

Diocese of Liverpool

**RESPONSIBILITIES DURING
A VACANCY**

Diocese of Liverpool

These guidelines to both Area Deans and Churchwardens are to assist them to effectively discharge their duties during a vacancy.

The Archdeacons and Diocesan Office Staff will be pleased to assist in whatever way they are able.

RESPONSIBILITIES DURING A VACANCY

Administration of a Vacant Benefice

When a benefice is vacant the responsibilities normally borne by the Incumbent or the priest in charge are given to a number of people - principally the Area Dean and the Churchwardens of the parishes that make up the benefice. This manual sets out these responsibilities and the processes by which they are administered.

Sequestration

On a vacancy being declared church law provides that 'the churchwardens of every parish comprised in the benefice and the Area Dean (and such other person as the Bishop may appoint, if he feels it desirable to do so) shall be the sequestrators of the benefice'. The parish is then in sequestration and under the care of the sequestrators.

The first formal act is for the Area Dean to inspect and sign the terrier and inventory of the parish church(es), parsonage house and other church property after its checking and signing by the outgoing incumbent and the Churchwardens.

It is the responsibility of the sequestrators 'subject to and in accordance with the directions of the Bishop, to make provision for the performance of the ecclesiastical duties of the benefice'.

In conjunction with the Parsonages Committee, they are also responsible for the proper care of the parsonage house (see appendix 1).

ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY THE SEQUESTRATORS

1. **Provision of Sunday Services**

The Churchwardens and Area Dean should liaise as early as possible after a vacancy is declared about the provision of services during the interregnum in order to make the necessary arrangements. The Area Dean is responsible on behalf of the Bishops for agreeing the appropriate pattern of services in each parish and advising the churchwardens about the availability of clergy and other ministers with permission to officiate (PTO) in the deanery.

Wherever possible, clergy and other ministers who are licensed, or have PTO in the Diocese, who live within the deanery (or its immediate neighbours) should be used in order to avoid unnecessary expenditure on travel. Bishops' Advisers, particularly those without parish responsibilities, are often a useful source of help. The Bishops, Archdeacons and members of the Cathedral Chapter are always pleased to respond to invitations to officiate if they are able to do so.

No additional services beyond the usual custom of the parish should be introduced during the interregnum without the support of the Area Dean and the agreement of the Bishop (see appendix 2). In many cases the number of services may have to be reduced depending on the availability of clergy.

The diocesan office will only reimburse the cost of visiting clergy for those services authorised by the Area Dean. Please follow the instructions set out in appendix 3 in order to obtain payment.

Under Canon C23 the Area Deans must report to the Bishop the arrangements which they and their fellow sequestrators have made 'to secure the ministration of the word and sacraments and other rites of the church during the vacancy'. They must also ensure that where a PCC has passed resolution A in schedule 1 to the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993, nothing is done in contravention of that resolution (unless or until the PCC concerned resolves to rescind it).

2. (i) Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

All requests for occasional offices should be referred to the Area Dean (unless the Bishop has appointed a priest-in-charge of the benefice during the vacancy). However, no service in church should be arranged without the agreement of the churchwardens.

The incumbent's fee for weddings and funerals should normally be passed to the diocese, unless the service is taken by a retired priest with PTO in which case this fee or a part of it may be retained by the officiating minister.

If banns of marriage are published by a reader, churchwarden or other lay person, that person should sign the banns' book, but the certificate of banns must be issued by a Clerk in Holy Orders. The incumbent's fee should be sent by the PCC Treasurer to the diocese and the balance retained by the PCC.

(ii) Monuments in Churchyards

During a vacancy (unless a priest-in-charge has been appointed) the Area Dean is responsible for considering all applications for churchyard memorials and for authorising those which fall within the limits of the Chancellor's general directions.

The incumbent's element of the fee should be passed to the Diocese and the balance retained by the PCC.

3. Parsonage House

Please read carefully and follow in detail the instructions concerning vacant houses, which are set out in appendix 1.

4. PCC and Parochial Meetings

The church representation rules make provision for the election of a lay member of the council as its Vice-Chairman and stipulate that 'during a vacancy ... the Vice-Chairman shall act as Chairman and have all the powers vested in the Chairman unless the rights of presentation are suspended and a minister has been appointed by the Bishop as priest in charge.

Similar provisions apply to the Chairmanship of the Annual Parochial Meeting.

While Area Deans are not automatically members of PCCs of vacant parishes, it is certainly helpful in view of their roles as sequestrators, if they are able, where it is appropriate and needful, to attend meetings of councils (and the annual parochial meetings) to advise on matters relating to the cure of souls in the parish. They have the Bishop's authorisation to receive copies of the minutes, and PCCs are encouraged to consider co-opting Area Deans as members of councils during vacancies, or, if all co-opted places are filled to invite them to attend as non-voting members.

5. When an Appointment is made.

Details of the appointment procedures are contained in the companion booklet 'Appointment of a Parish Priest'.

Churchwardens and Area Deans will receive official notification from the Bishop when an appointment is made. The Area Dean has the responsibility for overseeing the arrangements for the service of institution, collation or licensing and will seek the assistance and co-operation of the Churchwardens in the benefice as together they make the arrangements to welcome the new priest. You should refer to the Bishop's office for instructions and further guidance.

When an incumbent is instituted and all income received during the vacancy has been accounted for, the sequestrators' duties are complete.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that when a priest in charge is appointed the benefice remains technically vacant. However the Bishop expects the priest in charge to undertake the sequestrators' duties on their behalf, particularly the receipt of the incumbent's portion of any ecclesiastical fees and the subsequent payment of these to the diocese. As a result the duties of the sequestrators do in reality end on the day of institution, collation or licensing.

VACANT HOUSES

Sequestrators help is requested in taking care of the parsonage house while it is vacant, particularly in any period when the house is not occupied. It is diocesan policy to let houses whenever possible and it has been found this is advantageous both in terms of keeping the house in good condition and financially. However it is not always possible to do this given the timescales of some vacancies.

Please contact the Diocesan Parsopnages Secretary at Church House, if any problems arise. The following is a checklist for easy reference:

Council Tax	Please forward any correspondence to the Diocesan Office.
Electricity	This should be turned off at the mains UNLESS it needs to be connected to operate a burglar alarm. The diocese will continue to pay standing charges. Any correspondence should be forwarded to the Diocesan Office.
Garden	The diocese will normally arrange to maintain the garden during the interregnum using contract gardeners. However if the parish is able to offer assistance in the garden this is much appreciated.
Gas	This should be turned off at the main inlet. The diocese will continue to pay standing charges. Any correspondence should be forwarded to the Diocesan Office.
Inspections	Unless it is occupied please ensure the house is checked internally at least once every two weeks and that any correspondence is dealt with [see " Post/Telephone "]. A log of visits should be kept for insurance purposes.
Insurance	The diocesan policy ceases to cover for vandalism, theft and water damage (through burst pipes) 30 days after the property becomes vacant. Please ensure, therefore, that no one turns the water back on once the system has been drained down [see " Water "].
Keys/Security	<p>Notify the Diocesan Office when the house is empty and who holds keys. One set of keys together with the burglar alarm code should have been sent to the Surveyors by the outgoing priest, to allow access. If this has NOT been done please provide a set on request. Another set should have been given to one of the churchwardens, acting on behalf of the sequestrators or the diocese (in the case of other houses).</p> <p>Check all window and door locks. If there is an external opening to the cellar which cannot be secured, the internal cellar door must be locked.</p>

Post/Telephone	<p>Please forward any mail, not personal to the previous occupant, to the Area Dean. Dispose of all “junk” mail and free newspapers to reduce the risk of fire by vandals.</p> <p>The telephone must remain connected to ensure the number is retained. Forward any invoices to the Diocesan Office for payment.</p>
Repairs	<p>The Diocesan Parsonages Committee has the responsibility to maintain parsonages and other clergy houses (excluding those owned by PCCs). Therefore please notify the Surveyor, Smiths Gore immediately if the house is in need of repair through storm damage, vandalism etc.</p> <p>Please do not instruct a contractor to carry out any work as the diocese will not pay for work carried out without authorisation.</p> <p>Minor repairs/maintenance will be noted when the Surveyor carries out his inspection when the house is vacated.</p> <p>The contact number for repairs is as follows:</p> <p>Diocesan Parsonages Secretary 0151 709 9722</p> <p>The appropriate Archdeacon (in the case of an emergency outside office hours).</p>
Trees	<p>Please ensure that no trees are felled, lopped or topped without the consent of the Surveyors. This is for your protection and because large fines are imposed for unauthorised work to trees which are subject to preservation orders or in conservation areas.</p>
Water	<p>If the house is to remain empty you should arrange for a contractor to drain down the system. Please ensure that no-one subsequently turns the water back on as the insurance policy will not cover frozen/burst pipes.</p> <p>Please forward any correspondence from the water company to the Diocesan Parsonages Secretary.</p>

Appendix 2

The Area Dean will be prepared to authorise the normal Sunday Services, together with any weekday services on special holy days, which are customarily observed in the benefice. These will normally include.

The Epiphany

Ash Wednesday

Maundy Thursday

Good Friday

Ascension Day

All Saints' Day

Patronal or Dedication Festival, or Feast of Title (if not observed on the nearest Sunday)

Please note that the Area Dean is not able to authorise for reimbursement the cost of other non-Sunday services.

Other special services (eg Mothering Sunday, Harvest Thanksgiving, Remembrance Day, Christingle) should be included in the normal Sunday rota.

In the case of non-eucharistic services, the parishes are encouraged to make use of their Readers, Pastoral Assistants, Parish Evangelists, ministry team members and churchwardens whenever appropriate.