

Nomination to the See of Sheffield:

Lessons Learned for the National Church Institutions in supporting nominees to diocesan sees.

Introduction

In February 2018, the House of Bishops formally accepted the four recommendations set out in the report from the Independent Reviewer, Sir Philip Mawer, published in September 2017, on the nomination of Bishop Philip North to the See of Sheffield. Recommendation 4 asks **“that, together with his colleagues in the National Church Institutions, and those involved in the dioceses of Sheffield and Blackburn, the Secretary General reviews the lessons to be learned from what happened in order to avoid a similar lacuna occurring in future.”**

This paper fulfills that commitment to a review. I recognise and accept the NCIs' part in the failure **“to anticipate the extent and nature of the reaction to Bishop North's nomination and to prepare plans in advance for handling it”**, to quote Sir Philip again. The following paper is intended to give a diagnosis from the experience of those involved. It provides a suggested way forward for planning for such announcements and preparing for the reactions to nominations, with the overall aim of ensuring that the nominee is fully and personally supported by the National Church Institutions throughout. This paper is also, however, fundamentally about our relationships with our brother and sister Christians and we must bear in mind that this is very personal for a number of individuals.

Overview

This paper is made up of the following sections:

- **Conducting the Lessons Learned Review:** including the names of those with whom I spoke about the lessons learned;
- **Diagnosis and Lessons Learned:** a summary of the problems and the lessons learned from those with whom I spoke;
- **The Way Forward:** some suggested principles for future nominations taking into account the lessons learned; and,
- **Conclusions.**

Conducting the Lessons Learned Review

Sir Philip Mawer is clear in his recommendation that this lessons learned review should involve those in the dioceses of Sheffield and Blackburn affected by this nomination. In reality, there are also many others who were involved in the nomination of Bishop Philip North and the period following the announcement, who have their own thoughts about how the process could have been better handled and what steps might be taken to avoid any future failings in supporting the nominee, the receiving diocese and the sending diocese. Consequently, the diagnosis and conclusions drawn in this paper come from many conversations which I have had with those people over the last few

months. Those with whom I have had conversations which have contributed to this review are:

Diocese of Blackburn:

Bishop Julian Henderson - Bishop of Blackburn

Bishop Philip North - Bishop of Burnley

Diocese of Sheffield:

Heidi Adcock - Sheffield Diocesan Secretary

Bishop Peter Burrows - Bishop of Doncaster and former Acting Bishop of Sheffield

LJ Buxton - Sheffield Diocesan Communications Director

Canon Abi Thompson – former Sheffield Dean of Women’s Ministry

Bishops:

Archbishop John Sentamu – Archbishop of York

Bishop Libby Lane - Bishop of Stockport

National Church Institution Staff:

Revd Arun Arora – former Director of Communications

John Bingham – Head of Media

Caroline Boddington – Archbishops’ Secretary for Appointments

Other:

Edward Chaplin – Prime Minister’s Appointments Secretary

Richard Tilbrook – Prime Minister’s Deputy Appointments Secretary

It is worth noting that I have not sought to engage with those many people who commented on Bishop Philip’s nomination, both for and against, but who were not involved in the official process, either at diocesan or national level. This document is intended to focus on the lessons for the national Church institutions and their work with dioceses in supporting nominees to diocesan sees. Further, Sir Philip Mawer deals thoroughly in his review with the many, varied views of those who were affected by or commented on the original nomination.

Diagnosis and Lessons Learned

The following diagnoses and lessons learned are not attributed to individuals but are a summary of the main points which came out of the conversations with those listed above. Many of those I spoke to made similar points. There was an overall willingness to make changes to the way in which nominees for diocesan sees are supported. I have used headings to group together the similar comments and provide a summary of these conversations. The overall approach recommended, of diocese and NCIs being more proactive together about planning for the announcement of a new bishop, has been put into place in planning for recent appointments of a new Bishop of London and a new Bishop of Bristol.

Pre-announcement planning and issues around confidentiality

It is generally acknowledged that, as with other appointments, there is a need for confidentiality around the CNC process. However, it should also be acknowledged that the level of confidentiality previously required can pose problems for those involved in preparing for the announcement: namely the nominee, the sending diocese and the receiving diocese. Further, it is often the case that only two members of senior staff in

the receiving diocese know the name of the nominee until shortly before the announcement. It is those people who must arrange all the practicalities of the announcement.

From my conversations with the Diocese of Sheffield, it appears that this posed two major problems: First, given the short amount of time between nomination and announcement, there is a lot of work for two people to do. Secondly, this can cause an awkwardness and tension between senior staff who know the name of the nominee and those who don't, especially if the Diocesan Secretary is not informed. Meanwhile, the nominee may talk to those few people organising the announcement, but beyond that may feel they have little or no personal support in what can be a time of huge transition. For both the receiving diocese and the nominee, there has in the past been a lack of clarity about who can be involved in discussing the process, which has sometimes generated feelings of unease and a lack of support. Though this conclusion is drawn from the experience of the Diocese of Sheffield and Bishop Philip, it should be noted that this is not unique to this situation, and other bishops have shared similar experiences with me.

While confidentiality is important, the lesson to be learned from the situation in Sheffield, and the similar stories from other bishops, is that clear points of contact and lists of those who can be brought into the planning of the announcement need to be established for the nominee and the receiving diocese, to ensure proper support. I comment further on details of this a little later on.

Communications training

One area of support and preparation for the nominee which already does take place within this process is communications training. This is usually one session held by the national Director of Communications (or a deputy) and the Director of Communications in the receiving diocese with the nominee. Any potentially difficult questions or topics which may arise are discussed and the nominee is given training on how he or she would like to answer these questions. While this has often proved useful, it is clear from a number of cases that more thought could be given to any potentially contentious issues, and dealing with reactions post-announcement. This might cover the nominee's own views on certain topics, the plan they have for their ministry in the diocese, and general issues of the day. However, the Directors of Communications, both for the National Church and for the diocese, have usually prepared this training in isolation, relying on their own knowledge for preparing any issues or contentious topics which might arise. Further, the communications training tends to come towards the end of the process, not long before announcement. This does not allow for much, if any, follow-up or further training. In some cases, especially with appointments where it is known that there may be strong reactions, there has not been enough time for thorough preparation. There is normally a further day of training for the nominee before installation, but it was not possible to schedule this for Bishop Philip.

It is clear that the lesson to be learned here is to start a process of communication training as early as possible and to allow time, where appropriate, for more than one session. Furthermore, there is also scope for bringing more colleagues from the

National Church Institutions into this training, as people who may understand potentially contentious issues and be able to help the nominee discuss them.

Support from the National Church Institutions

As I have mentioned above, there has been clear support to the nominee from the National Church Institutions with regards to communications training, though I am recommending that more should be done around this. I should also be clear that the staff in the Archbishops' Advisers for Appointments and Development offer considerable support to the CNC and nominee, especially before the announcement is made. However, what is clear from the process in Sheffield after the announcement of Bishop Philip as the nominee to the See of Sheffield, is that there was no clear point of contact or line of communication between the nominee, the receiving diocese and the National Church Institutions. After the announcement of Bishop Philip's nomination, many of those in Church House with a legitimate interest were either not aware of the scale of negative reactions in some parts of Sheffield diocese to the announcement of Bishop Philip's nomination, or felt it was not their role to address it. Any additional support from the National Church Institutions therefore came too late in the process.

There is a clear lesson here, namely, it is pivotal that, from the beginning, the nominee and the receiving diocese know that they have support from the National Church Institutions and know who to contact for what purpose. Further, it should not be left to the diocese to deal with the national ramifications of the announcement, especially in situations where adverse and negative reactions can be pre-empted and any lasting damage to the nominee and diocese can be prevented. Put very simply, there has not in the past been enough national involvement in the planning for the outcomes of the announcement, which has tended to be led by the candidate and the receiving diocese. However, this has drawn attention to our duty to support the nominee and the receiving diocese to ensure that the nominee is fully able to launch their ministry in the best possible way.

However, the National Church Institutions cannot and should not operate without local advice. They need to listen to thoughts and opinions from within the diocese. This may be around the timing of the announcement or opinions on how the diocese might react. There must be what one person consulted described as "cultural simultaneous translation" to ensure that those working for the National Church Institutions truly understand the context, language and culture in the diocese, and therefore surrounding the announcement. This would also take into account the secular and civic context and impact. The National Church, the relevant Archbishop's office and the receiving diocese must work together, pooling knowledge and experience to support both the nominee and also those who may have concerns about their ministry.

The Five Guiding Principles in practice

One element in the variety of reactions at national level to the nomination of Bishop Philip to the See of Sheffield called into question the Five Guiding Principles set out in the *House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests*. It also became apparent that there were those in the Diocese of Sheffield who themselves

did not fully understand that these principles would allow for a non-ordaining bishop to become their diocesan bishop. It is clear that there was inadequate explanation of, and dialogue about the Five Guiding Principles and what it would mean for a diocese to receive a non-ordaining bishop as its diocesan bishop.

I have avoided considering the particular implications of this case in this brief review. The Archbishops commissioned Sir Philip Mawer to review this case. The House of Bishops has subsequently accepted Sir Philip's recommendations, and established an Implementation and Dialogue Group, a balanced group looking at how to implement and explain the Five Guiding Principles in practice.

It is fair to say that, following the settlement, not enough was done to educate those in dioceses of the possibility of non-ordaining bishops continuing to be appointed to sees. Consequently, this nomination would have come as a shock to those who did not know or think that this was possible. I look forward to hearing the progress of the Implementation and Dialogue Group when it reports to the House of Bishops. I therefore do not deal further here with the specific case of the See of Sheffield.

I also understand that the Vacancy in See Guidelines used by dioceses as they prepare for a CNC have been amended to include this and that the Appointments Secretaries are working more closely with dioceses at these early stages to ensure that they understand this.

This summary of main diagnoses and lessons learned is not exhaustive and there were many further comments which we will draw on to help guide detailed implementation. I hope though that this brief summary gives a clear steer for how the NCIs may better support nominees in all future nominations.

The Way Forward

It is clear that the main issue identified is a lack of joined-up planning and communication both pre- and post-announcement. To avoid any future similar lacuna, it will be key to ensure that there is a clear triangle of communication between the receiving diocese, Church House and Lambeth/Bishopthorpe. I therefore recommend the following way forward for this process:

First, that the Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments will ensure that the following NCI staff are kept abreast of any significant issues arising from the Vacancy in See and CNC process:

- The Secretary General of the Archbishops' Council;
- The national Director of Communications;
- The relevant Archbishop's Head of Communications;
- Other Lambeth and/or Bishopthorpe Senior Staff, as appropriate.

This group may then meet as necessary during the process to begin planning for any potential diocesan and national ramifications, and reactions to the appointment.

The Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments will convene a group comprising these people, the Prime Minister's Secretary for Appointments and representatives from the diocese (see below) to create a detailed communications timetable, in the light of the candidate who has been identified. The aim of the group is to support the candidate through the announcement and any ongoing issues. The Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments will liaise with the candidate about their possible involvement in meetings.

This group will, for each diocesan see to be filled,

- Identify whether or not there may be issues or reactions which will need to be addressed after the announcement both nationally and within the diocese;
- Decide how much communications training the nominee might require, whether more than one session is needed, and whether other staff might be helpful in this training;
- Agree where additional briefings might be required and who these should be with;

Secondly, that the circle of confidentiality within the receiving diocese is widened to include:

- The Acting Diocesan Bishop;
- The Diocesan Secretary; and,
- The Diocesan Director of Communications.

This circle of people within the receiving diocese (which will also include one member of the diocesan representatives on the CNC, any member of the senior staff team or if no member was present, someone else) would then be able to plan together for the announcement, and feed in local advice to the group of National Church staff arranging the announcement date. Indeed, this has already been implemented in the vacancies in the See of London and Bristol and has proved to be helpful.

These two groups will work together and bring into the circle of confidentiality, at the appropriate time, other key stakeholders who would be helpful in determining the reactions and how these should be handled. These might include the Dean of Women's Ministry or Provincial Episcopal Visitor, for example. This will be done judiciously and on a selective basis, according to the particular circumstances of the case.

It is for the Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments to be the main point of contact with the national church for the nominee, especially with regard to any concerns they may have about the announcement and reactions. Of course, at a certain stage, the nominee will have more contact with the diocesan staff as detailed above to arrange the announcement. I would also suggest that the group consider for each nomination whether there would be an advantage in offering to the nominee an accompanier, ideally another senior bishop, who can offer personal and pastoral support. If such a

person is appointed, with of course the approval of the relevant Archbishop, then he or she should also be part of the group.

Finally, I propose that this process should be put in place for all nominations to Diocesan Sees, recognising that there may always be potential issues and reactions, both within the Church and secular society, for which planning may be necessary. It will only be by gathering the two groups that potential issues and reactions will be unearthed. No appointment should be automatically assumed not to require this advance planning.

Conclusions

I am grateful to Sir Philip Mawer for his Independent Review, particularly for his recommendation of a Lessons Learned Review. In undertaking this review, I have been able to hear from all those involved in the process and to learn from them, comparing their views and seeing how better support can be provided to those appointed to diocesan sees.

Since the publication of Sir Philip's report, we have seen two further nomination processes for the Dioceses of London and Bristol. We have had the opportunity to put some of this learning, and suggested changes in process, into practice. It is regrettable that it is only the difficult experience of the See of Sheffield process in the spring of 2017 that has prompted these reflections. We will aim to continue to learn with each new nomination. We must endeavour to keep learning and adapting our processes to ensure the best for the whole Church, including individuals on all sides who can feel marginalised or alienated by some of the Church's decisions. As the Archbishops reminded us in February 2018 we must "reaffirm our commitment to the vital principle of mutual flourishing as the Church and will endeavor to maintain the bonds of peace and affection and live God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ, even amid difference on questions on which Christians may 'disagree Christianly'".

William Nye
Secretary General
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