

Simon Friend

House of Laity · Diocese of Exeter · General Synod 2026



“Simon has become a respected voice at General Synod having made significant contributions in debates on Living in Love & Faith, Safeguarding, Housing and Finance during his two terms. Re-electing Simon will ensure Exeter Diocese continues to have well-informed and theologically grounded representation.”

Anne Foreman

Proposer

General Synod Member 1999–2021

“It is a pleasure to have Simon as part of our rural church and as a Licensed Lay Minister. He brings a grounded sense of reality to what often feels like the remote body of General Synod. His desire to see flourishing rural communities is evident in his decision-making.”

Catriona Fursdon

Seconder

Churchwarden, St Michael & All Angels, Cadbury

Dear Elector,

Thank you for taking the time to read this and whether you vote for me or not, please do vote.

WHY I AM STANDING

The Church continues to face deep questions about inclusion, safeguarding, rural sustainability, episcopal leadership, and mission in a secular society. After two terms on General Synod and having served on the most recent Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) for this diocese, I have gained a broad perspective on the life of the Church nationally and locally. This is rooted in my ongoing ministry as a Licensed Lay Minister.

My approach to Synod work is shaped by contemplative listening, encouragement, and a commitment to love and acceptance across theological divides. Professionally, 30 years of leading multidisciplinary teams in property development has honed my strategic thinking, realism, and ability to sense what is required in difficult situations. I try to let go of my own agenda as far as I can see it, and to remain grounded in how the Church is perceived in the ‘real world’.

At the heart of my motivation is a desire to be ‘on the very edge of the inside’ - listening for the voices on the margins and reflecting them faithfully. I long for a Church that welcomes everyone, unconditionally, as Jesus did.

WORK & CHURCH EXPERIENCE

I am a Chartered Surveyor running my own development business, currently leading a major regeneration project in Bideford, North Devon. I particularly enjoy public consultation and helping communities imagine transformation.

As a Licensed Lay Minister, I have led worship and preached for many years. I serve in spiritual accompaniment and contribute my professional skills to the diocesan Glebe subcommittee. It was a privilege to serve on the CNC; a role that required confidentiality, discernment, and a deep understanding of diocesan needs.

MY OWN SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

My parents were farmers in North Devon, and I grew up in an evangelical Brethren chapel, which gave me a deep love of scripture. Later, I encountered charismatic renewal and, in my mid-twenties, a transformative year in Uganda revealed a God who loved me for who I was, not what I did. I retain close ties with Uganda and charities there.



SYNODICAL & DIOCESAN EXPERIENCE

- General Synod Lay Member, 2018–2026
- Diocesan Synod Member since 2015
- Licensed Lay Minister, BD in Theology
- Member, Crown Nominations Commission (current Bishop of Exeter)
- Member, Glebe Sub-Committee
- Former Exploring Spirituality Course team member
- Former Deanery Lay Chair
- Former Chair of Trustees, CHAT Mid Devon (2018–2024)



“When two elephants fight, it’s the grass that suffers.”

When I first stood for Synod in 2015, I suggested that one of the major issues would be whether the Church should accept same-sex marriages. While many other issues have rightly demanded attention, including the very practical needs of rural churches, the question of inclusion has remained deeply significant.

Although Prayers of Love and Faith have been introduced, progress toward full inclusion has been slow. This lack of movement is troubling to me, and it is an area where I hope the Church can continue to listen, discern, and grow.

The African proverb remains central to my perspective: when debates become dominated by powerful voices or entrenched positions, it is those on the margins - the voiceless, the vulnerable, the ‘grass’ who suffer. The still small voice of the grassroots can easily be lost.

Transparency on LGBTQIA+ issues is important. I have spoken in many LLF debates and participated in smaller discernment groups convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury. I support change that would allow same-sex marriages, alongside conscience protections for clergy who cannot conduct such marriages.

I am also happy to align myself with Inclusive Church, whose values resonate with my own commitment to welcome and inclusion.

CONCERNS ABOUT POWER, MONEY & PARALLEL STRUCTURES

In recent years, I have become increasingly concerned about certain approaches being taken within the Church, particularly those involving financial leverage through withholding of common fund contributions, and proposals for alternative episcopal oversight or parallel provinces.

From my perspective, these developments risk reshaping the Church through structural pressure rather than shared discernment. They can create an atmosphere of uncertainty, division, and mistrust, and they place significant strain on diocesan relationships and the wider body of Christ.

I believe deeply in the integrity of our shared structures, our common life, and our commitment to walk together even when we disagree. The Church’s future should not be determined by financial power or by mechanisms that fragment episcopal unity. My hope is for a Synod that encourages patient listening, theological depth, and grace-filled disagreement.

A HOPE FOR THE NEXT SYNOD

My desire is for a Church that welcomes everyone unconditionally, listens to those on the margins, and refuses to default into division. Vigorous debate is healthy; hostility and fragmentation are not. The world is not interested in our internal battles; it is watching to see whether we can embody the love we proclaim.

Thank you for reading my election statement. Please give me your first or high preference vote if you believe it resonates with how Exeter Diocese should be represented at General Synod.

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