



How to ...

Understand suspension of presentation

Introduction

Occasionally we send out letters to parishes and others consulting them about a proposed 'suspension' in their benefice. But what is a suspension? If you've ever wondered what this is all about, here's a quick guide to the basics.

It all starts with a patron.....

Every benefice has a patron, or patrons. Patrons can be very varied – some of our patrons in this Diocese include individuals, HM Queen, patronage organisations or trusts, institutions, Oxbridge college scholars and Cathedral chapters. The Bishop of Bristol is the patron of many benefices in the Diocese as well; either solely or jointly with others.

When a benefice becomes vacant, these patrons have the legal right to present a priest to the Bishop to become the incumbent of the benefice (usually called a vicar or rector). If someone talks about a benefice being 'suspended', it really means the patrons' rights are suspended – it is a temporary restriction on their right to present a priest to a benefice.

Why does this happen?

The Bishop can suspend the patrons' rights of presentation for any reason. It is usually done because there are changes anticipated to the benefice, known as 'pastoral reorganisation'. If the patrons' rights are not suspended, these changes can be harder to make. Whenever pastoral reorganisation takes place, parishes and patrons are always consulted as part of the process.

What's the process?

Before introducing (or extending) a suspension, the Bishop consults with interested parties. Legally, this must include:

- The patron(s) of the benefice
- The PCC(s) of the parishes in the benefice
- Both chairs of the deanery synod

The Bishop may also consult the Archdeacon(s) and others out of courtesy.

Any of these interested parties can reply in writing with their views, or ask for a meeting with the Bishop or their representative.

The Bishop considers these views before making a final decision about whether or not to go ahead. They must also gain the consent of the Mission and Pastoral Committee.

We're in a vacancy - does a suspension mean we won't have a minister?

No. A suspension just means there is a technical difference in the appointment. When a benefice is suspended, usually a priest-in-charge would be appointed and s/he would have the same general role and duties as an incumbent.

The recruitment process is often the same as if the patron's rights were not suspended, and most likely would involve patrons as well as the parish(es).

How long will the suspension last?

Suspensions last for up to five years initially, but can be renewed if need be. The Bishop can also end a suspension early make the existing priest-in-charge the incumbent if all parties agree.

Need more information?

All of the above processes and rights are outlined in two pieces of legislation:

- [The Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011](#) and
- [The Patronage Benefices Measure 1986](#)

Both of these can be viewed or downloaded from www.legislation.gov.uk

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