

SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW CANDIDATES IN THE GS ELECTIONS CAN RESPOND TO POTENTIALLY CHALLENGING QUESTIONS IN HUSTINGS – WHETHER ‘FORMAL’ OR ‘INFOMAL’ (IE INDIVIDUALS CONTACT YOU WITH Q’S).

The following are offered as ‘snippets’ that can be used individually, or together, or in some other expanded manner. They are not intended to be definitive, or exhaustive or the only possible response se to such questions.

Please feel free to adapt them as you feel appropriate.

You will need to assess what kind of answer will help in your situation.

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Women’s ministry within the Church (do you agree with the ordination of women as priests/bishops?)

- I believe that everyone has a crucial role to play in the life of the church.
- The Pauline image of the church as a body shows that everyone has a role to play – and no role is more/less important than any other – and no role should be seen as more/less important than any other.
- I am happy to serve alongside women in all roles – and under a female bishop.
- Either :
 - I am absolutely committed to the 5 Guiding Principles.
 - I am fully committed to the fact that the CofE has made a decision to open all roles to women - something that I will I respect and support (even though it does not reflect my own personal theological convictions).
- Or :
 - I fully support the ordination of women to the priesthood and the appointment of women to every role in the C of E.

Gender and human sexuality/LLF (do you agree that the Church of England, like the forward-looking Methodist Church, should make provision for the blessing of same-sex relationships/’marriages’?)

- I have a real tension here because I recognise that people of the same sex can deeply love each other – but at the same time I see that the New Testament picture of a man / woman in marriage as a portrait of the relationship between Jesus and His church puts limits on what we can endorse.
- In New Testament times the church was called to be countercultural in that men were called to faithfulness to their wives. In todays world, I think we might be called to be countercultural in a different way – ie to see the marriage of a man and woman as uniquely portraying Jesus’ love for His church.

Safeguarding, power & abuse (do you agree that there is a systemic issue in the leadership of evangelical churches as evidenced by the cases of Revd Jonathan Fletcher/John Smyth?)

- Abuse is absolutely wrong wherever it is committed. And so where evangelicals have been abusive we must call it out, repent and address the issues raised. But its not just evangelicals who have abused others – its Catholics and people of other faiths and people of no faith. So it seems rather naïve to make this an issue of any particular theological strand.

Diversity (are you committed to us being a more diverse church in all ways (including LGBT+?))

- I am absolutely committed to us being a church that reflects the diversity of the communities in which we live and the communities we serve. We have not done this well in the C of E.
- If you are actually asking – are you a welcoming church - then the answer is an unequivocal yes... or more accurately we should be and need to do better !
- This is not the question it pretends to be. In actual fact – any creedal church is not committed to diversity in all forms – because our creed has theological ‘boundaries’ that do not allow some forms of theological diversity. And if you want an ethical example - the church does not permit/bless threesomes in a cohabiting relationship. So the answer to the question has to be ‘no’. The real question is how does the church decide where its ‘boundaries’ are.

Emerging from COVID (what long term impact does the pandemic have for the Church and church attendance, and what actions do you think churches should be taking now?)

- The crucial issue here is that in the ‘rebuilding’ of church community and worship that we are not distracted from the need to continually engage in mission. The calling of the church remains to present an invitation to follow Jesus – that must still be our number 1 priority.
- We need to be ready to do things differently – but not recklessly.
- Those who are – for various reasons – housebound, have been served well by our engagement online – we really do need in the midst of our ‘return to church’ to ensure that we continue to serve these people.

Limiting factors (as quoted in the UnHerd blog, John McGinley of New Wine recently said that: “Lay-led churches release the church from key limiting factors. When you don’t need a building and a stipend and long, costly college-based training for every leader of the church ... then we can release new people to lead and new churches to form. It also releases the discipleship of people. In church planting, there are no passengers.” Do you agree that our clergy and church buildings are limiting factors to the growth of the Church of England?)

- The language here has been hi-jacked by various agendas. So let me be clear about what I think we DO need to do lots of things differently if we are going to bring people to faith and see a growing church in the 21st century. But that does not mean we ditch the baby and the bathwater... and it does not mean that all that we value about the Church of England should suddenly be redundant.
- Building’s, clergy and college based training are indeed expensive – but in the same way that we do need drivers on the bus, so we will continue to need stipendiary clergy as well as all the people of God playing their part.
- Let’s be honest – sometimes clergy can be a cork in the bottle – and sometimes buildings are a millstone around our necks. But one liners are never helpful when we are talking about discipleship, church growth and leadership. So lets put emotive language to one side and have a mature conversation.