

The Revd Deborah Leighton Plom

1. What has prompted you to stand for election to General Synod in particular, and in which ways do you think it will challenge your capacity and capabilities?

I am standing because I care deeply about the Church of England's vocation to proclaim the gospel, worship God faithfully and serve every community. Decisions made by General Synod directly affect parishes, clergy and congregations, yet the realities of rural and multi-parish ministry can be insufficiently understood nationally. Serving within a rural mission community of nine parishes has shown me both the remarkable faithfulness of local churches and the pressures faced by clergy, officers and volunteers.

I would bring broad ministerial experience, more than twenty years' governance experience, and the perspective of an autistic priest who understands how institutional language, processes and cultures can exclude people.

I would welcome the challenge of the need to weigh competing theological and practical considerations, and the responsibility of representing Exeter's clergy while exercising my own prayerful judgement. I would need to manage this alongside existing ministerial responsibilities and remain attentive when debates are demanding or contentious. It would require disciplined preparation, resilience, careful listening and a willingness to reconsider my conclusions. I believe these challenges would deepen rather than diminish the contribution I could make.

2. What do you believe the Church of England should prioritise over the next five years to support mission, Christian discipleship and the flourishing of parish and other worshipping communities?

The Church should prioritise sustainable local ministry, recognising that mission grows through faithful relationships, worship, pastoral care and service within particular communities. Parishes need realistic clergy workloads, properly supported lay ministry, good administration and resources flexible enough to reflect very different urban, rural and multi-parish contexts.

We should invest in forming confident disciples who can articulate and live their faith, rather than measuring growth only through attendance. Worshipping communities need support to offer prayerful, accessible worship; nurture children, young people and adults; and engage imaginatively with people beyond existing congregations.

The Church must also remove barriers that prevent participation. As an autistic priest and co-leader of Exeter's Neurodivergent Clergy Hub, I know that accessible language, processes, buildings and working cultures benefit everyone. Inclusion should be embedded in ministry formation, vocation, worship and governance.

National initiatives should strengthen rather than displace local relationships. The Church should listen closely to parishes, encourage appropriate experimentation, share learning honestly and avoid assuming that one model will work everywhere. Mission and discipleship flourish when local communities are trusted, equipped and connected to the wider Church.

3. What should General Synod do to help the Church become safer, more accountable and more trusted, ensuring that national reforms work effectively in parishes, dioceses, and cathedrals?

General Synod should ensure that safeguarding reform produces clear responsibilities, genuine independence, consistent standards and transparent accountability throughout the Church. Structures matter, but reform will succeed only if it shapes everyday culture and practice in parishes, dioceses and cathedrals.

Synod should listen carefully to victims and survivors, ensure that their experience influences policy and scrutiny, and communicate honestly about both progress and failure. National bodies must provide local churches with guidance that is clear, accessible and proportionate, alongside adequate training, professional advice and resources. Expectations should be realistic for small parishes and multi-parish benefices without allowing limited capacity to become an excuse for unsafe practice.

Accountability should include published measures of implementation, effective external scrutiny, clear routes for raising concerns and consequences where responsibilities are neglected. Synod itself must model the standards it expects by working according to the principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership.

Trust cannot be demanded or restored through statements alone. It must be earned through sustained action, truthful communication, careful use of power and a willingness to learn when systems or leaders have failed.

4. How should the Church prioritise good intentional investment in mission and growth whilst also resourcing parish ministry in all its forms?

Investment in mission and growth should strengthen the Church's enduring local presence rather than create competition between new initiatives and existing parish ministry. Parishes remain places where worship, pastoral care, occasional offices, community service and Christian witness are offered faithfully, often with limited resources and little public recognition.

Funding decisions should begin with a clear understanding of local context. Rural mission communities, estates, deprived urban parishes, chaplaincies, church plants and inherited congregations face different opportunities and pressures. Resources should therefore be allocated transparently, using measures broader than numerical growth alone. Spiritual

maturity, community engagement, new disciples, accessibility and service among people experiencing poverty or marginalisation are also important signs of flourishing.

Time-limited mission funding should include realistic plans for sustainability and careful evaluation. Learning from unsuccessful initiatives should be shared as openly as success. At the same time, dioceses must protect the basic capacity needed for parish ministry: stipendiary clergy, lay formation, buildings, administration and safeguarding.

Intentional investment works best when it equips local people, encourages appropriate experimentation and connects new worshipping communities with the wider Church. Growth should deepen the Church's common life, not leave established communities carrying unsustainable burdens.

5. General Synod must address issues on which faithful Christians hold deeply differing views. How would you contribute to honest debate, good disagreement and clear decision-making while helping the Church maintain its common life and mission?

I would contribute independently, prayerfully and with respect for the range of traditions within the Church of England. Our unity does not require us to pretend that differences are unimportant, and holding a firm conviction does not justify treating those who disagree as less faithful.

I would prepare thoroughly, examine evidence and proposals carefully, and consider their theological and practical implications. I would listen to other members' arguments, acknowledge legitimate concerns and speak honestly about my own convictions. As an autistic priest, I value clarity and would seek to identify where disagreement concerns principle, evidence, implementation or language, helping Synod reach decisions that people can understand.

I would not be bound by predetermined group voting instructions. I would consider each matter on its merits, remain willing to change my mind and pay particular attention to those whose lives are affected but whose voices carry limited institutional influence.

Clear decision-making also requires accountability. I would seek the views of Exeter's clergy before significant debates, report back afterwards and explain my votes. Good disagreement should enable truthful decisions while preserving relationships and our shared commitment to God's mission.