



The Diocese of Newcastle

The Archdeaconry of Northumberland

What to do during a vacancy

Notes for Area Deans and Churchwardens

Some useful books:

A Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors;
Moorhouse (Continuum), 2001

So the Vicar's Leaving – The good interregnum guide; Canterbury Press,
1998

Some useful phone numbers:

Church House 0191 270 4100
Archdeacon 0191 273 8245

Geoff Miller
1 July 2007

some flowers and a friendly face are always good though each parish will have its own ways and traditions. Getting together a simple list of useful contacts such as local doctors, dentist, window cleaner and milkman to hand over is invaluable too! Be friendly because this is the time to forge new and hopefully creative relationships for the future.

Collation/Institution and Induction Service or Licensing Service

Arrangements for the Service will be co-ordinated by the Area Dean and the Churchwardens. The following need to be considered:

- Date/time is set by Bishop's House.
- Order of Service is available electronically to the Area Dean who will meet with churchwardens to prepare details. The parish are responsible for the preparing and printing the final copies. Before printing a copy should be sent to the Bishop and the Archdeacon.
- Please check the wording of any appointment is accurate – speak to the Archdeacon or Bishop's House.
- New Incumbent should be asked to:
 - choose hymns and other music
 - make a list of friends, family and colleagues who he would like to be invited to the service.
- Churchwardens and Area Dean together:
 - prepare list of local contacts for invitation
 - prepare and send invitations
 - arrange with the Area Dean a time for the rehearsal
 - make other local arrangements – for refreshments etc.

An interregnum can be a very stressful time especially for the Churchwardens and the Area Dean but it can also be a very creative time for a parish as it prayerfully marks the end of a particular time of leadership and ministry and prepares to appoint and welcome a new priest. These notes are not meant to be exhaustive but should provide a useful resource for Area Deans and Churchwardens as they work together to ensure the church's ministry throughout the vacancy and beyond.

Vacancy

The time (also known as an interregnum) between the departure of the outgoing incumbent (through a move; retirement; resignation; or death in office) and the Institution and Induction or Licensing of the incoming incumbent.

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Churchwardens and the Area Dean to maintain the life, worship and mission of the parish during the vacancy. This responsibility begins from the date of resignation/retirement.

Services

At the beginning of the interregnum the Area Dean and the Churchwardens will agree the pattern of weekly services that will be provided. As far as possible this will reflect the pattern that the parish are accustomed to but depending on available clergy it may have to be modified. A signed copy of the agreed service schedule should be sent to the Archdeacon. This agreement forms the basis of those services for which it is appropriate to use the sequestration account to pay for clergy fees and expenses. If there is a curate or associate vicar in post, they, in consultation with Area Dean, may be responsible for the day-to-day organisation of services. Otherwise, the Area Dean will advise on clergy to cover normal services and occasional Offices.

Registers

Registers must be maintained. The quarterly Wedding Return (including nil returns) signed by a member of the clergy, must be sent to the local Registrar of Marriages.

Parsonage House

The Diocesan Houses Committee and especially the Property Department will work with the Churchwardens to take responsibility for the vicarage. Wherever possible (given the Bishop's permission) the Vicarage will be let this means the house is cared for by the tenants. If that is not possible the Churchwardens retain the keys and should check the vicarage regularly for possible break-ins and for post. If possible, curtains should be kept at the windows to deter squatters, and lights switched on sporadically at night to maintain the illusion of occupancy. If the parsonage is to be empty over the winter months, central heating should be switched on at a low temperature to avoid freeze-up and burst pipes. The Property Department will inspect the vicarage during the vacancy and prospective incumbents will need to look around. Wherever possible it is best if the telephone number could be kept for the incoming incumbent (see later). Further advice and help is available directly from the Property Department at Church House. (Tel. 0191 270 4100)

Income and Expenditure during the Vacancy

The Churchwardens should liaise with the Parish Treasurer to ensure that a separate vacancy account (often known as a Sequestration Account) is kept to record income and expenditure explicitly related to the interregnum. This does not have to be a separate bank account, but may be if this is more convenient for the parish. Income relates to:

1. The proportion of fees payable for occasional Offices which would normally be paid to the incumbent (i.e. for Banns of Marriage, Funerals, monuments erected in the churchyard, incumbent's share of the Marriage Fee). The proportion of fees normally payable to the PCC is paid to the PCC as it would be if there were an incumbent in post;
2. Garage and other rents normally payable to the incumbent of the benefice.

Expenditure relates to:

3. Fees and travelling expenses paid to retired clergy officiating during the vacancy. The current diocesan rate for expenses and the scale for fees paid to retired clergy can be found in the advice from Church House.
4. Travelling expenses for other visiting clergy (stipendiary or non-stipendiary clergy with a Licence, or clergy with Permission to Officiate).

5. The telephone bill for the vicarage, unless this is normally paid by the PCC;

6. Charges for gas and electricity in the parsonage during the vacancy; (the minimum heating necessary to prevent damp and freezing-up).

At the end of the vacancy the income and expenditure (sequestration) account is totalled up, and if it is in surplus, the money is sent to the Diocese, but if it is in deficit, the Diocese will refund the balance.

Meetings during the Vacancy

PCC meetings and the APCM and Meeting of Parishioners must take place as normal, and should be chaired by the elected lay chair of the PCC, unless the Bishop appoints a priest to be in charge for the duration of the vacancy. The Area Dean should be kept informed of important matters relating to parish meetings, and can be invited to the Annual Meeting if this would be helpful, though the presence of the Area Dean is not necessary for the Annual Meeting to take place.

When an Appointment is made

Once a priest has accepted the Living and all the necessary approvals have been given (not least CRB) it is possible to make an announcement. This must be made on the same day in both the parish that the priest is leaving and in the parish he/she is coming to. The new priest will visit the parsonage and inspect the house with the Archdeacon and the Diocesan Property Department. The incumbent-to-be receives a grant from the Diocese towards redecoration; the PCC should be encouraged to consider contributing towards the costs of redecoration, or even helping out with redecoration before the new priest moves in.

When the Incumbent Moves in

Please ensure that the gas, electricity and any other meters are read, and that the telephone bill and other bills are put in the name of the incumbent as appropriate. The incumbent should be responsible for any bills from the day of his or her occupation of the parsonage.

Welcoming the new vicar

It is always good if the Churchwardens lead the parish in making sure that the new priest and where appropriate his/her family are made welcome. Checking that they are offered hospitality as they move in the house, a card,