

**GENERAL SYNOD**  
**THE DIOCESES COMMISSION**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2015**

The Dioceses Commission is required to report annually to the General Synod. This is its eighth report.

1. The Commission consists of a Chair and Vice-Chair appointed by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York from among the members of the General Synod; four members elected by the Synod; and four members appointed by the Appointments Committee.

**Membership and Staff**

2. The membership and staff of the Commission are as follows:

Chair: Canon Prof. Michael Clarke (Worcester)

Vice-Chair: The Revd Paul Benfield

Elected Members: The Revd Canon Jonathan Alderton-Ford (St Eds & Ips)  
The Revd Canon Geoffrey Harbord (Sheffield) [from March 2015]  
Mr Robert Hammond (Chelmsford)  
Mr Keith Malcouronne (Guildford) [to October 2015]

Appointed Members: The Rt Revd Christopher Foster, Bishop of Portsmouth  
Mrs Lucinda Herklots  
The Rt Revd Dame Sarah Mullally, Bishop of Crediton  
Canon Prof. Hilary Russell

Secretary: Mr Jonathan Neil-Smith

3. Mr Keith Malcouronne had served as a Synod-elected member of the Commission from April 2011. The Commission wishes to place on record its gratitude to him for his valued contribution over the past four years. The Revd Paul Benfield's appointment by the Archbishops as the new Vice-Chair of the Commission in November 2014 created a casual vacancy amongst Synod elected members of the Commission which was filled from March 2015 by the Revd Canon Geoffrey Harbord.
4. Mrs Diane Griffiths stood down as Assistant Secretary to the Commission at the end of 2014. The Commission is grateful to Diane for her assistance.

**Duties and Powers of the Commission**

5. The Commission's duties and powers, laid down by the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure 2007, are summarized in paras 7-13 of its 2008 Annual Report (GS Misc 920), which is available, with other information about the Commission and its work, in the Commission's area of the Church of England web site: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/dioceses-commission.aspx>

## **The Diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales**

6. Following the historic creation of the new Diocese of Leeds (West Yorkshire and the Dales) in 2014, the Commission continued to watch developments there with interest, though it was very conscious that it was those on the ground who were engaged directly in realising the mission benefits of the new diocesan structure. One of the final formal changes was the agreement by the Privy Council on 19 March 2015 to change the names of the suffragan sees of Knaresborough and Pontefract to Ripon and Wakefield respectively.
7. In April 2015 the Commission responded to a request from the Bishop of Leeds, supported by his Bishop's Council, for more transitional episcopal support in the Leeds Episcopal Area by agreeing to a proposal to revive the dormant suffragan see of Richmond for this purpose. The Ven Paul Slater (formerly Archdeacon of Richmond and Craven) was subsequently appointed, and duly consecrated in Ripon Cathedral in July. This appointment provided much needed additional capacity within the senior team of the new diocese and enabled the Bishop of Leeds to give more time to the strategic leadership of the diocese as a whole.

## **Visits to dioceses and bishops' regional groups**

8. As part of its ongoing dialogue with bishops and dioceses, representatives of the Commission also made the following visits during the year:
  - The Bishop of Leeds (March);
  - The Assistant Bishop of Newcastle (March);
  - The Bishop of Guildford (June);
  - The East Midlands Regional Bishops' Meeting (September);
  - The Diocese of Leicester (September);
  - The Dioceses of Ely and Peterborough (October);
  - The Bishop of Chichester (October);
  - The Diocese of Truro (December).

## **Episcopal Oversight**

9. The Commission continued to take its statutory responsibilities for episcopal oversight seriously. It followed up its October 2014 symposium on this subject at Lambeth Palace by reflecting further on this, in the context of its role as the only central body to review bids from diocesan bishops to fill vacant suffragan sees. The Commission is particularly concerned that any proposal to fill such a see should be rooted in the diocese's mission strategy, cohere with the roles of others in the diocesan senior leadership team, and include roles that are inherently episcopal. In some instances submissions have not always been sufficiently clear in these respects and have had to be re-submitted before the Commission has felt itself in a position to approve the filling of a post.
10. Official guidance on the filling of suffragan sees is available on the Commission's web pages at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1122421/suffrag.pdf>

The Commission will be undertaking further work in this area in 2016 with a view to issuing fresh advice taking account of insights gained from its recent Symposium and its overview of submissions from diocesan bishops.

## Suffragan Sees

11. In exercising its responsibilities under section 17 of the Dioceses and Pastoral Mission Measure 2007, the Commission carefully considered, and agreed to, submissions for the filling of the following sees:
  - Dorking (in the Diocese of Guildford)
  - Islington (in the Diocese of London)
  - Kensington (in the Diocese of London)
  - Repton (in the Diocese of Derby)
  - Richmond (in the Diocese of West Yorkshire & the Dales)
  - Sherborne (in the Diocese of Salisbury)
  - Tonbridge (in the Diocese of Rochester)
12. Mention has already been made of the decision to revive the dormant see of Richmond (see para 7). Another such dormant see was that of Islington (vacant since 1923). In this instance the proposal to fill it was rooted in the Diocese of London's *Capital Vision* strategic aim to establish 100 new worshipping communities by 2020. In his submission the Bishop of London – with the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury – made it clear that additional episcopal capacity was needed to help bring this about. The person appointed would also be available as a resource to advise, develop and plant new ecclesial communities across the Church of England by invitation of the relevant diocesan bishop. The Commission recognised the part this post would play in the current drive for church growth underlying the *Renewal and Reform* programme but, in approving the filling of the see, indicated that it would review how this innovatory post had developed in 5 years' time.
13. Research in the Legal Office uncovered details of hitherto unknown suffragan sees which had never been filled. Details of these are available at on the Commission's web pages at:  
<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2252539/dormant%20sees%20-23-6-15.docx>
14. The process for filling any of these sees, as they have legally been created, is the same as that for filling any other vacant sees.

## Provincial boundaries

15. The Dioceses Commission is responsible for keeping both the provincial and the diocesan structure of the Church of England under review. With the encouragement of the both Archbishops, the Commission took a proposal to the House of Bishops in May to even up the distribution of dioceses between the Provinces of Canterbury and York (from 30:12 to 21:21 following a Severn / Wash axis). The main impact was considered to be upon the workload of the Archbishops and their staff and the House considered that this could be addressed in other ways. The Commission's proposal will not therefore be pursued.

[On behalf of the Commission]

MICHAEL CLARKE  
Chair

18 December 2015