

Vacancy preparation checklist for PCCs

During a vacancy, Churchwardens have legal responsibility for the church and the decisions made. However, it is important for PCCs as a whole to know what is involved and support their churchwardens.

Start now!

- Pray for the community and church, parish, benefice during this time of transition.
- Ask someone, or a group, to write a vacancy/benefice prayer.
- Make a list of the tasks and activities that happen in your church and who has responsibility.
- Review pastoral care, including a system for maintaining connections.
- Make sure you have a list of people to turn to for advice, support or training e.g. Archdeacon's office, Area Dean, Lay Dean, Deanery and Parish Development Adviser.

What can we do before the vacancy?

- Ensure there is clarity around the roles: e.g. Churchwarden, any paid staff, curates in training, laity and PTOs.
- Clarify who will make decisions, how they will be made and communicated.
- If you have schools in your benefice, identify a link person for each school and that they have been introduced to the school.
- Ensure that no one person has too many tasks or responsibilities but share the load. If people are to take on a new responsibility, check whether there is training or support available and safeguarding is in place.
- Check where you are with your Benefice Share payments and seek support from the diocesan Finance team if you are behind. There is a Benefice Share payment form to complete. If the Benefice Share has not recently been paid in full, we will not immediately go ahead with the appointment of a new incumbent.
- Consider what is realistic to continue, whether there is anything that can be laid down, during the vacancy.
- Ensure that the wardens/administrator have access to any files, important information etc.
- Consider how best to retain and then pass on confidential information to the new priest.
- Review contracts for equipment and services.
- Check and sign the Terrier and Inventory and ensure that keys, and everything that belongs to the church, are given to the wardens.

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Safeguarding

Ahead of going into a period of vacancy the PCC needs to:

- a. Ensure that there is a Parish Safeguarding Officer or, at an absolute minimum, a named safeguarding contact, in the parish, and that the diocesan safeguarding team are aware of who that person is.
- b. Ensure that any active safeguarding concerns or issues in the area of safeguarding are handed over from the departing incumbent to the PSO/safeguarding contact, including access to any relevant records and notes.
- c. That the PCC is clear how safeguarding tasks and responsibilities will be covered during the vacancy and that is recorded within the PCC minutes. These responsibilities include:
 - Receiving, recording, and reporting concerns to the diocesan safeguarding team
 - Updating of the Safeguarding Dashboard
 - Management of volunteer/staff safeguarding training and DBS data
 - Ensuring that those who need to, have completed their safeguarding training and have a current DBS (completed within the past 3 years) in place.

Please contact Jake Lent in the safeguarding team at safe.guarding@bathwells.anglican.org for help as necessary.

Communication

- Consider how the church family and wider community will be kept informed during this time of transition and vacancy, and about any decisions made.
- Ensure that there are realistic expectations, both amongst the congregation and wider community, in respect of the vacancy. There may be unhelpful rumours or misinformation that need addressing.

And finally...

- Meet together regularly to pray, think and plan. Notice what God is saying and discern how to respond.
- Listen carefully to what the congregation and community are saying and how they are feeling. People may be affected by the priest's departure: sometimes feeling loss, grief, anger, guilt, and uncertainty about the future.
- Aim to work well as a team and deal with conflict as soon as there is disagreement. There may be a jostling for power, especially when boundaries are unclear.
- You are not alone! This process is a partnership between you and the deanery and our diocese. Ask for support from the deanery, archdeacon or support services, as soon as you need it. A vacancy can be challenging but also a time to reflect and grow together as church, to discover new gifts and to celebrate the part you play in the community.