

Church Society Trust

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Church Society Trust holds patronage rights on behalf of Church Society which is a voluntary association of members of the Church of England.

Church Society exists to uphold biblical teaching and to promote and defend the character of the Church of England as a reformed and national Church. The Society is strongly committed to the supreme and final authority of the Bible as God's Word written.

Further information about Church Society and many other resources can be found on our website:

www.churchsociety.org

Information about the work of Church Society Trust can also be reached through:
www.churchsocietytrust.org.uk

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Clergy Appointments

Why Patronage?



charity trustees and are a reminder that the local church has wider responsibilities. At the same time, there is a pressure, inherent in an episcopal structure, for the Diocese to assume control. Patrons provide a check against this which has been part of the dynamic and strength of the Church of England since its earliest days.

There is a lot of jargon associated with clergy appointments some of which is explained in our leaflet "Clergy Appointments - An Overview".

Supporting churches

Other help Church Society Trust endeavours to provide:

- Supporting clergy who can often feel isolated in their ministry. Sometimes clergy facing crises say that Trust members or Directors were the only outside people to be interested in them.
- Praying for the work in the parish (please do use the Church Society prayer diary for this purpose).
- Mediating when problems arise in the parish.
- Providing resources for parishes (this is particularly the role of Church Society).
- Contacting clergy on a regular basis (Trust members are asked to be the primary point of contact).
- Practical help, which most often means providing visiting preachers including in an interregnum.
- Keeping parishes informed of issues that will affect them, and being a resource on pastoral, doctrinal and legal matters.
- Being an advocate for parishes, both locally and nationally, by tackling issues which have an impact on parishes.

Other patrons will be involved in other ways. For example, a Cambridge college provided grants to the clergy, accommodation for a reading week in the college and students for a parish mission.

The Patronage system is not a quaint relic of a past. Patronage is an outworking of the fact that the Church of England is neither a congregational federation, nor an episcopal hierarchy, but part of the body of Christ with all manner of intriguing interconnections enabling different parts of the body to strengthen and help each other.

but also increases the workload and hence the pressure for more centralisation by increasing numbers of Diocesan staff. Widespread lay patronage, and in more recent years patronage bodies have been an effective tool in preventing the Church of England becoming more clericalised. In most Roman Catholic countries this important lay role was abandoned long ago. However, it is worth remembering that in Scotland, for different reasons, patronage was long a source of considerable friction and division.

During a vacancy

Benefits of patronage during a vacancy:

- Ensuring a degree of continuity and consistency in ministry from one minister to another.
- Ensuring that the parish has an advocate, who will stand with them, particularly if there is a dispute in the appointment process. Parish Representatives are often intimidated by Diocesan officials, and sadly sometimes misled.
- Providing an outside and objective view, which may not be available to those close at hand.
- Being independent of some of the issues and factors at work in the parish, in particular ensuring that a small vocal group do not drown out the quieter majority.
- Being able to gather names from further afield.
- Having wide contacts, not simply of those looking to move, across the country.
- Ensuring that clergy who are outspoken on important issues are not sidelined because Dioceses do not want 'troublemakers'.
- Providing support and advice to parishes if things do not go smoothly.

Somebody, somewhere, has to pay some of the bills associated with patronage but it is not a cost borne directly by parishes and when Patrons are allowed to get on with their role it eases considerably the burden on Diocesan administration.

Overall the Patron has a role in providing a proper balance between finding the person of God's choice and fulfilling the needs of the parish without being unduly influenced by other factors. The involvement of three parties, parish, patron and Bishop, has come to be seen as an important balance. In some respects patrons are like

Introduction

Every parish in the Church of England has a patron. Due to changes in the last 40 years Bishops now hold the patronage of roughly half of all parishes, some patronage is in the hands of clergy or church bodies whilst much is held by private individuals, societies (such as Church Society Trust) or by the Crown.

The History of Patronage.

Patronage is as ancient as the Church. With the spread and impact of the gospel in Europe it was most often the local landowner who was responsible both for the building of a church and the upkeep of ministers. They usually retained the right to appoint the minister, though with the consent of the ecclesiastical authorities. With time such rights, and sometimes land, often passed into the hands of Bishops and religious foundations (including such places as Oxford and Cambridge colleges). The right of appointment is properly called an advowson and the person or body who holds this right is the patron. Patronage is therefore a form of property which can be transferred, most often as an inheritance, though historically it was possible to buy and sell patronage rights. Today there are still many hereditary patrons. Whilst patrons no longer have to support the clergy or churches financially, it should be remembered that often there was endowment and glebe land associated with a living. This property was given for the maintenance of ministry and buildings but this has now been removed from local parishes and very often where once property had been left on trust for a parish it has been removed and is no longer available for the original purpose.

Where the patron is not also the Bishop (and ignoring some of the other peculiarities that exist) they cannot admit a person into the spiritual rights and duties of an office. Therefore the role of the patron is to present a man to be instituted and inducted by the Bishop into the office. The Bishop can, with good reason, refuse to oblige, but the legal reasons are fairly limited.

In the 17th Century some Puritans encouraged landowners to buy rights of patronage and in some Puritan dominated towns, such as Ipswich, it was the local corporation which bought up the advowsons. By the early 19th Century around two thirds of patronage was still in

the hands of private individuals and in 1817 Charles Simeon set up a Trust to acquire the advowsons of livings occupied by evangelical clergy. This was followed by other groups and today the larger evangelical bodies (including Church Society Trust) are involved in appointments to over 1,000 churches. The patronage societies are still willing and eager to receive patronage of existing or new parishes.

The first half of the 19th Century also saw a vast migration of people into towns and cities leading to the establishment of many new churches. Often the Rector of an ancient parish became the patron of perhaps as many as 30 newly created parishes. In other instances our evangelical forebears, appalled by the tractarian influence in their local church, established new churches (they were less squeamish about putting the gospel before church niceties). These churches were established with their own trusts which provided for patronage by a group of private individuals. Many larger evangelical churches have such a background.

In the 1970s and particularly the 1980s several significant pieces of legislation were passed altering the system of patronage. Aside from the complexities of Teams and Groups the two most important Measures were the Pastoral Measure (1983) and the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986. The most significant development was the position given in the Pastoral Measure to the lay representatives of the parish. Formerly, unless the patrons were local people, the parish itself might have almost no say in who their next minister would be. This was a change for the good, although it is a system which does not work as well as it ought. The chief problems arise from the fact that, in the nature of things, parish representatives are not likely to be involved in more than one appointment and so are not always equipped to perform the task well.

In the last few decades there has been a vast re-organization of parishes in rural and inner-urban areas where dwindling congregations and fewer clergy have meant that several churches have, in effect, to share a full-time minister. In market towns and suburbia the number of clergy and other paid workers has also often reduced but not to the extent of requiring mergers. Whilst the various measures have enabled different patterns of ministry they have

invariably just become the mechanism for managing decline. In our experience the plans for retrenchment are usually dictated from central Diocesan bodies and this serves only to alienate congregations who feel helpless in the face of 'the system'.

The decline in numbers of clergy and the generally poor state of the finances of the Church means that on the face of it the only way forward is to combine churches under a single stipendiary ministry. However, this is not the only way. In many instances it may be much better to have a non-stipendiary, part time or non-ordained minister as the pastor or leader of a congregation. Sadly in some Dioceses there appears to be the assumption that every parish must have a full time priest who is, at least in principle, always available to do what they see as priestly things should this be required. This forces mergers when they are undesirable and unnecessary. It is also true that the motive for many parish mergers is to free up parsonages which can be sold or let to relieve Diocesan finances.

The consequence of all this is that full-time clergy are spread more thinly and feel more and more stretched. There are no doubt some extremely gifted people who can and do manage to prosper in such circumstances but in general the whole system of re-organization seems to create a spiral of slow decline. Sadly it is a spiral that few Diocesan and national church officials seem willing to break free from. In the midst of this the Patron's role is very difficult. We are often called upon to advise and help parishes faced with the inevitable consequences of Diocesan policy. We as Patrons are virtually powerless to intervene and we find so often that after an initial valiant struggle parishes just give up the fight and accept the imposed solution, disillusioned and dispirited.

The Benefits of Patronage

The role of Patrons in appointments has been significantly reduced by large scale suspension of their rights. Although the code of practice states that Patrons should, wherever possible, still have a full role in appointments this is often breached. In contrast more and more of the role has been taken on by Diocesan officials which reflects a retrogressive change in the understanding of the church