



The duties of a Churchwarden

Introduction

The office of Churchwarden is one of the most ancient in this country.

As both a Bishop's officer and a respected and influential member of the local congregation, the Churchwarden shares with the Bishop, Archdeacon and Incumbent, in the care of the benefice or parish.

Terms of office

Following their election, churchwardens must be legally admitted to office each year before the end of July otherwise the office falls vacant again. Normally this admittance is conducted by the Archdeacon at a special service known as a Visitation. If there are circumstances which make it impossible for a churchwarden to attend a Visitation, alternative arrangements can sometimes be made in consultation with the Archdeacon.

A churchwarden wishing to step down from office should inform the parish priest but must tender his or her resignation to the Bishop by giving two months' notice in writing. A replacement churchwarden can be elected at a meeting of parishioners which has been advertised for at least three Sundays prior.

Churchwardens hold office for one year at a time up to a maximum normally of six years. Some churches have their own special customs about this.

The law

A churchwarden's duties are set out in full in Canon Law (Churchwardens Measure 2001), but are summarised below:

- They form a link between the Bishop and the parish
- They represent the laity and co-operate with the Incumbent (i.e. rector, vicar or priest-in-charge)
- They encourage the parishioners in their faith and promote unity and peace among them
- They are responsible for maintaining order and decency in the church and churchyard especially during worship
- They are the legal owners of the church's property – i.e. the plate, ornaments and other moveable goods – and are responsible for keeping an inventory of it
- They carry out a range of duties which may be specific to the customs of the local church

What does this mean in practice?

The role will differ from parish to parish but these are some of the typical tasks a churchwarden might be expected to fulfill:



Prayer and worship

- Care and pray for the clergy
- Make sure there is bread and wine available for Holy Communion
- Check visiting priests have permission to officiate and pay fees
- Take responsibility for keeping order during services – e.g. welcoming, seating visitors
- Lead services, or arrange cover, in the absence of the parish priest

Administration and governance

- Become a member of the PCC and its standing committee
- Be responsible for taking offerings and recording the amounts received
- Discharge the office of Treasurer if the PCC fails to appoint one
- Act as trustee of any parochial charities that may exist
- Answer a number of written questions (known as Articles of Enquiry) sent to them by the Archdeacon on behalf of the Bishop each year
- Report to the Bishop any matter that affects the parish.
- Take on a significant role during a vacancy (or 'interregnum')
- Attend safeguarding training and co-operate with the church leadership team to manage any safeguarding cases that may arise, in line with Church of England policy

Buildings and maintenance

- Arrange to inspect the fabric of the church every year and make a report about the state of the building to the PCC and to the annual parochial church meeting
- Ensure the PCC commissions a Quinquennial (five yearly) Inspection Report of the church and acts upon its recommendations
- Make sure the church obtains a faculty whenever necessary
- Keep the church Inventory and Log Book up to date

Sources of support

The key to a successful period of office as Churchwarden is regular meeting and communication with the Incumbent and other members of the leadership team to discuss and plan together for the life of the parish.

There is an annual diocesan Churchwardens' Quiet Day and a Parish Officers' Training Day (both normally in the Autumn), as well as other specific training events and gatherings – all of which can be a valuable opportunity to meet with other wardens and share experiences. Check the diocesan website for details of these.

The Archdeacon is the "first port of call" outside of the parish for a Churchwarden who needs support or advice of any kind. Please do not hesitate to be in touch via the Diocesan Office if you need help.

The following is a useful handbook and guide to church law:

Practical Church Management: a guide for every parish - James Behrens (updated 2014)