

Name of Candidate: Lesley Jones

Questions from the electorate for clergy candidates
Are you optimistic about the future of the Church of England? Briefly state your three top reasons for your view.
Yes, I am optimistic for a number of reasons including: 1. Becoming a Jesus-Shaped Church. In recent years a fresh vision has emerged encouraging a '<i>simpler, humbler, bolder church</i>'. This renewed call to place Christ at the centre, and renewed focus on growing as a younger, more diverse community of disciples released significant investment from Church of England. I think the challenge for members of the next General Synod is how to roll this support out further - with less red tape - to more people and places. 2. Inclusion. With a presence in every community the Church of England continues to serve diverse communities in different settings - when we get it right, everyone feels welcome. I hope the next General Synod will build upon the recent work around supporting local clergy through measures around well-being and better pensions, and encouraging more people to explore their vocation that we can continue to sustain and grow. 3. National Leadership. In Archbishop Sarah Mullaly I believe we have someone who is not only a good shepherd, but someone who can meet people where they are, and seek consensus in a church where opinions are broad and debates can become polarized.
What should be the Church of England's highest priorities if we want to see more people coming to faith in Christ and growing as disciples?
1. National Resources for the Local Church. One of the biggest barriers to making Jesus known can be under-resourced parishes where fewer clergy lead more churches with much time and energy spent on fundraising to keep the heating on - while Church Commissioner investments recently topped £11 billion. More could be done to better resource Dioceses, reducing the financial burden of parish share and release resources – human and financial - to share the Gospel.

2. **Healthy Churches.** As churches grow, greater ministry resource is needed while day-to-day tasks continue to call and support from Diocesan teams can prove essential. I don't believe clergy can continue to absorb more demands on time and energy from the centre, without General Synod investing in support closer to home.
3. **Digital Spaces and AI.** While I may not understand AI most of us are aware that it is bringing with it great change. We have a national Communications teams and a digital presence in every Diocese so I am interested to see how the Church of England can help ministers – whatever their local context – make the most of online spaces, technology and emerging AI.

When the Church's teaching is unpopular, what do you believe is the responsibility of a General Synod member in defending and articulating it?

I believe it's important for all members of General Synod to understand the issues and the options ahead of any vote, especially when it affects the church's teaching, popular or otherwise. There is no short-cut to investing the time to read the information and reflect prayerfully and carefully on its content ahead of a vote. But, whatever the outcome of a debate, it's not for every member to 'defend' every decision but to offer a fair and accurate account of the process and when asked, be ready to share their position on a particular issue, and why they have voted in a particular way. While there will always be a wide range of views, this makes for a healthy debate, and as fellow disciples, there are always more things that unite us than divide us, and at times even general synod members are of one mind.

There is a danger that clergy are trained to be managers of church organisations rather than theologians, pastors, and ministers of the Gospel. How would you seek to ensure that formation prioritises those primary callings?

I think this is in part answered above, as benefices become larger and more complex with fewer parish priests. I often hear clergy speaking with frustration at the way in which much of our formation prior to ordination does not prepare us for leading as 'managers' unless this was part of an earlier career.

Mentor support in the shift from assistant curate to incumbent can be crucial, alongside regular spiritual direction, days off and firm boundaries, because formation is an ongoing process.

Perhaps expectations nationally have been to encourage 'clergy-managers' holding an ever-growing portfolio of responsibilities, rather than pastors working with a team of people, where collaboration is key and as previously mentioned, good Diocesan support teams on hand.

This is certainly a good question for General Synod, which could be raised through a motion from Salisbury Diocesan Synod or with enough support from G S members, a Private Members Motion.

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?

Last year, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said

"Slavery is a horror from the history books – and a relentless contemporary crisis."

Slavery is our past and our present.

We cannot avoid how funds from Queen Anne's Bounty - with its links to the transatlantic slave trade – sit in the church's investments and other legacy's too. Although not a member of General Synod when 'Project Spire' was discussed, I understand the church is attempting to get its house in order, allocating the funds across 8 years (2023-2031).

In contrast, over this same period Church Commissioners hope to invest £3.6 billion to support mission and ministry across the country and this may be a timely opportunity to include a call to tackle slavery in our communities today.

Guided by Anti-Slavery International and the UK Home Office statistics at the end of 2025 - we find that **23,411 potential victims of modern slavery** were identified through National Referral Mechanism (NRM) – the highest number of referrals since the records began in 2009 of which **30% of all of these were children** – meaning 7,028 potential child victims, and **22% of all people referred** were UK Nationals.

I believe this is a wake-up call for the church and nation.

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

Key to this, as mentioned above, is to make space to listen when people raise concerns, to read, pray and reflect, have time to conduct additional research if needed and listen to other views. Depending on the issue, the decision to vote may be straightforward, but it helps in those final moments before voting, to hear all voices ahead of a final decision.

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?

This is a key priority because as Christians we have a responsibility to care for God's creation, called to be good stewards of this precious gift. In my own life I am grateful for opportunities to get involved in different aspects of conservation and as an parish in a range of different settings consider how - whatever we are doing, planning for, hoping for - how we can do this in a way that respects and protects creation and addresses the worsening situation. The long hot Summer in here in the UK and effects of climate change around the world, should help us realise that this is no longer a climate 'crisis' but a climate 'emergency' and more needs to be done.

In my current post there is a great level of awareness and both church congregations hold Silver Eco Church awards - the challenge ahead is to go even further and aim for Gold which will in part release a number of ideas for engaging more widely with the local community.

What do you consider is the most urgent challenge for the Church of England and how should it be addressed?

I think at the time of looking at these questions we are witnessing a shift in UK politics and I feel the church needs to raise its collective voice and stand up to the misrepresentation of Christianity in the UK, as we have reached a situation where a crowd openly chanted the name of Jesus Christ while hiding their faces behind black balaclavas at two of our UK ports.

Just before Christmas a right-wing protest group were planning a huge 'carol service' and the Church of England responded quickly, releasing a powerful video – 'Christmas is for Everyone'. I think we need to do more of this as it supports the excellent work of parishes in communities where this mis-representation of Jesus is popular.

As the Church for all of England, we cannot avoid the public square or the political landscape and I would rather see the C of E on the front foot, and not the back. Too much mis-information, mis-understanding around faith is harmful, especially to people who want to know more about Jesus – and what they often find on-line is an 'us vs them' theology rather than the body of Christ.