



DIOCESE *of* **OXFORD**

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

A Summary of Churchwardens Responsibilities

Churchwardens are elected annually under the provisions of the Churchwardens Measure 2001 by the Annual Meeting of Parishioners, as the senior laypeople of the parish and congregation. Their term of office is one year, and they may serve for up to six consecutive terms of office, unless the Annual Meeting passes a resolution to set aside this rule. They are the Bishop's officers, and are admitted to office each year by the Archdeacon, on behalf of the Bishop. Their first responsibility is to the Bishop, usually via the Archdeacon. They, with the parish priest, are generally responsible for the day-to-day functioning of the parish.

Churchwardens are vital to the health and wellbeing of our church communities. It is an important and, at times, a demanding role.

The Canons of the Church of England [Canons E1.4 and E1.5] state that churchwardens shall be foremost in representing the laity and in cooperating 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. The property (the plate, ornaments and other moveable goods of the church), is vested in them, and they should keep an up-to-date inventory of these items and deliver them to their successors.

Churchwardens should:

- care for and support the parish priest, and be people to whom the incumbent can turn to for advice and support;
- try to ensure that the incumbent is relieved of unnecessary administrative and other tasks;
- provide feedback as a 'critical friend' for the parish priest;

- care for the congregation and encourage people in their Christian faith;
- help to resolve disputes or disagreements amongst the congregation or with the parish priest, or with the local community;
- when any concerns arise, they should consult the Area Dean and/or Archdeacon;
- Churchwardens should have a set of keys for the church;
- attend services regularly, and normally arrive in good time to support the welcome group, be present for any refreshments and assist in tidying up after services.

During a vacancy in a parish the churchwardens, along with the Area Dean, are responsible for ensuring that worship, pastoral care and mission continues in the parish and for supporting any assistant clergy, lay ministers, staff and volunteers in the parish in their responsibilities.

The way in which churchwardens exercise their office will vary from parish to parish.

Safeguarding

Due to the safeguarding responsibilities of the role, all Churchwardens are required to complete Basic Awareness and Foundation level training with the Diocese of Oxford. This involves completing the following safeguarding learning pathways:

Safeguarding Learning Pathway	Basic Awareness	Foundation
Delivery Format	Completed Online, or if required, at Parish based Face-to-face sessions.	Completed Online, or if required, at Face-to-face sessions.
Safeguarding Learning Pathway Summary	Provide learners with a basic awareness of safeguarding and enables them to integrate this into their Christian faith and the Church's ministry.	To enable learners to contribute to, and implement, good safeguarding practice within church and community contexts.

Further information regarding safeguarding training, accessing the E-learning modules and booking onto safeguarding training can be found here:

[Safeguarding Training \(anglican.org\)](https://www.anglican.org/safeguarding-training)

Churchwardens do not automatically require a DBS check. This is required in parishes where there is work with children or vulnerable adults, for instance where there is a Sunday School or youth group or a lunch club for the elderly etc.

If you have any queries on DBS issues, please contact

safeguarding@oxford.anglican.org

1. Meetings/Trusteeships

They should meet regularly with the incumbent. They are *ex officio* members of the PCC (the trustees of the parish) and the PCC Standing Committee.

Churchwardens become members of the PCC from the moment they are elected, although they might not be admitted to office by the Archdeacon until several weeks later. They may also be *ex officio* trustees of parish ecclesiastical and parochial charities.

2. Administration

With the incumbent and PCC, they should use their best endeavours to ensure that:

- there is adequate provision for and oversight of the administration of the parish, including financial administration;
- 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 (see [Safeguarding in the Diocese of Oxford \(anglican.org\)](https://www.anglican.org/));
- the PCC has a health and safety policy and ensures that it is implemented
- the PCC has a fire risk policy and ensures that it is implemented
- annual returns of attendance, articles of enquiry and finance are made online and on time: <https://parishreturns.churchofengland.org/>;
- there are adequate preparations for the Church Inspections, normally undertaken by the Deanery on the Archdeacon's behalf.

3. Finance

They should use their best endeavours to ensure that:

- there are proper systems in place 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;
- the church and its contents are adequately insured;

- all bills are paid;
- the PCC contributes appropriately to the Diocesan Share;
- the parish's end of year accounts are submitted promptly.

In the absence of a PCC Treasurer, the churchwardens must fulfil the role of Treasurer together.

4. Mission

Churchwardens should use their best endeavours to ensure that:

- the PCC has a Mission Action Plan and pays attention to implementing it;
- there is an appropriately encouraging welcome to people attending church;
- the church is open to the public as much as possible.

5. Pastoral Care

Churchwardens should use their best endeavours to ensure that the pastoral work of the Church is being undertaken in the parish and amongst the congregation.

6. Buildings and Contents and Property

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, (the list and description of any land or buildings belonging to the church). Please contact the Archdeacon's office if you require a proforma terrier and inventory;
- 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;
- an annually updated inventory and photographic record of all the items belonging to the church is retained;
- quinquennial inspections of the church by the church architect is carried out

and the necessary repairs are undertaken;

- a log book of all alterations and repairs to the church and its lands and contents exists;
- 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;
- the Archdeacon and the DAC are consulted about any repairs or alterations to the church, or any acquisitions or disposals of contents; and that a Faculty is obtained before any work is begun.

7. Liturgy and Worship

- In the absence of the parish priest they are responsible, with the Area Dean, for ensuring that there is someone to conduct services and that liturgy and the life of the parish continues as far as possible as with the previous incumbent. If there is no one available they should conduct any service, as far as possible, themselves. They must check that all visiting clergy hold the Bishop's licence or Permission to Officiate.
- They should ensure that the service register and other registers are properly filled in.
- During a vacancy in the parish the churchwardens together with the Area Dean, are responsible for the continuing ministry of the parish.
- They are responsible for ensuring that people are properly welcomed to the church and to services and that sides people are appointed.
- They are responsible for good order in the church and churchyard or the equivalent. In the event of a service being disrupted or a disturbance in church or churchyard they should call the police and, if necessary, may arrest a person or escort them off the premises. *Police should always be called in preference to using churchwardens' powers.*
- At the end of their period of office, churchwardens should handover their keys to their successors, together with the inventory, which should then be checked and signed.

8. Safeguarding

In relation to safeguarding, the churchwardens work with the incumbent, PCC and Parish Safeguarding Officer to:

- Ensure that in the period of a vacancy (during an interregnum), that the incumbent's safeguarding roles and responsibilities are fulfilled, in consultation with the PCC, Parish Safeguarding Officer and the Area Dean;
- Pay attention to the specific needs of children and vulnerable adults when undertaking health and safety inspections and risk assessment;
- Ensure that risk assessments are carried out before new activities are undertaken;
- Ensure that all parish activities with children and vulnerable adults are adequately supervised and insured;
- Ensure that the parish has procedures for responding to complaints and grievances;
- Answer questions regarding safeguarding as they arise in the Archdeacon's visitations, and respond to any specific safeguarding advice, which may be given from the Archdeacon.

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.

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)

“Rotas, Rules and Rectors” by Matthew Clements (Troubador)

Useful Websites:

www.oxford.anglican.org

www.parishresources.org.uk

www.churchwardens.com

www.ecclesiastical.com

www.churchcare.co.uk