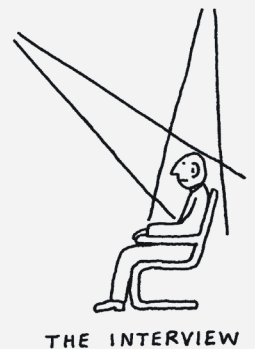
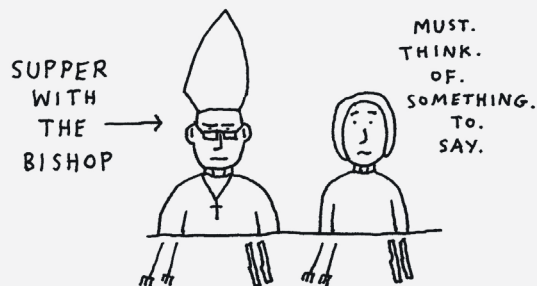
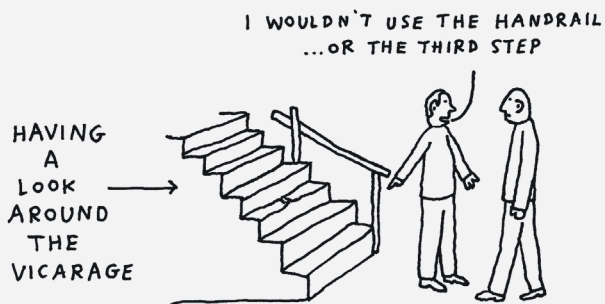
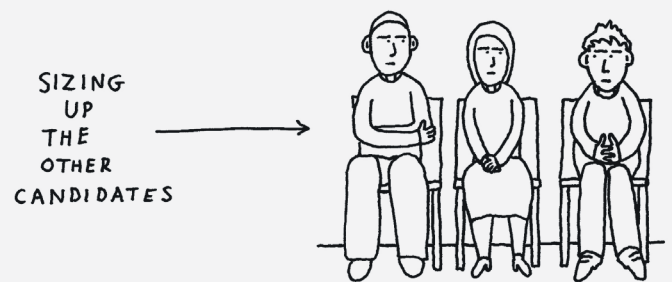
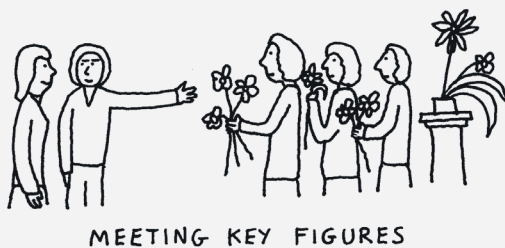
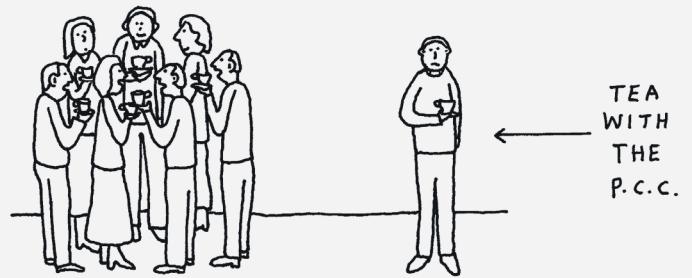
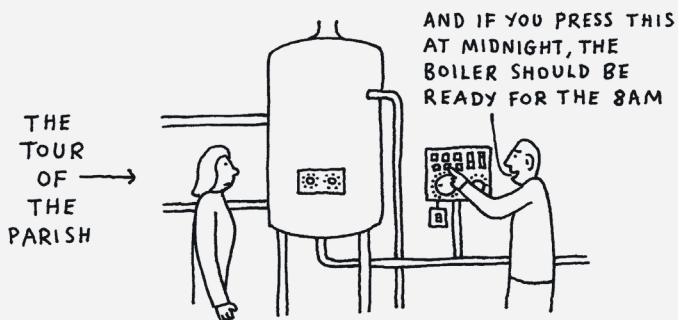


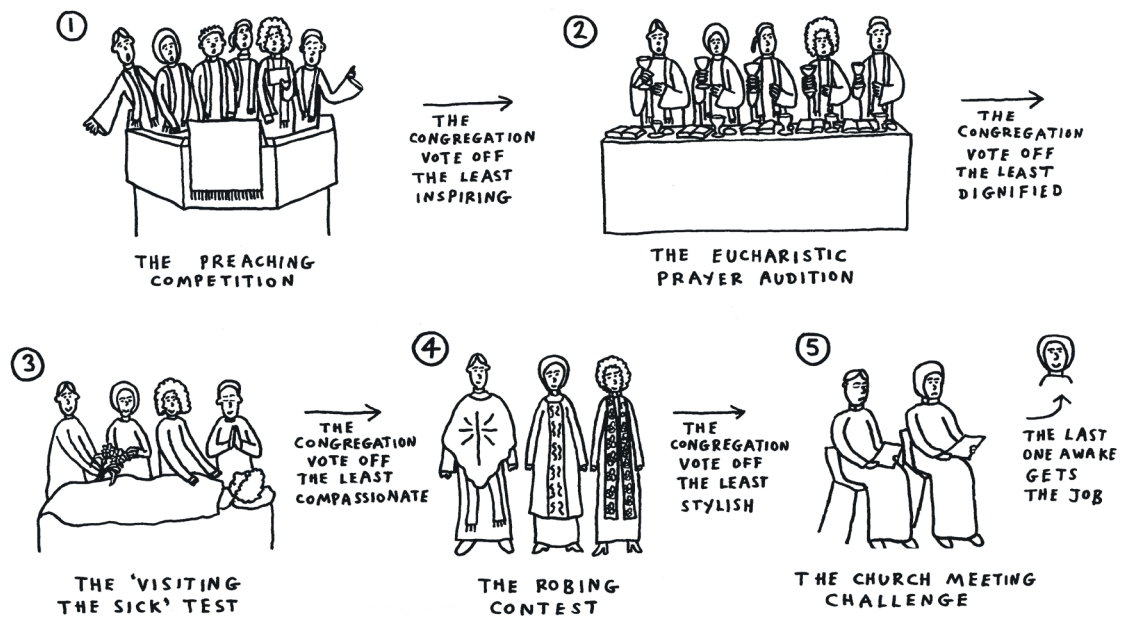
# the CHURCH TIMES guide to happy recruitment

A handbook for parishes



# APPOINTING A NEW VICAR

THE PROCESS IS LONG AND COMPLEX



## Introduction

Welcome to an insider's guide to replacing your vicar or rector. Many people in the C of E are old hands at this, of course, but because of the turnover in lay appointments such as churchwardens, PCC members, and so on, many of the people faced with this task are complete novices. This booklet is for you.

Now, not wanting to discourage anyone this early on, but if your priest has just announced that he or she is leaving, it's a bit late to be reading this.

If the parish hall extension has just been opened, named after your priest; or if he or she has just had a personal monogram stitched prominently into the altar frontal; or if there's a big festival coming up next year that depends entirely on his or her input — you could be reading this at just the right time.

If, on the other hand, you're reading this while your priest is enjoying the first flush of early success, congratulations: you're the sort of church that realises that staffing is an ongoing concern.

As many parishes discover, there are several factors at play when it comes to recruiting a new priest, and it's best to be aware of these at all times, even when you're basking in the glow of a happy and successful relationship with a priest who has declared publicly that he or she has no interest in ever going anywhere else.

Things can change overnight. This guide has been written to help you when they do.

Covid-19 presents new challenges for the recruitment process, just as it does for most aspects of church life. We don't mention it much in this guide, assuming that you will take all the precautions necessary.

# The lie of the land

THE FIRST question to answer is: **when a priest moves on, will the parish get another priest at all?**

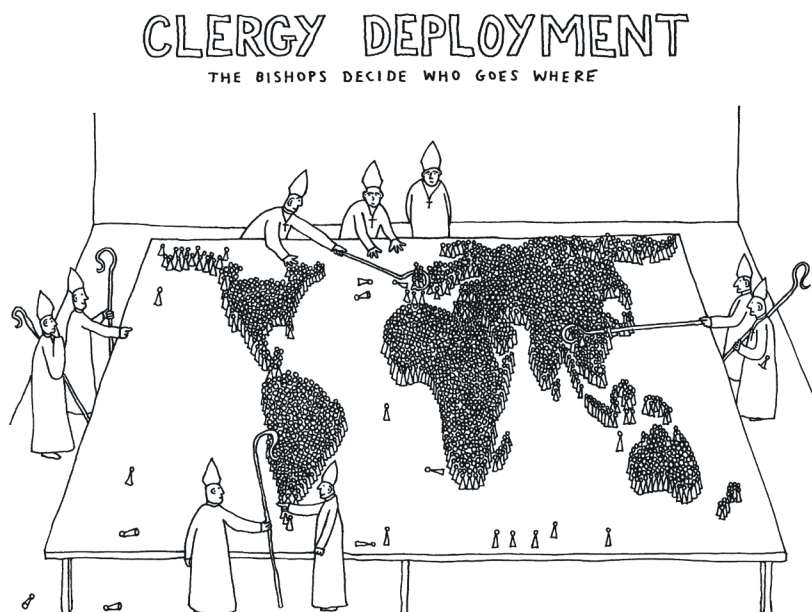
Despite the encouraging headlines about increasing numbers training for the ministry, plain demographics and the legacy of decades of under-recruiting mean that even those PR-savvy officials in the hierarchy admit that we might not see the current level of clergy again till 2030, if then.

The effects of this decline in numbers — as well as a decline in the money to pay them — has already been felt, to the extent that the single-church benefice is now rare outside metropolitan areas. It stands to reason that, if there are fewer priests to go around, they will have to be spread more thinly. Congregation members may fantasise about a cluster of eager clerics jostling to take on the parish next, but the reality is that, for parishes across large swaths of the country, there might just be one applicant — or none.

Managing the numbers of clergy and the expectations of parishes is primarily the work of an archdeacon; so it's never too soon to have a chat to discover if there are any diocesan plans for further amalgamations affecting your parish.

But maybe don't bother the archdeacon first off. The outgoing cleric, the churchwardens, maybe the rural or area dean, the deanery-synod rep — all these should have a good view of how things stand. The question to ask, then, is: will things stay the way they are? Or is an amalgamation (whatever name they might give it) on the cards?

Amalgamations are seldom welcomed, for obvious reasons. The frequency and times of services may have to be changed, the priest often lives outside the parish, and



so on. I have known two misguided attempts, in different parts of the country, to unite two neighbouring villages with no regard to a centuries-old legacy of animosity (in one case, in a quarry area, rock-throwing was a regular Friday-night activity). Christian charity ought to cancel out such a history. Hasn't yet.

On the other hand, a new grouping of parishes, if well-judged and well-managed, can lead to the pooling of resources and new friendships. People like worshipping with others, and the more the merrier: this can be possible with a larger catchment area as long (big proviso) that people are ready and able to travel.

The point of these gloomy warnings is to encourage you to find out if anything is on the cards.

**What if you discover that you're not getting another priest?**

Sorry to stay in gloomy mode, but if your present incumbent is not going to be replaced, you won't need to read much further.

To be a little reassuring, you won't be set adrift. Some sort of provision will be made. Most probably it will be an amalgamation with a neighbouring

parish; it might be a part-time or house-for-duty arrangement.

If you don't think this is fair, you can try negotiating. One thing: your position will be weaker if you have not been paying your full quota. Smaller, poorer parishes are not expected to pay the full amount it takes to provide a priest with a salary and a house, but they are expected to pay their bit. Being in hock to the diocese is not a strong bargaining position.

On the other hand, it's a strong argument that challenges the Church to avoid a bias towards wealthier areas. If the Church of England remains committed to a universal parish system, which it does, it should be prepared to support areas that struggle with issues such as low income and high unemployment, sparse population, a predominance of other faiths, etc.

The other thing you could do is to come up with other practical solutions: sharing with a different grouping of parishes to the one proposed; suggesting a part-time priest with a diocesan responsibility; a house-for-duty priest; and so on. Several of these prospects will involve you in recruiting, so read on!

## The process, and timing

AFTER your priest has announced that he or she plans to leave, this is roughly the order in which things need to happen:

- Establish contact with the patron of the living
- Talk to archdeacon to find out whether the post can be filled and when
- Draw up a parish profile — this process will help you decide what sort of priest you want for what sort of ministry - then write that down in the person spec.
- Advertise
- Interview and carry out background checks (the diocese will do the latter)
- Inform/consult all who need to be consulted/informed
- Appoint
- Find out when the new priest can move
- Announce
- Arrange a licensing/induction/installation service

Just listing these steps should tell you that this is not a swift process. Unlike almost every other organisation in the world, the Church seems to believe that it's perfectly normal to be without a key leader for months — the average is about nine months — despite the amount of notice given by the outgoing priest. To rub things in, the Church calls this gap between priests an "interregnum", when we all know that a new monarch takes over the instant his or her predecessor dies.

## The interregnum

YOU MIGHT as well know what the thinking is here. The chief use of this period of time is to treat it as a swallow of cool water between two different-tasting foods.

There are two common faults when looking for a new priest. The first is to look for a younger version of what you have at the moment: the same experience, the same strengths, perhaps a bit more energy?

The second is the reverse of this: to breathe a sigh of relief and look for someone who is the opposite of the present incumbent — someone who'll put a stop to the innovations that you haven't liked, and restore things to the way they were when the previous incumbent was around; etc.

The responsibility of those managing the process of finding a new priest is to clear a way through this thinking (starting with their own), and focus instead on the one big, simple question: What does the parish need?

Note: I say the parish, not the present congregation. Note, too, that the answer to this question is beyond the scope of a single individual. A thoroughgoing audit will touch on areas of ministry that could and should be done without the incumbent's input. An interregnum is often a great time to discover the talents in the congregation, hidden up till now because not called upon.

In your audit, there will be things that you don't believe that the church can hope to provide, such as an end to poverty, knife-crime, loneliness, or whatever. Put them down on the list, none the less. For it is only when you have this bigger

picture that you can start to see where a new priest could fit in, and therefore what gifts you'd like that priest to have.

Of course, in an open, self-aware parish, this sort of thinking might be in place already, and you could be ready to advertise and appoint immediately after the old priest leaves. The job then is to convince (usually) the archdeacon of this, and suggest that the diocese doesn't get to save the nine months or so of salary that it was expecting. We're sure they'll be amenable. . .

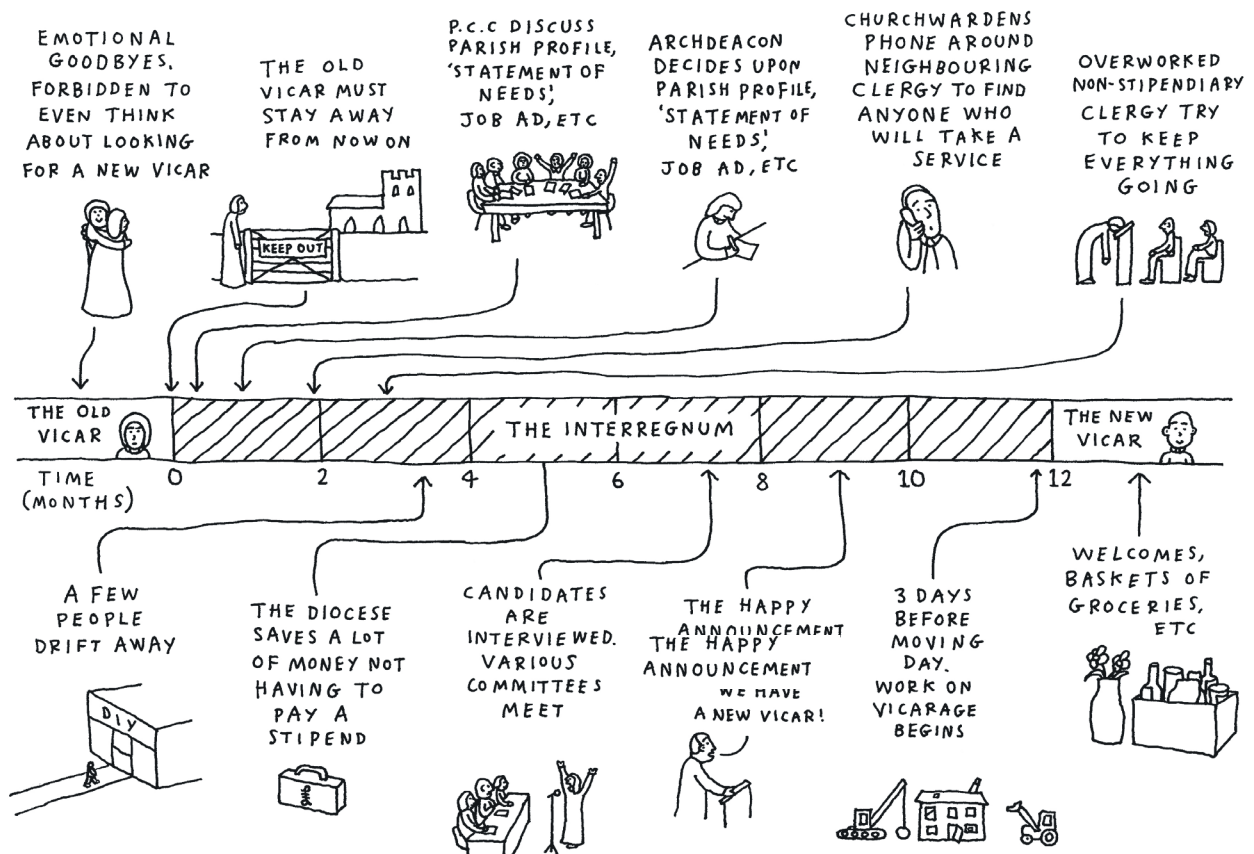
A couple of more practical thoughts: Is there anything majorly structural that you need to do? Yours wouldn't be an unusual parish if it had a large building project under way — though clergy have an admirable tendency to stick around till the extension is built or the roof fixed, and disappear only when it becomes time to enjoy the fruits of the new larger/drier/better-plumbed building.

If you do have something on the go, check what progress can be made. Is all the funding in place? Who takes over the project management. Is the departing priest a necessary signatory?

Think about the vicarage or rectory, too. What repairs does it need? Re-decorating should probably wait till the next vicar can have a say, but an unkempt house might put off a potential candidate. At least tackle the woodwork and windows, inside and out, together with anything serious like a new boiler or roof repairs. Decide what to do about the garden. If you have a notion that it might be empty for some months, think about short-term tenancies.

“ Think about the vicarage or rectory: what repairs does it need?”

# THE INTERREGNUM



## PATRONAGE

Back to the selection process, and a pretty fundamental question: whose decision is it?

The simple answer — the patron in consultation with the churchwardens — can turn out to be not so simple.

Trust me, you don't want a history of patronage in the Church of England. Suffice it to say that the patron could be the diocesan bishop; a church society (for example, the Church Society) with particular views about what theological viewpoint or worship style is permissible; an Oxbridge college; a random individual; or the Queen (though no longer in person). In some parishes, two of the above could take turns, presenting alternate priests.

Then there's the degree of consultation involved. Any of the parties involved could attempt to throw his/her/their weight around. (Be aware that that might include you, of course.) The thing to watch for is the person/institution/bishop/you, who wants to appoint somebody to take the parish in a direction of their choosing rather than what might be right for the parish.

It can look as if patrons have the experience, the influence, the power (though seldom any glory), and that can be true; but you have the local knowledge. And, more to the point, you have to live with the decision. Take account of wider agendas, therefore, but be confident with your own.

So, establish who is making the decision — and then, with them, try to establish some ground rules.



# Brain-picking

CHURCHWARDENS GENERALLY know all that needs to be known in a parish. But you need to be prepared for any eventuality. Maybe a priest has to leave suddenly or dies in office; the experienced churchwarden has moved away; a new one is yet to be appointed, leaving just one warden who has perhaps only been in office for three or four months. These things happen.

In any case, it is important to pick the brains (or hack the phone) of the priest who is leaving, and get stuff in writing, if the PCC secretary hasn't already. Consult the parish administrator/secretary.

Most of the important bits about running the parish will be written down somewhere (location of keys, bank-account passwords, that sort of thing). But are there important bits of information that your priest carries around in his or her head? If so, you want to find these out before your priest gets caught up in packing.

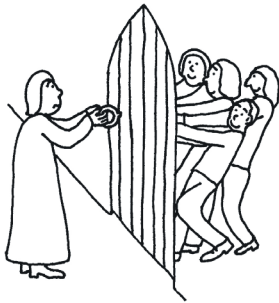
There are all the connections and relationships that have been made. Who are the most approachable people on the local council? What are the social services' support networks like? Who runs the local night shelter? How do you contact the imam? Do you share a youth

club? There's a heap of stuff that it would be criminal to expect the new incumbent to have to find out afresh — besides all the use you'll need to make of it in the interregnum.

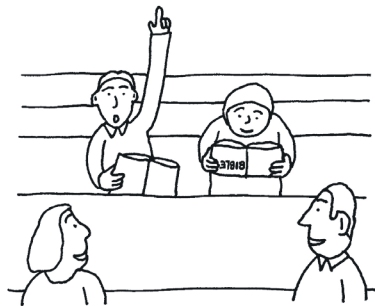
More sensitively, beside the practical stuff, thought ought to be given to pastoral care. Who are the people the priest has been supporting pastorally? What is to happen during the interregnum? Who can take over visiting duties, and what ought those people to know? Are there safeguarding issues? This sort of information tends not to be stored on a parish computer, obviously. Take advice about confidentiality.

## SUPPLY CLERGY

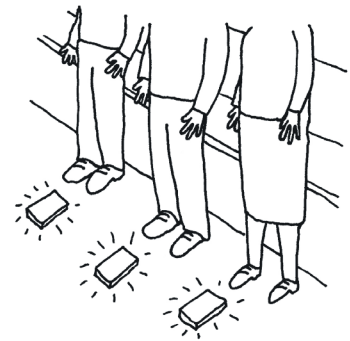
WHEN CONGREGATIONS MISBEHAVE



HOLDING THE DOOR SHUT



"WE HAD THESE READINGS LAST WEEK"



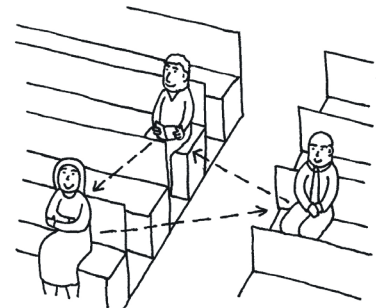
ALL DROPPING HYMN BOOKS AT THE SAME TIME



"WE DON'T HAVE A VESTRY"



MUMBLING THE HYMNS



SITTING IN THE WRONG PEWS

## PRAYER

SORRY NOT to have mentioned this before — in a way, that's an indication of how all the practical stuff can predominate in this process. But constant, committed, faithful, informed prayer is an essential part of this process. There is no way to align your desires with God than through prayer.

And you won't pray for long without realising that only God can hold all the elements of this process together, from forging an agreement between those responsible for the choice to catching the eye of the right candidate, right through to developing relationships with the new incumbent when he or she arrives.

Praying, too, is an opportunity to appreciate that God's ways are not our ways: the God who chose Peter as the founding member of his Church can very easily throw a screwball into the process. Yes, do all the sensible stuff contained in this article, but be ready for the unexpected.

Prayer also brings the parish together. Not everyone can be on the interviewing panel (though it sounds as if some parishes have tried), but everyone can be deeply involved in the process through prayer.

## The parish profile — but first ...

AS PART of your parish audit, draw up an honest assessment of the parish's strengths and weaknesses, not sparing the old incumbent's blushes. This is the starting-point for the parish profile. The profile is an essential bit of kit, describing the parish to prospective candidates, but its compilation can be much more significant than that.

As advised above, you need to pull together ideas about where the church should be heading. Again, this is an auditing exercise that could happen at any time in the church's life, but a change of priest is a good time, knowing that whoever comes next will have different talents and potential.

There is no formula for doing this, so it's up to you whether, for example, you set up a small working group to canvass opinion, or hold an extraordinary meeting of the PCC. The key thing is to involve everyone who wants to be involved — even if they wouldn't naturally push themselves forward, e.g. the youth group, the mothers-and-toddlers meeting, the residents of the neighbouring care home.

Questions you will quickly become aware of: is the vision of the church shared by all? How do you balance the different views of the congregation? How much of the vision is focused on people beyond the congregation? Are there power bases that need to be acknowledged and persuaded

to act generously? What areas of mission have been neglected, for what reason?

There are two reasons for this sort of introspection. The first is to prepare the ground for what you write in the parish profile; but, more immediately, it gives you an insight into how the interregnum will shape up.

A common problem in parish life is a shortage of people willing or able to contribute their time and energy to the running of the church and its activities. Naturally enough, the people who are most actively involved tend to have the greatest say in how things are done — indeed, what things are done.

The danger here comes from human nature: we run things the way we want to, and soon the church can become like a club. Things then become circular: when outsiders see things being done a certain way, particularly by people who seem to be church fixtures, they assume there's nothing for them to do.

All this self-examination ought to be a regular habit even when you have a priest, of course — and the existence of a cleric is by no means a bar to cliques and cabals. But it's particularly important that a parish hangs together when you're without a leader/referee/professional theologian/etc., or whatever roles the priest performs.

“The danger here comes from human nature: we run things the way we want to, and soon the church can become like a club.”

# The parish profile

DRAW UP a parish profile that is not too distant from this, i.e. still honest, but more succinct and forward-looking. Recruitment is a two-way street: you are looking for a suitable priest; he or she is looking for a suitable parish.

“Suitable” can mean many things here and does: every parish has an unfinishable variety of tasks to be done; every priest has an unfathomable range of talents. Sounding them out comes later, though. Right now, your job is to depict your parish in a way that will attract the right candidate(s).

There’s quite an art to this, so we’re preparing a separate guide that goes into this in much greater detail. But here are a few basic thoughts.

In terms of format, many dioceses have a standard form for parish profiles. Whether or not yours has, you can learn much simply by reading other people’s online. There are some basics: start with the area — give standard details of demographics, number of churches, services, etc.

Beyond this, the key is to be honest but positive: what does your parish have going for it? Think

“The key is to be honest but positive: what does your parish have going for it?”

congregation, activities, state of the buildings, school connections, location, finances, vicarage, support (e.g. Readers, administrator, etc).

Next, what are the challenges? You need the same degree of honesty here as in the positive bits. Do any of the following sentences sound right to you: “Of course, we’ll tell the candidates about that if they ask”; “If we mention this, no one will ever apply”; “When they’ve moved their family into the vicarage will be soon enough to tell them about that”? I hope not.

On the other hand, there is a way of presenting problems that tells the candidate that you’re committed to finding a solution — which you are, of course. “The parish is aware that its ministry to a nearby estate has made little impact, and is looking for a fresh impetus to fulfil this vision.” “Giving has dipped in the past three years. The PCC is arranging a special prayer day to focus on this problem.” “Our music has always been a bit

rubbish, but we’ve started recruiting some new people to the choir.”

Finally, what sort of person are you looking for? Are there any definite requirements? “The successful candidate will have at least three years’ experience working in a multifaith environment.” Or strong hints? “St Mary’s has a reputation for fine musicianship in its services.” Or directions you have identified in your soul-searching (see above)? “St Nicholas’s wants to develop its ministry to the care homes in the parish.”

Then there’s what continues to be called churchmanship. I’d advise against being too prescriptive: Evangelical, Catholic, etc — though some of the patronage societies like that sort of thing. But you can emphasise the bits of the tradition you favour: biblical preaching, informal worship, a commitment to social action, theological exploration, eucharistic discipline — that sort of thing.

## THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

You have done a bit of this in the parish profile, but draw up a list of attributes you’d like the new priest to have, in order of priority. To start with, devise some sort of forfeit for each person who jokes about wanting the Archangel Gabriel.

That said, it’s as well to recognise early that your future priest is not going to be perfect in every respect. How much experience do you want them to have? Older priests can bring well-developed skills to the post but might be set in their ways. Younger priests might be a bit raw, but they can learn quickly. Alternatively, older priests maybe have nothing to

prove, and can be willing to adapt to your ways. Younger priests might still be in the “know-it-all” phase.

How do you tell the difference? Look for signs in the applications and references, and make sure you interview diligently. Even then, it’s as well to recognise that there will always be a margin of error.

There are a few autocratic priests (perhaps I should write “psychopathic”) who know instinctively and

*Continued on next page*



# UNDERCOVER CLERGY

CHARACTERISTICS OF POTENTIAL NEW VICARS VISITING UNANNOUNCED DURING A VACANCY



TRYING TO  
BLEND IN



LOITERING NEAR  
THE VICARAGE



KNOWING A BIT MORE  
OF THE LITURGY  
THAN IS NORMAL



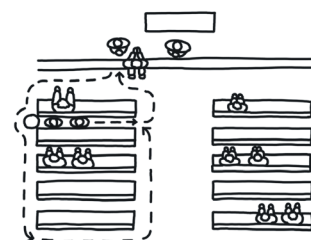
TAKING AN UNUSUAL  
INTEREST IN THE STATE  
OF THE FINANCES

SO, ARE YOU  
VISITING?



YES...  
I MEAN...  
NO...

APPEARING EVASIVE  
WHEN ASKED QUESTIONS



UNDERSTANDING HOW  
THE COMMUNION ONE-WAY  
SYSTEM WORKS

devastatingly well how to disguise their characters, and whose glowing references are written by people desperate to get rid of them.

On the other hand, I have also known able, imaginative priests who are just hopeless at presenting themselves. When they eventually get appointed, usually after being turned down several times, the parish is astonished at how good they are.

A few parishes make it their business to attend services conducted by prospective candidates to see how they perform, and to chat incognito to congregation members over coffee. This might seem sneaky, but could give a better picture than some artificial preach-off in front of a selection panel which some parishes employ.

The key thing you're looking for is fit. If you have a couple of decent Readers, it might not matter too much if the new priest is not the best preacher in the world. If you have an able parish administrator, it might not matter too much if the new man or woman is a little disorganised. Increasingly, priests are expected to be initiators, forging new relationships across the community, starting new projects. Such people need sweepers, midfield players who can follow up and make sure that a proportion of the bright ideas come to something. If you don't have those sorts of people in the congregation, you need to limit your requirements.

Above all, don't forget to look for holiness. You do want your new priest to be a person of prayer, don't you? And remember, prayer takes time.

# Finding someone

IN THE (bad) old days, the bishop would have a good idea of whom he'd like to slip into the vacancies that came up in his diocese. There were those pesky patrons to deal with, and occasionally an unbiddable PCC, but generally holes were filled with pegs of the bishop's choosing.

The advantage of these arranged marriages was that a good bishop knew the attributes of the clergy at his disposal, as well as the peculiar challenges of each parish. Roundish pegs could be directed to roundish holes.

But, like all neat top-down systems, such an arrangement was open to abuse and prejudice, especially in a Church that has continued to give its bishops power and respect. A square bishop might appoint a square peg to a roundish hole in order to make it squarer.

Advertising thus brought in an element of open government, attracting candidates from outside the diocese who could serve the parish better than the bishop's favourite.

Strangely enough, I find myself mentioning the *Church Times*. There are other ways of getting your vacancy known — diocesan websites, one or two commercial sites — but assuming that you want your vacancy to be seen by as many people as possible, and share a commitment to open and fair recruitment, an ad in the *Church Times* is still the best way forward.

The shortage of clergy is making parishes question the value of advertising. What's the point of spending all that money (the

average is about £8-900) if you attract only one or two applicants, or fewer?

There is an alternative view, of course: canny parishes realise that the fewer clergy there are around, the tougher the competition. They know that they have to advertise widely in order to attract anyone.

I live in a parish on the south coast that recruited a new team rector from Northern Ireland. I would say this, wouldn't I, but countless parishes and clergy have been attracted to each other when the former had no idea of the existence of the latter, and the latter might not even have been looking to move till he saw the former's advertisement.

In the secular world, this would be called serendipity or luck. Christians have a different understanding. . .

For its part, the *Church Times* has frozen the price of advertising clerical posts for almost a decade, ever since the last financial crash in 2008. And in 2010, we introduced the "until-filled" option. For a small premium, you can re-advertise a vacancy for free if you don't attract anyone suitable the first time around. Or the second time. Or the third, etc. Most parishes now opt for "until filled".

A word about the online recruitment service run out of Church House, Westminster, Pathways. Why you might think of using it: it's cheap, and it has been promoted heavily to the church hierarchy. Why you might choose not to use it: you won't have the help of Kelly, Lisa, or Katie, available on 020 7776 1010 (jobs@churchtimes.co.uk) every weekday,

9.30-4.30, to talk you through the application process, making sure that your vacancy is seen by thousands of potential candidates who access our website regularly or read through the jobs pages.

Also, the future of this paper relies on people like you who continue to use the service we provide. Put simply, the money you spend on recruitment not only finds you a priest but also supports everything else that the *Church Times* does: its weekly publication, its online news service, the resources it makes available to those who run the Church, and the myriad of additional projects: the Festival of Preaching, the Green Church and Green Health awards, the Festival of Faith and Literature, etc.

To put the cost of filling your vacancy through the *Church Times* into perspective: suppose your priest stays for just five years and you spent £800 to attract him or her, that's £160 a year, compared with an average of about £70,000 a year that it costs to fund a priest in terms of stipend, housing, pension, etc.

## **What if you get only one applicant?**

First, be grateful. Many parishes now have to advertise two or three times before attracting anyone, especially in a number of northern dioceses.

Second, take the Holy Spirit seriously: recruiting clergy should adopt the best practices of the secular world, but that doesn't mean that the process is wholly secular. It's important to try to discern when the Holy Spirit is at work, directing people to the right place.

Third, this is not an unusual way to appoint a new minister: several denominations work on the principle of considering only one person at a time.

“Canny parishes realise that the fewer clergy there are, the tougher the competition.”

# CLERGY ADVERTISEMENTS

UNDERSTANDING THE HIDDEN SYMBOLISM

SIGNS LIKE THIS MEAN THAT THE ADVERTISEMENT IS MORE LIKELY TO BE GENUINE, RATHER THAN ONE SUBMITTED BY A PRANKSTER

⊕ DIOCESE OF ██████████  
THE PARISH OF ██████████ AND ██████████  
WITH ██████████, ██████████, ██████████, ██████████ AND ██████████

- WE ARE LOOKING FOR A PERSON OF PRAYER WITH GOOD PREACHING AND PASTORAL SKILLS
- THERE ARE SUBSTANTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MISSION NETWORKING
- THERE IS SCOPE FOR ENCOURAGING LAY PARTICIPATION
- WE NEED A VISIONARY LEADER WHO IS ENERGETIC, ENTHUSIASTIC AND PRACTICAL

WE HAVE BLOCKED OUT THESE DETAILS FOR OBVIOUS REASONS

"WE LOOKED AT ALL OF THE OTHER ADVERTISEMENTS AND COPIED WHAT THEY HAD WRITTEN"



"YOU CAN GO TO THE PUB IF YOU LIKE"



"NO-ONE ELSE WILL DO ANYTHING"



"YOU WILL HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING"

Fourth, a low response might simply mean that you got your advertising right: a vague description of the vacancy which attracts a wide field of candidates can waste everybody's time.

But, of course, the applicant might be hopelessly wrong. A careful look at the application, perhaps followed up by a phone call, could well clarify matters. It's important not to drop your standards.

Even though it might seem strange with just one candidate, you need to go through a formal interview in order to discern whether this is the right fit.

In the past, you might have been advised to advertise a second time to get a wider field of applicants before interviewing. Nowadays, there's no guarantee you'd get any more. So treat the applicant you

“The parish is aware that its ministry to a nearby estate has made little impact, and is looking for a fresh impetus to fulfil this vision.”

have with respect, and go through the discernment process until things are clear.

### What if you get no applicants?

One option would be to move your parish to the Cotswolds, say, or Camden. If that's not possible, don't panic. Although it can seem like a snub — "What's wrong with us, that no one wants to come here?" — it could simply be the result of any one of a number of factors.

The first, of course, is the general shortage of clergy. Beyond that, it

might simply be a matter of timing: that one priest who is destined to come wasn't free/wasn't in the right frame of mind/didn't see the advert. In case it's the last, re-advertise. The popularity of the *Church Times's* "until-filled" option shows that it works, and that you're not alone.

If that doesn't work, rethink the advert: does it accurately reflect the joys associated with the post as well as the challenges? Or rethink your parish profile and your person spec. Or, in the last resort, rethink the post itself. Talk to the archdeacon about different options available.

→ The next three sections are written by Su Blanch of 3D coaching, which advises parishes and institutions about recruitment and HR matters. She is joint author with Claire Pedrick of *How to Make Great Appointments in Church* (SPCK, 2011). [www.3dcoaching.com](http://www.3dcoaching.com)

## PREVIOUS INCUMBENTS



BUILT THE  
TOWER



INSTALLED  
GAS LIGHTING



MAGNIFICENT  
BEARD



FOUNDED THE  
SCHOOL



DID WONDERS  
FOR THE ROSES



NAME ON  
A PLAQUE



LARGELY  
ABSENT



INTRODUCED  
INNOVATIONS



ABOLISHED  
INNOVATIONS



LEFT UNDER  
A CLOUD



WROTE  
A BOOK



BUILT CHURCH  
ON NEW ESTATE



DAY OFF:  
FRIDAY



UPSET THE  
FLOWER ARRANGERS



PUB OUTREACH  
MINISTRY



BEFRIENDED  
THE METHODISTS



STARTED THE  
FOOD BANK



KEPT THE  
PLACE GOING

## How to choose between applicants

The candidates' application — whether a form, a CV and covering letter, or an online application — is their opportunity to introduce themselves to you. This document should give you enough data to feel excited about the prospect of meeting them in person, an insight into what they might be able to bring to your parish, and therefore what the future might look like together.

Before getting stuck in to the applications, however, you need to return to the hard work that you have already slogged over in creating a parish profile and person spec for your ideal candidate. These are your criteria, and function as both a reminder of what has been agreed collectively about this post, and what you have communicated to applicants about your expectations.

Keeping hold of these guard-rails means that the read-through of applications is grounded and guided by decisions already made, rather than driven by an instantaneous reaction (whether positive or negative) to their material. The school that the candidate attended, their previous career-choice, or the football team they support can hook us in or turn us off very easily without us recognising it. Unconscious bias is very powerful, even in response to something on paper.

Have a structure in place, therefore, that helps you read the applications with integrity, making connections between what your needs are and what the candidate has to offer.

Identify from your person spec what is essential and desirable for this job, being clear that, if the candidate does not meet all that's on your essential list, they need to be taken out of the process. Being robust on this enables a safe process for the candidate and for you. This applies even if you have only a small number of applicants: just because nobody else applied (this time round) doesn't mean that the one or two who did are God's choice for you. As long as you're confident about your criteria, re-advertise.

Second, come to an agreement on how many candidates would be optimum to meet in person. This helps in making some short-listing decisions if there is a large field of candidates. These hard edges help to keep the process aligned with your original purpose.

Work through the applications looking for the evidence that connects with your essential and desirable criteria, identifying any gaps. As well as identifying competence from the content of the application ("does this person



meet our criteria?"), consider the "voice" that you are hearing. The candidate is introducing themselves as well as their skills: so what do you understand about them from how they have constructed their application?

Is there a clear voice which is relational? Or formal? Or measured? Or eager? Or desperate? Consciously recognising what you are sub-consciously picking up means that you can make some choices about what you need to do about this. It's very easy to infer and interpret without identifying what the evidence is.

As well as the hard scan of essential and desirable qualities, take some time in prayer to reflect on how this person's potential might fit in your place. Potential is difficult to measure, obviously, but there may be some hints and ideas in an application of which you can take note. Recognise that the candidate comes as a whole person, who may have had great experience before ordination in other contexts which you would value. Leading a team in a bank, a shop or in a high-pressured customer services environment is not the same as leading a team in a church context, but there are some key skills that will have been practised and honed there that will be useful to you.

In summary: what do you get from this candidate? If they were the post-holder, what would it be like working with them? How might they change the culture? Finally, what are your outstanding questions about this person that you would like to find out more?

## Keeping legal and being fair

The diocese will guide you through the legal process, including agreeing a statement of needs and the Section 12 meeting. Ensuring that the process is fair and that there is no discrimination is in everyone's interest and is a shared responsibility.

This means both being aware of personal unconscious bias and keeping it in check, and ensuring that there isn't anything in the process which unfairly favours or hinders an individual on account of their protected characteristics. Appointing the right person for your post seems like a rather obvious aspiration for this process, but it is easy to utterly undermine this hope by relying on bias and learned opinions as truths.

Unconscious bias is pervasive and powerful. It is possible to find strong, rational arguments to back up the biases that we hold. Keeping strictly to the criteria on the person spec means that other factors (gender, race, age, etc) must be disregarded.

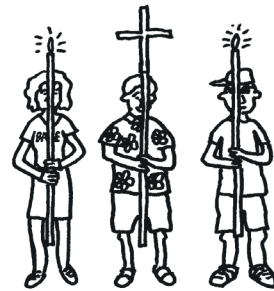
Beware the alluring confidence that, because your previous priest was a 40-year-old man, this next one needs to be, too. That reliance on assumptions hides

## THE INTERREGNUM

THIS IS THE TIME BETWEEN THE END OF ONE VICAR AND THE START OF THE NEXT ONE

### GOOD THINGS ABOUT AN INTERREGNUM

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WEAR ALL OF THE PROPER ROBES ETC.



YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ELSE INSTEAD OF HAVING A SERMON



### BAD THINGS ABOUT AN INTERREGNUM

SERVICES ARE CONDUCTED BY VISITING CLERGY WITH PECULIAR METHODS



TODAY'S SERMON WILL BE CONDUCTED VIA THE MEDIUM OF DANCE... AND I'D LIKE EVERYONE TO JOIN IN...

MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION HAVE TO DO THINGS



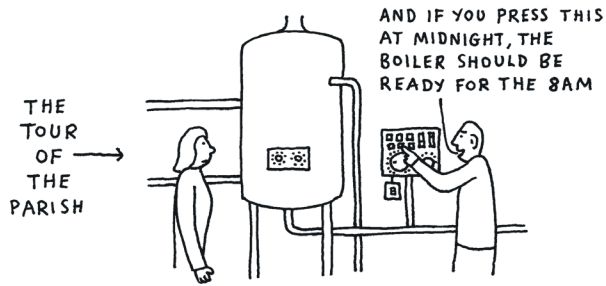
from you the gifts that God has developed in each person differently. It is illegal and unfair to make decisions in this way, and is dismissive of God's great work.

As well as ensuring that the process is free from discrimination, there's also a responsibility to keep confidentiality for the candidate. This includes the names of who has applied, what was expressed at interview, and what the outcome is. When representatives are nominated to be part of the appointment process, they are given the authority to carry that task out, and with it comes the requirement is to keep details confidential, even if there is pressure from others to share information about what's going on.

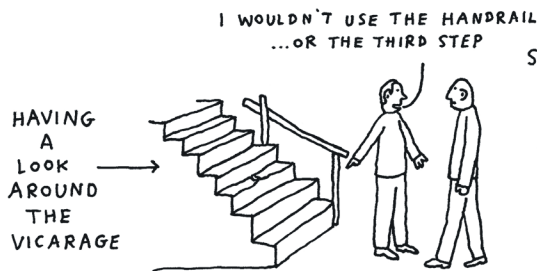


# INTERVIEWING

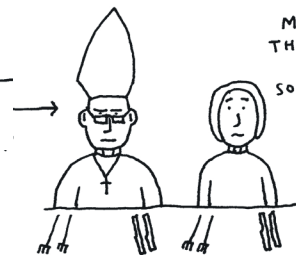
FOR A NEW VICAR



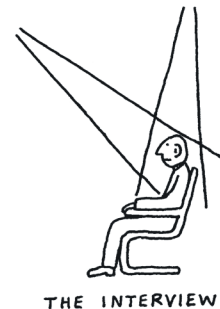
SIZING UP THE OTHER CANDIDATES



SUPPER WITH THE BISHOP



MUST. THINK. OF. SOMETHING. TO. SAY.



## Interviewing — it's about data-gathering

The interview is a two-way sharing of data which allows both you and the candidate to discern whether this is a good fit. It shouldn't be used as an opportunity to trip people up, put them under undue pressure, or to make them uncomfortable — unless this is the environment in which they are going to be working . . . in which case there might be some other work that needs to be done ahead of appointing someone.

It is unfortunate that more people have seen The Apprentice on TV than have observed well conducted interviews: from both your side and their side, this is not a style of interviewing which is going to allow for data to be shared effectively and therefore good discernment to happen.

So, the starting point for what should be asked at interview isn't revisiting the ghastly questions that you've had the misfortune of being asked at interview ("If you were a tree, what tree would you be?" "What's the worst thing you've ever done?" "What are your weaknesses?").

Instead, go back to your paperwork yet again, and figure out what you need to know from this process, so that you can collect good data that will enable you to discern the right candidate. Once you're clear on that, it's simpler to determine what will enable the candidate to demonstrate this to you.

This might include interview questions (self-reported data), preaching (observable data which demonstrates theology, teaching style and connection) or "Grill a vicar" at the local school (data on engagement with children) — or many other options.

Being intentional about what needs to be demonstrated, how you get that data, and what you're going to do with it, will help you build a process that fits your post. This process will be worked out alongside the patron and the bishop (or bishop's representative) —

“ The interview questions need to be agreed beforehand, and the same questions asked of all candidates. ”

so make sure you're in agreement before you get into the interview room.

The interview questions need to be agreed beforehand, and the same questions asked of all candidates. This makes the process fairer and less open to the risk of discrimination and bias, which is the spectre prowling around the room, as the possibility of reliance on gut feel colours objectivity. Asking candidates for examples provides more useful data than asking general or hypothetical questions. The latter can serve only to demonstrate their effectiveness at dreaming things up under pressure rather than bringing into the open actual evidence of what they have done and how they did it.

As well as activities that enable you to gather data about them, there need to be opportunities for the candidate to gather data about you, to discern whether this is the right place for them now. This includes visits to the house, the church(es), and the church school(s); and there is often a social gathering, which is their opportunity to find out more from a wider range of people about what your place is like.

For some, this is more daunting than the interview itself. It is useful to recognise that this can feel awkward and uncomfortable for the candidates — and therefore possibly not the best environment for them to get their data. Be kind.

Also, be kind in allowing them time and space to pray and reflect. Some dioceses plan the familiarisation day separately from the interview day, which means that the candidates get a chance to observe, explore, and discern without the pressure of performing.

A packed, over-crowded agenda may mean that you do not get the opportunity to really see the candidate and what they might bring to your parish. Instead, you meet an exhausted candidate who can't wait to go home.

This is a two-way process, of course: how they feel treated on their interview day gives them some data, whether accurate or not, about how they might be treated in your parish.

The interview will be chaired, often by the bishop or a representative of the bishop. Do take notes: this is going to be critical to the discernment that follows. Writing down what they say (rather than what you think they mean) is a useful discipline to avoid bias. Noting down only observable data rather than perception or judgement is important, also — as the notes taken can be accessed through a GDPR data request. Keep in mind that the candidate might see your notes.

At the end of the interview, candidates should be given plenty of opportunity to ask the panel questions. This is

## Once decisions have been made, invest some time in thinking about what needs to be shared with each applicant as feedback.

really helpful for them to get some clarity on the post, or the parish, or what the future might look like.

Once they have asked their questions, and the next steps of the process have been explained, and they are sent on their way, the hard work for the panel begins in earnest.

Prayer, again, and listening, need to be woven into this discussion. Once again, keeping tight to the criteria of what you need in your next post-holder is important. Getting excited about one of the candidates' enthusiasm for frogs shouldn't derail this process — unless, of course, ministry to frogs was identified as one of your criteria at the start. It's useful to have a clear process for sharing data and collecting it in this meeting, so that everyone has the chance to be heard, and any issues about the candidates' data discussed.

Once decisions have been made, invest some time in thinking about what needs to be shared with each applicant as feedback. Applicants who haven't been appointed, having taken the time and energy to participate in your process, need to get some value from it so that they can continue to discern God's call, and learn from this experience. Feedback shouldn't be given in the same phone call as being told "no" — that's a lot to process and they won't be as receptive as they could be.

Useful questions to consider for feedback include: Whom did we meet? What did we like in the data that they gave us? Where were the gaps between the candidate and our criteria?

For some candidates, the "no" might feel deeply disappointing to them. For others it will be a relief! It is important that they recognise that this is a no only for this post at this time, not a total rejection of them and their calling.

And for the "yes" candidate? It's also good to give them some feedback about the process, and how they came across.

This is the start of a new ministry for both of you, so keep asking God for guidance about how to make this work for the good of the Kingdom, as you begin this new season together.

For further information on how the Church Times can help you recruit your next vicar or rector, or fill any other church post, contact us by email: [ads@churchtimes.co.uk](mailto:ads@churchtimes.co.uk) or by telephone: 020 7776 1010

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