

# Being a churchwarden

Information for those considering the role



Thank you for considering the role of churchwarden. We hope and pray that this is the beginning of a vocational journey for you, as you discern whether God is calling you to serve church and community in this way.

One of the key ideas behind being a churchwarden is the opportunity to work in partnership and develop relationships that help people grow as the people of God. It is to share in parish leadership in a way that recognises Christ at the heart of all we do, and God's mission as our agenda.

So, what is involved in being a churchwarden? You will have seen others fulfilling this role in very different ways, and sometimes these can be a hard act to follow. There can be some confusion as to what the role and duties of a churchwarden are. We have brought together in this leaflet some information about the role and what it entails. This is not the last word on it, but we hope these pages contain enough information to help you in your thinking about whether to accept the nomination for election and plunge in.

Reading what follows about the role may leave you wondering whether it is 'do-able'. We are delighted to be able to include here thoughts on the role from two churchwardens who speak from experience to give you an insight into what it is like doing the job. We are hugely grateful to Carol and Christine for sharing their experience with us and we hope it will be an encouragement to you.

You don't have to be perfect to be a churchwarden, but it helps if you are willing to learn, to listen, to work collaboratively, and are not afraid to ask for help. We are pleased to be able to partner with staff at Church House Oxford to offer you support and help as appropriate. Should you have any questions, please do be in touch with us using the contact details overleaf..

Underpinning all this is your own continuing discipleship and prayer life, keeping in mind our common vision to become a more Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world: contemplative, compassionate and courageous. May God bless you in your journey and service in Christ's name.

With heartfelt thanks and prayer.

**The Venerable Judy French**

Archdeacon of Dorchester  
archdeacon.dorchester@oxford.anglican.org  
01865 208245

**The Venerable Jonathan Chaffey**

Archdeacon of Oxford  
archdeacon.oxford@oxford.anglican.org  
01865 208263

**The Venerable Stephen Pullin**

Archdeacon of Berkshire  
archdeacon.berkshire@oxford.anglican.org  
01635 552820

**The Venerable Guy Elsmore**

Archdeacon of Buckingham  
archdeacon.buckingham@oxford.anglican.org  
01865 208266



## What is involved?

Churchwardens are elected by the Annual Meeting of Parishioners. Their term of office is one year, but this can be extended to up to six consecutive terms of office.

They, with the parish priest, are responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the parish. Good parishes have strong mutually respectful relationships between incumbents and the churchwardens.

Churchwardens are vital to the wellbeing of our church communities. Being a churchwarden involves:

- supporting the parish priest, and providing them with feedback;
- encouraging the PCC in carrying out all its duties, including co-operating with the incumbent in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical;
- trying to ensure that the incumbent is relieved of superfluous administrative and other tasks;
- encouraging people in their Christian faith and discipleship;
- helping to resolve disputes or disagreements amongst the congregation or with the parish priest, or with the local community;
- consulting the area dean and/or archdeacon for advice when any concerns arise.

Churchwardens should attend services regularly, arriving in good time to support the sidespeople and welcomers, be present for any refreshments, and help tidy up afterwards.

The way in which churchwardens carry out their duties will vary from parish to parish, but detailed below are the key responsibilities.

### **Administration**

With the incumbent and PCC, they ensure that:

- there is adequate provision for and oversight of the administration of the parish;
- there are proper procedures in place for recruiting and managing lay staff and volunteers;
- the PCC adopts a safeguarding policy, and has an action plan for ensuring that the policy is implemented;
- the parish's approach to safeguarding is stated on the parish's noticeboards and website;
- the PCC has a health and safety policy and ensures that it is implemented;
- there are adequate preparations for the area dean and/or archdeacon's triennial parochial visitation.

### **Finance**

With the treasurer and PCC they ensure that:

- there are proper systems for counting collections, recording amounts and their secure holding until they can be banked;
- adequate processes are in place for managing the finances of the PCC;
- expenses of office are paid to the clergy;
- all bills are paid;
- the PCC makes its full contribution towards the Parish Share;
- the parish's end of year accounts, and other returns, are submitted promptly.

## Mission

The churchwardens work with the incumbent and PCC so that:

- the PCC has a Mission Action Plan, and focuses on implementing it;
- people who attend church and encounter the church in other ways are welcomed;
- the church is seen to be a force for good in the wider parish;
- the church is open to the public as often as possible.

## Meetings/Trusteeships

Churchwardens are ex officio members of the PCC (the trustees of the parish), and the PCC Standing Committee. They may also be ex officio trustees of any parish ecclesiastical and parochial charities. These should have regular meetings.

## Pastoral care

Churchwardens work with their parish priest to ensure that the pastoral work of the church is being undertaken in the parish and amongst the congregation.

## Buildings and contents

Churchwardens are responsible for ensuring that the PCC cares for and maintains the church and its contents and other buildings in the parish, and the churchyard or grounds.

They are responsible for ensuring that:

- there is a 'terrier' – a list and description of land and buildings belonging to the church;
- proper records of any property transactions, including licences under faculty (the authorisation for work to be undertaken on the church building), and tenancy agreements and leases are kept;
- a list of all ecclesiastical trusts and charities associated with the parish is maintained;
- an annually updated inventory and photographic record of all the items belonging to the church is retained;
- quinquennial repairs (outlined in a report every five years) are carried out;
- a log book of all alterations and repairs to the church, its lands and contents exists;



### **Buildings and contents (cont...)**

- appropriate building and contents insurances are in place;
- an annual report is made on the fabric of the church and any other buildings to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting;
- all valuable items are securely kept, and photographs of them are held elsewhere;
- the archdeacon and the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) are consulted about any proposed repairs or alteration to the church, or any acquisitions or disposals of contents, and a faculty is obtained before any work is begun.

### **Liturgy and worship**

Churchwardens ensure that visitors and newcomers are welcomed and assisted, that there is adequate seating, lighting and heating, and that all other facilities required are in place, including safety requirements.

They are responsible for good order in the church and churchyard. On the very rare occasion of a major disturbance within (or immediately outside) the church, the churchwardens take primary responsibility in dealing with the matter.

In a time of vacancy, they are responsible, with the area dean, for ensuring that there is someone to conduct services, and that the life of the parish continues.

# Being called to the role of churchwarden – thoughts from Carol

## My background



I have been a churchwarden for two terms of office in a parish of about 1,000 people. The first term was at a time when I was working full-time

and had two fairly young children. The second term began during my retirement.

I have worked closely with five rectors, male and female, and three other churchwardens. I have been responsible (with my fellow churchwardens) for the smooth running of church/parish/benefice matters during three periods of vacancy of 6 to 12 months. I was involved in the appointment of three new rectors. I also work alongside the other churchwardens in our benefice of four parishes.

I have always been very conscious of the history of the role. It dates back to the fourteenth century. Churchwardens are elected by the whole parish, not just by churchgoers. It's a great privilege to be elected, but there is also

an element of no one else being willing to take up the responsibilities involved!

Churchwardens are officers of the diocesan bishop. We are fortunate in Oxfordshire that churchwardens receive good support and guidance from the archdeacons and the bishops. All members of staff at Church House Oxford have been ready to help when I have had queries or problems. I have worked with the Diocesan Advisory Committee during several church projects over the years and have found members of staff ready to support and steer us through all the legal processes, as well as giving practical and prompt help when unforeseen building problems have arisen.

## What's involved?

The parameters of the role are set out clearly in Canon E1 of the Canon of the Church of England and in 'A summary of Churchwardens' Responsibilities' on the Diocesan website. Upon reading these, I think anyone would feel a bit daunted!

I would advise any prospective churchwarden to take heart from the

phrase which is used throughout the latter document: '[Churchwardens] should use their best endeavours to...' We can only do our best in whatever we attempt to do. We would not think about taking up this role if we did not regard it as a ministry in which we were determined to give of our best – and that is all that is asked of us.

A word of caution about delegating, which all

churchwardens are encouraged to do: I have found that people are willing to help in a general way but are often unwilling to take the final responsibility for a specific piece of work or implementation of a policy.

Churchwardens are the 'glue' holding parish and church life together. It is a very people-orientated job and, as such brings great pleasure and satisfaction as you serve God in the world, but can also bring great stress at times. Your own worship and prayer life needs to be protected as much as possible – you will need the strength and grounding in faith that those bring. If you are fortunate enough to have a fellow churchwarden working with you (and

I have worked with three wonderful colleagues), s/he will be your best support and you can rejoice or grumble together whenever necessary!

## What has gone well?

Generally, we have had to face all the problems associated with being a rural congregation, with an ageing demographic. However, we are in good heart and determined to 'keep on keeping on'.

We are supported by the whole parish in a peripheral way and most village residents wish to have a working church in their midst, even if they only

come to services occasionally or use us simply for marriages, baptisms or funerals.

Pastoral work has developed in the past five years and helps the churchwardens to keep an eye on the needs of vulnerable parishioners.

Liaison between church and the village primary school (C of E) has strengthened in the past few years and the Churchwardens have been actively involved in encouraging this.

**// Churchwardens are the 'glue' holding parish and church life together."**

## Challenges

Coping with the demands of three interregnums has been a challenge. Trying to calm the anxieties of our church family whilst having one's own private concerns about parish life requires resources of strength and I have had to 'let go and let God' on many occasions!

In 2013, after seven years of negotiations and disagreements (ultimately resolved) within the parish, we

finally went ahead with a substantial project to build a nave altar area in our medieval church. The start of the work coincided with an interregnum! This was a challenge to the churchwardens of the highest order, but everything went well (mostly!) and our parishioners thought the new nave altar and stone dais added to the appearance of the building and improved our worship.

Most of the issues I have faced as churchwarden have been resolved by keeping calm, praying at every opportunity and talking things through with people until a compromise has been reached.

## What would I say to someone considering being a churchwarden?

The role is a pleasure, a privilege and a ministry. You will be given a special way of serving God and your parishioners. You will need to be prepared to work hard, and there will be frustrations along the way, but those are definitely outweighed

by the feeling of being very embedded in your community and having the opportunity to serve it. A sense

of humour is not only desirable, but often completely necessary!

Take advantage of diocesan training for new churchwardens – it is excellent. Don't be afraid to ask diocesan staff for help. Appreciate your fellow churchwarden. Talk with other churchwardens in your area.

Support and befriend your incumbent; you are there for each other through the good times and the more difficult. Guard and develop your own prayer life. Go on quiet or retreat days when you can; they will refresh your soul.

Enjoy the job... you will never be bored... and thank God for the opportunity to serve him in such a unique way.

**// a special way of serving God and your parishioners"**

# Being called to the role of churchwarden – thoughts from Christine



The Rector of my church has been an extremely good tutor. Three years ago he asked me if I was interested in becoming churchwarden.

No one had been nominated. He suggested I try it for a year and said he would help me if I needed help. I am so pleased I said 'Yes'. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time being involved in church matters.

**// I am so pleased I said 'Yes'.**

The fabric of the building is very important and needs regular checking, inside and out. You need to make sure the building is safe, checking that fire extinguishers are in good working order, checking that lead work in stained glass windows is not deteriorating, etc. Health and safety issues must be addressed.

We have two very challenging projects at the moment. The first is a new toilet installation, which involves meetings with the architect and applying for a faculty. The second

is installing a new digital projector system, which involves meeting with the installers and another faculty. These are costly projects and need fundraising events and applications for grants.

I have been on various courses at Church House, which were very enjoyable. A churchwardens day brought us together to explore and solve issues which were of concern.

It was a privilege to have the opportunity to meet Bishop Steven in his

home one evening and to talk about his vision of how we should become more Christ-like. His message that we should become more contemplative, compassionate and courageous has stood me in good stead and focuses me on a daily basis.

My role as churchwarden has gone very smoothly. Our congregation get on very well with one another and as a result I have had no real issues. Our church was reorganised last Christmas to accommodate our Christmas Tree Festival, with the

altar being positioned on the south wall and the chairs in a more circular position. There were one or two parishioners who were concerned but I was able to reassure them that it was only temporary and we should embrace change from time to time.

To anyone who is thinking of becoming a churchwarden I would say 'give it a go'. Don't think about how previous churchwardens have carried out this role. This can be

daunting, especially if they were amazing at the job. The task for you is to put your own stamp on it. You are in control, in conjunction with your ministry team of course. There is a lot of help out there if you need it. Diocesan Church House will help you with a list of people and businesses who can advise if there is a problem. The role brings you nearer to God. You are working personally for him representing your church.

### What about you?

If you think this role may be for you, contact your rector or vicar to discuss it further.

Front cover picture courtesy of Steven Buckley; altar photo courtesy of Maurice Buddin. With thanks to Fr Richard Lamey and Peter Wells of St Paul, Wokingham; desk photo courtesy of Shutterstock.