

HOUSE OF BISHOPS

**A meeting of the House of Bishops was held at St Hugh's
College, Oxford on 18 September 2024**

MINUTES**THE BISHOP OF WINCHESTER IN THE CHAIR****1 WELCOME, APOLOGIES, MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

- 1.1 The meeting opened in prayer. The CHAIR welcomed members of press, the public, the General Synod and the College of Bishops to this meeting.
- 1.2 The CHAIR explained that the purpose of this discussion was to agree what, if any, proposals the House wished to bring to the General Synod in respect of the Crown Nominations Commission. He reminded the House that it did not decide the rules for CNCs – that is a matter for the General Synod – and there are processes to go through, including engagement with bodies of Synod such as the Standing Orders Committee, if such proposals are to be ready for the February General Synod. He explained for the benefit of members of the press and public that the College of Bishops had just had a discussion on this topic because otherwise it would not be possible to hear from a wider range of episcopal voices during a meeting of the House.
- 1.3 The CHAIR reminded members of the importance of not breaching confidences about individual CNC processes. The Order of Business would be as set out on the Order Paper.

2 CROWN NOMINATIONS COMMISSION

- 2.1 The BISHOP OF LONDON introduced the motion. She reminded the House that the proposals would not be decided by the House but by the General Synod. The Advisory Group on Appointments and Vocations had been asked to produce a paper of options building on past proposals. Central members of the Crown Nominations Commission would then be consulted with a view to bringing proposals to the February General Synod.
- 2.2 She reminded the House that the CNC worked as a discernment under God that was costly for the diocese and for those people considered in the process. It was the view of those involved that the mission of the Church was being thwarted. The Archbishops' Advisor on Appointments and Vocations was in daily receipt of letters questioning the integrity of the CNC process. His response was that he hoped and prayed that it was a fair process but feared that it was not. The concerns were across gender and church tradition but often came from under-represented groups. Concerns included that criteria were not being followed, that there was lobbying, that there was a lack of diversity in the central CNC members (including in the representation of the Northern province) and that candidates were finding the process damaging. The purpose of the proposals, both short and long-term, set out in HB(24)30 was to restore confidence in the process.

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- 2.3 Those speaking in favour of the motion made the following points:
- 2.3.1 That the problem was not the failure to appoint in certain dioceses but a much wider sense of failure in the process. There was unconscious bias against women and a difference between confidentiality and secrecy. It may be right on occasion not to appoint, but if the vote was narrow not appointing might not be the right result;
 - 2.3.2 That it was important to speak for the people in the process and the lack of confidence that this was a process of discernment. One consequence of the current process was that good people were not letting their names go forward for consideration;
 - 2.3.3 That the elephant in the room was the party groups who wanted only bishops who would interpret the Gospel in their particular way. It would be better to get rid of those groups and simply serve the Lord and the nation. At present some had no confidence in the CNC system;
- 2.4 Those speaking against the motion made the following points:
- 2.4.1 That the House was not clear at this point which matters were symptoms and which matters were causes, and accordingly the House should take more time to understand the underlying issues;
 - 2.4.2 That the proposals did not necessarily address the problems and would instead look like an exercise of episcopal power that did not contribute to the rebuilding of trust;
- 2.5 Introducing his first amendment the BISHOP OF OXFORD explained that 13 diocesan bishops had asked for the discussion. The normal process under CNCs produced lengthy vacancies. Failure to appoint made those yet longer. He was not attributing blame but considered that expressing regret would send a clear signal that the House took this issue seriously and that it regretted the impact on candidates and the mission of the Church in dioceses. CNCs were considering a wide pool of qualified candidates deemed ready for such a role and were simply discerning which of these was the right person. The proposals in the paper were incremental changes that built on past reforms.
- 2.6 In discussion it was noted that:
- 2.6.1 The concerns were not just being expressed within the Church. In the course of debates on the Lords Spiritual (Women) (Extension) Bill members of the House of Lords from many sides had expressed regret that the current system of appointing bishops was not working;
 - 2.6.2 As evidenced from the diversity of practice around the Anglican communion there is no perfect system for appointing diocesan bishops. It was important to acknowledge that the Church's disagreements over Living in Love and Faith were at the heart of the problem. That problem was not going to be

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- solved soon and the Church would need to learn to live with this condition;
- 2.6.3 The BISHOP OF LONDON was happy to accept the amendment.
- 2.6.4 The House AGREED – by 36 votes in favour and none against – to the amendment.
- 2.7 Introducing his amendment, the BISHOP OF ROCHESTER, as former vice-chair of the group whose proposals *Responsible Representation* had been presented in GS 2202, noted that this was a matter of significant concern (in particular for female and GMH clergy) with much rumour and speculation about the cause, but there needed to be a more transparent process of gathering evidence otherwise proposals would fail to command confidence. Without that the proposals may be addressing symptoms not causes and would be seen as increasing the influence of archbishops rather than commanding the wider support of the Church.
- 2.8 In discussion it was noted that:
- 2.8.1 Experience from other work suggested that it was possible to build unanimity in contested spaces by consultation, paying attention to power and being pragmatic;
- 2.8.2 That it was important to have consequences for bad behaviour, but it was also important to pay attention to the different traditions;
- 2.8.3 That voices of women had been silenced for too long if the House was to take seriously matters of justice;
- 2.8.4 That paying attention to power meaning looking to the powerless including the dioceses and the candidates involved. The proposals were modest and proportionate.
- 2.9 The BISHOP OF LONDON said she would resist the amendment. The paper included a proposal for a long-term review alongside the short-term changes designed to help candidates and dioceses.
- 2.10 The House REJECTED the amendment with 13 votes in favour, 24 against and 2 abstentions.
- 2.11 The BISHOP OF OXFORD introduced his second amendment. This proposed a backstop provision for appointing diocesan bishops. He noted that the normal vacancy was a year but failure to appoint bishops could mean much longer vacancies. Those gaps created problems in the mission of the diocese and with the appointment of suffragans. He did not want to advocate for a particular backstop – though he thought that a body that was not elected and which devolved the duty to archbishops may be possible – but the key was to have a backstop rather than 3-4 year vacancies.
- 2.12 In discussion the following points were raised:
- 2.12.1 That determination was an essential part of a fair process and that a

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backstop may be necessary to deliver that;

2.12.2 That by being untransparent this risked damaging trust, and it was important to listen to the underlying concerns;

2.12.3 That in the past new diocesan bishops had been announced before their predecessors had retired;

2.13 The BISHOP OF LONDON said that she was not in favour of the amendment which looked like an exercise in episcopal power, but that it might be a matter for consideration in the long-term review.

2.14 The House REJECTED the amendment with 14 votes in favour, 19 against and 8 abstentions.

2.15 The House returned to the main motion, as amended by amendment 1. In discussion the following points were raised:

2.15.1 That the Biblical story of appointing successor apostles was of choosing who was the right person with deep knowledge and apostolic witness. They did not consider appointing no one. The proposals were modest ones that made it more likely that a diocesan bishop would be appointed;

2.15.2 That bishops were leaders of mission and a full review was necessary to understand the cause and to hear from the local and central members of CNCs. The proposals in the paper would erode the trust that was essential to the mission of the Church;

2.15.3 That those in the parishes needed to know that the bishops were taking the issue seriously;

2.16 Responding the BISHOP OF LONDON expressed her gratitude to the members of the House and College who had spoken at personal cost, to the central and local members of the Crown Nominations Commission, and to the Archbishops' Advisor for Appointments and Vocations. The proposals represented an incremental step that built on past work. To delay this work would continue to expose clergy to a process that hurts people. But there would be a longer term review. But the proposals would help restore trust that the process was a discernment under God.

2.17 The House agreed, with 27 in favour, 9 against and 3 abstentions, to the motion as amended. The motion passed by the House was accordingly.

“That this House, regretting the difficulties in the recent CNC processes as set out in HB(24)30 welcomes the recommendations as set out in paragraphs 12 to 14 of that paper and request that work be undertaken to bring the proposals to Synod.”

3 CLOSE

3.1 The Chair closed the meeting in prayer.

SECRETARIAT

27 September 2024