

SUSPENSION OF PRESENTATION

Introduction

In the Church of England, priests are appointed to a *benefice*. This is the basic unit of ministry and may be a parish or a grouping of parishes. The priest appointed to serve in a *benefice* may be either an *incumbent* or a *priest in charge*. Where the patron's right of presentation to a benefice is '*suspended*', a priest in charge is appointed. Where the benefice is not '*suspended*', an incumbent (either a vicar or a rector) is appointed.

What is "suspension" of presentation?

In previous centuries, each parish or group of parishes had a Patron who appointed and paid for a priest. Patrons still exist and retain the right of presenting a priest to the Bishop for appointment. Usually, when a rector or vicar leaves, the Patron (who may be an individual or a body such as a university college) is primarily responsible for finding and presenting a new priest to the Bishop, although the Bishop, Archdeacon and PCC are also involved in various stages of the process. However, the Bishop may decide to suspend temporarily the patron's rights and, instead, following consultation, appoint a priest to be in charge of the parish(es).

Why is presentation suspended?

The Bishop is only able to suspend for certain reasons, and after consultation with the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. Usually, he suspends because of the possibility of future pastoral reorganisation i.e. changing the current grouping of parishes or the responsibilities of the clergy serving them. This is generally to achieve a fairer allocation of the available resources of stipendiary clergy, often in response to changes in population in different parts of the diocese. Proposals for any change are always subject to a separate process of consultation. If the proposals are found to be appropriate, they can be made permanent by a *pastoral scheme* or *order*. Otherwise, there is flexibility to try different arrangements.

Why might suspension of presentation be extended?

The Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 only allows the Bishop to suspend presentation for a maximum of five years at a time. Arrangements for pastoral reorganisation can be agreed and put in place within a much shorter period and in those cases the suspension is *lifted* and the priest in charge most likely becomes the rector or vicar. However, if at the end of five years the arrangements are not yet sorted out and more time is needed, the Bishop must consult the PCC, the patron[s] and deanery representatives (the Rural Dean and the Lay Chair) before he can extend the suspension for a further period.

What does suspension of presentation mean in practice?

There is a different appointment procedure for incumbents (rectors and vicars) and priests in charge. Since February 2011, all new appointments are made on Common Tenure:

An *incumbent* is presented by the Patron following the procedure set out in legislation called the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986.

- The appointment process involves the formal appointment of Parish Representatives with a right of veto, the making of a Parish Profile and PCC decisions about certain other matters. The Bishop also has to approve the proposed appointment.
- The Incumbent normally holds the benefice on a permanent basis under the provisions of Common Tenure, with a Statement of Particulars and provision for regular ministerial review.
- If consultations are already underway for proposals for pastoral reorganisation involving the benefice, a new incumbent can be appointed on *Common Tenure subject to pastoral reorganisation*, but if proposals are not implemented within 5 years the incumbent will revert to holding the post permanently.

A *priest in charge* is appointed by the Bishop in cases where the patron's right of presentation has been suspended under the provisions of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011.

- In cases where pastoral reorganisation is proposed but consultations are not yet underway, suspending the patron's right of presentation and appointing a priest in charge retains flexibility for pastoral reorganisation to be carried out subsequently.
- The appointment process for a priest in charge is not covered by the Patronage (Benefices) Measure, but in the Diocese of St Albans a parallel process, involving consultation with the PCC and patron and the making of a Parish Profile, is normally followed.
- The priest in charge normally looks after the benefice on a permanent basis under the provisions of Common Tenure, with a Statement of Particulars and provision for regular ministerial review.

There are a number of other technical and legal areas in which the distinction between an incumbent and a priest in charge is relevant (e.g. legal ownership of benefice property), but from the parish's point of view, the functions carried out by the priest in charge and by the vicar or rector are the same.

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