



Helpful Hints for Vacancies

Introduction:

DON'T PANIC! We realise that hearing your parish priest is leaving and you will be entering a vacancy can be alarming, particularly for Churchwardens and PCC members. Anxieties, and horror stories of vacancies in neighbouring benefices, may be swirling around. Those of us who work in the Diocesan Office and the Bishop's Office are here to help, and we hope these notes will prove useful. They can only be a guide, however, so the basic rule of thumb in a vacancy is:

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS AT ALL, ASK YOUR RURAL DEAN OR ARCHDEACON

During a vacancy, Churchwardens will be mainly concerned with the organisation of the provision of worship; dealing with the legalities around faculties and so forth; oversight of the vicarage/rectory if it is not let out; and the recruitment of a new priest. You can find advice and guidance on each of these issues on the following pages:

Services	p2 and p3
Who to contact about faculties	p2
Who to contact about the vicarage	p3
Annual Meetings	p4
Recruitment	p4 onwards

Prayer:

The most important thing that parishes can do as soon as their current priest leaves is to pray. God already knows who your new parish priest will be, and is preparing you for them and them for you. Regular prayer in services and by individuals is key. Please know that the Bishop and your Archdeacon are also regularly praying for you as you lead your parish during the vacancy, and for God to guide all of us to the person who will, under God, become your new minister.

Who can help us?

Legally during a vacancy, most day-to-day powers rest with the Rural Dean and Churchwardens acting jointly. They are deemed the “sequestrators” and those working in the Diocesan Office will usually look to them as the points of contact for anything relating to the vicarage/rectory, parish finances, etc.

They will normally be the ones who arrange the rotas for **Sunday service cover**. Your outgoing priest may have arranged the service cover for a few weeks after their departure, but technically this falls to the Churchwardens once the living is vacant. In practice, we ask Churchwardens across a benefice to work together, and to work very closely with the Rural Dean, to ensure that clergy cover for Eucharistic services and occasional offices (baptisms, weddings, funerals) can be fairly distributed across a multi-parish benefice. This becomes even more crucial if there is more than one vacancy at once in a Deanery. In parishes or benefices where there is an administrator, they will often be involved with drawing up service rotas.

Local Worship Leaders, Local Ministers, Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers), and retired clergy will all be ready and willing to assist wherever they can, but with fewer of them and more vacancies, it will not necessarily be possible to meet all the preferences of every parish, particularly if the vacancy is a long one.

Understandably, there are always particular ‘pinch points’ around Harvest, Remembrance, Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, so we do ask everyone to be as flexible as possible and to accept that it’s just not possible to offer the same level of clergy provision in a vacancy as we might all wish.

Churches used to having weekly services when a parish priest is in post may have to accept fortnightly provision, particularly of clergy cover, and so on. We understand that can be difficult, but mutual support and co-operation, with a good dose of grace and generosity of spirit, will go a long way to easing any tensions if cover cannot be found.

Where can we find help with...?

For most issues, your **Rural Dean** will be the first point of contact. If they are unable to answer your question, then either they or you can contact your **Archdeacon**. For more specialist questions:

Church Buildings Matters

Property Secretary – Mr Stephen Challenger s.challenger@hereford.anglican.org

Churchyard Matters, including memorial queries

Property Secretary – Mr Stephen Challenger s.challenger@hereford.anglican.org

NB: During a vacancy, all memorial applications should be sent in the first instance to the Rural Dean.

Vicarage/Rectory Matters

Diocesan Surveyor – Mr Mike Williams Mike.Williams@hereford.anglican.org

Housing and DAC Officer – Ms Sophie Mead s.mead@hereford.anglican.org

Finance, Parish Offer, payment of fees to visiting clergy and lay ministers

Finance Director – Mr Stephen Herbert s.herbert@hereford.anglican.org

Safeguarding

Specific concerns – Mr Carl Steventon carl.steventon@hereford.anglican.org

Training, DBS – Ms Karen Evans Karen.Evans@hereford.anglican.org

Training of Local Worship Leaders

Director of Mission & Ministry – The Rev'd Dr Elizabeth Wild

Elizabeth.Wild@hereford.anglican.org

Communications – if you have a good news story to tell, or a difficult issue has arisen locally and you need support with managing the media – Communications Director – Mrs Sarah Whitelock Sarah.Whitelock@hereford.anglican.org

Weddings – your Rural Dean will be your first point for queries. If they can't help then your Archdeacon or the Diocesan Registry can advise – Diocesan Registry Clerk – Ms Michelle Wilmot mwilmot@gabbs.biz

Planning a lay-led service:

There are a lot of pre-written worship resources which can be downloaded and used locally by any duly commissioned Local Worship Leader, Local Minister, member of a commissioned LMDG, or Licensed Lay Minister (Reader). They can be found right at the bottom of this page of the Diocesan website:

<https://www.hereford.anglican.org/ministry/local-ministry/>

Churchwardens are also permitted under the Church of England Canons to read Morning or Evening Prayer (without a sermon or talk).

Preparing for an APCM:

Since Annual Meetings have many important legal aspects to them, including elections, if you are in any doubt about anything please contact your Archdeacon. General information and the relevant forms may be found on the Diocesan website

<https://www.hereford.anglican.org/parish-support/parish-officers/apcm/>

Parish Websites and Social Media:

In a vacancy it's even more important than usual to make sure that any parish or benefice website or Facebook page is kept up-to-date. Not only will that help people in the parishes to know what is happening with services, special events, etc, in a time where there may be changes to the normal pattern, but once the advertising period begins, prospective candidates will be looking the parishes up online for information to supplement the parish/benefice profile.

If you need any advice regarding your parish/benefice's online presence, please contact the Communications Director, Sarah Whitelock - Sarah.Whitelock@hereford.anglican.org.

IN GENERAL, THERE IS ALSO A GREAT DEAL OF INFORMATION ON THE DIOCESAN WEBSITE. IT'S WELL WORTH YOUR TIME HAVING A LOOK ON THERE

Recruitment:

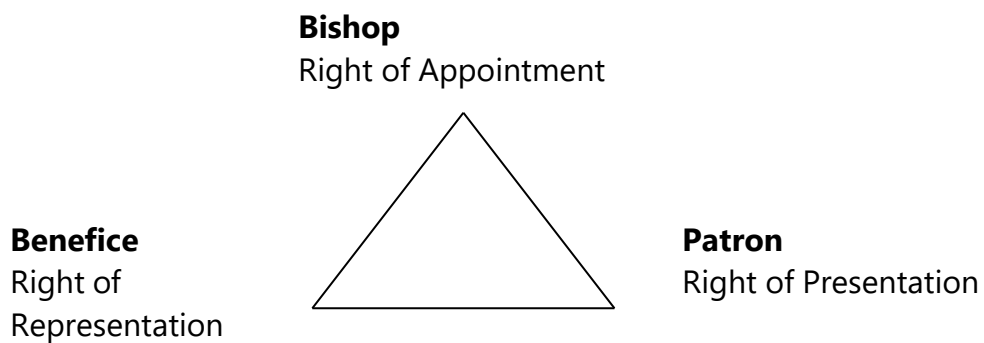
The Church of England is governed by Measures. These Measures are law which, having passed through a rigorous process within the General Synod, are then approved by Parliament and enacted by Royal Assent. When it comes to vacancies and the finding of a new priest the law which governs this is the Patronage Benefice Measure 1986. Where the measure is in operation the time between the vacancy occurring and the requirement for an appointment to be secured is 18 months. If this fails to happen, for example if one or more round of advertising/interviews does not yield any appointable candidate, then the appointment falls to the Diocesan Bishop.

It is helpful if one person in a Benefice can be appointed by the PCC(s) collectively to act as a 'point of contact' between the parishes, the Rural Dean, the Archdeacon's Office and the Bishop's Office throughout the process. This is not a formal role under the Measure, but it does make matters run more smoothly if everyone concerned knows who will be responsible for sharing information, or who can be contacted if there are questions. There are no rules on who such a person may be, but it's helpful if they are confident with IT, are available in the working day, and are on a PCC.

Who appoints and whom must the Bishop involve?

As an Episcopal church all appointments are the Diocesan Bishop's. By law he or she is required to work with both the Patron and the Parish(es) through their representatives. Unlike any other process there are therefore three parties involved, each with differing powers, rights and responsibilities.

In a diagram it looks like this:



The patron has the rights of presentation of the candidate both to the benefice and then, if agreed by them, to the Bishop for appointment. It is the Patron's duty to select candidates and shortlist for interviews. In practice the Patron(s) often delegate the day-to-day organisation of the process to the Archdeacon, but it remains the Patron's duty. If the Crown or CPAS is the sole Patron, or if it is their turn to present a candidate, then they run the process themselves, and the Bishop and the Benefice retain their legal rights.

If there is good reason then, after due consultation, the Bishop can suspend right of presentation to the living. Good reason in law is limited to: the need to replace a parsonage house, revisit a pastoral scheme, make some new pastoral reorganisation or possibly where there has been substantial pastoral breakdown which might require new pastoral arrangements. In such circumstances the requirements of the Patronage Benefice Measure are not binding and the placement of a priest-in-charge within a benefice is the duty of the Bishop. When a priest-in-charge is appointed, this diocese, as do most dioceses, still follow the spirit of the Measure in involving all the rightful parties, namely the benefice with parish representatives, and the patrons.

The parish representatives (two from each parish) are appointed by each PCC to ensure that their requirements are given due regard.

Timeline for Recruitment

The Patronage Benefice Measure and the other laws governing CofE appointments may often seem complex and unwieldy, especially if you have not worked with them before. In reality they provide a helpful framework that looks after the needs of the parishes, the diocese, and the clergy.

The most frequent question is: Why can't we recruit our new priest as soon as we know our current one is leaving, so they can have a handover?

The simplest answer is that since clergy are office holders, you can't legally have more than one person holding the same office at the same time. Also, the vicarage or rectory is part of the priest's remuneration, and you can't have outgoing and incoming priests (and any spouses, civil partners, or children) living in the same house at the same time!

In addition, there needs to be time for vacancy works on the house, and time for the parishes to take stock and discern carefully and prayerfully, with the wider community where possible, what their needs are for the next phase of their collective life of worship and witness. On another level, a pause so that the parishes can 'move on' from the previous priest and be ready to welcome the new priest, is helpful. All of that takes time.

Please be assured that we never artificially extend vacancies, nor do we drag our heels in starting the process. It may sometimes feel as though nothing is happening, but there will be several stages of the process going on behind the scenes. As a very rough guide, the average length of a recruitment process is around 12-18 months from when one priest leaves to the licensing of the new priest. This is only a very broad rule of thumb. It takes into account all the legally-necessary steps, the time needed to consult and draw up a profile, the time needed for works on the house, availability of the Bishop and Archdeacon (and patron(s) where relevant), advertising, post-interview checks, and the notice period of the incoming priest, which is a minimum of three months.

This timeline may well be longer in reality, for a number of reasons. The most common reason would be a lack of eligible applicants after one or more round of advertising. Other reasons include but are not limited to: the need to replace the house; consultation on parish boundaries; conversations around the shape of the role (it may not always be a simple like-for-like appointment); the need of an incoming priest to remain where they are so that a child may complete a school year, particularly if they are taking public exams; the requirement for a curate appointed to their first post of responsibility to complete their curacy before moving on. There are often other reasons specific to people and parishes too, so there can never be a guarantee of how quickly a post will be filled.

At the first informal meeting with the Archdeacon after the beginning of a vacancy, an outline timeline is usually shared with the Churchwardens/PCCs, which gives more detail of the process as a whole as it relates to the specific Benefice.

The Profile ('Statement of Needs')

The benefice profile with its statement of needs and person specification is a key way in which parish/benefice representation is exercised. The profile should encapsulate what the benefice is requiring and for whom it is looking in terms of gifts and qualities. Your Archdeacon can share a template profile with benefices if that is helpful. If parishes wish to use their own format that's fine, of course, but the Archdeacon can let you know the broad

subjects you will need cover.

There is some standard information about the diocese and about the support available to clergy in the diocese which we ask all benefices to include in their profiles. The Archdeacon's Office will give that to you in good time. In any event, parishes should wait until after the formal vacancy consultation meeting, which will be arranged by the Archdeacon, before they begin to draw up the first draft of the profile. Rural Deans can also offer support in drawing up or refining profiles.

What is a Section 11 meeting and what is it for?

The title "Section 11" refers to Section 11 of the Measure. What is required at this meeting is at least four things:

- A resolution to agree the final form of the Benefice profile with the Statement of Needs and the Person Specification.
- An agreement of who will be the parish representatives. In doing so there is the formal appointing of 2 names from each PCC involved who will then have the duty on behalf of that parish to share in the selection of the new priest.
- To agree the means of advertising the post.
- To request the Bishop that, on grounds of theological conviction, arrangements be made for the Benefice in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishop and Priests. (This would mean that only male candidates could be considered for the role. Any Benefice requesting this provision would be expected to have had preliminary conversations with the Bishop, and every PCC in the Benefice would need to have passed a formal resolution to this effect earlier in the process, and before the Profile was finalised.)

If the right of presentation has been suspended, an equivalent meeting will still take place, but it won't be a formal "Section 11" meeting.

How do we choose our representatives, and what is their role?

It is for each parish to choose its parish representatives from among those who are members of the PCC. In the past this was exclusively the churchwardens. Very often the churchwardens are still deemed to be the best people. However, the requirement is simply that each parish nominate two people who are then formally authorised for this task at the Section 11 meeting. Their role is to ensure that the statement of needs and the person specification are given due consideration in the discernment process and the interviews.

Competitive Interviews or Visits by Candidates Individually?

Many parishes may wish for and can request that several candidates be invited to interview as part of a single process. There are strengths in this in that it allows sensible comparisons to be drawn between the various strengths and weaknesses of each candidate. However, it

can move a process away from being about the discernment of God's will to something more attuned to human competitiveness. Those who excel in a competitive process are not always necessarily the best pastorally.

Although less frequent it is still both legal and appropriate for a parish to meet, discuss and discern a candidate's suitability one at a time. Negatively this might be more time-consuming. Positively it allows opportunity to talk, pray and discuss in a very different way to that of competitive interview.

Interviews in a large Multi-parish Benefice:

In a multi-parish benefice it is possible that there will anything from three to well over ten parishes involved. As each parish has a right to appoint two representatives this can add up to a very large number of people! Parish Representatives along with the Patron(s), Bishop, Archdeacon, and Rural Dean share in the formal interview processes.

It doesn't take much adding up to recognise that if all parish representatives were involved it would produce a very unwieldy and ineffective interview context with too many people.

As a consequence it is advised that in such circumstances the parish representatives decide among themselves which one from each parish, or which from among the large number available, are selected to engage in the formal interviews. Ideally this should not number more than eight.

The other parish representatives can share in the discernment process by taking candidates (and, if present, their spouses or civil partners) around the benefice. In so doing they can and indeed should gain an opinion of the candidate that can be fed back to the smaller group selected out for the formal interviews. Please note we never interview and nor should we make formal judgments based on a candidate's spouse or civil partner.

This important feedback is usually fed into the discernment process via the Rural Dean. Importantly, however, it is for those who have shared in the formal interviews to carry through the task of discerning if a candidate is suitable. It is for the Bishop to decide and make an offer, if deemed appropriate.

Cost of Advertising, Room Hire for Interviews, Candidates Expenses

The Diocese pays for advertising the vacancy in Pathways (the Church of England online jobs portal), advertising in the Church Times, candidates' travel expenses and subsistence, and also for overnight accommodation if required. The vacancy is also advertised on the Diocesan website and in eNews. All these will be arranged through the Archdeacon's Office.

The Diocese is responsible for the cost of room hire for interviews and for the provision of refreshments on interview day. The Archdeacon's Office will ask the Benefice point of contact

to find a suitable venue and catering arrangements, and will then arrange payment of invoices.

The Benefice is responsible for the cost of any necessary room hire and refreshments on the orientation/parish visits day. The Benefice is also responsible for any costs involved in the preparation of the Statement of Needs/Parish Profile.

The visit the day before: its purpose, limits and pitfalls

It is customary but not an absolute requirement for the candidates to spend some time on the day before interviews in the benefice. This is primarily for the candidates to discern from who they meet and what they see whether this is a place and a ministry which they feel gifted to undertake and willing to explore to see if this is God's call to them.

While parish representatives who are not part of the formal interview process will often do much of the taking around it is vital that neither they nor anyone else seeks to conduct questioning that could be judged by a candidate to be pre-empting what is proper for the formal interviews. Of course an impression will be gained, and this is important, but of paramount importance is the requirement that the candidates be given space and opportunity to explore, ask questions and seek a sense of whether this is the right place and has God's calling. In summary this first day is for the benefit of the candidates, and it is **not** the time or place for the benefice to make or come to a judgment. If at any point a candidate judged that they were being unfairly treated and complained, this could render the whole process invalid. *It is vital that questioning and judgements are left within the formal interviews.*

While it is sometimes the wish for an open meeting to meet the candidates at a social gathering the night before interviews this is fraught with dangers and is not to be encouraged. There are several reasons for this. As already stated any appointment is properly and legally an Episcopal appointment. It is the express intent of the Bishop and the Diocese to work as collaboratively as possible. However the problem with an open social meeting is that it gives very confused messages. It does not make clear that we are an Episcopal church nor that the appointment of a candidate is governed by clear legal processes. Many coming to such a gathering think that they are choosing their next vicar. On several occasions there have been repercussions of anger when, even for very good reasons, strong views expressed by some within the open meeting were not followed. What can easily happen is a blurring of the process as to whether the suitability of a candidate is being discerned through its appointed representatives, patrons and Bishop or by a benefice social event. Further those who come to an open meeting do not have access to application forms, references, or the information gained later in the interview process. This is significant because a candidate who presents genially on a social event may not have the skills for that ministry. There is also a concern the other way in that in a large gathering it is possible for one candidate or another to be bearded by an individual taking matters into their own hands.

There have been instances where for example anti-women clergy feeling is expressed by a

person to a candidate even when this is not the official position, and then negative things said about that candidate. If there were an extreme instance and a candidate raised a serious objection it could render the whole process null and void. What must be made clear (possibly repeatedly!) is that the way the parish legally and properly has its views upheld is through the parish representatives and benefice profile with its statement of needs. This is the legal process and is clearly set out in the Measure. It is why great pains are taken through the consultation process and at every stage to make this as professional and informed as possible. There are a few exceptions:

- Where there are other clergy (training curates, assistant curates, OLMs, SSMs), Readers, Youth Workers, Intergenerational Missioners (IMs) or an LMDG (Local Ministry Development Group) it is wise to arrange a meeting where candidates can ask questions about the benefice and ministry. It is best to ask the Rural Dean to chair this meeting to avoid it becoming another interview. It is solely for the candidates to meet the ministry team and ask them questions. The Rural Dean can then feed back to the Archdeacon any observations about this interaction.
- Where a Benefice is part of a formal Group Ministry, all the other incumbent clergy in the Group have the legal right to be consulted over the appointment of a new incumbent in the Group. They do not have a right of veto over an appointment, however. That consultation sometimes happens, for example, over lunch on the day before the interview. If this applies to your benefice then the Rural Dean will take the lead on arranging that aspect of the orientation day.

The formal interviews:

Practically care needs to be given to provide enough rooms for the interview, a waiting room for candidates, and potentially a space for the spouses/civil partners where relevant. (Spouses or civil partners are not to be interviewed). Other considerations in choosing a suitable venue are parking, toilet facilities, and catering facilities.

- Timetable:
After the shortlisting the Archdeacon's Office will send out a timetable with a list of who will be in each panel and some proposed questions. There will also be a request to send to the Archdeacon any other specific questions the panel wishes to ask.
- Homily or Presentation: Formal interviews normally include a presentation and/or a short homily.
- Panels:
On the morning of the interviews it is customary for the panel members to meet at least half an hour early to pray and finalise who asks which questions. After the candidates have left the panel members will prayerfully deliberate as to which candidate they discern God is calling to the role. Sometimes the panel does not feel

that God is calling any candidate who was interviewed. In that case, it is far better not to make an appointment and to re-advertise the post rather than make what later turns out to be an incorrect appointment.

Decisions and Announcements:

If at the end of the formal interviews there is a mind to appoint a candidate, it is not possible to make this public straight away. There has to be a formal exchange of letters with a formal offer and acceptance. It is usual for any announcement to be co-ordinated with an announcement in the candidate's present benefice. Those on the panel therefore have a duty not to make any comment about the outcome of the interview – whether or not a candidate has been appointed – unless or until the Archdeacon's Office or Bishop's Office has completed all the post-interview processes and confirmed the timing and content of any announcement to the parishes.

All appointments are subject to a clear enhanced DBS check. The Bishop, or his/her representative chairing the appointment panel, will always give feedback to all interviewed including those not appointed.

Above all, please remember what we said at the beginning. Don't panic, do pray, and do phone your Archdeacon if you need any help! Remember, God cares even more about your benefice than you do, and is already at work leading you to your next priest.

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