

**Diocese of Oxford
General Synod Elections 2021**

Questions to Candidates

Name of Candidate (please enter name in full)	Mark David Bennet
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Questions and Replies

Question 1:	How do you think General Synod can promote engagement with the recommendations of the <i>From Lament to Action</i> report published in April this year?
Reply: 120 word limit applies	The failures of decades will not easily be reversed, not the damage readily healed – action by Synod is only a small part of what needs to be done. Questions are a tool members can use to keep the topic on the agenda of decision-makers, and Synod can ensure that monitoring reports are regularly produced. The nurture of current and potential Synod representatives could be improved, with some mentoring and fast-tracking of suitable candidates to influential committees – but not overloading a few talented individuals with the whole burden of this common task. In this and other areas the Synod will have to keep a difficult topic on the agenda even if it is unpopular.

Question 2:	What are your views on the place of the parish in the Church of England, bearing in mind concerns raised by the ‘Save the Parish’ campaign, concerns about availability of resources for the rural church and opportunities for new mission initiatives outside the usual parochial structure?
Reply: 120 word limit applies	<p>The vision of the Church of England belongs on the front line with its mission, not in the centre: in the parish (together with chaplaincies and sector ministries) at the heart of a rich missional ecology.</p> <p>We do need to both address and challenge cultural and social changes. However, a strategy which focuses at scale on new ways of being church risks unpicking too much of our core ecology of mission, and seems unconscious of the unintended effects which increase pressure on parish ministry (eg diverting clergy from parish posts).</p> <p>We need to recover theological virtues (eg faithfulness), a richer theology and research base, and not fantasise we can do “Church without the difficult bits”.</p>

Question 3:	If a motion was presented for a change in the law to permit same sex marriage in the Church of England, would you support it and, in any
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	event, what outcomes would you like to see from the <i>Living in Love and Faith</i> conversations?
Reply: 120 word limit applies	I would vote for permissive legislation if it were good enough (cf Women Bishops). At present we are living dishonestly, and we can only hope to live and witness better if we are honest about who is in the room: we need to change. I do hope and pray that more of us find ways of understanding the true and deep faithfulness of many of those who disagree with us – and I hope that LLF makes this possible for some, so that we can find appropriate ways of honouring that faithfulness as we move forward together.

Question 4:	Would you support any further proposals for ‘Church of England’ financial resources to disinvest from fossil fuel industries and what other actions do you think could be taken in the Church of England in order to promote the Fifth Mark of Mission?
Reply: 120 word limit applies	Yes, I would give this active support. I think the investing bodies should be pressed to invest in decarbonisation rather than simply disinvesting from fossil fuels, and I think that the executive bodies of the Church of England should produce guidance and resources which make it easier for Parishes and Dioceses to take practical steps. Likewise the collective financial muscle of the church should be used to achieve economies of scale in procurement and secure appropriate solutions for historic buildings. Some of this was included in my amendment to the Oxford Diocesan Synod motion. I would also like to see the Church active in developing and promoting negative carbon investment.