

St John's Church, Milborne Port Vacancy update March 2022

Dear Friends,

We would like to take this opportunity to update you on the progress that has been made in our search for our new Priest for the Benefice of Milborne Port and Milborne Wick with Goathill and Charlton Horethorne with Stowell.

The Post

We are delighted to say that the vacancy is now being advertised in the Church Times, interviews are scheduled for the end of May and so we are hopeful that we will have the new person in post by September. This is really great news! To have the vacancy last for a year may sound like a long time but in fact that is about the minimum we could have hoped for. However, please rest assured that if we do not think any of the candidates are right this time round we would not hesitate to ask the Diocese to readvertise.

The post has been advertised as "Priest-in-Charge" for the Benefice rather than a Rector or a Vicar. The Churchwardens and PCCs of each Parish have agreed to this temporary change in title at the request of the Diocese. We do not feel that it will make any material difference to the day-to-day role of our new priest and should not be seen a cause for concern to our congregations.

What does Priest-in-charge mean?

In today's cash-strapped church it is increasingly common to appoint a Priest-in-charge; reviews by your church wardens of recent and current vacancies show this to be a widespread practice within the Church of England.

Instead of the usual process in which the Benefice PCCs and their elected "recruitment team" advertise the post, receive and short-list applications, interview and select a preferred candidate which they request the patron(s) to "present" to the Bishop for induction into the role, the Bishop "suspends" the patron's right to "present" the PCCs' preferred candidate.

In place of the above, the Bishop will permit a Benefice to advertise for and recruit a Priest-in-Charge rather than a Vicar/Rector. The process is identical to recruiting a Vicar/Rector with full PCC and Patron involvement, however the selected candidate is "licensed" in the Benefice as Priest-in-Charge by the Bishop.

What is the difference between a Priest-in-Charge and a Vicar/Rector?

In simple terms, not very much - a Priest-in-Charge will act as if they were Vicar/Rector. Both carry out the same roles and have the same duties and responsibilities under church law. A Priest-in-Charge will usually work exclusively within the Benefice in which they have been deployed, however as outlined below, there is a possibility that their job scope could be changed by a Bishop. In addition, the role of Priest-in-Charge is time limited; whereas a Vicar/Rector is inducted into a Benefice on an open-ended basis with no time limit to their tenure, a Priest-in-Charge is licensed as such in a Benefice for up to 5 years. By and large, a Benefice will notice little difference between a Priest-in-Charge and an incumbent (Vicar/Rector).

Why does a Bishop choose to do this?

The reason for this process is normally to allow a Bishop maximum flexibility in considering possible changes to the shape of ministry in a Deanery by way of (pastoral) reorganisation. Changes may be required for various reasons including but not limited to:

- Allocation of stipendiary clergy taking account of changes in population in different parts of a diocese.
- Management and stewardship of resources to best effect – essentially fitting within a budget.
- Changes to parish and benefice boundaries.
- Pastoral and missional requirements and need.

How likely is it there will be changes to our Benefice?

While we cannot be certain, your church wardens would point to the following factors “in our favour” so to speak.

- The Diocese is purchasing a new house in Milborne Port to act as the residence of the Priest or incumbent within the Benefice.
- This Benefice is viewed as cohesive and well managed; we pay our parish share and our Profile is widely considered as exciting and forward-looking.
- Congregation numbers have stood up well despite the ravages of Covid, etc.
- During a recent (Mar 3rd) meeting attended by the Benefice recruitment team, the Archdeacon, the Area Dean, and the Lay Dean, the Archdeacon verbally made it very clear that this Benefice will not be broken up...that is to say, none of the constituent parishes is under consideration for being joined to a neighbouring Benefice.

What we are not in a position to say with any certainty is that the Benefice won't be “added to” as a result of this process, i.e. it is possible that one or more parishes currently within neighbouring Benefices might be added onto our Benefice at some point. While we are noting this as a possibility, we need to point out that at no stage have any of us heard any suggestion that this might be the case. Furthermore, we have made it very clear that this Benefice is big and varied enough in terms of populations and geography to provide a genuinely full-time and challenging role to any incumbent.

How long does this arrangement last?

The technical term for this is a “suspension of presentation” and this can last for up to 5 years, or until the Bishop is satisfied that there is no need to make changes to a Benefice, whichever period is the shorter. When the suspension of presentation is lifted, the Priest-in-Charge is “converted” to Benefice Vicar/Rector as soon as possible. In very rare cases suspensions can be renewed for a further 5 years by a Bishop.

The Vicarage

You will have noticed that the sale of the old Vicarage has now been completed. The new property chosen by the Diocese is much more suitable to modern family living and its purchase is due for completion in early May; which gives plenty of time for it to be made ready for the new Priest.

In conclusion, we have so much to encourage us as we look forward in the very near future!
Please keep this process in your prayers over the coming weeks.

Yours,

Charlie Beney

Trudy West

Nicki Edwards

Jacquie Hall

Church Wardens