



Archdeacons' Visitation News



What makes up a churchwarden?



Google tells me you can make up to somewhere between 325 to 354 different words from 'churchwarden'. There's something that might while away a few hours on a quiet afternoon, should you have one! But there's another answer to this question and it's a much more useful and telling one, too.

The Oxford diocesan website sets out the role of a churchwarden as follows:

"Churchwardens have important legal responsibilities, but the office also has a vital spiritual, pastoral and missional dimension – the duty is to be foremost among the laity in the life and mission of the Church in the parish."

Churchwardens are some of the senior lay leaders of the church. They are elected in accordance with the **Churchwardens Measure 2001** at the Annual Meeting of Parishioners (or Vestry Meeting). This meeting can be attended by those whose names are on the church electoral roll of the parish and those who are resident in the parish and have their names on the register of local government electors. This usually precedes the Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

The post of churchwarden, dating back to the 13th century, and their role are governed by **Canon E1** which states: "The churchwarden shall discharge such duties as are by law and custom assigned to them; they shall be foremost in representing the laity and in co-operating with the incumbent; they shall use their best endeavours by example and precept to encourage the parishioners in the practice of true religion and to promote unity and peace among them.

"They shall also maintain order and decency in the church and churchyard, especially during the time of divine service."

Given the role as it is set out above, and mindful that it does not even list all of the ways that a churchwarden may be called on to fulfil these duties, we want to thank you all for what you offer to God and in service of your church and community.

This should never be taken for granted. Please be assured of our continued prayers for you. By the way, one of the words you can make out of churchwarden is 'hurrah' – the response to which is "and so say all of us!".

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Code of Conduct for members

In 2024, the General Synod voted by a large majority to explore introducing a Code of Conduct for Parochial Church Council (PCC) members.

The motion came from the Diocese of Chelmsford, prompted by real situations where persistent poor behaviour made PCCs unsafe places to serve.

The Archbishops' Council is undertaking a formal review of whether an enforceable code is feasible and desirable. Given that this is only an exploratory review, anything implementable may still be some years away.

The challenges described by Chelmsford are ones we recognise within our own parishes too. We want to encourage healthy, grace filled cultures within our PCCs, so rather than simply waiting for the General Synod, we could pilot – and then possibly introduce – a scheme within the Diocese of Oxford.

Participation in any such scheme would be entirely voluntary. This follows the approach we have taken with other issues recognised by the national Church, particularly those with long implementation times.

Given that churchwardens play a significant part in maintaining the health, unity and peace of parish life, we would be very interested to receive feedback to help shape any proposals we might bring forward.

The question of what "good" looks like is not hard to determine. The more difficult questions are around gauging the appetite for a code and determining what practical mechanisms for accountability might be.

We would value your help in translating the 'fruit of the Spirit' into clear, workable behavioural expectations.

If you have any comments, please email:

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From the Diocesan Registrar

Parochial Church Councils are 'creatures of statute'. That means they exist because legislation (The Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956) says there will be a PCC for every parish.

Section 2 of that Measure (equivalent to an Act of Parliament) also sets out what it is a PCC is supposed to do (its functions or purposes), including: "co-operation with the minister in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical".

It is accepted, because of those purposes, that PCCs have charitable status. PCCs are charities and the PCC members are the charity trustees.

The 1956 Measure and the Church Representation Rules (which set out how a PCC is to conduct its business), collectively form a PCC's 'governing document'.

When a charity has an income in any given year of £5,000 it is required to register with the Charity Commission; however, there is special provision made for PCCs so that they do not have to register unless their income level is £100,000 or more in any given year. That special provision will continue until 2031.

Any charity (including a PCC) which is not registered with the Charity Commission, remains a charity nonetheless and is subject to charity law and the duties which all charity trustees have.

Continued...



The Charity Commission has given a lot of helpful guidance to charity trustees, available freely online. In particular, its short guides on “Decision-making for charity trustees (CC27)”, “Managing charity finances”, “Managing conflicts of interest”, and “Reporting information” are helpful reading for any new or longstanding PCC member.

The guide “The essential trustee (CC3)” sets out the essential trustee (PCC member) duties: 1. ensure your charity is carrying out its purposes for the public benefit; 2. comply with your charity’s governing document and the law; 3. act in your charity’s best interests; 4. ensure your charity is accountable; 5. manage your charity’s resources responsibly; and 6. act with reasonable care and skill.

More and more, PCCs are having to engage with compliance requirements and expectations as a result of their charitable and corporate status, particularly in relation to banks and financial reporting. These can be very challenging in terms of the time, resource and skill involved.

There is, I am afraid, no escaping that at present. However, PCCs (members individually, and the PCC as a whole) need to make sure that appropriate advice is sought, when needed, and that these matters are taken seriously.

As with any charity, its reputation and the integrity of its status depends to a high degree on the conduct and decisions of the trustees. This is perhaps more so with a PCC, where, in addition to the statutory charitable purposes, the public (those inside and outside the church) expects to see the example of Jesus Christ in “the Church’s” dealings, with money, with dispute, with each other and with the world around them.



A PCC must look for all the gifts which St Paul encouraged in the early Church: apostles, prophets, teachers, and the gifts of healing, miracles, and administration – or in its proper translation, service.

The 2025 revised Charity Governance Code (which can be found by searching online) sets out its own “universal” principles of good governance, putting a new emphasis on “Ethics and Culture” for the first time.

I commend this to all PCCs as a good framework of principles for parochial governance and mission.

Darren Oliver
Diocesan Registrar





Heat pump usage guide

As part of the diocesan commitment to reach net zero carbon by 2035, we are investing in retrofit works across our housing stock to ensure that all properties reach a minimum rating of C by 2028.

As part of reaching this target, many houses are having insulation and windows improved, as well as having renewable sources of energy installed, including solar panels and heat pumps.

Heat pumps are a technology that offers the ability to radically reduce the carbon emissions produced by running a property, providing both heat and hot water by using electricity at an efficient rate. To date we have installed 37 heat pumps across clergy houses in the diocese, and we are looking to increase installation rates as we work to transition houses away from oil boilers to run on renewable sources of energy instead.

The pumps contain a refrigerant that, in its unheated state at about -20 degrees, extracts heat from the surrounding atmosphere and pressurises it to create enough heat to then supply to the home via its radiators and hot water. While a reduction in carbon emissions is an important goal, it's also a priority that they offer a good quality of life to the clergy living in these houses.

As they are a very efficient technology, and with regular servicing carried out by the diocese, they have the ability to provide a warm and comfortable home at an affordable cost to the occupants.

This article will provide guidance to clergy with heat pumps, or clergy anticipating having heat pumps installed in the coming months, on how to best make use of the technology for efficiency, comfort and affordability.

Keep the heat pump on for longer periods, without turning it off and on

In the UK, we're used to turning our heating systems on in the morning, off when we go to work and back on again in the evening when we return home, as this is how traditional boilers work best. However, with an air source heat pump, a better strategy can be to keep the heating on for longer, and instead of turning it off, to lower the temperature by a few degrees overnight or during the day when out at work. This is because heat pumps work best when maintaining consistent temperatures over longer periods, not in 'boom and bust' cycles that work well for gas boilers.

However, it's best to make sure your heat pump isn't trying to heat your hot water or the house overnight when outside air temperatures are significantly lower, as the pump will have to work harder. That's unless you're using a 'time-of-use tariff' when electricity is cheaper overnight. Overall, it's best to keep your heat pump on all the time and let your settings maintain a lower temperature when you're out or asleep.

The way to do this is to programme your heat pump with a normal 'comfort' temperature of about 20 degrees at set times when you will be at home, and programme a 'set back temperature', normally 1-2 degrees lower (maximum 3 degrees lower) for times when you'll be out or asleep. This will keep the heat pump working at a high efficiency, which will keep your bills as low as possible while receiving the heat that you need.

Heat all rooms in a large house consistently, as this will actually help to keep your bills lower



This might seem surprising as we are used to associating more heating with more cost; however, the truth can be slightly different with a heat pump.

Gas boilers are very good at firing out heat at high intensity efficiently; however, heat pumps work best when they are maintaining a

consistent performance over longer periods. This means that while you have some cold rooms in the house, the heat from heated rooms gets lost to them gradually, and the heat pump has to continually work to maintain the temperature that you require. This makes the system less efficient, leading to higher bills. However, if all rooms are kept heated, and with good insulation levels in your house, the heat can be retained much better, resulting in less work from the heat pump to maintain a consistent temperature, and lower bills for you.

If a room is genuinely unused, keep it heated but at a slightly lower temperature (e.g. 16-17 degrees).

If you are experiencing any issues with your heat pump, or are looking for further guidance to help you get the most from your technology, don't hesitate to get in touch with us at:

✉ retrofit@oxford.anglican.org



Social media

Social media plays an important part in how people discover information, form impressions and connect with local community life. Yet one of the most common misunderstandings in parish communication is the belief that posting something online means people will naturally see it.

In practice most posts reach far fewer people than expected because platforms show content only to users who have already interacted with the page or account. This limitation often leaves churches puzzled when well-intentioned posts seem to disappear into silence.

Understanding these limits is essential for clergy who want to communicate effectively. Social media can support mission but only when it is used realistically. Instagram and TikTok for example reach new audiences only when the content is genuinely strong. These platforms promote short videos that hold attention and create engagement. Average or purely informational posts are not pushed to wider audiences. A brief reflection filmed with warmth and clarity may travel far but a flat notice about Sunday services will not. Quality matters far more than frequency on these platforms.

Instagram and TikTok should therefore be used with care. They can extend the reach of a parish only when the content resonates with the interests of people who would not usually encounter the church. Short videos need a clear point, an authentic voice and a sense of humanity. They do not need to be polished but they do need to be worth watching. When clergy or volunteers create content that feels sincere or insightful these platforms can help it travel. When content feels routine it will be shown only to existing followers.

Facebook however works differently. Although Facebook pages have limited reach without regular engagement, Facebook community groups are one of the most effective ways to reach people who have no prior connection with the parish. Community groups exist to help neighbours share information. Posts about local events, volunteering opportunities or seasonal services often do well because they relate directly to community life. When clergy share parish updates within these groups they are far more likely to reach people who have never visited the church than when posting solely on the church page.

Understanding how different age groups use social media also helps clergy make realistic decisions. Young adults aged 18 to 24 spend significant time on TikTok and YouTube yet even for them only strong content reaches new viewers. Slightly dull videos are simply ignored by the algorithm. Adults aged 25 to 34 look for helpful, practical or encouraging material rather than reminders about church events. A short video answering a real question often outperforms a list of service times. Posts must give people something they actually want to watch or share.

Adults aged 35 to 44 remain active on Facebook community groups which makes these groups especially valuable for parish communication. Parents and carers in this age range often rely on these groups for local information. Churches already have strong community identity which aligns well with the purpose of these groups. Adults aged 45 to 64 also respond well to Facebook especially when posts speak clearly about pastoral support courses or opportunities to connect. YouTube can serve those looking for longer reflections but audience growth is usually steady rather than dramatic.

Older adults aged 65 and over use Facebook and YouTube most. They appreciate calm, clear communication such as simple reflections, service recordings or practical information about parish life. They are also likely to view content shared by friends, which means personal sharing within the congregation can extend the reach of posts far more effectively than relying on the church page alone. For this group, clarity matters more than style and regular, consistent posting is helpful even when individual posts do not travel widely.

The central lesson for clergy is that social media is not a noticeboard. It does not automatically broadcast information to a parish. Everything depends on relevance quality and engagement. Instagram and TikTok reach new people only when the content is strong. Facebook community groups reach new people because they serve local need. Posting something online does not mean it will be seen. When clergy approach social media as a place for genuine human connection rather than an announcement platform, communication becomes far more effective and far more realistic.

By recognising the strengths and the limits of social media, clergy can make choices about where to focus time and energy and can communicate in ways that serve the needs of the parish.

Diocesan Advisory Committee

It may not surprise you to learn that of all the complaints that arrive in an Archdeacon's inbox, faculties top the list.



Terrifying bedtime tales told to the grandchildren of churchwardens must feature an all-consuming, always expected but never quite arriving monster known only to those unsleeping youngsters as the dreaded “deeyesea”!

Recently I spoke at a conference organised by our amazing church buildings officers (CBOs). It did a lot to de-mystify and explain the whys and wherefores of the complex and challenging world of faculties and church development projects.

I shared with them a rather crude picture (above), showing a room in Waddesdon Manor, where a compliant toilet, a kitchenette, and a children's play area have been unceremoniously dropped in. Of course, it would never happen – and imagine the furore if it did! But something like it is what happens in lots of our listed church buildings.

The reason development can happen is because churches are exempt from secular planning legislation and the requirement to get listed building consent. This exemption, known as the Ecclesiastical Exemption, is the foundation on which all our church building projects rest. Without it, it would be virtually impossible to justify harming (in the planning officer's use of the word) a church to improve its facilities.

The exemption exists because the government recognises that our churches are not just relicts, to be preserved at all costs from the developer's wrecking ball. Our churches have a purpose, a reason for being which is more important than beauty and heritage value. But this freedom comes with a heavy price. We are required to operate our own, alternative planning system. And it has to be just as rigorous as the secular system.

This is a legal requirement that dioceses must demonstrate to government. If we lost the exemption, all our development

projects would cease and our churches become museums. Not many of us have tried to get listed building consent outside of the church system. Country houses and hotels spend a fortune on professionals who help them navigate consent.

Just to find out from the council if you need consent costs £175 and takes four weeks. Any time spent on your case by council officers after that first initial hour's work is charged at £169 an hour – and that's not consultancy to help you get your consent. The consultants are much more expensive.

All this is provided for free under the church system. And our CBOs are not just the equivalent of council officers, processing paper. They offer advice and guidance. They are experts in their field and have a wealth of knowledge of what has worked and what will work. They understand how churches must present their plans to get permission and they share all this as part of their service. If we had to pay for this ourselves it would add a good percentage to the cost of our projects, and put many of them out of reach. Our equivalent to the council's planning committee is the DAC. This is made up of experts and professionals who give their time for free to keep this system working.

The volume of work that is processed is quite extraordinary. This year, every month has seen more than 200 new or resubmitted applications. That means each one of the five CBOs is working on more than 40 new applications every month, adding to the case work they already have.

Is this healthy?

Clearly not, but it is funded out of parish share, so the pressure to keep costs down is immense.

Are there delays?

Yes. Often far too long, with implications for all our projects.

Can't we just water down these silly regulations?

Not unless we want the government to take away our ability to develop churches.

The sensitive and well thought through development of our churches (none of them look anything like my desecration of Waddesdon Manor!) is a testament to the dedicated people who persevere with a system that is creaking under its own weight. That much we can all agree on. But please, do not take out your frustration on our CBOs. They all go above and beyond, as does everyone in their churches who are involved in these projects.

The Revd Deiniol Heywood

Formerly Interim Associate Archdeacon of Buckingham



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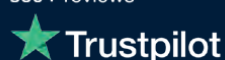
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