

VESTRY PAPERS



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Good vestry members: born or grown?

by Loren Mead

I've often wondered — are good vestry members just born that way, or are they people who take on the job and grow into it?

I think I could make a case for either one. I've known, and I bet you have, too, people who serve all their life in their church's leadership cadre — part time on the vestry, other times just "on call" for whatever leadership is needed.

Then there are the others — cajoled, nominated, and then elected against their own considerable hesitation, but who grab on, learn the job, and become outstanding leaders, sometimes serving again and again.

Either way, I've seen how much difference just two or three good vestry members can make in the life of a parish. I hope you have a full dozen on your vestry. If you DON'T,

part of your job is to BE the kind of vestry person who makes the others move from wherever they are to "outstanding."

I'm telegraphing my message.

Whatever kind of a vestry person you are now — you can grow in the job. Lots of experience and born to the job? Get better. Just starting and uncertain how to go about it? Get better.

Here are a few tips:

Growing. Nobody's got it made. Everybody is called to be more than they've been before. Each of us can learn from one another, because ultimately we are being called by God, not simply by the nominating committee. God is calling us to give ourselves

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*This Issue:
Vestry Orientation
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Vestry membership begins with faith and passion. From there, what do you need to know? How might you bring your best self for the ministry ahead? How will your faith influence your activities and how will you get through any spiritual valleys? This edition explores theological issues and canonical responsibilities that are part of vestry service.

*Inside:
Light over darkness*





Vestry service: light over darkness

by Ellen Bruckner

About twenty-five years ago, I began my leadership journey as an elected vestry person in my current congregation, Christ Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In the first year of my term, the vestry dealt with a significant conflict that resulted in our clergy person resigning and the congregation

through the dark times so that one can experience the light.

Following are a few hints I have learned throughout the years that help get past the feelings of frustration, disappointment, and anger that can be triggered by some vestry meetings. These are not necessarily new

Consider electing new vestry members in late spring and having an all-day retreat on a Saturday in June so that all is up and running smoothly by September, when many programs begin.



beginning a search process. Since then I have served several more terms in the same congregation, a couple of those as senior warden. Some would say I am a glutton for punishment; I choose to look at it more as a labor of love. Because of this work I have grown in my understanding of church as institution and as community. I have deepened my relationships with many people in the community and have a very real sense of making a difference.

Serving on the vestry is a wonderful way to be “in the know” because my own sense of belonging needs to know what is going on in the community. This desire/need outweighs all the tough moments that occur for vestries. Churches are living organizations that change continually. There is no way to escape conflict, disappointment, hard times, or all the negative aspects that happen in life. But just as the difficult times exist, so do the really great times, times of joy, of deepening relationships and working together to accomplish tasks one person cannot do alone. For me, it is worth working

learnings, and I am sure many experienced vestry people could add additional ideas.

- + Help new members come on board each year.
- + Remember the vestry is an organization that consists of people who care about this job and the church, each with his/her own background and understanding of church. Everyone on the vestry has his/her reason for being there.
- + Be familiar with the canons (laws) of the church — local, diocesan and national. You will feel more secure in some of the decisions you are asked to make.
- + Know the history of your local congregation.
- + Attend meetings; actions often speak louder than words.
- + Know your own expectations and don't be afraid to express them on everything from how one behaves in a meeting to how decisions are made.

*Next Issue:
Parish Communications*

And when the bishop comes...

by Michael Hanley

It's a standard joke. The bishop and the parish priest are in the sacristy just before the start of the service marking the bishop's visitation to the congregation. The bishop peeks out of the doorway and notices that very few of the faithful are in attendance. Turning to the priest the bishop exclaims, "Did you tell the people I would be here today?" To which the priest replies, "I'm afraid word did indeed get out!"

Diocesan bishops are required to visit congregations in their diocese at least once every three years. In my experience these visits have been a mixed blessing for all concerned. Congregations and clergy tend to become anxious over these visits and spend a good deal of time getting ready for the event.

In the best of times

In the best of times, this means that the confirmation groups finish their classes. The vestry talks about parish life with the bishop, and the liturgy committee plans the service with the help of the documents provided by the bishop's office. Often, however, just the opposite occurs: a quick confirmation class is pulled together, the faithful are cajoled to attend the special day's celebration, and the silver service is brought out for a grand reception so all can "meet and greet" the bishop.

The experiences of bishops during these visitations are similarly diverse. In the best of situations, bishops and their staffs spend considerable time and energy getting ready for visitations and have high expectations for these events. But like many congregations, bishops, too, report frustration over the process of doing parish visitations.

The key: If vestries set a congregational development agenda rather than waiting for the bishop to offer his or her own agenda, they will have a stronger voice in the conversation than is typical. Take a risk.



One potential model for planning an episcopal visit is to invite vestry members to gather demographic data and the parish's vision and mission statement. Give this information, as well as any yearly goals currently being pursued, to the bishop at least two months prior to the visitation date. Then, one month before the visit the vestry meets to discuss the data. The vestry sends the bishop a copy of the relevant data at least one week prior to the visit and invites the bishop to use the data as a starting place for their discussions during the visitation.

Advantages for both

Discussions of congregational development issues during episcopal visitations have many advantages for both bishops and the congregations they visit. First, such discussions tends to shorten the time it takes for new bishops to get to know their churches. Congregations who know and trust their bishop are more likely to ask for help in difficult times.

Second, discussions will improve accountability for planning and growth.

Third, if done yearly, such interaction will maintain a higher level of commitment to the goals that are set; leadership will have a clearer sense of the challenges they face.

Fourth, vestries and bishops will find that the time spent during a visit is creative and enables everyone to work on the adaptive changes we all need to consider especially during this time of deep change in congregational life.

Finally, by engaging in these such discussions we might change: "Oh, it's you again," to "Oh, it's good to see you again" for all concerned.

Rector of St. Christopher's Episcopal Church in Roseville, Minnesota, the Rev. Michael Hanley explored the subject of episcopal visitations for his doctoral work at Seabury-Western. For a full copy of his findings, use the link on the Vestry Papers page at www.episcopalfoundation.org.



Chances are that you were elected to vestry membership because you care deeply about the work of your congregation. No doubt you have a favorite area or two of parish life, perhaps the choir or young people. While such passions are important, remember that the work of the vestry is to help oversee and energize the life of the whole parish.



Energy is a great gift, not only for the parish but for the clergy. Be the person that takes initiative, and comes to the job with a consistently positive and faithful attitude. Your special gifts, be they a spirit of listening or an eye for detail, will be put to work and your demeanor will always effect the group, be it positive or negative.

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to helping this parish community BE a place where all of us are being led from where we've been, to where God needs us to be.

Attentiveness. We need to be ATTENTIVE to what's going on in ourselves and in others. I recommend what I call the "index card" method of spirituality (pardon my being so prosaic, but it's how I think and what I do). Take an index card and jot on it the people, the groups, the issues you want yourself and God to be attentive to.

Stick the card in your pocket or in a book you're working on — a place where it can be inconspicuous, but accessible. Be sure to put on the list SOME people you're at odds with or issues that bug you. Then, whenever you have a couple of minutes, pull it out and review the names and issues (don't worry about what to ask or say about them — just run them through your mind. The rest will take care of itself). And you might want to put all the other vestry names on it, too. One card. Not a bunch of them.

Money. This is a bear cat. On a vestry, money is more than it is in the rest of your life. You have to pay attention to the budget — to what money can help the parish deal with and what you can't do because of shortages. You have a responsibility about it. However your calling from God is for more than that — it is not to balance the budget, **but to learn to be generous!** That's where your personal growth as a disciple diverges from the vestry job.

The vestry job is management, planning, decision-making; **your personal job** is to move yourself from self-centeredness to **becoming a giving person.** Your job is to be a responsible leader of the parish institution,

to gather and use its resources to do its job. Simultaneously, you have the call to become a better user of the resources with which God entrusted you.

Getting clear about your role doesn't solve the "bear cat" issue, but it will help you lead the vestry in its fiscal responsibility while also helping your fellow vestry members become increasingly generous.

Being there. To be a winner, they say the most important thing is just BEING THERE. I want to say the same thing about being a good vestry person. Being there is what needs to count most. You need to be there. EVERY SUNDAY, not just now and then. You need to be there for the special vestry events — retreats, meetings, whatever. Your PRESENCE is important — as a reminder to yourself of your calling, as a reminder to others that this is God's church and you are on the team, as a reminder to all those others who may need to feel support in their ministries, some of whom may feel uncertain or unsupported.

As a vestry person, you have a chance to make a difference in your own life and in your parish. Being on the vestry is a job. Sometimes a hard job. But the opportunity and the calling is much broader and deeper. You are being invited to grow in grace as Jesus' disciple.

A friend of many Episcopal congregations and the author of numerous articles and books, the Rev. Loren B. Mead served from 1974 to 1994 as founding president of the Alban Institute in Washington, D.C.

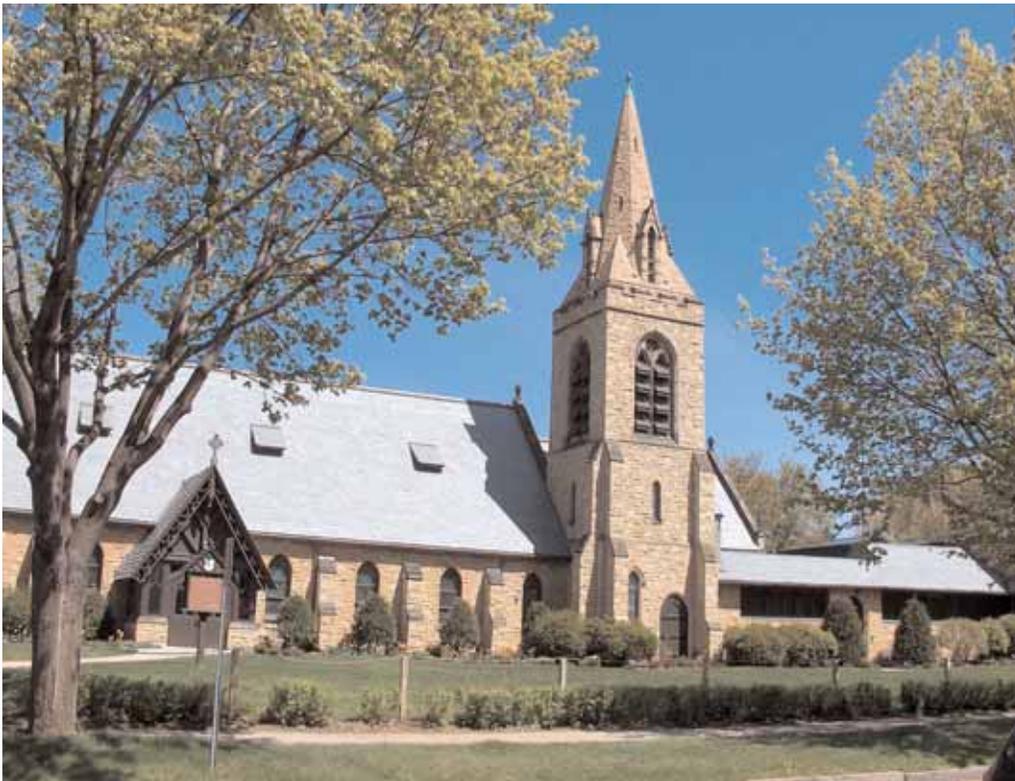
Canonical responsibilities of the vestry include its primary responsibility of taking care of finances and buildings and choosing individuals to fill positions of parish leadership. A good vestry will go further by: working with the rector or priest in charge and the congregation to envision the future and to articulate a mission; engaging the congregation to understand and commit to that mission; marshaling the resources necessary to make it a reality; and then annually assessing progress toward fulfillment of the mission.

Who is responsible for what?

by Leonard Freeman

John Coburn, former bishop of Massachusetts and former president of the House of Deputies, once remarked that he liked to keep the canons of the church “behind” him for support but “not in front” of him as an impediment. That same kind of understanding is necessary for an effective relationship between vestry members and rectors. Working together to provide healthy parish leadership, specific canonical responsibilities are as follows:

- + Use and control of all buildings and furnishings
- + Education of all ages in the scriptures...and in the exercise of their ministry as baptized persons;
- + Stewardship education for all ages;
- + Preparation for baptism, confirmation, reception and reaffirmation;
- + Announcing the bishop's visit with the



Confirm that your parish insurance policies are current and up to date. Make sure that coverage includes the directors and officers of the parish (that would be the vestry) so that you are covered in case of any lawsuit, which is rare, but does happen. Participate in Safe Church training with your diocese.

The vestry's role:

- + To be agents and legal representatives of the parish in all matters concerning corporate properties; and the relations of the parish to its clergy;
- + To ensure that standard business methods, as outlined in Title I, Canon 14, Section 2, will be observed;
- + When a parish is without a rector, to see that worship continues and to call a new rector;
- + To nominate persons for holy orders and other offices as appropriate.

The rector's role:

- + Worship and spiritual life;
- + Selection and oversight of assisting clergy;

warden and vestry, and providing information about the congregation's spiritual and temporal state;

- + Applying “open plate” offerings from one Eucharist a month to charitable use;
- + Reading communications from the House of Bishops at worship;
- + Recording baptisms, marriages, confirmations and burials in the parish register.

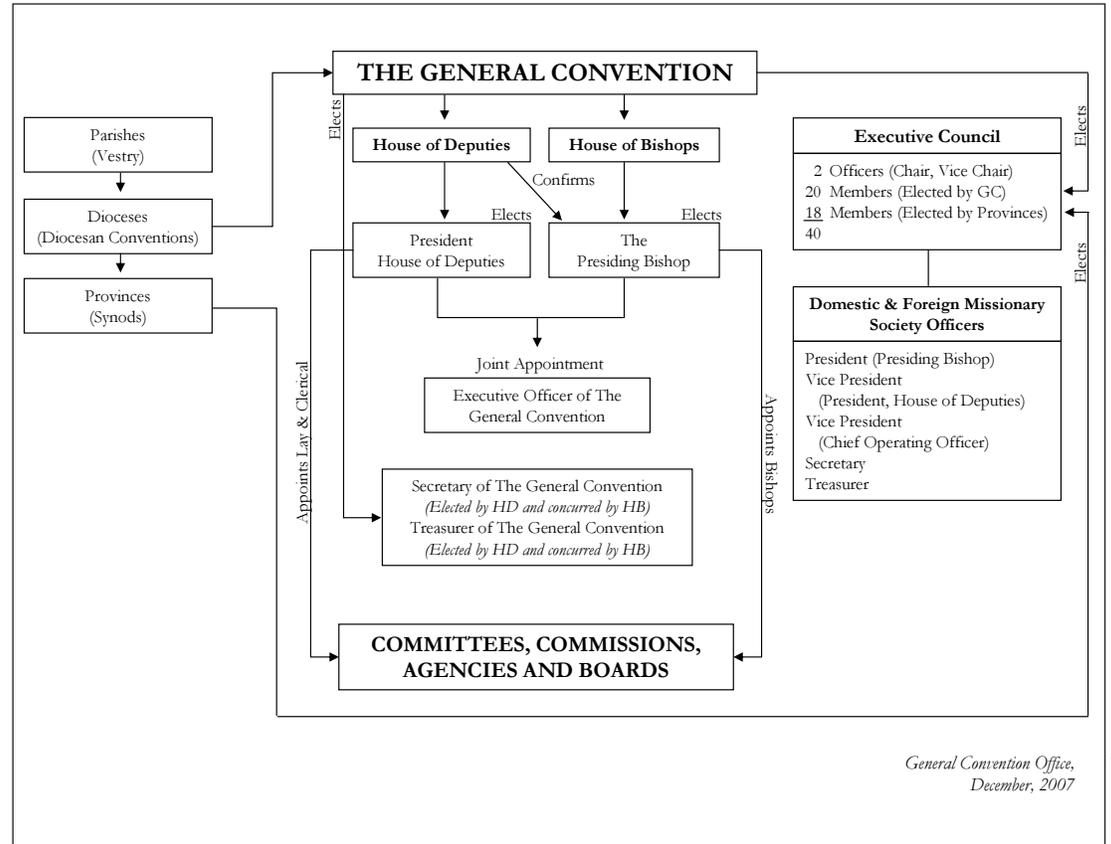
Looking at the two canonical lists, one would think that vestries don't have much to do with parish program, but that would be a misreading, for no one person can do all the

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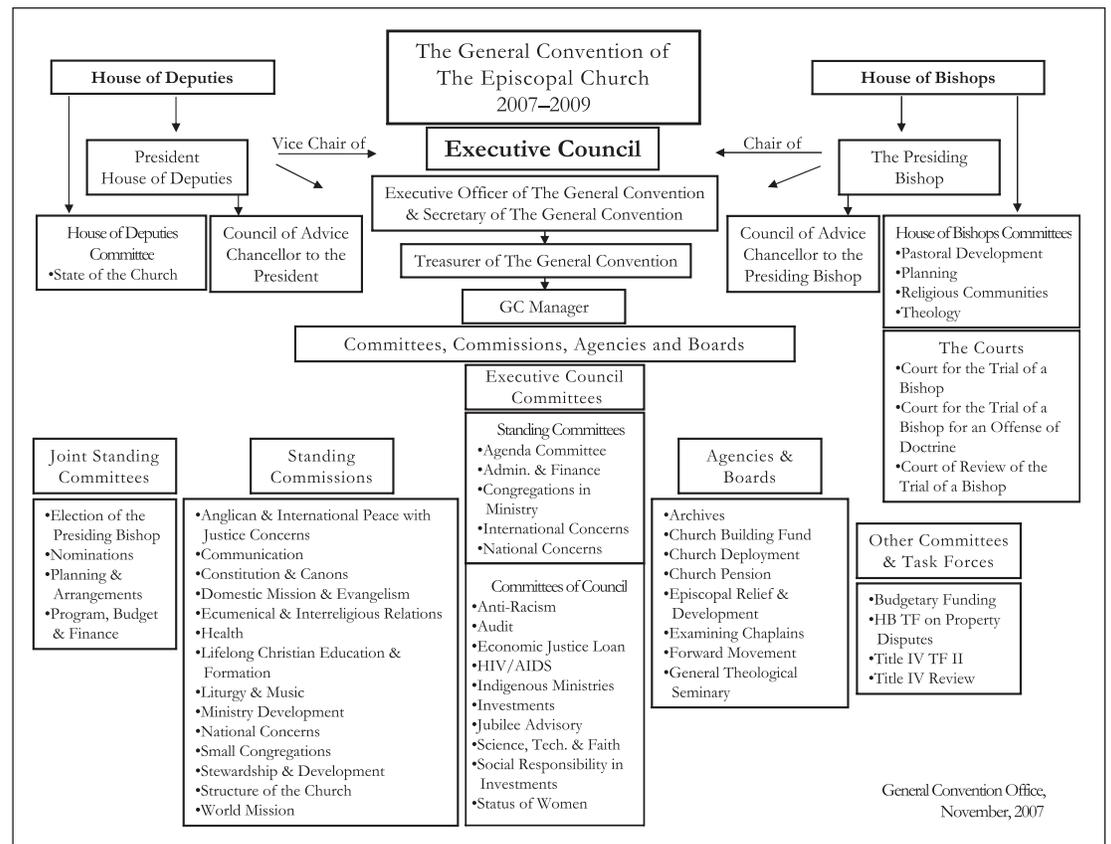
The canonical structure of the church

Keep these documents in a notebook for new vestry members to review: mission statement; rector's letter of agreement; parish history and by-laws; community demographics (see page 7); minutes of recent meetings; recent resolutions; parochial reports for last five years; diocesan mission plan.



The Episcopal Church Annual, 2007. Reprinted with permission from Morehouse Publishing.

Many groups make up the structure of the Episcopal Church – but it all starts with the vestry. See left, top.



Vestry service: light over darkness

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- + Be aware of your own expectations for clergy persons. And be aware of when expectations are clouding decisions.
 - + Know what kind of time and energy you have to commit and check periodically to see if you are over-extended.
 - + Encourage differing opinions in the conversations but be careful about taking these differing opinions personally.
 - + Participate in fellowship activities as much as possible. This builds working relationships. You might even offer to host a social gathering of the vestry and spouses. Have fun together.
 - + Don't hesitate to ask questions and for clarification.
 - + Don't hesitate to ask the vestry to table a discussion in order to give people more time to think about the issue.
- + Be willing to be held accountable and to gently hold others accountable.
 - + Recognize and be patient with the synergistic aspect of organizations. Often direction emerges from dialogue and from hearing all the voices. The ideas that emerge from the group are usually greater than what any one person can propose. This process takes time — more time than a “yes/no” vote, but the community building aspect of dialogue is worth the time. Taking the time allows the Spirit to have voice.

A retired teacher, Ellen Bruckner is on the vestry at Christ Episcopal Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and is the coordinator for Province VI.

Who is responsible for what?

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things on the “rector” list. And so, functionally, in most congregations the rector and vestry will operate as a partnership, with committees assisting a rector in determining direction and carrying out the work of stewardship, education, worship, confirmations, building usage, and charitable giving, etc.

It is good to know that a rector is not overstepping his/her bounds when making an executive decision, for canonically he/she is the responsible party for most program

areas. But he/she will need, and count on, the help given by vestry members to make it all happen.

Leonard Freeman is the rector of St. Martin's-by-the-Lake in Minnetonka Beach, Minnesota. Canonical summary reprinted from The Vestry Resource Guide with permission from The Episcopal Church Foundation.



Short facts: There are some 7,200 Episcopal parishes and missions in the Episcopal Church, some 2.2 million baptized members, and some 300,000 church school students. About 17,000 clergy are on the rolls. Episcopalians are also members of the worldwide Anglican Communion, which numbers about 70 million members.

Find out the demographics for the community that surrounds your congregation and view the summary of your parochial reports at: www.episcopalchurch.org/growth.htm (Click on “Studying Your Congregation and Community”).



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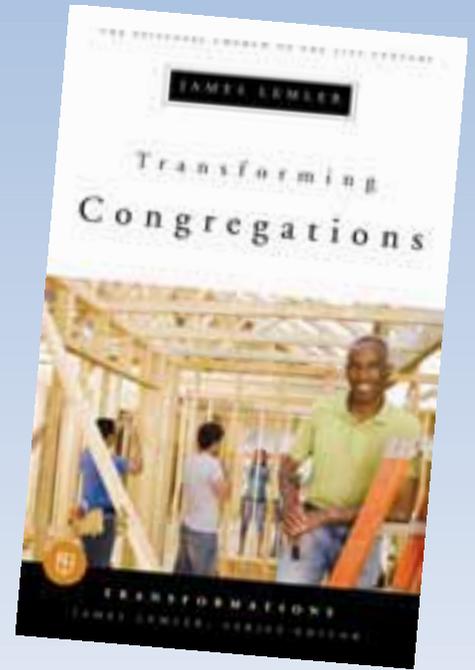
Reader's Corner

Transformation: The Episcopal Church of the 21st Century

A new series of nine books designed to invigorate ministry and provide a roadmap for direction in these changing times.

Three books are out: *Transforming Congregations* by James Lemler (series editor), *Transforming Vocation* by Sam Portaro and *Transforming Evangelism* by David Gortner. Coming soon are additional books on congregational life, worship, preaching, Christian formation and stewardship, and the Bible.

Church Publishing



Why Choose the Episcopal Church?

Bishop John Krumm details his discovery of the Episcopal Church as his spiritual home. Covering everything from rite and ceremony, to doctrine and discipline, to organization and outreach, this personal testament of faith tells what a blessing it is to be an Episcopalian.

Forward Movement

Other good picks

Vestry Handbook – Revised Edition

This updated classic includes sample job descriptions, new material on the spiritual life of vestry members, new canons approved in 2000, additional information on dealing with sexual abuse in the parish, managing conflict, and handling money. Christopher L. Webber

Morehouse Publishing

Doing Holy Business: The Best of Vestry Papers

Read some fifty articles on different aspects of vestry and parish life written by leading authors in the Episcopal Church. Explore money, God and vestries. Mediate on the spiritual leadership of clergy and laity. Learn about roles and responsibilities. Investigate leadership in times of crisis. Edited by Lindsay Hardin Freeman

Church Publishing

The Vestry Resource Guide

Designed for first-time vestry members, this eighty-page manual explores the ministry of the vestry, what it means to serve, possible conflicts, stewardship, clergy leadership and prayer. Includes discussion questions and Bible study. The Episcopal Church Foundation

Forward Movement

