

# Vestries - Your simple guide

(excerpts taken from the Church of Ireland Parish Handbook 2017)

## Introduction

Many parishioners or new-comers to the Church of Ireland may not understand how churches are managed. This simple guide outlines briefly the management structures for governing the smooth running of a Parish, and explains how parishioners can become more involved.

## The General Vestry

Each year around Easter, every Church of Ireland Parish follows a process to record details of parishioners who wish to be considered members of the Church of Ireland, who can then be directly involved in the governance and management of the Parish. Every lay member of the Church of Ireland, and any member of the clergy who is not serving, who is at least 18 years old and lives within the parish boundaries (known as Residents), or who regularly attends the parish church from outside the parish boundary (known as Accustomed members), is entitled to be registered as a member of the general vestry of the parish.

## Offices within the local Church

At the Annual Easter General Vestry meeting, members are able to nominate and vote for those people to take specific offices within the church. This includes People's Wardens, Parochial Nominators, Diocesan Synod representatives, and Select Vestry members. The Select Vestry is the group of individuals which takes responsibility for managing certain activities and decision-making within the parish. The spiritual direction and vision for the parish lies primarily with the Rector and the Bishop.

## Select Vestry

The people who make up the Select Vestry are the members of the clergy officiating in the parish (who is also the Chairperson), 2 churchwardens per church (known as the rector's churchwarden and the people's churchwarden), the two glebewardens (known as the rector's glebewarden and the people's glebewarden) and up to 12 additional parishioners who are registered members of the general vestry for the parish and elected to the Select Vestry at the Easter Vestry meeting.

The responsibilities of the select vestry include managing the parish finances and employing any lay people, overseeing Church of Ireland Policies are being effectively adhered to (e.g. Child Safeguarding), providing the infrastructure which supports worship and ministry, looking after the exterior and interior of churches, clergy residences, other parochial buildings and graveyards, and ensuring compliance with State and church legislation and regulations.

Select Vestry meetings are typically on a monthly basis and positions are only held for 1 year until the next Annual Easter Vestry Meeting.

## **Charity Legislation Reform**

The purpose of the charities legislation is to ensure greater accountability in charities, to protect against the abuse of charitable status and fraud, and to enhance public trust and confidence in the charities sector. Under the legislation, select vestries are considered to be charities. Charity trustees are defined as the people having day-to-day control of a charitable organisation, for example, members of management groups or committees. As such, select vestry members are charity trustees. In fact, select vestry members have always been considered by the Constitution of the Church of Ireland to be trustees of the Church and in that position are under an inherent duty to act in the best interests of their parish.

The basic responsibilities of select vestry members, as charity trustees, have not changed significantly. As before, they should continue to put the interests of the parish before their own interests and act prudently in all matters to do with the parish. The additional obligation under the reformed charities legislation is the requirement to report to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) on the parish's finances and activities.

The fact that select vestry members are also charity trustees should be seen positively. Trusteeship recognises that members have accepted a particular responsibility and are accountable for this. If members work prudently and act lawfully, there is nothing to fear. Along with the responsibility of being a trustee comes the opportunity to make real difference to the parish and its aims, its mission, finances and the employment of any lay staff.

### **Why does any of this matter?**

The purpose of the local church is to function as the body of Christ to advance God's Kingdom in the world by displaying God's glory. Therefore being aware and involved in the running of the local church is important if we want to see God's purposes being fulfilled in our community. Please consider registering as a General Vestry member in order that we, the Body, can partner in God's mission. Being a General Vestry member does not mean that you have to put yourself forward for any specific responsibilities or join the Select Vestry, but it does mean you can be speak into the future of the governance and stewardship that supports the ministries in the Church of God.

Should you require any further guidance, please speak with Revd Jonny or Lorraine Ogilby (Honorary Secretary).

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