

## **VACANCIES**

*Also issued separately as Guidance for the Churchwardens*

Section A: General and preparatory

Section B: Formal procedures: also for the PCC Secretary

Section C: Payment of expenses incurred during the vacancy: also for the PCC Treasurer

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## **Section A: General and preparatory**

In the vacancy the Churchwardens are legally in charge of the parish and act on behalf of the Bishop in looking after the interests of the parish. If you have any questions, the Rural Dean, the Archdeacon and the Diocesan Secretary will be pleased to assist.

### **Pre-vacancy meeting**

When the vacancy is announced, the Archdeacon holds a meeting with the churchwardens to explain the procedure and to deal with arrangements for cover during the vacancy.

### **Informal Vacancy meeting**

An informal vacancy meeting is arranged by the Archdeacon at an early stage and is attended by members of the PCC(s), the Archdeacon, the Suffragan Bishop, the Patron and the Rural Dean or Lay Chair or deanery pastoral committee Chairman. At this meeting the procedures to be followed in making a new appointment will be explained and any particular issues clarified. The procedure for the appointment of an incumbent is governed by a piece of legislation called *The Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986* [See Section B]. A different procedure applies where the living is suspended and a priest-in-charge is to be appointed.

### **Parish Profile**

The Archdeacon makes arrangements for a profile of the Benefice to be written by representatives of the parish(es). The profile should contain information about the local community as well as the life of the congregation. The draft is sent to the Archdeacon, who will check it. [*The Parish Profile must be agreed at the PCC(s)'s Section 11 meeting if the appointment is of an incumbent. Where the Crown is the Patron, the PCC has a right to send a copy of the Parish profile to the Patron to assist in making an appointment, even though some other provisions of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure do not apply. Where the appointment is of a priest-in-charge, the Profile is still an important part of the process.*]

### **Cover during the vacancy**

If there are assistant ministers in the parish, the Rural Dean convenes a meeting with the outgoing priest, the assistants, the Churchwardens and the Rural Dean to discuss practical arrangements for the conduct of the vacancy, and these are set out on paper. Where there are no assistant ministers, the Bishop will nominate a neighbouring priest to be available for pastoral emergencies, and send the name to the churchwardens. It may also be helpful for the churchwardens to ensure they have an up-to-date copy of the Diocesan Directory giving contact details for other clergy in the deanery.

### **Church Services**

Church services are arranged by the Churchwardens in consultation with the Rural Dean, and the Churchwardens are responsible for ensuring that a minister is available to conduct each service. You should not wait for the vacancy to begin before putting this matter in hand. While no major innovations or alterations in the pattern or nature of services should be made in a vacancy, it is sometimes necessary for the parish to be flexible about service times to enable other clergy to assist. Service times should be clearly advertised on the church notice board, in the porch and elsewhere.

### **Advertising the vacancy**

The Archdeacon writes a short notice of the vacancy which is circulated to all the clergy of the diocese in the monthly online See Round emailing known as "the E-Bundle". It is also the practice in this diocese to advertise vacancies on the diocesan website, in the Archbishops' Appointments Adviser's List and in the church press. The costs of advertising are normally met by the parish.

### **The hand-over from the outgoing priest**

When the outgoing priest leaves, it is the responsibility of the churchwardens to ensure that the incumbent has handed over to them all files, records and keys, including Diocesan Handbooks, and that the parsonage house meters have been read and bills paid. The services (gas, electricity and telephone) should be put in the name of the churchwardens during the vacancy. The churchwardens should check that the house is clean and empty, and arrange for cleaning and removal of left-behind furniture if necessary.

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## **Section B: Formal procedures** (please copy this section to the PCC Secretary)

### **Special arrangements for the appointment of an incumbent**

Under the *Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986*, when an incumbent's resignation is announced, the Designated Officer (who in this diocese is the Diocesan Secretary or Registrar) sends a formal notice of the forthcoming vacancy (**Form 31**) to the Patron and the PCC Secretary. (More detailed guidance on the vacancy procedure is sent out at this stage to the PCC Secretary)

Once the formal notice from the Designated Officer (**Form 31**) has been received, a special meeting of the PCC must be held within four weeks. If there is more than one parish in the benefice, the meeting must be a joint meeting of all the PCCs. At this meeting (from which the outgoing incumbent and spouse and the patron are excluded) the following matters must be dealt with:

- (i) The Benefice must formally agree the profile of the Parish(es), [or individual profiles for each parish] together with a statement about the new incumbent's task and priorities as they see them. This profile is returned to the Archdeacon for distribution to the Patron (if not the Bishop) and also to the Bishop of the Diocese, the Suffragan Bishop and the Diocesan Secretary.
- (ii) The PCC will normally elect two of its lay members to act as its representatives in the selection of the new incumbent. These representatives need not be the Churchwardens, though in practice PCCs usually find it is convenient to appoint the Churchwardens. Where there are more than two parishes in the benefice, at least 4 parish representatives are appointed including at least one from each parish. It is helpful if one can be identified as a "lead" representative for contact purposes.
- (iii) The PCC may request the Patron to advertise the post [*in addition to the standard adverts mentioned above*], and may ask for a joint meeting with the Bishop and the Patron where they feel that this is necessary [*normally matters for discussion at such a meeting will have been covered at the informal vacancy meeting*].

Where the Crown (or the Duchies of Lancaster or Cornwall or the Lord Chancellor) is the patron, some provisions of the *Patronage (Benefices) Measure* do not apply and the PCC does not need to hold a special meeting. However, the PCC should appoint parish representatives and has a right to send a copy of the Parish Profile to the Crown Appointments Adviser.

The PCC may, if appropriate, consider if it wishes to take advantage of arrangements available to those whose theological conviction leads them to seek the priestly or episcopal ministry of men. If it wishes to consider this, it may do so under the Section 11 meeting and should pass a resolution in the following form:

"This PCC requests, on grounds of theological conviction, that arrangements be made for it in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests". A PCC which has passed a resolution should send a copy of it to the diocesan bishop, archdeacon, diocesan registrar, diocesan secretary and registered patron.

### **Special arrangements for the appointment of a priest in charge**

If there is a new proposal to 'suspend' the patron's right of presentation to the benefice, the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee will consult the parishes. In the case of a 'suspended' benefice the Bishop invites the parishes to produce a profile and asks the churchwardens of the benefice to assist him in making the appointment of a priest-in-charge. In practice an informal vacancy meeting will always be held and the patron will be consulted over the appointment of the priest-in-charge.

### **Special arrangements for the appointment of a team vicar**

The appointment of a team vicar is not covered by the provisions of the *Patronage (Benefices) Measure* but will be the responsibility of the Rector and Bishop acting jointly or the special Patronage Board for the Team, depending on how the Team is constituted. There are special provisions to ensure that the other Team clergy, and the parishioners within the Team area who will be in the special care of the new team vicar, are consulted and separate details will be given. However, the process for the appointment of a team vicar is similar to that in other vacancies.

### **The PCC**

During the vacancy the PCC is chaired by the Lay Vice-Chairman.

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**Section C: Payment of expenses incurred during the vacancy**

*(please copy this section to the PCC Treasurer)*

Additional expenses incurred during the vacancy (e.g. visiting clergy; interview expenses) should be paid from PCC funds. It should be noted that during the vacancy the Parish Share is reduced.

**Fees**

Details of fees to be paid to retired clergy and others who take Sunday services or occasional offices during the vacancy are set out in the [Stipends Letter](#) (section 9).

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## **Section D: The parsonage house**

### **Responsibility for the parsonage house**

The parsonage house is held in trust for the benefice and during the period of office of a particular incumbent the house is vested in him or her as legal owner. With this ownership goes the responsibility for seeing that the house and grounds are properly cared for and maintained under the overall supervision of the Property Committee of the Diocesan Board of Finance. During a vacancy in the benefice, the churchwardens are asked to assume these responsibilities and to see that the house remains weatherproof and is locked up at all times. Twice weekly inspections should be made to see that no unauthorised entry has been gained and that everything is in order. Any problems should be reported to the Estates Secretary at the Diocesan Office. The cost of repairs, running expenses and utility costs will be met by the Property Committee.

Please contact the Estates Department of the Diocesan Office about the central heating; usually the heating should be left on continuously at a very low temperature, minimum of 6°C, between the months of October and March but sometimes it may be more appropriate to drain the whole system down and switch off the water, gas and electricity.

### **Redecoration and other repairs during the vacancy**

At an early stage in the vacancy the Archdeacon, the Estates Secretary, and sometimes the Diocesan Surveyor, visit the parsonage with the churchwardens, and note any repairs which need to be carried out while the house is empty. They also discuss any redecoration that may be needed. No redecoration is carried out, of course, until the new incumbent has been appointed and has been consulted about the colour scheme. It is hoped that parishes will take responsibility for necessary redecoration, and this should be seen as an opportunity for the parish to be generous in providing a welcoming atmosphere for the new incumbent (and family), though the new parish priest may wish to do some of it personally. The diocese makes a grant towards the cost of decorating.

### **Improvements**

Parishes (and new incumbents) often wish to have improvements (such as new kitchens) carried out during a vacancy: whilst acknowledging the logic of this, the Diocesan Board of Finance does not always have the funds available to permit this unless there is letting income. There is a long waiting-list of improvements. Sometimes a parish or the Patron can provide the money themselves in order for the work to be carried out. When a new incumbent is appointed, attention is drawn to the fact that, in accepting the benefice, the parsonage house is accepted as it is.

### **Insurance**

The diocese holds a 'blanket' insurance policy covering parsonage houses against normal risks and public liability during a vacancy, but this policy only holds good on the understanding that the house is secured and regularly inspected and that the utility supplies have been dealt with as indicated above. Insurance cover for theft of structural items (eg. fireplaces, roof tiles, radiators etc.) and wilful damage is provided up to a maximum sum of £2,500 and there is cover up to £5,000 for oil and water leakages in respect of any one house, but this lapses after a house has been empty for more than two years. There is no insurance cover during a vacancy for any contents in the house unless the PCC chooses to take out independent insurance. There is public liability cover to a maximum of £3,000,000.

### **Letting the vacant house**

The Property Committee has a policy of letting parsonages during vacancies. This removes the legal burden of looking after the parsonage from the churchwardens. It also discourages vandalism and squatters and produces much-needed income, the first call on which is for work to the parsonage concerned. Any surplus is paid into the Diocesan Stipends Fund to help meet the payment of stipends throughout the diocese. The Archdeacon will take the opportunity to discuss the possibility of this with the churchwardens at an early stage, during the pre-vacancy meeting. It should be understood that legally, agreement for letting the house rests with the churchwardens and not the PCC.

The procedure for letting is that the churchwardens and the Estates Secretary are appointed as sequestrators of the benefice; this is a legal requirement which allows the parsonage to be let. They also sign the tenancy agreement which is usually a 6 month Assured Shorthold Tenancy. The Estates Secretary is responsible for arranging for the property to be let and the tenancy is managed by the Estates Department.

A decision on letting has to be taken as soon as possible as the legal minimum length of a tenancy is six months. As most vacancies are at least six months long, letting the parsonage will not interfere with the appointments procedure for a new vicar as long as the decision to let is taken early.

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## **Section E: The new appointment**

In the Church of England, appointments are made by Patronage. A Patron can be a private individual, a Patronage Trust or Board, a Cathedral or College, or the Bishop. All appointments are regulated by the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 and both the Patron and the Diocese must act in accordance with the process as set out in the Measure.

### **Meeting a candidate or candidates**

The Patron may identify a suitable candidate or candidates in a variety of ways. Sometimes there may be a process of competitive advertising and shortlisting of candidates, followed by competitive interviews. In either case the Patron will seek to work together with the Bishop and with the Parish Representatives appointed at the special PCC meeting. In some cases the Patron will identify one candidate and present that person to the Parish Representatives. Whatever the process, when a suitable candidate or candidates has or have been identified, the Parish Representatives will be asked to meet them at the earliest opportunity. They should show them round the parish, and talk frankly about its needs and opportunities. They should also arrange for a meeting with time for discussion with all assistant ministers including Readers and any Local Ministry Team. The candidate(s) should, wherever possible, meet others in the parish such as the Head Teacher of a church school, or student in training on a ministerial training course, and this is to be encouraged provided everyone understands that the assessment of any candidate's suitability is a matter for the Parish Representatives alone. Assistant ministers must report their own reactions to the Parish Representatives, and not to the Bishop or Patron. The Parish Representatives have a right of veto over the appointment, but they need to bear in mind that those making the appointment are primarily seeking God's will for the future mission in the parish and that the candidate is also seeking God's will for his or her own ministry.

### **The service**

Once the appointment has been made, the Archdeacon arranges the date of the Institution or Collation Service of the new incumbent, or the licensing of the priest-in-charge or team vicar, with the Bishop, the Patron and the minister-designate. (Where the Bishop is the Patron the service is known as a Collation, and where there is some other Patron it is called an Institution). The Archdeacon will send a template and instructions about the standard form of service in use in the diocese. It is the churchwardens' responsibility (and not that of the new incumbent) to have the hymn sheets printed and to issue invitations. The new priest is invited to select the hymns for the service and to provide the names of those he or she wishes to invite. Full details of the process following the appointment are sent by the Archdeacon to the churchwardens.

### **Moving expenses**

When the new incumbent moves in, removal expenses are paid by the diocese and also a resettlement allowance at the current level as indicated in the annual stipends circular to incumbents, a copy of which is sent to PCC Treasurers. There is also a further grant if this is the candidate's first incumbency.

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