

# Role of Churchwarden



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.

Following the election at the annual meeting of parishioners, churchwardens must be legally admitted to office each year before the end of August otherwise the office falls vacant again. Churchwardens are invited to attend one of the Admission Services in their Archdeaconry to be admitted. If it is impossible to commit to one of the services alternative arrangements can sometimes be made in consultation with the Archdeacon. Churchwardens are *ex officio* members of the PCC.

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

Churchwardens hold office for one year at a time up to a maximum normally of six years.

## The Law

Churchwardens are appointed according to the qualifications and procedures set out in the Churchwardens Measure 2001, as amended.

A churchwarden's duties are set out in full in Canon Law and are summarised below:

### Churchwardens

- form a link between the Bishop, Archdeacon and the parish
- represent the laity and co-operate with the Incumbent (ie rector, vicar or priest in charge)
- encourage the parishioners in their faith and promote unity and peace among them
- are responsible for maintaining order and decency in the church and churchyard especially during worship
- are the legal owners of the church's property – ie the plate, ornaments and other moveable goods – and are responsible for keeping an inventory of it
- ensure that all the property is stored safely when not in use
- hold a set of keys for the church
- 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 fulfil:

### **Prayer and worship**

- care and prayer for the clergy
- taking responsibility for keeping order during services – eg welcoming, seating visitors
- lead services of the word, or arrange cover, in the absence of the parish priest
- ensure that a sufficient supply of bread and wine is provided for services of Holy Communion

### **Administration and governance**

- become a member of the PCC and its standing committee
- may be responsible for taking offerings and recording the amounts received in the absence of a Treasurer

- discharging the office of Treasurer if the PCC fails to appoint one
- ensure that the service register and other registers are properly filled in, including a churchyard plan if the churchyard remains open
- act as Trustee of any parochial charities that may exist
- complete the Articles of Enquiry sent to you by the Archdeacon on behalf of the Bishop at the end of each year of office (this is a legal requirement)
- report to the Bishop any matter of importance that affects the parish
- take on a significant role during a vacancy in collaboration with the Rural Dean
- undertake DBS checks as necessary and attend safeguarding training. Co-operate with the church leadership 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 (APCM)
- pay attention to the specific needs of children and vulnerable adults when undertaking health and safety inspections and risk assessment
- ensure the PCC commissions a Quinquennial (five yearly) Inspection Report (QIR) of the church and act upon its recommendations
- ensure the electrical installation is checked every 5 years ideally to coincide with the QIR
- ensure the fire extinguishers are inspected annually
- ensure all portable electrical appliances are tested every year (PAT test)
- have the lightning conductor tested every 3 years
- make sure the church obtains a faculty or Archdeacon's (List B) permission whenever necessary
- where appropriate, check stability of headstones annually, in accordance with the Diocesan Chancellor's instructions on the diocesan registry website
- keep the church Inventory and Log Book up to date

At the end of a Churchwarden's period of office, keys should be handed over to his/her successor with the inventory. The handover should also include a description of the role and responsibilities within that particular parish.

### **Sources of support**

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

The Archdeacon's office is the 'first port of call' outside of the parish for a Churchwarden who needs support or advice of any kind.

### **Further sources of information:**

*Practical Church Management: A Guide for Every Parish* James Behrens (2014)

*How to Look After Your Church* Council for the Care of Churches

[www.peterboroughdiocesanregistry.co.uk](http://www.peterboroughdiocesanregistry.co.uk)

- Churchwardens
- Faculty Jurisdiction
- The DAC
  - DAC Notes for Guidance

[www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk)

[www.parishresources.org.uk](http://www.parishresources.org.uk)