

Name of Candidate:

JONATHAN BAIRD

Questions from the electorate for lay candidates

1. Are you optimistic about the future of the Church of England? Briefly state your three top reasons for your view.

Yes.

Provided that:

1. The chronic and growing shortage of vicars can be gripped and reversed. At present, clergy numbers are falling off a cliff. There are not enough vicars to tend to their flocks. If this can be addressed, the Church can continue to fulfil its spiritual role; and achieve its social good (the latter has been quantified at £ 55 billion per annum according to Treasury green book rules).

Elaborating on the subject above, please see also my answer to Question 6 below.

2. The episcopate concentrates more on supporting the clergy and less on political activism and the promotion of expensive vanity projects.

[Concerning the episcopate, there are too many bishops (as a confidential Church report noted in 2022) and most of them should be returned to parish ministry. In 1837, there were twenty-six bishops when there were many more clergy and much larger congregations. Today, there are 117 bishops.]

3. There is significant bureaucratic & diocesan reform (in Salisbury Diocese alone, the ratio of bureaucrats to clergy has increased over the last nine years by 2.27 times); funding is redirected away substantially from making grants; and there is an absolute focus on rebuilding parish ministry.

2. What are your views on gender and human sexuality? Do you think that the church of England should carry out same sex blessings? Do you think the church of England should change its teachings on marriage?

There are two sexes.

Gender and legal sexuality are private matters, which an individual may choose to bring into the public domain.

Over the last thirty years, in attempting to circumvent Canon B30, the Church has succeeded in turning all four questions above into a plate of spaghetti. In so doing and to varying degrees, it has managed to upset almost everybody. In part, this is symptomatic of its tendency to try to be 'relevant' rather than concentrating more on following the Bible, the liturgy and its traditional mission of helping vicars to attend to their flocks.

However today, getting the toothpaste back into the tube will be nigh impossible. To avoid multiple shattering of a broad church (as has happened elsewhere), which is multifaceted, multi-factional and global (85% of Anglicans reside outside England), such matters should be handled locally and without rancour, trusting as much as possible in the wisdom and good sense of the vicar and the PCC.

On the final point, as the Church has recognised in recent years, there should be a growing emphasis on subsidiarity.

3. What are your views on the church's decision to spend £100 million on "reparations" for historical slavery when there are over 50 million people currently held in slavery (UN figures) who could be helped instead?

Robert Tombs, one of our foremost historians, has described the research underlying the Church's decision as 'historically fraudulent'.

On 11th January 2023, the Church Commissioners announced their intent to pay slavery reparations. Immediately, I sent their report to Tombs, who had published in the Telegraph the very next day an article, which demolished their argument. Since then, I have been in the vanguard of the campaign to get the decision reversed.

Further recent research has revealed that Queen Anne's Bounty (the Church Commissioners's precursor fund) made no profits WHATSOEVER from slavery; Britain was at the forefront of abolishing slavery worldwide; over a fifty-year period, the Royal Navy committed 13% of its men & resources to dismantling the transatlantic slave trade; and African slave traders shipped roughly 60% more slaves to the Arab slave markets than all Europeans and Americans shipped across the Atlantic.

Addressing substantively modern slavery also may be *ultra vires* (beyond the Church Commissioners' powers).

Instead, I have suggested discrete and contained research into:

- i) poor treatment on maternity wards for minorities and those with little spoken English; and
- ii) unfavourable outcomes for Afro-Caribbean boys as a consequence of absent fathers, which Lord Tony Sewell has agreed privately to spearhead.

4. Many of the debates in Synod have good arguments on both sides. How would you decide which way to vote?

In advance of each session, the preparatory zoom calls, which have been held amongst us members of the General Synod Standing Committee of Save the Parish (Save the Parish being probably the broadest grouping within the Church of England and certainly within General Synod), have been enormously helpful in thrashing out the more important issues; and establishing what really is being proposed. This outstanding forum, together with private and trusted discussions, is also a useful mechanism for spotting 'Pooh traps'.

Beyond that, one is influenced by the quality of the paperwork, the quality of the argument, the quality of the speeches and the cut of the jib of the speakers.

Also, I consume a vast amount of relevant research, print media and commentary.

Thereafter, it is substantially a matter of good sense, judgment and conscience.

5. Do you see the current climate crisis as a key priority for the Church of England and why? How do you demonstrate your concern to care for God's creation in your church life?

In July 2022, I asked publicly the lead bishop on achieving net zero by 2030 what was the likely cost to the Church of hitting this target. He had no idea. I said to him that a reasonable aggregate estimate was £ 4 billion and asked him where the money would come from. Again, he had no idea.

In the relevant General Synod debate in 2020 (when the Church's target date for achieving net zero was advanced from 2045 to 2030, on a very tight vote in a half-empty Chamber), the now Chair of the Finance Committee of the Archbishops' Council stated: "I fear that we have set a target which is totally unrealistic and is unsupported by any plans". He was right.

In the Pewsey Vale, there is an iconic example of the inappropriateness of this policy. A tiny church was advised by the diocesan net zero team to spend £ 40,000 on net zero works. The same result was achieved by procuring 120 blankets and the requisite airtight plastic storage containers for £ 400. In other words, for 1% of the cost.

As a mean Scot, I always switch off lights and appliances and put on more jerseys.

6. What is your perspective on 'Save the Parish'? Is it a viable manifesto when so many rural parishes have dwindling congregations?

Save the Parish hits the nail on the head.

Furthermore, the most important objective of Save the Parish and its manifesto ( STP-General-Synod-Manifesto-2026.pdf) is to get more vicars into the pulpit.

That way, as confirmed by the Church's own research, congregations will stop dwindling and begin to recover.

In order to repopulate the pulpit:

1. The morale of existing clergy needs an enormous boost, not least to stop so many abandoning their vocation (in 2024, 33% more clergy resigned than retired). To achieve this, their remuneration needs to be increased significantly; their jobs need to be made less beastly, stressful, dispiriting and impossible (by reducing their number of parishes and trashing unnecessary bureaucracy, reporting and heavy-handed oversight); and they need to be treated by the hierarchy with decency and respect.
2. Mandatory retirement at the age of seventy should be scrapped forthwith (vicars should have the opportunity to continue if they so choose).
3. A massive and determined recruitment drive is required. The Church Commissioners have the money.
4. The more than 1,000 clergy, who sit behind principally diocesan desks (including all archdeacons), need to be assigned parishes and removed from bureaucratic roles.

All four points above can and should be achieved in short order.