

# Managing a Vacancy and Appointing a New Priest

A guide for  
Churchwardens and  
PCC Members

# Prayer for a vacancy

This is a prayer that may be used in the parish during the vacancy. Alternatively you may wish to write a prayer specific for your context that may be used in be used in worship and in meetings during the vacancy.

God our Father  
You have welcomed each one of us in Jesus  
and called us to be His Body in this place;  
Send us your Holy Spirit,  
at this time of uncertainty and change,  
to fill us with vision, energy,  
and faithfulness in prayer,  
that we may be true to our calling  
to bring new life to our community;  
And guide with your heavenly wisdom  
those who are to choose a new Incumbent for this parish,  
that the one who we receive  
may be a wise and gentle shepherd of your people:  
    ready to serve us with joy,  
    to build us up in faith,  
and to lead us by example  
in loving obedience to your son,  
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

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# Introduction

A vacancy is a time of transition which brings with it different emotions, hopes and fears. It can be a time when parishioners feel a sense of loss that needs to be taken seriously. It can also be a time of growth, where talents can grow and emerge.

During a vacancy people will be reflecting on the past, present and future, considering what are the strengths to celebrate and build on and what changes might be necessary. It is above all a time for seeking God's guidance and leading for the next chapter of worship and witness, a time for rootedness in prayer. The time of vacancy is a time to ask some important questions:

- What might God be calling us to do?
- Who or what might God be calling us to be?

It is our hope that through a vacancy being open to God and guided by the Holy Spirit parishes can work in new and creative ways that will give hope for the future and thereby, in response to God's immense love, live and tell the Gospel story.

Through the vacancy you will be supported by the Bishops, your Archdeacon, your Area Dean, Lay Dean and the different departments of the Diocesan Support Staff. This document outlines the vacancy process. Full details of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 are available through the Assistant Diocesan Secretary. The Measure sets out all that you should need to know about managing the vacancy process but there are bound to be times when you will have other question to raise.

Please consider us and our PAs your key points of contact for any queries you have through the vacancy process.



Simon Hill  
Archdeacon of Taunton

Anne Gell  
Archdeacon of Wells

Adrian Youngs  
Archdeacon of Bath

# Practicalities during a vacancy

## Leadership

During the vacancy the Churchwardens and Area Dean have legal responsibility. Any licensed clergy (eg Curate, associate minister or PTO) and Readers will assist them. This does not mean that Churchwardens must do everything but they must ensure that it is done. A lay chair (who need not be a Churchwarden) will chair the PCC and also the APCM, if it occurs during the vacancy.

It is often helpful to have a small management team or transition group to co-ordinate activities in the vacancy. The Churchwardens should be part of any such group along with any person licensed to have specific ministerial responsibilities.

## Worship

During the vacancy Churchwardens are responsible for the provision of services. As far as possible services should follow the established pattern. In some cases the number of services may have to be reduced depending on the availability of clergy and authorised ministers but this should not be done without careful consideration and in consultation with the Area Dean.

## Occasional Offices

In the absence of an incumbent any publicity should be clear on how arrangements can be made for weddings, baptisms and funerals. The local funeral directors should be told who to contact in the event of a funeral request.

## Finances

The Diocesan Board of Finance will pay a service fee (where appropriate) and travelling expenses. Claim forms are available from Jessica Cook, Parish Share and Stipends Officer

E: [jessica.cook@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:jessica.cook@bathwells.anglican.org)

T: 01749 685126

## Churchyards

During the vacancy the Area Dean is responsible for considering all applications for churchyard memorials.

## Care of the Vicarage/Rectory

The Property Department will contact the churchwardens about the Vicarage and care of the vicarage during the vacancy. They may arrange for the property to be rented out. Any queries about the property should be addressed to Ali Walker or Annabel Cook, Property Coordinators:

E: [property.helpdesk@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:property.helpdesk@bathwells.anglican.org)

T: 01749 685144 (Ali) or T: 01749 588902 (Annabel)

## Communication

It would be important to keep the church community and the wider community up to date with the process. A useful maxim is “tell as many people as much as you can, as often as you can”. Consider regular updates in church communications and have a contact person on the PCC who people can talk to.

## Curates in Training

Where there is a curate in Initial Ministerial Education Phase 2, the Diocesan Director of Training, in consultation with the Archdeacon, will appoint someone to take on the training and supervisory role.

## Prayer

Prayer should undergird all that you do. Consider what is appropriate to your context as regards prayers in services, prayer meetings and a vacancy prayer. An alternative short prayer to the one given earlier in this booklet is:

God our Father,  
help us to put our trust in you  
to send your chosen person  
to lead us on  
to where you would have us to be  
Amen

# The appointment process

## Legal Framework and Spiritual Context

Every benefice in the Church of England (whether it consists of a single parish or a group of parishes) has a patron, whose responsibility it is to nominate a new incumbent (vicar or rector) to the Bishop when the benefice falls vacant. This is called the right of presentation to a vacant benefice.

The patron may be the Bishop, an individual, the Diocesan Board of Patronage, a college, a society or a group of individuals. If more than one body is involved, patronage is either exercised jointly or by turns depending on the provisions of the pastoral scheme which created the benefice.

Under the provisions of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 the Bishop has the power to suspend the right of presentation of a patron to a vacant benefice in order to allow plans for pastoral reorganisation to be considered or implemented. If the Bishop wishes to suspend the patron's right of presentation there will be a full consultation with all interested parties. In such circumstances, a priest in charge will be appointed until such a time when the patron's rights will be reinstated. Although a priest in charge is legally different from an incumbent, the responsibilities in the benefice are identical and most parishioners are unlikely to know that there is any distinction.

If the patron's right of presentation is suspended, the usual provisions of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, the legal framework upon which all vacancies are filled, will not apply. However, the Bishop will endeavour to follow the spirit of the Measure and consult all the interested parties in making an appointment including patrons.

The law with regard to priests in charge, associate priests and vicars in team ministries is less specific and there are slightly different procedures. In certain cases for specific reasons, it may be considered that interim ministry is appropriate.

Whatever the exact nature of the post the next stage in the life of the benefice must be seen in a spiritual context and as a discernment process, and the best way to discern God's will is through prayer and waiting upon God. This should underpin all that is done.

During the appointment process the Archdeacon acts as the Bishop's representative. After the vacancy is announced the Archdeacon will meet with the churchwardens to discuss practicalities, outline the vacancy process and set a date for meeting with the PCC(s).

In order to advise the Bishop, the parishes and the Deanery Mission and Pastoral Group will need to consider whether the post should be replaced like for like or whether there will be any changes. It will be important to consider how the post fits into the Deanery Plan.

### **Pre Section 11 Meeting**

Once the vacancy starts the Designated Officer (Assistant Diocesan Secretary) will send out an official Notice of Vacancy (Form 31) to the PCC Secretary and Form 34, Appointment of Parish Representatives, to be completed by the PCC Secretary after the Section 11 Vacancy meeting and returned to the Designated Officer. The Section 11 Vacancy meeting of joint PCCs must take place within 6 months of this letter being sent. The PCC Secretary should convene this meeting giving at least 10 clear days notice.

The Archdeacon in conjunction with the Area Dean, Lay Dean, the Diocesan Parish Consultancy Officer and churchwardens will convene a vacancy (pre Section 11) meeting. The meeting is for all members of the PCCs, any assistant clergy, Readers and such others as the Archdeacon agrees with the churchwardens.

At the meeting advice will be given on:

- Practical arrangements
- Advice on the procedures that must be followed in making an appointment
- How to compile parish/benefice profile
- A draft timetable will be discussed for the interview process

### **Section 11 Vacancy Meeting**

This is a specially convened meeting of the PCC (held jointly where there is more than one PCC involved). It should be chaired by one of the lay vice chairs, and the Area Dean may be invited to attend. The meeting comprises the following:

1. Approve the parish/benefice profile. The profile will require detailed work (see Profile section below). This is the work of a group with someone acting as co-ordinator. A draft should be seen by the Archdeacon. The final version must be approved by all PCCs. When finalised it should be sent to the Archdeacon.
2. Appoint lay members of each PCC to act as representatives in the selection of a new incumbent. Two representatives should be elected by each PCC. In case of multi parish benefices of more than half a dozen parishes our guidance is to limit to one each otherwise the interview panel becomes very large. The PCC is effectively delegating its responsibilities for the appointment to their representatives so it is important that they represent the breadth of the congregation and have the confidence of all.
3. Decide whether to request that the vacancy is advertised. The PCC can only request advertising, and they are responsible for the cost of advertising. The final decision lies with the patron. Posts in this Diocese are generally advertised in the Church Times and on the diocesan website.
4. For appointments of incumbents, 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. If there were a Section 12 meeting, it can significantly lengthen the vacancy.

5. Decide whether to request a written statement from the Bishop describing the needs of the wider church in relation to the parish or benefice. This is rarely needed as the Deanery provides a brief statement about its role and the Archdeacon supplies a generic statement on the Diocese and its vision of the future.

No other business should be transacted at the Section 11 meeting. It is possible for an ordinary meeting of the PCC to follow on from the Section 11 Meeting but this must be distinct.

### **Writing the Parish/Benefice Profile**

The parish profile is the shop window for the parish and requires careful consideration.

The profile should include the following bearing in mind the following order for looking to the future:

1. **Vision** for the future of the parish/benefice
2. **Key Tasks** which will enable you to carry out the Vision
3. **Skills** of the priest and the congregation that will allow you to achieve the Key Tasks
4. **Qualities** of the priest you are looking for

The profile is a detailed document giving information on, amongst other things, the local context, the congregation, ministry, mission, buildings, the finances, the future, the Deanery and the Diocese. It aims to be really clear in saying to potential applicants who you are and what you offer.

Detailed guidance on writing a parish profile is available at:

<http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/supporting-parishes/ministry-support-vacancies/parochial-appointments/>

Assistance in writing the profile is available from our Parish Consultancy team:

**Caroline Bruce:** [caroline.bruce@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:caroline.bruce@bathwells.anglican.org) T: 01749 685127

Alongside Caroline, the team has two Parish Vacancy Support Advisers, Sandra O'Shea and Lisa Face. Sandra and Lisa work with particular parishes, with whom they will share contact details. If you have any difficulty getting in touch with any members of the team please contact Josie Halla, [ministryformission@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:ministryformission@bathwells.anglican.org) or 01749 685104 and she will be happy to help.

### **Writing a Role Description**

Alongside the Parish Profile it is necessary to write a Role Description.

A template form is available from the Archdeacon's office, along with guidance notes at:

<http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Guidance-on-Writing-Role-Descriptions-2018.pdf>  
<http://www.bathandwells.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Template-Role-Description-2018.docx>

There is generic information as well as a section on key tasks which will be based around information given in the Parish Profile. This will form part of the interview pack.

When a new incumbent starts their post, the role description is signed by the new incumbent and the archdeacon and then forwarded to Human Resources Department at Flourish House, Cathedral Park Wells, Somerset BA5 1FD.

## Applications, Shortlisting and Interviewing

Dates for an advertisement, closing date, shortlisting meeting and interviews will be agreed. These dates are the patron's prerogative and are usually arranged by the Archdeacon. The Archdeacon's PA will communicate these dates to all parties involved. The PCC will need to arrange, book and cover the costs of venues. Travel and also advertisement costs also fall to the PCC(s). Applications are received by the Archdeacon'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 and will also use the meeting to help the panel plan the interview questions and format of the day. Sometimes a shortlisting meeting is not necessary. After shortlisting, the Archdeacon's office will follow up on references for shortlisted candidates.

The Archdeacon will inform any candidates not shortlisted, and will invite those who have been to interview. The benefice will finalise arrangements for the benefice tour day, evening reception for candidates and the location for interviews. They will usually have a tour of the parsonage house, the church(es) and key parts of the parish(es). Tours are to be conducted by a trusted person not on the panel, who again will need to regard names and details of candidates as confidential. Overnight accommodation may be required by some of the candidates – this should not be with parishioners but somewhere near such as a local B&B or pub. The benefice will inform the Archdeacon's PA of the tour day arrangements and interview location. The Archdeacon's PA will send a detailed timetable to the candidates and the interview panel .

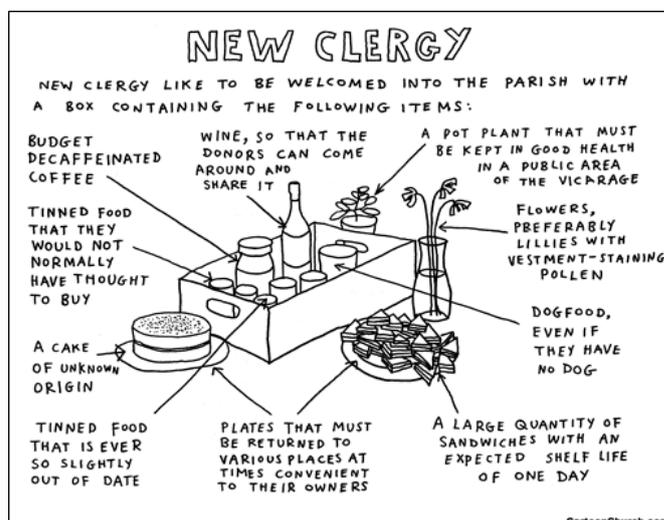
The interviews will be conducted according to good practice and equal opportunities guidelines. At the end of the interview process, the Archdeacon will collect in all paperwork and arrange for secure filing or shredding, and panel members will be requested to delete any details about candidates from their computers. The Archdeacon will bring 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 the candidates of the outcome of the interview. The appointment of a candidate will be subject to a satisfactory DBS check.

## 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 Archdeacon's office will circulate an announcement to be read out in the respective churches. It is important that the appointment remains confidential until an agreed formal announcement is made in church.

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.

The Area Dean will guide Churchwardens in organising the Institution and Induction service and will organise a rehearsal. Service templates are available from the archdeacon's PA.



# Preparation Notes for Licensings

## Invitations

### A suggested template invitation:

The Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councils of  
request the pleasure of your company  
at  
the Celebration for a New Ministry  
of  
The Reverend .....  
as  
.....  
by The Rt Revd ..... Bishop of .....  
and The Ven..... Archdeacon of .....  
at ..... Church .....  
on..... at 7.00 pm  
and afterwards for refreshments in .....(eg the Church Hall)  
RSVP to.....by.....  
Robing ( Choir Dress) for Clergy/Readers to take place in .....

Invitations can be sent by email or printed. It is customary to invite the following:

- Those on the Parish Priest Designate's list, i.e. family and friends, past parishioners, etc.
- Clergy and Readers of the Deanery
- Other Clergy and Readers who have helped during the vacancy
- Ecumenical partners

Community guests including those who will be giving greetings, for example; the Mayor (where appropriate) the Chairman of the Parish Council, Head Teacher etc. Churches are encouraged to invite people from across the community as this is a mission opportunity.

Patrons may be sent a copy of the invitation so that they are aware of the practical arrangements but it should be made clear that it is 'for information only'.

## The Service

### Service booklet

A **template Order of Service** is available

- Although it is a standard diocesan Order of Service, it can be adapted to local circumstances and your Area Dean will be happy to advise in the first instance
- The priest designate chooses four hymns and one reading
- During the final hymn, an offering will be taken for the Diocesan Ordination Candidates' Fund (for those in training to be ordained)
- The new priest should give a brief introduction about themselves for the service booklet including a photo

- Churchwardens will need to send a draft order of service to the Archdeacon before it is printed
- A copy of the finalised order of service should be sent to the Bishop
- Printing is arranged by the benefice

### Rehearsal of the service

The rehearsal is the responsibility of the Area Dean and should be arranged in consultation with them.

Robing and seating of visiting clergy and Readers and the placing of visitors and the Readers should already have been discussed.

The Bishop needs a chair at the top of the chancel step; seats need to be provided for the Archdeacon, and the Area Dean and Lay Dean by the Bishop. Front pews should be reserved for the parish priest designates' family and the patron.

The rehearsal should be attended by the Parish Priest Designate, all the Wardens, the Verger if there is one, the Crucifer if there is one and similarly Acolytes, the Organist and others taking part in the Service, though not the Bishop, Patron and Archdeacon. Those involved in the Act of Dedication may be invited to attend, if possible.

At the Rehearsal, the detailed movements of the service will be gone through.

The parish will need to provide oil for the anointing of the new incumbent, if required.

A Bible for the oaths should be placed at a convenient place near the chancel step.

The new priest is responsible for the brief notices (to include details about refreshments) and prayers.

### Robing

Churchwardens should ensure a separate space is available for the Bishop's procession (Bishop, Archdeacon, Area Dean, Lay Dean, new Incumbent, and Bishop's Chaplain)

There should be a place for visiting clergy and Readers to robe

Robing will usually be choir dress

### Service Register

The Area Dean is asked to ensure that the Register is written up beforehand, **using a new page**. The Bishop, Archdeacon, Area Dean, Lay Dean, Wardens and the new Incumbent are to sign.

### Order of procession

The choir, servers, Readers and Clergy should arrive in procession at the principal door of the church a few minutes before the Service starts.

The Churchwardens, Lay Dean, Area Dean, Archdeacon, Bishop and his/her Chaplain arrive at the principal door for the Service to begin. They may be led by a Verger and join with the rest of the procession.

The Patron and Parish Priest Designate together with a previous colleague or parish representative remain outside the main door of the church until they are welcomed in and taken in procession for the Presentation.

The Bishop's procession enters to the opening verses of the first hymn. The Churchwardens lead the Bishop to the chair at the Chancel step. They should move outwards and stand behind the Area Dean and Archdeacon.

**Procession in:** 1.Cross 2.Visiting Readers (deanery + priest's guests) 3.Benefice/Parish Readers  
4.Benefice Clergy 5.Area Dean and Lay Dean 6.Archdeacon 7.Churchwardens  
8.Bishop 9.Bishop's Chaplain

**Procession Out:** 1.Cross 2.Churchwardens 3.Bishop and new incumbent 4.Bishop's Chaplain  
5.Archdeacon 6.Area Dean and Lay Dean 7.Parish Clergy 8.Parish Readers  
9.Visiting Clergy 10.Visiting Readers

## Parking

Parking spaces for the Bishop, Patron, Archdeacon, Area Dean and Lay Dean should be provided and clearly indicated. Arrange additional parking where necessary and have Parking Stewards where appropriate. Consider notifying the Police if the extra traffic/parking could cause problems.

## Useful Contacts

### Archdeacon of Bath

The Ven Dr Adrian Youings  
01225 873609

[adbath@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:adbath@bathwells.anglican.org)

**Denise Blake**, PA to the Archdeacon of Bath  
[denise.blake@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:denise.blake@bathwells.anglican.org)

### Archdeacon of Taunton

The Ven Simon Hill  
01823 413315

[adtaunton@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:adtaunton@bathwells.anglican.org)

**Julia Gratton**, PA to the Archdeacon of Taunton  
[julia.gratton@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:julia.gratton@bathwells.anglican.org)

### Archdeacon of Wells

The Ven Anne Gell  
01749 685147

[adwells@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:adwells@bathwells.anglican.org)

**Sue Anderson**, PA to the Archdeacon of Wells  
[sue.anderson@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:sue.anderson@bathwells.anglican.org)

**Peter Evans**, Assistant Diocesan Secretary

[peter.evans@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:peter.evans@bathwells.anglican.org)  
01749 685110

**Jessica Cook**, Parish Share and Stipends Officer

[jessica.cook@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:jessica.cook@bathwells.anglican.org)  
01749 685126

**Ali Walker and Annabel Cook**, Property Coordinators

[property.helpdesk@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:property.helpdesk@bathwells.anglican.org)  
01749 685144 (Ali) 01749 588902 (Annabel)

**Caroline Bruce**, Parish Consultancy Officer

[caroline.bruce@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:caroline.bruce@bathwells.anglican.org)  
01749 685127

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[ministryformission@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:ministryformission@bathwells.anglican.org) or 01749 685104 and she will be happy to help.

## Resources

- So the Vicar's Leaving: The Good Interregnum Guide – Alexander and Martineau (2012)
- <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/supporting-parishes/ministry-support-vacancies/parochial-appointments/> Vacancy Support pages
- Parish Spotlights <https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry-for-mission/mission/the-role-of-deaneries/deanery-mission-planning/parish-spotlights/> (useful data on the parish)
- Growing Through A Vacancy: A Handbook - available through [www.cpas.org.uk](http://www.cpas.org.uk)

## Vacancy at a glance

This is an outline of what is involved in the vacancy process. Various other practicalities are covered by the Area Dean, Lay Chair, Archdeacon's office and the Bishops' office.

Task	Responsibility	Date
Prayer and Discernment	PCC, church, diocese, patron	ongoing
Meeting to discuss practicalities	Archdeacon, churchwardens, Area Dean and Lay Dean	
Pre Section 11 Meeting with patron, Archdeacon, PCC (s), Area Dean, Lay Dean and Ministry for Mission to discuss vacancy	Archdeacon	
Prepare profile and role description Support through Parish Consultancy Officer and Parish Vacancy Support Advisers (see page 7)	PCC(s) (through team)	
Confirm timetable for vacancy	Archdeacon	
Section 11 Meeting To discuss 5 items in Patronage Measure including election of PCC reps and approval of profile (see page 6)	PCC(s)	
Reps names to be sent to archdeacon's office	PCC(s)	
Approve profile	Archdeacon	
Approve advert	PCC(s) and archdeacon	
Advert appears in Church Times and on diocesan website	Archdeacon's PA	
Shortlisting meeting (if necessary)	PCC reps, patron, deanery reps, Archdeacon	
Arrange and coordinate parish tour day, evening reception for candidates and location for interviews. Inform Archdeacon's PA	PCC(s)	
Inform candidates of arrangements for tour and interview days	Archdeacon's office	
Interview	PCC reps, patron, deanery reps, Archdeacon	
Candidates to be paid travel expenses	PCC	
Announcement in church	Churchwardens and Archdeacon	
Compile order of service for licensing	New incumbent, wardens and Area Dean	
Invites to licensing service to be sent out	PCC	
Draft order of service to be sent to Archdeacon's office for approval	PCC	
Order of service to be sent to Bishop's Office	PCC	
Licensing rehearsal	Area Dean	
Licensing service	Churchwardens and Archdeacon	
Role Description to be sent to HR	New incumbent through Archdeacon	