

REVIEW OF THE CNC – REPORT FROM THE THEOLOGICAL REVIEW GROUP

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Discerning in Obedience:

A theological review of the Crown Nominations Commission

1. Preliminary

1.1. Forty years ago a major change took place in how the Church of England was provided with diocesan bishops. The Prime Minister's Office, till then solely responsible for nominations to the Crown, agreed to the creation of a representative body within the structures of the newly formed General Synod, to consult on vacancies and to supply the Prime Minister with names. This body, now called the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC), was constituted separately for each vacancy under the chair of the Archbishop of the Province, and contained diocesan members elected for the occasion and members elected by the General Synod for a term. Two names were to be submitted for each vacancy, indicating an order of preference, and the Prime Minister might submit either to the Crown, or ask for a third name. It became usual, in fact, for the first name to be appointed, and since 2008 when the Prime Minister decided no longer to exercise choice in forwarding a recommendation to the Queen, the second name has been treated as a reserve, should the first be unavailable. The situation today, then, is that within the framework of Crown Nominations the Church of England is effectively responsible for nominating its diocesan bishops.¹

1.2 The question put to this review by the two Archbishops is to what extent the process followed is fit for its high ecclesiological function.² They have put the question to theologians, hoping that they would focus more on the broader integrity of the process than on the nuts and bolts of procedure, which were, anyway, very thoroughly overhauled in 2000-1 by a Commission under the chair of Baroness Perry of Southwark.³ We try to set the CNC within its context in the church's life, and to explore the forces that shape its workings, but always

¹ We have not found it necessary to discuss the legal question of the extent of the royal prerogative, but it is clear that the present arrangements, resting on convention, could cease to be secure if they were widely thought to be abused.

² We reproduce here our Terms of Reference, to which we shall return at a later stage (7.1-6). They are: "(i) to provide the members of the Commission (central and diocesan) with a theological framework within which to discharge their responsibilities as they nominate bishops; (ii) to enable the Commission to understand the nomination of diocesan bishops within the context of the wider church of God in particular: the national responsibilities; the role of the Church of England within the Anglican Communion; and the wider Church catholic; (iii) to enable the Commission to understand the nomination of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York within the same context; (iv) to articulate any particular responsibilities of the Archbishops in relation to shaping the nature of the episcopate and the leadership of the Church; (v) to draw out the merits and disadvantages of the different ways of choosing bishops within the Anglican Communion." The Diocese in Europe, founded in 1980, was never included in the CNC process, and for that reason is implicitly excluded from the Terms of Reference.

³ *Working with the Spirit: Choosing Diocesan Bishops. A review of the operation of the Crown Appointments Commission and related matters*, Church House Publishing (2001).

within the framework of the theological question: what does it mean for the Church of England to seek its bishops in obedience to God's will? We have not been working in a vacuum, for a lively discussion about the appointment of bishops has been going on elsewhere, and it is clear that in the eyes of some the process is problematic. At this point we simply note three general points on which anxieties and frustrations centre, reserving comment for later.

1.3 (a) Within the Anglican tradition the episcopate has been seen as the key to unity in the church by virtue of its continuity with the apostolic tradition in sacramental life and teaching. This is a period of the church's life in which internal tensions run high over major questions. In particular, the decision to consecrate women bishops, accompanied by measures designed to accommodate disagreements (the policy known as "mutual flourishing") has turned a spotlight upon senior appointments as an indicator of how well these measures are working. This generates conflicting fears: on the one hand, that the nomination of bishops having become drawn into the more general area of disagreement, the workings of the CNC may become a theatre of factional power-struggle; on the other hand, that precisely to avoid such an outcome the CNC may opt for the false unity offered by candidates who are merely bland and inoffensive.

1.4 (b) Models of business-leadership are seen to threaten the theological authenticity of the episcopate as traditionally understood, and there are some fears that newly-introduced programmes for leadership-development may impose a pyramidal structure of institutional promotion based on transferable management skills in place of the gifts of the Spirit. The impact of this culture-shift upon the House of Bishops might be to encourage a pragmatic approach to decisions that ought to be principled, and so to weaken the House's intellectual and moral authority; in diocesan planning and strategy it could encourage one-sided attention to measurable outcomes, undermining deeper and more enduring spiritual work. Is the role of the bishop shaped as it should be by reflection on the nature of the church?

1.5 (c) The focus of concern upon the more publicly contentious issues, and on achieving an orderly introduction of women to the House of Bishops, may also, it is feared, hide from general attention the need for a wider diversity of gifts that needs to be present within the House of Bishops. That there is now no diocesan bishop who has had a career in Higher Education - a resource that once would have seemed indispensable - raises questions about a loss of intellectual depth and seriousness. Some fear that the opening of the episcopate and other senior roles to clergy of minority racial backgrounds seems to have stalled, or gone into reverse. The fact that a large proportion of diocesan bishops is drawn from among the suffragan bishops, themselves appointed by diocesan bishops, can be taken to suggest that the episcopate is cloning itself and becoming homogeneous. The bishops who sit in the House of Lords, though better equipped to address specialist questions than they used to be, are sometimes criticised for failing to bring a theological voice to major issues.

1.6 Bishops are, and must be, representative persons, speaking for the worshipping community as a whole. It is not necessarily a sign of failure, then, that the processes of nomination should resonate with issues that are alive and contested in the wider discussions of the church. It is common to hear reference to the “parties” of the Church of England, those networks of communication where longstanding sympathies and widely-shared concerns express themselves outside diocesan structures. Entrenched attitudes and spoiling behaviour are sometimes associated with these, but it is important also to appreciate the positive part they have played in enabling the Church of England to hold together as a living body with a wide range of enthusiasms within it, filled with committed people who are liable to have strong views on some things, yet are fully committed to living and working together with other Christian worshippers, handling their differences through reasonable discussion. It would be possible to have a church without the tensions these formations generate; it would not be possible for such a church to be vitally alive and widely engaged. Tensions will be reflected, as they always have been, in sometimes anxious scrutiny of patterns of appointment to the episcopate. Where serious cause for worry would arise, would be if appointments became a proxy for addressing issues that ought to be discussed directly, or if the issues so overshadowed the work of appointments as to hide from view other questions about what makes a good bishop. If episcopacy is to fulfil its vocation in reconciling tensions and turning them to cooperative service, the church must have the confidence that the nomination of a bishop is not a weapon in anyone’s armoury.

1.7 Our view of the overall structure of the CNC process is positive. It is capable of serving the church well, even in a stormy setting. It has already acquired a considerable tradition of practical wisdom. It is built on good practices of consultation that evolved under the aegis of the Prime Ministers, as well as on historical understandings of the role of the laity in church appointments. Though as a whole it is unique to the Church of England, it contains many elements in common with procedures of other churches of the Anglican Communion.⁴ It can call upon the most generous service from lay Christians who bring impressive gifts and experience to bear on the task. We shall undertake to show that it rests on responsible theological grounds, and that we may and should have confidence that God will speak to us through its

⁴ For extended surveys of the common ground, see Norman Doe, *Canon Law in the Anglican Communion*, Oxford (1995) and, more briefly, the collectively authored *Principles of Canon Law in the Anglican Communion* (2008) on the Anglican Communion website (especially 36, 37). Our own soundings have confirmed the general contention that the basic elements in Anglican practices are common, the majority of them involving a representative process with an episcopal or archiepiscopal input. The breadth and transparency of the democratic character of the process vary, the most elaborate form being that of the Episcopal Church of the United States, where candidates go through a number of rounds to canvass support. Many provinces now base their decision on some form of interview or verbal public statement by the candidates. Lay participation is common. The influence of the Metropolitan takes different forms in different provinces: some have a role in determining the composition of appointment committees, others have power of authorisation, or the right to intervene if no consensus is reached. Another difference lies in the degree of openness; while many provinces follow the practice of secret ballots, others have visible election processes. The degree of consensus required varies from a bare majority to the most common two-thirds majority, up to the three-quarters required in the Church of Kenya.

means. Yet there are painful points of pressure on its current operations, and these need to be addressed effectively. Sometimes they can be addressed by reconsidering practical arrangements, often they need a more consistent theological vision of leadership in the church's mission and the role of episcopacy within it. The episcopate is of one piece with the ministry of the church, the ministry of one piece with the church as a whole. There are questions about what it means to lead, and to be led as, Christ's body in the world that are more far-reaching than questions of process; and it is these that we hope to highlight.

1.8 The members of the review were: The Revd Professor Sarah Coakley (University of Cambridge); Professor Tom Greggs (University of Aberdeen, from the Methodist Church); The Most Reverend Josiah Idowu-Fearon (Secretary General of the Anglican Communion); The Revd Professor Morwenna Ludlow (University of Exeter); The Revd Professor Oliver O'Donovan FBA (chair, Emeritus, University of Edinburgh); Father Thomas Seville CR (Community of the Resurrection, Faith and Order Commission); The Revd Dr Jennifer Strawbridge (University of Oxford); The Revd Dr James Walters (London School of Economics). We met twelve times between October 2016 and June 2017, in the course of which we were privileged to learn from the experience of twenty four people who addressed us and answered questions, including all the central members serving from 2013-2017, former diocesan members from a variety of dioceses, former candidates who had had the experience of being interviewed, serving diocesan bishops, representatives from the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns and from the Committee for the Ministry of and among Deaf and Disabled People, and senior members from the National Church Institutions. The group authorised some of its members to meet separately with other individuals from whose experience it wished to learn. It invited written submissions from all members of General Synod and diocesan bishops. To all those who communicated with us in writing or in person we should like to express our gratitude for their candour and thoughtfulness. We hope that in what we have written they may see a fitting response to the considered views they put to us. We are also grateful to those whose comments we solicited on an early draft of our work: Dr Paul Avis, Mr Edward Chaplin (Prime Minister's Appointments Secretary), Professor Norman Doe (University of Cardiff), Bishop Christopher Hill, Sir Philip Mawer, Mr Stephen Slack (Chief Legal Officer) and Dr Jeremy Worthen (Faith and Order Commission). The review was administratively supported by the Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments, Ms Caroline Boddington, and by Ms Philippa Kiralfy of her staff, to both of whom we owe our warm gratitude for orienting us in our explorations of a maze with which most of us were initially unfamiliar. But to avoid any views of ours being wrongly attributed to the Secretary, we should mention that when consulting on our views and recommendations we met independently.

2. Discernment

2.1 From ancient tradition the ordination of a priest and bishop is accompanied by the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, which prays for the "sevenfold gifts" of the Holy Spirit. Who is to

receive these gifts? The new priest or bishop, certainly, for the tasks of the new ministry. But also those among whom that ministry will be conducted, for the grace to receive it and profit from it. And it is a prayer for the ordaining bishops, who bear the responsibility for confirming the candidate's calling on the part of the church. It is, in fact, a prayer made for the obedience of the whole church to the guidance of the Spirit, the church composed of a multitude of roles and tasks, as many and various as the sevenfold gifts that make them possible. It is a large and ambitious prayer, for, as Jesus says, God does not give his Spirit "by measure" (Jn. 3:34). The *Veni Creator* could fittingly be used at the convening of a CNC, or at the election of its members by the General Synod or Vacancy-in-See Committee, for they, too, have a task, which is to nominate a suitable person as bishop of a diocese, and they, too, need a special gift to enable them to perform it, the gift we often call "discernment".

2.2 The task that is done by the CNC is best described as "nominating" a bishop. As technically used of church procedures, to "nominate" is to identify candidates, to "elect" is to make the final choice of one candidate. In many of the churches in the Communion these two moments are clearly separated, though not in the English process, which is more diffused and dispersed. The term "election", derived from the New Testament and used since patristic times, may be applied to the whole appointment-process from beginning to end; it may also be used precisely of the final stage in that process, which in English church law is the formal act by which the Cathedral chapter accepts the Crown's nomination. The CNC thus makes a decisive contribution to an "election" of a bishop, but since it depends on wider consultation and is subject to the processes of Crown Nomination, it is potentially misleading to talk of the CNC's discernment as an "election", quite apart from the inappropriate comparisons with political elections that that language may invite.

2.3 "Discernment" is a word used in English translations of the bible for two common Greek verbs, one of which, *diakrinein*, describes the act of distinguishing things that are not easy to distinguish, especially spiritual and moral alternatives that demand a spiritual insight. The other, *dokimazein*, has the sense of "examining" and "approving", and is often used of future courses of action: we are to discern "what is pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5:10), "what is the will of God" (Rom. 12:2). It is used of appointments to positions of responsibility (1 Cor. 16:3, 2 Cor. 8:22, 1 Thess. 2:4, 1 Tim. 3:10). What is indicated by this range of senses is, above all, a kind of insight. Discerning something is quite different from expressing a preference. Preferences are things we bring with us; we express them, and then, perhaps, negotiate them in relation to others' preferences. But discernments are things we start out *not* having, and have somehow to reach. Those who look for a bishop may begin by having preferences, but their preferences will be relevant only to the extent that they offer a clue to what they do not yet have, an insight into what God intends to do through this or that person in this or that place. That is not only an understanding of what God *has* done in the past through a candidate or in the diocese, but of what God *is* bringing about, here and now. They are looking for the

direction where God is leading - leading the candidates, the diocese and themselves, and through them the wider church - a path on which they are being invited to set foot together.

2.4 Discernment involves a step of faith enabling us to conceive something that God will bring about, which is not yet objectively visible. There can be no set of procedural rules that will guarantee getting a discernment right. However carefully the diocese's needs, the candidates' qualifications and the evidence of their potential have been weighed up, a discernment goes one step further. It has a prophetic quality, anticipating what God will provide, and recognising his anointing of a particular person to give leadership for it. The element of the unpredictable, and of a faith that can only cast itself upon God, is vividly illustrated in the most famous story of an appointment in the New Testament, where we are told that the apostolic church, seeking someone to be appointed to the Twelve in Judas' place, prayed that God would "show which of the two you have chosen" by casting lots (Acts 1:24). It was a remarkable gesture. The church had done its homework: it had clarified its criteria, conducted its search, narrowed its field to two. But it had to be quite clear that the appointment was not ultimately a matter of deciding, but of being shown. Not the randomness as such, but the openness of the process to God's sovereignty is what is important about it. However great the responsibility borne by the church, it is not infinite, but exercised in dialogue with a God who is capable of doing what the church cannot do.

2.5 In order to reach a discernment, then, it is essential not to try to know the end from the beginning. If CNC members approach their meeting with the names of their preferred candidates already fixed in their minds, they are likely to miss seeing what God intends them to see. Their horizon will be determined by their pre-judgments. Pre-judgments are well and good; we need to have formed them if we are ever to learn anything new. But we can learn new things only as we advance from our pre-judgments, and allow what is yet to unfold to be unfolded. **For CNC members this crystallises into a clear rule: they must approach their task expecting to be shown something, to find a bishop whom perhaps they have never heard or thought of.** To think ahead about what will be needed in a bishop is necessary; to review a few possible names to get a sense of the field similarly; but at that point the work of searching for God's will has still hardly begun.

2.6 But if discernment implies a capacity to look forward and envisage what lies on the horizon, it is not an exercise of free-roaming imagination. To discern the emerging future well, we must look back and look around, taking bearings from what God has done in the past. So discernment is approached through understanding and discrimination. Understanding has to do with the universal principles on which God works, now as always. Discrimination has to do with the particulars of the concrete situation in which we pray that he will work. Both are important: without an understanding of what a bishop *essentially is*, no one is in a position to discern God's will for who the next bishop is; without an appreciation of the *particular stories* of the candidates and of the church in that place, no one can be in a position to discern God's

will for the *next* bishop *there*. There must be study and reflection, then: of profiles of candidates and diocesan needs, of the way God's grace in Jesus Christ is served by a bishop as distinct from another minister, of the qualifications for a bishop on a careful reading of the New Testament and the Ordinal. This study is only the preparation for a discernment, but without it a well-grounded discernment can never be reached.

2.7 Can our discernments of God's purposes fail? Certainly, they can. Inadequate, even unworthy bishops have been appointed from time to time, and sometimes God allows what appeared to be a perfectly wise discernment to be overtaken by events. The privilege of discernment is given within the context of a contingent world and fallible expectations of the future. But that does not prevent God caring either for the world or for the church, and his blessing does not depend upon our success in making the discernments he calls us to make. He has preserved episcopal leadership as a blessing in the past even through periods when criteria were defective and some bishops were plainly unfit for their role. Yet he continues to call us to search for his will. That our discernment is not infallible does not make us less responsible for responding. Which is why the nomination of bishops must be approached with prudent consideration, and why critical reflection is needed on the steps by which nominations are reached. God's grace is greater: if we seek to discern his will, he will bless us beyond what our insight and care deserve, and will provide mercifully for our failures. But God's grace always demands an active and thoughtful response.

2.8 Who is called to exercise discernment over God's anointing of a new bishop for a diocese? The first answer must be: the whole church, for the bishop holds an authority to which the whole church needs to be committed to recognising. So the recognition of a new bishop by the diocese and the wider church is an important part of a bishop's institution. But this decision, like all major decisions in a large community, has to be taken representatively through delegated bodies. For most church decisions the bishop *is* the representative body; by what body, then, is it appropriate for the bishop to be nominated? Three theological principles bear upon this, all of them important: (i) the *continuity of the apostolic ministry*; (ii) the *need for the church as a whole* to recognise God's working through the leadership he gives it; (iii) the *exercise of the gifts of the Spirit* in discerning the will of God for the circumstances. In the different procedures followed for selecting bishops in episcopally-led churches we can see these principles working together in various ways and with various priorities, and there is no ground for asserting that one particular form is the gold-standard against which all others must be measured. If, at the end of the day, it can be said believably that the ministry of bishops **is a continuous ministry of word and sacrament**, faithful from generation to generation; **that the church as a whole recognises and accepts the episcopal ministry** sent to it; and that the selection of bishops is based on **a careful discernment informed by knowledge of the candidates and the situation**, then the process of selection has proved itself. Yet there are broad differences among the processes, turning on which of these three principles dominates. (i) There are systems that give the initiative to existing bishops; (ii) there are systems

that culminate in a public election at a synod; (iii) there are systems that involve a nominating body of members equipped with appropriate gifts of insight and knowledge. Within the churches of the Anglican Communion all are found, though the third type predominates. The Church of England's CNC is a typical example of the third type, though set uniquely within the framework of the Crown Nomination, the Prime Minister and the Queen acting to monitor its decisions.

2.9 Although the CNC (as now named) is a recent innovation, it is in strong continuity with the older historic tradition of the Church of England, in which, as in most European churches of the medieval and early-modern periods, appointments were often the result of collaboration between complementary lay and clerical perspectives. The bishop, responsible for the succession of apostolic ministry, ordained suitable persons to it; a patron responsible for the welfare of the local community presented *this* ordained person to serve in *this* charge, whom the bishop then instituted. It served to ensure that appointments reflected more than one view, not only that of the clergy but that of the laity, not only of the diocese but of the parish. The gift of discerning an appropriate person was given through the combination of different gifts working in harmony. From that collaborative practice there sprang the role exercised by monarchs in appointing bishops, which developed into an exclusive control of the appointment after the Reformation. (It is not strictly correct to speak of the role of "the state" in this connection, for not every state was held to have a right to be involved in church appointments; the role belonged to the monarch as a Christian lay-person.) As a member of the national church, and so sharing in the distribution of the Spirit's gifts "to equip the saints for the work of ministry and strengthen Christ's body" (Eph. 4:12), but also with the responsibility for protecting national welfare and safety, the monarch was supposed to identify a nomination that would be best for the given time and place, helping to ensure the church was an effective presence in the life of the wider political community. The monarch did not "make" someone a bishop, as ambassadors or privy counsellors were "made". That was done by the church's ordination. The monarch's role was to "provide" the candidate for the vacancy, and though monarchs and Prime Ministers sometimes used their power in objectionable ways, it was always seen as limited in principle, being bound to uphold the doctrine (including the doctrine of episcopacy) that the church taught.

2.10 From this historic practice certain principles survive, which are of continuing importance. That the public engagements of a bishop require a width of interested voices to be heard, that there should be a pooling of insights in which lay perspectives work alongside those of clergy, these are principles inherited from the days of Prime Ministerial nomination. In the New Testament two contrasted kinds of variation are discernible in the life of the church, a variety of the Holy Spirit's gifts on the one hand, which build a richer and fuller unity, and a variety of dissident opinion on the other, which splits away from the unity of faith and divides the church. The process as we have it was designed to give room to the first, while

precluding the second. Both in the wider context of the Secretaries' consultations in the diocese and in the narrower context of the CNC itself, **there is a complex representational balance to be maintained.** If the balance of perspectives were to be seriously upset - if, for example, the Archbishops were to gain an overwhelming influence, or, alternatively, if particular points of view could force the election of bishops whom the Archbishops would have difficulty in confirming and consecrating, then a practice intended to reach a common discernment would have broken down.

2.11 Beyond those whose views are consulted and the members of the CNC, there is another group of people essentially involved in discerning the will of God for the appointment. These are the candidates themselves, and especially the candidate who is nominated. In the Ordinal the first question put to candidates for all three orders of ministry is about a personal conviction of being "truly called". The candidate is a disciple of Christ, committed to obeying the plan of God for his or her life. Nobody can take the responsibility for that obedience from the disciple's shoulders. He or she must be sure of being called if the church is to take the step of ordination. **The call of God is proved by a convergence of the judgment of the nominators with a personal conviction of vocation on the part of the nominee.** That does not mean that the candidate could form such a conviction independently, which might indicate an advanced case of self-absorption. One can know oneself called to be a bishop only as one is invited to become one; vocation to be a bishop is unlike vocation to be a priest, in that the question cannot be raised initially by the candidate. Nor does it mean that the candidate has *wanted* to be a bishop. It is a good thing, perhaps, that some priests think about what it might be like to be a bishop, and feel that they could cheerfully assume the responsibility if they were invited. But the church has warned against taking such thoughts too seriously. The dangers of ambition are greater than the dangers of excessive modesty. The phenomenon of the reluctant bishop, who had to be pressed to occupy his seat, was highly prized in the patristic church. Yet even the reluctant bishop, confronted with the fact of an invitation, must reach the personal conviction that it comes as God's call; it can never be taken as a matter of course that when a bishopric is offered, it is accepted. Perhaps in the days when the first hint of an appointment was the arrival of the Prime Minister's letter everything seemed too easy and too obvious. It is not necessarily a bad thing that our future bishops now have to wrestle with the question of their vocation a little longer and harder. There is a personal discernment that only the nominee can make, and without it the church's discernment will be incomplete.

2.12 One of the advantages of approaching the task of discernment as the Church of England does is that it allows a great deal of reflection and discussion to proceed in confidence. There is, of course, a properly public face of the church, and anyone who would be a bishop must be able to act in public and to accept public accountability for public actions. But the information on candidates delves much deeper into private lives than most people are comfortable to have circulating in public, especially with the risk, in the unhealthy atmosphere of these times, that it may attract hostile interpretation. Good possible bishops may be deterred

from candidacy by the prospect of publicity, and, worse, the electoral system may tend to bring forward candidates with a taste for publicity, or an exceptionally thick skin, who may not make very good bishops in pastoral or theological respects. Candidates are more likely to entrust information about themselves to the small group appointed to reach the discernment in the assurance that it will be used for that purpose and not passed on.

2.13 But **if the candidates are to have that trust in the CNC, members of the CNC must also have trust in one another.** Their deliberations must be protected from publicity if they are to be conducted in a way that will give their conclusions decisiveness and clarity. In the New Testament “trust” and “faith” are one and the same concept, *pistis*, which refers to a relation of trust and trustworthiness, faithfulness and good faith. The trusting relation in which Christians stand to one another is an expression of the faith each has in Christ. Oriented to Christ in *pistis*, members of the community are bound together in *pistis*. *Pistis* not only characterises the community, but constitutes it as a community, allowing it to act together coherently. The CNC and the candidates thus form a little representation of the church, delegated for their task and working together to make a unified discernment out of the variety of gifts and perspectives that each brings. What do they need to trust one another with? Not only with knowledge of personal information about the candidates, but also with knowledge of themselves, their hopes and fears for the church, their priorities and strategies for serving it, and they may often take positions and make concessions that might hurt them if a hostile interpretation were put upon them in public. It is the strength of a confidential process that such communications can be made.⁵ Confidentiality is about building “confidence” (from the Latin *fides*, “faith”), which is to say, creating a space for complete openness among participants within the protection of clear boundaries.

2.14 In the New Testament the tension between openness and concealment is understood as an eschatological one: what is kept secret today (for good or bad reason) is to be made plain by God tomorrow (Lk. 12:2-3). There is a place for concealment in works that God will reward openly (Mt. 6:4-6); there is also a need to speak openly, as Jesus did (Mt. 5:14-16; Jn. 18:20). The CNC works towards a public outcome, and it has a defined sphere of confidentiality that enables its work to be conceived and carried through without being subverted by invasive publicity. But **confidentiality is imposed on a limited set of proceedings for a definite purpose. Some of the difficulty experienced with the CNC process has turned on the loss of a distinction between confidence and a general culture of secretiveness**, which tends to redouble the doubts and uncertainties people have about one another’s motives and goals.

⁵The terms of confidentiality are expressed in a declaration that each member is required to make, “not to divulge to any outside person information about this Commission’s proceedings, or about any person it has considered for the appointment, or about others who have been the source of its information, neither during my membership nor afterwards....not to make copies of any of the papers provided, to delete all digital copies ...and to return all hard copy papers.” In our view these terms are necessary, but also sufficient.

3. Oversight

3.1 On a number of occasions in the past quarter-century members of the Church of England have attempted to describe the role of the bishop, drawing upon traditional resources in the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer and reflecting on new challenges.⁶ History has generated many types of ideal bishop, and in our own time, too, the role has been successfully interpreted in very different ways. There is a temptation, perhaps, to gather all the possibilities together and to end up with a catalogue of outstanding characteristics that are never likely to be found in one person. Documentation current within the process favours the list, “priests, evangelists, theologians, prophets, stewards and apostles”. The impression can too easily be formed, perhaps, that the bishop must be everything anyone else can be, and must be it pre-eminently. So let us try to avoid that by starting from the precise point at which the bishop’s ministry is different from other ministries, and only then move out to what it also has in common with other ministries.

3.2 The name “bishop” (*episkopos*) means “overseer”. The bishop watches over the life of word and sacrament in the diocese as a whole, the local community of churches into which the Holy Spirit has breathed life. That life is already given and already active. It is not the bishop’s task to breathe life into lifeless things, but to *ensure that those who live by God’s power live well together*. Is “oversight” just another word for “leadership”? No, it is a special *kind* of leadership. There is a great deal of leadership that is not “oversight”, or not over the whole community. “Leadership” is a wide term, covering many variations. “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone” (1 Cor. 12:4-6). Any ministry may involve leadership of some kind, and some ministries involve outstanding leadership. **A community with much life will have many leaders**, and needs them all; **but it needs just one bishop, to help the leaders work with one another**. The bishop is the leader who relates to the leaders in the local community, knowing them and known by them, presiding when the community comes together to pray, guiding its consultations about where God is leading it.

3.3 We speak often of the bishop as a *minister of the church’s unity*. Unity in a living body is a matter of coherent and cooperative functioning; every living body needs coherence within itself and a coherent relation to its environment beyond itself. “Among the Spirit’s gifts this

⁶ See, for example: *Episcopal Ministry, the report of the Archbishops’ Group on the Episcopate* (1990); *Apostolicity and Succession*, CCU (1994); *Women Bishops in the Church of England? A report of the House of Bishops’ Working Party*, Church House Publishing (2004); *Working with the Spirit* contains an appendix, “Towards a Theology of Choosing Bishops”, by Michael Nazir-Ali. A personal view, but exceptionally well informed, is given by Paul Avis, *Becoming a Bishop: a theological handbook of episcopal ministry*, London, Bloomsbury-T & T Clark (2015).

ministry is called to ensure that the very diversity of charisms does not endanger the essential unity of the one fellowship of Christ's flock."⁷ The bishop safeguards the local church's communications, internal and external, works to strengthen them and heals breaches in them as they arise. **The unity fostered by the bishop, then, is not an erasure of differences of view, let alone a negotiation of expedient compromises, but a sign of the hope that all will share in Jesus' call to mutual love and spiritual union.** This is a service that needs the constant attention of one person, and may, indeed, involve great personal strain, as tensions are projected on, and need to be sustained by, the one who prevents them from resulting in a breach. The bishop is called to follow the apostolic pattern in this way, too; the demands of other people's ministry impose the burdens on his or her own: "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation" (2 Cor. 1:6). Let us explore this on three fronts.

3.4 (a) In overseeing the ministry of word and sacrament in the local church, the bishop participates fully in that ministry as its chief minister. Presiding at the sacraments and leading the diocese in prayer, the bishop has a special responsibility for the act that sustains the continuity of the ministry from one generation to the next, ordination. The purpose of oversight is to support the continuity of the living proclamation of the Gospel in the church, so **a bishop needs to be an articulate interpreter of the apostolic tradition.** The Pastoral Epistles describe the "overseers" (*episkopoi*) of their own context as having "a firm grasp of the word which is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that (they) may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it" (Tit. 1:9). Later, when the pattern of monarchical bishops was fully established, Gregory the Great declares, "A bishop dies, if no sound is heard from him."⁸ Diocesan bishops often take their teaching role with great seriousness, and make opportunities to give Christian teaching both to clergy and laity. There are many varieties of teaching within the church, but the bishop's teaching, when it accomplishes an authoritative proclamation of the faith, is a form that the others cannot do without. If the preservation of the church's unity parts company with the articulation of its faith, the former becomes merely a matter of institutional self-protection, the latter merely a matter of private opinion. From this work of interpreting the tradition there follow others: explaining Christian leaders and communities to one another, especially where there are disagreements, and making a path for the church's message to the outside world as a spokesman for the Gospel in the public realm.

3.5 **To give the Church a voice in the wider public sphere is one of the most important evangelistic functions of the bishop.** If our present social condition, as many will say, is marked by the loss of coherent sign-systems in governance, representation, community and

⁷Henry Chadwick, "Episcopacy in the New Testament and Early Church", *Selected Writings*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans (2017), p.8.

⁸Letter I.32, tr. John R.C. Martyn, Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies (2004).

education, the church, as sign and instrument of God's coming Kingdom in the world, and the bishop as its chief pastor, can have powerful significance within a thin public culture. Humane actions and well-chosen words on the local or national stage can be powerful signs of the justice, mercy and unity of the coming Kingdom, for which the world longs. In the words of the Common Worship Ordinal, bishops are "to proclaim the gospel boldly, confront injustice and work for righteousness and peace in all the world." The form of this will vary with context and circumstances. At times, the bishop is called to be a prophetic sign, speaking forgotten or uncomfortable truths into an impoverished public discourse. At times the bishop will be a priestly sign, acting as God's presence in community or national tragedies or celebrations. And very commonly the bishop's role is to be a kingly sign of authority in a fragmented society, gathering scattered groups to serve a common cause, as God always acts "to gather up all things in Christ" (Eph. 1.10).

3.6 (b) In connecting the multiple centres of activity *within* the diocese a bishop needs to involve others in the ministry of communication. The bishop needs a staff to support the work, which will extend the episcopal ministry in a variety of ways beyond the reach of a single person. Here the roles of suffragan bishops and area bishops must be mentioned, ordained to perform a whole range of episcopal functions alongside the diocesan bishop, and often appointed precisely to supply complementary skills and connections that will enrich what the diocesan bishop can do. Are there two bishops, then? Not strictly speaking. There is one coordinated ministry of oversight, with two people exercising episcopal duties within it. The unity of the bishop's diocese is not a purely personal unity. Too much concern with the bishop's personal qualities and sympathies tends to reduce the service of unity to having an inoffensive and perhaps rather featureless record. To be a minister of unity is to be the centre of an effective network of communication that reaches to every corner and brings strength from one part of the diocese to another. It is a service of special importance to those who feel excluded by others' hostile attitudes or who, for whatever reason, lack access to education, opportunity and fellowship.

3.7 (c) It is always true in fact, but especially true in the practice of the English church where much work is undertaken nationally, that the bishop *of the place* (all bishops are bishops *of somewhere*) is at the same time a bishop *of the universal church*. The bishop is the link that connects the two, the service that ensures the church's catholicity. It is too easy for dioceses, and sometimes for bishops, to take the short-sighted view that the bishop's "real work" lies at the heart of the local community, and that trips to Westminster (or beyond) are a tiresome distraction. But the bishop outside the diocese is serving the diocese, representing his or her own particular Somewhere and securing its living contribution to the wider church. Westminster "or beyond", because of course the central church is only the first of the concentric circles that spread out from a diocese. There are ecumenical engagements with other

Christian communities, global links with Anglican Communion churches elsewhere in the world, and so on, in all of which the bishop models a culturally open and receptive way of building links *on behalf of the diocese*. This vision is not well served, we think, by a phrase that has been current in the documentation, referring to a bishop's "dual role". **We should be speaking, rather, of a "communicative" - or, perhaps, borrowing a Methodist term, "connectional" - role**, for although a communicator may speak now to one, now to another person, the role of communicating between them is one role, not two. The language of "dual role" encourages the view that diocesan representatives on the CNC are there to defend the needs of one role, central representatives to defend another. It therefore sets their interests against each other, instead of helping their vision to converge on a role that consists precisely in moving confidently between the locality and the wider church.

3.8 In the light of this outline sketch we explore three questions about the qualifications needed to fill it well. There will be *moral* qualifications, *theological* qualifications and *administrative* qualifications.

3.9 (a) The requirements of the office of bishop outlined in the Pastoral Epistles (Tit. 1:7-9 & 1 Tim. 3:1-7) are not centred on gifts and skills, but on moral character. Not on what a potential bishop can do, but on what a potential bishop has come to be, reflecting the love of Jesus Christ, ordering the unruly wills and passions of sinful humankind. It is the same criterion that Saint Paul applied to his own ministry (2 Cor. 1:12): "Our boast is this: the testimony of our conscience that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity." Like all Christians, a bishop is a sinner saved by the grace of God, and lives by daily repentance and the assurance of God's forgiveness. But the prominence of the role makes the bishop more visible, and therefore more exposed to criticism and temptation, which is why it is necessary to ask questions about past failures in matters that invite criticism, in handling money, sustaining close relationships or managing fits of anger, etc. Past failures may, quite possibly, be no impediment, but they pose the question of whether a candidate has reached, by repentance and growth, that integrated and mature Christian character that will hold firm under pressure, or whether there are ongoing weaknesses. **What we look to find in a bishop is the arc of a mature and compelling life of faithfulness to the gospel, the life "above reproach", that will represent the transforming power of the gospel to many outside the church who know nothing else of it.** Being "well thought of by outsiders" (1 Tim. 3:7) is not simply a matter of avoiding scandal; a life of integrity is an evangelistic witness. As Gregory of Nyssa put it (citing those verses), Paul "imitated [Christ] so clearly, that he displayed his own Master formed in himself. By the most accurate imitation the pattern of his soul was changed to its prototype, so that it no longer seemed to be Paul living and speaking, but Christ himself living in him".⁹

⁹ *On Perfection*, in *Ascetical Works* tr. V.W. Callahan (Fathers of the Church Iviii) p.96.

3.10 (b) Must a bishop be a theologian? This is a question that has been very much to the fore in recent discussion. We write, of course, as a group of theologians, most of whom have had careers in higher education and have maintained a role in ministry while doing so. That Christian ministry is deeply involved in theology, and theology deeply involved in ministry, has been the basis on which our own lives have been built. Yet theology has more than one manner of communication, and we have not been in the habit of producing lecture notes in the pulpit. Not all bishops should be University professors, any more than all University professors could be credible bishops. The occasional professor among the bishops has been, and still can be, an important resource: House of Bishops statements are usually read with some critical acumen, so it is no bad thing if they can be written with some critical acumen, too. To which we should add that there are many who know nothing of the church apart from the contributions of Bishops to the House of Lords, and who judge it, favourably or unfavourably, by the reflective quality of that contribution. But the House of Bishops, like the church itself, requires a variety of gifts, and does not need forty University theologians. What it does need is for all its members to be able to participate constructively in a general theological discussion, and to make intelligent use of the help of more specialist theologians. **The episcopate has the responsibility of guarding the church's tradition of teaching, and almost all the questions that come before it for discussion have some doctrinal features, even if they are not all primarily doctrinal questions.** How, then, can we identify an appropriate level of theological articulateness required by the work of a bishop?

3.11 We might start by noticing a few of the things that every bishop has to do. Tensions and controversies among the clergy may arise from differing theological orientations and strands of teaching in the church, and it falls to the bishop to resolve them. Will he or she understand how the different points of view were formed, and where their roots lie in the church's history? And since those who express themselves most strongly often do not express themselves most effectively, will the bishop be equipped to help them articulate their own convictions more adequately, as well as understanding opposed convictions more sympathetically? Social questions with strong moral overtones constantly trouble the wider society in which the diocese is set. Will the bishop have the depth of understanding to make a public contribution that will carry significant weight, and not sound to the world like a knee-jerk reaction or the echo of a slogan? Diocesan Synods have to make decisions on matters of importance to the wider church, and the bishop is responsible for facilitating a debate that will produce the fullest possible understanding. Will the issues be presented fully and clearly, doing justice to the main points of view while pointing forward to possible lines of action? Dioceses need a missionary strategy. Will the bishop be able to put forward a compelling overall view of the elements it must contain, relating different proximate goals to one another and to the whole witness of the Gospel? Dioceses need financial policies, which, as we have come increasingly to recognise, are deeply morally freighted. Will the bishop be able to supply a

framework within which the financial officers are free to operate, but which can also be explained and defended morally and theologically? These are examples of tasks that are not exceptional for a bishop, all of them involving a serious measure of theological understanding.

3.12 The old distinction between the “useful” and the “academic” studies dies hard, and theology is usually assumed to belong among the “academic”, and therefore not to be of much use. But if the business in hand is interpretation, and common understanding of diverse tasks, we can hardly ignore the contribution of theology to a reasonable faith as a discipline of enquiry and discussion, asking and answering difficult questions without dogmatism or scepticism under the guidance of Scripture and tradition, so avoiding the twin errors of creating and ignoring a crisis. Though sometimes theology has been presented by theologians in an excessively deconstructive style, it can feed the imagination and intelligence with *narratives and concepts* that encourage the development of virtues, and guide practical reason with *norms of belief and practice* by which difficult decisions and conflicting views are held up to the measure of catholic Christian understanding. It offers *examples of experience from different ages of the church*, giving a point of reference to judge our own standards by. To teach effectively, to inspire and reanimate clergy who may be jaded by long exposure to sacred texts and practices, the bishop must be able to find stimulus in theological study. If followers of Jesus in the Gospels are called “disciples”, *i.e.* learners, it is right to expect of a future bishop that learning will have a consistent place in his or her life. Theology is not a store of knowledge that a particular person (whether a bishop or an academic) has, but an air we all need to keep breathing. Neither is it merely a matter of having ideas. Intelligent people do tend to have ideas, and bishops may sometimes have a gift for clothing their ideas in rhetoric or poetry that catches the imagination of others. That is very welcome when it happens. But there is something that needs to come first and give a solid grounding to good ideas, which is a mind formed by the attentive reading of Scripture, from the Christian tradition and from exploratory engagements with the world understood through the lens of faith.

3.13 **We should like to see CNCs asking themselves more insistently whether, and how well, a potential bishop has acquired a theological culture.** We should also be glad to see more higher theological degrees in the House of Bishops, but principally for what that would indicate about the intellectual liveliness of the pool from which bishops are drawn. The master’s degree, doctorate or other educational qualification is of interest as an indication of time spent, habits of mind gained, topics mastered, questions pursued beyond superficial answers, a sense of where to look for information and how to make good use of it, and so on. But it is not the only indication. Testing the adequacy of a candidate’s theological culture in interview may need a theologian to lead the questioning, though most CNC members will be able to form a reasonable judgment of how interestingly someone speaks, how capably someone takes a question back to its foundations, how agile someone is in understanding and appreci-

ating alternative perspectives. One suggestion may be in place, simply to stimulate the imagination: to invite candidates to identify an issue on which they feel strongly, and then to explain, as convincingly as they can, the case *against* the position they take. It would show up, at least, the capacity to learn something from a disagreement.

3.14 (c) An ancient Christian tradition spoke of bishops as having two distinct “powers”, of “order” and “jurisdiction”, which roughly amount to a spiritual authority exercised in word and sacrament and an authority to make decisions. Since the church as the body of Christ exists in two ways, as the spiritual communion of the faithful in Christ and as an organised body with institutional structures within the world, so the authority of the bishop’s office must serve it in both those respects. There are administrative responsibilities of various kinds, including the very demanding responsibility for clergy discipline, which a potential bishop must be capable of bearing.

3.15 **There need in principle be no tension between spiritual and administrative qualifications.** A CNC may need to make a compromise between them in a given case, where a candidate perfectly equipped for both is not to hand, but it should always start out looking to find both. The anxiety that nobody can be administratively competent and truly spiritual at the same time, is a false one and arises when we fail to think in a fully Christian way about the one or the other of these sets of qualities. We are taken in by stereotypes: the administrator as hard, the spiritual leader as soft, the administrator as “worldly”, the spiritual leader “other-worldly”, and so on. And that is an easy mistake to make, because there is so much in the leadership we commonly see in the world and the church that simply conforms to those stereotypes. But we need to think more deeply about the types of leadership that the Holy Spirit makes available to us.

3.16 Leadership, as we have said, is a very general term, with many different kinds of application. It is notionally distinguished, and usually separated in practice, from excellence in particular kinds of specialist performance: the best Vice-Chancellor is not usually the most brilliant researcher or the most inspiring teacher. Yet leadership in a community is never separable from *some* level of competence in the relevant performances. If the Vice-Chancellor is not at least credible as a scholar or teacher, the scholars and teachers will have no confidence in judgments made about the life of the University. Furthermore, the kind of community that is led dictates the kind of leadership required to lead it. Much everyday discussion of leadership seems to be looking for a universal model, a paradigm drawn from one sphere that will set the terms for every other, whether it is the coach of a sports team, the entrepreneur of a start-up business or the leader of a political party. But leadership of a transitory commercial association is going to look very different from leadership in a community for the whole of time. Leadership by hiring and firing will be very different from leadership on the model of Jesus Christ, who washed his disciples’ feet. **Those who worry about the episcopate falling**

captive to secular models of leadership have appreciated a danger. The response to that danger is deeper thought about the character of Christian leadership, how the life of the body of Christ shapes norms for administrative effectiveness and responsibility in its own context. The alternative to being “conformed to this world,” Saint Paul says, is “the renewal of your mind” (Rom.12:2).¹⁰

3.17 How do we discern, then, the competences that a candidate may bring to the administrative side of the role? Inevitably, we look at the ministry already accomplished and the skills that have been proven. But being a diocesan bishop is not quite like anything else, and it is important to realise that a candidate’s record, which usually does not include being a diocesan bishop somewhere else, can tell only so much. In looking at candidates’ “experience” there may be a temptation to focus over-narrowly on those particular experiences of church leadership lying institutionally close at hand, which give those who have had them a certain prominence in church circles. The imagination too easily becomes shaped to **the pyramid-conception of institutional seniority**, in which each level of responsibility is simply the one below it plus a small increment of responsibility. The church of the Spirit of Jesus Christ does not limit its expectations of leadership in this way. There can, of course, be excellent reasons to appoint a suffragan or area bishop, or an archdeacon, to a diocese, but mere familiarity with the ropes of diocesan administration is not as such an excellent reason. There is a qualitative leap involved in taking responsibility for the whole body, and fitness must be judged not only by record and achievement but also by potential. New skills can always be learned by the right person; gifts of leadership are more than an accumulation of acquired skills and experiences that can be counted off.

4. Preparing for the Gift of Leadership

4.1 The CNC’s work is to nominate a diocesan bishop, and it begins, more or less, when a vacancy arises. But it builds on institutional foundations that have been laid long before. Before the vacancy occurs there is, first of all, the work of the Archbishops’ Secretary for Appointments, responsible for the background personnel work which will ensure that the CNC has candidates to consider. There is now also the Strategic Leadership Development Programme, which, though with no direct role in providing candidates for appointments, is obviously significant in enriching the pool from which candidates will be drawn. We have not been asked to review either of these important ministries, and it would be presumptuous to pretend to do so, but as their work bears strongly upon that of the CNC, we can hardly ignore them. Our observations, then, are side-views, not all-round views, and deal only with the way that their operations shape the conditions within which the CNC works.

¹⁰ See *Senior Church Leadership: a resource for reflection* by the Faith & Order Commission of the Church of England (2015).

4.2 The initiative entitled “Nurturing and Discerning Senior Leaders” is still in its early phases, and the patterns it will assume may be expected to evolve further. It would be wrong to credit it with too definite a set of theoretical assumptions. Among the programmes arranged under its banner are the Bishops’ Leadership Programme and the Strategic Leadership Development Programme for those who “might be called to wider leadership roles in the future”. In thematising leadership as a matter of concern it inevitably feeds the discussion, on which we have already said something, of how leadership in the church is, and is not, like leadership in other contexts. Through its programmes existing and future church leaders receive (among other things) exposure to wider thinking about leadership, and so are forced to reflect on that discussion themselves. It is appropriate for such forms of additional training to be eclectic, but we may recall Alexander Pope’s warning that “A little learning is a dangerous thing”. Explorations of leadership in business-studies generate their own heated debates and their own internal self-critiques; merely dipping into their reflections may leave the over-simple impression that there is a model style of leadership to fit all purposes. The value gained from the experience lies ultimately not in new skills acquired, but in how they are deployed within a Christian ministry that has integrity as a whole. Exposure to unfamiliar fields of discussion always needs to be dialectical, and secular wisdom (business models, technical skills etc.) should be acquired in a context in which the question “what is this good for?” is asked, and receives a theological answer. And since the thinking of the church itself has historically shaped many of the norms of leadership widely accepted in the Western world, and brings its own critical reflections to contribute to the discussion, we should expect an engagement with business-inspired discussions to be two-sided. **The theological engagement needs to be as fresh as other engagements,** and we would expect ongoing theological exposure to be part of the mix in any programme for Christian leadership.

4.3 Initiatives such as these are likely to have an ultimate effect on the appointment of bishops, but it is not immediately clear what effect they will have. They might end up by sharpening the pyramid-structure of recruitment for higher responsibility, which in our view would be a pity; they might equally end up by flattening it, which would be an enrichment. In referring to a “flatter” structure, we do not mean one with no peaks, but one with many peaks. The diversity of gifts in the church implies a widely distributed structure of responsibilities, a range of different openings in leadership, all of which can be nurtured and discerned. The pyramid is a default position for the imagination, in which the varieties of working are forgotten, the only movement is on a one-dimensional scale of up and down, and the only question how fast, or how slowly, one goes up. Encouraging the recognition of real diversity in leadership, equipping gifted people with a range of skills and insights that could lead their ministry in many directions, is of greater service to the work of the CNC in the long term than

creating a *cadre* of those who cherish expectations of promotion and can think of it in only one way.

4.4 A church in which bishops have a national role, and their appointment is a national and not simply a local event, requires a professional central secretariat to ensure that the process of nomination is smooth and equitable, and that it is supported by adequate information about possible candidates and responsibly compiled personnel documentation. The office of Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments in its present form is relatively new, and it is understandable that its development should have attracted notice, even some suspicion. The secretariat has had to establish its working practices through trial and error under the spotlight of synodical attention, its operations visible in a way that the church was not accustomed to when the business was done unobserved in Downing Street. A system such as the Church of England uses to nominate bishops has the advantage of being able to weigh a great deal of personal information in confidence. But if the collection of this information is to be wide-ranging and validated in full responsibility to those it concerns, and if those concerned are to have the benefit of personal advice, it requires a secretariat with a wide remit. It is not surprising that the novelty of such a concentration of responsibility should have prompted questions. But the framework within which the Secretary acts can provide a satisfactory answer to them. In the operations of the CNC itself there is the important working partnership with the Prime Minister's Appointments Secretary, whose involvement in diocesan consultations and CNC meetings offers a guarantee that advice from the diocese can reach the CNC by more than one route, and that the process will be conducted with objectivity. In the personnel work that builds up the lists of possible candidates, security lies in **clear terms of reference for their compilation and use**, and in an ecclesially rooted oversight that will prevent the secretariat from becoming, or appearing to become, autonomous.

4.5 The present system of episcopal lists evolved in response to anxieties noted in the Perry Report that diocesan sees were being filled too predictably by suffragan bishops, originally appointed by other diocesans, so that the House of Bishops was largely recruited by a "safe choice" from a "very small pool". The intention of the lists was to ensure that a wider range of candidates would be considered. A list must, of course, be a prompt for the imagination, not a straitjacket. The list of potential diocesan bishops is made available to CNC members as a resource from which they may nominate candidates, but they are not restricted to the list. The development of the lists has no doubt helped to widen the field within which the CNC has operated. But since the proportion of the twenty new diocesan bishops appointed since January 2013 up to the time of writing (June 2017) who were already bishops has been

70%, the impact has not been startling.¹¹ Of the names appearing on CNC long-lists over the same period 48% were already bishops, and of those interviewed the proportion was 59%. From those figures we conclude that it is within the CNC itself, rather than in the preparatory personnel work, that attention tends to narrow down upon the suffragan and area bishops.

4.6 On how the CNC may be helped to think more boldly we shall have more to say later. For the moment the point is simply that the initial lists which feed the CNC's explorations **need to be broadly based**. There are two lists, one for diocesan and another for suffragan bishops, deriving from the decisions of diocesan bishops to place clergy of their own diocese upon it. Other people may make suggestions, but the diocesan bishop has the last word. We accept that it is theologically appropriate that bishops, to whom belongs the responsibility for maintaining the ministry of word and sacrament, should be responsible in this way for initiating the process of discerning vocations to the episcopate. We do, however, share a concern that this method of compiling the lists is too diocesan in its orientation. Important and valuable ministries which develop gifts that might be of great service to the episcopate lie outside the diocesan structure, in the armed forces, the mission societies, education and so on. These may often not come to the notice of diocesan bishops. **The responsibility for the lists should therefore be situated with the House of Bishops collectively**, which means operatively with the Archbishops, who may delegate oversight of it to other bishops. While diocesan bishops should continue to exercise the freedom to place names on the list directly, it is important that this oversight should also imply the power to add names directly. To avoid any misunderstanding that the two are connected directly, we suggest that this oversight should be **exercised at an arms-length distance from the running of the Strategic Leadership Development Programme**.

5. The Roles in the Discernment

5.1 The CNC is entrusted with reaching a common discernment on the nomination of a bishop, and its discernment will have validity for the whole church to the extent that it is reached by bringing together diverse perspectives representative of the life of the church. The members not only bring different personal gifts, but also, as they belong to various communities within the church, different communal gifts of viewpoint and insight. And in the CNC process they play different parts, which we have now to consider.

The Archbishops

¹¹ For comparison, the Perry Report (*Working with the Spirit* p.16-19) noted that of those appointed between 1996 and 2000 89% were already in episcopal orders, while of those appointed before 1996 and still in office in 2000 only 56% were. In weighing the significance of these figures it is important to remember that there are considerably more suffragan/area appointments than diocesan. It is not in itself surprising or objectionable that a good number of diocesan bishops should have followed this route. But the episcopate will suffer if it is entrenched as a habitual expectation.

5.2 At the centre of the process are the two Archbishops, who sit on all the CNCs (except when they commission another senior bishop of their own province to deputise for them) and in their own provinces take the chair. The distinction between “bishop” and “archbishop”, as the church has understood it, is not a distinction of orders of ministry, but of administrative authority within the order of bishops. Administratively Archbishops function as convenors and chairs, in the CNC as in the House of Bishops, with responsibility for giving an orderly shape to the discussions. Spiritually, they lead the Christian community as bishops entrusted with maintaining the apostolic continuity of the church’s ministry, and this is expressed sacramentally in their responsibility for consecrating a new bishop. The point of making the distinction is not to keep the two aspects of their authority separate, but to ensure that they are held together in operational harmony. The nomination is an administrative process, but since it results in a consecration - or sometimes in the translation of a bishop from one place to another - the sacramental end of the process must determine the way in which it proceeds, allowing no conflict to arise between the administrative dynamics of the appointment and the sacramental integrity of the episcopate. The presiding Archbishop’s position, then, can sometimes be a difficult one. The nomination the Commission reaches may not be the nomination the Archbishop would have preferred. That possibility is built into the process; it is not a mishap. Yet the Archbishop has the duty to ensure that it is reached in a way that presents no threat to the ongoing ministry of the church, and must be able to take responsibility for confirming the election at the end of the appointment-process. This requires skilled and fair conduct of the chair; but it also requires clear spiritual leadership.

5.3 To consider the administrative aspect of the role first: the chair is held by the provincial Archbishop in most CNCs, but by a lay person in the CNCs for York and Canterbury. Since the whole process, from gathering nominations to deciding and forwarding the chosen name to the Prime Minister, is complicated and needs to be got through in a contained period of time, the chair needs to do a great deal more to facilitate it than merely hold the ring. Above all there is the task of creating an atmosphere of mutual trust, in which the members come to have confidence in one another. To accomplish this, certain procedural decisions must remain with the chair. We are struck that Standing Orders, while empowering the CNC to arrange its own business, give no support to the role of the chair, so that in principle almost any detail of procedure might become a matter of tedious wrangling and voting. The Lay Chairs in particular can have a difficult time asserting their authority, and even the Archbishops, despite the dignity of their office and their experience of the role, do not always find it easy. Our view is that **an explicit strengthening of the chair’s authority is needed**. We would favour the expansion of Standing Order 141(1) to give the Chair authority to settle procedural matters not determined by Standing Orders, and the abrogation of Standing Order 141(8), which gratuitously weakens the authority of the Lay Chair in the matter of a casting vote.

5.4 **The spiritual authority of the Archbishop has weight especially in clarifying the principles on which bishops are chosen and appointed in the Church of Christ.** The task of the CNC as a whole, on the other hand, is to reach a particular nomination for this time and this place. That is to say, it addresses the question of who has the vocation to be a bishop through the lens of this vacancy at this moment. It does not decide in principle whether a given *class* of candidates (women, say, or those living in civil partnerships) is eligible as such for episcopal consecration. Such matters are determined by the doctrinal responsibility of the House of Bishops as exercised within the framework of the General Synod. It may be perfectly possible, then, for the presiding Archbishop to give serious and useful guidance to the CNC without at any point indicating a preference among the candidates. The Archbishops naturally prefer to exercise their presiding role in this way wherever possible, not wishing to suggest how other members should rank the candidates, and wishing to ensure a good working-relationship with the future bishop, whoever that may be. But it may not always be possible for them to be so discreet. Other members can become aware of how the presiding Archbishop sees the field simply from the way general guidance is given. If our view is followed on the secrecy of the ballot (6.7), the Archbishop's preferences will be known to the other members in the end. No great harm is done by this, we think, if members of the CNC have been well chosen for the job. And there may even be a danger in the presiding Archbishop's leaning too far towards discretion, creating the impression of holding something back, which will not assist the dynamics of trust. Should it leak out by some indiscretion that the new bishop was not the provincial Archbishop's first choice, that is a misfortune, not a catastrophe; such situations occur constantly in secular life, and there are constructive ways of handling them. As for the Archbishop who is not in the chair, the same constraints need not apply; the voice of the House of Bishops needs to be heard among the other voices, and the supporting Archbishop has an important contribution to make in contributing an evaluation of the candidates.

5.5 It is not necessary for a new diocesan bishop to believe that he or she was the provincial Archbishop's favourite; what is necessary is a conviction of being seen as *an appropriate person to be consecrated*, or, as the case may be, translated. Usually this may simply be assumed. There are various ways in which the system normally ensures that only those who are suitable are considered. There is, first of all, the list of those judged ready for episcopal office, from which many nominations come; if someone is nominated who was not included on that list for some precise and compelling reason, the Archbishop may explain those reasons privately to the nominator, while if there is some confidential personal information involved that cannot be shared in that way, the Archbishop may encourage the candidate to withdraw from consideration. For most purposes these controls are sufficient. But since it is possible that the CNC could end up considering a candidate the Archbishops would deem it improper to consecrate, or information might emerge in the course of interview that put a candidacy in such a light, we suggest that after interviews and before voting **a formal declaration should be made jointly by the two Archbishops** (*i.e.* in their capacity as bishops, not on behalf of the Chair) **that on the evidence presented to the CNC all candidates under consideration are**

eligible for consecration under church doctrine and practice, and so eligible for membership of the House of Bishops. The declaration we propose is not a legal declaration but a pastoral one, made in exercise of the bishops' general and ecumenical oversight of the continuity of apostolic ministry, and it does not purport to speak the last word on any candidate, since there may be problems that remain hidden, but offers a provisional judgment on the basis of what has been seen and known. While in other churches of the Communion the election of a bishop can often be challenged on legal grounds, either as to the quality of the candidate or as to the procedure, such a measure would not fit the English pattern because of the Crown Nomination context. The Archbishops' declaration will therefore serve to provide an assurance that the nominating process cannot erode the doctrine of the church, and so to reinforce the confidence of the nominee that he or she will be welcomed in the House of Bishops. We hope that it may have the effect of focussing the CNC members' attention on what they really have to decide: *which* of a number of *eligible* candidates is most suitable *for this vacancy*. In the unlikely event that a CNC for York or Canterbury might have before it candidates who are not already diocesan bishops, the same declaration should be made by the House of Bishops' representatives there. If the Archbishops found themselves unable to make the declaration in any case, the CNC would have to decide collectively whether to accept the Archbishops' judgment directly or prorogue to seek legal advice, and the Prime Minister would have to be informed.

5.6 The Provincial Archbishop has the responsibility of confirming the appointment after it is announced and the formal election by the Chapter conducted, and subsequently (where needed) for conducting the ceremony of consecration. This gives the Archbishop a general oversight over the reception of the new bishop by the diocese. The Archbishop's Charge is a traditional means of helping the new bishop focus on the role, and has often been highly valued by bishops. It should be broadly and theologically framed, communicating specific needs and opportunities in the diocese to which the CNC have given weight in their reflections, but allowing room for the bishop's own leadership, not appearing to set out a programme of tasks.

Elected Members

5.7 The other members of the CNC are elected by the bodies to which they belong, the diocesan Vacancy-in-See Committee and the General Synod, precisely in order to bring a variety of experiences and perspectives to the discernment. They need to be people capable of forming and expressing judgments conscientiously and clearly, good co-operators who can work with the presiding Archbishop and the other members to forge the variety of views into a common mind. More difficult to describe precisely, they also need to be representative of the church. It is easy enough to know what constitutes representation when a community has certain simple and well-understood distinctions within it: when North, South, East and West are the primary and sole determinants of identity, representation means having the same

number from North, South, East and West. But communities are rarely so simple, and the church, in particular, with its manifold gifts of the Spirit, is highly resistant to by-the-rule representation, which always seems to end up distorting its natural shape in the service of some reductive agenda. Finding a suitably representative group of people, then, equipped with necessary gifts, may be a very different matter in the General Synod, on the one hand, and in a diocese on the other. In common to both contexts, however, is a general truth about representation: a good representative is more than a typical instance of the represented class. **To represent others is to *be trusted by those who share an angle of vision and to commend that vision to those who have other angles***; it requires virtues both of loyalty and of imaginative flexibility. Not just *a* something (traditional Catholic, woman in ministry, inner-city priest etc. etc.), but an *advocate for* that something, a communicator who can command the trust of those whose point of view is represented and the respect of those who do not share it. To represent a community is to share the representative service of Christ for all humankind before God.

Central Members

5.8 The central members are three laity and three clergy (not bishops), elected from their respective Houses of the General Synod. Because they serve for a five year term, they play a crucial part in giving continuity to the CNC process. As well as sitting on Commissions for particular vacancies they meet with the Archbishops from time to time to discuss matters of process. They are involved in large expenditures of time, often at great cost to the lay members. They need to be capable of relating cooperatively with one another, transcending the differences of viewpoint that they bring and seeking a pattern of appointments that will reflect the authentic character of the Church of England and yield an effective and coherent episcopate. It is an extremely demanding role, and we have been struck by the quality of the gifts and the generosity of the commitment that are brought to it. In the course of their service central members acquire considerable experience and knowledge of the personalities and undertakings of the Church of England. To diocesan members they can appear very formidable; they are the “insiders”, the masters of a complicated process. All of which adds up to what the wider world likes to call “power”, and it is important that it should be exercised in a discreet way, and with restraint. Where the integrity of a body depends on a certain representative balance, no member can wear two hats. This implies that a central member needs to step aside from a CNC for his or her home diocese.

5.9 CNC members elected by the Synod tend to be broadly identified with the main permanent groupings of synodical opinion, and this identification is reinforced by a convention, as we are informed, that a central member who is unable to take part in any given proceedings is replaced by a substitute drawn from the same synodical group. Organised blocks of opinion are part of the General Synod’s normal operations, essential to getting business done, and we do not intend to echo the rather fruitless complaint that the Synod tends to operate

synodically. Diverse approaches and traditions in the church's life, reflections as they are of the active life of the Spirit, need formal expression in the synodical structures if that body is to achieve cooperation and common action. These organised groups not only enshrine certain common pre-judgments; they also seek to develop them constructively into fresh and common judgments on new issues, and the extent to which they succeed in this is the extent to which they escape the charge of being merely "tribal". They standardly publish slates of candidates for internal synodical elections; these recommendations influence, though not always decisively, how Synod members vote - which is usually done by post. This electoral practice governs the selection of members of the CNC, although their election takes place at a different point in the quinquennial cycle from most others. For internal Synod purposes these electoral practices may work well, but the purposes of the CNC are not simply those of Synod business, and in relation to the CNC they do not work well. **The election of central members needs to ensure the representation of the wider church, not merely the synodical groups.**

5.10 Many aspects of the church's life need to find an echo of sympathy and understanding among the members of the CNC, not merely those that occupy the main attention of the Synod at any given point. Many matters not often at the head of Synod agenda ought to be constantly present in the thinking of those who nominate bishops, such as how to evaluate the theological ability of potential bishops. The electoral system as it stands does not provide for such needs. **The question we believe must be put to the Synod, then, is how it could adapt its electoral procedures to allow for CNC members to command a broad range of necessary competences and interests, and so to represent the whole church more adequately.** Not to instruct the General Synod how to do its business, but merely to illustrate the kind of change that could be thought about, we would ask whether the election might be held in full synod rather than by post, and held in a context of prayer; whether a fuller description of the role could be agreed on and circulated to guide electors; whether, rather than standing for election singly, candidates might stand as pairs, a principal with an alternate who would serve in case of unavailability - which would also help reduce the great burden of the role. Pairings might be devised on a cross-party basis or angled to represent other leading concerns. But however those suggestions may be viewed, we feel strongly that the basis of election of central members needs more credibility if the process is to commend itself widely to the church, and we hope Synod may take an imaginative approach to redesigning it.

Diocesan members

5.11 The six diocesan members of the CNC are elected from the diocese's Vacancy-in-See Committee by its own members for the occasion of the vacancy. The Vacancy-in-See Committee itself, besides electing its representatives, has the duty of preparing a diocesan profile to inform the CNC. A great deal of attention was given by the Perry Report to processes of election, and we are conscious of no need to revisit them at length. We strongly agree with its

general view that **the key to effective diocesan participation lies in the selection of the members and their careful preparation for the task.**

5.12 As is the case of the central members, to achieve a good representation of the diocese in its six CNC members is a subtle and difficult business, and requires a kind of judgment that cannot helpfully be codified in universal rules. In a case that attracted some public notice a diocese with a large presence of ethnic minority ministries had no ethnic minority element among its CNC members, which was understandably felt to be a failure of the process. The responsibility for achieving a representative Vacancy-in-See Committee rests with the Bishop's Council, which has powers to nominate additional members to ensure a representative balance, of regions, types of community, types of ministry etc. We believe that this is the right place for such responsibility to lie, and, given the great variety in the character of dioceses, would resist any attempt to bind its judgment by any universal dictation of what good representation should look like. But no corresponding responsibility presently lies with the Vacancy-in-See Committee to seek a representative group of CNC members. We suggest emending the Regulation to require the Committee to **hold a minuted discussion of what is required for good representation of the diocese** before it proceeds to receive nominations for the election. We would also entertain the idea of giving the Bishop's Council the power to petition the Archbishop to order the Vacancy-in-See Committee to re-run the election, if procedural failures can be argued to have affected the outcome.

5.13 There is bound to be a difference in character between the Vacancy-in-See Committee and the representatives it elects to the CNC. A Vacancy-in-See Committee has a significant block of *ex officio* members who serve in central diocesan functions, which is necessary to ensure that the diocesan profile does justice to the state of affairs in the diocese. But since each diocese has its own small-scale version of the central-local tension, **it is important that the central diocesan administration should not be the only voice to be heard on the CNC.** To guard against an over-dominant role for the diocesan centre, the rule is observed that no more than one of the six be a dean, an archdeacon or a suffragan bishop. This restriction, in our view, does not exclude enough. The Vacancy-in-See Regulation originally prohibited more than one member of "the bishop's staff", and **we favour restoring a broad construction of that phrase**, including all who are both appointed directly by the bishop and report to the bishop directly. We are mystified by the form of the Regulation requiring that "not less than half" shall be lay members, instead of requiring **the same equal balance of clergy and laity as is required among central members.** Given that one place is open to a member of the central diocesan administration, the possibility of assigning a fourth place to a lay person presents a plain risk of squeezing out the representation of the parochial clergy of the diocese.

5.14 We are anyway **unhappy that suffragan or area bishops should serve on the CNC**, for three reasons which seem to us cumulatively persuasive. In the first place, a suffragan bishop on the diocesan team unbalances a Commission that already has two bishops; the principle

of not wearing two hats (5.8) applies here, too. Secondly, the suffragan bishop is in a special way an extension of the episcopal ministry of the outgoing diocesan, and ought not to influence the succession directly. Thirdly, it may well be that during the interregnum the other clerical members are formally under the suffragan's discipline, which creates a real risk of undue influence. These three general considerations, combined with the current tendency for CNCs to appoint disproportionately from the ranks of suffragan bishops, make the presence of one of them as a diocesan representative inappropriate.

5.15 We return to the preparation for the task, on which the effectiveness of diocesan participation seems to us to hang. When the Commission is in process of being elected and convened, the weight of information to be digested in a short time is very considerable, and mainly in documentary form; a briefing meeting of the Vacancy-in-See Committee with the Secretaries, though usual, is not required. Is this an adequate way of helping diocesan members achieve an orientation to their task? The CNC usually has to fit its business into two days of meeting, and is impeded if there is a great deal of explaining needed. We should very much like to see **an expansion of the preparatory work undertaken by diocesan members**, providing them with a variety of media of presentation where appropriate, to strengthen their confidence (a) in handling the CNC procedure itself, (b) in thinking about the role of a bishop and the particularities of their own diocese. This should be **the responsibility of the Bishop's Council, with the Archbishops' Secretary in support as facilitator**. But since time is short once the vacancy is declared, **we would welcome it if Vacancy-in-See committees began preparing before the vacancy occurred**: it could hardly be a waste of their time to meet occasionally during their period of comparative dormancy for guided sessions of theological study and administrative briefing on the work of a diocesan bishop.

5.16 There is a point that follows from this: the needs of the *diocese* are extensively stressed in the briefing paperwork that is prepared both from the consultations of the Secretaries and from the consultations of the Vacancy-in-See Committee. But the needs of the diocese cannot be understood in isolation from the national church and its worldwide ties, both with the Anglican Communion and ecumenically. The CNC is presented with a short document on "The Ministry of a Diocesan Bishop in the wider Church", an innovation requested by the Perry Report. To overcome the notion of the "dual role" of the bishop and to see the role as an integrative and connectional one, we suspect that something more ambitious is needed. We would encourage the **Archbishops to consider how preparatory material made available to Vacancy-in-See Committees and CNC members may have a stronger national and international content, and how these materials can be integrated more fully with the diocesan profiles**.

5.17 The particular gifts that can be brought to the discernment by the diocesan members of the CNC are varied. Some may have experience of the government of the Church of England, gained by membership of the Diocesan or General Synod; others may bring experience

in the secular world, with useful insights and skills, not least in personnel matters and interviewing; others again may have experience in parish ministry, perhaps of a general, perhaps of a specialised kind, while others may have experience of pioneer leadership outside diocesan structures. The perfect diocesan team might include all of these, but it could be a good team that included two or three of them. Of equal importance, however, is that all six members should have the social and administrative skills that will enable them to get on top of the process quickly and make a full contribution to it, and this must be in view when the membership of the Vacancy-in-See Committee is first decided, which may be years in advance of a vacancy. For reasons given at length in the Perry Report we resist the suggestion that the diocesan CNC representatives should be directly elected by the Diocesan Synod; such an election would be a hurried affair, precipitated by the vacancy, easily politicised. **The Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council need to exercise great care over the selection of the Vacancy-in-See Committee**, ensuring that its members are prayerful, competent, articulate and capable of thinking for themselves, and are also representative of the variety of communities and ministries within the diocese.

Balance of Representation on the CNC

5.18 The present balance of the CNC - two Archbishops, six central and six diocesan members - replaced arrangements in place for thirty years from 1977, which assigned the diocese a representation of four. This change, promoted by General Synod against the advice of the Perry Report, has proved controversial, since in conjunction with the rule requiring a two-thirds majority it allows the diocesan members to act together to prevent a nomination. Critics have held this development responsible for the prevalence of more narrowly local, as opposed to national considerations in the nominations, and a corresponding weakening of the House of Bishops as a whole. But arguments can also be made in favour of the equal balance. One is that it makes it less likely that divisions among the central members will dominate the CNC, since they will be more qualified by diocesan perspectives. Another is that it widens the scope of diocesan representation, preventing the dominance of the diocesan centre and its concerns. Although we agree that there is an imbalance in the way concerns are presented to the CNC, tending to favour the local over the national, we are not convinced that further adjustment of representation is the right way to address it. We fear that this would reinforce the idea that diocesan members are there to fight for their local interests, and central members to resist them, rather than that two complimentary perspectives on the needs of the whole church, local and central, have to be brought together into one point of view. We ourselves lay greater weight (5.15-16) on the value of fuller preparation of CNC members for the task of discernment and of improved documentation that will set the needs of diocese within the context of the national episcopate, along lines we have already indicated.

5.19 There are, however, two special cases which require more detailed consideration. For a nomination to one of the Archiepiscopal sees the chair is taken by a lay person, and there

are two members from the House of Bishops as well as the usual six diocesan and six central members. In the case of Canterbury there is also a representative of the Primate of the Anglican Communion. The constitution of the Canterbury CNC has caused considerable disquiet, since it is out of proportion to the way the Archbishop's role has evolved that the Diocese of Canterbury should exercise such a strong voice in the nomination. The traditional arrangement by which the Primate of All England is at the same time a diocesan bishop is widely valued, and is felt to be important to the integrity of the Archbishop's role, which clearly implies that there must be a voice for the diocese in the nomination. Yet the present level of representation is seen as indefensible, and contributes to make the Commission unwieldy. We would favour **the proposal to reduce diocesan representation**, and in compensation give formal and permanent status to arrangements for consultation on the appointment of a Bishop of Dover. In order to keep a balance of lay and clerical representation we would suggest there should be **one lay and one clerical member**.

5.20 We have made the point above that the Archbishop's office has been historically understood as that of a president among bishops. The bishops must have confidence in the appointment of the Archbishops, so that it is proper for the House to have an elected representation in these nominations. As things stand, the CNCs that nominate to Archiepiscopal sees include two bishops, one of whom is elected by the House while the second may either be the remaining Archbishop, or, at the Archbishop's discretion, a second elected bishop. In a nomination to York it would be unusual for a sitting Archbishop of Canterbury not to be involved, so in almost all cases there will be just one elected bishop. Standing Orders do not specify that this must be a diocesan, or even come from the province of York. In a nomination to Canterbury the Archbishop of York may choose to be part of the Commission, or not; it will be generally assumed, other things being equal, that this choice indicates a decision whether to be candidate. These arrangements have a haphazard appearance. It is surely improper that an Archbishop of York could be nominated without any bishop of the Northern province having a voice. It is invidious that, when no one else in the Church of England is ever required publicly to declare a candidacy for an episcopal see, the Archbishop of York is more or less forced to do so, negatively or positively, when a vacancy arises at Canterbury. It is erratic that the level of elected representation in an election should depend on an individual's decision. Given the senior position of the Archbishop of Canterbury, no attempt to organise the two Archiepiscopal CNCs on symmetrical lines will be successful; there must inevitably be a disequilibrium between them. We propose, then, that **on the CNC for York the Archbishop of Canterbury should continue to have a position *ex officio*** (which may be delegated to another bishop from the Southern province), while the other episcopal position should be **reserved for a bishop of the Northern province elected by the whole House of Bishops**. On the CNC for Canterbury, on the other hand, **the two episcopal seats should be chosen by election by the whole House of Bishops, one to come from the Northern, the other from the Southern province**. We would then regard it as a matter of good practice that the Archbishop of York should be invited to meet the Chair of the CNC and the Secretaries to discuss what is required

in a new Archbishop of Canterbury. Whether or not the Archbishop will be a candidate need not be known publicly. There would, of course, be nothing to prevent the Archbishop of York being elected as one of the two episcopal members.

5.21 The most distinctive feature of the Archiepiscopal nominations is the Lay Chair, who is a communicating member of the Church of England, appointed by the Prime Minister in the case of Canterbury, by the Appointments Committee in consultation with the Archbishop of Canterbury in the case of York. The significance of this arrangement is to highlight the importance of the national profile of the two Archbishops as the leading public voices of the established Church, and, in our view, it should be valued. The task can be a daunting one, but those who have undertaken it have been public figures with a significant weight of experience, who have brought to the task not only their own Christian faith but a sense of national context that would be difficult to equal, which strengthens the wider authority of the Archbishops in the nation. There has been a minority opinion within the Church of England which has favoured severing every link between the church and the wider public and political structures, and from that point of view the role of the Prime Minister in appointing the chair for the Canterbury CNC is an anomaly. Our view, which we believe to be in keeping with the traditional teaching of the Church of England on church and state, sees such interactions as an important safeguard for the character of democratic government in Britain, which has in past generations been open to moral and spiritual influence. Lay Chairs for the Canterbury CNC have not interpreted their role as being mouthpieces for a Prime Minister's agenda, but have sought to facilitate a balanced process in the broadest interests of the church. We find it more difficult to understand the logic of the appointment of the York chair by the Appointments Committee, a body which is mainly involved in church appointments, with little experience to enable it to identify a figure with the appropriate profile. It might usefully be discussed whether this appointment, too, **might rest with the Prime Minister.**

5.22 The point has been repeatedly put to us that the House of Bishops has difficulty making the fullest use of its own resources because there is no mechanism for forward planning in the filling of senior sees, most significantly those with a seat in the House of Lords. Given that the CNC is constituted separately for each vacancy, and that diocesan members need by no means fall in line with any planning that has been done, it is clear that any forward planning must be tentative. A candidate who is thought of as a possible bishop of a more senior see must be free to receive a vocation to a less senior diocese. Yet since, on the one hand, the field of candidates for senior sees is likely to be a different one, more heavily weighted towards those who are already diocesan bishops, and since, on the other, a potential candidate may be encouraged confidentially to remain in readiness for the more senior see, forward-planning may yield useful results. It does not lie within our scope, we think, to propose more than a first step in this direction. The right body to attempt it, we would think, would be the central members meeting together with the two Archbishops (representing the House of

Bishops). Experience would have to dictate whether further steps were required. We recommend that **forward planning for the filling of future vacancies in senior sees** should be taken up by the central members and the Archbishops.

6. Discerning and Deciding

6.1 Interviewing candidates has been a recent addition to the CNC process, and has excited strong reactions. Administratively, its introduction has made the process slower and more cumbersome, and has imposed a burden on short-listed candidates which becomes especially heavy when someone is interviewed for more than one vacancy. The experience of some of those who have been interviewed has left them unimpressed. Some have found the homily they are invited to present too much like a school-exercise; some have felt the interview too artificially constrained, a context that did not allow them to present themselves in a rounded way. Among longer-serving members of the CNC, however, the interview is generally felt to be a great improvement. They remember some of the more outstanding homilies they have listened to and occasions when the encounter with a candidate has been decisive. This is satisfying when it happens, conveying a sense that prayers for guidance have been answered. But it may also pose the temptation to trust the impact of an interview too much, and to spend too little time mulling over the patiently gathered documentation.

6.2 Picking our way through these opinions we have come to think that the value of the interview has been well proved. It allows the CNC to turn the information they have about candidates into personal acquaintance. It is also a real test of relevant gifts. An ability to express oneself well before a roomful of unfamiliar people, the focus of mind to seize an opportunity to give serious edification in circumstances not immediately conducive to it are, in our view, no bad things in a diocesan bishop. We admire the practice followed by some churches in the Communion of sending members of the selection panel out to listen to the preaching of candidates in their home contexts, but this does presuppose a comparatively leisurely pace of process, and it courts a certain publicity. It is difficult to see how it could be adapted to the more pressured and confidential work of a national Commission. But we should be very sorry if there were no opportunity for the candidates to edify the members of the CNC. It is true that the interview places a burden on unsuccessful candidates, and that is a serious consideration. Potential candidates who feel that it is simply the wrong time for them to entertain such a move may always decline the invitation to interview, which certainly has no implication that they will not be invited again. In general, however, the burden that candidates carry, putting their own future up for discussion by other people, is simply one aspect of the burden the whole church must share in securing the continuity of episcopal ministry. However reluctantly a candidate accepts the invitation to interview, the decision to do so is offered to the CNC as a service, a willingness to take a risk on behalf of the wider church. Regardless of the outcome, it is a generous and valuable contribution. The suggestion has been made that those on the relevant list could be invited to express interest in a particular vacancy for which a CNC

is being convened. An experiment along these lines is being conducted with suffragan appointments. In line with our reflections on episcopal vocation (3.11) we have real worries about transferring this practice to diocesan appointments, and would not like to see the field narrowed in a way that brought the ambitious or the restless to the front. It would be a pity, in our view, to eliminate the candidacy of the reluctant bishop, persuaded of God's call against his or her initial judgment, for reluctance, when genuine, may be valued as the ancient church valued it, as the confirmation of a true calling.

6.3 Although the interview has been a good innovation, the experience that candidates have had of it has not been all that it could and should be. The arrangements do not have the effect of drawing them into a process of shared discernment, to which they are essentially a party. Efforts to ensure secrecy, and especially to prevent the candidates from identifying one another, are commonly felt as intrusive and are often fruitless. Within the framework of the overall confidentiality of the proceedings we encourage the Archbishops to permit interviewed candidates and members of the CNC to meet one another naturally and **to share in the Eucharist and a common meal**. This, we believe, would do much to alleviate the difficulty experienced by candidates. The interviewing itself has often been criticised as stilted and inflexible, more apparently concerned with covering certain questions *pro forma* than with genuinely probing the candidates' minds. We are told that interviewing was initially conducted partly in panels, but that this practice was abandoned because members of the Commission found it difficult to reconcile the impressions they had formed in different meetings with candidates. We do not find that difficulty very decisive when weighed against the opportunity for more CNC members to ask and to follow up questions, and for the candidates to ask questions in their turn. We encourage the Archbishops **to consider ways in which the interview process might be more imaginatively organised, to enable fuller interaction between candidates and Commission members**.

6.4 This raises the more general question of secrecy. Secrecy serves two purposes in the CNC process: it protects the constitutional function of the nomination in tendering advice to the Queen, and it protects the confidence of the candidates against disturbing and unsettling publicity. The point of secrecy is to achieve confidentiality, which is the ability to think and act freely within a defined group of people. We have quoted (2.13) the terms of the declaration members are asked to make, and stated that we think them necessary, but also sufficient. When secrecy intrudes beyond what is needed for such confidences, it tends to become destructive of the ends it is supposed to serve. Instead of creating a safe space where free conversation may take place, it prevents those conversations from taking place. And that, of course, is the cue for the frustration with secrecy that tempts people to breach it. When important business is afoot, we all need to talk to someone; the point is to ensure that we are talking to the right person, and that the right person is talking only to us, not to everyone else. This has an important implication when a successful candidate is offered the nomination. There will be plenty of ears ready to pick up rumours and tongues to repeat them, and the

nominee's freedom, as well as the dignity of the Crown Appointment, depend on their not doing so. Yet he or she will need one person who is personally trusted to talk to and pray with. There may also be a partner to be consulted. And someone in the diocese, perhaps someone nominated by the diocesan CNC members, will need to be available to field questions which the candidate needs answered. A reasonable and workable plan for private consultation needs to be agreed between the nominated candidate and the Archbishops' Secretary, with every party to it understanding the terms on which confidence is extended.

6.5 A common discernment is reached as the insights and perspectives of Commission members are brought together to reach a shared resolution on what it is that God wills for the particular appointment. **The crucial work in reaching that resolution is done by discussion**, listening to and questioning one another's views, exposing the differences and exploring ways of reconciling them. Discussion clarifies differences, and sometimes overcomes them; where it does not, it makes them more intelligible and therefore less alarming. It has been made clear to us that disagreements on CNCs sometimes run deep and resist easy reconciliation. Yet discussion is still of the greatest importance in making every member wiser about the differences of view that persist. There may or may not be changes of mind; what there will be is a stronger common view of how each candidate appears seen from the variety of angles of vision. And this is especially important when it comes to reaching decisions by ballot. If I cannot share the enthusiasm of the majority for a favoured candidate, I can at least understand better what it is that they appreciate, and when the voting goes against me, I can accept the reasonableness of the outcome, making the secondary judgment that though the result was not the best bishop ideally possible, it was the best bishop possible for that group of people working in that context. Members who leave the process deeply frustrated by an outcome they regret are usually not only disappointed, but bewildered. There may be no avoiding disappointments, but the bewilderment can be reduced.

6.6 Only when discussion has been allowed to go as far as it fruitfully can is it the moment for voting. Voting formalises the measure of consensus reached and resolves the remaining differences in line with the majority view, but it brings no further clarity than the discussion has achieved. The procedure for voting, especially for voting at the second meeting of the CNC, where a decision is made after interview, has excited a great deal of reflection and commentary, the discussions rather less so. We are not the only ones to find this balance of pre-occupations rather troubling. The day is always a very full one, the time is tight. The voting procedure is complicated and demands a lot of attention. Moreover, it is secret, and since among fourteen people a ballot may be secret without actually keeping secrets, it will invite private speculations on how members voted, suspicions of tactical manoeuvring and undeclared agendas, which, though perhaps imaginary, are destructive of the search for a common mind.

6.7 In the light of our reflections on confidence and secrecy (2.11) we encourage the Archbishops to propose the necessary change to Standing Order 141(6) **to remove the requirement that voting in the CNC should be secret**, subject, of course, to the rule of confidentiality that governs all the CNC's proceedings. The confidentiality of CNC proceedings is a good example of a sphere of restricted communication that enables people to communicate with one another frankly. The secret ballot, on the other hand, appears merely to create a veil of mystery dividing those who need to be able to cooperate more. Yet arguments in favour of the secret ballot are not negligible: (a) the presiding Archbishop, too, would declare a vote, and it might become known if the Archbishop had favoured a candidate other than the successful one (a concern on which we have already commented in 5.4 above); (b) the Archbishop's vote might carry too much influence; (c) if, as has occasionally happened, the diocesan members apparently act and think as a block, the secrecy may allow their solidarity to break up. These arguments have in common that they treat secrecy as a defence against dysfunction - breach of confidence, the phalanx mentality etc. We suspect, on the other hand, that the secrecy of the ballot may actually encourage the dysfunctional syndromes it is meant to guard against. A culture in which members report their votes, and when appropriate explain them (the Archbishops, no doubt, after everyone else), strikes us as a better defence against excessive influence than secrecy can be. **We believe open voting will help to provide a context in which discussion, and not only the casting of votes, receives proper emphasis.** It may also be a better defence against the temptation to breach confidence, simply because it allows members to talk more openly to one another.

6.8 Ways of simplifying the voting system have been suggested to us. (a) Two names are reached, one of which is formally submitted to the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister does not need a second name, does the CNC need to be troubled with finding one? Our own view is that a second name is clearly needed. Accidents can intervene between nomination and installation, as in a recent case that attracted some notice, and it is a complicated matter to reconvene the CNC once it has disbanded. (b) A more possible simplification would be to make do without the second round of balloting by which the second name is chosen. Could not the name of the runner-up be taken? In the voting system prescribed, which proceeds by eliminating the candidate with least support in each round, the runner-up will be the most acceptable alternative to most voters.¹² There is, however, some resistance to this suggestion, with which we sympathise. For it would mean that the second name would follow automatically from the conclusion of the first round of voting, and there would not be a further opportunity for discussion and consideration.

¹² The present voting arrangements follow lines proposed by the Perry Report (*Working with the Spirit*, p.53-4) and are a version of what is known as the "Coombs Rule", designed to achieve judgment-aggregation. Professor Iain McLean's Report on the CNC's Electoral Procedure in 2014 found that the system was suited to its purpose.

6.9 Not only complicated, the voting system is also capable of resulting in deadlock if a round of voting fails to yield a two-thirds majority for one out of the final two candidates. Out of the fourteen voting members a two-thirds majority requires ten, which is a high threshold. If that is not reached, deadlock can only be resolved if one or more supporters of the runner-up transfers support to the leading candidate. A special case of the same problem arises when one or more members find themselves unable to support either of the final two candidates. Failing a concession on someone's part, the CNC must begin again from the beginning, a frustratingly lengthy process inviting speculation and publicity. Our view is that **after one failure to reach the ten votes required for a nomination**, the chair should be empowered, by amendment of Standing Order 141(6), **to accept the vote of nine members out of fourteen as conclusive**. For the Archiepiscopal sees, where, on our proposals, the number of voting members will be twelve for Canterbury and fifteen for York, the strict two-thirds majority is not so far out of reach. It may therefore not be necessary for them to be covered by this special provision.

7. Conclusion

7.1 We were asked, first of all, *to provide the members of the Commission (central and diocesan) with a theological framework within which to discharge their responsibilities as they nominate bishops*. Of primary importance in that framework is the idea of a discernment, which **involves a step of faith enabling us to conceive something that God will bring about, which is not yet objectively visible** (2.4). **The crucial work in reaching that resolution is done by discussion** (6.5). CNC members **must approach their task expecting to be shown something, to find a bishop whom perhaps they have never heard or thought of** (2.5). **The call of God is proved by a convergence of the judgment of the nominators with a personal conviction of vocation on the part of the nominee** (2.11).

7.2 The other key element of the task is representation. By seeking to reach a conclusion together from their different angles of vision the members of CNC bring the life and vision of the whole church to bear upon their discernment. **There is a complex representational balance to be maintained** (2.10). **To represent others is to be trusted by those who share an angle of vision, and to commend that vision to those who have other angles** (5.7). In this connection we voiced some concerns over the way both central and diocesan members are elected. **The election of central members needs to ensure the representation of the wider church, not merely the synodical groups** (5.9). Within the diocese **the Diocesan Synod and Bishop's Council need to exercise great care over the selection of the Vacancy-in-See Committee**, ensuring its representativeness (5.17). Vacancy-in-See Committees should **hold a minuted discussion of what is needed for good representation of the diocese** (5.12). **It is important that the central diocesan administration should not be the only voice to be heard on the CNC** (5.13). We are **unhappy that suffragan or area bishops should serve as diocesan members of the CNC** (5.14), and **favour restoring a broad construction of "the bishop's staff"**

in interpreting the restriction on the election of such persons. We also think that there should be **the same equal balance of clergy and laity as is required among the central members** (5.13).

7.3 **The key to effective diocesan participation lies in the selection of the members and their careful preparation for the task** (5.11). We should like to see an expansion of the preparatory work undertaken by diocesan members, and we would welcome it if Vacancy-in-See committees began preparing before the vacancy occurred (5.15). We encourage the **Archbishops to consider how preparatory material made available to Vacancy-in-See Committees and CNC members may have a stronger national and international content, and how these materials can be integrated more fully with the diocesan profiles** (5.16).

7.4 We were asked, in the second place, to help the Commission *understand the nomination of diocesan bishops within the context of the wider church of God*. Episcopacy is not the only form of Christian leadership, but a distinct form with a distinct purpose, an oversight of the life of the churches of the diocese which strengthens both their internal connections with one another and their external connections to the wider church. **A community with much life will have many leaders, but it needs just one bishop, to help the leaders work with one another** (3.2). **The unity fostered by the bishop is a sign of the hope that all will share in Jesus' call to mutual love and spiritual union** (3.3). The bishop's role is not a "dual role", divided between diocese and central church; **we should be speaking, rather, of a "communicative" or "connectional" role** (3.7).

7.5 **The episcopate has the responsibility of guarding the church's tradition of teaching** (3.10), and **a bishop needs to be an articulate interpreter of the apostolic tradition** (3.4), especially in **giving the Church a voice in the wider public sphere** (3.5). **We should like to see CNCs asking themselves how well a potential bishop has acquired a theological culture** (3.13). **There need in principle be no tension between spiritual and administrative qualifications** (3.15). **We look to find in a bishop a mature life of faithfulness that will represent the transforming power of the gospel to those who know nothing else of it** (3.9).

7.6 Thirdly, in interpreting *the nomination of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in the same context*, we noted that the role of the Lay Chair is an important link between the church and the wider political society, as befits a role with a high national profile. We suggested that the appointment of the Lay Chair for York, and not only for Canterbury, **might rest with the Prime Minister** (5.21). We also noted that the House of Bishops needs to have stable representation in the nomination of an Archbishop and proposed tighter arrangements for this: that **on the CNC for York the Archbishop of Canterbury should continue to have a position *ex officio*, with the other episcopal position reserved for a bishop of the Northern**

province elected by the whole House of Bishops; on the CNC for Canterbury the two episcopal seats should be chosen by election by the whole House of Bishops, one to come from the Northern, the other from the Southern province (5.20). We also observed that diocesan representation on the CNC for Canterbury is out of proportion, and favoured **the proposal to reduce diocesan representation to one lay and one clerical member (5.19).**

7.7 We were asked, in the fourth place, *to clarify the particular responsibilities of the Archbishops in shaping the nature of the episcopate and the leadership of the Church.* Welcoming the Strategic Leadership Development Programme, we accepted that **those who worry about the episcopate falling captive to secular models of leadership have appreciated a danger, but the response to that danger is deeper thought about the character of Christian leadership (3.16), helping the church to get past the pyramid-conception of institutional seniority (3.17). In leadership training the theological engagement needs to be as fresh as other engagements (4.2). The development of lists of those thought suitable for episcopal appointments needs to be governed by clear terms of reference for their compilation and use (4.4), and they need to be broadly-based (4.6). Responsibility for them should be situated with the House of Bishops collectively, and exercised at an arms-length distance from the running of the Strategic Leadership Development Programme (4.6).**

7.8 Within the CNC we distinguished the Archbishops' role as Presidents of the House of Bishops, exercising the spiritual responsibility of the bishops to uphold the succession of apostolic ministry, from their role as Chairs (5.2). **The spiritual authority of the Archbishop has weight especially in clarifying the principles on which bishops are chosen and appointed in the Church of Christ. The task of the CNC as a whole, on the other hand, is to reach a particular nomination for this time and this place (5.4).** We have proposed that **a formal declaration should be made jointly by the two Archbishops to the CNC that on the evidence presented to the CNC all candidates under consideration are eligible for consecration under church doctrine and practice, and so eligible for membership of the House of Bishops (5.5).**

7.9 We encourage the Archbishops, as Chairs of the CNC:

- (a) to relax the atmosphere of secrecy around CNC proceedings, except as is necessary to preserve confidences entrusted to them and to avoid publicity that would impede its work or hurt the dignity of the Crown Nomination (6.4). We have argued that **confidentiality is imposed on a limited set of proceedings for a definite purpose**, and that an excessive culture of secrecy can undermine the confidence and trust it hopes to build (2.14)
- (b) to experiment with bringing candidates invited for interview together with the Commission **to share in the Eucharist and a common meal. (6.3)**

- (c) **to consider ways in which the interview process might be more imaginatively organised, to enable fuller interaction between candidates and Commission members** (6.3)
- (d) to engage with the central members of CNC in **forward planning for the filling of future vacancies in senior sees** (5.22)

7.10 We encourage the Archbishops in their role as Presidents of the General Synod to initiate certain changes that lie within Synod's power over Standing Orders, in particular:

- (a) **to strengthen the chair's authority** in details not covered by Standing Orders (5.3);
- (b) **to remove the requirement that voting in the CNC should be secret** (6.7);
- (c) to empower the chair, **after one failure to reach the ten votes required for a nomination, to accept the vote of nine members out of fourteen as conclusive** (6.9);
- (d) to change the constitution of the CNCs for the Archiepiscopal sees in line with 5.20 and 7.6 above; and
- (e) to review the method used for the election of central members by the Synod (cf. 5.9 and 7.2 above).

7.11 Lastly, we were asked to *draw out the merits and disadvantages of the different ways of choosing bishops within the Anglican Communion*, in doing which we have not wished to appear to dictate a pattern that would suit all churches equally, and have been content to draw out some differences that are raised by the practice of the Church of England. The selection of a future bishop needs to involve the responsibility of the existing episcopate in sustaining **a continuous ministry of word and sacrament**, the **recognition and acceptance of the church as a whole of the episcopal ministry**, and **a careful discernment informed by knowledge of the candidates and the situation**, exercised on behalf of the church by those who are authorised to do so (2.8). The English model is an extension of historical practice which we see as well adapted to our needs, depending heavily on the work of a nominating Commission that brings together complementary perspectives of laity, clergy and Archbishops, viewing the vacancy both from the point of view of the diocese and from that of the national church. The system of open election, the principal alternative, suits contexts where the selection is made within the diocese, and is hard to imagine in the context of a nationally collegial episcopate. The English model has the benefit of allowing personal information to be entrusted to it in confidence.

7.12 The moral success of this model, finally, requires a climate of mutual trust and confidence that those charged with the task will put the interests of the church, both local and national, ahead of any sectional agendas. **If the candidates are to have that trust in the CNC, members of the CNC must also have trust in one another** (2.13). This requires a personal

maturity, fortitude and integrity which only prayerful dispossession to the Holy Spirit can supply. When this theological aspiration is frustrated, the whole church suffers; when it succeeds, results both surprising and enriching may be the outcome.