

Church Society's submission to the body considering the Method of Appointment of Diocesan Bishops

Church Society, particularly through its associated Patronage Trust, has considerable experience of filling vacancies for parish clergy not only in the 111 livings with which it is associated but also in cases where it is consulted by other patrons. The Society accordingly submits to the Review Group the following comments and suggestions:

Role of Appointments Secretaries: No information is given in GS Misc 522A about the form of instructions given to the Secretaries for their preparatory work; this is clearly unsatisfactory. The relevant instructions should be drawn up and approved by General Synod. Reference is made on page 3 of GS Misc 522A that 'a CAC member may sometimes suggest that a priest about whom they know nothing has been mentioned as an interesting possibility'. Again it is clearly unsatisfactory that any CAC member should be submitting a name about which he knows nothing; clear instructions on the information to be given by CAC members when they submit names should be prepared in a form approved by General Synod.

Regarding further preparatory work General Synod should approve the following:

- the format of CVs
- the criteria to be adopted regarding those to be approached in dioceses by the Secretaries and the questions to be asked - in particular enquiries should be made regarding the suitability for episcopal office as given in the consecration services for bishops.

Interviews: Clergy who are to be considered for parish vacancies are generally subject to in-depth interviews. It is surely inconsistent to omit these in the case of those being considered for episcopal office. The suggestion that interviews are not held because they would be bad for the morale of candidates who are subsequently passed over must carry little weight. Furthermore how can CAC members know the views of candidates on particular church issues without holding interviews?

It is suggested that all candidates who come through the preliminary stage of consideration should be interviewed by a panel of about 6 members (4 from CAC members and 2 from outside with particular expertise in this field - balanced by churchmanship and gender).

Episcopal balance: It is essential that subject to meeting the criteria of orthodoxy and the requirements for bishops as given in their consecration services the overall pattern of bishops should broadly reflect the numerical strengths of the different theological standpoints in the Church of England. The present system of producing a short list for a diocese (given on page 5 of GS Misc 522A) is likely to mean that individuals who could well become outstanding bishops are eliminated at an early stage because they are deemed to hold what, rightly or wrongly, is described as more extreme theological stances. It is vital that such candidates are given the fullest consideration and a guarded arrangement should be introduced in the voting to enable this to happen.

References: These must be meaningful - notes from diocesan bishops about individuals they do not know well are not helpful.

Provision of information to CAC members: All the information given above i.e. CVs, results of interviews and references should be supplied in the same form to all members of the CAC whether elected by the General Synod or diocesan Vacancy in See committees.

This submission was approved by the Council of Church Society on 11 May 1999.