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Discerning in Obedience: a theological review of the Crown Nominations Commission: A report from the Monitoring Group established by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York

Summary

This paper sets out reflections of the oversight group monitoring the implementation of *“Discerning in Obedience”*. It draws out issues relating to the operation of the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) and notes the changes to Standing Orders under discussion at this Synod and the timing of consideration of issues for the sees of Canterbury and York. It welcomes the establishment of the group on election processes, including the Vacancy in See Committee, and sets out some issues for consideration in relation to the work of the House of Bishops in relation to Episcopal Lists. The group has been very encouraged by the positive reception of the report.

1. Members will recall that the arrangements for progressing the recommendations of the report *“Discerning in Obedience: a theological review of the Crown Nominations Commission”* (GS1171) included the establishment *“of a small oversight group to monitor the progress on the discussion and implementation of arrangements”* (GS2080 paragraph 11 and as set out in Annex 1 of the paper which also included CNC related issues raised in the *“Review of the nomination to the See of Sheffield and related concern: Report by the Independent Reviewer”*). This group was asked to report back to General Synod and this is its first report.

2. Membership of the group is as follows
 - The Rt Revd Dr Michael Ipgrave (Chair)
 - The Very Revd Peter Bradley
 - The Ven. Nikki Groarke
 - Canon Dr Addy Lazz-Onyeobi
 - Dr Lindsay Newcombe

Caroline Boddington, Archbishops’ Secretary for Appointments was in attendance at the meeting.

3. Members will recall that as this group was unable to meet prior to the July General Synod, the Archbishops provided an update on progress (GS Misc 1185). At our meeting in November 2018 we were able to reflect on the progress that has been made, on future plans and on themes we would like the various groups to bear in mind as they progress their work. We were very encouraged by the positive welcome *“Discerning in Obedience”* has received and the way in which its theological reflection has opened up deeper consideration of process issues.

Crown Nominations Commission

4. The Archbishops and Central Members were charged to i) review the proposals relating to the culture and operation of the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC) and Vacancy in See process not requiring Standing Order Changes ii) consider those

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recommendations requiring Standing Order changes for the Standing Orders committee.

5. They keep the operation and culture of the CNC under continuous review and we detected that the report had stimulated discussion on some key issues. We would like to draw attention to
 - a) The establishment of a national/diocesan group to oversee the announcement of a new diocesan bishop which ensures greater local involvement in the arrival of a new bishop
 - b) The introduction of briefings for candidates prior to interview to enhance the mutuality of the discernment
 - c) The commitment to creating a culture of mutual trust in what could be an anxious environment and to ongoing exploration of meaningful conversation enabled by an external consultant

6. We would like to underline the questions that the report raised (paragraphs 3.10 onwards) about consideration of the Bishop's teaching ministry and the challenge to consider how a "potential bishop has acquired a theological culture". Bishops continually face questions which require theological and doctrinal reflection and we would encourage the CNC to create some realistic scenarios to explore at interview. The need for practical theologians who step readily into the contemporary mission culture is acknowledged and we also note the need for the episcopate to be equipped to guard the Church's tradition of teaching. We mused that this might be a wider issue for clergy training but note that the Archbishops and central members will be exploring this further in relation to bishops at their next meeting.

7. We spent some time exploring the role of the CNC in relation to the *House of Bishops Declaration on the Ministry of Women as Bishops and Priests* (GS1076) and the *Statement of Guiding Principles*. We note that members of the CNC are asked to affirm their commitment to these and that the possibility of the nomination of a bishop who, on the grounds of theological conviction is unable to receive the ministry of women as priests and bishops, is covered within the Appointments Secretaries consultations. We understand that CNC Central Members will be exploring the issue of Mutual Flourishing further at their next meeting and would invite them to consider how they are able to reassure the wider church that these principles underpin their work.

8. We note that a number of proposed Standing Order changes are tabled for consideration by the February General Synod GS 2120 relating to
 - a) The disqualification of central members from meetings of the Commission for their own diocese (SO 137 3);
 - b) The appointment of the lay chair for the York CNC (SO 138);
 - c) The election of bishops to meetings of the CNC for Canterbury and York (SO 139);
 - d) The nomination of replacements for central members of the CNC (SO 140): and
 - e) The requirement for a secret ballot (SO 141).

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9. We understand the rationale for not pursuing two of the report's recommendations namely
- a) That if no candidate received the required 10 votes, the Archbishop in the Chair should accept the vote of nine out of fourteen members as conclusive; and
 - b) the Chair should be given authority to settle procedural matters not determined by the Standing Orders;

and note the proposed alternatives

- c) A Standing Order revision set before Synod that the 2/3 majority should relate to those present and voting rather than to voting members as currently (SO 141); and
 - d) A commitment to the current SO 141 (1) that "the Crown Nominations Commission may, subject to this Standing Order, regulate its own business and procedure".
10. One of the more complex recommendations of the report is that the Archbishops should make a statement jointly that on the evidence presented to the CNC all candidates under consideration are eligible for consecration in accordance with the teaching of the Church and any guidance given by the House of Bishops, and so eligible for the House of Bishops (5.5). We noted that this had not yet been considered in detail and wondered whether this issue should be remitted to *the Faith and Order Commission (FAOC)*. The report sets this responsibility in the context of the Archbishops as Presidents of the House of Bishops holding the spiritual responsibility of the bishops to uphold the succession of the apostolic ministry.
11. As a group we affirm the reflections of the report that a culture of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit is fundamental to discernment. We were advised that the reflections on the nature of discernment in the report have been reflected on deeply within the CNC. The proposal to use the Veni Creator at the beginning of meetings is one element of framing the meeting in prayer and we note that this will be used in CNC meetings.

The Sees of Canterbury and York

12. The report contained a number of recommendations in relation to the See of Canterbury. Together with a Canterbury Diocesan Synod motion which proposed changes to the composition of the CNC for the See of Canterbury and the extension of the role of the CNC to cover nominations to the See of Dover, these were considered by the Archbishops' Council in October 2018. The Council proposed that there should be greater representation from the Anglican Communion in the nomination and deferred further discussion to a future meeting. Clearly legislation to introduce any changes would need to be considered by General Synod in due course. The consultations for these changes will not be completed until late 2020.
13. We note that one Standing Order change in relation to representation from the House of Bishops on both the Canterbury and York CNCs is being progressed, namely that the elected Bishops should be from the Province concerned. We also note the conclusion that the Archbishop of York should continue to be able to choose whether to serve on the Commission for Canterbury which can be explored further when the details of the Canterbury CNC are looked at.

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Election Processes and Operation of Vacancy in See Committees

14. Issues relating to the process of Vacancy in See Committees have been remitted to a group which is charged with reviewing the election processes for membership of the CNC. The terms of reference of that group are
- a) to review the process for the election of Central Members to the Crown Nominations Commission;
 - b) to review the process for the election of diocesan representatives from the Vacancy in See Committee;
 - c) to review the matter of disclosing declarations of interest in synodical elections; and
 - d) to take a broader, theologically informed view of representation in and of the church so as to stimulate a wider discussion in the church on electoral process and related matters.
15. A number of issues emerging from the report relating to the Vacancy in See Regulations rather than Standing Orders have been referred to this group, namely
- a) That a provision be introduced such that there should be equal balance of clergy and laity amongst elected members;
 - b) That the regulation be amended such that neither Suffragan nor Assistant Bishops can serve on the Crown Nominations Commission for their diocese;
 - c) That only one member - clerical or lay - of the Bishop's Staff team may serve on the CNC;
 - d) The extension of the regulation to ensure a minuted discussion on representation; and
 - e) The reservation of designated places on the CNC to ensure balanced representation (raised in General Synod 2018)
16. This group aims to report to General Synod in February 2020. Whilst this initially appears to be many months away, we acknowledge both the complexity of the work and also the other committees who will need to consider its recommendations next Autumn prior to General Synod. The first meeting of the group was held October 30th 2018 and at the time of our meeting were still at the early stages of planning their work. We may have further comments prior to July Synod but at this stage we wish to stress to the group the importance of ensuring a diverse membership of the Vacancy in See Committee itself.

House of Bishops/Development and Appointments Group

17. The Development and Appointments Group (DAG) were charged to review the management of Episcopal Lists on behalf of the House of Bishops. We are keen to emphasise the need to make these clearer and less mysterious. We note the concerns of the original report in relation to vocation and some of the learning programmes and wish to emphasise the importance of meaningful conversation, feedback and spiritual

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support for individuals. “*Discerning in Obedience*” has stimulated much thought about how the Church makes appointments and we hope that these might be shared and take root in dioceses as they consider their own processes.

18. Following our meeting the House of Bishops has agreed to implement a pilot process whereby existing Suffragan bishops and those in the pool for ministry as a Suffragan Bishop might have the opportunity to express interest in vacant Suffragan sees. This was noted in “*Discerning in Obedience*” along with some reservations. We will be interested in the learning from this for the Crown Nominations Commission in the light of the aspiration that it will enhance rather than detract from the discernment process.
19. We noted the encouragement to bishops to reflect on the nature of episcopacy and are all alert to the work of “Nurturing and Discerning Leaders” and of other projects such as Peer Review in enabling Bishops in a contemporary expression of an age-old calling. We were reminded of the call to be bi-lingual in the expression of ministry, of holding secular ideas on leadership in creative tension with the theological imperatives of episcopacy. Feedback from both the Bishops’ and Deans’ programmes suggests that participants have relished the external stimulus and exploring how to hold these with their episcopal vocation. This is ongoing.

Conclusion

20. As requested, this paper has set out our reflections on the progress that has been made in relation to the report “*Discerning in Obedience: a theological review of the Crown Nominations Commission*”. We would like to thank those who have been part of progressing the recommendations of the report and invite those who continue to be involved to consider some of the themes we have reflected on.

+Michael Lich, Chair of the oversight group

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