

EXTRACT FROM WWW.CHURCHCARE.CO.UK - A FASCINATING SITE WITH LOTS OF OTHER ADVICE AND GUIDANCE ABOUT LOOKING AFTER THE CHURCH AND ITS ENVIRONS (PARTICULARLY USEFUL FOR BUILDINGS, COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH COMMITTEES)

THE ROLE OF A CHURCHWARDEN

Introduction

The role of a churchwarden is extremely varied but is best described as management, maintenance, and ministry. Management refers to the churchwarden's relationship with the clergy, the PCC and the members of the congregation; maintenance refers to his or her responsibilities to look after the church building; and ministry refers to their pastoral role with regard to the parish priest and to the congregation.

It is a shared leadership, but it is leadership rather than management. The churchwarden should be someone who the congregation respects as a leader and who can take charge when needed. A churchwarden may have to take a service at ten minutes notice, or deal with the press when some scandal occurs. He or she needs to guide the PCC to make the right decisions. Churchwardens should be wise and, if needed, firm. They should not be frightened when dealing with senior clergy. They should maintain their own Christian faith, and not let it become stale.

Many of the churchwarden's responsibilities are connected with maintenance. But there are also responsibilities in connection with the Sunday services, for keeping order in the church, and for collecting the church offerings. Churchwardens have to make various reports each year to the annual parochial meeting and to the archdeacon. They are charity trustees for the church and may be trustees of some charitable trust connected with the church. They have to go to all the meetings of the PCC and the standing committees, and should meet and pray regularly with the parish priest. Their work is not just the maintenance of the church building, but helping the smooth running of the church.

Their third and most important role is on a personal level. A churchwarden cares for the parish priest and the parish priest's family. A churchwarden should also care for the congregation, to encourage its members in their Christian faith, and to help heal any quarrels or disagreements that arise between them or between the congregation and the parish priest.

Duties and responsibilities of Churchwardens are stated briefly in Canon E1. They may be summarised as:

- Churchwardens, when admitted, are officers of the bishop. They shall discharge such duties as are by law and custom assigned to them; **they shall be foremost in representing the laity and in co-operating 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.
- They are the legal owners, on behalf of the parishioners, of the plate, ornaments, furniture and furnishings and other articles belonging to the church - they are responsible for ensuring that none of those articles is disposed of without a faculty, and that valuable items, alms boxes, etc. are secure against theft.
- In consultation with the incumbent, they must compile and keep up to date an inventory of all the articles belonging to the church, a "terrier" of the lands belonging to the church, and a logbook of all alterations, additions and repairs to the church, its lands and articles and to other events affecting any of them and keep the PCC informed to enable it to carry out its functions in relation to the fabric of the church.
- Again, in consultation with the incumbent, churchwardens must in every year carry out or arrange for an inspection of the fabric of the church and the articles belonging to it and make a report on these to the Parochial Church Council, which then delivers the report to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.
- They should try to ensure that the PCC carries out its responsibilities for the care, maintenance and insurance of the fabric, goods and ornaments of the church and the care and maintenance of the churchyard. In particular it is the duty of the churchwardens to ensure that the necessary faculty is obtained before any works are carried out.
- Churchwardens **should try to ensure that the incumbent is relieved of administrative work**, particularly in connection with such matters as the insurance, heating, lighting, cleaning and maintenance of the church and other parish buildings, and the repair or replacement of such things as hassocks, hymn and prayer books, noticeboards and the like.
- They should try to ensure that the PCC meets its financial obligations, including contributions to diocesan funds and the payment in full of the working expenses of the clergy in the parish.
- A churchwarden may hold the office of treasurer of the PCC, and if no one else is willing to act in that capacity, the churchwardens who are members of the PCC must do so.
- Churchwardens are responsible for taking any offerings or collections in church (helped by the sidespeople).
- The churchwardens are also responsible for arranging provision of the bread and the wine for the Holy Communion.
- They are responsible for the seating of the congregation in the church, and for the maintenance of good order and behaviour, especially during services, assisted in these duties by the sidespeople. The churchwardens should arrange the sidespeople's rota, and ensure that the sidespeople know what their duties are. Churchwardens have power to eject anyone creating a disturbance during a service, so long as they do not use unnecessary violence; they may also arrest a person guilty of riotous, violent or indecent behaviour in the church or churchyard and bring that person before a magistrate.
- During a vacancy in the benefice, the churchwardens will normally be the "sequestrators", together with the Area Dean and any other person appointed by the bishop, and must carry out the duties required of them by the bishop. At other times when the incumbent is absent, the churchwardens are responsible for ensuring that church services are maintained and the needs of any visiting clergy are adequately provided for.
- As lay officers of the bishop, the churchwardens ought, when necessary, to report to him or to the archdeacon as to the state of the parish and any neglect or default by the incumbent in discharging his or her duties. They must also make accurate replies (their "presentments") to the "articles of enquiry" put to them on the occasion of each visitation.
- On going out of office they shall duly deliver to their successors any goods of the church remaining in their hands together with the inventory which shall be checked by their successors

Term of office - all churchwardens must be 'admitted to office' by making the necessary declarations before their Archdeacon (or another appointed by the Bishop) by 31 July in the year of their election. They are appointed for a one year term of office which commences on the date on which they are formally admitted to office, and continues until they or their successors are again duly admitted, or until 31 July in the year following their election at the latest. **However, churchwardens become ex-officio members of their church council from the actual date of their election.** Once in office, a churchwarden may resign his office by written notice to the bishop by post and shall take effect two months after the notice is served or at an earlier date agreed by the bishop in consultation with the minister and other churchwardens.

After six successive periods of office a person cannot be re-appointed as churchwarden unless the meeting of parishioners positively and exceptionally passes a resolution to allow this to happen. Such a resolution can be revoked at any subsequent meeting of parishioners. Any person who has served six successive years as churchwarden cannot be re-appointed for another two years (again, unless the meeting resolves otherwise). The year from which this provision took effect is 2002.

Churchwardens automatically vacate their office if they cease to have their name entered on the church electoral roll, and a casual vacancy arises. A casual vacancy also arises if a person elected to be a churchwarden fails to be admitted to office by 31 July in the year in which they were elected.

In the event of a casual vacancy during the year of office, the vacant place may be filled in the same manner as the person being replaced had originally been appointed (i.e. election or Incumbent's nomination) except where, in the case of nomination by the minister and that minister has ceased to hold office in the parish, the casual vacancy shall be filled by election by a meeting of the parishioners. A person elected to fill a casual vacancy must be admitted to office within three months of the election or before the next Annual Meeting of Parishioners if earlier.

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