

The Churchwarden PASTORAL



The Diocese of
Canterbury

2012

From the Archdeacons of Ashford, Canterbury and Maidstone:

We want to share some thoughts about your pastoral relationships within your parish. Of course, how these work out will vary greatly between parishes, your own gifts, the needs of the parish and the way in which other lay members of the church share in the ministry in that parish and also the particular gifts and temperament of the incumbent.

Nevertheless, we think there are some areas that are of common concern. The Canons of the Church of England state

“Churchwardens shall be foremost in representing the laity and in co-operating with the incumbent; they should 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”. (Canon Law E1:4)

That, perhaps, is not a bad starting point, though of course, it does not say much about the detail!

Here are a few phrases from that Canon Law:

IN THE PARISH

“Representing the Laity” - Congregation and Parishioners

A representative does not only represent his or her own personal view. By prayerful imagination you are to be aware of and to balance the views of different groups within the life of the parish e.g those enquiring in the faith and those well established, those who are young and those who are old, those who are strong or weak, newcomers and those well settled amongst whom in some parishes there will be those whose families have been woven into the fabric of that community for generations. Not an easy task!

To be an effective representative - as well as pastorally to “promote peace and unity” in the church - it is important to know the congregation. This does not necessarily mean that both Churchwardens will know to the same degree every member of the church - clearly that is impossible. Nevertheless, there should be between the two Wardens a comprehensive awareness of all those who worship and an awareness of those who are on the fringe of church life. This clearly means communication and ears and eyes open to the life of the church and community.

As you know, you are elected at a meeting of the parishioners and in that sense, strictly speaking, are representative of the whole parish, not only of the congregation. In practice, of course, the electors are usually members of the church so we would not want to press this. In symbolic terms, however, it may be a reminder that wardens need to bear in mind the accessibility of the church to the whole parish and not just to the existing congregation.

CO-OPERATING WITH THE INCUMBENT

You represent the views of the laity, many of whom have long associations with the church and love of its traditions. Others will come fresh to faith or from another Parish. The Incumbent may/will have fresh ideas drawn from his/her other experiences and from his/her training. You also may have wide experience of church life.

Healthy interaction, rather than a trial of strength between two viewpoints is, we suggest, the most creative way forward. This involves delicate awareness and sensitivity, both to a Warden's personal views about matters, the views of the members of the church and of the Incumbent.

It is important that Wardens should meet regularly with the Incumbent so that matters can be shared in an informal way outside the structures of the PCC. Such meetings also enable personal relationships to grow.

Wardens, with the Clergy, should seek to develop and encourage co-operation between the Incumbent and lay people, particularly through the PCC. They should be wary, very wary, of leading a confrontation. Clearly this is all bound up in the sort of relationship which the Incumbent and Wardens have mutually sought to establish. Straight talking to the Clergy is best done privately on the basis of a well established relationship.

Whilst, of course, Bishops, Archdeacons, and, hopefully, other Clergy within the Deanery will offer support to one another, we believe that Wardens have, in particular, a role to play in their personal pastoral care of their Clergy and we believe that the sensitive care of the Clergy and their wives/husbands and families ought to be high on the Wardens' agenda.

It needs to be sensitive and not manipulative. It means being able to recognise that a new Incumbent will be different from the last one and that a new Curate (if you have one) will need not just the support and encouragement of the Incumbent and other Clergy but also the support, warmth and positive (not grudging) encouragement of the laity of the church and in particular those who have leadership as Wardens.

As Clergy pray for those who hold office in the life of their church, we hope that you also will give some time in prayer for the life of your church, Clergy and community.

WARDEN TO WARDEN

Well, you all know stories of churches where Wardens never talk to one another, Wardens who are sensitive about their status, and Wardens who refuse to let go! Yet they are reminders of how matters can go wrong.

We need to be people who can bear each other up, not jealous of one another and the gifts of others. Wardens ought to want to know one another and should be prepared to grow and share together.

You should be prepared to learn from each other and to hand on the task of Warden with its various responsibilities and opportunities with an openness and humility and ultimately to lay down the office with dignity and without interference with successors. Matters do need to be handed over.

We think too, it is important to the overall continuity and well being of the life of the parish that past Wardens are seen to be generously and quietly supportive of those who have succeeded them. This probably goes without saying but if you look across the Church of England, you will see that these matters are not necessarily always being worked out in practice!

You have a role and responsibility within the life of the Diocese. The Church of England is not a Congregational Church. All parishes are part of the diocesan structure and the paying of the Parish Share, communications from Diocesan House and the availability of diocesan specialist officers and much more are all marks of that. We hold things in common within the family life of the diocese.

Deaneries now have a major and growing role in respect of planning the Mission of the Church in a local area and providing for its delivery. Church Wardens can play an important and distinctive part in the context of the Deanery family of churches - building working relations and creating partnership for mission.

You will know that Wardens are officers of the Bishop and the Bishop, of course, may consult with you at any time about the life of a parish. During a vacancy if the Warden(s) are elected as the parish representatives, then here they will have contact with the Bishop and their role is an expression of their pastoral care for the whole future life of that parish.

ARCHDEACONS AND WARDENS

In practice, the Archdeacon admits Wardens by authority of the Bishop at the Archdeacon's annual Visitation and you have heard about that. But not withstanding Visitation contacts, we hope that Wardens will always feel free to seek the advice and support of Archdeacons but remember that Archdeacons like to hear good news as well as bad!

You will have a role during interregnums or, for instance, during the sickness of the clergy and in these circumstances you will also have contact with your Area Dean. It is not that you have to be in touch with Area Deans, Archdeacons and Bishops all the time but to be aware that we are around, we have some measure of availability and we would wish to be helpful and supportive.

We have hinted at a few areas within your relationships which we feel are important. There will, of course, be others. You have much responsibility and you will rightly expect to be well supported. This day and all the resources of the staff at Diocesan House seek to that as you come to your responsibilities in the strength of the Holy Spirit and as you give to the people of your parish and your Clergy a measure of your love, friendship, encouragement, prayers and your laughter - that as you so give you will also receive.



Philip Down
Archdeacon of Ashford



Sheila Watson
Archdeacon of Canterbury



Stephen Taylor
Archdeacon of Maidstone

The Future Direction of Canterbury Diocese

In January 2012 Archbishop's council adopted the following strategic objectives

- To grow the church numerically and spiritually
- To re-imagine ministry
- To contribute to the common good by building sustainable and life-giving communities and partnerships

Each of the five diocesan frameworks has set priorities based on these objectives

Children, Schools and Young People

- Ensuring CofE schools are working as effectively as possible, in terms of compliance, distinctiveness and in the areas of RE and collective worship
- Supporting parishes with their work with children and young people both in the life of the church and in outreach
- Shaping government policy in education

Licensed Ministries

- Re-imagining Ministry as the main priority

Local Church Development

- Engaging in strategic missional planning
- Growing the church through spirituality and discipleship
- Delivering training as a multiplier for mission and ministry

Communities and Partnership

- Building capacity in the core team via a skills audit and internship programme
- Running a programme of workshops for churches, NGOs and Universities for social action
- Offering seed corn grants for community based projects

Resources and Compliance

- Providing a protection of the Diocese and component parishes in the areas of finance, safeguarding, property, employment and reputation

- Working with the parishes to think about the wider issues of stewardship using financial health-checks and working to develop business/mission plans
- Promoting and facilitating communication in its widest sense

