

General Synod 2026 – Hustings questions

Answering is optional in all these questions. Enter your response below the questions.
Responses limited to 200 words per question.

Your Calling

1	In what ways do you think God has called you to this role? I have been a Christian since birth, attending St Martin's Dorking. As a young person, I felt called to be a priest. As I grew older, I realised that I could rectify injustices more effectively from The House of Commons as a Christian MP, rather than from the Pulpit. To me, being called by God involves recognising and responding to a divine invitation to fulfil a specific purpose or mission. That mission was to stand for General Synod in 1985. I believed that Our Lord equipped me for the tasks on General Synod – when I became a Church Commissioner specialising in Mission and Pastoral (Deputy Chair), Education, Assets Committee and Governance (Deputy Chair-Legislative Committee). I have the experience, knowledge and approachability to help the Church of England and our Parishes flourish. As a Member of General Synod, I am privileged to chair The Queen Victoria Clergy Fund (£5.5m) supporting clergy and their families in need. I really do care about our Clergy wellbeing and these grants have really helped support them. I look on General Synod as being a Public Appointment, where I can really articulate the issues of the day to help our Church flourish and keep it relevant.
2	What is your personal hope for the Church of England? As I articulated in my Election Address, I want to see a '<i>safer, bolder and united Church moving forwards with renewed confidence</i>'. There must be healthy growth with The Church of England being 'The Church for the Nation' offering a sacred space and common ground. As the Church of England, we must be distinctive where Parish Churches are seen as Christian Monuments of stone full of life and welcoming to all comers with no barriers. The Church of England's potential is for good news across its 16,000 parishes. It is constrained by many challenges - declining and ageing congregations; falling clergy numbers; exhausted clergy; ancient buildings in need of repair and funds!; safeguarding concerns; perceived loss of relevance in society and unresolved ongoing disagreements about core doctrine issues on the nature of human identity, marriage and sexuality. I long for every local church to feel confident about stepping out with a distinctive hope-filled Christian message in the face of life's uncertainties and challenges as the rock, welcoming everybody and caring for those in need. I am willing to serve on General Synod, to play my part, in partnership with others, in helping make this happen, for the good of all.

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Church of England Structures

3	What do you consider the three top priorities of the Church of England over the next five years?
	1. Mission, Evangelism and Growth We must not forget that we are here to bring God's Kingdom to everyone. We must grow more disciples, lay and ordained and properly finance their training and equip our leaders to Grow the Kingdom We therefore need to recruit and train fully a new generation of clergy as pastors and evangelists as front line responders. Hence why I am a St Martha's College Director 2. Safeguarding and ensuring that our house is in good order To me, this is an absolute priority for our Church. We need to implement the Independent Safeguarding Structures, have clarity for our parishes and improve our credibility with the Charity Commissioners whilst making the burden on our volunteers and paid staff manageable. 3. Children and Young People It is vital that the Church continues to engage with and bring the Gospel to Children and Young People I have been Chair of Governors of 5 Diocese Church Schools including two Academies. I want to see more Church Schools and committed Christians teaching RE in our Schools. I support the Diocese's Youth Catalyst project and would support additional funding to promote their vital Youth Ministry Work.
4	What do you feel are the main safeguarding topics for discussion at the General Synod? How would you rate your own understanding of those topics?
	Safeguarding is my absolute priority for our Church. Truly independent safeguarding is necessary to achieve effective safeguarding. The Church of England has demonstrated that marking its own homework was a scandal and a PR disaster. It was wrong for referrals being sent to the Bishops as I said in a safeguarding debate in General Synod. The culture needed to change and the need for <u>universal</u> compliance and practice across all Dioceses is essential. If re-elected, I will campaign for openness and address the issues of power. I praise the work our Parish Safeguarding Officers – but it is essential that our Dioceses and Cathedrals operate in an environment where everyone feels safe. When the GS Legislative Committee took the Clergy Conduct Measure 2025 to the Ecclesiastical Committee, we separated Safeguarding and made it our number 1

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	priority saying we would pay whatever amount in compensation to the victims through the Church Commissioners. I fully support independent scrutiny and proper governance arrangements and the Redress Scheme. We do note the spiralling rise in legal fees (£10m+ annually) because of the increase in Safeguarding cases. I understand my Safeguarding role and responsibilities both within the MoD and Church of England.
5	Do you recognise the key structure of the parish and priest as the bedrock of local ministry and mission in the Guildford Diocese and the Church of England?
	The Parish is the foundation of our Church, where Mission and Ministry happens, with a Parish Priest supported by countless volunteers. I support the Parish System and agree with Save the Parish that we need a 'Charter of Care' for Clergy, to properly resource Parishes from historic funds and not constantly increase Parish Share, to honour and resource the volunteers who hold parishes together and to reform the Mission and Pastoral Measure. I also think that some new 'projects' seldom deliver the growth expected and often undermine our traditional parish system. The Parish is the historic nature of the Church of England, preceding the Norman Conquest and is the foundation of our Christian witness in England. The parish church is a primary sign to each locality that it belongs to the Church of the people of England. As +Andrew's nominated Board Member on St Martha's College, I have great faith and confidence in the number of lay people coming through <i>Foundations in Ministry</i> who are equipped with vital training in the Bible, theology and leadership and how they will work and support our Parishes and priests across Guildford Diocese.
6	What is your view on maintaining a church in every parish when many are struggling financially?
	If we are no longer a church of parishes we are no longer the Church of England. Many parsonage houses have been sold off with parishes losing their endowments and glebe. We need to consider streamlining our Dioceses with possible mergers so that we resource frontline ministry in the places from which resources have been taken. As Deputy Chair of the Church Commissioners Mission, Pastoral and Closed Churches Committee, I kept as many churches open as possible. It has meant amalgamations but the pulse of the worshipping community is in our local Churches at the heart of the local community.

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	In my time on Synod, I have seen Church Closures occurring soon <u>after</u> their local Vicarages were sold. Stewardship campaigns and occasional fundraising will not halt Church closures. It requires additional Income streams and using the church buildings imaginatively. Every diocese is facing the challenge of financial viability. This is a missional challenge and not about ‘balancing the books’ and reducing stipendiary numbers. I thank God that the £230m spent in 2025 by the Church Commissioners supported the mission of dioceses and parishes. We need to ensure that in the next quinquennium this funding does not become less parochially facing.
7	Given the previous question, what thoughts or concerns do you have about the choice of central funding for limited focal projects or a model of funding towards the dioceses in support of all parishes? In the midst of concerns about central funding, finance, structure and organisation we must not forget what we are here for: to bring God’s Kingdom to everyone. We must grow more disciples, lay and ordained, properly finance their training and equip our leaders to Grow the Kingdom through continued but limited funding. As a Church Commissioner on the Assets Committee, I saw Strategic Development Funds being granted. Some of the earlier grants were not properly monitored. I changed that and introduced accountability. Not only that – but if the Diocese failed to spend the grant by a certain time and without good reason, I successfully proposed that the grant money be clawed back and allocated to a needier Diocese. All such funding needs to be carefully planned with proper conversation and strategic aims agreed from a position of trust with central funding projects still encouraged. We had a problem with some Dioceses not submitting grant applications. SDF is open to all with some wealthier Dioceses not hesitating in grant applications. I encouraged them all to apply in partnership with some of the Parishes. But I did look out for their sustainability plans as many such grants were one-offs.
8	How would you solve the burden of expensive church building maintenance costs? From 19 February 2026, listed places of worship have been forced to bear the full cost of VAT on repairs. This ends a system that has operated for over 25 years, where places of worship could reclaim VAT. It means that local people must now raise money not just to repair roofs and towers but to pay a 20% tax to the UK Government.

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	As the Guardian of Historic Buildings, we should <u>not</u> have to fund the repairs of our Nation's churches. Churches as we know, unlike historic houses, are the home to a whole range of activities that support the local community including foodbanks, mental health support, and community groups. It seems unfair that Museums and galleries offering free admission do not have to pay VAT on repairs, but listed churches do. I agree with Save The Parish that the Church Commissioners should directly support Parish Ministry by covering the cost of VAT for church building works for parish churches. I will argue for that meaning Parish Share can be kept as low as possible and more of your giving and parish money be freed up to support the maintenance of our buildings and local parish ministry decisions.
9	Should a candidate for General Synod who threatens to redirect parish share to the Ephesian Fund, withdraw their candidacy? Why or why not?
	Parish share is a freewill offering made by individuals and PCCs to the Diocese. It is not the property of the Diocese. If a PCC chooses to route its payments via the Ephesian Fund it might be signalling that the Diocese should listen to their concerns. I do think that we should listen to each other. The money is passed on to the Diocese by the Ephesian Fund for now. If the Diocese should take irrevocable steps contrary to the doctrine and canon law of the Church of England, those who transmit their giving via the Fund may choose to direct it elsewhere. That action would seem to be a clear statement by any PCC or candidate that doctrine and canon law are not infinitely flexible. If a parish does withdraw its funds, I know as an elected member of both the DBF and Bishop's Council, it could do long-term harm to Church and the good work the Diocese undertakes and could mean that we could not afford the number of Ordinands, Stipendiary Clergy; Lay Training. It would seriously affect Church House capacity to deliver and we would no longer be working as one body for the common good.

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Doctrinal and Theological

10	In what ways does the doctrine of original sin (as defined in article 9) influence your wider theology and ethics?
	The rationale of Article IX and its use of the term $\phi\rho\omicron\nu\eta\mu\alpha$ $\sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ properly belongs to the age in which it was written. It is sufficient to say in the C2st that we remain subject to sin even after our conversion to faith in Jesus as our Saviour, and that we should be constantly alert to the threat posed by the Adversary who seeks to devour us. In public life both as a General Synod Member and former MP, the Nolan Principles bind me. I accept that we are all sinners. Theologically, we seek redemption full of hope for Salvation. My aim is not to be overtly judgemental as we all have sinned and fallen short of the law.
11	Thomas Aquinas defined love as "to love anything is nothing else but to will good to that thing." (Summa Theologica 1.20.2, c.f. Romans 12:9). Do you agree with this definition? If so, how would you define the word <i>good</i> (particularly but not only moral goodness), and practically what does it mean to will good when loving God or our neighbour?
	I pray daily to be a good person and to love my neighbour. I see Love as the presence of the Holy Spirit. As fellow human beings, we share in his love for Him and for us. As General Synod Members, we participate in the love of God and pray that we faithfully do His work in His name by loving and respecting each other. I am tempted to ask how many angels can dance on the top of a needle with life and our faith being challenged daily?

Mission and Ministry

12	What is the most significant change to the structure/strategy of the Church of England that will allow more people to come to know Jesus?
	To dispense with the colossal burden of administration nationally and in the dioceses, and to use all available resources to ensure that we really are the Church of England in every parish. Nobody is converted by people they never meet in a diocesan office, or latterly "working from home" on a laptop.

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	Although as a Church Commissioner, I did support £2m being allocated for digital worship during COVID to make us accessible to all. I see the apostolic ministry means “sent out” – to meet and engage with the people with the Word of God. That’s what all the clergy should be doing, including the bishops. As a former Church Army Director, I supported Pioneer Ministers going to Nightclubs in Bournemouth. We cannot be complacent. We must take the Good News to the People as they won’t come to us! The Church needs to be open to all and needs to be more relevant. We must put more funds into Training and supporting Catalyst Youth Ministry to enable young people to grow a generation of missionary disciples who live out and proclaim the gospel without fear. Next Year’s Easter Monday Pilgrimage to Guildford Cathedral will hopefully attract many young people.
13	Why does it appear that other denominations are able to attract children and youth more than the Church of England?
	It is only an appearance on the outside! The Church of England is – theoretically – present in every parish for people of all ages. Some free churches, whose territory is vast compared to a parish, provide children’s services rather than liturgical worship, turning their chapels into something more akin to a Sunday School. Other denominations put much more funds in to Children and Youth Ministry 100 parish churches are open, welcoming people of all ages. A free church covering the same territory can appear successful because it is one building drawing upon the area covered by upto 100 parishes. I do believe that children and young people of any age should be disciples, following Jesus and being full members of The Church of England. When a Member of GS Board of Education and of the Dearing Commission. I called on Church Schools to host termly Holy Communion in their schools, rather than in the Church. It brought a number of parents (and the Church congregation) to school for the service with children taking on many roles and my article was featured in <i>The Church of England Newspaper</i>.
14	Care for Creation is part of the Church’s marks of mission. How do you feel about the net-zero targets for 2030?
	In General Synod, we approved the annual Festival of Creation in Christ for the 1st Sunday in September Hope for All Creation: A Theological Response to the Environmental Crises sets out a Christian understanding of the environmental crises, rooting care for creation

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	in the biblical story of redemption and renewal, structured around the themes See, Reflect, Respond. Care for creation is a core part of Christian discipleship and mission for hope rooted in God's purposes for creation. I give thanks for God's creation and redemption of the world, reflect on humanity's responsibility to care for the natural world and pray for its renewal. The ultimate aim is to draw Christians through worship and prayer to participate in the Church's mission to <i>"safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain/renew the life of the earth"</i>. Achieving long-term emissions reductions means sustained commitment, investment and local action across the Church. £30 million has been invested upto 2034. Every diocese has funding to build net zero capacity; 6,000 churches are Eco Churches; 1000+ churches decarbonisation projects. As an Assets Committee member, I supported the aspiration and timeline for Net-Zero. But we do need to be socially responsible with 2035, a more likely date.
15	What are your thoughts on encouraging more people to enter the church as trainee ordinands?
	The National Director for Ministry reported that the number of stipendiary clergy had fallen from 14,603 in 1960 to 6,682 in 2026. Nearly half - 3,153 – were 55+ meaning they will retire within 15 years under the usual retirement age of 70. 379 clergy left the ministry in 2025/26 with an additional 278 retiring – meaning a loss of 657 clergy with just 417 ordinands coming forward. We must look after our Clergy and their wellbeing. It is vital that we encourage more trainee ordinands – especially when you consider that we are relying on 8,368 retired clergy with PTO and 2,440 SSMs. It is quite a responsibility to consider whether they genuinely have a vocation before becoming “trainee ordinands” and ask themselves whether they are prepared to commit to three years of intensive theological training, so they can be effective ministers after ordination. But we really do need more Trainee Ordinands. We should be flexible about training and deployment with St Martha's College doing an outstanding job Training for Ordination and Licensed Ministry offering a modular course to explore a vocation in ministry. Shortened courses such as St Mellitus College offer full-time and part-time pathways for ordinands including a two-year course.

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Inclusivity

16	Are you aware of the Racial Justice Covenant in place for the Guildford Diocese, and can you make a statement about your recognition of the aim of the covenant and your support?
	I was aware as we discussed the appointment of a Diocesan Mission Enabler for Racial Diversity on Bishop's Council, which I supported and the Racial Justice Covenant. I made a number of suggestions on the wording of the draft Guildford Diocese Racial Justice Covenant to Geoff Andrews as it needed to reflect the racial diversity of the communities in our Cathedral, Churches and Schools, as well as Church House, The Covenant – a '<i>charter for change</i>' – is a commitment for Parishes to sign up to every TWO years and provides a way for parish leaders to deal with racism within their churches and has the strong support of +Paul. Umair Asif made an outstanding contribution at a recent Diocesan Synod talking about the toolkit in which he mentioned Disciples, Diversity, Representation and Accountability. All these aims, I support as I believe diversity is fundamental to God's creation as it neatly fits into our Transforming Church Transforming Lives framework. Dorking St Martin's Institute has invited Umair Asif to deliver a lecture on 'The Church and Racial Justice' on Sunday 20 September 2026. I am very used to working with the Ethnic Community both with the Gurkhas and as MP for Leicester East.
17	How will you encourage a Church of England where each parish can foster a balanced and informed understanding of inclusivity, creating a culture where differing perspectives can be expressed openly, and where everyone feels genuinely heard, seen and valued?
	Treat everyone with equal respect and focus on worship, which if properly offered, brings everyone equally before the altar. The Church is not a branch of a political party, but a place of worship. I believe that one does not need to be right – but one does need to be heard. My philosophy would be to disagree well, when we cannot agree. Everyone to be welcomed in a safe and secure environment where everyone can be heard and have a sense of trust and mutual respect. We should also offer a Code of Practice with mutual trust and respect and where everyone's view is valued.

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18	What do you think the Church of England needs to do differently if we are to engage those who have experienced the church to be abusive, homophobic or sexist?
	As already stated, I want our Church to be open to all and to flourish where all people are genuinely welcomed. We should encourage a culture of openness where people have a sense of trust and will be heard. We must never be judgemental with people of all views valued. We must not discriminate, nor make anyone uncomfortable and if necessary, we can disagree well. Friendship is the lifeblood of the church and we must offer a safe and secure environment to all worshippers where people will not be abused or receive homophobic or sexist remarks. There must be a clear willingness to Listen and to Learn from each other. The CofE should not tolerate such behaviour and neither will I. My local PCC has a Code of Conduct for all Members as does General Synod. The Church of England is doing a great deal of work to address its extensive safeguarding failures and offenders, including some of the most senior clergy in the hierarchy. As part of that development, it should find practical ways to encourage all members to live in mutual respect, according to the scriptures, and to seek together the fruits of the Spirit.
19	How do you think the Church of England can ensure LGBTQI+ people are fully welcomed, valued and able to flourish in the life of the Church?
	As already stated, I want our Church to be open to all and to flourish where all people are genuinely welcomed. We must never be judgemental with people of all views valued. We must not discriminate and everyone needs to be and should be treated as full members of the Church family. Friendship is the lifeblood of the church and we must offer a safe and secure environment to all worshippers. All are welcome to join the Church, but not necessarily to redesign the Church 100% in their own image and its 2,000 years of apostolic history. We should treat everyone (regardless of whether we have similar or different views) with grace, courtesy and respect.

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20	Given that faithful Christians interpret Scripture differently on difficult and contested questions, how would you seek to maintain unity within diversity when they disagree?
	I would start by saying that there is Unity when we pray. I feel that this Nation does not pray enough! Faithful Christians do need to have mutual listening with Charity and Trust. My basic premise is that everyone has a voice and a right to be heard and where we do not agree on an issue, we should disagree well. We must offer hospitality with generous orthodoxy and to not encourage mistrust. But there could be a fundamental flaw with such a question. The Church's teaching is based on the Word of God in scripture and is not a matter for debate. The leaders of the Church are called to teach and uphold the scriptures. Those who wish to be Christians are expected to accept the Creeds and the apostolic tradition. Those who cannot accept the Church's teaching are free to hold dissenting opinions. But I personally would hate them to leave.
21	Do you believe that women and men are treated equally in our churches? If you were elected to the General Synod, what changes would you like to see which would support women's ministry?
	The majority of churchgoers are women, as are the majority of ordinands. There is a risk of excluding men in the future, if the Church becomes perceived as something chiefly for women. The Church of England is positively encouraging Women's Ministry and treating women equally. In July 2014, we approved legislation enabling women to become bishops and removing all gender distinctions in the canons of the Church of England in relation to the ministry of bishops, priest and deacons. As A/Chair of General Synod Legislative Committee, I presented The Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015 (c. 18) to the Ecclesiastical Committee meaning that whenever a vacancy arose during the past ten years, the position has to be filled by an eligible woman bishop. In 2024, the rules were extended for five more years. We must ensure there is a valued place for <u>all</u> our priests and lay to belong for the Church of England to flourish to keep our Church "united and together". To sustain the diversity of the Church of England and mutual flourishing, the Five Guiding Principles were voted through and I continue to support them as the very best way of holding our beloved Church together.

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Equal Marriage and Marriage Law

22	Marriage laws in the UK are being reformed, with the proposed change moving the system from licensed buildings to licensed officiants. Should clergy be permitted to conduct weddings in any dignified and safe location?
	Yes, I do think that clergy should be permitted to conduct weddings away from licensed buildings - so long as members of the clergy only conduct church weddings. I believe that it would be a good thing as many couples now marry in the hotels where they are holding their Reception. This could enable licensed Clergy to marry in a Chapel as they do in the US Episcopal Church There is a real possibility that It might even extend the presence of the Church to weddings which are otherwise conducted by secular officials.
23	How do we resolve the apparent conflict between making all people feel included and welcome whilst holding firm to the Bible's and CofE's historic position on marriage, and so allow the CofE to move on from endless debates about sexuality?
	The General Synod has been talking about this at length since 2012. Its leaders should perhaps reaffirm the plain teaching found in canon law, and in the 1662 Service of Holy Matrimony, and put an end to 'damaging divisions' which have caused a significant loss of confidence in the Church. Nevertheless, whether we like it or not, the next General Synod will continue to wrestle with issues of gender, identity and human sexuality as and when the House of Bishops Working Group brings proposals to General Synod and there is no consensus. We must be in listening mode. *The College of Bishops debated the pastoral prayer proposals this week, in Oxford. My prayer and wish is that – as part of this - we should find some kind of a 'settlement' that would prevent anyone feeling they must leave the C of E (whatever their views). We must of course continue to listen to each other. Not to do so could (I fear) mean that the next quinquennium could become a prolonged 'wrangle' which will (tragically) undermine any ongoing unity. We must trust in The Lord that with Him everything is possible - and that we should 'never say never'.
24	If you were an Incumbent, would you allow an assistant priest or curate in your parish to use the Prayers of Love and Faith if, in conscience, they felt able to do so?
	I am not an Incumbent and it would be upto the Incumbent to decide in consultation with the Churchwardens and the PCC

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	The Incumbent's principal role is the Cure of Souls, as stated above. Having served on Synod through endless debates on LLF, I can report that there is no consensus on the way forward. There is a lot of listening going on as well as both sides seeking discernment. There would likely be a rift within the PCC and congregation if it went ahead at this time. The Synod Legal Office has advised that The Prayers do not have proper canonical authority under Canon Law. As such, they would not be permitted to be used by anyone conducting worship in a parish church. It would seem therefore that the Clergy cannot just make changes like this and 'inflict' it on the Congregation.
25	Would you support a member of your congregation who was in a same sex marriage being on your PCC, or leading worship or children's/youth work in your church?
	As with a number of previous questions, this one is really addressed to the Clergy, for whom I cannot answer. But as Vice-Chair of our PCC, I can state that I treat all those selected for our PCC and lay ministry equally but as a layperson, I do not have a formal role in selecting them or indeed 'overseeing' the work of the Clergy. Anyone selected for the PCC and other work will need to go through DBS Safeguarding checks and Safer Recruitment. I personally believe that you should leave your personal views and life outside the Church as I did when an MP. It is essential that such views of whatever kind must not impact on the daily life of the Church. In summary, we undertake a Risk Assessment on all PCC Members and those in other leadership roles to see if they are appropriately suitable and appropriately trained with everyone being supported in their roles. The final decision as to who should lead worship or children's youth work rightly lies with the Incumbent.

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19 September 2026