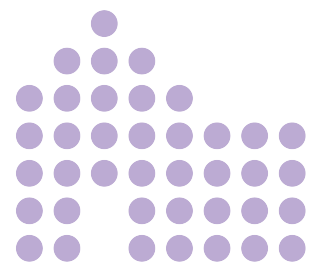


# LOOKING FOR A VICAR

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND  
APPOINTMENT PROCESS



Church  
Society  
Trust

EQUIPPING GOD'S  
PEOPLE TO LIVE  
GOD'S WORD

## The Appointment Process

The appointment of incumbents - vicars, rectors, priests in charge - is governed by the Patronage Benefices Measure 1986. Various minor alterations have been made, but the Guidelines and Appendices published in May 2013, confirmed the position of the 1986 Measure. The Legislative Reform (Patronage of Benefices) Order 2019 made changes to the timings of presentation, and the Section 11 meeting.

However each Diocese has its own approach to appointments and parishes will do well to familiarise themselves with such documents, although this will usually be explained at the Pre-vacancy meeting.

A book that many Diocese are using is 'How to Make Great Appointments in the Church' by Claire Pedrick & Su Blanch, published by SPCK.

The table below incorporates the most recent changes to timings in the early stages of the process.

<b>What</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Who</b>
Vacancy arises	18 months for a new incumbent to be presented	Patron
Pre-vacancy meeting		PCC, Archdeacon, Patron, Bishop of Maidstone*
Notice of vacancy		Diocese
Section 11 meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To agree Parish Profile</li> <li>• To decide whether to request advertising</li> <li>• To appoint parish Representatives</li> <li>• To decide whether to consider seeking episcopal provision under Women Bishop's legislation</li> </ul>	'As soon as practicable' following the issuing of the notice of vacancy, and within 6 months	PCC only
Section 12 [if required]		Diocese, patron, PCC, Bishop of Maidstone*
Candidates sought Advert placed Pathways		Patron PCC Bishop of Maidstone*
Shortlisting		Patron Bishops' 'safe to receive' list consulted
Candidate(s) visit(s) parish		Parish representatives ....
Interviews		Parish representatives, Patron, Diocese, Bishop of Maidstone*
Decision reached		Interview panel
Bishop to Bishop reference		Bishop
Forms filled out		Patron, Parish representatives & Bishop
Offer letter		Patron
Safeguarding		Diocese
Formal announcement		Parish representatives, et al
Institution		Church, diocese, patron

Bishop of Maidstone\* - where the PCC has passed a Letter of Request and the Diocese has allowed extended oversight.

## Preparing for a vacancy

When is the right time to be thinking about your next incumbent?

The one word answer to that question is: Now, Today.

1. You do not know when that day will arrive. It may be that you have only recently appointed a new vicar and are assuming that you have many years before you go through that again. But he may fall under the proverbial bus, in other words you may be looking much sooner than expected.
2. You will do well to be prepared ahead of time. The better informed a PCC, the better decisions will be made. There will not be that sense of panic and rush, you will know what to expect, when and how long you have to do various things and to whom you can look for advice. You will also have given yourselves time to get your heads around the process and the language.
3. You can use an annual PCC item to review the Parish Profile to remind / teach the PCC of the qualities required of a church leader, according to the New Testament.
4. You can use the time before the vacancy arises to build a good relationship with a supportive patron. In doing this the Patron will not be a stranger when the times comes, but hopefully someone you trust and can rely on.
5. You might look to change your patron to one who more closely supports your position.

[Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, 2006 version - Part I]

## The pre-vacancy meeting

This is a relatively new idea and a good one. It allows the Diocese and or Patron meet with the PCC in order to inform them about the appointment process and answer any questions.

This is a good opportunity for a well briefed PCC to quiz the Diocese or Patron on what will happen, when and why. This will be particularly important if the Diocese's approach differs from the 1986 Measure or the May 2013 Guidelines.

## Notice of vacancy

This is issued by the Chancellor of the Diocese and marks the start of the appointment process. The Patron has eighteen months to present a candidate.

[Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, 2006 version - Part II section 7-9  
Legislative Reform (Patronage of Benefices) Order 2019]

## Suspension

Suspension refers to the rights of the Patron to present a nominee being suspended, such that the Bishop takes over the appointment process. In most cases the Diocese will still involve the Patron but they will lead the process; the parish would still have a major say in the appointment.

There are two grounds for suspension: the first is pastoral reorganisation, the second a change of vicarage.

The 1986 Measure makes it clear that when it comes to pastoral reorganisation there must be a scheme in place rather than a vague idea that something may happen sometime in the future. The current practice of whole deaneries being suspended is against the Measure but is still practised by too many Dioceses.

[Pastoral Measure 1983 section 67;  
Pastoral Measure Code of Practice 2009 section 9.21-25]

## **The section 11 meeting**

This is a meeting for the PCC at which important decisions are taken. It must take place 'As soon as practicable' following the issuing of the notice of vacancy, and within 6 months.

The Notice of Vacancy is sent out by the Diocese to the Patron and acts as the starting gun for the appointment process. However many Dioceses delay the issuing of the Notice, either due to poor administration or to serve their purposes, such as a late decision to suspend.

This can be damaging to the Patron as it eats into the eighteen months the Patron has to nominate a candidate, and frustrating for the Parish as it creates an unnecessary delay.

As stated above the Section 11 meeting is a meeting of the PCC, neither the Diocese nor the Patron is to be present. However there is a trend developing of Dioceses trying to claim a seat at the table, often under the guise of 'helping' the PCC. Once again an appeal to the 1986 Measure should prevent any such muscling in.

On other occasions when the Diocese calls a meeting with the PCC during a vacancy it would be advisable for the PCC to ask the Patron to be present as well, and or the Bishop of Maidstone under the Women Bishops' provision.

There are four things the PCC must decide at this meeting:

1. To sign off the Parish profile
2. To decide whether or not to request the Patron to advertise the vacancy
3. To appoint parish representatives
4. To decide whether to reconsider any Resolutions concerning the consecration of women as Bishops

It is good practice to have reached conclusions on all four of these matters prior to the Section 11 meeting. The meeting itself can then be a rubber stamping of decisions already made by the PCC.

[Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, 2006 version - Part II section 11  
Legislative Reform (Patronage of Benefices) Order 2019]

## **The parish profile**

This is a description of the parish / benefice which will include information about the locality and amenities, as well as the life of the church. The temptation is to make things seem better than they are but as with everything honesty is the best policy. It is usual to include things like attendance figures and the last year's accounts, as appendices.

In a multi-parish benefice it will usually be appropriate for each parish to write a section about their church, and for someone to oversee the rest.

When writing a profile the challenge is to think ahead to the next five to ten years rather than the last five or ten years. It is good to include a section which captures the PCC's hopes and fears for the immediate future, as that will have a direct bearing on the person they are seeking.

As an introduction there will be a statement as to what sort of a church this is. Consequently it is important to include key words and phrases that will secure the church as New Wine, Anglo Catholic or Evangelical. These are designed to put off the wrong candidates as well as attracting the right ones.

Key words and phrases to secure an Evangelical future would be: 'conservative evangelical', 'expository preaching', 'penal substitutionary atonement', 'complementarian'. It will be important to ensure that these appear throughout the Profile.

### **The person specification**

This, along with the role description, is the most important section of the Profile. It tells any applicants what you are looking for and provides the key criteria for short listing and interviews.

The temptation if the previous incumbency has gone well is to use it to describe that minister, if it has gone badly then the temptation is to describe the opposite. Both should be resisted. The question is what is the person who will lead you through the next phase of the life of the church going to need to be like - the Church Society article on the character of a christian minister will be helpful here.

The key words and phrases mentioned above are vital in this section. You will be asking not just that the candidates believe these things but also that they teach them, and want evidence of that from their previous ministry.

The temptation is to write a very long list, that has to include 'good sense of humour'. Try to not have too many points, and it can be helpful to split what you do have into 'essential' and 'desirable'.

There are some good examples of such person specifications on the Church Society website .....

### **The role description**

This tells the applicants what it is that you want them to do should they be appointed. It will also provide the basis for a six month review and the future ministerial development of the incumbent.

It is therefore linked to the hopes the PCC has for the next few years, and you will be seeking evidence that the candidates have some experience of what you require. So a curate will not have been in charge of a parish but may have run a CYFA Venture, or manages a youth team in his current post.

Once again highlighting some priorities within what could be an endless list will help the candidates as well as those making the selection.

### **Statement of Particulars**

This is a section that the Diocese sometimes chooses to put into the Profile. It is a stand alone section that belongs to the Diocese and not to the Parish.

The flavour of a parish / benefice will also be conveyed by the inclusion of any resolutions concerning women's ministry, membership of Church Society or GAFCON, conferences church members are encouraged to attend, mission agencies supported, and a position paper on where the church stands on certain issues of the day, for instance signalling that Keith Sinclair's statement in the Pilling Report is the position of the PCC. It might be wise for the PCC to agree a paper on the expectations they have of Bible teachers or leaders within the church.

## **Advertising**

It is common practice for advertisements to be placed in the Church Times, although increasingly this done on-line. Most Dioceses now use Pathways, the Church of England's centralised appointments system. Dioceses advertise their vacancies, CPAS are hosting a list of evangelical openings, and parishes will usually make their Profile available on their website.

The wording of an advertisement is usually done by the Diocese or Patron, but a well prepared PCC would do well to ask for some input.

The cost of advertising is borne by the PCC and not the Patron, although some Dioceses will pick up the bill.

Church Society prefers head hunting to advertising, whilst recognising that good and bad appointments can be made using either method.

The Evangelical Patrons Consultative Committee, administered by CPAS, provides a list of clergy looking for a move and curates coming to the end of their title post. Patrons will also be aware of others who, if approached would consider a move but are unlikely to apply both to a list or an advertisement.

## **Parish representatives**

Two members of the PCC are elected to represent the parish in finding a new vicar, in some multi-parish benefices each parish may only appoint one representative, and it is not unknown for Bishops to only deal with the church wardens when a parish is suspended.

These two must stand by the Profile, and any positions the PCC has taken, eg passing a Letter of Request. They must have the confidence of the PCC and be trusted to act for the PCC in the process. Fellow PCC members need to support them as they keep confidences, and be the cut out between the representatives and the congregation.

It is not uncommon for a small group to work with the two representatives and to be bound by the same confidentiality.

## **Resolutions concerning the ministry of women**

Parishes which have passed a Letter of Request are invited to decide whether or not they wish to review their position.

Dioceses will often apply pressure to PCCs during a vacancy to remove such a resolution, blaming the extreme views of the previous incumbent and suggesting that the PCC would do well to be open to a more inclusive ministry this time around. Which is why the PCC should be alert to extra meetings called by the Diocese and be ready to call in reinforcements.

Parishes may apply to their Diocesan Bishop for oversight from a Bishop who shares their convictions on women's ministry, the way to do this is outlined in GS Misc 1077.

To make such a request is to send out a clear message as to where the PCC stands and will ensure the appointment of a Conservative Evangelical minister, or an Anglo Catholic. While this may go beyond the personal convictions of some PCC members it could be a vital step in securing the evangelical future of the parish.

There are some for whom the making of such a request will not be possible for theological and ecclesiological reasons. These PCCs will need to spell out their position very clearly in the Parish Profile.

## **The section 12 meeting**

This is a meeting between the PCC, the Diocese and the Patron and can be called by either the Diocese or the Patron or the PCC if they have concerns about the statement agreed at the Section 11 meeting. It must be called within 10 days of receiving that statement, and held within 6 weeks of the notification.

## Shortlisting & Interviewing

Applications will be looked at and a number of candidates asked to come for an interview.

There is no set pattern among Dioceses or Patrons as to who should be involved - CPAS shortlist at their regular Trustees' meeting. Sometimes a meeting may be held but more often than not the process is conducted by email - when a parish is under suspension some Diocese will invite comments on candidates from Patrons and Parish Representatives before they make the final decision.

Church Society prefers the head hunting route, after which candidates chosen by the Directors will be sent to the parish one by one.

However the most common practice is the panel interview. Best practice suggests that this will have been preceded by a visit to the parish and vicarage by the prospective candidates and their spouse. This allows the Parish Representatives to spend time with the candidates and answer the question only they can, 'How well will this candidate fit in here?'

The interview will be lead by either the Archdeacon or Bishop, or the Patron. It may include a short talk on the lectionary readings from the previous Sunday or the day of the interview, sometimes a short response to the Parish profile is also asked for.

Interview questions will be agreed beforehand and divided up between the panel, it is important that each candidate is asked the same question as all the others.

In some cases interviewers might be asked to keep a score of how well they think each candidate answers each question, these may be totted up at the end to give an idea of how the candidates have performed.

The key measure for both shortlisting and interviewing is the Parish Profile. Questions will arise from the candidate's application form in relation to the Profile. Does the candidate fit the Person Specification, has he the proven skills and abilities that are being asked for, for instance is he an expository preacher? Does his experience match up to the job that he is applying for, for instance has he worked in a deprived area? How has he tackled the difficult issues of the day - in sermons, at midweek meetings?

Parish Representatives may have specific questions for each candidate following the visit. Follow up questions will of course depend on the answer given by the candidate.

Interviewers will keep a record of the answers and their response, for the later discussion. A record will be kept by whoever is leading the interview so that the unsuccessful candidates can be given feed-back as to why they were not offered the position.

A discussion between the panel will follow at the end of which the successful candidate will have emerged. In that discussion it is important to reflect the priorities set out in the Profile. In some cases attempts have been made to focus on a 'desirable' quality, ability, gift such that it trumps all the 'essentials'. Once again the representatives need to stand firm and hold their line as stated in the Profile.

In some situations it has proven helpful for the Parish Representatives to talk together, or even to ask further questions of one candidate, before they reach their decision, which they communicate to whoever is leading the appointment process.

If the Bishop is not part of the interview, s/he will meet with the nominated candidate.

[Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, 2006 version - Part II section 17]

## Acceptance, Announcement & Institution

Once all parties are in agreement and Forms 36,37 and 38 completed, the candidate will be sent an offer letter, by the Patron in a sole parish appointment. Once the successful candidate has accepted the position, and safeguarding and other paperwork issues have been taken care of, an announcement can be made. This

would usually happen on the same Sunday in the candidate's and the receiving church. There can often be quite a delay waiting for the paperwork to be completed, so on occasions an announcement will be made subject to the paperwork being in order.

Arrangements will then be made for the institution, licensing, collation or whatever other name that is given to the occasion.

During the service the Patron will usually present the candidate to the Bishop, who will lead and preach; the Archdeacon will also have a role to play; and the new incumbent will choose the hymns, lead prayers and give the notices.