



The Diocese  
of Southwark

# Guidelines for a Parish in Vacancy

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# GUIDELINES FOR PARISHES IN VACANCY

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## **FOREWORD**

A vacancy is the time between one incumbent leaving and the next starting. Vacancies are an integral part of the life of all parish churches. Vacancies can be a time for opportunity and growth, but may also be a time of anxiety and difficulty.

These information sheets are for parishes in the Southwark Diocese approaching or embarking upon a vacancy. They are intended for those who have particular responsibilities during vacancies including PCC members and churchwardens.

They are written in such a way as to make the information as accessible as possible. However the Church of England, including its vacancy and appointment processes, is governed by law, so some technical terms are sometimes used. These guidelines will help you understand these, and the process. Your Archdeacon is available to help those who wish to know more.

# THE VICAR IS LEAVING...

## The announcement

One Sunday morning it will be announced in church that the Vicar is leaving. Losing the Vicar triggers a range of emotions among the congregation. Some will be sad; others may even be relieved. These feelings need to be recognised and acknowledged. And then everyone needs to recognise that a new phase of parish life is about to begin.

Soon the Vicar's last Sunday will be decided and made known. It is really important for everyone that an incumbent has 'a good leaving' which is carefully and thoughtfully planned. After all, it can be hard to say 'good-bye'. The parish needs to enjoy and benefit from the last months of a vicar's ministry.

## Leaving the Vicarage

Before the Vicar leaves, the diocesan Property Department will send a 'key form'. This will

1. Ask for the Vicar's future address
2. Ask for the name and contact details of the person(s) who will be responsible for holding the parsonage keys
3. Provide other information that will assist the Diocesan property Department in managing the property during the vacancy.
4. Require the outgoing Vicar and a churchwarden to confirm that the property is being left completely vacant. This means no furniture, equipment, effects etc. inside, outside, in the loft or on the roof.

This is very important since the parish has to pay for the removal of anything the vicar has left behind.

The form should be returned to the Property Department within 7 days of the Vicar vacating the property.

**And don't forget...**

Read the gas and electricity meters on moving-out day to determine the amount the Vicar is due to pay. Make sure the telephone is left connected (to keep the number) and ensure that the Vicar pays what is owed.

If the Vicar had tenants or lodgers, they must be given notice to vacate by the Vicar's departure date. Although this is the Vicar's responsibility, the Property Department need to know that it has been done.

In the sad event of a vacancy caused by the death of the vicar, dependants do not need to move out for three months and may wish to speak with the archdeacon about remaining longer.

On departure the house becomes the joint responsibility of the churchwardens and the Diocese. Further details about this can be found in the section of this booklet on 'the Vicarage'

## LIFE IN THE PARISH CONTINUES

Before leaving the Vicar should brief the Wardens about

- Parish files
- Confidential information
- The transfer of relevant parish material on the incumbent's own computer
- The different areas of ministry undertaken; about who is responsible for areas of work that have not been the Vicar's responsibility and the unusual/occasional items that only the Vicar knows about.
- Clergy who might cover services in the first few months of the vacancy - which it is usual for the Vicar to arrange before departing; later months are the Wardens' responsibility.

The Wardens will also meet with the Area Dean to discuss ministry during the vacancy.

### Planning for the Vacancy

During a vacancy the Area Dean and Churchwardens legally become 'sequestrators', i.e. the Bishop's officers in the parish. During the vacancy, the Area Dean will be the first point of contact for Churchwardens and others seeking advice and support in the day-to-day running of the parish

The Wardens with the PCC will need to decide whether the Wardens, Ministry Team or Standing Committee are the core working group for overseeing the life of the parish during the vacancy. Other licensed and authorised ministers and those with leadership roles in the church also have a part to play, in the practical aspects of church life.

It will be important to publicise the list of who is going to look after (not singlehandedly running) different areas of church life - enquiries about baptism, pastoral visiting. Home/study groups, church rotas etc

A vacancy is not just a period of 'marking time' but may be a time of creative discovery and for enjoying the benefits of co-operative ministry within the church and with neighbouring parishes. The Area Dean and Archdeacon can help you with this.

## **The PCC**

The Parochial Church Council should be chaired by the elected lay chair. It continues to meet regularly to promote the whole mission of the church. An experienced curate or non-stipendiary minister does not become priest-in-charge in the vacancy, even if they find themselves bearing extra responsibilities. The Area Dean or Archdeacon can advise about the running of the Annual Meeting if one falls during the vacancy.

## **Assistant clergy and others**

The Area Dean will advise on the supervision of curates, Readers, SPAs and the work of others in the absence of the incumbent. If there is a training curate, the Area Bishop (often acting through the Archdeacon) works with the Diocesan Director of Ministerial Education, the Area Director of Initial Ministerial Education (IME) and the Area Dean to ensure that proper supervision is in place. The

Churchwardens will be kept fully informed and they will need to be aware of the importance of the curate continuing in their pattern of study and attendance at IME training.

## **Keeping the worship and Church Services strong**

The churchwardens and Area Dean are responsible for the maintenance of appropriate church services for the parish. This includes provision for baptisms, weddings and funerals. It may not be possible to offer the full range of services that a parish enjoyed

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before the Vicar left, at least temporarily. For instance it may be appropriate in some churches to ensure that there is one midweek service where it is not possible to provide a daily Eucharist.

Be sensitive in arranging services, so as to ensure that curates, NSMs and Readers are neither left out nor exhausted. A vacancy is a good time to invite neighbouring clergy, including the Archdeacon and Area Bishop to minister.

### Do remember that

- If the parish reserves the Sacrament, consecrated elements may only be used for communicating the sick - not at a Sunday service.
- Only those who hold the Bishop of Southwark's licence or Permission to Officiate may officiate or preach during a vacancy. Exceptionally, priests who are licensed or have Permission to Officiate in other dioceses may officiate or preach at one service in the Diocese per year, providing that their own bishop has first confirmed that they are "safe to receive". This confirmation should be obtained through Bishop Christopher's office by contacting his Chaplain. Priests from other dioceses need Bishop Christopher's Permission to Officiate if they are to officiate more than once pa.

The churchwardens must safeguard and keep up-to-date all church registers.

Morning and Evening Prayer on Sundays may be taken by Readers. If the parish does not have a Reader, the Registrar of Readers for the Diocese will be pleased to suggest names of those who live nearby.

Travelling expenses should be offered to all clergy and Readers, who travel from another parish to help out. Only retired stipendiary clergy should be paid fees for duty and these are set out in the Diocesan booklet 'Pay and Conditions of



Service' ([www.southwark.anglican.org/downloads/resources/PayCon14.pdf](http://www.southwark.anglican.org/downloads/resources/PayCon14.pdf)). These payments are the responsibility of the parish - which will not be paying incumbent's expenses during this period.

It is helpful for the outgoing incumbent or the Wardens or others, as appropriate, to provide a simple briefing sheet (hopefully no more than a side of A4 per service) describing key points that a visiting priest might like to know before taking the service - so that they at least know the expectations of the congregation. One of the fruits of a vacancy is for congregations to experience different styles of preaching and leading/celebrating without visiting clergy being unwittingly or knowingly insensitive!

### **Buildings and Finances**

The Churchwardens and PCC remain responsible for the maintenance of the fabric of all their church buildings during the vacancy. The wardens continue to have the legal ownership and custody of the moveable goods belonging to the church.

Parishes need to maintain payment of their Parish support fund pledges throughout any vacancy.

Following changes in legislation in 2013, a proportion of the fees for weddings and funerals belongs to the Diocesan Board of Finance rather than as previously (technically) to the incumbent who then assigned them. This proportion of the fees should continue to be paid to the DBF at Trinity House.

### **Communication**

Good communication is essential to ensure the smooth running of parish life, particularly when the incumbent, one of the main channels of communication, is no longer there. Weekly and monthly notices and notice-sheets and the parish website are all important ways of keeping people aware of the continuing life and worship of

the church. At all costs avoid putting across the message that 'without a vicar there is no church'

The Parish needs to be kept aware of the progress that is being made in seeking a new priest. Clearly certain matters are confidential (names of short-listed candidates for example!) but the whole church can be asked for contributions to be considered for inclusion in the parish profile. When there are clear milestones in the process, encourage prayer both privately and in the church intercessions - when the post is advertised, a short-listing meeting, interview dates are obvious examples. It is good that people know who the parish representatives are so that they can be upheld in prayer as well (but not harassed for information!). Some churches devise a special 'vacancy prayer' to be used each Sunday until an appointment is made.

### **Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults**

During the period of vacancy, the Churchwardens take on the Incumbent's role in ensuring compliance with Diocesan Safeguarding Policies and Procedures. A list of these responsibilities can be found on pages 3 -6 of A Safe Church. In addition they must continue to fulfil their own responsibilities as Churchwardens, outlined on page 3-7.

If there is a current safeguarding issue or allegation at the time of the departure of the previous vicar, the Diocesan Safeguarding

Adviser will inform the Area Dean of the details, and a meeting between the outgoing vicar, the Wardens, the Area Dean and the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser may be appropriate.

If an allegation or a concern about a child or vulnerable adult is raised during the vacancy, the Churchwardens, in co-operation with the Parish Safeguarding Officer, should immediately inform the Archdeacon and/or the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser and seek advice to ensure that Diocesan and Parish safeguarding procedures

are followed. These can be found in section 6 of A Safe Church. The Area Dean may be asked to fulfil the role of the Incumbent during this process.

If there is a current or previous safeguarding issue which impacts significantly on the parish, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser will meet with the new Vicar before they are instituted. Churchwardens should also ensure that they brief the new incumbent fully.

## OCCASIONAL OFFICES

During a vacancy requests for baptisms, weddings and funerals will continue and need to be responded to well. This is a very important part of the ministry and mission of the parish which need to go on.

Parish policies relating to aspects of these ministries should not be altered during this period, (for instance regarding the admission of children to communion before confirmation or about marriages where one or both parties have been married before with a previous partner still living). Existing policies need to be stated in the Parish Profile.

Please do not ask the minister who has left to return to cover these. Doing so makes it hard for the priest to settle in their new parish or adjust to retirement, and makes it difficult for the incoming incumbent in their predecessor is still active in ministry in the parish. If it is pastorally necessary the Area Bishop should be consulted before the invitation to the minister is made.

### Requests for Baptisms

The parish will need to identify a person in the parish (if the point of contact was previously the incumbent) to receive enquiries for baptism. In many parishes other arrangements are already in place. Once it is established that a family are eligible either by being parishioners, regular worshippers or members of the Electoral Roll,

the request should be referred to the churchwardens and the Area Dean. No guarantee of a particular date should be made until this has been done.

In churches where there is an established Baptism Team/Visitor it is important that it continues to function, liaising with the priest who will take the service so that any follow-up, sending of birthday or anniversary cards takes place.

The minister taking the service may be able to visit the family ahead of a service, or failing that phone them. Visiting clergy should be briefed beforehand about local 'house style'.

There are no fees for a baptism.

A member of the church should ensure that the Baptism register is completed and any baptism cards or candles are prepared.

### **Requests for marriage**

When a marriage is requested in church, the person responsible for taking details should refer it to the Area Dean before proceeding any further. This needs to be done before confirming a date for the service.

The parish must establish that the couple have a right to marry in the church. This can be by residence in the parish, attending for at least six months, or other Qualifying Connection. The couple will need to produce proof of this connection. If all of this is in order, the Area Dean will arrange for one of the local clergy to take the service and they will liaise with the couple and the parish. The Area Dean can also advise about the proper calling of banns (if required).

Local arrangements about music, choir, flowers, bells etc should continue, which are all extras and can be charged for. Other charges such as for administration are not extras and so are not permitted - only the statutory fees may be charged.

A proportion of the fees belongs to the Diocesan Board of Finance and this should be paid to the DBF by the parish treasurer. All visiting clergy officiating at weddings should be paid expenses only by the PCC.

## **Funerals**

The outgoing incumbent in consultation with the Area Dean should have informed local undertaker that there will be a vacancy in the parish. If there are assistant or non-stipendiary clergy or Readers trained to take funerals available in the parish they will be the first port of call. They may, depending on availability or volume of requests, be able to cover funerals. If they are unable to do so contact the Area Dean.

If there is no one within the parish who can take funerals, contact the Area Dean who will arrange for another local minister to take the funeral. It is good practice for the parish to be informed by the Area Dean or officiating minister of such funerals for inclusion of names in parish intercessions, bereavement follow-up, invitations to Memorial/All Souls services etc.

If a funeral for a parishioner is to be held in the church, the Area Dean and/or Officiating Minister will contact the appropriate person (Churchwarden, Parish Office etc) to ensure that local arrangements are made.

## THE VICARAGE

### Caring for the Vicarage

During a vacancy the churchwardens are responsible for the safety and security of the parsonage house of the parish, when it is empty. The Property Department at Trinity House are ready to help and advise (020 7939 9400).

There are very few areas of the Diocese where unauthorised occupation and vandalism are not potential problems. Legal proceedings to regain possession are both time consuming and expensive and the need to take such action might prevent a new Vicar being able to take up occupation. Both squatting and vandalism are invited if a house looks deserted. Curtains at windows, the occasional light on during the evening (which is off later at night) and a tidy garden all help to protect a house. If vandalism or squatting take place please inform the Property Department and your Archdeacon immediately.

A regular routine of inspections (at least twice a week) is essential if insurance cover is to be maintained. Appointing a particular person to be responsible for this can be a good way of making sure the matter does not slip.

### Vacancy Works

When it is known that the Vicar is leaving, the Property Department will arrange a vacancy works meeting. This will be undertaken by an Assistant Diocesan Surveyor, the Archdeacon and a parish representative. This will be the occasion when the state of the building is examined and the need for repair/improvement identified.

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This will lead to the preparation of a schedule of works and its subsequent implementation. The scope of the works will be at the discretion of the Archdeacon and Assistant Surveyor.

Whilst the Vacancy Works are being undertaken, the appointed contractor will have responsibility for all matters relating to the Vicarage and the parish will not be able to have access during this time.

### **Letting and Caretaking**

There may be a significant between the previous vicar moving out and the work beginning. In this case, it may be appropriate to have the property let out. If the period is too short for a 6 month tenancy parsonage houses may be occupied on a rent free basis under licence by a caretaker. In these cases the licensee pays for utilities and council tax. The Property Department will deal with all necessary paperwork and will arrange for a caretaker (according to careful criteria). When the property is occupied, whether by tenants or caretakers, the Church Wardens are not responsible for the security for the property. If you have concerns about how tenants or caretakers are behaving please contact the Property Department

### **Winter precautions**

If for any reason the parsonage remains vacant between October and March it is essential that the central heating system is kept running to prevent freezing and water damage. The heating should be left on with the boiler programme set to run continuously at a room thermostat setting of 10C with the trap door to the roof space left open. A freeze of the water installation could delay the next vicar moving into the parsonage.

### **Repairs**

The Property Department must be informed without delay of any repair required, whether or not tenants/caretakers are in residence to enable prompt action to be taken.

## **Use of the house**

Various parish activities may have taken place in the parsonage at the invitation of the previous vicar. When it is known that they are leaving, alternative venues and arrangements must be made for these. It needs to be remembered that the parsonage is primarily a home and different clergy will have different perspectives on how and if the parish may use parts of it and their decision needs to be respected. This may be especially sensitive if the previous incumbent has permitted a room in the Vicarage to be used as a Parish Office. Such use needs to stop before the Vicar leaves, and cannot continue during the vacancy. Please don't assume that the next Vicar will be comfortable with such use of their home.

## **Preparing the Vicarage**

When the vacancy works inspection is carried out an assessment will be made of the condition of the interior decoration of the property and an interior redecoration will be agreed by the Assistant Surveyor and the Archdeacon.



## CONSIDERATIONS AT A VACANCY

A vacancy gives the opportunity to explore new, different and sometimes innovative patterns of ordained and lay ministry.

Each Deanery has a Mission and Pastoral Working Group which offers a local perspective and advise on the most effective use of resources. It may be that the Working Group would wish to meet to discuss the implications of a particular vacancy. Otherwise, its recommendations for the deployment of resources within the Deanery may already be known and the Archdeacon will have been advised. Attention will also be paid to the Mission Action Plan drawn up by the parish.

There will be discussions initiated by the Archdeacon or Area Bishop with the Churchwardens and the PCC about the likely provision to be made for authorised ministry in the parish for the next stage of its life. This may be a process leading towards the appointment of a full-time stipendiary priest or to other provision - a part-time minister, oversight offered by a non-stipendiary minister or a reconfiguration of the pattern of ministry across the local area.

Normally the Archdeacon and Area Dean will visit the PCC just before an incumbent leaves (with their permission) or just afterwards to explain and describe the process of any re-organisation and/or the vacancy process. This is an informal meeting. If there is an external patron, they can also be invited to this informal meeting.

The further formal meetings which the PCC holds are described in the section headed 'Implementing the Process'.

## MISSION ACTION PLANNING IN A VACANCY

Mission Action Plans are a vital source of information and reflection during a vacancy, especially when writing a Parish Profile. While many parishes will have an up-to-date MAP, some may not have one at all, and others may have one which is due for review or which reflects the priorities of the previous incumbent more than those of the church as a whole.

### **Writing a MAP if you don't have one:**

A MAP written during a vacancy will focus on the first stages of the MAP process and will be a useful exercise both for planning priorities for the period of inter regnum and discerning the opportunities for mission and church growth that you will want a future incumbent to develop with your church.

**Stage One:** The first step is to do a church audit of your strengths, weaknesses and resources (people, gifts, time). The second step is to do an audit of your wider parish community: what are the social needs and demographics, what are the mission opportunities, what are you already doing that could be built on, where are their possibilities for partnership with others? Out of these two audits you can begin to prayerfully discern a realistic and bold vision for where you want your church to be in five years time.

**Stage Two:** The second stage of developing a MAP is to write a action plan around a set of specific objectives. Each action in the plan needs to be SMART, that is Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed. In a period of vacancy you will need to discuss

which of your priorities you can develop and which you need to leave for future action. You won't want to make a very detailed plan that doesn't leave space for discussion and prayer with the new incumbent when they arrive. If you don't have the capacity to start any new activities identify the key areas of church life that need to be maintained and nourished in order for the church to be in a good place to move forwards with your vision once the new incumbent is in post.

### **Reviewing your MAP if you already have one:**

A vacancy is a good time to review an existing MAP. What has been achieved/not achieved from your stated objectives, what has gone well/not gone so well? What have you learned about your church and the wider community? How far have the vision and actions been owned by the congregation? Out of this review process you can modify and update your existing MAP objectives for the period of vacancy. It will be important to focus your resources on key areas of your church life and mission, so you may need to be strategic in choosing to work on fewer key objectives from your MAP, leaving some to be picked up again once a new incumbent is in post. You may decide that you need to develop a new MAP, if for example the MAP primarily reflects the previous incumbent's priorities, in which case follow the paragraph above.

If you need help and guidance in developing a new MAP or reviewing and modifying an existing one please contact the Mission Support Officer Vanessa Elston on [Vanessa.Elston@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:Vanessa.Elston@southwark.anglican.org)

## **SOUTHWARK DIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION**

The SDBE has produced these helpful guidelines for a parish entering a vacancy

### **Appointing Clergy to Parishes with a Church school**

The Diocese of Southwark affirms the importance of Church schools alongside parish churches as central to the mission and ministry to local communities. The importance of this partnership enables the school and the parish to contribute more fully to the life and well-being of the other as a community of faith in active association.

In the Diocese of Southwark there are 106 Church schools, educating more than 36,000 children and young people. Parish clergy and members of the congregation play a hugely important role in the daily life and continuing development of these schools and there is much good practice. However an area where there is more varied experience is the process of appointing clergy (incumbents/priests in charge) in parishes where there is a Church school. In some cases the role and importance of the Church school in the mission of the parish and its future development is not explicit. These guidelines are designed to help PCCs, patrons and schools to work together to enable clergy applying to lead a parish with a Church school to more fully understand the opportunities and expectations.

Please note that many Church schools in our Diocese are oversubscribed and clergy with school age children applying for a post should be made aware of the local situation.

## During the vacancy

The *ex officio* foundation governor place on the school's governing body should be filled on a temporary basis and under the school's Instrument of Government it is usually the responsibility of the archdeacon to make this appointment. Archdeacons usually look to other local clergy, readers, church wardens or PCC members to take this on to ensure continuity during this period.

The school and the parish will need to work together regarding collective worship, involvement in the school's Faith Group/Committee, prayer groups and other established activities and links.

## The Parish Profile

The following checklist may be helpful for inclusion in the Parish Profile:

- information about the school, with brief information about the school's size, status, name of the headteacher and chair of governors
- links to the school and Board of Education websites
- reference to the governance arrangements; ex-officio role and PCC appointments to the school governing body
- a brief outline of the core role and responsibilities in relation to the school and a short statement, prepared by the headteacher and chair of governors, about the school's aspirations for the future
- information about the future plans for the school and any issues relevant to the appointment of the new incumbent following discussion with the headteacher and chair of governors

- details of any chaplaincy arrangements in the school and arrangements to participate in the planning and leading of collective worship
- explicit reference to the incumbents responsibilities towards the school in the role description
- reference to the school in any advertisement
- a list of all schools in the parish, including other church schools, community schools, academies, free schools and independent schools.

### **Considering Applicants/Candidates**

- To explore previous involvement in schools and education chaplaincy.
- To suggest to applicants that they might choose the headteacher of a school as a referee.
- To ensure shortlisted candidates have contact with the headteacher and chair of governors in the context of a planned visit to the prospective parish. Wherever possible candidates should visit the school in session.
- To seek feedback from the headteacher and chair of governors and communicate this to the interview panel.
- To provide shortlisted candidates with a copy of the most recent Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS - Section 48) report.
- To provide shortlisted candidates with access to relevant policy documents published by the Board of Education.
- To consult the Board of Education as appropriate.

### **For discussion with prospective candidates**

- Nurturing and promoting the relationship between the parish and the school.
- Role of the incumbent on the governing body.
- Role in planning and leading collective worship.

- Involvement in other aspects of school life.
- Pastoral care of pupils, parents, headteacher, staff and governors.
- A visible presence in school.
- Access to the church for Services and as a resource for learning.
- Supporting inter-faith issues in schools.
- For secondary schools, the role of the incumbent will include facilitating relationships with churches across the deanery and an awareness of the diversity of church tradition.

### **Following appointment**

- The headteacher and chair of governors to be involved in the welcome and induction of a new incumbent.
- The Director of the Board of Education to write a letter of welcome and to outline the role and work of the Board.

## THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS

The legislation that governs appointments in the Church of England is the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986. These notes are designed to help the PCC in understanding the Measure. Only the Measure and not these notes, is authoritative. Questions about the legal implications should be referred to the Archdeacon who will consult the Diocesan Registrar if necessary.

Each diocese appoints a Designated Officer to act as the contact between the interested parties and to ensure that the legal process is followed. In the Diocese of Southwark the Diocesan Registrar is appointed as the Designated Officer.

When a benefice is vacant or about to become vacant the Diocesan Bishop after appropriate consultation (with the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group, the Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committee and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee) will determine on one of three courses of action:

- (a) A 12-month restriction of the patron's right of presentation (to appoint a new incumbent)

Or, after the appropriate consultation, with the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group, the Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committee and the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee)

- (b) Suspension of the Patron's right of presentation for up to 5 years - in which case a priest-in-charge may be appointed. (The process of suspension is governed by recommendations



made to the Diocesan Bishop by the Diocesan Pastoral Committee after due consultation with all interested parties). The two main reasons for considering suspension are (a) plans for proposed or impending pastoral reorganisation and (b) plans to replace the parsonage.

(c) To appoint a new incumbent

The Diocesan Bishop may delegate his role in the administration of the appointment process to the appropriate Area Bishop and/or Archdeacon.

There are three different parties involved in the appointment process whose roles are set down in the Patronage Measure:

**The Patron** (who may be a private individual, a group of people or a corporate body and in many cases the Diocesan Bishop) who *nominates* a candidate

**The Parish Representatives** elected by the PCC who *affirm (or veto)* the Patron's nomination

**The Bishop** who may also affirm or veto a nomination and *institutes* the priest to the parish

The system has evolved over several centuries and provides some very important checks and balances. In practice in the Diocese, all three parties work together on the process.

## **IMPLEMENTING THE PROCESS - PREPARATION FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A VICAR**

The Archdeacon, Area Dean and Patron (or their representative) will arrange to meet with the PCC to talk through the process, highlighting the roles and responsibilities of the PCC.

The process outlined below describes the process for the appointment of a Vicar or Rector under common tenure. Much of this process is followed if a Priest-in-Charge is to be appointed and a separate note outlines the important differences.

### **Preliminaries**

When a benefice is vacant or about to become vacant, the Diocesan Bishop serves a formal notice to the Designated Officer ('Form 30' or 'Notice of Impending Vacancy')

The Designated Officer sends to the Secretary of the PCC (Form 31) and to the registered patron of the living. The Patron will nominate an individual to act on their behalf and send their name and address to the PCC Secretary.

### **"Section 11" Meeting**

Within four weeks of the issue of Form 31, the PCC must meet. This is referred to as a 'Section 11' meeting, as it is described in Section 11 of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986. The outgoing incumbent

and spouse, the Patron or the patron's representative should not attend this meeting

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Prepare a statement describing the conditions, needs and traditions of the parish. Area Deans have been trained in some of the episcopal areas in assisting PCCs in producing their statements. It is expected that the PCC will involve the Area Dean as a consultant in that process.
- Appoint two *lay* members of the PCC to act as the parish's representative in connection with the selection of the new Vicar. They need not be the churchwardens and must not be clergy, deaconesses or licensed lay workers or the spouse of the outgoing vicar.
- Decide whether to request the patron to consider advertising the vacancy (the patron is under no obligation to do so but it is rare for them not to respect the PCC's wishes). If the PCC requests advertising it will be expected to bear the cost of the advertisement and of the ensuing process (travel costs of candidates etc). The advertisement will be written in the light of the parish statement in consultation with the patron and Area Bishop.
- Decide whether to request a statement in writing from the Bishop describing in relation to the benefice, the needs of the diocese and the wider needs of the church. In order to ensure that all the parties to the appointment are working collaboratively throughout, it is the normal policy of some Area Bishops to provide such a statement.
- Decide whether to request a joint meeting (known as a Section 12 meeting) with the patron and the Bishop to

exchange views about the PCC's statement and the Bishop's written statement (or an oral statement that he gives). The meeting must be held within six weeks of the request (and in the case of the Bishop and Patron the request must be made within ten days of receiving the parish's statement). The Area Dean and Deanery Lay Chair are also invited to the meeting.

As soon as practicable after the meeting of the PCC to consider these matters, the PCC Secretary should send Form 34 'Appointment of Parish Representatives' duly completed to the Bishop of the Diocese, the Patron and the Designated Officer.

There is a lot to do, especially in preparing and agreeing a Parish Profile and Statement of Need. The PCC may well wish to embark on this process before the Form 30 is issued and liaise with the Archdeacon about timings.

In the case of Team or Group Ministries, United or Joint Benefices there are special provisions for ensuring that consultation takes place with all the appropriate parties. The Archdeacon will be able to advise on this.

## PREPARING THE PARISH PROFILE

Whilst the PCC gives final approval to the Parish Profile it is helpful and advisable to consult and involve a wide range of people in the preparation of it. This might be done by asking the congregation to make written comments or by holding one or more Congregational Meetings - exploring the strengths, challenges, needs, hopes and vision of the church. The Area Dean will work with the PCC in the development of its statement. The parish's Mission Action Plan (as these come into being) will be an important document to feed into the statement and should be submitted as part of it. The 'Spotlight' information from the 2011 census is very useful and is available on the Diocesan website and the 'Signs of Growth' material for the church is equally valuable.

As many people will be involved in providing input to the document, it is advisable for the PCC to appoint a small group to work on it to present to the PCC for final approval.

The outgoing incumbent will also have some factual information to contribute before they leave about organisations they have been involved within the parish for instance. They should be asked for this before they leave - but not for their views about the future direction of the parish!

A suggested checklist...

The information in the profile is intended to provide prospective incumbents with as clear and accurate a picture as possible of the current life of the wider parish and the local church. It should include:

- a description of the population, size, nature and features of the parish
- a description of the church(es) and other church buildings and properties
- a list of services (forms and style of services, average attendance)
- a note of other ordained and lay ministers and colleagues (if any)
- details of the profile of the congregation
- average number of occasional offices and forms of preparation and follow up
- the nature and extent of lay leadership and involvement in mission and ministry
- if there is a church school see the separate sheet for suggested information to include
- a list of church activities and groups
- details of the financial position of the church, including whether Parish Support Fund payments are up to date and whether clergy expenses are paid in full
- a description of other churches in the parish and the nature of links and activities ecumenically

- a note of other establishments and institutions in the parish and the nature of engagement and involvement with them
- the nature and extent of pastoral ministry within the parish
- a brief description of the vicarage.

This list is illustrative not exhaustive and not all of it will apply in every case!

Equally important as the factual description is a picture of the current state of the parish - its achievements and challenges, its aspirations and fears, its hopes and anxieties. It may be helpful to consider these sorts of questions:

- What is distinctive about this parish - what makes it what it is?
- Where would we like to be the parish in five years time?
- What are the strengths and resources of the parish which will help it to achieve this?
- What are some of the barriers and challenges along the way?

In the light of the factual description and statements about the parish, it will then be possible to draw up a statement of the qualities, gifts and attributes which the parish discerns are needed in the next incumbent and the particular tasks that will face them. The Person Specification will provide a set of criteria by which prospective applicants will evaluate whether this is a possible next step for them in their ministry. It is also an objective set of criteria for questions in the interview process.

The Person Specification could run the danger of being too long and too idealistic. It will be helpful for the parish in looking forward to focus on at most seven or eight essential attributes - even if it includes a further three or four 'desirable' ones.

The profile needs to offer an accurate picture of the life of the parish which is why it is important that it is written and presented with honesty and care. Remember to include photographs that show the breadth and diversity of parish life (having sought the necessary permissions to use them first!). It is very rare indeed for potential applicants to ask for a hard copy of a profile these days. The Episcopal Area Office can advise on formatting if needed.

## **APPOINTMENT BY INTERVIEW PROCESS**

If the PCC ask for the post to be advertised, the post is advertised in the national Church Press, normally for two weeks. The Church Times offers a deal whereby for the payment of an extra 20% the post will be advertised until filled.

Applicants apply for details and are sent the parish statement/profile and other relevant information as agreed with the parish. The Church of England Common Application Form is enclosed for completion. This process is normally handled by the relevant Episcopal Area Office (although on occasions by the Patron).

Those who wish to apply return the application form to the Area Office. (The Diocesan Bishop is also sent copies of all applications).

The Patrons, Area Bishop and/or Archdeacon and parish representative meet to consider the applications and draw up a short list (normally of 3-5 candidates), using the criteria drawn up by the parish.

References are taken up for the short-listed candidates. Confidential references are obtained by the Area Bishop from the Bishop of the Diocese in which candidates are currently working.



The short-listed candidates are all invited to an informal visit to the parish. Spouses and the family of a candidate will be invited to attend if they wish but it is obviously not a requirement. In some parishes this visit takes place on a separate day to the interview, in some it forms the first part of the formal interview day.

Candidates are interviewed by a panel usually consisting of the Area Bishop and/or Archdeacon, the Patron and the parish representatives (i.e. those who have been involved in short-listing).

After the interviews the panel discuss and decide on their preferred candidate. All parties should all agree on one candidate (decisions are not taken by a majority decision).

## **CANDIDATES VISITING THE PARISH**

The purpose of a visit is to enable candidates to see something of the parish as part of their process of discernment as to whether this might be the right place for them to serve. This is not an additional or pre-interview and this will need to be made clear to those who will be meeting the candidates. Parishes may decide whether to invite candidates to come on the same day or on different days.

Candidates should be shown the church and other properties in parish ownership. They should have the opportunity to walk or be driven around the parish so that they can get some idea of the local context, amenities and prominent features.

In determining who should meet candidates on such a visit (because often many would like to!), it is important to remember that the visit is for the benefit of the candidates. Therefore it is helpful for them to meet people by virtue of the office which they hold or the role which they undertake in the life of the church. It is advisable for the parish representatives not to take part in this visit to prevent it seeming like an extra interview.

Candidates might properly meet any stipendiary or non-stipendiary clergy in the parish, SPAs and Readers and other ministers in a Local Ecumenical Partnership. They should also meet with the Churchwardens (if they are not the representatives) and people like those responsible for music, children and youth work, pastoral co-ordinators, the treasurer, house group co-ordinator etc. Meetings over coffee or lunch can enable this to take place in a more informal setting.

It is helpful to invite the Area Dean (and if practicable the Lay Chair) to a lunch-time gathering in order to provide the wider Deanery context for ministry.

## **THE INTERVIEW**

The primary question in the minds of those conducting the interview should be not 'Is this the best person we can get' but 'Is this God's choice and the right person for this parish at this time in its life?'

The interview panel consists of the Patron, the Area Bishop and/or Archdeacon and the two parish representatives.

The interview needs to take place in a quiet and relaxed setting where there is no risk of being disturbed, preferably in the parish. It is important to have a second space available for candidates to arrive and settle (and depart) - with one other person briefed to welcome and offer drinks etc.

The questions will have been discussed together beforehand - often at the short-listing meeting and probably formally agreed electronically well in advance. The scope of the questions should be determined by the Person Specification and parish profile. They will therefore explore the candidate's ability to do the job that has been specified.

There may be a short presentation which the candidates will have been informed about ideally at least a week before the interview. An

hour should be allowed for the presentation and interview with a short break in between to allow the panel to put aside one interview and be ready for the next. It is advised that all discussion should be reserved for the end of the interviews and does not happen between them.

There should be opportunity in the questions to explore a candidate's experience by asking them to describe aspects of their relevant current and previous work and their particular interests and emphases in ministry. Candidates should be expected to indicate their understanding of the present needs of the parish and their own understanding of its development and potential.

All candidates should be asked the same substantive questions - although follow-up questions will be dependent on the initial answer that is given.

Questions should be open ended, simple and presented in a friendly way. The objective is to get the candidate to talk - not to respond with 'yes' or 'no' answers to lengthy questions.

Candidates need to be allowed time to ask questions of the panel and valuable insights are often learned from the perceptiveness of the questions that a candidate asks of you.

No questions should be asked that relate to the candidate's gender, age, race, sexual orientation or disability. The chair of the panel will stop the interview if this happens.

Keep a record of the answers which a candidate gives you. This will be helpful at the end of the day in making an informed recommendation.

## **MAKING THE DECISION**

In making the decision it is important to remember the three different roles which the Patron, the Bishop and the parish representatives play (see the section 'The Appointment Process').

In practice there will usually be a discussion at the end of the interview day in which the three parties will discuss together which of the candidates is best suited to be the next incumbent and about whom all three parties are agreed.

There should never be a sense of 'choosing someone who might do'. If the three parties do not agree or do not believe that any of the candidates that they have seen is right, then it is best to start the process again (and never right to appoint someone on the grounds that it will shorten the vacancy).

Once everyone is agreed, the Patron will then offer the job to the preferred candidate - and if they indicate that they are likely to accept the post, a formal letter offering the appointment is written by the Patron - usually within a week.

When the candidate has replied to this letter in writing an announcement can be made. This needs to be done on the same day both in all the churches of the new parish and in the churches of the parish from which they are coming.

Every new priest has to complete current Safeguarding procedures. Because this can take some time, an announcement can be provisionally made before this has been received and the words 'subject to the satisfactory completion of legal procedures' is added to any announcement made.

## APPOINTMENT BY MEETING A SUGGESTED CANDIDATE

The PCC may ask the Patron not to advertise the post but instead to suggest a particular candidate for the parish to meet.

If this is the case, the same process will apply as in the open advertisement process. A candidate will need to complete a Common Application Form and supply references. They will need to make an informal visit to the parish for their own benefit and then be formally interviewed by the parish representatives.

Depending on the patronage, the Bishop and/or his representative will also be involved in this - as might the patron.

At the end of the interview, the parish representatives will need to determine if they are minded to accept or reject the Patron's nominated candidate. The Diocesan Bishop has similar rights. This is why it is preferable for all parties to work together.

In this method, each candidate needs to be assessed on their merits - a candidate can only be rejected or accepted and not put on hold to see 'if there is another alternative'.

It is perfectly permissible for a parish, subject to the PCC agreeing, to move sequentially from one process to another (for instance asking the Patron to suggest a particular candidate in the first instance and if that does not bear fruit, to advertise). It is not possible to run both processes in parallel!

## **APPOINTMENT IN OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES**

Parishes which cannot afford the cost of advertising but which would like to interview more than one candidate may

- Ask the Archdeacon to encourage applications
- Consider advertising only on the Diocesan website.

In either case the appointment can then proceed as detailed in 'Appointment by Interview Process'

## **APPOINTMENT OF A PRIEST-IN-CHARGE**

If presentation to a benefice is restricted or suspended, the provisions of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 do not apply and legally the living is filled, after consultation with the PCC, by the Bishop.

In practice many of the procedures are similar to those for finding a Vicar and the sheets on Implementing the Process - especially the Section 11 meeting, preparing the Parish Profile, Advertising and the Interview process can be followed.

The profile should contain a statement (agreed with the Archdeacon) as to why the living has been suspended and some indication of how the plans are developing either for rebuilding the parsonage or for pastoral re-organisation.

The Diocesan Bishop has a duty to consult the Patron, but in this Diocese it is considered good practice to involve the Patron in the process (even though they have no legal responsibilities). This is because when the restriction or suspension is lifted, there is technically again a vacancy in which the Patron has the right to present a candidate. In many, but not all, cases a shortened procedure will be followed whereby the Priest-in-Charge will be appointed as incumbent to the living following due process involving parish

representatives, Patron and Diocesan Bishop. It is as well therefore for everyone to contribute to the appointment from the start.

In the appointment of a priest-in-charge the Bishop consults with the PCC, which does not appoint parish representatives. However the PCC can delegate its responsibilities - to the Churchwardens. This is particularly important when it comes to a formal interview where it would be impossible and inappropriate for a whole PCC to short-list and interview candidates.

The advent of Common Tenure in 2012 has made more secure the position of priests-in-charge and has removed what was once seen as making such posts less desirable.

## SERVICE OF INSTITUTION OR LICENSING

Preparations for the service for the new parish priest will begin about three months beforehand. In the case of a Vicar it is a service of Collation or Institution (depending on whether the Bishop is the patron of the living). A service of Licensing is held for a Priest-in-Charge. Where diaries permit, it is usually the case that the Diocesan Bishop will take the service if the new priest is coming from outside the Diocese and the Area Bishop will preside if they are coming from within the Diocese.

The Area Dean is responsible for overseeing the service and ensuring everything goes smoothly.

Churchwardens, working with the Area Dean and new priest, are asked to draw up a list of those to be invited to the service. The clergy of the Deanery Chapter, the Deanery Lay Chair are invited. The list should include the Mayor, the local MP and councillors, ministers of other churches in the parish, representatives from the local church school (if there is one) and other local schools and other community leaders. All this needs to be done at least six weeks before the date of the service. A list of those invited should be kept and passed to the new Vicar as a good indication of local people for them to make contact with!

The service is normally one of Holy Communion. A template for the service is available from either the Bishop of Southwark's Office or the Episcopal Area Office (depending on who is taking it).

The new priest is usually asked to choose the hymns. The Bishop will choose the readings - which are normally those set for the day and s/he will approve a draft of the service before it is printed. Responsibility for printing the service lies with the parish.

The Area Dean will conduct a rehearsal with all those taking an active part (except for the Bishop and Archdeacon) a few days before the service so that they know what they are expected to do and when.

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The Diocesan Bishop's chaplain normally accompanies the bishop. The Area Bishop will always need one of the local clergy or a Reader to act as chaplain for the service (someone with local knowledge of the church is helpful!) Particular attention needs to be paid to robing arrangements for the Bishop's party and other robing clergy and readers; the order of processions in and out; seating arrangements for participants and visitors; arrangements for the administration of Holy Communion.

Spaces should be reserved for the Bishop's car and for the Mayor's car on the evening of the service. Someone should escort the Bishop to the Vestry and the Mayor and their Consort to their reserved seats. All taking an active part in the service should be present at least 30 minutes before the service is due to begin.

In preparing the service it will have been made clear as to whether the oaths are to be sworn during the service or in the vestry before the service begins. In the latter case, the Bishop, Archdeacon, Patron (or Area Dean representing them), churchwardens and new priest should be in the vestry fifteen minutes before the service.

The Patron and the new priest should take their seats before the service in the first pew/row on the north side of the church if they do not enter with the procession.

The Area Dean (or other suitable person nominated by them) should give out notice a few minutes before the service begins. These are brief so they don't delay the start of the service. The Area Dean will also co-ordinate the welcomes given to the new priest in the course of the service. (This will also mean that the Area Dean is best placed to brief the Bishop on guests that he should especially welcome and greet at the beginning of the service).

If the Mayor is present, a member of the congregation should take responsibility for leading the Mayor out before the congregation leave. This person should also take care of the Mayor at the reception that follows the service.

The church's Service Register should be made up ready for the Bishop to sign when he returns to the vestry.

## HANDING OVER AND MOVING ON

Don't try to involve the new priest in the work of the parish before their arrival. Allow them plenty of time to take their leave of their last parish - remembering how it felt when your own priest left. Take your cue from them as to whether in the time between the announcement of their coming and their arrival they would like to be copied into PCC minutes, monthly news-sheets etc.

Your new priest will appreciate a more detailed briefing on the parish before they start. This might include some informal discussions with other members of staff and with the churchwardens.

The new priest will not only be starting a new ministry but will have moved house and location as well. They will need some help and guidance in finding their way around. Welcome and support that is sensitive but not over-bearing makes a very good start to a good working relationship.

Keep hold of all that has been undertaken and achieved in the vacancy. New gifts and skills amongst the congregation may well have been identified and exercised - make sure that people don't hand back everything they have taken responsibility for in the vacancy.

The length and complexity of the Guidelines gives some indication of the responsibilities which need to be undertaken when the parish is in a vacancy. Throughout this time your Archdeacon and Area Dean are always willing to share these responsibilities with you. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with them.

## USEFUL CONTACTS

### The Bishop of Southwark's Office

Trinity House, 4 Chapel Court, Borough High Street, London SE1 1HW.  
Tel: 020 7939 9420

### Diocesan Secretary

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020 7939 9434

### Property Department

Diocesan Director of Property Management

020 7939 9410

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### Finance Department

Directory of Finance

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### Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser

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### Director of Communications

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