



**14 September 2023**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week Winchester Cathedral witnessed an historic – if rather bizarre – event. On Tuesday evening I was elected as Bishop of Winchester by the College of Canons (and I'm very grateful to them for having done so!). It's one crucial step, although not the final one, in my formally becoming your Bishop.

It was, by any stretch of the imagination, however, an unusual election. There was only one candidate, and the Canons were instructed to elect me by the King, no less, via documents called a 'Congé d'élire' and a 'Letter Missive'. They had no choice in the matter. So what then was it all about? And is it all too obscure to be of any relevance to us?

It does, in fact, express something very important. And that is the ancient principle that the Diocese itself has a critical role to play in the process of discerning and calling its Bishop.

And that of course is wholly true in our case. The Diocese of Winchester has been fully involved in the whole process from the start: through the work of the Vacancy in See Committee; through the drawing up of the Statement of Needs; and through the Diocese's significant involvement in the Crown Nominations Commission, which led ultimately to the invitation to me to be nominated as the next Bishop of Winchester.

The College of Canons' election of me is representative of all that.

There is, though, another, more theological sense of the word 'election' that relates to our God's choosing and calling of us. And that sense too is absolutely vital in all of this. It's vital to me to know that this is God's calling on me for the next stage of my life and ministry (and frankly I wouldn't go anywhere near it if I didn't believe that!).

Both those senses of calling are vital: called by the people of God, and called by God himself. And very often of course that latter calling is discerned through the first.

And that is a general principle – it's not just about the calling of Bishops, but the calling of us all. So often our calling to any kind of ministry, whether in church or in the wider world (including in 'secular' employment) comes through the discernment of gifts and skills in us by others, which in turn reflects the calling of God on our lives.

I hope and pray in this next season of our Diocese's life we all grow in confidence in that calling, and in turn have the joy of seeing others too discern God's calling to know him, to love him, to serve him and to follow him.

Yours in Christ,

**Philip Mounstephen**  
**Bishop Designate of Winchester**