

# **DIOCESE OF ST. ALBANS**

## **CHURCHWARDENS' ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

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Churchwardens are not only the elected representatives of the laity in the parish, but also officers of the Bishop. They are admitted to office by the Archdeacon at the Visitation, and remain in office until their successors are admitted. Where new churchwardens are unable to attend the Visitations they need to contact the Archdeacon to arrange for admission. In order to leave office before a new election, they must offer their resignation to the Bishop in writing, and with the agreement of their incumbent.

The duties of Churchwardens are set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of Canon E1 of the Canons of the Church of England:-

- 'The churchwardens when admitted are officers of the Ordinary. 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.
- In the churchwardens is vested the property in the plate, ornaments and other moveable goods of the church, and they shall keep an inventory thereof which they shall revise from time to time as occasion may require. On going out of office they shall duly deliver to their successors any goods of the church remaining in their hands together with the said inventory, which shall be checked by their successors.'

The functions of the churchwardens fall into the following categories:-

### **A SHARED LEADERSHIP**

1. Churchwardens are elected as the lay leaders of the parish. As such, they should have a close working relationship with the incumbent and other clergy. This is best developed where there are regular meetings for prayer and for sharing a vision of the parish's life and mission.
2. Churchwardens are ex-officio members of the Parochial Church Council (PCC)/District Church Council (DCC) from the date of their election, even though the outgoing churchwardens retain office and continue to serve as ex-officio members of the PCC until their successors are admitted by the Archdeacon. The churchwardens should lead the PCC/DCC in carrying out all its duties, including co-operating with the incumbent in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.
3. As lay officers of the Bishop, the churchwardens have a duty to care for the clergy. This includes a concern for the incumbent's family, expenses and time off. It also involves feeding back to the clergy the comments of parishioners, both positive and negative. Where necessary the churchwardens ought to report to the Bishop or Archdeacon any serious complaints about the state of the parish or the incumbent's discharge of his/her duties, but only after a serious attempt has been made to deal with such complaints locally in a constructive and co-operative spirit.

## **B CHURCH BUILDINGS AND CHURCHYARDS**

1. The church building is vested in the incumbent, but the churchwardens should see that the PCC/DCC carries out its responsibilities for the care, maintenance, repair and insurance of the fabric. In particular, it is the churchwardens' duty to be familiar with the quinquennial inspection report. They should ensure that the necessary permission, whether a faculty or an Archdeacon's letter, is obtained before any works are carried out, and that any conditions imposed by grant-making bodies such as English Heritage are observed. All repairs should be dated and recorded in the church Log Book, together with details of the cost and who carried them out.
2. The churchyard is similarly vested in the incumbent. The churchwardens should be familiar with the Churchyard Regulations currently in force, and should ensure that necessary faculty applications are made. They should see that the PCC/DCC maintains the fencing of the churchyard, and they are responsible for seeing that a plan is made and kept up to date.
3. Churchwardens are 'owners' as trustees of the plate, ornaments and all furniture and furnishings of the church. It is their responsibility to ensure that a faculty is obtained before any item is added or disposed of. They should keep the inventory up to date, inspecting the items at least once a year. A certificate to this effect in the inventory should be signed at every Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM), when a report must be made on the furnishings and fabric of the church. The churchwardens should ensure that valuable furnishings, alms boxes etc. are secure against theft; also that items of particular value are kept in the bank, especially where they are not in regular use.
4. The churchwardens should ensure that the PCC/DCC is aware of its responsibilities in relation to the church's Registers and Records, and that these are duly carried out in accordance with the instructions in the Diocesan Handbook (section C).
5. The churchwardens may also be trustees of the Church Hall, School and other local trusts, and should ensure that they and the PCC/DCC are familiar with their duties in this respect.
6. The churchwardens are asked to meet once a year with the Archdeacon or the Rural/Area Dean or their deputy to inspect the church and to discuss any matters of concern. Instructions concerning this annual inspection are sent out at the time. There is a three-year inspection cycle and the Archdeacon or Rural/Area Dean will indicate what they will expect to find ready in each particular year.

## **C WORSHIP**

1. The churchwardens are responsible for the seating of the congregation in the church, and for the maintenance of good behaviour in the church building and churchyard. They should arrange the sidespeoples' rota and ensure that sidespeople are trained to welcome all worshippers, especially visitors.
2. The churchwardens are responsible for the taking of offerings and collections (helped by the sidespeople), for recording the sums received in the service register and for the proper disposal of the money in accordance with the joint decisions of the incumbent and PCC/DCC.
3. Only retired clergy are eligible to receive fees for taking services in the incumbent's absence. Fees should not be offered (nor should they be paid) to stipendiary or non-stipendiary clergy, or to Readers. However, expenses of travel should be offered on every occasion to all who take services (though not all will accept them). See Section G3 of the Diocesan Handbook.
4. In the absence of the incumbent, the churchwardens are responsible for ensuring that church services are maintained, and they may consult the Rural/Area Dean if difficulties arise. In the last resort, a churchwarden may be required to lead Morning or Evening Prayer him/herself.

## **D VACANCIES**

1. Churchwardens are legally in charge of the benefice when there is no incumbent/priest-in-charge, together with the Rural/Area Dean. Where there are several assistant ministers, a meeting is normally arranged by a member of the Bishop's Staff before the vacancy begins, to allocate responsibilities. Confirmation of decisions taken is given in writing.
2. The Archdeacon arranges through the churchwardens a vacancy meeting (usually before the vacancy begins). It is an informal meeting between the Archdeacon, the Suffragan Bishop and members of the PCC(s). Where there is more than one PCC, this is held jointly. The Rural/Area Dean, the Lay Chairman and the Chairman of the Deanery Pastoral Committee may be invited, which helps to widen the perspective. If one of the churches in the benefice is involved in a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP), representatives from the other participating denomination(s) will also be invited. The churchwardens are provided with some questions to be circulated beforehand so as to enable prior consideration.
3. The Archdeacon sends to the Churchwardens a set of Guidelines, setting out the main responsibilities of the Churchwardens, PCC Secretary and PCC Treasurer in a vacancy, including the operation of a vacancy account funded by the incumbent's portion of any fees. Various expenses relating to the vacancy may be paid from this source, as explained in the Guidelines.

4. Churchwardens may or may not be elected to serve as the two Parish Representatives in making the new appointment. If so, their duties will be explained to them. Where the patron's right of presentation is suspended and a priest-in-charge is to be appointed, there is no formal requirement for Parish Representatives but the Churchwardens will be consulted by the Bishop before any appointment is made. When an appointment has been made, the Archdeacon will agree a date for the institution/licensing, which it is their responsibility to arrange. This will be confirmed when agreed with others and appropriate notes will be included to assist with this. There is a diocesan order of service. Only a wrap-around outer sheet of A4 is required to be produced to give details on the front and hymns (to be chosen by the incoming priest) on the inside and back.

## E TRAINING FOR CHURCHWARDENS

Training sessions are offered (usually on Saturday mornings) as a regular service by the diocese and follow the annual visitations by the Archdeacons. Mainly intended for newly appointed churchwardens, they are open to all churchwardens who wish to make the most of the training on offer.

This in no way detracts from the fact that every churchwarden is unique and should feel free to bring to the job his or her particular gifts and skills.

Help and advice is available to churchwardens at all times from the Rural/Area Dean or the Archdeacon.

Further reading:

- ***The Diocesan Handbook*** - available via the diocesan website at [www.stalbans.anglican.org/Information/The-Diocesan-Handbook](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/Information/The-Diocesan-Handbook). Paper copies of extracts from the Handbook are available from the Diocesan Office on request.
- Various departments of the Diocesan Office also produce a range of ***advice leaflets***, eg. DAC leaflets on the care and use of church buildings; these are also available via the diocesan website or upon request. See [www.stalbans.anglican.org/Resources](http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/Resources)

*The following publications may be ordered from the Diocesan Resources Centre (01727 818158; [resources@stalbins.anglican.org](mailto:resources@stalbins.anglican.org))*

- ***The Church Representation Rules*** (published by Church House Publishing) - every parish should ensure they have a copy of the current edition
- ***The Churchyards Handbook*** (published by Church House Publishing)
- ***A Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors*** (Macmorran & Briden)
- ***ABC for the PCC: A Handbook for Church Council Members*** (J Pitchford)
- ***Practical Church Management*** (J Behrens)
- The central ***Church Buildings Council*** of the Church of England produces a range of publications on aspects of the care and maintenance of churches and their contents

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