



How to ...

Survive a vacancy

Note to Churchwardens

When an incumbent leaves, the responsibility for leadership in the parish falls to the Area Dean & Churchwardens jointly. They become what is termed, the sequestrators of the parish. Assistant clergy (retired clergy, OLMs, training curates and SSMs) and LLMs should consider them to be the incumbent of the parish for the period of the vacancy. They can only operate within the parish under the authority of the Churchwardens and Area Dean.

There will be support from the deanery, the Diocese, the Archdeacon and others in the parish who will share the extra workload which will present itself. As leaders you are responsible for the parish but you do not have to do everything yourself and, of course, depending on your situation there should be at least two of you per parish if you are a multi-parish benefice.

Before the Incumbent leaves

- The TM will contact you and organise a date and venue for an 'Introduction to the Vacancy' meeting for the PCC, Archdeacon, Area Dean, TM and Patron (if applicable).
- Meet the departing priest to gather a list of tasks which s/he does and which will need to be done by someone else.
- Meet with the leadership team, standing committee, and PCC as appropriate to work out how these tasks will be covered and what arrangements need to be made to say 'goodbye' to the priest.
- Consider, with the appropriate bodies, the workload of the parish/benefice administrator and the possibility of paying for extra hours during the period of the vacancy.
- Assist the TM in the gathering of information for a Parish Review.
- Refer to the resource 'Growing Through a Vacancy' which the TM will provide.

Once the vacancy has started:

- Meet the Diocesan Property Manager and Archdeacon at the vicarage to discuss its care and maintenance in the vacancy.
- Make sure that, as far as possible, the normal life of the parish continues (both regular activities and areas which are in development).
- Maintain regular contact with the TM who will share the findings of the Stage 1 Review with the PCC/s and leadership team etc. as appropriate and accept the content of a report for the Diocese.
- Maintain regular contact with the Area Dean who shares responsibility with you for leadership in the parish.
- Give consideration, in discussion with the TM, to the paperwork which will need to be created before a new parish priest is appointed (Parish Profile, Role Description, Person Specification and Advert.)

When the vacancy work is running smoothly

- Decide with the PCC(s) who will create the paperwork and the process by which it will be approved.

- Ensure the 'paperwork group' completes the paperwork and submits it to the PCC/s for approval, commitment and (if there is more than one PCC) agree how the cost of the advertisement will be met and how payment will be made.
- Submit paperwork to the Deanery and Diocese via the TM.
- Make sure the TM knows who will be the principal contact in the parish responsible for liaison with the HR department in the Diocese.
- Via the principal contact, arrange dates for the appointment process as follows:
 - A meeting of the Archdeacon, Area Dean and Patron (if applicable) to discuss the recruitment process including the appointment of Parish Representativesⁱ
 - Advertising via the Church Times and Diocese of Bristol Website
 - Shortlisting meeting
 - Familiarisation and Interview days

Further Information

- Growing Through a Vacancy: Handbook - to guide clergy and churchwardens through a vacancy (56 pages) available from CPAS £2
- Information about current vacancies see www.bristol.anglican.org/who-we-are/news/vacancies/
- Contact George Rendell, Transition Manager: george.rendell@bristoldiocese.org

Written by: George Rendell, Transition Manager

ⁱ Note about parish representatives:

- Assistant clergy cannot be nominated as a parish representative to interview and choose the new incumbent.
- Team vicars in formal Teams are automatically members of the interview panel of the parish for the appointment of the Team Rector.
- Assistant clergy are not involved in interviewing prospective new incumbents, however it is strongly suggested that they are able to meet the candidates informally.
- LLMs can be nominated as a parish representative if they are members of the PCC.
- OLMs cannot apply for the post of Incumbent and should not be asked to take a leadership role during the vacancy as they were not selected or trained for an overall leadership role.