

FILLING A VACANCY FOR AN INCUMBENT OR PRIEST-IN-CHARGE

VACANCY PACK

The appointment of a new Incumbent or Priest-in-Charge is an important event in the life of a parish. It is the product of an extensive process of consultation and prayerful discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The process is shaped by a legal framework and regulated by timescales. Three parties are involved: the Bishop, the Patron, and the Parish Representatives who act on behalf of the PCC. This framework ensures that their different roles come together effectively, and that the vacancy can be as short as possible.

This pack is designed to guide your parish through the appointment process. Throughout the process your Rural Dean will be on hand to help and advise you. If you have any queries which they cannot deal with, please do not hesitate to be in touch with me at Church House.

Elizabeth Geddes
*Diocesan Director of Human Resources
and Designated Officer for Appointments*

September 2025

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1 VACANCY PROCESS CHECKLIST

The appointment process begins when the PCC Secretary is officially informed of the vacancy by the Diocese's Designated Officer. This will usually be prior to the out-going minister having left. It is not appropriate for an out-going Incumbent or spouse to be present or in any way to participate in the deliberations of the PCC.

The PCC Secretary will receive attached to an email, a letter containing information and a link to the diocesan website where, via the HR pages, an electronic version of the Vacancy Process Checklist can be found. Using this will enable the process to be undertaken smoothly. It outlines the steps to be followed and summarises the timescales which govern appointments in the Church of England. If you are experiencing difficulty in meeting any of the timescales, please contact the Designated Officer and the member of senior clergy who is taking the lead role in the vacancy process as soon as possible.

2 COMPLETING THE PARISH FACT SHEET

The Parish Fact Sheet provides the **factual information** about your parish, congregation(s), leadership, buildings and finances. It is designed to comply with the information required under the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986.

The task of completing the Parish Fact Sheet is relatively straightforward and can substantially be delegated to a Churchwarden or to the PCC Secretary. The information on this form will be helpful to the PCC in drawing up its Parish Profile, and the PCC as a whole needs to agree the contents of the Fact Sheet.

The completed Parish Fact Sheet should be sent together with the Parish Profile and Form 34, electronically, to those on the distribution list detailed later. However, if the parish fact sheet and parish profile are not ready, it is helpful to receive the Form 34 as soon as it is completed. This enables those dealing with the vacancy to contact the relevant representatives. Increasingly appointments and correspondence are being done electronically. This cuts down on postage and is generally more efficient. Copies of the Parish Fact Sheet and Parish Profile will be placed on the diocesan website along with the application form for potential candidates to see.

3 WRITING THE PARISH PROFILE

The Parish Profile is your opportunity to paint a picture of your parish(es) so that interested applicants gain a realistic understanding of what the parish is like and the sort of incumbent that you need. It is a more **descriptive document** than the parish fact sheet. It allows you to analyse what is happening in your church and what developments you would like to see. Many parishes include photographs to make the document interesting to potential applicants. Please be mindful that whilst it is great to have photos included, especially showing people, so that the candidate knows they already have a congregation, if children are included there must be parental permissions in place as it'll be going onto the diocesan website.

It is difficult for a whole PCC to produce such a document; so, it is sensible if the PCC delegates the task to a small group. In due course they should bring to the PCC a draft document for comment and ratification.

If your benefice is formed of more than one parish, then you will need to decide, in consultation with the Rural Dean, how best to present yourselves. One possibility is to submit individual Parish Factsheets but create one joint profile for the united benefice. In other words, to write a 'Benefice Profile' as opposed to a 'Parish Profile'. If you prefer to submit individual Parish Profiles, as well as individual Parish Factsheets, that is equally fine. **However, you will need to agree on one Role Description.**

You will need to include a copy of your most recent accounts, together with a statement about your current finances.

You may have developed a statement of the PCC's vision and goals for the coming years. This could be included in the Parish Profile.

If there is a significant area which you wish the next incumbent to develop, please outline what this is as it will help you to define the sort of person you are looking for.

Does your parish have particular views of which applicants should be aware? For example, if your parish has written a Letter of Request to the Bishop asking on theological grounds that a male priest be appointed, you should say so. Otherwise, it is helpful to include a statement on the following lines:

'The PCC is supportive of the ministry of women at all levels in the Church' (and mention if previous ministers have been women).

The Rural Dean will be pleased to assist in commenting on any draft profile before it is submitted. The Bishop or Archdeacon who is dealing with the appointment will also wish to comment on the Parish Profile before it is finally included with the advertisement on the diocesan website. The Bishop may also issue his own **Statement of Needs** about the appointment from a Diocesan perspective which will accompany documentation sent to candidates.

4 ROLE DESCRIPTION

Most of the role description for any clergy person will be as stated in the Canons of the Church, together with the standard requirements which are specified in the Common Tenure arrangements.

There may be some specific responsibilities or duties which are customarily expected in your parish or benefice. Examples might be trustee responsibilities for local charities, or involvement in school governing bodies, or local chaplaincies. Please list these in the Parish Profile.

The successful candidate will be required to provide leadership on safeguarding and encourage all to contribute toward creating a safer church. It is also diocesan policy that the successful candidate will encourage the congregation to live out their everyday faith Monday to Saturday, not just on a Sunday, it will be useful if this is included in the role description during advertising.

5 PARISH REPRESENTATIVES and FORM 34

The PCC will need to hold a special meeting, or meetings, (sometimes called a Section 11 Meeting) to ratify the Parish Profile and to elect two lay members of the PCC to represent you in the appointment process. It is helpful if the representatives are chosen to represent the range and diversity of parish life. They should be confident to speak about the Parish Profile and ideally have the skills and expertise to discern the right person. They do not have to be the churchwardens. It would be most helpful if they could be on email to enable prompt and efficient communication. **It is also worth bearing in mind their availability as some meetings and interviews may need to take place during the working week.**

Please note: Parish representatives are required to complete the Safer Recruitment and People Management Module on the Church of England National Safeguarding Team's online learning portal, before they can take part in the appointment process. They should also have completed the Basic Awareness Module.

You should record the contact details of the elected **Parish Representatives** on **Form 34**. You will also need to record the outcomes of any decisions of the PCC with regard to a Letter of Request to the Bishop in relation to the acceptability of a female incumbent, and any wider theological convictions concerning the ministry of ordained women in the benefice. There are some particular requirements which the PCC needs to follow if a Letter of Request is to be considered, and Mrs Liz Geddes will advise upon these as may be requested. This should be done within **6 months** of receiving notice from the Designated Officer.

Once completed, the original signed copy of Form 34 should be emailed (or posted if that is not possible) to the Designated Officer for Appointments (who is the Diocesan Director of Human Resources) at Church House. Electronic copies should also be sent to the Bishop of Chester, to the Patron (if not the Bishop), and to the Suffragan Bishop or Archdeacon overseeing the appointment. Please send this form in as soon as possible, even if the final versions of the Parish Fact Sheet and Parish Profile are not quite complete. On receipt of the form the senior clergy and Church House officials will then know who to contact in relation to the vacancy.

When finished, copies of the Parish Profile, the Parish Fact Sheet, the latest Financial Accounts and Statement, and any other relevant documentation should be sent by email (or post, if that is not possible) to the Designated Officer for Appointments at Church House, to the Patron (if not the Bishop) and to the Bishop of Chester.

Electronic copies of all documentation when completed should be sent to the following:

- The Suffragan Bishop
- The Archdeacon
- The Rural Dean
- The Deanery Lay Chair
- The PCC representatives

Their up-to-date contact details can be found on the electronic Diocesan database, CMS, accessed via your parish CMS user.

PATRONAGE (BENEFICES) MEASURE 1986

Notice of Appointment of Parish Representatives and other matters

Diocese of CHESTER

Benefice of

To: The Presenting Patron

**The Designated Officer: Mrs E A Geddes, Church House,
5500 Daresbury Park, Daresbury, Warrington, WA4 4GE**

1. I hereby give you notice that, at the duly convened meeting(s) of the parochial church council, which took place on _____, (and _____), the following persons were appointed as the representatives of the council in connection with the selection of a new incumbent/priest-in-charge.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Please note: Parish representatives are required to complete the Safer Recruitment and People Management Module on the Church of England National Safeguarding Team's online learning portal, before they can take part in the appointment process. They should also have completed the Basic Awareness Module.

2. I enclose a copy of the statement prepared by the council describing the conditions, needs and traditions of the parish (the Parish Profile).

3. The council resolved:

- 1 to request the presenting patron to consider advertising the vacancy in the church press (e.g. Church Times, Church of England Newspaper, etc.)/Diocesan website/Pathways **(please delete as necessary)**
- 2 to request a joint meeting under section 12 of the Measure; **YES/NO**
- 3 to request a statement in writing from the Bishop describing in relation to the benefice the needs of the Diocese and the wider interests of the church; **YES/NO**
- 4 that it
 - 4.1. is **content** for male and female candidates alike to be considered for appointment. [☐]

or

- 4.2 **intends** to consult the wider church community with a view to passing a resolution to make a request to the Bishop, 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 (concerning women priests). [☐]

or

- 4.3 **has made** a request to the Bishop, 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 (concerning women priests). [☐]

(Please tick one of the boxes in 4.1 – 4.3)

Signed: _____
Secretary of the Parochial Church Council.

Dated: _____

Electronic Copies to: The Bishop of Chester
 Suffragan Bishop
 Archdeacon
 The Rural Dean
 The Deanery Lay Chair
 PCC Representatives

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PATRON

If the Patron is not the Bishop and is an individual, they will usually involve themselves in the appointment or appoint a representative. If the Patron is a college or a patronage trust, they will similarly appoint a representative. The Diocesan Designated Officer will inform the PCC Secretary who this person is. If the legal formalities are not undertaken by the Patron within two months of the benefice becoming vacant, then the Bishop fulfils the role of the Patron.

JOINT MEETING

Once the Parish Profile has been submitted, any of the three parties to the appointment (PCC, Patron or Bishop) may request a 'round table meeting' to reflect on it. This may be referred to as a 'Section 12 Meeting'. In practice, such a meeting is rarely called. If requested, the PCC Secretary must convene this within 6 months of the vacancy start date, giving participants 14 days' notice. In the case of the Bishop or Patron requesting a joint meeting this must be made within 10 days of them receiving from the PCC its Parish Profile.

Once a meeting has been requested, the Patron may not legally make an offer of the benefice to a priest until the meeting has been held, or all concerned have agreed not to hold it, or until the six-month period has expired. If either the Patron or the Bishop request a joint meeting and the PCC Secretary fails to convene it, then the Parish Representatives lose the right to veto any choice of Incumbent.

The **purpose of the meeting** is to exchange views on:

- (a) the Parish Profile and
- (b) the Bishop's Statement or, if no written statement has been requested, to invite an oral statement on the appointment.

The Bishop and/or the Patron (or their representative) may send a representative to the meeting if they are unable to attend personally. At least one third of the members of the PCC must attend, and the outgoing Incumbent and spouse are excluded. The Rural Dean and the Lay Chair of the Deanery Synod must also be invited to attend.

THE RIGHTS OF PATRONS AND OTHERS

Before an offer is made to a priest to be presented to an incumbency, the Patron needs to secure the written agreement of the Parish Representatives and the Bishop (if the Bishop is not also the Patron). The Diocesan Designated Officer will provide the appropriate forms for this.

The Patron may choose to submit a name to the Parish Representatives and to the Bishop (if he is not the Patron), without advertising the position locally or nationally. Normally, however, the Patron will want to involve the Parish Representatives and the Bishop (or Archdeacon) at each stage of the process.

When the Patron has chosen a priest to whom they wish to offer the benefice, they must give notice of this to the Bishop and to the Parish Representatives who must approve the offer before it is made. A Patron will have deemed the name to have been approved unless:

- the Bishop gives notice of refusal within 4 weeks
- the Parish Representatives give notice of refusal within 2 weeks

In the event of a refusal, the Patron has the right to refer the matter to the Archbishop for adjudication.

Once the Patron has offered the benefice to a priest and the priest has accepted in writing, the Patron must give formal notice of the presentation to the Bishop. This must happen within **18 months** of the date when the benefice becomes vacant. If the Patron fails to do this, or if no priest has accepted the appointment, then patronage lapses to the Bishop. In making an appointment under these circumstances, the Bishop must consult the PCC representatives, but (s)he does not normally need their approval before offering the benefice to a priest. ***The Bishop would only appoint a priest without consultation in extreme cases and where the appointment had lapsed.*** Before the Bishop has decided on the Priest, the PCC may resolve that the Archbishop should make the decision and the PCC secretary shall send a copy of such resolution to the Archbishop and the Designated Officer.

Further details of the legal process are available on the Church of England website and in various publications. The Diocesan Designated Officer will be happy to advise on specific matters.

7 THE SELECTION PROCESS

ADVERTISING THE POSITION

All vacancies in the Diocese are advertised on the Diocesan website free of charge. This usually generates a number of 'expressions of interest' from clergy from both within and beyond the Diocese. Increasingly clergy interested in a move outside their own diocese use the internet and keep any eye on areas of the country to which they may wish to move.

At present the Diocese also advertise all vacancies on Pathways at no extra cost to the parish.

The costs of advertising in the National Church Press are expensive. It can range from £750 - £1000, depending on the size and publication. Obviously, a national advertisement has a much wider readership, but this does not necessarily mean that it will generate more or better applicants.

Not all clergy respond to adverts. Some look to their bishop for advice and guidance. The Bishop / Archdeacon or Patron (if not the Bishop) will discuss with the Parish Representatives the best way forward for your parish. The final decision on advertising, however, always rests with the Patron. The costs of an advertisement, together with the reasonable costs of candidates attending interview, will fall to the PCC if the PCC has agreed that the post should be advertised. Any advert must be agreed by the Patron and the Bishop or Archdeacon dealing with the vacancy.

SHORTLISTING

The Diocese requires all candidates to submit an application using its official application form and provide the names of three referees. If the post is advertised, there may be more applications than can easily be interviewed and it will then be necessary to shortlist. The Bishop / Archdeacon and/or Patron is responsible for this in consultation with the Parish Representatives, and in some cases, they may involve the Rural Dean. If there have been only three or four applications and two of these do not satisfy any of the criteria you have set out, it is unhelpful to shortlist them just to make up the numbers. On the other hand, a perfect shortlist could be just one ideal candidate! If the PCC has thought carefully about the essential criteria, normally candidates who did not meet them would not be called for interview.

Candidates should be asked if they have any special needs to be taken account of in the selection process e.g. good access, large print documents, dietary needs etc. When coming to interview, they will also be asked to present receipts for any reasonable expenses, including travel costs.

If candidates require overnight accommodation (essential if living over 100 miles away), the parish will be required to offer it, preferably in a convenient bed and breakfast hotel (e.g. Travel Lodge or Premier Inn) rather than in the home of a parishioner.

All expenses are expected to be covered by the Parish.

VIEWING THE PARISH

The Bishop / Archdeacon, Patron and Parish Representatives will need to agree a timetable and the procedures for the appointment. It is helpful for applicants to get as good a flavour of the parish as possible in advance of any interview. To this end, arrangements need to be made by the Parish Representatives to show shortlisted candidates round the parish, view the church(es), the vicarage and any other significant parish facility. This is often arranged to take place earlier on the day of the interviews, or the day before.

If there are assistant clergy and/or lay workers, the Bishop / Archdeacon, the Patron and the Parish Representatives will need to decide if and how to involve them. It may be important that the applicants meet them and have the opportunity to be briefed on how the parish is organised. On the other hand, if there are difficulties in a ministry team, this may not be advisable.

If members of a ministry team are invited to assist in talking informally to the interviewees or taking them on a tour or sharing in an informal lunch, it needs to be clear that this is *not* part of the interview process, but an opportunity for the candidates to get to know what the parish is like.

Parish Representatives need to be mindful that some candidates may not have told their churchwardens or colleagues that they are applying for the post; so strict boundaries of confidentiality need to be observed to save any future embarrassment.

THE INTERVIEW

The interview panel will normally consist of the Bishop / Archdeacon, the Patron or representative (if the Patron is not the Bishop) and the Parish Representatives. Sometimes the Rural Dean is invited to share in the interviews.

If the interviews are to be held at your church, it is important to select a quiet room where you will be confident that you will not be disturbed. Ensure that there is not a telephone that will ring during the interview and switch all mobile phones to silent or off!

The Bishop or Archdeacon will advise you about the layout of the room. It provides a friendlier atmosphere to sit around a low coffee table in a circle rather than have the interview panel sitting behind a desk with the interviewee sitting opposite.

Ensure that a jug of water and glasses are available.

Candidates may be required to give a presentation. If so, they will be notified about this in advance of the interview by the Bishop / Archdeacon or Patron. The Bishop or Patron will draw up a draft structure of questions, to be finalised with the parish representatives. The questions asked, the order in which they are asked, and which member of the panel is to ask each question, are decided in advance of the interview. Similar questions should be asked of all applicants in order that the interviews be equitable.

It is diocesan policy that the list of questions put to all candidates includes the following:

How would you encourage the congregation in their Christian discipleship and witness in everyday life, Monday to Saturday?

Are you content to live within the guidelines set out in Issues in Human Sexuality? This only requires a Yes/ No response and candidates will have been sent the question in advance of the interview.

How would you provide leadership on safeguarding and creating a safer church?

The Bishop / Archdeacon and Patron (if not the Bishop) will have seen the references in advance of the interview and will ask any questions which the references raise.

Candidates attending interview may wish to seek reimbursement of reasonable expenses, including travel costs, and should be asked to present receipts in support of their claims.

If candidates require overnight accommodation (essential if living over 100 miles away), the parish will be required to offer it, preferably in a convenient bed and breakfast hotel (e.g. Travel Lodge or Premier Inn) rather than in the home of a parishioner.

All expenses are expected to be covered by the Parish.

THE DECISION

Once the interviews are completed, the interview panel retires to discuss the performance of the candidates and agree whether an appointment is to be made. Referral should be made to the notes made by the interview panel member(s) for any clarification.

It is the Patron's responsibility to present to the Bishop, the proposed Incumbent as a result of the selection process, but in practice patrons who are there at the interview will hope for a collaborative consensus on who is best for the post.

The panel will agree whether the Bishop / Archdeacon, or the Patron, will give feedback to the unsuccessful candidates.

Once the interview panel has decided on the person they want, if all agree, the Patron will formally recommend the person to the Bishop. There remain some necessary legal processes before an official announcement can be made, such as a **Clergy Current Status Letter** (CCSL) if the successful candidate is from another diocese. A **DBS disclosure** is also required, and in some circumstances an **Occupational Health Assessment** may be required. The candidate must accept in writing the written offer of the Patron/Bishop.

ANNOUNCING THE RESULT

A formal announcement will be made from the Diocesan Office when all these requirements have been met and a date for the institution or licensing has been set. However, an **informal announcement** in both the old and the new benefice can be made "subject to completion of legal requirements". The date of this is decided between the Senior staff member, candidate and parish. Once a date is agreed, it is important that the Bishop or Archdeacon handling the appointment, and the Rural Dean know when it is to take place.

INSTITUTION OR COLLATION

Clergy need to give notice to their bishop of a move. So it may be three or four months before they take up the new post. The Bishop must give at least four weeks' notice of his intention to institute or collate the priest to the PCC Secretary, who must see that the notice is displayed at or near the principal door of every church and licensed place of worship in the parish for two weeks. The institution or collation can then take place.

NB A collation is the act of presenting a priest to a benefice when the Bishop is patron. Where he is not the patron, the Bishop will institute the priest to the benefice. If the priest is not the Incumbent, but the Priest-in-Charge, the Bishop will license the priest.

The Archdeacon will induct and install (an Incumbent) or install (a Priest-in-Charge) usually during the same service.

The collection taken at the service will be donated to the Chester Clergy Family trust. Gift Aid envelopes will be provided by the Rural Dean.

Appendix 1 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questioning techniques

The questions will be agreed with the Bishop / Archdeacon and the patron. However, the following may provide some helpful advice in preparing some suggested questions.

Questions should be open so that they give the opportunity for the applicant to respond. For example:

Wrong question: "Do you think you would like this parish?" Answer could be just "Yes" which does not help you understand why they are interested

Right question: "What is it about this parish that is attractive to you?" Answer has to give more information

Questions should not be discriminatory or make assumptions about any applicant e.g. that if it is a woman, she will be doing the caring. Appropriate questions to both sexes should be more along the following lines:

"How do you balance the needs of the job with a healthy family life?"

Similarly, to a priest who has health or disability concerns you may ask if there are any reasonable adjustments that would support him in his work.

To a priest from a non-white ethnic background, you should not ask: "Do you think you will fit in here?" You may ask what has attracted him/her to the post and what skills (s)he brings, as you would to a white applicant.

You should aim to ask similar questions of all applicants, but if the answer is unsatisfactory or you are not sure what they meant, do ask probing questions. For example, "What success have you had with special events to encourage new worshippers, and what made it work well?"

Answer: We had a good Mothering Sunday Service and the church was full.

Possible probing questions: How was this advertised? How many were completely new families? How did you follow this up?

It is appropriate to probe their approach to ministry and underlying theology behind it with questions to ascertain how they will work with you. For example, how they deal with parents who are not church goers who want their children baptised, or their attitude towards a large non-Christian community in the parish.

It is also important to examine a candidate's attitude to women in ministry and to consider how their view matches with the views of the PCC which were discussed at the start of the vacancy process when considering whether a Letter of Request should be made. Avoid closed questions, such as "do you agree with the ministry of women" which will generate a yes / no answer. A more searching

question should be asked along the lines of “Please could you tell us about your views on the ministry of women, including the ordination of women to the orders of deacons, priests and bishops”. You may wish to probe on the underlying theology of their response.