

## **A Year in the Life of a Vestry**

By Martha Goodwill, Diocese of Southwest Florida

The vestry is given many opportunities to take a vital role in the financial health of the church which can lead to greater opportunities for mission and ministry. When your financial house is in order, hearts and minds are free to vision what God holds in store for the church and its people.

First, let us review the annual requirements which have the vestry looking back at the previous year's accomplishments and challenges:

### 1. Parochial Reports –

*“Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work...” Titus 3:1*

The Parochial Report is a tool for the collection of data that is intended to assist the wider Church in understanding itself and planning for mission.

Annual Parochial Reports are completed for each calendar year and include congregational statistics and financial information. This report must be filed online with The Episcopal Church. The originals with signatures are then mailed to the diocese no later than March 1<sup>st</sup> of each year.

Diocesan staff holds an annual workshop to review the process and give hands-on assistance to those preparing the Parochial Report. This year's workshop is on February 4, 2014.

### 2. Audits –

*“A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but an accurate weight is his delight.” Proverbs 11:1*

Annual audits of the church's financial records are due to the diocese by September 1<sup>st</sup> of each year. But, planning ahead can have this annual task completed well early of the required deadline. An audit can be completed by a church committee made up of parishioners or by an outside auditing firm. In either case, a review of the church's internal controls is paramount.

Whether a church has a full-time paid staff or all volunteers, life in a church office can sometimes feel transient. New finance committee members, vestry members, volunteers, ushers and even staff members can come and go, and not know exactly what is expected of them.

Administration of church finances is a sacred trust. It is very important for the vestry and Rector to establish a strong system of internal control because they have the responsibility for overall stewardship of the church. Every church should have a Policies and Procedures manual that will help train new staff, volunteers, finance committee members, and clergy on what is expected of them to maintain the integrity of the church, and the trust of the congregation.

The diocese has a sample Policies and Procedures manual which churches may use in drafting policies and procedures unique to each church. The diocese also offers Audit Procedures which are to be used for committee audits. If the Audit Procedures are completed in detail then they can be used as a tool for drafting the church's Policies and Procedures manual. Also, diocesan staff holds an annual workshop to review the Audit Procedures for committee audits. This year's workshop is on April 1, 2014.

Now, we can review the annual requirements which give the vestry the opportunity to vision what the next year can hold:

### 3. Stewardship –

*"You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion ..." 2  
Corinthians 9:11*

Stewardship is a spiritual commitment to giving of our time, talent and treasure, and it is based on our belief that we give because we receive. All that we have comes from God and for this we thank God in many ways.

Churches use the term "stewardship campaign" to describe the annual effort to collect pledges of financial support from parishioners to support the operating budget for the coming year. Pledging gives the church a chance to assess priorities in a planned and thoughtful way and is an indispensable tool in the vestry's creation of the annual budget.

Planning for the stewardship campaign should be done in late summer to early fall of each year. The diocesan resource for stewardship is The Rev. Canon Chris Gray. Rev. Gray can offer a variety of resources to the vestry in planning for a stewardship campaign.

### 4. Budgeting

*"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" Luke 14:28*

For a church to be successful in managing its financial resources, budgets are an absolute necessity. Budgets are a control mechanism. But, more than that, they are a planning tool and an operational guide to help each church achieve its short- and long-range objectives. Vestries should view the budget as an opportunity to establish church goals and a tool in visioning new missions or ministries.

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Diocesan staff holds an annual workshop to aid vestries and rectors with budgeting. This year's workshop is on November 4, 2014.

The diocesan staff will offer the annual vestry retreat on May 10, 2014. Throughout the year, the staff is available to help with any questions or concerns a vestry may have. Please call or email us anytime.

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