

GENERAL SYNOD**REVIEW OF THE FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES****Summary**

1. In July 2014 Synod gave final approval to the Bishops and Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 2014, enabling men and women to be ordained to all three orders of ministry and, relevant to this motion, to be consecrated as bishops. Two months earlier, in anticipation of the Synod's decision, the House of Bishops made its Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests (GS Misc 1076), which included the Five Guiding Principles, intended to support the mutual flourishing of all within the Church of England, in particular, enabling those unable to receive the ministry of female bishops or priests to flourish within its life and structures. While the subsequent appointment of women as both suffragan and diocesan bishops has been welcomed, objections raised to the announcement on 31 January 2017 that the Bishop of Burnley, the Rt Revd Philip North, was to be the next Bishop of Sheffield, led to his withdrawal, five weeks later, of his acceptance of the nomination. The objections centred on Bishop North's known theological position opposed to the ordination of women as priests. The motion before Synod enables Synod to express its views on the circumstances of Bishop North's nomination and, in particular, on the Five Guiding Principles and whether they are 'fit for purpose.'

2. The Motion was tabled in March 2017 (over four years ago) and paragraph (e) calls on the House of Bishops to review the Five Guiding Principles and "report to the Synod by February 2018". The fact that this date has long passed, together with subsequent events, means that some amendment will need to be made to the motion before it is put to the vote: see paragraph 14 below.

The motion

3. The motion, as tabled in March 2017, is as follows:

That this Synod:

(a) share the sadness and regret of the Rt Revd Philip North in his decision, announced on 9 March 2017, to withdraw acceptance of his nomination to the See of Sheffield;

(b) note the substantial support for Bishop North's nomination from many women and men, lay and ordained, in the dioceses of both Sheffield and Blackburn, and in the wider Church of England;

(c) express its full support for Bishop North in his future ministry, whether in the Blackburn diocese or elsewhere;

(d) note, with concern, the implications of Bishop North's decision, and the public debate that preceded it, for the 'mutual flourishing' of the Church of England; and

(e) request the House of Bishops urgently to review the 'Five Guiding Principles' and to consider whether they need to be amended or amplified in

GENERAL SYNOD

order to ensure that there is an equal place at all levels in the Church for men and women of different theological convictions on the issue of women's ordination, and to report to the Synod by February 2018.

The Five Guiding Principles

4. The Five Guiding Principles, set out in the House of Bishops Declaration of May 2014, are:

1 Now that legislation has been passed to enable women to become bishops the Church of England is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being open equally to all, without reference to gender, and holds that those whom it has duly ordained and appointed to office are the true and lawful holders of the office which they occupy and thus deserve due respect and canonical obedience;

2 Anyone who ministers within the Church of England must be prepared to acknowledge that the Church of England has reached a clear decision on the matter;

3 Since it continues to share the historic episcopate with other Churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and those provinces of the Anglican Communion which continue to ordain only men as priests or bishops, the Church of England acknowledges that its own clear decision on ministry and gender is set within a broader process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God;

4 Since those within the Church of England who, on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion, the Church of England remains committed to enabling them to flourish within its life and structures;

5 Pastoral and sacramental provision for the minority within the Church of England will be made without specifying a limit of time and in a way that maintains the highest possible degree of communion and contributes to mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England.

Background

5. On 31 January 2017 Downing Street announced that the Rt Revd Philip North was to be the next Bishop of Sheffield, in succession to the Rt Revd Steven Croft following his translation to Oxford diocese. As reported in the *Church Times*, Bishop North, “acknowledged that there would be those who “for theological reasons will have misgivings . . . I want to make it absolutely clear that I am determined to be a Bishop for all, and will love, care for, appoint, and develop the ministry of all clergy, female or male, Catholic and Evangelical, and all points in between.”¹ He spoke of “really good, close working-relationships” with women priests in Burnley, and of the

¹ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/3-february/news/uk/bishop-north-translated-to-sheffield>

GENERAL SYNOD

“very good precedent” set by other traditionalist bishops working with women clergy. Although he had a “number of ideas” about how to work with women in Sheffield, he wanted to speak to them first, before commenting in public.

6. However, although Bishop North received support from women bishops (The Bishop of Dorking, Dr Jo Bailey Wells, said that, on hearing of his nomination, she had “*sensed the hand of God at work*”, and regarded it as “*the sign of a healthy Church: one that is learning to live in unity amid diversity, even in a situation where one member’s convictions are a source of pain to another.*” The then the Bishop of Repton, in Derby diocese, the Rt Revd Jan McFarlane, said “*Bishop Philip’s appointment is a perfect opportunity for the Church of England to say that what matters first and foremost is our faith in Jesus Christ, which means that we are brothers and sisters who put each other’s needs before our own.*” The Bishop of Newcastle, the Rt Revd Christine Hardman, said that the integrity of the appointment process was “*undermined if it is subject to campaigns which seek to overturn decisions which are carefully and prayerfully made. I wouldn’t have expected my appointment as the Bishop of Newcastle to be challenged by those who take a different theological view to my own.*”²), opposition to his nomination built up over the following month and, on 9 March, after spending some days on retreat, he announced his decision to withdraw acceptance of the nomination.³ Subsequently it was announced that the Dean of Liverpool, Peter Wilcox, would be the next Bishop of Sheffield.

7. Perhaps inevitably, there were mixed reactions to Bishop North’s decision. In a statement, as reported in the *Church Times*⁴, Philip North explained his decision:

“It is with regret and sadness that I have decided that I am unable to take up the nomination as Bishop of Sheffield. It is clear that the level of feeling is such that my arrival would be counter-productive in terms of the mission of the Church in South Yorkshire and that my leadership would not be acceptable to many.”

Bishop North apologised to those who would be disappointed by his decision not to accept his nomination, saying that there was “much to be done” in learning how to disagree well in the Church of England, and tolerate theological differences. He added: ““The highly individualised nature of the attacks upon me have been extremely hard to bear. If, as Christians, we cannot relate to each other within the bounds of love, how can we possibly presume to transform a nation in the name of Christ?”

² <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/3-march/news/uk/women-bishops-rally-round-philip-north-in-sheffield-row>

³ What is thought to have been a significant intervention was an essay for Modern Church by the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, the Very Revd Professor Martyn Percy, in which proposed that Bishop North should voluntarily withdraw from nomination, as “an act of integrity, consistent with his beliefs, and with his wider concerns for the catholicity of the Church, and for the flourishing of pastoral relationships,”. In the essay he wrote: “If your own diocesan bishop doesn’t think your sacramental ministry as a woman and a priest is actually efficacious, then your integrity comes under real pressure.”

⁴ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/10-march/news/uk/bishop-north-pulls-out-of-sheffield-after-personal-attacks>

GENERAL SYNOD

The Archbishop of York, John Sentamu, said that he understood and accepted Bishop North's decision, but with sadness. "What has happened to Bishop Philip clearly does not reflect the settlement under which, two-and-a-half years ago, the Church of England joyfully and decisively opened up all orders of ministry to men and women."

8. Two days after the above motion was tabled, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York referred the issue to the Independent Reviewer, Sir Philip Mawer.⁵ In their letter they identified five particular areas of concern:

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

The Mawer Report

9. Sir Philip issued his 74-page report in September 2017. He concluded that "not nearly enough" had been done in the Church, including in the Diocese of Sheffield, to inform and educate the clergy and laity about the 2014 Settlement and the effect of the Declaration. He recommended that the House of Bishops "*commissions a group with balanced membership to review what has been done, distil examples of good practice within dioceses; and provide resources to help dioceses, deaneries and parishes, and theological training institutions to engage in further consideration of the issues.*" [Page 68, para 191].

10. On the consistency of Bishop North's nomination with the House of Bishops' Declaration, Sir Philip concluded that it was "entirely consistent" [paras 125-130 and 195], but he recommended that the House of Bishops "*invites the Faith and Order Commission to examine the theological challenge which has been posed to the 2014 Settlement and that the results of this work, together with the House's response to the pastoral challenge I have identified in paragraph 192, inform the ongoing process of discussion and education about the Settlement for which I have also called.*" [Para 198]

11. On the reactions to Bishop North's nomination in the Church and beyond, and the response of the institutional Church to the nomination and the reactions to it, Sir Philip concluded that there was "*a failure of all concerned to anticipate the extent and nature of the reaction to Bishop North's nomination and to prepare plans in advance for handling it.*" He recommended that those involved, including the

⁵ Sir Philip also received a request from WATCH ('Women and the Church') to examine one aspect of the nomination process in respect of the Sheffield vacancy, namely whether the two secretaries (Archbishops' and Prime Minister's Appointments) had made clear the guidance in paragraph 12 of the House of Bishops Declaration to the vacancy in see committee and others in Sheffield consulted as part of the process leading to Bishop North's nomination.

GENERAL SYNOD

Secretary General, “reviews the lessons learned from what has happened in order to avoid a similar lacuna occurring in the future.” [Para 202]

12. Sir Philip’s report was analysed in a number of reports and articles in the *Church Times*: see footnote below.⁶ In one article Dean Martyn Percy, while welcoming the report, was quoted as saying, “*The report cannot resolve the fundamental conundrum at the heart of the matter: if a bishop can’t receive their own clergy’s sacramental ministry as unequivocally efficacious, you can’t expect that same episcopacy to be received without significant questions and some resistance.*”

The Implementation and Dialogue Group

13. Following Sir Philip’s report and as a response to it, in 2018 the House of Bishops set up an “Implementation and Dialogue Group” (“IDG”).⁷ The IDG’s lengthy report forms the main part of paper GS 2225, distributed to Synod members with the Agenda for the July 2021 group of sessions and to be the subject of a ‘Take note’ debate immediately before a debate on the above Motion. It is not intended in this paper to analyse or summarise the IDG report (an Executive Summary is on pages 2-8), save for quoting the final paragraph of the Executive Summary:

“Finally, we commend to the House of Bishops, and to all the clergy and laity of the Church of England that they make every effort constantly to pursue the unity to which we are called by Our Lord, and the love for one another which He commanded us to show ;with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Amending the Motion

14. As mentioned in para 2 above, paragraph (e) of the Motion has been overtaken by time and events. It is intended to seek to amend the Motion by substituting the following wording in paragraph (e):

“(e) welcome the report of the Implementation and Dialogue Group (as set out in paper GS 2225) and, noting the intention that the proposed ‘Standing Commission on House of Bishops Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests’ should report at least once a year to the House of Bishop, request that each such report is sent to all General Synod members, with an opportunity, if requested, for the report to be debated.”

David Lamming
General Synod – House of Laity
St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, 399
June 2021

⁶ <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/15-september/news/uk/the-sheffield-fiasco-and-the-question-that-simply-wasn-t-asked>;
<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/22-september/news/uk/sir-philip-mawer-s-review-into-sheffield-fiasco-suggests-2014-settlement-is-revisited>;
<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/15-september/news/uk/a-disaster-unfolds-a-sheffield-timeline>;
⁷ See <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/9-february/news/uk/archbishops-set-up-group-to-review-2014-women-bishops-measure-after-sheffield-debacle>;