



Churches will be encouraged to offer a place of sanctuary for young people as part of efforts to combat knife crime and serious youth violence, in a key debate to be held at the General Synod next month.

The Revd Canon Dr Rosemarie Mallett, a priest in Angell Town, south London, will urge parishes to consider opening their doors after school hours as safe havens for young people in hot spot areas for serious violence.

Dr Mallett, a prominent campaigner in combating knife crime, will lead a debate at the General Synod in York calling for church leaders to be trained to support families and communities affected.

She will call for churches to take a range of practical measures - from providing knife amnesty bins to training for clergy and other leaders to protect young people potentially vulnerable to "county lines" exploitation.

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But Dr Mallett will also highlight the unique spiritual dimension churches can bring through prayer and pastoral support for communities affected.

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Speaking ahead of the debate, Dr Mallett said: "We must work with other organisations to find the best way to support young people in our parishes and our schools, and to be part of the solution" to the challenges - not only of serious youth violence but the whole issue of young people who fall through the system.

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"One way that churches can help is to provide safe havens for young people."

"This isn't necessarily about running youth clubs, in many cases this may simply be providing a place where they can go, relax and feel safe, especially during the period immediately after school hours when flashpoints can occur."

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Serious youth violence will be one of the major issues discussed at the General Synod, the national assembly of the Church of England, when it meets at York University between Friday July 5 and Tuesday July 9.

Members will also hear details of plans to provide extra money to help the Church of England dioceses fund an increase in the number of people coming forward to train for the priesthood. The move follows a 23% rise in the number of people starting training for ordained ministry in the last two years, a key step forward in the Church of England's programme of Renewal and Reform.

Other debates include a motion encouraging dioceses to help in enabling refugee doctors, teachers and other professionals to put their skills to work in the UK. Synod will be asked to adopt a Covenant on clergy care and well-being and to back moves towards a new relationship of communion between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in Great Britain.

Synod will also discuss the rise of new forms of church gatherings known as Fresh Expressions and the *Setting God's People Free* programme, aimed at helping lay people to be confident in living out their faith in homes, schools, communities and places of work.

Members will hear a presidential address from the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu and a presentation by the Mothers' Union worldwide president, Sheran Harper.

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- *Dr Mallett is Director of the Southwark Diocese Department of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. She is a member of the **Synergy Network** of churches changing communities together.*
- The Church of England's programme **Renewal and Reform** is aimed at ensuring that the Church of England once more becomes a growing church for all people in all places. One of the key aims of this is to increase the number of candidates for ordination.

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