

# Churchwardens

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## Duties and responsibilities

October 2025

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The office of churchwarden is one of the earliest forms of lay ministry, playing a significant role in the local community as well as in the church congregation.
- 1.2 Churchwardens are foremost an officer of the parish, representing the lay people and have a close working relationship with the incumbent or priest-in-charge (as the case may be). Their rights and responsibilities are set out in Canon Law and various Church Measures.
- 1.3 The purpose of this note is to provide a brief summary of the key duties and responsibilities of the churchwarden.

## 2 Shared leadership

- 2.1 Churchwardens should have a close working relationship with their incumbent. They should be their "critical friend", be loyal and supportive, but also honest, establishing themselves as someone the incumbent can turn to for advice and encouragement. This should include co-operating with the incumbent<sup>1</sup> to promote the whole mission of the church, pastoral, evangelistic, ecumenical and social.
- 2.2 As well as working closely with the incumbent, churchwardens will work with the other clergy in the parish and work with the PCC in carrying out all of its duties.
- 2.3 Churchwardens should encourage feedback from parishioners and communicate this to the incumbent. They should also consider reporting to the Archdeacon or Bishop any serious complaints in respect of the parish or the incumbent's discharge of his or her duties. Churchwardens should first try to deal with issues in a cooperative and fair manner.

## 3 'Officer of the Bishop'?

- 3.1 Under Canon E1, paragraph 4, individuals chosen to undertake the role of churchwarden are formally admitted to office by the Bishop (or by the Archdeacon on his behalf). Although the Churchwardens Measure 2001 suggests that the churchwarden is an officer of the Bishop, this is, however, not the reality of the relationship. In fact, although admitted by the Bishop, it is only the parishioners that can remove a churchwarden, although this may require a complaint to be made to the Bishop.
- 3.2 The Bishop has had the power to suspend a churchwarden in cases where the individual may pose a safeguarding risk<sup>2</sup>.
- 3.3 Churchwardens are required to **attend Visitations**, at which they must respond to questions and share concerns about their parish<sup>3</sup>. They may also share good news!
- 3.4 The Bishop can question a churchwarden at any time as to parochial matters and, at any time, a churchwarden can inform the Bishop of such irregularities or derelictions of duty as they consider need his intervention<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Revised Canons Ecclesiastical, Canon E1, paragraph 4

<sup>2</sup> Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure 2016, section 2 / Churchwardens Measure 2001, section 6A

<sup>3</sup> Legal Opinions Concerning the Church of England (Church House Publishing, 9<sup>th</sup> Edn, 2020) *Part 5 Churchwardens*

<sup>4</sup> Legal Opinions Concerning the Church of England (Church House Publishing, 9<sup>th</sup> Edn, 2020) *Part 5 Churchwardens*

## 4 Churches and churchyards

- 4.1 Although the church building is generally vested in the incumbent, churchwardens can be seen as "guardians" of the church and are "owners" of the movables<sup>5</sup> i.e. the plate, ornaments and all furniture and furnishings of the church.
- 4.2 The churchwardens should assist the PCC to discharge its duty to **care, repair, insure and maintain the fabric of the church**. At least once every year churchwardens should inspect, or arrange an inspection of, the fabric of the church and all articles belonging to the church<sup>6</sup>.
- 4.3 Churchwardens should **maintain a full terrier of all land**<sup>7</sup> belonging to the church and a **full inventory of the articles**<sup>8</sup> belonging to it. As soon as practicable after the beginning of the year, the terrier, inventory, log-book (see below) and any other records should be presented to the PCC to assist it in discharging its functions in relation to the fabric of the church and the articles belonging to it<sup>9</sup>.
- 4.4 Every year, the churchwardens must deliver to the PCC and, on behalf of that PCC to the Annual Parochial Council Meeting, **a report on the fabric of the church and all articles belonging to the church** having regard to the inspections carried out, including an account of all actions taken or proposed during the previous year for their protection and maintenance<sup>10</sup>.
- 4.5 It is for the churchwardens to **ensure that when a faculty or licence is required** by law the necessary action is taken to obtain it. All alterations, additions, repairs and events affecting the church, the land or any articles belonging to it should be dated and **recorded in the church log-book**<sup>11</sup>, together with details of the cost of the works, who carried them out and details of any documents relating to such alterations, additions, repairs and events which are not kept with the log-book.
- 4.6 The **churchyard** is also vested in the incumbent. Churchwardens should familiarise themselves with the "Churchyard Regulations: Rules relating to burial, interment of cremated remains and the placing of memorials/gravestones in churchyards in the Diocese of Gloucester " (2020)<sup>12</sup> made by the Chancellor of the Diocese, and as above, should ensure that an application for a faculty is made where appropriate.
- 4.7 In carrying out these duties, churchwardens should act in consultation with the incumbent (or priest-in-charge)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Revised Canons Ecclesiastical, Canon E1, paragraph 5

<sup>6</sup> Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, section 50(1)

<sup>7</sup> Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, section 49(1)(a)

<sup>8</sup> Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, section 49 (1)(b)

<sup>9</sup> Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, section 50(6)(a) and (b)

<sup>10</sup> Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, section 50(2)

<sup>11</sup> Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, section 49 (2)(a)

<sup>12</sup> [Diocese-of-Gloucester-Churchyard-Regulations-Fourth-Edition-27-07-19-2-2.pdf \(anglican.org\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure 2018, section 49(3)

## 5 Worship

- 5.1 Churchwardens should use their best endeavours to encourage parishioners "in the practice of true religion and to promote unity and peace" amongst them.
- 5.2 **Seats must be provided in every church and chapel** within the parish for the use of the parishioners and others who attend divine service<sup>14</sup>. The churchwardens may direct individuals to where they may or may not sit, and may assign seats to individuals either beforehand or at the time of a particular service or for an indefinite period. They have no right to prevent someone from entering the church if there are no seats or from standing during the service. They can remove anyone who makes use of a seat assigned for someone else provided that they do so without unnecessary force and without causing a scene or disturbing the service.
- 5.3 Churchwardens should provide a sufficient quantity of **bread/wafers and wine for communion**<sup>15</sup>.
- 5.4 Churchwardens should **maintain order and decency** in the church and churchyard<sup>16</sup>, particularly during divine service, and may remove an individual from the church who disturbs a service. Churchwardens are also able to restrain anyone who is acting in a violent or indecent manner in any church or churchyard.
- 5.5 Churchwardens are also responsible for **the taking of offerings and collections** (with assistance). They are also responsible for recording the sums received and for the proper **disposal of money** in accordance with decisions taken together with the incumbent and PCC.

## 6 Vacancy

- 6.1 Where there is no incumbent or priest-in-charge, the Churchwardens, together with the Area Dean, are legally responsible for the benefice<sup>17</sup>.
- 6.2 These individuals should ensure that there is someone available to conduct services and, otherwise, that parish life should continue as far as possible in the absence of the incumbent.

## 7 Powers of the Bishop

- 7.1 Churchwardens should remember that the Churchwardens Measure 2001 gives the Bishop a wide range of powers to deal with difficulties (if they arise)<sup>18</sup>. For example, he may appoint a person to do any act in respect of which there has been any neglect or default on the part of any person or body charged with a duty under the Measure, or give any directions which he may consider expedient for the purpose of removing the difficulty.

<sup>14</sup> Revised Canons Ecclesiastical, Canon F7

<sup>15</sup> Revised Canons Ecclesiastical, Canon B17, paragraph 1

<sup>16</sup> Revised Canons Ecclesiastical, Canon E1, paragraph 4

<sup>17</sup> Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure 1992, section 1(1) (as amended by The Team and Group Ministries Measure 1995, section 17(2))

<sup>18</sup> Churchwardens Measure 2001, section 10(1)

- 7.2 As stated in paragraph 3.2 above, the Bishop has the power to suspend a churchwarden in circumstances where safeguarding issues arise.

## **8 Duties and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding**

- 8.1 Since 1 October 2016, Churchwardens have been under a specific legal duty in relation to their approach to and handling of safeguarding matters. It is outside the scope of this note to include detailed guidance in relation to safeguarding matters, but churchwardens should take reasonable steps to ensure they fully understand their legal obligations in this regard.

## **9 Churchwardens as members of the Parochial Church Council**

- 9.1 An individual chosen, appointed or elected as churchwarden will automatically become a member of the PCC until he or she ceases to satisfy the eligibility requirements or ceases to be a churchwarden<sup>19</sup>. That individual will also be a member of the standing committee of the PCC.
- 9.2 As ex-officio members of the PCC, individuals appointed as churchwardens will, along with all other PCC members, take on the role of charity trustees and, accordingly, must be able to meet the eligibility requirements set out in the Charities Act 2011<sup>20</sup> and the Church Representation Rules<sup>21</sup>. If you are unsure about the legal requirements, please contact the Diocesan Registry.

## **10 Contacts**

- 10.1 For more information, or if you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Gloucester Diocesan Registry:

Narrow Quay House, Narrow Quay, Bristol, BS1 4QA  
[gloucesterregistry@vww.co.uk](mailto:gloucesterregistry@vww.co.uk)  
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**VWV LLP**  
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<sup>19</sup> Church Representation Rules r.M17

<sup>20</sup> Charities Act 2011, sections 178 and 178A

<sup>21</sup> Church Representation Rules, Part 7