

**REVIEW OF THE DIOCESE OF NEW WESTMINSTER'S
2020 EPISCOPAL ELECTORAL SYNOD**

REPORT SUMMARY

A. OVERVIEW

1. Following the 2020 Episcopal Election, Diocesan Council retained Vice-Chancellor Kevin Smith ODNW and his law firm Farris LLP to conduct a review of the election.
2. The Final Report of that Review was presented to Diocesan Council at its May 5, 2021 meeting. The full Report is available [here](#).
3. This document is intended to summarize the key points from the Report for the ease of review of Synod Delegates.

B. SUMMARY

4. The Diocese of New Westminster's 2020 Episcopal Election was unique in that it took place amidst a global pandemic and in a purely "virtual" way. Everyone who participated in the Review acknowledged that the unprecedented circumstances of this election created uncertainty and some unusual aspects. Notwithstanding these logistical obstacles, Candidates, others involved in organizing and delivering the election, and Synod delegates generally, all reported a high degree of satisfaction with how the process unfolded.
5. Challenges bring opportunities: there was a consensus that some of the exigencies of Covid-19 (for example, electronic voting or facilitating remote "virtual" participation) would be beneficial to incorporate in future elections, even if those elections are at least primarily (if not exclusively) in person.
6. A consistent theme we heard was that more clarity would have been welcome – acknowledging that to the extent aspects of the past election process were less clear than they could have been, this was in large part due to the uncertainties of the

pandemic. As difficult as it is to imagine nine months later, we were reminded that as late as the end of August or September of last year, it was still hoped that it would be possible to hold an “in-person” Synod in October.

7. As to what kind of “clarity” would have been welcomed: interviewees raised issues ranging from big questions of policy and approach (*“What is the Diocesan Profile intended to be? Who is it for?”*; *“Where should the Diocese be looking, when it calls a new Bishop?”*; *“What is the proper role of the Episcopal Election Committee?”*), to comparatively granular questions about process and timing (*“What are the technical requirements for Candidate videos?”*, *“How many nominators should Candidates have?”*; *“What is considered proper social media use during the lead-up to the election?”*)

8. In relation to many of the themes raised, we acknowledge that there are a range of reasonable viewpoints on these issues. In many such cases, we considered that these are questions properly answered by a future Diocesan Council or Episcopal Election Committee. For now, the Review highlights the issue and summarizes the main perspectives as expressed to us, without necessarily making a firm recommendation, unless we considered that there were strong principled reasons to adopt one approach over the others.

9. In certain instances, the Review makes firm recommendations regarding a suggested change for future elections (for example, in relation to certain proposed amendments to the relevant Canon, Regulation, or Rules of Order).

C. MAIN THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Main themes identified and recommendations made by the Review include the following:

10. **“External” versus “Internal” Candidates:** this election attracted only one Candidate from outside the Diocese, which is fewer than in previous elections. The Review considers why that may have been, and whether that is a good thing, bad thing, or neutral. Related topics include how the Diocese advertises episcopal vacancies, and the extent to which it is desirable to remove “barriers to entry” for external Candidates (for

example, by possibly facilitating introductions to prospective local “nominators”, for Candidates who may not have those local connections.)

11. **The proper role of the Episcopal Election Committee (the “EEC”):** currently, the Canons contemplate the EEC having an “administrative” function, as opposed to a more substantive function (such as a recruiting, or a “screening” or “vetting” role). The proper role of the EEC is an important issue for Diocesan Council, and the Diocese generally, to remain alive to. If a more “interventionist” or substantive role for the EEC is considered desirable in the future, corresponding revisions to the Canons would need to be made. Further, the Review suggests that it is important to balance geographical diversity and diversity of identity, background and perspective among EEC members, with a mix of levels of experience with Anglican church practices, governance and elections generally.

12. **The Review recommends creating a “Prospective Applicants Pack” and a “Candidates Pack”,** which would contain information relevant to the respective stages of the process, including timelines, required submissions, expectations, information about a background vetting process, communication contact points, pastoral support for Candidates, and so on.

13. **Pastoral support and taking care of Candidates:** the Regulations currently contemplate a “Diocesan Liaison” for each Candidate. In this election, Candidates were offered a liaison relatively late in the process and the Candidates’ response to the offer was mixed, with some seeing it as helpful, others less so, and all agreeing that Candidates should not feel obliged to speak to that person. We recommend an alternative model such as that used in the Diocese of B.C. of a “Candidates Chaplain.” Rather than requiring multiple Liaisons, a potentially resource-heavy model, one chaplain to support all the Candidates may be a more functional way to provide support Candidates.

14. **The role and function of nominators:** everyone interviewed agreed nominations were a necessary component of the application process, but there were varied opinions on (a) the appropriate number of nominators to require; (b) whether only

Synod delegates should be permitted to nominate individuals to stand for election or whether the pool of potential nominators should be broader; and (c) the proper role and function of nominators. In summary, for reasons set out in the Report,

- (a) *In relation to (a):* we recommend the number of nominators remain at four but the Canon be amended so Candidates cannot submit more than four nominators.
- (b) *In relation to (b):* we see merit in requiring some level of local support, notwithstanding that this may be considered a barrier to entry for external Candidates, although we suggest Diocesan Council consider implementing a mechanism for interested individuals from outside the Diocese to request to be introduced to Synod delegates who have expressed an openness to hearing from new prospective applicants.
- (c) *In relation to (c):* if nominator names are made public (as required by the Canons), it must be the case that a nominator is more than simply an agent for the process: they are a public supporter of a particular Candidate. We recommend that the role of the nominator should be clarified and communicated to both Candidates and nominators, at the outset of the process in advance of the next election.

15. Notwithstanding the high degree of awareness about the election (84% of delegates reported learning about the election more than three months in advance), **there were a number of logistical challenges that came to light as a result of the shift online.** For future elections, it would be advisable to, as soon as possible after the election is announced, ask parishes to confirm the identities and contact information for their Synod delegates and Alternate. Another recommendation was to consolidate election information on to its own communication stream on the 14TEN or in a bespoke newsletter so the information is organized and readily available in one spot. Others suggested content include a teaching series of short video clips providing context and information for delegates who might be unfamiliar with (for example) the episcopal election process. Lastly, providing an on-the-day reminder to delegates of where they can find their online

voting link. This email could also include important contact information for delegates in the event of technical difficulties. As noted by one Priest-in-Charge, asking parish clergy to act as technical support for their delegates was unhelpful: it would have been more appropriate for this support to be offered from diocesan staff.

16. High levels of appreciation were reported in relation to Data on the Spot and SimplyVoting, the service provider (and online mechanism) which facilitated the “virtual” Synod and voting therein. **In our view, Diocesan Council should strongly consider using this technology or similar for future episcopal elections, whether or not they take place virtually.** Further, serious considerations should also be given to whether or not delegates are required to attend in person, or whether a “virtual” attendance option is incorporated as part of a hybrid model of future Synods, whereby some delegates can attend in person, and others can attend virtually. The online system proved to be effective and removed the potentially high barrier for some delegates to participate because of their personal circumstances, or the difficulty of travelling from outside of Vancouver.

17. While acknowledging that the pandemic required this particular election to be convened online, **most interviewees underscored the importance of an in-person component to electoral synods.** The usual opportunities for fellowship, communal discernment, and the sense of belonging and coming together was substantially impeded by a virtual process. Many Candidates independently expressed the view that they would have preferred to be physically present at the Cathedral during the election – in one person’s suggestion, even simply to receive the Eucharist from the Archbishop, prior to the first ballot.

18. **The Review recommends an amendment to the Canon** which sets out a mechanism, by which Candidates may be automatically removed from further ballots if, following a round of voting, they have failed to attain a certain threshold of support. Regrettably, there was some confusion after the 1st Ballot was cast about the application of this provision. While we believe the correct interpretation was applied in this election, we recommend a revision to the Canons to reduce the likelihood of future confusion or uncertainty. We also recommend a review of the Electoral Synod Rules of Order to ensure

that appropriate distinctions are drawn between those and the Rules of Order for a “regular” Synod (for example, not providing for motions, resolution, or a need to ‘adjourn’).

19. **Many Candidates expressed appreciation for the follow-up they received following the election from different individuals who were involved in the process.** While we do not consider there is any value in *requiring* such contact (through the Canons or a Regulation, for example), we consider it a salutary practice for the Metropolitan, the Chair of the EEC, and the new Bishop-elect to reach out to all Candidates following the election, as Candidates indicated to us that they appreciated this kind of pastoral “check-in”.

D. CONCLUSION

20. Interviewees all recognized the exceptional nature of this election as it occurred amidst a global pandemic. They extended their gratitude to those who put their names forward as Candidates, and the many volunteers who assisted in various ways. The election was a positive experience for the vast majority of participants (including delegates, Candidates, and those who helped organize it). The aim of the Report is to highlight the many positive aspects of the process in this election, and by identifying areas for improvement, ensure an even stronger process in future elections.

21. We reiterate our gratitude to all those who assisted with or contributed to the Review, including the 17 individuals who graciously agreed to be interviewed, as well as all Synod Delegates who responded to the survey which asked about their election experience.

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