

ADMINISTRATION IN RURAL MULTI-PARISH BENEFICES

Introduction

Having an effective and efficient system of administration is an important aspect of rural church life. Good administration can help the work of ministry to develop and flourish. Every new incumbent comes with their own experience and new ideas which are much appreciated. This paper is designed to enable everyone to carefully consider the issues involved in administration and it is hoped that several of the points will be useful to each person and each context whatever the background, in establishing and maintaining good administration.

Getting started

It is essential to gain clarity over what is it you want an administrator to do, and to decide what is essential and what may be desirable. In small parishes and benefices it is often more straightforward to work with simple lists and spreadsheets rather than subscribe to websites which can add extra complexity and cost.

The list that follows should not be read as a fully comprehensive list. Rather it is designed to indicate how wide-ranging the role of Benefice Administrator could be. In establishing this role, it is well worthwhile spending time achieving appreciation across the benefice of the necessity of the role, its potential benefits, an indication of costs, and the implications of having one person as the focal point for administration.

It is quite likely that another local benefice has experience of all of this, and it can be helpful to draw on their knowledge. Consideration of how an administrative post will be managed is important, including how delegation will work, and how the roles of incumbent and administrator can function well together. There will inevitably some overlapping of roles, both with the incumbent and lay office holders. Having an administrator will make a difference to an incumbent's roles and responsibilities.

Here is a list of some potential areas, which of course do not necessarily need to be done by just one person:

- Being the point of contact for all enquiries for use of the churches, including christenings, weddings, funerals, interment of ashes and headstone applications.
- Compiling and emailing the weekly benefice news sheet.
- Acting as the communication link between all the parishes in the benefice, incumbent, churchwardens and other ministers.
- Creating posters, advertising and invitations to events and special seasonal services such as festival services and All Souls tide.
- Helping organise the allocation of ministers to the monthly rota of services.
- Writing up christening, wedding and burial registers.
- Producing certificates for christenings and weddings.

- Drafting orders of service for specific services.
- Compiling quarterly fee returns to the diocese.
- Updating the benefice web site.
- Creating invoices for, and receiving payments from, wedding couples and funeral directors.
- Ensuring fees pertaining to weddings, funerals and monuments are allocated to the relevant PCC.
- Making a list of all the Banns to be called and send a reminder email to the clergy and churchwardens for each Sunday.
- Maintaining up to date information on parishes on *a Church Near You* and benefice websites.
- Handling arrangements for weddings pertaining to organists, flowers and bells.
- Holding a benefice-wide calendar.
- Keeping notice boards at all churches up to date: this includes the annual table of church fees and notices of special services/events etc.
- Ordering of supplies including stationery, communion wine and wafers, candles, certificates, registrar's ink etc.
- Liaising with groups wishing to visit churches in the benefice including arranging events, where relevant.
- Managing bookings and payments for other premises if applicable.
- Co-ordinate and liaise with church volunteers, for example communicating with those who compose the reading and intercessions rotas.
- Manage and maintain the various church databases and statutory records ensuring GDPR compliance.
- Ensuring Safeguarding and DBS records are completed in conjunction with the PCC Safeguarding lead member.

Appointing someone

Whether the appointment is to be on a voluntary or paid basis it is important to draw up the appropriate paperwork such as contracts and timesheets so there is clarity for everyone.

As well as a job description detailing the various aspect of the post, you need to state what level of skills and experience you are seeking. These could include:

- Demonstrable administrative and organisational skills.
- Some knowledge of the church.
- IT literacy (Microsoft Word, Outlook, Excel etc).
- Ability to multi-task and manage own workload effectively.
- Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to deal sensitively with a very wide range of issues some of which may be complex, sensitive, and confidential.
- Good written and oral communication skills.

Stating how many hours you are seeking each month is important. There can be merit in working on a flexible year system such that for example less hours are required in August but potentially more in December. The

more flexibility one can offer, the greater the likelihood of people applying.

To have an initial probationary period ending with a simple review can work well. (It is important that both parties can walk away with honour if the arrangement is not working.) Having an annual or bi-yearly appraisal has merit and is especially important in administrative roles that involve a high degree of communication. This should also cover a review of duties and responsibilities.

You are more likely to attract suitable applicants if you make the post attractive and are prepared to pay well. The minimum hourly rate you should consider is £10 per hour. It is good practice to keep the amount you pay under annual review. You need to state clearly if the post is to be paid a fixed number of hours (per week or month) or is it for the postholder to complete a timesheet. There can be some human resources complexities involved in this and it is important to gain expert advice.

An administrator needs somewhere appropriate to work. It is recommended that this is not the vicarage or rectory. Could a benefice office be set up? This has the potential advantage of being accessible to other people for printing etc. Consideration should be given to the provision of computers, photocopiers, mobile phones, printers etc.

It is of course possible to handle the administrative aspect of benefice life in different ways, including dividing the tasks between several people. One option is to have an online administrator to cover much of the role, including bookings, invoices, rotas, returns and the website, while someone else handles all the printing and keeping noticeboards up to date.

Advice on contracts and best employment practice can be obtained from the Diocesan Parish Resource site at <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/support-services/human-resources/parish-toolkit/> . If you can't find the information you need there, please contact the Diocesan Human Resources Team. The person to contact for guidance is Tim Barnett, Senior HR Adviser (Tim.Barnett@oxford.anglican.org)

Other resources

John Truscott has many years' experience in helping churches develop many aspects of their ministry, including administration. Details can be found at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Administration>

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