

4.3 Moving between posts

4.3.1 Bishop's charge

Use a "Bishop's charge" at the beginning of each new incumbency to set out the aims and objectives of the incumbency.

There would be a formal process by which this is drawn up, involving all the principal interested parties - the cleric, the parish, the deanery and the diocese. Much of the work will have been done as part of the vacancy and appointments process, especially if there is help to improve the quality of parish profiles by promoting constructive reflection on the future needs and direction of the parish. It would provide a thoughtful written statement of direction to which all parties can refer back as a basis for accountability and review. Opportunities for review in the light of evolving vision and changing circumstances would be built in. The purpose is to reduce hidden agendas and misunderstandings. The same process could be used where a pastoral reorganisation is to take place, to reduce the tendency for clergy and laity to fight over the direction in which the benefice is to move.

4.3.2 Induction interview

Provide for an induction interview within 6 weeks of induction, and a second one 4 - 6 months afterwards.

This would be designed to

- promote early reflection on direction and priorities in the light of the bishop's charge as outlined above
- ensure that the post holder has understood and is able to work with the agreed objectives
- help reduce the problems associated with taking on too many commitments too soon
- counter the pressures to replicate the strengths and remedy the weaknesses of the previous post-holder
- ensure implementation of any additional resources agreed at appointment time (ref 4.2.6)
- link with ministerial review thereafter (ref 3.3.4)

Notes and quotes

"I heard of a diocese where there was a system by which the leaving incumbent completed a comprehensive questionnaire, and handed it in a sealed envelope to the Area Dean for onward transmission to their successor. This system was quietly dropped for no apparent reason."

Diocesan Secretary

"Considering so much of the business of the church is helping people with life transitions and endings, we're pretty bad at it when it comes to ourselves."

Parish priest

4.3.3 Exit interview

Invite clergy for an “exit interview” on leaving each post.

The intention is to provide senior staff with usefully frank information relevant to future management that might not otherwise be forthcoming. It might be carried out by senior staff, or by someone reporting to them.

4.3.4 Continuity strategies

Publish an outline of the information clergy should routinely expect to pass on to their successor.

Practice appears to vary widely, with a normal presumption of a “clean sheet” start for the new post holder. This can lead to the new person having to re-invent the wheel, or rely on factional or loaded information about “the way things are done here”.

4.3.5 Parish personnel details

Prepare an induction package with photo, contact details, post-holding history and accredited gifts, skills and aptitudes of all lay post-holders.

This could be produced by members of the congregation during the vacancy, and/or as part of the process of preparing a parish profile. It would include all current post-holders, and possibly others in recent years. It would not be designed to require clergy to memorise details and instantly recognise people, but to create a useful reference aide-memoire.

4.3.6 Liturgical closure

Develop resources to encourage good quality liturgical “closure” at the end of an incumbency.

Encourage circulation and development of liturgical “templates” as a basis for creating services to suit individual occasions. Encourage the area dean to take a lead in organising the service with both the leaving cleric and the senior laity of the church. This is especially important where the cleric is leaving under difficult circumstances such as sickness or disgrace. The wounds left raw in the parish through lack of closure can come back to haunt the next post-holder. The service may be better able to meet the needs of all concerned if the leaver is not also presiding.

Notes and quotes

"A further frustration in the ordained ministry which really cannot be ignored is the relationship between some congregations and their Parish Priest in relation to the role which he is expected to perform. He is often regarded as a sort of household servant to keep the building in good repair; the finances in the black; the pews filled and in general to ensure a comfortable passage through this world into the next for those who count themselves 'the faithful of the Church'. There is often little sense of the Church being a team institution with a prime purpose of ministering to the needs of those outside its number - indeed, frequently the only thing that can be said about outsiders is that they're a pretty bad lot because they don't come inside and make it better for us!"

Clergy counsellor

4.4 Changes between moves

Clergy are routinely required to manage change, such as additional workload through pastoral reorganisation, or taking on diocesan responsibilities in addition to an existing parish post. Managed well, these times of transition are excellent opportunities for review and stress prevention.

4.4.1 What *will* change

All parties to a major change, especially senior staff, should be frank from the outset about what will change.

Pastoral reorganisations are a significant opportunity for senior staff effectively to support clergy at the coal face. The temptation is to reassure everyone that everything will continue just as before, which leaves clergy to take personally all the flak for implementing unpopular changes.

4.4.2 Job adjustment review

Whenever a significant change is proposed to a job, a job adjustment review should take place.

The circumstances to trigger such a review may be any change involving over 6 hours work per week, and/or lasting longer than 6 weeks, eg

- a close colleague leaving or going on long-term sick leave
- new training or management responsibilities within the parish
- additional tasks at deanery or diocesan level

The process should be designed to enable the post holder to take effective action to avoid overload, by delegating old responsibilities, or agreeing with other parties the changes in what will be done and how. In the first instance, a member of the senior staff should agree with the post holder the amount of time that the post holder should allocate to the job adjustment review (eg 2–3 days) and name the people with whom agreement must be reached. The post holder should then submit a proposal for managing the change to the senior staff member. Where the post holder is unable to reach agreement with other parties or present a “safe” proposal, professional assistance (eg work consultancy) should be made available. Satisfactory planning should be in place before the change is implemented. Issues to be addressed include

- overall workload
- impact on others
- training needs
- timetabling and implementation of change

Plans for action
