



**DIOCESE** *of* **OXFORD**

*A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world*

**Dorchester**

# **Vacancy Guidelines**

**May 2020**

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## **Introduction**

These guidelines have been written to help churchwardens, PCC members and others who will be shouldering responsibility during a vacancy. Although they have been written as if the vacancy is in a single parish, the reality is that most are part of multi-parish benefices. Wardens, PCC members and parish representatives will almost certainly find their work easier if this period is seen as a time of co-operation and collaboration between parishes and congregations.

The period of time between one incumbent leaving and the next arriving can be a time of great growth and development in lay ministry as people are encouraged to work together in taking responsibility for roles and tasks which may previously have been done by the incumbent.

## **The Announcement**

One Sunday morning it will be announced in church that the Vicar/Rector/Priest-in-Charge is leaving. Losing the Vicar triggers a range of emotions among the congregation. Some will be sad; others may even be relieved. There may well be feelings of shock, loss, bereavement and anxiety. These feelings need to be recognised and acknowledged. Then everyone needs to accept that a new phase of parish life is about to begin.

Soon the Vicar's last Sunday will be decided and made known. It is really important for everyone that an incumbent has 'a good leaving' which is carefully and thoughtfully planned, with them, and those close to them. After all, it can be hard to say 'good-bye'. The parish needs to enjoy and benefit from the last months of a vicar's ministry.

It is important that you should not feel isolated: the diocese has a range of people to support you during the vacancy and to assist you with the appointment process.

Prayer is particularly important at this time, both for the future wellbeing of your vicar, and for wisdom and discernment as a new incumbent is sought. You may like to create a prayer and invite everyone to use it across your parish/benefice.

## **What to do before your vicar leaves**

It will be important for the churchwardens to sit down with the vicar and discuss a number of issues.

1. **Information.** The vicar is often at the centre of the information network of a parish. S/he may well know the big picture, where others only know bits of it. So it is important that information relating to the running of the parish is written down. A ring binder is often a good idea, in which it can be noted, for example, who normally orders the communion wine, who has the spare set of boiler room keys, what part does the local council play on Remembrance Sunday. This information folder can be kept in the parish office or vestry and will be enormously useful both during the vacancy and to the new incumbent.

2. **Unfinished work.** The vicar may have been involved in pieces of work which they will not be able to complete before their departure. These may include large projects, such as repairs/re-ordering or other smaller things. It is important for everyone to be clear what stage each piece of work has reached and whether any further action needs to be taken during the vacancy.

3. **Pastoral care.** If the vicar has been working with a pastoral care team, then any ongoing concerns can be shared with them. If the vicar has been doing much of the pastoral care by him/herself, then it is a good idea for any special concerns to be shared with a designated person so that the new incumbent can be properly briefed. Occasionally there are issues which are of a highly confidential nature and may be best held out of the parish, in which case the Area Dean is a good person to talk to.

4. **Safeguarding.** During an interregnum the PCC must, working with the churchwardens, ensure that all information about safeguarding matters is securely stored before passing the information on to the new incumbent. The departing incumbent must give all safeguarding information to the Parish Safeguarding Officer who can pass the information on to the new incumbent when he/she takes up his new role.

5. **Finance.** The treasurer should ensure that all expenses owing to the vicar are paid up to date. If the vicar has been doing the fees administration for the parish, then this should be handed over. In this case, the vacancy may be a good opportunity to designate a fees treasurer and take this burden off the shoulders of the new incumbent.

## 6. **Before leaving**, the vicar needs to

- Ensure the wardens know the whereabouts of parish registers, baptism & wedding certificates.
- Hand over all keys, parish records, confidential files etc.
- Brief the wardens on the different areas of parish life. A sheet entitled 'Who does what ...' can be helpful here.
- Hand over any child protection and safeguarding paperwork/forms to the Parish Safeguarding Officer that they may be held securely during the vacancy.
- Make sure that all vicarage utility meters are read and the wardens as well as the utility companies are given the readings.
- Ensure the vicarage is empty of all furniture and rubbish. (This is important since the parish has to pay for the removal of anything left behind.)

## **Who is responsible for what?**

### **Sequestration**

During a vacancy, the wardens and Area Dean become 'sequestrators', which means that they are responsible for the maintenance of services, care for the vicarage and preparation for the arrival of the new vicar. The sequestrators are also responsible for the money – see Fees and Finance below.

The Area Dean is a valuable resource, as well as holding joint legal responsibility with the wardens during the vacancy, and will be available to answer questions or help solve practical issues.

### **Management**

It is often a good idea for a small management group to help the churchwardens with day to day care of the parish/benefice (arranging rotas, pastoral care, worship provision etc.). This team could be the standing committee, or could be drawn from other members of the PCC. A possible way for a multi-parish benefice to handle all of this is given below. If there is a curate or associate minister and LLMs in the parish it may be right for them to be included in this group. But note that the group is responsible to the churchwardens and the PCC, and this is not an opportunity for mavericks to get their own way!

It's useful to publicise the list of who is going to look after different areas of church life such as enquiries about baptism, pastoral visiting,

home/study groups, church rotas etc.

A vacancy is not just a period of 'marking time' but may be a time of creative discovery and for enjoying the benefits of co-operative ministry within the church and with neighbouring parishes. The Area Dean and Archdeacon are key resources from the wider church to help facilitate this.

In a multi-parish benefice, it is very useful for the wardens of the different parishes to meet regularly to share information and encouragement and to work co-operatively where this is most useful (e.g. it may be sensible to rationalise the service pattern for the duration of the vacancy if it is proving hard to get cover). This may take the form of regular Benefice Council meetings, or other, *ad hoc* gatherings.

In a Team Ministry, the Team Rector holds legal responsibility during a vacancy and will normally organise the day to day running of the parish(es). If it is the Team Rector's post which is vacant, then the Team Vicar(s) will normally organise the day to day running of the parish(es), although legal responsibility is held by the churchwardens and Area Dean.

If the post is for a House for Duty Associate Clergy, the incumbent remains responsible for management and organisation. If it is an incumbent's House for Duty post, the Area Dean and churchwardens hold legal responsibility, though as above it can be useful for others such as PCC members to help on an *ad hoc* basis with the day to day arrangements.

It should be noted that any House for Duty clergy remaining in the benefice continue to offer ministry for 2 days plus Sundays. It should not be assumed that they will offer more during a vacancy, and while they do not assume responsibility it is hoped that they will be in close touch with the Area Dean and churchwardens.

### **The parish continues to function**

The life of the parish will go on: services will take place, there will be enquiries about weddings, baptisms and funerals, the PCC(s) will continue to meet, and pastoral needs will arise. It may seem rather overwhelming, but with some thought and planning it should be quite possible to ensure that everything runs smoothly. And this will be an enormous gift to your new incumbent!

## **PCC**

The chair of the PCC is the incumbent and all PCCs should appoint a Vice-Chair. During a vacancy the Vice Chair takes the chair at the PCC. If your PCC is normally chaired by a lay person, they simply continue in this role. It continues to meet regularly to promote the whole mission of the church.

An experienced Associate Priest or Self-Supporting Minister does not become Priest-in-charge in the vacancy, even if they find themselves bearing extra responsibilities. The Area Dean may be able to advise about the running of the Annual meeting(s) if one falls during the vacancy.

Your meeting pattern is probably well established, but there may well be a need for extra meetings during the vacancy so that everyone stays well informed and the parish's part in the process of making the new appointment can stay on track. In a multi-parish benefice, regular contact between the different PCCs is important, and this may take the form of regular wardens' meetings or more frequent Benefice Council meetings.

## **Sunday services**

As far as possible, your regular service pattern should be maintained: this is not the time to make radical changes, although you may need some flexibility. Non-Eucharistic services may be led by Licensed Lay Minister, but you will need a priest to take Communion and Baptism services. It is possible that you may have to drop, temporarily, any weekday service which you normally have, depending on how difficult it is to find cover. If you are part of a multi-parish benefice, this may be a time when you increase the number of benefice services and come together more frequently as congregations.

The task of finding someone to take each service may seem onerous, but you may have access to retired clergy or associate ministers from other parishes. Do consult the Area Dean, who shares this responsibility with you and who will have the overview of what assistance is available from the Deanery, and may also be available to help out him/herself. Vacancies vary in length, but a minimum of six months is not unusual, so forward planning is very much advised.

Be sensitive in arranging services, so as to ensure that associate clergy, SSMs, LLMs and, where appropriate, retired clergy, are neither left out

nor exhausted. During a vacancy SSMS and LLMs have their working agreements revised and this is done by the Area Dean in conjunction with the Archdeacon. A vacancy is a good time to invite clergy from beyond your own benefice including the Archdeacon and Area Bishop.

Travelling expenses should be offered to all visiting clergy and LLMs. These payments are the responsibility of the parish/benefice – which will not be paying the incumbent's expenses during this period.

It is helpful to provide a simple briefing sheet describing key points that visiting clergy need to be aware of before taking the service – so that they at least know the expectations of the congregation. One of the fruits of an interregnum is for congregations to experience different styles of presiding and preaching.

### **Parish policies**

There should be policies in place in relation to issues such as baptism and marriage of divorced persons. The Churchwardens and PCC should be aware of these and they have a responsibility to maintain them. A vacancy is not the time for changing these. If there is doubt, consult with the Area Dean. Existing policies should be stated in the Parish/Benefice profile.

### **Occasional offices baptisms, weddings and funerals**

You may have a well-oiled parish or benefice office which deals with these enquiries, or it may have been an area of ministry which has been handled solely by the vicar. In any event, it is important to have a clear system in place for dealing with enquiries and arrangements.

If you have a parish/benefice administrator, so much the better. If not, it is sensible to designate one member of the management group to be the contact person and ensure that arrangements are in place. It may be useful to discuss this with the vicar so that you have a clear understanding of what is needed.

### **Baptisms**

There is no statutory fee for baptisms. As a minimum, you need to ensure that all Godparents have been baptised. Make sure that a certificate is given to parents, cards to god-parents, and the register is filled in.



## **Weddings**

You need to be clear about your parish fee structure for weddings, including additional optional items such as organists, choir, flowers, bells. Weddings which have already been booked will need to be handed over to an ordained person to conduct. Because weddings involve legalities, including establishing a qualifying connection, calling of banns, and registration it would be sensible to involve the Area Dean or to seek advice from the Registrar before any wedding is booked in order that the couple's right to be married in the church can be checked. It is most beneficial to have one person who liaises with wedding couples.

## **Funerals**

You should contact the local funeral directors so that they know that the parish is in a vacancy. If you have no assistant clergy, they will normally ask someone from outside the parish to take the funeral, either at the crematorium or in church. If a funeral takes place in church, it is normal for the parish to provide an organist, and there is a fee payable for this.

## **Fees and Finance**

The wardens and Area Dean are responsible for receiving fees and making payments during the vacancy. These should be recorded as usual and remitted to the Diocese in the normal way (if you are uncertain about what this is, ask your vicar before s/he goes).

Funerals and weddings involve the collection of fees. If you do not have a fees administrator, someone will need to be responsible for collecting them and for making sure that those providing elements of these services such as music, bells, flowers etc. are paid, as well as visiting clergy, where appropriate (see below). Up to date information about the fees due for occasional offices and fees payable to visiting clergy during a vacancy is available from the diocesan website

<http://www.oxford.anglican.org/support-services/finance/parochial-fees/>

In a vacancy, the parish can claim for visiting clergy taking Sunday services and their expenses from the Diocese. The relevant forms, and general advice, may be obtained from Mrs Pat Burton at Church House Oxford on 01865 208204 [pat.burton@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:pat.burton@oxford.anglican.org) .

If clergy are asked to do other pastoral work, such as sick visits etc, the parish is expected to be responsible for expenses. In the case of a team ministry where several members of the team are absent at the same

time, the Archdeacon may give special permission to claim from the Diocese. The Area Dean or the Archdeacon can help with further advice on particular cases.

Where a minister from outside the parish takes a wedding or funeral service, the minister's fee received should be sent to the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance.

Only retired clergy (including those who have been stipendiary, self-supporting, House for Duty or Minister in Secular Employment) aged 65 years or over and who have permission to officiate (PTO) may receive payment which is set at two-thirds of the minister's fee. Details about fees for retired clergy are on the diocesan website

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/support-services/finance/parochial-fees/>.

Clergy who hold a licence, whether paid or unpaid, may not receive a part of the fee. However, all may receive travelling expenses, which are normally paid in the case of funerals by the funeral director and by the PCC in the case of weddings.

Parish share has to be paid as normal during a vacancy, as it is a contribution towards the whole diocesan and national church budget and as the diocesan budget already makes an allowance for clergy vacancies, but there are obviously savings on the incumbent's working expenses.

### **Good Communication**

This is essential to ensure that people are well informed about parish life, particularly when the incumbent, one of the main channels of communication, is no longer there. Weekly pew sheets, monthly magazines and the parish website are all important ways of keeping people aware of the continuing life and mission of the church and how the vacancy and the appointment process are progressing.

### **The Vicarage during the vacancy**

During a vacancy the wardens are responsible, with the Buildings Department at Church House Oxford, for the safety and security of the parsonage house. The contact person is Tony Kerry, Deputy Diocesan Surveyor on 01865 208292, [tony.kerry@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:tony.kerry@oxford.anglican.org). Further details on housing will be included in the next draft of this document.

# The Appointment Process

## Background

Appointments in the Church of England are governed by a piece of legislation called *The Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986*, and by *The Legislative Reform (Patronage of Benefices) Order 2019* which came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 and makes significant changes to the 1986 Measure. These notes are designed to help the wardens and PCC(s) in understanding the Measure. Only the Measure and the 2019 Order, and not these notes, are authoritative. Questions about the legal implications should be referred to the Archdeacon who will consult the Diocesan Registry as appropriate.

There are three different parties involved in the appointment process whose roles are set down in the Patronage Measure:

**The Patron** who may be a private individual, a group of people or a corporate body, or in many cases the Diocesan Bishop

**The Parish Representatives** elected by the PCC(s) who affirm (or refuse to approve) the patron's offer of the post to the selected candidate.

**The Bishop** who may also affirm or refuse to approve the offer of a post to the selected candidate, and institutes the priest to the parish/benefice

The system has evolved over several centuries and provides some very important checks and balances. In practice all three parties work together on the process.

## Initial stages

Your benefice becomes vacant on the date of your incumbent's resignation/retirement. Your PCC Secretary/ies will receive a legal document called The Notice of Vacancy from the Diocesan Registrar no later than the date on which the vacancy begins.

Under the new arrangements in the *2019 Order*, The Notice of Vacancy will also refer to a 'Start Date', which is the date on which the **timetable** for the appointment process begins. As soon as the Bishop or Archdeacon know formally that the benefice will become vacant, they will consider when the timetable for the appointment process will begin.

There are three options for the 'Start Date':

1. Before the benefice becomes vacant (but after the outgoing incumbent's resignation has been tendered and accepted); or
2. On the date the benefice becomes vacant; or
3. On a particular date within 3 months of the benefice becoming vacant.

In deciding when the 'Start Date' is to be, the Bishop or Archdeacon will consult the Parish Development Adviser (who is normally the first person to meet with a benefice to discuss the process) and will make a decision based on the needs of the benefice at that point. As a general rule, the Bishop or Archdeacon will assume the 'Start Date' will be the date the vacancy arises (option 2 above) unless the parish(es) request a later start date.

When a post becomes vacant, if there is the possibility of pastoral re-organisation, then the Bishop can suspend the living. This means that a Priest-in-Charge instead of a Vicar is appointed. The Bishop will confirm with the Area Dean and Lay Chair whether the Deanery Plan envisages any change to the current arrangements. Then, assuming that the parish is not to be suspended, the process normally unfolds in the following way.

### **Who will be involved?**

A number of people from outside the parish/benefice will be involved in the process of appointing your new incumbent. Please be assured that they will be working together with you for the best outcome for the parish/benefice. Here is a 'who's who':

### **Bishop**

The Bishop makes the decision whether to license a new incumbent or not and so has to be happy with the person who is selected. In the Dorchester Area the Bishop of Dorchester acts for the Bishop of Oxford, as does the Archdeacon of Dorchester on occasion, in handling the legalities of the appointment.

### **Patron(s)**

The Patrons 'present' the candidate to the Bishop.

### **Archdeacon**

Often involved in the process and is a good person to ask for advice if the Area Dean is not available.

## **Parish Development Adviser**

Will be involved early on in helping you to think about your needs and aspirations for the development of the parish, and what needs to go in the Parish Profile. The Dorchester Archdeaconry Parish Development Adviser is the Reverend Charles Chadwick on 01865 208246 [charles.chadwick@oxford.anglican.org](mailto:charles.chadwick@oxford.anglican.org) .

## **Area Dean**

Shares legal responsibility for the parish with the wardens during the vacancy and should be first port of call for any problems. The Area Dean and the Deanery Lay Chair will be involved in the shortlisting and interviewing to keep the deanery perspective in view.

## **Parish Representatives**

Normally two representatives (or two from each parish in a multi-parish benefice) who are chosen by the PCC(s) and who will be involved in the selection process. At the interviews, they have a right to refuse to approve the offer of a post to a candidate.

## **Preparation of the parish profile**

This is a very important document – effectively the “shop window” of your parish/benefice. If well drawn up, it will greatly help potential candidates discern whether or not to apply for the post.

A good profile will be descriptive of your church, congregation, community, area, activities, services and so on. It's very helpful to put in details and photographs of the Vicarage or Rectory, and its postcode too.

It will be analytical of your strengths and weaknesses. It will capture your hopes, aspirations, and vision for the future mission of the church. And it will be clear about the qualities and characteristics you would like to see in your ideal new incumbent. It will also contain an outline role description and person specification for the new incumbent.

The process of drawing up the profile, role description and person specification can begin soon after your incumbent has announced that they are leaving, and will enable you as a congregation to really think hard about who you are, what God is calling you to be, and who you might need as a new incumbent to help you to move towards this calling.

There is a document available on the diocesan website called “Guidelines for drawing up your parish profile” which will help you as you think this through. [www.oxford.anglican.org/mission-ministry/parish-development-advisers/](http://www.oxford.anglican.org/mission-ministry/parish-development-advisers/) The Parish Development Adviser will also be happy to help you, and you may like to plan time with him to help you to think through the profile.

If you are in a multi-parish benefice, it is really important that the PCCs agree to a joint wording of the Parish Profile, and that a joint drafting group be set up to take responsibility for coming up with a document which is acceptable to all.

The Area Dean and Deanery Lay Chair will add a short section outlining the deanery perspective.

### **Timetable**

Under the old system, the ‘Section 11’ meeting (which refers to Section 11 of the 1986 Patronage (Benefices) Measure and is a Meeting of the PCCs), had to take place within 4 weeks of the PCCs receiving the Notice of Vacancy from the Registrar, and the ‘Section 12’ meeting (see below) had to take place within 6 weeks of the ‘Section 11’ meeting.

The *2019 Order* has simplified this process, so that as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020, there is now one maximum period of six months beginning with the ‘Start Date’. During this six month period, PCCs need to hold their ‘Section 11’ meeting (which is a joint meeting of all the PCCs in the case of a multi-parish benefice), and then, if appropriate, ‘the Section 12’ meeting with the Bishop/Archdeacon and Patron(s).

The appointment process therefore now begins on the ‘Start Date’ indicated within the Notice of Vacancy, from which a period of six months follows during which both Section 11 and Section 12 meetings need to take place.

### **The “Section 11” meeting**

The purpose of this PCC meeting is to:

- Formally agree the arrangements for preparing a parish/benefice profile.
- Appoint two lay members of each PCC to act as the parish’s representative in connection with the selection of the new vicar. These people will represent the interests of the parish at the shortlisting meeting and on the appointment panel.

- Decide whether to request that the presenting Patron should consider advertising the vacancy (for which the PCCs will normally have to pay, along with travel costs of candidates etc.). The advertisement will be written in the light of the Parish/Benefice profile in consultation with the Patron and Bishop/Archdeacon.
- Request a written statement from the Area Bishop describing in relation to the benefice the needs of the Diocese and the wider interests of the church
- Request a joint meeting (the Section 12 meeting) with the patron and the Bishop/Archdeacon to exchange views about the PCC/Benefice's Profile and the Bishop's written statement. The meeting must be held within the six months period indicated in the Notice of Vacancy. The Area Dean and Deanery Lay chair are also invited to the meeting.

If you are part of a multi-parish benefice, all the PCCs should arrange to meet together in a joint meeting, to deal with the Section 11 agenda.

### **The “Section 12” or Vacancy Meeting**

The purpose of this meeting is to set the scene for all that follows in the appointment process. All members of PCCs are most welcome to attend. The agenda is drawn up by the Bishop's Office and will cover:

1. Who is involved in the appointment process and what are their roles and responsibilities.
  - A. PCC – to have produced a profile, at final draft stage, which contains details of the parish or benefice, an outline role description detailing what will be the key areas for the new parish priest, and a person specification which outlines the qualifications, experience, skills and competencies being sought.
  - B. Patron as the individual, or institution, who presents the candidate to the Bishop. They will have insights to share about your parish/benefice too.
  - C. Bishop who needs to agree to licence the candidate.
  - D. Parish Representatives –you will have chosen these at your section 11 meeting. The parish representatives have the right to refuse to approve the offer of a post to the selected candidate, provided their ground for exercising their refusal is not discriminatory.
  - E. Area Dean and Deanery Lay Chair – offer a deanery wide perspective and act in an advisory capacity.

- F. Wider Ministry Team – it's beneficial for anyone who has an authorised ministry to have the opportunity to meet all the candidates. This group may well include SSMS, LLMS, those with a licence to preach, and those retired clergy who would like to attend. While they are not a formal part of the process the Bishop or Archdeacon will consult them for their views.
- G. Wider Congregation – you will need people to undertake a whole range of practical tasks such as providing refreshments, ferrying candidates about, and so on. Above all the wider congregation can support this whole process by their prayers.

2. The task of this meeting is to:

- a) Discuss and agree the draft profile, role description and person specification. This often leads to minor amendments being made before the final version is produced. When the Parish/Benefice Profile is in its final form, with photographs etc., it should be sent to the Bishop's Office in electronic form so that it can be sent out to interested applicants.
- b) Agree who will draw up the Advertisement for *The Church Times* and Pathways website. For *The Church Times*, you will need to have four or five attractive bullet points. Pathways is the webpage where candidates will apply for the post. Here you have the opportunity to write more about the vacancy at no extra cost. *The Church Times* has the widest readership so two inclusions will reach many people, though many parishes choose the 'Until filled' option as current experience shows that this is often money well spent. Details of the post will also go on the Diocese of Oxford web-site at the same time. Patrons sometimes offer to pay the cost (or a proportion of) of *The Church Times* advert, otherwise it is for the parish to pay.
- c) Achieve clarity regarding costs associated with the whole interview process. Some candidates may need overnight accommodation as well as their travel costs both to and from the interview, and any meals and drinks provided across the interview day.
- d) Agree a suggested timetable which will include dates:
  - By which the advertisement needs to be with the Bishop's or Archdeacon's PA.
  - For dates when the advertisement will appear in *The Church Times*, *Pathways*, and on the Diocesan Web Site.



- Closing Date for receipt of applications by the Bishop's or Archdeacon's Office.
- Short-listing of applications by the Appointment Panel, which will comprise the Bishop or Archdeacon, the Parish Representatives, the Patron, and the Area Dean and the Deanery Lay Chair.

### **The Shortlisting**

Hopefully a good number of people will have applied so a careful process of discernment will be necessary to judge who should be invited for interview. Experience has taught that having more than five candidates for interview can make the whole process unwieldy and difficult to handle.

It is at this meeting that the questions to be used at the interviews will be decided. The scope of the questions should be determined by the Parish/Benefice profile. They should enable exploration to be made of the candidate's ability to do the job that has been specified. Where there is a church school, good examples of questions are to ask how a candidate might nurture and promote the relationship between the church and the school, and how they might support inter-faith initiatives in the school.

### **How the interview day might work out**

The day is designed to be one of mutual exploration and discernment by everyone involved. The day usually begins with Holy Communion at 8.30am. It's important that the candidates, and their spouses/partners, have the opportunity to see round the Vicarage/Rectory. Time to visit local schools is beneficial and where it is a church school the panel will be seeking feedback from the head teacher and chair of governors.

Also in the day the candidates will need to meet the Ministry Team and to get a feel for what it might be like to live and work here are essential too. There may well be some key local dignitaries such as the Mayor or Chair of the local Council who could be invited along to the lunch to give the candidates more information.

### **The interview**

This is, by its nature, an exacting occasion for all concerned. There is a great deal of listening, praying and discerning involved. All members of the interview panel are bound by the highest level of confidentiality. It's good practice to keep a record of the answers which candidates give.

This will be a helpful contribution to the discussions at the end of the day.

The overarching question members of the panel will be bearing in mind is not “Is this the best person we can get?” but “Is this God’s choice and the right person for this benefice/parish at this time in its life?”

All candidates should be asked the same substantive questions – although supplementary questions may be dependent on the initial answer that is given. Questions should be open ended, simple and presented in a friendly way. Remember that people need to be allowed time to ask questions of the panel and valuable insights can often be learned from the perceptiveness of the questions that a candidate asks you.

Questions that relate to a candidate’s age, race, gender, marital state, sexual orientation, or disability are **not** permitted.

After the interviews have finished the appointment panel will discuss each candidate and decide on their preferred one. All members of the panel should agree on one candidate (decisions are not taken by a majority decision).

### **Offering the post**

The offer of the post is made by the Bishop or Patron. The Patron completes Form 36 (sent to them by the Registry) and sends it to the Bishop for approval in making the offer. The Patron also completes Form 37 and gives it to the Parish Representatives for their approval (or refusal to approve) the offer to the selected candidate. This should be done at the end of the interviews

If the candidate accepts the post, their acceptance will be subject to a medical report, references and a Safeguarding check. The Bishop is responsible for contacting all candidates after the decision has been made.

The identity of the new vicar must be kept confidential until the official announcement is made. This is normally co-ordinated by the Bishop’s or Archdeacon’s office with the successful candidate and the receiving parishes. When the announcement is made, details of the appointment should be made widely known.

All paperwork connected to the interview process should be regarded as confidential and returned to the Bishop/Archdeacon to be shredded at the end of the interview process. All emails relating to candidates should also be deleted.

Once the successful candidate has agreed to take the job, the usual period for him/her to give notice in their current parish is normally no less than 3 months.

### **Getting ready to welcome your new vicar**

Along with some of the immediate practical things like the Vicarage/Rectory – see below – it's good to think of ways you might welcome your new vicar and those close to her/him. These might include food in the kitchen on arrival, a party of welcome, details of local doctors, dentists, shops, leisure facilities etc. Preparing to welcome your new vicar in a warm, sensitive and hospitable way is time very well spent.

Although you will have been praying your way through the whole process, it is important to remember to pray for your new vicar as they say goodbye to their old parish and prepare to move. It can be a time of uncertainty and stress, and your continuing support through prayer and acts of practical kindness will be appreciated.

### **The Vicarage**

Any queries related to the house should be addressed to the Archdeacon. There may well be works to the house during the vacancy, and these will be organised by the Diocesan Buildings Department who will also have organised the letting of the house during the vacancy. The incumbent-designate will probably need access in order to measure up for curtains, carpets etc.

Although your new vicar will receive a re-settlement grant to help them pay for decoration and soft furnishings, it is unlikely to cover the full cost. Offers of help with decoration (in cash or in kind) are usually very well received and will make him or her feel welcome.

### **Licensing**

Arrangements for the licensing service are the responsibility of the Area Dean and Wardens in consultation with the incumbent-designate and the Bishop's office. There is an agreed form of service for the licensing of a new incumbent (who to invite and liturgy is available on the

website), and it is customary for the incumbent-designate to choose the hymns.

Churchwardens should consult with the Area Dean on who should be invited to the licensing service. Invitations should be sent out as early as possible. The head teacher and chair of governors of any church school(s) should be involved in the welcome of a new incumbent. In the Dorchester Area these services are non-Eucharistic to ensure that those invited from the wider community (e.g. Councillors, Head teachers) do not feel excluded from part of the service. There is usually a party after the service and some thought may need to be given to looking after people who may have travelled a long way to take part in it.

### **Handover**

The Archdeacon's office will send you a checklist of the information which you need to hand over to your new vicar.

### **And finally ....**

The length and complexity of these guidelines give some indication of the responsibilities which need to be undertaken when a parish/benefice is in a vacancy. Throughout this time your Archdeacon, Area Dean, and Parish Development Adviser are always willing to assist you. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with them.

While the whole process of handling a vacancy and making the appointment has its own particular nuances and tensions, it can also be a time of great creativity as we deepen our relationship with Christ and with one another and find ourselves drawn closer to him and all that he stands for.