

Filling a Vacancy: Guidelines for PCCs

Information about what you can expect to happen, and who is responsible for what.

The Preliminary Vacancy Meeting

When it is announced that your incumbent, priest-in-charge or vicar is leaving, the archdeacon, who will support you throughout the process of filling the vacancy, will contact the PCC secretary (or team rector) to arrange a date for a preliminary meeting of the PCC, together with the rural dean. This **Preliminary Vacancy Meeting** is often referred to as a *Pre-Section 11 Meeting*, as the rules for PCCs filling incumbent vacancies in Church of England legislation are in section 11 of the relevant measure.

This meeting is important because the archdeacon will explain the PCC's role in the appointment of its next incumbent or priest-in-charge, outline the process and an approximate timetable, and explain the agenda for the subsequent formal meeting, called the **Final Vacancy Meeting** (or **Section 11 Meeting**). Any questions about care of the clergy house and garden, and issues about cover for services etc can also be raised here.

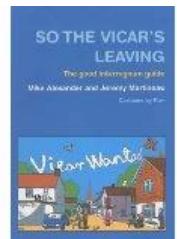
Some useful resources to help you through

Paper E6 of the *Diocesan Handbook* is on the diocesan website and provides guidance about

the arrangements for patterns of services and financial help with the costs of them. There is also an excellent publication produced by CPAS which many have found helpful, called *Growing Through a Vacancy: A Handbook*, see www.cpas.org.uk for details.

Also available in leaflet form with key points for PCCs.

Another good resource is a book, *So the Vicar's Leaving: The Good Interregnum Guide* (Alexander and Martineau 2012)



Suspension? What's that all about?

If your parish is subject to pastoral reorganisation due to the outworking of the deanery plan, the archdeacon will make sure you know how your vacancy fits with the overall deployment of stipendiary clergy within the deanery. If this is the case, you may also receive a letter from the bishop asking your views on his plans to suspend the rights of presentation. Suspension means that the right of the patron to present a candidate to the bishop as the next parish priest is suspended, pending re-organisation. It does not mean that any arrangements to provide priestly ministry will be delayed, and should never come as a surprise, as it will have been previously discussed at Deanery Pastoral Committee meetings. When a suspension is in place and a priest-in-charge is being appointed, we still follow a similar procedure for the meeting, and invite all the same people, though the bishop is not legally obliged to do so.



When does the *Notice of Vacancy* get issued?

Once the date for the final vacancy meeting has been set, the bishop initiates a process in which the diocesan secretary will send to the PCC secretary an official ***Notice of Vacancy***. (For the appointment of a priest-in-charge or a vicar in a team ministry this is in the form of a letter.) With regards to the appointment of an incumbent this notice will name the patron who has the right to choose the new incumbent. In the Diocese of Worcester this is most often the bishop (who delegates this responsibility to the archdeacon), sometimes the dean and chapter of the cathedral, and occasionally other people or bodies. Sometimes there are arrangements for patrons to act jointly. The final vacancy meeting has to take place within four weeks of this notice being sent, which is why we don't send it out straight away. The archdeacons' PA will at this point schedule potential dates for shortlisting and interviewing. Other relevant forms for the meeting will be included with the Notice of Vacancy. These will be used to inform the relevant people of the outcome of the meeting.

Preparing for the Final Vacancy Meeting

The agenda for the final vacancy meeting (section 11 meeting for incumbents) is clearly specified in law, and should be as detailed in the box (further background information and a copy of the measure is available online). However, practice in each diocese varies, and guidelines for how we expect the meeting to be conducted in the Diocese of Worcester are detailed below the box. Most of the detailed work and discussion will have normally happened prior to the meeting, which is the final and formal point of part one of the process.

The PCC secretary should call PCC members to the final vacancy meeting, giving at least 10 clear days' notice. The outgoing incumbent and spouse, and the patron or patron's representative (ie the archdeacon) should not attend this meeting. The rural dean or the deanery lay chair may be invited to attend, and can chair the meeting if you wish. This is particularly useful in the case of multi-parish benefices. If necessary the meeting can be adjourned provided that it completes its business within the specified period.

The law with regard to the appointments of priests-in-charge and vicars in team ministries is less specific than for incumbents and therefore depending on the circumstances the diocesan secretary's notice of vacancy letter may specify a longer period than 28 days for the PCC to hold its meeting.



Preparing your Parish Profile

The most important piece of work you will need to do as a PCC prior to the final vacancy meeting is prepare your parish profile. You can start on this as soon as you know you have a vacancy to fill, and often some of the potential content will already be on your church's web site, if you have one, or in other PCC documents and vision statements. It is sensible for the PCC to appoint a small group to draw up a draft, and the final version will need to be ready for final approval at the final vacancy meeting, so the PCC and archdeacon should have seen it by that stage and had opportunity for comment. Please see the following information sheet entitled: ***How to Prepare a Parish Profile***

The agenda needs to follow some clear rules

AGENDA FOR THE MEETING OF THE PCC UNDER THE PATRONAGE (BENEFICES) MEASURE 1986

1. To prepare a statement describing the conditions, needs and traditions of the parish
2. To appoint two lay members of the PCC to act as the PCC's representatives in connection with the selection of an incumbent
3. To decide whether to request the Patron to consider advertising the vacancy
4. To decide whether to request a joint meeting with the Patron and the Bishop
5. To decide whether to request a statement in writing from the Bishop describing in relation to the benefice the needs of the diocese and the wider needs of the church

* Additionally PCCs may decide whether to take advantage of arrangements available to those whose theological conviction leads them to seek the priestly or episcopal ministry of men.

Notes on these agenda items (the numbers refer to the agenda items listed above).

1. The statement is the **Parish Profile**, which should be formally approved, at least in draft form, at the meeting. When finalised it should be sent to the diocesan secretary's office, who will forward to the patron on the PCCs behalf, and the archdeacon, who will usually arrange for a link to it to be made on the diocesan web site, and send it to the bishop's office for forwarding to enquirers.
2. Immediately after the meeting the PCC secretary should forward to the diocesan secretary's and archdeacons' offices the names and addresses (including email if possible) of the parish representatives (using form 34 supplied by the diocesan office). This information will be forwarded to the patron(s) on the PCC's behalf. It is the patron's task to choose a new incumbent. The parish representatives have the right to veto the person chosen, but this would normally be because the candidate fails to meet one of the main criteria stated by the parish in its statement. In teams and multi-parish benefices the rules for representation are sometimes complex, and the archdeacon will outline the specific requirements in your case at the preliminary vacancy meeting. In this diocese we encourage full consultation and a collaborative approach. When a priest-in-charge is being appointed the PCC's representatives do not have a right of veto

but the bishop invites them to express their goodwill.

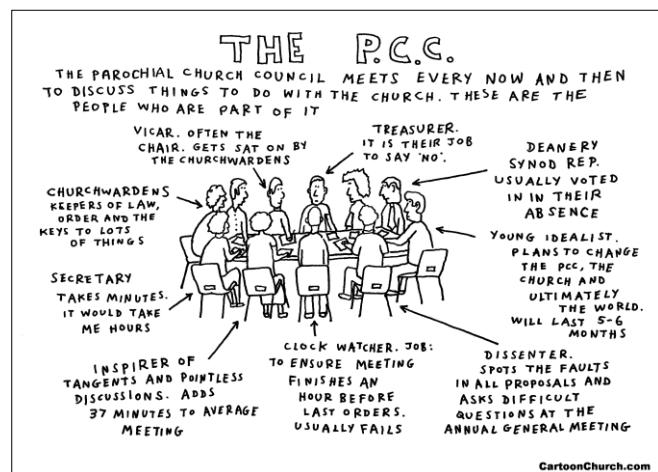
3. It is the patron's decision (or the bishop's if suspended) whether to advertise the post or not. The PCC can ask the patron to consider doing so. In this diocese vacancies are generally advertised on our web site, the Church of England vacancies list, and in the Church Times, unless the bishop has a candidate from within the diocese he would like to be considered first, for example a curate who is coming to the end of their training. The archdeacon will know if this is the case at the preliminary vacancy meeting, so you will know whether the patron is minded to advertise or not.
4. For appointments of incumbents, including the rector of a team ministry, the PCC may request another meeting, known as a Section 12 Meeting, if there have been serious problems that need discussing with the bishop or his representative and any other patron, or where the PCC is divided over the future needs of the parish. The patrons may also request a section 12 meeting (sometimes in order that they might meet the people and better understand the needs of the parish). If the groundwork has been done at the preliminary vacancy meeting we find this is very rarely necessary in this diocese.
5. There is a generic statement from the bishop (which is regularly updated) about the diocese and our *Kingdom People* vision, and some deaneries also have some information

about the deanery for profiles. The archdeacon will provide this information when work commences on the parish profile, so it can be included.

* The PCC is entitled to discuss these specific issues relating to women priests, but it does not have to. It may decide that it does not wish to have such a discussion. It should be noted that all bishops will abide by the five principles for mutual flourishing agreed by the House of Bishops, and the bishop's office can provide more details for those parishes for whom this may be an issue. The new guidelines as of 2015 are detailed below:

- The responsibility for signalling that a parish wishes to take advantage of arrangements available to those whose theological conviction leads them to seek the priestly or episcopal ministry of men rests with the PCC.
- A meeting of a PCC to consider a motion seeking arrangements of this kind should either be one held under section 11 of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 or one for which the secretary of the PCC has given members at least four weeks' notice of the place and time of the meeting and the motion to be considered. Given the importance of the issue such a motion should have been passed either (a) by a majority of those present at a meeting at which at least two-thirds of the members of the PCC who are entitled to attend are present or (b) by a majority of all the members of the PCC.
- The recommended form of the resolution to be passed by the PCC is as follows: *"This PCC requests, on grounds of theological conviction, that arrangements be made for it in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests."* A PCC which has passed a resolution should send a copy of it to the diocesan bishop, archdeacon, diocesan registrar and registered patron.
- PCCs which have passed a resolution may rescind it at any time. The same procedures as are set out above should

apply in relation to a PCC meeting which is to consider a motion rescinding a resolution. PCCs which have passed a resolution should review it from time to time, especially when a vacancy in a benefice arises.



Applications, Shortlisting and Interviewing

Dates for an advertisement (if planned), closing date, shortlisting meeting and interviews will have been set prior to the final vacancy meeting. These dates are the patron's prerogative and are usually identified in liaison with the archdeacon. The archdeacons' PA will communicate these dates to all parties to be involved. The PCC will need to arrange, book and cover the costs of venues and inform her. Usually applications are received by the bishop's office on the patron's behalf, and then sent to the members of the interview panel a few days prior to the shortlisting meeting. All information about candidates should be held by the panel members in strictest confidence. The archdeacon will chair the shortlisting meeting (although if the patron is other than the bishop, the arrangements may be different), and will also use the meeting to help the panel plan the interview questions and format of the day.

After shortlisting, the bishop's office will follow up on references for shortlisted candidates, and send them to the archdeacon, who will bring references to the interview. The archdeacon will inform any candidates not shortlisted, and will invite those who have been to interview, giving

details of the day. The archdeacons' PA will send to the panel a detailed timetable for the day, including any arrangements for candidates to be shown around. They will usually have a tour of the house, the church(es) and key parts of the parish(es), to be conducted by a trusted person not on the panel, who again will need to regard names and details of candidates as confidential.

The interviews will be conducted according to good practice and equal opportunities guidelines, all of which will be explained by the archdeacon. At the end of the interview process, the archdeacon will collect in all paperwork and arrange for secure filing or shredding, and panel members will be requested to delete any details about candidates from their computers. The archdeacon will have usually brought the form to the meeting for completion by the patron and on which the parish representatives give their consent to the proposed candidate. The archdeacon will inform candidates of the outcome of the interview, and arrange for the successful candidate to meet the bishop, before a formal offer letter is sent. Papers to enable a DBS check will have been seen by the archdeacon's representative as part of the interview process, and any offer will be subject to a satisfactory outcome.

Arrangements for the appointment of a priest in charge follow a similar pattern with the archdeacon acting on behalf of the bishop.

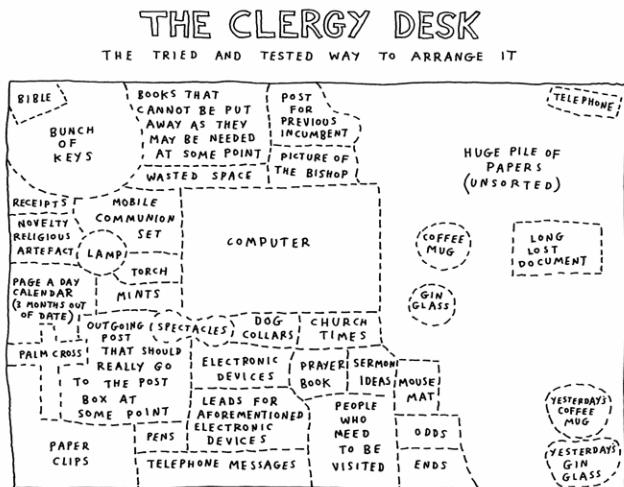
What happens when the right person has been identified?



Once the offer has been accepted the archdeacon will liaise with the new post-holder and the bishop's office will circulate an announcement to be read out in the respective churches. It is important that the embargo date / time is strictly respected.

Dates for a licensing service will be arranged to suit the new post-holder (who will normally need to give three months' notice including a month to move house), the parish(es), the licensing bishop and the archdeacon.

While most patrons welcome the opportunity to follow this approach there are some who make other arrangements. In those cases the archdeacon will explain the patron's way of working at the pre vacancy meeting.



Nikki Groarke and Robert Jones (Revised 1 February 2015)

Filling a Vacancy: How to Prepare a Parish Profile

Information about how to produce a profile which will attract the best suited applicants.

What is the aim of a parish profile?

The profile document will be made available online, and by post if requested, to priests who are interested in applying for the vacant post. It needs to give the answers to some key questions.

- What is the nature of the community or communities we serve?
- What is the deanery and diocese of which we are a part like?
- Who are we as a worshipping congregation, or congregations, and what goes on in our buildings?
- What is our history, and our vision under God for the future?
- What kind of priest are we looking for?

The aim is to provide a picture, giving enough information for a prospective candidate to imagine the role and the setting, so they can discern whether they may be called by God to explore their suitability for the post. The archdeacons' PA Kathy, K.Jones@cofe-worcester.org.uk is always willing to send some examples of other recent profiles, or they can often be found on the vacancies page of the diocesan website. Lengths will vary, depending on whether you are describing a single church or a team or multi-parish benefice, but looking at a few others will give an idea of something which is usually 15-30 pages long.

How should we produce it?

It is a good idea to form a small group (4-6) who can act on behalf of the PCC or benefice. The group should ideally comprise people who are computer literate and able to collate and format the information. They can gather content from all kinds of people, but will need to communicate by email with each other, and someone within the group will need to have basic design skills, knowing how to format text and edit photographs. It is often a good way to get people involved in the process of appointment who are on the edges of the church. They should be representative, a cross selection of the congregation or members of different churches if there is more than one parish involved.

Often churches have an idea of the kind of content they want, and some of it will already exist on your church web site if you have one, or as papers which have been sent out to the PCC for other purposes. If you have none of this, the archdeacon and rural dean can come and lead an envisioning day with the church to kick-start the process.

Eventually you will need a colour document, preferably a PDF, which can be sent as an email attachment.

Key Question: Does this profile make us excited about the future of our church, and describe a church and community the right priest would want to be part of?

What about content?

Content should centre on answering the key questions in a punchy, succinct way, with good use of bullet points, and photos which illustrate your themes. Even if it comes from many different sources, someone needs to take responsibility for formatting it consistently. Detailed below are the areas it might be good to cover under each question

1. What is the nature of the community or communities we serve?

Here you should give information about the **geographical size and nature** of the area. Is it urban, suburban, a market town, small town or new town? Is it in the inner city, with housing estates? Is it a commuter village, or a collection of rural hamlets? Where are the main centres of population, including shopping and local services? What are the **transport networks**? Where is the nearest main line station, are there any bus routes, where is the nearest motorway, and is it vital for people living there to have their own means of transport? This is perhaps a good place to include information about the **clergy house**, or this can go elsewhere.

What is the social demographic of the area?

Give details about the predominant age group, ethnic groupings, other faith communities and any significant social problems. Where is the area on indices of social deprivation? What are the principle industries, if any and how are levels of employment?

What are the key institutions?

List any local institutions, especially those where there is a special link, eg local hospitals, nursing homes. If you have a link with the local authority, please specify. Please list schools in the parish. Indicate size, whether they are church schools and whether there has been an expectation of governorship responsibility?

2. What is the deanery and diocese of which we are a part like?



The archdeacon and rural dean will provide info for this part, outlining the diocesan vision and culture, and describing relationships

and structure within the deanery.

3. Who are we as a worshipping congregation, or congregations, and what goes on in our buildings?

How would you describe your **worship tradition**, for example traditional catholic, modern catholic, open evangelical, conservative evangelical, central, charismatic, liberal or other? Do you regularly use incense? What vestments do you expect clergy to wear? Do you use Common Worship or BCP liturgy? What percentage of your services are Eucharistic? What is the usual pattern of Sunday and week day services? What is your average attendance and how does that vary for festivals? Do you have a choir, music group or organist? You may wish to give statistics for occasional offices (weddings, baptisms, funerals – in church and at a crematorium etc), and detail the numbers on the church electoral roll at last AGM, identifying any predominant age/social/ethnic group, or proportion of worshippers living outside the parish.

Who else is on the **team**? Readers/LLMs, ALMs, retired clergy, NSMs etc

What do you have in the way of **buildings**? How are they used in addition to worship (eg. tourism, community use)? What are the demands of the buildings? Approximate age, is church listed? Seating capacity? Is the church kept open? Condition (list any works required and

approximate costs). Is there a church hall? Are there other places of worship in the parish and do good ecumenical links exist?

Give details about the state of your **finances**. It is good to state whether parish share is paid in full and if you have any stewardship/planned giving in operation, and whether there are any major capital projects in progress or anticipated? You may wish to make available a link to your annual review and accounts.

4. What is our history, and our vision under God for the future?

If you have an agreed vision statement, you can include it, together with any interesting aspects of the church's history, especially if they will impact the role. What have been the main areas of your ministry and outreach, eg schools, prisons, homeless, young people, food banks? What mission work at home and overseas do you support? Are you part of any wider church networks, eg New Wine, Inclusive Church, Walsingham pilgrimage? Do you have any parish partnerships e.g. with Magdeburg, Peru or Morgoro?

Describe any aspects of your church's ministry and mission that you hope to develop, both immediate opportunities and a longer-term wish-list. What are your particular strengths and challenges? What do you believe God is calling you to? How have you engaged with the **Kingdom People vision**? If you have looked at the eight characteristics and identified areas where you wish to work with your new priest and grow, or if you have hopes and dreams about new areas of mission and ministry you would like help to engage with, share them in the profile. It is important that you and your new priest can share a kingdom vision and work towards it.

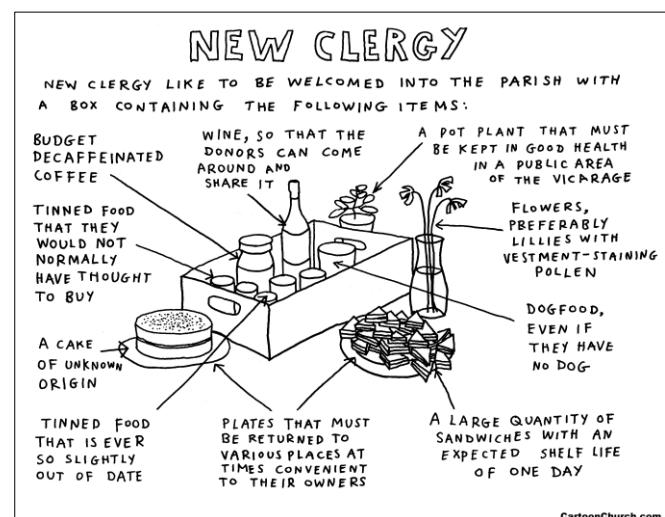
5. What kind of priest are we looking for?

Considering what you have included so far, and particularly what areas for development you hope for, this is where you list the skills, qualities and attributes you would wish the new priest to bring. This list, called a **person specification**, will

be used as the basis for the shortlisting and interview process, so it is important to include the characteristics you consider essential, as well as some desirables. Looking at other examples may help here. We will also use some of the words and phrases from this part of the profile in any advertisements. Above all be realistic about who that next person might be and the gifts and skills that they might share.

The question readers will be asking is: "Am I the kind of person they want?"

This is where profiles often get particularly unrealistic, saying, in effect: 'we want an outstanding preacher and service leader, who has a real concern for young people, old people, single people and the family, has a real heart for ministering to people at the margins of our community, who is a visionary leader but is also extremely collaborative, gets on marvellously with every age group, listens beautifully, loves every form of service going and will visit us all at least once a week unless we are in hospital in which case s/he will visit us more regularly. Oh, and s/he must be brilliant at getting in money, too.' This kind of stuff leads to the standard joke about the Angel Gabriel not being available.



There is an enormous difference between the must haves and the things that would be really helpful but are not absolutely essential. Most profiles mix up the two things. By now, if you have given a good, clear and honest picture of the life and ministry of the church then it should be equally clear what kind of person you want. It is

worth then thinking through how you describe the essential characteristics and then the desirable characteristics of the person you want as vicar. It can be hard distinguishing between these two categories. However, in theory if the potential vicar lacks any one of the essential qualities then you shouldn't appoint them.

So, the sharpest way of looking at it is getting a list of essential and desirable characteristics together and asking yourselves very candidly and honestly: 'Which characteristics on this list must our next vicar have ALL of?' What are the absolute bottom line, non-negotiable, definitely must have qualities?

The answer to that question forms your essentials list, the qualities that you will definitely stick out for. Beyond that you need to describe the other characteristics that you would really like to see. Make sure that your list of desirables is not so long as to be meaningless. All the qualities will be good and important things, but you can't have everything. So go for the most important to you.

Try not to include more than 10 – 12 characteristics in your whole list – essential and desirable.

The archdeacon will be happy to advise and help along the way, and should ideally see the draft profile before the final vacancy (section 11) meeting.

If done well, producing your profile can be a really inspiring and creative time for a parish, benefice or team as you enjoy praying, thinking and reflecting together about the next stage in the adventure of mission that God is leading you towards.

Some Golden Rules

Be positive – you are trying to attract someone to come, so you need to tell them why your parish, team or benefice is a good place to be.

Be upbeat – there are always good things going on and good stories to tell. There are always positive things to say about the future, however tough the present is.

Be honest – don't pretend that things are different from how they are.

Keep it simple – write in short, uncomplicated sentences in shortish paragraphs with sub-headings to break things up. Don't pack it so full of facts and figures that only an expert in statistical analysis could understand it.

Make it look nice – you don't need to get it designed by a professional but you do need to try and make it as attractive to read as possible. Good photographs brighten the whole thing up.

Make it emailable – PDF is best.

You can't tell them everything – you haven't got space and they won't read it. Just keep to the main points. They can always ask more detailed questions when they come and see you.

Keep it human – try to bring in a few quotes from different people in the congregation about what they like about church, what they think about the future, how they got involved, what was the best thing that ever happened or whatever. Just drop the quotes into the profile every now and then to break it up and give a human feel to it.

Think in terms of lists: the best five things about our church, the top three challenges for the future, the five key qualities of our new priest.

Put yourself in the reader's position – s/he may well never have heard of your parish/benefice or know very little about it. At best they probably have a sketchy view of what the place is like. You have to try and help them get a real handle on who you are and what's going on.

Seek help – especially from your Rural Dean and Archdeacon.