

The Role of Churchwardens

A. General Duties

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.
- have a set of keys for the church.
- attend services regularly, and normally be present before and after the services to be available as a point of contact for newcomers or the congregation.

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.

B. Attributes Required

(Adapted from 'Practical Church Management' by James Behrens & 'Courageous Leadership' by Bill Hybels)

In priority order, the following attributes are vital for a churchwarden:

1. **Calling:** Motivated by serving God and following his calling
2. **Character:** (see below)
3. **Chemistry:** Someone who the vicar and the congregation respect and relate to
4. **Competence:** Ability to do the role (see below)

The following characteristics are therefore important for a churchwarden:

- Committed to Christ

- Committed to this church and its vision and values
- A listener – to congregation and clergy
- Someone whom the congregation respects and relate to
- Someone who connects with a large proportion of the congregation
- A peacemaker who encourages unity
- Wise, and if needed, firm
- Trustworthy – including with finances
- Comfortable with dealing with senior clergy (as officers of the bishop)

Every churchwarden will have different gifts and it is therefore expected that they will bring different strengths to the role.

C. Areas of Responsibility

1. Meetings / Trusteeships

Churchwardens are ex officio members of the PCC (the trustees of the parish), and the PCC Standing Committee. 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, has an action plan for ensuring that the policy is implemented, and the churchwarden fulfils their role as specified in the policy.
- 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.
- During an interregnum, to ensure that the incumbent's safeguarding roles and responsibilities are fulfilled, in consultation with the PCC, parish safeguarding officer and the area dean. Also, that information about safeguarding matters is securely stored before passing to the new incumbent.

Churchwardens should ensure that they are up-to-date with current best practice – including attending mandatory safeguarding courses to the required level, and other training courses required by the diocese.

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.

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.

D. In Our Context

Many of the official duties of churchwardens are set by law, as above. However, at St James' and St Luke's, in common with many churches, we try to spread this load as much as possible, so there are teams who have responsibilities for many of the areas traditionally covered by churchwardens:

- **Fabric Team:** Buildings
- **Treasurer & Finance Support Teams:** Finances
- **Administrator:** Administration, Insurance, Registers, Management of Cleaners
- **Vergers, Deputy Wardens, Sidespeople, Welcome Team:** Taking practical care of services including counting money, recording attendance, opening/closing church
- **Service Team Administrator:** Rotas for service teams
- **Vision Team:** Supporting vicar with long-term vision
- **Service Leaders, Preachers, Retired Clergy:** Leading services in the vicar's absence
- **Parish Safeguarding Officer:** Promoting and ensuring safeguarding

The churchwardens between them need to be aware of these areas and report on them as necessary, but should not need to get hands-on involved on a regular basis. The vicar and PCC also take a leading role in overseeing many of these areas. The load on the churchwardens should therefore be considerably lighter than might at first appear.

However, if there is a breakdown in the statutory duties and no-one is doing them, then the responsibility falls to the churchwardens to ensure that they are done.

Therefore, in our context, the key roles for the Churchwardens include:

- A focus for communication between the congregation, the vicar & where necessary, the diocese – in particular encouraging spiritual growth, unity and peace. Includes meeting regularly as necessary with the vicar and other warden – generally done informally or via email/phone, unless there's a crisis.
- Ensuring the smooth running of the church –in particular as a leading member of the PCC & regularly attending services.
- Ensuring their statutory responsibilities are met –in particular relating to finances & buildings – whether by others or themselves. Taking responsibility for these areas in the event of others not doing so.
- During an interregnum, the churchwardens have a responsibility for working with the Rural Dean to provide leadership, cover and recruitment – working with the PCC and others above. This is likely to be a considerably more demanding role.

Hopefully these notes are helpful, but if you need clarification, please ask.

Toby May

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