

**INFORMATION FOR PARISHES**

**IN A VACANCY**

For more information please contact the Parish Support Team on 01722 411922

Or by email [parishsupport@salisbury.anglican.org](mailto:parishsupport@salisbury.anglican.org)

This document is available as a free download on our diocesan website: [www.salisbury.anglican.org](http://www.salisbury.anglican.org)

**What should we ask the Vicar about before he/she goes?**

It is important that you ask the outgoing incumbent/Vicar about the location of official papers and parish records such as plans of the churchyard. Make sure you know where keys are kept and have telephone numbers for domestic and church suppliers etc. Ask for a copy of the incumbent’s diary of forthcoming events, e.g. weddings booked for next year, and the relevant contact details.

**The Parochial Church Council (PCC)**

The Chair of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) is the Incumbent. The PCC should have elected a lay member as Vice Chair (Church Representation Rules, section M19). During a vacancy the Vice Chair acts as Chair and has the powers vested in the Chair.

**Church Services**

Churchwardens are responsible for arranging the services during a vacancy, in consultation with the Rural Dean. The customary order of Sunday services should be maintained as far as possible. Non-Eucharistic services may be led by a Reader (LLM) but it may not be possible to maintain a full diary of services so you should expect that there may have to be some adjustments to the pattern. Any changes may only be carried out with full agreement of the PCC and after discussion with the Rural Dean who must give his/her approval. Only clergy and lay ministers who are licensed (LLMs & LWLs) or have permission to officiate (PtO) in our diocese may lead services. If none of these is available, a Churchwarden may conduct the first part of Morning and Evening Prayer, but he/she may not preach. Protocol dictates that a retired priest does not take services in his/ her former benefice within two years of leaving.

**Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms**

It is advisable to set up a system to manage weddings, funerals and baptisms, to ensure adequate preparation is given, and to designate one member or the parish secretary to deal with all enquiries. Weddings involve legal constraints so it is advisable to contact the Rural Dean for any advice, including advising where one of the couple is divorced.

**Sequestrators**

The “Sequestrators” of the benefice during a vacancy are the Churchwardens, the Rural Dean and the Diocesan Secretary. They are responsible for administering the income of the benefice, i.e. service fees, etc, during the vacancy.

**Fees – Statutory Fees, Bishop’s Guidelines and Casual Duty Fees**

Find all the information in the Parochial Fees section on this page: <https://www.salisbury.anglican.org/supportforparishes/finance/>.

**Safeguarding**

When it is known that a member of clergy is considering leaving, is due to retire or has another post, the following process will be initiated:

* The Suffragan Bishop’s Secretary will copy the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer (DSO) into the Notification of Departure.
* The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will check the list of former offenders/issues of concern - if any issues are present these will be discussed with the Vicar prior to his/her departure and an early discussion with a Churchwarden and Rural Dean initiated (as determined by the DSO).
* The Churchwardens should agree who will take the lead on Safeguarding issues during the vacancy and inform the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer as well as their local Parish Safeguarding lead (PSO).
* If any Safeguarding concerns arise during the vacancy, the Churchwarden in conjunction with their PSO should contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer and agree a process for managing the situation.

If a former offender/person causing concern currently attends the church:

* The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will speak to the Incumbent about a handover process and agree who will monitor during the vacancy.
* The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will ensure: the person monitoring has a copy of the Safeguarding Agreement/knows the concerns; the offender knows who will be responsible and that the nominated person has the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer’s details usually the local PSO.
* The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will keep in contact with the nominated person during the vacancy.
* When a new incumbent is appointed the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will discuss the situation with him/her and arrange for them to be confidentially briefed re the situation.

Where a former offender wises to join a church during a vacancy:

* The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will discuss with the Churchwardens who will take the lead on the situation or nominate a person to do this.
* The usual contractual processes will take place and the Agreement will be signed by a Churchwarden/nominated person.
* The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will inform the new Incumbent when he/she is in post and arrange for them to be confidentially briefed re the situation.

Where a new case comes to light during a vacancy:

* The Diocesan Safeguarding Officer will contact the Churchwardens/Rural Dean/Assistant Clergy as necessary to discuss the situation and process for handling the case.  If the Parish learn about the person before the DSO they will contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team as soon as possible.  A person should not be allowed to come to church until an agreement has been put in place or else the DSO determines some form of risk management measures are in place.

If any concerns or issues arise the Diocesan Safeguarding Officers are available to discuss these at any time.  Contact [safeguarding@salisbury.anglican.org](mailto:safeguarding@salisbury.anglican.org) or via the contact information on the Diocesan website.

**Parsonages and other Clergy Housing**

The Diocesan Board of Finance generally seeks to let vacant clergy housing of all types in suitable circumstances for short terms. Parsonages have a different status to other clergy housing (being benefice property) but the Board of Finance is able to let them, as appointed sequestrator for this purpose, during vacancies.

The advantages of letting clergy housing are several: rental income can help to meet the cost of redecoration and other works that may be needed on clergy leaving and occupied properties are usually more secure and they stay in better condition if heated and ventilated, especially in winter, than those which are left empty for extended periods

It is therefore most important that, on a parsonage or other clergy house becoming vacant, any items which belong to the parish are removed and relocated elsewhere. An incumbent may have been entirely content, for example, to allow a PCC to put a photocopier in a parsonage and use it from time to time. This may not, however, be a view shared by the next prospective incumbent nor one taken by short-term tenants. It must be remembered that parsonages and other clergy housing are homes for clergy and their families.

If a property has been let for a short term to private tenants, it is likely that any significant works required will have been completed before the letting. Pre-occupancy meetings with clergy, which are arranged by Rural Deans, are an opportunity to discuss any matters of concern which remain.

If you are a churchwarden, or involved in your church, and wish to know more about how to help during a vacancy then please contact the Property Department:

The Property Department, Emmaus House, The Avenue, Wilton, Salisbury, Wilts SP2 0FG.

Tel: Salisbury 01722 411933 Email: [property.dept@salisbury.anglican.org](mailto:property.dept@salisbury.anglican.org) Website: <https://www.salisbury.anglican.org/supportforparishes/buildings-and-property/>

**Maintenance and adaption of the church**

Maintaining your building, even through a vacancy period, is really important. We encourage churchwardens to make applications and discuss works with the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) at the earliest opportunity. It is advisable to have the support of a licensed member of the clergy, usually the Rural Dean.  Major re-ordering or adaption works should first be discussed with the Rural Dean and Archdeacon. A DAC site visit it also advisable at an early stage. Contact details and useful information can be found on the diocesan website: <https://www.salisbury.anglican.org/supportforparishes/care-of-church-buildings-and-churchyards/>

**Memorials in churchyards**

During a vacancy application should be made to the Rural Dean.

**Ex-officio posts held by the incumbent/vicar**

Posts such as School Governor or trustee of a local charity sit vacant. In the case of Incumbent and Churchwardens' Trusts the churchwardens will be responsible for administering the trusts. Major policy decisions should be deferred until an incumbent is in post and able to participate in the decision-making processes.

**FILLING A VACANCY – THE PROCESS EXPLAINED**

Legislation in The Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986, lays out guidelines for the vacancy and appointment process. When a benefice becomes vacant the Diocesan Bishop serves a formal notice to the Designated Officer – in our diocese this is the Diocesan Registrar (‘**Form 30**’ or ‘Notice of Impending Vacancy’). The Diocesan Registry will send a notice, referred to as a **Form 31**, to the secretary of the PCC(s) and to the registered patron(s). The PCC Secretary(s) will also be sent a **Form 34** which asks for the names of the parish representatives, as chosen by the PCC to represent them in the appointment process.

**The “Section 11” Meeting**

The PCC must meet within six months of the Form 31 being sent to the PCC Secretary by the Diocesan Registry. This meeting is referred to as a ‘Section 11’ meeting because it is described in Section 11 of the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986. The outgoing incumbent and spouse/partner and the Patron or the patron’s representative should not attend this meeting. The Archdeacon, through the area offices, will lead the process from this point onwards and it is important that parishes maintain close contact with both the Area Office and the Archdeacon as a matter of good practice.

The section 11 meeting has to:

* Appoint two lay members of the PCC to act as the parish’s representatives in connection with the selection of the new incumbent. They need not be the churchwardens and must **not** be clergy, deacons or licensed lay workers or the spouse of the outgoing vicar.
* **The PCC Secretary must then complete and return Form 34 to the Registry and send a copy to the Area office.**
* Start to prepare a statement describing the conditions, needs and traditions of the parish. Parishes that have a Mission Action Plan or who have done a parish audit will be best placed to draw up a parish profile and job description. The Area Office will be happy to offer help and offer advice. Please contact either the Sherborne Office on 01258 444521, or the Ramsbury Office on 01722 438662 to obtain further help.
* Decide with the Archdeacon where and how to advertise the vacancy. The Diocesan office will pay for the cost of the advertisement, and for travel and accommodation expenses for all the candidates. The advertisement will be written in the light of the parish statement in consultation with the patron and Area Bishop.
* Decide whether to request a joint meeting, known as a **Section 12** meeting, with the patron and the Bishop to exchange views about the PCC’s statement and the Bishop’s written statement (or an oral statement that he gives).

The Archdeacon will set dates for shortlisting and interview well in advance of advertising the post. Interviews usually take place over two days. The first day is an opportunity for candidates to visit the benefice and the second day is the formal interview with a panel consisting of the elected parish representatives, patrons, the Rural Dean, Archdeacon and Area Bishop. Before an appointment is made the Area Bishop sends the candidate an offer letter and, where appropriate, the Archdeacon sends a house information letter. A date is then agreed for the licensing/collation. The parish organises the licensing/collation service in consultation with the Bishop and Archdeacon and sends out the invitations.

If no candidate is chosen, a meeting is held with the parish representatives, patrons, local clergy and the Archdeacon to determine the next steps. New dates are set for the recruitment process and the vacancy is re-advertised. If no appointment is made within 18 months from the time the Form 30 is issued, the right of patronage will lapse to the Diocesan Bishop who may, with the agreement of the PCC, select a candidate for presentation to the benefice.

# Frequently Asked Questions

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# We have known for months that our Vicar is retiring, why doesn't the diocese arrange to appoint a new Vicar immediately? - The appointment of a priest is not the same as a secular recruitment process. The period immediately after an incumbent has resigned or retired leaves the benefice in vacancy (also known as an interregnum); it is a time for reflection and enables parishioners to evaluate the situation in the parish[es], clarify their aspirations for the future, and to consider what qualities and attributes they would expect of a new priest. It would be inappropriate for this to be done whilst the retiring incumbent was still in post, and whilst parishioners were saying "farewell" to him/ her. The vacancy period gives time for the parish to prepare for change; each priest will have their own particular style of ministry which may differ considerably from his/ her predecessor. On a more mundane level the vacancy period provides a convenient opportunity to carry out significant works to the parsonage house [e.g. refitting the kitchen] without causing disruption to the occupants.

**We have had a letter from the Mission and Pastoral Committee recommending that presentation to the benefice should be suspended. Why is this happening, and what does it mean? -** The Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC) may recommend suspension of presentation as a step towards pastoral re-organisation or a change in the provision of ministry across the area. Such proposals will have been discussed at deanery level in the Deanery Strategic Plan. Sometimes presentation to a small benefice will be suspended so that a half-time post of parish priest can be combined with a sector ministry responsibility. Suspension of presentation is the temporary removal of a patron's rights to present an incumbent for appointment to the freehold of a benefice. Once a benefice is suspended, the priest will be known as a Priest in Charge, although his/her role in the parish will be similar to that of a Rector. The DMPC may also recommend suspension of presentation for legal reasons, for example where it has been agreed that the parsonage house is to be relocated. Diocesan good practice ensures that the appointment process for a Priest in Charge will be broadly the same as that for an Incumbent, and the patrons and representatives of the PCC will be invited to take part in the selection process. A Priest in Charge may go on to be named as first incumbent as part of a Scheme for pastoral re-organisation.

**LICENSED LAY MINISTERS (LLMs) DURING A VACANCY**

**The Role of Licensed Lay Ministers (known as LLMs or formerly as Readers)**

LLMs are lay people, called by God to a voluntary preaching, teaching, liturgical and pastoral ministry alongside their ordinary occupation or employment. They come from all walks of life and have undergone careful selection and a rigorous programme of theological study and formation before being admitted and licensed.

* LLMs are authorised by Canon to conduct and preach at Matins, Evensong and family or other non-statutory services. He or she may also preach at Holy Communion, read the Gospel, lead the intercessions and Ministry of the Word, administer the paten and chalice and distribute the sacrament to sick or housebound people not present at a celebration.
* LLMs may publish the Banns of Marriage and sign the entry in the Banns book, but may not sign the Banns Certificate or officiate at a Marriage. He or she may officiate at a Service of Prayer and Dedication after Civil Marriage with suitable preparation and the approval of the Warden of Lay Ministers or Rural Dean.
* LLMs may conduct a funeral service provided those responsible are agreeable to this. LLMs are not authorised to baptise except in emergency situations.
* LLMs may be asked to prepare people for baptism, confirmation and marriage, to visit and pray with the sick, or to undertake other pastoral and educational work as part of the ministry team of the benefice.

During a vacancy many LLMs are willing to undertake additional responsibilities but not all are able to commit more time. LLMs give their ministry freely and receive no fees for their services. However, LLMs should be reimbursed at the diocesan rate for travel expenses. (In the LLM’s own benefice reimbursement of expenses incurred in ministry and in-service training should be agreed annually).

This booklet contains summary guidance only. For more information please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Pastoral Department at Emmaus House who will be happy to offer you further help.