



CNI



PRESS WATCH - Gay clergyman passed over seven times for promotion to bishop

Jeffrey John, a gay senior Anglican churchman, has been passed over for promotion to a bishopric for a seventh time since the Church of England rescinded his appointment as bishop of Reading in 2003 amid homophobic protests, Harriett Sherwood writes in The Guardian.

John, dean of St Albans Cathedral, was put forward for the post of bishop of Sodor and Man in February, but failed to make it on to the shortlist despite positive feedback. The rejection came shortly before [he was passed over for appointment as bishop of Llandaff](#) after objections to his sexuality allegedly were raised. In the diocese of Sodor and Man, which covers the Isle of Man and surrounding islets, John's name was considered by the Crown Nominations Commission (CNC), an appointment body of 14 people chaired by the archbishop of York, John Sentamu, and including representatives of the General Synod and from the diocese of Sodor and Man. An open vote confirmed that the panel had no objection to John's sexuality and long-term civil partnership with Anglican priest Grant Holmes.

But in subsequent secret ballots, John's name failed to win enough support to ensure a place on a shortlist for interview. Although some members of the CNC were believed to be unhappy with the shortlisting process, an appointment has been made and is expected to be announced in the coming weeks.

John's exclusion broadly follows a pattern that has seen him fail to win appointments seven times in the past seven years. Since Reading, the English dioceses of Southwark, Exeter, and

St Edmundsbury and Ipswich have considered him as a candidate for bishop. In Wales, as well as the recent Llandaff process, he was left off slates in Bangor and St Asaph after members of electoral colleges were reminded of a moratorium on consecrating bishops in civil partnerships placed on provinces by the Anglican communion.

Many senior figures in the C of E maintain John has the attributes and track record necessary to be a bishop, and many believe that his repeated rejection can only be explained by opposition to or concerns about his open sexuality and civil partnership.

In 2003, John was appointed as bishop of Reading, but was later pressured by Rowan Williams, then archbishop of Canterbury, to stand aside after some traditionalists in the C of E and the Anglican communion threatened a split if his consecration went ahead. At the time, he was given assurances that he could expect to become a bishop within a few years.

In 2010, John was shortlisted for Southwark. In [an account](#) of the selection process published after his death, Colin Slee, the dean of Southwark Cathedral and panel member, wrote: “The meeting was not a fair consideration at all.”

Slee claimed that the archbishops of Canterbury and York were “intent on wrecking” the candidacies of John and Nick Holtam, who was married to a divorcee, “despite the fact that their CVs were startlingly in an entirely different and better league than the other two candidates, and probably every one of the new bishops I can recall in the past 15 years”.

In 2013, John was interviewed for Exeter, and in 2014 for St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. A week after the latter interview, former CNC member [Tim Allen told the synod](#): “[Gay clergy] who are honest and frank enough to live openly in a civil partnership, while behaving in the chaste way required by church law, are, it seems from all the evidence, de facto excluded from the House of Bishops, even when they are eminently qualified to be a bishop ... Such prejudice and discrimination is wrong.”

Last month, John – who was born in Wales and speaks Welsh – was excluded from the appointments process for the bishopric of Llandaff after the electoral college failed to reach a two-thirds majority in favour of any candidate. John reportedly received more than half the

votes, including the unanimous support of electors from the Llandaff diocese.

In a letter to John Davies, the bishop of Swansea and Brecon, currently the most senior bishop in Wales, John said he had been told that “a number of homophobic remarks were made and were left unchecked and unreprimanded by the chair”.

He had been told by a member of the electoral college that the only arguments made against his appointment “were directly related to my homosexuality and/or civil partnership – namely that my appointment would bring unwelcome and unsettling publicity to the diocese, and that it might create difficulties for the future archbishop [of Wales] in relation to the Anglican communion”.

Despite appeals to the Church in Wales to reconsider the process – including a letter from nine Labour MPs in Wales – the church rejected allegations of homophobia and said [it was satisfied](#) that the process had been carried out “properly and fairly”.

One C of E bishop, Nicholas Chamberlain of Grantham, has [publicly declared that he is gay](#)

and in a long-term celibate relationship. Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury, was aware of Chamberlain's sexuality and relationship when he consecrated him in November 2016. When the bishop went public, Welby said Chamberlain's sexuality was "completely irrelevant to his office".

A spokesperson for the C of E said: "We do not comment on Crown Nominations Commission business. We would resist strongly any suggestion that selections for senior appointments are influenced by the sexuality of candidates."

Alan Wilson, the bishop of Buckinghamshire, said: "There is a pattern here, and I'm amazed that after all these years there is still so much mendacious obfuscation about appointing Jeffrey John as a bishop. It calls into question the sincerity of all the church's hand-wringing apologies to gay and lesbian people."

The C of E allows clergy to be in same-sex relationships and civil partnerships as long as they are celibate. It does not permit clergy to

marry same-sex partners and does not conduct same-sex church weddings.

++++++

This article first appeared in the April 6 2017 issue of The Guardian.

++++++

The inclusion of an article in Press Watch does not imply endorsement by CNI. Rather it is an endeavour to present articles from a variety of view points for consideration by CNI readers.