

About Being a Member of the Vestry of St. Paul's Episcopal Church

“Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.”
(I Peter 4:10)

A parish is led by its clergy and vestry. This is not a board of directors, nor is it senior management, though there are some similarities in the ways these groups function. A vestry is different because a church is different.

The vestry exercises a ministry of servant leadership. Clergy and laity both have vital roles in the leadership of the Church. Though the rector and the vestry have different responsibilities, a relationship of trust enables them to work closely together.

The Mission

The catechism of the Book of Common Prayer sets forth the Church's reason for being: it is “to restore people to unity with God and each other in Christ.”

The Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan

We are a community of Christians who practice an ancient faith in a post-industrial age. Through worship, service, and pastoral care the congregations of the diocese bring the love of Christ alive, ministering both in the mainstream and at the margins. Together we seek creative, life-giving, faith-enhancing responses to the challenges of contemporary economic, social, and spiritual life.

As individuals and as community, we carry out the mission as we represent Christ and the Church; bearing witness wherever we may be; and, according to the gifts given us, carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world.

The responsibilities of being a member of the vestry begin with the baptismal covenant:

- * to be faithful to the apostles teaching and fellowship in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers.
- * to persevere in resisting evil and, when we fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord.
- * to proclaim, by word and example the Good News.
- * to seek and serve Christ in all people, loving neighbors as self
- * to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

hint: the heart of the baptismal covenant is in the verbs.

The vestry:

- * helps to discern the vision toward which God is drawing our community.
- * holds the community accountable for its realization of that vision.
- * keeps the mission and vision of the Church clearly before the parish community.
- * guides the parish in providing a secure and safe place for worship, education, fellowship, and activities.
- * educates the parish on the shared responsibility of financial stewardship and support.

The vestry is composed of nine elected lay members of the congregation. These members must be communicants in good standing, at least 16 years old, and to the well being of the parish.

Each elected member serves a three year term may run for a second three-year term. After service of six continuous years, one full year must elapse before being eligible to serve again.

From the elected membership of the vestry, the vestry selects a Senior and Junior Warden. The elected membership may be joined by a clerk, secretary and treasurer. The Clerk must be an elected member of the Vestry. The clerk and secretary may be the same person. The Treasurer may but is not required to be an elected member of the vestry.

Special meetings of the vestry may be called by the rector (and others in accordance with the parish by-laws). The Rector sets the agenda for special meetings and only the agenda items set may be addressed.

The Wardens

The vestry leaders are called “wardens” which refers to a tradition in the Church of England.

The Senior Warden is the senior elected lay member of the congregation and is an advisor to the rector and family. He/She is sometimes called the “Rector’s Warden” as the Senior Warden is the Rector’s advocate, confidant and principal support within the parish. The Senior Warden has no specific authority other than that of being an elected member of the Vestry and whatever authority is tendered to him/her by the Vestry or the Rector.

During the absence of a Rector or Priest-in-Charge, the Senior Warden has specific responsibilities as assigned by the Canons and parish by-laws.

The Junior Warden at St. Paul's has primary responsibility in the area of property and maintenance. The Junior Warden chairs the Building and Grounds committee. In the absence of the Senior Warden, he or she may assume those responsibilities as well.

At St. Paul's the Vestry has four principal areas of responsibility:

- Financial wellbeing, and the parish budget.
- Property and Maintenance
- The calling of a rector (during a vacancy)
- Work with the Rector in general oversight.

The Major Vestry committees are:

- The Finance Committee meets monthly to review the reports of the Treasurer (as committee chair) and respond to questions as they arise.
- The Stewardship Committee is responsible for year-round general education in the area of Stewardship as well as the annual Stewardship Campaign.
- The Building and Grounds Committee works with the Junior Warden (as Chairperson) and continually oversees the maintenance and upkeep of our building.
- The Executive Committee is composed of the elected officers of the Vestry, meets between vestry meetings and is the parish personnel committee.

Vestry Members Expectations:

- **to attend church regularly**, and make themselves known to new and old members alike. A Vestry Member should attend different services from time-to-time. Truly there is nothing more important than attending, in-person services every week.
 - when possible, attend the social and educational opportunities of the parish such as our Art Walk, Tuesday Lunch and Music events.
 - should commit to the parish financially and work toward the tithe, the standard of giving in the church
 - strive to work within a trust filled relationship with the rector, other members of the vestry, parish clergy and others to best serve.
 - stay away from triangles, gossip, name-calling and the like as those things damage trust and forsake the good that is in all of us.
 - speaking poorly of clergy, wardens, other vestry members and members of our community is not appropriate.
 - Attend all regular and special meetings of the Vestry, and the Vestry retreat.

- If assigned, to represent the Vestry on a committee or event you should attend meetings of that committee or group.
- Support the clergy, and other leaders.
- Support in every way possible the annual Stewardship Campaign of the parish.

Being elected a member of the vestry is a significant responsibility and a challenge. As a member of the vestry, you are “vested” with the leadership of the parish, and thus you are a critical element in its success.

With God’s help, you will serve with distinction, and through your efforts and the efforts of your brothers and sisters in Christ, you will find joy in being vessels for the Lord’s work.

“May the Lord who has given you the will to do these things give you the grace and power to perform them.”
(BCP p.532)