



DIOCESE OF BRISTOL
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Formal Written Questions and Candidate Responses General Synod House of Lay Elections

This document brings together questions submitted by members of the electorate to candidates standing in the General Synod House of Laity elections, together with the responses provided by those candidates.

Electors were invited to submit questions as a means of exploring candidates' views, priorities, experience, and vision for the future life and mission of the Church. All candidates were given the opportunity to respond to the same set of questions. However, candidates were under no obligation to answer any or all of the questions submitted, and no word limit was imposed on responses provided.

This document has been produced to promote transparency, informed engagement, and constructive dialogue throughout the election process. Electors are encouraged to consider candidates' responses alongside other available information when discerning whom they wish to support.

In preparing this document, some questions submitted on similar themes have been amalgamated. Where this has occurred, care has been taken to preserve the substance and intent of the original questions, ensuring that electors receive the information needed to make an informed decision when casting their vote. This approach was adopted in recognition of the limited timeframe available for candidates to provide responses, the importance of making those responses available before voting opens, and the desire to avoid multiple questions seeking answers on substantially the same issue.

In the interests of transparency, each question is identified as either **“As Submitted”** or **“Amalgamated”**.

All questions submitted to candidates are reproduced below, together with the exact responses received from them.

To improve readability and provide a consistent format for electors, candidate responses have been transferred into a single document and formatted uniformly. The content of responses has not been altered.

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We hope this resource will assist electors in determining how they wish to cast their vote.

For ease, each question begins on a new page of the document. It will therefore be necessary to scroll past the final answer to the previous question to view the subsequent question and the candidate answers.

If you have any queries, please contact
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Questions and Answers

1. Do you support and rejoice in the ministry of women in all roles in the church, including ordination as priests, consecration as bishops and ministry as diocesan bishops and Archbishop? Would you willingly receive the ministry of women in those roles? (As submitted by Sally Eaton)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

As a serving female Lay Minister working in partnership with a female curate, my answer to this is a clear 'yes'! In my work as a Bishop's Advisor, I have conducted discernment interviews with women whom I believe have a divine sense of calling which should not be thwarted.

Dr Brendan Biggs

Yes, I do support and rejoice in the ministry of women in all the roles mentioned in the question, and I willingly receive the ministry of women in all these roles. It has been remarkable to see the gradual transformation of the church as it has become possible for women to be ordained successively to all three orders of ministry. This has been a wholly positive change, and the benefit to the church from the release of women to these callings is incalculable.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

Yes and Yes.

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

Yes, I support and rejoice in the ministry of women in all roles and at all levels. I would willingly receive the ministry of women in all these roles.

I was delighted by the enthronement of Sarah Mulally; I hope and believe her ministry will encourage women and girls throughout the world, within the Church of England and beyond it.

I'm a guide at Bristol Cathedral. Many of our visitors have little or no awareness of the issues that occupy the hearts and minds of church members. They are always astonished if I mention that it was only in 2005 that Bristol became the first cathedral to admit girl choristers. I sometimes point out, too, that the original plaque commemorating the ordination of the first women in the Church of England, which took place here, in 1994, was only inscribed with the names of the men who presided at that service! It took Bristol's first woman dean, arriving in 2020, to notice this as an anomaly and have the plaque updated with the names of the women who had been ordained.

We need women at all levels.

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

Yes. I fully support the ministry of women in every role in the Church, and would gladly receive their ministry as priests, bishops, diocesan bishops and Archbishop.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

Yes. I fully support and rejoice in the ministry of women across the Church, including as priests, bishops, diocesan bishops and Archbishop. I would willingly receive the ministry of women in all these roles.

Scripture shows women actively participating in the life and ministry of the early Church. At Pentecost, Peter affirmed the fulfilment of Joel's prophecy that God would pour out his Spirit on both sons and daughters (Acts 2:17–18). I believe the gifts and calling of women are an important part of the life and ministry of the Church, and I am grateful for the women who serve faithfully across the Church of England.

Mr Edward Shaw

Thanks to Sally for this chance for me to share where I'm coming from. I am fully supportive of the Church of England's Five Guiding Principles that "...enable those with different views on the ordination of women as bishops and priests to relate each other within one church." I happen to hold a minority view that is very kindly protected by the majority through those principles, but I don't believe my convictions stop me from supporting and rejoicing in the ministry of my dear Gaby in Southmead, or in Bishop Viv's time as Bishop of Bristol, or in Archbishop Sarah's national leadership. I have gladly received pastoral care and oversight, bread and wine, and bible teaching from each of them.

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

I very much support the ministry of women. I have been fortunate to have had three women incumbents in my church. One under which I served as church warden and the present one that I was part of the short listing, interviewing and appointment team. The appointment of the present ABC in my mind shows our communities and the world that we are moving forward.

2. The Church of England faces a number of challenges at the moment. What do you see as some of the greatest challenges? And what experience do you have in engaging with those challenges? (As submitted by Tim Burkill)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

The list of challenges faced by the Church of England at the present time is a depressingly long one, and I do not have the opportunity to engage with all of them! So, in the interests of brevity, I will discuss 3. I will also caveat my answer by saying that I see many things to celebrate and believe that God is at work in our church.

I remember a speaker at a conference I was at saying that for many people, going into a church is as alien an environment as a betting shop would be for us.

*Therefore, I think that one of the greatest challenges is addressing **the sharp decline in church attendance** through the development of a culture of welcome and invitation. In my Lay Ministry work, outreach is one of my key interests – I am, for example, currently running a series of ‘Inspired breakfasts’ aimed at the church’s nonmembers, and have invited non-Christian friends to these. They will, I hope, be a springboard for a new Alpha course in the Spring. As a church, we are working at developing a clear ‘outreach pathway’ for seekers, supporting them as they seek and come to faith.*

*Another current challenge of which I am aware is that of **clergy wellbeing** – a challenge with which I seek to engage by supporting our incumbent who is about to retire, and the curate, who is stepping up to a role as curate in charge. There are many ways in which dioceses do support clergy well, but I think that there needs to be more awareness of the pressures faced by some clergy, particularly those in multi unit parishes. I strongly support the call in the Save the Parish report for a clergy charter of care.*

*In my election address, I noted that the Church remains deeply divided on certain issues, including those relating to human sexuality. **Church unity** is therefore a key challenge: how can we make space for different theological positions while moving forward together for the advancement of God’s kingdom? I have followed developments in the LLF process with interest and, personally, have valued conversations with people whose views differ from my own. In a world marked by polarisation and division, I believe the Church has an opportunity to be counter-cultural by modelling what it means to disagree well.*

Dr Brendan Biggs

A current challenge for the senior leadership of the church is how best to work with external authorities such as the Charity Commission, the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament, and INEQE, the church’s external auditor of safeguarding. All these bodies have been critical of aspects of the church’s

governance, but they do not always take the same view as to what should be done, and it will not be easy to find ways forward that ensure best practice in the Church of England's unique situation. I have asked questions in Synod about the Archbishops' Council's response to the Charity Commission's request to the church to identify and remove legal impediments to good safeguarding practice and I will continue to pursue this point if re-elected.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

The greatest challenges for the Church include money, and a decline in Christian influence and practice in western society. Going forward, climate change will increasingly pose a daily problem: keeping buildings in good order and comfortably usable during intense heat, and mitigating against storm damage. (at SMR, we are going to have photovoltaic cells installed on the high roofs, and alternative, non-fossil fuel heating solutions have been considered, for when our ageing boiler eventually gives up completely).

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

I think one of the Church's greatest challenges is the crisis of public trust in us. Whilst this is clearly a society-wide issue, I think its causes vis-a-vis the Church are mainly twofold:

- a) historic and systemic safeguarding failures and*
- b) the sense that that we are disconnected from people's lives today, especially in not having to comply with equalities legislation.*

In regard to experience of safeguarding: in my professional role, I was called on to contribute to Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) by investigating my own agency. I was shocked that other contributors were willing to mask failings in order to preserve the reputation of their agencies. I challenged this attitude. I use this example here as it mirrors the general public's impression that Church leaders are more interested in institutional self-preservation than in accountability.

In regard to disconnectedness from societal concerns, I have worked towards equality throughout my professional life. I've been blessed to have had many happy experiences of helping to reconcile seemingly disparate points of view, some of which I've mentioned in my answers to other questions.

Declining attendance and financial pressures are two of our further challenges which must, in turn, contribute to clergy discouragement and burnout, as well as to recruitment challenges.

I have extensive, secular experience of managing budgets, of mentoring other leaders, of recruitment and of supporting staff and volunteers' well-being.

I would bring all this experience and more, were I to be elected to the General Synod.

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

I think some of the greatest challenges facing the Church of England are declining attendance, financial pressure, clergy wellbeing, and helping churches engage meaningfully with their local communities. I have seen some of these challenges first-hand through a long interregnum and the amalgamation of two parishes, both of which required patience, good communication, and a willingness to work together through change.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

I think one of the greatest challenges facing the Church of England is the decline in congregational numbers and the question of how we build healthy, sustainable and growing churches for the future. Closely connected to this is how we engage younger generations and communicate the Christian faith in a culture increasingly shaped by digital media and different ways of understanding identity, community and meaning.

My experience sits particularly at this intersection of theology, culture, media and education. As a lecturer and researcher in Global Media and Digital Cultures, I have worked with students and educators on questions of faith, culture, identity and digital media. Through my work with Church of England schools and Christianity as a Global World Faith, I have also engaged with questions of how younger people encounter Christianity in a diverse and changing cultural context. My work in racial justice and reconciliation, including developing resources for Church of England parishes, and my three and a half years of prison ministry at HMP Bristol, have further taught me the importance of listening to people whose experiences of Church and society can be very different.

I would want to bring this combination of theological conviction, cultural awareness and practical experience to Synod, while recognising that the challenges facing a parish in one context may look very different from those facing another.

Mr Edward Shaw

Thanks for these questions, Tim. The Church of England will not exist in a couple of generations unless we become more effective at keeping and attracting children and other younger people. I'm part of church that is managing to do that and want to help enable all churches to do the same. Key to this will be allowing churches to do this in context-appropriate ways and releasing both people and money from central bureaucracies and initiatives to the front line that is the local church.

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

The climate that we live in is becoming more secularised day by day, as Christians, we find ourselves at odds with sections of society who view us as unattached from the real world. One of the challenges the church faces is to connect with our communities through outreach and show others that we have something worthwhile to offer in our buildings, congregations and way of life.

3. In July, General Synod voted on whether “all baptised, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ” and to “recognise a legitimate range of theological perspectives, held in good conscience, across the Church of England, on the right ordering of committed, faithful, intimate same-sex relationships.” If you were present, how did you vote on this? If you weren’t, how would you have voted? (As submitted by Caroline Jowett-Ive)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

Had I been at General Synod, I would have approved the first statement – no one is excluded from God’s Kingdom and it is vital that all feel welcomed and affirmed – we are all made in God’s image.

As someone who has remained in the Church of England during and following the LLF process and the introduction of gay blessings, I would also have supported the second statement. However, after amendments, the final motion still carried paragraph d, which stated that there are “no fundamental objections” to a committed, faithful, intimate same-sex relationship and that it can be “entirely compatible with Christian discipleship and ministry.” This entails a move from a position of tolerance to one of affirmation. It brings wider issues, such as clergy discipline into scope. It is a place where, as someone who holds to the church’s traditional teaching on marriage and human sexuality, I cannot go in good conscience. I would therefore, have voted in line with the House of Bishops on this motion.

I am grateful for this question as I feel that we need to discuss and wrestle with these issues. I felt that it was importance to be transparent about my position in my election address.

Dr Brendan Biggs

I voted in favour of the motion referred to in the question and am sorry it was not passed.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

I was not present, but if I had been there, I would have voted in favour of the motion.

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

I would have voted in favour, no question.

I have been deeply moved by the testimony of many faithful Christians who have felt diminished or been excluded from roles and rites, simply because of whom they love. I believe we are each made by God’s loving hand, in his image.

If those of us in straight relationships stop to imagine how we would feel if we couldn't bring our loved one to sit in the pew beside us, in all transparency, pride and joy, we will only feel compassion for those who cannot. For me, compassion without action is a shadow emotion.

When I first attended Open Table, as an ally, I met a woman - clearly a devout and learned Christian- who told me she comes all the way from Cheltenham to Cotham in Bristol to attend this monthly service because "it is the only place where I feel fully accepted in both being a Christian and being gay." That was enough reason for me to want to continue to support Open Table.

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

I wasn't present for that vote, but my understanding is that the amended motion did receive majority support overall, including among both clergy and laity, but was lost because it did not receive the required majority in the House of Bishops. If I had been there, I would have voted in favour, gladly and in good conscience.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

I was not present at the July General Synod, but I would have voted in favour of this motion.

I believe that all baptised, believing and faithful people, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ. Scripture teaches that the Church is one body in Christ, with every member having a place and a part to play (1 Corinthians 12:12–27).

I also recognise that there is a legitimate range of Christian theological perspectives concerning committed, faithful, intimate same-sex relationships. I believe the Church should be able to hold these differences honestly and respectfully, while continuing to listen to Scripture, to one another and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Mr Edward Shaw

Thanks Caroline - I was there and voted! That full General Synod motion this July was:

That this Synod

- a) affirm that all baptised, believing and faithful persons regardless of sexual orientation are full members of the Body of Christ;*
- b) delight in the lives and ministries of LGBTQIA+ people in the Church of England;*

c) recognise a legitimate range of theological perspectives, held in good conscience, across the Church of England, on the right ordering of committed, faithful, intimate same-sex relationships, and;
d) recognise that this includes views that affirm and views that reject the position that there are no fundamental objections to being in such a relationship and that such a relationship can be entirely compatible with Christian discipleship and ministry.

I spoke in this debate – wanting clarity on the original motion (which was very different to the above!). I would have happily supported a motion that just included statements a) and b) – especially because I happen to be gay, have been baptised into, and now minister as an LLM within the Church of England. But in good conscience, I could not support the use of the word “legitimate” in statement c) because I think that it would have served to subtly undermine the Church of England’s current doctrine and liturgy. As the governing body of the Church of England, General Synod needs to be careful not to be seen to contradict what our governing documents say, without going through the proper processes for making such changes.

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

My answer to this question would be to say that I would vote in favour of any proposal that welcomes all into the church. If I believe as I do that God doesn’t judge, then who am I to. I would welcome the opportunity in the future to part of the mechanism that brings about meaningful change.

4. What is your biggest concern for the Church. And what is your hope and prayer for our Diocese at this time? (As submitted by Katherine Bloomer)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

I'd like to start my answer to this question on a positive note. As an LLM serving in the Diocese of Bristol, I see much which gives hope – initiatives in areas of mission and discipleship, quality training for clergy and LLMs, support for fresh expressions of church, and safeguarding. In answer to your question I refer back to my answer to question 2 where I mention outreach. My biggest concern is the decline in church attendance, particularly among young people – something which I have witnessed as a member of the same church for 30 years. My prayer for our Diocese is that churches would unite with a renewed passion to get out there and share the good news of Jesus in word and action!

Dr Brendan Biggs

My biggest concern is that, with generational changes, the church will face a society that is increasingly indifferent to it. But we have in our Diocese clergy and lay people doing excellent work in their parishes and my hope and prayer is that Transforming Church. Together will enable that work to flourish so that communities will be able to hear and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

Fewer people practising the Christian faith, not as many people accepting Jesus Christ as their personal saviour, loving, trusting and respecting Father, Son and Holy Spirit. My hopes and concerns for this diocese are that we will not see any further reduction in numbers of administrative staff or clergy, though I admit that this sounds like a bit of a pipe-dream!

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

My biggest concerns for the Church are my biggest concerns for humanity.

I'm pleased that the Diocese of Bristol has declared a climate emergency, since the climate crisis is probably our greatest threat.

I feel proud that so many churches are leading the way in addressing climate change; for example, by transitioning energy supplies- no mean feat in our historic buildings.

I support A Rocha and think it's great that so many churches in the Diocese do too.

I think Bishop Viv was wonderful. I love her 'Humanity reconciled, Creation restored' priorities and agree with her that we should be deeply ambitious for the Church and for our communities.

She spoke of being 'a Church for everybody, not just our members' and highlighted values of openness, generosity, creativity and bravery. Who could not agree with and be inspired by these?

My hope and prayer for our Diocese is that we appoint another bishop who will continue her work, and that together we can truly become beacons of love, inclusion and positive change in our communities.

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

My biggest concern is the pressure being felt across the Church, particularly through the shortage of clergy, the merging of churches into ever-larger parishes, and the challenge of sustaining good stewardship. My hope and prayer for our Diocese is that we remain faithful, generous and outward-looking, supporting one another well as we seek to serve our communities with confidence and compassion.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

My biggest concern is that the Church could lose confidence in its calling to proclaim Christ and make disciples, particularly at a time when many churches are experiencing declining numbers and significant pressures on resources. I am concerned about what this means for the spiritual life and sustainability of our parishes, and particularly for how we engage younger generations.

My hope and prayer for the Diocese of Bristol and the Church of England as a whole is that we would be a Church that is deeply rooted in Christ, confident in the gospel and attentive to the communities we are called to serve. I pray that our churches would be places where people encounter Jesus, grow as disciples and discover that the Christian faith speaks meaningfully into every part of life.

I also pray for a Diocese that listens well and makes space for voices and experiences that can easily be overlooked. My work in racial justice, reconciliation and prison ministry has taught me how important it is to listen to people whose experiences of Church and society may be very different from our own.

Ultimately, my prayer is that we would see our churches renewed, our parishes strengthened, and a new generation come to know and follow Jesus. As Jesus says, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18).

Mr Edward Shaw

Katherine, thanks for this chance to share. My biggest concern is that we fail to pass on the “good deposit” of the Gospel of Jesus lovingly and faithfully to the next generation. My prayer for our Diocese is that we will be more honest about the contexts in which this is failing to happen (we too often ignore what is no longer working) and more supportive of the churches where this is happening (often in low-key, highly relational ways).

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

My biggest concern must be the falling numbers in our churches, the declining number of clergy and all too often the way in which many churches find themselves unable to commit to paying their parish share. I would hope that through my links with 'Save our Parish' I can contribute a voice in the debate for a better and fairer distribution of funds.

5. General Synod can be very polarised. How have you worked constructively across deeply held differences of opinion. (As submitted by Nathalie Marshall)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

A great question for someone standing for Synod for the first time!

I assume that the question refers primarily to theological differences, but it is worth mentioning that I have had to do this in a secular context throughout my working life, holding leadership roles in teams in which there were strong disagreements. I think that some of the key principles are relevant in a theological context – prayer in advance of difficult meetings and discussions, learning to hear and respect what other people are saying (verbally and non verbally), and being open to changing my views.

In my own church context, differences of opinion on deeply contested issues do not often occur – this is, I think, the case in many churches. However, during my time in lay ministry, there have been differences of opinion between myself and other members of church staff, and we have been able to work through these by keeping focused on the big picture. On a personal level, I have sought out discussions in which different opinions are aired and have found them to be both informative and constructive. I welcome the fact that General Synod continues to wrestle with contested issues and am committed, if elected, to wrestle with grace!

Dr Brendan Biggs

Bishops Viv and Neil have done an excellent job of convening the Bristol General Synod representatives and we have worked well as a team together. More broadly, across Synod as a whole there are important topics such as governance and safeguarding where we share common ground and can work together across theological differences to press for the changes that need to be made.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

Trying not to take sides in family divorce, seeking to be fair to all, give both sides the same amount of care and attention.

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

Working constructively across deeply held differences of opinion has been key to my working life.

In my twenties and early thirties, I was a community development worker. (For those who remember that far back, I was deployed to work on Broadwater Farm Estate following the riots there in 1985.)

I was involved in the Women's Peace Movement and became an anti-racism trainer. (That might seem presumptuous these days. We continue to evolve:-)

As all teachers know, the skills of active listening and conflict resolution were essential to my later career in education: When I became a head teacher, I ensured that all staff were trained in them.

A small example:

When I took over my school- where 75% of pupils were Muslim- I noticed that the majority didn't attend throughout December, claiming to be going 'on holiday'. I realised they were avoiding Christmas, which was celebrated across several weeks in a very secular way.

We developed a new way of celebrating the faiths within our school community, focussing on their religious and spiritual meanings, and sharing those with the whole community. Everyone was included and we all learnt from each other: within two years, not one family withdrew their children from Christmas celebrations or any other school day.

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

My experience of working across deeply held differences has come through the long process of bringing two parts of a benefice together into one Parish. I know from that experience how important it is to listen carefully, build trust, and keep people involved, especially when there are real concerns and strong feelings on different sides. That process took 13 years, so it required patience, honesty and a willingness to stay in conversation even when agreement was not easy. What encouraged me most was that, by the end, people felt heard and we were able to move forward together as one Parish.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

I have learned that constructive disagreement begins with listening. James 1:19 says, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." For me, this does not mean abandoning conviction, but taking the time to understand why someone holds a particular position and what experiences have shaped their perspective.

Much of my work in theology, racial justice and reconciliation has involved engaging people from different cultural, theological and social backgrounds. In my academic work, I regularly encounter different interpretations and perspectives, and my work with Church communities has taught me to listen particularly carefully to voices and experiences that may otherwise be overlooked.

I have also learned that disagreement does not have to prevent relationship or collaboration. We can disagree deeply while treating one another with dignity, recognising our shared identity in Christ and seeking the things that build up the Church.

If elected, I would seek to bring that same approach to Synod: listening carefully, speaking honestly, being willing to learn, and holding my convictions with humility. I would not expect everyone to agree with me, but I would want people to know that I have heard them and will represent them faithfully.

Mr Edward Shaw

Nathalie – you are, very sadly, right. Here’s one small way – whenever there has been one of the big debates about sexuality, I’ve sought to sit next to someone who I know disagrees with me. I want to see and hear the debate from their perspective and have so benefitted from the conversation we’ve been able to have in between speeches and votes. The love and support I’ve felt (and sought to give) have not lessened our disagreements but have helped me better learn what it means to “bear with another in love.”

I have also been part of many of the numerous efforts to draw together sisters and brothers in Christ with different perspectives on marriage, sexuality and relationships, in the hope of finding a better way forward for the Church of England. This has included service on the Archbishops’ Pastoral Advisory Group (helping write the Pastoral Principles) and being part of the informal St. Hugh’s Group.

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

At present I have no knowledge of Synod, but my church is not made up of a homogenised group of people. They all come with different ideas and experiences, so we try to work together for the best outcome for all.

6. Do you support the use of Prayers of Love and Faith liturgy in a stand-alone service for the blessing of people in a same-sex relationship? (As submitted by Kirill Babeev)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

Thank you for this question and for addressing this contested issue. Firstly, I believe that Christ calls all of us to follow him without exception, whatever our sexuality. All are invited to find true forgiveness, belonging, identity, peace, joy, hope and an eternal destiny in Him. As a church, we need to affirm and recognise all people and to acknowledge the challenges which same sex attracted believers have faced and continue to face in the church. I believe that we need to agree on what good pastoral support for same sex attracted people looks like and to have more consensus on this across the church.

However, as someone who affirms the church's inherited position on marriage and human sexuality, I could not support such a motion as it stands in good conscience. Within a broad church, there is an ongoing need to develop grace as we continue to grapple with issues of human sexuality.

Dr Brendan Biggs

Yes, I do support the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith in standalone services. Proposals for enabling this are due to be brought back to General Synod within the next two years, and I hope it will be possible for such use of the Prayers of Love and Faith to be approved.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

Yes, I support the use of LLF prayers of blessing both in stand alone services and in main congregational services, but I wouldn't go so far as to allow for same gender marriage. My answer to this question is broadly scriptural. (See Ruth 1.16, and 1 Samuel 18.1). Although not personally a member of the LGBT community, they have my sympathy and support, especially trans people, who have been increasingly under attack in recent years, and who face challenges and emotional struggles which many of us will never know. It should be noted, however, that other disadvantaged groups also experience problems in the Church of England: people with severe disabilities have to constantly remind the powers that be of their deep and genuine need for full inclusion. Disabled people still face significant barriers to accessing worship, such as physical access to buildings, the need to remind people on a regular basis that accessible formats are required - I basically have to book in advance if I want to attend a service, and if it is at a different church from the one at which I usually worship, I often have to seek out and take my own worship materials and rely on memory alone. Attitudinal barriers to full inclusion of disabled people in church life still also exist. I am not an expert on the racial equality situation in the Church, but from what I observe, we have work to do in terms of including people of all

backgrounds in governance, for instance. A previous meeting of the General Synod voted to stamp out conscious and unconscious racism, and the organisation as a whole has been deemed to be institutionally racist. The Windrush generation were particularly badly treated in churches in previous decades.

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

Easy-peasy. A wholehearted yes.

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

Yes. I support the use of Prayers of Love and Faith in stand-alone services for the blessing of people in same-sex relationships. I believe same-sex relationships should be recognised in church, and I welcome the liturgy that has been agreed by General Synod as a positive and pastoral step.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

I recognise that there are strong and sincerely held convictions on different sides of this question, and I have friends and fellow Christians who understand this differently from me. I also recognise the pain the Church's history in this area has caused, and I do not want that pain to be overlooked or minimised.

From my own theological perspective, my concern is that a stand-alone service of blessing for a same-sex couple risks being perceived by many as a wedding in all but name, which sits in tension with the Church of England's historic understanding and current doctrine of marriage. That tension is what gives me pause. If elected as a member of General Synod, I would seek to listen carefully to all sides, taking time to understand different perspectives and experiences before reaching a considered decision.

Mr Edward Shaw

Kirill – thanks for the opportunity to say “No” and explain why. I believe that the Prayers of Love and Faith liturgy contradicts the doctrine of the Church of England on marriage and sex – if used within a normal or stand-alone service. Until that doctrine is changed through the appropriate Synodical process the liturgy (which is part of our doctrine) cannot contradict it.

This highlights the pressing pastoral need for a proper Synodical process that gives the option of such formal doctrinal change – alongside significant structural changes that would protect the ministries of those who'd be unhappy with any such changes. This is going to be the best way of caring for all who are LGBTQI+ in our churches whether they support the Prayers or, like me, cannot.

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

As the COE take for ever to bring about meaningful change, I see this as a small step towards inclusivity. I support the use of the Prayers of Love and Faith liturgy and see this as another way forward the future of an Inclusive church.

7. What is your view of the Church of England's approach to addressing its historic links with transatlantic slavery, including the proposals for reparative justice being taken forward through Project Spire? Do you support this approach, and why? (Amalgamated from questions submitted by William Patrick Mills and David McGregor)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

Project Spire is another contested issue in the church, so thank you for raising it! My short answer would be that I applaud the desire for justice, but that I have concerns regarding a centralised process which I think was somewhat rushed, with a lack of consultation and scrutiny/critique of the 2023 Church Commissioners' report. I also share the reservations of some in the church regarding the place of Project Spire at a time when many parishes are facing financial crises.

As you will be aware, the implementation of Project Spire has been paused due to a legal challenge. I think that this hiatus is welcome and will give synod a needed opportunity for debate and further consultation.

Dr Brendan Biggs

Thank you for this question. I was supportive of Project Spire when it was presented to General Synod in 2024. It seems instinctively right that, if the church has profited financially from chattel slavery, the Church Commissioners should invest some of their endowment in projects that will benefit those who continue to suffer the effects of racial injustice and inequality. Since that initial presentation, Project Spire has become increasingly controversial, and some historians have challenged the analysis by Grant Thornton which showed benefits accruing to the church from slavery. The proposal is currently subject to review by the Charity Commission: if it comes back to Synod I will carefully examine the evidence and arguments put forward by both sides.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

I am not ruling out funding projects in communities around the world which have been adversely affected, historically, by the middle passage and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. However, I think that such reparations should be very limited, and expectations of how much they can address hurt and harm from hundreds of years ago need to be well managed. There is a problem, nevertheless, in terms of where to draw the line? how far back do we go? I would favour prioritising awareness of modern slavery and exploitation. There are lots of causes of deprivation, and historic slavery is one of these.

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

I believe strongly in conflict resolution, reparative and restorative justice, all of which I see as parts of the same paradigm.

I'm glad that the Church has chosen to address its historic links with transatlantic slavery in the ways it has.

On a local level, I am pleased to be able to talk with visitors to the Cathedral in my role as a welcomer there. It's so important to allow space to listen to people's diverse views; I think this is being done well.

It's helpful to have the facts about Project Spire since, as ever, people are often inflamed by a few misleading headlines. (I'm not talking here about members of deanery and diocesan synods but about ordinary visitors to the Cathedral.) (NB it's also helpful, of course, not to bombard people with said facts!)

For example, it seems important to me to know that the amount of money designated to project Spire - £100million over eight years-is a small proportion of Church Commissioners' Funds and that, as the Archbishop of Canterbury has said, it does not reduce or take away from the money allocated to parishes, which continues to rise.

It also seems important to me to understand that the fund is not specifically compensation but is meant as an investment fund. There is even the hope that it will encourage others to invest in the same way.

To me, it is vital to acknowledge our historic links to the Transatlantic Slave Trade and also to recognise and address the racism and injustices that are its direct descendants. (Again, on a local level, most people are appalled to learn that compensation to slave-owners was only paid off by the British government in 2015. I think this gives some perspective.)

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

I support the Church of England's willingness to face honestly its historic links with transatlantic slavery, and I welcome the desire behind Project Spire to seek justice and repair. At the same time, I would want this work to be more than simply allocating money in response to something painful in our country's history. For me, the important thing is that any funds are used thoughtfully and practically here in the UK, in ways that listen to affected communities, support real opportunities, and help bring healing, justice and reconciliation.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

I believe the Church of England should be willing to tell the truth about its historic links with transatlantic slavery and to take seriously what that history means for the Church today. Historical research is important because we cannot respond responsibly to something we have not properly understood.

My work in Black Theology and racial justice has taught me to ask not only what happened historically, but where injustice is experienced now, whose voices are being heard, whose voices may be missing, and what faithful action looks like in response. I therefore support the Church taking seriously the work of reparative justice and considering how its response can contribute to healing and

reconciliation.

I also recognise the very real financial pressures facing parish churches. At the same time, I understand that resources have already been set aside for this work. I think it is important that those resources are used responsibly and faithfully for the purpose for which they were designated. The question for me is therefore not simply whether money should be spent, but how those resources can be used well to support truth, repentance, reconciliation and meaningful action.

But for me, the question cannot simply be about looking backwards. As Christians, we also have to ask: now that we know, what do we do? Truth should lead to repentance, reconciliation and action. For me, this is ultimately about being truthful about our past, listening carefully to those affected, and asking what faithfulness requires of us now.

Mr Edward Shaw

Thanks to both William and David for raising this important issue. The national Project Spire has hit the headlines often – not helped by contested historical research and bad communication that has eroded trust. Personally, I'd love it if the Church of England's response was seen to be more local than national, and more about combatting current barriers than seeking to right past wrongs that can never be made right again. A positive example for me would be Trinity College's discovery of a link between their main building and the transatlantic slave trade, resulting in their annual Jubilee scholarship for a Black, British undergraduate or taught postgraduate student. This is an inspiring story of a local Christian community publicly recognising an evil strand to their building's history, at the same time as positively widening access to the training they now provide in it.

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

I feel far too much time is taken up with talk of things that we had no control over and seemingly should not be held accountable for. We were not responsible and of course we do condone the actions of those who were. I have no knowledge of Project Spire so cannot comment upon its validity.

8. Do you and your church support the use of alternative parish share giving arrangements, such as the Ephesian Fund, to divert your giving from general diocesan funds and limit it to only those churches who oppose use of same-sex blessing prayers (Prayers of Love and Faith)? If so, why? (Amalgamated from questions submitted by Kirill Babeev and Andy King)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

My church does not, to the best of my knowledge, give parish share through the Ephesian fund.

We are sadly in a position where a lack of consensus on contested issues has led to a situation in which some feel, in good conscience, that they cannot give to the central church through traditional parish share arrangements. Their position is understandable and the Ephesian fund at least gives them an avenue through which they can continue to contribute to the church, albeit in a more restricted way. My hope and prayer is that we can come to a position where everyone feels represented within the wider church and where there is no longer any perceived need for alternative arrangements.

Dr Brendan Biggs

I do not support arrangements for diverting parish share away from the Diocese, nor does my church. We should work together to support each other in mission across the Diocese as a whole.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

No.

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

I do not support the Ephesian Fund. I feel we are one body in Christ and our funds should be used to support all who love and follow Him, including those in loving, committed, same sex relationships.

My non-Christian friends see the Church as being obsessed with sex, which is not a good look if we hope to attract them to follow Jesus.

I pray that we can shift this stereotype and would, if elected, work towards the use of Prayers of Love and Faith for same-sex couples at the earliest instance.

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

Candidate did not provide an answer, expressing that she felt it had been answered in her answer to question 6.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

I recognise that there are serious and sincerely held theological disagreements within the Church of England, and I understand why some churches may have concerns about how their giving is used. I believe those concerns deserve a

hearing, and that churches should have a genuine voice in how their financial giving is directed, particularly where matters of deep theological conviction are involved.

My own church pays parish share through the normal diocesan arrangements, and I value the principle of shared responsibility that parish share represents. It allows churches with different circumstances and levels of resource to participate in the common life and ministry of the Diocese. I have seen the value of this especially through the Diocese's work supporting communities where churches might not otherwise have the same resources.

Mr Edward Shaw

Thanks to both Kirill and Andy for this one. I need to declare an interest here as a trustee of the Church of England Evangelical Council (CEEC) that was instrumental in setting up the now separate charity that is the Ephesian Fund. I am one of its Patrons and so, unsurprisingly support its use – as does my church (Emmanuel Bristol) which is paying our parish share via the Ephesian Fund.

The Ephesian Fund simply enables local churches and individual givers that oppose use of Prayers of Love and Faith to keep giving to the Diocese in a way that both preserves their consciences and diocesan finances. Many dioceses in the Church of England have recognised the Fund (or similar arrangements) as a helpful way of doing this. Most charities allow some donors to restrict their giving, if it helps people to give.

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

The Ephesian Fund is not something that has been talked about at my PCC, so I have little idea of its aims. On a personal level I certainly would not support such an idea as my answers to questions 3 and 6 should clearly show.

9. Do you think the integrity of the Church, and hence its power to proclaim the Gospel to the world, is being undermined by using Church buildings for secular events, some of possibly questionable morality like "raves" - i.e. has it become a bit cowardly & worldly? If no, why, please? If yes, what would you do to help the Church of England to combat those that seek to "water down" its beliefs? (As submitted by Catherine Kosidowski)

Mrs Helen Margaret Aberdeen

The Church of England has very sound guidance on this issue – Canon F15 states that “The churchwardens ... shall not suffer the church or chapel to be profaned by any meeting therein for temporal objects inconsistent with the sanctity of the place” The Church of England's own legal guidance says that secular use can be authorised, but the proposed use must be consistent with the church's status as a consecrated building and the primacy of worship must be retained. Secular events can take place but should still be appropriate for a consecrated space. I have no objection to certain events such as music concerts or choir rehearsals which take place in my own church.

I do, however, feel a degree of concern that some recent events in churches are not in line with this guidance. One example is the partnership between St Paul's cathedral and the London nightclub, Fabric, about which I have reservations. There was also the controversial 'silent disco' in the nave of Canterbury Cathedral, featuring the music of Eminem, Britney Spears and the Spice Girls. I feel that such events, where unvetted elements of performance (lyrics, visual presentation) are not compatible with Christian values, the lyrics of Eminem being a striking example!

I can see that the intentions behind these events may be to build bridges to the secular community, but I feel that they miss the mark. We are called to be 'in the world but not of it' and we must beware of sliding into cultural compromise which can damage the sharing of the gospel message and hinder the discipleship of new Christians by causing confusion.

If I were elected to Synod, I would be prepared to voice objections to inappropriate use of churches and cathedrals.

Dr Brendan Biggs

Not all alternative uses of church buildings are secular, of course: for example, Bristol Cathedral hosted Standing Room Only with Archbishop Justin a few years ago. Bearing in mind that the naves of parish churches were originally the people's space, and that our church buildings have benefited from contributions from the whole community, I think it is right that they should be made available for appropriate secular use. This can be a way in which we can create

connections with the wider community, since those who come to church for a secular event can be invited to return for a service or outreach event such as an Alpha course. Just as many fresh expressions of church enjoy the use of secular buildings – such as schools and village halls – for worship, so it seems appropriate that we should make church buildings available for events such as concerts that will benefit the wider community.

Ms Auriol Sarah Britton

It is usual, inevitable some might say, that churches have broader uses beyond just Christian worship. I have cast my vote in a national pole in a church worship space before, though not in a C' of E' one. Churches have been community/cultural centres for centuries. However, there need to be rules and guidelines vis a vis which types of events are acceptable, and people need to be present, there need to be guarantees written into the contract, as it were, to help to ensure that things don't become out of hand on the night. I very much doubt that a church would receive diocesan approval to hold a rave! We should welcome people of all faiths and backgrounds into churches, for a variety of events, including Christian worship, but we shouldn't take it too far, since to do so would be unholy, and bring the Church into disrepute. Many churches will need to use their space throughout the week, for concerts, educational events and respectable filming activities, for instance, both to raise the profile of the organisation, and to bring in much-needed revenue, but uses of Christian faith spaces for non-religious activity should be consistent with the building's role as a place of worship and mission.

Ms Toni Lynne Glazzard

Thank you for this question, which is not as straightforward as it first seemed to me.

I have just learnt that St. Paul's is being criticised for its new partnership with a night club. I do find this partnership surprising, although I don't know enough about it to criticise it.

For example, although you mention raves, I can't find any evidence of raves to be held at St. Paul's or in any other functioning church building. I wonder whether people sometimes use the word 'rave' as a sort of catch-all for noisy events that we might consider a nuisance?

I can find evidence of raves taking place in deconsecrated buildings that were once church buildings and, to my mind, this is completely different and readily acceptable.

The rest of my answer to this question is instinctive and anecdotal.

Churches local to me have held many non-religious musical events including incredible, immersive sound and light shows, that have, to the best of my knowledge, been very successful in raising funds for the church's maintenance and in bringing people into the church who might not, otherwise, enter.

I don't think the Church's power to proclaim the Gospel is undermined by opening its doors to the wider community or that this has the effect of 'watering down' its beliefs. On the contrary. When I was assisting at one of these sound and light shows at the Cathedral, a probably- homeless, definitely- drugged man, came into the centre of the nave and began to take his clothes off. The vergers were marvellous. They reacted as an elite corps, surrounding the man and removing him gently to a safe space where they helped him dress and recover , with humour and compassion. Anyone witnessing this could have only seen God's love and mercy manifested in their actions. I was proud to be associated with them.

Mrs Gaynor Michele Halls

I do think the Church should listen carefully to its congregations and local communities when deciding how its buildings are used. In my view, a church building belongs at the heart of its community, and it is right that it should be welcoming and open in ways that draw people in. But I would not want that openness to mean losing sight of why the building exists, or watering down the faith we are called to proclaim. For me, the key question is whether an event is respectful of the church as a place of worship, consistent with Christian witness, and likely to build good relationships with the wider community. If those things are held together, I think the Church can be both faithful and welcoming.

Dr Victoria Omotoso

No, I do not think that using Church buildings for secular events necessarily undermines the integrity of the Church or its ability to proclaim the Gospel. I think the context and nature of the event are important.

Church buildings are part of the communities they serve, and I believe there can be value in making them accessible and welcoming spaces within those communities. A secular event taking place in a Church building does not automatically mean that the Church has compromised its beliefs or become "worldly".

However, I do think the Church needs to exercise wisdom and discernment about what it permits to take place in its buildings. There will be events whose content or conduct is fundamentally incompatible with the character and witness of a Christian church, and those should be considered carefully.

For me, this comes back to the distinction between engaging with culture and conforming to culture. The Church should not be afraid to engage with the world around it, but neither should it compromise its Christian convictions simply to appear relevant or acceptable.

Scripture calls us to be “in the world” while remaining distinct from it (John 17:14–18). I would therefore want the Church to approach the use of its buildings with both openness and discernment: asking what serves the community, what is consistent with the character of the Church, and what communicates faithfully who we are as followers of Christ.

I would not want to approach this by assuming that every secular event is problematic, nor by assuming that every use of a Church building is acceptable. The context matters, and the Church should be courageous enough to make careful, principled decisions.

Mr Edward Shaw

Thanks to Catherine for this final question. It’s hard to come to an opinion without specific examples and I’m conscious that some “Rave in the Nave!” headlines have been misleading. That said, our buildings are designated as places of worship and that worship is meant to be directed to the Triune God whose truth and beauty they have been designed to point us to. We will sometimes disagree as to what can be seen as worship and how we can best use our buildings to proclaim the Gospel today, but what we say and do in our buildings should always be distinctive to what happens in the world around us.

Mr Malcolm John Thorne

I don’t believe using church buildings for secular use should or could affect the integrity of the church. A balance must be made, activities such as “raves” are completely different to using the building for community related activities such as concerts and choirs to rehearse. Church buildings must become financially viable not closed six days of the week. The Church is an integral part of the community and we especial need our city churches open to the public as often as possible. If members of the community are to learn about what happens in a church building, we must invite them in.