

GENERAL SYNOD ELECTIONS 2026

Candidate Questions and Answers

Diocese of Derby

Responses are grouped by question. Within each question, candidates are listed alphabetically by first name. Responding to these questions is optional.

As part of the election process, voters have been invited to submit questions for candidates and candidates have been invited to respond.

The Parish Support Team is acting only as a neutral facilitator in collecting and circulating these questions and answers. The wording and content of each question and answer are the responsibility of the individual voter who submitted it and the candidate who responded. These do not indicate endorsement by, or represent the views of, the Parish Support Team or the Diocese.

CLERGY

Question 1

Does your church pay parish share directly to the diocese to support ministry across all churches in the diocese, or do you limit who can be supported by using an arrangement such as the Ephesian Fund where only those churches who agree with your theological position on sexuality can be supported by your giving? *Dwayne Engh*

Bryony Taylor

We pay parish share directly to the diocese.

Gary Weston

Yes, we pay our common fund contribution directly to the diocese; diverting our common fund payment through other arrangements is not something we have considered. We are a diverse congregation who hold a breadth of theological opinions and have worked hard over recent years to focus on our call to be good news in our community, while remaining open and gracious, with each other and those regularly joining us in those areas where we do not agree theologically or are not yet settled on a particular position.

For me, the tension around using mechanisms such as the Ephesians Fund shows the depth of feeling and conviction people hold on all sides of the discussions around sexuality, and we need to continue to work hard to understand those convictions in a way that does not have a negative impact on our mission locally or nationally. Currently, at a national level, I think those outside the church often see us negatively as arguing amongst ourselves about what we disagree on, rather than as followers of Jesus who are doing their best to bring His Good News to those locally.

Jason Ward

200 words is hardly enough for such a loaded question, but I will try.

The medium-sized working-class church I lead currently pays above the request so that ministry costs are largely met. At the same time, when PLF came out, they were so troubled by a perceived abuse of proper process and the rushed, radical change to Anglican doctrine that they had to do something to state their concern. In the end, they opted (with regret) to use the Ephesian Fund. It made it slightly easier, in our particular case, that this would have no actual financial impact on other churches, while still expressing our disquiet. I shared this with Bishop Libby in tears, because it marked a real strain in our fellowship. She was brilliantly understanding.

However, I choose not to let this one issue define our partnership with colleagues and the diocese. I maximise diocesan engagement; I support and fellowship everywhere I can. While we cannot “agree to disagree” on this, nor treat PLF as mere “theological dispute”, we have to find a way to help each other as fellow Christians as much as possible, without dismissing the emerging tensions over how we support our LGBTQI+ friends.

Julian Hollywell

Dwayne, thank you for your direct question. Yes my church does pay parish share directly. In the interests of transparency: like others, we were unable to pay our full parish share last year, (I am deeply concerned about this situation, but not ashamed of our financial reality. As a long standing

parish priest it is with great frustration I say we need far better dialogue on the issue of parish share).

As I am standing for re-election, I have a clear track record and have spoken on the Ephesian Fund both in the House of Clergy and at the Standing Committee of General Synod. I wholeheartedly oppose it. I resigned as Vice Chair of the Business Committee of the DBF in Derby Diocese because I was so deeply frustrated that senior officers of the DBF failed to accept what a dangerous precedent it sets and the Diocesan Leadership failed to clearly and publicly name how the Ephesian Fund fundamentally undermines our collegial mission, Anglican ecclesiology and the polity of a 'broad church', it affects mission and ministry in our poorest and smallest 'ordinary' parishes most deeply.

Phil Mann

I lead St Werburgh's Derby, and we pay our full parish share directly to the Diocese of Derby, contributing to ministry across the diocese.

I have also had leadership roles in the revitalisation of St Francis, Mackworth, and St Ed's, Allenton and Shelton Lock. Both churches also pay their parish share directly to the diocese.

As we begin the revitalisation of St Philip's, Chaddesden, I hope and expect that it will follow the same principle.

I believe parish share expresses our commitment to the wider church and to supporting ministry across the diocese.

Sarah Watson

The four churches where I am Priest-in-Charge pay Common Fund directly to the diocese to support ministry across all churches in the diocese, without limitation. I ensure that Common Fund is a standing item on PCC agendas and that it is discussed regularly. I am committed to the flourishing of all churches and traditions across the diocese.

Question 2

How will you vote on future motions from the Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group, and on any future move toward standalone blessing services or equal marriage?

Rhoda Blackwell

Bryony Taylor

I will vote for as much inclusion of LGBTQ people as possible.

Emma Sykes

As stated in my election address, I support the move toward standalone blessing services and equal marriage, and the full inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in the life of the Church. I also recognise and respect those who hold a different view in good conscience, and I believe appropriate protections must be in place so that all traditions can flourish. It is a difficult tension to hold but one that needs to be worked at with care and grace.

Gary Weston

Currently, it is not clear what future motions or recommendations will come from the newly formed Working Groups, as such it is difficult at this stage to commit to how I will vote. What is clear to me is that the work on LLF/PLF over the last Synod term has left many deeply dissatisfied. I have friends and colleagues whose views in this area differ greatly, who have been deeply disappointed by the tone, level of information provided, and the outcome of the various debates.

Before I can commit to how I would vote, there needs to be greater openness and clarity around any future motion. I also think we need to find a way that enables individuals to be honest and open in a way that fosters trust and deepens relationships. I have managed to do this on a small local level in the Church where I minister and also to an extent by being part of the Bishops' Consultation Group on LLF/PLF and would bring those experiences to any potential engagement with the Working Groups before voting on future motions.

Jason Ward

Hello. I will have to respond to each motion as it comes up: it is unclear what the working group will propose in the end. However, when it comes to future moves towards standalone blessing services and same-sex marriage, I will be suggesting first that the damage caused by the last rush to implement it as "experimental prayers which did not fundamentally change the doctrine of the church of England" left all sides unhappy and feeling betrayed. This needs to be addressed before any further difficult motions are brought forward. Second, I am not yet persuaded that the case for same-sex marriage as a biblical and Christian response to the manifold challenges that our LGBTQ+ family and friends suffer has been made. Obviously, as any Christian who knows they are not yet perfect or perfectly in line with God's mind must do, I reserve the right to be shown from Scripture (with reason and tradition supporting, a la Hooker) that I am mistaken.

Julian Hollywell

Rhoda thanks for your question. My record in Synod and my ministry show I strongly advocate for equal marriage as a missional imperative. Not because 80% of the population support it, but because I believe God honours love however it is found. As the philosopher Henri-Frédéric Amiel said "Life is short. We don't have much time to gladden the hearts of those who walk this way with

us. So, be swift to love and make haste to be kind.” That is true for all people and a good grounding for our pastoral ministry.

To be clear: I lament the actions of the House of Bishops stalling stand alone blessings. Under Canon B5 I undertake stand alone blessings. If elected I will vote for progress towards change and I hope I live to see equal marriage.

I was instrumental in bringing the Clergy Well-Being Covenant before Synod. I stand as one with colleagues who are LGBTQIA+. The restrictions placed on the personal lives of faithful clergy is a profound institutional sin. I voted for the removal of ‘Issues’ and I am committed to a church that reflects God’s love for all.

Phil Mann

I hold to an orthodox, biblical understanding of marriage and human sexuality, rooted in Scripture and the historic teaching of the Church of England. I believe marriage is the lifelong covenant between one man and one woman.

I will therefore vote according to these theological convictions on future motions from the Relationships, Sexuality and Gender Working Group.

I recognise that this is an area where there are deeply held and differing views within the Church of England. I am committed to treating everyone with dignity, kindness and respect, while being clear about my own convictions and seeking to uphold the Church’s teaching and unity.

Sarah Watson

In my election address, I said that I believe the Church should be a place where everyone is valued, belongs, can contribute and flourish. I also spoke about the importance of listening to and representing people from across the breadth of traditions and perspectives within the Church of England.

For transparency, I would support the introduction of standalone services of blessing, while also ensuring that appropriate provision remains for those whose theological convictions mean they would not wish to offer such services. Equal marriage is not currently expected to come before this Synod in legislative form, but I want to be honest that I am still working through my position, continuing to read, listen and reflect prayerfully.

Question 3

Will you consult before voting on major motions, and how? *Rhoda Blackwell*

Bryony Taylor

I will keep abreast of the issues being discussed and will work alongside the Together for the Church of England network to raise awareness and seek views from fellow clergy in the diocese. I will endeavour to be accessible and available to anyone who would like to discuss the business of General Synod with me.

Emma Sykes

Thank you for your question Rhoda. It's important to make people aware of what is coming up on General Synod and I would hope that there would be space at Diocesan Synod for reporting back on what has been debated as well as an opportunity to discuss up and coming major debates and motions. When previously on Synod, I encouraged people to get in contact with me if they had particular concerns or thoughts and I would want to continue this practice if elected.

Gary Weston

I think being open, listening, and being involved in local discussions is a vital part of being a Diocesan representative on General Synod. Alongside this, it is also important to be available to those you are representing and to take on board the views of others as well as a general 'sense' of feeling from being involved in the Diocese. Our synodical system is based on delegating and trusting our representatives; this is true at PCC, Deanery, and Diocesan Synod as much as it is for our General Synod representatives. As a result, I think the best any of us can do is offer informal consultation, and I would be committed to doing this through all avenues available to me in the Diocese, from Clergy Chapter to being involved at Diocesan Synod as well as through being available for individual conversations. At heart, I deeply care for the Church and want to see it flourish; for me, the heart of this is relationship, and by having those relationships, I would hope to have enough of an ear to the ground for many to feel they have been listened to.

Jason Ward

For as long as my fellow clergy enjoy having me as the Chair of the House of Clergy in Diocesan Synod, I will continue to relay what is taking place at Diocesan Synod and, if elected, General Synod, and continue asking for input, questions, motions and concerns. If we choose someone else to take on the role of Chair next time, I will still be at those meetings, hearing what my fellow clergy think, have to deal with, and have new solutions for.

Where I possibly can, therefore, unless on those rare moments of personal conscience, I will be doing my very best to fairly represent the interests and concerns of my colleagues across the diocese, rather than any one particular group, based on what I know from those many meetings and consultations.

Julian Hollywell

Thanks for this interesting question Rhoda and it relates to a really important aspect of our position as members of the General Synod. Like MPs, if elected, we are not delegates, but that does not negate our responsibility to listen to the needs of the clergy in our diocese. My record shows that I consult and engage with as wide a group as I am able. I am clear, if elected I am not

a mouthpiece for Derby Diocesan policy, I am elected by the clergy on the ground, and that is what matters.

I have a track record of bringing questions to the General Synod from colleagues, whether or not I agree with their position. I commit to listening and consultation over the next five years as I have done for the previous eleven years.

Phil Mann

I recognise that it will be impossible to consult everyone before every major vote, but I am very willing and committed to listening to people across the Diocese of Derby.

I would welcome hearing from anyone who wants to share how a proposed motion might affect them, their church or their ministry. I believe good decision-making involves listening carefully, particularly to those who may be directly affected by the decisions Synod makes.

My contact details are widely available, and I would be very happy for people to contact me by email or phone to discuss significant issues and forthcoming motions. I would also seek to listen to the views of those with whom I disagree, as well as those who share my own convictions.

Ultimately, I will need to vote according to my conscience and convictions, but I want those decisions to be informed by prayer, Scripture, the wider Church, and the experiences and perspectives of people across our diocese.

Sarah Watson

The nature of consultation will vary depending on the issue. Some matters are primarily questions of personal theological conviction and conscience, while others, such as structural or governance changes, are shaped by wider consultation.

I would want to ensure that the views, experiences and concerns of clergy across the diocese are heard and taken seriously as I exercise my judgement if elected to Synod.