

## C11 CHURCHWARDENS

### Qualification and Election

These matters are regulated by the Churchwardens (Appointment and Resignation) Measure 2001 and Canon E1.

Normally there will be two churchwardens of every parish. The requirements are that they:

- must be baptised
- on the church electoral roll
- actual communicants
- aged 21 or over.
- (in all situations this applies, unless the Bishop directs otherwise)

In addition they must not be subject to disqualification:

- under the Charities Act
- because of certain criminal convictions,
- because of disqualification after proceedings in a case of pastoral breakdown.

Unless a Parishioners Meeting (see below) decides otherwise a person cannot serve for more than 6 years continuously, after which there should be a 2 year break before re-appointment. The first 6 year period did not start until the churchwardens were admitted to office in 2002.

Churchwardens are chosen annually, not later than 30<sup>th</sup> April in each year, by election at a meeting of parishioners, i.e. a joint meeting of all those whose names are on the Church Electoral Roll and persons resident in the parish on the register of local government electors. Candidates for election must be nominated and seconded and the nomination paper received by the minister before the start of the meeting. The nomination paper must include a statement, signed by the candidate, that they are willing to serve as churchwarden and are not disqualified.

Normally both churchwardens will be elected at the meeting. However, if it appears to the minister that the election of a particular churchwarden might cause serious difficulties between the minister and that person, the minister can restrict the election to one churchwarden only. In this situation, the minister appoints the other churchwarden from among those nominated and announces their appointee before the meeting elects the other churchwarden.

This meeting of parishioners (sometimes popularly called the Vestry Meeting) to choose churchwardens is quite distinct from the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) which usually follows immediately afterwards. The meeting to choose churchwardens must be convened by the minister (i.e. incumbent, priest in charge or team vicar) or the churchwardens by a notice on or near the principal door of the parish church, and every other building in the parish licensed for worship, for a period including the last two Sundays before the meeting. The meeting is to be presided over by the minister or, if the minister is not present, by a chair chosen by the meeting. The chair of the meeting does not have a casting vote.

### **Admission and Resignation**

Churchwardens designate become members of the PCC from the date they are chosen, although they only become Bishop's Officers from the date of admission to office. This normally takes place during the Archdeacon's annual visitation of the Deanery. On that occasion the new churchwardens will be admitted to office after subscribing the declaration that they will faithfully and diligently perform the duties of the office and are not disqualified. Churchwardens so chosen and admitted will continue in their office until their successors are similarly admitted, or failing such admission, until 31<sup>st</sup> July. In cases where a newly chosen churchwarden is unable to attend a visitation, arrangements will normally be made for the declaration to be made before the Rural Dean.

A churchwarden may resign by serving written notice on the Bishop by post. The resignation shall take effect 2 months after service of the notice, or earlier as agreed by the Bishop after consultation with the minister and any other churchwarden.

A churchwarden's office is also vacated if their name is removed from the Church Electoral Roll, or if it does not appear on a new Roll, or if the churchwarden becomes disqualified.

A person chosen to fill a casual vacancy shall be chosen in the same way as his/her predecessor, except that where the outgoing churchwarden was chosen by the minister and the minister has now ceased to hold office, the new churchwarden shall be elected by a meeting of parishioners.

### **Duties as Officers of the Bishop**

Churchwardens have been called 'the eyes of the bishop'. In that capacity each year they present at, or prior to, the visitation the answers to such questions as have been put to them in the Archdeacon's Articles of Enquiry. And they are at liberty to include in their response any further matters affecting the parish which may be relevant, always remembering that the aim is to inform the Archdeacon and the Bishop whether all is well with the parish or, if not, what is amiss. The formal occasion of the annual visitation and completion of the Articles of Enquiry do not mark the limit of the churchwarden's responsibilities in this respect. At any time the Bishop or Archdeacon may make enquiry of them as to parochial matters, and at any time they can inform the Bishop or Archdeacon of any concerns or irregularities in the life of the parish.

### **Duties relating to the parish**

As leading lay people within the parish church they should work in partnership with the minister and seek to represent the lay people of the parish.

Their legal responsibilities are to act as guardians of the parish church and its services. The plate, ornaments and other movable goods of the church are in their legal ownership.

They are under a duty to compile and maintain an **inventory** of church goods and a **terrier** of church lands, and to make an **annual fabric report** to the Annual Parochial Church Meeting. They are also responsible for keeping a **logbook** of all work done to the church.

Churchwardens are also charged with the maintenance of order and decency in the church and churchyard, especially during the time of divine service.

They also have a legal responsibility for allocation of seats to the congregation and the

collection of alms, although in practice they will be assisted by others in these tasks.

During a vacancy in the benefice the churchwardens, together with the Rural Dean, will automatically become **sequestrators** and as such have responsibility for provision of services and care of the parsonage house, although much of this will be undertaken by Diocesan Office staff.

They will be members of the PCC's standing committee.

They also act as joint treasurers where no other treasurer is appointed by the PCC.

2005