

## What a Vestry Does – 2008 workshop

According to the agenda for the day, this workshop is called “What a Vestry Does” and explains it as follows: “Being a Vestry member requires a basic nuts and bolts knowledge of the church governance. This workshop, a primer for new members and a review for returning ones, will examine the leadership roles and the foundational documents and concepts of church governance in the Episcopal Church”.

I want to begin by sharing with you what one congregation says on their web site about their Vestry:

*“The health of Grace Church relies on the strong and devoted leadership of its Vestry. According to the Canons of our Diocese, the Vestry has five important responsibilities:*

- 1) *To work with the Rector to promote the spiritual welfare of the Parish and to aid the Rector in the institution, conduct, and development of the program of the Church both within and without the Parish.*
- 2) *To be agents and legal representatives of the Parish in all matters concerning its corporate property.*
- 3) *To recruit and support suitable Candidates for Holy Orders and other Ministry in the Church.*
- 4) *To represent the Parish in its relations with the Rector, serving as a Council of Advice for the Rector whenever the Rector requests it.*
- 5) *To elect a Rector when there is a vacancy in compliance with procedures set forth by the Church Canons and procedures.*

*The call to service on the Vestry requires us put our hearts into the continuous quest to learn the will of God for Grace Church and to do it. The Vestry must work against the temptation to see itself as merely the business or administrative body of the Church. God calls the members of the Vestry to an active ministry of co-creation with Christ and not merely the committee of the parish that pays the bills. The Vestry is expected to pray, to search our hearts and minds together, to consult and discuss with one another, to bring passion and commitment to our cooperation as baptized ministers in the New Covenant. The prayer, mutual support, and encouragement of the Rector, by the entire community, and in particular the Vestry, is necessary for the health of the entire body of the faithful. In all*

*things we are to be obedient to the church's mission to "restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." (Book of Common Prayer, p. 855).*

*Our hope is to reach a common mind in our discernment and decisions as often as possible. When a member disagrees with a decision that commends itself to most of the Vestry and to the Rector, the practice of humility and trust can give integrity to his or her subsequent support of the outcome.*

*God's grace makes it possible for our forbearance and respect for one another to transcend mere acquiescence and to express instead the power of love and unity in Christ. In cooperation with the Rector, the Vestry should arrive through discussion at a full understanding of the response or task that is being proposed and pledge itself to full accountability. If difficulties occur in following through on any project, the Vestry should promptly consult with the Rector so that the goal can be realistically reset. We express our humility and faith in Christ also in the way we are receptive to the Rector's teaching and pastoral ministry, and the openness we have to one another's contributions to the common life.*

*The Vestry does not merely represent and reflect opinions held by members of the parish. Rather, the Vestry's role is to lead with a sense of God's desire for Grace Church. If we remain attentive, we see signs that reveal whether the parish is indeed growing into the full stature of Christ. Where our spiritual health is weakened there will be passivity, complaining, resentment, reluctance to be held accountable, rigidity, and lack of candor. Where our obedience to our Lord is emerging from a growing sense of freedom we will recognize the fruits of the Spirit in frankness, initiative, generosity, gratitude, and flexibility. We need to pray for these fruits not merely for our own personal good but so that our Church can be a sign of what it means to be a living branch of the True Vine."*

I think you can see that the role of a Vestry is very broad and encompassing. I'll get to the role of the Vestry in a few minutes, but I want to begin by looking at Church Governance, as the explanation said we would, in the context of the big picture.

1. Outside to Inside
  - 1.1. Church Universal – History
    - 1.1.1. Anglican Communion
  - 1.2. The Episcopal Church, USA – National Canons, Preamble
  - 1.3. Diocese of Fond du Lac – Diocesan Constitution, Article I
  - 1.4. Congregation (Parish/ Mission) – Diocesan Canons, Title V
  - 1.5. Members – National Canons
  - 1.6. Vestry – Diocesan Canons, Title VI

2. Episcopal Church, USA
  - 2.1. Dioceses
    - 2.1.1. fundamental geographical unit of the church.
    - 2.1.2. Only ecclesiastical entity whose boundaries are precisely defined by canon law.
  - 2.2. General Convention
    - 2.2.1. Legislative authority for Episcopal Church, USA
    - 2.2.2. Made up of delegates from Dioceses
    - 2.2.3. Executive Council between conventions
  - 2.3. Presiding Bishop
    - 2.3.1. Elected by General Convention
    - 2.3.2. Chief Pastor and Primate.
    - 2.3.3. Policy and Strategy.
    - 2.3.4. Representative of Church and episcopate.
    - 2.3.5. Provide for interim in a Diocese.
    - 2.3.6. Convene Bishops.
    - 2.3.7. Presiding Officer.
    - 2.3.8. Visitations.
    - 2.3.9. Reports and Pastoral Letters.
    - 2.3.10. May delegate authority.
  - 2.4. Canons
    - 2.4.1. Enacted by General Convention
    - 2.4.2. Sets the framework for the structure of the church
3. Diocese of Fond du Lac
  - 3.1. Deaneries
    - 3.1.1. 5 deaneries, 4 with assigned congregations
    - 3.1.2. Presided over by a dean, appointed by the bishop
    - 3.1.3. Network for clergy and laity
  - 3.2. Congregations – will expand later
  - 3.3. Bishop
    - 3.3.1. Chief pastor of the diocese
    - 3.3.2. Because unable to be present in each congregation each Sunday, presbyters, or priests, serve as delegates and representatives in local congregations
    - 3.3.3. Must visit each congregation at least once every three years
    - 3.3.4. Works with congregations seeking new clergy
  - 3.4. Executive Council
  - 3.5. Standing Committee
  - 3.6. Trustees of the Diocese

4. Congregations
  - 4.1. Unorganized Missions
    - 4.1.1. Established by Bishop
  - 4.2. Organized Missions
    - 4.2.1. Application to the Bishop who names the mission
    - 4.2.2. Bishop appoints a Vestry annually
    - 4.2.3. Title to real estate vested in the Trustees
    - 4.2.4. Purchase of property or bequest must be accepted by the Bishop
    - 4.2.5. Representation in the Convention
    - 4.2.6. No corporate character, part of the diocese
    - 4.2.7. Aided Mission may be dissolved if it shall fail to fulfill its agreements
  - 4.3. Parishes
    - 4.3.1. Formed from an organized Mission
    - 4.3.2. Needs approval of Bishop and Executive Council
    - 4.3.3. Requirements
      - 4.3.3.1.a place of worship and a Vicarage or adequate housing for clergy
      - 4.3.3.2.thirty or more communicants
      - 4.3.3.3.for at least two years has supported its Vicar without missionary aid.
    - 4.3.4. After consent
      - 4.3.4.1.elect two Wardens, at least three, no more than nine, Vestry Members
      - 4.3.4.2.adopt a parish Constitution
      - 4.3.4.3.May take corporate character
5. Members
  - 5.1. Baptized – "All persons who have received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism with water in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, whether in this Church or in another Christian Church, and whose Baptisms have been duly recorded in this Church, are members thereof."
  - 5.2. Communicants – "All members of this Church who have received Holy Communion in this Church at least three times during the preceding year are to be considered communicants of this Church."
  - 5.3. CIGS – " All communicants of this Church who for the previous year have been faithful in corporate worship, unless for good cause prevented, and have been faithful in working, praying, and giving for the spread of the Kingdom of God, are to be considered communicants in good standing.
  - 5.4. Confirmed – " It is expected that all adult members of this Church, after appropriate instruction, will have made a mature public affirmation of their faith and commitment to the responsibilities of their Baptism and will have been confirmed or received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church or by a Bishop of a Church in communion with this Church. Those who have previously made a mature public commitment in another Church may be received by the laying on of hands by a Bishop of this Church, rather than confirmed."

6. Vestry
  - 6.1. Who
    - 6.1.1. Adult Communicants in Good Standing
    - 6.1.2. Wardens
      - 6.1.2.1. Members not less than two years
      - 6.1.2.2. provide a proper book in which shall be recorded names of all persons baptized, married, and buried, together with a list of the persons confirmed and those who are communicants of the Church, with the date of every event recorded and under the signature of the person recording.
      - 6.1.2.3. Cares for and protects the church buildings, kept in good and reverent repair and sufficiently insured.
        - 6.1.2.3.1. Property & Casualty Insurance
          - 6.1.2.3.1.1. Church Insurance Company of Vermont
          - 6.1.2.3.1.2. Diocese is the Policy owner
          - 6.1.2.3.1.3. Congregations are participants
          - 6.1.2.3.1.4. Claim limits are TOTAL of diocesan policy
          - 6.1.2.3.1.5. The Pinnacle Policy
            - 6.1.2.3.1.5.1. Multi-peril property
            - 6.1.2.3.1.5.2. All-risk
            - 6.1.2.3.1.5.3. Directors and Officers / Employment Practices
            - 6.1.2.3.1.5.4. Umbrella Liability
            - 6.1.2.3.1.5.5. Blanker Flood Coverage
            - 6.1.2.3.1.5.6. Sexual Misconduct Coverage
            - 6.1.2.3.1.5.7. International Accident & Casualty
            - 6.1.2.3.1.5.8. Workers Compensation / Employer's Liability
    - 6.1.2.4. With clergy, see things needed for the orderly worship of God and proper administration of the Sacraments are provided
    - 6.1.2.5. When no Vicar/Rector
      - 6.1.2.5.1. procure suitable supply clergy
      - 6.1.2.5.2. take care that the Church building be kept from all secular and other uses not authorized by the Canons.
      - 6.1.2.5.3. make and certify all entries in the Parish Register required by these Canons
      - 6.1.2.5.4. make out and present to the Bishop the annual report therein required.
    - 6.1.2.6. Senior Warden – leader of leaders
    - 6.1.2.7. Junior Warden – building and grounds
  - 6.1.3. Vestry Members
  - 6.1.4. Clerk
    - 6.1.4.1. elected annually by the Vestry
    - 6.1.4.2. attends all meetings of the Vestry, taking minutes of the proceedings
    - 6.1.4.3. attest to all documents requiring it
    - 6.1.4.4. keep the list of voters
  - 6.1.5. Treasurer
    - 6.1.5.1. be elected annually by the Vestry
    - 6.1.5.2. responsible for collection, reception, and disbursement of funds
    - 6.1.5.3. makes a full and complete account to the Annual Parish Meeting

## 6.2. What

- 6.2.1. Discerns, articulates and implements vision
- 6.2.2. Accountable for people and place - stewardship of money & property
- 6.2.3. Keep God's mission in the forefront
- 6.2.4. Team members with clergy
- 6.2.5. Legal requirements like a not-for-profit board, but NOT Board of Directors or Management
- 6.2.6. Draw all members into ministry, but NOT workhorse of the congregation – program development and oversight
- 6.2.7. Calling a new Rector / Vicar in covenanted relationship, not employee/employer
- 6.2.8. Discernment validation of ordination process
- 6.2.9. Supporting clergy
- 6.2.10. Clear and direct communication

## 6.3. Where

- 6.3.1. Church building

## 6.4. When

- 6.4.1. Term of Office
  - 6.4.1.1. Hold office until successors elected or appointed.
  - 6.4.1.2. No Warden elected for more than three consecutive one-year terms. Junior Wardens elected Senior Warden don't count that time. Service as Vestry member doesn't count that time either.
  - 6.4.1.3. Vestry Members elected for a three-year term. An interval of at least one year between terms. Wardens and Vestry Members appointed to interim office are eligible for election to the same office without regard to the interim period served.
  - 6.4.1.4. Wardens and Vestry Members can fill vacancies occurring in the interim between annual meetings.
- 6.4.2. Meetings
  - 6.4.2.1. at least four times a year in the months of January, April, September, and December.
  - 6.4.2.2. Special Meetings called by the Rector or by two members of the Vestry
  - 6.4.2.3. Can't transact business unless Rector/Vicar present (no Rector, Warden), must give notice
  - 6.4.2.4. Compensation package of Rector/Vicar may not be adjusted without the consent of Rector/Vicar

## 7. Why

### 7.1. Canons

- 7.1.1. National, Diocesan - brief in defining the role of the vestry. To complicate matters, there seem to be many overlapping areas of responsibility with the clergy.

### 7.2. Constitution, By-laws of congregation

### 7.3. How

- 7.3.1. Prayer
- 7.3.2. Decision making
- 7.3.3. Behavior

8. Who will help us?
  - 8.1. The Holy Spirit
  - 8.2. Vestry itself
    - 8.2.1. Know yourself
    - 8.2.2. Know your congregation
    - 8.2.3. Know your community
  - 8.3. Diocese staff and structure
  - 8.4. Publications/resources
  - 8.5. Other vestries
    - 8.5.1. benefit from experience of others
    - 8.5.2. obtain ideas to aid you with your various responsibilities.