

Part 1– Preparation

Introduction

These three articles have been prepared as a CPAS resource for any ordained person looking to apply for a new post as incumbent, priest-in-charge, team vicar or chaplain. They cover three areas of applying for a job:

- Preparation
- Application
- Interview

I am writing as a former CPAS patronage trustee and in a style as though I am one of the team who are short-listing and interviewing for an appointment. I do this not because I wish to appear to put myself in a position of power. No, in this process we are both on a journey to discover God's will for this post and your application so he must be the one in control.

But I want you, in your application, always to have someone like me in mind. Put yourself in the shoes of those responsible for the selection and you are more likely to write and present yourself in a helpful way.

These are edited versions of a slightly longer article for anyone applying for any post in a church or Christian mission which may be found as Articles A22 and A23 in the Resources section of my website: www.john-truscott.co.uk. Those files include a little more detail on writing a CV than here and give illustrations relevant to a range of clergy and lay posts in churches and mission agencies.

The other articles in this CPAS series ([2. Application](#) and [3. Interview](#)) are available to download from www.cpas.org.uk.

Note on the Pathways website

Pathways is a new way of applying for clergy posts and vacancies within the National Institutions of the Church of England. You can search specifically for clergy posts at <http://pathways.churchofengland.org>.

To apply for a post on Pathways you need to create a profile for yourself, similar to one on 'LinkedIn' which you can update at any time. Once you have created your profile page you can go on to apply for specific posts.

At October 2017 CPAS and a number of dioceses are using the system but within about a year we expect this to be the only way to apply for clergy posts.

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1a Seek God's will

The first stage of the process starts before you even begin to look at specific posts, but also includes the skill of reading a parish profile well.

I assume that your first desire is to find God's will for your life and, in particular, for the next chapter of your ministry, and that you are seeking to please God in finding the next post.

So the first area of preparation has to be seeking wisdom from God and trusted counsellors. Guidance may well then come, in part at least, through the process of applying for posts. But there needs to be a prior period of reflection before God and discussion with those who know you best as to what you should be looking for.

Here are some of the issues to consider.

- Why do I feel it may be right to look for another post at this point rather than later?
- To what extent might considerations such as my spouse's needs, my children's education, my singleness, my parents' health, my need for access to specialist academic input, and so on affect my decision?
- Am I looking for a fresh challenge, possibly outside my comfort zone, or an escape from my present post at any price?
- Am I looking for another church or a more specialised ministry of some kind, and why?
- To what extent is any present restlessness driven by my need for 'promotion' (such as to move to a larger church), or 'an easier life' (to get away from the inner-city), or do I feel my gifts mean I should expect to seek to do something similar to what I have done here (such as grow a small church)?
- Am I a pioneer or a maintainer, an evangelist or a pastor, a leader or a follower, a team player or a solo worker?
- To what extent do I need to consider the members of my present church in my decision whether to move now or not?
- Are my gifts the same as they were ten years ago or are they slowly changing and have I taken account of this?

Before you rush to the Pathways website or the appointments pages of websites or pages of the Church Times or Church of England Newspaper make sure you have taken time and given careful thought to such points. Perhaps a one-day 'retreat' away from all distractions and your present post, with just a Bible and a notebook, might enable you to hear God's voice for you. Then open your heart to your close family and a few friends to see what their reaction might be.

PREPARE A PRIVATE ASSESSMENT

To help you think through some of the issues above, try preparing an honest assessment of the kind of person you are and the experience that you have already gained. Not



only will this help you consider what kind of posts might fit you well, it will also help you at formal interview.

You might like to give yourself the kind of headings that you would expect to see in a person profile, so:

1. CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

How would others sum up your character? Test yourself, for example, against each in turn of the nine aspects of the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22,23. Or take the person specification for an elder in 1 Timothy 3 (adjusted to a modern setting as required).

2. CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

List the experience you have had of God at work in your life, God at work through you to others, different forms of Christian belief and priority, and of worship.

3. PERSONAL QUALITIES

How would you sum up your personality (don't just quote four Myers Briggs letters though that analysis can be part of this)? How would others see you? What do you hide from others?

4. SKILLS AND GIFTING

First, practical abilities insofar as you would distinguish these from spiritual gifts, then gifts you feel you have and are passionate about from lists such as Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4.

5. WORK EXPERIENCE

This might be in both church and secular settings. Not a list of jobs you have held, but the experience you have gained through holding those jobs, perhaps even experience forged out of spectacular failures.

Ask advisers what you have conveniently omitted in all this. This may be a painful process, but finding a new post is often just that. Discovering more about yourself can be one of the richest benefits.

1b Prepare a CV

If you are thinking of looking for a new post, it is a useful exercise to write (or update) a CV, even if you never submit it (application forms are usually required for most posts today). It is a helpful discipline and you are likely to use all the information somewhere in your applications.

You may not have done this since before ordination. The type of CV you had then may not be quite what is required now: it may have had too much detail about professional qualifications and responsibilities, too much management jargon, and too little about Christian gifting and your experience of church work. It may also be written in a style that is designed to sell 'you' as a 'product' against the 'opposition' with excessive language about your brilliance.

A CV (curriculum vitae – literally, the course of one's life) is a straightforward document written to tell a prospective employer (or a selector) about your education, aptitudes and professional experience. In your case, and this is a crucial point, it has to give someone like me clues as to what you may be capable of achieving. So I can see that you have led one church through a change process, but do I feel you are capable of doing the same with this much larger church now? I read you had an amazingly successful career as a music teacher, but how do you cope in a much less structured environment as a vicar? You were awarded your PhD on 'The deep theology of Jürgen Moltmann', but can you teach our unruly teens?

Your application and your interview are trying to do exactly the same thing: converting a past track record into information and evidence for decisions about the future. It helps to keep this point in mind all the way through the application and selection process.

Here is a suggested five-section structure.

1. THE OPENING

Key information:

- Your full name, marital status, date of birth and all contact details.
- Spouse's name and children's details (names, ages) if applicable.

For many secular posts, discrimination legislation means

that much of this information may be withheld. But in most church posts where any family will be involved in church life with you, it is relevant and helpful. Remember this is an exercise as you probably won't use your CV.

Now for what makes you stand out from some others, a short statement to bring you to life in print:

- A one-sentence profile that describes you and summarises all that is to follow in the rest of the CV; or
- A statement of what you see as the next chapter in your life; or
- Some idea of your vision for your service for Christ or your heart for ministry.

Aim for no more than about 25 words.

2. EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS

This section should include:

- Secondary and tertiary education details and dates.
- A Levels and tertiary qualifications (or equivalents) including grades.
- Theological training.
- Other professional qualifications or academic/other achievements.
- Courses attended.
- Any relevant 'time out' activities (eg. VSO, short-term mission).

'Courses attended' should not take more than a few lines, so summarise if necessary. As a reader of CVs I am not impressed by lists of 29 CME events, but I am by short, selected lists of training relevant for this post. Something like '29 one-day and residential courses, including (1)... (2)... (3)...'.



3. EMPLOYMENT HISTORY AND ACHIEVEMENTS

It is normal to give your present post first, with title of job and a brief outline of responsibilities and achievements. Then list previous positions with dates and outline details and achievements in reverse order (i.e. going backwards in time) all in terse bullet format. Omit some of the detail if you are going back more than ten years, but don't leave gaps.

Look back to your 'secular' career and think what aspects of it are the most relevant ones to determine whether you will fit the kind of church posts you will be applying for. Major on those, which may mean highlighting aspects of experience more than the chronological listing of posts.

For example, if you have been a teacher in the past, the natural focus of your CV would be your professional responsibilities. But for a church post the out-of-school activity you ran each week might be more relevant and the assemblies you created could be stressed.

You may then want to prepare an addendum to your CV giving achievements/failures or lessons learned from your current post in more detail – some application forms ask for this so it is wise to be prepared.

4. CHRISTIAN BIOGRAPHY

This might include how and when you came to faith; some brief idea of your theological position realising the danger of simplistic labels; and the churches you belonged to before ordination and responsibilities you held there (with dates).

5. PERSONAL DETAILS

I often find these too predictable and therefore utterly boring when reading a list of CVs, so cut this section to a minimum. Give perhaps:

- One key interest (danger sports are good but do include it if you and your spouse are the North-West Rutland Salsa dance champions!).
- Something revealing about your personality or past.
- Your most satisfying voluntary responsibility provided it is not within a Christian context (to prove you are real).
- Mention the season ticket for your football team if they are languishing in a low division (it encourages pity for you and indicates grit), but forget about it if you have the misfortune to support Chelsea or Man U.

1c Check this could be you

So, you have now asked for details of an advertised post. Correct reading of the parish/church profile is the key activity. It may be wise to ask for a few profiles before you are even ready to apply for one, to get a feel of what is available and to see how you react to what you read. In this section the word 'profile' is used to describe the complete set of papers for the post (the application pack) unless the phrase 'person profile' is used when the reference is to what some would call the 'person specification'.

It sounds so obvious, but the first thing to do is give yourself time and space away from distraction and check all the details you have received with care. It should be your prayer for wisdom as to whether this is a post you would be right to apply for or not. But obvious though that appears, some people applying for posts I have been involved with have not been through this stage with sufficient thoroughness. Examples include:

Someone desperate for a post who is applying for several very different positions all at about the same time. If somehow noted by selectors, this feels like a

panic attack.

Someone who clearly does not match one seemingly essential requirement of gifting, personality or experience and makes no attempt to explain this.

Someone who has missed a key detail included in the profile for the post. So, if you are not a car driver, check that is not a requirement.

The papers for any post can only give a partial view of both the position and the church so undertake some further research. You might want to do this both before applying for the post and, if short-listed, before the interview.

Here are some of the options for a church post.

ASK

There is nothing wrong in talking to those responsible for the process. It is quite reasonable to telephone and explain that there is further information you would value knowing, if that is possible. It is probably best not to overdo this, but a single call with two specific questions should not be seen as unreasonable.

CHECK INFORMATION SOURCES

The website is the obvious first port of call. This may include the weekly newsletter and possibly MP3 files of services or, at least, sermons. Try to take in the information presented and the way it is being put across.

USE ANY NETWORKS YOU HAVE

If you have friends in the area, ask them for what they know about this church. Remember that one person's view will only be one angle on the truth. You could contact the rural/area dean or archdeacon.

VISIT INCOGNITO

There is nothing against this, provided you act discreetly. This might be a midweek visit to the church and its area to get a feel for it all, or to a Sunday service provided you do not make your presence too obvious. Be careful, though, not



to make too much of just one quick snapshot – it may not have been typical. And be ready for the Welcome Team member who asks why you are visiting that day! If you are intending to commit yourself to a church position that will have a major impact on your life and the lives of your family members for some years to come, it makes sense to give the process proper attention.

1d Read between the lines

If there was only one piece of advice I could give, it would be this one.

If I am short-listing for a post, I read the profile carefully and then try to define the three or four key characteristics that the church is looking for. They may not be listed as such at all, but are clearly there by taking an overview of everything requested. Or they may be stated along with 46 other things which drown them out.

The list I come up with can be quite diverse. Here is one example.

1. This person must show they have a clear teaching gift which can cover discipling new Christians from this estate who have no church background at all through to mature Christians who are looking for biblical preaching and its application to life today.
2. He or she clearly needs to be comfortable with letting lay leaders take considerable responsibility and play a significant role in key decision-making.
3. Within the next few years it looks as though there will need to be either a major building project or a church plant of some kind. So this person needs to be able to handle significant change and challenge and find creative solutions for the way ahead.
4. The leader clearly needs to be comfortable with a diverse range of spiritualities and to hold together a younger sector of the congregation keen to move ahead and a significant group of over 65s who feel they have been disenfranchised in recent years.

I had garnered this from every part of the profile, and while the listing of requirements included predictable points (pastoral gifts, good sense of humour...) these four seemed to me to be the real needs and so offered me criteria on which to assess each candidate. Most application packs include a role description and person specification which are important and helpful documents.

If I, as a selector, am carrying out this exercise, you need to do so too. As a result your application will stand out from those that plod through every point listed. Take a typical plodding application which starts as follows.

'I appreciated the chance to read your profile and felt that I would enjoy working with you in future. You are in a lovely part of the country too. I was glad to see that you are looking

for someone who prays because I do that. You want someone to visit the retirement homes in the street and I would be happy to do that.'

Contrast that with an application from someone who has carried out the kind of analysis I suggest above.

'From my analysis of the church's profile, from studying your website and from the way you structure the post requirements I sense there are four priorities for this post as follows: (1), (2), (3), (4). I now address these four in turn to show how well I might fit each one.'

As I read this I am engaged, impressed with someone who has done their homework and used their brain to think.

1e Define questions to ask

This is another aspect of reading between the lines, not to determine what the church really needs this time, but to see what they might have omitted to explain. I have in mind not so much factual information (which you can research as above) but something rather more subtle, such as the reasons why some points have been mentioned, or how realistic the church has been in putting this post together.



As a selector I am impressed when a candidate has a couple of sharp questions for the interview panel, after either reading the profile (so included in the application) or after visiting (so brought in at interview).

Last year I read a church profile for a Vicar which contained several photographs of church members on each page. It was great – a real feel of a people-centred church. But I noticed that most of the photos were of over-50s. Was this by chance, or did it mean there were few younger church members? The text made no mention of the age profile so I waited to see which candidates for short-listing had spotted this too. A couple had and slipped the question into their application – one of them was eventually appointed.

I was recently interviewing for a group of three churches. One was in a town, two were in nearby small villages. But the numbers attending the main church were only double those for the other two, when the population difference was much more marked. So what was going on? I could think of a number of possibilities, but the paperwork did not enlighten me. The candidates that impressed me had spotted this too and asked about it or commented in some way.

If a church asks for a teacher and a candidate (gently) asks if the church is prepared to become learners, that can offer a

challenge that sets an application or interview alight. But it is easy to come across as rather too cheeky, so tread carefully.

1f Understand the process

It is worth being aware of the possible processes that you will be expected to follow as you seek a new post.

COMPETITIVE INTERVIEW

This is now the norm for most posts. The stages will be as follows:

1. The post is advertised in local and/or national media, web, etc.
2. Applications are invited either by completing a form that is provided and maybe some form of written response to the parish profile. In addition.
3. A panel short-lists a group of perhaps two to five candidates from those who have sent in written applications.
4. An interview process takes place for the short-listed candidates together which will include a day in the parish, meetings with staff, PCC members and others, and a formal interview for each candidate on their own.
5. The post is either offered to one candidate or the process starts all over again.

The candidates can therefore be said to be in 'competition' with each other. This is an unfortunate word for choosing the person that the church believes is God's choice for the post, since the aim here should be to find God's right way forward. If one person is not selected, this should be seen as helping them discern that this post was not for them.

HEAD-HUNTING

This title is no better than 'competitive interview' for a Christian position! This can follow much the same process as above except that stage 1 is omitted and, instead, possible candidates are personally approached to ask if they would be interested in submitting an application.

This depends on knowing who might be suitable for the post and lacks the transparency of the previous process, but cuts out the advertising stage. It can still be a competitive interview.

However, another option is to select just one candidate and run through the process with them alone so that the idea of competition is no longer present. This means that at interview the panel are not able to compare the candidate against others, except those that have already been put through the process and not selected.

CPAS SYSTEM

Where CPAS is the sole patron, the patronage trustees form the panel at stage 3 and we usually ask candidates to visit the parish on separate days (to minimise any sense of

competition), with the formal interviews on a different day (all together). When the parish is suspended or when we are joint-patrons, there is usually just one day when all candidates visit the parish.

CHURCH OF ENGLAND PATRONAGE SYSTEM

All of this is carried out under the terms of the Patronage Benefices Measure 1986. The patronage system remains a total mystery to many non-Anglicans, but even though archaic, it works pretty well. It has much to commend it over some other methods.

There are three parties to the appointment:

- The patron (or, quite often these days, two or more patrons) whose role it is to find candidates and, on appointment, present the chosen one to the bishop. The patron may be the diocese, the bishop, the monarch, one of the large patronage trusts, an individual (probably a land owner years ago) or others.
- The bishop (and, increasingly, the archdeacon and rural or area dean) who will license the person appointed.
- The parish representatives, two people chosen by the PCC to represent the council throughout the process.

Any one of these three may veto an appointment, under certain conditions. If the living is 'suspended' the bishop normally organises the process but CPAS are usually allowed to play a full role as patrons, even though legally we have no rights in this situation.

Technically, the patron 'presents', the bishop 'institutes' or 'licenses' and the church 'receives' the chosen candidate. The strength of this strange system is that there are three distinct parties (unless the bishop himself is the patron when there are two) who have to agree together. The church do not make an appointment themselves, although have a greater part to play in the process than would have been the case some years ago.

GOD'S PLAN FOR PEOPLE'S LIVES

Whatever the system in use, this should be seen as a carefully worked out process to determine God's choice of person for this role. The mechanics are important, but at heart it is an exercise in divine guidance as all parties try to seek God's will. Prayer will therefore be at the heart of the exercise – and this makes it distinctive from a typical secular interview.

As someone who is involved in a range of church and mission agency appointments, I am often impressed with the way those appointing approach what is an awesome task. There has often been more thought, prayer and discussion put into the process than candidates may appreciate. I have been in several interviews where groups of people have been praying continuously in another room right through the day, asking for wisdom and discernment for everyone.

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