DIOCESE of OXFORD

A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world

A Summary of Churchwardens' Responsibilities

Introduction

If you're reading this, it's likely that you are considering becoming or have become a Churchwarden. Churchwardens are a vital and indispensable component of our church communities, enabling God's people to flourish. We couldn't be the church God calls us to be without you – so thank you! Your willingness to serve in this ministry is a blessing to your parish, your community and to the whole church.

What is a Churchwarden?

Churchwardens have important legal responsibilities, but as church officers they also have a vast spiritual, pastoral, and missional dimension to their duties. They are to be, before all else, the 'first among equals' in the laity's contribution to the life and mission of the Church in the parish. Their most precious currency is the relationships they form and sustain: with their incumbent and PCC, across the whole of the parish, and as a conduit to the wider church through the Area Dean, Archdeacon, and Bishop.

Legal responsibilities

Following completion of a nomination form (which lays out the declaration individuals will have to make that declare they are they are fit and proper persons) churchwardens are elected annually by the Annual Meeting of Parishioners, under the provisions of the Churchwardens Measure 2001[1]. They may serve for up to six consecutive terms of office, unless the Annual Meeting passes a resolution to set aside this rule. The role and responsibilities of a Churchwarden are set out in Canon Law, and can be summarised as:

- becoming a Bishop's officer. When you are admitted to the role, you are formally appointed on behalf of the Bishop.
- being a representative of the laity and support to the incumbent. This means, with the incumbent, taking responsibility for the day-today running of the parish and encouraging the faith of the laity.
- being responsible for maintaining order and decency in the church and churchyard, especially during worship.

[1] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2001/1/contents

- being responsible for some of the church's property, keeping the inventory, and making sure these are passed on to your successors.
- holding a set of keys
- promoting and modelling a high standard of safeguarding culture.
- acting as a 'caretaker' during a vacancy with the support of the Area Dean and Archdeacon.
- attend the Visitation Service. This a formal service with legal elements but it is also a time to celebrate the role and work of all Churchwardens. In addition, it is a good time for social interaction with fellow Churchwardens, the Area Deans and your Archdeacon or Associate Archdeacon.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. No two parishes are exactly the same. The way Churchwardens exercise their office will vary depending on their context. Below are some further reflections on some of the key responsibilities.

Parish relationships

- Churchwardens should have a close working relationship with their incumbent and meet regularly. They should support and encourage the incumbent in the shared ministry of the parish, remembering that they too are human. Within the parameters of honesty and loyalty, they should be a 'critical' friend and a person who can be relied upon for advice.
- Churchwardens are *ex officio* members of the PCC and standing committee. With the incumbent and other members of clergy, the Churchwarden will ensure that the PCC carries out its duties, promotes good governance and administration and fosters strong relationships. If the PCC is without a secretary or a treasurer, a Churchwarden should cover these roles or ensure that a suitable person is found to do so.
- A Churchwarden will also have an important relationship with the wider congregation and parish. They will encourage others in their faith and set an example. They often act as a conduit between congregation, PCC, and clergy, sensitively bringing up any concerns and helping to manage any conflicts.

Buildings and churchyards

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

- the terrier (the list and description of any land or buildings belonging to the church) and inventory (with photos) are up to date and stored securely;
- proper records of any property transactions, including licences under Faculty and tenancy agreements and leases are kept;
- a list of all ecclesiastical trusts and charities associated with the parish is maintained;
- a log book of all alterations and repairs to the church and its lands and contents exists and is kept up to date;
- appropriate building and contents insurances are in place;
- the PCC is given regular reports on the fabric of the church, and an annual inspection and report is made on the fabric of the church and any other buildings to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting;
- regular repairs and maintenance of the church are carried out (cleaning the gutters, removing vegetation from stone walls, etc.)
- all valuable items are securely kept.

Inspections

To assist with staying on top of the buildings, churchyard, and administration, there are two forms of regular inspection carried out.

- The **Quinquennial** inspection is conducted every five years by an appropriately qualified architect who will note any necessary repairs and given an indication as to cost and urgency. A good relationship with your architect is advisable.

- Every three years an **Archdeacon's inspection**[2] (which can be done by someone on behalf of the archdeacon) will take place. This is an opportunity to look at how the legal and practical requirements are being met and to discuss any issues. Those doing the inspections will be keen to help and offer advice and suggestions where necessary. They also appreciate hearing local news, celebrating what is going well listening to any future plans.

Please note:

- Before any repairs are carried out, or any acquisitions or disposals of contents made, please contact the Archdeacon and the DAC for guidance as to what permissions may be needed for proposed work. This can often avoid issues later on in the process.

Worship

- Working with others, Churchwardens should help ensure that people are welcomed to the church and that the church and churchyard are in good order both before and after the service.
- In the unlikely event of disruption or medical emergency, the Churchwarden should call the emergency services and alert the person leading worship. If necessary, they should escort a disruptive person off the premises, though they should appropriately risk assess the situation before doing so and work to keep others safe.
- In the event that the person leading worship does not arrive and no other clergy or LLMs are present, the Churchwarden is authorised to lead worship in their absence. It is advisable to have a form of morning or evening prayer available just in case this unlikely event occurs.

[2] More information, including the inspection form can be found here: https://www.oxford.anglican.org/churchwardens

Reporting

Throughout the year, the diocese may ask for information to assist in making decisions about resourcing, mission, and ministry. Churchwardens, or someone that they might direct on their behalf, can be a huge help by returning this information promptly and accurately. These include:

- the Archdeacon's Articles of enquiry, which help us to see where churches are engaging in mission and ministry (for example, which discipleship courses are offered) and where additional support may be offered.
- statistics for mission, which help us build a picture of the worshipping life of the diocese.

In addition, please do share other news with the Archdeacon, Area Dean and Lay Chair. We want to celebrate and encourage the good things that are happening in each parish – some of which may be helpful to other parishes. Likewise, we would want to help with any problems or issues that may arise.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Along with the incumbent and parish safeguarding officers, churchwardens help to set and maintain a strong culture of safeguarding. Churchwardens' own training requirements are as follows:

- both *Basic Awareness* and *Foundation* level safeguarding training are required and should be refreshed every three years. We also recommend *Raising awareness of domestic abuse* training. All can be completed online.[3]
- Leadership training is also recommended (especially because of a Churchwarden's responsibilities in a vacancy). Leadership training is provided through the diocese.[4] If you complete Leadership training and keep this up to date you do not have to redo Basic Awareness and Foundation.

[3] https://safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org/
[4] https://www.oxford.anglican.org/safeguarding/safeguarding-training/

Vacancies

In the absence of the incumbent, Churchwardens, along with the Area Dean, are responsible for ensuring that:

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- there is someone to conduct services and that the life of the parish continues as usual as far as possible. If there is no one available, they can conduct any service themselves – please contact the Area Dean or Archdeacon if you would like help or guidance in doing this;
- they have checked that all visiting clergy hold a Bishop's licence or have Permission to Officiate. This can be done by looking at the National Register of Clergy[5], or by contacting the Area Office;
- the service register and other registers are properly filled in;
- safeguarding remains a priority, DBS checks and training are up to date and volunteers continue to be safely recruited.
- any applications for headstones or ledger stones are sent to the Area Dean to be processed.

Here to help

These responsibilities may feel a little daunting or overwhelming. Churchwardens are not expected to do everything outlined in this document themselves, but to make sure that there are other people available to carry out the various tasks. In addition, we want Churchwardens to feel supported and encouraged in this role and there is always help and advice available from:

- Area Dean / Deanery Lay-Chair. These are usually experienced people who will be able to assist with some enquiries, or else to point you in the right direction. They are committed to your flourishing and to the flourishing of the churches across your deanery.
- Archdeacon. Archdeacons are excellent sources of advice and guidance across a range of subjects, and especially for trickier or seemingly intractable problems. But they will also delight in hearing what is going well, so do

[5] https://www.churchofengland.org/about/national-register-clergy

remember to share good news too. You will meet them at the Visitation service; please do take the opportunity to introduce yourself.

- Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). The DAC is available to help advise on church building issues and to give advice on any future plans you might have involving the church or other buildings. It's always worth getting in touch at an early stage as you develop plans. Email: churchbuildings@oxford.anglican.org
- Other Churchwardens. Former Churchwardens and current Churchwardens across your area are repositories of experience and wisdom and can often be sought out and consulted.

Finally, a huge thank you – be assured of the many prayers of all those who value and appreciate the invaluable service and ministry of Churchwardens.

Recommended reading for Churchwardens:

"Churchwardens – A Survival Guide" by Dudley & Rounding (SPCK)

"Practical Church Management" by Behrens (Gracewing)

"A Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors" by MacMorran & Briden (Continuum)

"An ABC for the PCC" by Pitchford (Bloomsbury)

Useful Websites:

Diocese of Oxford: https://www.oxford.anglican.org/

Parish Resources: https://parishresources.org.uk/

Ecclesiastical: https://www.ecclesiastical.com/

Resources for Churchwardens: https://www.churchwardens.com/

ChurchCare | The Church of England: https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare