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)	**Reverend Dr Stephen James O'Connor**

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	I welcome the report and fully support her recommendation that both safeguarding, and the oversight of those responsible for it be undertaken by two independent charities. The way in which the ISB was recently dismantled shows only too clearly why there needs to be root and branch change from the current system where we have been

	slow to acknowledge that harm has occurred, delaying compensation, and in many cases, preventing timely apologies or redress. I do support the concerns of independent safeguarding experts such as Thirtyone:eight however, that these changes do nothing to detract from the maxim that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, so this process needs to be managed with sensitivity and care without further delay.

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 unequivocally support the votes made by General Synod on two separate occasions last year to call for the full implementation of the LLF proposals and would like to see the expressed will of General Synod on these issues implemented by the bishops as soon as possible. I greatly regret ongoing attempts to delay and frustrate this process by those opposed to the full inclusion of LGBTQI+ people in the life – and sacraments – of the Church, but have committed to support their implementation, and the work of the new programme board to find a way to achieve this. I am confident that with love, grace, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit this can be achieved.

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 I would not. The proposals contained in the LLF report ensure that no cleric will be obliged to use the prayers or to bless LGBTQI+ relationships against their conscience. These safeguards need to be secured within the measures used to implement the LLF proposals. I fully support others' right to adhere to their individual conscience, but do not believe that this requires separate pastoral or sacramental provision. The 2014 arrangements are often cited as a precedent for such a move, but I think a far more apposite precedent is the exemption on grounds of conscience for those opposed to marriage after divorce which work perfectly well without the implementation of alternative pastoral or sacramental provision.

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	I visit my two local Church schools on a weekly basis as well as another non-Church school, and fully support the efforts of the Church in Oxford Diocese and elsewhere to increase our engagement with young people, families, and schools. Part of this process means that we need to listen to what they want and expect from the Church, and by engaging with those working with these groups to elicit a greater range of opinions and experiences, expand our provision, and improve the training of lay and ordained ministry at every level to ensure that there is a coherent and clearly enunciated national strategy for this work with clear funding streams and lines of accountability for their delivery.