

ARMED FORCES COVENANT PROPOSAL – DIOCESAN SYNOD (November 2025)

That Diocesan Synod approve a proposal for the Diocese of Oxford to become a signatory to the Armed Forces Covenant

BACKGROUND

In February 2015 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York signed the Armed Forces Covenant (see attached) on behalf of the Archbishops' Council. This followed overwhelming support offered by General Synod in July 2014 to the following motion.

That this Synod, believing that the commitment of those that serve in the Armed Forces demands a reciprocal obligation from the Nation to ensure that they and their families are not disadvantaged:

(a) ask dioceses to reflect on the Armed Forces Covenant and to consider signing Community Covenants, where not already signed, and Corporate Covenants, setting out how they can meet both the pastoral and spiritual needs of the Armed Forces Community, including serving personnel, regulars and reservists, and military families located in their own diocesan area;

(b) invite the Archbishops' Council to sign a Corporate Armed Forces Covenant setting out how it will provide pastoral and spiritual support for the Armed Forces Community, including serving personnel, regulars and reservists, and military families; and

(c) ask the Archbishops' Council to report to Synod in the next quinquennium on the implications of the recommendations set out in The Church and the Armed Forces Covenant (GS 1960).

Several dioceses have now signed the Covenant, most recently Rochester, Guildford and Lichfield. Over 400 Local Authorities have signed the Covenant, including many in our own diocese: [Local Authorities - Armed Forces Covenant](#).

There has been renewed impetus to signing the Covenant in the last few years, recognising the increasingly unstable international environment and the need to offer all possible support to the AF community. This was summarised in a paper to General Synod in July 2025 by the Bishop to the Forces - [GS-Misc-1428-Armed-Forces-briefing.pdf](#).

PURPOSE

At its heart, the Covenant is about the duty of care owed by society to those who put themselves in harm's way in defence of society and to their families. It honours their work and commits to supporting them where they live and work, as they transition to civilian life and in the education and wellbeing of their children.

The purpose of a diocese signing the Covenant is to offer a public declaration of our agreement with these commitments. Theologically it affirms the dignity of each Serviceman and woman whilst honouring the sacrificial nature of their work. It acknowledges the spiritual and pastoral support that is necessary and available for the military communities, including the significant gift of prayer. In signing the document alongside Armed Forces representatives, it also symbolises the important partnership between the Services and the diocese.

WHY OXFORD?

The Oxford Diocese has one of the largest Service communities in any diocese. This includes the following:

- The Defence Academy in Shrivenham, training future commanders from around the world, developing concepts and doctrine for the Armed Forces and containing the training centre for chaplains
- The Headquarters of the Royal Air Force near High Wycombe
- Training establishments: RMA Sandhurst and RAF Halton
- Barracks in Windsor, Didcot and Bicester
- RAF Benson (helicopters) and RAF Brize Norton (main transport hub for personnel departing and returning from operations)

It is not possible to give a clear figure for the number of people within the AF community in the diocese, but this would include serving personnel, civilians working at military establishments, and families. Figures from the Reserve Forces and Cadets Association for the South-East suggest also that there are 1000 Reservists, about 5000 in cadet organisations and over 70,000 veterans within the diocese. We have spouses and parents of Service personnel working within Church House.

CONTENT OF COVENANT

Please see the attached, draft document that is in line with those signed by other dioceses. It begins with a standard declaration and principles, common to each document, of the commitment of the government and people of the UK to the AF community. This reflects the principles of the Armed Forces Act 2011, that the government has a moral obligation that no member of the Services should be disadvantaged in the provision of public and commercial services; and that in some circumstances special treatment may be appropriate, especially for the injured or bereaved.

The second section, 'Demonstrating our Commitment', covers the support that our diocese would want to offer, including support for those serving (including reservist chaplains), families and schools and veterans. This section can be adjusted for local context.

WHAT NEXT?

This proposal already has the support of the Bishop's Staff. If agreed by Diocesan Synod, then we will finalise the draft document and approach a representative of the Armed Forces (or possibly from each Service) to sign the Covenant with the Diocesan Bishop and Dean, probably at Christ Church. It may also be prudent to nominate an Armed Forces Champion to act as promoter and primary point of contact.

Jonathan Chaffey

Archdeacon of Oxford



Diocese of Oxford

We commit to uphold the Armed Forces Covenant and support the Armed Forces Community. We recognise the contribution that Service personnel, both regular and reservist, veterans and military families make to our organisation, our community and to the country.

Signed on behalf of:

Either senior RAF Commander or one of each Service

Diocese of Oxford

Christ Church Cathedral

Signed:

Signed:

Signed:

Name:

Name: The Rt Revd Steven Croft

Name: The Very Revd Prof Sarah Foot

Position:

Position: Bishop of Oxford

Position: Dean of Christ Church

Date:

Date:

Date:



The Armed Forces Covenant

An Enduring Covenant Between

The People of the United Kingdom
His Majesty's Government

– and –

All those who serve or have served in the Armed Forces of the Crown

And their Families

The first duty of Government is the defence of the realm. Our Armed Forces fulfil that responsibility on behalf of the Government, sacrificing some civilian freedoms, facing danger and, sometimes, suffering serious injury or death as a result of their duty. Families also play a vital role in supporting the operational effectiveness of our Armed Forces. In return, the whole nation has a moral obligation to the members of the Naval Service, the Army and the Royal Air Force, together with their families. They deserve our respect and support, and fair treatment.

Those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most, such as the injured and the bereaved.

This obligation involves the whole of society: it includes voluntary and charitable bodies, private organisations, and the actions of individuals in supporting the Armed Forces. Recognising those who have performed military duty unites the country and demonstrates the value of their contribution. This has no greater expression than in upholding this Covenant.

Section 1: Principles of The Armed Forces Covenant

1.1 We, the **Diocese of Oxford**, will endeavour to uphold the key principles of the Armed Forces Covenant in our civic engagement and pastoral practice:

- *no member of the Armed Forces Community should face disadvantages arising from their service in the provision of public and commercial services compared to any other citizen;*
- *in some circumstances special provision may be justified, especially for those who have given the most, such as the injured or bereaved.*

Section 2: Demonstrating our Commitment

2.1 We recognise the contribution that Service personnel, reservists, veterans, the cadet movement and military families make to our organisation, our community and to the country. We will seek to uphold the principles of the Armed Forces Covenant by:

Promoting the Armed Forces:

- *promoting the fact that we are an armed forces-friendly organisation*
- *appoint an Armed Forces Champion in order to promote this Covenant*

Employment support to members of the Armed Forces Community:

- *seeking to support the employment of veterans (young and old) in our recruitment practices by advertising vacancies widely, including through the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) website and the Church of England vacancies website, called Pathway;*
- *encouraging and warmly welcoming applications from those veterans who have service-related injuries, providing they meet the essential criteria for the job;*
- *seeking to support our employees who choose to be members of the Reserve forces, seeking as far as possible to accommodate their training and deployment;*
- *seeking to support our employees who choose to be Cadet Force Adult Volunteers and accommodate as far as possible their training needs;*
- *looking favourably upon employee requests for leave and flexible working by spouses with partners on deployment, and compassionate leave for any spouse/partner;*
- *affirming the important work of Regular and Reserve military chaplaincy and facilitating the transition to and from civilian and military ministry by recognising the transferability of skills and experiences of those engaged in military chaplaincy;*
- *supporting all who engage as Officiating Chaplains to the Military, by accommodating as far as reasonably possible their duties with the military*

Education:

- *making Church schools in our Diocese aware of the particular needs of children from Service families including support for children in the admissions process*

Civic responsibilities:

- *recognising and remembering the sacrifices made by others by marking Remembrance Sunday and similar commemorative and ceremonial occasions;*
- *supporting Armed Forces charities and supporting staff who volunteer in such charities;*
- *ensuring that wherever possible our Church buildings and facilities are accessible to the Armed Forces Community, especially Veterans with disabilities*