

PASTORAL CARE OF THE CONGREGATION IN A VACANCY

THE BEST

The ideal is to have a well-organised system of pastoral care already in place that is not reliant on the clergy. Then, when the vicar moves on, they do not leave a big hole as the existing scheme can continue.

If the vicar led or looked after the pastoral care team then someone will be needed to take over that role. The team should continue to meet, new members may need to be appointed and new people may need adding to pastoral care lists. The rest of the team may also need to share out any specific individuals the vicar kept an eye on.

IN REALITY

In many churches the minister does much of the pastoral care personally. It is particularly important that they do a proper handover, perhaps through using the handover forms available from www.grow-vacancy.org.uk. If possible the outgoing vicar and leadership team should organise a new system for pastoral care that kicks into place right at the start of the vacancy.

The aim of this is not heavy shepherding but to make sure that everyone has somebody who will keep an eye on them, notice if something goes wrong or if they

start drifting away from church, and who will care and pray for them.

An organised system should not stifle natural and spontaneous love and care, but should be a safety net to ensure that nobody and no situation is left out. The most important people to bring into a pastoral care system are the newer and more fringe church members because these are the ones most vulnerable to being lost.

EXAMPLE ONE

When the rector left St Lawrence's she handed on a list of all those she was aware of who were in need of pastoral care at that time. A retired vicar in the congregation was invited by the wardens in consultation with the outgoing rector to further develop the network of care, and he drew up a list of everyone who ever attended church services. He started with the electoral roll and the church family address list. He then asked a number of people to look through the combined list and think of people missing from it. Eventually he built up a list of everybody, including the children.

Then the home group leaders were asked to supply lists of their members and invited to keep a pastoral eye on them. The families minister became responsible for

keeping an eye on all the families not covered by the home groups. The remaining church members were divided between several individuals, mainly on the standing committee. In this way everyone was covered and few if any drifted away unnoticed in the vacancy.

EXAMPLE TWO

When the vicar left his multi-parish benefice of eight small churches, he realised he knew all of the regular congregation members by name (totalling 80 or so people across the eight churches). He also realised there was a network of less regular people who were expressing increased interest in the faith.

In consultation with the wardens, he identified a member of each of the congregations who he felt had sufficient standing and suitable gifts to cover 'pastoral care' during the vacancy. He invited them to two sessions where he explained the role and offered practical guidance on how to fulfil it. He supplied each person with the a list of not only the regulars (who they already knew!) but also those with growing interest.

Whilst the role was not onerous it was significant in helping people feel cared for, and nurturing the faith of those on the fringe.