involved problem-solving, negotiation and bringing together people with different interests.

I am also a natural networker. If elected, I would make a particular effort to get to know fellow Synod members outside the formal sessions, including people whose theological or other views differ from mine. General Synod should not simply be a succession of speeches and votes: relationships and conversations between meetings can help us understand one another, identify common ground and develop better proposals.

Those relationships would also help me to work with others in developing and supporting worthwhile motions, or in organising constructive opposition where I believe a proposal should be challenged.

My experience of parish, deanery and diocesan life has taught me that policies need to work in practice, not merely on paper. I am comfortable asking difficult questions, but prefer building relationships and finding constructive solutions to simply winning arguments.

Above all, I believe Christian leadership is servant leadership. I would seek to listen, engage and build relationships so that I can contribute effectively to the work of General Synod and the wider Church.