



How to ...

Understand suspension of presentation

Introduction

Under the provisions of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011, the Bishop has the power to suspend a benefice. When suspension is being considered consultation letters are sent to the parish and other interested parties. But **what is a suspension?** If you've ever wondered what this is all about, here's a quick guide to the basics.

Patron(s)

Every benefice has a patron, or patrons. Historically, the patron would have appointed and paid for a priest. Whilst times have moved on, patrons still retain the legal right of presenting a priest to the Bishop for appointment. Patrons can be very varied – some of our patrons in this Diocese include private individuals, the Crown, patronage organisations or trusts, institutions, Oxbridge college scholars and Cathedral chapters. The Bishop of Bristol is the patron of many benefices in the Diocese too.

A benefice may have more than one patron. Where there are two or more patrons, they may take it in turns to present a new incumbent, or they may act jointly. It depends on the legal set up of the benefice.

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?

At times the Bishop may feel that additional flexibility is needed and therefore, a technical legal step, the suspension of the patron's rights of presentation, has to be taken.

A suspension of presentation is possible if any of the below are being considered:

- Replacement or changes to a parsonage house;
 - Pastoral re-organisation (for example: changing boundaries, uniting benefices, etc); and/or
- A change in the way the parish(es) are to be staffed (the need for interim ministry).

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;
- Priest-in-charge (or if Team Ministry: Team Rector and Team Vicar).

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

As part of the suspension process all statutory interested parties (listed above) have the option to reply in writing with their views, or request a Section 85 meeting with the Bishop or her representative (likely the Archdeacon of Bristol or Malmesbury). The consultation period lasts 28 days. The Bishop considers any views/representations received before making a final decision about whether or not to go ahead. The consent of the Mission and Pastoral Committee is also required to proceed.

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 they would have the same general role and duties as an incumbent. Although a priest-in-charge is legally different from an incumbent their respective responsibilities in the parish are the same, and parishioners will be unlikely to know that there is a difference. Moreover the procedures for appointment are very similar.

How long will the suspension last?

The Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 allows the suspension to last for up to five years initially, but can be renewed if need be. The Bishop can also end a suspension early and make the existing priest-in-charge the incumbent if all parties agree. If at the end of five years the arrangements are not yet sorted out and more time is needed, the Bishop must consult all statutory interested parties before the Bishop can extend the suspension for a further period.

Need more information?

The principal law relating to patronage is contained in:

- [the Patronage \(Benefices\) Measure 1986](#),
- [the Patronage \(Benefices\) Rules 1987](#), and
- [the Legislative Reform \(Patronage of Benefices\) Order 2019](#).

Suspension processes is outlined in:

- [The Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011](#).

For any further information please contact Governance Support Officer. Contact details can be found in [Staff Directory](#) on the Diocese of Bristol website.