

General Synod Election 2026
The Rev'd Andrew Wilkinson
Standing for the House of Clergy, Diocese of Blackburn

Proposed by The Rev Canon Peter Lillicrap, Vicar of The Trinity Benefice, Area Dean of Blackpool and Chair Of Blackburn Diocesan Synod (House of Clergy)

Seconded by the Rev'd Canon Brian McConkey, vicar of Ribchester, Hurst Green and Mitton and Asst Area Dean of Preston

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am standing for election to the General Synod because the Church is at an **important moment**. After years of wide-ranging debates and major central initiatives, many clergy and parishes are looking for **greater stability** and a renewed focus on the Church's core responsibilities: **mission and pastoral care**. My roots are firmly in this part of the country. I was brought up in East Lancashire and attended St Wilfrid's School in Blackburn, converting to christianity from my family's Unitarianism in my youth. Over the course of my ministry, after studying at Nottingham, Lancaster and Sandhurst, with degrees in theology and religious studies, I have served in a variety of settings, including eight years with a Church of England Mission Society, as an army chaplain, in Urban Priority Areas, on a housing estate in the East Midlands and more locally in Morecambe and Longridge. I now serve as Vicar of Garstang St Helen's, Churchtown, and St Michael's on Wyre.

I have worked across a **broad range of church traditions** and have always sought to ground my ministry in consistency of belief, orthodox theology and the proclamation of the Gospel. Outside ministry, Rosemary (a nursing sister) and I have been married for 35 years and have two children living here in the vicarage and at university.

Having 24 years of experience as an Area Dean, I have seen at first hand the **pressures facing clergy** and parishes, whether financial, organisational or personal. I also understand how the synodical process works and how concerns raised locally can be taken into the national conversation. One example was my involvement in bringing the issue of the redistribution of Church Commissioners' funds to be passed at Garstang Synod and from there to be successfully passed by Blackburn Diocesan Synod through the Hereford Motion. This was then debated at General Synod in July 2025, but questions around the **almost £12 billion of resources** and lack of financial **support for parish ministry** remain critically important for the future and should continue to be addressed for the next funding triennium, I can only do this if you vote for me as a member of General Synod.

As a member of the Save the Parish network, I support its 2026 principle that parish ministry should remain at the heart of the Church's mission, a vision of a **priest in every community**. It has matured into an organisation that brings

together frontline clergy, senior staff and laity in consultations such as that on vocations recently at St George's House Windsor. If elected, I will work to ensure that, staying true to the Archbishops' vision, local churches are properly resourced, that parish ministry remains the primary focus of evangelism, and that any changes to church structures strengthen rather than weaken the parish system. I also believe we should invest in strong theological education. Bearing in mind all those in this diocese who are currently facing almost impossible financial challenges to maintain their church fabric we need to develop a long-term strategy to help protect and maintain our historic church buildings.

Alongside this, I remain committed to clergy welfare. Through my national role with the **Church of England Employees and Clergy Association (CEECA)**, part of Unite, I advocate regularly for you and all clergy with national church bodies on matters such as stipends, pensions and clergy terms of service. As an example, issues such as the future of the Heating, Lighting and Cleaning allowance (HLC on our stipends) may seem technical, but they have a direct impact on clergy households and well-being and deserve careful attention. Many of us won't even know that it is under threat from HMRC, which is why people like me need to have a voice on General Synod. The Clergy Conduct Measure also requires very close scrutiny in the next Synod..

My interests include being a non-executive director ("expert by experience") for Safe Spaces England and Wales, I support victims of abuse and believe the Church must continue to strengthen independence, transparency and accountability in safeguarding practice at every level, not just with parish clergy.

There has been significant debate in recent years on subjects such as Project Spire and Living in Love and Faith. Whatever our individual and political views, those discussions have occupied a great deal of time and energy. They have had a good airing and I don't propose to further them in this synod because the church now needs breathing space and unity to face the challenges of the future. We have an opportunity for the next Synod to place greater emphasis on the core principles of **unity, supporting clergy, sustaining parish ministry and sharing the Gospel** effectively in our communities.

These are just some of the issues which will be important over the next five years. What I can offer you is a strong voice that isn't afraid to speak up, publicly, on issues, and a pledge to represent you, diligently and vocally. As decisions are taken which will shape how the Church of England engages with the remaining three quarters of the 21st century, it is hugely important that General Synod has people in it who aren't afraid to **challenge**, test and

(at times) contest proposals from the central church. Should I be elected, I promise to be one of those representatives.

I would be **grateful for your first preference vote** in this year's election.

Yours in Christ,

Rev Andrew Wilkinson