

GENERAL SYNOD

INTERIM REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE CROWN NOMINATIONS COMMISSION

1. Members will recall that in 2016 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York established a small group of theologians to reflect and report on the operations of the CNC, to present its report to General Synod during 2018. The Group's membership is: The Revd Professor Sarah Coakley (University of Cambridge); Professor Tom Greggs (University of Aberdeen, from the Methodist Church); The Most Reverend Josiah Idowu-Fearon (Secretary General of the Anglican Communion); The Revd Professor Morwenna Ludlow (University of Exeter); The Revd Professor Oliver O'Donovan FBA (chair, Emeritus, University of Edinburgh); Father Thomas Seville CR (Faith and Order Commission); The Revd Dr Jennifer Strawbridge (University of Oxford); The Revd Dr. James Walters (London School of Economics).
2. The Terms of Reference of the Group are:
 - To provide the members of the Commission (central and diocesan) with a theological framework within which to discharge their responsibilities as they nominate bishops;
 - To enable the Commission to understand the nomination of diocesan bishops within the context of the wider church of God, in particular: the national responsibilities; the role of the Church of England within the Anglican Communion; and the wider Church catholic;
 - To enable the Commission to understand the nomination of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York within the same context;
 - To articulate any particular responsibilities of the Archbishops in relation to shaping the nature of the episcopate and the leadership of the Church; and
 - To draw out the merits and disadvantages of the different ways of choosing bishops within the Anglican Communion.
3. The group has now completed its consultations, and would like to thank members of Synod who gave it assistance. In the light of the fact that the Houses of Clergy and Laity will be electing the central members for 2017–2022 over the summer, the Archbishops have requested that some early reflections on the task of the CNC and the role of central members should be shared with Synod in July.
4. For all dioceses except Canterbury, York and Europe the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) is constituted of the two Archbishops (the Metropolitan in the chair), six members elected for the occasion from the diocese and six members (three clerical, three lay) elected by the respective Houses of Synod for a five-year period. Their task is to nominate two candidates appropriate for appointment as bishop of the diocese; in normal circumstances the one they have indicated as preferred will be appointed. The purpose of this presentation is not to anticipate everything that report may contain, but to highlight themes directly relating to the election of the six central members of the CNC by the Synod.
5. To reach a nomination an act of *discernment* is necessary. "Discern" in the English Bible (where it translates two different Greek verbs) may mean the distinguishing of things that are not easy to distinguish, especially spiritual and moral alternatives, it may mean "examining" and it may mean "approving". It is often used of courses of action: "what is pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10), "what is the will of God" (Rom. 12:2), and of appointments to positions of responsibility (1 Cor. 16:3, 2 Cor. 8:22, 1 Thess. 2:4, 1Tim. 3:10). In all these applications what is in question is a kind of insight, enabled by a gift of the Holy Spirit.

6. Discerning is quite different from expressing a preference. Preferences are predispositions we bring with us; discernments are things we start out *not* having, and have to reach, as we come to recognise a direction in which God is leading. Discernment involves a step of faith, and has a prophetic quality. Once the church's needs, the candidates' qualifications and potential have all been weighed up, it takes a further step to anticipate God's provision of someone to give this particular leadership at this particular time. In discernment one cannot know the end from the beginning. Pre-judgments are only starting-points, from which an exploration has to go forward, allowing what is yet to unfold to be unfolded. For CNC members this crystallises into one clear rule: to hold their mind open to the possibility of finding a bishop they had never heard or thought of.
7. The discernment the CNC has to reach is not who is eligible *in principle* for episcopal consecration. That is determined by church law and doctrine. It is who *in particular* God will call to be a bishop at this time and in this place. But it must take its bearings from how God does work and has worked. Understanding and discrimination are the preparation for discernment - understanding of the principles of God's working, discrimination of the particular situation and people involved: profiles of candidates, of diocesan and central church needs, of the role of episcopacy in the ministry of God's grace in the Gospel, of the qualifications for a bishop on a careful reading of the New Testament and the Ordinal.
8. This discernment has to be made by a body which effectively *represents* the church as a whole. Representation is a form of service to others, in the image of Christ our Representative. A representative is not simply a typical instance of a class, but one who *is a voice for* that class. This service requires virtues both of loyalty and of imaginative flexibility. Good representatives are advocates, capable of setting a distinct point of view within the wider life of the church, parochial, diocesan and central, communicators who can command the trust of those whose point of view they present and the respect of those who do not share it. They are articulate, but rarely noisy; they are capable of expressing others' confused ideas clearly; they are capable of cooperation in forging a variety of views into a common mind. The complicated rules of election of CNC members intend to ensure that the CNC as a whole will represent the church, with lay voices and clerical voices, central perspectives and local perspectives, guided by broader consultations conducted by the Secretaries in the diocese. That balance has to be found afresh in each CNC, and those who serve on it need to appreciate its importance and sustain it - at the cost, sometimes, of urging their own point of view.
9. Because the central members serve for a term, they play a crucial part in giving continuity and stability to the working of the CNC. As well as sitting on Commissions for particular vacancies they meet with the Archbishops from time to time to discuss matters of process and wider context. They are involved in large expenditures of time, often at great cost. They need to be capable of relating cooperatively with one another, transcending the differences of viewpoint that they bring and seeking a pattern of appointments that will reflect the authentic character of the Church of England and yield an effective and coherent episcopate. It is a demanding role, and our impression is that the Church has received some outstanding service in it. Central members acquire considerable experience and knowledge of the personalities and undertakings of the Church of England. To diocesan members they can appear formidable, the "insiders" who have mastered a complicated world. It is important that they should be capable of exercising their role discreetly and with restraint.
10. Representation is a function that assumes many forms, and the church, with its manifold gifts of the Spirit, is difficult to represent adequately by a *pro forma* measure based on identifiable constituencies. CNC members elected by the Synod tend to be broadly identified with the main permanent groupings of synodical opinion, and this is reinforced by a convention that a central member who is unable to take part in any given proceedings is

replaced by a substitute drawn from the same synodical group. The central membership thus expresses the dynamics of the synod, which is a different thing from representing the church as a whole. The representative character of the CNC needs to be broadly conceived, with many aspects of the church's life finding a voice within it. Members need to be people who resonate not only with the business of Synod, but with a wide range of experiences and contributions that give colour to the life of the church, including those of racial minority communities, of specialist services, of theological wisdom, etc.

11. One of the advantages of nomination through a small delegated body is that it allows reflection and discussion to proceed *in confidence*, allowing free communication to take place within clearly marked boundaries. In the Greek of the New Testament "trust" and "faith" are one and the same concept, *pistis*. In English "confidentiality" is about having "confidence" in one another (from the Latin *fides*, "faith"). The trusting relation in which Christians stand to one another is an expression of the faith each has in Christ; believers are formed into a community of mutual trust by their faith in Christ.
12. Candidates entrust information about themselves to the CNC and its staff in the confidence that it will be used for that purpose only, and not passed on. But if candidates are to have that trust in the CNC, members of the CNC must have it in one another. Members, too, trust one another with knowledge of themselves, of their judgments of the candidates, of their hopes and fears for the church and their strategies in serving it. It is a context in which discretion in dealings with the outside world must be matched with candour towards those who participate in the process, and a high level of mutual trust is a condition for its moral success. Those who are capable of sustaining the tensions of this well are likely to be few and need to be chosen carefully.

Professor Oliver O'Donovan
on behalf of the CNC Review Group