

The Ven Stewart Fyfe

General Synod Election Statement 2026

I am seeking election to my third term at General Synod, partly because of unfinished business and partly because of new ambitions. The high turnover in the house of clergy makes it unusual for clergy to remain on Synod for multiple terms, but the complexity of both the Synod processes and the matters under debate, mean that my experience can make a unique and potent contribution. In terms of unfinished business, in the past quinquennium I was elected to two senior roles: Deputy Prolocutor of the Province of York and to the Dioceses Commission. I would look to stand again for election to each.

As **Deputy Prolocutor**, I sit on the Standing Committee for the House of Clergy, overseeing the core business of Synod that affects clergy, such as the Clergy Code of Conduct, the Clergy Conduct Measure and the Safeguarding Code of Practice. Each is complex and technical, so long experience on Synod is a significant advantage. Having become an Archdeacon since my last election has also brought a helpful perspective to many of these issues.

The **Dioceses Commission** has responsibility for the size, shape and number of Dioceses in the Church of England. It also approves all Diocesan applications for Suffragan bishops. I have supported the Commission in maintaining the cultural independence of Dioceses (and the authority of a Diocesan bishop to lead their diocese), thereby staving off forced mergers, but we are in the middle of two key pieces of work: (1) encouraging greater co-operation between Dioceses to avoid the nonsense of reinventing the wheel in 42 Dioceses; and (2) looking at the nature of senior appointments in the Church. Whilst the workload of senior clergy has increased over the past 5-10 years, the proliferation of senior appointments is a concern, from a cost perspective (it limits money available for parish ministry), from a governance perspective (with multiple points of authority) and from a vocational perspective (when there are already too few priests available for front-line ministry). I am keen to continue the work of shaping episcopal responsibility to flatten our structures and simplify senior staff roles, particularly in dioceses where area bishops and area archdeacons often trip over one another with similar responsibilities and roles, or in dioceses (not Carlisle!) where Suffragans are little more than episcopal curates. We need a far more flexible approach to episcopal ministry than the inflexible, high cost option that we have at the moment.

Over the past 7 years, I have led the formation and development of the **Rural Interest Group on General Synod**. Since there is no longer a National Rural Officer, or any national Church oversight of rural affairs, this group has undertaken important work in rural-proofing agenda items and advocating for the rural church. We have developed fruitful links with Parliament through the House of Lords and played a part in wider national rural issues such as farming, ecology, housing, climate resilience and food security. As co-Chair, I am invited to sit as an adviser to the Rural Bishops forum. We played a particularly prominent role in the discussions around triennium funding arrangements, requiring that more Church Commissioner disbursements are made directly to fund parish ministry. To make time for my new ambitions I now want to effect an orderly handover of the leadership of the rural group to ensure its future.

As to my new ambitions, under a new Arch-bishop I will be campaigning to address the underfunding of parish ministry which has occurred since the creation of strategic development funding in 2015. Doing this work effectively requires insight into the (considerable) complexity of church funding structures and the levers available to effect change. Whilst I have some sympathy with the Save the Parish movement, I also consider that some of their expectations are simply unrealistic, partly because they misunderstand the national funding framework and partly because they overlook the significant vulnerability of many rural parishes. I will continue work with them creatively to support the parish as the base unit of ministry, but I think we need solutions that look forwards, not backwards. In particular, I think it would be a mistake to lose strategic development funding entirely. It is a matter of redressing the balance, not 'either/or'.

I also intend to use my legal background to offer more detailed work on our legislative business. Synod, like Parliament, is primarily a law-making body. This is specialist work and as a number of experienced hands have stepped down lately, I feel called to step up and offer more of my time to Revision and Steering Committees for new legislation. This work will also allow me a more direct means of ensuring that legislation takes into account the needs of local churches, including smaller rural parishes.

At the very end of the last quinquennium I presented our Diocesan Synod Motion on Kairos Palestine. There is now a new phase of work to be done in framing the forthcoming national conversation, particularly in our work with the Faith and Public Life Division to provide the resources for that conversation. As well as input on the technical aspects of this, I want to ensure that we maintain the careful tone that I believe I set during the debate. This work needs to reflect both the urgency of the situation in Israel/Palestine (and the effect on the worldwide church) but also the diversity of views within the church. There is a need to navigate a chasm of difference with distinctively Christian values including the ability to see the image of God in each other, to understand deeply, to speak honestly, to display humility and to seek reconciliation, justice and blessing.

Finally, the LLF process which dominated the last quinquennium has ended, but the issue remains and the journey continues through two new working groups set up to take the work forward. Whilst it is unclear where the working groups will take us, I will approach whatever comes next with the twin principles of doctrinal integrity and pastoral generosity. Rather than seeking to change our doctrines, I would love us to explore the riches of our doctrines more fully, to allow God to surprise us with unexpected areas of agreement and scope for pastoral generosity. By shifting the focus to where we agree, rather than our divisions, we can build unity and shared confidence in proclaiming the Good News for all in the complexity of 21st century life.

In all the business before Synod, I will continue to listen extensively, speak carefully, and pray unceasingly to discern God's will. Thank you for reading this. I am praying for you as you consider your vote. Please pray for me, and for all our candidates.

Stewart