

Application for Election to General Synod 2026

Charles Houston from All Saints, Neen Sollars (Ludlow Deanery)



Campaigning for the Rural Parish.

I live in Neen Sollars in the Ludlow Deanery where, as a Lay Reader since 2001, I have helped run our small village church with other lay leaders. I am a semi-retired Chartered Surveyor, who likes painting, cycling, tennis and history and I am married to a Lydbury North girl with whom I have four grown-up children.

I have served on General Synod (GS) for the last five years (thank you if you kindly voted for me in 2001) and I am also on Diocesan Synod and Bishops Council – I must be mad!

I have found the past five years on GS quite frustrating at times, because firstly, so little time is spent on the pressing issue of mission, particularly in rural areas but everywhere else too; and secondly, the past five years have been dominated by debates about LLF / PLF which are divisive but seem to satisfy neither side. I believe that the church is strongest when it stands on its traditional values and teachings. However, the reason that I am prepared to spend time on these decision-making bodies is because **I believe in the parish as the beating heart of the Church of England** and, having helped run a rural church for over 25 years, I understand the key issues that both help and hinder rural parish growth and I believe that I can make a difference. My priorities are:

1. **Supporting the Clergy.** I will support anything that makes the life of the Clergy easier. On GS, I have voted in favour of measures to increase the Stipend and to restore the clergy pensions to a meaningful level. I also support any measures that promote lay leadership as without this a) there is no way that rural ministry can survive- Clergy have to be everywhere at all times or they get stressed-out trying; and b) without such help in place, it is becoming impossible to attract new clergy (there are currently 13 interregnums in the diocese). Finally, not all clergy can afford a much needed break and I am fortunate to be able to host Holidays for Clergy Heroes!
2. **Show me the money!** The Parish is not only the heartbeat of the church, but it is also the main source of funds. I have voted in favour of (failed) attempts to fix the lack of funding from the centre to rural dioceses like ours and have questioned the trend to increasingly allocate funds to non-frontline posts. I am also frustrated that GS hasn't had the chance to debate and vote on Project Spire (so-called slavery reparations) which is proving a massive and avoidable own goal. Conscious of the dire state of the diocesan finances, I have not claimed any travel, meals or accommodation expenses from Diocesan funds whilst serving on GS; that makes me a cheap date!
3. **Making Life easier for Parishes.** As a PCC member and former churchwarden, I am aware that they do a fantastic but often thankless job and I have asked questions at GS about some of the mad net zero rules affecting church heating and trying to reduce the burdens of compliance and faculties, so that PCCs can focus on mission and doing church *well*.

Finally, I am not happy that any beautiful medieval village churches should close on our watch – nor do I accept that the future of rural ministry is bleak- it just needs a few things to work better and I am prepared to put in the time to campaign for these. If you feel the same, then please give me your first vote (or second one if you must). Thank you, Charlie Houston