Diocese of Oxford
General Synod Casual Vacancy Elections 2024

Questions to Candidates

Voters were given the opportunity to pose questions which might be put to the candidates, relating to any matters on which they believed a representative of the diocese on General Synod might wish to express a view.

Several suggestions and suggested themes were received, and I have selected Four, as set out below.

I am now inviting all candidates (clergy and lay) to consider the questions and, if they wish, to submit written responses. No candidate is obliged to provide answers to any or all of these, but any written responses any candidate wishes to make will then be posted on the diocesan website.

Please note that if a candidate does not provide any answers, the relevant part of the website will be marked "none provided" and if a candidate chooses not to answer every question, the words "no answer provided" will be inserted for that particular question.

The website will also make clear that this is entirely optional. It is an additional opportunity for you to engage with voters if you wish to do so. I reserve the right to remove any response which might reasonably be considered offensive or prejudicial (though I do not expect that I shall need to do so).

A word limit has been set for your replies of ***120 words per question***. Additional words will be cut from the final submission but you could, of course, give a shorter answer.

Please return your completed form to doliver@wslaw.co.uk and copied to sleader@wslaw.co.uk, by **5pm on Tuesday 14 May 2024**. Your submissions will be posted on the Diocesan website, with your Election Address and Video Presentation, on Thursday 16 May 2024 at 5.00 pm.

Darren Oliver
Presiding Officer for General Synod Election
9 May 2024

Name of Candidate (please enter name in full)	**Mark James Hopkins**

Questions and Replies

Question 1:	What are you views on the 'Future of Church Safeguarding Report' by Professor Alexis Jay released in February 2024?
Reply: 120 word limit applies	If elected to synod I would support a vote to implement the recommendations of Professor Jay to create two independent safeguarding charities, one to deliver all church safeguarding activities and one to provide scrutiny and oversight of safeguarding. In my

	opinion, the church is not viewed overall as a safe place by victims and survivors, younger people, and the wider public in general. There has been a loss of trust in the institution because the processes are not independent enough of Diocesan bishops and structures. For this reason I support fully independent structures.

Question 2:	What is your position on 'Living in Love and Faith' and on the inclusivity of LGBTQ+ people in the Church?
Reply: 120 word limit applies	I am a passionate advocate of LGBTQ+ inclusion as a gay priest and an LGBTQIA+ chaplain. Since the days of the *Shared Conversations* process I have campaigned for *Issues in Human Sexuality* to be scrapped and for new guidance to be issued which will allow married same-sex clergy to be ordained and minister without fear of reprisals. If elected to synod I will vote for synod to implement without delay what it has already decided regarding trialling stand-alone services of blessing and for bishops to immediately issue the new *Pastoral Guidance*. I will ensure legislation is robust so that ministers who do not in good conscience choose to bless same-sex couples will not be pressured to do so.

Question 3:	Noting the Five Guiding Principles in the House of Bishop's 2014 Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests (under which the diocesan bishop can make arrangements for pastoral and sacramental provision for churches who cannot accept the ministry of bishops and priest who are women), would you support similar arrangements being made for clergy and churches on matters arising from 'Living in Love and Faith'?
Reply: 120 word limit applies	No. Churches and ministers already have full control over whether they use the 'Prayers of Love and Faith'. There are already options for churches to seek alternative pastoral and sacramental provision with regards to their views on the ordination of women Making further arrangements on the grounds of matters arising from 'Living in Love and Faith' could have damaging pastoral consequences. For example, it would be difficult for a gay student to accept confirmation if their school chaplain requested a bishop specifically appointed for a view that same-sex relationships were sinful. It would be highly painful for a gay priest such as myself if churches were to seek sacramental provision only from bishops who had never ordained gay priests.

Question 4:	Bearing in mind the Diocesan Synod's March 2024 resolution endorsing the need to significantly increase our engagement with young people, families and schools, how would your membership of General Synod help with this?

Reply: 120 word limit applies	Prior to ordination I worked as a primary school classroom assistant, and before that I was a Children's ministry trainee for a church. I led on two CPAS Ventures for young people for ten years, have led youth groups and served as a school governor. I am passionate about engaging with young people but believe the two main reasons why young people are not coming to the Church of England is that the institution has lost trust and is deemed to be homophobic. I would seek to change the messaging young people hear from the church, so that they can come to see that the good news we have to offer is love and salvation through Jesus Christ.