



EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Welcome - Worship - Connect - Serve
St. John's Vestry Handbook

For the Mission of the Church

Everliving God, whose will it is that all should come to you through your Son Jesus Christ: Inspire our witness to him, that all may know the power of his forgiveness and the hope of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

For the Diocese

O God, by your grace you have called us in this Diocese to a goodly fellowship of faith. Bless our Bishops and other clergy and all our people. Grant that your Word may be truly preached and truly heard, your Sacraments faithfully administered and faithfully received. By your Spirit, fashion our lives according to the example of your Son, and grant that we may show the power of your love to all among whom we live; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the Parish

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

From *The New Zealand Prayer Book*

For the Mission of the Church

Draw your Church together, O God,
into one great company of disciples,
together following our Lord Jesus Christ
into every walk of life,
together serving him in his mission to the world,
and together witnessing to his love
on every continent and island.

Prayer before a Meeting

God our Creator,
when you speak there is light and life,
when you act there is justice and love;
grant that your love may be present in our meeting,
so that what we say and what we do
may be filled with your Holy Spirit.

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE AND WORK OF THE VESTRY

The Bishop, the Diocese and the Parish

A diocese is the fundamental geographical unit of the church. It is the only ecclesiastical entity whose boundaries are precisely defined by canon law. A parish or mission is by canon law subordinate to the diocese, and a congregation may call itself "Episcopal" only because it is in union with the bishop, the diocese and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (ECUSA).

As chief pastor of the diocese, the bishop is required by canon law to visit each congregation at least once every three years. The bishop may also pay a visit on occasions other than the official visitation to teach, preach, meet with the Vestry, dedicate new buildings, lead special worship services and confirm. The bishop also works with parishes in conflict and with congregations seeking new clergy.

The purpose of the bishop's official visitation is to be present to teach, preach, celebrate the Eucharist, baptize and confirm, if there are candidates, and look over the parish register. The bishop is not a visiting dignitary or a guest in the parish, but comes as the leader of the church in the diocese to learn of the parish's vision and dreams, to hear of the hopes and concerns of parishioners, and to remind the congregation that it is part of a national and worldwide church, called to mission and ministry in the world.

Property: The title to parish property is held by the Vestry in trust and is secured against alienation from the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Arizona. This includes both real estate and financial resources. This in no way inhibits the right of the Rector and Vestry to the control of the property for the purpose of carrying out the mission and ministry of the congregation. The Vestry is responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the property. Any proposal to make a major architectural alteration of the property must be submitted to the Standing Committee, and indebtedness that would encumber or alienate the property must be approved by the bishop and the Standing Committee of the diocese.

Parish bylaws: St. John's maintains a current document containing its bylaws. Any changes to the bylaws must be approved by the Vestry.

Vestry Organization

The canons of the church give exclusive authority over the fiscal affairs of the parish to the Vestry. However, the mission of the Vestry should be viewed as broad-ranging. Vestry members are also spiritual leaders who are committed to building up the Body of Christ so that it can be an effective instrument of mission and ministry in the world.

While by-laws vary from congregation to congregation, the following are characteristics of a Vestry:

To serve on a the Vestry, one should:

- 1) be a member of the Episcopal Church enrolled as a member of the parish, 16 years of age or older;
- 2) have been regular in attendance at the services of the church in the year preceding election;
- 3) have made and maintained a financial commitment to the parish in the year preceding election.

These are qualifications not only for election but for continued service on the Vestry. A Vestry member leads the way by participating in the worship and spiritual life, in stewardship, and the financial support of the congregation

Terms of office: The term of a Vestry member at St. John's is three years. Vestry members are not eligible for reelection in the year following the expiration of that vestry member's term.

The Wardens form the principal unit of leadership in the parish. The Senior Warden is appointed on a year-to-year basis by the Rector, and the congregation must affirm this appointment during the Annual Meeting. The Junior Warden is elected by the vestry members during the Annual Meeting.

A model relationship between the wardens is characterized by a sharing of responsibilities of leadership in collaboration with clergy.

The clerk, or secretary, of the Vestry is elected by the Vestry following the Annual Meeting. The clerk keeps minutes of meetings, gives notices of meetings to the parish, and maintains Vestry records.

The treasurer is appointed by the Vestry at the Annual Meeting, or by the Vestry. The treasurer deposits and disburses funds and oversees financial record keeping. Treasurers do not control parish finances but are stewards who serve at the direction of the Vestry.

Meetings: The Vestry usually meets once a month. The Vestry is required to meet at least ten (10) times per calendar year. Special meetings may be called by a majority of the Vestry in writing. The reason for the meeting must be specified in the notice and clergy duly notified. If, however, the congregation is without a Rector, the wardens alone may call a special meeting.

The Rector is canonically responsible for presiding at all Vestry meetings, although he or she may, from time to time, delegate that responsibility to a warden or Vestry person. During an interim period, meetings may be run by the wardens since they are canonically "in charge." As the primary role of the Rector is to preside at the Eucharist and over the spiritual life of the parish, the Rector is considered the presiding officer at Vestry meetings. If, however, the compensation of the Rector is being considered, it may be appropriate for the Rector to leave the room so that the Vestry can freely discuss compensation for the coming year under the direction of the wardens. On other occasions when the Vestry wishes to discuss confidential matters with the Rector, a vote may be taken to go into executive session so that no one else is in attendance.

Committees: Committees or commissions are set up to reflect the mission of each parish. They may include finance, education, property, evangelism, investment, mission or outreach, stewardship, congregation life and worship, to name a few. At least one member of the Vestry may serve as a liaison on each of the main committees, but the chair of the committee need not be a Vestry person.

Vestry retreat: Several times per year, the Vestry (along with the clergy and staff of the parish, and their partners/spouses) gather for a retreat. These retreats may occur away from the church, and may occur overnight. Depending on the different purposes the retreat is designed to serve, included in these weekends may be worship, Bible study, community building exercises, fellowship, mutual ministry evaluation, review of past goals and future goal setting.

Norms for Working Together Prayer:

Prayer and the study of Scripture should always be a regular part of the life of the Vestry. Vestry members are spiritual leaders of the congregation, and that dimension of their life and work needs to be nurtured and nourished. This means much more than having a perfunctory prayer at the beginning of the meeting: taking time to reflect and to listen to God before launching into Vestry business centers the members and the meeting in its real purpose for being.

Decision-making: A number of important decisions, such as the calling of a new Rector or establishing a major new direction for the parish, may be made by consensus rather than by formal vote. A consensus does not mean that everyone wholeheartedly supports a decision but that everyone can live with and support it. The Vestry talks together and listens to different viewpoints to gain clarity on an issue.

Routine decisions are made by a majority vote. These decisions should not take up an inordinate amount of the Vestry's time through lengthy discussion and debate in order to get a consensus.

Meeting length: Vestry meetings are allocated to last for one hour. If further discussion is required after this hour, then items may be *tabled* until the next event, or an additional meeting may be scheduled.

Vestry meetings are usually open to members of the parish, who may observe without power of vote. Guests may speak if recognized by the chair of the meeting. When the Vestry goes into executive session to discuss personnel or other matters of a confidential nature, the meetings or a portion thereof are closed.

Behavior: Our baptismal covenant commits us to respect the dignity of every human being. We are to speak the truth in love and to build up the Body of Christ. Vestry members are obligated to speak up in Vestry meetings. Everything that needs to be said should be said there and not in the parking lot after the meeting or in subsequent telephone conversations. If a Vestry member has differences with another Vestry member or a member of the clergy, those concerns should be addressed directly to the party involved. "Triangulation" around an issue is never a healthy practice.

Conflict: A certain amount of conflict is healthy and normal, but conflict unacknowledged and unresolved is destructive. What we can learn through our conflicts is that grace abounds even in unexpected places and situations. Try not to let conflicts in your Vestry and in your congregation go unattended or they will escalate. The bishop and diocesan staff stand ready to work with parishes not only to resolve major conflicts but to anticipate them and help deal with them productively.

Access to the bishops and their staff is immediate for clergy and parish wardens in time of conflict or pastoral need. The Wardens and Rector of a parish in conflict are encouraged to seek help from the Bishop's office. Without an invitation from the Vestry to intervene in a parish situation, the Bishop and the Bishop's staff do not generally get involved in a parochial conflict. Parishioners with "gripes" are advised to speak to members of the Vestry and make their dissatisfaction known through the elected lay leadership of a congregation. It is believed that conflict cannot be resolved unless all the parties involved talk openly and honestly with one another, thereby building up the Body of Christ by speaking the truth in love.

Stewardship: As leaders of the congregation and trustees of the parish resources, Vestry members should exemplify responsible commitment in their own giving and in the management of the resources of the parish. Each Vestry member is encouraged to work toward a tithe in his or her own giving. We cannot expect or ask others to do what we ourselves will not do. Vestry members have the opportunity to demonstrate giving as an essential dimension of the Gospel. A Vestry is called to have a vision of the church which is beyond the immediate interests and survival needs of the local congregation. Stewardship goes beyond maintenance in reaching out and giving resources away to meet the needs of God's people in the world and extending the mission of the church. Experience has shown that those congregations with vision and commitment are healthy and thriving.

Mutual Ministry Review

Mutual Ministry Review is not a performance evaluation of the Rector. It is a time for both parish and priest to reflect upon how the church, in its broadest sense, has accomplished its goals. It is a way to ask questions about what God is calling the church to do at a particular time. In addition, it is a way to determine jointly the needs of the congregation and community and the gifts of the "ministers"--lay and ordained--of the congregation in meeting those needs. Such a thoughtful evaluation may be the first step in creating a long-range plan for ministry.

When Mutual Ministry Review occurs in the first year of a new pastorate, it is appropriate to review expectations, goals, and the ways in which the vestry, clergy, and congregation see these early months. For priests, it is a time to look at expectations they may have had about their role and working relationships, if and how the goals outlined in the parish profiles can be realized, and to join in an effort to make the whole

ministry truly mutual. For the vestry and lay leadership, it is a time to consider their role in creating the kind of parish community they want, their expectations and the realities of the new ministry, and to share in the giving and receiving of feedback. It is a time to speak the truth with love so that differences between expectations and realities can be shared and honest dialogue about the future can take place.

Mutual Ministry Review is not conflict resolution. It may give rise to discussion of differences and to sharing ideas about different views of innovation and change. But if the church and its congregation are facing conflict, there are other processes available to help them. Mutual Ministry Review is for churches who want to look at their achievements and challenges and to set and agree upon joint goals for ministry. It is also for the vestry and leadership of churches who want to begin the process of being more intentional about ministry by reviewing what the church is currently doing.

The three or four hours set aside for an annual mutual review are a time to get to know each other better, for Vestry and other leaders and clergy to talk together about ways to improve their working relationships, to talk about how the various church activities and programs are meeting the needs of the church and its members, and to look at new ideas for ministry. It is a time to ask:

"What is working well and what needs our attention?"

"Do we need to make changes in our stated goals?"

"Are our goals relevant to where we find ourselves today?"

"Are our expectations fair, realistic, a stretch--but not impossible?"

In the best of all circumstances, evaluation occurs on an informal basis all the time. The formal review is a process for stimulating open discussion so that appropriate change can be planned, instead of happening casually in the parking lot after church, on the phone, or during coffee hour.

Developing excellence in lay and ordained ministry cannot be accomplished by one person but requires the whole community. Excellence occurs when the laity and the clergy leadership are committed to a shared vision of God's calling for the ministry of their congregation. The partnership is essential. Evaluating only the priest's work toward the vision demeans the role of the laity and denies the possibility of growth and development of their ministry--of their relationship to God through God's Church.

While we constantly struggle with the idea of whether or not we are really being faithful to God's call, the idea of a formal review of evaluation is often threatening and scary. But without taking the time to ask, "Where are we going? And how are we doing in getting there?" opportunities to live out our faith are lost.

(adapted from a statement from the Deployment Office in the Diocese of New York)

Responsibilities and Relationships

The relationship among the wardens, the Vestry and the Rector is critical. The fundamental characteristic of a healthy relationship is trust. This does not occur immediately in the pastoral relationship but must be developed and nurtured over a period of time. The early stages of a pastoral relationship are a time of testing as to whether the Vestry and Rector can trust one another. When trust is present, anything is possible; without it, nothing happens in the right spirit. Once a Rector is called to a parish, the pastoral relationship may not be dissolved without the mutual consent of the Vestry and the Rector. If the consent is not mutual, the Bishop gets involved as an arbitrator to resolve the impasse. Since the relationship is one of commitment, it is to the benefit of the parish, the Vestry, the Rector, the bishop and all concerned to make sure that the match is an enduring one. A pastoral relationship is normally ended when the Rector retires or is called to a new ministry. The Vestry must give its consent to the resignation of the Rector, and it almost always does.

Letter of agreement/Covenant of Ministry: All financial arrangements, vacation times, benefits, duties and responsibilities should be carefully written down in a covenant of ministry which is drawn up at the time of the call.

Salary: Total clergy compensation (or TCC) includes a cash stipend and a housing allowance. Mandated benefits include health insurance, life insurance, and 18% pension paid on the TCC. Additional aspects of the package may include reimbursement for travel, dental insurance, funds to be used for continuing education as well as 1-2 weeks for the same purpose, and 4 weeks of annual vacation. By canon law the Rector's salary must be paid in the amount agreed upon in the Letter of Agreement and on the date agreed upon. Neither a Vestry nor a treasurer may reduce without formal re-negotiation or withhold the salary of a cleric.

Housing: The Rector submits a portion of the agreed upon salary to the Vestry to count toward Housing expenses. The Vestry is responsible for approving this amount in accordance with tax laws.

Continuing education and sabbatical leave: It is customary that all clerics take time yearly for continuing education opportunities. St. John's includes this time in the Rector's Letter of Agreement. Time for continuing education is to be used annually and not accrued. It is also customary for the Rector to take a sabbatical at a time interval specified in the Letter of Agreement. Continuing education and sabbatical leave are not considered extended vacation but time for professional training and enrichment absolutely necessary for the health, vitality, and renewal of both clergy and congregation. Thus, congregational budgets should reflect adequate preparation for both.

Collaboration: The Vestry and the Rector work together as a team. Both the Rector and the Vestry are concerned about the spiritual life of the congregation, and both are concerned about the more mundane matters such as money and the leaky roof. When canonical rights and duties are inflexibly insisted upon, resentments may emerge. The best working model for Vestry and Rector is the collaborative one, each recognizing and respecting the province of the other.

Rector's responsibilities: The Rector is responsible for the worship, music, education, and spiritual welfare of the congregation. Such responsibility includes the oversight and administration of parish staff and ministries, as well as the use of parish facilities.

Vestry responsibilities: Having been duly elected by the congregation, the Vestry represents the parish formally in relationship with the Rector. The Vestry is responsible for assuring that the congregation have adequate ordained and lay leadership and that parish finances and properties are managed appropriately. The Vestry is also responsible for seeing that each member of the parish is asked to make a financial pledge for the support of the mission of the Church. The Vestry is responsible for developing (more often by delegating the budget's initial development to a finance or budget committee of the parish) and then approving the annual budget for presentation to the parish at Annual Meeting. The Vestry is also responsible for seeing that the parish's assessment by the Diocese is paid regularly and that an audit of all financial records occurs according to diocesan policy.

In addition, the Vestry has a responsibility to

- work with the Rector to discern, articulate, and carry out the mission of the parish;
- help create and promote programs and activities that achieve the ministry of the parish;
- play a liaison role between parish members and clergy and staff, supporting good communications among all members of the church;
- represent members of the congregation to clergy and in turn help the parish understand the work the clergy are doing and the pressures they may be under;
- mobilize the parish in terms of financial and human resources in order to realize the mission of the parish;
- create a well-planned strategy for various types of fundraising;
- support the ministry of every member of the parish and the Rector;
- evaluate candidates for postulancy;
- establish a regular review of ministry to evaluate and refine the work of the parish;
- be examples of spiritual leadership committed to building up the Body of Christ.

Full disclosure: All parish financial records, excluding individual pledge records or records of people helped through the Rector's discretionary fund, should be a matter of public scrutiny. There should be no secret funds, and information on the salaries of all employees is readily available.

Records Management and Archives: The Vestry is responsible for the records of the parish. Regardless of the source of the records-- Vestry, Rector, clerk, treasurer or other person acting on behalf of the parish-- those which document the activities of the parish and its members are the property of the parish. Some records are permanent, and others do not need to be kept beyond certain legal or administrative limits. These limits are described in records retention schedules published by the Episcopal Church. The Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs (Episcopal Church, USA, New York, 1 January 1995) is available through the Episcopal Church Center in New York, NY.

Staff: In consultation with the Rector, all staff positions--i.e., the parish administrator, administrative assistants, assisting clergy, youth workers, educators, choir directors, and organists-- are created and funded by the Vestry. Personnel filling those positions are hired by and serve at the discretion of the Rector and are accountable to the Rector. The Rector may work collaboratively with a nominating or personnel committee in the selection of staff.

Hiring Policy: Employees of the congregation do not serve on vestries for reasons of conflict of interest.

Employee benefits: A 1991 resolution of General Convention mandated that all lay employees working more than 20 hours a week be included in a pension plan offered by the church.

Safe Church and Anti-Racism Training: All church employees must complete training for Safe Church conduct and anti-racism training. All volunteers who interact with children or other vulnerable groups must take these trainings as well. The training covers appropriate conduct for a church setting, and guidelines for reporting any kind of sexual, verbal, or physical abuse. It also offers best practices for eliminating racism. It is an expectation that all Vestry members complete Safe Church Training, as well as the approved training for anti-racism. Please contact the Parish Administrator to enroll in these training modules.

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

1. Who calls a Rector?

A. The Rector is called by the Vestry with the approval of the bishop. Sometimes the by-laws of a parish require that a congregational meeting vote to affirm the call of a candidate selected by the Vestry. A Vestry usually delegates to a Search Committee the task and responsibility of identifying a priest to call as Rector. The congregation neither directly hires or fires a Rector.

2. May the Vestry terminate the employment of a Rector?

A. No. The position of Rector is a tenured position, and a Rector leaves a parish only in the event of death, retirement, resignation (with the consent of the Vestry), or removal under provisions of canon law. When a Rector and Vestry cannot mutually agree to dissolve their pastoral relationship, the bishop is at first a mediator and as a last resort an arbitrator, in which case the bishop's decision is final and must be obeyed by both parties (known as a "Canon 21" situation).

3. May the treasurer or the Vestry withhold the salary of the Rector if they do not believe that the Rector is doing an adequate job?

A. No. The compensation agreed upon must be paid. A Letter of Agreement is drawn up at the start of a Rector's tenure and is reviewed periodically; ethically, its terms must be followed.

4. May the Vestry reduce the Rector's salary as an expression of disapproval?

A. No. The Letter of Agreement between the Rector and Vestry is a legal contract to which both parties must be faithful; the Letter of Agreement may be reviewed annually and renegotiated.

5. How should a Vestry respond to a conflict with the Rector or a conflict between the Rector and a faction of the parish?

A. Members of the Vestry are encouraged to voice concerns to the Rector directly, either privately or in a Vestry meeting. The Rector should always be part of the conversation. If the process is not fruitful, the wardens have access to the ministry of the bishop, most readily through the Canon to the Ordinary. Working through the conflict is the first course of action advised.

6. The Rector is out of town and the Vestry wants to have a meeting to discuss the Rector's salary. May they do this?

A. No. The Vestry meets at regularly scheduled times and the meetings are presided over by the Rector. Special meetings of the Vestry may be called only by the Rector or by a majority of the members of the Vestry in writing, stating the purpose of the meeting. The Rector always presides unless the Rector delegates that responsibility to a warden or another Vestry person.

7. Who hires clergy assistants?

A. The Rector. A curate, assistant or associate Rector serves at the discretion of the Rector, so defined by the canons. Staff positions are, however, created with the approval of the Vestry and included in the annual budget for which the Vestry has responsibility.

8. Who hires and fires staff?

A. The Rector has the right to hire staff whose salaries have been determined and provided by Vestry planning, and the Rector may terminate staff as well.

9. Who elects the Vestry?

A. The congregation, at its Annual Meeting. A third of the Vestry is elected each year and serves for a three-year term. Vacancies during a term are filled by the Vestry or elected at Annual Meeting from a slate presented by a nominating committee.

10. May the Rector screen the list of Vestry candidates and remove those who do not agree with him or her about parish policy?

A. No. All qualified parishioners in good standing may submit their names to appear on Vestry ballots. An opportunity for nominations to be made from the floor may be encouraged. Contested Vestry elections are a sign of parish health.

11. Who chairs Vestry meetings?

A. It is the Rector's canonical responsibility to preside at Vestry meetings, though from time to time the task may be delegated to a warden or other Vestry member.

12. Can the chair of a Vestry meeting who is also a member of the Vestry vote on matters before the Vestry?

A. Yes, but only in the event of a tie.

13. When a Priest-in-Charge or Interim is serving the parish, who chairs the Vestry meetings?

A. The Wardens are the canonical authority in a parish without a Rector, and they may conduct Vestry meetings in congregations where an Interim Priest is serving—unless clergy and wardens agree otherwise. In a congregation with a Priest-in-charge serving whose responsibility is to normalize parish life, the Priest-in-Charge generally chairs the meetings.

14. Should formal Rules of Order be used at a Vestry meeting or an Annual Meeting?

A. The use of rules of order is preferable but not required at these meetings. When the Diocese meets in convention it uses Robert's Rules of Order.

15. When is it appropriate to go into Executive Session at a Vestry meeting?

A. When matters of a sensitive nature are discussed which require confidential treatment by the Vestry. In Executive Session, all visitors are asked to leave the meeting and no formal minutes are taken.

16. Do members of the parish have voice and vote at a Vestry meeting?

A. Vestry meetings are open as a rule to members of the parish who are welcome to express their views to the Vestry formally if recognized by the chair of the meeting; however, only members of the Vestry are allowed to vote.

17. Can the Rector vote at Annual Meeting?

A. No, except in the event of a tie. The Rector is considered a member of the clergy of the Diocese and not a member of the parish, even though the Rector makes a financial pledge to the parish. Typically, the Rector does chair the Annual Meeting.

18. Does the congregation approve the parish budget at the Annual Meeting?

A. No. The Vestry is fully responsible for the financial matters of the parish and presents the budget at the parish Annual Meeting only for informational purposes. It is incumbent on the Vestry to give a full accounting to the parish on the financial condition of the parish.

19. Can the Bishop visit a parish without a formal invitation?

A. Yes. The Bishop is the leader of the Church in the Diocese.

20. Must a parish financially support the mission of the diocese?

A. Yes. Canon law states that every parish must give financial support to the mission of the diocese.

21. What is the difference between a Rector, a Vicar, a Priest-in-Charge and an Interim Priest?

A. A Rector is called by the parish to be its ordained leader. A Vicar provides clergy leadership to a mission congregation. A Priest-in-Charge serves at the discretion of the Bishop for a limited tenure to accomplish certain goals, and may be a candidate for Rector, depending on the terms set forth initially. An Interim Priest is appointed by the Bishop to serve a parish during its search for a new Rector, and the Interim Priest may not be a candidate for Rector of that parish under any circumstances.

22. In a situation where the organist and the Rector disagree on musical matters and decisions, who has the final say?

A. The Rector.