

Church of England fails to agree successor for Archbishop of Canterbury

Ruth Gledhill Religion Correspondent Last updated at 6:58PM, September 28 2012

The body responsible for choosing the next Archbishop of Canterbury has failed to agree who should be the successor to Dr Rowan Williams. Despite a three day session, aided by prayers invoked on Twitter with the hashtag #prayfortheCNC, the 16-member committee has been unable to decide on who should take on the job that the present incumbent today implied was “impossible”.

A source told The Times that a decision on who should succeed Dr Rowan Williams was not expected soon. “A decision is not imminent,” he said.

Two names, a preferred candidate and runner-up, have to be decided on to be sent to the Prime Minister and then the Queen before the appointment can be made. The Crown Nominations Commission has met three times so far in secret locations, with members sworn to confidentiality.

Candidates have been summoned for interview for the first time ever in the process to appoint a new Archbishop of Canterbury, with some candidates interviewed twice. But still the 16-person committee has been unable to settle on the right man for the job - women are not yet eligible - and it is expected that the committee will now have to convene for a fourth meeting, probably in October.

In an unusually cryptic statement, the Church of England said: “This week’s meeting of the Crown Nominations Commission has been accompanied by much speculation about possible candidates and the likely timing of an announcement of the name of who will succeed Dr Rowan Williams as Archbishop of Canterbury when he steps down to become Master of Magdalene College. “The CNC is an elected, prayerful body. Its meetings are necessarily confidential to enable members to fulfil their important responsibilities for discerning who should undertake this major national and international role. Previous official briefings have indicated that an announcement is expected during the autumn and that remains the case; the work of the Commission continues.

“There will be no comment on any speculation about candidates or about the CNC’s deliberations. Dr Williams remains in office until the end of December.”

The final shortlist for the next Archbishop of Canterbury that was being considered by the committee included a bishop who is praying desperately that he does not get the job. In a move almost guaranteed to net him the top post in the Church of England and worldwide Anglican Communion, the Bishop of Norwich, Graham James, has insisted he is “hoping and praying” he does not get the job. The final cut also included three of the Church’s most experienced bishops. Bishop James, along with the Bishop of London, Richard Chartres, and the Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, are among those interviewed for the post

of successor to Dr Williams. Bookmakers William Hill now make Bishop James their 9/4 second favourite. Bets are still being placed on the Bishop of Durham, Justin Welby, the Bishop of Coventry, Christopher Cocksworth, and the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu. However, Bishop James is emerging within the Church as a strong favourite. At 61 he is considered young enough to see the Communion through the next Lambeth Conference in 2018 but not too young to be caught out by lack of experience. As a former chaplain to the late Lord Runcie when he was Archbishop of Canterbury, he is regarded as a safe pair of hands because he knows where the pitfalls lie - one reason he is thought not to want the job.

Bishop James told the BBC the role was a job suited to a "lot younger man than me." Asked what he would do if he was chosen, he said: "I shall probably pray a lot more."

Describing the post as head of the Church of England as a hugely important one, he said the position was "massively demanding" with "lots expectation, but relatively little power and executive authority".

In a lecture at Canterbury Christ Church University, Dr Williams said that Anglicanism attempts what seems to be impossible, by being comprised of so many parts.

"It denies itself the short cut of a single universal executive," he said.

Dr Williams also criticised politically correct language for Christian festivals after law student Mike Arnold complained about directives where Easter and Christmas holidays had to be referred to as "festive breaks". Dr Williams said: "I must admit to a level of real scepticism about this level of puritanism in language.

The reason we have a festive break towards end of December is because there's a Christian festival called Christmas. The reason we have a festive break in the spring is because there's a Christian festival called Easter."

He said that if he was living in a different culture, he would not object to a festive break being titled Eid or Divali. "I think that one of the signs of a weakening of our public intelligence in this country is our obsession with the idea of offence. Everybody is very, very, very ready to be offended and sometimes on other people's behalf."

He said most members of other faiths had "better things to do" than be offended by the fact that Christians are Christians.

Source: an email dated 9/30/2012 with this text from the *Sunday London Times* dated 9/30/2012.