

A guide to good practice for working agreements

A number of people in various forms of licensed and authorised ministries in the diocese are required, or strongly advised to have working agreements. Specific guidance notes are available for Curates, Readers and Lay Pastoral Ministers; these give advice related to that particular form of ministry. This guide aims to offer advice on general issues which relate to any working agreement between an incumbent, an assistant minister and the PCC.

Incumbents and Assistant Ministers often ask about the best way to express their agreement. In drawing up a working agreement, it should be borne in mind that the greatest value of the exercise usually lies in airing the issues under discussion, rather than in the polished nature of the finished document. It is usually best to put down what seems right after discussion, and then amend it later, rather than not spelling out vital issues at all.

The initial agreement

The following issues should all be addressed somewhere in the working agreement:

- There should be a description of the context of the ministry, and of the time offered by the assistant minister (e.g. full-time stipendiary ministry; part-time ministry; a set number of hours per week; particular tasks to fit around children's schooling; etc), including arrangements for time outside the parish.
- The particular responsibilities of the assistant minister should be set out.
- Who is the assistant minister responsible to? Are they responsible for others? (e.g. a LPM coordinating a visiting team)
- Arrangements for Supervision and reflection on ministry, especially in the early stages of licensing/authorisation. Who is responsible for this? Where and when will it occur?
- Where and when will staff meetings occur? What will be the balance between 1:1 meetings and larger groups?
- What provision is there for in-service training? (both time and financial resources)
- Provision of working expenses.
- Are there other particular financial issues? (e.g. assignment of funeral fees; insurance cover on parish business – the PCC should be sure that any ministry carried out in its name is covered by public liability insurance, but checking that car insurance covers the payment of a mileage rate for ministry should be the responsibility of the individual minister)
- When will routine review of the working agreement occur?

A question often asked is who should be party to this agreement. In the first instance it is an agreement between the incumbent and the particular minister, and should be signed by both of them. The guidance notes for particular ministries should specify whether any diocesan officer needs a copy. The PCC should be aware of any parts of the agreement which concern them (especially financial matters); it may be helpful for them to see the whole agreement, so there is transparency about the arrangements.

Any major change of circumstances for either the parish or the assistant minister should trigger a review of the agreement.

Interregnum arrangements

As the working agreement is between the incumbent and the assistant minister, it will clearly need attention in the case of an interregnum. In the same way that transparency is helpful in drawing up an initial agreement, there needs to be clear discussion about expectations during an interregnum (there is anecdotal evidence of assistant ministers feeling very hurt, either because too many expectations are laid on them at this stage, or because they feel excluded).

The people who ought to be involved in reviewing the agreement at the start of an interregnum are the Rural Dean and the PCC. It is vital that the assistant minister is able to express how much they wish to offer in these circumstances. If the interregnum is prolonged, it would be advisable to keep the situation under review.

Once a new incumbent is in post, there should be a 'light' review as soon as practicably possible, and then a thorough review when the incumbent has been in post for 6 months.

Similar discussions should take place in the event of the incumbent being unavailable in the parish for any significant length of time (e.g. sabbatical leave, parental leave, or long-term illness).