

“Crib sheet” for churchwardens during a vacancy

NB : each church is different, but these are some of the things you might expect to do, with some suggestions of where to find help

Services

- Sunday, weekday, Festival service cover: the Rural Dean is responsible for this, but is always grateful for any help. Wardens should provide service requests at least 4 weeks prior to the service date – and some Rural Deans like to arrange up to 10 weeks in advance.
- ensure there is someone to welcome the visiting vicar and to show them where everything is and what is expected;
- weddings: someone at the church needs to take details (there is a standard form) and book the church etc and inform the Rural Dean; again the Rural Dean will sort out clergy; there is a temptation to get the old vicar back but this should be resisted; if in any doubt about eligibility (e.g. foreign nationals or married before) contact the Rural Dean before accepting the booking;
- baptisms: as with weddings; n.b. you need to make sure that the clergy person taking the service is aware of a baptism and the details, especially if the baptism has been booked after the rota has been done.
- funerals: as with weddings, you will need to book the church; the funeral director will liaise with you and the Rural Dean about who is taking the service; again the temptation to get the old vicar back should be resisted; often one priest is “appointed” as the contact person for undertakers – especially when there is more than one vacancy in the deanery.

Administration

- you need to make sure that there is a properly elected vice-chair of the PCC who will chair PCC meetings in the absence of the vicar;
- PCC meetings should run as usual; many churches have meetings like standing committee, or church officers, or wardens meetings: it’s probably a good idea to keep going with these;
- Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM): this can be a bit more contentious, given the election of PCC and wardens: sometimes Rural Deans or Archdeacons are asked to chair these meetings;
- payment of fees: during a vacancy there will probably be more services taken by retired clergy than you may be used to; the treasurer should familiarise themselves with current diocesan policy about fees (ask Church House if you’re not sure): all fees are payable to the PCC and the Treasurer then pays the Officiating Minister their appropriate fee. Monthly returns should be sent to Church House by the Treasurer as usual.
- returns: statistical returns are now done online: ask Caroline Dykes at Church House if you need help;
- returns: weddings – to the registrar general: at the end of every quarter copies of the wedding certificates for that past quarter are sent to Carlisle or Kendal; let the Registrar in Carlisle or Kendal know who to send the returns to during the vacancy;
- returns: Archdeacons’ Articles of Enquiry: the church officers collectively should be able to answer all the questions;
- registers: there should be an entry in the service register for every service; baptisms, weddings, burials, and confirmation, in the appropriate register as they happen;
- burials – a complicated area! your parish will have a policy about who can be buried; the funeral directors should contact you about doing burials or interment of cremated remains – they can’t just bury without your permission; headstones – there are quite strict rules about what is permitted – consult the Rural Dean before giving any indication that anything would be allowed;

Pastoral

- you need to keep track of people who need Communion at home – some regularly, more rarely just as a one-off; there should be at least a few lay people who are authorised to do this;
- you also need to keep track of people who need a visit either in hospital or at home; if there is a Pastoral Visiting Team then they should be aware of this - or if not there should be at least a few lay people who could visit on behalf of the church; if there is a particular need for a vicar ask the Rural Dean;
- visits for baptisms, weddings, and funerals, should be done by the clergy taking them unless you have a baptism visiting team (so you will need to let the visiting clergy have details in good time). Baptism registers, cards etc should be filled in prior to the service.
- Parish Magazine: the “Vicars Letter” could be shared around the standing committee, Readers, retired clergy, etc. Appoint someone to maintain “The Diary” and the listing of “Births, marriages and deaths”.