

VESTRY PAPERS



January/ February 2009

To inspire, affirm and inform Episcopal leaders in their work

You're a new warden: Now what?

by Donald Romanik

So you've just been elected a warden in your parish. You may be thinking: What now? How does this differ from being a member of the vestry? What is the difference between a senior and junior warden? What is my relationship supposed to be with the rector? What are the expectations of the parishioners? Why did I ever agree to do this?

These are all good questions. As someone who has served as senior warden (or the functional equivalent) in both a family size parish and in a program size cathedral, and in both situations during times of clergy transition, I offer these suggestions on how you exercise this important ministry in the life of your congregation:

First, the role of a warden differs from parish to parish, depending on the traditions and culture of the congregation, the personality, and leadership style of the rector and the needs of the community at a particular time.

The canons of the Episcopal Church say very little about wardens other than their responsibility to ensure that worship services are continued in the absence or disability of the rector or parish priest. The term itself

dates back to seventeenth century England because of the individual's responsibility to unlock the church doors for worship and other events. The distinction between "senior" and "junior" warden or "rector's warden" and "people's warden" depends on the diocese, the parish and even geographical or regional customs and practice.

An open and trusting relationship

Putting canons and customs aside, the primary role of the warden is to serve as the lay partner of the rector or priest-in-charge in articulating the mission and vision of the parish, managing its day-to-day operations, identifying and nurturing leaders, and empowering members of the congregation to live out the Gospel in their daily lives. The role requires an open, honest and trusting relationship between warden and rector — and it is virtually impossible to fulfill if these key elements are missing or impaired.

The warden does not always need to agree with or "rubber stamp" the opinions or decisions of the rector, but major issues of disagreement need to be discussed and

continued on page 4

*This Issue:
The ministry of wardens
Circulation 24,500*

In old England, wardens were responsible for unlocking the church door so that services could take place. Today wardens still hold keys, whether they know it or not. Many a good warden has enlivened and strengthened a church; a few poor ones have created divisions that may remain for generations. This issue explores the special ministry of those privileged to hold the office of warden.



photo credit: Brian Winter

Vestry retreat at St. Chad's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

*Inside:
Five best traits of wardens*



The votes are in!

WHAT MAKES A GOOD WARDEN?

By Lindsay Hardin Freeman

Vestry Papers thanks rectors from the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes for their participation in this informal survey. We asked two questions from rectors of Consortium congregations: What are five best traits in a warden? What would you like your warden(s) to know, but that is hard to articulate face-to-face?

Five best traits:

- A generalist in church experience
- Supportive of rector in professional role
- Supportive of rector in his/her personal journey
- Collaborate in decision making
- Able to develop a friendship with rector

Would like warden to know:

I have been able to articulate this usually: I am a complete human being who is called to be an ordained minister. I have certainties and insecurities; strengths and weaknesses; generousities and pettinesses; openness and narrowness; wins and losses. All these and much more make me a whole person. I know you will treat me as such.

Leslie Smith, Interim Rector of Christ Church, Short Hills, New Jersey



Five best traits:

- Warden is a recognized leader in the parish.
- Warden is a supporter of rector and parish vision for mission.
- Warden has been caught at prayer and identifies self as having a spiritual life (at whatever stage of development).
- Warden can stand up and address the congregation with confidence.
- Warden is fun to be with.

Would like warden to know:

That wardens have a special ministry — which I trust — to correct, challenge, encourage, and/or redirect me at any time.

Ted Copland, Rector, St. Boniface, Sarasota, Florida

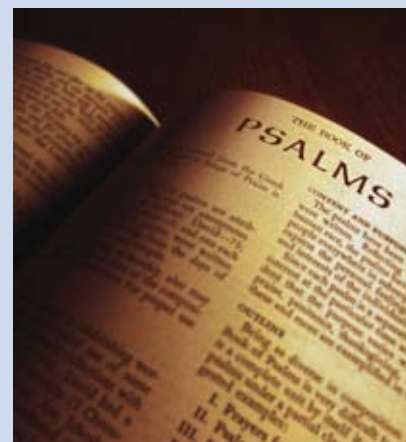


Five best traits:

- Loves God.
- Loves the church.
- Loves me.
- Is well-organized.
- Isn't afraid to work harder than he or she ever thought they'd have to work.

Would like warden to know: I will never complain, but I work a whole lot harder and am stretched a whole lot farther than you have any idea.

Anonymous



Note how St. Paul defines the responsibility of being a leader: diligence. "We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."

Romans 12:8

WHAT MAKES A GOOD WARDEN?

Five best traits:

- Honesty
- Accountability
- Hope
- Faith
- Courage

Would like warden to know:

I told my wardens at our biweekly meeting this week the one thing I've needed to share most with them — which is my greatest fear for my own ministry at St. Martin's — and that is not being able to unlock the enormous potential of this parish. We have some disconnect between the energy, passion and love for this community and our ability to meet strategic goals.

There are some circumstantial things that have contributed to that disconnect, but there are also questions about the whole congregational system and my role within that system. It ended up being a really constructive and forward looking conversation as we make plans for 2009.

I've generally been blessed with excellent wardens — and St. Martin's in Providence is the best of a good bunch. In my three years here, I've found them to be consistently constructive, supportive, challenging when necessary, loving and generous.

Clare Fischer-Davies, Rector, St. Martin's, Providence Rhode Island



"Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire."

*G.K. Chesterton
(1874 - 1936)*

Five best traits:

- Love of God and neighbor — an exemplary Christian life and regular church attendance.
- Committed to working in partnership with the rector — honest and open, but non-adversarial.
- Takes initiative to make things happen and is available for regular meetings, sometimes on short notice.
- Unflappable — not reactionary when difficult things arise — a "non-anxious presence."
- Good sense of humor and likes having fun! AND (you didn't ask, but I'll volunteer anyway)

Five worst traits:

- Uses role to lord it over others — loves too much the "insider" status the role gives them.
- Likes to micromanage, does not have clear role boundaries.
- Unavailable to rector or staff.
- Takes no initiative to get things done — has poor organizational skills.
- Poor at conflict management, is adversarial with rector or others

Would like warden to know:

How much I appreciate it when they think I've done a great job. Also (and I do try to articulate this as often as possible) how much I absolutely love the fact that they are so available and willing to roll up their sleeves and be involved, that they take initiative to make things happen, even though they are both otherwise very busy, responsible people. I'm blessed to have two of the best wardens ever right now, so you asked me at a good time. I might have had different answers under other circumstances.

Jeff Gill, Rector, Christ Church, Andover, Massachusetts





If two or three years on a vestry seems like a long time, consider yourself lucky. In colonial Virginia, men (there were no women elected then) were elected to lifetime terms.

You're a new warden: Now what?

continued from page 1

resolved privately — and not during vestry meetings or in front of the congregation as a whole. An openly contentious relationship between the warden and the rector is unhealthy, unchristian, and can destroy or at least permanently damage the mission and vitality of a congregation.

If difference or disagreements are irreconcilable, one of the parties to this key partnership needs to resign, which usually means the warden needs to move on. Obviously, if the rector is engaging in illegal, immoral or inappropriate conduct, the situation is different; the warden has a responsibility to address these issues immediately with the bishop.

Provide the “glue”

In some situations, wardens serve as liaisons or primary contacts between the vestry and members of the congregation. While this role can be appropriate and necessary, wardens should avoid creating or nurturing triangulation and encourage individual members to have direct conversations with vestry members or other parish leaders with whom they have questions or concerns. Except in cases of misconduct, a warden must always encourage a parishioner to speak directly with the rector when there are issues of disagreement or concern.

The role of the warden is especially critical during times of clergy transition from the time the current rector announces his/her departure to the six to twelve month period after the new rector arrives. While the bishop's office and professional interim clergy are essential in ensuring a smooth transition, the warden often provides the continuity in leadership and the “glue” that keeps the congregation focused during a very challenging and emotional time.

An open mind and sincere heart

Serving as warden of two Episcopal parishes was an incredibly rich and rewarding time in my spiritual and faith journey and helped me nurture and develop leadership and “people” skills that have been invaluable in my life, career and ministry. If you are called to serve in this important but somewhat confusing role, my best advice is to approach it with an open mind, a sincere heart and a willingness to be shaped and directed by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Donald Romanik is president of the Episcopal Church Foundation.

RX for wardens: good relationships

The only specific duty assigned to “church-wardens” in the national canons is to notify the bishop “when a parish is without a rector,” and even this duty may be carried out by “other proper officers” (III,17, Sec.1). Usually one of the wardens will preside in the absence of the rector, and some states and dioceses specifically provide for this. If the rector is disabled or resigns, this can, of course, become a very significant responsibility.

But, for the most part, the wardens' leadership will be more a matter of

tradition and chemistry. The relationships the wardens establish can bring the opportunity to exercise enormous influence. The clergy will turn to them for support and guidance; parishioners will turn to them for leadership; all will look to them as enablers and communicators whose gifts and commitment will make things happen and bring the parish together in support of common goals.

Christopher L. Webber, *The Vestry Handbook*, revised edition, 2000, reprinted with permission.

Let's hear it from the other side

by Jay Nord

Question: What are five best traits for a rector to have?

How about: inspirational, organized, a great multi-tasker, outstanding people skills, and a good delegator? And underscore that with humility.

My selfish side would like a rector that solves every problem before it gets to me, and makes me look good with very little effort on my part. I would like a rector who is good at everything, all the time, inspirational from the pulpit, infinitely patient in every circumstance, jovial at all times, and loved by all at all times. And oh, did I mention that he should be technologically savvy so he can rocket our parish into the 21st century, while being a financial wizard who can always make the budget balance?

I am a self-employed entrepreneur who prides himself at being the ultimate generalist — I am pretty decent at just about everything I need to do, but not really great at anything. A rector needs to be a good

on Sunday, are perhaps more difficult, and often more critical to the long-term health of the parish.

With this in mind, I will start my wish list with Sunday services and work from there, and I will try to keep it obtainable, lest we get confused and start to think we are building the Bionic Rector:

1) Inspirational: Clearly, producing a Sunday service that moves and inspires the congregation is a great place to start. You do not want your rector to be a dud from the pulpit, and if I understand my fellow Episcopalians, I believe we all appreciate a good show on Sunday. The rector has to be able to deliver a good and consistent product on Sunday. This is job #1.

2) Organized: By this, I mean organized enough to be effective. I am a project manager by trade, and I have met two types of effective project managers — those with a meticulous desk, and those with desks that might qualify for Federal disaster relief.



The Rev. Stephanie Spellers (left) leads worship with Kendra McLaughlin and Manikka Bowman for The Crossing at St. Paul's Cathedral in Boston, Massachusetts.

generalist, too. My rector often says that "if it was just the Sunday morning stuff, my job would be easy." The rest of the week in parish life, the things that lay the groundwork for a great worship experience

So when I say organized, I am talking more about the results than the method. It is important that in the attempt to stay organized that one does not become a

continued on page 6



"Warden" means "steward" or "guardian", and wardens are the chief stewards and servants of their congregations.



Depending on local or diocesan customs, some parishes have senior and junior wardens; others, such as the Diocese of Pennsylvania, have a rector's warden and a people's warden. In the latter, a rector appoints one warden and the congregation elects one as well, thereby upholding a tradition of balance.

Let's hear it from the other side

continued from page 5

control freak. The rector needs to be a good conductor of the orchestra and avoid the role of the one-man vaudeville band.

3) A good multi-tasker: the rector, like the business entrepreneur, has to be the consummate juggler. The key to successful juggling is to be selective about how many balls you attempt to keep in the air at one time. Another key is to always keep priorities in mind when managing personal and parish time, talent, and treasure. Avoiding perfectionism is critical — the rector's job can be all consuming and then some. Sometimes you need to lower the bar. We have borrowed a phrase from business

spiritual work in progress, and allows himself to be accessible, personable, yet still in charge, he has done all he can.

5) A good delegator: this ties in with organization, multi-tasking, and people skills. To move the community forward, the rector must motivate and empower people to move their own missions, and the mission of the community, forward. Letting people run with their own ideas, so long as they check in and get proper sign-off, is critical.

The one trait I would like to infuse all these other attributes with is the key to having it all come together — Humility. From this most basic (and most difficult) spiritual trait



Lysander Puccio (right), Warden, discusses property issues with vestry member Elizabeth Mellon at St. Mary's Manhattanville in New York City.

that we use a lot in our vestry meetings to keep us on track: "Good enough, proceed on."

4) Outstanding people skills: the rector needs to be a peacemaker, leader, motivator, spiritual guide, communicator, counselor, and negotiator, while possessing patience, wisdom, and perspective. The biggest trap is becoming a people pleaser. No one is going to be perfect at this. At the end of the day, if the rector has been a good example of a

will naturally flow many of the other traits needed to lead a spiritual community. From humility will flow the basic message a community needs to hear from the rector — "I am not in charge. God is. All is well. Rejoice."

Jay Nord is the senior warden of St. Martin's by-the-Lake Church in Minnetonka Beach, Minnesota.

Wardens: chief stewards and servants

“Warden” means “steward” or “guardian,” and wardens are the chief stewards and servants of their congregations. Wardens have a special and public ministry, and must lead by example as faithful churchgoers and visible donors of time, talent and treasure. They must be willing to listen, able to delegate, and, above all, able to engender trust in relationships with the rector and the congregation.

Wardens and rector form a leadership team that shares responsibility for parish governance.

National church and diocesan canons and parish bylaws govern the roles of clergy, wardens and vestries, but do not provide detailed requirements. What wardens actually do can vary from one congregation to another, from one set of circumstances to another, and even from one individual to

another. This flexibility allows a rector and a vestry to adapt to the differing gifts that successive wardens bring to their ministries.

Wardens have four types of responsibilities:

- legal responsibilities with regard to property and contracts
- fiduciary responsibilities
- responsibilities to the congregation
- responsibilities to the rector (and other clergy)

Above all, successful ministry as a warden depends on keeping oneself spiritually and physically whole. Wardens need to take time to nourish themselves and call upon the talents of other members of the congregation to get things done. While challenges may stretch the patience and tax the time and spirit of a warden, this ministry should be one of fulfillment and gratification.

Reprinted with permission from the Diocese of Washington.



For more on vestry leadership, [The Vestry Resource Guide](#) offers handy, how-to advice on your responsibilities.

To learn more visit www.ForwardMovement.org or call Forward Movement Publications at 800-543-1813.





ECF's Mission

To strengthen the leadership and financial capabilities of Episcopal congregations, dioceses and related organizations to pursue their mission and ministry.



President

Donald V. Romanik

Senior Program Director

Anne Ditzler

Editor

The Rev. Lindsay Hardin Freeman
VestryPapers@EpiscopalFoundation.org

Editorial Associate

Kelly Mistick

Director of Marketing

Rebecca McDonald

Design/Production

Monarch Communications

Subscriptions

\$40 annually. Mailed in packages of 15 copies per issue. \$30 annually for electronic version. Published in January, March, May, July, September and November.

Episcopal Church Foundation
815 Second Avenue
New York, NY 10017

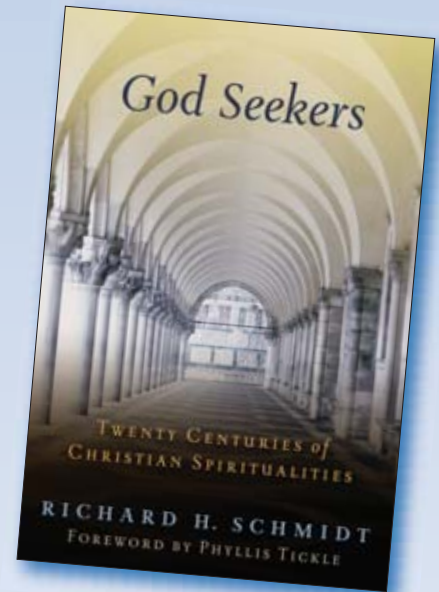
Call (800) 697-2858
or subscribe online at
www.EpiscopalFoundation.org

Reader's Corner

God Seekers: Twenty Centuries of Christian Spiritualities

There ARE ways to become more knowledgeable in the faith, and reading this book by Richard H. Schmidt would be one. Learn about such figures as Irenaeus, Patrick, Martin Luther and Dorothy Day, along with their place in history. All told, the contributions of some thirty-three key individuals are explored through capsule biographies, select quotations and questions for reflection. Great periods of spiritual discernment come to life; and the reader, Anglican or otherwise, will be both renewed and deepened upon finishing the book.

Wm. B. Eerdmans
www.eerdmans.com



Other Good Picks

Vestries in the Episcopal Church

Uncomplicated and readable, this 24-page booklet by Robert R. Hansel is a helpful tool (and good gift) for vestry members. It explains in a straightforward manner not only the job of vestries, but the special partnership needed between rector and vestry members. The book points out that vestries routinely find help from their rectors, dioceses, publications and other resources. To his credit, Hansel finishes by saying, "But chiefly help will come through a prayerful day-by-day commitment to Jesus Christ. It is he whom we are all called to serve. All else is merely a matter of means."

Forward Movement
www.forwardmovement.org

The Calling of Vestry as Servants of the People of God

An informative little 8-page booklet that presents a new way of calling vestries, rather than using the vestry search committee or drawing straws. Author Heyward H. Macdonald presents a process that encourages parishioners to attend a "Vestry Ministry Exploration Workshop," consisting of Bible study on Romans 12, a dialogue on personal spiritual gifts, a presentation on vestry life and work, and a panel of current and former vestry members. Participants then choose whether they would like to apply for vestry service and are ratified, or not, at the annual meeting. Everyone is steered into a job within a month or so, whether it be on the vestry or in another important capacity.

Forward Movement
www.forwardmovement.org

EDITOR'S NOTE:

I am particularly grateful for the contributions of several people during the preparation of this issue: Sally Johnson from the Church Pension Group; author Christopher Webber; and Cynthia Cannon of the Consortium of Endowed Parishes.

The Rev. Lindsay Hardin Freeman