

WHAT TO DO DURING A VACANCY

NOTES FOR AREA DEANS AND CHURCHWARDENS

UPDATED MARCH 2026

 Seeking  Sharing  Sending

A vacancy can be a very stressful time, especially for the Churchwardens and the Area Dean, but it can also be a very creative time for a parish as it prayerfully marks the end of one particular time of leadership and ministry and prepares to appoint and welcome a new priest. These notes are not meant to be exhaustive but should provide a useful resource for Area Deans and Churchwardens as they work together to ensure the church's ministry throughout the vacancy and beyond.

Vacancy Meaning

The time (also known as an interregnum) between the departure of the outgoing incumbent (through a move; retirement; resignation; or death in office) and the Institution and Induction or Licensing of the incoming incumbent. The vacancy starts on the date the resignation comes into effect which may not be the same as the last service where the Incumbent is present. A letter will be sent from the Diocesan Registry to confirm that the parish is in vacancy. They will also send a Parish Statement Form for the PCC to fill in as part of the Appointment Pack for the next Incumbent.

Responsibility

It is the responsibility of the Churchwardens and the Area Dean to maintain the life, worship and mission of the parish during the vacancy. The Churchwardens and the Area Dean are also known as sequestrators during the vacancy. This responsibility begins from the date of resignation/retirement.

Services and Rotas

At the beginning of the interregnum the Area Dean and the Churchwardens will agree the pattern of weekly services that will be provided. As far as possible this will reflect the pattern that the parish are accustomed to but depending on available clergy it may have to be modified. If there is a curate or associate vicar in post, they, in consultation with Area Dean, may be responsible for the day-to-day organisation of services. Otherwise, the Area Dean will advise on clergy to cover normal services and occasional offices and help to plan the service rota.

Registers

Service Registers must be maintained. Churchwardens should ensure that registers are signed by visiting clergy as appropriate.

Parsonage House

The Diocesan Houses and Glebe Committee, and especially the Property Department, will work with the Churchwardens to take responsibility for the vicarage. Wherever possible (given the Bishop's permission) the Vicarage will be let. This means the house is cared for by the tenants and the responsibility for Council Tax and Water Rates then falls to them.

If a rental is not possible the Churchwardens retain the keys, to inspect the vicarage regularly for any maintenance issues at least once a week and make a record of doing so. There will be a need to carry out garden maintenance to the lawns, hedges, shrubs and flower beds and to also check for possible break-ins and deal with the post. The Property Department will maintain the trees. If there are concerns over the ability to maintain the gardens it is important to contact the Archdeacon to avoid the grounds becoming unmanageable. If possible, curtains should be kept at the windows to deter intruders, and it is advisable to have a couple of lamps plugged into timer switches, to maintain the illusion of occupancy. If the parsonage is to be empty over the winter months, central heating should be left on at a low temperature of 13 degrees, until the Property Department can arrange for the central heating to be drained down.

The Property Department will inspect the vicarage during the vacancy and prospective incumbents will need to look around as part of the appointment process and before moving in. Wherever possible it is best if the telephone number could be kept for the incoming incumbent (see later). Further advice and help is available directly from the Property Department at Church House – contact details below.

Expenses during the Vacancy

1. Fees and travelling expenses are paid to retired clergy officiating during the vacancy. The current diocesan rate for expenses and the scale for fees paid to retired and other PtO clergy can be found in the advice from Church House. The PCC pay the clergy and then claim back costs from the DBF in accordance with the agreed pattern of worship.
2. Travelling expenses are paid to other visiting licensed clergy and Ministers.
3. The telephone bill for the vicarage is paid, unless this is normally paid by the PCC.
4. Charges for Council Tax and Water Rates, gas and electricity in the parsonage during the vacancy are paid by the PCC if it is not let. The parish can claim back these expenses from the sequestration fund at Church House. If a tenant is not being sought then there is the opportunity for the PCC to claim an exemption from the local authority as the vicarage is being held for a 'Minister of Religion'. When the vicarage is vacant Northumbria water will not charge water rates but the PCC will need to inform them that the property is not occupied.

The proportion of fees normally payable to the PCC for occasional Offices (i.e. for Banns of Marriage, Weddings, Funerals, monuments erected in the churchyard, etc.) continues to be paid to the PCC and the rest of the fees sent to the DBF as it would be if there were an incumbent in post. Garage and other rents normally payable to the incumbent of the benefice can be collected by the PCC.

The Churchwardens should liaise regularly with the Parish Treasurer to ensure that fee income is properly dealt with. Good communication around costs relating to the Parsonage house in the vacancy is also important as well as more generally making sure the PCC budget and financial controls are maintained.

Meetings during the Vacancy

PCC meetings and the APCM and Meeting of Parishioners must take place as normal, and should be chaired by the elected Lay Chair of the PCC, unless the Bishop appoints a priest to be in charge for the duration of the vacancy. The Area Dean should attend a PCC meeting, just before or early into the vacancy, to discuss the vacancy process and agree the pattern of services. The Archdeacon can attend this too if appropriate. The Area Dean should be kept informed of important matters relating to parish meetings, and can be invited to the Annual Meeting if this would be helpful, though the presence of the Area Dean is not necessary for the Annual Meeting to take place.

As part of the appointment process there will be two meetings with the PCC and the Archdeacon:

- A Section 11 meeting where the Parish Statement is agreed and Parish Representatives are elected to be on the interview process of the next Incumbent
- A Section 12 meeting where the Appointment Pack is finalised before moving to advertising for the next Incumbent.

The Parish Statement and Brochure

A brochure about the parish's vision and hopes for a new Vicar needs to be put together as part of the Appointment Pack. Examples of these are available for reference from the Archdeacon's Office. The Appointment Pack also includes the Parish Statement, including the latest APCM Financial statement, a Role Description and Person Specification.

When an Appointment is made

Once a priest has accepted the post and all the necessary approvals have been given (including an enhanced DBS check), it is possible to make an announcement. This must be made on the same day in both the Benefice that the priest is leaving and in the Benefice s/he is coming to. This will be confirmed via the Bishop's office.

The new priest will visit the parsonage and inspect the house with the Archdeacon and the Diocesan Property Department prior to the move. The incumbent-to-be receives a grant from the Diocese for moving and towards redecoration. The PCC should be encouraged to consider contributing towards the costs of redecoration, or even helping out with redecoration before the new priest moves in.

When the Incumbent Moves in

Please ensure that the gas, electricity and any other meters are read, and that the telephone bill and other bills are put in the name of the incumbent as appropriate. The incumbent should be responsible for any bills from the day they receive the keys and take responsibility of the property.

Welcoming the new Vicar

It is always good if the Churchwardens lead the parish in making sure that the new priest and, where appropriate, his/her family are made welcome. Checking that they are offered hospitality as they move in the house, a card, some flowers and a friendly face are always good, though each parish will have its own ways and traditions. Getting together a simple list of useful contacts such as local doctors, dentist and window cleaner etc. to hand over is invaluable too. Be friendly - this is the time to forge new and hopefully creative relationships for the future.

The Licensing Service (sometimes known as a Collation/Institution or Induction Service.)

Arrangements for the service will be co-ordinated by the Area Dean and the Churchwardens. The following need to be considered:

- The date/time is set by Bishop's House.
- A template order of Service is available electronically to the Area Dean who will meet with churchwardens to prepare details. The parish are responsible for the preparing and printing the final copies. Before printing, a copy should be sent to the Bishop and the Archdeacon.
- Please check the wording of any appointment is accurate – speak to the Archdeacon or Bishop's House.
- The new Incumbent should be asked to:
 - choose hymns and other music
 - make a list of friends, family and colleagues who s/he would like to be invited to the service.

The churchwardens and Area Dean together:

- prepare list of local contacts for invitation
- prepare and send invitations
- prepare the order of service and submit to Bishop's House for approval
- arrange with the Area Dean a time for the rehearsal
- make other local arrangements for refreshments etc.

Some Useful Publications:

- Practical Church Management; Behrens (Gracewing), 2020
- Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors; Macmorran & Briden (Mowbray), 2010
- So the Vicar's Leaving – The good interregnum guide; M Alexander & J Martineau (Canterbury Press), 2002

Links:

[Growing Through a Vacancy handbook | CPAS - Making Mission Possible](#)

Church Representation Rules 2025:

www.churchofengland.org/governance/church-representation-rules

Some Useful Phone Numbers:



Vicarages: Ian Beswick and Alison Campbell
0191 2704121



Finance Officers: Tom Royle and Gillian Green
0191 270 4131



Archdeacon of Lindisfarne: Catherine Sourbut-Groves
07436 220872



Archdeacon of Northumberland: Rachel Wood
07469 950198



Archdeacons' PA: Katherine Govier
0191 270 4142