

## **Election Address: General Synod 2026 – Durham Diocese**

Canon Dr Jamie Harrison

Born 1953

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General Synod Member since 1995

Chair, General Synod House of Laity since 2015

Reader/LLM, St Nicholas Durham

Emeritus Honorary Lay Canon, Durham Cathedral

Former Lay Chair, Durham Diocesan Synod; current member, Durham Bishop's Council

Nominated by Jo Cundy and Angus Goudie

It has been a great privilege to serve on General Synod since 1995 for Durham Diocese. During this period I have contributed to seeing women become bishops; supported significant national funding to come into the diocese; and more recently been on interview panels for both Dean Philip and Bishop Rick. I have been on the Archbishops' Council during difficult periods, particularly over safeguarding failures and the resignation of Archbishop Justin. At times it has been a rollercoaster, but I have tried to be faithful in responding to victims and survivors of church-based abuse, not least as a trustee of Safe Spaces, the telephone support service for victims and survivors of church-based abuse and as a member of the National Redress Project Board and the National Safeguarding Steering Group. As a trustee of the Archbishops' Council I have supported the mechanism to provide funds for survivors in urgent financial need (the Interim Support Scheme).

After eleven years as Chair of the House of Laity in the General Synod, I am now looking to return to the Synod 'back benches'. This would allow me to focus more on the local – parish, deanery, and Diocese. I would hope to keep up my contact with Easington Deanery as well as engaging in Durham Deanery as a Reader/LLM and seeking to continue on Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council. The contacts I have built up over many years in relation to national church people and structures will continue to be useful; and in continuing as a lay member of the General Synod (should I be re-elected) I would hope to keep the needs and concerns of Durham Diocese to the fore.

I am now one of the few Synod members with a long history of attending Synod and so hold the corporate memory (I have been physically present at every Synod gathering apart from zooming during Covid and needing to zoom from home when my wife Anne was unwell). I have been able to develop friendships across Synod groupings and, as House of Laity Chair, have needed to be impartial and above the fray (the Lay Chair does not chair Synod meetings

but only when the House of Laity meets, which is rare). However, the General Synod Lay Chair has notable influence and I would expect to use my understanding and contacts to the benefit of Durham Diocese.

Three major concerns remain for us as a Church and Diocese – safeguarding, sexuality, and finance (with the linked concerns over projected clergy numbers). On safeguarding, we have an excellent local team led by Beth Miller. With significant changes coming in how scrutiny and audit will function at a national level, I have great confidence in our ability to maintain high quality safeguarding here. But there is always more that can be done (I am currently on the national safeguarding committee looking at complaints, scrutiny and an ombudsman-type function) and there is no room for complacency. Survivors deserve the highest quality of response and we still have much to do (and much to repent of).

On LLF and sexuality, I have consistently said that I am seeking an outcome that honours those who hold different views; which allows difference to flourish and produces an outcome that is doable over time. I tend to a traditional view of marriage but see that others hold valid views in good conscience which differ from mine. I have been disappointed (and frustrated) that we have not made better progress through the LLF process and would want to engage in the next steps.

On finance, we have to recognise the pressures on parishes and dioceses. Faithful witness in many parts of the Diocese is under severe pressure. Looking ahead, the projections on clergy numbers are not good, given the age profile of our clergy and expected retirements without enough replacements coming in. This is a challenge to seeking new ordination candidates as well as developing lay ministers alongside. So the money may be there, but not the ordained people to carry out the tasks. I would want to be part of our solutions here.

I am now fully retired as a medical doctor, having had a varied career as a GP in Durham City, including 18 years working as a part-time doctor in HMP Frankland. I am a trustee of St John's College with Cranmer Hall in Durham University, as well as serving as trustee on the St Nicholas Durham PCC, the Durham Diocesan Board of Finance, the Archbishops' Council, and Safe Spaces England and Wales.

I remain fully committed to supporting ordained and lay ministry at every level in the Church and have much valued working alongside Archbishop Sarah over a number of years. On the General Synod, I am a member of the Evangelical Group. I remain committed to seeking racial justice and to valuing the contribution of all, not least those who in good conscience differ from me in ethical and theological ways. My deepest desire is to see the Church of England flourish, especially in the Diocese of Durham, and in the making and sustaining of disciples of Jesus Christ.