





# The Parish Vestry

**An Introduction to the Operational Role of the Wardens & Vestry  
In the Reformed Episcopal Church**



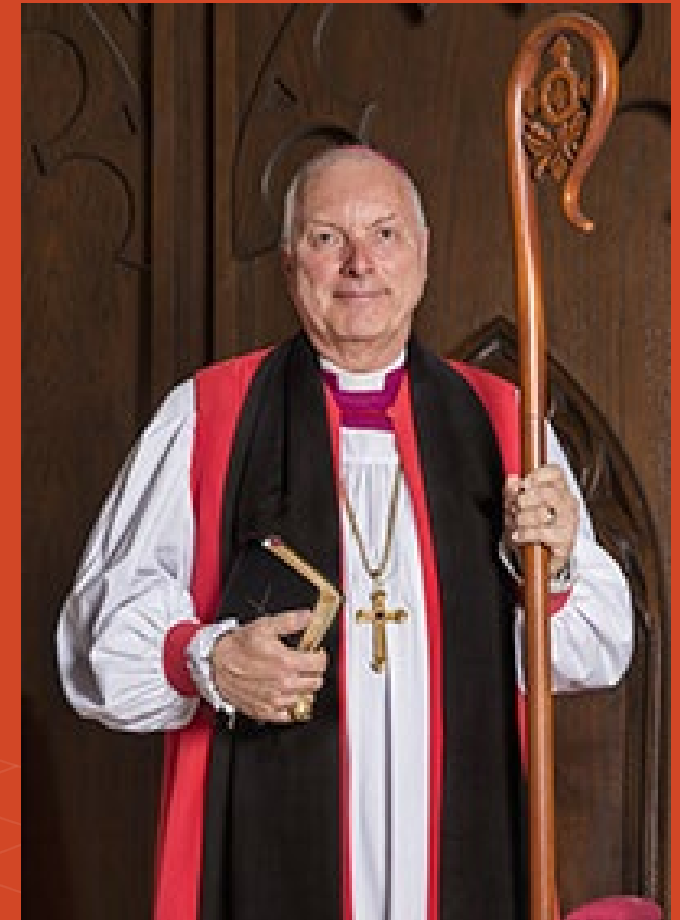
# The Parish Vestry

Produced under the auspices of the chapter of  
The Cathedral Church of the Holy Communion,  
Dallas, Texas

The Ven. Canon James T. Payne, D.D.



# Cathedral Church of the Holy Communion



The Most Rev'd Ray R. Sutton, Diocese of Mid America





# The Parish Vestry

Part I – Vestries

Part II- Vestry Organization & Duties

Part III- Church Wardens & Officers



# A Vestry Prayer

Almighty God, giver of all good gifts, grant to all the members of this Vestry, wisdom to avoid false choices, the courage to follow our Lord's teachings, vision to see thy true calling for our parish, and the grace humbly to acknowledge thy Church universal, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*\*

\*The Pastor's Prayer Book, Robert N. Rodenmayer; Oxford University Press 1960



# Overview of this presentation

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- A Brief History of Vestries
- American Anglican Polity: Conciliarism & Subsidiarity
- Key vestry responsibilities
- Tools and Resources for new vestry members



# Part I :

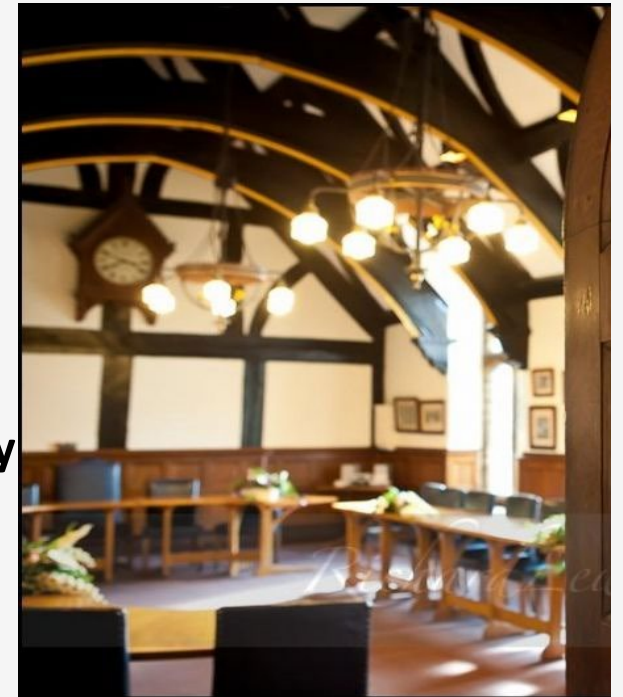
## A Brief History of Vestries

**Q: What does the word “vestry” mean?**

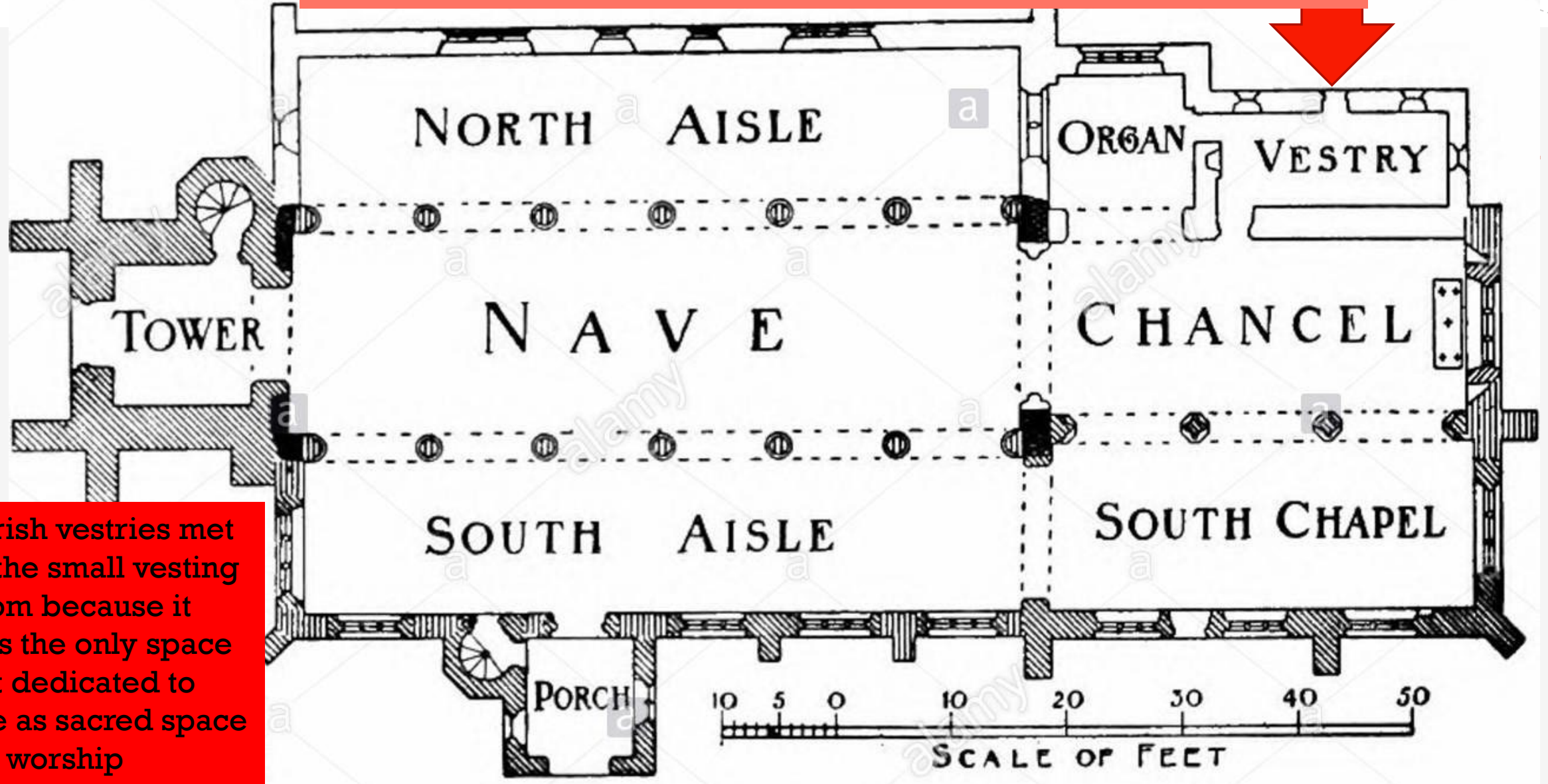
**A: “Vestry” originally described a place, a room.**

In old English parish churches, before there were parish halls or Sunday school, often the only place to meet apart from the sanctuary and nave was in the robing or “*vesting*” room where the clergy put on their “vestments” for worship. This may or may not have included what we call the *sacristy* where the communion vessels, candelabra, vestments and other altar furnishings were kept. Apart from its use to vest for the service, it was the place the priest might give counsel or catechize.

It was often the only room large enough to host a meeting other than the church itself.







Parish vestries met  
 In the small vesting  
 room because it  
 was the only space  
 not dedicated to  
 use as sacred space  
 for worship

PLAN OF KIMPTON CHURCH



# History of Vestries: *continued*

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After the 16<sup>th</sup> Century English Reformation, there was no longer a separation of Church and State, a departure from the Middle Ages. The parish church was still *the church* of all the people and the vestry served as a sort of village council. It consisted of twelve men of the parish, usually from the most prominent citizens. Originally it was self-perpetuating, not elected. Eventually these men came to be called the “Vestry” after the place they met.

Local parishes had to take over much of the charitable work previously administered by monks and nuns. To provide funds for this work vestries were required to provide alms boxes in each church during Divine Service for poor relief. They later set the rate of the local “poor tax”, used along with the alms to help feed the poor, the widows and orphans of the village and its surrounding area. The Vestry maintained the roads and perhaps organized the fire brigade, and was, of course responsible for ordinary upkeep of the parish church and churchyard.



# Parish Records & The Vestry

The Church was now part of the State. The Bishop appointed the Vicar, but the Vestry had to ensure that he was paid and also maintain parish property and financial records.

The priest's salary came from tithes of crops grown on all the village lands; which he supplemented by farming his "glebe lands." All finances were under the supervision of the Vestry.

The local parish was also the repository of public records. Community births, deaths, weddings, baptisms, burials and confirmations had to be recorded. If the parish was vacant, (i.e., had no priest), it befell the vestry's duty to preserve and keep these key records until a new vicar was appointed.

The English vestry system described above was abolished in 1894.

A photograph of a page from a parish record book. The page is titled "1665 Burialls" and contains a list of burials. The entries are written in a cursive script and include names, dates, and sometimes the names of parents or other relatives. The page is divided into two columns by a vertical line.

1665 Burialls		1665 Burialls	
Octo 24	a N C of Henry Triggs P	14	Joseph Gynn s of Richard P
25	Sarah Feild a nurse Childe P	14	a w C of Nicholas Powell P
25	Elizabeth Hollanda N Childe P	19	John Clarke S of Richard P
26	Hellen Wood middome P	19	a C of Willm Williams posth P
28	Mary Ellis wife of M <sup>r</sup> Humphry P	21	a N C of Willd Johnsons posth P
29	Mary Northaprentice Powell P	21	a Stilborne C of John Gilhams
30	Edward Bitts at Nish Ponells P	25	Thomas Skilton S of Edward
31	Francis Fillpott S of Charles P	27	John Lestridge S of Edward
Novem 1	a C of Robert Clarkes posthouse P	Decem 2	a N C of Widdome Parnells ps P
3	Ann Caarst wife of John P	4	Margerie Gothricke
4	Eliza Gardner D of Willd P	6	a C of Widdon Williamsons ps P
4	Fane S Ellins a N Childe P	8	Eliza Newton wife of Thomas



# Churchwardens & Clerks

Churchwardens were present in England from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but Vestries evolved later.

Vestries were under the authority of the church wardens. There were two types of Wardens. They were chosen each year at what was called the annual vestry meeting of the parish. The Senior Warden (or Vicar's Warden) was appointed by the Vicar, the People's Warden was elected by the men of the parish at this annual meeting held on Easter Day. Each represented its constituency before the vestrymen and were thus part of "The Vestry", which was chaired by the Vicar, or often in his absence, his warden.

A man was not allowed to decline the position of warden without payment of a fine, most often the payment of £20.00 ( about \$1,200 today). Jews (interestingly) were not exempt, and in the London area, were often chosen, but more generally usually paid the fine not to serve.

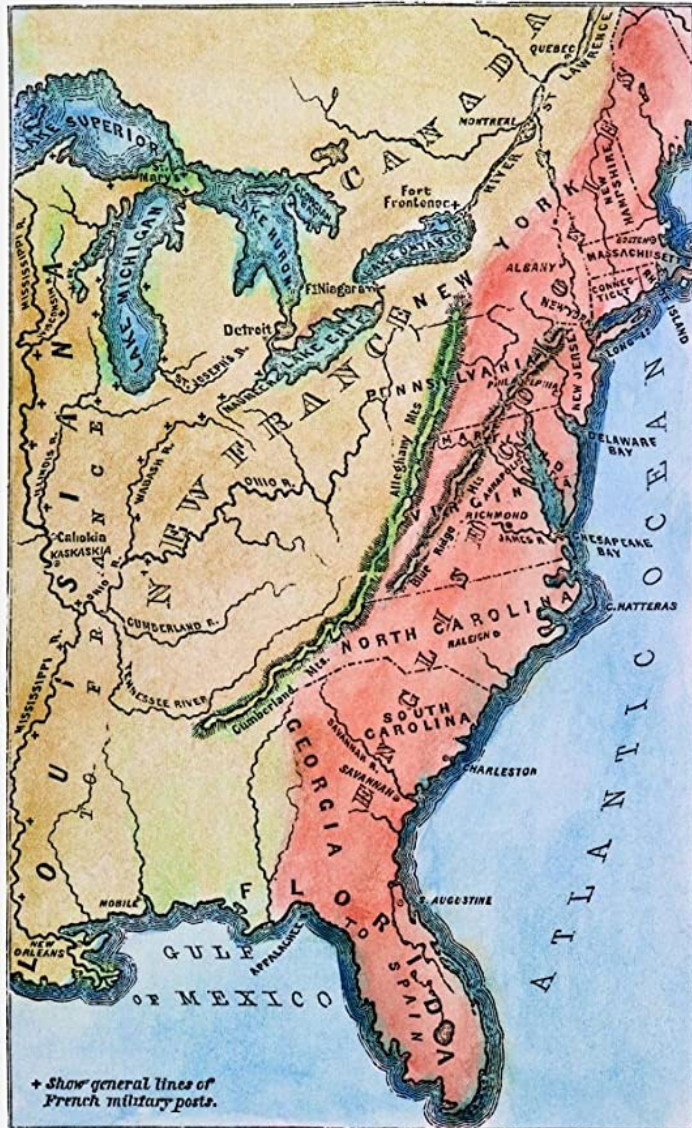
By the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Vestries were called Select Vestries, appointed by the Crown. The vestrymen set and collected the annual "church rates" a locally imposed tax on each parishioner and landowner for the upkeep of the parish.

The parish clerk was paid to directly keep the records and also to keep mandatory attendance records.

Parishioners could be fined for non-attendance of Divine Service. Jews, Quakers and non-conformists were exempt from fines provided they registered as such with the parish clerk. They were not, however, exempt from the church rates. The preceding illustrates the lack of inherent spiritual connection between wardens and vestrymen and the Church in many Hanoverian & Colonial churches



# Vestries in America



The Church of England ( C of E ) was brought to North America by the English colonists as early as 1607. In 1619 it became the Established Church in Virginia.

By 1776 The Church of England was the ‘official’ tax supported “State Church” in 7 colonies:

Virginia, New York, Maryland, Connecticut, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. In several New England colonies, the Congregational Church was the officially state supported church.

In Anglican colonies, the vestry’s civil authority was transplanted into civil and religious life to varying degrees, particularly in the South. In Virginia, vestries collected religious taxes, maintained roads & ferries and were able to refer civil and criminal lawbreakers for prosecution.

In the non-Anglican colonies, vestries existed, but often had had no authority beyond the operation of the parish. This set a precedent for the future.

After the American Revolution “disestablishment” began. Virginia & Maryland “diesestablished” the Church in the 1780s. In 1833, Massachusetts, Was last to do so, ended its official tax support of the Congregational Church.



# An “Episcopal” Church without Bishops



*St. John's Episcopal Church, Hampton, Va.  
Founded in 1610, it is the oldest Anglican  
continuous parish in the United States.  
From 1610 until 1790, it had no bishop.*

To understand American Anglicanism, it must be noted that from Jamestown until 1784 there was not a single bishop in the thirteen American colonies. Thus, there was no diocesan structure.

Parishes were technically under the Bishop of London, who exercised little actual or practical authority. Few people were confirmed. Many neglected services where no fines were assessed.

Local congregations built church buildings and then “called” (employed) priests, who were of necessity all ordained in England. No real episcopal oversight meant that they were essentially chaplains serving at will, or they became powerful religious figures in their community. In neither case was historic order maintained.

Though church missionary societies had some oversight, vestries effectively functioned much like dissenter or congregational church boards that answered to no one until the American Church could be reorganized after the revolution in 1784.



# 1785-1789: A new structure for the American Church

After the American War of Independence, the previous tenuous connection between the colonial churches and England were severed and it was evident to all that some type of regular order needed to be restored.

American Anglicans, now called Episcopalians, created a new polity that preserved important parts of the Episcopal structure of Church of England, but that also reflected both the Federalist and Democratic ideals that came together in the United States Constitution. The structure of the Episcopal Church resembled that of the new nation in that it was federal with a two-chambered legislative structure and a written constitution.

These structures were not at issue with the founders of the Reformed Episcopal Church in 1873 and thus, with modifications, remain an important part of our own covenantal identity and operating structures.

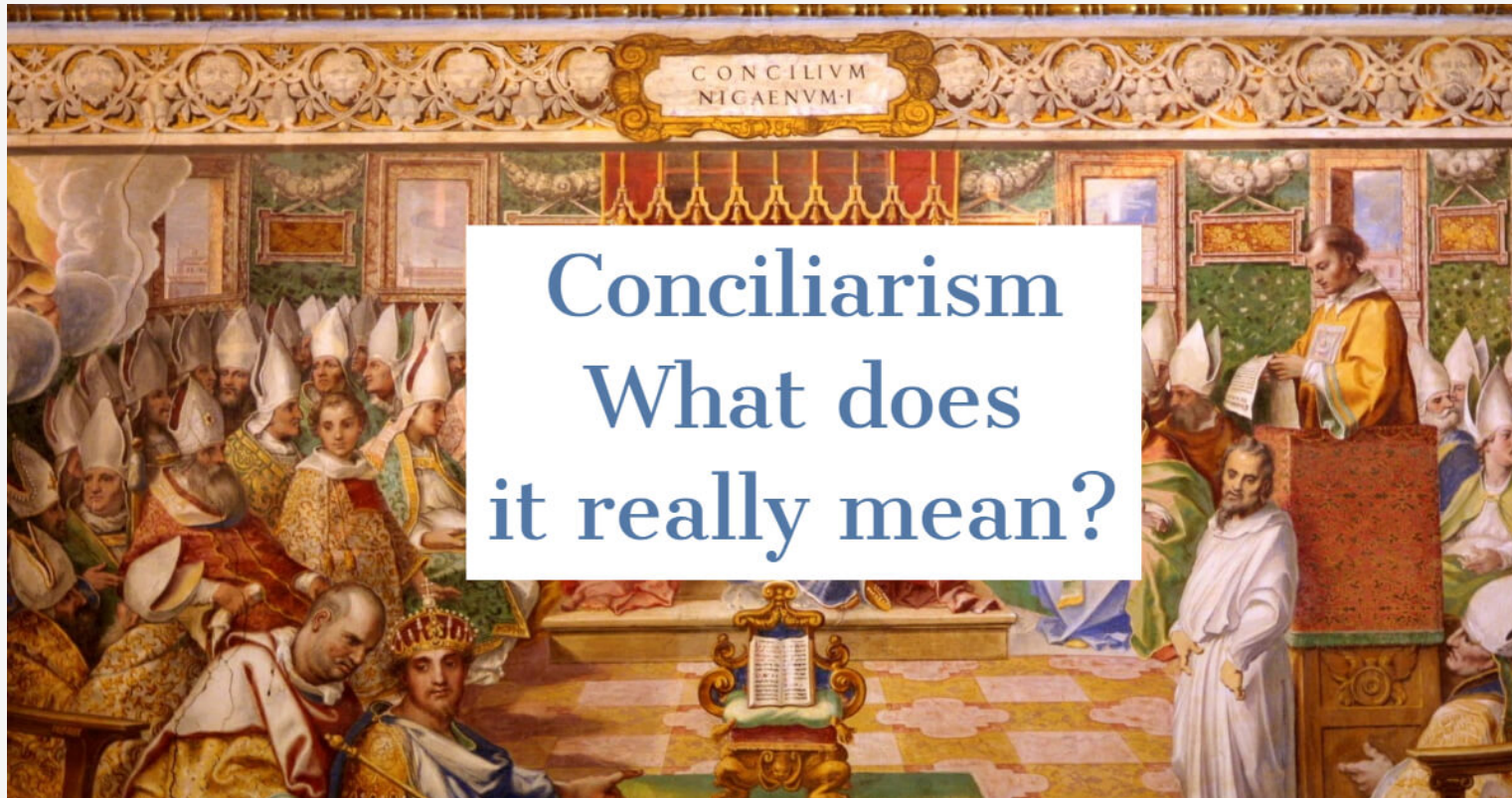
Fundamentally our church order consists of Laity (Baptized & Confirmed, and Deaconesses, set apart) as well as Clergy (Bishop, Priest/Presbyter, Deacon) organized into parishes/missions, which in turn are further organized into dioceses. At the national level we have a General Council, but also a Council of Bishops. These governing structures incorporate the entire people of the church according to two

principles:

**Conciliarism & Subsidiarity**



# Part II American Anglican Polity: Conciliarism & Subsidiarity



**The conciliarism idea is deeply rooted in Church History beginning with the Ecumenical Councils**





**Conciliarism means:**

**“Meeting & deciding together in council with one another”**

As Reformed Episcopalians, we say that the way we make important decisions is by meeting and deciding together, at every level of the church.

We do it in “councils”—which is where we get the adjective “conciliar” and the noun “conciliarism.” Conciliarism is the way Anglicans make decisions.

In your own local Anglican church, you will find this “council” at the annual parish meeting, and between those meetings through a representative body called The Vestry.

At the diocesan level, this happens at the annual diocesan council or synod. Between the annual synods, a “standing committee” of clergy and lay leaders from across the diocese meet to continue the work of the annual synod.

Every three years all of the clergy and lay delegates of every congregation gather to “meet together” in what we call “General Council” to make important decisions that affect the life and mission of the whole church.

In each of these, clergy and laity work together in defined roles according the limits of what is called “subsidiarity”. This legal concept is further extended to the wider church.



# Conciliarism at work (Global Anglican Futures Conference: GAFCON -2018



Over 2,000 Primates, Bishops, Clergy & Laity representing many provinces, hundreds of dioceses, thousands of missions and parishes meeting and working together via the Jerusalem Declaration.



## What does Subsidiarity mean?

**It means making decisions at the lowest level possible within a mutually agreed framework**

1. By working out the rules by which we will live and worship together in a covenantal way, we can establish the boundaries of our common life as Anglican Christians.
2. The “big issues”: what we believe (the boundaries of doctrine), issues regarding worship, morality, Christian ethics, principles of mission, financial and fiduciary standards are spelled out in fixed relationship to each other that allows decisions to be made with agreed upon limitations to all the parties.
3. Conflict resolution within the body of Christ is spelled out in an orderly manner with checks and balances on all levels of authority.
4. Resources for mutual help and support are provided as at every level.
5. The goal is one clarity, efficiency, conflict avoidance and resolution while being biblically faithful and with the maximum liberty for the local parish within the agreed and known boundaries of communion. There is thus some room for diversity in expression provided the substance of the Faith be kept entire.



# Subsidiarity:

Hierarchy of Authority  
As pertains to Vestries  
& Parish Councils



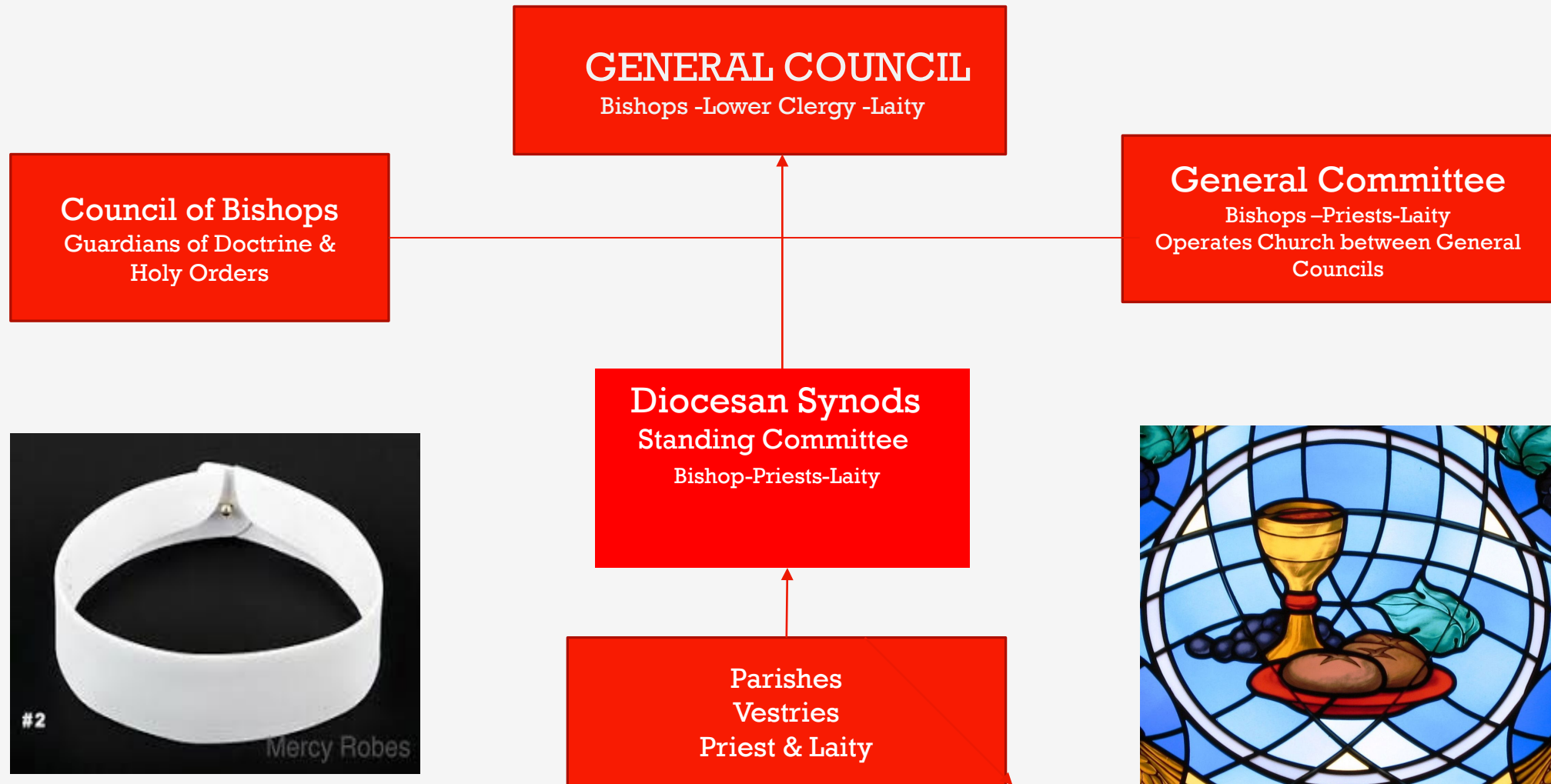
The “toolbox”

**Holy Scripture**  
**The Constitution & Canons of the**  
**Reformed Episcopal Church\***  
**Diocesan Constitution & Canons**  
**Diocesan Customaries or Policies**  
**as Duly Adopted**  
**Parish Articles of Incorporation**  
**Parish By-Laws**  
**Parish Policies**

[\* the requirements of Civil or Criminal Law and the  
Constitution of the Anglican Church in North America also apply]



# How Conciliarism & Subsidiarity work together in an Anglican Church Ordination Process



A man seeking ordination does so within the structures of the Church



**A simplified chart of the path to Holy Orders as required by the canons and the various discernments, testing, and approvals by the Bishop, Clergy, and Laity of the Diocese making decisions together.**

The new priest will usually serve as an assistant for several years before being given a mission or called to a parish to be a rector. The "call" is made by a vestry.



The Bishop assigns the deacon to a parish. After a minimum time in service, he MAY be ordained a priest, but he must have a "call". (The call is issued only by a parish vestry)

If he passes, the Bishop MAY ordain him a deacon. The final decision is his & his alone.

He is assigned an examining chaplain and must also be active in a local congregation and report 4 times a year to the Bishop (clergy & laity)

His studies in seminary complete, his name is brought before the Standing Committee by the Bishop to be approved as a candidate for Holy Orders. (clergy & laity)

He prepares for and takes his written & oral ordination exams, conducted by the Bishop &/or the examining chaplains. (clergy)

The Bishop enrolls him as a postulant & he begins his formal studies.

The Bishop does due diligence & meets with the man & his wife & considers postulancy.

Approved by both clergy & laity he is then referred to the Bishop.

**START HERE**

A man thinks he is called to Holy Orders

He goes to his priest (clergy) for counsel and approval

He is recommended to the parish vestry seeking their endorsement





Most of the work of the Church involves similar examples of conciliarism and subsidiarity.



# Part III

## The Work of the Wardens & Vestry







# Parish Vestries are Established by the Canons

## [General Council] CANON 49 - *Of Parish Vestries*

Section 1 In every Parish of this Church the number, mode of election, and term of office of Wardens and Vestrymen, with the qualification of voters, shall be such as the State or Provincial or Diocesan Canon Law may permit or require, and as required by the By-Laws of the Parish. The Wardens and Vestrymen elected under such law shall hold office until their legal successors are elected and have qualified.

Section 2 Except as provided by the law of the State or Province of the Diocese, the Vestry shall be agents and legal representatives of the Parish in all matters concerning its corporate property and the relations of the Parish to its Clergy.





Continued from previous page

Section 3 The Rector, when present, shall preside in all the meetings of the Vestry.

Section 4 All Vestry Meetings shall be open to all members of the Parish or Mission and shall be conducted in accordance with the laws of the State, Territory, or Province of incorporation and in full compliance with the Constitution and Canons of the Reformed Episcopal Church, the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese or Missionary Diocese, and the By-Laws of said Parish or Mission

Section 5. Vacancies occurring in the Vestry during the year may be filled by the remaining members. Any person so elected may serve until the next Annual Parish Meeting, at which time a replacement shall be elected by the Parish to serve any unexpired term in office.





# Diocesan Canons provide needed clarity regarding the work of Vestries

## DMA Title IV CANON II – *Of the Wardens and Vestry*

**Section 1.** The governing body of a local Parish or Mission Parish is called a Vestry, which shall legally exercise temporal authority in the conduct of parish business, hold title to and maintain all parish property, and have authority over the finances of the same within the limitations of the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Mid-America and of the Reformed Episcopal Church.

**Section 2.** A Vestry shall consist of two Wardens: a Rector's Warden (or Senior Warden), and an Accounting Warden (or Junior Warden), and some number of Vestrymen. The term of office shall be determined by the Charter or By-Laws of the Parish or by the Parish at a stated meeting, subject to the Constitution and Canons of this Diocese of Mid- America and of Canon 49 of the Reformed Episcopal Church.





# How are Parish Vestries Constituted ?

## The Rector & Wardens & Officers

1. The Rector (Called by the Vestry, instituted as Rector by the Bishop & under contract to the Parish corporation ) functions as Pastor and *Chief Executive Officer*. He corresponds the Chairman of the Board in a Corporation
2. The Senior Warden (Nominated by the Rector, confirmed by the Vestry) is the *Chief Operating Officer*, and chief lay leader of the parish. His office corresponds to that of Corporate President. He/she executes contracts on behalf of the parish vestry and is sometimes called the Rector's Warden because he/she represents the interests of the Rector and his family to the Vestry & the Parish. He thus has important dual authority.
3. The Junior Warden (Elected by Annual Meeting or the Vestry) Supervises all parish property and property maintenance. In small parishes, functions as Treasurer and in some cases, oversees the ushers. Is "the people's warden" and equates the office of Vice President.





## How are vestries constituted Part 2

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4. The “vestrymen” – men and women consists of a group made up of Three, Six, Nine or occasionally Twelve- Elected Members- minus the Wardens, serving overlapping three-year terms. These represent the communicant membership of the parish.

5. Usually there is a Secretary/Clerk, and Treasurer. These may or may not be elected members of the Vestry. If not, by action of the Vestry, they may have voice, but no vote. In some cases, they may even be paid employees.

By-Laws may allow for other officers, “assistant treasurer”, etc if duly approved.



# Basic duties of the parish Vestry



**DMA Title IV Canon 2 Section 8.** It shall be the duty of the Vestry to take charge of all properties of the Parish, to regulate all its temporal concerns, to act in calling a Rector or Minister-in-Charge unless otherwise provided by the Charter and By-Laws of the Parish, to employ all other persons serving the Parish under salary and fix the amount of each salary. The Vestry cannot buy or sell real estate of the Parish without the approval of a Parish meeting called for that purpose.





# VESTRY MEETINGS & DUTIES



# Partial List of Vestry Authority/Duties

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The calling of a rector & other clergy & of financial and other benefits

All matters concerning budget and finance and operations policy

All matters concerning the parish property including real estate

All matters concerning terms of employment and compensation

All matters concerning insurance and other risk management issues

Provision of vestments and items needed for Divine Worship

Endorsement of persons seeking Holy Orders or being a Deaconess







# Typical Parish Committees

1. Finance Committee
2. Safety or Risk Management
3. Building & Grounds
4. Christian Education/Youth Group
5. Parish Communications
6. Parish Life/Events
7. Outreach
8. Music/Choir
9. Evangelism
10. Women of the Church
11. Men's Group
- & others



# Committee Guidelines

1. The Rector, Senior Warden, and Junior Warden should be members of the most important committees: Finance, Safety/Risk Management, Compensation, Building and Grounds and “ex-officio” members of every committee.
2. The Senior Warden generally substitutes for the Rector in his absence except as follows:
3. The Finance Chairperson ordinarily chairs meetings of that committee.
4. The Junior Warden should chair Building & Grounds or other committees primarily involving parish fixed assets.
5. In all cases, the Rector may request to have the floor or assume the chair.
6. Committees other than those named above, when it is possible, should have a vestry member on the committee. In every case all committees are under vestry authority.
7. Committees should broadly represent the communicants of the parish and seen as a training ground for future vestry members.
8. Committees should be given general instructions and then allowed to function within their sphere of authority.
9. Any member of a committee should recuse themselves on matters concerning themselves or that constitute a conflict of interest, and abstain on any vote concerning the same.





## Special Committees

1. Strategic Planning or Self Assessment Committee
2. Building Committee or Sub-Committee
3. Rector Search Committee
4. Other limited-duration committees for a special or singular set of goals and a duty to report.



# Limitations on Vestry Authority

1. The Vestry may not meet unless called into session by a person(s) authorized to do so. Usually the Rector, either Warden, or (sometimes) a minimal number of vestry members named in the by-laws.
2. Individual Vestry members have no individual authority to act in an official or corporate act without approval of a majority of the Vestry.
3. The Vestry has a responsibility to do “due diligence” and exercise its fiduciary responsibilities.
4. May not take any action forbidden by Law, or by the Constitution & Canons, Policies established by the General Council or Diocesan Synod, by Parish By-Laws, or established policies of the parish.
5. Required to use generally accepted accounting rules and allow the Bishop or diocese to inspect or audit financial records



# MONTHLY VESTRY MEETINGS

1. Should be scheduled at a regular time & announced in advance
2. Should have a written agenda and sent out in advance
3. Should include minutes of the previous meeting.
4. Should include an income/expense statement, a balance sheet showing assets & liabilities & a statement of all banking accounts & investment accounts from the previous month end.
5. Reports from the Rector, Wardens and Committees as needed.
6. Resolution/updates of Old Business.
7. New Business presentations.
8. Closed Session – Personnel or other confidential business.
9. Schedule next meeting and adjourn.

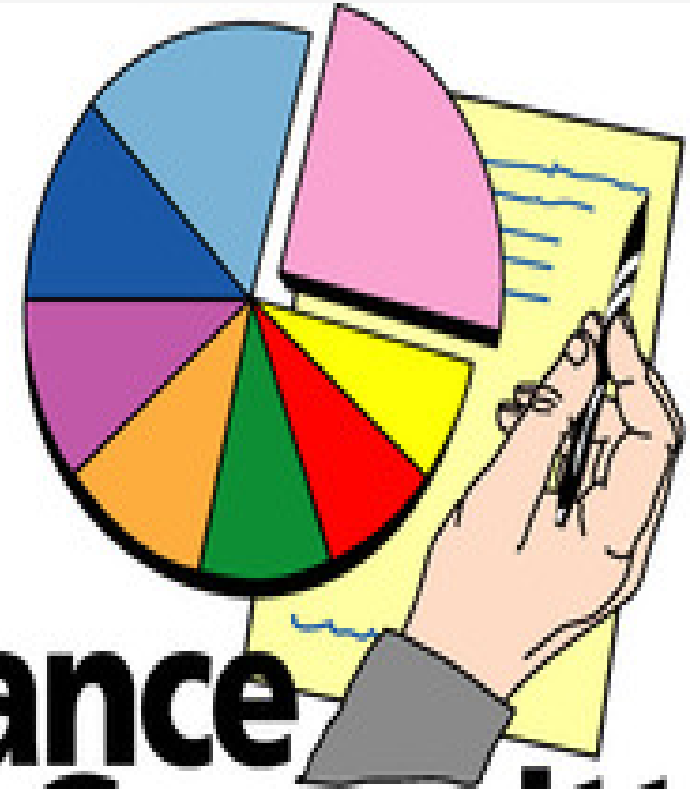




**Two areas that require their own separate presentations in our webinar today:**



**Risk Management or  
Safety Committee**



**Finance  
Committee**



# Legal Issues Concerning Vestries & Parishes



&



These important issues will also be covered later in today's presentation



# HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL VESTRY MEMBER

- Regularly prepare for, attend, and participate in vestry meetings.
- Be regular in attendance at worship.
- Be an active member in at least one of the parish's ministries
- Practice and model good stewardship as becomes a mature Christian.
- Attend workshops and retreats if able.
- Interpret decisions of the vestry and the Rector to other parishioners in a supportive way.
- Maintain confidentiality. Most interpersonal or divisive issues do not belong in the Vestry, but should be taken to the Rector, Wardens or Parish Council instead.
- Support the mission of the church, putting overall interests of Christ and His church and its mission first.
- Be receptive to individual parishioner's concerns and, if necessary, be willing to discuss these concerns with the Rector, Wardens and/or Parish Council as appropriate.







Vouchsafe O Lord, to thy servants to whom the affairs of this parish are committed such prudence, justice, and charity that they may be of one mind and one heart in the building up of thy Church, and in the spread of thy kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Blessed Lord, who hast called us to this office in thy Church, guide us, we beseech thee in our deliberations, so that our aims may be to the strengthening of thy work in this parish and the support of the Church's mission throughout the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



