

Churchwardens

Churchwardens are elected annually under the provisions of the Churchwardens Measure 2001 by the Annual Meeting of Parishioners, as the senior laypeople of the parish and congregation. Their term of office is one year, and they may serve for up to six consecutive terms of office, unless the Annual Meeting passes a resolution to set aside this rule.

They are the Bishop's officers and are admitted to office each year by the Archdeacon, on behalf of the Bishop. Their first responsibility is to the Bishop, usually via the Archdeacon. They, with the parish priest, are generally responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the parish.

Churchwardens are vital to the health and wellbeing of our church communities. It is an important and, at times, a demanding role.

The Canons of the Church of England [Canons E1.4 and E1.5] state that churchwardens shall be foremost in representing the laity and in cooperating with the incumbent; they shall use their best endeavours by example and precept to encourage the parishioners in the practice of true religion and to promote unity and peace among them. They shall also maintain order and decency in the church and churchyard, especially during the time of divine service. The property, in the plate, ornaments and other moveable goods of the church, is vested in them, and they should keep an up-to-date inventory of these items and deliver them to their successors.

Churchwardens should:

- care for and support the parish priest, and be people to whom the incumbent can turn to for advice and support
- try to ensure that the incumbent is relieved of superfluous administrative, and other, tasks
- provide feedback, as a 'critical friend,' for the parish priest
- care for the congregation and encourage people in their Christian faith
- help to resolve disputes or disagreements amongst the congregation or with the parish priest, or with the local community

When any concerns arise, they should consult the Area Dean and/or Archdeacon.

Churchwardens should have a set of keys for the church.

They should attend services regularly, and normally arrive in good time to support the welcome group, be present for any refreshments, and assist in tidying up after services.

During a vacancy in a parish, the churchwardens, along with the Area Dean, are responsible for ensuring that worship, pastoral care, and mission continues in the parish, and for supporting any assistant clergy, lay ministers, staff, and volunteers in the parish in their responsibilities.

The way in which churchwardens exercise their office will vary from parish to parish.

1. Meetings / Trusteeships

They are *ex officio* members of the PCC (the trustees of the parish) and may be appointed to the PCC Standing Committee (see M31 of the PCC model rules). Churchwardens become members of the PCC from the moment they are elected, although they might not be admitted to office by the Archdeacon until several weeks later.

They may also be *ex officio* trustees of parish ecclesiastical and parochial charities. They should meet regularly with the incumbent.

2. Administration

With the incumbent and PCC, they should use their best endeavours to ensure that:

- there is adequate provision for and oversight of the administration of the parish, including financial administration
- there are proper procedures in place for recruiting, and managing lay staff and volunteers
- the PCC adopts a Safeguarding policy, and has an action plan for ensuring that the policy is implemented
- the PCC has a health and safety policy and ensures that it is implemented
- there are adequate preparations for the Archdeacon's triennial parochial visitation.

3. Finance

They should use their best endeavours to ensure that:

- there are proper systems in place for counting collections, recording amounts and their secure holding until they can be banked
- adequate processes are in place for managing the finances of the PCC
- expenses of office are paid to the clergy
- the church is adequately insured
- all bills are paid
- the PCC contributes to the Diocese's Common Fund
- the parish's end of year accounts, and other returns are submitted promptly.

In the absence of a PCC Treasurer, the churchwardens must fulfil the role of Treasurer together.

4. Mission

Churchwardens should use their best endeavours to ensure that:

- the PCC has a Mission Action Plan, and pays attention to implementing it
- there is an appropriately encouraging welcome to people attending church
- the church is open to the public as much as possible.

5. Pastoral Care

Churchwardens should use their best endeavours to ensure that the pastoral work of the Church is being undertaken in the parish and amongst the congregation.

6. Buildings and Contents and Property

Churchwardens are responsible for ensuring that the PCC cares for and maintains the church and its contents and other buildings in the parish, and the churchyard or grounds.

They are responsible for ensuring that:

- there is a terrier, (the list and description of any land or buildings belonging to the church)
- proper records of any property transactions, including licences under Faculty and tenancy agreements and leases are kept

- a list of all ecclesiastical trusts and charities associated with the parish is maintained
- an annually updated inventory and photographic record of all the items belonging to the church is retained
- quinquennial repairs are carried out
- a log book of all alterations and repairs to the church and its lands and contents exists
- appropriate building and contents insurances are in place
- an annual report is made on the fabric of the church and any other buildings to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting
- all valuable items are securely kept
- the Archdeacon and the DAC are consulted about any repairs or alteration to the church, or any acquisitions or disposals of contents, and that a Faculty is obtained before any work is begun.

7. Liturgy and Worship

In the absence of the parish priest, they are responsible, with the Area Dean, for ensuring that there is someone to conduct services, and that liturgy and the life of the parish continues as far as possible as with the previous incumbent. If there is no one available they should conduct any service, as far as possible themselves. They must check that all visiting clergy hold the Bishop's licence or Permission to Officiate.

They should ensure that the service register and other registers are properly filled in.

During a vacancy in the parish, they, with the Area Dean, are responsible for the good ordering of the parish.

They are responsible for ensuring that people are properly welcomed to the church and to services, and that sidespersons are appointed.

They are responsible for good order in the church and churchyard or the equivalent. In the event of a service being disrupted or a disturbance in church they should call the police, and, if necessary, may arrest a person, or escort them off the premises.

At the end of their period of office churchwardens should handover their keys to their successors, and the inventory, which should then be checked and signed.

Churchwardens are not expected to do everything above themselves, but to make sure that there are other people available to carry out the various tasks.

Please contact the current St Mary's Church Wardens for more information.

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