



The Vacancy Audit Guide
An introduction for PCC's
Diocese of Durham



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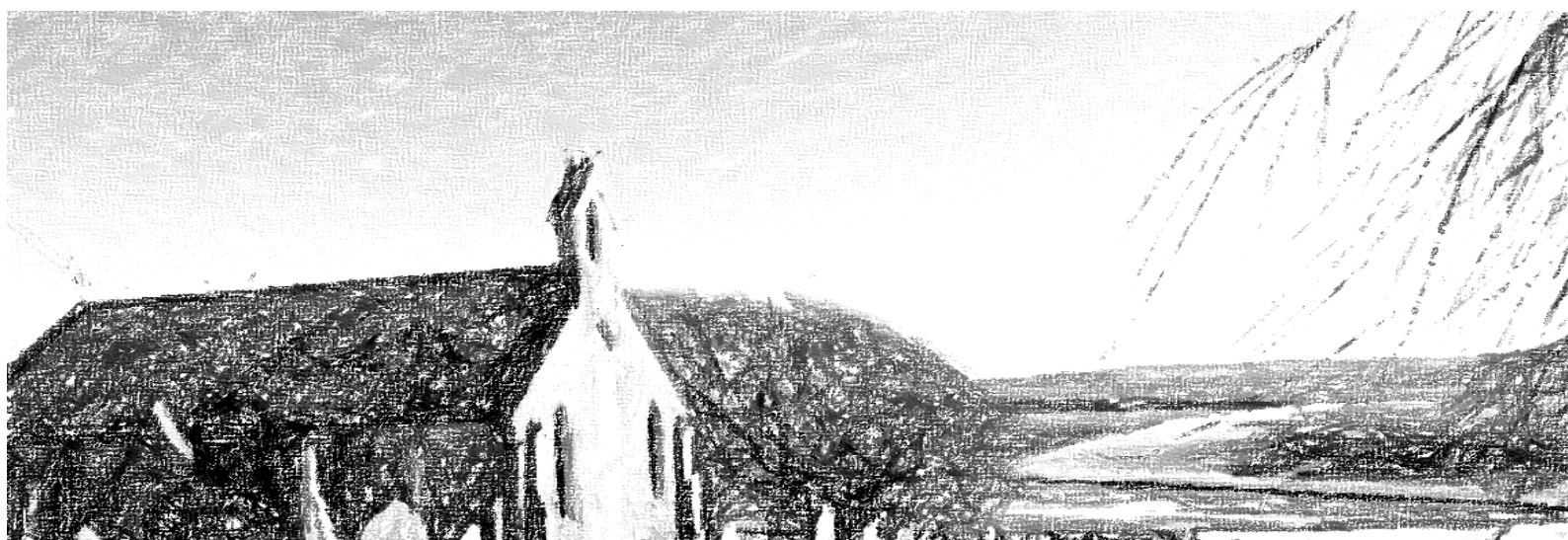
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I. Vacancies in context

An introduction from our Diocesan Bishop, Paul.

The Diocese of Durham has a rich history of adapting and evolving, since the first Northumbrian Christians began to establish new communities of worship, discipleship and mission among the people of what became the Durham Diocese.

In each of these seasons, the challenge for God's people has always been the same - to discern how we might '*proclaim afresh*' the good news and reality of Jesus in every generation. In doing so we begin to discover afresh the faithfulness of God to his people, to his mission and to the promise of Jesus that he would **build his church** (Matthew 16:18).

In entering a period of vacancy, God gives each of our churches an important moment for prayer and reflection, in order that we might discern how God is leading us and what our future life together should look like. This pack is intended to support those reflections and help your PCC, together with your Archdeacon, Area Dean, Lay Chair and facilitators, to together identify the signs of God's future for mission and worship among the people of your parish.

For some of us this will become an important moment to boldly respond to the implications of the changing shape of our congregations and God's work in our communities that may require a new way of collaborating, meeting or how we organise our life, worship and mission together. For others of us this will become an important time to refine, strengthen or re-orientate some element of our life as a local church in order *to remain in [him] that we might bear much fruit to the father's glory* (John 15:5-8).

Like the vine pictured in the gospel, churches are living and dynamic, organic bodies, that flourish most where they are supported by rather than contained by their structures. As you work through this pack we would encourage you to do so prayerfully, and with an open mind, ready to hear and respond to the voice of God as he calls us into his work of **Blessing our communities in Jesus' name for the transformation of us all.**

+Paul



2. A prayer for guidance: The **Waymark Prayer**

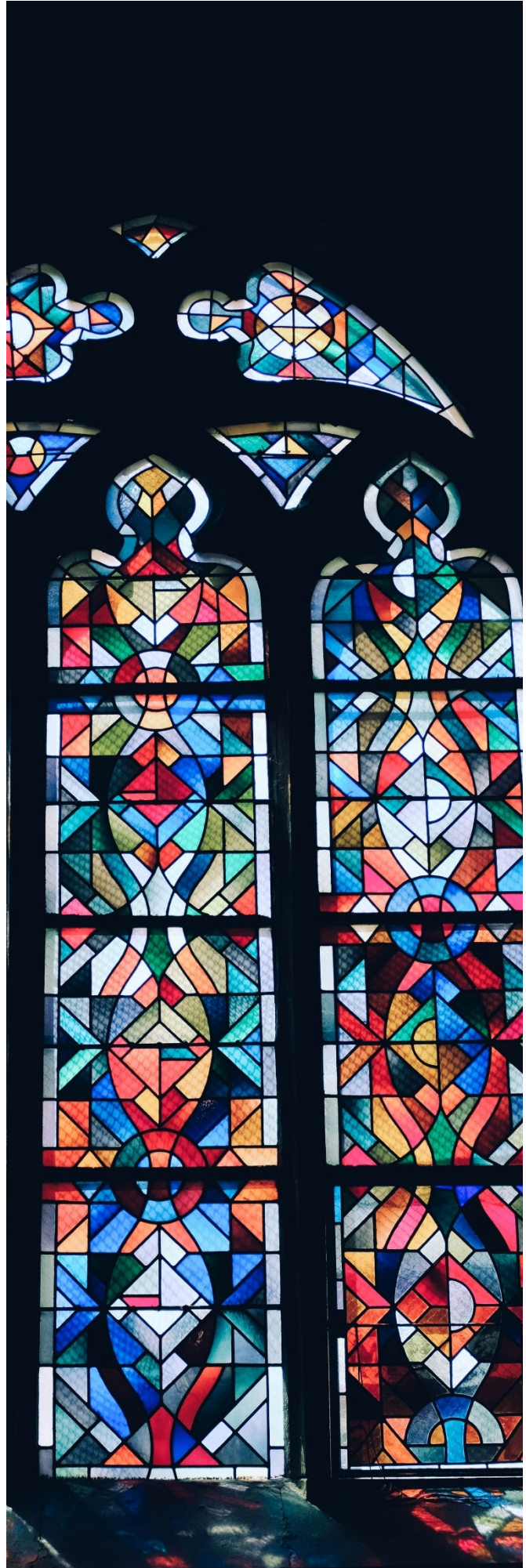
Loving God, guiding the people of Durham
Diocese faithfully through the years:

We thank you for saints who have marked our
path,
young and old, known and unknown
from all places and in all walks of life.

Help us to find your way in our generation:
transformed by your truth,
sharing your life, blessing our communities.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen



3. God's purpose for our parishes?

One of the most important parts of the service when a new priest is licensed into a new parish is when the bishop says;

“Receive this Cure of Souls which is both yours and mine. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

The words “cure of souls” here come from the Latin *‘cura animarum’* meaning care of the whole of the people of God and not just those who attend a particular church. They point us outwards in mission and in provide some important clues as to God's purpose for our churches.

1. Receiving this charge in the name of the *Father, Son and Holy Spirit* points to both the importance and nature of this commission, in the same generous way that the Son is sent, serves and saves; and that the Spirit comes to empower and bring glory to the Father, we too are to go forth, proclaim, gather and to transform for the glory of God and good of all.
2. It shows that the priest and the bishop are **as one**, and that although the bishop will not be there in the parish day-by-day they are part of the ongoing ministry of the parish
3. It is done in the context of worship
4. They are words spoken by the bishop **not just** to the priest but **to the whole of the people of God** in that parish and for the sake of that parish.

Together, these principles ‘frame’ the Anglican understanding of the Parish Church as the basic unit of mission in the Church of England for the wider care of the entire nation, entrusted with and sharing in the cure of souls, whether we know them or not.

This understanding is firmly rooted in scripture (Romans 12 v 4-5; 1 Corinthians 12 v 12-13; Galatians 6 v 2; 1 Peter 3 v 8; etc.) and also in the tradition of the Church of England. As Anglicans we are not merely a parish or even a group of worshippers in a church, but a community of hope and reconciliation, bound together in love.

Together, these are the principles that should shape the appointment of our priests.

The purpose of the Vacancy Audit Process is to help our parishes to explore their readiness to renew their mission by receiving a new priest and to discern what shape their shared ministry should take as the church considers the next phase of its ministry in the community.





4. Discerning the next steps in our journey together

Whilst any period of vacancy can introduce frustration or extra pressures, they are also a very precious moment to pray, take stock and to recalibrate.

These natural 'pause points' protect churches from ploughing on without first discerning whether the future should look the same as the past. In many instances this will not be the case – over time our parishes, churches, congregations and the nature of mission all change and new approaches may well be needed to ensure future fruitfulness. This might involve stopping something, collaborating in a different way or beginning a new expression of ministry.

In John's gospel **Jesus** taught the disciples the importance of recognising the different seasons of their life in God and of God's work in them. Liking his people to a vine, He pointed to the **different phases of growth, fruitfulness and pruning**. In each of these, the 'gardener' (God our father) was at work and, whatever the season, His admonishment to us was to make every effort to remain in him (John 15:1-9)..

Taking time to pray, talk and reflect will be essential to this. The prioritisation process is intended to help you do this and highlights **four critical areas of the life of our churches** to consider ahead of meeting with your Archdeacon and their supporting team.

The four key areas for consideration are

- Missional potential
- Financial health
- Buildings fit for mission
- Leadership and governance

First Steps?

1. Hold **section 12 meeting** with your Archdeacon at the outset of the vacancy period.
2. **Share this guide with your PCC** ahead of meeting facilitator
3. **Initial meeting with facilitator** to introduce Vacancy Audit process, answer questions and identify any specific areas for consideration or any particular support needs.
4. **Reflection period** where PCC works through **4 areas of Vacancy Audit pack**. This may include consultation with congregation members and your Area Dean.

5. Our future prospects? **Four critical questions**

The purpose of the **vacancy audit process** is to help us to consider our context, capacity and our sense of what God is calling us to, and to identify what we might need to do in order to fruitfully and meaningfully respond to that. Levels of energy and faith, facilities, appetite for mission, having the right structures for governance, finance are all crucial elements to consider and are critical to understanding the needs, challenges and opportunities ahead and your capacity to respond to these.

The parish discernment **workbook** (see separate document) will help you to assess your...

- **Missional potential**
- **Financial prospects**
- **How far your buildings are 'fit for mission'**
- **The strength of (and any gaps in) your governance structures.**

This is not a pass/fail exercise. Done well this will help you to take stock of your current situation, and consider your preferred future and likely implications for you to move towards that.

Together we will produce one completed workbook. Depending on your local situation you may choose to form some subgroups to work on behalf of the wider PCC, to work initially in small groups or to do the whole thing all together, taking several meetings to work through each section. Your facilitator can advise you on how to do this.

The following notes outline the issues involved in and importance of each question. The related tasks are presented in the separate **Workbook** which can be completed by hand or online.

5i. What is our **Missional potential?**

Parish Churches and the “Five Marks of Mission”

Our Christian faith matters to us, and makes a difference in our lives. God wants others to have this experience too, so sends those of us who already believe in Christ to share the love that he has poured into our hearts with others.

For churches to fulfil their God-given purpose and at the same time to have any chance of being sustainable and continuing into the future, **mission must be at the centre**. If a minister is going to help this church in its mission, the desire to share God’s love in word and action must **already** be real: a vicar can only help a PCC and a church community to do what they already want to do.

The “Five Marks of Mission” describe how the Church of England (and worldwide Anglican Communion of churches recognize) see our shared mission. This states that *‘The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ:*

1. *To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.*
2. *To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.*
3. *To respond to human need by loving service.*
4. *To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.*
5. *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth’*

The question for us all is whether our churches are actively trying to engage in this mission, in a range of ways suited to their own situation and to consider..

- ***How is our church involved, deliberately and purposefully, in this mission?***
- ***What is our potential for mission in the future?***
- ***How concerned are we for those people who do not regularly worship with us?***

Of course, worship is an integral part of how we do mission. For many people who would not yet call themselves Christians, or who have been away from the church for some time, coming to worship services is often an important way to begin their Christian journey and, through good, lively, engaging worship, Christians are encouraged in their faith and strengthened to serve God and share his love day by day.

As Christians, God calls us all to be part of this process of demonstrating and declaring the gospel of Jesus. How are you doing this? The mission questions should help you to think about this and (where any gaps might emerge) the extent to which your church is ready, willing and able to address this.



5ii. What are our **Financial Prospects?**

Finance tends to be an issue that most of us struggle to talk about. Embarrassment, confusion, fear or a sense of trying to maintain control can all get in the way of us communicating well and in some cases can even prevent us from taking stock of our affairs or making a pressing decision.

When it came to finances Jesus encouraged generosity and straight talking. He painted a generous and practical picture of God's attitude to money and presented our finances as being both an *entrustment to steward* and a *gift* to use well for the good of the Kingdom and of others.

Your finances and financial systems will have an important bearing on your church's potential for future mission and ministry. Reviewing them will give you a powerful insight into what your assets for (and constraints upon) mission are. As you think about where you are spending and what matters most, it will also give you an insight into what matters most to you as a congregation and whether they are the things you want to or should prioritise going forwards. Jesus refers to this when he says 'for where your treasure is, there will be your heart also' (Matthew 6:21).

As a Diocese we are supporting churches to cultivate a culture of generous giving and providing support to help PCC's and treasurers organise their finances as effectively as possible. And together we have committed to all making an appropriate and fair contributions to the cost of financing mission and ministry in this region.

How do your finances look currently? What do your levels of giving, the 'balance' of what you spend your money on and your longer term prospects tell you about the challenges you should be anticipating, your prospects for mission or the decisions that might need to be made in the imminent future?

The finance exercises will help you **as a PCC** to assess your financial context, priorities, opportunities and challenges.

- Try to be as **frank as possible**, even if some elements are a bit frustrating or disappointing.
- Pause to **pray as you go**. Note areas where you can see God's provision or help and be thankful. And take care to ask 'Lord, what are you saying to us through what we see?'
- Note any area where you need **help** or to **take action**.



5iii. How far are our Buildings ‘fit for mission’?

For many people, our buildings are intrinsically what they think of when you ask them to picture a church and whilst our buildings are often important landmarks, resources for mission and the community and can be ‘thin places’ to meet with God, they should never become the centre of our attention, identity or purpose.

Yet, Church buildings are also related to mission: they are often where we meet for worship and host other events, and can be places where people receive a warm welcome and, as places of prayer, can also be a space for people to privately seek God.

In some of our Parishes, Local churches can find that trying to maintain their building and keep worship services running becomes almost all that they do; survival becomes the purpose of the church, rather than buildings and services supporting mission.

The Buildings related questions are designed to help you reflect on your relationship with your building and its potential to enable mission through considering their condition, current use, location, accessibility and sustainability. Where this highlights any areas where you may want further advice your facilitator can help identify the relevant people or points of advice and information.



5iv. How healthy is our Governance?

Churches with good, healthy relationships are attractive places to be. Leaders (not just clergy) who encourage and build up other people in their giftings are a great asset.

This section asks you to look at how you relate to each other in church, how well you understand your roles as trustees, as leaders and in safeguarding; and how you handle the times when things don't always go so well. A united church is one where God can work, but unity doesn't mean that everyone has to agree all of the time – a great definition of unity is *“what the love looks like between those who disagree.”*

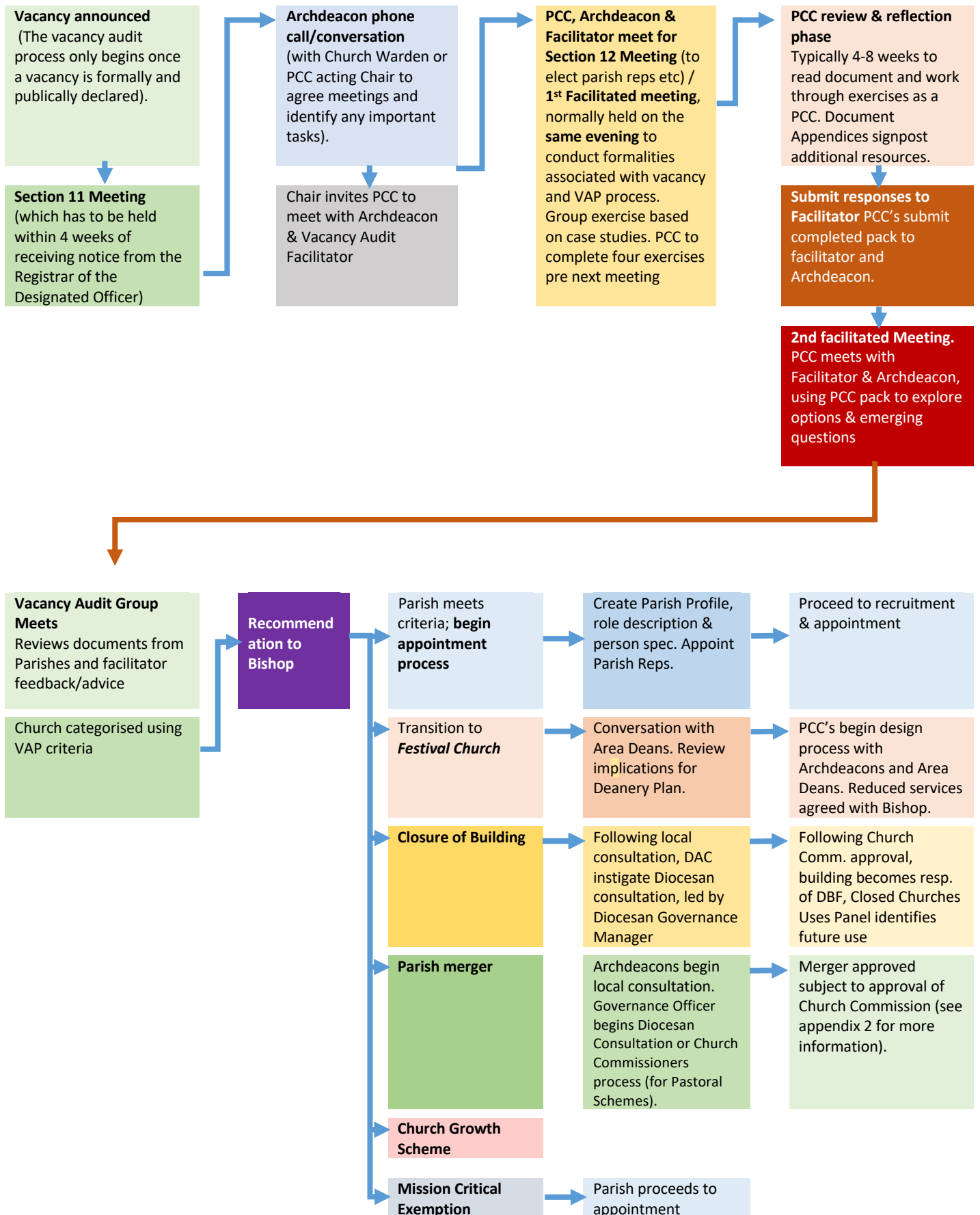
In considering this section of questions, it isn't about whether you all agree all of the time (which would actually be quite worrying!) it's more about how you handle the times when you don't agree and how you make decisions for the good of the kingdom, rather than just the good of the church members.

The governance section will help you reflect on this as well as identifying any points of strength, challenge or any gaps.



6. Overview of the prioritisation process

NB: There is no 'typical' parish but this is how we intend the process to generally proceed in 2021-22.



7. Reflection: **The Vine and the Branches**

¹ 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

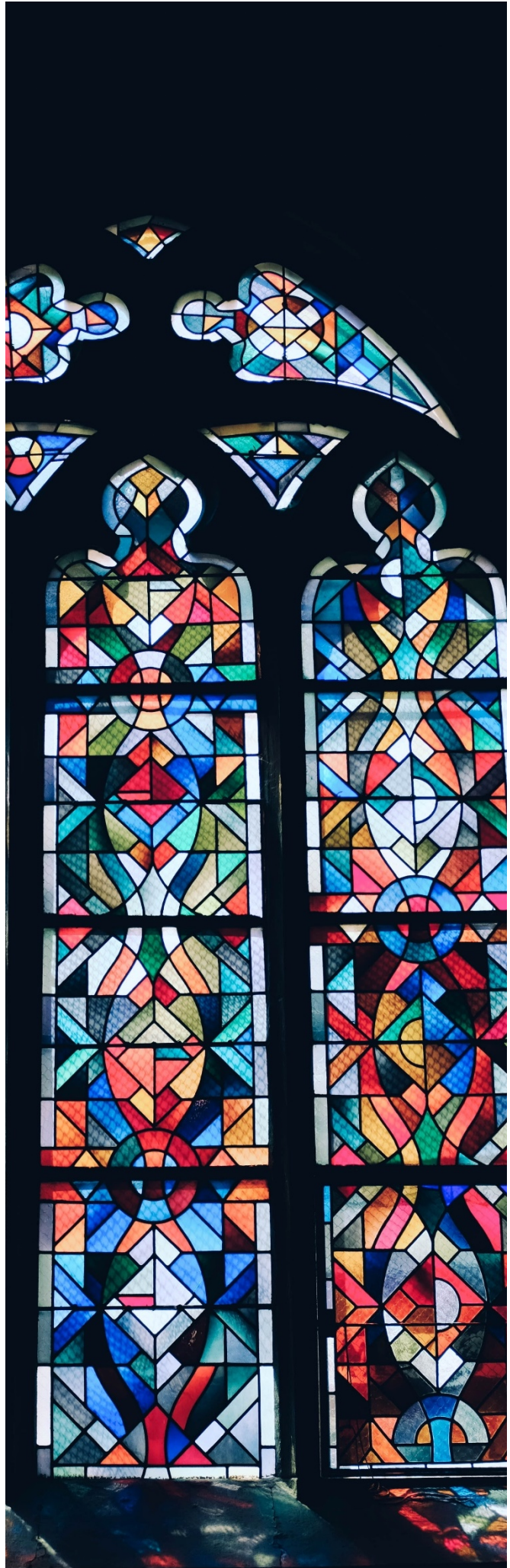
⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love'.

(Jesus speaking in the Gospel of John, Chapter 15).

Reflection:

Read the passage through as a PCC, then make some space for silent prayer.

- Which words speak to you and to your situation?
- What is God calling your attention to?
- How is God portrayed? And how does Jesus describe us?
- What is God wanting you to know about Him?
- How does it relate to the life of your church & parish?



Appendix I. Towards a different future? Some scenarios

Every church goes through seasons of change, be it by merger, replanting, obsolescence or closure, or as new challenges emerge or as the congregation or the physical fabric and population of an area changes. Whilst such changes produce an inevitable mix of hope and sometimes sadness, they should not generate fear or despair – Jesus has been very clear in his words: ***'I WILL build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'***.

Keeping sight of God's larger vision for the church can help us engage fruitfully with those moments when our congregations find themselves at a crossroads in their journey. His church more than just a building or one form of service. The Diocese of Durham is committed to finding the best ways for our congregations to flourish through our area. In some cases this may be by redeploing clergy differently, through merger, closure of a building, replanting or transition to a 'festival church'.

Here are some of the scenarios together with a brief overview of what the process may involve.

1, Proceeding to appointment

All churches in vacancy are expected to undertake the pre-appointment review process outlined in this document and we are confident that, where this done thoughtfully, the process of reflection, prayer and discussion should help Parishes to position themselves for fruitful service and mission in the future.

Where Churches have considered the four questions of Mission-readiness, their buildings and finance, leadership and governance, and where the Bishop and Archdeacons are in support, Parishes can proceed to begin recruitment (which starts with the creation of a **Parish Profile**). This should take account of your local context, your call to mission, and qualities of leadership of ministry that are needed for the church to engage with its future opportunities and challenges. Together with your Archdeacon you will develop a role description and person specification and appoint Parish Representatives who will be actively involved in the interview, communication and decision process. Once these elements are in place a Parish can proceed to recruitment.

2, Transitioning to a FESTIVAL Church

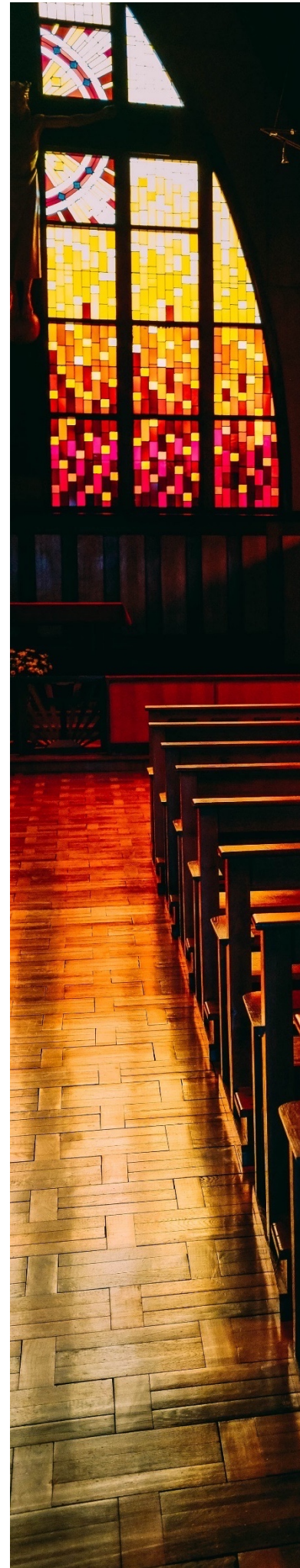
The term *Festival Churches* has become a 'catch all' description for those church buildings where permission is granted to dispense with weekly worship in order to move to infrequent or occasional use of a building. Doing this allows congregations to respond to changing attendance or capacity whilst still maintaining a worshipping presence, albeit less frequently.

Buildings may be made available for community use, alongside some mission events, occasional offices and services throughout the year at Easter, Christmas or Harvest, etc., (hence 'festival' churches) whilst keeping the option open to reinstate more regular worship and activity, should this become possible later on.

Doing this avoids the demands of disposing of a church building and reduces some weekly running costs, but **does not** relieve the parish of the ongoing financial responsibilities for the building (e.g. insurance, maintenance and security), nor of their financial obligations (parish share) to the Diocese, and can run the risk that the building deteriorating further with less frequent use.

Becoming a festival church involves local consultation with your congregation and community, consultation with your Archdeacon and Area Dean, consideration of the implications for deanery planning and the permission of the Bishop for permission to reduce services.

You can find out more by visiting <https://afchurches.org/>



3, CLOSING a Church BUILDING

Closure of buildings tends to be done as a reactive measure, when congregations have declined to an unsustainable number and can no longer manage their building or where the fabric of the building declines to being at a point beyond economic repair. Disposal of a building can often feel a very painful moment, our buildings often being associated with all sorts of personal and collective memories and events.

Where this is the case, keeping sight of our identity is important: Churches are firstly the people – past, present and future, gathered together in Jesus’ name, but our buildings (whilst a great gift) should be a **resource** for mission and worship, and never the focus nor limit of it.

For some churches, closing a building, although a demanding process, can be very life giving in the longer term. Relocating to a new or shared building, perhaps in a school, community centre or shared ecumenical project can reduce the day to day pressures on a church or PCC, free up new energy and time for mission and worship and be the beginning of new relationships in the community.

Closing a church building typically involves three phases:

- I. **Local consultation** - Once the PCC has decided to close the building, the PCC (together with the Archdeacon) begins to plan a period of local consultation, planning a public meeting to present the case to the local community and to solicit local feedback and advice from local stakeholders.
- II. **Formal, Diocesan ‘Consultation’** (an appraisal of the church building and legal context) involving the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the care of churches and churchyards (DAC) and Diocesan Governance Support Manager (Paul Stringer)
- III. **Church Commissioner consideration**, consultation and approval.

Paul Stringer, together with your Archdeacon can advise you on this process.

4, MERGER of a Parish

For other congregations, the process of reflection that you undertake having entered into a vacancy, may raise the question of whether the parish itself has a future. This is typically where the congregation has dwindled to a small number and where the church is struggling to provide local leadership and governance, perhaps as its **PCC** ages or struggles to recruit.

Beginning to explore whether to continue as a parish, or whether to consider closure and merger is not a sign of defeat. Where we are prayerfully exploring other ways for mission and ministry to continue (for example) through collaboration with the neighbouring parish or benefice, this demonstrates faith and faithfulness.

Closing a parish typically involves three key phases and will involve working with your **congregation, Area Dean and Archdeacon** throughout as you explore this. Because of its importance and implication for other people, it is a decision for **the Parish, the Diocese and the Deanery**

Stage one: Local consultation

Having decided to close, the PCC liaises with their Archdeacon and Area Dean (In order to consider the implications of closure for Deanery Planning, etc). Normally a **Public Meeting** with Archdeacon and Area Dean in attendance follows, to notify and consult local stakeholders.

Stage two: Diocesan Consideration

Following local consultation (and subject to the approval of Bishops Council), Archdeacons direct the Diocesan Governance Manager to draw up proposals to seek the view of interested parties based on the publication of a draft scheme or draft order under the oversight of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee. **‘Pastoral Orders’** enable the Bishop to conclude the process following formal Diocesan consultations. This is only the case about 10% of the time, e.g., with Parish Boundary changes or Plurality Orders (whereby two benefices can be held by one incumbent). Generally such changes are undertaken through a **Pastoral Scheme** – a nationally governed process involving the Church Commissioners and requiring a report by the Church Buildings Council.

Stage three: Church Commissioners Enquiry.

Most closure processes usually involve the **Church Commissioners** who require that a final period of public notice and consultation happen (under the **Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011**) and that a formal report on the condition and history of the building be made by the Church Buildings Council. This phase can take up to 2 years during which the building remains the responsibility of the PCC and remains an 'open church' (although the PCC may approach the Archdeacon to suspend services in line with Canon law, if the PCC no longer has the capacity to continue ongoing management). Where a closure is agreed the parish boundaries are realigned with a new benefice being created either by the union of parishes or the creation of a new parish & benefice being formed. Any building then becomes the responsibility and the property of the DBF. The **Closed Churches Uses Panel** then undertakes to find a new use for the building. Where a sale is agreed this is administrated by the Church Commissioners

5, Planting or revitalisation

As a result of the 2019 Waymark Conference (which gathered representatives from each of our 235 Parishes) and the Diocesan consultation which followed, we have adopted '**Energising Growth**' as a key element of our Diocesan Plan for 2021-26. One way we are hoping to develop this could be through **church planting and revitalisations**. Each of our Deaneries are being encouraged to consider how they might do this, with a view to aiming to plant at least one new church or congregation in every Deanery in the next five years.

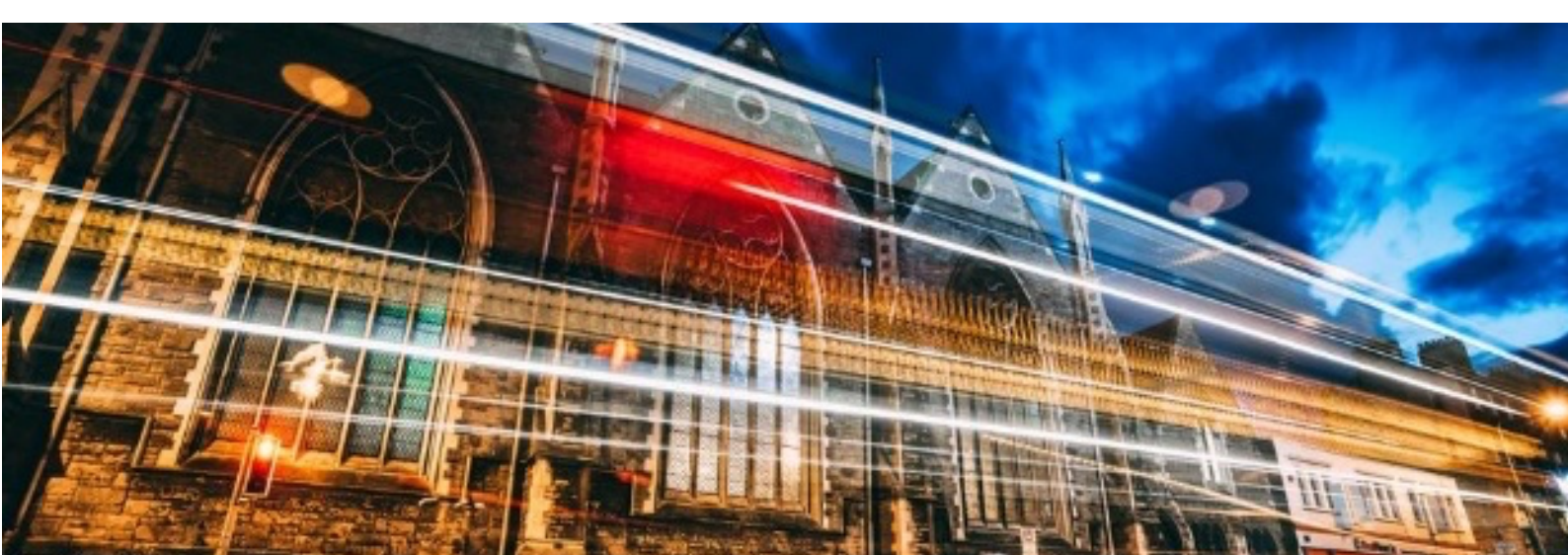
Whilst in some cases, closing the parish church or a merger with the neighbouring parish or benefice may well be the right move for the congregation as it considers God's future, local ministry could be revitalised through developing a fresh expression of church or through partnership with others to develop a church plant of some sort. We are at the beginning of developing this strategy. Where planting would be considered, its relationship to the Deanery strategy and context will be very important. Libby Wilkinson, Duncan Podbury and the Mission, Discipleship & Ministry Team are able to advise Churches and Deaneries interested in this and to provide further examples of some of the different ways churches could explore this possibility.

6, Mission Critical Exemptions

In asking **every church in vacancy** to complete the **vacancy audit process**, we are really confident that this will facilitate and resource all our churches, their PCC's and our Archdeacons to establish a really informed view of the church, its condition, context and call, in order to discern God's best future for each Parish and the best use of our shared resources.

Where churches have completed the discernment and review process and are ready to proceed to appointment, appointments will be made in chronological order, dependent on when a church completed the process. This is intended to be the primary way we allocate clergy and organise when vacancies are advertised and appointments made, with the same process used for every church.

Inevitably there will be a few exceptions to this where we deem that a particular church should be regarded as '**mission critical**'. Such churches may not have 'passed' each of the four pre-appointment criteria (readiness for mission; finance, buildings and governance readiness), but because of (for instance) their significance to the Deanery plan, or by virtue of a specific (e.g.,) geographic or missional variable (generally to do with the churches significance beyond its parish) we may, at the Bishop's discretion, proceed to appointment. Where this is the case, the reflections from the VAP process will be very important in shaping the parish profile, person specification, and should form the focus which shapes the PCC's strategic focus in the years immediately following.



Appendix 2. Further information & resources

Paul Stringer (our **Diocesan Governance Support Manager**) can provide advice on the processes and technicalities associated with the legal changes of merging parishes, closing a church, public consultations and interactions with the Church Commissioners etc. Paul's email is paul.stringer@durham.anglican.org

Dan Spraggon (**Closed Buildings Uses Panel Secretary & Buildings for Mission Secretary**) can advise on the implications of caring for a building once it is closed and the processes around reordering, repurposing or disposal. Dan's email is: daniel.spraggon@durham.anglican.org

To talk about the possibility of **church planting, revitalisation teams, or Communities of Hope** contact our Diocesan Director Mission, Ministry, Discipleship & Growth, Ven Libby Wilkinson – archdeacon.of.durham@durham.anglican.org

Churches Conservation Trust - <https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/>

For **guidance on closing a church and managing closed building** take a look at this resource from the Church of England - <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/church-buildings-council/how-we-manage-our-buildings/churches-no-longer-needed>

Partnership for Missional Church and **Know Your Church, Know Your Neighbourhood** are both excellent programmes/resources that have helped Durham churches discern their gifts and opportunities for mission and helped them better understand themselves and their local area. PMC is a well regarded 3 year process, working in partnership with other churches, organised by the Diocesan Ministry, Discipleship and Mission team. Know Your Church, Know Your Neighbourhood is run by the Communities Together Durham team (who provide support to any of our parishes wanting to develop a local response to issues of deprivation).

- For information on PMC visit <https://churchmissionsociety.org/churches/partnership-missional-church/> or contact Archdeacon.of.Durham@durham.anglican.org .
- For info on KYCKYN contact info@communitiestogetherdurham.org.uk

The **Parish Giving Scheme** website has some brilliant resources and ideas for churches wanting to address the issue of giving more effectively. You can visit their website at <https://www.parishgiving.org.uk/home/>

Appendix 3. Frequently asked questions

Our PCC is struggling - who is available to help us?

At the start of the Vacancy Audit Process you will be assigned a facilitator to work with your PCC and on behalf of and with the Archdeacon. Your Facilitator can advise on different ways to tackle this work as well as providing advice on other useful contacts and points of information.

How long will this take?

Working through the VAP process will vary significantly depending on the individual circumstances of each parish and their capacity. Your Archdeacon will be keen to see you work through it well, taking time for listening, discussion, prayer and consideration of all the possibilities. In some instances these reflections will identify further work that will need to be undertaken before an appointment (or other change) can be made. Once completed, the conclusions will be shared with the Bishop and the Bishop's Leadership Team who will advise on the best way ahead for your parish. Where the intention is to appoint, vacancies will be dealt with in chronological order.

Our PCC is struggling to meet because of Covid.. what should we do?

Where this is the case it is vital that you consult with your Archdeacon to agree a way ahead and so that they can support you.

What resources do we need to get started?

The main resources are i. The **Vacancy Audit Guide** (this document) which introduces the processes and some of the key ideas and ii. Copies of the **Vacancy Audit workbook**.

Both are available as e-documents/PDF's. The **workbook** can be completed as a word document or printed out and completed as a handwritten document. Your facilitator, Archdeacon and Area Deans all have copies of these documents.

How should we get started?

Your section 12 meeting (which follows the vacancy arising) is the natural time for you to discuss the vacancy audit process with your Archdeacon and to identify a facilitator. You should then contact your facilitator to arrange a meeting with your PCC.

The Facilitator will then meet with your PCC and introduce the process and use some initial discussion questions to help start the process of reflection. PCC's should then work through the workbook. You could either do this by giving this as homework to everyone, ahead of meeting to discuss and producing a Master document (i.e. one workbook completed on behalf of the whole PCC & church), or by setting up some focus groups. Some parishes may find it useful to ask a sample of the congregation for their reflections on the four areas, before discussing and writing up the formal response as a PCC.

The image shows the interior of a church, likely during a service or a quiet moment. The pews are made of dark wood and are arranged in rows, leading towards the altar. The walls are also made of wood, and there are several large stained glass windows. The light from the windows is warm and golden, creating a peaceful atmosphere. The ceiling is high and arched, with a chandelier hanging from it. The floor is made of light-colored wood, and there is a small cross on the wall in the distance.

Vacancy Audit **WORKBOOK**

A resource for Parishes in Vacancy
Diocese of Durham



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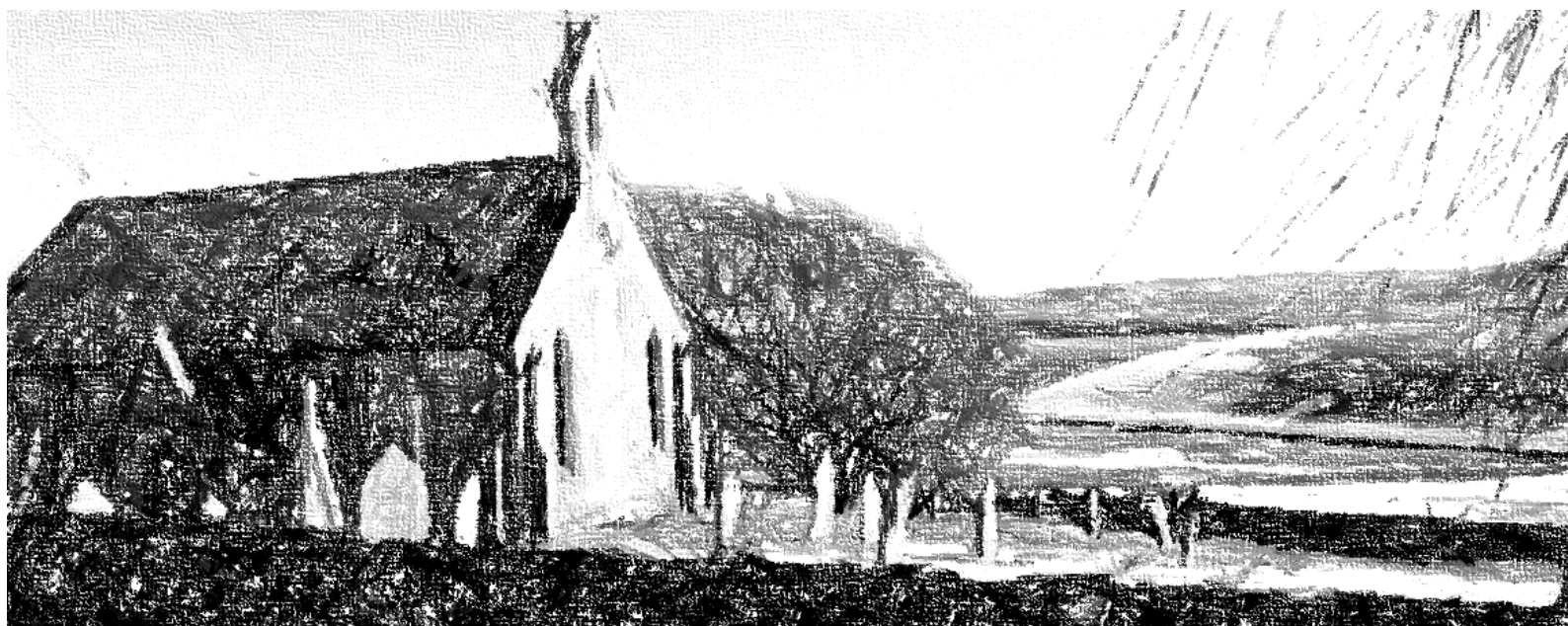
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Introduction

This workbook is designed to help Churches in vacancy to reflect on their current circumstances, sense of call and readiness for mission and ministry. In working through this it should help you as a PCC or congregation to get a sense of what work or actions you might need to prioritise in order to be able to engage fruitfully with God's mission or any changes you might need to consider. In some cases this might involve considering a new form of ministry or a change in how they use their buildings or operate as a PCC/etc. You should read this in conjunction with the Vacancy Audit Guide for PCC's



How to use this workbook

Every church and PCC is unique and whilst we expect every PCC to complete a 'master copy' of this workbook *how* you work through this workbook and the Vacancy Audit process should be tailored to your circumstances and the shape of your church and PCC. The key thing is to do this in a *prayerful way*, to allow sufficient *time* for meaningful engagement and to *involve the whole of your PCC*.

Some PCC's may choose to spread the work over a number of sessions, perhaps all completing one or two sections before a meeting, before joining together to share their reflections and present their shared sense of how things are as well as any differing perspectives when they meet with their facilitator. Other PCC's might choose to work the materials through on an away day, or to split into *working groups* who each ask a sample from the congregation for their thoughts. Talk your ideas through with your facilitator at the start.

As you look through this pack it might feel a bit weighty at the start. Don't worry if that's how it feels! As you read through you'll notice that the questions are actually a mix of simple 'tick box' questions and some that need a bit of explanation. And our hope is that some will generate discussion between you, from which prayer and new insights and decisions will follow.

Short answers are fine. And don't worry about presentation or spelling – this isn't an exam! The most important thing is to pool our ideas, to listen to one another well, and to be ready to respond to God leading us.

Finally, the purpose of this workbook is to give a really good 'overview' of the life of your church in four key areas (mission, buildings, finance and leadership). Most of the questions are designed to collecting our reflections and observations, however a few (e.g., '*what is our annual energy consumption?*') are questions that only one person really needs to answer. Bear that in mind as you approach the document.

If you need help consult the guide or ask your facilitator or have a look at the 'more information' section at the back of the **guide book**.

Exercise I. Taking stock of our potential for mission

M1. Vision & Purpose (tick or mark 'Y' to the statement that fits your view).

How far would you agree with the following statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat true	Disagree	Strongly disagree
'Our church has a really clear sense of vision and purpose'					
'Across the church there is a strong sense of support and commitment to our mission'					
Does the church have a mission statement ? If so, write it here:					

M2. Helping people come to faith in Christ

<p>What regular groups or services do you run for people seeking to understand Christianity? (e.g. <i>Emmaus, Alpha, Start; Messy church</i> or invitation services). How often?</p>	
<p>What practical forms of service in the community is the church engaged in? (e.g. <i>Food Bank, parent and toddler group, working with asylum seekers, dementia café, etc.,</i>).</p>	
<p>What other mission activities you feel called to pursue if you could?</p> <p>What support would you need to begin this work?</p>	

M3. General

<p>What % of your congregation are actively involved in mission?</p>	
<p>How often does mission (sharing faith and community outreach) feature in your PCC discussions?</p>	
<p>What links do you have with other churches/mission-partners? How does it help the congregation understand mission better?</p>	

M4. Engaging with the Diocesan Priorities.

How is this church sharing in and developing the four diocesan priorities. How effectively are you engaging?

Energising Growth	
Caring for God's Creation	
Engaging with Children, Youth & Young Adults	
Challenging Poverty	

Other comments on mission:

Exercise 2. Taking stock of our **Financial Position**

F1. Attitudes to Giving

How far would you agree with the following statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat true	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>'Our church has a positive and generous attitude to giving'</i>					
<i>'Our income is sufficient to cover all our true costs'</i>					
<i>'We regularly talk about & teach about giving'</i>					
<i>'Most people are planned givers'</i>					
<i>'Not many people use gift aid'</i>					
<i>'We are good at encouraging people to sign up for gift aid and planned giving schemes'</i>					
Other comments					

F2. Systems & Reporting

How does the PCC monitor its financial position?	
How do you financially plan for the future?	
Describe your church's reserves policy	
In what ways does your budget reflect your church's priorities?	
When did you last have a campaign/promote giving ? How well received was this? How far did it change attitudes and actual giving?	

<p>How do you encourage church members to join the planned giving scheme or use Gift Aid?</p>	
<p>How do you enable church members to leave a legacy to the church?</p>	

F3. Quick Yes/No finance questions

<p>Do you have a contactless card reader</p>	
<p>Can people give online?</p>	
<p>Can visitors donate if no one else is in church?</p>	
<p>Are annual accounts independently reviewed, and submitted to the diocese with the parish return?</p>	

F4. Parish Share

<p>Is the PCC able and willing to pledge parish share at the level of its guided pledge? If not, is there a plan to work towards this amount?</p>	
<p>How far does the PCC understand what the guided pledge represents?</p>	
<p>Are contributions made regularly and on time?</p>	

Other comments on finance

Exercise 3. Buildings fit for Mission?

B1. Buildings general

How many buildings is your parish responsible for? What sort of buildings are they?	
Is there anything unusual about them? (e.g. festival church status, special interest, grade I listed, etc.,)	

B2. How are your buildings used?

How many hours of the week are your buildings in use for?	
What proportion of this is for community mission?	
What proportion is for letting to other groups?	
How many acts of regular worship take place in your buildings each week?	
How occasional offices do you have every week?	
What other uses do your buildings have?	
Have you considered whether all your buildings are really necessary?	

B3. Future purpose & vision

What vision do you have as a parish for the future use of your buildings and their place in the community? What challenges can you foresee?	
How have you considered sharing your buildings with ecumenical partners? What were your conclusions?	

B4. Quick Yes/No accessibility & facilities questions

Do you have toilets?	
Do you have hot water?	
Do you have kitchen facilities?	

B5. Challenges, works and costs

How accessible are your buildings accessible to both ambulant and non-ambulant people with disabilities (Consider entrances, toilets, kitchens & catering)	
What matters from your last quinquennial are outstanding?	
What plans do you have for renovation or re-ordering of your buildings?	
What does the annual maintenance plan for your buildings involve and cost?	
How much is the cost of maintenance as a proportion of annual expenditure?	

B6. Sustainability & the environment

What is your current energy usage?	
What is your carbon footprint**	
How do comfortable do your congregation and any visitors or users feel in your buildings?	

What actions have you taken to improve energy efficiency? Have you considered a Green Energy Tariff?	
What plans do you have to make your buildings more sustainable environmentally?	
Other	

** You can work this out using the Church of England 'energy footprint tool' which you can find at www.churchofengland.org

Other comments on buildings

Exercise 4. Leadership & Governance

L1. General comments about the CULTURE of our church

(Tick or mark your answer 'Y' in the relevant box)

How far would you agree with the following statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat true	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>'Our PCC is a good reflection of the diversity of church membership..</i>					
<i>'There is a healthy mix of people (skills, experience, views) on our PCC</i>					
<i>'As a PCC we have a good grasp of their responsibilities as Trustees ..</i>					
<i>'The people who come to our church are a good reflection of the people who live in our parish..</i>					
<i>'Every age group has opportunities to lead, to contribute and we are good at listening to and responding to them..</i>					

L2. Our PCC: General

(Tick or mark your answer 'Y' in the relevant box)

How far would you agree with the following statements?	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat true	Disagree	Strongly disagree
<i>'Prayer & listening to God are a strong feature in the life of our PCC</i>					
<i>"We find it easy to fill spaces on the PCC..</i>					
<i>'As a PCC we find it easy to speak up and to listen to a range of opinions'</i>					
<i>"We find it hard to deal with conflict or disagreement..</i>					
Other comments					

L3. Leading together

What creates the most passion or disagreement in PCC meetings and how are disagreements handled?	
How well does the church collaborate with other denominations, the deanery, and the diocese? Can you give some examples?	
How well is leadership shared between clergy and lay people?	

<p>Are most roles carried out by a small group of people, or does everyone have a 'job' to do?</p>	
<p>Are there in-crowds or cliques?</p>	
<p>Is safeguarding established as embedded good practice by all? How do you know this? Would this be clear to others?</p>	

Other comments on how we lead & govern

Additional Resources

You can find out more about resources to encourage giving and more effective ways of giving through the 'Generous Giving' project at www.thegenerousgivingproject.com

A free legacy toolkit is available to PCCs. Visit www.churchlegacy.org.uk

The Church of England has a free Energy Footprint Tool (Carbon Footprint Tool) which you can find at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/policy-and-thinking/our-views/environment-and-climate-change/about-our-environment/energy-footprint-tool>