



## How does a new Bishop get appointed?

Gareth Lewis-Jones - a member of the Diocesan Vacancy-in-See Committee - explains...

### What is a 'Vacancy in See'?

When a diocesan bishop retires, moves, or dies, the bishop's 'see' (their seat, centred on the cathedral) becomes vacant, so the Church calls this a "vacancy in see". Bishop Christopher announced his retirement in Advent 2025 and his ministry with us as our diocesan bishop will come to an end in August 2026.

The Vacancy in See is the formal period when the diocese and the national Church work together to discern and appoint the next diocesan bishop.

Every diocese has a Vacancy-in-See Committee, which "wakes up" and starts meeting when there is - or will be - a vacancy in the diocesan bishop's post. Its job is to help the diocese reflect on its needs, prepare key documents, and elect some of the people who will serve on the national Crown Nominations Commission. By law it has two main tasks:

- to prepare a description of the diocese and a *Statement of Needs* - a formal document that describes the diocese and sets out the gifts, experience and qualities we believe we need in our next bishop. It goes to the Crown Nominations Commission (see below) and becomes one of the key tools they use when they are short-listing and interviewing candidates
- to elect six diocesan representatives to the Crown Nominations Commission

The Committee will meet several times between February and June 2026, pray together, listen to voices and opinions from across the Diocese, and then agree the profile and priorities for the next Bishop of Southwark. In our diocese the Vacancy-in-See Committee has three strands of work: the prayer group keeps the whole process rooted in prayer; the communications group helps everyone know what's happening and gathers views; and the Statement of Needs group turns all of that into the formal profile.

During a vacancy, the day-to-day work of the diocese continues under the care of the senior staff, area bishops and others with delegated authority. The Rt Revd Dr Rosemarie Mallett - Bishop of Croydon - will serve as Acting Diocesan Bishop during this period.

## Who chooses the new bishop?

No single person in the diocese chooses the new bishop - it's a shared process of discernment between the diocese, the wider Church of England and the Crown. The final appointment is made by the King, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister, after the Church's Crown Nominations Commission - the national body that recommends names for diocesan bishops in the Church of England - has put forward a name.

Once the Statement of Needs is finished, the Vacancy-in-See Committee elects six of its members to sit on the [Crown Nominations Commission](#) (CNC) for this appointment. Those six join national representatives and the Archbishops' and Prime Minister's Appointments Secretaries to shortlist, interview, and, God-willing, agree a name to recommend. The voting members of the CNC are the two Archbishops (or a diocesan Bishop acting on their behalf), six members elected from the Vacancy-in-See Committee of the Diocese and six 'Central Members' elected from the General Synod. The Archbishops' Secretary for Appointments and the Prime Minister's Appointments Secretary are non-voting members of the Commission.

The CNC will use the diocesan Statement of Needs, together with its own consultation, to shape the process when shortlisting and interviewing candidates. After prayer, interviews and discussion it puts a preferred name (and a reserve) to the Prime Minister.

## Is it just like filling any other senior job?

Appointing a bishop does include things like role descriptions and interviews - but at heart it is a spiritual discernment, not just a recruitment exercise. The whole process is framed in prayer, listening for where God is calling the diocese and which person God is calling to serve as bishop here.

There is a national process for suggesting names to the Appointments Secretaries, sometimes advertised through Church newspapers and diocesan channels. However, for most of us the main call is to pray for those responsible for discernment, rather than lobbying for particular names.

## How can congregation members get involved?

Each parish is part of our wider diocesan family - so by engaging with this process, praying, and taking part in consultations, you are helping to shape the future context in which our local mission and ministry will happen, as well as the gifts and priorities of the next Bishop of Southwark.

Please **pray regularly** - for Bishop Christopher, for those on the Vacancy-in-See Committee and CNC, and for the person whom God is calling to be our next bishop. Check out the prayer resources below for inspiration. We can pray for wisdom, unity and holiness for everyone involved, that the process is transparent and gracious, and that God will prepare the right person and their family for this call. We can also pray that, during the vacancy, our diocese will grow in faith, hope and love, and that we will be ready to welcome and support our new bishop when they finally arrive.

Secondly, people can take part in **diocesan consultations** - surveys, meetings, and conversations - and share their experiences and hopes for the future of our diocese.

### **What is the timeline for this process?**

Typically, once a bishop announces their retirement, the Vacancy-in-See Committee meets within months to begin its work and produce the Statement of Needs. Our Vacancy-in-See Committee began meeting together in January 2026 - and will conclude its work in June 2026. After that, the Crown Nominations Commission will meet for consultation, shortlisting and interviews. This will take a number of months - and the announcement of our new bishop will be made in due course.

There are stages when a lot is happening behind the scenes - especially during CNC meetings and confidential interview stages - so there will be quieter periods, where you won't see much progress (even though the hard work is continuing).

Dioceses usually try to share what they can at key milestones - such as when the Statement of Needs is agreed or CNC dates are set, while respecting the confidentiality of candidates - so do look out for updates.

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