

Chichester Diocesan Synod Motion on Appointment of Archdeacons

Background note from the Secretary General

The history and development of the office of archdeacon

1. The office of archdeacon is an ancient one, referred to by St Jerome (347-420). The duties of archdeacons have varied considerably down the centuries and the understanding of the office has evolved within the various traditions of the Church.
2. In ancient times archdeacons were deacons who had not been ordained to the presbyterate. The archdeacon was the principal deacon of a church (i.e. a diocese) and assisted the bishop in a wide range of tasks. The archdeacon was often chosen to succeed the bishop who had appointed him and would then have received the orders of priest and bishop. The practice of choosing archdeacons from the order of presbyters, rather than from the order of deacons can be dated from around the end of the first millennium. It was after that that archdeacons came to have an oversight role for fellow presbyters rather than only deacons.

Archdeacons in the Church of England

3. The functions of archdeacons in the Church of England today depend on a combination of canon law, custom and statute law. Archdeacons are the holders of a senior ecclesiastical office. Canon C 22 summarises some of the authority and functions that archdeacons have. In particular, Canon C 22.4 provides that an archdeacon '*shall see that all such as hold any ecclesiastical office within the [archdeaconry] perform their duties with diligence, and shall bring to the bishop's attention what calls for correction or merits praise.*'
4. The disciplinary aspect of the archdeacon's role is recognised in the statutory code of practice issued under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003. Proceedings may be instituted against a priest or deacon by, among others, a '*person who has a proper interest in making the complaint*'. The code of practice gives the relevant archdeacon as an example of a person who may have a proper interest for this purpose. About a quarter of all proceedings under the Measure are instituted by archdeacons.
5. The archdeacon's responsibilities in the faculty jurisdiction are also bound up with their supervisory role. The archdeacon is responsible for ensuring that incumbents comply with the requirements as to faculties. He or she also supervises the conduct and efficiency of the parochial clergy – and particularly incumbents – more generally in terms of ensuring that they comply with their obligations as to the keeping of statutory registers and performing their other legal functions. More generally, archdeacons in the Church of England have come over the centuries to be seen as senior clergy to whom incumbents can look for advice and guidance.

Some issues to be considered

6. It is clear that the role of the archdeacon has developed since the first millennium when the office was regularly held by those in deacon's orders only. In particular it has developed in such a way that archdeacons have come to exercise supervisory and disciplinary functions over presbyters. Were the law to be changed as proposed a view would need to be taken on whether these supervisory responsibilities in relation to presbyters should still be exercised.
7. It could be argued that the position of such an archdeacon would in principle be no different from that of the chancellor of the diocese or members of bishops' disciplinary tribunals who do not need

to be presbyters or indeed deacons. All of these, as lay people, exercise jurisdiction over the clergy generally. They are, however, members of a court or tribunal exercising judicial power.

8. The archdeacon, by contrast, is one of the clergy – appointed from among their number. It would, at the very least, create a new pattern of relationships if those in priest's orders were overseen by a person who was in deacon's orders only.

9. A related question is whether a deacon is ordained to oversight at all. Both the 1662 and *Common Worship* Ordinals depict the deacon as being ordained to an assisting ministry in relation to the bishop and the priest with regard to the ministry of the word and the sacraments. In the ordinal, deacons are not invested with the authority of oversight. Archdeacons, by contrast exercise an 'ordinary jurisdiction' within their archdeaconry (Canon C 22.2).

10. Recent Church of England reports on diaconal ministry – *For Such a Time as This*, (GS 1407, 2001) and 'The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church' (GS Misc 854, 2007) – while strongly affirming the distinctive role of the diaconate, do not envisage deacons exercising oversight.

11. Finally, some thought would need to be given to whether an archdeacon who was in deacon's orders only – and therefore not able to preside at the celebration of the Eucharist – would be hampered in the exercise of his or her ministry by this fact. Certainly the expectations of the role undertaken by archdeacons in parishes and cathedrals would need to change.

The legal position

12. Amending Canon C 22.1 as proposed would not in itself suffice to make it possible to appoint as archdeacon a person who was in deacon's orders only. That is because it simply reflects, in canonical form, the provision on the qualifications for the appointment of archdeacons contained in section 27 of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners Act 1840: '*No person shall hereafter be capable of receiving the appointment of ... archdeacon ... until he shall have been six years complete in holy orders and ... be in priest's orders at the time of the appointment*'

13. In order to achieve what is intended by the Chichester motion it would therefore be necessary to pass a Measure to amend the 1840 Act as well as an amending canon.

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Secretary General
June 2011

**Published by the General Synod of the Church of England
and on sale at the Church House Bookshop**

31 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BN

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£1