

# A Consultation Document Bishops and their ministry fit for a new context

A Confidential Briefing

Prepared for

The College of Bishops

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## 1 Preface

***We, Archbishop Justin, Archbishop Stephen and Bishop Sarah have been considering how the episcopate of the Church of England might best be shaped to enable the church to be as fruitful in its mission as possible. (Bishop Sarah is Dean of the Province of Canterbury and in that role has been on behalf of the two Archbishops chairing the Convenors of the Regional Bishops Meetings) As part of these deliberations we commissioned, Maggie Swinson, Stephen Conway and Mark Sheard to undertake a listening exercise with all bishops and other key stakeholders and following that to provide us with advice on options for change.***

***We have received that advice and weighed it. This advice, together with our individual and collaborative seeking of the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, has allowed us to draw some initial conclusions for shared reflection. We believe that there are two main areas for consideration as we move beyond the events of 2020 and 2021:***

- ***The structural question around how dioceses are structured, the number and nature of them;***
- ***The cultural question around how we seriously reflect on the behaviours and ways of working of bishops.***

***We are clear that this process of change is not a quick fix – it will require a sustained and intentional focus built on a long-term horizon of around 10 years.***

***We remind all of us of the words from the Ordinal,***

***“To serve this royal priesthood, God has given particular ministries. Bishops are ordained to be shepherds of Christ’s flock and guardians of the faith of the apostles proclaiming the gospel of God’s kingdom and leading his people in mission. Obedient to the call of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, they are to gather God’s people and celebrate with them the sacraments of the new covenant. Thus formed into a single communion of faith and love, the Church in each place and time is united with the Church in every place and time.”***

***This document lays out our thinking about options for Episcopal change to fit our new context. Our ambition is to see us deploy all the resources entrusted to us by God to the maximum advantage for the extension of His Kingdom. This is entirely a missional task. Following the careful listening undertaken by the Task Group, and our prayerful deliberation on what we have heard through them and from God, we believe that God is calling us to embrace significant change.***

***The options for consideration for Episcopal change outlined in this document align fully with what we believe God is saying to us in other contexts – it is a clear call to be a simpler, humbler and bolder church. This will require us to address both our structures – being prepared to lay down what we have been entrusted with, and our culture – being prepared to lay down and surrender much that we have held dear, but which we now believe may well now be hindering our mission.***

***Of course, our listening is not yet complete, which is why we now wish to share our conclusions with you for your thoughts and prayerful reflection. There is a need for further work for all of us as bishops to undertake to consider how we might change our ways of working, some of which do not need any legislative change. We set out much of this in the questions towards the end of this document. There will also be a need to share some of the thinking around structural change with the Dioceses Commission and especially its Chair, Caroline Spelman, who can then consider what further work might need to be commissioned.***

## 1a Executive Summary

- 1.1. This document arises out of a commission to a Task Group by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Dean of the Southern Province to provide private advice to them on how the episcopate of the Church of England might be reshaped to fit its current context. It should be read in conjunction with the related piece of work done by the Task Group which spells out some of the theological principles and is entitled 'Principles of Change for Bishops'.
- 1.2. The approach taken was founded on an extensive listening and consultation exercise with all diocesan bishops and numerous other stakeholders. In all, over 80 1-hour interviews were conducted.
- 1.3. The consultation exercise was interpreted in the light of some theological principles to inform and shape how bishops might seek to live and lead change together. The principles are derived from reflection on the Divine Nature. In considering episcopal change, the intention is to reflect on the way that bishops are deployed and the structures within which they are deployed in order to further the mission and ministry of the church. This document affirms the historic understanding of the threefold order of ministry as the Church of England has received it and does not seek to change the nature of episcopal ministry.
- 1.4. This is not intended to be a comprehensive report on Episcopate and Episcopacy in the Church of England. It is a document focussing on the conversations that Maggie, Mark and Stephen have had. There are clear areas that need further work and some interesting omissions. For example, there is little reflection here on the ecumenical understanding of episcopate and episcopacy and there is little mention of the international dimension especially the outworking of episcopate and episcopacy among other Provinces of the Anglican Communion. This document and the partner document setting out the theological principles are work in progress and we hope the work ahead at the College and beyond will continue to help us all shape what the future will look like.
- 1.5. The document presents a number of recommendations and options – with a clear focus on how the episcopate can be reshaped to facilitate enhanced mission – and, in line with the developing vision and strategy work, be simpler, humbler and bolder.
- 1.6. The recommendations are primarily focussed around the ways in which bishops can be even better deployed. The key points are as follows:-
  - 1.6.1. Episcopal ministry should generally be firmly rooted in specific oversight. This is a particular issue in dioceses where there is a single suffragan.
    - All Suffragans should have clear Area responsibilities and clear role definitions which identify their distinct role from their Diocese;
    - PEVs should be integrated within diocesan structures.
  - 1.6.2. We want actively to welcome episcopal ministry being offered in new ways (e.g. House for Duty, self-supporting bishops etc)
  - 1.6.3. Consideration should also be given to the modification of the terms of office (allowing early retirement, fixed-term appointments and addressing stipend differentials) (4.5.6)
- 1.7. The issue of reshaping diocesan structures is central to this document.
  - 1.7.1. The following points are addressed in Section 2.
    - The current deployment of bishops – and diocesan structures – do not reflect current population patterns.

- There are concerns about the costs of diocesan offices although at the same time there is a lack of investment in the capacity of dioceses to undertake change.
  - Data on giving as a percentage of income strongly suggests that the majority of dioceses are not capable of sustaining themselves. (This has been underlined in the financial consequences of the pandemic and the significant sums that dioceses have required in sustainability funding).
- 1.7.2. Structural reform, including ensuring all suffragan bishops have specific responsibility for leading mission in territorial areas, can help better support mission.
- 1.7.3. We have considered options for a revised structural model against the following principles:
- the Church's structure should reflect the population it serves, and to whom it is sent in mission;
  - The norm should be that bishops have responsibility for leading mission in a particular area;
  - Each bishop should have access to a small team to help develop mission in their area;
  - Central support functions should be kept as lean as possible to allow as much resource as possible to be focussed on 'frontline mission and ministry'.
- 1.7.4. We propose three options for the possible closer working together of dioceses:
- a series of diocesan combinations which could reduce the overall number of dioceses;
  - Enhanced regional structure;
  - Simple but deeper and more intentional cooperation; with the pooling of a number of 'back office' functions.
- 1.7.5. At this stage, within the limits of this exercise it has not been possible to explore the details of all options which would need to be explored on a case-by-case basis.
- 1.7.6. We have explored the role of mission network bishops, and we recognise the value of the 'Islington model'. There would be significant 'Kingdom' benefits in developing this model – but such posts would need to be centrally funded. Indications from the Church Commissioners are that this should be possible.
- 1.7.7. We want to acknowledge the enormous value for church and nation provided by the Lords Spiritual. We think that is timely to review the succession to this office and likely numbers into the future (fixed sees reflecting population; special topics etc).
- 1.8. Although the question of how any recommendations might be implemented was not technically within the remit of the Task Group – it will fall to different offices within the Church – some consideration has been given to the issue. We intend to take a pragmatic approach which is relationally-led; permanent structural change is more likely to be advocated for than resisted at grass roots level in this way. This could be built, for example around the scheduled retirements of bishops.
- 1.9. Other aspects of the cultural question around the behaviours and ways of working of bishops which do not require legislative change include the culture and power of bishops, the selection and formation of bishops and the wellbeing and development of bishops will start to be addressed by careful consideration of the questions at the end of this document.

## 2 Tackling the Structural Question

### 2.1 Introduction

In addressing the issues of structure, we have considered the following:

- How do we support appropriate inter-action, mutual support and leadership within regions?
- How should we approach the role of diocesan bishops, their number and the scale of responsibility?
- The overall number of dioceses: should there be fewer dioceses and bishops, or more bishops but with more localised apostolic and pastoral oversight without the current differentials of stipend, housing and public status?
- Amalgamation, merger or acquisition – how to model bringing dioceses together?
- What should be the range of roles and of suffragan bishops and how more diverse might the model be?
- The appropriateness of only operating a geographical model of episcopacy?

### 2.2 The current landscape

In considering whether the structure of the dioceses and episcopate is appropriate to current needs it is helpful to rehearse some simple facts about the current structure:

- In total the Church of England consists of 42 dioceses (40 on mainland England plus Sodor and Isle of Man and Europe). There are therefore 42 diocesan bishops.
- 26 of the 42 Diocesan Bishops sit in the House of Lords as Lords Spiritual; the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the bishops of London, Durham and Winchester sit ex-officio and the remaining 21 places are occupied by a combination of those longest serving in English dioceses and those who qualify under the Lords Spiritual (Women) Act 2015.
- In addition to the 42 diocesan bishops there are currently:
  - 52 suffragan bishops. In the main these are Bishops who do not have direct oversight for a distinct area, although in some cases they may have specific area responsibilities or other duties.
  - 20 Area Bishops who do have direct and specific oversight for a distinct area. These Bishops are located in 7 dioceses who operate specific area schemes (Chelmsford, Leeds, Lichfield, London, Oxford, Salisbury, Southwark). These tend to be the larger dioceses.
- The scale of the dioceses varies widely.
  - In population terms the largest is London serving a population of almost 4.5 million. This is followed by Chelmsford serving a population of over 3 million, and Southwark, Leeds and Oxford all serving over 2.5 million. At the other end of the

spectrum are Hereford, and Carlisle serving populations of less 500,000 as well as Sodor and Man serving a population of less than 100,000<sup>1</sup>.

- The size of a diocese's population does not reflect geographical size of course; other measures which could be used to gauge the size of a diocese are its budget and its headcount.
- The total income of the 42 dioceses amounts to just over £500m based on 2019 figures ranging from London recording an income of £36.3m to Hereford at £5.9m.
- Concerningly expenditure amounted to £530m; across the 42 dioceses approximately two thirds (27) are operating on deficit budgets. Therefore, even prior to the pandemic, there is a net annual deficit of approaching £20m.
- Overall, the 42 dioceses deploy approximately 8500 FTE split between stipendiary clergy and diocesan staff. The largest aggregate 'employer' is, not surprisingly, London with a complement of 537, while the smallest is Carlisle at 83.
- Other interesting comparative data highlights the discrepancies in the ratio of clergy serving the overall population of a diocese.

### 2.3 Summary Challenges

It is an unavoidable reality that the church's current diocesan structure should be developed to enable it better to fulfil the role stated in the terms of reference we gave the Task Group: *"Bishops and diocesan structures exist to lead and support mission in localities and regions and to build the capacity of the Church in all its parishes, chaplaincies and networks to offer ministry and public engagement in all local communities across the country"*<sup>2</sup>. In particular:

- The current deployment of bishops – and diocesan structures – does not reflect current population patterns.
- Many suffragan bishops do not have specific responsibility for leading mission in territorial areas.
- There are concerns about the costs of diocesan offices, although at the same time there is a lack of investment in the capacity of dioceses to undertake change.
- Data on giving as a percentage of income strongly suggests that the majority of dioceses are not capable of sustaining themselves in the longer term without more mutual and central funding. (This has been underlined in the financial consequences of the pandemic and the significant sums that dioceses have required in sustainability funding).

These challenges strongly indicate that a significant change to the operating model is required.

In developing options for a revised structural model, it is helpful to do so against some principles. We are consulting you about the following principles for structural reform which have been used to shape the options for change:

- In geographical terms the Church's structure should reflect the population it serves, and to whom it is sent in mission. Consequently, each major population centre should have an

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<sup>1</sup> Sodor and Man has been excluded from subsequent comparative data due to its unique character.

<sup>2</sup> From the TOR

oversight leader with the responsibility for the development of the Church's mission in that area.

- The norm should be that bishops have responsibility for leading mission in a particular area. It is a question as to whether all the oversight leaders need to hold the office of bishop or some other office e.g. an archdeacon or area dean.
- Each bishop should have access to a small team to help develop mission in their area.
- Central support functions should be kept as lean as possible to allow as much resource as possible to be focussed on 'frontline mission and ministry'
- Those oversight leaders should be supported and held accountable in the way they discharge their responsibility.

These principles tend towards both the re-deployment of bishops, and to reflective changes to diocesan structures and resources. In all respects due attention should be paid to ensuring that the cost of change is clearly outweighed by the benefits in terms of strengthening the Church's mission.

Two areas of change are addressed below:

- The Future Structure of Dioceses
- The Future Allocation of Bishops

## 2.4 The Future Structure of Dioceses

Given the principles outlined above, we see the potential for a reduction in the overall number of dioceses as the focus for change. Fewer dioceses however should not necessarily mean fewer bishops – rather, perhaps bishops with more localised, apostolic and pastoral oversight. This might, in turn, require a focus on a reduction in the current differentials of stipend, housing and public status.

We have considered three options for structural change below. Each option is focussed on reducing the size and burden of maintaining 42 separate dioceses, allowing resources to be focussed on 'frontline' staff (Parish clergy and Chaplains) and providing the benefit of reducing the 'managerial' time demands on bishops, in turn freeing them for more missional ministry.

### 2.4.1 Diocesan Combinations

The starting point for a restructuring of the diocesan operating model would be a programme of diocesan combinations where two or three dioceses come together.

The missional objective would be to create larger missional units which would redress the balance between frontline missional staff and backroom administrative and managerial support.

Dioceses could be combined primarily on the basis of geographic adjacency. In addition, we believe the following factors should be considered:



- Overall population size – a minimum threshold could be set for a combined diocese –for example it should serve a minimum population of 2 million.
- FTE clergy – a minimum threshold of clergy could be set for a diocese to ensure an optimal ratio of headcount and budget between ‘frontline’ parish /and chaplaincy clergy and ‘backroom’ staff.
- Combined income – again a minimum threshold could be set for a combined diocese to support the appropriate infrastructure – and this could also be developed to set a minimum threshold for income / clergy FTE.

Within a combined diocese there could be:

- A diocesan bishop who supports and holds accountable the bishops and other oversight ministers in the team, as well as holding national responsibilities;
- Area bishops responsible for leading mission within a specified area.

Each bishop should have a small team to help develop mission in their area, enabled by a diocesan support centre, combining existing diocesan offices into one.

In assessing the viability of a potential combination there are numerous factors that would come into play. It is not within the scope of this document to assess all those factors. Detailed modelling and consideration would need to be given on a case-by-case basis.

Rochester and Canterbury are already well-advanced in conversation about closer working together which might lead to a union of two of the most ancient English dioceses. At this stage we shall commend the Dioceses Commission to look closely at future configurations in the East of England, the South West and the North East. We shall also ask the Commission to look closely at regional relationships without an additional burden of bureaucracy.

#### 2.4.2 Regional Development

A more radical approach to restructuring than simply combining pairs of dioceses could be the further development of regions leading to the creation of much larger dioceses on a regional level. This option provides the opportunity to align diocesan structures more closely with civic and local authority structures.

One of the areas we have considered is the appropriate interaction, mutual support and leadership within regions. It is clear that many dioceses reported positively on their experience of working within regions. This was not universal but was probably the more common experience. However, it should be noted that much of this positivity arose from good inter-personal relationships rather than significant areas of collaborative working. The Regions in their current format do not really represent strategic mission units – more collegiate support groups. However, that is not to say that regions could not be developed to fulfil a more strategic role.

An option for change could therefore be to develop the regional model, deploying bishops on a regional basis.

Regions could be built up from a portfolio of, typically, 6 dioceses reflecting the regional groups that currently exist.

Within each region, there could be:

- a regional bishop who supports and holds accountable the bishops and other oversight ministers in the team, as well as holding national responsibilities;
- bishops responsible for leading mission in the largest urban areas;
- bishops responsible for mission within county boundaries;
- full-time area deans holding responsibility for other large urban areas which deserve specific oversight;

Each bishop should have a small team to help develop mission in their area, supported by a regional support centre i.e. combining existing diocesan offices.

Regions, or clusters of dioceses within regions, working more closely together, could be more purposeful immediately and also build the relationships on the ground which would enable dioceses coming together intentionally over time as a locally agreed process, like good pastoral reorganisation practice with parishes. There could be real savings if there was a genuine union of administration and certain services, such as education. Bishops of each diocese could be assistant bishops in every diocese of the cluster or region to enable a sharing of expertise and focus.

It is important to note that some regions work better than others and share more already than friendly meetings. South Central and the South East appear to be the least functional. The Yorkshire and North East region is relatively new. Therefore the pace and depth of change will vary, even if desirably persistent. Leadership will be crucial. Regional Convenors are already being called together for wider consultation and reporting. There is a strong case for making the Convenor's role much more formal, with devolved authority from the relevant archbishop for the pastoral care of the regional college of bishops. The Theological Principles refer to the brokering role of bishops and the exercise of 'a subtle authority'. These would be de rigueur for Convenors. The National Ministry Team is already exploring working with regions for the further devolution of selection, formation and training for ordinands and lay ministers. The delegation to Convenors could include C4 faculties, using them like Marriage Surrogates in a diocese. Much of the work of the pastoral division of the Church Commissioners could be devolved to regions with a deeper understanding of the local context when considering how best local parishes might be structured in order to better serve their communities.

If we were to pursue this route we do not envisage that there would be a significant decrease in the overall number of bishops, although the structure of the episcopate would clearly be altered, with a much greater focus on for example having area responsibilities for mission and pastoral oversight.

This option represents significant reform, and offers opportunity to re-focus many bishops towards mission and growth and away from tasks of diocesan administration. This in turn may lead to a long-term cultural shift in the nature of episcopal ministry and gifting sought in potential bishops.

However, the challenges in the process of implementation should not be underestimated.

### 2.4.3 Pooling Back Office Functions

A third option to consider is in some ways a simpler one to implement – the informal (or semi-formal) pooling of back office functions. Whilst at this stage it has not been possible to undertake a detailed assessment of the functions undertaken within each diocese, it seems almost certain that there is a huge amount of duplication within a number of central diocesan functions (e.g. HR; finance etc). The principle of subsidiarity is generally used as the rationale for maintaining as much capacity as possible at a diocesan level. However in many areas of back office functionality it would be hard to make the case that the requirements of dioceses are so different that separate resources are an essential requirement. Indeed the argument for maintaining full resourcing within each diocese may well be further weakened when both the financial and opportunity cost in management time are recognised. A pooled resource would create opportunities for enhanced capability.

It should be noted, however, that whilst there has been some experimentation with pooled resources, these experiments have not been regarded as universally successful, and some have been abandoned. However, the reason for this remains cloudy.

## 2.5 The Future Allocation of Bishops

### 2.5.1 Specific focus

For almost all bishops the locus was absolutely central to the episcopal role and identity (see 3.1 above). An Area system is, in the view of the majority of those who took part in the conversations, a better way of expressing oversight and pastoral care. This is a principle that we believe needs re-affirming in relation to all bishops with responsibilities for, or within, dioceses within whatever future diocesan structure is formed. There is a clear implication within this that suffragan bishops should not serve within dioceses without specific delegated areas of responsibility.

### 2.5.2 The role and diversity of suffragan bishops

As has been noted above (3.5), the role of a Suffragan without specific area responsibility is unsatisfying in many respects.

It is therefore highly desirable that there should be significant reform to the role of Suffragans to clarify the post-holders' roles and responsibilities – with a clear focus on territorial focus. Within the Diocesan structure Suffragans should have area responsibilities. This is not a new issue: nearly 20 years ago *Suffragan Bishops* (GS Misc 733) identified many of the same issues - lack of role definition, overlap and confusion with the role of archdeacons etc. Resolving these issues is now overdue. We believe there should be Area Bishops for localities, with distinct jurisdiction (shared with archdeacons and the laity!), We should not perpetuate suffragan bishops who are just 'spare parts' in the system. Within this review attention should also be given to the questions of how we might enable sideways moves for long term suffragan bishops. It would be good to explore moves between dioceses and to different roles, with the maintenance of pension expectations. Moves could include to cathedral deaneries and canonries for those with appropriate skills and experience.

### 2.5.3 Non-territorial roles

We have also given consideration to the issue of the appropriateness of only operating a geographical model of episcopacy, in particular what can we learn from the ministry of the Bishop of Islington and the network ministries of the Bishops of Beverley, Richborough, Ebbsfleet and Maidstone, and what are the benefits of mixed mode, as with the Bishop of Fulham?

This necessarily touches on a number of different issues. The Dioceses Commission has recently completed a review into the See of Islington and the report reflects the impasse that appears to have emerged. The value of the post is clearly recognised: "...We need people appointed to posts such as these to help us avoid the gravitational pull towards 'business as usual' and to embrace a new paradigm and culture. We put huge resource, in the Church, into business as usual. We need healthy correctives to that, such as this post."<sup>3</sup> The style of missionary bishop is both an historic one in England, and a contemporary one in other parts of the globe.<sup>4</sup> Yet no clear funding mechanism appears to exist within the Church's current model which requires bishops to operate as suffragans within a see, and therefore imposes a funding burden on the diocese. Again, this is an issue that Church of England has also engaged with for some considerable time: the 2001 Church of England report *Working with the Spirit* said: 'If the emergence of the historic episcopate can be seen as a limiting to one of what originally belonged to all, it can also be seen as a localizing, and eventual institutionalizing, of an originally itinerant and charismatic ministry. ... It also developed ... from the peripatetic ministries of apostles and apostolic delegates, prophets and teachers. Missionary bishops in both East and West and the pattern of the episcopate in the Celtic Church, before its Romanizing, appear to have continued this aspect of episcopacy.'<sup>5</sup>

We believe that if one of the core purposes of the episcopacy is to lead and equip the church for mission it seems clear that the model of non-territorial missionary bishops should be both endorsed and enabled – and in all probability expanded. This will inevitably require detailed work with the Church Commissioners and the legal office, but size of the prize is undoubtedly worth the effort.

#### 2.5.3.1 Network Ministries and Mixed Modes

We believe it would make good sense for all traditionalist and complementarian network bishops to be more embedded as active members of the college of bishops in dioceses and regions, with episcopal roles in one diocese as well as network responsibilities. This would mean having a larger overall number of such colleagues. It would also offer a much more equal access to the experience that would enable them to be considered to be diocesan bishops. This is already working well in London with the Bishop of Fulham rooted in the college of bishops of the diocese and working well in Southwark, too. Although we are aware that this issue will need

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<sup>3</sup> From Justin Welby – quoted in Dioceses Commission Report on See of Islington

<sup>4</sup> See also Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, and Martyn Percy, eds., 'Varieties of Missionary Bishop', in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies*, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: OUP, 2016), pp.92–104 for a good summary of North American 'mission bishops'.

<sup>5</sup> *Working with the Spirit: Choosing Diocesan Bishops*, p.105.

further careful consideration. There is a priority for us to listen to the lived experience of bishops in particular female diocesan bishops as part of this process going forward.

#### 2.5.4 Lords Spiritual

Our listening exercise with current Lords Spiritual (and indeed with other diocesan bishops) revealed widespread consensus on two points: firstly the high value of the Lords Spiritual in being able to bring Kingdom values and influence in the Public Square; secondly a recognition that reform of the House of Lords is inevitable at some stage, and that the Church should seek to shape at least the elements of reform that will impinge on the Lords Spiritual from within before they are imposed. In practice we believe this implies both a reduction in number of Lords Spiritual and the attachment of those roles to specific sees rather than by rotational allocation. We believe that there are clear benefits both for the selection of bishops with the best potential to engage positively and regularly in the Lords and across Parliament, and for the further strengthening of episcopal regions. There is a strong case to put further resource into the Parliamentary Unit to provide adequate support for all Lords Spiritual in their national roles.

We ourselves share the experience of the tension between managing a national role and leading a diocese. Whilst this tension could be addressed through reformed diocesan structures providing better episcopal support within dioceses in the context of enhanced area systems, it also seems to us that there might be opportunity for senior bishops to take on specific national roles perhaps after holding diocesan responsibility. (see Special Topics 4.5.5 and Fixed Terms 4.5.6 below)

#### 2.5.5 Special topics

As noted above tension is often felt between managing a national role and a diocesan role. If we adopt the model of expanding the number of non-territorial bishops, then the opportunity to develop non-diocesan episcopal roles to speak into particular issues could be explored. This might be particularly appropriate for bishops who no longer feel called to serve as Diocesans, or who have a very particular passion and knowledge on a particular subject. These roles could also be fixed term. Examples might have been the appointment of a Brexit bishop; or a Covid bishop.

#### 2.5.6 Terms of Office

##### 2.5.6.1 Early retirement

We recognise that it is possible for bishops to reach the end of their strategic ministry in a place well before retirement age. If this is one or two years, the facility already exists within the rules of the Pensions Board for early retirement to be offered by the archbishop as an option. If it is true at a younger stage, greater clarity needs to be provided that bishops moving into parochial ministries or chaplaincies will continue to be eligible for a bishop's pension.

#### 2.5.6.2 Fixed term

We are also giving further consideration to whether there should be a time limit set on service as a diocesan bishop of seven years renewable for a further term, not unlike the current pattern for heads of house in Oxford and Cambridge. We are also considering the possibility of appointing bishops for a fixed term of five years to inhabit a specific development role.

#### 2.5.6.3 Stipend differentials

We recognise that this is a heated discussion among bishops, but with no hint of resolution. Some say that equalising stipend and conditions would be a sacrament of seriousness registering the intention to diminish hierarchy and break down deference, as well as enabling greater fluidity of movement of bishops in and out of different roles in the church's ministry. Others remain convinced that the differential is a worthy mark of the bearing of greater responsibility. It is clear to us that leaving things as they are would add further weight to the case for greater accountability.

### 3 Tackling the Cultural Question

A key element of the brief we gave to Maggie, Mark and Stephen was to listen to bishops as they offered suggestions for the future, commented on the culture of the House and College, and shared personal experiences of ministry during and after the pandemic and the nature of ministry. We are grateful for what we have heard from what were very open and honest conversations during over 80+ hours of consultation. It is clear that all were keen to develop the positive changes and developments in digital forms of worship and the deepening of corporate prayer life among senior staff teams, for example. We have pulled out what we see as the most salient themes where we want to see development and change through our working together as a College. Some of these themes are picked up in the 'Theological Principles for Change' which accompanies this document. We would like your feedback on these themes to test both accuracy and priorities for action:

1. Ministry grounded in a place was considered important and there was concern that this might be compromised by an over-enlargement of episcopal areas or the development of more specialist 'cross border' forms of episcopal ministry.
2. A number of Bishops highlighted their desire to pursue particular areas of specialism and interest such as theology and mission initiatives but found the pressure of administration, safeguarding and CDMs made it difficult to carve out the time to pursue these interests during 'normal' times.
3. Regardless of the structure within which Diocesan, Suffragan and Area Bishops minister, the nature of responsibility, role and authority must be clear. The lack of clarity, particularly for some Suffragan Bishops, is causing frustration and hindering them in fulfilling their potential in episcopal ministry. Realistic and iterative role descriptions for all bishops are desirable, knitted into an effective MDR regime (see below).
4. Suggestions including fixed term (renewable), house for duty, self-supporting, part-time/job share, or interim ministry were welcomed. The enabling of sideways moves or moves out of

episcopal appointments was also welcomed, especially by Suffragans/Area Bishops and those approaching retirement. Barriers to this flexibility were cultural rather than legal.

5. There was deep commitment to the House of Lords and national portfolios. The 'team' approach being adopted in many of the portfolios was helping to spread the load. However, support and capacity for those carrying these responsibilities remained a challenge and largely depended on the diocese and senior staff, particularly Suffragan and Area Bishops providing backfill.

The conversations raised questions about **culture and power**. This is part of ongoing work within the House and College which needs to include the following:

1. Establishing a mutual understanding of accountability for Bishops because this is currently lacking.
2. Developing a culture within which all bishops feel free to express their views in meetings of the House or College rather than deferring to those perceived as more senior in the 'hierarchy'.
3. Improving the transparency of decision making because it appears to many that some decisions are being made before discussion in the House or College.
4. Dismantling the sense of hierarchy which persists within and outside formal meetings, connected with deference the church more widely.
5. Creating a clear process through which Suffragan or Area Bishops can seek advice or raise concerns.

It was suggested that the **selection and formation** process for bishops is not robust or transparent and is therefore open to 'political' manoeuvring. The following suggestions were made which would support development in this area:

1. A Senior Appointments Advisory Panel process not necessarily limited to Bishops but possibly to include Deans and Archdeacons.
2. Standard appointment processes for Suffragan and Area Bishops.
3. Ongoing training and development based on a Personal Development Plan as part of MDR for all identified for future senior appointments.

A number of **wellbeing and development** issues were voiced and, in light of the universal agreement that the administrative burden on bishops had increased and would continue to do so, this needs attention. It is clear that too much depends on pre-existing relationships rather than intentional planning. The Group highlighted the need for:

1. Meaningful MDR for all.
2. Formalising the cell group system so that it was equally open to all.
3. A 'Buddy' system for newer bishops providing confidential support and advice from outside the diocese and also for those carrying the responsibility of a diocese during an interregnum or the long-term absence of the Diocesan.
4. Standardising administrative and other practical support for bishops.

## 4 Summary and Conclusion - The Way Forward and Next steps

### 4.1 Summary and Conclusion

***This document has laid out our thinking about options for Episcopal change to fit our new context. Our ambition is to see us deploy all the resources entrusted to us by God employed to the maximum advantage for the extension of His Kingdom. This is entirely a missional task. Following the careful listening undertaken by the Task Group, and our prayerful deliberation on what we have heard through them and from God, we believe that God is calling us to embrace significant change.***

***The proposals for Episcopal change outlined in this document align fully with what we believe God is saying to us in other contexts – it is a clear call to be a simpler, humbler and bolder church. This will require us to address both our structures – being prepared to lay down what we have been entrusted with, and our culture – being prepared to lay down and surrender much that we have held dear, but which we now believe may well now be hindering our mission.***

***We believe that there will need to be significant changes to how dioceses are structured, the number and nature of them as well as serious consideration being given to the behaviours and ways of working of bishops as we move beyond the events of 2020 and 2021.***

***Of course, our listening is not yet complete, which is why we now wish to share our conclusions with you for your thoughts and prayerful reflection.***

### 4.2 Implementing Changes

1. We are enormously grateful to Stephen, Maggie and Mark for the work they have done, the results and thinking from which is set out in this document. It is obvious that they have given a tremendous amount of their time, effort and energy over the last few months in listening to bishops and in praying and considering what they have heard. They have laid it out clearly and helpfully highlighted the issues we now need to consider further.
2. This is of course a first step in what will be a much longer process that we believe will lead to some significant changes to the shape, structure and number of dioceses and bishops in the Church of England. We suggest that given everything else that is happening we will be moving to having fewer dioceses over time. We also believe having read this document and listened to Mark, Maggie and Stephen that numbers of dioceses or even shape of dioceses is secondary to ensuring good and appropriate leadership and prayerful response to what God is asking of those of us who are called to be bishops in the Church of God.
3. We now want to continue the conversation and listening that Stephen, Maggie and Mark have started, and all that is here is intended to enable all of us to say what we want to say, and to shape this important piece of our life together. We hope that you will all feel able to engage with the questions set out here and also feel free to raise other matters around all of this.
4. It is important to read the Theological Principles paper which the three have crafted as an essential underpinning of their work. It is also important to note that much that was said in the conversations and meetings they held with bishops does need to remain confidential. We appreciate the way in which the conversations were conducted and understand this exercise



may well be one that could be conducted on a regular basis allowing bishops a chance to be open and honest and reflect on their vocation and work.

5. We want to underline what is said in the document that there are some key issues relating to culture and our behaviour as bishops. As difficult as it may be, it is essential for us to review how we are and what models of leadership we want to take forward in our lives and ministry.
6. The changes this document contemplates are considerable. If implemented, they will have a significant impact on culture, roles and responsibilities and the structures within which the Episcopate of the Church of England operates.
7. The structure and culture of the Church of England, and the proliferation of 'vested interest' and diversified decision-making power structures make change difficult. Yet if we are not prepared to change then fruit cannot be produced – this is a gospel truth.

#### 4.3 Delivering Change?

1. Bishop Sarah recently entreated us to hear these words: "Be ready for faithful change – the most significant change in the gospels and wider New Testament occurs when people are not in control – the transfiguration and Saul on the road to Damascus bear witness to this. I worry that we are only willing to allow the change of which we are in control and that we are happy with. How do we discern what God is calling us to and have the courage to change even when we resist it? You use the St John Henry Newman quote, "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to change often." But the Church of England is built to resist change; the path to the ordination of women is a witness to this and so also is our woeful history of racial injustice."
2. We must therefore be prepared to accept radical change, and in doing so understand the effort / effect ratio; whether it is best to achieve the change we wish to see by revolution or by evolution.
3. It has long been recognised that change is most fruitfully implemented when it arises out of collaborative relationships, where those affected by it wish the change to come about. As noted above, there are already some good relationships leading to a degree of collaborative working within regional clusters. This can be built on and encouraged further and more widely.
4. Changes to diocesan structures and resources should follow, only if, and when, the cost of change is clearly outweighed by the benefits of strengthening the Church's mission. A pragmatic approach of this type can avoid lengthy, exhaustive legal processes which sap energy and distract from the Church's missional focus. It will also avoid reputational damage which would occur should the Church appear to be only in the process of managing decline. Change initially implemented in this way can of course be made permanent through appropriate legal processes in due course.
5. We intend to address the vital issues of culture directly ourselves, in conjunction with +Emma Ineson in her new role, looking for support and challenge from the College and the House.
6. We also intend to work closely with Caroline Spelman and the Dioceses Commission to lead on some of the specific proposals that will result from this work.
7. To this end and noting all that has been put before us in the document we want to set out now some key questions on which we value your views:

## 5 Questions

### A 'Personal' and theological challenges

- 1 **How do we ensure those being called towards episcopal ministry are suitably discerned and equipped? Is it right to put forward some process for assessing the capability and suitability of potential candidates?**
- 2 **How do we ensure that our behaviours align with our theology and values and how do we open ourselves to be challenged appropriately as those called to be bishops in the church of God?**
- 3 **How can we model and implement mutual accountability?**
- 4 **To deepen collegiality, how do bishops, particularly diocesan bishops, work for greater transparency and accept a readiness to appropriately 'step back' and work within teams?**
- 5 **How can bishops' meetings be designed to guarantee the safety and trust of all participants?**
- 6 **How might bishops in the Church of England learn more from Majority Anglican bishops across the board in theological study, mission and evangelism and in the generation of ministers?**
- 7 **How might bishops be freed from busy-ness to enable more direct engagement in mission, pastoral work, teaching and being prophetic when they are subject to increasing external compliance processes, and more complex financial and management concerns post-Covid?**

### B Practical and Structural Change

- 1 **Do you agree that episcopal ministry is best exercised within a geographical area?**
- 2 **Do you agree that all bishops should have an area of delegated responsibility as part of their ministry?**
- 3 **Considering how dioceses operate and might be shaped in the future, would it make sense to encourage dioceses in a region to work together and identify areas in which they can share and use resources across boundaries?**
- 4 **Are there some areas of the country in which conversations to bring forward a more formal way of asking dioceses to work together can begin?**
- 5 **Is it right to move towards a series of measures for bishops to allow the possibility, for example, of moving from one see to another more easily, considering early retirement, looking at fixed term appointments, creating bishops to lead on areas of work and ministry?**

## C General questions

- 1 How might the church achieve a greater diversity of bishops, and are there limits to diversity?**
- 2 Where do bishops believe that power really lies?**
- 3 How might bishops be equipped to be aware of the power they have?**
- 4 How might bishops explore what FAOC describes as 'supple authority'?**
- 5 How do bishops model and inhabit the church's theology of safeguarding, and how might this be improved?**
- 6 What planned investment might bishops make in engaging with cultural and scientific change as sentinels for the Kingdom?**

**And finally ..**

**Can you put forward suggestions of how we might work differently together now in the light of the document and the findings set out by Stephen, Maggie and Mark?**

## Conclusion

We intend to give time to these issues at the College meeting in September this year and would also be grateful to receive both individual responses and responses from regional and other groupings of bishops, if you wish to discuss together in other settings beyond the College.

To bring any structural change will be difficult and take time and will also quite rightly involve many other parts of the church. We look forward to hearing further suggestions and proposals around these matters.

Perhaps even more importantly we can change our behaviours and our culture as soon as we decide so to do. There are matters here that need addressing, and again we look forward to continuing to do that at the College.