

Questions to candidates for General Synod House of Laity

Portia Crees

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

I support the right of people to follow their conscience held beliefs and have deep respect for people with various views on this and am committed to their flourishing. I would not seek to exclude any group, in our diverse Church. This is already a settled issue within the Church of England.

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?

My understanding was that Helen King's PMM at General Synod in July 2026 was thoroughly debated before falling at the final vote. It was criticised by a majority of bishops as problematic due to its timing, but also for its theological ambiguity, and potential to derail ongoing church processes that were seeking to look at the issue further in the future.

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?

Figures show that as a result of the Ephesians Fund, share collection has increased overall since the inception of the Fund since it has allowed some who previously were unable to give, for conscience reasons, to do so. My Church, St Thomas' Kendal has always given in excess of what has been asked in Parish Share; one of very few churches who have consistently done so. We have not made use of the Ephesians fund for the paying of Parish share to the diocese, though it was debated in the PCC. However some givers in our church use the Ephesians Fund to give to our church as individuals. At St Thomas' as a mixed church, we have found a middle way, facilitating those who would like to give to the church via the Ephesians Fund, whilst continuing to send our Parish Share to the diocese directly, thus supporting the diocese's wider ministry.

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?

The decreasing number of stipendiary clergy is a function of falling church attendance and an increasing age profile. This has the impact of falling financial contributions, and a smaller pool of people from which to recruit future clergy. Of course the issue needs addressing, and were I to be elected to general synod I would support a greater focus on the local church and support for stipendiary ministry. There seems to be only two possible remedies to this situation in the short term. A greater emphasis on mission and evangelism, and the facilitation and training of further Lay leaders in the mean time. I would also seek to support actions to remove roadblocks to people either becoming LLMs or clergy.

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

If local leaders seek training or ordination this should always be encouraged and supported. If it is possible that some could do so in a self supporting capacity then then we should be delighted and do everything we can to assist them in this.

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

The institutional "Vision and Strategy" of the Church is unchanged (till 2030) but are also wordy and incomprehensible to the average person, since they seem more like aims. The three strategic priorities are:

- Becoming a church of missionary disciples where all God's people are free to live the Christian life, wherever they spend their time
- Being a church where "mixed ecology" is the norm, giving every person in England access to a compelling community of faith through new churches and forms of church alongside parishes, cathedrals, schools and chaplaincies
- Being a church that is younger and more diverse.

I don't personally believe that the first two are the most important things, but that we should facilitate spiritual renewal and empower and resource parish churches to do things locally.

Alongside these are ++Canterbury's priorities which seem to be "Safeguarding as the non-negotiable top priority". a "serious and focussed approach" to safeguarding as a "fundamental, non-negotiable responsibility". Healing internal division, Mullally has said she'll lead with "calm, consistency and compassion" and wants the church to treat

one another with love, dignity and respect. With a steady, low-drama leadership style rather than announcing fresh strategic goals. This alongside continued rollout of the education vision, Financial sustainability, and Anglican Communion unity.

Of course safeguarding is vitally important, and my experience of safeguarding (which is extensive) has been that at a local level the systems are in place and are working well. So while this should continue as a basic priority – priorities for the future should both look wider and refocus on the basic mission of the church.

In my opinion the priorities should be facilitating:

Evangelism – at as many levels as possible from low impact social action and community projects in the community such as I am involved with, to more directed activities and events that have an evangelistic focus. Alongside the continued gospel focus of baptisms, weddings, funerals, Easter and Christmas.

Discipleship – after someone comes to faith or expresses an interest, a life long attention to people's questions and needs to help them to grow as Christians and become confident in what they believe, and integrate into the church community. This is a continuation and next step after evangelism and may well have some crossover. It usually has wider involvement than simple or regular church attendance.

Accessibility – Church can be intimidating for people who have not grown up with its culture and funny little ways. I didn't grow up in church, and it took many years before I was confident even as to what to do! I would encourage the prioritisation of less jargon, more openness and explanation to newcomers and more understanding that not everyone grew up in church, and may not have even been in a church before. This is deeper than being welcoming but about thinking things through and putting oneself in someone else's shoes. Awareness of the complex lives people lead and their needs, and making it easier for them to access church.

Young people between 16-24 – I think it is good that there is a renewed focus on "growing younger" as a Church, and support for children and families work, Network Youth outreach and such. However there is another stage that needs attention. This largely arises because at 18 young people's legal status changes from a "child" to an adult and they can no longer attend "youth" events and provisions without being a safeguarding checked volunteer. Additionally young people are not permitted to attend, for example, a small group for adults until they reach 18, as this could be a safeguarding issue. The result is that there is little provision for them. Though there is often focussed work done with students who arrive at university at that age, those who do not are completely missed and often unpastored and undisciplined at a very vulnerable stage in their development as Christians. I would say a priority for the church is to look at what can be done to support this age group as there is little point in investing in young people if they are not encouraged on to the next stage in their walk. This is both a church

priority and a huge social issue since we have nearly a million (981,000) people between 16-24 who are not in education employment or training in the UK - they are often out of church too.

People with hidden disabilities, neurodiversity and mental health issues – I will push for greater awareness and inclusion for these people.

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

Yes. The Church of England has often used the metaphor, first used by the 16th-century theologian Richard Hooker, of the three legged stool; scripture, tradition, and reason. The scripture stands above and across ever changing cultures, tradition has stood the test of time, and these give us a solid bedrock for our faith to which we can apply reason.

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

The first comment would have to be acknowledging that the LFF process has concluded. However the underlying issues, hurts, feelings, and divisions remain. There will have to be care in navigating obvious tensions which continue. Within most parishes there is a range of views, and work needs to be done to heal these rifts and refocus on the mission of the church more widely,

While I affirm the stated position of the doctrines of the church of England, I also acknowledge the pressures on people to conform to cultural expectations, and agree that it is a huge issue moving forward that will need thoughtful discussion with grace and understanding. This is the biggest issue in the circles I move in with autism and hidden disabilities outside the church, so this isn't just an internal matter but a part of our witness to outsiders.

I think the obsession with the internal affairs of the church with regard to SSM and clergy obscures the wider cultural shifts and cultural issues more widely in which we are all called to witness. LLF seems to have led to us looking inward rather than outward and a distraction from mission.

I hope the new Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group will look more widely than just internal church issues.

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

Empathy, thoughtfulness and kindness. Through my own lived experience and in supporting many others over many years.

A settled, mature faith that can hold together conviction and humility. I have a settled enough faith and knowledge of scripture and doctrine to engage seriously with debates, but also enough humility to recognise that sincere, faithful Christians disagree, sometimes sharply, on major questions.

Integrity — willingness to say unpopular things when conscience requires it, whilst using tact and diplomacy to try to move towards consensus.

A genuine love for the whole Church, alongside my own local church with a history of service and activity in churches over many years, a good working knowledge of church systems, and a broad range of wider knowledge.

Groundedness - the ability to listen well, especially to views different from my own, and stay non-anxious under criticism or in tense debates.

Seeing the detail - I have extensive experience in going through lengthy documents and teasing out what is important, what the issues are and what the argument is actually about.

Commitment to safeguarding and pastoral sensitivity, especially given how central those issues are in most Synods currently