

Introduction

Increasingly curacies are varying in length, with some dioceses now making them shorter than three years whilst those doing part-time curacies might wait up to seven years before 'sign off'. Regardless of the length of curacy, there will come a moment for all assistant curates when you anticipate the bishop formally releasing you from curacy and declaring that you are deemed ready for your next appointment.

This paper seeks to provide help for those finding themselves looking for their first appointment after curacy.

Often first conversations will happen with Bishops, Archdeacons or IME 2 Officers in your current diocese but as each of the dioceses of the Church of England have different processes, this paper explains more fully how the discernment journey might work in your context.

Understanding the Clergy Appointment Process

The way incumbents are appointed changed in 1986, with the Patronage (Benefices) Measure. This legislation enhanced the role of the Parochial Church Council in the process and gave the elected parish representatives (appointed by the PCC) the power of veto on the patron's choice of a particular candidate. This played a part in ensuring that the whole business of clergy appointments has gradually become more transparent.

The way in which clergy are trained, and styles of leadership, have also changed in recent years. Clergy no longer work in isolation; a collaborative climate is becoming more normal, and this is now reflected in the way appointments are made. But as always, long established ways of operating are very slow to change and there is still a lot to be said for the discernment of others, especially bishops and patrons, in the development of an individual priest's ministry.

Ultimately, the decision about what your next post is going to be is yours. It can feel flattering if your diocese says in effect, 'We want to keep you, and we'll find you a post'. That may work for some. But will there be a good 'match' between what the diocese thinks suitable for you and what you are actually looking for? It partly depends on how you view guidance and how well diocesan senior staff know you. The voice of the bishop suggesting you look at a particular post may be the voice of God, or it may just be that they have a post to fill.

Towards the end of your curacy, you need to have checked with your bishop before looking for your next post, particularly if you have not been 'signed off'. Once you are free to look for posts, you need to be proactive. There may be plenty of jobs, but some

are inevitably more popular than others. You can submit applications for more than one post at a time, but most people would advise you only to apply to those you really believe might be right for you, otherwise you are wasting your time and other people's, too. Of course, finding out what is right for you may be a process, and often curates find that it's after going to a couple of interviews that they are much clearer about what the right post might look like. You should also become more able to convey to the panel your readiness for the role and your sense of call to the parish.

You need to be realistic about the level of job you are applying for. You may be ready to be incumbent of a medium-sized church, or you may want to work in a team, perhaps as a team vicar or associate vicar, before feeling that you are 'on your own'. If you are wondering about what the right level of post is, then the advice of your training incumbent, your archdeacon or a mentor may be valuable. It should help ensure that you don't aim too high, and that you don't overlook the possibility of being stretched in a good way. Going onto a 'list' such as the EPCC Register administered by CPAS can also be a way of getting this kind of advice.

Sometimes people are put off leading a church because they think 'I can't do finance', 'I can't cope with buildings', or 'I don't think I'll be any good at chairing PCC meetings'. But that is where teamwork comes in. None of us has all the gifts needed for leadership, and if we don't inherit a good team when we become an incumbent, then one of our first tasks will be to create one. We will find ways to learn, and we'll get better at finance, buildings, chairing meetings or whatever it is. We may also find that if

we try to play to our strengths, God will provide others who can play to theirs.

People sometimes find themselves restricted to a particular area, because of a spouse's job. If you feel you are in this position, there may be creative solutions. Whose 'career' is more important? Could you take it in turns to have priority in terms of job moves, and how the other fits in? What are the commuting options which might widen the choice in terms of looking for a parish? Could you work without a stipend for a while, but with the clear intention of

waiting for the right stipendiary post to come up in the area you need to be? Have you considered other possibilities, such as chaplaincy in a hospital, prison or higher education, or some other kind of specialist post?

Other circumstances that may be important for you to consider will include your wider family, whether single parents with children or caring for elderly parents. Single people may want to recognise the importance of their friendship network.

Additional Note for Women

For women looking for posts, the situation can be a little more complicated. There may be different challenges for those who are priests and those who are permanent deacons.

As part of the package of proposals when women were allowed to become bishops, the House of Bishops agreed a Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests designed to sustain the diversity of the Church of England and the mutual flourishing of its constituent parts. The Declaration embodies five guiding principles which have been endorsed by the General Synod. The Declaration acknowledges that some PCCs may wish to pass a resolution to take advantage of arrangements available to those who,

on grounds of theological conviction, are unable to receive the ministry of women bishops or priests. This declaration may be passed by churches at both the more Catholic end of the church spectrum and by some conservative evangelical churches.

If you are struggling with the issues this raises for you, you should be able to talk matters through with your diocesan adviser for women's ministry (or equivalent).

If you need advice, don't hesitate to ask for help. Those who administer the 'lists' (see EPCC below) are happy to help you explore your options, and perhaps suggest a solution which you had not thought of.

Additional Note for Complementarians

As you move on from curacy, if you hold complementarian convictions, it is worth thinking through what your theology means in practice, not simply in principle. Be realistic about what you can work with in good conscience and with integrity, and be prepared to explain this calmly and clearly. It is also important to be up to speed on the Church of England's Five Guiding Principles (and the associated arrangements under the House of Bishops' Declaration), so you can navigate conversations about oversight and provision appropriately and without misrepresentation.

Think carefully, too, about how you will work alongside any female ordained and lay leaders in the church to which you are moving. Consider in advance what patterns of collaboration, communication, and mutual respect will enable you to serve wholeheartedly, and what boundaries (if any) you would need to maintain, expressed in a way that

affirms the dignity, gifts, and flourishing of women in ministry. Wherever possible, seek counsel from trusted mentors who understand both your convictions and the practical realities of appointments in the Church of England.

Finally, give careful attention to tone and presentation. It is possible to be both clear and gracious: to speak the truth as you understand it without becoming combative, careless, or defined by what you are 'against'. In interviews and informal conversations, aim to communicate theological conviction alongside evident humility, teachability, and commitment to the unity and mission of the church. A dismissive attitude, loaded language, or lack of awareness of the Church's agreed frameworks can quickly make a candidate appear difficult to appoint. Clarity is helpful; unforced self-presentation, charity, and emotional maturity are often decisive.

Permanent Deacons

For those who are permanent deacons the issues are different. Some dioceses are not open to employing permanent deacons, and as permanent deacons will almost always be in some kind of associate role, they

will usually be limited to large churches, team ministries or to sector ministry such as theological education or chaplaincy.

EPCC Lists and Other Help

There are various ways of seeking additional help or support if you are looking for a new post.

The Clergy Transition Service (CTS) caters for all backgrounds and traditions in the Church of England – from clergy currently in parochial posts, sector ministry, new forms of church and mission agencies, as well as ordained people currently employed or engaged in contexts other than the church. It is open to those currently serving in self-supporting posts, who are seeking a stipendiary role.

As well as practical help with developing a personal profile, job applications, and interview skills, the Service can work with individuals to develop a deeper understanding of their strengths and talents. By encouraging participants to develop greater self-awareness, reflect on personal values and think prayerfully about context and culture CTS can support the process of transition.

The CTS opens access to a wide range of resources to support a lifelong, fulfilling service to the Church, including access to a network of practitioners inside and outside the Church: [Clergy Transition Service](#).

If you're an evangelical, the [EPCC Register](#) (administered by CPAS), operates in a similar way. There are forms to fill, and the Register goes to some bishops and archdeacons as well as trustees of all the evangelical patronage trusts. You can also opt for an online interview with one of the CPAS Patronage team members. It is much better to have an interview than just to complete the form, because it may help you to process your thinking, and it will enable the EPCC trustees to have a much better idea of who you are, and thus, what posts might be most suitable for you.

What Am I Looking For?

Before you rush into accepting the first post you are offered, or you fill in an application form or put your name on a list, it is worth spending time thinking and praying about where God may be leading you. As Christians we tend not to think in terms of career, but of service; having said that, God wants us to use our God-given gifts to the full, so if you have particular gifts and skills, how might they best be used? Often it's not easy to find the balance between thinking ahead and planning, and being open to God's surprises, as he leads us somewhere we'd least expected.

- Who am I? How has God shaped me? Do I have a realistic sense of my gifts and skills? Do I tend to downplay my strengths or see all the gaps in my abilities?
- What sort of situation most motivates me? Am I a pioneer, a self-starter or entrepreneur? Do I enjoy a challenge? Would I rather try to turn around a difficult or struggling parish than take on one which seems to be more 'successful'?
- What sort of context am I drawn to/gifted for/willing to go to? Am I open to rural, urban or suburban? Would I be prepared to lead a group of churches which have recently come together, or to manage a multi-parish situation?
- What sort of church tradition am I most comfortable with? Would I only be able to work well in a context where I felt 'at home', or am I flexible and able to cross the boundaries of traditions while still being true to myself and my own convictions?
- What have other people seen in me, things that I may be too modest to admit to myself? This is where a mentor might help, someone who can keep confidences and help us to make a realistic assessment and can encourage us to take steps of faith. For example, if you can foresee yourself leading a large church at some stage, what experience of working in a large church do you have so far? Could your next step need to be an associate role in a large church? Or if you want to teach theology, do you need additional qualifications, and what opportunities might there be to do some teaching alongside your role in a parish? We don't normally aspire to be a bishop or archdeacon, but if others have seen exceptional potential in us, how can we best develop it, and what posts and roles might give us the right kind of experience?
- Have I considered options other than parish ministry? There are short courses for those who are thinking about various kinds of chaplaincy. Take time to find out more. Or some clergy enjoy

dual-role ministry, that is, two supposedly half-time posts, leading a church or churches and a

deanery or diocesan role such as mission enabler, lay training adviser, or youth work specialist.

Applying for Posts

When you know what you are looking for, and you've sent for details and like what you see, it is time to apply.

For parish appointments where the patron is the diocesan bishop, there is often a standard application form, which has accompanying notes on how to fill it in. It is worth reading the notes closely, because they will help you to avoid some pitfalls. If you are applying to a post which has another patron, there will be a different form (or no form at all) and what is asked for varies widely.

A CV is a good starting point because it may remind you of important information you want to convey that the form does not appear to ask for. For example, you may not have gained much leadership experience in your curacy, but if in your life prior to ordination you have been responsible for thousands of people, or run a hospital, or had a significant leadership role in a voluntary organisation, you will want those who read your application to know. Make sure you include this in the standard form, and you may also want to refer to it in any supplementary paperwork you are asked for, or in your accompanying letter.

Interviews

Most people find interviews daunting. But preparation counts for a great deal, and if you have completed your application form carefully and you have prepared for the interview, this should enable you to present yourself with confidence. Remember that first impressions are important, and you will make most impact by:

- The way you dress.
- How you connect with the panel through smiling, making eye contact and appearing at ease but engaged
- Conveying a brief summary of what you would bring to the post (in business terms your USP or unique selling point: why you believe God may be calling you to this role).
- If you have been diagnosed as neurodivergent it's important to let the interview panel know beforehand so that reasonable adjustments can be made.

Remember to 'check the buzz': what are the buzz words or phrases current in the Church or in the diocese at the moment? Read the Church press and check the diocesan website about current emphases and strategies. Has the diocese got a mission statement or strapline? If the diocese is looking for a 'leader in mission' or for someone to plant a 'Fresh Expression' of church, you will look foolish if you don't realise what is meant.

And be prepared to explain anything which the interviewers may think unusual about your

application: e.g. a shorter than normal curacy, a gap in employment, less experience than they might expect for the post.

It has been suggested that there are only three basic interview questions:

- Can this person do the job? (Experience, track record, achievements.)
- Will this person do the job? (Motivation, disposition and approach to the task.)
- Will this person fit in? (Values, character, emotional intelligence.)

The following are a sample of questions that may be asked at interview, and which fit into these areas. Could you respond to them? Note the word 'respond' rather than 'answer'. Of course you want to be honest, but you are in control of what information you give to those interviewing you. And don't say anything unless you can expand on it or give an example of what you mean.

There are a variety of ways to prepare: writing notes on how you would respond to each question, rehearsing with a friend, or if you feel you need additional help, arranging a coaching session – your diocese may be able to recommend someone to do this. If you have not been interviewed for some time (or at all), you may find this helpful. Ideally the interview may become more of a dialogue, but if you don't have to think so hard and you are not caught out by a question, you are likely to feel more relaxed.

Sample Questions

For Starters

1. What led you to apply for this post? Why now, and why here?
2. Tell us about yourself.
3. What have you got to offer us?
4. What have you most enjoyed about your curacy/last post?
5. What have you found most challenging?

Questions About Your Achievements

1. What have you contributed to your current parish?
2. Give us an example of a project or piece of work you've achieved in your current parish that reflects your strengths.
3. Can you tell us about a time when you've dealt with disagreement (e.g. among PCC members) and how you resolved it? What did you learn? What would you do differently?
4. How have you identified new leaders and developed existing leaders?
5. What will you be remembered for in your current parish?

Questions About Your Potential

1. What are your priorities in ministry?
2. How do you see yourself fitting into this parish?
3. We have struggled to relate to x part of the parish/ y age group of people. How would you approach that as a mission opportunity?
4. How would you approach your first six months in this parish?
5. How would you encourage others to develop their gifts and ministries?

Questions About Your Personality and How You Would Fit In

1. Do you prefer to work on your own or with others?
2. What sort of people do you find most difficult?
3. What style of worship are you most at ease with?
4. What have you read recently that has most influenced or inspired you?
5. What do you prefer to wear when leading a service if it is left to you?
6. How do you arrange your time off? What do you like doing? What do you do for fun?

Difficult Questions and Questions About Weaknesses

1. What do you see as your greatest weakness?
1. Why did you stay in your current post so long? Or why are you leaving so soon?
2. We all make mistakes. Tell me about one of yours.
3. What decisions do you find it difficult to make?
4. What has been your attitude towards marriage after divorce/unmarried or same sex couples looking for their children to be baptised?
5. We've never had a woman vicar before – how might it be different if you came?
6. There are five churches in the benefice. How would you ensure that ministry happens and that you do not get burnt out?

Questions About Areas of Debate in Church Doctrine or Practice, or in Wider Society

Applying for a clergy post mentions a number of issues which may be raised at interview. It's good to be aware about current controversies – which might range from homosexuality to prophecy and healing, to clergy pensions! For example:

1. Do you think the Anglican Communion has a future?
2. How would you live out the 5 Guiding Principles?
3. How would you handle a conversation about sexuality?
4. Why is safeguarding important?
5. How do you respond to recent calls for assisted suicide to be made legal?

Questions to Ask Yourself on the Pre-Interview Visit (if there is one) and During the Interview:

1. With God's help, would I be able to do this job? Would I be able to find help if and when needed?
2. I know what they said they are looking for, but what do they really want?
3. Would I be happy living and working here? Would I be able to build a network of friends around me? If appropriate, will my family be happy? (NB if housing is the only issue, is anything negotiable? The parish may already be aware that the house is too large and expensive to heat or too small for someone with children, and they might be open to building an extension, or finding a new vicarage).
4. Would I be able to work with the other clergy and lay leaders?
5. Do I share the values, church tradition and aims of the church enough to work comfortably here?
6. Would this post help or hinder my longer-term aims (if those are important)?
7. Do I believe God wants me here? It might be full of challenges, but still the right place.

And finally...

Any major transition may be stressful and exhausting in terms of emotional energy. Allow yourself time and space to give to the process. It may take several rounds of application and interview before you find the right post, but most clergy start to find that they have a way of knowing whether each is right or wrong. Sometimes, for all kinds of reasons, you may not be sure why this or that job is the right one, but have to trust God. Serving God as an ordained person is rarely easy, but it should continue to be a great adventure.

Edited by Andy Wooding Jones from original version by Rosie Ward © CPAS 2026

From Curacy to Incumbency

He Goes Before You

The Rev Funmilayo Vaughan, Rector St Marys Parish Church.

In reflecting on my journey from curacy to incumbency, the passage that immediately came to mind was: 'The Lord goes before you. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.' (Deuteronomy 31:8)

In choosing where I would go for curacy, I can truly say that the Lord had already gone before me, personally preparing the parish I was to serve. I began my curacy in 2021 in the Great Baddow Team Ministry, yet my connection to that place began earlier. In 2018, I attended the Bradwell Vocations Day at Meadgate Church; as I left the building, which was a former school, I remember thinking, I really like this place. So, when in 2021 I received a letter from the DDO confirming that Meadgate Church had been chosen for my curacy, I knew that the Lord had indeed gone ahead of me.

My curacy was within a benefice of three churches. When I first met my training incumbent, my expectation was to serve Meadgate church as their curate; however, between that first meeting in March 2020 and my start date in June 2021, things changed. I was now required to serve as a curate in all three churches. The first lesson I learned as a curate was the importance of being willing to adapt. The immediate challenge was how to divide my time faithfully and fairly between three parishes. Honest conversations with my Training Incumbent (TI) were vital, and with the support of team vicars, licensed lay ministers, and parishioners, the arrangement worked. It wasn't easy, but it was possible. I am grateful to God for my service in all three churches.

Another key experience of curacy was learning to seek the wisdom and counsel of others. Curacy is very much about learning ministry on the ground and stepping into areas you have never worked before: the occasional offices, (weddings, baptisms, funerals) and my involvement in children's and youth ministry, attending school assemblies, PCCs and learning how team ministry works. I return again to that opening passage: 'Do not be afraid or discouraged.' Curacy certainly pushed me out of my comfort zone, and at times, the fear of failing or not doing a good job felt real. Yet it was in these moments that the word of God became my anchor: Do not be afraid, I have gone ahead of you. Acknowledging my fears to my TI and receiving guidance from him and others enabled me to step into these new areas of ministry with growing confidence.

Another encouragement from my curacy experience is this: do not be afraid to voice your fears to trusted friends, colleagues, and hopefully your TI. The parishes I served genuinely wanted me to grow and were gracious in allowing me to learn from my mistakes. I grew to especially love school ministry and youth work, both areas I had previously avoided. I also came to appreciate the contextual nature of the PCCs in the three churches. Each of which was different, and in that, I received the gifts of what to do and what not to do. I encourage you in your own curacy to step out and try the new thing; you may discover a passion you didn't expect.

In my early months as a curate, I became a dog owner. This proved to be a real gift for ministry. Conversations with fellow dog walkers opened the door to pastoral encounters, which led me to lead a remembrance service for animals. I learned the importance of having a presence in the community simply by being out and about. For you, it might be sport or another form of recreation. Whatever it is, I encourage you to keep doing it. We are often reminded to have a life outside of ministry; this, for me, made a significant difference.

Again, I return to that opening verse: 'He will be with you.' There were challenging times in my curacy, particularly being away from close family and friends. But the Lord was with me, and he provided wonderful brothers and sisters in my benefice, both young and old to support and encourage me. I encourage you to make use of these connections in your own parish; we are not asked to do ministry life alone.

As I reflect on my curacy years, I am reminded of the African proverb: 'It takes a village to raise a child.' It took the village of the Great Baddow Team Ministry, the young and the old, to help shape me and send me out to begin my ministry as an incumbent.

I wish I could tell you that the same divine encounter occurred during the selection process for my incumbency post. It didn't. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:7: 'For we walk by faith, not by sight.' The selection of my post came through prayer and faith, and admittedly, fear. Like Abraham, I did not know where I was going (Genesis 12) but only trusted that God would confirm the place for me. I saw the advert on the CPAS website, and there was a pull to apply. Still, I hesitated for three weeks. With a friend's encouragement, I contacted CPAS to ask about the post. I followed this up with a visit to the church and a walk around the area. I did not hear a word from the Lord assuring me that this is it; I was to walk by faith.

The Application and Interview – I used the interview and writing application day with my CMD adviser, which helped guide my thoughts and expectations. I felt encouraged that the application and interview were not limited to my life in curacy, but about who I was before considering a life in ministry, it was about me and what I was to bring as Funmilayo. I have now been an incumbent for 13 months and one day at the time of writing (I'm not counting!). I am the Rector of the parish church in Frinton-on-Sea. I can be honest and say I had never heard of Frinton-on-Sea before seeing the post, and for me, this was again God asking me to trust and walk by faith. I arrived to a welcoming parish that gave me the space to settle in, and in that space, they expressed their kindness to me.

No longer am I under the covering of my TI; I am now the lead minister of the church. As daunting as that sounds, I am learning that I have not been asked to do this alone. I am learning to recognise and appreciate the gifts and experiences of other leaders in the church and other ministers from different denominations as we work together to advance God's kingdom in the church and the community. As a minister, whether curate or incumbent, I have found that my life is not my own. I return to the same realisation I had when I first became a Christian: my life belongs to Jesus. Since he has called me into ministry, it is only right that I surrender and ask God to help me.

To be instituted and inducted, and to have pastoral care of souls, is not something to take lightly. In this, I draw strength from Scripture: 'The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.' (1 Thessalonians 5:24) I am learning to be kind to myself. There are many things I want to do but simply cannot, and perhaps some things I am not meant to do. I am learning that it is okay to ask for help and to say, 'I don't know.' There is no weakness in that.

As a new incumbent, I carry with me into my new role my learning from curacy, in so doing, to know what I can apply what is and what is not contextually right for my new parish, to appreciate the work already being done and for us to work together to bring about the 'new thing'. There are expectations placed on a new incumbent, questions about what changes will be made, and how things will be shaped. In this, I pass on the wise counsel given to me by wise minister friends, my spiritual director, and my mentor: take things easy simple words, but profound ones. As a new incumbent, I am learning to know my parish, its people, and its community. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, my helper, he will direct me. The key is to trust, wait, and then act, though this is not always easy.

A word of encouragement and a prayer of praise for my call into ministry and into my current post: 'I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service.' (1 Timothy 1:12)