

## Church Wardens

Church Wardens are officers of the Bishop, and are answerable to him. They are also foremost in representing the laity and senior partners with the incumbent in the work of the parish. They make annual declarations to the bishop or his appointed officer each year, usually at the Visitation service (or, in our case this can be delegated to a parish occasion of public worship at an earlier date, nearer to AGMs). In their declaration they confirm that they are communicant members of the church over eighteen years of age, and intend to be diligent in their duties. These are the main qualifications for office. It is not wise to appoint to roles that involve handling money, people with convictions for money related offences. It is good practice, according to our Policy for the Protection of Vulnerable People, to voluntarily opt for a CRB or similar check as appropriate. Anyone with a conviction for an offence which might put vulnerable people at risk should not be considered for appointment. An informal enquiry in this regard can avoid embarrassment at a later stage.

Wardens are appointed or elected annually. The maximum number of consecutive years for which a person may accept nomination or appointment varies, but a generally accepted maximum is six years. In some places, three years is the norm. A longer period may bring stability, but a shorter one shares out the load more equitably, and gives greater emphasis to progression planning. A situation to be avoided is one in which a senior and respected figure holds office for so long that anyone else is afraid to take on the role for fear of unfavourable comparison.

There are usually two Wardens in each parish. Historically it was often the case that one was elected by the Annual Meeting (The People's Warden), and one was appointed by the priest (The Vicar's or Chaplain's Warden). Some parts of the Anglican Communion (notably England) have moved to a system of election for both Wardens. A case can be made for both practices, but however they are appointed or elected, they are equal partners in their office, and not individually especially answerable to the priest or the congregation as the case may be. As members of Council they accept the collective responsibility of that body towards the congregation.

Wardens are responsible for the 'infrastructure' of the Church: that is, with all that makes church possible and provides a proper context for the priest to work, and the congregation to worship.

In practice this means that the wardens are responsible stewards of the Church fabric and all the property of the church. They are responsible for keeping

inventories and terriers. They are responsible also for the organisation of sides people and generally for the ministry of welcome. In the absence of an elected Treasurer, a Warden is expected to take on that role. Wardens will be signatories to church accounts and ex officio members of the Church council. In the occasional and unexpected absence of a Licensed Minister, a Church Warden may read prayers and lead worship. On special occasions, it will be the wardens who are primarily involved with the priest in their organisation.

If an interregnum (vacancy) occurs in a parish the Wardens have a special responsibility to liaise with the archdeacon or his/her nominee with regard to both day to day matters that need decisions, and with all arrangements for seeking, appointing and settling a new priest.

Wardens are expected to cooperate with their priest and Council in all that furthers the Christian faith, and the mission of the church in the parish. They have a duty of care towards their priest. They should be a first port of call for a priest who is experiencing practical problems.

Wardens are responsible for keeping order in church. What that might mean is that Wardens can have a mediating role in disputes, and have a direct line of communication with the bishop or archdeacon if they have problems in the exercise of these or other duties. In this way Wardens are one bridge between the diocese and the parish. They should ensure that communication is a two way process.

Wardens should set an example of diligence, faithfulness and probity. They will make an annual report to the AGM and may be required to report to diocesan authorities on particular matters from time to time. To be a Church Warden is an honour and great responsibility, and should be regarded as such by both clergy and laypeople alike.