

Suspension of Presentation

Each benefice has a patron or patrons. A patron is a person or body who owns the right to present a priest to a vacant benefice as incumbent (Rector or Vicar). There are several variations of patronage including, sole patronage (one person or body), joint patronage (two or more patrons who act together), patronage by turns (two or more patrons who take turns to act as sole patron) and patronage boards (usually for team ministries). Many patronages in the Diocese of Canterbury are held by the Archbishop but the Bishop of Dover acts for him in all patronage and parochial appointment matters in the diocese.

When an incumbent (vicar or rector) leaves, it is important for everyone involved to think carefully about the future. The views of the parish, deanery and diocese are taken into consideration. If a new priest is to be appointed on a basis which is essentially ‘like for like’, the PCC(s) compile a parish profile and appoint parish representatives. Following advertisement and interview, the Patron(s) consult with the parish representatives and then ‘present’ a candidate to the Bishop who would then appoint that person as incumbent: or if the Archbishop is patron the Bishop of Dover will make the appointment directly. However, in conversation with the parish and deanery, the Bishop may feel that additional flexibility is needed to look at the arrangements for a benefice, and this is achieved by putting the procedure described above on hold, with the option of him licensing a priest in charge. This gives the opportunity not only to look at the pastoral care arrangements but also to look at possible reorganisation. In order to do that, there is a technical legal step that has to be taken, which consists of suspending the patron’s rights of presentation.

The Bishop is likely to seek to suspend the rights of presentation to a benefice when for pastoral, missional or financial reasons Pastoral reorganisation (for example, a union of benefices, the creation of a team ministry or the alteration of parish boundaries) is under consideration. Occasionally it is used when it is intended to change the parsonage house for a benefice. The Bishop is required to obtain the consent of the DMPC (known in Canterbury as the Diocesan Mission and Ministry Committee) and to consult the patron, the PCC(s), the area dean and lay co-chair of the deanery synod concerned before deciding to suspend a patron's right of presentation.

When the rights of presentation to a benefice are suspended, any new priest appointed to that benefice is licensed as a Priest-in-Charge operating under a Bishop’s Licence rather than being incumbent of the Benefice. Since any Priest-in –Charge would be appointed under Common Tenure there is very little practical difference between a Rector/Vicar and a Priest-in-Charge. In both cases a priest is appointed to the parish, in both cases the Patron and parish are involved in the selection process, and in both cases the priest will be free to stay so long as (s)he, the parish and the Bishop feel that staying is right.

Following consultation, the right of presentation to a benefice can be suspended by the Bishop for a period lasting no longer than five years. It is possible to renew the suspension, but again for no longer than five years. If suspension is renewed and a Priest-in-charge is in post then that priest continues as Priest-in-charge.

Suspension may be lifted by the Bishop with the consent of the DMPC or when a pastoral scheme takes effect, naming a new Rector/Vicar for the benefice.