

**REVIEW OF NOMINATION
TO THE SEE OF SHEFFIELD
AND RELATED CONCERNS**

Report by the Independent Reviewer

Contents

PART 1: PRELIMINARIES..... 4

- a) Introduction..... 4
- b) The Nature of the Independent Reviewer’s Role and of this Review 4

PART 2: THE 2014 SETTLEMENT AND THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS’ DECLARATION ON THE MINISTRY OF BISHOPS AND PRIESTS 7

- a) The 2014 Settlement 7
- b) The Five Guiding Principles..... 8
- c) ‘Mutual Flourishing’ 9

PART 3: NARRATIVE OF EVENTS 10

- a) The Diocese of Sheffield and the Implementation of the 2014 Settlement 10
- b) “New Norms, New Beginning” 11
- c) Bishop Croft’s Departure and the Vacancy in See Committee..... 13
- d) The Crown Nominations Commission (CNC)..... 17
- e) Bishop North’s Reaction to his Nomination and the Preparations for its Announcement..... 21
- f) The Announcement of Bishop North’s Nomination and Subsequent Events 22
- g) The Doncaster Minster Meeting 24
- h) Opposition Grows..... 25
- i) Professor Percy’s Intervention 27
- j) The Effect of Professor Percy’s Intervention..... 32
- k) Bishop North’s Withdrawal and its Aftermath..... 35

PART 4: ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES..... 38

- Point (a) What has been done in the Church, including in the Diocese of Sheffield, to inform and educate clergy and laity about the Settlement agreed in 2014, and the effect of the Declaration within that Settlement? 38
- Point (b) The process leading to the nomination of Bishop Philip North to the See of Sheffield..... 42
- Point (c) The consistency of Bishop North’s nomination with the House of Bishops’ Declaration .. 47
- The Critique offered by Professor Percy and Others 49
- Two Preliminary Points: 51
 - (1) What exactly does Bishop North believe about Women’s Ordination?..... 51
 - (2) Professor Percy and the Views of The Society and Forward in Faith..... 52

Some Reflections:.....	54
(1) The History of the Church of England’s Engagement with this Issue	54
(2) The Nature of the House of Bishops’ Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles.....	56
(3) The Bishop as “A Focus of Unity”	57
(4) Mutual Flourishing	59
Point (d) The Reactions to Bishop North’s Nomination in the Church and Beyond it	62
Point (e) The Response of the Institutional Church to the Nomination of Bishop North and to the Reactions to it.....	65
PART 5: SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	68
Point (a) What has been done in the Church, including in the Diocese of Sheffield, to inform and educate clergy and laity about the Settlement agreed in 2014, and the effect of the House of Bishops’ Declaration within that Settlement?	68
Recommendation 1	68
Point (b) The process leading to the nomination of Bishop Philip North to the See of Sheffield.....	69
Recommendation 2	69
Point (c) The consistency of Bishop North’s nomination with the House of Bishops’ Declaration ..	69
Recommendation 3	70
Point (d) The reactions to Bishop North’s nomination in the Church and beyond it.....	70
Point (e) The response of the institutional Church to the nomination of Bishop North and to the reactions to it	70
Recommendation 4	71
PART 6: CONCLUSION	72
LIST OF APPENDICES	74

PART 1: PRELIMINARIES

a) Introduction

1. In their letter of 23 March 2017, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York asked me, in my capacity as Independent Reviewer under the Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests (Resolution of Disputes Procedure) Regulations 2014 (hereafter, “the Regulations”) to address certain concerns that had arisen in the Church about events surrounding the nomination, and subsequent withdrawal, of Bishop Philip North as diocesan bishop of Sheffield. In their letter (reproduced at Appendix 1) the Archbishops identified five such areas of concern, viz:

- (a) *what has been done in the Church, including in the diocese of Sheffield, to inform and educate clergy and laity about the settlement agreed in 2014, and the effect of the Declaration within that settlement;*
- (b) *the process leading to the nomination of Bishop Philip North to the See of Sheffield;*
- (c) *the consistency of that nomination with the Declaration;*
- (d) *the reactions to that nomination in the Church and beyond; and*
- (e) *the response of the institutional Church to the nomination and to the reactions to it.*

They concluded by asking me to exercise my power under Regulation 27 of the 2014 Regulations to consider and report on the operation of the House of Bishops’ Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests in relation to each of these five areas.

2. I had separately received a letter dated 13 February 2017 from Women and the Church (WATCH) asking me to examine one aspect of the nomination process in respect of the Sheffield vacancy, i.e. whether the Archbishops’ and the Prime Minister’s Appointments Secretaries had made clear the guidance in paragraph 12 of the House of Bishops’ Declaration to the Vacancy in See Committee and others in Sheffield consulted as part of the process leading up to Bishop North’s nomination. A copy of the letter from WATCH is at Appendix 2. In the light of both of these letters I had no doubt that I should accede to the Archbishops’ request and I so informed them on 24 March.

b) The Nature of the Independent Reviewer’s Role and of this Review

3. Before I embark on an account of the events which led to these two approaches and my analysis and conclusions about their implications for the House of Bishops’ Declaration and the Church, it may be helpful if I clarify the nature of my role as Independent Reviewer and the approach I have adopted to the conduct of this review. I do so in order in part to respond to some anxieties about the role which were expressed to me in the course of my review.

4. The function of the Independent Reviewer is to consider grievances brought by a PCC under Regulations 8-15 or, under Regulation 27, wider concerns brought by any person relating to any aspect of the operation of the House of Bishops' Declaration. Regulation 27 is cast in very wide terms. Although the discretion Regulation 28 gives the Independent Reviewer as to whether to enquire into a concern is one to be used sparingly, I am clear that, once exercised, it is appropriate for the Independent Reviewer to examine all matters pertinent to the way in which the Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles it embodies were applied in a particular situation. I have therefore adopted a broader rather than a narrower approach to my review, in the belief that anything less would fail to be of service to the Church.
5. A (very) few of those I met in the course of the review asked whether I was truly able to act independently in conducting it. I was able to assure them that:
 - (a) Regulation 7 requires me to act impartially and fairly in carrying out my duties, having regard to the Five Guiding Principles referred to in paragraph 5 of the House of Bishops' Declaration.
 - (b) Apart from the reimbursement of a few modest expenses, I have received no recompense from the Church for my role.

Whether or not I have succeeded in fulfilling the requirements of Regulation 7 is for the readers of this report to judge.

6. As regards the manner in which I have conducted this review, I have followed the approach set out in the Guidance Notes on the operation of the Resolution of Disputes Procedure which I published in December 2015, with one important exception. Normally I would expect to publish the agreed record of all the meetings and conversations I have conducted in the course of a review. In this case, however, people – not just Bishop Philip North but the members of the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) which considered the Sheffield vacancy and many others in the diocese of Sheffield and beyond it – are at the heart of the events I have been asked to examine. Some of those concerned have been happy to write or speak to me on the record. However, many others involved in those events have felt understandably nervous about speaking frankly to me of their actions and their concerns except on a confidential basis.
7. I have felt it more important to get at the full facts of what occurred than to cavil over giving them an assurance of confidentiality. Moreover, to append to this report some of the evidence I received from individuals - in particular from some of those involved in the work of the CNC and in the diocese of Sheffield - but not the evidence from others (by far the majority) who asked that it remain confidential, would not give a balanced picture. I have therefore decided not to append any of the detailed submissions I received or notes of the many conversations I have had with individuals involved in the work of the CNC or in the diocese of Sheffield. If any of those

concerned wish to publish their own submissions to me, that is a matter for them. The assurance I can give all those who read this report is that every fact stated in it is based firmly on the evidence I have received. In particular, those factual sections of the report dealing with individuals prominent in this story (Part 3) have been checked with those concerned.

8. Altogether in the course of my review I have heard directly from 76 different people in 40 different meetings in Sheffield, York, Oxford and London. In addition I have received 48 letters and other forms of written submission. A description of the conduct of the review and a list of all those who have given me oral or written evidence is at Appendix 3. I am grateful to them and to all those who have assisted in making practical arrangements for me to conduct my enquiries, not least the Bishop of Doncaster and his senior colleagues, and Mr Jonathan Neil-Smith and Ms Sue Moore of the Central Secretariat at Church House, Westminster, who have offered me exemplary assistance throughout.
9. The responsibility for the conduct of the review and for this report is, however, entirely my own. I begin it with a brief account of the development of the “settlement” which in 2014 cleared the way for women priests in the Church of England to be consecrated as bishops. This is followed by a largely chronological account – based on the evidence I have received and reflecting the differing perspectives of those involved – of the events which I have been asked to examine. I then turn to analyse the issues raised by those events and the conclusions and lessons to be derived from what happened, before giving my recommendations.

PART 2: THE 2014 SETTLEMENT AND THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS' DECLARATION ON THE MINISTRY OF BISHOPS AND PRIESTS

a) The 2014 Settlement

10. The debate in the Church of England about the ordination of women to the priesthood and their consecration as bishops has been running for many decades. As long ago as 1975 the General Synod passed a motion saying that it could see no fundamental objections to such a development. When, after many years of debate in the General Synod, Parliament passed in 1993 the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure, the Synod passed the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod 1993 in order to provide for the possibility of extended episcopal oversight for those who, on grounds of theological conviction, could not accept the Church's decision. The idea that provision should be made for those who – whether from a traditional catholic or a conservative evangelical perspective – found themselves in the minority on this issue is therefore not new.
11. The failure in 2012 of the initial attempt to pass legislation in the Synod enabling women to be consecrated as bishops in the Church of England led to a substantial re-think about how such provision was to be made. The wish of the majority (supported by many in Parliament) to see the necessary legislation passed was clear. The key issue for those in the minority was whether their position would continue to be recognised and honoured in the Church.
12. The shape of the eventual settlement was hammered out in a series of facilitated conversations which began in early 2013 and was subsequently refined by the work done in an extended initial Revision Committee of the whole Synod. The 'settlement' contained two key elements:
 - A simple 'one clause' Measure putting beyond doubt the ability of the Church to consecrate women as bishops.
 - A more complex set of arrangements setting out how those of differing views on the matter would relate to each other once the Measure had been passed.

These latter arrangements also had two main elements:

- A Declaration by the House of Bishops on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests. This embodied five Guiding Principles, which the House had first commended to the Synod in May 2013 when submitting legislative proposals for the consecration of women to the episcopate and which the Synod had welcomed in a resolution carried on 20 November 2013. The bulk of the Declaration went on to describe arrangements for applying those principles in practice.
- The passage of an Amending Canon (No.33) requiring the House of Bishops to make Regulations prescribing a procedure for the resolution of disputes arising from the arrangements for which the House of Bishops' Declaration made provision. The Amending Canon was given Final Approval by the Synod on 14 July

2014 and the Regulations – the Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests (Resolution of Disputes Procedure) Regulations – were made by the House of Bishops in November 2014.

b) The Five Guiding Principles

13. The Five Guiding Principles are at the heart of the 2014 Settlement and differences over their interpretation are central to the concerns which have arisen as a result of Bishop North's nomination to the See of Sheffield. I detail and examine those differences later in my report. For the moment, it will suffice to lay out the principles and the key points the House of Bishops underlined when articulating them. The Five Guiding Principles are:

- 1 *“Now that legislation has been passed to enable women to become bishops the Church of England is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender, and holds that those whom it has duly ordained and appointed to office are the true and lawful holders of the office which they occupy and thus deserve due respect and canonical obedience;*
- 2 *“Anyone who ministers within the Church of England must be prepared to acknowledge that the Church of England has reached a clear decision on the matter;*
- 3 *“Since it continues to share the historic episcopate with other Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and those provinces of the Anglican Communion which continue to ordain only men as priests or bishops, the Church of England acknowledges that its own clear decision on ministry and gender is set within a broader process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God;*
- 4 *“Since those within the Church of England who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion, the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures; and*
- 5 *“Pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority within the Church of England will be made without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England.”*

14. In introducing the Five Guiding Principles, paragraph 5 of the House of Bishops' Declaration notes that:

“They need to be read one with the other and held together in tension, rather than being applied selectively”.

15. The House also recorded in paragraph 6 of the Declaration that it believed that the outworking of these principles *“needs to be accompanied by simplicity, reciprocity and mutuality”*. In paragraphs 7-15, the House went on to give examples of what these

subsidiary principles would mean in practice. The full text of this part of the Declaration is reproduced at Appendix 4.

16. The first and fifth of the Five Guiding Principles and paragraphs 11-13 of the Declaration are particularly relevant to the question the Archbishops have referred to me as to whether or not the nomination of Bishop North was consistent with the House of Bishops' Declaration. My finding on that point, along with a discussion of the different arguments put to me about it, is set out later in this report. At this stage, I simply wish to make these observations.
 - (a) The 2014 Settlement was the conclusion of a legal and political process. It was not the conclusion of a theological debate, as indeed the many differing theological and ecclesiological points raised in the course of my enquiry testify.
 - (b) It was a package, the various different elements in which were critical to securing the 'settlement'. Try to unpick the package and the basis for the settlement is immediately called into question.
 - (c) The critical contribution which the House of Bishops' Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles made to the Settlement was that they attempted to answer the question how those of differing views on the issue of women's ordination could continue to live together for the sake of the Gospel. At heart, they are about relationship, about how relationships (and with and through them, mutual trust) can be sustained in the face of fundamental differences of theological understanding on the issue.

c) 'Mutual Flourishing'

17. One concept contained in the Five Guiding Principles and the House of Bishops' Declaration which is central to the issues I have been asked to examine is that of "mutual flourishing". This is embodied in the fifth Guiding Principle, which speaks of pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority within the Church of England being made *"without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England"*.

18. Paragraph 14 of the Declaration makes clear that if mutual flourishing is to be achieved, it is not simply a matter of what provision is made for the minority but that a positive, active commitment is required of all concerned, both those in the majority and those in the minority:

"Mutuality ... means that those of differing conviction will be committed to making it possible for each other to flourish".

This concept of mutual flourishing, and the different understandings people had of it, is central to the events which unfolded in the diocese of Sheffield and to those I now turn.

PART 3: NARRATIVE OF EVENTS

a) The Diocese of Sheffield and the Implementation of the 2014 Settlement

19. I begin this section of my report with a brief portrait of the diocese of Sheffield before describing what the diocese had done to inform and educate its clergy and laity about the 2014 Settlement.
20. The diocese of Sheffield extends across the whole of South Yorkshire from the Peak District and Penistone north of the Woodhead Pass, across to North Lincolnshire and Goole in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and from the edge of Barnsley in the north to the borders of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire in the south. The diocesan bishop is supported by one suffragan (the Bishop of Doncaster) and two archdeacons (of Doncaster and Sheffield). The diocese is home to 1.27 million people who are served by 128 stipendiary clergy, 27 self-supporting ministers and 203 lay Readers, in addition to a number of retired clergy. Of the ordained clergy who are not retired, 51 (27 %) are women.
21. South Yorkshire has a strong sense of community and local pride. Although regular attendance at church as a percentage of the population is low (1.4%), there was a small increase in average weekly attendance in 2014-15. There is a strong desire for the diocesan bishop to be a visible figure in the county, playing a full part in local civic leadership and acting as a spokesperson for the region in the House of Lords and elsewhere.
22. There are some marked contrasts in churchmanship in the diocese. In the eastern part of the diocese there are a number of anglo-catholic parishes which look to the Bishop of Beverley for episcopal oversight. By contrast, in and around Sheffield, there is a smaller number of large conservative evangelical parishes which look to the Bishop of Maidstone. In Sheffield itself there are also some large parishes of an open evangelical or liberal catholic tradition. In all of these can be found strong lay as well as clerical voices.
23. In total 29 PCCs have passed the Resolution prescribed by paragraph 20 of the House of Bishops' Declaration requesting, on grounds of theological conviction, that arrangements be made for them in accordance with the Declaration. Of these 4 are conservative evangelical and 25 are traditional catholic. (In addition, Sheffield contains two congregations planted by Christ Church Fulwood, a large conservative evangelical Anglican parish church. One of these is openly affiliated to the Anglican Mission in England.)
24. The history surrounding the reception of the ordained ministry of women in the diocese of Sheffield has been very difficult. This began in the 1990s, if not before, with the debate on the ordination of women as priests. Following the passage of the 1993 Measure the then Bishop of Sheffield, the Rt Revd David Lunn, changed his view on the matter from one of opposition to one of acceptance. For the ordained women in the

diocese, this was an unexpected affirmation. For the traditional anglo-catholic parishes and the growing conservative evangelical presence, it meant a dislocation in their relationship with the diocese. The traditional anglo-catholic clergy formed a separate, non-geographical deanery – the Hickleton Chapter.

25. During my visit to the diocese, I was repeatedly told of a “*disastrous*” diocesan conference held in 2002 under Bishop Lunn’s successor, Bishop Jack Nicholls. Whatever the truth or otherwise of this description of the conference, this perception of it is clearly ingrained. The debates in the Diocesan Synod about the (failed) 2012 Measure and the 2014 Settlement were equally contentious. In the first, the resolution in favour of the Measure was passed by a single vote in the House of Clergy and according to some who spoke to me would have failed had it not been for the absence through ill health of a member who was a conservative evangelical priest. In the second, opposition remained substantial and some of the debate was particularly contentious, the voting figures being as follows:

	Bishops		Clergy			Laity		
	For	Against	For	Against	Abstentions	For	Against	Abstentions
2012	1	0	13	12	5	23	16	1
2014	2	0	24	8	1	29	8	0

26. The key point is that against this fractured background, neither those in the minority nor those in the majority (notably ordained women themselves) felt confidently affirmed in their ministry.

b) “New Norms, New Beginning”

27. This difficult and divided situation had not gone unaddressed by Bishop Steven Croft, the diocesan bishop of Sheffield from 2009-16. On the contrary, he and his senior colleagues had devoted considerable effort to seeking to heal divisions on the issue within the diocese. For example, first, he had appointed the Bishop of Beverley and the Bishop of Maidstone as Assistant Bishops in the diocese, to reflect and honour the place of traditional catholics and conservative evangelicals respectively within the wider diocese. Secondly, he had reached out to the large conservative evangelical parishes in the city of Sheffield. Thirdly, after receiving in January 2016 a petition from two traditional catholic deacons seeking a separate ordination by the Bishop of Beverley, Bishop Steven had decided to reshape the ordinations in order to agree to the petition. Whilst these and other actions helped to assure both traditional catholics and conservative evangelicals of their continued place within the diocese, however, they stretched the forbearance of women clergy and their supporters in the diocese to its limit.

28. Perhaps most significantly, following the passage of the Measure enabling the consecration of women bishops and a presidential address he gave at the Sheffield Diocesan Synod on 19 July 2014, Bishop Croft established in the autumn of 2014 a working group led by a retired bishop living in the diocese with wide ecumenical experience, Bishop David Hawtin, to explore how the Five Guiding Principles should be lived out within the diocese of Sheffield. The Ministry Provision Advisory Group, with a carefully balanced membership, proceeded energetically and meticulously about its task. Between October 2014 and March 2015, it met eleven times and conducted three diocesan-wide consultation evenings with, respectively traditional catholics, conservative evangelicals and ordained women in the diocese.
29. The group presented its report (a copy of which can be found on the diocesan website¹) to the Bishop's Council on 23 June 2015. In July 2015 (after it had been checked by the General Synod's Legal Adviser for factual and legal accuracy), it was debated by the Diocesan Synod and on 22 July, Bishop Croft sent out an Ad Clerum attaching the report and requesting that all PCCs and deaneries discuss it. He also stated his intention to implement the recommendations in the report.
30. Those recommendations need to be read in full and in the context of the Group's report. In brief, they recommended continued study and promotion in all parishes of the Five Guiding Principles and the House of Bishops' Declaration as well as a number of practical steps to encourage not only understanding of them but their living out by all sections of the Church. They addressed directly the need for all parts of the Church to internalise norms of behaviour which would promote the mutual flourishing of all in the Church which had been called for by the House of Bishops in its Declaration and offered, amongst other things, a "mutual flourishing declaration", which they urged should be promoted in and through the Bishop's Council. The part of the Group's report which addressed mutual flourishing, which includes the text of that declaration, is reproduced at Appendix 5 of this report.
31. There is no doubt of the considerable effort which, under the guidance of Bishop Steven and his senior colleagues, Bishop Hawtin and the group put into their task. Indeed, when Bishop Steven spoke to colleagues in the House of Bishops about "New Norms, New Beginning", several asked for a copy to inform their own thinking. Bishop Hawtin wrote a letter "Accompanying New Norms, New Beginning" for Bishop Croft to send out with the report to interested bishops. Indaba conversations were piloted and offered to deaneries; a successful clergy conference was held in 2015; and archdeacons' visitations in 2016 were used to review progress.
32. However, substantial evidence was presented to me which indicated that, whilst all deaneries and PCCs were aware of the report, many parishes did not address the issues in it, let alone absorb the implications of the Five Guiding Principles. Some

¹ http://www.sheffield.anglican.org/UserFiles/File//New_Norms_New_Beginning_FINAL_.pdf

women clergy and some who support their ministry felt that the discussion in the diocese had been focussed on those who could not on theological grounds accept the priestly or episcopal ministry of women and that the voice of ordained women needed to be encouraged and heard, a view also expressed later to the Appointments Secretaries during the vacancy in the See. Those parishes which did address the report tended, it was claimed, to be from the minority who were unable to accept women's ministry. Bishop Hawtin himself saw the process initiated by his group's report as a five year educational programme. Although this had begun under Bishop Croft's leadership, Bishop Croft's departure led, according to some, to a weakening of the pace. The experience of the Hawtin group's report proved yet again how difficult it is, despite the best of intentions, to move attitudes and behaviour, especially within a dispersed organisational structure like that of a Church of England diocese.

c) Bishop Croft's Departure and the Vacancy in See Committee

33. On 12 April 2016, 10 Downing Street announced that Bishop Croft was to become the Bishop of Oxford.² The diocese of Sheffield immediately issued a note, which was made widely available, setting out the steps which would follow. Once Bishop Steven had vacated the See, the Bishop of Doncaster would act as Diocesan until the new bishop was appointed. The Vacancy in See Committee, previously elected by the Diocesan Synod, would put together a "Statement of Needs" for the diocese and its thoughts on the qualities needed in the next bishop of Sheffield. This and the result of consultations undertaken by the two Appointments Secretaries would be made available to the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC). The Vacancy in See Committee would also elect six members to join six others elected by the General Synod and the two Archbishops in forming the voting membership of the Commission which would discern which two names to nominate to the Prime Minister for The Queen's approval.
34. The Vacancy in See Committee, chaired by the Bishop of Doncaster, held its first meeting on 15 June 2016. It elected a drafting group, led by the Revd Canon Mark Cockayne, to prepare the Statement of Needs. The group – whose membership included those of all strands of churchmanship – was not permitted to start work until the vacancy in the See was formally created by Bishop Croft's confirmation of election as the Bishop of Oxford on 6 July. As the second meeting of the Vacancy in See Committee had been arranged for 30 August, the drafting group had to do its work quickly. Nevertheless the statement it produced was praised by the overwhelming majority of those from the diocese to whom I spoke as presenting an accurate account of the diocese's needs. The text of the Statement of Needs can be found on the diocesan website³.

² To assist them to follow the subsequent sequence of events, readers of this report can find a summary timeline at Appendix 6.

³ [http://www.sheffield.anglican.org/UserFiles/File/Vacancy_in_See_2016/Statement%20of%20Needs%2012916%20\[web-reduced\].pdf](http://www.sheffield.anglican.org/UserFiles/File/Vacancy_in_See_2016/Statement%20of%20Needs%2012916%20[web-reduced].pdf)

35. The Statement included a number of references to the importance of the next bishop being able to be a focus of unity in the diocese. For example, on page 2 it said that the next bishop of Sheffield would need to be:

“a focal point of unity in the Body of Christ enabling mutual flourishing amongst the different Anglican traditions in the diocese”.

Section 1.4 dealt directly with the issue of mutual flourishing. I quote it in full:

“The Diocese of Sheffield is a rich and diverse tapestry of Anglicans of very different traditions. We believe that this diversity strengthens the church rather than weakens it. In Sheffield we have a large number of ordained women in ministry and many clergy and lay people who support their ministry. There are also significant numbers of clergy and lay people who are unable, in conscience, to accept the ministry of women as priests and bishops.

As a diocese we recognise that these different views are reasonably held in good conscience and for good theological reasons within the spectrum of Anglicanism. In 2015 the Diocesan Synod received a report called New Norms, New Beginning, endorsed the House of Bishops’ Five Guiding Principles and agreed to take forward the principle of “mutual flourishing” as a way to maintain the highest possible degree of communion across the whole of the Diocese of Sheffield. Our next Bishop must, therefore, be someone who can see the value in the different traditions, affirm them and be able to relate to them, reflecting the doctrine of the Body of Christ and being a focal point of unity.”

36. Section 2.5 identified one of the key qualities needed in the next bishop as being “a warm, generous and inclusive spirit to hold together the geographical and theological diversity of the diocese”. This section not only identified the diversity of Anglican traditions in the diocese, but the diversity of communities too, including the sense of exclusion felt by those on its geographical and social fringes. This demand that the next bishop have the capacity to be a leader in mission and a unifying figure within the diverse communities of South Yorkshire, able to understand and relate to the needs of the outer Sheffield estates and traditional coal field parishes in the diocese as well as those of the vibrant city of Sheffield, was a major consideration in the subsequent deliberations of the Crown Nominations Commission.
37. Section 5.1 of the Statement explicitly referred to the fact that the issue of ordination of women to the priesthood had “been a source of tension in the past, re-kindled by the ordination of women as bishops”. At that point twenty-nine parishes (17% of the total) had asked for appropriate arrangements to be made under the House of Bishops’ Declaration, 15% of which were conservative evangelical parishes and 85% traditional catholic. The 15% however included two-thirds of the members of churches requesting alternative oversight. The concluding SWOT analysis⁴ identified the

⁴ Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

diversity of traditions and the promotion of mutual flourishing among them as potential strengths and opportunities for the diocese but also referred to “*some remaining suspicion of church traditions other than one’s own*” and to the failure to find common ground in the shared conversations on sexuality as being among the weaknesses and potential threats facing the diocese.

38. Although the Statement of Needs included a number of statistics, for example on the number of benefices, on church attendance and membership, and on numbers of clergy, Readers and ordinands, it is perhaps surprising that it did not mention the number of clergy (stipendiary and self-supporting) in the diocese who were women. In fact there has been some debate in the course of my review about precisely what these figures are. Suffice it to say that figures supplied by the diocese’s Dean of Women’s Ministry, the Revd Abi Thompson, show the following:

Category of ministry	Women	Total	%
Stipendiary	28	128	22
SSM	15	27	56
LSM	1	6	17
Chaplain	6	21	29
DBF Employee	1	7	14
PTO	16	149	11
Ordinands	17	31	55
Unknown	1	1	100
Totals	85	370	21

It is clear from this that while women form a relatively small, though very significant, percentage of stipendiary clergy and clergy with permission to officiate (who will include many retired clergy), they form a much higher percentage of self-supporting ministers and of ordinands. Either way, they make up around a fifth of all clergy and ordinands in the diocese.

39. During my extensive interviews in the diocese of Sheffield I asked many of those I met whether the possibility of a woman or a non-ordaining bishop⁵ being appointed to succeed Bishop Croft had been discussed either in the Vacancy in See Committee or during the consultations undertaken by the two Appointments Secretaries in the diocese. The picture which emerged is as follows:

- (a) The possibility of a non-ordaining bishop (specifically of a bishop who takes a headship view) was raised during a public consultation at the cathedral convened by the Appointments Secretaries on 8 September. It does not appear to have been

⁵In this report, I use the term ‘non-ordaining bishop’ to refer to a bishop who, on grounds of theological conviction, refrains from ordaining women to the priesthood, although he may (and often does) ordain both women and men as deacons. In some cases, such bishops, when diocesans, choose – in exercising their responsibilities for arranging ordinations – not to ordain either men or women to the priesthood but to delegate that task to other bishops.

canvassed specifically by the Appointments Secretaries during the consultations they conducted with civic leaders in the diocese, although the possibility of appointing a bishop who did not ordain women featured in the consultations insofar as a number of people noted the fact that in the Northern Province every diocesan bishop recognises the priestly and episcopal ministry of women. It was, I understand, suggested in this context that, given the percentage of traditional catholic clergy and the contribution of churches led by headship evangelicals to mission in the diocese, Sheffield might be an opportunity to make such a nomination.

- (b) However, whilst the Vacancy in See Committee was very clear about the need for the next diocesan to be a focus of unity, the possibility of a non-ordaining bishop being appointed was not discussed by that Committee. It was mentioned in only two of the 125 comments received by the drafting group prior to the completion of the Statement of Needs.
- (c) Nor was there any discussion about the possible appointment of a woman bishop, although this possibility was not ruled out.
- (d) The statement in paragraph 12 of the House of Bishops' Declaration that "*dioceses are entitled to express a view, in the Statement of Needs prepared during a vacancy in see, as to whether the diocesan bishop should be someone who will or will not ordain women*" was not drawn to the attention of the Committee by anyone present. It was not mentioned in the guidance supplied by the Appointments Secretaries to the Diocesan Secretary, nor was it mentioned by the Appointments Secretaries at their meeting with the Vacancy in See Committee on 6 September 2016.

It appears from all the evidence given to me that the assumption of most of those involved was that, in spite of the relative progress made under Bishop Croft in healing the wounds of division, the diocese was not yet ready for the appointment of a woman diocesan. The possibility of a non-ordaining bishop being appointed simply did not cross the mind of most people.

40. In addition to the production of the Statement of Needs, the other main task of the Vacancy in See Committee was the election of six representatives – three clergy and three lay – to serve on the Crown Nominations Commission. At its meeting on 6 September the following were elected through Single Transferable Vote:

Clergy members:

The Bishop of Doncaster
The Revd Canon Geoffrey Harbord
The Revd Canon Ian Smith

Lay members:

Mrs Ann Brown
Mr Shaun Clarkson
Mr Mark Russell

The obvious omission is the absence from this list of an ordained woman (although an ordained woman did stand for election). In terms of church tradition, the list contained a traditional catholic, two who were broadly affirming catholics and three broadly open evangelicals.

d) The Crown Nominations Commission (CNC)

41. The CNC met for the first time to consider the vacancy in the See of Sheffield on 1 November 2016. As the vacancy was in the Northern Province, the Archbishop of York took the Chair. The Archbishop of Canterbury was on this occasion replaced on the Commission by the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Rt Revd Stephen Cottrell. The six diocesan members (listed above) were joined by the six central members who are elected by the General Synod for a five-year term and had already served the bulk of this. One of the elected members – the Dean of Southwark – stood down from consideration of the Sheffield vacancy and the Chair of the General Synod’s House of Clergy nominated the Archdeacon of Lincoln to serve as his replacement. The six central members of the Sheffield Commission were therefore:

Mrs April Alexander
The Revd John Dunnett
Mr Aiden Hargreaves-Smith
The Ven Gavin Kirk (replacing the Very Revd Andrew Nunn)
The Revd Canon Dr Judith Maltby
Ms Jane Patterson

They were joined by the two Appointments Secretaries who, while they are members of the Commission and therefore able to contribute fully to its proceedings, do not have a vote.

42. Ms Patterson’s participation in the Commission has been questioned by a number who gave evidence to me. This is because she is one of the representatives of the diocese of Sheffield on the General Synod and a regular attender at Christ Church, Fulwood, a large conservative evangelical parish church in the city of Sheffield. Additionally, she serves as Chair of the Trustees of two congregations planted by Christ Church, one of which is openly affiliated to a conservative evangelical organisation, the Anglican Mission in England (AMiE).
43. Ms Patterson’s decision not to stand down from the Commission has been questioned both on the grounds that it gave the diocese of Sheffield, in effect, a seventh member on the Commission and that it skewed the balance of churchmanship amongst its members. The latter charge does not readily stand up: had Ms Patterson stood down, the Chair of the General Synod’s House of Laity would, under the Commission’s current rules, have been entitled to nominate a General Synod member with similar theological convictions to her own to replace her. Moreover there is at present no

clear policy requiring a central member of the Commission to stand down when it considers a vacancy in their own diocese, a matter to which I return later.

44. Ms Patterson told me that she considered carefully whether to stand down, and discussed the matter with the Archbishops' Appointments Secretary. In the absence of a clear policy, she decided to continue, not least because she was the only elected central member of the CNC from the Northern Province. To help clarify that she was serving as a central member, she confirmed this at the first meeting of the Diocesan Vacancy in See Committee, following which she did not attend any further meetings of the Committee. She therefore took no part in the preparation of the Statement of Needs, the election of the six diocesan members of the CNC or the consultation meetings which were part of the process other than the public meeting held by the Appointments Secretaries on 8 September.
45. The proceedings of the CNC are confidential, not surprisingly as they involve discussion not only of individual candidates for an appointment, but often of the performance of the previous bishop and of the current senior staff team in the diocese, as well as of the views expressed in confidence to the Appointments Secretaries during the course of their consultations in the diocese. In the course of my review, I have heard at length and in confidence from all but the two replacement members of the Sheffield Commission who have given me their individual accounts of the proceedings in the Commission. I have also discussed various aspects of the work of the Commission with the two Appointments Secretaries. In my judgement, it would not assist continued confidence in the work of the Commission (or indeed in the work of the Independent Reviewer) if I were to disclose all that has been said to me in confidence. I therefore confine this description of the Commission's consideration of the Sheffield vacancy to those matters which I consider are crucial to an understanding of what happened subsequently or which raise questions of policy to which I will return later.
46. The first meeting of the CNC on 1 November 2016 had before it a range of documents which included the following:
 - (a) The diocese's Statement of Needs;
 - (b) A Memorandum from the Appointments Secretaries summarising, among other things, the result of their consultations in the diocese;
 - (c) A note from the outgoing bishop (Bishop Croft);
 - (d) A note from the Archbishops on the Ministry of a Diocesan Bishop in the wider Church.

In advance of the meeting, the members of the Commission were invited to submit names of candidates for consideration. These are divided into two lists: mandatory names, submitted by members of the Commission, which have to be considered and discretionary names (which are only included if the Archbishop of the Province agrees). Bishop North's name was submitted both as a mandatory and a discretionary

name and therefore had to be considered. The first meeting of the Commission had two main purposes:

- To agree a job description and person specification for the role being filled, and
- To determine a shortlist of candidates for consideration, through a series of votes by secret ballot.

The resulting shortlist for the Sheffield vacancy included one female candidate as well as Bishop North and two other male candidates.

47. The Commission met for a second time on 28-29 November 2016 to interview the short-listed candidates. Each candidate was asked to prepare a homily, a presentation and a safeguarding statement. The members of the Commission had agreed in advance a set of questions to be put to each of the candidates. As we have seen, the issue of mutual flourishing had been covered in the Diocesan Statement of Needs and was mentioned in the Appointments Secretaries' memorandum, and one of the questions asked of all the candidates concerned this subject. It was not clear to Bishop North, when he was interviewed, that the question was being asked of all the candidates and he challenged the questioner robustly when it was put to him. The position was then clarified but the incident raised questions, for some in the room at least. I give Bishop North's account of this episode shortly.
48. Once the structured interviews were concluded, the Commission began the process of voting through secret ballot by which two names, in order of preference, were to be identified for submission to the Prime Minister and The Queen. (The voting process in the CNC has been described to me as confusing and questions about it have been raised by a number of those involved, a point to which I again return later.) It is a requirement of that process that, to be submitted, a name must obtain the votes of at least two-thirds of the voting members of the Commission, i.e. ten out of a total of fourteen votes. As the voting drew to a close, Bishop North's name emerged as a clear first in the order of priority.
49. Having given a brief chronological account of the CNC's process in respect of the Sheffield vacancy, I summarise now the factual position, derived from the evidence I have received, in relation to the main questions about that process which are relevant to the matters referred to me by the Archbishops. (A number of wider issues about the functioning of the CNC were also raised with me in the course of my review, and I refer to these in a later section of my report.)
 - (a) In the case of the vacancy in Sheffield as in other vacancies, all candidates shortlisted for interview by the CNC were provided with a role description which set the ministry of the Diocesan Bishop within the context of the Five Guiding Principles.

- (b) The issue of ‘mutual flourishing’ and the way in which a candidate would work with these principles was explored at interview with all the candidates (as described above).
- (c) The issue of mutual flourishing featured in both the Diocesan Statement of Needs and the Appointments Secretaries’ memorandum. The great bulk of both these documents understandably focussed on wider issues.
- (d) The Statement of Needs was not however shared with shortlisted candidates as such, although substantial extracts from it were included (without attribution) in the extensive brief sent to all these candidates. The impression of the diocesan members of the Commission, as reported to me, was that, throughout the Commission’s proceedings, the Statement of Needs was given less attention than the Appointments Secretaries’ memorandum⁶.
- (e) Although the possibility of Sheffield providing a suitable opportunity for the appointment of a non-ordaining bishop in the Northern Province had been identified in the Appointments Secretaries’ consultations, there is no evidence that any member of the Commission went into its meetings with the pre-conceived notion that this should be the outcome. Nor is there evidence that pressure was brought on members of the Commission to this end. The needs of the diocese in terms of the continuing development of its mission were the dominant theme in discussions within the Commission.
- (f) Bishop North was known personally as a friend by two of the members of the Commission. I have been assured that this was disclosed to all the Commission’s members.
- (g) When the possibility of Bishop North being nominated was under discussion in the Commission, the diocesan members were asked to comment on this and clear views were expressed by a majority that his nomination would be welcomed in the diocese, although others expressed caution about the likely reaction. A number of parishes in the Doncaster archdeaconry of the diocese had had first-hand experience of Bishop North’s ministry through his participation in the Crossroads Mission undertaken in the diocese of Sheffield in 2015. The view of many (but not all) of the members of the Commission was that his reputation for mission would outweigh any personal reservations about his stance on receiving the ministry of women.
- (h) It is clear from my conversations with those involved and from the outcome of the voting in the Commission that Bishop North secured the support of a clear

⁶ It is nonetheless fair to add that when, before it proceeded to select a name and in accordance with the Standing Orders of the Commission, the Archbishop of York asked each of the Commission’s members in turn if the Commission had paid due regard to a) the views of the diocesan members and b) the requirements of the mission of the Church of England as a whole, each answered in the affirmative.

majority of the diocesan as well as of the central members of the Commission. To others in the Commission, his nomination came as a complete shock.

50. In the light of subsequent events, I specifically asked whether there had been any discussion in the Commission of contingency planning or the need for additional support to be arranged for Bishop North against the possibility of an adverse reaction to his appointment in the diocese. There was no such discussion.
51. Once the CNC has made its recommendations to the Prime Minister, arrangements for the announcement of the outcome are in the hands of the Crown in discussion with the candidate. Responsibility for preparing a successful candidate for the announcement of his or her appointment falls in practice to the Appointments Secretaries. The Appointments Secretaries were mindful that the context in which Bishop North was preparing for the announcement and the early stages of his ministry was one in which his nomination would raise significant questions for some and be a cause of celebration for others.

e) Bishop North's Reaction to his Nomination and the Preparations for its Announcement

52. Bishop North was as surprised by his nomination as were some members of the CNC. When he had been approached initially by the Archbishops' Appointments Secretary to tell him that he had been nominated as a candidate for consideration by the Commission, he had been unsure whether to allow his name to go forward for consideration but, after reflection and taking some advice, had concluded that he should. By the time of the interview, he was still very unsure about the wisdom of being part of the process because of his position on the ordination of women. (He had previously had to withdraw from appointment as the suffragan bishop of Whitby because of opposition to his appointment as a result of his position on this issue.)
53. His doubts had shown in his performance on the day. In particular they had been reflected in his challenging response to the question about mutual flourishing put to him by a member on behalf of the Commission to which I have already referred. He subsequently apologised to that member for his response. This, he said, had indicated his deep level of ambiguity about the post (a fact that he had made known to some members of the Commission after his interview).
54. During the interview, Bishop North had shared his doubts about proceeding openly with the Commission. In particular, at the conclusion of the interview he had asked if his possible nomination would be welcomed in the diocese of Sheffield. He was immediately assured by two of the diocesan members of the Commission that it would be (an exchange which a number of members of the Commission thought irregular and which the Archbishop of York asked those present to disregard). When he had learned that he was the first-choice candidate, he had hesitated for two weeks before accepting nomination. During that period and with the agreement of the Archbishops' Appointments Secretary (who, he said, had been open and helpful throughout), he had

spoken to a number of people to help his discernment of his calling, although the confidentiality surrounding the Commission's proceedings meant that the circle of those he could consult was inevitably limited. In the end he accepted the nomination because he had been assured that a clear majority of the diocesan representatives on the CNC had strongly favoured his appointment. He believed he was answering a call from the diocese to be its bishop.

55. During the period prior to the announcement of his nomination, Bishop North was provided with the support offered to all in such a position. He met the church's Head of Senior Leadership Development to discuss development needs and was provided with an experienced executive coach. He was invited to be part of the new cohort of the diocesan bishops' leadership programme and to participate in the team effectiveness training for bishops' staff teams. The Communications Unit of the National Church Institutions worked with him to plan the announcement and he was given training by an experienced external communications trainer. However, according to Bishop Philip himself, the communications training did not go well. It had focussed, in his view aggressively, on one potential scenario (a possible protest at the cathedral against his appointment). The result had been not to build, but to blow his confidence.

f) The Announcement of Bishop North's Nomination and Subsequent Events

56. If Bishop North was feeling uneasy and to some degree frustrated prior to the announcement of his nomination so were the Bishop of Doncaster and other members of the senior staff team in the diocese of Sheffield. The Diocesan Communications Officer, L J Buxton, was telephoned by the Director of Communications for the National Church Institutions two weeks prior to the announcement but was told that she could not speak to anyone about preparations for it other than to the Bishop of Doncaster. Although evidence was given to me that news of Bishop North's nomination had begun to leak very soon after the conclusion of the CNC's proceedings, the Bishop of Doncaster himself felt inhibited (because of the emphasis on the confidentiality of the Commission's proceedings) in sharing the news with his senior colleagues. Members of the senior team formally learned the identity of their new diocesan bishop when Bishop North telephoned each of them 2-3 days prior to the announcement by 10 Downing Street on 31 January 2017. The result was that there was little or no opportunity for the diocesan senior team to work out in advance a co-ordinated approach to handling the announcement and the response to it in the diocese. The primary focus of those working on the arrangements for the announcement appears to have been on ensuring that the process proceeded smoothly rather than reflecting on its wider implications.
57. As a result of the efforts of all involved and in spite of the limited notice, the initial announcement of Bishop North's nomination in the diocese went well. The visits to the Cathedral Archer Project and to a local school and the press conference in the cathedral were very successful. A breakfast meeting between Bishop North and the

senior staff was described as excellent and a lunch with Church House staff and inter faith representatives as very well received.

58. Initial reaction to Bishop North's nomination was mixed. Much was supportive. Whilst surprised, both traditional catholics and conservative evangelicals within the diocese were encouraged by what they saw as a clear affirmation of the Church's commitment to mutual flourishing⁷. This reaction of surprise, even shock, was confirmed by many to whom I spoke in the diocese. No-one (or at least very few) in Sheffield had foreseen the possibility of a non-ordaining bishop being nominated to the diocese in succession to three former diocesans, each of whom had supported women's ordination.
59. The initial focus of much of the publicity surrounding the announcement was on Bishop North's commitment to mission and supporting the poor and marginalised, and on the undoubted gifts he would bring to this aspect of the life of the diocese. The announcement of his appointment by No. 10 Downing Street and by the diocese made no direct mention of his views on the ordination of women, a fact which was later criticised by some who saw it as part of an attempt to cover those views up. However, the announcement did mention Bishop North's six years of service as the Priest Administrator of the Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham and he himself addressed the issue head-on in his remarks at the cathedral on the day of the announcement. In fact, news of Bishop North's position on the issue spread rapidly, assisted by social media. Attention focussed in particular on his membership of the Council of Bishops of The Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda⁸. Many ordained women and their supporters in the diocese, including women in lay ministry, understood this to mean that Bishop North could not accept the validity of their vocation, even that he adhered to a theology of taint, a characterisation of its theology which The Society and its associated organisation Forward in Faith would (and did) strongly deny⁹. One of the many sad features of the events I am chronicling is that various views were attributed to Bishop North by many people at different times, views which he does not in fact hold. However, as we shall see, a key reason for this was that, with the exception of a meeting he himself caused to be arranged in Doncaster Minster, Bishop North refrained from articulating clearly on the public record what his views are¹⁰.

⁷ The claim, published in the Church of England Newspaper on 24 March, that conservative evangelical clergy in the diocese were ready to oppose Philip North as their bishop, was subsequently rebutted by a majority of these clergy in a letter to the same newspaper.

⁸ Hereafter sometimes referred to as 'The Society'. The Society is an ecclesial community dedicated to maintaining catholic teaching and practice within the Church of England. A fuller description of its nature and activities can be found on its website at <http://www.sswsh.com/>.

⁹ See, for example, a statement issued by the Bishop of Wakefield on 28 February 2017 on behalf of the Council <http://www.sswsh.com/fullposts.php?id=215>. I address these matters more fully later in this report.

¹⁰ Bishop North has explained that having, as he saw it, articulated his position clearly at the Doncaster Minster meeting, as the opposition to his nomination mounted, he was concerned that anything further he said on the matter would simply exacerbate the situation and provide ammunition to those opposing his appointment. Therefore (and in accordance with some advice he received) he decided to remain quiet on the issue.

g) The Doncaster Minster Meeting

60. Bishop North had from the outset realised that ordained women in the diocese of Sheffield needed to hear directly from him where he stood on the matter of women's ordination. In his remarks in Sheffield Cathedral on 31 January, he spoke of his determination to serve all in the diocese, including those who for theological reasons had misgivings about his appointment, and continued:

"I have asked to meet the women clergy of the diocese as soon as possible in order that concerns can be shared and for me to outline some ideas about how best we can work closely together and develop and enhance women's leadership across the diocese. Trust is something that needs to be earned and I would ask you fervently to give me the chance to do that.the Anglican commitment to mutual flourishing gives us a golden opportunity to model for the nation unity in the midst of diversity."

Bishop North therefore asked the Dean of Women's Ministry in the diocese to arrange an opportunity for him to speak to a meeting of ordained women shortly after the announcement of his nomination. A similar meeting had, he felt, worked well after his appointment as Bishop of Burnley and he hoped to repeat that success. The meeting took place on 7 February in Doncaster Minster (having been moved there from a smaller venue because of the number wishing to attend). To it were invited all ordained women and ordinands from the diocese but not any male clergy (a matter which itself later attracted some criticism). Thinking it unwise for Bishop North to venture unsupported into such a potentially difficult gathering, the Bishop of Doncaster offered to accompany Bishop North to the meeting and to chair it but his offer was refused. In the event the meeting was chaired by the Dean of Women's Ministry.

61. The Dean of Women's Ministry was apprehensive about the meeting (she had received some 270 emails after the announcement expressing surprise and concern) but afterwards she felt that it had gone reasonably well. Bishop North spoke for about twenty minutes and then, after a short break, responded to questions from those present. The women who spoke in her view spoke directly but conducted themselves well. Some, particularly those who had been longer in holy orders, had clearly been scarred by their experience of sexist and misogynistic language used about them by some male priests who did not recognise their orders. While some of the women present felt that the tone of the meeting was gracious, others found it aggressive. One reported that there had been "a lot of fear". The question all wanted answered was essentially this:

"How can my ministry be affirmed by my diocesan bishop if he doesn't think I should be a priest in the first place?"

62. Bishop North attempted to explain both the theology which underlay his position on the ordination of women and how he would seek to support women in ministry. As diocesan bishop, he would ordain both men and women as deacons but would ordain neither as priests. Such an approach would be consistent, for example, with that adopted by Bishop Richard Chartres in London. What he had hoped would be the beginning of a dialogue became, however, in his view *“a savaging”*. With a few exceptions, many of those who contributed spoke forcefully against his nomination. Contributions were speeches rather than an exploration of how to understand each other and work together.
63. A consistent theme was that those present had not been consulted about whether they wanted a bishop who would or would not ordain women as priests. It had simply not crossed their minds that someone who did not ordain women as priests could be appointed.
64. A further difficulty followed the meeting. The recently-appointed Diocesan Secretary had attended the meeting and taken a note of it. A number of the women invited were unable to attend and it seemed to the diocesan organisers of the meeting a straightforward matter to produce a record of what was said which could be shared with them. However, Bishop North was informed a few days in advance but not consulted about this intention. Bishop North had been uneasy about the often nuanced answers he gave to questions at the meeting being translated into cold print and used as part of a campaign against his nomination. So he had asked that the note be limited to his opening remarks. The omission of his replies to questions, however, angered a number of those who had been present.

h) Opposition Grows

65. From the date of the meeting in Doncaster Minster, the groundswell of opposition to Bishop North’s appointment strengthened. It would not be accurate by any means to characterise it as universal. Many of those in the diocese asking questions were wanting to understand Bishop North’s position better and seeking to come to terms with his appointment. They wanted to make things work. In the Doncaster Archdeaconry, the opposition was relatively limited. In Sheffield, the voices of protest were more pronounced, not only in Hallam, a suburban part of Sheffield housing the University¹¹, but also in some parishes in the City’s housing estates. A group of people from different parishes, lay and ordained, from a broad range of church contexts, started an on-line forum called Sheffield Action for Ministry Equality (SAME). They posted a pastoral letter of concern, requesting the opportunity for dialogue with Bishop North. SAME later became seen by some who gave evidence to me as a focal point of opposition to Bishop North’s appointment. But the organisation did not come

¹¹ Many of those who subsequently wrote to Bishop North asking him to re-consider his acceptance of the nomination were associated with the parish of St Mark’s Broomhill, in the Hallam district of Sheffield.

into being until 25 February, three and a half weeks after the 31 January announcement of Bishop North's appointment and was seen by those who set it up as a response to the absence of other means of making their views known and of voicing the anxieties they and others felt and the questions they had, rather than being a focus for opposition. To them it was "*a collective, not a campaign*".

66. To these questioning voices in the Church were gradually added other powerful voices from within the secular leadership of South Yorkshire. If some women clergy in Sheffield felt that the nomination of Bishop North struck at the very heart of their ontology, their very 'being' as women priests, other lay people saw it as a challenge to the self-understanding of South Yorkshire – direct and plain speaking; entrepreneurial in attitude; proud of its steel and coal-mining traditions as well as its newer innovative industries; fiercely conscious of its egalitarian roots, many of them in the Labour movement¹². Ignorant (why should they be otherwise?) of the protracted debate about women's ordination in the Church of England, they could not understand how anyone could fail to accept the equal place of women in ministry, or how the Crown Nominations Commission could have nominated someone as the diocesan bishop (a person to whom many outside, as well as inside the Church, looked for leadership and to speak on behalf of the area) so clearly at odds (as they saw it) with the dominant secular ethos. Prominent voices questioning the nomination included those of Lord Blunkett and the MP for Sheffield Heeley, Ms Louise Haigh.
67. The Bishop of Doncaster and his team were acutely aware of the turning tide of opinion. Bishop Peter suggested to Bishop North following the meeting in Doncaster Minster that they should jointly send an Ad Clerum to the diocese describing how they would work together in the spirit of the Five Guiding Principles but this suggestion was not pursued. Bishop Peter addressed a clergy study day on 28 February during which he attempted to tackle pastorally the issues relating to the nomination of Bishop Philip and, on 1 March, sent a summary of his remarks in a pastoral letter to all clergy and licensed lay ministers in the diocese. He initiated a 'listening exercise' in which he undertook to attend meetings in deaneries and elsewhere called to consider the issues which had been raised. Some have subsequently criticised this exercise as implying a degree of provisionality about Bishop North's nomination. It is difficult, however, to see what more Bishop Peter could have done to demonstrate his support for his future colleague, given that he also had to hear and absorb the questions, and in some cases the pain that some clergy and laity in the diocese were feeling, and deal with the increasing sense of uncertainty as to whether Bishop North would accept the post.

¹² One example of Sheffield's strong pride in its egalitarian roots is 'The Women of Steel' statue, a memorial to those women who worked in the steel industry in both World Wars. At one point, following Bishop North's nomination (March 8, International Women's Day), the women represented in the statue were dressed in mitres and Episcopal purple, a form of protest which, while it amused some, angered others who supported Bishop North's nomination.

Virtually everyone to whom I spoke has been warm in praise of the Bishop of Doncaster's conduct throughout this whole episode.

68. During this time of mounting opposition, the Bishop of Doncaster, and indeed everyone else trying to support Bishop North, were operating under the very considerable handicap that, following the Doncaster meeting, Bishop North increasingly withdrew. Initially he carried on working, kept in contact with the Bishop of Doncaster and responded to letters and e-mails, despite becoming increasingly unclear about how to manage the developing situation. On 28 February he began a period of leave, going on a pre-Lenten retreat. Thereafter, contact with him, although it continued throughout, had to be conducted through a few trusted intermediaries. The result was a growing vacuum into which those who questioned Bishop North's nomination spoke most strongly.

i) Professor Percy's Intervention

69. Most significant of all in terms of its individual impact was the voice of the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, Professor Martyn Percy. Professor Percy is head of a major Oxford college, a distinguished theologian and a long-term supporter of equality in ministry.
70. Both he and his wife, the Revd Canon Dr Emma Percy (the Chair of WATCH) had lived in Sheffield between 1997 and 2004, Professor Percy as an academic but also as Canon Theologian at the cathedral and his wife as Vicar of Millhouses. With this personal history in Sheffield and given the eminent position he occupies, it is not surprising that Professor Percy's intervention attracted particular attention.
71. Professor Percy and I have met during my review and he has written to me at length explaining his intervention. In so doing, he has made clear that he does not see himself as a significant campaigner on gender-related issues within the churches but as a commentator, as someone committed to responsibly raising questions of church polity, theology and protocol connected with them. He makes clear that no-one suggested to him that he should write about the issues he saw as being raised by Bishop North's nomination. Indeed, his intervention was not sparked by that nomination but by the publication in 'New Directions', the journal of Forward in Faith published in February 2017, of an address given by the Director of Forward in Faith at that organisation's Assembly in November 2016¹³.
72. Professor Percy's intervention came in the form of an article – 'Questions of Ambiguity and Integrity' – published on the Modern Church website on Friday, 24 February 2017¹⁴. The specific issue Professor Percy addressed in this article is clearly set out in the address by the Director of Forward in Faith as follows: *"Until last year, you could tell by looking who was a priest whose ministry we could receive, and who was not. But*

¹³ 'New Directions', Vol 20, no. 257, p.14. The address can be found at Appendix 7, sub-appendix A.

¹⁴ The text of Professor Percy's essay is reproduced at Appendix 7, sub-appendix D.

now we have male priests ordained by women bishops. We can't receive their ministry; but how can you tell who ordained whom, for example, when you're a churchwarden arranging cover in a vacancy? One of the reasons why the Bishops invite priests to register as Priests of The Society [of St Wilfrid and St Hilda] is to help answer that question. Deacons and ordinands can register as well. They sign a Declaration that commits them to what The Society stands for. Priests and deacons submit their letters of orders to prove they were ordained by a bishop whose orders we can recognise. The relevant Society bishop sends them a Welcome Letter, so they can prove that they are clergy of The Society; and we have begun to issue identity cards to priests."

73. The Director stated in his address: *"Like a church, The Society is led by bishops. It is not a democracy."* Professor Percy therefore concluded that the views the Director of Forward in Faith was expressing were those of the Council of Bishops of The Society and that, as a member of the Council, Bishop North must also hold them. Professor Percy insists that he was not making a personal attack on Bishop North. Rather he sought to ask whether any person holding views which the Director's address confirmed Bishop North to hold as a member of the Council of Bishops could ever, as a matter of ecclesiological and theological integrity, have oversight as a diocesan bishop over so many priests and parishes with whom they could not be in full communion and in a See such as Sheffield.
74. Accordingly, in his article Professor Percy invited Bishop North to reflect on his position: *"Bishop Philip faces a clear choice here. He can distance himself from and essentially disown the official view of The Society – that the sacramental ministry of women, and men ordained by female bishops – cannot be received. This would presumably mean him leaving The Society. Or, he can fully own the official position of The Society, in which case his clergy are in a most difficult place, with a diocesan bishop effectively not recognising many of their sacramental ministries. What you can't have is both a fudge and integrity. The Society is episcopally-led, as [the Director] so helpfully clarifies. Women are not recognised as 'real' priests or bishops; men ordained by female bishops are therefore not to be regarded as 'proper' priests either."*
75. Professor Percy's views are contained in full in his letter to me of 7 April which, with its several appendices I am with his agreement publishing as Appendix 7 to this report. I am also publishing in the same manner the note of my meeting with Professor Percy in Oxford on 9 May (Appendix 8). I do this not because, as I suspect he would be the first to acknowledge, Professor Percy's views on the issues raised by Bishop North's nomination are any more important than anybody else's but for the following reasons. First, they offer the fullest critique not only of that nomination but of the Five Guiding Principles and the 2014 Settlement.¹⁵ Secondly, in the view of everyone in Sheffield to

¹⁵ Other academics and theologians of note have also offered a critique of the Settlement, as I describe later in this report.

whom I spoke they profoundly affected the course of events from the moment they appeared.

76. Professor Percy's arguments need to be read in full but may be summarised as follows:

- Since the adoption of the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod in 1993, the Church of England's position on the issue of gender equality in ministry had lacked integrity in the sense of coherence and wholeness because it had tried to hold together views on women's ministry which were essentially incompatible.
- A diocesan bishop, as distinct from a suffragan bishop, shares the 'cure of souls' legally and, crucially, sacramentally with all clergy in the diocese. So the bishop needs to be fully confident that the ordination of all these clergy is not only lawful but fully valid and their sacramental ministry unambiguously efficacious.
- Whilst The Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda and its associated organisation Forward in Faith accepted that women could be lawfully ordained priests and consecrated as bishops in the Church of England, it did not accept the validity of their actual sacramental ministry – that they were truly priests and bishops in the Church of God.
- As a member of the Council of Bishops of the Society, Bishop North could not, if he was to remain true to his beliefs, with integrity accept nomination as a diocesan bishop, a role which required him not only to affirm the ministry of all the clergy in his diocese but the validity (or efficacy) of all their sacramental actions, not least in the Eucharist. All that the clergy did in their sacramental ministry was done on behalf of the bishop. So to disown or seriously doubt the sacramental ministry (or its efficacy) of a significant number of those clergy was an extremely serious matter.

Professor Percy summed up the question of integrity he posed as follows:

"The question of integrity then, is this. Should anyone accept a nomination to be a diocesan bishop, when this same person cannot recognise and affirm the sacramental validity of a significant percentage of their own clergy who would be in their care, and with whom they will have to share in the 'cure of souls'? I think the answer to this must be "no" and unequivocally so. Any position of integrity would refuse such an invitation and nomination".

In the light of his arguments Professor Percy invited Bishop North "to reflect on his position, and work through his theological convictions with honesty and sincerity: in other words, act with integrity". For Professor Percy, the answer to the question he posed was obvious: it was simply a matter of following the position taken by the Council through to its logical conclusion. One either had to distance oneself from the views expressed by The Society and outlined in 'New Directions' or, if not, to withdraw from the nomination to become a diocesan bishop in this case.

77. Professor Percy went on in this and subsequent articles to challenge the Five Guiding Principles and the basis of the 2014 'Settlement', which he considered an unsuccessful attempt at political management – part of *“a mere suite of fudged and managed compromises – rather than an act of theological leadership”*. The Church of England was beginning to discover, he concluded, that trying to contain *“two integrities”* – two different views on the validity of women’s ministry – was neither credible nor desirable – *“if you truly want to be one Church, you can really only afford one integrity”*.
78. At this point my focus is on the impact of Professor Percy’s article on events relating to Bishop North’s nomination to the See of Sheffield. This was profound. Professor Percy had assured readers of his article that it was *“not in any way personal”*. This is not how it appeared to Bishop North, for several reasons. First, and fundamentally, the article presumed to know what Bishop North’s views on the validity of the orders of women priests were and that they were to be equated precisely with views expressed by the Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda and Forward in Faith. Professor Percy took the view that since Bishop North had not said anything on the public record to distinguish his views from those of The Society - and indeed had acted out such views in the arrangements for his consecration to be Bishop of Burnley (where only a select few bishops had been invited to lay hands on him, to the exclusion of others) - as a member of the Council of Bishops of The Society, Bishop North’s views and those of the Society must be presumed to be one and the same. Nevertheless, as has become clear in the course of my review and as I will later describe, Bishop North’s views on the subject of women in ministry are his own and are not necessarily to be identified precisely and in every respect with those held by other members of the Council of Bishops.
79. Secondly, while the article dealt with theological issues of relevance to the whole Church, it focussed them on the person of Bishop North. In effect, it presented him with a deeply personal challenge. If he proceeded with his acceptance of nomination, would he be acting with integrity? The clear implication of the article was that he would not.
80. Thirdly, although the article appeared on the website of Modern Church, an organisation devoted to furthering debate on matters of theological importance to the Church, it achieved far more prominence than might otherwise have been the case because its appearance was foreshadowed by a report in The Guardian on the day of its publication. Professor Percy has explained that the appearance of this report was not a result of a deliberate initiative on his part to gain publicity for his views but a coincidence of timing. He wrote regularly for The Guardian and had been in touch with the paper on 23 February on an entirely different matter. In the course of conversation, he had been asked if he was working on anything else and had mentioned his Modern Church article. The timing of the appearance of The Guardian piece had not been his intention.

81. There was another, highly unfortunate aspect to this matter. Professor Percy emailed a copy of his Modern Church article to Bishop North at 15:01 on Thursday 23 February. In his email he emphasised that he had written the article on his own initiative and that it was not meant to be personal. He assured Bishop North that *“as a matter of courtesy, not least, I wanted you to have a draft copy [of the article] so you could reflect on the contents before it is due to be published”*. But Professor Percy had already shared the article with The Guardian and at 15:13 (twelve minutes later) Bishop North’s office received an email from a Guardian journalist seeking an urgent comment on the article. To Bishop North, this was evidence of discourtesy, to say the very least. Professor Percy has since written personally to Bishop North apologising for what happened but to date has not received a reply.
82. There is one further respect in which Bishop North found Professor Percy’s conduct during this affair deeply hurtful. Professor Percy has himself accepted that the language he used in his article and at various points in the affair went beyond that normally employed by academic theologians and became colourful, even polemical. One example of this is Professor Percy’s use of the term ‘disingenuous’ to question the integrity of Bishop North’s statements (and actions) in supporting women in ministry. In an email exchange with the Director of Forward in Faith on 24 February – an exchange which was intended by the Director to be private but into which Professor Percy then copied Bishop North – Professor Percy said:

“Bishop North is keen to promote women in leadership. The purpose of my article is to ‘out’ the manifest duplicity and disingenuous affirmation of the ministry of ordained women. All Bishop Philip North is doing in public, when he affirms the ministry of women, is winking at his own members [in The Society] whilst he speaks, and over the heads of the women. He doesn’t think they are valid clergy – at least not sacramentally. He doesn’t think that men ordained by women bishops are valid clergy either”.

Professor Percy used the word “disingenuous” to signify that Bishop North’s actions were not candid or straightforward. But the Oxford English Dictionary also gives the meaning of the word as ‘insincere’. Setting aside the question – on which I have already touched – as to whether these were in fact Bishop North’s views and acknowledging the difficulty Professor Percy, like others, had in knowing what those views were, it is not difficult to understand that Bishop North saw this as a challenge to his own personal integrity, as denigrating all that he had done as Bishop of Burnley to seek to promote women’s ministry. The fact that this exchange was not made known more widely did not lessen Bishop North’s sense of hurt.

j) The Effect of Professor Percy's Intervention

83. The effect of Professor Percy's article and the report of it in The Guardian was to elevate what had previously been essentially a matter of controversy within the diocese of Sheffield to that of a story of regional and national significance. To those who had reservations about Bishop North's nomination, it supplied theological arguments from a weighty source in support of their concerns. To those in the diocese seeking to 'manage' the divided views which had been expressed following the official announcement, it was the equivalent of 'pouring petrol on the flames'. Up to the publication of the article, there were signs that the diocese was thinking its way through the implications of the nomination and that it could proceed. After the appearance of the article there was, in their view, no such chance. From that point on, the ability to 'manage' the matter within the diocese slipped from their hands.
84. The appearance of Professor Percy's article had another consequence. It galvanised the National Church Institutions into action. Although the Bishop of Doncaster had rung the Archbishop of York after the Doncaster Minster meeting to report that it had not gone well, he had felt, and had assured the Archbishop, that at that point the situation was retrievable. In the period following the official announcement, the attention of both the Archbishop's office at Bishopthorpe and of Church House, Westminster had understandably been focussed on the February meeting of the General Synod which was to debate a report from the House of Bishops on the highly controversial subject of the Church's attitude towards issues of human sexuality. They were unaware of the struggle senior staff in the diocese of Sheffield were having in responding to concerns about Bishop North's nomination. A request from The Guardian on the afternoon of 23 February for a comment on Professor Percy's article alerted them to what was happening.
85. Following a conversation with Bishop North, the then Director of Communications for the Church of England (the Revd Arun Arora) provided in response a comment which was subsequently reported by The Guardian as follows: *"A C of E spokesperson said North had said at a meeting with women clergy in the diocese that 'he is in favour of women's leadership and would actively promote it'. The spokesperson added: 'The beauty of the Church of England is its theological breadth and its ability to hold together disparate views across a range of issues whilst still finding unity in Jesus Christ. The Church of England supports all orders of ministry being open equally, irrespective of gender, and remains committed to enabling all people to flourish within its life and structures.'"*
86. This was followed by a fuller response to Professor Percy's article, which had also been reported in The Yorkshire Post, in the form of an article in that newspaper by the Archbishop of York. The article, published on Saturday 25 February, is reproduced in

full at Appendix 9¹⁶. The article said that Bishop North's nomination should not have surprised anyone as it was consistent with the 2014 Settlement. Professor Percy's arguments had, largely, been considered and rejected by the General Synod in the run-up to that Settlement. The Archbishop reminded readers that Bishop North had assured women clergy in the diocese of Sheffield that he would actively promote them in leadership and asserted the Archbishop's confidence in this assurance and in Bishop North's personal integrity *"which remains unimpeached in the midst of debate"*.

87. Professor Percy himself responded to the Archbishop's article in a piece which was published in The Yorkshire Post on the following Monday (27 February). This too is reproduced at Appendix 10¹⁷. Professor Percy said that he agreed with most of what the Archbishop had written. Bishop North was *"a fine person but he should decline to be the next Bishop of Sheffield and here is why. He cannot, in his conscience recognise, value and affirm the sacramental integrity of one-third of his clergy. Such a position has no integrity"*. Professor Percy continued: *"I know that Bishop Philip North is a loyal Anglican. But his appointment does not represent a triumph for a broad church that can now showcase its diversity, and a capacity to live with differences and disagreements. It sends a completely different message to the world. Namely, that we tolerate exclusion and discrimination at the highest levels and that our Church leaders support such discrimination, in the name of inclusion and 'mutual flourishing'. The Church of England has to find better ways forward with its complex balancing act: between managed diversity and integrated unity. We cannot be seen, as a public and national church, to be sanctioning and sacralising such sexism."*
88. The Archbishop did not himself respond publicly to this piece but on 28 February, as part of an attempt to explain the nature of the 2014 Settlement, the Secretary General of the General Synod published a blog providing a simple guide to the Five Guiding Principles¹⁸. The following Saturday, The Yorkshire Post published an article by the Church of England's Director of Communications in which he criticised Professor Percy's article in a manner which caused Professor Percy profound dis-ease. Mr Arora's article is reproduced at Appendix 11. The heart of his argument was that:
- (a) Professor Percy had labelled those who disagreed with him in terms which made holding an opposite view to Professor Percy's own morally unacceptable and in so doing had excluded any room for reasoned or balanced debate.
 - (b) Bishop North's nomination had been made within the framework of the 2014 Settlement, which *"sought to achieve how people with fundamental differences could still walk together. In doing so the settlement reflected one of the great beauties of the Church of England in its theological breadth"*. The article

¹⁶ The article as published by The Yorkshire Post was an edited version of this piece.

¹⁷ This article was also edited: a full version can be found within Appendix 7 – further appendix F.

¹⁸ The blog was called 'Five Guiding Principles on Women and the Episcopate – A User Guide'.

<http://cofecoms.tumblr.com/post/157822785237/5-guiding-principles-on-women-and-the-episcopate>

continued: *“Since that settlement was reached, 10 women have been consecrated as Bishops in the Church of God. Philip North is the first Diocesan bishop to have been nominated whose views on women bishops reflect the Church’s traditionalist approach and also those of our sister Churches across the world including the Roman Catholic Church and Orthodox Church: 10 to one is a pretty good result for those whose desire is to keep score against their opponents”*.

89. In the eyes of both the Secretary General and the Director of Communications, in defending Bishop North’s nomination and the 2014 Settlement, the Director was not expressing a personal view but defending the official position of the Church of England as decided by the House of Bishops and the General Synod. To Professor Percy, however, this piece was deeply concerning. It cast the debate as being a personal one about Bishop North rather than as being one about issues of theological principle, when Professor Percy had himself clearly stated that he had no personal issues with Bishop North. To some women clergy and others in Sheffield who contributed to my review, neither this piece nor that by the Archbishop of York was helpful, the one because it falsely equated the appointment of women suffragan bishops with that of a traditionalist diocesan; the other because they saw it as trying to close off debate when they had genuine questions to which they were still seeking answers.
90. The efforts of the Communications Unit of the Church of England and of the diocesan communications officers in Sheffield and Blackburn to provide support for Bishop North’s nomination continued. They were supplemented by those of the Revd Dr Rob Marshall who Bishop North, on advice from the Bishop of Chichester, decided to ask to assist him in handling media interest in the story. While this appointment may have provided succour to Bishop North, it did not clarify but rather confused responsibility for managing that interest, and Dr Marshall willingly withdrew after a few days.
91. The Communications Unit was involved in encouraging or facilitating the appearance of other statements supportive of Bishop North, including one in which a letter signed by thirty-two women priests from the diocese of Blackburn appeared in The Church Times on 3 March testifying to their personal experience of Bishop North’s support for their ministry as well as to his many other qualities. I have been assured by the Dean of Women’s Ministry in Blackburn, the Revd Canon Fleur Green, that while she was asked by the Communications Unit at Church House to write the letter, she wrote it herself and that no pressure was applied to her to do so or by her to ordained women in Blackburn to sign it (indeed three declined to do so).
92. Other expressions of support for Bishop North were issued by various bishops, both female and male. He also received many letters expressing support. But the flow of letters into Bishop North’s office asking him to re-consider his acceptance of nomination continued unabated. The great majority of these letters were (on the basis of the ones I have seen) cast in firm but courteous and reasoned terms. Nevertheless, cumulatively, they had a strong, negative effect on Bishop North. Moreover, alongside

formal letters, a major negative campaign developed on social media. To some who gave evidence to me, the use of social media in this instance was to be welcomed as an indication of an increasing democratisation of decision making in the Church. To others it simply opened the door to those who wished to do so to write abusively and without restraint or accountability on matters about which they had little or no knowledge. I have seen some posts on social media which Bishop North would have had every right to regard as deeply offensive, had he been minded to read any of them.

k) Bishop North's Withdrawal and its Aftermath

93. In fact, by this point, Bishop North had found the weight of the public focus on himself and his opinions too much. The reaction to his nomination had been costly for him in psychological and emotional terms. He had believed that the Church in Sheffield was calling him, only to find that he had been misled. Instead of relating to his new diocese as a person and a bishop, he had found himself becoming a symbol which people were either for or against, deprived of his personhood and of the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with his critics. On 9 March 2017, Downing Street announced that Bishop North had withdrawn his acceptance of nomination for the See of Sheffield.

94. On the same day, Bishop North issued a statement, which is reproduced in full at Appendix 12. In his statement, Bishop North wrote:

"I apologise to the many for whom this decision will come as a disappointment. There is clearly much to be done on what it means to disagree well and to live with theological difference in the Church of England. The highly individualised nature of the attacks upon me have been extremely hard to bear. If, as Christians, we cannot relate to each other within the bounds of love, how can we possibly presume to transform a nation in the name of Christ? I hope though that this conversation can continue in the future without it being hung upon the shoulders of one individual".

Some who gave evidence to me assumed that Bishop North's reference to "the highly individualised nature of the attacks upon me" was a thinly veiled suggestion that the letters he had received from them and others calling on him to stand down had been personally abusive. I do not understand it in that way. Rather the fact was that the divisions within the Church on the ordination of women and the meaning of the 2014 Settlement had become focussed and personalised on Bishop North's proposed appointment in Sheffield. Indeed Professor Percy had made the issue of whether Bishop North should allow his nomination to proceed a matter of personal, not just theological, integrity:

"I invite him [Bishop North] to reflect on his position and work through his theological convictions with honesty and sincerity: in other words, act with integrity".

Some argued in evidence to me that since a bishop's role is a public one, Bishop North should have realised that he and his nomination would be subjected to public challenge and resultant media interest, of the sort that any career politician might face. With respect, whilst a bishop is a public figure, that is an analogy which I believe many in the Church would find it hard to accept.

95. Bishop North's announcement of his withdrawal was accompanied by a statement from the Archbishop of York, the text of which is at Appendix 13. In it the Archbishop expressed his appreciation of Bishop North's many gifts. Bishop North's decision was, the Archbishop said, a personal one, which he understood and accepted with sadness. The Archbishop continued:

"... what has happened to Bishop Philip clearly does not reflect the Settlement under which, two and a half years ago, the Church of England joyfully and decisively opened up all orders of ministry to men and women. It also made a commitment to mutual flourishing ...

*"There will be continuing debate in the coming days and weeks of lessons to be learned, how that learning might inform and inspire us to act as a church in our dealings with one another and how, when we disagree, to **disagree Christianly**, remembering at all times that our identity **is in Christ alone**"¹⁹.*

The statement concluded by calling on the Church to spend time during Lent in penitence and reflection on what had happened and in prayer for the dioceses of Sheffield and Blackburn as well as Bishop North.

96. Many to whom I have spoken during this review shared the Archbishop's sense of sadness at this outcome. Some in Sheffield felt that if Bishop North had made his own position on the ordination of women clearer and had continued to engage in the diocese after the Doncaster Minster meeting, the diocese would have come to accept his leadership. Even those who felt that Bishop North's nomination had been a mistake and that he had made the right decision in withdrawing were concerned for Bishop North personally and a number wrote to him to say so. Those who shared his theological position on women's ordination were grievously disappointed, feeling that what had happened called into question, as the Archbishop's statement suggested, the Church's commitment to delivering on the promises about mutual flourishing embodied in the 2014 Settlement. Some of those who had been critical of Bishop North's nomination felt that the Archbishop's statement unjustly implied that all who had genuine questions about that nomination had, in expressing them, failed to behave in a Christian fashion. Nonetheless, sadness was the dominant note struck in the reactions of many on all sides of the debate.

¹⁹ The emphasis in the quoted text is to be found in the original.

97. At the conclusion of its work, the Crown Nominations Commission had of course identified two candidates worthy of appointment to the See of Sheffield and the Church and the Crown moved swiftly to fill the continuing vacancy in the See. On 7 April 2017, the Prime Minister's Office announced the nomination of the Very Revd Dr Peter Wilcox, Dean of Liverpool, to the See. Dean Wilcox's election as the next Bishop of Sheffield was confirmed on 5 June and he was consecrated bishop in York Minster on 22 June. Commenting on the day of the announcement of Bishop Wilcox's nomination, Bishop North said:

"I pray that clergy and lay people of all traditions will be able to unite around his leadership and so together continue to bring renewal to the parishes of the [Sheffield] diocese to the glory of God".

98. Meanwhile, on 23 March, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York had written to me asking me to review the implications of what had happened for the future outworking of the House of Bishops' Declaration in the life of the Church, with particular reference to the five areas set out in their letter. Having summarised the key events and facts relevant to that task, it is to it that I now turn. I set out my analysis of the issues raised by the events I have chronicled in relation to each of the five areas, before summarising my conclusions and making any recommendations relevant to each one.

PART 4: ANALYSIS OF THE ISSUES

Point (a) What has been done in the Church, including in the Diocese of Sheffield, to inform and educate clergy and laity about the Settlement agreed in 2014, and the effect of the Declaration within that Settlement?

99. In this section of my report, I seek to answer this question in the terms posed by the Archbishops. I consider in a later section the challenges posed, not only by Professor Percy but by other academics and theologians, to the House of Bishops' Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles in particular.
100. It will be clear from paragraphs 27-32 of my report that the Diocese of Sheffield, under the leadership of Bishop Steven Croft, had done much to try to address the question how the 2014 Settlement on women's role in the Church's ministry should be lived out in the diocese. It will also be clear that, in spite of all the effort, whilst considerable progress had been made, understanding of the nature and implications of the Five Guiding Principles and the House of Bishops' Declaration was still patchy. Anecdotal evidence was presented to me that more attention had been paid to the terms of the Settlement by parishes which dissented from the majority view than those which upheld it. There was also a feeling among some ordained women that the Settlement and the work done in Sheffield on its implementation focussed more on the conditions needed to assist the flourishing of the minority than on their flourishing, than on the development of a culture and processes within the Church which would enable all involved in the Church's ministry to flourish regardless of their gender.
101. If Sheffield is to be regarded in this respect as a microcosm of the Church, among the lessons which emerge from its experience are, I suggest, the following:
- (a) Leadership from the top, not just from the diocesan bishop but the whole of the senior leadership team, was necessary to achieve any progress.
 - (b) A process of dialogue was essential in facilitating understanding and learning, a process which was structured in a way that enabled all involved to speak frankly without fear of repercussions and which embraced ordained women and women in lay ministry as well as those who had theological reservations about their ordination.
 - (c) Sustained attention was required to the issue. There were no quick fixes to be had when it came to building mutual understanding and trust.
102. If the diocese of Sheffield had done much to begin to address this issue, what of the rest of the Church of England? Enquiries made of dioceses by the Secretary General of the General Synod in April 2017 about what they had done to educate and inform clergy and laity about the 2014 Settlement elicited a response from thirty two of the forty two dioceses, a response which presented a varied picture. In twenty three dioceses, no special arrangements had been made to inform or educate beyond, in

most (but not all) cases, letters to the clergy and discussions at diocesan synod. All ordinands were required to give assent to the Five Guiding Principles and this would have given a bishop opportunity to explore them with candidates and explain what they meant within the context of each diocese. Bishops in all dioceses would also have met with parishes which passed Resolutions under the Declaration, to discuss their theological convictions and to explain the process under the Declaration.

103. In the remaining nine dioceses which responded, four had additionally drawn attention to the Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles on their website and in e-newsletters. Five (including Sheffield) had made more proactive efforts to identify ways in which the spirit of the Five Guiding Principles could be incorporated into the life of the diocese. The Secretary General, Mr William Nye, gives examples of these efforts in his letter of 28 April (reproduced at Appendix 14). It is instructive at this point to quote his own assessment of the responses he received from dioceses:

“What is clear from the responses I received is that, while considerable effort has been put into informing (mainly clergy and diocesan synods) about the existence of the Declaration and the commendation by the House of Bishops of the Declaration to all members of the Church of England, rather less has been done in the wake of the 2014 Settlement to ensure that there is a full understanding among clergy and laity of all aspects of the Settlement. Most information and education has focussed on the position of minority parishes that might pass Resolutions under the Declaration”.

104. In his letter, Mr Nye indicates that whilst the National Church Institutions put much effort into developing the 2014 Settlement and assisting its scrutiny through the normal synodical process (a process which itself attracted much publicity), once the Settlement had been reached they *“took no further steps at a formal level to inform or educate about the Settlement, but looked to dioceses to do so as necessary”*. Mr Nye continues:

“In retrospect, it might have been more helpful if the NCIs had provided some relevant and accessible material to assist the bishops and the dioceses with the process of education and reception”.

105. Were such material readily available, it might be of assistance in two other respects. First, although all office-holders and ordinands in the Church of England are required to ‘sign up’ to the Five Guiding Principles, it has been represented to me by those of very different views on the ordination of women that many (ordinands in particular) do not understand the significance of what they are signing up to. Unless there is a more deliberate approach to this matter, there is a danger that the requirement will simply become a box-ticking exercise. Secondly, as time elapses, knowledge and understanding of the thinking underlying the 2014 Settlement and the context in which the Settlement emerged will inevitably fade, not least as the Church’s attention switches to addressing other contentious issues, such as those surrounding human

sexuality. Thirdly, the reaction among secular leaders and others in Sheffield to Bishop North's nomination indicates that if it is difficult for those actively involved in the Church to understand the background and what the 2014 Settlement means, it is even more difficult for those not so involved to do so.

106. I am therefore convinced that if the 2014 Settlement is to hold, a much more comprehensive, sustained and proactive approach is required to informing the Church and those outside it of the rationale for, and the nature and implications of the Settlement than has taken place to this point. Drawing on examples of good practice from within the Church, such a programme needs to be developed under the leadership and authority of the House of Bishops, to be resourced by the National Church Institutions and to be carefully and conscientiously implemented by dioceses and other relevant bodies, such as those responsible for the training of ordinands for the ministry.
107. Such a programme cannot be developed as effectively and convincingly as it should be, however, unless the House of Bishops first gives further attention to two key aspects of the Settlement:
 - (a) The theology underpinning it – in the light of the critique of the Five Guiding Principles and the House of Bishops' Declaration made by Professor Percy and others in the context of the Sheffield events. I consider some aspects of this critique in addressing below the third of the five areas of concern referred to me by the Archbishops, viz the consistency of Bishop North's nomination with the House of Bishops' Declaration.
 - (b) As, if not in practical terms more importantly, the pastoral implications of the Settlement – for ordained women as well as for those who cannot, on theological grounds, accept their ministry.
108. As I have already noted, it is clear from my conversations with ordained (and lay) women in Sheffield that many of them felt that, while plenty of attention had been paid to the flourishing of the minority, little had been given to theirs. Faced with the nomination of a diocesan bishop who would not ordain women as priests (although he would as deacons), simply telling them that the Bishop of Doncaster would ordain women as priests was not enough reassurance. They wanted to know not only how their future diocesan regarded their ministry and its sacramental validity, but how he would relate to them during celebrations of the Eucharist and on other diocesan, deanery and parish occasions. When he said that he would promote women's ministry and women in leadership, what would that mean in practice? In short, they had many practical and pastoral concerns to which they could find no answers in the House of Bishops' Declaration or, immediately, elsewhere.

109. As I have already noted, part of the responsibility for the absence of answers to their questions capable of wider dissemination lay with Bishop North.²⁰ But part of it, I suggest, was the collective responsibility of the House. In my first report as Independent Reviewer, on an expression of concern by WATCH about Chrism Masses, I drew attention to a suggestion by the then Chair of WATCH that a forum be developed in which those of differing convictions on the ordination of women as priests and bishops could discuss together what ‘mutual flourishing’ meant for each of them and for the Church. That suggestion was welcomed at the time by the Chairman of the Council of Bishops of the Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda. In my report, I made clear my willingness to assist the Church in responding to the challenge which had been identified and I subsequently wrote to various parties to assess their willingness to engage in facilitated conversations to this end. However the general view expressed in response was that the immediate focus of dialogue about the implementation of the House of Bishops’ Declaration should be in the dioceses. Reporting this in my first Annual Report to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, I suggested that this outcome underlined the need for means to be found to ensure that the learning being built up by diocesan bishops and others as they wrestled with the implementation of arrangements consistent with the House of Bishops’ Declaration was made available to others facing similar challenges. I continued:

“This is important, not only to enable those concerned to understand the variety of different arrangements which might be made consistent with the principles set out in the Declaration, but also to enable the whole Church to build a picture of what ‘mutual flourishing’ can look like whilst the unity of the Church in jurisdiction and in mission is preserved.

Gathering such information is going to be important as well in helping to ensure that parity of treatment in different parts of the country to which paragraphs 16 and 27 of the Declaration refer and in helping new generations of diocesan leaders to understand both the thinking embodied in the Declaration and its out-working in practice. This is a matter, I suggest, which the House of Bishops may find it helpful to consider as the Church approaches the second anniversary of the introduction of the arrangements set out in the House of Bishops’ Declaration”.

110. Everything which happened in Sheffield has further convinced me of the need for precisely this sort of exercise to be conducted, and for its progress to be reviewed on a regular basis.

²⁰ See paragraph 59 above.

Point (b) The process leading to the nomination of Bishop Philip North to the See of Sheffield

111. I have summarised this process fully in paragraphs 41-51 of my report. I do not think it is for me to recommend changes to the Vacancy in See Committee or the Crown Nominations Commission processes solely on the basis of what happened in the case of the nomination of Bishop North, not least given that a group chaired by Professor Oliver O'Donovan has been considering the theological basis of and other matters connected with the work of the Commission and is, I understand, to report shortly²¹. However it is appropriate for me to identify a number of questions about both aspects of the process raised by the events in Sheffield, questions which I suggest require further consideration in the context of consideration of the report of the O'Donovan group. In setting them out, I make clear that neither I nor those who raised them with me wish to imply criticism of the work of the two Appointments Secretaries, whose efforts to manage the Church's complex arrangements for discerning who God is calling to be a diocesan bishop have been widely praised during my inquiry.
112. The first issue I identify is that there was no real attempt during the Vacancy in See process to address the possibility of appointing a non-ordaining bishop to the Sheffield vacancy and what the implications of this might be for all in the diocese. In particular, the opportunity referred to in paragraph 12 of the House of Bishops' Declaration for the Committee to express a view on whether the next diocesan bishop should be someone who will or will not ordain women was not drawn to the attention of the Committee. Since the events in Sheffield, the Appointments Secretaries have ensured that the guidance they provide to dioceses does include this point. That is a welcome development. Although some represented to me that posing the question will simply invite most, if not all, dioceses to say that they want a diocesan bishop who will ordain women, I cannot see that ignoring the relevance of the question will help anybody.
113. Secondly, there was no detailed attempt by the Crown Nominations Commission to consider what the implications of appointing a non-ordaining bishop to the diocese might be, i.e. there was no real attempt at contingency planning, at thinking through the consequences of such an appointment. That was, in my submission, a major lacuna, especially once it became clear that Bishop North was the first choice of the requisite majority in the Commission.
114. Thirdly, the evidence I received from within the diocese of Sheffield and from central members of the Commission suggested that there is a need to think through again how the views of a diocese are facilitated and reflected in the CNC process. Specifically:

²¹ An interim Report on this Review (GS Misc 1159) was presented to the General Synod in July 2017. <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/4000489/gs-misc-1159-interim-report-on-the-review-of-the-cnc.pdf>

- (a) Although the Appointments Secretaries give very full guidance to a diocese on how to proceed once a vacancy has arisen, it was said that the guidance given is not particularly user-friendly. It was suggested that there is need for a simple 'noddy guide' which would convey the essence of this guidance in a more readily digestible form.
- (b) Those carrying the weight of expressing the views of the diocese of Sheffield in relation to the vacancy there certainly felt that more time should have been allowed for the completion of their part of the process.
- (c) They also felt that the Statement of Needs produced by the Vacancy in See Committee should have been given greater prominence and recognition in the proceedings of the Commission. The Appointments Secretaries would no doubt argue that, important though it is, the Statement of Needs is only one means by which a diocese's requirements in its new bishop gain expression and that it should not be given undue attention over and against others. Nonetheless there is scope, I suggest, for more evident recognition to be given to the Statement.
- (d) Whilst diocesan CNC members were grateful for the briefing they were given by the Appointments Secretaries, both diocesan and central members of the CNC expressed concern about the relative disadvantage the diocesan members felt themselves to be under in playing a full part in the proceedings of the Commission. This was largely the product of the novelty to them of those proceedings. This sense of disadvantage, not to say disenchantment, was expressed to me forcefully during a meeting with a number of diocesan CNC members, one of whom described the CNC process as the least spiritual appointment process in which they had ever been involved. There are, I think, clear questions to be addressed about the adequacy of the training provided for diocesan members of the Commission and, at least on the basis of the Sheffield case, the perceived dynamics within the Commission.

115. Most noticeable in the case of the Sheffield vacancy was the absence from the six diocesan members elected to serve on the CNC of any ordained woman. Some attributed this to the failure of ordained women on the Vacancy in See Committee to organise themselves in such a way as to maximise the chances of a woman being elected. Others went so far as to argue for the inclusion in future of a reserved place for an ordained woman among the six diocesan representatives on the CNC considering any vacancy. The difficulty about this latter suggestion is that if there is to be a reserved place for a woman, why not set aside reserved places for others too? Nevertheless, that the system through which diocesan members are elected to the CNC would repay further consideration as well as greater explanation to those who form the relevant electorate during any vacancy, I have little doubt.

116. As already noted (see paragraph 42 above), strong representations were also made to me about the fact that one of the diocese of Sheffield's representatives on the General Synod, previously elected by the Synod as a central member of the CNC, was able to continue as a member of the Commission which considered the vacancy in Sheffield. I note that a similar case was considered by Baroness Rennie Fritchie (a distinguished former Commissioner for Public Appointments) in a review she conducted in 2010 of the CNC process around a vacancy in the See of Southwark. In the report of her review, Baroness Fritchie observed:

"I think that in terms of influence and perception of influence it would be advisable for central CNC members to wholly withdraw from taking part in an appointment which is being made in their own diocese. This would enable the process to be more objective and remove any suggestion of additional or undue influence. It would also ensure that the balance of diocesan members and central members was properly maintained. It would also free up the affected member to contribute their thoughts and contributions more freely within the diocese at the earliest stage in the process.

I know that selecting additional members who might be able to bring a particular church view or experience to substitute on these rare occasions, will be a challenge. I don't propose to suggest how this might be done, however, I believe that a way could be found which would satisfy all concerned".

117. No criticism can be made of Ms Jane Patterson's decision not to withdraw from the Sheffield CNC (see paragraphs 43-44 above), as Baroness Fritchie's observation on this point was considered but not adopted as a matter of policy following the Southwark vacancy. Nevertheless the issue of influence and perception of influence raised by Baroness Fritchie is a powerful one. It would, I suggest, be timely to revisit it.
118. Two other important concerns were expressed to me about the CNC process by some central members of the Commission. The first, paralleling concerns about the election of the diocesan six, was the process for electing the central members of the Commission. This, it was claimed, gave undue weight to the voices of those representing a minority position in the Church. Thus, it was said, the system for electing members to the Commission at both national and diocesan level failed to produce a result which reflected the balance of opinion in the General Synod or, often, in the relevant diocese on the subject of the consecration of women as bishops.
119. The second concern was the system of voting within the CNC itself, by which the names of candidates for consideration are progressively eliminated and two names, later put in order of preference, emerge which carry the support of a two-thirds majority of members of the Commission. This too, it was said, enabled a minority to

block the nomination of female candidates, however outstanding their qualities²². This ability to block candidates was particularly facilitated by the rule that in the CNC (unlike in voting on propositions in the General Synod) an abstention is taken into account when calculating whether a candidate has obtained a two-thirds majority in the Commission. People, it was argued, tended not to say what they thought, with the result that it was possible for the outcome of voting in the CNC to bear little or no relationship to the tenor of the discussion which had preceded it.

120. It should be said at once that these criticisms of the voting processes (a) for electing national and diocesan members to the Commission and (b) for discerning which candidates should be nominated to a vacancy were by no means universally expressed among the central or diocesan members: indeed the great majority felt that the CNC process in relation to the Sheffield vacancy had been conducted entirely in line with the approved processes as they understood them and that changes in those processes were either unnecessary or unlikely to produce a better functioning Commission. That said, I think it right to record them here, first because they were expressed to me with considerable force and secondly, because it would appear sensible for them to be taken into account during consideration of the report of Professor O'Donovan's group.
121. Before I conclude this analysis of the issues raised with me relating to the Vacancy in See Committee and CNC processes, I mention for the sake of completeness one other point to which some objection was mounted. This concerned the fact that the six members elected by the diocese included two people – the suffragan bishop and the bishop's chaplain – who would have to work very closely with the new bishop. It was questioned whether it was right for either to be involved in selecting their future 'boss'. It is clear that the election of these two people was entirely within the existing rules and that the principal reason why they were among those elected to represent the diocese of Sheffield in the Commission was that the electors in the Vacancy in See Committee had considerable confidence in their ability to do this fairly and effectively. Nevertheless, any comprehensive review of the CNC procedures will be bound to take this criticism into consideration.
122. To summarise my analysis of the issues raised with me in relation to the process leading to the nomination of Bishop North to the See of Sheffield:
 - (a) There were some shortcomings in the process. In particular there was no full discussion in the Vacancy in See Committee or during the consultation process of the possibility of a non-ordaining bishop being appointed to the See or of the implications thereof. Both the work of the CNC and the subsequent credibility of the diocesan membership were hampered by the absence from among the diocesan members of an ordained woman. And it was inappropriate for two

²² This had been particularly evident, it was claimed, in the proceedings of both sittings of the CNC for Oxford (the initial failure of which, and the subsequent nomination of Bishop Croft to the See of Oxford having created the vacancy in Sheffield).

members to give Bishop North an indication during the proceedings of the Commission that his nomination to the vacancy would be welcomed within the diocese, given not least that there had been no collective discussion on this matter within the Vacancy in See Committee.

- (b) Nevertheless, the nomination process was conducted fully in accordance with the policies and procedures then in place. When, at the conclusion of proceedings, the Archbishop of York asked each of the members of the Commission in turn whether they felt that the needs of the diocese and the wider Church had been met by the outcome, all replied in the affirmative.
- (c) A number of questions have been raised with me about whether those policies and procedures are entirely fit for purpose. These questions (identified in paragraphs 112-121 above) are, I suggest worthy of further reflection in the wider context of the consideration of the outcome of the O'Donovan review, where they can be considered not solely in relation to what happened in relation to the Sheffield vacancy.

123. I conclude this section of my report with two more general observations. First, whilst much attention has inevitably focussed on the roles of the Vacancy in See Committee and the CNC in relation to the Sheffield nomination, it is important not to attach too much weight to the potential impact of possible changes in the procedures for a vacancy in see or in relation to the working of the Commission. Appointments of particular diocesan bishops understandably tend to become a focus for the debates and controversies being played out on matters of wider theological difference within the Church, whether to do currently, for example, with the ordination of women or human sexuality. The procedures for handling a vacancy and in respect of the CNC cannot alone be expected to carry the burden of resolving those contentious issues. Rather they are matters for the wider Church.

124. Secondly, the one matter I have not to this point identified as being a major question arising from the Sheffield events is 'what is the essential degree of confidentiality surrounding the CNC's proceedings?' There is no doubt that Bishop North felt that the strong emphasis understandably put on that confidentiality inhibited his ability to consult in the run-up to an announcement as widely as he would have wished before he formed a view on whether to allow his nomination to proceed. There is no doubt also that the Bishop of Doncaster and others in Sheffield felt that the heavy emphasis on confidentiality inhibited their ability to prepare for handling the aftermath of that announcement. As I shall go on to suggest, the lack of adequate, careful and considered preparation for that announcement was to prove a major deficiency.

Point (c) The consistency of Bishop North’s nomination with the House of Bishops’ Declaration

125. I have noted previously that, in introducing the Five Guiding Principles which are at the heart of the House of Bishops’ Declaration, the House stated that the principles “need to be read one with the other and held together in tension, rather than being applied selectively”. I have also noted that the Five Guiding Principles need to be read within the context of the Declaration as a whole. It is on this understanding that I turn to consider whether Bishop North’s nomination to the See of Sheffield was consistent with the House of Bishops’ Declaration.
126. Neither the House of Bishops’ Declaration nor the Five Guiding Principles say specifically that a non-ordaining bishop may still be appointed to a diocesan see. Indeed the Declaration does not make any assumption about the theological position on this issue of diocesan or suffragan bishops. However, the possibility of a non-ordaining bishop being appointed to a diocesan or a suffragan see is clearly implied by paragraphs 11-13 of the Declaration, which are set out in full at Appendix 4: –
- (a) Paragraph 11 refers to the need to ensure that in each diocese there is at least one serving bishop, whether the diocesan or a suffragan, who ordains women to the priesthood. There would be no need for this statement if all diocesans were in future to be willing to ordain women.
 - (b) Paragraph 12 refers to the right of dioceses to express a view on whether their diocesan bishop should be someone who will or will not ordain women, and goes on to say that in dioceses where the diocesan bishop does not ordain women, he should ensure that a bishop who is fully committed to the ordained ministry of women is given a role across the whole diocese for providing support for female clergy and their ministry. Again it is clear that the declaration recognises the possibility that a diocesan bishop may be someone who does not ordain women.
 - (c) Paragraph 13, after noting that all bishops have a shared responsibility for the welfare of the whole Church of England, says that *“it will be important that senior leadership roles within dioceses continue to be filled by people from across the range of traditions.”*
127. Paragraph 13 does not refer to leadership roles “excluding those of diocesan bishop”. Nor are the references to mutual flourishing in the Declaration qualified in any way to exclude particular positions or roles from consideration. It is clear that the Crown Nominations Commission and others involved in one way or another in the Sheffield appointment proceeded on the understanding that under the 2014 Settlement all senior roles are open to male bishops and priests regardless of their particular view on the subject of women’s role in ministry, just as they are open to female bishops and priests. And in my submission they were entirely right to do so.

128. I am fortified in this conclusion not only by my own reading of the House of Bishops' Declaration but my understanding – confirmed by the Secretary General of the General Synod – that the possibility of a non-ordaining bishop being appointed to a diocesan role was covered in various ways during the debates in General Synod and in the steering committee which led up to the 2014 Settlement. I attach at Appendix 15 a note by Mr Nye which confirms this point.
129. Why then did so many in and beyond the diocese of Sheffield express surprise, even shock, when a non-ordaining bishop was nominated to fill the vacancy in the diocese? For several reasons, perhaps:
- (a) They simply assumed that, the diocese having previously been led by three diocesan bishops who had ordained women, the next bishop would be of a similar view.
 - (b) In explaining the 2014 Settlement, no-one had communicated to them that this was a possibility.
 - (c) Nor had anyone raised the possibility of a non-ordaining bishop being appointed in the discussions which immediately preceded the work of the Sheffield CNC.
 - (d) Even if the possibility had occurred to them, they had not seen it as a real one given their understanding of the needs of the diocese of Sheffield and of the character and attitudes of its people.
130. Whatever the reason, there is no doubt that Bishop North's nomination was consistent with the House of Bishops' Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles. The question whether the nomination was consistent with the Declaration is not of course the same as the question was the nomination a wise one, in the context of the needs of the diocese of Sheffield. The CNC believed that it was and it is not, I am clear, for me to second-guess the decision of the CNC on that point.
131. It would be possible for me to end there my consideration of the third of the areas of concern referred to me by the Archbishops. However, to do so would be wholly inappropriate, for it would be to ignore the weighty critique of the theological and ecclesiological issues raised by Bishop North's nomination offered not only by Professor Martyn Percy but by a number of other academics and theologians of note – namely Professor Paul Avis, Canon Dr Malcolm Grundy and Professor Linda Woodhead. In a number of respects, the challenge posed went beyond questioning the rightness or otherwise of Bishop North's nomination and constituted a challenge to the Five Guiding Principles and the House of Bishops' Declaration itself. Also relevant in this context are the reflections on the nomination offered by a wide range of interested

bodies including Affirming Catholicism, Forward in Faith, Modern Church, Reform and WATCH. With one exception, all of the relevant submissions or documents from these individuals and organisations are being published with my report²³.

132. I embark on my examination of these matters with some diffidence. I am not a trained theologian. More importantly, I am not the author of the House of Bishops' Declaration. It is not for the Independent Reviewer to be the principal defender of the 2014 Settlement: the responsibility for explaining and defending that Settlement must rest with the House of Bishops in relation to the Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles and with the General Synod whose members voted for the Settlement. There is, in my submission, a clear need for the House of Bishops itself to ensure that the challenge posed by Professor Percy and some others – which is in effect a fundamental challenge to the 2014 Settlement – does not go unanswered if confidence in the durability of that Settlement is to be maintained. If it is not maintained, not only the continued place in the Church of those in the minority who cannot accept the ministry of women will be put in doubt; the support for the 2014 Settlement of those who take the view of the majority will also be put in question. Nevertheless I regard it as consistent with my role to offer some reflections on the issues raised, reflections which I hope may be helpful to the fuller examination of the arguments which I suggest is necessary.

The Critique offered by Professor Percy and Others

133. I have already summarised Professor Percy's critique in paragraphs 69-82 above. The differing critiques offered by Professor Avis, Canon Grundy and Professor Woodhead may be briefly summarised as follows. In attempting such a summary I am conscious that any attempt to précis complex theological and ecclesiological arguments is almost certain to be inadequate. That is why I invite readers of this report to read the arguments advanced by those I have named in full. My purpose in attempting a brief summary here is simply to illustrate the range and weight of the points being made.
134. Professor Avis's consideration of the issues is set out in an article "Bishops in Communion? The Unity of the Episcopate, the Unity of the Diocese and the Unity of the Church"²⁴ to be published in the October issue of *'Ecclesiology'*, sight of an advance draft of which he has kindly given to me and others. Professor Avis argues that two ecclesiological anomalies which have arisen in the Church of England since the consecration of women as bishops – viz the inability of some members of the College of Bishops in conscience to recognise women bishops' episcopal orders and ministry; and the inability of a diocesan bishop in conscience to recognise the priestly

²³ The exception is that by Professor Paul Avis. Professor Avis's article 'Bishops in Communion' is to be published in the October 2017 edition of *'Ecclesiology'* (vol.13.3, pp.299-323. www.brill.com/ecclesiology). The other submissions may be found at Appendices 17 & 20-23 of this report.

²⁴ *Ecclesiology* 13.3 (October 2017), pp.299-323. www.brill.com/ecclesiology

ordination of some clergy in his diocese because these clergy are female or have been ordained by a female bishop – present *“a serious challenge to the Anglican understanding of the Church and to the way this understanding is instantiated in Anglican polity.....I am driven to the conclusion that the Church of England is skating on the thinnest of thin ice, ecclesiological speaking.”* Dr Avis goes on to explore, by means of the concepts of *reception, economy* and *charity*, whether a *modus vivendi* is possible that would enable the Church of England to live with these two anomalies with theological integrity.

135. In his letter to me of 31 March, Canon Grundy draws on his doctoral research into what several important ecumenical agreements and conversations have said about the theological and ecclesiological nature of episcopal ministry. He argues that the appointment of a non-ordaining bishop (specifically of Bishop North to the See of Sheffield) would involve the appointment of *“a person whose ministry could not properly be exercised collegially or communally”*. It would not therefore be in accordance with the agreements he cites, agreements by which the Church of England is bound.
136. Professor Woodhead expressed her views on the theological and ecclesiological issues most fully in a blog she posted on the Modern Church website on 20 March (Appendix 16). Professor Woodhead’s critique is similar to that of Professor Percy. Those holding traditionalist views on the ordination of women, she argues, *“lost the argument about God, gender and priesthood a long time ago, and now find themselves unable to offer a theological rationale for ‘separate provision’ or a bishop who doesn’t recognise the orders of an ever-expanding proportion of his own clergy”*. The Five Guiding Principles are inherently contradictory and amenable to wholly different interpretations. Bishop North’s nomination goes beyond what she and others believe to have been sanctioned by the Guiding Principles and raises a new set of theological, ecclesiological and moral concerns which the Guiding Principles do not resolve. Much deeper theological and ecclesiological thinking is required, she argues, if the Church is to resolve the fundamental questions raised by Bishop North’s nomination.
137. Whilst the various contributions to the debate sparked by Bishop North’s nomination offered by all four of the thinkers I have mentioned need to be read in full, they contain a number of common themes, starting with matters specific to Bishop North and then becoming more general. These themes may be summarised as follows:
 - The Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda and Forward in Faith has adopted a distorted understanding of the Five Guiding Principles, in particular of Principle 1.
 - As a member of the Council of Bishops of The Society, Bishop North must be assumed to hold views consistent with those expressed by The Society.
 - It would not be possible for Bishop North or anyone else holding those views to be a diocesan bishop because, while they could affirm that all the clergy (male and

female) with whom they shared the ‘cure of souls’ in the diocese were lawful holders of their office, they would not in conscience regard their priesthood as ‘true’ (in the language of Guiding Principle 1) or valid, and so could not be in full sacramental communion with all their clergy.

- Whilst it is possible for a suffragan bishop to minister to part of the Body of Christ (the Church), a key aspect of the role of diocesan bishop is to be a focus of unity for the whole diocese and for this reason he has to be in full sacramental communion with all the clergy in the diocese.
- It is not possible for someone to be appointed a diocesan bishop who cannot, because of their views on women’s ordination, fulfil the obligations of the role. Moreover, to appoint such a person to a diocesan see would be to strain the ecclesial integrity of the Church to, or beyond, its breaking point.

138. With due diffidence, I offer below some reflections on these points from the perspective of:

- (a) The history of the Church of England’s wrestling with these matters.
- (b) My understanding of the nature of the House of Bishops’ Declaration and of the Five Guiding Principles.
- (c) My understanding of what the Church means when it speaks of a bishop – and a diocesan bishop in particular – being “a focus of unity”.
- (d) My understanding of what the concept of mutual flourishing means and what it demands from each of us, whatever our views may be on women’s role in ministry.

Two Preliminary Points:

(1) What exactly does Bishop North believe about Women’s Ordination?

139. Before I offer these reflections, I address two preliminary points. The first is an issue which was of considerable importance in the context of the Sheffield appointment – viz what exactly did Bishop North believe about the ministry of those ordained women with whom he was being called to share the cure of souls?

140. As I have previously noted, Bishop North gave an account of his views to the ordained women and female ordinands he met in Doncaster Minster on 7 February. He believed that his candidacy to be their diocesan bishop, including his views on what was meant by mutual flourishing, had been tested by the Crown Nominations Commission and found to be acceptable. The continuing demands on him to explain his position were not matched by similar demands on others (including women bishops) to explain theirs, another example, in his view, of the imbalance in the Church’s living out of mutual flourishing in practice.

141. Nevertheless, in the context of my enquiry, Bishop North has explained his position on the matter as follows. I reproduce it, with his permission, in his own words:

“The basis of my own objection to women’s ordination is the authority and unity of the Church. In my view the Church of England is part of the one holy catholic Church of God and that imposes limits on what it can and can’t decide unilaterally. Extending the historic threefold order to women constitutes a major doctrinal change and thus, whilst it may be the way the Spirit is calling the Church, it is an action that the Church of England does not have the unilateral authority to undertake. Thus it is one that undermines the unity of the Church. This means that I feel the need to stand aside from it and thus in conscience cannot ordain women to the priesthood. However the nature of my objection does not cause me to doubt the validity of those orders that the Church of England bestows on female candidates and I hold their ministry to be transformative and grace-filled. I also accept that there are two legitimate, theological views in the Church on this and so am very happy to sponsor female candidates for ordination.

That is where I stand. However, there are many traditionalists who take a different view from me and look at validity in different ways. I serve them and am happy to do so and would fight very hard to preserve not just their place in the Church but their right to be appointed to senior office within it.”

As we have seen, Bishop North had intended, as diocesan bishop, to ordain both men and women as deacons, although he would not have ordained either men or women as priests.

(2) Professor Percy and the Views of The Society and Forward in Faith

142. Professor Percy, in the absence of any alternative account of Bishop North’s views, mounted his criticism of Bishop North’s nomination on the basis that those views were one and the same as those expressed in the article published in *New Directions* in February 2017, which reproduced the address given by the Director of Forward in Faith at that organisation’s National Assembly in November 2016. As I have described earlier²⁵, in this address, the Director had referred to the introduction of what he called ‘identity cards’ for priests who are members of the Society, enabling them to show that they had been ordained by a male bishop. The Bishop of Wakefield subsequently expressed regret for any offence that the description of The Society’s membership cards as ‘identity cards’ may have caused.
143. The submission by Forward in Faith to my review takes issue with Professor Percy’s accusation in his essay “Questions of Ambiguity and Integrity” that The Society and Forward in Faith do not recognise the orders of male priests ordained by bishops who also ordain women to the episcopate and/or as priests. The submission quotes from the 2015 statement “Communion, Catholicity and the Catholic Life” issued by The

²⁵ Paragraphs 71ff.

Society in refuting any suggestion that The Society and Forward in Faith espouse a theology of taint. The Executive Committee of Forward in Faith invites me “to consider whether knowingly persisting in alleging that those of differing convictions hold doctrines that they have publicly stated that they do not hold is in line with the principles of reciprocity and mutuality embodied in the House of Bishops’ Declaration”²⁶.

144. I doubt that either confidence in the House of Bishops’ Declaration or the cause of mutual flourishing in the Church of England would be advanced by my condemning the behaviour of anyone involved in this saga. I simply draw attention at this point to the words of paragraphs 9 and 10 of the House of Bishops’ Declaration:

*9. **Reciprocity** means that everyone, notwithstanding differences of conviction on this issue, will accept that they can rejoice in each other’s partnership in the Gospel and cooperate to the maximum possible extent in mission and ministry. There will need to be an acknowledgement that the differences of view which persist stem from an underlying divergence of theological conviction.*

10. In particular reciprocity will mean that those of differing conviction will do all within their power to avoid giving offence to each other. There will need to be sensitivity to the feelings of vulnerability that some will have that their position within the Church of England will gradually be eroded and that others will have because not everyone will receive their ministry.

I shall have more to say later on what this implies about the conditions necessary to achieve true mutual flourishing in the Church of England.

145. In my view, the most significant charge levelled by Professor Percy at Forward in Faith’s understanding of the Five Guiding Principles centres on its published understanding of Guiding Principle 1. As I have noted previously, for Professor Percy, much weight attaches to the statement in this Principle that the Church of England ... “holds that those whom it has duly ordained and appointed to office are the true [emphasis added] as well as lawful holders of the office they occupy”. Professor Percy accuses the Society and Forward in Faith of swallowing the second proposition – that those whom the Church has appointed are (regardless of gender) the lawful holders of their office – but not the first, because they cannot accept the validity of their orders. The Executive Committee of Forward in Faith’s response (see paragraph 22 of the Forward in Faith submission) is to accuse Professor Percy and others of misinterpreting the first Guiding Principle.
146. The Forward in Faith article in support of this assertion is contained in the Annex to the organisation’s submission at Appendix 17. In brief, its argument is that:

²⁶ See paragraphs 27 and 28 of Forward in Faith’s submission at Appendix 17.

- If all clergy and ordinands were to be required to be “fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open to all, without reference to gender”, rather than merely recognising and accepting that that is the Church of England’s commitment, that would make nonsense of the whole Declaration.
- The second half of Principle 1 – where the reference to all office holders being the true and lawful holders of their office arises – refers to the office they hold, not to their place in the threefold order of bishops, priests and deacons.
- Nowhere in the first Principle is there a statement that traditional catholics (or anyone else) should hold a particular view as to the sacramental validity of the ministry of women (and of men ordained by women) as bishops and priests. Such a requirement would pose problems not only for traditional catholics but for others in the Church.
- The Declaration says that the Principles “need to be read one with the other and held together in tension, rather than being applied selectively”. The first Principle needs to be read with the fourth Principle and cannot be interpreted in a way which requires those who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests to disavow that conviction.

Forward in Faith’s submission finishes on this point by calling for Professor Percy’s misrepresentation of the first Principle to receive authoritative correction.

147. It is for the House of Bishops, if it so wishes, to comment on whether or not Professor Percy’s or the Society/Forward in Faith’s interpretation of the first Guiding Principle is valid. As a mere layman, I offer the following thoughts, which I hope may assist the House not only in addressing that issue but the other challenges which have been posed to the 2014 Settlement in the course of my review.

Some Reflections:

(1) The History of the Church of England’s Engagement with this Issue

148. The question of the relationship between a non-ordaining bishop and women clergy in his diocese, although highlighted by Bishop North’s nomination, is not one which is new. It has been an issue since women were first ordained to the priesthood in 1994. Prior to that the Church had struggled with the question how differing views on the ordination of women could be held together in the Church. It had thought it not a matter of organisational survival to do so but one of Christian obligation.
149. The Church of England has always recognised that, given the fractured state of the Universal Church, while it had the right and responsibility to decide the issue of women’s ordination for itself, its own decision had to be set within the context of a wider discussion and debate within the Universal Church, i.e. a process (known in theological terms as ‘reception’) in which the whole Church would come to a view on whether the innovation represented by the ordination of women was consonant with

the faith as handed down through the ages. This is explicitly recognised in Principle 3 of the Five Guiding Principles.

150. The Church of England and the wider Anglican Communion have also consistently recognised (the latter in Resolutions at the Lambeth Conferences of 1978, 1988 and 1998) that (a) the decision to ordain women would inevitably place restrictions upon the visible expression of full ecclesial communion, but that (b) the obligation of all concerned was to do everything possible to limit the extent of this impairment of communion and to accord an honoured place to those of differing views on the issue. Resolution III.2 of the Lambeth Conference 1998, for example, called upon the provinces of the Anglican Communion *“to affirm that those who dissent from, as well as those who assent to, the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans”* and that *“there is and should be no compulsion on any bishop in matters concerning ordination or licensing”*.
151. It was therefore in a context of much careful theological debate and reflection that, following the passage of the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure in 1992, the Church of England agreed in 1993 initial arrangements – which came to be embodied in the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod – to provide extended episcopal oversight to those who could not accept the Church’s decision. *“Bonds of Peace”*²⁷ - attached to a report by the House of Bishops GS 1074, the report in which these arrangements were proposed - contained this paragraph, which I believe to be as relevant to the Church’s situation now as it was then:

“We now enter a process in which it is desirable that both those in favour and those opposed should be recognised as holding legitimate positions while the whole Church seeks to come to a common mind. The Church of England needs to understand itself as a communion in dialogue, committed to remaining together in the ongoing process of the discernment of truth within the wider fellowship of the Christian Church. Giving space to each other and remaining in the highest possible degree of communion in spite of difference are crucial, as we strive to be open to the insights of the wider Christian community. Though some of the means by which communion is expressed may be strained or broken, the need for courtesy, tolerance, mutual respect, prayer for one another and a continuing desire to know one another and to be with one another, remain binding upon us as Christians, no less within our own Church than is already the case in our ecumenical relations. The danger to be avoided is that, where ecclesial communion is impaired, communities may begin to define themselves over against one another and develop in isolation from each other”.

²⁷ I add here that although some continue to claim that, in *“Bonds of Peace”* and the subsequent Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod, the Church of England recognised the existence of two integrities on the subject of women’s ordination to the priesthood, this is not the case. What the Church did do was recognise the existence of two views on the matter, either of which could be held with integrity, and which the arrangements made were intended to hold within the one integrity of the Church.

152. Why have I emphasised this history (familiar as it will be to many in the General Synod and the House of Bishops, though not I suspect to many outside it)? For the simple reason that the House of Bishops' Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles are to be seen, not as the result of a failure of theological leadership but as the product of a determined attempt to provide that leadership, as the result of a process of sustained theological reflection and debate over a period of many years. The theology they embody is consistent with the development of that debate and with the Church's gathered experience over several decades. That does not, of course, make the theology right: it is one of the Church of England's foundational beliefs that all Councils, including those in the Church, may err. It does, however, mean that the last thing the Five Guiding Principles represent, in my submission, is a failure to give theological leadership.

(2) The Nature of the House of Bishops' Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles

153. In his article "Questions of Ambiguity and Integrity", Professor Percy speaks of the present state of the Church's thinking on these matters as consisting of "*a mere suite of fudged and managed compromises*". In his subsequent essay "Not a Matter of Opinion: Discernment, Difference and Discrimination" he describes the Five Guiding Principles as having been "*imposed on Synod by the House of Bishops as the 'cost' (or counter-weight) for approving women bishops*". The notion that the House of Bishops can impose its will on the Synod will come as a surprise, I suspect, to most members of the Synod as well as of the House. But is the Declaration (and the Five Guiding Principles it embodies) to be seen as no more than a quick political 'fix' to get the Church out of the hole it had dug for itself by rejecting the initial draft Measure which would have enabled the consecration of women as bishops?

154. The Five Guiding Principles contain within themselves the tension which the Church has been wrestling with since at least 1994. But the fact that they are, as the Declaration says, to be "read one with the other and held together in tension" does not make them a mere set of fudged compromises. Rather it reflects the reality of the Church's situation. Moreover, the Five Guiding Principles are relational and contingent. They emerged from a discussion about how relationships were to be continued within the Church in the event of a decision to ordain women as bishops. Once that decision had been made in 2014, the Church had a confirmed position on the matter. The Five Guiding Principles are not about protecting the theological position of those in the minority but about honouring the continued place of the minority who cannot accept, on theological grounds, the Church's decision.

155. The Five Guiding Principles, and the House of Bishops' Declaration of which they form part, focus on protecting the minority because that was their purpose. The majority in the Church achieved the passage of the 2014 Measure. The Five Guiding Principles and the Declaration were intended to answer the question, being asked by the minority, as

to whether, if the Measure was passed, they could trust the majority to continue to accord them an honoured place in the Church of England.

156. The Five Guiding Principles and the Declaration were not hastily drafted and were not imposed on the Synod. However, it is fair to say that they were a solution to a political problem. To the minority, they offered the prospect of a continued place of honour in the Church. To the majority they were the price of getting the 2014 Measure through.
157. One difficulty about the Five Guiding Principles is that they have begun to assume an almost totemic significance in the thinking of many in the Church, a significance I doubt they were intended to bear. The fact that, for perfectly understandable reasons, ordinands and clerical office holders are invited to sign up to them (without, so far as I have been able to establish, a great deal of explanation or understanding of the significance of what they are doing) means that their status has hardened. This process has been assisted by the quasi-legalistic way in which some in the Church (including, among others, Forward in Faith) have approached their interpretation.
158. It needs to be remembered that the Five Guiding Principles are simply that – guiding principles. They are a part, not the end, of the story. The failure of the Church to engage since 2014 in a sustained dialogue about what mutual flourishing would and could mean in practice has led to them being expected to carry a burden they were never intended to carry. Unless such a dialogue begins in earnest, they will face increasing challenge and be the focus of increasing dispute.

(3) The Bishop as “A Focus of Unity”

159. As I have noted, much of the critique of Bishop North’s nomination offered by Professor Percy and others focuses on the role of the bishop, and especially of the diocesan bishop, as ‘a focus of unity’ for the Church. The question being asked is ‘How can a diocesan bishop be a focus of unity for his diocese if he is not in full sacramental communion with all of the priests in his diocese?’
160. This question, it should be noted, is as relevant to the position of a woman diocesan bishop as it is to that of a non-ordaining bishop. In the 2004 report “Women Bishops in the Church of England? A Report of the House of Bishops’ Working Party on the Episcopate” (GS 1557), the central issue was whether a woman can be a bishop for a whole diocese, including those who do not recognise her as a bishop because of her female gender. No attention was given to the inverse situation, of whether a man can be a bishop for a whole diocese including those whom he would not ordain as a priest because of their female gender, because that situation had already existed for ten years and was not something expected to change. Moreover, “Bonds of Peace” had already made the case in 1993 that fundamentally we are dealing with the same “set of theological, ecclesiological and moral concerns” in the case of both those welcoming and those resisting change on the ordination of women: namely, how do dioceses

continue to express the communion of the Church when that communion is significantly restricted, as it will be within each diocese for the foreseeable future.

161. In preparing to undertake this review, I asked the Revd Canon Jeremy Worthen, Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Theology, for his reflections on this key issue. A note containing his response is at Appendix 18. The heart of his argument is that since 1994, communion within the Church of England has inevitably been impaired for everyone in that Church, whatever position they take on the subject of the ordination of women. He writes:

“The way that the Church of England lives the communion that is God’s gift has been affected in significant ways by how it has chosen to respond to the decision about the ordination of women as priests and bishops. One result of that is that it is no longer possible to speak in a straightforward way about the Church of England holding ‘full sacramental communion’ within its own life, or with other Churches. Yet it remains truly a church, bound together as communion and bound together in communion with other Churches”.

He concludes:

“The continuing significance of the bishop as a ‘focus’ of unity therefore needs to be understood in relation to the kind of unity we have within the Church of England today”.

162. To these considerations I add the following brief reflections of my own. Professor Percy and others put much emphasis on unity being focussed in the person of the diocesan bishop. However it is not, I submit, primarily the person who is the focus of a diocese’s unity but the office he or she holds. It is easier if one likes and even agrees with the views of one’s diocesan bishop to see him or her as the focus of the diocese’s unity but it is not (and never has been), a requirement. One’s loyalty – whether as priest or lay person – is primarily to the office of the bishop rather than the particular individual who holds it.²⁸
163. Moreover, while a diocesan bishop is the ‘ordinary’ of a diocese and holds in trust the legal authority that goes with that, he or she does not carry the weight of expressing the sacramental unity of a diocese alone. That unity is expressed collectively by all the bishops in the diocese, suffragan as well as diocesan, and is demonstrated more widely in the collegiality not only of the House of Bishops but of the College of Bishops as a whole.

²⁸ It is relevant also to the consideration of the concept of the bishop as a focus of unity to note an evangelical perspective on the issue, as stated by the Bishop of Maidstone in his submission at Appendix 24. He writes: “.....there is in general, a strong evangelical view that ‘the focus of unity’ concept has been widely misinterpreted. For evangelicals, the focus of unity is Christ himself, as He is revealed in the gospels and apostolic teaching. The idea that bishops, in their own persons, need to hold a majority view on everything in order to foster unity has no place in New Testament teaching.”

164. Professor Percy argues that a diocesan bishop is different from a suffragan. This is, of course, correct in terms of the extent of their legal or juridical authority. But it has never to my knowledge been the Church of England's position that, within the threefold order of bishops, priests and deacons, a diocesan bishop has a different status or significance from a suffragan. A bishop is a bishop is a bishop.
165. In saying this, I in no way withdraw the concern I have already expressed that the pastoral implications for the ministry of ordained women of appointing a non-ordaining bishop as diocesan should be addressed more fully by or on behalf of the House than they have been hitherto. I understand completely the view expressed to me by ordained women in Sheffield that saying to them simply "you have the Bishop of Doncaster to look after you" is inadequate. But in acknowledging this, I underline the fact that any such exercise will also need to address the implications of appointing a woman bishop for her pastoral relationship with the male clergy in her diocese who are unable on theological grounds to accept the sacramental validity of her orders.

(4) Mutual Flourishing

166. I conclude this section of my report with some reflections on the issue of mutual flourishing. To Professor Percy, mutual flourishing has limits. In his essay "Not a Matter of Opinion", Professor Percy writes:

"To be clear, I am willing and able, in all conscience, to see those groups that wish to practise discrimination – be they ontologically-based in 'catholic' wings of the Church or 'complementarians' in conservative Evangelicalism – continue as part of the Church of England, and to be resourced for their flourishing. I do not think it ecclesially wise or in Christian charity to try and drive them out. They are part of the body of Christ, and more unites us than divides us.

But make no mistake: these groups are also, inherently, discriminatory. And I cannot see how justice or integrity is best-served, or the mission and ministry of the national Church can ever be enhanced, by extending the influence of such groups across the wider Church".

Such groups have, in his view, elected to marginalise themselves by choosing "opinions that necessitate distancing themselves from the mainstream". They should therefore remain at the margins until they part company with those opinions.

167. I fully respect Professor Percy's right to hold and express these views. I do not, however, believe his view of what constitutes 'mutual flourishing' is consistent with what the House and the Synod had in mind in espousing the Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles. Rather the mutual flourishing referred to in the fifth Guiding Principle was and is about remaining in the highest possible degree of communion in spite of difference for as long as the Church continues to be in dialogue, in a process of 'reception', on the subject of women's role in ministry. During that period there are – as the Declaration makes clear – to be no limits on the offices in the Church which are

open to those of differing views on the issue (paragraph 13). All are to be treated equally (paragraph 15).

168. With equal rights come equal obligations. These include:

- The need to speak of each other in terms of regard and affection rather than disdain or condemnation. During my conversations with ordained women in Sheffield, I was given examples of language used of them by some male clergy holding traditionalist views which were wholly unacceptable. Any use of language by anyone in this debate (whatever position they hold) which is hurtful or demeaning is utterly to be condemned. No toleration of it should be shown by anyone, especially anyone in a position of authority in the Church.
- The need for caution before attributing views to others which they may not in fact hold. Bishop North was repeatedly alleged to hold views which, it has become clear in the course of this enquiry, he does not in fact hold.

169. Paragraphs 9 and 10 of the House of Bishops' Declaration touch on these matters in speaking of the need for reciprocity. In doing so, they emphasise the need to go beyond the negative – being sensitive and avoiding causing offence – to embrace the positive:

“Reciprocity means that everyone, notwithstanding differences of conviction on this issue, will accept that they can rejoice in each other’s partnership in the Gospel and co-operate to the maximum possible extent in mission and ministry”.

An act of empathy – putting ourselves into the shoes of those with whom we may profoundly disagree – is required of all of us. As I suggested when concluding my report on Chrism Masses, we need as a Church to get beyond thinking of ‘mutual flourishing’ in terms of what will contribute to my flourishing to a point where we consider the question “What would a state of mutual flourishing look like which was more than one of merely tolerating difference and living with hurt but in which, to quote paragraph 14 of the House of Bishops' Declaration, ‘those of differing conviction will be committed to making it possible for each other to flourish’ and in which the aim of all concerned is to promote what is held in common, honouring each other in the process”.

170. The responsibility for moving into this better, more positive state, rests with all of us. First, it rests on the institutional Church which, under the guidance of the House of Bishops, needs to show that it realises that it is not enough simply to will the end – the flourishing of all sections of the Church in their common calling to witness to the Gospel in a world increasingly in need of Christ’s message. The means to achieve this end also need to be addressed: for example, through purposeful programmes to explain the implications of the House of Bishops' Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles to ordinands and others in training for licensed ministries; through deliberate attempts to ensure that both women and those who hold minority views

are given the preparation required to enable them to be considered for senior roles in the Church; and through the provision of opportunities for continued dialogue at diocesan and national level which facilitate the exchange of examples of good practice and check the progress being made.

171. Secondly, it rests on the organisations which represent those with differing views on the issue. *“The danger to be avoided”*, as the passage I quoted earlier from *“Bonds of Peace”* puts it, *“is that, where ecclesial communion is impaired, communities may begin to define themselves over against one another and develop in isolation from each other.”* For example, whilst I fully recognise the genuine efforts the leadership of Forward in Faith has made to emphasise the responsibility lying on their organisation’s members to participate fully in the life of the Church²⁹, I am struck by the extent to which the language used in some of Forward in Faith’s key publications to express its own self-understanding is about separate rather than shared identity. In the same address, the Director talks of The Society of St Wilfrid and St Hilda (*“The Society”*) as an ecclesial structure:

“It is like a church; but it is not a church in an exclusive sense”.

Later he says:

“We sought ‘an ecclesial structure’ which will continue the orders of bishop and priest as the Church has received them and which can guarantee a true sacramental life; in the end, with our bishops, we created it ourselves”.

Like the rest of the whole Church, Forward in Faith and The Society are living with the tensions created by impaired communion. The point I am simply making – a point which I address to them to consider but which I emphasise is of relevance to every organisation involved in this discussion – is whether they can find a different language in which to express their theological position, one based on a more corporate understanding of the Church and of the role of the bishop within it.

172. Thirdly, the responsibility rests on each and every one of us, in relation to the manner in which we conduct ourselves in our relationships with others. There can be no better guide on this than the words of Saint Paul, who in many of his Letters to the early Church stresses the need for everyone to act in ways which build rather than undermine the unity of the Church. Here, for example, is an extract from his letter to the Philippians, part of a passage which is read at the service to inaugurate every new General Synod:

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish

²⁹ See, for example, the Director of Forward in Faith’s welcome injunction in his address to the organisation’s 2016 National Assembly for members to maintain or rebuild relationships with the rest of the Church of England.

*ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus ...”.*³⁰

173. I pause at this point to refer briefly to an email exchange I had some time after my visit to Sheffield with an ordained woman serving in the diocese who had been among the most prominent critics of Bishop North’s nomination. In her email she referred, among other things, to the feelings of hurt, anger and betrayal which some women in the diocese felt because of what had happened. She concluded, however, with this:

“As I think X [another woman priest involved in SAME] has mentioned to you, one of The Society’s young Assistant Curates in the diocese has invited us for dinner, and also to his priesting. We will go, and continue the good work of reconciliation begun when we met with him individually to share our experiences and understanding together.”

And she quoted Mother Teresa:

“There are no great acts. Only small acts done with great love”.

To that, one can only respond “Amen”.

Point (d) The Reactions to Bishop North’s Nomination in the Church and Beyond it

174. I have given an account of the principal features of this reaction in paragraphs 56-82 above. The major issue I identified there was the failure of all concerned to anticipate the likely reaction in the diocese of Sheffield to the news of Bishop North’s nomination and to make preparations accordingly. Bishop North’s nomination was (or would have been) the first instance since 1994 of an ordaining diocesan bishop being followed by a non-ordaining diocesan. Given this and Bishop North’s previous withdrawal from Whitby, was it not necessary to have a clear strategy in place from the day of the announcement to explain how this was going to work? With the benefit of hindsight, it is odd that no one person or institution either clearly saw the need or was in a position to make this happen.

175. Why was this? For several reasons:

- (a) Once the CNC had completed its work, the Church’s understanding was that arrangements for handling the announcement of the nomination were in the hands of the Crown.
- (b) The cloak of confidentiality surrounding the Commission’s work meant that the only people who knew, formally, about the impending announcement were the members of the Commission.

³⁰ Philippians 2.1–5.

- (c) The emphasis on confidentiality meant that even those members of the Commission, such as the Bishop of Doncaster, who were concerned about the likely reception of the announcement felt inhibited in taking others into their confidence in order to pursue preparations.
- (d) The confidence in how the nomination would be received shown by some (but not all) of the diocesan representatives during the Commission's proceedings perhaps lulled others into a false sense of security.

Whatever the reasons, Bishop North's nomination revealed a lacuna as to who sees it as their responsibility to co-ordinate the handling of the announcement of a new diocesan bishop in circumstances where, like Bishop North's, it might raise high profile issues.

- 176. It is not that Bishop North was lacking help in preparing for the announcement (see paragraph 55 above). My understanding, however, is that although the Archbishops' Appointments Secretary was flexible and supportive throughout – for example, in giving Bishop North time and opportunity to consult others before accepting nomination – the range of support offered to Bishop North by the Church did not go beyond that which is regularly offered to those about to be nominated as a diocesan bishop. No-one took an overview – arguably, no-one was in a position to take an overview – of what would be required to support announcement of the nomination, to support Bishop North personally, and to see the process through.
- 177. For this reason, the answers to the questions ordained and lay women in ministry and others in the diocese of Sheffield and beyond it understandably began asking from the moment of the announcement were not immediately available, at least in a publicly transmissible form. The 31 January announcement of Bishop North's nomination did not mention his non-ordaining position except by implication. There is no evidence, however, that this omission was deliberate, as some later suggested to me it had been³¹. As it was, in the immediate context of the announcement, only limited advantage was taken of the opportunity to explain Bishop North's position up-front and on the record, and thereby to try to set the terms of the future debate.
- 178. Bishop North had, of course, recognised the need for ordained women in Sheffield to hear directly from him on this issue and it was at his initiative that the meeting with them in Doncaster Minster was arranged. But, as we have seen, the arrangements for the meeting were inadequately thought through and in the end the meeting compounded rather than alleviated the problem. Moreover, the fact that the only meeting Bishop North organised was one restricted to ordained women and female ordinands meant that some women concluded that Bishop North saw them as 'the

³¹ Had it been, it would have been remarkably stupid, since there was no way in which Bishop North's position on the subject of women's ordination could have remained secret. Indeed Bishop North himself referred to the issue during his remarks at the cathedral on the day of the announcement (see paragraphs 59-60 above).

problem'. Conversely, some of their male supporters thought it meant that he saw their views as of no account. Bishop North's subsequent gradual withdrawal from engagement in the diocese meant that there was no opportunity to correct this perceived imbalance. The Bishop of Doncaster and his senior colleagues did their best but the limited opportunity they had had to make preparations before the announcement and the lack of material with which to answer the questions that were being asked of them meant that they were, from the start, running to catch up.

179. After the intervention of Professor Percy (which I have described in paragraphs 69-82), the task became, in their view, well-nigh impossible. That intervention both raised the public profile of the debate and altered its character. Professor Percy's articles posed the issues he believed Bishop North's nomination raised in stark, attention-grabbing and uncompromising terms, reflecting his view that Bishop North's theological position constituted "*a form of gender-based discrimination*" and that the Five Guiding Principles "*do not address the deeply-held, conflictual and irreconcilable theological views that continue to underpin this debate*" (the debate, that is, about women's ordination)³². As we have seen, Professor Percy's intervention was, he insists, primarily prompted by the publication of the address given by the Director of Forward in Faith to its 2016 National Assembly rather than by Bishop North's nomination itself. I do not doubt that Professor Percy did not see himself as making a personal attack on Bishop North. Nonetheless the terms in which he articulated the issues and, more importantly, the context in which he raised them inevitably meant that public attention focussed on the personal decision Bishop North would make as to whether to continue with his nomination.
180. To some who were supportive of Bishop North's nomination, Bishop North appeared, both at the time and in retrospect, to have been the victim of a 'campaign' against his nomination. Undoubtedly there were some who actively worked to undermine that nomination. But others, including those who founded SAME, primarily saw themselves as giving expression to genuine concerns and posing questions to which they wanted (and had yet to receive) answers. Although they made provision for those accessing the SAME website to sign an open letter of concern to Bishop North (which I understand over three hundred people did), the letter was not, in the event, sent. The Vicar of St Mark's, Broomhill, a key figure in SAME, spoke to the press about her concerns only after they approached her and after first checking with the diocesan authorities that there was no moratorium on doing so. She and others felt that their voices had not been heard. Their challenge was directed at the wider Church, not at Bishop North. The strength of the reaction immediately following the announcement can, I believe, be more readily attributed to the failure of anyone to identify in advance

³² These quotations are taken from Professor Percy's letter to me of 7 April at Appendix 7.

the possibility of a non-ordaining bishop being appointed than to the effects of a well organised 'campaign'.

181. The use of social media by both opponents and supporters of Bishop North's nomination was a particular feature of the aftermath of the announcement. Its direct impact was less than it might have been because Bishop North understandably decided not to interest himself in what people were saying through such channels. He faced a big enough personal and psychological challenge as it was. Nevertheless, this particular aspect of the Sheffield affair confirmed:

- The power of social media as a means through which people can rapidly transmit information (and mis-information) and gather support for their views.
- The use of social media as a tool for building coalitions of the like-minded.
- The difficulty of distinguishing true facts from mere assertions and of correcting falsehoods.
- The limited suitability of social media as a means of exploring complex ideas and conducting genuine, nuanced debate.
- The irresistible temptation some feel to say things through social media which they might hesitate to say face to face.

There are important issues here for the Church as well as society to consider in a wider context. The fundamental dynamics of the Church are, arguably, changing, assisted by the advent of social media and other wider social developments. In the eyes of some, decision making is becoming increasingly democratised. This poses challenges for all in established positions of leadership in the Church, whether as bishops or in Synod.

Point (e) The Response of the Institutional Church to the Nomination of Bishop North and to the Reactions to it

182. I have already given an account of the principal features of this response in paragraphs 83-98 above. The first thing to notice is the absence of any clear, co-ordinated strategy for explaining and defending the nomination, at least in the initial stages. The primary responsibility for handling the announcement lay, in the first place, with Bishop North and the Appointments Secretaries, and then with the Bishop of Doncaster and the diocese. I have already commented at some length on the difficulties Bishop North and those in the diocese of Sheffield felt in making adequate preparations. The Communications Unit of the National Church Institutions was involved in arranging the preparation of the announcement and the media training given to Bishop North, but after that largely withdrew. As the Secretary General's letter of 28 April confirms (Appendix 14, paragraphs 39-40), the initial reports received by the National Church Institutions were that the announcement of the nomination had generally been favourably received. It was not until some three weeks after the announcement that the National Church Institutions became aware of substantial concerns being

expressed in the diocese and at national level, perhaps partly because their attention had understandably been focussed meanwhile on the February meeting of the General Synod.

183. The alarm sounded when, through a request from The Guardian for comment, the National Church Institutions were alerted to the imminent publication of Professor Percy's article. The Secretary General, again understandably, saw it as his responsibility to support and explain the policy of the House of Bishops and the 2014 Settlement as approved by the General Synod. So through a variety of means – detailed in paragraphs 43-50 of his letter – the Archbishop of York, the Secretary General and others sought to explain the policies embodied in the Settlement and to show how Bishop North's nomination was consistent with that Settlement.
184. I do not think the National Church Institutions can be criticised for the range of actions which they took once they woke up to – or rather, were awakened to – what was happening. The criticism that might properly be articulated is, rather, this: that they were all party to the collective failure which I have already identified to recognise the potential storm Bishop North's nomination might create and to prepare to handle it. I do not think it sensible or just to pin this failure on particular individuals. The fact is that nobody saw the storm coming (to a considerable extent because of the confidentiality surrounding the CNC's proceedings) and it was not clearly anyone's responsibility to do so.
185. This failure, coupled with the failure of the National Church Institutions to grasp at an early stage the difficulties into which the nomination had run, meant that both Bishop North and the Bishop of Doncaster struggled to cope with the rising tide of criticism. Bishop North's appointment of the Revd Dr Rob Marshall to help him handle the media interest was a sign of this. A carefully thought-out and coordinated plan, implemented from the day of the announcement, would have better offered Bishop North the practical and other support that he required.
186. Some specific aspects of the National Church Institutions' response have been criticised, for a variety of reasons, as I noted in paragraphs 88-91 above. In my view, none of the actions criticised were improper, although some of the arguments used to support Bishop North's nomination might have been better chosen. I do not think it was inappropriate for the Communications Unit to seek to explain and defend Bishop North's nomination. The Unit supports all of the National Institutions of the Church and its job is to communicate, explain, advocate for, and on occasion defend against criticism, the officially agreed positions of the Church, whether they have been approved by the General Synod, the House of Bishops, the Church Commissioners or some other responsible Church Institution. On occasion, staff of the Unit act as official spokespersons of the Church. So, the then Director of the Unit, the Revd Arun Arora was not acting outside his brief when he penned the article which appeared in The

Yorkshire Post on 4 March. The style of his article was forthright but arguably no more forthright than that of Professor Percy.

187. The criticism about Mr Arora's piece which has been more widely articulated is that it included this passage:

"Since that [the 2014] Settlement was reached, ten women have been consecrated as bishops in the Church of God. Philip North is the first diocesan bishop to have been nominated whose views on women bishops reflect the Church's traditionalist approach and also those of our sister Churches across the world including the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Church: 10 to one is a pretty good result for those whose desire is to keep score against their opponents".

I notice that a similar argument is expressed in paragraph 39 of the Secretary General's letter of 28 April at Appendix 14. There is simply no way in which the ordained women to whom I spoke in Sheffield (and many others, male or female) would accept that this argument involves comparing like with like. For them, the more pertinent considerations are that, more than two years after the passage of the 2014 Measure, there are still only 11 women in a College of Bishops 117 strong; that only two of them are diocesan bishops; and that no woman has been appointed a diocesan since September 2015. Moreover, quoting such figures reduces their concerns simply to concerns about numbers. It does not answer their pressing questions as to what are the theological, pastoral and practical implications of appointing a non-ordaining bishop as their diocesan.

188. Criticism has also been expressed of the Archbishop of York's article in the Yorkshire Post of the preceding Saturday for failing to address the concerns expressed by ordained women directly. The Archbishop's assertion of his confidence in Bishop North's readiness to further the ministry of women was no doubt well-intentioned and, on the basis of Bishop North's record in Burnley, well-placed. However it was received by a number of ordained and lay women in ministry as amounting to no more than saying to them "trust me". Would the situation have been improved if the Archbishop had himself visited Sheffield following the article and talked to clergy (male and female) and to licensed lay ministers, as several suggested to me he should have done? Possibly, but by this point (the first week of March) time was rapidly running out. Moreover, the Archbishop felt that he could not intervene in this way unless invited to the diocese by the acting diocesan bishop and was understandably reluctant to intervene over his head. So the moment when such an intervention might (I can only stress might) have conveyed the reassurance many were seeking passed rapidly by.

PART 5: SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

189. In this penultimate section of my report, I summarise the main findings of my review in relation to the five areas of concern referred to me by the Archbishops and set out my key recommendations in relation to each. In doing so, I emphasise that this summary has to be read in the light of all that has gone before, not least my account (based on the evidence given to me) of the events which triggered the review.

Point (a) What has been done in the Church, including in the Diocese of Sheffield, to inform and educate clergy and laity about the Settlement agreed in 2014, and the effect of the House of Bishops' Declaration within that Settlement?

190. As the evidence I have presented makes clear, the answer to this question is “not nearly enough”. Many dioceses appear to have taken only very limited action and even those (like Sheffield) which have done more have not necessarily managed to create an understanding of the Settlement and its implications among all parishes.

Engagement with the issue appears to have been greater among those parishes which, for theological reasons, cannot accept the ordination of women and their consecration as bishops. Since the passage of the 2014 Measure, there has been no nationally co-ordinated and resourced attempt, on a sustained basis, to convey the message of and achieve buy-in to the terms of the Settlement. There also appears to have been too ready an acceptance of the argument that ‘exploring together what mutual flourishing means is not relevant to the particular situation of my parish, deanery, diocese, etc’.

191. **Recommendation 1: I recommend that the House of Bishops commissions a group with balanced membership to review what has been done; distil examples of good practice within dioceses; and provide resources to help dioceses, deaneries and parishes, and theological training institutions to engage in further consideration of the issues.** I emphasise that the task is more than simply one of “educating and informing”; true understanding will only emerge from a process of dialogue which focuses on the question “what would mutual flourishing look like – for me, for you, and for the Church – and what do I need to do to ensure it is achieved?” So the process will require leadership and it will take time. If it can be successfully carried out, it may not only help the Church as it engages with other internally divisive issues (notably that of human sexuality) but help model ways of coping with conflict to the wider world.

192. **If this process is to be successful, it will require further attention by the House of Bishops to two key challenges posed to the 2014 Settlement in the course of the events surrounding Bishop North's nomination:**

(a) **One relating to the theology underlying the Settlement, i.e. which answers the criticism of the House of Bishops' Declaration and the Five Guiding Principles expressed by Professor Percy and other academics and theologians as discussed**

in paragraphs 133-173 above. (I offer further relevant comment on this below); and, as importantly,

- (b) **The challenge, as much pastoral as theological, posed by women clergy and lay ministers in the diocese of Sheffield as to what the nomination of a non-ordaining bishop as a diocesan implies for their ministry including what it means for the expression of that ministry in practice. In addressing this challenge, it will, as I have noted in paragraph 165, also be appropriate to address the implications of appointing a woman bishop for her pastoral relationship with those male clergy in her diocese who are unable on theological grounds to accept the sacramental validity of her orders.**

Point (b) The process leading to the nomination of Bishop Philip North to the See of Sheffield

193. The process was conducted entirely in accordance with agreed procedures. However, it revealed some shortcomings and has raised a number of questions (many of them not new) about whether the current procedures relating to a Vacancy in See committee and to the Crown Nominations Commission are capable of improvement. I have identified these questions in paragraphs 112-124 above.

194. **Recommendation 2: Since some of them go well beyond the scope of my enquiry and it would, in any event, be wrong to make changes based solely on what happened in relation to the vacancy in Sheffield without further consideration of the issues in the round, I recommend that the matters I have identified are considered alongside the outcome of the review of the Crown Nominations Commission led by Professor Oliver O'Donovan, the report of which is I understand to be received shortly. These should include the issue of the extent to which the cloak of confidentiality currently surrounding the work of the Commission can be relaxed in order to ensure the degree of preparation for the announcement of a nomination commensurate with the controversy it is likely to arouse³³.**

Point (c) The consistency of Bishop North's nomination with the House of Bishops' Declaration

195. For the reasons I set out in paragraphs 125-130 above, the nomination of Bishop North to the vacancy in the See of Sheffield was entirely consistent with the House of Bishops' Declaration.

196. As I have described in paragraphs 131-138, Professor Martyn Percy and others have argued that the Five Guiding Principles are mutually inconsistent and that Bishop North's nomination as a diocesan bishop could not, and should not, have proceeded because, holding the views they ascribed to him, he was unable to fulfil a key requirement of the role of a diocesan bishop. To proceed with his nomination was not

³³ See paragraph 124 above.

only wrong given the nature of the diocese of Sheffield; it was inconsistent with Anglican theology and ecclesiology and with the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the ecumenical understandings into which the Church of England has freely entered³⁴.

197. Together these arguments constitute a fundamental challenge to the 2014 Settlement which I respectfully suggest only the House can authoritatively answer. I have offered some reflections in paragraphs 148-173 which I hope may assist in this task.

198. **Recommendation 3: I recommend that the House invites the Faith and Order Commission to examine the theological challenge which has been posed to the 2014 Settlement and that the results of this work, together with the House's response to the pastoral challenge I have identified in paragraph 192, inform the ongoing process of discussion and education about the Settlement for which I have also called.**

Point (d) The reactions to Bishop North's nomination in the Church and beyond it

Point (e) The response of the institutional Church to the nomination of Bishop North and to the reactions to it

199. I address these two points together because the wider response to Bishop North's nomination in the Church and beyond it, and the response of the National Church Institutions were, immediately and on the whole, the reverse of each other. The Appointments Secretaries, the central members of the Crown Nominations Commission and everyone embraced by the term "the National Church Institutions" were entirely familiar with the terms of the 2014 Settlement and therefore comfortable that Bishop North's appointment was consistent with it (even if some members of the CNC had reservations on other grounds about the nomination and some were apprehensive about how it might be received). Very few in the diocese of Sheffield and more widely in South Yorkshire and beyond it understood that the terms of the Settlement meant that a non-ordaining bishop could be appointed to a see in succession to not one, but three ordaining diocesans. This was largely because, in the course of the consultations which led up to Bishop North's nomination no-one spelled out this possibility. Reactions to the possibility were not canvassed and its implications, were it to happen, were not discussed.

200. The Appointments Secretaries have already moved to include in their guidance to dioceses reference to the fact that, under paragraph 12 of the House of Bishops' Declaration, dioceses "*are entitled to express a view, in the Statement of Needs prepared during a vacancy in see, as to whether the diocesan bishop should be someone who will or will not ordain women*". This is welcome. I add, however, that, if my understanding is correct that the Declaration envisages that both those who accept women as priests and bishops and those who, on theological grounds, do not are equally entitled to consideration for diocesan posts, expressing a firm view on this

³⁴ This last argument is, in particular, that advanced by Canon Malcolm Grundy (see Appendix 19).

issue should come only at the end of the conversation in a diocese conducted during a vacancy in see: it is not sufficient simply to put the question without discussing it first.

201. The other key finding I wish to underline was the failure of all concerned to anticipate the extent and nature of the reaction to Bishop North's nomination and to prepare plans in advance for handling it. I do not intend to repeat here what I have already said on this matter in paragraphs 182-188 above. It is noteworthy that a co-ordinated response to the reaction only began to appear when the Secretary General became aware of the difficulties Bishop North and the Bishop of Doncaster and his senior colleagues were facing following The Guardian's request for a comment on Professor Percy's first article.
202. **Recommendation 4: I recommend that, together with his colleagues in the National Church Institutions, and those involved in the dioceses of Sheffield and Blackburn, the Secretary General reviews the lessons to be learned from what happened in order to avoid a similar lacuna occurring in future.** Such an exercise would be as relevant to the handling of the contested nomination of a woman bishop as of a non-ordaining bishop, and should embrace not only the communications issues but also the question of what personal support might be needed for a bishop or bishop-designate at the centre of such events.

PART 6: CONCLUSION

203. I conclude my report with these few final observations. First, many have characterised Bishop North's eventual decision to withdraw his acceptance of nomination for the See of Sheffield as representing a failure of the 2014 Settlement. I suggest that we should all be wary of rushing to that conclusion. The Guiding Principles are simply that – guiding principles. They are meant to be applied and their implications worked out in the context of particular circumstances. The Five Guiding Principles made it possible for Bishop North to be nominated to the See. I do not in any way under-estimate the personal pressure he felt under to step down because of the weight of the negative reaction his nomination faced. In the end, however, Bishop North withdrew because the uncertainty he had felt from the outset about the wisdom of his nomination to Sheffield proved well-founded. As he himself said in announcing his withdrawal:

“The news of my nomination has elicited a strong reaction within the diocese and some areas of the wider Church. It is clear that the level of feeling is such that my arrival would be counterproductive in terms of the mission of the Church in South Yorkshire and that my leadership would not be acceptable to many”.

This was an honest and worthy, if a difficult decision by Bishop North and should be acknowledged as such.

204. Secondly, the story of what happened in respect of the Sheffield nomination is not populated by villains but by people who were simply seeking to do their best according to their own understanding of their responsibilities and in the light of their Christian convictions. That is why, although I have raised some questions in the course of this report about the actions of particular individuals, I have refrained from criticising anyone. There is, frankly, no merit, if those of differing convictions in the Church are to continue to live together, in anybody searching for scapegoats.

205. Finally, I return to the points I made earlier in this report (see paragraph 16) when describing the Five Guiding Principles and the 2014 Settlement. The Settlement was and is a package. If there are tensions (some argue, inconsistencies) within it, that is because the Settlement sought to answer the question how those of differing views on the issue of women's ordination could continue to live together within the Church of England for the sake of the Gospel. At heart, the Five Guiding Principles are, as I noted in paragraph 16(c) above, about relationship, about how relationships (and with and through them mutual trust) can be sustained in the face of fundamental differences of theological understanding on the issue of women's ordination.

206. I have suggested in this report that further consideration, under the auspices of the House of Bishops, of the theological and pastoral issues raised so far by the Church's experience of living out the 2014 Settlement would be healthy. But at the end of the day, the choice facing the Church is a simple one – whether to continue on the path it has been treading since women were first ordained priests in the early 1990s or

whether to say to those who, on theological grounds, cannot accept the ministry of women – as I believe acceptance of the arguments of Professor Percy and others who take a similar view would entail – ‘the conversation is over; the Church has decided; the place allotted to you in the Church is an honoured but a more limited one than the 2014 Settlement envisaged’. In short, the choice for the Church is whether to continue wrestling with the issues I have identified, for the sake of the Gospel, or whether to abandon the Settlement. If those who take the majority view in the Church are to retain credibility in the eyes of the minority, there is only one choice which I believe they can make. Equally if those in the minority wish to continue as honoured and full members of the Church of England, they need to ensure that they act and speak in ways which show understanding of the position of ordained women, which emphasise their commitment to the corporate life of the Church and which encourage the majority to remain unequivocally committed to the success of that Settlement, *“that they may all be one so that the world may believe.....”*³⁵.

Sir Philip Mawer
September 2017

³⁵ John 17.21

LIST OF APPENDICES

1. Letter of 23 March 2017 from the Archbishops of Canterbury & York
2. Letter from WATCH of 13 February 2017
3. List of all those who gave oral or written evidence, with a brief description of the process
4. Extract from the House of Bishops' Declaration (Paras 6-15)
5. Extract from 'New Norms, New Beginning' re mutual flourishing
6. Summary Timeline
7. Professor Percy's letter of 7 April, with related appendices [51 pages]
8. Note of meeting with Professor Percy on 9 May
9. Archbishop of York's article in The Yorkshire Post of 25 February [N.B. unedited]
10. Professor Percy's article in The Yorkshire Post of 27 February [as published]
11. The Revd Arun Arora's article in The Yorkshire Post of 4 March [as published]
12. The Rt Revd Philip North's Statement of 9 March
13. The Archbishop of York's Statement of 9 March
14. Secretary General's Note of 28 April
15. Extract from Secretary General's letter 25 May
16. Blog piece by Professor Woodhead dated 20 March
17. Forward in Faith submission
18. Reflection by J Worthen
19. Submission from M Grundy
20. Affirming Catholicism submission
21. Modern Church submission
22. Reform submission
23. WATCH submission
24. Submission from the Bishop of Maidstone