

General Synod election – written hustings

The elections are underway to serve on the General Synod from 2021 – 2026.

In the Guildford Diocese there are 9 clergy candidates for 4 clergy places; and 8 lay candidates for 4 lay places. I am one of the lay candidates.

Each candidate has produced an Election Statement, which is published on the Guildford Diocese website:

<https://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/about/governance/general-synod/synodelection/general-synod-election-candidates>

The voters in the Guildford Diocese are its 371 Deanery Synod members. They have been able to submit written questions, which each of the candidates can respond to within a 200 word limit.

Four questions have been submitted and the questions and answers are on the Diocesan website:

<https://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/about/governance/general-synod/synodelection/webforum>

These were my answers to the questions:

Question from Revd Kuhan Satkunanayagam:

In what ways would the candidates promote the presence and participation of Anglicans of global majority heritage in all structures of our church?

Answer from Adrian Vincent:

The ways that this can be done are set out in the recent report “From Lament to Action” <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/FromLamentToAction-report.pdf>

The report notes “these issues are critical not only as a matter of justice but also for the growth and development of the church’s life” (page 11). “While there will be a cost to implementing these recommendations, there will be a greater cost in failing to do so” (page 17).

The report “scrutinised 25 previous reports presented to the General Synod of the Church of England during the past 36 years” (page 5). It found that, “Reports and debates took place with regularity” and “motions...were noted or accepted but the accompanying recommendations or action plans were left largely unattended” (page 15).

The General Synod spends too much time making speeches and passing aspirational motions. It spends too little time focussing on: who is to carry out the action; how it is to be funded; and setting up a process to ensure that the action is carried out and its effectiveness measured.

I will give attention to the details of practical implementation. Warm words are not enough.

Question from Merinda D'Aprano:

Could the candidates outline their position on inclusivity of LGBT+ people, specifically their role and place in parish ministry? A response to the recent decision by church in Wales to bless same sex partnerships and their view on the practical implications of LLF would also be helpful.

Answer from Adrian Vincent:

Living in Love & Faith needed 468 pages to outline these issues. It is a big ask to do the same within the hustings 200-word limit. Fortunately, I can refer you to my recent review of LLF, including practical implications, on my website here:

<https://adrianvincent.org.uk/book-reviews/>

and to page 2 of my Election Address which includes my view that "The General Synod should be about good governance rather than changing doctrine."

A key message of LLF is not to make statements at each other, but rather to engage in face-to-face discussions where we can learn from each other. I would be happy to meet any Deanery Synod member to discuss these matters. My contact details are on my Election Address.

Question from David Leach:

What can the Church of England learn from the disruption caused by Covid 19 over the past 18 months and how could General Synod respond?

Answer from Adrian Vincent:

It feels early to reach conclusions. Some thoughts from my personal experience are:

1.) Prior to Covid, my church had thought about installing a camera to allow housebound members of the congregation to watch our services. It took the pandemic to kick start us to do it. That is a sad reflection on the priority we had given to the housebound.

2.) One issue was the data protection implications if members of the congregation were filmed during a service. The CofE issued guidance in May 2021:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/digital-labs/blogs/filming-and-photography-churches-consent-and-gdpr>

That guidance was more than a year after we needed it. It is not efficient for 16,000 churches to each conduct their own legal research when this can be issued from the centre. The General Synod can give greater attention to providing such practical benefits to parishes.

3.) My church now has lots of people who view our services on Facebook. But we don't know who most of these viewers are, or how to contact them to develop a

relationship. General Synod could commission research and share ideas of best practice in this area.

Question from Chris Watts

If elected to General Synod, how would you decide how to vote on difficult issues?

Answer from Adrian Vincent:

I have an unfair advantage. I know Chis, and he told me a couple of months ago that General Synod members should be people who walk with God as their guide and pray about issues before deciding how to vote, in the knowledge that they can make mistakes.

I agree. However, I fall short.

I have been a reader of The Church Times since I was a teenager. I was on the staff of General Synod and then a member and have been studying the difficult issues facing the CofE for decades. This encourages a tendency in me to pray for God's help to achieve what I have already concluded must be God's will!

I was at a Christian conference yesterday at which Canon David Short said we need to come to prayer with empty hands, not with our own solutions and actions. He begins his prayers with "I am completely helpless to do life on my own."

That is a lesson I need to continually learn.

If you want to vote for the candidate who is the most spiritual person, I can recommend several of my fellow candidates.

October 2021
Adrian Vincent