

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 ([1. Preparation](#) 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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2a Explain why you have applied

Here I ask you again to put yourself in my shoes as a selector and see it from my perspective. That should help you pitch yourself correctly. I present this as a series of eight questions divided over five sections, with two final sections of overview.

Always complete an application form in typescript, not handwriting. Even if you have the neatest of writing, reading a pile of applications is much easier in typescript. Today most applications are submitted electronically by email.

If you have already followed advice so far, you will have checked carefully that you feel it is right that you should apply for this post (section A3). Now you have to convince me that this is a right decision. I am praying for God's discernment, but I need your help.

Here are two questions that will be going through my mind. An interviewer I know and respect often asks as a first question at formal interview: 'Why now? Why here?' So I start there.

Q1: WHY ARE YOU CONSIDERING LEAVING YOUR PRESENT POST?

The reason may be straightforward but a sentence of explanation somewhere is still necessary.

- You have completed a reasonable number of years for the post in question and you are looking for a fresh challenge.
- You are at college or in a fixed-term post and the period expires soon.
- Your family are at points in their school years when you would prefer to move next summer or not again for a few years.
- You were not thinking of leaving but saw the details for this post and felt it matched you particularly well, or friends encouraged you to apply.

But it may be that things are not so straightforward.

- You are at present out of work and urgently looking for something.
- You have only been in your present post a short time but it is not working out well.
- You have been made redundant or, possibly, dismissed from a post.

In these last cases I would prefer you to be honest. The application is not the place to go into detail but you will need to work harder to show why you are applying for this new post than people in the first category. Better to say now that you and a colleague cannot work together, explain what this means in a sentence and what you have learned from it, and then go on with an excellent application than to hide this now and for it to come to light at interview or through a reference.



Q2: WHY ARE YOU APPLYING FOR THIS PARTICULAR POSITION?

Again, the reason may be fairly clear. If I can see that you have a good reason for looking for something new and that this post clearly matches your gifts, experience and personality pretty well, you will not need to do much. Be careful, though, about overdoing it. Do not tell me that God has told you to apply for this post, or that this is the perfect post for your spiritual gifts.

But sometimes people apply for something where the match is not so close and, in these cases, I need to know more. Here are some typical cases.

- This is a deeply rural church, and your experience has been in urban areas until now. If you don't help me, I will have questions. But if you tell me that you were brought up on a farm and have always felt a call to get back to that environment, that explains it.
- You are relatively young and inexperienced in ministry and are now applying for a post of considerable responsibility. You may well be God's choice (as Samuel found with David), but I need to have some pretty good reasons to know why I should consider you seriously.

For a written application, try to include brief answers to both Q1 and Q2. The answers do not have to come at the start and may be slipped in at other points in the application.

2b Address the issues

I now need to ask myself two more questions to help me to judge whether you should be considered further for this post. These relate not to you now, but to the vacant position.

Q3: HOW WISELY HAVE YOU ASSESSED THE SITUATION?

This takes the previous question on a little further. I want to see evidence that you understand this church and the needs for this post. So if you have followed the advice in section A4 and read carefully between the lines, analysed the position and addressed what you see as the key features, I will be impressed.

Let me now give you the kind of things that I do **not** want to see in an application:

- A general application that you are probably putting in for several posts, changing the name of the church and a few other details here and there. This kind of application usually stands out a mile.
- An application that sells you and your gifts but seems light on this post and the needs here. Sometimes I get the distinct impression that the person applying is trying to twist the post to fit what they know they can do. I want you to start from this post and show me why I should consider you seriously for it, not to start with you and show me that this post would be your dream job.
- A pedantic approach to the papers for the post, ticking every box mentioned and giving me information that I should be able to assume. The post wants someone who prays and you do that. They want a good sense of humour and you have that. From all this I can see that you can read, but I have no evidence that you can think.
- An approach that seems to show that you know exactly what the problems are and have already formed a clear plan for how to tackle them all in the first three months. I shall be suspicious if you seem to know more about this post than we do. Tell me you will 'explore' or 'investigate' or 'listen' more than you will 'initiate', 'scrap' or 'revolutionise'.
- A copy of what you have done in your present post. So, you stopped all the home groups and started 'missional clusters' (whatever they are) instead and that is exactly what you intend to do here too. This idea is valid, but as one possibility among several others, not as a definite action to take when you know so little.

Q4: HAVE YOU SUSSSED OUT THE LIKELY PROBLEMS?

But I do need to sense that, once you have checked out the real position, you have some ability in problem-solving. In



fact I want you to spot the possible problems, even if they have not been articulated in print as such.

Here are some possible difficulties associated with a church post. Some recognition of them and outline ideas of how you might deal with them could justify your short-listing. Then at formal interview I can dialogue with you about one or two in more detail.

- A financial deficit.
- The previous vicar dying in post after 21 years.
- Lack of any small groups in church life.
- Decline in numbers over the years.
- Managing a gifted staff team in a large church.
- Few teenagers in church.
- Vandalism by local youths.
- Loneliness because there are no other staff.
- An elderly volunteers team.

2c Be real about yourself

Any application needs to be strenuously honest for any Christian post (and for any other post applied for by a Christian I trust). You may not want to tell any lies in what you put forward, but I need to feel I am receiving an honest assessment. Here are two more questions I ask.

Q5: AM I DISCOVERING THE REAL YOU?

I want you to be honest about your strengths, but I don't want a hard sell, thank you. So I certainly want to hear about where your gifts and experience will fit you well to this post, but I also want to know where your weaknesses lie.

I will respect you for your honesty. Tell me that administration is not your strong point. Your referees will probably tell me anyway and I would far rather hear it first from you. 'I am not particularly good at managing my diary but my husband helps me and tells me I have improved significantly over the past year. I have a part-time PA in my present post and would like to explore whether there might be funding for something similar here.'

If you have health problems, say so and explain how you overcome them. 'I am somewhat dyslexic so my spelling is not good. However, many people I deal with are unaware of this because I use a computer with a sophisticated spellchecker.'

One question I sometimes ask at interview is, 'What would scare you most if we now told you we were offering you this post?'.

If someone assures me that nothing would frighten them, I cannot see that they are the right person or this post is the right one for them. If they pause for a moment and then mention something out of their experience, or a level of responsibility they have not had to cope with before, or something about the risks they would be putting their family

under, that sounds good. I want to know you will be frightened, because it shows the post is going to challenge you and will ensure you have to rely on God.

Q6: ARE YOU TELLING ME THE WHOLE STORY?

You should never leave gaps in your application or I will become suspicious. Here are some examples that would give me hesitations about whether to short-list you.

- The church asks for someone with outstanding pastoral gifts as a key requirement but you say nothing about this. Are you hiding anything?
- This is a church clearly set in a particular tradition or network of which you do not seem to have any experience. You do not address this in your application. Do you just not see it as important, or do you have an agenda to win the church over to your own particular style?
- There is some aspect of your past that raises an issue, but you make no reference to it. For example, you apply for a post at the church where you were yourself a member for some time.
- Aspects of your current post raise questions: you are leaving after only a short time and do not explain why; you are a curate but do not give your current training incumbent as a referee and fail to comment on this.
- You are applying for a post that would be classified by most people as one step beyond what you should naturally be looking for next, but say nothing about this.

In each of these cases you may be an excellent candidate who is well worth short-listing but, if you keep quiet on issues that are obvious to me as a selector, I am left with questions about you.

There may also be points about your beliefs or practices that might conflict with this church's position (although not necessarily stated in the papers). If you hold strong views and feel this might be an issue, it is worth raising these now rather than waiting for them to come up at interview. Issues might include your firm views on:

- Doctrine: Scripture, salvation or other key issues.
- Baptism, divorce, remarriage.
- Gifts such as tongues, prophecy, healing.
- Gender and ministry.
- Current debates within the Anglican Communion.

2d Give me reasons to select you

But looking at this post and then at you, how can I be sure that you have the potential to fill this role? What I have to work from is your past and present experience but I need to assess your future capability (the point I made in section part 1). This applies in the written application and at interview.

Q7: WHAT EVIDENCE ARE YOU GIVING ME FOR ALL YOU TELL ME?

Don't underplay your strengths. However, I don't want to know so much about your own opinion of your brilliance, but some evidence that what you are telling me stacks up. So a leadership position needs someone who can handle conflict. To say 'I am good at conflict' will not impress. To outline, briefly, a conflict you resolved would be different.

Don't write, 'My main gift is preaching'. That tells me nothing other than your opinion which others may or may not agree with. Instead, 'I believe passionately in preaching and use a variety of means. On average one person per week asks if they can talk to me one-to-one about something I have said in the sermon.' That tells me much more. It is not conclusive (perhaps it is the same one person every week!) but it is something to pick up at interview. Here are two other examples.

- 'When I arrived the teens group had eleven members, all apart from two of whom were girls. Meetings averaged five or six. Three years on and we have 26 members, many of whom have joined through recommendation of a friend at school and attendance averages 19 with about 40% being boys.'
- 'When a local man died through a drugs overdose, I invited people to attend a meeting with the community police officer. 32 came (of whom 26 were not church members). Out of that came the local drug-awareness project which they asked me to chair.'

Q8: CAN I DETECT SOME ENTHUSIASM FOR YOUR MINISTRY?

Finally, I want to feel some passion in both the written application and at interview. But the more you try to fake this the more obvious it is. It is worth checking through a written application to see if there is any emotion there. If it is flat and dull, don't engineer something but write in addition about something that excites you.

If you believe in preaching, explain that it is changed lives that excite you, not your ego trip. If it is pastoral work, talk about how local people coming to believe in their own abilities to visit and lead worship is what gets you out of bed in the morning, even if the changes are small and come at a high cost. If it is funerals, tell me what has happened to bring about your excitement.

Print is not an exciting medium, but don't rely on exclamation marks! Be aware too that double exclamation marks are a complete turn-off!! If you are excited, it should shine through. Never manufacture passion.

2e Apply in the required format

It may be tempting to try to copy one application for another, but it is usually obvious if someone has done



this where the two formats required are not identical. Here are some possible formats you may be expected to apply in.

STANDARD FORMS TO COMPLETE

Many of the questions will apply to information you have on your CV, which is why it is wise to have written a CV before seeking out any posts. But check that you complete the form in the way requested.

If it is an online form, fill it in exactly as instructed. If the spaces do not expand, do not go beyond the boundaries given to you. If they do, don't put in too much as this confuses rather than impresses. Try to lay it all out clearly in columns wherever possible so that I as a selector can read it quickly and easily.

If the form includes doctrinal questions (such as 'What is your understanding of salvation?') take your time and work through drafts before you feel you have something that is right and ready to be entered on the form.

If it asks for your theological tradition (as the standard Church of England form for clergy does) be honest but state it within the context of what the church is looking for. It is however important to be aware of the meaning and sub-meanings of different terms, most of which carry baggage with them. Much will depend on who is reading your application. For example, will everyone reading the papers understand a term you use such as 'Word and Spirit' or 'Liberal Catholic' or 'Open Evangelical'?

There should be one question, however, which allows you to explain why you have applied for this post, and/or how well you fit the job description and person profile. It is often this question or questions on which the selectors will fix their attention provided nothing else you have stated gives cause for concern. It is often better to state your answer to this point on a separate sheet and give a reference to this on the form. You can then use more space, but never more than two sides of A4, and lay it out well.

If you include a covering letter:

- Ensure you lay it out in correct letter format and address it the right person with their correctly spelt name and title. It is worth erring on the side of formality, so 'Dear (title – surname)' unless you know the person, or Dear Bishop, and 'Yours sincerely' rather than a flowery Christian greeting. Use a bold one line heading to start, referencing the post.
- Include all your contact details within the letter-heading.
- Keep it short, offer to supply further information in any format they wish and try to sound enthusiastic without overdoing it.

Then get the whole application carefully proofed both for typos but also for the way you have expressed yourself (tone) and your style of writing. Bad sentence construction is not going to impress a selector. Your use of language and

attention to detail at this point is important. You can send this by email as a pdf. Submitting hard copies of applications is rarely asked for today.

CHOOSE YOUR REFEREES WITH CARE

Practices on when to add references into the process vary. They might be taken up on application and available for short-listing, or only for those short-listed and available to the interviewers, or only shown to interviewers after the interviews, or only taken up for the successful candidate to check that something has not been missed.

The choice of referees will, within some well-marked boundaries, be within your power but I have seen plenty of unwise choices. If you are asked to submit names and contact details of referees with your application (as is normal) bear in mind the following guidelines.

1. If the form asks for a character referee, choose someone who has known you well over some time and who would be able to write honestly about you. Better someone you trust to be objective than an enthusiastic member of your fan club.
2. If the form asks for a referee who has observed your ministry, choose someone who can comment on your current use of the kind of gifts you need for this post. It is not so helpful to have someone who has not seen you for a few years, or who never hears you preach.
3. Choose people who are likely to be honest and express with integrity weaknesses as well as strengths. If I see a reference which says you have no weaknesses that the referee is aware of (and I do see these), that throws into doubt his or her assessment of everything else about you.
4. It can be well worth discussing your application with your referees before you submit it. They can then say if they feel this is not right for you, which may make you rethink, rather than being asked to comment when they think you should not have applied for this post.

2f Follow key guidelines

1. KEEP IT SNAPPY

Use lists, bullets, short statements perhaps in note form, not long prose or turgid detail. Remember: I may have a pile of 15 to read on my desk. Yours needs to be the one with pizzazz.

2. AVOID JARGON AND VERBIAGE

Avoid management-style phrases that mean little. Instead, be specific and give concrete examples. Use strong verbs: what have you pioneered, changed, closed down, evaluated, accomplished, initiated, promoted? There is a danger of Christian jargon too – this is a professional application, not a cosy testimony. Avoid overuse of words such as 'worship', 'ministry', 'fellowship', 'anointed'.

3. NEVER LIE

Be honest – the whole application should create an

impression that is true to the real you. Beware of being economical with the truth too. If I find you have misled me, how can you expect me to trust you with this post?

One winner of 'The Apprentice' lied on his CV. The interviewer rightly rounded on him – yet the candidate eventually won the series. It seemed to show he was smart. That's business for you. But it's not right for you.

4. LEAVE NO SCOPE FOR SUSPICION

Try to ensure that I don't end up suspicious on some point where you have been silent. I may well think you were trying to slip something past me without my noticing it. So explain the one-year gap between your last two jobs and why you went to University but don't list a degree then.

I will be happier if you tell me you were sent down from University for a spectacular misdemeanour that hit page one of The Sun than if you try to cover it up and I wheedle it out of you at interview. In fact it may make you a much more interesting person... If it happened at theological college, though, that might be a different matter!

5. FOCUS ON SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

... even where you feel you failed, rather than on general responsibilities which do not tell me much. It's OK that you were responsible for home groups at your last church, but better that you reorganised them and saw numbers grow by 15%, or that the weekly material you produced resulted in three more people offering to lead. If things went wrong (you reorganised and numbers fell by 50%), explain what you have learnt from the experience. I will be suspicious if you don't appear to have failed at anything.

6. DON'T OVERSELL YOURSELF

If you make yourself look amazing, I shall be wondering why you have stooped so low as to apply for this post. In a Christian context I am looking for a realistic assessment with some humility. But don't sound like a doormat either. Be realistic, then ask a close friend to check it and tell you whether it rings true or not.

7. NEVER SOUND TOO CLEVER

Beware criticising a previous employer or church, as if they were not good enough for you or as though your failings were wholly their fault. If there were problems, say you can explain at interview.

8. LAY IT OUT WELL

- Leave good margins.
- Insert spaces between sections.
- Emphasise heading and sub-headings.

Then I will want to read it, compared with an application that is cramped, untidy, and with large blocks of unbroken text.

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