



DIOCESE OF  
**Bath & Wells**

Living and telling the story of Jesus



# Managing an incumbent vacancy

A guide for benefices

April 2026

## Prayer for a vacancy

Below is a prayer that may be used in the parish during the vacancy.

Alternatively you may wish to write a prayer specific for your context that may be used in worship and in meetings during the vacancy.

God our Father

You have welcomed each one of us in Jesus  
and called us to be his body in this place;

Send us your Holy Spirit,  
at this time of uncertainty and change,  
to fill us with vision, energy,  
and faithfulness in prayer,

that we may be true to our calling  
to bring new life to our community;  
And guide with your heavenly wisdom  
those who are to choose a new Incumbent for this parish,  
that the one who we receive  
may be a wise and gentle shepherd of your people:

ready to serve us with joy,

to build us up in faith,

and to lead us by example  
in loving obedience to your son,  
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

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## Introduction

An incumbent holds significant spiritual, legal and moral responsibilities, and when there is a vacancy parishioners can feel a sense of loss that needs to be taken seriously. The vacancy can also be a fruitful time, where talents can emerge and grow.

During such a vacancy people will be particularly reflecting on the past, present and future, considering what are the strengths to celebrate and build on and what changes might be good. For the next chapter of witness and worship, with a new leader anticipated, it is important to be particularly rooted in prayer, asking:

- Who or what might God be calling us to be?
- What might God be calling us to do?
- What sort of leadership will help us to fulfil those callings?

It is our hope that through a vacancy, open to God and guided by the Holy Spirit, parishes will feel God's immense love and feel able to work in new and creative ways that give hope for a future continuing to live and tell the Gospel story in our communities.

The vacancy process begins with the Pre Section 11 meeting, which is hosted by the benefice PCCs and led by either the archdeacon or bishop.

At the meeting advice will be given on:

- Practical arrangements
- Procedures that must be followed in making an appointment
- Compiling the benefice profile
- A draft timetable for the interview process

Through the vacancy you will be supported by the Bishops, your Archdeacon, your Area Dean, Lay Dean and the different teams from diocesan Support Services.

This document outlines the vacancy process. Please consider us and our Archdeaconry Assistants your key points of contact for any queries you have through that process.

## Practicalities during a vacancy

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. 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.

### Leadership

During the vacancy the Churchwardens and Area Dean have legal responsibility. Any licensed clergy (e.g. curate, associate minister or PTO) and Readers will assist them. This definitely does not mean that churchwardens must do everything, but they must ensure that it is done. A lay chair (who need not be a churchwarden) will chair the PCC and also the APCM, if it occurs during the vacancy.

It is often helpful to have a small steering team or transition group to co-ordinate activities in the vacancy. The churchwardens should be part of any such group along with any person licensed with specific ministerial responsibilities.

### Worship

During the vacancy churchwardens are responsible for the provision of services. In some cases the pattern of services may need to be changed, depending on the availability of clergy, Readers and authorised lay ministers. The Area Dean will be able to offer support and advice.

### Occasional Offices

In the absence of an incumbent, it should be clear how arrangements can be made for weddings, baptisms and funerals. The local funeral directors should be told who to contact in the event of a funeral request.

## Safeguarding

The Diocesan Safeguarding team is available to support and advise parishes in ensuring that due regard continues to be given to safeguarding during the period of vacancy.

It is vital that Safeguarding is given due regard and important that Safeguarding policies and necessary safeguarding training are kept up to date.

The PCC, working with the churchwardens, must ensure that all information about safeguarding matters is securely stored before passing the information on to the new incumbent. The departing incumbent must give any safeguarding information to the Parish Safeguarding Officer (PSO) who can pass the information on to the new incumbent when they take up their new role.

Through the vacancy the PSO may find it helpful to link up with a neighbouring PSO for mutual support.

For Safeguarding queries email [safe.guarding@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:safe.guarding@bathwells.anglican.org) or telephone: 01749 588907.

## Finances

When there is no incumbent in post, the wardens and Area Dean act as sequestrators, legally responsible for administering the income of the benefice.

Fees for services and pastoral duties undertaken by clergy during a vacancy can be claimed from the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) sequestration fund. Contact [accounts@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:accounts@bathwells.anglican.org) for claim forms and further advice or [download the form from the website](#).

Fees can be claimed by the benefice for up to four services a week (excluding weddings and funerals) and for up to two days of pastoral visiting. Where any additional services are felt to be necessary, payment of the clergy is a matter for the individual PCC, and reimbursement out of the sequestration fund will not be available.

Travelling expenses should be paid, at one of the current recommended PCC rates: either full reimbursement at 45p per mile (HMRC tax free rate) or the public transport rate equivalent of 25p per mile. The decision as to which rate is to be used is a matter for agreement between the sequestrators and the officiating clergy.

The above fees are not payable to full time stipendiary clergy, self supporting ministers (OSSMs), Chaplains or Readers, although they can claim travelling expenses. Fees are only paid to clergy who hold the Bishop's Permission to Officiate (PTO). It is the responsibility of the sequestrators arranging the service to ensure that this requirement is complied with.

Sequestration funds are only available once a benefice is legally in vacancy and cease to be available the day before the institution of a new Incumbent or the licensing of a Priest in Charge .

Further information is available at [bathandwells.org.uk/parochial-fees](http://bathandwells.org.uk/parochial-fees)

## Schools

A benefice may include several schools, both church and non-church. During a vacancy it can be helpful to identify and introduce a link person to maintain those relationships. If the incumbent has previously been the main point of contact, this named link person can help ensure continuity and offer support to school leaders and staff.

This role might include:

- **Emailing the headteacher once a month** to let them know the local church is praying for them, to ask for any specific prayer points, and to give a brief update on the progress of the vacancy.
- **Maintaining a friendly presence**, such as occasionally dropping into the school with a card or some biscuits for the staffroom, simply to show that the school community remains in your prayers.

At the beginning of a vacancy, it is helpful to set realistic expectations with your schools about the level and type of support the church can offer during

this period. Clear communication early on helps to sustain trust and avoid misunderstandings.

## Churchyards

During the vacancy the Area Dean is responsible for considering all applications for churchyard memorials.

## Care of the Vicarage/Rectory

The Property Department will contact the churchwardens about the care of the vicarage during the vacancy. They may arrange for the property to be rented out. Any questions about the property should be addressed to Annabel Cook, Property Coordinator.

Email [annabel.cook@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:annabel.cook@bathwells.anglican.org) or telephone 01749 588902.

## Communication

It is important to keep the church family and wider community up to date with the vacancy. A useful maxim is “tell as many people as much as you can, as often as you can”. Consider regular updates in church communications and have a contact person on the PCC who people can talk to. Ensure that you update your A Church Near You page, website, noticeboard etc, so that people know who to contact during the vacancy.

## Curates in training

Where there is a curate in training, the Ministry Training Team Leader, in consultation with the Archdeacon, will appoint someone to take on the supervisory role.

## Benefice Share situation

Each benefice contributes into the diocesan Common Fund. This payment is called the Benefice Share. If you would like to know more about the Common Fund, please see [bathandwells.org.uk/common-fund-parish-share](http://bathandwells.org.uk/common-fund-parish-share)

When a benefice goes into vacancy we look at whether the Benefice is managing to remain up to date with payments, so that if a benefice is struggling to pay into the Common Fund we can work together to plan how that payment might be reached and the benefice be able to feel confidently sustainable into the future. This means that if the Benefice Share has not recently been paid in full, we will not immediately go ahead with the appointment of a new incumbent. Instead there will be a conversation with the Archdeacon and the diocesan Support Services team about the options for the future.

## Prayer

Prayers undergirds all that we do as God's people. Consider what is appropriate to your context as regards prayers in services, prayer meetings and a vacancy prayer. An alternative short prayer to the one given earlier in this booklet is

God our Father,  
help us to put our trust in you  
to send your chosen person  
to lead us on  
to where you would have us to be  
Amen



## Resources

- Growing Through A Vacancy: A Handbook - available through [www.cpas.org.uk](http://www.cpas.org.uk)
- Parish/Benefice dashboards, available on the Parish Returns System— contact [returns@bathwells.anglican.org](mailto:returns@bathwells.anglican.org) for guidance if needed
- So the Vicar’s Leaving: The Good Interregnum Guide – Alexander and Martineau (2012)
- [bathandwells.org.uk/parish-vacancy-process](http://bathandwells.org.uk/parish-vacancy-process)

## Vacancy at a glance

This gives an overview of the vacancy process, to give a sense of context for the information in this document. For information on the appointment process, see the document Managing an Appointment, which you can obtain either on the website or via your archdeacon’s office.

| Task  | Responsibility               | Date                   |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Prayer and discernment   | PCC, church, diocese, patron | Throughout the process |
| 2. Sorting the profile  |                              |                        |
| Meeting to discuss practicalities   | Archdeacon and Churchwardens |                        |
| Pre Section 11 Meeting with patron, Archdeacon, PCC(s), Area Dean, Lay Dean and Deanery and Parish Development Adviser to discuss vacancy | Archdeacon                   |                        |
| Section 11 Meeting<br>To discuss 5 items in Patronage Measure including election of PCC reps (see p6)                                     | PCC(s)                       |                        |

| Task   | Responsibility                             | Date |
|--|--|------|
| Confirm timetable for vacancy  | Archdeacon                                 |      |
| Reps names to be sent to archdeacon's office   | PCC(s)                                     |      |
| Prepare profile and role description<br>Support through Deanery and Parish Development Adviser   | PCC(s) (through team)                      |      |
| Approve profile  | PCC(s) and archdeacon                      |      |
| Approve advert   | PCC(s) and archdeacon                      |      |
| <b>3. Recruiting</b>   |  |      |
| Advert appears for c.5 weeks on diocesan website, Pathways, and if requested The Church Times  | Archdeaconsry Assistant                    |      |
| Shortlisting meeting (if necessary)  | PCC reps, patron, deanery reps, Archdeacon |      |
| Arrange and coordinate benefice visit and orientation day and location for interviews c.2 weeks after closing date. Inform Archdeaconsry Assistant | PCC(s)                                     |      |
| Inform candidates of arrangements for visit and orientation and interview days   | Archdeacon's office                        |      |
| Interview  | PCC reps, patron, deanery reps, Archdeacon |      |
| Candidates to be paid travel expenses  | PCC  |      |
| Announcement in church   | Churchwardens and Archdeacon               |      |

| Task   | Responsibility                       | Date |
|--|--------------------------------------|------|
| <b>4. Preparations for licensing service (generally c.3 months after announcement)</b> |                                      |      |
| Compile order of service for licensing   | New incumbent, wardens and Area Dean |      |
| Invites to licensing service to be sent out  | PCC                                  |      |
| Draft order of service to be sent to Archdeacon's office for approval                  | PCC                                  |      |
| Order of service to be sent to Bishop's Office   | PCC                                  |      |
| Licensing rehearsal  | Area Dean                            |      |
| Licensing service  | Churchwardens and Archdeacon         |      |
| Role Description to be sent to HR  | New incumbent through Archdeacon     |      |