

Glossary of key terms

Here are definitions of some key church-related terms.

Anglican

A member of the Church of England or Anglican Church belonging to the Anglican Communion. (Adjective commonly used as a noun.)

Anglican Communion

A group of Churches world-wide with historic and present links with the Archbishop of Canterbury. All Anglican diocesan bishops are members of the Lambeth Conference.

Archbishop

Leading bishop with authority over a Province. There are two in England – of Canterbury and of York. Also sometimes known as Metropolitan or Primate.

Archdeacon

A senior member of the clergy responsible to the diocesan bishop for an archdeaconry. The archdeacon usually inducts new incumbents, shares the pastoral care of the clergy and does much practical, legal and administrative work.

Archdeaconry

Part of a diocese for which an archdeacon is responsible.

Area Bishop

In some larger diocese, a bishop to whom the diocesan bishop delegates spiritual oversight for a particular area. See also Suffragan Bishop and Assistant Bishop.

Area Dean

See Rural Dean.

Assistant Bishop

Usually a retired bishop or bishop who has served abroad, who helps the diocesan bishop in some of his/her work.

Assistant Curate

See Curate.

Benefice

a) The position held by an incumbent entitling him/her to a stipend and a parsonage house in return for carrying out spiritual duties. b) The parish or group of parishes served by one incumbent.

Bishop

Chief minister (of diocese) with spiritual oversight of clergy and lay people. Bishops are the first and most senior of the three Holy Orders of the ordained ministry in the Church of England. A diocesan bishop often has the help of other bishops – see Area Bishop, Assistant Bishop, Suffragan Bishop.

Canon

a) Law of the Church of England made by the General Synod, requiring the Royal Assent – hence 'Canon law'. b) see also Residentiary Canon, Honorary Canon, Minor Canon.

Cathedral

Principal church building of a diocese, staffed by a dean (or provost) and chapter, where the diocesan bishop has his/her cathedra ('seat' or 'throne').

Chancellor

Judge in church court in each diocese where Canon Law, etc. is administered. Must be an experienced barrister or solicitor.

Chapel

- a) A subsidiary 'church within a church' in a church building, often where weekday services are held.
- b) A place of worship within an institution (e.g. school, hospital, prison etc). See Chaplain.

Chapel of Ease

Legal name sometimes used in a parish to describe an additional C of E church other than the parish church. See Daughter Church.

Chaplain

- a) Priest, deacon or lay person in a special community such as a school, college, university, prison, hospital, the armed forces, industry etc.
- b) Priest, deacon, or lay person who assists a bishop in administration or on ceremonial occasions.

Chapter

- a) Corporate title for the dean and canons of a Cathedral.
- b) Corporate title for the clergy of a deanery.

Church Army

Organisation of trained lay people within the Church of England who assist in parishes or engage in various mission and social projects throughout the country. Men are 'Captains'; women are 'Sisters'.
Headquarters Address: Church Army, Wilson Carlile Centre, 50 Cavendish Street, Sheffield, S3 7RZ
Tel: 0300 123 2113

Churchwarden

The leading lay officer in a parish (at least two are appointed annually).

Clerk in Holy Orders

Legal title for a member of the clergy.

Clergy

General name for all ordained ministers.

Commissary

- a) A representative in England of an overseas bishop.
- b) The deputy of a diocesan bishop at an institution.

Convocation

A representative body consisting of the diocesan bishops, together with elected suffragan bishops and area bishops ('Upper House') and elected representatives of the clergy ('Lower House') from the dioceses in a particular province. Hence, 'Convocation of Canterbury' and 'Convocation of York'. See Proctor.

Curate

Deacon or priest appointed to assist the incumbent or take charge of a parish temporarily during a vacancy or while the incumbent is incapacitated.

Curate-in-charge

Curate with special responsibility for a second church in a parish.

Daughter church

An additional C of E church in a parish other than the parish church – often in an area of new housing. See Chapel of Ease.

Deacon

The third of the three Holy Orders of the Church's ordained ministry. Ordination to priest normally happens one year after serving as a deacon. A deacon may undertake a full ministry in worship and in pastoral care except for those functions specifically reserved for a priest, e.g. being President at Holy Communion. Women as well as men may now be ordained to this order. See also curate and parish deacon.

Deaconess

Women used to be ordained deaconess to do work in a parish similar to that of a deacon. Since 1987 women have been ordained deacon and only a few deaconesses remain.

Dean

a) Senior priest in charge of a cathedral. b) Title given to senior clergy of some colleges in universities. See also Provost, Rural Dean.

Deanery

a) A collection of parishes over which the Rural Dean has oversight. b) House occupied by the Dean of a Cathedral.

Deanery Synod

Body consisting of all the clergy working in a deanery and lay representatives elected from every parish.

Dedication

a) Ceremony by which a new building or other major asset (e.g. bells, church organ, new church furnishing, etc) is blessed for church use. b) The saint after which a church is named.

Diocesan Bishop

The bishop in charge of a diocese.

Diocese

Main administrative and pastoral area in the Church of England – often roughly coincides with local county. There are 42 dioceses in the Church of England. See Bishop.

Group Ministry

Group of adjacent parishes, including more than one benefice, where the clergy work together. See also Team Ministry.

Honorary Canon

Courtesy title awarded to some senior clergy, giving them their own 'seat' at the cathedral. In some dioceses Prebendary is the equivalent title.

Incumbent

The priest who is in charge of church life in a particular benefice. Depending on the parish his/her title may be Vicar or Rector. See also Priest-in-Charge.

Local Ecumenical Project

A local area where a local covenant or a more far-reaching agreement between the authorities of different denominations (covering the sharing of church life, buildings and/or ministry) has been made.

Local Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Scheme whereby ministers are ordained deacon or priest, with a view to working only in a clearly defined area, e.g. their own parish or deanery. See also Non-Stipendiary Ministry.

Metropolitan

Title of a bishop who has special oversight over a group of dioceses or a province. In England used only of the two archbishops.

Minister

General name given to all who do the pastoral work of the Church or who lead worship. In common use only of the clergy.

Ministers in Secular Employment

Clergy who, in an honorary capacity, serve as ministers at their place of work.

Minor Canon

Assistant priest on the staff of a cathedral, usually concerned with choral services.

Missionary Society

Organisations set up to help the Church in its task of mission at home and overseas. Names and addresses of such organisations appear in the 'Church of England Year Book'.

Monastery

House occupied by a community of monks. See Religious Orders.

Monk

Male member of a Religious Order.

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Ministers ordained deacon or priest who serve as honorary curates whilst continuing full-time secular employment. See also Ministers in Secular Employment.

Nun

Female member of a Religious Order.

Ordained Ministry

General term to describe Bishops, Priests and Deacons.

Ordination

Ceremony by which priests and deacons are commissioned. A bishop always presides.

Parish

Smallest pastoral area within the Church of England, sometimes divided into districts. A parish usually has one main church building, the parish church, but may also include chapels of ease or daughter churches. The parish may be linked with others in a single benefice. See also Group Ministry, Team Ministry.

Parish Deacon

One who has served as Assistant Curate for the first appointment may be called Parish Deacon for subsequent and more senior posts.

Patron

Person or corporate body with the right to nominate to the diocesan bishop a priest to be instituted as incumbent of a parish when there is a vacancy.

Plurality

(in the expression 'held in plurality') describes the situation when one priest is incumbent of two or more benefices, which are in other respects independent. This situation is usually resolved by forming one 'united benefice'.

Prebendary

In some cathedrals a title equivalent to Honorary Canon.

Precentor

In some cathedrals and collegiate churches, the priest responsible for choral services.

Priest

Second order of ordained ministry. From 1994, women as well as men may be ordained to this order. See Bishop, Deacon.

Priest-in-charge

Priest who is responsible for a parish where for pastoral reasons the diocesan bishop does not wish to grant the freehold and thus make the priest an incumbent.

Primate

Title given to the archbishop of a province. The Archbishop of Canterbury is Primate of All England. The Archbishop of York is Primate of England. Overseas, often applied to the senior archbishop in a Church with several provinces.

Proctor

Member of the clergy elected to the Lower House of Convocation of a province and therefore also a member of the House of Clergy and of the General Synod.

Prolocutor

The title of the president or chairman of the Lower House of the Convocations of Canterbury and York.

Province

Area of the Church under the authority of an archbishop – consisting of a number of dioceses. Hence 'Province of Canterbury' (Southern Province), 'Province of York' (Northern Province).

Provost

In cathedrals which are also parish churches, the usual title of the senior priest in charge. See also Dean.

Rector

Title of incumbents of certain parishes. See also Vicar, Team Rector.

Registrar

See Diocesan Registrar.

Religious Orders

Groups of men or women, clergy or laity, who bind themselves in a life-long commitment and fellowship according to a monastic discipline or rule. Many such groups (known as communities) follow the traditional rules e.g. Benedictines (monks and nuns) and Franciscans (friars and sisters). Members of religious orders are commonly addressed as 'Brother' or 'Sister' though 'Father' continues to be used for priests. A full list of religious orders within the Church of England appears in the 'Church of England Year Book'.

Residentiary Canon

Senior member of the clergy on the staff of a cathedral.

Royal Peculiar

A church within the personal jurisdiction of the Sovereign. (Examples are Westminster Abbey and St George's Chapel, Windsor.)

Rural Dean

Leader of local clergy in a deanery, who is joint chairman of the deanery synod with an elected Lay Chairman. In cities sometimes known as Area Dean.

Rural Deanery

Now usually Deanery.

Succentor

In a cathedral, a priest who assists the Precentor in conducting services. See also Minor Canon.

Suffragan Bishop

Full-time assistant bishop in a diocese – takes his/her title from a place in the diocese but does not usually live there.

Team Ministry

Large parish, or a number of parishes forming a single benefice, where a team of clergy work together.

Team Rector

Leader of the clergy in a Team Ministry.

Team Vicar

Priest on the staff of a Team Ministry.

Title

The first appointment of a newly ordained deacon.

United Benefice

See Plurality.

Vicar

Title given to incumbents of certain parishes. See also Rector.