

Vanda Leary – General Synod election address 2026

I am standing for election to the General Synod House of Laity because I believe the General Synod must **listen to the voices of ordinary churchgoers**. I will champion a **broad, inclusive church** that is accepting of all God's people and **supports local parish ministry**.

I know the Diocese well and I have extensive governance experience. I will bring that wider experience and practical, common-sense parish reality to the floor of General Synod.

I ask for your 1st preference vote. Thank you

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ABOUT ME



I know the Diocese well. For the past 3+ years I've been working as the Strategic Programme Manager in the Diocesan team, helping to bring investment for mission and church growth across all traditions and all parts of the Diocese. Over the years I have lived and worked in every archdeaconry and four of our deaneries (Isle of Wight, Fareham, Portsmouth, Petersfield). I really appreciate the amazing variety across Portsmouth Diocese – urban, suburban, rural, coastal, inland, mainland, island – so much packed into our small Diocese!

General Synod decisions should be well-rooted in local ministry. I worship at St Peter's Petersfield where I've been a PCC member for 15 years (currently PCC Secretary) and am an active participant in church life from chalice assistant to running a Lego tombola at the church fete.

We all experience a sense of God's calling in different ways, and I see my vocation as service in church governance at all levels. I've been a Deanery lay chair for 9 years (just ended), Diocesan Synod representative for 8 years, am currently a member of the Diocesan Audit, Finance and Risk Committee and am a former member of Bishop's Council.

Outside of the church, I am a board member for a social housing and care provider, trustee of a money advice charity, and community governor at a local secondary school. In all of these settings I am able to draw out the key points for the organisation, and bring constructive criticism and support as needed. I know there will be much to learn as a new General Synod representative, but my prior experience means that I will be able to take this in my stride.

In my work as a programme manager and consultant across a range of organisations, my particular strengths have been turning vague aspirations into clear plans and working collaboratively across organisational boundaries.

All of these experiences mean that I am skilled at making sense of the complex, listening carefully and working well with others holding a range of differing perspectives.

I will be leaving my current paid diocesan job at the end of October 2026, so will be a fully independent voice by the time the new General Synod first meets in November. I'll be moving to a part-time freelance role so will have sufficient time to devote to General Synod duties.

THE IMPORTANT ISSUES

There will be many and varied issues to consider over the 5-year term of the next General Synod. For all the issues, I intend to listen carefully to all the points of view, as well as sharing my own perspective. I hope I will have the humility to learn from others and know that I am not always right!

However, there are some core points where I do have a strongly-held view, and these will inform my thinking more widely:

- **Supporting local parish ministry:** As you'd expect from my current job, I am an advocate for targeted investment for church growth across all traditions. But it's important that this is underpinned by a healthy respect and care for parish ministry in all its richness. Therefore I support a rebalancing of national church funding to give more for clergy stipends, alongside continued targeted investment.
- **Accepting LGBT+ people, their relationships and their ministry:** It's a sorrow to me that LGBT+ family and friends are not always confident of acceptance in church. Despite the many years of discussion on LLF with apparently little progress, I remain hopeful that we can find the strength and pastoral generosity to hold together different theological perspectives. So I will work to allow progressive parishes to celebrate same-sex relationships in their churches and to more fully recognise the vocations of LGBT+ people, while legally securing and respecting the conscience of conservative parishes.
- **Ensuring local voices are heard:** The parish voice needs to be heard in all deliberations at General Synod as we strive together to support God's work. I will continue to maintain my connections and local knowledge to ensure I can represent the Diocese well. And I will work to ensure that church governance at all levels is effective and considerate of the local voice.

Once again, **I ask for your 1st preference vote.**

Thank you!

P.S. It's good to be rooted in the local church! Here I am enjoying our varied diocesan life – eating doughnuts (no hands!) at St Michael's Paulsgrove Christmas Fayre, running a Lego tombola at St Peter's Petersfield church fete, and visiting Newport Minster.

