

Preliminary Meeting regarding the Vacancy

A meeting was held in St John's church on 11th October to provide guidance to the Benefice for appointing a new Vicar and the steps leading up to it.

Anne Gell, the Archdeacon of Wells, welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced her fellow representatives from the diocese: Tristram Rae Smith, the Assistant Area Dean; Rob Sage, the Lay Dean and Caroline Bruce, the Diocesan Parish Consultancy Officer.

Attending the meeting were members of the three PCCs and retired clergy.

General background for clergy appointments

Anne Gell impressed upon us that it is very early days and that although we are in "vacancy" that does not mean that we are "vacant" as we, as a church, continue to function in terms of the church's ministry and the work that we do. It should be looked upon more as a period of a time of change, reflection on the past and where we are now, and looking to the future.

It is a time full of challenges and opportunities. It is a time to look at how things have changed, especially during the pandemic. She asked us to consider how we are now as a church and community, and to consider whether the wider context of our respective village communities has changed.

It is the Archdeacon's role to help and guide the PCCs through this process. Importantly, it is the PCCs, Bishop and patron who are all part of the process. However, the role of the PCCs is key. No parish priest can be elected without the voice of our church community through its elected representatives on the PCC.

Setting out the broad process for appointing the next incumbent

The Bishop of Bath and Wells and Mr Edward Wingfield Digby are (jointly) our patrons and are the third party in any appointment. It is the patrons' responsibility to nominate a new incumbent to the Bishop when the benefice falls vacant.

A meeting of the PCC Representatives will take place once the Parish Profile has been compiled.

The Churchwardens and Area Dean assume all legal responsibilities during the vacancy. The Area and Lay Deans have yet to meet to decide on the way ahead.

The churchwardens are the people who will be the voice of the church. PCCs need to help and support them, due to the increased expectation that falls on their shoulders. Anne recommended that we look at ways in which the burden can be shared, and ways to support them. Anne thanked us all for our roles on our respective PCCs.

Preparation of a Parish Profile

Caroline informed us that this is the document that promotes us as a parish. It is a window to prospective candidates that says who we are. It is designed to encourage the right person to come. It should say where we see God in the neighbourhood; what it is that is important to us both personally and to us as a wider church. It is a vision of God's manifestation. It is not only looking inward at us but should show how we want to engage in the wider community. It should say what the church could be doing and extend to the wider community. Caroline Bruce is here to help us in the compilation of the Profile and to act as a critical friend.

Practical matters

Anne says she would dearly love to continue as we have done in the past, but we are facing difficult times. Nicki Edwards pointed out that as a Benefice, we are working well. We are trying to generate a common vision of the five churches. Rev Frank confirmed that we are going to be proactive, rather than reactive. We may not know what the future is, but we know who we are. We need to show what we believe we are, who we are and where we want to go in the future. Rev Brian spoke about what we are like as a welcoming and well-organised community.

Jacque Hall said that we are blessed with wonderful, retired clergy, and Anne thanked them for what they do and will do in the future. The Area Dean will help if necessary. Robert Hall introduced himself as the treasurer of St John's. There is no Benefice secretary at present, and the decision has been made not to advertise for the time being. The additional work has fallen on the shoulders of others and should be shared.

Anne suggests that the name of a point of contact for the immediate future is provided – it was decided, after the meeting, that this should be Jacque Hall.

To sum up there is the need to look to God for the support we need; we need to go through the visionary and discerning process. We need to keep prayer at the heart of what we are doing. God has a purpose for us – we are seeking this and His will.

Have courage, have hope, be expectant and pray.