

# Running a Parish in a Vacancy

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1:1 The purpose of this booklet

- The booklet gathers together helpful information for the outgoing priest, the Churchwardens and the Rural Dean for the whole of the period between knowing that a vacancy is looming to the arrival of the new priest.
- It draws on the experience of Churchwardens and Readers during vacancies as well as on that of Diocesan staff.
- It has been written primarily for churchwardens, but those with whom they share responsibility have also been in mind: the Rural Dean, the outgoing priest and the PCC treasurer.
- Treasurers will find a summary of the financial aspects of a vacancy in Section 8.

## 1:2 Understanding the vacancy

- The careful organisation of the life of the church during a vacancy is important. There is often a sense of insecurity and this can lead to tensions.
- People need to understand that the likely length of a vacancy will be about nine months. Apart from the process of making the appointment, a new priest may not be able to move speedily. Issues of children's education and spouse's work often mean that moves have to be carefully timed.
- Essentially there are two parts to the vacancy process: the search and the time between the appointment being made and the inauguration of the new priest's ministry.
- It is important, as far as possible, to keep things going as usual. This will be much easier in churches where there is a culture of collaborative ministry and where a significant number of people are willing to share responsibility. The vacancy can also provide a good opportunity of sharing the tasks as widely as possible.
- The Churchwardens, working with the Rural Dean (known collectively as "sequestrators"), take responsibility for the life and work of the church during the vacancy but they need to avoid carrying the full burden themselves. The local church should take great care to ensure that the Churchwardens are supported in this responsibility during the vacancy. While specific attention needs to be given to provision of services, the pastoral care of the congregation and others is also very important (see sections 2 & 3). If there is a curate then s/he would take prime responsibility for this, but Readers, Pastoral Workers, Parish Assistants/Evangelists and others can be involved.
- Parishes with a curate will find that the curate takes a leading role within the worship and pastoral care of the church, but they must remember that such a curate is still in training and needs supervision, support and time for his/her programme of training and study.

## 1:3 The Vacancy as 'Opportunity'

- Vacancies can and should be creative opportunities. Many congregations speak appreciatively of the variety of ministry they receive during a vacancy. Clergy and Readers come from a spread of traditions and flexibility on all sides should be expected.

- A vacancy can be a time of consolidation and growth as people become more involved in the work and worship of the parish; as mentioned previously, it can also be a time of uncertainty which leads to an increased workload on a few individuals (especially Churchwardens and Rural Deans!) We hope that this booklet will help promote the former and minimise the latter.

#### **1:4 Other resources**

- All the staff at Church House – please do use them (01928 718834)
- See section 9

#### **Handy Hint**

Ensure that someone in the parish has access to the diocesan electronic database, CMS, to check up to date contact information.

Please contact Church House for a guide on ‘how to register and use the system’.

## 2 MINISTRY DURING A VACANCY

### 2:1 THE ROLE OF THE RURAL DEAN during this time is:

- ◆ To act as 'priest-in-charge' in oversight
- ◆ To help the Churchwardens discharge their duties
- ◆ To offer advice
- ◆ To provide a list of helpful contacts

#### Handy Hint

The Rural Dean to provide a list of Clergy (retired, SSM and curates) and Readers who are willing to help out with services; the list should indicate their Sunday and weekday availability and the type of services they are happy to take.

### 2:2 BEFORE THE OUTGOING PRIEST LEAVES

#### 2:2:1 The Churchwardens should arrange a meeting about service cover as soon as the vacancy is announced. It is helpful if this meeting is attended by:

- ◆ The outgoing priest
- ◆ The Rural Dean
- ◆ The Churchwardens
- ◆ Any Assistant Clergy / Curate
- ◆ Readers in the parish

This meeting can:

- Address the **planning of services and service cover** for the first few months of the vacancy. Any retired clergy used must have Permission to Officiate (PTO) in Chester Diocese. An up-to-date list of clergy holding PTO can be found on the Diocesan electronic database, CMS, and accessed via your CMS Parish Access user.
- It is usually best if the outgoing priest takes a lead in this but shows the Wardens how it can be done for future reference.

#### Handy Hints

- ◆ It is best to plan well in advance and to do three months at a time.
- ◆ Try and ensure some continuity, if possible, by using a smaller number of ministers on a regular basis, rather than lots of different people.
- ◆ If you are in a multi-parish benefice, try to co-ordinate your use of Readers and Clergy.
- ◆ Communion-by-Extension (a service of Holy Communion led by a lay minister using elements previously consecrated by a priest) should only be used if there is no alternative, not on a regular basis, and not without consulting the Diocesan Bishop first.
- ◆ The outgoing priest should not be invited back for normal Sunday or midweek Services.

**2:2:2 Look at what else needs to be done before the vacancy starts (the following may help as a check list), discuss these, or decide when you will discuss each area.**

- **Regular Church services**

- ***Pattern of services***

Is it possible to carry on with the same pattern (midweek and Sunday)?

- ***Readings and hymn at services***

How are these chosen at present, how will they be chosen in the future?

- ***Intercessions***

Is there a rota for leading these and who will continue to prepare and distribute it?

- ***Festivals***

How soon do you need to start thinking about next Christmas, Easter or whatever?

- ***Communicating with visiting clergy and Readers***

Who will do this?

They should be informed of the readings and hymns and type of service.


They will also need to know how much you are asking them to do: lead, preach, read the lessons, lead the intercession.

- ***Fees (see section 8 for more details)***

All travel expenses should be paid; check with the Finance Department about the current rates for clergy and for laity.

There is no fee payable for taking a regular church service for Readers, non-retired clergy or clergy of retirement age who are licensed to a parish.

Retired clergy should be offered a fee for usual Sunday and midweek services.

 **Handy Hint**

Think together about if, and when, it might be appropriate to ask the outgoing priest back to take a wedding, baptism or funeral.

- **Occasional Offices (Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals)**

Discuss how these will be handled.

Who will be the parish contact?

Who will be the parish contact person for each?

If you have a 'vestry hour' when people come to make arrangements, could this continue?

How will you inform the local community and the funeral directors of the new arrangements?

Who will make the actual arrangements with the family / funeral directors, the organist, the vergers, the grave digger *etc*?

Who will ensure that the church building is open and staffed?

Who will ensure that the Registers are filled in?

The statutory quarterly marriage returns to the local Registrar need to be signed by a clerk in holy orders. How will this be arranged?

Who will deal with the fees?

## Handy Hints

- ♦ It is very helpful if the outgoing priest produces a list of fees and what to do with each part of the fee (*see section 8 and form B*)
- ♦ This should include details of the statutory DBF fee, the PCC fee, the fee for the organist, bells and choir and any other PCC overheads
- ♦ Don't forget to offer travel expenses

**N.B.** there is no fee for a baptism!

### • **Churchyard issues**

These include:

- ♦ the maintenance / care of the churchyard
- ♦ the regulations for gravestones
- ♦ the fees for gravestones
- ♦ the upkeep of the burial plan for the churchyard

The approval of wording on memorials, usually the responsibility of the parish priest, fall to the Rural Dean in a vacancy. Similarly, any requests for memorials which do not comply with the churchyard regulations should be referred to the Rural Dean.

### • **Communicating with the PCC, congregation and community**

This has a number of aspects:

- ♦ Deciding who will take responsibility for what area
- ♦ Deciding how this will be communicated:
  - Magazine
  - Notice boards
  - Newsletter
  - Parish Office
- ♦ Being aware that communication during the vacancy will be an ongoing need and planning for this

### • **In a benefice or team**

Provisional arrangements for working together during the vacancy

- ♦ Communication
- ♦ Avoiding duplication
- ♦ Best use of human (and other) resources

### • **Provisional arrangements for how service cover will be planned after the first few months**

Remember to think about this early enough

As the vacancy begins, you should be planning for the period 3-6 months after this (See earlier for useful hints)

### • **Provisional arrangements for how welcome / pastoral care will be provided during the vacancy**

Can this / how can this continue to be done?

Who will co-ordinate this?

What will happen about home communions?

Is there a need for some help / training for a few people before the vacancy begins?  
e.g. for newcomers, for the sick or housebound, for baptism contacts, for the bereaved

- **Provisional arrangements for how members of the church with any leadership role will be supported in their ministry during the vacancy**

Possibilities include

Regular meetings for discussion, prayer, support

Use of Diocesan Officers

Inclusion in the Sunday intercessions

**N.B.** any **training curate** will need a new supervisor; this will be arranged by the Initial Ministerial Training Officer, in consultation with the Archdeacon.

- **Church employees**

If there are employees, who will take responsibility for issues arising with them?  
(e.g. salaries, supervision)

- **Other tasks undertaken by the outgoing priest which may not be widely known**

Is it possible or not to continue these areas of work?

e.g. editing the magazine or providing a letter for the magazine  
chaplaincy work – industry, nursing homes, schools

- **The handing over of information by the outgoing priest**

See section 3

## **2:3 DURING THE PERIOD OF THE VACANCY**

***It is helpful to plan to meet again with the Rural Dean (possibly every 2 months) to review the arrangements for each area:***

- **Planning of services and service cover in the light of experience**

How do congregation members feel?

Are the people involved feeling over-used or under-used?

Is the present pattern sustainable?

If wondering about any major changes

– consult the Rural Dean or Archdeacon

- **Is the pattern of overall activity in the parish sustainable?**

- **Are the arrangements working well for:**

- ◆ Welcoming and pastoral care


- ◆ Support of members involved in leadership and ministry

- ◆ Communication of the arrangements and of any news about the appointment process to the congregation and to the wider community

- ◆ Working with other parishes / churches in the benefice / team



- **Are you in need of any 'outside help' in any area of church life and ministry?**  
Might it be helpful to discuss this with the Rural Dean, Archdeacon, Diocesan Secretary or another Diocesan Officer?

 **Handy Hints**

- ◆ A vacancy can sometimes provide the opportunity for people to 'come forward' and offer their gifts. Try asking around for untapped expertise!
- ◆ Remember your CMS Parish Access user, will be able to use the diocesan electronic database to check for up to date contact details of Diocesan Officers.

### 3 TRANSFER OF INFORMATION BEFORE THE VACANCY BEGINS

**3:1** It is very helpful if **the outgoing priest** passes information on in written form to the Churchwardens for general parish matters and to the Rural Dean and Archdeacon about any confidential matters. The latter could be combined with personal reflections on the life of the parish to assist with the next appointment.

#### **Handy Hints**

- ◆ This information should be passed on, giving sufficient time for any queries to be dealt with.
- ◆ Forms will be sent to the outgoing priest to assist with this process.
- ◆ The forms can also be found at the end of this booklet.

#### **3:2 Check list for information to be passed to the Churchwardens** (Form A)

*(which may then be passed onto the next priest)*

Copy also to the Rural dean and Archdeacon

- **Parsonage House**

- Key holders
- Alarm system details
- Utility details
- Location of stopcock, fuse box, meters
- Gardeners (if any)
- Cleaner (if any)
- Window Cleaner

- **Church Building (and halls)**

- Key holders (including safe)
- Alarm system details
- Sound system details
- Registers (including churchyard plan for burials if appropriate)
- Other documents: e.g. quinquennial report, inventory, terrier, guarantees and warranties for church equipment

- **Parish Computer**

If the parish owns the computer:


- Whereabouts of the machine and of software (back-up and installation discs)
- Password(s)
- Who will deal with e mails?

- **Parish (boundary) map**

- **Visiting lists**
  - Home Communions
  - Nursing Homes
  - Housebound individuals
  
- **Lists of useful contacts**
  - Lists of phone numbers / e mail addresses *e.g.*
    - Funeral directors
    - Grave digger
    - Organists
    - PCC members
    - Lay leaders
  
- **Details of Educational Trusts** (see 5:3)
  
- **Present Parish Practice** (Form B)
  - On such areas as baptism and the marriage of divorcees
  
- **Information about fees** (Form B)

**3:3 Material to be passed to the Rural Dean – with a copy to the Archdeacon:**

- **All the above** (Forms A & B)

 **Handy Hint**

Think about passing lists on in electronic format.

## 4 THE PARSONAGE HOUSE

### 4:1 General

- Day-to-day responsibility for all practical matters relating to the parsonage rest with the Property Manager and his/her team. (The Property Department)
- Their work is governed by church legislation, planning law and listed building regulations, and is overseen by the Houses and Glebe Sub-Committee within policies laid down by Bishop's Council.
- Work is subject to budgetary limits (as decided by Diocesan Synod) and is financed through parish share. In this way, the cost of providing suitable living and working accommodation for priests and their families is shared by all parishes.

### 4:2 When the former priest moves out

**As soon as the information is available, the Churchwardens should alert the Property Department as to the exact date on which the parsonage house will become vacant.** Unless they direct otherwise:

- Utility meters should be read within a day or two of vacation of the house, and any oil-tank checked. Meter readings should be passed on to the Property Department.
- Keys should be retained by one of the Churchwardens
- The intruder alarm and any other security systems should be left set.
- The telephone line must not be disconnected. Rather an answerphone message should be recorded to redirect callers to the curate, churchwarden or other appropriate person
- In the colder parts of the year, both the central heating and water systems are usually drained down and this will be arranged by the Property Department at Church House. If for a particular reason the Churchwardens feel the heating should remain on, please contact the Property Department to discuss.
- Our insurers require weekly checks to be carried out on the house, by the churchwardens whilst it remains empty. Confirmation that the property has been checked and no problems identified, should be sent by email to the Property Department. Any problems should be reported to the Property Department immediately.
- In the growing season, arrangements should be made for grass-cutting and other basic garden maintenance
- Ensure that post is re-directed to the former priest and that the Diocesan office knows the address to which diocesan mail should be sent (usually one of the Churchwardens or the PCC Secretary) during the vacancy.

### 4:3 Vacancy inspection

- The Property Manager will arrange a date for an inspection of the empty house, together with the Archdeacon, the Rural Dean and Churchwardens.
- The subsequent report, detailing what work is needed to bring the house up to standard, may go to the Houses and Glebe Sub-Committee for approval.

- The Property Department will instruct the appointed contractors to carry out the approved works.

#### **4:4 Letting during vacancy**

- If there is likely to be sufficient time before the house is required for an incoming priest, it might be let by the diocese.
- The Property Manager is responsible for finding a tenant and for the preparation of the necessary assured short-hold tenancy agreement, which avoids creating any security of tenure.
- The tenancy agreement may be signed by the Diocese's Managing Agents on behalf of the sequestrators acting in a vacancy

#### **4:5 When a new priest is identified**

**The Churchwardens should advise the Property Department of the new priest's contact details and date of expected occupancy.**


- At this stage, the new priest may request a meeting at the house, with the Property Manager if they wish.
- It is the responsibility of the PCC to arrange and pay for internal decorations throughout and for appropriate floor coverings in the "public" parts of the house *i.e.* the study, hall and stairs. This should be discussed and agreed with the incoming priest first.

#### **4:6 When the new priest moves in**

**The Churchwardens should confirm to the Property Department, the date when the new priest moves into the property.**

Apart from the normal courtesies of welcome due to a new neighbour, the Churchwardens should ensure that the new priest:

- receives all keys to the house, garage and other outbuildings
- knows how to operate the intruder alarm and any other security systems
- understands the operation of the central heating system and the answerphone
- is aware of the location of stopcock and utility meters
- has a list of church and local contacts, with telephone numbers.

 **Handy Hint**

Consult section 8 for a summary of the financial aspects.

## 5 THE CONTINUING LIFE OF THE CHURCH

### 5:1 PCC Meetings

- The PCC should continue to meet during the vacancy and the whole PCC should be involved in drawing up the parish profile.
- The agenda for each meeting should be sent, in advance, to the Rural Dean and a copy of the minutes from each meeting should also be sent.
- If there are major items (e.g. decisions about buildings, employment of church workers) the Rural Dean may wish to be present and days for these meetings need to be set with this in mind.

#### Handy Hint

- ♦ If your Annual Meeting will take place during the vacancy:
  - Plan for this in good time
  - Consult your Rural Dean &/or Diocesan Secretary if advice is needed

### 5:2 Church Schools

- It is likely that the outgoing priest has been involved in a number of ways
  - As a governor
  - Taking assemblies
  - Teaching RE
  - Pastoral care of staff
- Others in the parish may be able to be involved, with the consent of the school, in each of these areas.
- If you feel that there should be a Foundation (church-appointed) governor to fill the gap during the vacancy, please contact the Diocesan Director of Education at Church House for advice. This could be particularly important if the school is likely to face an OFSTED inspection &/or if the Governing Body is already short of members.

### 5:3 Educational Trusts

- If there is a Church school or house or a former school or house, there will be an educational charity and the priest is usually a trustee.
- If Church officers are trustees of such a charity (buildings or funds from the sale of premises), they must not confuse their role as Church officer with that of trustee.
- All funds must be kept separate from Church funds and used only in accordance with the terms of the educational charity.
- In cases where the priest is the sole trustee, it would be helpful to advise Education staff in Church House, from whom further advice on matters in connection with Church educational charities can be obtained.

### 5:4 Safeguarding Issues

- If the outgoing priest has acted as the Lead Recruiter for the parish, a new one will need to be registered with thirtyone:eight (formerly known as CCPAS). Please see the Diocesan website for further information.

### **5:5 Role of the Rural Dean towards the end of the vacancy**

It is also a good idea for the Rural Dean to meet with the Churchwardens or Standing Committee to discuss preparations for the arrival of the parish priest. Among areas worthy of discussion are:

- Ensuring the PCC fully understand their responsibility for meeting full working expenses.
- Raising the issue of how they will minister and support the new priest (and his or her family). Most clergy seriously overwork, often at the expense of their families. Local church leaders need to be aware of this danger.
- Raising awareness that the new parish priests will always be different from those who they follow. They will bring different skills and ways of doing things. They also need to be sensitive to the inherent 'tradition' or 'culture' of their parish.
- Reminding the PCC that discovering God's purpose lies at the heart of Christian Ministry. The new priest is not there to be simply a 'Customer Service Manager'. S/he must have space for prayer, study and reflection.
- Consideration needs to be given to the arrival and welcome of the family. Churchwardens play an important part in helping the new family to adjust to different surroundings.
- Careful consideration needs to be given to the Induction or licensing (see section 7) and to the first Sunday in the new parish(es)

## 6 THE APPOINTMENT PROCESS

### 6:1 General

- The process of appointing a new priest to fill a vacancy is a complicated one, governed by church legislation the main purpose of which is to find, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a person who feels called to the parish and who is acceptable to the parish, to the Bishop (who shares the cure of souls) and to the patron (if that is a body or individual other than the Bishop).
- The process depends on whether the new priest is to be appointed as a priest or as a priest-in-charge (the patron's right of presentation having been suspended), and on a number of other details.
- A member of Bishop's Staff will be responsible for working with the parish (and, where applicable, the patron) on the appointment. Sometimes this will be the Diocesan Bishop or Archdeacon. They, together with the Director of HR, will be responsible for liaison with the parish throughout the appointment process.
- All of the formal paperwork is routed through the HR Director's office.
- Above all, it is important to remember that the parish will be given a full opportunity to take part in the process of finding a new priest. But, as a matter of policy, the process does not normally start until after the former priest has left. This policy is intended to give the parish space and time to reflect on previous ministry, and to discuss its hopes and aspirations for future ministry.
- In recent years, the average length of vacancy in the diocese has been about nine months – some vacancies are filled more quickly, but others take rather longer.

### 6:2 The vacancy meeting

- At the appropriate moment, usually just after the start of the vacancy, the Director of HR will write to the PCC Secretary (and to the patron) giving formal notice of the vacancy and setting out in detail the procedure applicable to the particular case.
- This procedure will always involve a meeting, at which the Rural Dean will be willing to help if invited, at which the PCC will agree a number of issues including a statement about the conditions, needs and traditions of the parish – the Parish Profile. This is an important document, which will be studied carefully by the patron, the Bishop, the Archdeacon and (perhaps most significantly) by potential candidates. You can find full details of the process related to 'Filling a Parish Vacancy' in a separate document with the same title on the Diocesan website at <https://www.chester.anglican.org/vacant-parishes2.php> (under the heading 'Preparing the Parish Documents).
- As well as other formal business (details will be given by the Director of HR), the parish will be invited to appoint two representatives to take part in discussions with the patron, the Bishop and potential candidates.
- The representatives will have to attend meetings and be involved in interviewing potential candidates, and must therefore be willing and able to devote the necessary time. The representatives must be lay members of the PCC, but need not necessarily be the Churchwardens.



### 6:3 The selection process

- Once the vacancy meeting (and any necessary continuation meeting) has finished its business, the PCC Secretary should arrange completion of all the necessary paperwork and its distribution as directed by the Director of HR.
- When the Member of Bishop's Staff dealing with the vacancy (and patron, if that is a body or individual other than the Bishop) has received and studied the Parish Profile and associated information, s/he will contact the PCC representatives to discuss how best to organise the selection process.
- The Bishop may have potential candidate(s) to suggest, or it may be decided to advertise the vacancy. Details of visits by potential candidates and/or formal interviews will be settled. All of these aspects will be tailored to the particular case – there is no such thing as a “normal” process, just as each parish is “unique” – so that the parties involved have the best chance to reach a common mind.
- The process as a whole may take some time, and there may be periods when not much seems to be happening. It is, however, more important to make the right selection than to make a speedy one.
- Please be assured that the vacancy will be discussed at every meeting of Bishop's Staff.

#### Handy Hints

- ◆ Ensure that the congregation are kept informed of the 'stage of process' reached
- ◆ Pray regularly for the process in Sunday services

- Once all parties (candidate, Bishop's Staff member, patron and PCC representatives) have reached informal agreement that a particular candidate is the right one, the member of Bishop's Staff (or occasionally external patron, if there is one) will write to the successful candidate offering them the post. Once the offer has been accepted, the Director of HR will arrange for the completion of the formalities to confirm the acceptability of the appointment, as required by church legislation.
- The date when the name of the new priest is made public must be agreed with him/her and must coincide with the announcement in his/her present parish.

## 7 THE INDUCTION OR LICENSING SERVICE

### 7:1 Date and time

- If the new priest is coming into the diocese from elsewhere, the service is usually taken by the Bishop of Chester, in which case his Chaplain arranges the date and time after consultation with all concerned.
- If the new priest has previously served within the diocese, the service is usually taken by the appropriate Suffragan Bishop, whose secretary arranges the date and time after consultation with all concerned.
- Subsequent references in this chapter to “the Bishop” denote the Bishop of Chester or the Suffragan Bishop, as appropriate.

### 7:2 The Invitations

These are sent out by the Churchwardens in consultation with the Rural Dean and the new priest to:

- Clergy and Readers of your Deanery (with details of where to robe)
- Clergy (and Readers if room) of the Deanery from which the new priest is coming (with details of where to robe)
- Representatives of other denominations (with details of where to robe) one of whom should be asked to say a sentence of welcome.
- Civic and community leaders, including a head teacher to represent the schools. They, too, are asked to say a sentence of welcome.
- Relatives and friends of the new priest, and representatives of his/her former parish. (numbers should be agreed with the priest).
- The patron or patron’s representative
- The Dean of Chester (or representative)
- The Diocesan Secretary (to organise a Church House representative)
- The Lay Chair of the Deanery Synod
- The Deanery Secretary
- If you are an Ecumenical parish, please remember to invite the Senior members of the relevant churches

#### Handy Hint

Ensure that the invitations include an RSVP date, which is **before** that of the rehearsal.

### 7:3 Orders of Service

- The Rural Dean will bring these to the rehearsal.
- The Rural Dean will advise the new priest to select hymns and songs in consultation with the organist or music group leader. The hymns should be printed or duplicated on a separate sheet and be available at the rehearsal.

## 7:4 The Rehearsal

The Rural Dean arranges this, and the following should be present:

- The Rural Dean
- The Churchwardens
- The new Priest
- The Organist (and/or choir-leader, if appropriate)
- Assistant Clergy/Readers of the parish
- The Verger and/or Crucifer

## 7:5 Practical Arrangements

These should be discussed at the rehearsal, noting the following:

- The Bishop's chair is placed at the chancel step before the service (making sure the choir *etc.* can take their place) and is removed after the induction.
- A table is placed near to the Bishop's chair, with a New Testament, an ink pen and blotting paper.
- The Churchwardens should reserve car parking for:
  - The Bishop
  - The Archdeacon
  - Civic Dignitaries
  - The Patron
  - The Rural Dean
  - The Churchwardens should also decide where coaches will park.

### Handy Hint

Ensure that you inform all people with reserved parking, in good time before they need to set out, where their spaces are to be found

- The Churchwardens should find out numbers and reserve sufficient seating for:
  - Robed Clergy and Readers
  - The new Priest's family
  - Invited Civic Dignitaries
  - The Patron
  - The Deanery Lay Chairman
  - The Dean of Chester (or representative)
  - The Diocesan Secretary (or Church House representative).
- The Rural Dean chooses a Bishop's Chaplain for the service and, in consultation with the Churchwardens, decides on seating in the sanctuary for Bishop, Archdeacon, Bishop's Chaplain and Rural Dean for the latter part of the service.
- Assistant Clergy and Readers of the parish process behind visiting Clergy and, if possible, sit in their normal seats.
- The Rural Dean will check these arrangements on the day.

## 7:6 The Service

- The Chapter Clerk, or another person appointed by the Rural Dean, is responsible for marshalling the Clergy and Reader procession.
- The Rural Dean says the vestry prayer and announces the first hymn.
- The greeting of the Bishop is by one Churchwarden (or one from each parish in the case of a united benefice).
- The Procession to the door, bell and stall is led by the Rural Dean (preceded by the Verger or Crucifer if appropriate). It is his/her responsibility to ensure that both this, and the Act of Dedication Procession, balance speed with dignity.
- The organ may be played quietly during the processions, but must stop immediately each station is reached.
- In the Act of Dedication the Priest should stand by the font, in the pulpit (unless inconvenient) and at the centre of the altar.
- The Welcome is not formal, and speeches are firmly discouraged. The Rural Dean welcomes the Priest first, then introduces the others: "I introduce X and Y, your Churchwardens". In this way assistant clergy, Diocesan Secretary/Church House representative, Dean, Deanery Lay Chairman, a representative of other churches, civic dignitaries and head teacher are introduced.

### Handy Hint

There is no necessity for any of these persons to say anything, but if they do it should, ideally, be a one-sentence greeting such as:

"I welcome you on behalf of ... and wish you every blessing in your ministry".

- Only one Churchwarden from each parish should speak, but in a united benefice all are introduced.
- The Churchwardens should provide the Rural Dean with a list of "welcomers" before the service.
- The priest responds briefly to the welcome and invites everyone to partake of refreshments. It must be understood that this is not a time for him/her to preach or speak at length.
- The Intercessions are led and concluded by the priest, announcing which version of the Lord's Prayer is to be used.
- If it is the custom of the parish for assistant Clergy, Readers or other laity to lead intercessions, the Rural Dean should discuss with the new priest the desirability of these others being involved.

## 7:7 After the Service

- The Churchwardens should detail members of the congregation to escort the following to the place for refreshments and, if necessary, reserve car parking for them:
  - the Bishop
  - the Archdeacon
  - the Patron

- the Rural Dean
  - the invited civic guests
- 
- The Churchwardens should make sure that the Orders of Service (but not the hymn sheets) are collected after the service and given to the Rural Dean as soon as possible.
  - The collection from this service should be sent payable to the Chester Clergy Family Charitable Trust c/o Bishop's House, Abbey Square, Chester, CH1 2JD. Gift Aid envelopes will be provided by the Rural Deans.
  - It is often thought best to avoid speeches at the refreshments, but if they do take place, they should be not more than five minutes in total.

## 8 SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL INFORMATION

### 8:1 Parish Share

- As the parish share is a contribution towards ministry throughout the Diocese, payments of parish share continue during the vacancy.
- Please do not cancel your standing order or direct debit mandate.

### 8:2 The Parsonage

- **Repairs and minor improvements** will be identified by the Property Manager following an inspection. A report will be issued, and any necessary work identified will be carried out at DBF expense. Please do not carry out repairs before consulting the Property Department.
- **Interior decorations** are the responsibility of the PCC, unless agreed otherwise with the Archdeacon or Property Manager.
- **Possible major improvements** to the parsonage may be identified through inspections carried out during the vacancy. These will be subject to agreement by the Houses and Glebe Sub-Committee.
- **Council Tax** is not usually payable on empty parsonage houses if they are 'awaiting occupation by a minister of religion'. The PCC should contact their local council immediately informing them of such and of the exact date that the property became vacant. During a vacancy, amended bills will be sent by the council to the Vicarage and post should be checked regularly. Further information can be found on the diocesan website by using the link below: <https://www.chester.anglican.org//clergy-housing/houses-in-a-vacancy.php>
- **Water rates** remain the responsibility of the PCC, at all times, whether or not in vacancy. However, some water suppliers will not charge whilst a property is empty. Therefore, the PCC should contact their provider to inform them of the exact date that the property became vacant.
- **Telephone** line rental charges and the cost of official calls remain the responsibility of the PCC at all times.
- **Essential parsonage running costs**, such as the cost of gas (on a low setting, if the PCC hasn't been asked by the Property Department to drain down the system), the electricity standing charge, and grass cutting costs during the growing season (March to October), will be refunded to the PCC by the DBF. Reimbursement of costs arising from any other garden maintenance will only be made if prior permission was granted by the property department, before any such works have been carried out. **The PCC should supply utility providers with actual meter readings before paying for such costs in the first instance.** You must provide the DBF with copies of all invoices for which you are making any claim for reimbursement. If in doubt, please contact the Finance Department.
- **Rentals.** Occasionally the parsonage house will be rented out on an assured shorthold tenancy. If this is the case, then arrangements will be made by the Property Department. The tenancy agreement may be signed by the Diocese's Managing Agents on behalf of the sequestrators acting in a vacancy.

### 8:3 The Sequestration Account

- There is no need for the sequestrators to open a special bank account for the vacancy it is suggested that they use the PCC's bank account.
- They should keep a careful note of all receipts and payments so that they can account to the Archdeacon, through the Diocesan Office at the end of the sequestration.
- Fees may only be retained by a member of the clergy in the circumstances detailed in section 8:4.
- Please forward all other fees normally payable to the DBF (but not the PCC portion of the fees), to Church House using the fees returns forms found on the diocesan website, detailing fees for monuments and those received for services conducted by curates or assistant priests. Further information can be found at <https://www.chester.anglican.org/support-services/finance/fees/>

### 8:4 Fees and expenses

#### **Statutory fees for Weddings and Funerals**

Stipendiary Priests (Incumbents and Priests in Charge), Curates, Associate Ministers and SSM/NSM's.	Remitted to the DBF in the normal way using the current monthly returns form found on the diocesan website.
Retired Clergy and those with PTO in Chester Diocese (but <b>not</b> holding a licence)	A portion of the DBF fee is permitted to be kept by PTO clergy, the remaining amount must be remitted to the DBF using the monthly fees returns form which can be found on the diocesan website.  <b><i>Please check current fees returns forms as not all fees are payable at the same percentage split.</i></b>

#### **Weekly Service fees**


The recommended fee payable to clergy (retired or otherwise) currently holding PTO (but **not** holding a licence) within the diocese, is **£50.80**, for taking a normal Sunday service, a midweek service, baptism or a session of visiting from 01 January 2025 (the fee rate was £49.60 for services taken during 2024). This is the maximum amount the DBF will reimburse.

*\* The rates are reviewed annually and if there is a change, they will next be updated in January 2026.*

The DBF will refund the PCC such fees up to this rate so long as the PCC provides the Finance Department at Church House with a list detailing:

- The name of the retired member of clergy holding PTO
- The nature of the service or session of visiting
- The date and time of the service

***Please note fees will only be reimbursed for services held after the date the parish officially enters a vacancy i.e. the day after the outgoing priest retires or is licensed to their new parish).***

 **Handy Hint**

Clergy taking services **must** appear on the diocesan list of Clergy with PTO, as detailed on the diocesan electronic database, CMS. Clergy holding a licence are not permitted to receive fees and these will not be reimbursed by the DBF. This also includes clergy of retirement age licenced to a post.

If in doubt, please check with the Finance Department at Church House.

- **Other clergy (including NSMs), Readers, or others.** Fees must not be paid to anyone other than those as defined above (i.e. only clergy holding PTO in Chester Diocese, retired or otherwise, are eligible).
- **Expenses of visiting clergy and readers.** In addition to the above fees, out of pocket expenses should be offered by the PCC to all who take services. Treasurers are encouraged to offer such expenses automatically and not place visiting clergy in the position of having to raise the question themselves. We encourage the use of the Diocesan mileage rate, which currently is 45p. These expenses should be paid directly by the PCC and are not reclaimable from the DBF

**8:5 Any questions on this section?** Contact the Church House Finance Department:

Telephone: 01928 718834

E-mail: [churchhouse@chester.anglican.org](mailto:churchhouse@chester.anglican.org)

Address: Church House, 5500 Daresbury Park, Daresbury, Warrington WA4 4GE



## 9 USEFUL RESOURCES

**N.B.** the processes and details mentioned in these may not match those of Chester Diocese exactly, but you may still find useful information and support within them.

Grove Booklets Pastoral Series:   65 Situation Vacant D Parrott & D Field  
  67 Understanding the Interregnum Tony Bradley

'So the vicar's leaving'           Mike Alexander & Jeremy Martineau, Canterbury Press 2002

'Temporary Shepherds'         Roger Nicholson, Alban Inst 1998

'Practical Church Management'   James Behrens, Gracewing 2005

EIG website [www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk)

PARISH NO.: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PARISH NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 YOUR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_



**VACANCY FORM A: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE OUTGOING PRIEST**

**GENERAL INFORMATION:**

1. Please give completed copies electronically to: the Churchwardens, Rural Dean, and Archdeacon.
2. Please send a copy of page 1 'Parsonage House' information, electronically to the Property Department at Church House.
3. Churchwardens to pass a completed copy onto the incoming priest

- **Parsonage House**

	Name	Phone No.	Code	Meter Reading
Key Holders (1)			-----	-----
(2)			-----	-----
Alarm System				-----
Water Supplier			-----	-----
Electricity supplier & meter reading			-----	
Gas supplier & meter reading			-----	
Oil/coal supplier			-----	-----
Telephone supplier			-----	-----
Gardener			-----	-----
Cleaner			-----	-----
Window cleaner			-----	-----
<b>Locations of the following</b>				
Stopcock				
Meters				
Fuse box				

**(Cont.)**

• **Church Building (and halls)**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Phone No.</b>	<b>Keys</b>	<b>Code</b>
Key Holders (1)				-----
(2)				-----
(3)				-----
Alarm System Installer			-----	
<b>Details for the location of the following</b>				
Registers				
Churchyard plan				
Last quinquennial report				
Inventory and Terrier				
Parish boundary map				

Please ensure that you attach the following to this form:

• **Visiting lists**

- Home Communions
- Nursing Homes
- Housebound individuals

• **Lists of useful contacts**

Lists of phone numbers/email addresses e.g.

- Funeral directors
- Grave digger
- Organists, Choir leader, Bell Tower captain
- PCC members & Lay leaders

• **Details of Educational Trusts**

• **Current gravestone regulations**

• **Other information about Sound System(s) and Parish Computer(s)**

PARISH NO.: \_\_\_\_\_  
 PARISH NAME: \_\_\_\_\_  
 YOUR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_



**VACANCY FORM B: TO BE COMPLETED BY THE OUTGOING PRIEST**

***OCCASIONAL OFFICES***

Completed copies given electronically to: the Churchwardens, Rural Dean and Archdeacon

Churchwardens to pass a completed copy onto the incoming priest

- ***Present Parish Practices***

On such areas as baptism and the marriage of divorcees

**OPTIONAL EXTRAS IN ADDITION TO THE STATUTORY FEES, AS PER THE CURRENT TABLE OF PAROCHIAL FEES: (N.B. statutory fees are revised each January)**

- **Marriages**

PCC fee for overheads (verger and heating)	
Organist fee	
Bells	
Choir	

- **Funerals, Crematorium Services, Burials**

PCC fee for overheads (verger and heating)	
Organist fee for funeral in church	