

General Synod Election Address 2026

Candidate: William John Harry Leeming,
Churchwarden of St Michael, Whitewell
in the Parish of the Hodder Valley

Proposer: Alexandra Helena Anne Dugdale,
Member and Secretary of Whalley Deanery Synod

Seconder: Helen Richards,
Member of Whalley Deanery Synod



Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to tempt your support towards me as your first preference vote to become a member of General Synod in the House of Laity in 2026 for the full 5 year term.

I am 25 years old and I have grown up in a rural community for the majority of my life. My parents were both dairy farmers until they lost the farm in 1996. For 14 years, we lived in the outskirts of Blackburn in Clayton-Le-Dale until my parents found a perfect smallholding to return back to livestock. We have a plot of land of 34 acres which mostly accommodated sheep, chickens and the occasional cattle. I am also a precision tooling and maintenance engineer which I do as a full time role. I enjoy researching the tooling and materials to improve the sustainability as well as the quality of the products we make for defence and aerospace purposes.

I have grown up in a Church of England Primary School and I have since been interested and faithful to the wonders of God and the Holy Spirit. I have listened to the teachings of the Bible and followed its teachings throughout my life and I continue to learn and spread its teachings through all my daily tasks. I truly believe God isn't just for our Sunday Services, but for every minute of our daily lives.

In 2021, Our Parish Church became short of a churchwarden and our current churchwarden was ready to retire. I heard my priest struggle to find a replacement to keep the church maintained to its local community. I suddenly felt a call from God of duty to serve him as a warden for our church, for my priest was very thrilled! Although the task was quite daunting to begin with, the support and encouragement I had was fantastic and I was pleased to be installed as one of the youngest churchwardens not just in the Diocese of Blackburn, but also the country. I felt a true belonging, dedication and strength to support our church and continue the upkeep of the church fabric and services. As our priest declined to poor health, it became a regular occurrence for approximately 3 months to lead the Service of the Word in my church. With the encouragement of our priest, we joined our neighbouring Parish with Slaidburn with Tosside and Dalehead to become the Parish of the Hodder Valley. I now serve on my 5th term as Churchwarden of St Michaels Church at Whitewell.

In 2025, I was asked by the Diocese of Blackburn to be part of the Young Adults Group, that would then communicate on Zoom with four other Dioceses to discuss the possible issues Young Adults are facing in our churches and how we can involve them into church to be more inclusive and support them in our churches. We were later contacted by General Synod to make a speech of our experiences as Young Adults in our diocese, for which I spoke at July General Synod meeting in York 2025. Three positions (later amended to five positions) opened up for Young Adults to be non-voting members of General Synod beginning of February 2026. I was therefore voted on as a member of General Synod from February 2026 to July 2026. I used this experience to listen to the motions and amendments throughout

the sessions and joined as many Fringe meetings to meet and learn of the many different topics and people involved across the country. Hearing the facts and real case scenarios really intrigued me and I felt I had a mission to help and support many of the cases, especially involving Young Adults and rural communities across the country whom were rarely represented. During my time at General Synod, I've had the opportunity to speak at three selected motions on three different topics.

(Proposer) Alex Dugdale: Whalley Deanery

William is currently in his fifth year as a churchwarden at St. Michael's, Whitewell, which is situated in the Hodder Valley Parish, in a beautiful rural area within the Forest of Bowland's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now referred to as a National Landscape). William is therefore familiar with not only the issues faced by rural communities in general, but also with how young people experience life in rural communities. William became a co-opted member of the General Synod last year and is already aware of the Church of England's drive to seek the voices of younger people, to gain an understanding of their perspectives on what they consider the 'big issues', and to support them better on their journeys through both life and their walk with Jesus. William is keen to bring the voice of the young and the rural community to the General Synod where topics such as Climate change, sustainability and job security/opportunities will likely be high on the agenda. He is an attentive listener and is keen to represent all the voices of the rural community at General Synod, to inform their discussions and help develop the Church of England's future mission. I wholeheartedly support his nomination for General Synod (House of Laity).

(Seconder) Helen Richards: Whalley Deanery

I want to further support my nomination of Will Leeming for the General Synod position. Will Leeming is a devoted Christian who became churchwarden at St Michael's, Whitewell at a young age and is now in his fifth year of service. Although he initially felt a little daunted in the role, he stood up to the challenge and has made a big, positive difference at St Michael's. He has raised funds, contributed to church services, and introduced new ideas like the Harvest and Patronal events, which have helped increase attendance.

Rural churches, including those in the Hodder Valley, often struggle to attract younger members, and our parish is working hard to change that. Will has already introduced a new and fresh approach to this challenge, and we are beginning to see positive results that continue to grow.

Will would be a strong representative for rural communities at the General Synod, and I believe it is important that all areas are heard. As a farmer, he has gained practical problem-solving skills in engineering and a deeper understanding and appreciation of nature through working directly with it, which has fuelled his passion for the environment and climate change. Will recently gave an outstanding speech at the Hope for All Creation presentation on this subject.

I feel Will would make an exceptional candidate for the role, and his warm, friendly personality makes him a pleasure to work alongside.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this address. Please feel free to get in touch if you have any queries on anything at any time and I will be more than happy to get back to you. I would be very grateful for your support and for choosing me as your first preference vote. I will do my absolute best to represent you all in the House of Laity at General Synod.