Among the many roles for the laity in the Episcopal Church, being a warden is one of the more challenging and yet potentially the most rewarding. In writing this monograph I hope to share with you some of the opinions I have formed and conclusions I have reached from many years of service on my parish’s vestry and other not-for-profit boards. Also mixed in are insights I have gained from reading and from discussions with clergy and vestry members of various congregations in this diocese and beyond. It is not meant to be a basic primer. So, I have sought to avoid material that can easily be found in the typical book for vestry members. My observations here are what I most want to share with wardens in the great hope that what is said will help them to be more effective leaders of their congregation.

If the sole matter to be discussed were the legal requirements of wardens, the topic could be dispensed with very briefly because there are only two stated requirements in canon law. These are (i) to notify the bishop when the rectorship becomes vacant and (ii) to be in charge of the parish when the rector’s position is vacant or when the rector becomes incapacitated. It should also be noted that the warden holds the authority even when a congregation has a priest-in-charge. The Religious Corporations Law has only one role for wardens. At least one warden must be present at a vestry meeting if the rector is not in attendance. In the absence of the rector, a warden chairs each vestry meeting and the annual parish meeting.

It is surprising to everyone that such an important position could carry so modest a set of requirements. Realistically, however, wardens will want to do much more. When they do so, they can greatly strengthen their congregation. Then they can finish their term in office feeling that they have served God in an important way, made a valuable contribution to their congregation, and that the time in office was richly rewarding.

Note: Throughout my comments I use certain words in a generic sense for simplicity. For instance, congregation would denote either a parish or a mission. Vestry means the governing board of any congregation. Rector also includes an interim, an interim pastor, a priest-in-charge, and a vicar.

What It Means to Be a Warden

Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary defines wardens as people who guard or have charge of something; they are custodians, head keepers, or watchmen. They have a very special role both from an organizational perspective and as to what can be achieved through leadership. More about that in a moment.

During your service as warden, I ask you to keep several concepts in the forefront of your thinking.
• You were called to serve the Church as well as your congregation. As your rector is called, so too are you (and your vestry colleagues.) Accordingly, there is a spiritual component to your position. Be sure that decisions and actions that you and the vestry take are in the best interests of both the Church and your congregation’s ministry. There is no place on the vestry for anyone’s personal agenda.

• Even though the Episcopal Church uses an archaic word to describe your position, you are, in fact, a trustee. Consequently, you are a fiduciary. That responsibility is described in both state laws (Religious Corporations Law and Not-for-Profit Corporations Law) and in the canons. You hold and manage the material assets of your congregation. You also are accountable to others beyond your congregation—among them, the Attorney General—for the prudent management of those assets. Prudent is the key and provocative word.

• You also are a steward. Although Webster’s reveals that "steward" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word sty ward: the keeper of the sty, I hope that you will view the word in a more profound way. While "trusteeship" has a legal connotation, it is my belief that "stewardship" focuses on the moral and ethical aspects of trusteeship. Ask yourself regularly, “If I had to face my successors, could I say to them that I was a good steward during my time in office?” A steward holds the temporal assets in trust for current and—equally important but often overlooked—for future generations.

• You are first among equals on the vestry. It is incumbent upon you to lead and to provide vision (not all of it but certainly a good portion.) A vestry member is just one of many. It is all too easy for any or all of them to let slip those roles. You, as a warden, are only one of two. Moreover, you have a special title, one that causes you stand out! Wardens cannot and must not avoid their responsibilities. Because you do stand out and are first among equals, you ought to perform another role. You, uniquely, can facilitate or synthesize solutions at critical times. When there are differing or divergent opinions on the vestry, you should seek a practical alternative and, if possible, consensus.

More than any other person on the vestry, it falls on you to keep the “big picture” in focus. You should address today’s actions in the context of long-term solutions. You, especially, ought to be measuring deliberations, plans, and actions with a broad perspective, asking, “What are the implications for tomorrow as well as today?”

Finally, I would like to remind you that, while the wardens and rector must work closely and, I fervently pray, in harmony, each plays an important role in congregational governance. Sometimes, because of differing perspectives and responsibilities, each may reach differing conclusions. As a result, even if you are called the Rector’s Warden, you ought not act as the rector’s rubber stamp. That does not mean that you have to be in conflict. It does, however, mean that, if your views differ with the rector’s, you should speak up, but do so in private. Nothing is gained, and a lot is lost, by the appearance of friction, whether real or imagined.
Your Relationship With the Rector

As I move on to several specific topics, first I have some additional comments about your responsibilities to the rector.

Let me begin with the observation\(^1\) that in the early church our baptism was seen as a union with Christ. Everyone was a minister, and only later did the Church require full-time professional priests. As time elapsed, the laity turned over to its ordained clergy responsibility for running the vastly expanded Church. The laity became “followers of Christ,” in accordance with codes developed by the clergy. The evolution of clericalism peaked when the laity became expected to “show-up, pay-up, and shut-up.” The recent refocusing on the Baptismal Covenant has returned the Episcopal Church to its theological roots. Thus, the relationship between clergy and laity has come full circle. We currently are working our way through the practical implications that all are ministers. Now we are struggling with the need to create a renewed, practical understanding of the roles for the ordained and the laity.

As the Rt. Rev. Richard F. Grein, Bishop of New York (ret), has pointed out, “[C]lergy are part of a total ministry of the people of God; they are to prepare the baptized for mission…Clergy are called to service on behalf of the baptized, and the people of God are called to ministries of service in the world.”\(^2\) That process, unquestionably, has created stress for a portion of the clergy as well as for some of the laity. Not surprisingly, both groups are finding it difficult to make the transition.

Here are some other thoughts—ones more closely linked to the specific relationship between the rector and the wardens.

Well-being

You must have a commitment to help your rector in his or her ministry. Yours is a very special partnership with your rector, which others on the vestry cannot have. He or she needs wise counsel and reinforcement in areas where his or her skills may need support. You should nurture a close and constructive working relationship, with rapport based on understanding, respect, and trust. Look on your role as supportive, not reforming. Your rector deserves support and sustenance, not lectures or directives.

Do your vestry and rector have a shared and mutually arrived at understanding of expectations of each other? If not, confusion is the certain consequence, and virtually everyone will become unhappy. Rectors cannot and should not be expected to achieve more than is possible. Vestries often make excessive and unreasonable demands, and rectors generally are poorly prepared to deal with those impossible situations. All too often frustration, anger, disappointment, burnout, or other problems ensue.

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\(^1\) A number of the thoughts that follow are taken from a presentation that was given by Juli Towel and the Rev. James G. Callaway, Jr. in a workshop at the 1996 annual conference of the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes.

The Cornerstone Project has published a booklet that ought to be required reading by all wardens. Its title is *Involuntary Termination of Clergy Within the Episcopal Church*. This important document addresses issues of substantive conflict with the rector where the relationship had to be dissolved. You should understand the factors that so often lead up to such a crisis and be able to identify at an early stage the telltale warning signs. Sometimes the problem comes from the rector, but it can arise just as easily from the vestry or the congregation. Whichever the source, perceptiveness by the wardens might allow for the problem to be defused through discussion or outside mediation. If that is not sufficient, you need to know how to address the damage to both the congregation and the lay leadership. In these situations, the healing process generally takes a long time.\(^3\) Usually it will significantly impact the effectiveness of both the interim priest and the rector who follows. The Summer 2006 issue of Congregations, published by Alban Institute, devotes its whole issue to congregational conflict.

Wardens also need to be alert to “clergy burnout.” It is an increasingly prevalent experience, which arises for a number of reasons, some relating to the congregation, others caused by the rector’s personal life. Whatever the source, though, it cannot fail to affect the congregation. The longer it goes unattended the worse it becomes for everyone. Although the number of causes is vast, two in particular are discussed below. One is the financial stress caused by low compensation. The second is excessively long rectorships. Another is summarized in the headline to an article in *The Living Church*, “Clergy Carry the Burden of Trying to Do It All.” In this latter case, the vestry itself, perhaps unknowingly, has created the stress. Both you and your fellow warden must be alert to the indications of burnout and must discuss the problem with your rector. Seeking outside help for him or her is an appropriate and compassionate solution. One thing, however, is certain. The problem won’t disappear by itself. The longer it takes to address the matter, the more substantive will be the damage.

*Partnership*

At the beginning of this section, I noted that, as an outgrowth of our understanding of the Baptismal Covenant, thinking about the relationship between rector and laity has changed substantially. Seen through the altered perspective, the rector is no longer located at the top of the congregational pyramid, while the laity makes up the lower region. Instead, it might be illuminating to view the rector as being at the center of a congregational sphere, with his leadership radiating out to the congregants, who comprise a substantial part of the orb.

From *The Book of Common Prayer* (page 855):

\[
Q. \text{ Who are the ministers of the Church?} \\
A. \text{ The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests and deacons.}
\]

\(^3\) For those in the midst of such a situation, I recommend reading the Summer 2006 issue of *Congregations*, published by Alban Institute, which looks at congregational conflict from many perspectives.
Inasmuch as all people are ministers, the rector should be identified as being within the community of ministers not above or outside the community. I, consequently, like to view the rector as one who enables and empowers. Considered in that light, both the rector and laity form a partnership in the ministry of the congregation. Each brings equally significant but different strengths. These thoughts vividly portray the essence of a partnership. Viewed in that light, vestries have much to think about—not only in the way they work with their rector but also in the calling process and in the way they treat him or her.

There are encumbrances, however, to a smooth transition. One is that many vestry members view the rector as being hired (and presumably fired at the pleasure of the vestry.) Moreover, since the rector in that line of thinking has been “hired,” it presumably follows that the rector takes orders from his or her “employer.” That line of thinking is a formula for disaster, notwithstanding that it is all too prevalent. It also is a deeply flawed premise.

Other more benign forces exist to undermine the partnership relationship. An article in Congregations, a publication of the Alban Institute, notes that clergy and lay people (including vestries) too often see the church from different viewpoints. “[Clergy] have a significant investment in the church, spiritually, personally, and financially. On the other hand, laity have a more voluntary relationship to the church. They are primarily customers of spiritual life and sacraments.” If parishioners view themselves as consumers, then the recognition that we all are ministers breaks down and puts in jeopardy the concept of partnership. Key to that observation is the necessity of helping lay people to recast their understanding of what it means to be a part of a congregation.

Compensation

I believe you are charged to see that your rector is honorably and equitably compensated. That means a just cash stipend and, additionally, benefits that at least meet the diocesan guidelines. My personal conviction is that the diocesan minimums are woefully inadequate. I encourage every congregation to think of compensation levels significantly above those amounts. Church Pension Group publishes some worthwhile documents. Its web site is www.cpg.org/home/research/index.html. Among the offerings are illuminating statistics based on its own files. For instance, The Diocese of New York is in the top 10% of dioceses when it comes to total clergy compensation. However, it drops to the bottom 10% when compensation is adjusted for regional cost of living. Making matters even worse, we are very near the bottom (9th decile) as measured by pledges.

Weigh your rector’s cash stipend in comparison with the salaries of a number of other positions (as of 2010):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>After 5.5 years</th>
<th>$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York City Sanitation</td>
<td></td>
<td>67,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City Police</td>
<td></td>
<td>76,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Congregations, September/October, 1999, p. 20.
5 Clergy cash compensation is recognized as a stipend rather than as a salary. Along similar lines, rectors are called to a congregation; they are not hired. Accordingly, they are not employees. Even the I.R.S. concurs.
Wardens as Stewards: A Call for Excellence

New York State Police
After 1 year $ 71,000
After 5 years $ 85,000

New York City Public School Teacher
Top $100,000

School Teacher at One Private School
Starting $55,500
Median $97,000

Musician – New York Philharmonic Orchestra
Over $118,000

Rabbi at One Suburban Synagogue
$100,000-$150,000

New York State Legislator $79,500

New York State Supreme Court Judge (lowest state court) $136,700

All of the above receive liberal pension and benefits packages. The only difference in benefits is that the rector receives housing. Yet, looking at the disparity, it is impossible to attribute the spread solely to the value of housing. The most reasonable conclusion is that our priests, in general, and our rectors specifically are significantly underpaid.

Your rector’s compensation ought to be viewed as an issue of great importance, since it quantifies the value your congregation places on the position. Avoid using compensation as a referendum on the worth of your rector. Otherwise, it ultimately is bound to cause substantial damage to both the rector and to your own congregation. Similarly, regardless of what the rector says, don’t use budgetary problems as a reason for not compensating him or her fairly. If he or she insists that the additional stipend is not needed—or wanted—let that person return the excess as a contribution to the congregation.

In the final analysis, I am strongly persuaded that under-compensating our clergy both causes and has inflicted substantial long-term damage to the Church. I am also convinced that many gifted people find it financially impossible to enter the priesthood. Pulpit and Pew Research of Pastoral Leadership issued a study on clergy compensation that affirms this view. It said “Low salaries and declining professional levels of ministry may well be causing many talented graduates to enter into other professions or forms of ministry other than serving local congregations.” Compensation practices, in general, are too modest to sustain a family—yet most congregations want their rector to be married. Moreover, the compensation issue is likely to become a much bigger issue over the coming decade when a significant number of clergy reach retirement age. Wardens should play a leadership role in securing fair, appropriate compensation for the congregation’s clergy.

Every congregation must address the compensation issue. It is easy to say, “We can not afford to pay more.” That, simply, is avoiding responsibility. To attract and retain quality clergy, you must provide an appropriate stipend. As an experiment, ask members of the local synagogue how much their rabbi receives. I virtually can guarantee that it is more—in some cases a great deal more—than your rector receives.

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7 For a valuable analysis of this subject, read the report from the Church Pension Group, Will There be a Clergy Shortage (http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/salary.html).
8 In a study published July 2001 by Auburn Seminary (p. 24) entitled Is There a Problem? Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future noted, “...starting salaries [for rabbis are] as much as twice as high as beginning salaries for Christian ministers...”
Another thing about clergy benefits—consider providing sabbaticals as well as time and money for continuing education. The investment, I assure you, will pay off handsomely in your rector's development and growth. Those benefits will accrue richly to your congregation as well.

Tenure

I mentioned earlier that the relationship between your congregation and its rector is a partnership, rather than a marriage. I would like to expand upon the partnership concept and also to clarify why I avoid the marriage image. Partnerships typically last so long as they are beneficial to both parties. The sacrament of marriage, however, is, or at least should be, enduring. In my experience, the rector-congregation relationship is healthiest when it does not exceed something approximating eight to twelve years.

As with all things, there are exceptions. Nonetheless, I caution that those exceptions are the rare exception. In general, change enriches both priest and congregation. I have seen many sound associations deteriorate when the relationship continues for too long. Moreover, excessive tenure is stressful to a congregation when the incumbent rector finally leaves or retires. It is shocking to note, according to Alban Institute research, “a pastor who comes to a church after a long pastorate will almost always be an interim, either intentionally or unintentionally.” William O. Avery in Congregations (Summer 2009 edition) observed, “While there are many joys and benefits of long pastorates, one of the perils of these long tenures is that a period of congregational turmoil almost inevitably follows them.” The warnings appear all too often. Over and over, congregations and clergy think their situation is unique. The odds though, are against them.

When the Rector Leaves

Whether your rector has been with your congregation for fifteen years or fifteen months, a change in clergy leadership is a significant event.

The diocesan staff does an outstanding job in guiding congregations through the search process. Rather, than echoing their advice, I would like to share a few of my own thoughts about the period between the departure of the incumbent and the arrival of the new rector. My comments are based on involvement with several searches as well as experiences I have gained from people elsewhere.

I enthusiastically support the position of the Diocese of New York that congregations allow sufficient time before calling a new rector. That interim period should not be considered time wasted. To the contrary, it can be extraordinarily valuable. Your whole congregation (not just the vestry or search committee) needs time to look at itself—to understand where it has been, where it is now, and, most critically, where it would like to be under the new rector’s leadership. Through this process, your congregation more probably

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9 Action Information, March/April 1992, p. 3
will call a rector who meets its needs. In addition, you probably will call a rector who shares your expectations and is excited to be among you.10

The interim period offers other valuable opportunities. It is a time when the laity takes on added responsibilities. Even with an interim pastor, many tasks normally performed by the rector will now be the responsibility of members of the congregation. Most visible is the heightened duties of the wardens as the ones in charge. Beyond that duty, though, are many administrative and pastoral tasks that the laity can do and may need to do in support of the interim’s role. In other words, there is a golden chance for members of the congregation to become more involved in ministry.

This period also is an ideal time to resolve previously unaddressed problems or challenges and to bring about needed changes. An able interim, unencumbered by the emotional and political baggage of unresolved issues, often can work wonders for the congregation. The new rector then can start his or her new ministry focused on the future.

Other things also occur during the interim. One of those is the preparation of a parish profile. It takes substantial time to work through a well-done self-study and to produce an insightful profile of the congregation. Don’t fail to comment on weaknesses along with strengths. I have often heard from clergy that profiles honestly addressing shortcomings and weaknesses mean a great deal to them. Your congregation may be reluctant to share—or even admit—its “darker side.” However, quality candidates, especially those best suited to your congregation, value forthrightness. They are not daunted by weaknesses because they know all congregations have them. Another key element of the profile is the congregation’s aspirations for the future.

As a caveat, I recommend that the search process, including the preparation of the profile, start after the current rector departs. Otherwise, it is quite likely that your reflections will be influenced, knowingly or subconsciously, by that person’s presence. I have found that the clearest thinking comes when the congregation is freed of its ties to the departing rector.

When people in various congregations ask me if I know someone they should consider, my first response is, “Please tell me in one, simple sentence the most important characteristics or strengths you are looking for in your next rector.” There are two typical reactions to my question. The first goes something like this: “We want an excellent preacher, teacher, administrator, and fundraiser and a person with a wonderful, outgoing personality, who gets along with everyone.”11 The other standard reaction is a blank look. Those people just want names of “good people.”

10 A rector wrote the following to The Living Church (p. 14, 1/26/03): “I followed a 30-year pastorate. While a healthy congregation when my predecessor retired, there were many issues and identity questions. The congregation had an interim rector for nearly two years. In that time, he was able to empower the laity to determine who they were and what this congregation wanted for a future. I firmly believe that if the search process had been any shorter, then I would have been the unintended interim.”

11 The Rev. John Martiner sums it up this way in an article in The Living Church, January 7, 2007, page 16: “…many feel a rector should be a crackerjack administrator, a financial wizard, a great orator and a teacher, the life of any party, devoted to children and the elderly, but paying special attention to large contributors…a
Who, after all, has ever sought a bad preacher, an inept administrator or a catatonic introvert? The positive qualities are givens. When asking the question, I am seeking the one or two things most important to your congregation’s spiritual and corporate growth and development. What do you expect the new rector to help the congregation achieve or become during the first three to five years of the new ministry? How you answer the question generally determines the characteristics you will get in the rector you call. Without thoughtful consideration of the congregation’s needs and aspirations, a priest who might be perfect for one congregation could be a terrible mismatch for another.

I would like to throw in an additional thought about the search process. All too often the committee defines what it is seeking in a rector in one of two ways. They look for a candidate who has qualities that are the opposite of weaknesses they perceive the departing rector. Others seek someone who is the clone of the past rector but younger. Both approaches are likely to lead to a wrong selection, as neither profile addresses whom the congregation needs to lead it into the future.

If the past rector search did not turn out well, you need to discover the source of the problem. In most cases, the vestry summarily assigns the entire fault to the rector. I would suggest, however, that the flaw might have been the search process itself. Did the congregation clearly articulate its goals and aspirations? Did the congregation thoughtfully define and honestly present itself in the search process? Were the people involved in the search open and candid with the candidates? If the answer to any of these questions is less than a resounding, “yes,” it is probable that the congregation’s search problems will continue.

I would like to offer another thought regarding the search process. One of the comments heard often is, “We would like a rector who is just like our previous one.” A congregation that seeks a clone has not looked at itself reflectively. A healthy and vibrant congregation requires different skills in a new rector because (i) circumstances have changed since the last search, (ii) the previous rectorship itself likely created new needs or requirements, (iii) the congregation is ready to go in a new direction, or (iv) the congregation perceives a changed leadership role for the rector. Whatever the cause, change is leavening.

In thinking about change, consider the image of school. When students are in first grade, the teacher that is needed has a special set of skills. As those students advance in grade, the teacher skills change. By high school, the teachers needed require yet other

counselor, building superintendent, expert on music and the arts, well read, a visitor in homes, a theologian who makes things simple, a non-judgmental lover of all kinds of behavior, an inspiring leader in worship, involved in many community organizations, while at the same time being at the end of the phone for every need… A sociologist, a psychologist, a source of all kinds of personal information, a visionary (who never changes things), a person of prayer who is a ‘regular guy,’ someone who is always nice, never tired, spends total time on parish events, and has a perfect family life… This is a partial list.” It may be partial, but it is overwhelming and impossible to find in its entirety in any one person.

An article in Congregations, the bi-monthly periodical of The Alban Institute (Sept.-Oct. 2001, page 32), the Rev. Luther Kramer states “…70% of conflicts between a pastor and members of the church or governing board can be traced inadequacies in the search process.”
talents. Analogously, congregations likely require different gifts from their rectors as time evolves.

The Vestry

It surprises me how often I hear vestry members, unwittingly or not, describing their role as if they were members of Congress. They view themselves as delegates who represent various constituencies. Not only is the congressional model a bad analogy, it is totally wrong. People on the vestry, as I mentioned earlier, are trustees. Because they are not delegates, once elected, vestry members must divorce themselves from personal or group agendas. Rather, they have to embrace the needs and interests of the entire congregation. Their decisions should promote the congregation’s mission, not the particular interests of a clique or constituency.

Informing

Do you orient new vestry members to their role and responsibility? Have you considered a packet of materials to bring new people up to speed? It might include the Religious Corporations Act, the Not-for-Profit Act, the congregation’s bylaws, the past year’s vestry minutes, the previous audit, and other historical material. Additionally, plan to meet with new people for a tour of the church’s facilities. At a suitable time, brief them on significant issues that have recently been resolved as well as important matters that are pending.

I have found it especially helpful to send to vestry members articles of interest. It tends to improve their general understanding of trusteeship and broaden their knowledge of the Church. It will also increase awareness and appreciation of the vestry members’ duties and often enhance their decision-making skills.

Finally, if it is not current practice, send the agenda and supporting material for vestry meetings sufficiently beforehand so that members can arrive prepared.

Better Use of Meeting Time

How is time spent at your vestry meetings? Is the typical session consumed with basic business? Too often, time spent on issues is in inverse proportion to their importance. It seems people spend too much time on minutiae because they feel the need to discuss and debate every matter. Except in very specific and limited circumstances, vestries ought not function as a committee-of-the-whole (or as congressional delegates do.) The better place for thoughtful discussion of the issues and details is in committees, where hours can be devoted to fact-finding, to hearing varying viewpoints, and to weighing the alternatives.

Vestries should trust their committees for the analysis of important issues and have faith in their work and recommendations. If the vestry feels a matter requires more thought, it should be returned to the appropriate committee for further research and reflection.
When preparing the budget, the Finance Committee ought to have the primary role. At vestry meetings, the Treasurer should present information essential to the vestry in fulfilling its role as fiduciary. Once the budget is adopted, however, extensive review of monthly numbers by the entire vestry should be unnecessary. To do otherwise signals a lack of confidence in the Finance Committee or its Treasurer. The Treasurer ought to limit his or her financial report to the one, two or three significant things that the other vestry members might have missed but ought to be aware of. That report doesn’t need to last more than a few minutes.

I would suggest that for most vestries the time spent in regular meetings should be evaluated and, if necessary, re-prioritized. Many critical issues never get addressed because meetings become bogged down with less important matters. Thinking about and planning for the future often seem to receive way too little attention.

Congregations exist to further God’s kingdom, enhance members’ spiritual journeys, strengthen members for ministry to and in the world, and spread the Good News. How often does your vestry explore ways to carry out its core mission? Priests and lay people are partners in ministry. How can you strengthen the partnership between the rector and the congregation? Other potential topics appear later, under the heading “Broadening Your Perspective.” The Rev. Richard Kew and Bishop Roger White put it this way, “Where congregations are vital and strong in the way they undertake their mission, usually sometime in the past there has been a significant change in the manner in which the vestry and other leadership groups in the parish function.”

Succession and Elections

What has your vestry done to assure capable leadership in the future? Is there an effective process for succession of vestry members and for identifying potential wardens, treasurers and committee chairs? These issues are too important to wait until the last moment. Committees, especially the important ones, are valuable training opportunities and a great way to identify prospective leaders. A key part of the committee process is the intentional commitment by the chairs to inform and cultivate non-vestry members. I have observed too often that vestries exclude non-vestry people from key committees, or, if they do include them, non-vestry people are treated as “back-benchers.” Every chair, during his or her tenure, should take responsibility for developing as many people as possible for leadership positions. Chairs, accordingly, need to see themselves as teachers. If a vestry doesn’t have a full list of talented, well-informed vestry replacements, it hasn’t fulfilled a significant component of its stewardship role.

As I believe that rectors and vestry members ought to have limited tenure, so I believe that incumbency for other lay leadership ought to be similarly limited. I have heard numerous stories of treasurers and other leaders who have served without a break for very long terms. Especially if it is the treasurer, all sorts of risks may arise. Even if the risk of dishonesty is not an issue, there is the likelihood that too much information resides only in the one person’s head. What happens if that person should move away or die? Where is the

continuity of leadership? Moreover, without change the probability is that various matters will not be examined with a fresh perspective. As with all organizations, new eyes bring new insight.

Sometimes, though, the quest for freshness can be overdone. Typically wardens are able to serve for three two-year terms and other vestry members for two three-year terms before mandatory rotation sets in. Some congregations, however, that limit service to only one term (two years total for wardens and three years for other vestry members). It seems to me that such a short time severely limits the ability of a person to serve effectively or to see anything of substance through to completion. Very short terms, I believe, also stifle the desire for creative thinking and tend to turn people away from addressing longer-term matters.

Although I strongly believe in reasonable term limits for all vestry members, nonetheless, wardens and the vestry ought to consider what happens to "corporate memory" as a result of rotation. Have you made provision, beyond depending on your rector, for retaining congregational and vestry corporate memory? This can be invaluable when deliberating current issues. Understanding the past is important to planning for the future. It ought not be a limiting factor in looking forward, but there is a linkage between history and the future. As scholars of history so readily remind us, significant blunders occur when that reality is ignored.

Another electoral issue is whether the congregation should have multiple candidates for each vestry position. Vestries are not congresses, and vestry people are not delegates representing constituencies. What is most needed are people with specific skills and abilities. Those individuals may not be either well known or the most popular. A careful blend of the required talents most probably will come as the result of a responsible Nominating Committee’s lengthy and thoughtful deliberation rather than from a popularity vote. Needless to say, I passionately oppose having more than one person stand for each vestry slot.

By-Laws

By-laws are each congregation’s governing document. They contain a great deal of vital information. All too often, though, they are not reviewed for timeliness and for continuing conformity to the laws of the State (Religious Corporations Law) or the canons of the National Church or Diocese. The by-laws may also not be consistent with current vestry practices. It is imperative that they be reviewed regularly for accuracy.

A draft model of by-laws is available on the diocesan website (www.dioceseny.org).

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14 The New York State Religious Corporations Law requires two-year terms for wardens and three-year terms for other vestry members. State law does not limit the number of successive terms a person may serve; that limitation is set by the congregation’s own by-laws. State law does, however, specify that the total number of vestry members (other than wardens) shall be no more than 24 and that the actual number decided upon and set forth in the congregation’s by-laws must be evenly divisible by 3. Though the rector, if the parish has one, presides at vestry meetings, he or she is not included in that count. Section 42 of the Religious Corporations Law outlines the requirements for a quorum. The sample by-laws provided on the Diocese’s web site provides the requirements for a quorum.
One matter covered in the draft is the issue of whether the rector (but not a priest-in-charge) has a vote. The simple answer is that when the rector is present, he or she does have a vote. Additionally, the rector is the presiding officer of all vestry meetings. If the rector is not present and both wardens are in attendance, one of the wardens is selected by the vestry to be the presiding officer; if only one is present, that warden presides.

It would be prudent, however, for the rector to abstain from voting on any matter where a conflict of interest might arise, such as his or her own compensation.

**Conflict of Interest**

Vestries must be sensitive to conflicts of interest. A conflict occurs whenever a congregation purchases services or products through a business where a vestry member (or even a member of the congregation) is associated. Vestry members, as fiduciaries, must always place the interests of the congregation above those of any individual. A conflict may be apparent or real. Consequently, the best policy is to avoid having any business dealings. That approach eliminates many potential problems or risks. Despite that warning, if there is a business relationship, the Vestry should document that there is an compelling reason and that it is in the congregation’s best interests.

**Being a Good Steward**

Stewardship in its broad sense encompasses many topics. Let me touch on a few.

**Planning and Addressing the Future**

You have a responsibility to help assure that your congregation effectively carries out its mission. There are at least three planning documents that are essential for focusing your congregation and your vestry.

1. a **Mission Statement**—what your congregation is (not a description of what it does but, rather, what it is and why it exists);

2. a **Vision Statement**—what you would like your congregation to be; and

3. a **Long-Range Plan**—an articulation of the goals and strategies necessary for the congregation to implement its Vision and Mission.

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15 The Episcopal Church’s Mission Statement is found in *An Outline of the Faith* in *The Book of Common Prayer*, p. 855:

Q. What is the mission of the Church?
A. ...to restore all people to unity with God and to each other in Christ.

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?
A. ...as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?
A. ...through the ministry of all its members.
Without these tools your congregation and your vestry are unfocused, even rudderless. With them energy and decisions are harnessed and directed.\textsuperscript{16} I cannot encourage you too strongly to address these matters. To quote the King James version of Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision the people perish.” Don’t let it be said of your vestry, “Here there is no vision. The people perish.”

As a beginning point, you might try the following exercise. Imagine that your congregation is starting as an entirely new congregation, having only its communicants and material assets in the form of cash—no ministry, programs, facilities or problems. How would this new congregation view itself, and what would it want to accomplish? From those deliberations should come a Vision Statement, a Mission Statement, and, if the process is carried along far enough, a Long-Range Plan that details specific strategies and actions for meeting the aspirations articulated in the Vision and Mission Statements.

An alternative approach might be responding to the seven questions Lyle Schaller asks in \textit{Create Your Own Future}.

1. What do we believe the Lord is calling our congregation to be and to do today and tomorrow?
2. What do we want our congregation to look like five years from today?
3. What do we believe we do best in ministry today?
4. What do we believe should be our number-one point of excellence five years from now?
5. What changes should be made in our real estate?
6. How do we believe non-members view our congregation today?
7. How do we want non-members to perceive our congregation five years from now?

\textit{Care of Property}

Another important aspect of stewardship is the vestry’s obligation to be a good steward of its congregation’s property. That stewardship speaks volumes to parishioners, to prospective members, and to the wider community. What would my initial—and, perhaps, last—impression be if I visited your church? Would I sense pride, reluctant obligation, or something worse as reflected by the condition of the facilities? Appearance communicates powerfully both to prospective congregants and to current members.

There are many reasons to properly maintain the congregation’s gathering place and spiritual home. Most important is because it is God’s house, and we are charged to be faithful stewards of God’s property.

I have another comment regarding the stewardship of property. Does your congregation provide funds in its budget for depreciation? Alternatively, does it have a

\textsuperscript{16} The magazine \textit{Fortune} (May 1, 1995, p 129) commented as follows: “Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Propaganda Minister [said], ‘Here lies the root of all our failures. Our generals are complete aliens to our National Socialist ways of thought. Many do not even want a National Socialist victory. Soviet generals, on the other hand, are fanatical adherents of Bolshevism, and so they fight fanatically for its victory.’ So there it is. The Nazis had the V-2. They had the snorkel. They had better-looking uniforms. But what they didn’t have was sufficiently shared values.”
“Reserve for Replacement of Capital Items”? As a practical matter, congregations should reserve at least 1.4% of the current value of all capital items that need to be replaced or renewed. This includes equipment as well as buildings. If your congregation does not reserve sufficient funds, it is not providing for the adequate maintenance its physical assets.

The 1.4% of current value presumes your building (or buildings) and all equipment will be restored just once every 71 years. Even so, it may amount to a dramatic sum. Few if any congregations are able to meet that heady number. However, the failure to do so means that the facilities are deteriorating. In other words, the level of deferred maintenance is inexorably growing. By quantifying the figure your vestry will become conscious of the financial magnitude of maintaining facilities over the long term.

Finances

As fiduciaries, you and the vestry are accountable to the congregation for all financial matters. This obligation requires prudent stewardship of funds for both current operations and the congregation's endowment. The mandate applies regardless of the size of the budget or the endowment.

Earlier in this presentation I asked, “Are you sacrificing your congregation’s future resources to benefit today’s projects and program?” When resources are limited, all too often it becomes common practice to fund immediate and urgent needs to the detriment of long-term, perhaps more important, needs. If so, the good works you are doing today may not be financially viable tomorrow. Vestries have an obligation to balance current and long-term responsibilities.

Additionally, are you preserving the long-term, inflation-adjusted value of the endowment? Do your congregation’s investment policies reflect sound investment practices, or are they simply the most convenient method?

It is important for you and your vestry colleagues to ask these questions. The answers that best meet your congregation’s situation may require difficult and unpopular decisions. Please remember your duty is not only to your contemporaries but also your successors. Are you being a good steward if you limit the ability to carry out mission and program in the future for the sake of today’s needs and opportunities?

Pledging and Planned Gifts

Speaking of stewardship, how effective is your congregation's every member canvass? It is important, in my view, to stop using the term “stewardship” for annual pledging. When we mix the terms, the true meaning of stewardship is lost, and its value becomes debased. Stewardship is much too important to be used as another term for budgetary support.

In general, Episcopal congregations have not done well in developing annual giving. Ironically, I have found that congregations of modest substance often have the most generous pledging. Consider the following: as mentioned previously, pledging in this diocese is near the worst among all the dioceses in the U.S. Based on latest numbers, the
Church Pension Group notes that New York’s average pledge is $1,317, whereas pledging in many dioceses in the south and in Alaska exceeds $2,000, topping out at $2,367 in West Tennessee. Why should the Diocese of New York be so far below the best, especially considering that income levels here are so much above theirs?

In too many cases a congregation’s financial problems are caused by lack of motivation, not a lack of wealth. Clearly we are doing something wrong, despite the “wealth” of information and advice that is available.

One person’s hierarchy of givers intrigues me. At the bottom are the Customers. They don’t pledge, and either they give nothing or give “when I come.” This group may account for 30%-40% of a total congregation. Next in ranking are the Patrons. The Dues Payers comprise one part, while those slightly more generous are the Fair Share people. Both the Customers and Patrons give for external reasons, i.e., their giving serves to fulfill expectations of others, or for similar reasons. Above them in the hierarchy are the people who give for internal or personal reasons. The Partners include the Percentage givers and the Tithers. Then at the apex are the Joyful Givers.

Needless to say, if one were to array the number of people in each category in pyramidal form, the first two groups would fill the bulk of the base; few are Partners, and a minute percentage represent the Joyful Givers. Most congregations, unfortunately, are overpopulated with Customers and Patrons. A dramatic change in financial health would occur if there were a more substantial constituency of Partners and Joyful Givers. The challenge is for all congregations to convert the Customers and Patrons to Partners and Joyful Givers.

While on the topic of money, has your congregation developed a planned giving program? This is a valuable way to enhance the financial health of a congregation—no matter what your congregation’s size is. All too often, though, this source of stable long-term funding is overlooked because the effort may not show results for many years. Others ignore the opportunities because they think planned giving applies only to rich people. The possibilities, however, are relevant even for those with modest income or assets. There are many cases where people left their only significant asset, typically their home or an insurance policy, to their congregation.

Planned giving, it should be noted, encompasses far more than just bequests. There are many ways for members of your congregation to make significant gifts during their lifetime. For example, the gift of appreciated assets, especially stocks, substantially benefit the donor—through tax saving—as well as the congregation. Pooled income funds can enhance the income of donors who have even just modest assets. The National Church and Episcopal Church Foundation are structured to aid your congregation substantially with educational materials and investment vehicles.

Broadening Your Perspective

I encourage you and your vestry colleagues to develop your “peripheral vision.” By this I mean acquiring a deeper knowledge about current and emerging trends and practices that could affect or, perhaps, are likely to affect your congregation. The information and
understanding you gain will assist you in becoming more effective vestry members. Here are a few suggestions to help you broaden your perspective:

- Read what Arlin Rothauge has written\(^{17}\) about the behavior, dynamics, and characteristics of congregations, including the probable relationship of the rectors to their congregations, based on how big they are. His writings provide thoughtful guidance to understanding congregations based on the number of active members. He also describes the inevitable changes that take place as congregations grow. The four groups he profiles are: The Family Church (up to 50 active members), The Pastoral Church (50-150 active members), The Program Church (150-350 active members), and The Corporate Church (above 300-500 active members).

- Reflect on whether your congregation is viewed as a social agency that also holds worship services or whether it is seen as a community of Christian people who, through spiritual growth, manifest their faith through various outreach programs. If your congregation is the former, it is one of a great many community-based organizations. The latter group, however, is something unique. Reorienting the focus ought to set off many exciting and healthy dynamics. If you reread the Catechism (page 855 of *The Book of Common Prayer*) you will find four ways the Church pursues its mission: it prays; worships; proclaims the Gospel; and promotes justice, peace, and love. The mission of the Church rests on four “legs,” not one.

- Discuss the following statement\(^{18}\) by Kirk Hadaway, the National Church’s program officer for congregational research, to the Executive Council regarding contracting congregations. “The base problem is the fact that so many of our churches don’t know why they are there…It’s a caretaker sort of ministry, which is good and helpful, but it is a prescription for continuing decline.” He contrasts that picture with several observations regarding growing congregations. “[They] have a clear mission and purpose, follow up with visitors, have strong leadership, and are involved in outreach and evangelism.” Which of the two quotations is more applicable to your congregation?

- Consider the profound hunger that many people have for a deeper spiritual life. A number of years ago Trinity Parish in New York City found that need to be the number one topic when Church leaders were asked to name the key issue facing the Church.\(^{19}\) Surprisingly, it was not one of the expected choices before the poll was taken. In summarizing the findings, Trinity’s rector said, “[People] are seeking a spiritually oriented faith that connects them more fully with the mystery of God, themselves, other people, and the rest of creation.” Trinity Church in Boston was told the same thing: “The deepening, nurturing and

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\(^{17}\) Sizing Up A Congregation For New Member Ministry, by Arlin J. Rothauge, issued by The Episcopal Church


\(^{19}\) Other answers by ranking were: (i) sense of community, (ii) liturgy, and (iii) regaining relevance.
development of the spiritual life of Trinity's people...is the clear first priority identified by those...interviewed."\(^{20}\) Other evidences are the growth of a number of movements such as Cursillo, the Stephen Ministry, and Education for Ministry (EFM). What spiritually means in these contexts is personal formation and growth in faith. How well is your congregation fulfilling that craving?

- Examine Loren Mead’s observation that the Church in earliest times operated under the Apostolic Paradigm. Once it became the establishment, there was a shift to the Christian Paradigm—a time when people defined themselves as Christians. They became so by birth, not by choice and commitment. Mead believes that a new Church is emerging, one he calls "the once and future church." It is a new expression of that earliest Apostolic Paradigm, when the primary identity of people was their Christian faith. The church was family and there was a special closeness among its members. Worship, prayer, and learning strengthened them in their faith and witness. The church was not a building to maintain, but the living body of Christ. I believe we are in such a new time. It is sometimes called the post-Christian era.\(^{21}\) Other people looking at the future also see substantial change ahead. How much time has your vestry spent examining the changes they foresee and their relevance for your congregation?

- Consider the opportunities presented in the following statement by the Rev. Canon Kevin Martin\(^{22}\), Canon to the Ordinary for mission and congregational development in the Diocese of Texas: “Our task [the leadership of a church] is to identify Christian leaders, raise them up, train them, teach them and empower them for ministry...I believe not enough of our churches see themselves as centers of ministry and training...They see themselves as giving out or dispersing something to people...[I see] the local congregation as a training-development center for people.” That is a very different model from the traditional one.

- Think about the fact that Christian education has the most dramatic growth trend among Episcopal Church statistics. How is your congregation addressing that hunger?

- Reflect on the statement by the Rev. James C. Fenhagen, “The Vestry is not a corporate board. It is the authorized body of the baptized community called out by the congregation to share with the clergy in the spiritual nurture of the congregation and its mission to the world...When the Vestry is seen as the spiritual center of the congregation’s leadership, it is ready for mission.”\(^{23}\)

\(^{20}\) Being, Building, and Bettering Our Christian Community: Trinity Church for the New Millennium.

\(^{21}\) These thoughts are liberally taken from an address given by the Rev. Kenneth L. Chumbley at a leadership conference for the Diocese of West Missouri on February 8, 1997.

\(^{22}\) From an article in Ratherview (a publication of The Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest), Fall 1995, p. 12.

\(^{23}\) Vestry Papers, Lent, 1997, p 1. Vestry Papers is a publication of The Cornerstone Project.
• Become aware of the differing cultural norms for those who are over fifty, the Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1961,) and the so-called Generation Xers (those born in the 1960s.) If your congregational population, like most, is aging, those differences and associated needs and expectations should influence the way you communicate with different age groups within and outside your congregation. Attracting a younger age group is critical to the long-term health of congregations. So is the ceding of power and influence by the entrenched to younger people. The Episcopal Network for Evangelism has some interesting material at www.http://members.aol.com/ENE2020/generations.htm, where some qualitative difference between various age groupings are presented. You will also find some interesting statistics as well as links to additional material that might stimulate thinking.

• Get a copy of A Report on Episcopal Churches in the United States. It is available through the Office of Congregational Development of the National Church (800) 334-7626, ext. 6283. This 83 page document, derived from a much larger examination of responses to a survey of 41 faith groups (14,000 congregations, synagogues and mosques), highlights innumerable characteristics connected with growing or healthy Episcopal congregations and those that are that are contracting or weaker. This study is so valuable and revealing that a good deal of time should be allotted at several vestry meetings (or at a specially held meeting or at a retreat) to discuss issues raised in the study. It will be time very well spent.

• Research and evaluate the compensation required to support a full-time priest in a financially healthy congregation. Wesley Frendorf and Charles R. Wilson indicate that, at most, only 15% of the Episcopal churches can afford a full-time priest. Does that observation have implications for your congregation?

• Appreciate the changing roles of the clergy and the laity. In the future, the two will likely be interacting quite differently than in the classical model. The Baptismal Covenant calls all of us to be ministers. Ministry, accordingly, is a shared responsibility.

• Reflect on an observation by The Very Rev. Robert Giannini, Dean and rector of Christ Church Cathedral in Indianapolis, who has observed

When I was in seminary [in the late 1960s] the basic understanding of the priest was as counselor...I fully expected to have an appointment book full of people who were going to come to me for pastoral counseling in my nice quiet office. The main focus of ministry was seen as helping people with their problems. That has shifted to rector as CEO or maybe even COO, chief operating officer...But the model I truly believe we need is the rector as rabbi. We need to go back to our biblical roots and capture that sense of the priest as teacher, leader, and enabler.24

What fundamental role will your congregation most seek and need when choosing the next rector — counselor, administrator or teacher, leader and enabler?

- Explore issues regarding trusteeship and boards of not-for-profit organizations. It will help your vestry to function more effectively.

As you delve into topics such as these, share articles of importance or relevance with the vestry. Give them some worthwhile bedtime reading. Help your vestry colleagues to grow in their responsibilities. By now you may be asking, “Why did I take on this position?” I believe that we do so because so much can be achieved under effective leadership. What you must do is to set your sights high enough to stretch your talents and abilities. Many people and resources exist to help you carry out your responsibilities. Keep in mind the diocesan staff and the trustees of the diocese, other wardens, publications, outside organizations, and consultants. You are not asked to carry out your responsibilities without support.

You truly have taken on an awesome task—one that is both exciting and enriching.

I would like to leave you with a phrase someone, I wish I could remember who, used in addressing a group such as this one: “Wardens as servants of Christ not as slaves to a title.” How apt.

I wish you well in your roll as steward and servant.
Reading List

*Congregations: The Alban Journal* (a bi-monthly journal published by The Alban Institute)

*Involuntary Termination of Clergy Within the Episcopal Church: Conversations with Rectors, Wardens, Interim Rectors and Bishops*, Cornerstone Project of the Episcopal Church Foundation, November 1996

*The Vestry Resource Guide – Servants Called to Leadership*, Cornerstone Project of the Episcopal Church Foundation (Available from Forward Movement Publications: 1-(800)-543-1813)

*The Living Church* (a weekly publication about the Episcopal Church)

James C. Fenhagen: *Ministry for a New Time*

Wesley Frensdorff and Charles R. Wilson: *Challenge for Change – Clergy and Congregations*

Hadaway and Marler, *New Church Development: A Research Report*. Available free through Congregartional Ministries at The Episcopal Church Center

Gerald W. Keucher: *Remember The Future*

Richard Kew and Roger J. White: *The New Millennium – New Church Trends Shaping the Episcopal Church for the 21st Century*

Richard Kew and Roger White: *Toward 2015 – A Church Odyssey*

James B. Lemler: *Trustee Education and the Congregational Board – A Reflection on Leadership in the Community of Faith*

Loren B. Mead: *Financial Meltdown in the Mainline?*

Loren B. Mead: *More Than Numbers – The Way Churches Grow*

Loren B. Mead: *The Once and Future Church – Reinventing the Congregation for a Mission Frontier*

Loren B. Mead: *Transforming Congregations for the Future*

Roy M. Oswald: *Making Your Church More Inviting*

Thomas C. Reeves: *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity*

Arlin J. Rothauge: *Sizing Up a Congregation For New Member Ministry*

Lyle E. Schaller: *Create Your Own Future – Alternatives for the Long-Range Planning Committee*

Lyle E. Schaller: *44 Ways to Expand the Financial Base of Your Congregation*
William H. Venable: *Your Job as a Vestryperson or Warden*

Christopher L. Webber: *The Vestry Handbook (Revised Edition)*