

Ad Clerum 3e.2

ASSISTANT MINISTERS IN A VACANCY OF THE BENEFICE

1. When an incumbent leaves, the churchwardens are normally in charge of the parish, assisted by the rural dean. It is the churchwardens' responsibility to arrange for services to be taken and generally supervise the running of the parish. Where there are assistant ministers the bulk of the day-to-day ministerial work will be done by them, where possible. However, assistant ministers must take care to refer policy decisions to the churchwardens, and, where necessary, the rural dean. It is a wise rule that major innovations to the pattern or nature of services should not be made during a vacancy.
2. During the vacancy the Parochial Church Council is chaired by the lay vice-chairman. Different procedures apply in a team ministry where the *Teams and Groups Measure* allows for the appointment of an acting team rector. When there is a vacancy in a district or area of a team ministry, it is the team rector who is responsible for - and shares with colleagues - arrangements for a vacancy in such a district or area of a team ministry.
3. Before the vacancy begins, the rural dean will convene a meeting with the churchwardens and any assistant ministers, to make arrangements for the day to day ministerial work during the vacancy. The outgoing incumbent should be invited to the meeting, if appropriate. Where there is an assistant curate in title post and/or SSM(s), the DDO/ADDO, NSM Officer and/or deanery Reader Adviser will be invited to the meeting, as appropriate. The arrangements agreed at the meeting are to be recorded in writing, and copies circulated to all parties and, in the case of ministers in title post, to the CME Officer. Where there is a formally constituted team ministry, the team rector or acting team rector convenes the meeting, which should include the churchwardens or district warden(s), other team clergy and ministers, and the rural dean. However, where the team rector's post is the subject of the vacancy, the rural dean convenes the meeting.
4. Where an assistant is in his/her first post, the bishop will appoint a neighbouring incumbent to take responsibility for his/her supervision and support and to whom the assistant can refer in case of need. This will be especially important if the assistant is in the first year of ministry when the vacancy occurs; there will be particular elements of education and training to be undertaken, not least in relation to marriages and eucharistic presidency for deacons about to be priested, but assistants throughout their first four years should receive regular supervision.
5. Where there is more than one assistant minister, difficult questions of seniority can sometimes arise, especially where there is a mix of men and women, stipendiaries and non-stipendiaries and Readers. The order of seniority needs to be worked out with regard to the particular circumstances of each parish; this should normally be done before the vacancy begins, at the meeting referred to in paragraph 3 above. The agreed arrangements should be included in the paper referred to in paragraph 3. In a team ministry, where there is an understanding of collaboration and working together, the acting team rector (see paragraph 2 above) is responsible for leadership and co-ordination.
6. In all cases other than those covered in paragraph 4, the rural dean will arrange to see the assistant minister(s) periodically throughout the vacancy. In a team ministry this responsibility can normally be undertaken by one of the other members of the team.

7. Where the parish has a person in training for ministry (on a theological training course, or on the Readers' course) decisions about appropriate arrangements for support and any necessary supervision will need to be made, in consultation with the course principal or the tutor for Readers. It should not be assumed that any responsibility devolves upon the assistant. This point should also be covered at the meeting convened in accordance with paragraph 3 above.
8. Similar principles will apply during the prolonged absence of the incumbent through special factors such as sabbatical leave, maternity leave or incapacity.

The New Appointment

9. Under the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, the PCC is required to appoint two lay members (who may or may not be the churchwardens) to act as its representatives in the appointment of the new incumbent. It is the bishop's wish that, together with the patron, they should arrange for any prospective incumbent to have a properly arranged and adequately timed meeting with all assistant ministers, including licensed readers. Following the meeting, the bishop or archdeacon will seek feedback from assistant ministers. Where the appointment lies with the Patronage Board of a Team Ministry, or with some other group as, for example, in the case of a part-time diocesan officer, it will be for that group to ensure that this consultation is properly arranged. Where the appointment is of a priest-in-charge, it is the practice in this diocese for the bishop to work with the churchwardens. However, the same process of consultation with assistant ministers will apply.
10. Once a new incumbent is appointed, it is for the assistant staff to do everything they can to make the appointment a success and to ensure that their joint ministry is fruitful, whether or not they approved of the appointment or find him/her personally or doctrinally congenial. The early stages are especially important, i.e. when the new incumbent moves into the parish, is instituted and begins work.
11. Assistant ministers hold the bishop's licence, which cannot be revoked by the new incumbent/priest-in-charge. The bishop and the assistant minister may terminate the licence by giving three months' notice, but the incumbent/priest-in-charge may do so only with the prior written consent of the bishop and with six months' notice. (It must be noted that this is the legal position, and does not express the spirit in which we hope ministry will be shared by incumbents and their colleagues.)

Copies of this **Ad Clerum** will be available for churchwardens, assistant ministers and licensed readers whenever a vacancy occurs.