General Synod Elections 2026

House of Laity

Election Address

Brendan Biggs

Diocese of Bristol

proposed by Bruce Finnamore
seconded by Helen Clifton

About me

I live in Clifton, Bristol, with my wife and 13-year-old daughter. I was born and grew up in Bristol and I worship at **All Saints Clifton**, where I sing in the choir and enjoy reading and leading prayers in services.

I work as a **solicitor** in the corporate team at Ashfords. Before turning to law, I taught English in various Oxford colleges. I studied theology for a year at Trinity College Bristol.

I was brought up in a **Christian home** and came to faith as a teenager. I have been most influenced by the open evangelical tradition in the church. More recently, I have come to value the Anglo-Catholic tradition. We enjoy attending New Wine as a family.

I have been a member of **General Synod** since 2020 and of Bristol Diocesan Synod since 2012. I was a member of the PCC of Christ Church Clifton for seven years and I now sit on All Saints PCC.

General Synod

At its best, General Synod draws together a **wide variety of perspectives**, and I have learned much over the last six years from the thoughtful contributions to debates and careful scrutiny of legislation.

Both in formal business and in informal discussion with other Synod members from the Diocese and beyond there is a real sense of **working together** to make decisions that will best enable local churches to build God's kingdom.

Not everything has gone well over the past five years, however. In particular, the church has not moved quickly enough to implement **independent oversight of safeguarding**, and we remain divided on **human sexuality**, where there is unfinished business from the Living in Love and Faith process.

Safeguarding

In February 2025, following publication of the **Jay Report**, General Synod voted to set up a new independent body to have oversight over national safeguarding. A new Safeguarding Structures Programme Board, with an independent chair, has been established to put the new arrangements in place.

Progress has been slow, however. Legislation is yet to be drafted and, while the Charity Commission has asked for independent safeguarding structures to be implemented by the summer of 2027, the programme is not expected to be completed until the end of 2028. In its recent annual report, INEQE, the **independent auditor of Church of England safeguarding**, while identifying much good practice in dioceses, has criticised the lack of clarity concerning future safeguarding structures.

I have asked questions in Synod about the need to identify and address legal impediments to good safeguarding practice. The new **Clergy Conduct Measure**, which has recently come into force, has made some positive changes, and the **Abuse Redress Measure** is expected to come into force by the end of the year. In the light of recently publicised cases, there remains the need to consider what **further reforms** are needed so that we can be sure the church will be able to respond to safeguarding concerns properly. I will continue to pursue this point if re-elected.

Human sexuality

The process known as **Living in Love and Faith** drew to a close this year, with the Prayers of Love and Faith for same-sex couples commended for use in regular services, and the much-criticised guidelines in *Issues in Human Sexuality* withdrawn from use in the discernment process.

A new working group has been convened to make recommendations to General Synod, within two years, on authorising the Prayers of Love and Faith for use in **standalone services** and enabling clergy to enter into **same-sex marriages**.

I support these proposals, have spoken in favour of the standalone services, and hope it will be possible to implement both proposals in the next Synod. For me, this is a **matter of justice**: it should be possible for gay people, as it is for straight people, to have their relationships blessed in church and for such relationships to be no bar to ordination or preferment.

Other issues

Of the numerous other issues that come before Synod, I will select three for mention here. Reforms have recently been made to simplify **financial flows** from the central church to dioceses and vice versa. But there is more to be done, to ensure that best use is made of endowment income in circumstances where some dioceses – including our own – are facing financial difficulty. The priority for expenditure must always be the support of **parish ministry** in local churches, and our financial arrangements must enable that.

A topic that has recently become controversial is **Project Spire**, the proposal to allocate some of the Church Commissioners' funds for investment in projects benefiting communities descended from victims of chattel slavery. The plan has been endorsed by General Synod but not yet approved by the Charity Commission. There is a need for further examination of the historical evidence and proposed investments in the light of recent disagreements.

Finally, there are likely to be developments relating to governance. The proposed **National Church Governance Measure**, which would have simplified the National Church Institutions, was withdrawn earlier this year after criticism from the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament. It is expected that work on governance will resume at some point in the next Synod and careful scrutiny will be required to ensure that any proposals work well, not least from a safeguarding perspective.

Your vote

Please consider giving me your first-preference vote as I seek to use my experience to continue to serve on General Synod and work for the changes that need to be made. If you have any questions, do feel free to email me at brendan.biggs@gmail.com, or call 07982 611183.