

CHURCHWARDENS

This is a brief guide to the matters outlined. For further information, please read from the Bibliography, or speak to your Archdeacon.

What are churchwardens, and what do they do?

Churchwardens have important legal duties but also spiritual, pastoral and mission responsibilities, which make them foremost among the laity in the life and mission of the Church in the parish. They must be seen as setting an example in ministry, in commitment to regular worship and in seeking to witness to their Lord. The partnership of priest and churchwarden is a key partnership in the effective functioning of any parish.

Functions of churchwardens include;

- to be officers of the Bishop (not of the incumbent or PCC);
- to hold ex-officio membership of the PCC;
- to be foremost in representing the laity and co-operating with the incumbent;
- to encourage parishioners in the practice of true religion and to promote unity and peace;
- to have oversight of finance, even though the detail of this will be handled by the treasurer;
- to have oversight of the care of the fabric of the parish church, and to report on its condition each year to the Parochial Church Council and to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting;
- to have legal ownership of the moveable furniture and ornaments of the parish church, and to keep an up-to-date inventory of them;
- to maintain an up-to-date Log Book of all works done to the fabric of the parish church;
- to present, at the end of their year of office, answers to such questions as are put to them by the Bishop or Archdeacon;
- to ensure that all parish Registers and Records are properly kept and filed;
- during a vacancy, to share the oversight of the parish with the Rural Dean;
- to hand on to their successors in office all documents in their possession.

Who can become a churchwarden?

To be elected to office as churchwarden, a person must be;

- baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity;
- at least 21 years of age;
- on the Electoral Roll of the parish;
- an 'actual communicant' (defined, broadly, as someone who has received Holy Communion according to the use of the Church of England, at least three times in the previous twelve months).

But –

there are certain categories of people who are disqualified from serving. Such are;

- people disqualified from acting as a charity trustee (broadly, those who have been declared bankrupt or who have a criminal conviction for dishonesty or deception);
- people who have a criminal conviction under the Children and Young Persons Act 1933);
- people who have been party to a breakdown of parochial pastoral relationships as defined in the Vacation of Benefices Measure.

How long do churchwardens serve?

- Churchwardens are elected to serve for a period of one year only.
- However, a person may be re-elected as churchwarden to serve in further years, normally up to a maximum of six consecutive years of service (although this rule did not come into force until 2002; thus an individual, however long previous service may have been, may continue in office until 2007, provided such a person continues to be re-elected).
- After six years, a churchwarden must have at least a two-year break before seeking re-election.

But –

- It is possible, though not recommended, for a meeting of parishioners to pass a resolution that the six-year rule should not apply in that particular parish. It is equally possible for a further meeting of parishioners to rescind this resolution.
- It is envisaged that the resolution should be passed only where there is simply no one else able to take on the responsibility of being churchwarden. It is not provided to enable someone who simply likes being churchwarden to stay in post beyond the six years.
- It is in principle a very good thing for others to be allowed to take responsibility, and for an ex-churchwarden to look for a variety of other ways of serving God and the Church.

When and how are churchwardens chosen?

- Churchwardens are chosen annually by election at a Meeting of Parishioners (this is a meeting separate from the Annual Parochial Church Meeting, whose voting membership is confined to the Electoral Roll membership).
- The Meeting of Parishioners includes anyone on the Electoral Roll, plus anyone resident in the parish whose name is on the register of local government electors, whether or not such a person attends the parish church.
- This annual Meeting of Parishioners must be held each year before 30 April .
- A candidate for election as churchwarden must be nominated and seconded in writing by two people who are entitled to vote at the meeting.
- Each nomination paper must also be signed by the candidate indicating a willingness to stand for election.
- Nomination papers must reach the parish priest (or, during a vacancy, an outgoing churchwarden) before the meeting starts.
- Bearing in mind the considerable spiritual, pastoral, missionary and temporal responsibilities of churchwardens, it is important that substantial thought and prayer be put into the process of nomination well before the time of the meeting.
- If more than two candidates stand for election, there must be an election, using properly signed voting papers, unless everyone present agrees to an election by a show of hands.
- There is a procedure for deciding the result if an equal number of votes is cast, but the law makes no provision for a situation where no one is prepared to stand for office. It simply assumes that there will normally be two

churchwardens, or occasionally one, if circumstances are exceptional.

- There is also a special procedure where it appears to the parish priest that the appointment of a particular person nominated might give rise to serious difficulties.

How are churchwardens admitted to office?

- It is recommended that once churchwardens have been elected, they should be publicly affirmed in their office in the context of public worship.
- However, churchwardens do not formally take office until admitted to it by the Bishop or his substitute – this is normally the Archdeacon at his annual May visitations.
- Since the office is an annually elected one, a person must be admitted every year, even if he or she has served in the previous year.
- Churchwardens therefore remain in office until their successors are admitted, or until 31 July, whichever is the earlier.
- Anyone elected to the office who has not been admitted by 31 July ceases to be churchwarden, and a further election must take place.
- If a churchwarden for any reason cannot attend the visitation to be admitted to office, he or she must make separate arrangements with the Archdeacon for admission.

What happens if a churchwarden wishes to resign during the year of office?

- A churchwarden may resign only by first giving the Bishop written notice, and this takes effect at the end of two months.
- A casual vacancy may be filled at any time; the appointment is to be made at a specially convened Meeting of Parishioners.

Bibliography

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