

The Episcopal Electoral Model in the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church

Introduction

There is regular commentary in the Church of Ireland on the Episcopal Electoral Model employed by the Church and how it compares with similar models for other Churches. Often this commentary is based on one feature of another Church's model that the commentator finds appealing (e.g. the naming of the candidates for the vacant see prior to the election – the practice in the Scottish Episcopal Church).

It's important when evaluating any proposed alteration to the current arrangements to see alternative models as whole models rather than focussing exclusively on one aspect of the model. This is not to say that a particular feature of the model cannot or should not be incorporated into our own, nor is to suggest that an entirely new model cannot or should not be adopted. Rather it is to suggest that it is important to see the context in which all the relevant features of other Church approaches to Episcopal Elections apply before determining whether or not these approaches are appropriate in the Church of Ireland.

The following paper summerises the features of the Episcopal Electoral Model of the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church. It then tabulates the features of these models along with the comparable features of the Church of Ireland's current approach.

The relevant Chapters of the Constitution of the Church in Wales and the relevant Canon of the Scottish Episcopal Church are available on request.

I wish to acknowledge with thanks the assistance of Ms Anna Morrell of the Church in Wales and Ms Lorna Finlay and Mr John Stewart of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

It is commended to the Commission for your attention.

Episcopal Electoral Procedure in the Church in Wales

Introduction:

The electoral procedure for the Church in Wales is governed by Chapter V of that Church's Constitution and associated regulations. The constitution deals mostly with the composition of the college and the facilitator. The regulations go into more detail on the arrangements. In composition, the Electoral College is similar to that employed by the Church of Ireland but there are some significant differences.

Composition of College

The college for the election of a diocesan bishop (as distinct from the Archbishop of Wales) comprises the Archbishop and Bishops (5 excluding the vacant see), six clergy and six laity from the vacant diocese and three clergy and three laity from the other dioceses in the Church (5 in total) (Chapter V S10). The total size (assuming only one vacant see) is 47.

Facilitator

The President of the College appoints a facilitator to the vacant diocese to assist it in preparing a profile of the diocese and convening the diocesan electors to consider the needs of the diocese and potential candidates (Chapter V S11). Thus, the procedure gives a formal recognition to what *de facto* tends to happen informally in the Church of Ireland. The facilitator appears to have no specific role in the actual meeting of the College.

Meeting of the Electors

The electors can be summoned after the sitting Bishop has given notice of his intention to retire or resign but the actual meeting doesn't take place until up to 30 days after the resignation has taken effect (Chapter V regulation 16.1). The meeting of the electors is private (Chapter V regulation 21.1) and there is no vote by orders (Chapter V regulation 21.5). A two thirds majority is required to elect (Chapter V regulation 22).

If there is no election within three consecutive days the right to fill the vacancy passes to the Bench of Bishops unless the Governing Body determines otherwise (Chapter V regulation 23).

Bishop-Elect

The Bishop-elect has 28 days to accept the appointment. If he accepts, the Bench of Bishops determine his fitness (regulation 26.1). If so satisfied they ratify as a 'Sacred Synod'. If they are not so satisfied, the Electoral College is re-convened (regulation 26.2).

Notes

In the Church in Wales, the post of Archbishop of Wales is elected by an electoral college comprising the Bishops of the Church and three clergy and laity from each diocese. The post of Archbishop of Wales is held in addition to a Bishopric but is not tied to any particular diocese. The Constitution also allows for the appointment of an assistant Bishop in any diocese (Chapter V S15) with the approval of the Bench of Bishops. The person so appointed has no right of succession.

Episcopal Electoral Procedure in the Scottish Episcopal Church

Introduction

The procedure for electing Bishops in the Scottish Episcopal Church is governed by Canon 4 in the Code of Canons of the same Church. The procedure is quite different from that employed by the Church of Ireland and essentially requires a 'Preparatory Committee' to nominate suitable candidates and an 'Electoral Synod' (essentially a modified Diocesan Synod) to elect the Bishop-elect. There are several groups/Individuals involved in the procedure.

Relevant Groups/Individuals:

Provincial Panel: There is a standing provincial panel for Episcopal Elections. Each Diocesan Synod elects one clerical and one lay representative on the Provincial Panel (Canon 4, S2). It is from this body that several members of the Preparatory Committee are chosen.

[Diocesan] Standing Committee: Appears to be analogous to a Diocesan Council. When the retirement/resignation of the sitting Bishop is announced this body prepares a Description of the Diocese for distribution to various bodies involved in the Election.

Preparatory Committee: The Preparatory Committee's main function is to prepare the list of Candidates from which the Electoral Synod chooses the Bishop-Elect. The Preparatory Committee comprises a 'Convenor' (normally the Primus), 1 other Bishop, five members of the Provincial Panel (chosen by the Standing Committee of the General Synod). The members chosen by the General Synod Standing Committee must include the two representatives from the vacant diocese and one other clergy and one other layperson. The Diocesan Synod of the vacant diocese shall choose a further two lay and two clerical members.

Episcopal Synod/College of Bishops: Analogous to the House of Bishops in the Church of Ireland.

Electoral Synod: The Electoral Synod is a modified form of the Diocesan Synod (some individuals, e.g. Candidates in the relevant election, are excluded from membership). It meets three times:

1. A 'Preliminary Meeting, which discusses the needs of the Diocese and names of people who might be suitable Candidates (the Preparatory Committee is required to consider such names but not obligated to shortlist them);
2. A 'meeting with the Candidates';
3. The 'Electoral Meeting'.

Assessor: Acts as the assessor to the Preparatory Committee and the Electoral Synod. Plays a similar role to the same position in the Church of Ireland.

Procedure:

Announcement of Resignation/Description of the Diocese Prepared: Shortly after the sitting Bishop has indicated an intention to resign the Standing Committee of the vacant diocese compiles a Description of the Diocese together with future plans and intentions. These are circulated to all members of the Electoral Synod, the Diocesan Bishops and the Preparatory Committee.

Mandate issued: Within 21 days of the Diocese becoming vacant, the Primus issues a Mandate inaugurating the Electoral Procedures.

Electoral Synod (Preparatory Meeting): Within 14 days of the Mandate being issued, notice summoning the preliminary meeting of the Electoral Synod must be issued. The meeting must take place between 14 and 21 days after the posting of such notice. The meeting will discuss the description of the diocese, the qualities sought in candidates and names who might be suitable candidates. It will be the duty of the Convenor of the Electoral Synod to ensure that any names suggested be considered by the Preparatory Committee. At the same meeting, the Convenor will announce:

1. The date on which the Preparatory Committee will declare the list of candidates;
2. The date of the 'Meeting the Candidates' meeting (30-60 days after the list of candidates is declared);
3. The date of the Electoral meeting of the Synod (5-15 days after the meeting the candidates meeting).

At any of its meetings (except when the candidates are present at the 'Meeting the Candidates' below) the Electoral Synod may decide to divide separate houses of clergy and laity, each electing their own Chair. This takes place at the request of a majority of either house and lasts as long as the Convenor may direct.

Preparatory Committee: The Preparatory Committee is convened. With the exception of the declaration of the list of names of the Candidates, all of the proceedings of the Preparatory Committee are considered confidential. The Preparatory Committee is tasked with preparing a list of 3-5 names and is entitled to receive any suggestions, consult any interested groups (including the Diocesan Standing Committee and the College of Bishops) and interview prospective candidates.

The Preparatory Committee is also tasked with obtaining a CV, a statement (in response to a questionnaire prepared by the Preparatory Committee) and an assent to nomination form from each prospective candidate. The documents so prepared are confidential to the Preparatory Committee, the College of Bishops and the Electoral Synod. There are procedures in place to address a situation where a member of the Preparatory Committee is nominated for the vacant post.

Prior to the meeting of the Preparatory College where the list of candidates is agreed, the College of Bishops are consulted. Any person not agreed as acceptable by the College of Bishops is excluded from the list of candidates. The reason for this decision is recorded in the minutes of the College of Bishops but is otherwise confidential. If the Preparatory Committee fails to produce a list of names of candidates within the prescribed time, the Electoral Synod is convened and this is explained to the Synod and an alternative date set. Failure to finalise a required list by the second date will void the process.

List of Candidates Declared: The Preparatory Committee declares the list of Candidates.

Electoral Synod (Meeting the Candidates): The papers prepared by the Preparatory Committee are sent to the members of the Electoral Synod. These papers are considered confidential and at the conclusion of proceedings are disposed of in a manner the Convenor directs. The list of candidates is also considered confidential until the date the Preparatory Committee declares the

list. When the Synod convenes the Candidates are introduced to the meeting by the Convenor and the meeting proceeds as the Convenor directs. While 'meeting the candidates' the Electoral College may not meet as separate houses.

Electoral Synod (Electoral Meeting): After Holy Communion, the meeting begins with a Roll Call. This is the only part of the meeting that is public. After due discussion the Synod is balloted. A successful candidate requires a simple majority (of those present and voting) in the houses of clergy and laity. If there is no election after the first two ballots, the Convenor shall call upon members to vote by order of preference. If no candidate receives a majority of first preferences in both houses, the candidate with the fewest first preferences is excluded with their votes transferred to their second preferences. This carries on until only two candidates are left. If neither has a majority in both houses the Convenor adjourns the Synod for 30-90 minutes and then calls the Synod to vote again in order of preference. If this fails to break the deadlock the election is declared void. Members may vote for 'None'. If the total voting for 'None' exceeds one third to total number of votes cast, the election is void (even if a candidate has a majority in both houses in the same ballot).

Bishop-Elect: A Bishop elect must accept the election within 7 days of election. As the successful candidate was evaluated by the College of Bishops prior to the election there is no subsequent ratification procedure.

Void Election: If an election is declared void the Primus issues a fresh mandate (requiring a new Preparatory Committee to be appointed). Should this be declared void, the right of election passes to the Episcopal Synod.

Summary

The table following summerises the main features of the Episcopal Electoral Model for the Church of Ireland, the Church in Wales and the Scottish Episcopal Church for comparative purposes.

	Church of Ireland	Church in Wales	Scottish Episcopal Church
Consideration of needs of Diocese	Informal - But routinely done by the diocesan representatives on the Electoral College.	Provisions allow for appointment of facilitator who meets with Diocesan electors to consider needs of the diocese.	Diocesan Standing Committee prepares description for interested parties. There is also a preliminary meeting of Electoral Synod which discusses the description and needs of the diocese.
Nomination procedure	On the day	On the day	Preparatory Committee nominates. Various bodies may make suggestions but sole right to nominate vested in Preparatory Committee. No right to 'nominate from floor'.
Information on candidates made available to members of the electing body	Nothing sent in advance. At the College, nominator is required to outline their nominee's age, academic qualifications and ministry.	Nothing sent in advance – At the College, a nominator will presumably outline their nominee's background and qualifications	Preparatory Committee obtains CVs, Statement and consent from candidates. Circulated to members in advance of the 'meeting the candidates' meeting. Treated as confidential.
Electing Body	Electoral College comprising 4 Bishops, 12 clergy and 12 laity from the diocese and 12 clergy and 12 laity from other dioceses in the Province. Additional Clergy and Laity if election due to appointment of Primate. Total 52 or 64.	Electoral College – all the Bishops, 6 clergy and 6 laity from vacant diocese and 3 clergy and 3 laity from all other dioceses. Total 47.	Electoral Synod – modified form of diocesan synod. Accordingly varies in size, the largest being about 150.

	Church of Ireland	Church in Wales	Scottish Episcopal Church
Meetings of Electing Body	One formal meeting – though provision allows for reconvening if Bishop elect refuses.	One formal meeting – though provision allows for reconvening if Bishop elect refuses.	Three meetings – A preliminary meeting, a Meeting the Candidates Meeting and an Electoral meeting.
To elect	Two-thirds of clergy and two-thirds of laity present and voting.	Two thirds majority of the entire College (no vote by orders)	Simple majority of Clergy and Laity (provision allows for members to vote for ‘None’)
Time Limit on meeting of Electing Body	Typically one day	Up to three days	Unspecified, but it would appear one day
Ratification	By the House of Bishops	By a ‘Sacred Synod’ of the Archbishop and Bishops	All Candidates are ratified by the College of Bishops prior to the Electoral Synod taking place. Accordingly, the election is definitive.
In cases of inability to elect	The House of Bishops elects	The Bench of Bishops elects unless the Governing Body determines otherwise	The process re-starts but if it fails a second time, the Episcopal Synod (Primus and Bishops) elect.
Publicity	Only the name of the successful candidate released – done prior to ratification by the House of Bishops.	Only the name of the successful candidate released – done prior to ratification by Sacred Synod (Archbishop and Bishops) but all Bishops would have been present at the College.	Candidates names are released prior to the meeting of the Electoral Synod but not statements, CVs etc.
Estimated Time Period from vacancy to election (presuming successful election)	Probably not less than one month.	Probably not less than one month. Seems to take 1 to 3 months.	Probably not less than 3 months. Typically seems to take about 6 months.