



# The patronage process as drama

*A guide for Patrons and PCCs*

**A50** Articles series: Structures

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**This article is written primarily for Church of England non-diocesan Patrons and those who serve on Patronage Boards. It explains the process for selecting a parish's new Rector, Vicar or Priest-in-Charge and some of the issues that arise and is written as though a dramatic production. It assumes sole patronage but, later in the article, notes the variations for when patronage is shared.**

It will also be of use for PCCs of the churches all Patrons serve, for Administrators guiding a vacancy and for clergy who would value an up-to-date explanation of the system for when they seek a new parish or leave their present one.

I have spent over 30 years as a Patronage Trustee, both for a large national board and for individual livings. As I am now no longer directly involved in this ministry, I am setting out this simple guide for others based on a paper I wrote at the request of one particular Patronage Trust.

I take the Church of England patronage system as a given – even if not perfect, I believe it can work better than a number of alternatives.

This article has three sections for a parish vacancy. In true dramatic form these are presented as:

Prologue	The cast list
Act 1	Five preparatory scenes
Act 2	Five selection scenes
Sceneries	Nine backdrops.

## Prologue: The cast list

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If this was the story of how to select a new incumbent for a church, I would first introduce the three main characters in the plot. So the *dramatis personae* are as follows.

## The Patron

This may be:

- an ordained person (often the diocesan Bishop but it might be the incumbent of a nearby church);
- a group of Trustees (an independent Patronage Trust or a Diocesan Board of Patronage);
- the Crown through the office of the Lord Chancellor;
- a (former) landowner, company or other individual.

When livings are amalgamated into a team ministry or multi-parish benefice, there may be a Patronage Board made up of the individual Patrons of the various livings, often chaired by the diocesan Bishop. See later.

The Patron's role in a vacancy is to nominate a candidate to the diocesan Bishop (not to 'appoint' as such) and then to present them to the Bishop for licensing. Outside a vacancy the Patron has no legal standing apart from a requirement to be consulted over suspension of the living (of which more anon), changes to boundaries and issues affecting the parsonage house.

## The Bishop

Secondly, there is the Bishop of the diocese who will appoint or license the new incumbent. They may delegate parts of the day-to-day aspects of this role either to a Suffragan or Area Bishop or to the appropriate Archdeacon. The Bishop, or whoever they delegate to, is however likely to take a much greater interest in all stages of an appointment than in the past. They expect to be at the interview and, often, offer to administer

the process. But most Patrons should aim to handle the whole process themselves.

## The Parochial Church Council

Thirdly, there is the PCC who in turn operate through two elected 'Parish Representatives' who affirm or veto the Patron's nomination and eventually receive their new incumbent. The PCC have the responsibility of agreeing the written 'parish profile' but after that have to leave matters to their two Representatives.

It would be wise for the PCC to keep in mind the need to choose Reps for a future vacancy so as not to be caught out if the need suddenly arises. They will often be the Church Wardens but there is no requirement that they should be. However, they do need to be PCC members.

The point is that there is value in the tensions that exist between these three 'independent' parties. You are seeking God's choice of a new incumbent through this process of checks and balances. The Patron *nominates*, the PCC through their Parish Representatives *affirm or veto* the nomination and the Bishop then *licenses*.

In practice they may work much more closely together than this role separation suggests, but all three parties have a veto. All, we hope, will make prayer a priority throughout the whole process. Note that this three-fold independence is lessened when the Bishop is also the Patron.

So, if that is the cast of our drama, let's take Act One which comes in five scenes, five distinct periods of time or fixed meetings for Patron and PCC. However these may sometimes get muddled up somewhat in true dramatic form as you will see.

# Act 1: Five preparatory scenes

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Act 1 takes place prior to the selection process.

## Act 1: Scene 1

### Low-level continuous contact

Our drama begins, perhaps in flashback, long before the vacancy is reached. It is vital for the Patron to build good relationships between themselves and the church through the PCC. This level of contact is not in any formal way required of the Patron whose legal duties relate only to the vacancy process and to certain

matters where they have to be consulted as described above. So Patrons should avoid any suggestion that they are trying to influence the church, such as by pushing a view on any matter that is not their responsibility, but it makes every sense to stay in contact and become known.

Patrons need to build a good sense of rapport with the church. Here are some ideas. Not all can apply to every Patron.

- A series of meetings every two or three years with the incumbent, Church Wardens, PCC or staff team;
- members of the Patronage Trustees being invited to preach at the church from time to time;
- Patrons receiving the annual reports from the APCM – and so be known to be taking an active interest in the work of the church;
- the Patron asking the incumbent to provide an annual report on the health of the church so they can be aware of any trends;
- and of course the Patron praying for the incumbent and for the church and being seen to be taking a real and caring interest in all that is going on.

The Patron should be seen as a real friend of the church and not a faceless person or body of people who appear when there is a vacancy!

## Act 1: Scene 2

### **Making contact**

This second step can be seen as a natural development from Scene 1, but the storyline has moved forward in that the incumbent has announced their departure or has informed the Patron that a forthcoming vacancy is likely. The Covid pandemic has introduced us all to Zoom and its equivalents in video conferencing. An informal but advisable first step in handling the selection process is for the Patron to set up a video conference call to include the Archdeacon and Church Wardens to discuss the situation and plan the next few scenes. This is an important step to enable the various parties to meet and prepare to work together.

## Act 1: Scene 3

### **A preliminary vacancy meeting**

Scene 3 is another informal meeting (but this time in person) in that it is not required by law, but it makes good sense from everyone's point of view to link the ongoing relationship the Patron has with the church and to build trust with the PCC for the vacancy itself.

It is triggered by the official Notice of Vacancy (form 31) having been issued by the Diocesan Designated Officer (a technical term, usually the Registrar) to the PCC Secretary, Patron and diocese. This Notice of Vacancy is the dimming of the theatre lights, if you like, for the legal process starting at Act 1 Scene 4. The Bishop now has to give the notice to the Registrar no

later than the date on which the benefice becomes vacant. The Patron can do nothing officially until this is then received. But the Bishop can instruct the Registrar to delay sending it out by up to three months.

Prior to the official meetings described below in Scene 4 it is quite in order for the Patron to ask to be invited to a PCC meeting (whether a normal one or a special one which might not be minuted). Travel arrangements and diary commitments may mean that not all members of a Patronage Trust can manage this so it may be one or two. It is a good idea to invite the Bishop and/or Archdeacon to come too but in this case it is essential that the Patron takes the initiative, chairs the meeting and diocesan staff come as guests.

The kind of areas to include in a gathering of this kind would be as follows:

- personal introductions and the building of understanding and trust;
- an explanation of the vacancy procedure from the Patron's point of view;
- a check-up of how the PCC see the present health of the church (so it may be best if the incumbent is not present for an open and honest discussion);
- a challenge to the PCC not to take easy options (such as ask for a clone of the present incumbent, to expect a married person of 40 with a spouse who can work full-time for the church without pay and 2.4 perfectly behaved children, or to see no other way forward than present priorities!);
- an opportunity to get the PCC thinking future vision instead of past glory, should such be necessary; within this might come the idea of leadership style – many appointments are made that fit theological positioning to a T but where the new incumbent has a very different personality and style from their predecessor;
- a discussion of what any terms of tradition (such as 'catholic', 'evangelical', 'liberal') mean and how they see any need to shape this; also, where necessary, to explain the current procedures for churches where, because of theological convictions or for the sake of unity, the PCC are unable to accept the ministry of a female incumbent or bishop (see Backdrop 8 later).

It is an excellent idea for the church to draft out the parish aspects of what will become the parish profile for the choice of a new incumbent long before any vacancy process comes into view. There is then no reason why work on the role definition and person profile for a new incumbent cannot start the moment the present incumbent

announces their departure, provided the existing incumbent does not influence the writing of it in any material way.

It would also be wise for the Patron to consult the present incumbent as soon as they announce their departure and ask them for a statement of how they see the present health of the parish, where progress has been made in recent years, and where a future incumbent might wisely invest time and energy. This is a confidential statement for the Patron alone and must not form part of the legal process.

## Act 1: Scene 4

### The Section 11 meeting

Excuse the jargon but 'Section 11' and 'Section 12' are what these next two official meetings are called. The terms come from the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 which is the key piece of ecclesiastical legislation that Patrons work under, as amended by the Legislative Reform (Patronage of Benefices) Order 2019.

This is a formal meeting which the PCC are required to hold (and also a Section 12 meeting if requested) within six months of the date of the Notice of Vacancy (form 31) having been issued. But most will want to hold the meeting without anything like this possible delay.

There are several people not permitted to be present at this meeting and the Patron should ensure that none of them is there. These are the Patron, Bishop, Archdeacon, the outgoing incumbent and the outgoing incumbent's spouse. But the meeting may of course be combined with an informal meeting with the Patron (Scene 3) in which case the Patron (and others) have to leave when the PCC go on to this point in the agenda. There are six items for the PCC to cover.

#### 1: The appointment of two representatives of the Council

Once the PCC have produced their profile all legal powers for the selection are vested in these two Representatives, not in the PCC as such. As noted earlier, they must be PCC members and although the two Church Wardens are often chosen, this does not have to be the case. What is vital is that the PCC have confidence that their Representatives can make clear decisions, represent PCC views rather than follow personal ideas, be present for the interviews and be discerning and prayerful. Once nominated by the PCC, one of them acts as the contact for the Patron. It is therefore vital for this person to be easily contacted and both need to be willing to give significant time to the process.

#### 2: The preparation of a parish profile

The PCC then have to study and approve a profile which describes the conditions, needs and traditions of the parish. In practice this takes time and a number of redrafts and is often given final approval at a different meeting. The profile should be honest about weaknesses as well as strengths. The specific profile for the new incumbent within this needs to be sharp but not showing all the strengths of the previous incumbent plus all the aspirations never met in their time.

Some dioceses give very specific advice as to how the profile should be constructed. I provide ideas on this website in Training Notes TN114, *How to prepare a church profile*.

If this document already exists in draft form and is simply updated each year and seen by the Patron, then the focus now can rightly be on getting the role description and person profile for the new incumbent carefully drafted. The profile is not allowed to be specific about age, marital status or disability under anti-discrimination rules. But it might be wiser to rethink the whole profile at this point. Its original drafting may have been in a different church context from what you have now. It is worth reading samples from other churches.

It would be wise for the PCC to share a draft of their statement with the Patron, Bishop and Archdeacon before the Section 11 meeting. The 'professionals' can often spot a glaring omission or a muddled set of items in the person profile. But the PCC make the final decision on content.

Profiles these days are distributed to candidates electronically. These should be in pdf and not too large a file size. But the document should be in colour with plenty of professional design, full of good photographs. The presentation standard is often incredibly high.

#### 3: Whether to ask the Patron to advertise

The PCC may ask the Patron to advertise, but the meaning of this term is getting clouded in these days of social media and websites. What is seen as important for many people is the concept of transparency.

I would always recommend full disclosure: that would mean advertisements in the church press and on the CofE Pathways website, coverage in the diocesan website/system (which may well be automatic), and details on the church's website provided it is clear that this has been put in by the Patron. Although the PCC usually pays, details come from the Patron and applications go directly to them. For further information on advertising see 'Backdrop 6' later in this drama.

**4: Whether to ask for a Section 12 meeting**

Any one of the PCC, Bishop and Patron has the right to request a Section 12 meeting (see Scene 5 below) when the Bishop and Patron join the PCC to discuss the draft profile. It is unusual for a Patron to request this but a Bishop may well do so and if this happens it is vital that the Patron is represented there. Section 12 meetings delay the process, but some Bishops ask for them as a matter of course. An alternative is to hold an Informal Vacancy Meeting (Scene 3 above) which doubles as an informal Section 12.

**5: Whether they want the Bishop to provide a statement**

The statement will describe the relation to the benefice, the needs of the diocese and the wider interests of the church. This is now normal practice.

**6: Whether they wish to ask for alternative arrangements**

These are conducted under the House of Bishops Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests 2014 and relate to the ministry of women. General Synod has passed legislation that is fully and unequivocally committed to all orders of ministry being equally open to all without reference to gender. However those within the C of E who, on the grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests are to be seen as fully within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion and will be enabled to flourish within its life and structures. See 'Backdrop 8' later in this article for details.

For more information on all legal arrangements: see, on the Church of England website, chapter 11 of the paper 'Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011 – Code of Recommended Practice Vol 1 – Pastoral reorganisation'.

**Act 1: Scene 5****A Section 12 meeting**

If a Section 12 meeting has been requested by any party, the Bishop and/or Archdeacon meet with the PCC and the Patron. It is now normal practice for the Rural/Area Dean and the Lay Chair of the Deanery Synod to be present too.

This is a one-item agenda meeting: the parish profile. Bishops often request this meeting as a form of pastoral visitation. A Section 12 meeting may be chaired by the Lay Vice-Chair of PCC or the Patron although a Bishop may seek to fulfil this role. It is good practice for the Patron to have had some time with the Bishop and Archdeacon before the meeting to plan how the meeting should run and to take as active a part

**Summary of the paper trail**

Under the Patronage (Benefices) Measure 1986 as amended and 'The House of Bishops' declaration on the ministry of bishops and priests' this is the formal process that takes place.

**At some point before or at the vacancy**

If relevant, the PCC pass the required resolution in accordance with the House of Bishops' declaration and send this to the diocesan bishop and others.

**Notice of vacancy**

The Diocesan Designated Officer issues **Form 31** to the PCC Secretary, the Patron and the diocese. The Secretary then needs to arrange for the **Section 11** meeting to take place as soon as possible (the limit is now six months).

**Section 11 meeting**

The PCC Secretary completes **Form 34** to record the decisions taken at the meeting. This has to be returned to the Designated Officer, Bishop and Patron immediately with a copy of the profile (in practice this is usually a copy of the draft profile). All parties then have 10 days (from receipt of Form 34) to call a Section 12 meeting if they so wish. In practice it will be the Bishop if anyone who does this. This is done using **Form 35**.

**Section 12 meeting (where held)**

The parish profile will be completed after this. Sometimes Patron and Bishop may make suggestions but they cannot shape the final text as such. It is the responsibility of the PCC to provide a pdf for all applicants and all parties to the interview process.

as is possible. It should be possible to prepare most of the ground by phone before the day. The normal practice is for the parish profile to be in draft by this stage and for the meeting to discuss this draft. It is possible for a Bishop to try to influence the wording on issues such as churchmanship so the PCC and Patron need to know where they stand on such matters. It is important that the PCC Secretary minutes this meeting accurately and fully.

**In practice**

Each diocese operates in a slightly different way but what has changed in the past few years is pressure from the Bishop and/or Archdeacon to run the system. That will be their default mode of thinking. So, when the living is not suspended, the Patron needs to make it clear that they will run the whole process and they know what they are doing. In my experience the secret here is to



build trust with the Bishop or Archdeacon concerned and not to hold them at arm's length.

In some dioceses the Bishop and Archdeacon work together so that both are involved throughout the whole process (and both attend the interviews). In others the Bishop runs part of the process and the Archdeacon handles other aspects. In still others the Bishop and Archdeacon between them decide which one will run the system and the other only turns up as far as public visibility is concerned when it comes to the licensing service when the two have quite different legal roles. The final statement comes

from the PCC. The Patron or the Bishop may have given advice but cannot insist on any specific wording or the ultimate shape of the document. So if the Section 12 meeting proposes significant changes to the profile, the PCC should then hold a second Section 11 meeting, without visitors, to finalise the profile and to ensure they as a Council are happy with it.

Churches that look to a Provincial Episcopal Visitor (or 'flying bishop') need to bring him into the process from the very outset and ensure he is fully involved throughout. He will give advice on specific issues to do with his involvement.

## Act 2: Five selection scenes

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After an interval our drama now moves from Act 1 on preparation to Act 2 on selection.

### Act 2: Scene 1

#### Applications

As the curtain rises, everything is now in place for a 'normal' selection process involving advertisement, applications, short-listing and interview.

The Patron will now normally arrange for the vacancy to be advertised (though in practice the Archdeacon's office may take this over unless this is resisted). This involves liaison with the Parish Representatives.

The Patron ensures that profiles and application papers are available on the diocesan and/or parish website. It is however important that the Patron checks first with the diocese who may insist on some of their own paperwork being included: eg. role description, statement of particulars detailing stipend and independent person specification. Every diocese is different so it is vital the Patron checks what the diocese may require at that time.

The Patron receives the applications (unless the Bishop or Archdeacon is running the process) and copies them to all those who are taking part in short-listing. Confidentiality is vital. The Parish Reps need to be reminded of this and throughout the process.

This raises the issue of how many applications you are likely to receive. It may be unfortunate but the following parishes tend to receive several applications:

- flagship churches for a particular tradition;
- a large single-church parish which has seen growth in recent years;

- a single-church parish in a clear community such as a market town;
- a parish in a desirable location, especially the south.

On the other hand, it is more difficult to fill:

- complex, large churches with a significant staff team;
- multi-parish benefices in rural areas with small congregations and many Sunday services to run;
- tough inner-city parishes in areas of deprivation, or older housing estate parishes, especially if in the north;
- churches seen to be 'failing', or where the previous incumbent died in post.

Some parishes see themselves as needing someone 'with incumbency experience' but there are Curates ordained after some years in highly responsible secular posts. Be ready for surprises.

It is common these days for the advertisement to give short-listing and interview dates. For the possibility of an application from the current Curate or Associate Vicar, see 'Backdrop 3' later in this article.

#### Application forms

There is a standard C of E application form for clergy posts which is in general use and designed for online completion. It has now been streamlined and the online version with boxes that expand takes only 8 pages. But the full version with notes takes 20.

Some Patronage Trusts may use a variation of this. You need to think whether to use this, one of your own or simply ask for a CV and up to two sides of A4 in reaction to the profile.

The form does not ask for marital status (other than on the confidential section for the Bishop, Panel Chair and Administrator alone), age or family information at all. The confidential section also includes names of referees, questions about health, safeguarding, racial equality and a recruitment monitoring form which is detached and sent to the Monitoring Officer of the diocese. In other words, this process is exactly as for any post in any public body these days.

The key question on the application form is the Personal Statement where the candidate reacts to the person specification for the post and the role specification.

But the form and the HR climate of the Church of England today raise questions which the Patron needs to consider carefully. Here are the kind of questions you might ask.

- 1 Are we happy to go along with a standard HR-correct process when (a) most personal information is available in Crockfords and on parish websites, (b) we may know some candidates through our various networks?
- 2 Are we trying to be completely unbiased in the selection process and so will judge the short-listing wholly on the application form (perhaps scored as is common in many jobs today), or do we include personal knowledge of the candidates which we are likely to have for some but not for others? So what if someone we consider a brilliant fit for the post writes us a rubbish application, or someone whose theological views we question writes a brilliant one?
- 3 Should we go out of our way to research any applicants that we do not know well? This might include watching videos of their preaching online and talking to people who know them (but who are not referees) and trawling social media. This has the advantage of aiming for a position where the Patron has roughly equivalent knowledge of each applicant but raises questions as to the ethics of using networks to discover information that the application form does not divulge. It is likely that the Parish Reps will in any case be checking out website preaching and social media for each candidate.
- 4 What if we end up in partnership with a Bishop or Archdeacon who sees such things in a very different light from ourselves?

Patrons (and, for that matter, Parish Representatives) need to have considered such things before they find themselves in a difficult position. However, all need to keep in mind that in HR-correct secular selections, professional selectors will tell you that they use a variety of means to discover background information about possible candidates. It is not quite as clear-cut as some might make out.

## References

Another issue to consider is when to ask for references. The options open are:

- As applications are received – so the references are available for short-listing (not so common these days).
- After short-listing and given to the interviewing panel before interviews.
- After short-listing but only read to the interviewing panel after formal interviews.

When requesting a reference, the Patron can devise their own form or questions, or simply ask referees to comment on the candidate's fit with the person profile and role definition, sending the parish profile to each referee.

## Act 2: Scene 2 Short-listing

Increasingly, the normal practice is for the Bishop or Archdeacon to call the Patron and Parish Representatives to their office for a short-listing meeting, having circulated copies of the papers received. But, unless patronage is shared, it should be the Patron who undertakes this part of the process and leads the short-listing. Different Patrons handle this in different ways but it is now more common to invite the Parish Representatives to join the Patrons to short-list together and come to a common decision, or even to invite the Bishop and Archdeacon to take part too.

Whatever system is used, there is a reason for then checking candidates with the Bishop. Bishops are party to information individual Patrons will not have: Bishop to Bishop references. There is little point in calling for interview a candidate whom the Bishop has already decided they will not licence. There may be good reasons for their decisions.

Just occasionally a Patron has to stand up for their rights at this point (in my experience this unusual situation tends to happen with clergy whose ordinations are suspect in any way or with Curates of limited experience but who are perceived to be ready for a large job rather than

a typical first living, or after three years of curacy rather than the four expected by some Bishops).

The normal number of candidates to call for interview is three, but four can be valuable if there are enough suitable applicants and bearing in mind that some may be applying for other posts or drop out for other reasons. It is possible to interview five but that is pretty hard going for everyone concerned. Never short-list any candidate you can see no way of appointing just to make up numbers.

A problem arises if the Patron can only find one suitable candidate for interview or there are two and one drops out. In cases such as this you need to decide whether to go forward and interview just one (with no one else to compare with therefore) or to readvertise and start again.

## Act 2: Scene 3

### Visits and interviews

There are different methods in operation at this point. The default method is as follows.

Three or four candidates are called for interview, which often lasts over two days. On the first day the candidates together have a tour of the parish and locality, are told about local education, see over the parsonage house, meet a limited number of key people (Head-teacher of church school, Church Wardens, Readers, church staff, etc.), perhaps have some diocesan input, and sometimes meet the PCC over a buffet meal.

They should also have an unhurried session with the Parish Representatives to discuss the parish profile in a little more detail. The Reps might explain any present difficulties or other issues candidates should be aware of but which might not find their way into print. Candidates should be encouraged to ask questions. The point of this part of the process is to inform them, not to judge them. The candidates should also be given a pack with sample literature from the parish, accounts, etc. It is vital that all candidates go through the same process.

It is important that nothing during this period takes the place of the formal interviews. It is not unknown for church staff or PCC members to turn any session into a quasi-interview, but such people have no legal responsibility for the selection process and the danger needs to be guarded against. It is however helpful for general impressions to be collected and passed on to the interview panel after the interviews.

Formal interviews take place on the second day when the interviewing panel arrive and the candidates are free to leave as soon as their interview is over.

There are, however, other ways of handling all this. One is to ask the parish to see each candidate separately, usually on different days, and arrange a tour and other informal gatherings. The candidates then all return on a fixed interview day for formal interviews but will not see each other then so will not know who else has been short-listed. This takes longer to action but clergy often prefer it.

### The formal interview

There has been a significant change in recent years over who is present at interview. It is now common for the formal panel to consist of:

- Bishop or Archdeacon or sometimes both;
- Patron (which may involve two or three representatives of a patronage body);
- Parish Representatives;
- Rural/Area Dean;
- sometimes Lay Chair of Deanery Synod.

If the living has not been suspended, the Patron should seek to chair the interview panel. If the living is suspended still aim for this although the Bishop could insist that they chair instead.

The normal procedure, and the one the Bishop will expect, is for the decision to be taken as a whole group together. A Patron may feel their representatives need time on their own to consider the candidates, but Bishops will want to take more of a lead.

Within the interview it is normal to have some form of practical demonstration. This is usually a five-minute homily on the lectionary reading for that day. This needs to be clearly explained to give all candidates time to prepare before the day of the interview. It is usually wise not to permit data projection as an aid. Sometimes there may be a second demonstration such as a five-minute introduction to a PCC to propose a new service pattern.

Each interview should last at least an hour in my view, though sometimes a Bishop may expect to cover the ground in 45 minutes. There then needs to be 15 minutes between each interview for comfort breaks and the writing up of notes. The panel need at least 30 minutes together before the start of the interviews to agree on questions to ask and how to conduct the proceedings. It might be better to do this by video conferencing a day or two beforehand.

For how to conduct the interview see two other documents on this website. Article A17, *Staff selection step by step*, is designed for a broader application than just clergy interviews but covers the way to conduct a formal interview and decision process. Training Notes TN65, *Sharp*



*interview questions*, covers the type of general questions that can be asked at formal interview and shows how to ask supplementaries.

Formal interviews are a pretty blunt instrument but well-run ones can be effective. You may find some Parish Representatives are not used to interviewing anyone and need help and advice.

### Practical arrangements

At all times throughout the process the Patron needs to ensure that everyone is being as sensitive and professional as possible in all their dealings with people who are at a particularly vulnerable point of their lives. It is vital that no one who meets candidates gives away names to friends at church or discusses the process with others.

**Travel:** encourage careful stewardship but ensure the PCC is prepared to pay full public transport fares and mileage costs at diocesan rates.

**Spouses:** They should be encouraged to visit the parish wherever this is possible, but many will have their own employment or have childcare issues. It is however important for the couple to feel that the spouse has had every opportunity to see the area, consider schooling where appropriate, and inspect the parsonage house in detail before the candidate accepts the post.

**Accommodation:** Where candidates stay overnight it is important that this is in a neutral venue (eg. simple local hotel at PCC expense). Staying with a church member may seem like a money-saving option but this is unfair on candidates and is open to unhelpful partiality.

## Act 2: Scene 4

### Post-interview

Once you have agreed the preferred candidate, the Chair of the Interview Panel needs to contact all candidates. They offer the post to the one but you need to allow time for decision and, in some cases, for the spouse then to visit to see the parish and parsonage house if this has not already happened.

The Chair needs to keep detailed notes of every interview as unsuccessful candidates will expect feedback over the phone. It needs a robust approach to be able to give disappointing news and then talk it through in some detail. In today's climate the panel may be asked to prepare printed notes on each candidate with scores and hand these in at the end of the interviews. Once the Chair has a firm answer, the PCC Secretary sends **Form 36** to the Bishop for their

endorsement, and when this has come through **Form 37** to the Parish Representatives for their formal endorsement. When both of these have been received back the Secretary then sends **Form 38** to the Designated Officer to conclude the formal process.

Announcement of the appointment has to be timed carefully. There will be DBS checks to be carried out and, in some dioceses, a medical check too. Then the appointment needs to be announced on the same Sunday at both churches (the candidate's present church as well as the new one). It is vital that all interviewers keep the name of the incumbent-to-be to themselves until the formal announcement or considerable embarrassment and problems can result. This will need to be stressed to the Parish Reps who may well come under pressure from friends to reveal where the process has reached.

### Timetable

Strictly, nothing can happen until the Notice of Vacancy has been received. There are however some cases around the country when a diocese is keen to move the process on more quickly than this, but the legalities are tricky!

Here is a typical timetable when everything goes easily:

Notice of Vacancy	Month 1 Day 1
Section 11 meeting	Month 1 Day 22 say
Profile and ad ready	Month 3 Day 1 say
Short-listing	Month 5 Day 1 say
Interviews	Month 5 Day 22 say
Announcements	Month 6 Day 1
Licensing	Month 9 Day 1 ...

... depending on present post, school holidays, and so on. So the whole process has taken at least eight months. It is difficult to see things moving much faster than this except in special cases. If there are several parishes involved or several Patrons, the process could take somewhat longer.

## Act 2: Scene 5

### If an appointment is not made

Never fear failing to appoint after interview. Hold a second interview with two candidates if they are both suitable. If no one appears to be a good choice, you need to repeat the whole process but, before doing that, here are some points to consider.

- 1 Is there a clear reason why you did not appoint and, if so, does this mean you need to change the parish profile or its

- person specification in any material way?
- 2 Were the problems ones of theological position, leadership style, personality or availability? Did someone put a veto on any candidate and, if so, why?
  - 3 Would there be value in readvertising, or might it be more appropriate to rely on internet promotion and head-hunting for this second stage?
  - 4 Do you need to consider a different kind of candidate? For example, might there be someone younger or less experienced than

you would expect who might prove to be the right person (Samuel had this issue in selecting David!).

- 5 Are you mobilising everyone for prayer and seeking God's wisdom, or were you in any way relying on your own abilities too much?

However, once an appointment is made and announced the PCC Secretary can plan for the licensing service where the Bishop appoints and the Patron presents the candidate. At which point the curtain comes down on our drama. Or, perhaps, it might be more appropriate to say that the curtain is just rising on the main act.

## Sceneries: Nine backdrops

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Finally, nine scenery backdrops that may need to accompany Acts 1 and/or 2.

### Backdrop 1: Suspended livings

If a Bishop decides, with the permission of the Pastoral Committee, to suspend presentation (ie suspend the Patron's right to present a candidate) under section 67 of the Pastoral Measure 1983, the Patron and the PCC have to be consulted formally first and both can make representations. This can be done up to three months before a vacancy occurs and at any time during a vacancy. The suspension, once agreed, usually lasts for three or five years. Patrons should seek to keep it as short as possible.

Where parishes have been suspended (and some dioceses at various times do this automatically) the process of selection goes to the Bishop who normally delegates this to the Archdeacon. If the Patrons have good relationships with the Bishop, it is possible in some cases for the Bishop to trust the Patron to run the whole process as though the living has not been suspended. It is worth aiming for this.

In this case the Bishop licenses a Priest-in-Charge not a Vicar or Rector. And the Patron and Parish Representatives have no right of veto, though this would rarely be enforced.

Suspension may occur for a number of valid reasons: pastoral reorganisation being the main one (ie. where a Pastoral Scheme is introduced). Another reason for suspension at a time of vacancy is when the Bishop wishes to make changes to the parsonage house. Suspension is usually lifted quite quickly in these cases but this may still not be in time for the licensing of the new incumbent.

It is worth noting that if a Bishop puts in a Priest-in-Charge against the wishes of the Patron, the Patron can refuse to nominate this person once the suspension is lifted.

### Backdrop 2: Shared patronage

So far this paper has described a single church parish but these are becoming less common as many Vicars and Rectors are given several parishes to look after. Patronage for a group of parishes each with their own Patron, or a Team Ministry, may be carried out in a number of different ways. This also applies to a single parish which, for historical reasons, has joint Patrons.

- **By 'turns'** Each Patron takes it in turn to be involved, so if there are five Patrons each is only involved every fifth vacancy. This system is not popular, as you might appreciate, but if the Crown is one of the Patrons, they insist on it.
- **Jointly** All Patrons work together for each vacancy. This is seen as much better than turns, but can be difficult if there are conflicting traditions represented and can mean that clergy interviews become quite intimidating with not only Reps from each parish but Patrons too. Each Patron has a veto.
- **Special Patronage Boards** Some dioceses prefer to set up a special board instead of joint working, but can only do so

with the Patrons' permission. In this case decisions are taken by majority vote and no Patron has a right of veto. Different Patrons may have differing numbers of votes. Many boards will be chaired by the Bishop unless one Patron clearly has a majority over all the others.

- **Team Patronage Boards** These are the same as Special Boards but operate for all team ministries.

The systems are somewhat more complicated when there is more than one parish involved. There is a joint Section 11 and, if required, Section 12 meeting, for all the PCCs. These will normally be led by the Archdeacon. Each PCC appoints its Parish Reps, unless there is an agreed arrangement to keep the total number manageable. Each PCC needs to agree its contribution to the single parish profile.

### Backdrop 3: Internal candidates

When a vacancy process starts it is now not uncommon for there to be a group of people within (usually) larger churches or multi-parish benefices who wish to make the case for the Associate Vicar or Curate to be appointed. There have also been cases where an Associate has been recruited by the incumbent with the express intention that they would be their successor. If this happens it needs sensitive handling.

The general feeling in the world of patronage is that to appoint an internal candidate is possible, with advantages of continuity, but should never be assumed as the best way forward.

The advantages of appointing from within when this is a possibility are as follows.

- The church knows the candidate well in terms of their theological position, their character, their family life and their abilities (for example, as a preacher) to an extent that you can never know for any external candidate.
- There is no real period of the new incumbent having to find their feet and so church life can flow on without major distraction, especially if this person has in effect led the church during the vacancy.
- The whole process may be speeded up – for example there is no need to wait three months before the person can leave their present position.

The disadvantages include the following.

- The church may be given what they want but this may not be what they need. The people who are promoting the internal appointment may be blinkered into seeing someone whom they like and not be prepared to face the challenge of necessary change.
- If things do not work out well (and sometimes a No. 2 proves ill-suited to be the No. 1), there will always be regrets that a more robust system was not chosen. Or it may be that one group favour the internal candidate but others have a different viewpoint, and the appointment may split the church.
- The new incumbent may feel they have to continue to provide what people want because they have in effect voted for them – they may not feel they have a sufficient mandate to make changes.

My suggestion for a policy on this would be as follows. The only way an internal candidate can be appointed is for the normal processes to be carried out, including the preparation of a parish profile, advertising, and then for the candidate to be put through the correct procedures against others. If this person comes out as the best candidate, you have a win-win situation because everyone knows they were chosen against all others who applied.

There is still a difficulty at short-listing and interview in that the Parish Representatives know one person much better than the others. But the role of the Patron (and even the Bishop) can be crucial here in offering a measure of independence. One wise way forward is to suggest at short-listing that the panel find if possible three good candidates and then interview them *plus* the internal candidate.

A full, robust process which then leads to the internal candidate being appointed will present a mandate for possible change and so protect candidate and parish from feeling they have to give in to power bases within the church.

### Backdrop 4: Process delays

Delays can occur. Here are some reasons why.

- 1 The Bishop may seek to delay the whole process for some reason. A bishop can instruct the Registrar to delay sending the Notice of Vacancy to the PCC Secretary, Patron and diocese by up to three months from the actual date of vacancy. Or it might be the Bishop's crowded diary

meaning that finding dates for meetings and interviews create delays. The Patron needs to keep chivvying as necessary if they want to move things on.

- 2 The diocese may have a policy of not advertising the vacancy other than for internal candidates as a first move. This can be frustrating if the number of suitable internal candidates is limited! Advertising is carried out by the Patron who should insist on their rights to go straight to the open market.
- 3 There can be a delay (through suspension) if the parsonage house needs attention before a new incumbent can live there.
- 4 Another possibility is when a Patronage Board tries to find dates for meetings when this involves several people.
- 5 There can be delays if there is a 'problem' with a proposed appointment and the Bishop asks for a second interview with the preferred candidate or talks with the Patron. You may yourselves wish to go to a second interview, for example from interviewing four candidates to set up a second interview for two. This is common practice in the secular world where there may be several rounds of interviews for senior posts.
- 6 There is of course a significant delay if no appointment is made and the process has to start again. But delay is always to be preferred to the danger of a 'wrong' appointment.

The Patron has eighteen months to nominate a candidate to the Bishop from the date on the notice of vacancy (under the 2019 amendments). After this the right to nominate lapses and is referred by the Bishop to the Archbishop of Canterbury's office. The Parish Reps lose their right of veto at the same time.

However, in practice, the Patron would usually be asked to continue the process of seeking a suitable candidate but there is nothing to stop the Bishop taking this out of their hands.

## Backdrop 5: Powerful PCCs

It sometimes happens that if a PCC includes a number of people in senior management positions, or several people from non-Anglican backgrounds, there can be incomprehension at the Church of England patronage system and a feeling that Patron and Bishop should move out

of the way while the PCC makes an appointment. People used to appointing senior staff at work despair at some of the features of the patronage system: the time it takes, the parties that are involved, and so on.

Early explanations and constant links with Church Wardens in particular will help the Patron enormously here to build understanding and trust. Say that the whole process is governed by legal processes and remind people that the PCC does not employ the Vicar.

However, it is possible that the Patron will be asked if the PCC can appoint, say, four Parish Representatives rather than two. And it is likely that in any informal visit by candidates for interview, some PCC members will try to be the ones that ask the questions over a buffet meal, rather than the other way round.

If the PCC want more than two Parish Representatives, the law only allows two in a single parish. However, there is no reason why one or two others cannot support them provided, and this is important, they are seen to have no legal standing and at the end of the day only the two legal Representatives' views count.

## Backdrop 6: Advertised vacancies

The position here has changed from the pattern up to 2017 with the introduction of the CofE Pathways programme – see <https://jobs.churchofengland.org/pathways/>.

This is a system for both clergy and lay appointments in the Church of England. Clergy may register and update their details. They still need to fill in an application form for any post they apply for. Patrons may advertise the details of their posts. There is a subscription system for this with a fee for listing a vacancy, but you pay a monthly subscription and a set-up charge too.

This would not work for a Patron with only a limited number of benefices, but you can make use of their one-off advertisement option for a single price plus the normal listing fee.

But there is now some unease about the Pathways system and some clergy are finding it confusing. So dioceses and other Patrons are still advertising in the church press. It is well worth paying for the 'until filled' option in the Church Times (for a 20% extra over a two-week spot). You may want to consider other publications but for most it will be just the weeklies. The cost will probably be over £1,000.

There is nothing to prevent Patrons from advertising and at the same time head-hunting from their own networks. In this case all they

are doing is bringing the advertisement to the notice of certain people and suggesting they might consider applying. There is nothing wrong with that as a process, provided Patrons never give the impression that by pointing out the advert to anyone they are suggesting in any way that they are likely to be either short-listed or appointed.

It can however be awkward among friends if a Patron suggests to someone they know well that they might like to apply and they then fail to short-list them.

Sources for head-hunting would be:

- the Patron's own knowledge of people and their suitability for this post;
- the Bishop may well suggest names (usually internal to the diocese);
- Patrons can approach, with care, personal contacts with wide networks;
- members of the church may suggest names – ensure this is no more than to suggest they apply;
- some Patronage Trusts keep lists of clergy looking for moves.

Note that the diocese will usually advertise the vacancy on their website for you but it is the Patron who runs the advertising process. If the Bishop wants to restrict advertising to within the diocese as a first step (as sometimes happens) this should be resisted. As has already been advised, go for open advertising from the outset.

## Backdrop 7: **Candidates' spouses**

It is important that you consider the needs of spouses and families of married candidates in this whole process. Spouses should be encouraged to attend the informal parts of the visit and interview process (not the formal interview) but should not be penalised if this is not possible because of childcare needs or employment.

It is of course essential that the spouse has a full opportunity to see over the parsonage house in detail, and considers issues such as schooling, before the candidate accepts the offer of the incumbency.

You are not permitted to interview spouses, nor to take marital status into account at all. It is necessary to know something of a candidate's home life and telephone calls to referees can be one way of ascertaining this or checking up on any points made. But Parish Reps are likely to trawl social media to find such information.

## Backdrop 8: **Alternative arrangements**

Parishes that wish to take advantage of the alternative arrangements that have been put in place for those who wish to seek only a male incumbent must follow a certain procedure. The PCC should convene a special meeting and pass a motion that reads in a similar way to the following. "This PCC requests, on grounds of theological conviction, that arrangements be made for the parish of ..... in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests."

PCC members have to be given four weeks' notice of a meeting to pass such a resolution and the motion has to be passed by a simple majority where two-thirds of the members entitled to vote are present or by a majority of all PCC members.

The PCC sends a copy of this passed motion to the diocesan Bishop, Archdeacon, diocesan Registrar and the Patron. The PCC must be ready to explain its theological convictions in relation to gender and ordained ministry and articulate the nature of the conviction which underlay the decision to pass the resolution.

The decision to pass this resolution may be made at a Section 11 meeting or at any other time. If the resolution is passed before a vacancy is announced, the Council will be expected to review it at the Section 11 meeting.

It is the required duty of patrons to "do everything possible to achieve an outcome (of a new incumbent) that does not conflict" with the PCC's theological conviction. In other words the Patron follows the PCC's lead in this respect whatever their own convictions on the issue. If there is any disagreement the diocesan Bishop has a duty to "do all in his or her power" to achieve such an outcome.

The PCC can at any point rescind such a resolution.

## Backdrop 9: **Essential prayer**

I have left this heading to last, not in any way because it is unimportant but because it is a way to come back to the ultimate point of all the above. This should form a backdrop scenery to the whole of the drama.

You are here to find God's chosen person for the next stage in the history of a benefice. You are not engaged in a selection process for a new CEO of Christ Church PLC. You are not here to find a manager of the church staff team as a first priority. Your job as Patron or Representatives is



to lead a process that seeks to uncover the identity of the next spiritual leader of this church. Your humanity means that you cannot do this in your own strength. It is God's choice you seek: 'your will be done'.

### Background reading

The first book is getting rather dated but is good.

***Situation vacant*** by David Parrott and David Field, Grove Pastoral series No. 65, 1996.

***How to make great appointments in the Church*** by Claire Pedrick and Su Blanch, SPCK 2011.

***A handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors*** by Kenneth Macmorran and Timothy Briden, Continuum. Regularly updated.

Advice for PCCs may be found at <https://cpas.org.uk>, then go two screens left on the scrolling section, 'Learn more', then 'Download free guide'.

The Benefices Measure may be found at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/1986/3>.

### This website

Here are relevant items on my own website in the Resources section of <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>. Those in bold italic are mentioned in the text above.

#### Articles

A17 Staff selection, step-by-step  
**A22, A23** ***Job applications in Christian ministry***

#### Training Notes

TN28 No two leaders are the same  
**TN65** ***Sharp interview questions***  
 TN76 How to prepare a job reference  
 TN78 The role of a church leader  
 TN87 What to look for in your leaders  
**TN114** ***How to prepare a church profile***  
 TN132 What you look for in your Minister

You might therefore like to be proactive in suggesting how prayer might be included throughout this long process. Here are some ideas to consider.

- You might encourage the PCC to tackle this as an issue in its own right so that church intercessions and prayer diaries keep the appointment in focus throughout the entire process.
- The key points for prayer include the preparation of the parish profile, the short-listing meeting and the interviews. At these times it might be possible to mobilise the whole church for prayer and you should encourage the staff to promote this. For example, some churches have a continuous time of prayer taking place throughout the interview day, with people signing up to be present at fixed times in a nearby room.
- You should encourage openness as far as is possible to inform the congregation, without giving away anything which should be strictly confidential. Information that should be in the public domain might include an idea of the whole process, special dates in the process, the names and details of the Patron, the Bishop or Archdeacon and the Parish Representatives, the person specification and role description.

The spiritual health of the future of the church depends upon the outcome of this drama. History is full of examples of churches where the new incumbent may not have been the right choice – and the work of the gospel suffered as a result.

Pray that you as Patron or Parish Rep may fulfil your considerable responsibilities with diligence and under the leadership and guidance of the Holy Spirit. May the glory all be to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This article is available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles> then A50. See also items on the website listed above.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of advice on patronage issues.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A50 under Structures,

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