

Vestry Responsibilities, Roles and Election

This document is intended to describe the responsibilities of the vestry and the roles that they play in the life and operation of the church. In addition, it will briefly describe the process we use at St Peter's to seek potential candidates from the congregation and selection for those nominees who have agreed to stand for election to the Vestry.

Vestry Responsibilities

The general responsibility of the vestry is to serve as helpers of the Rector in whatever is appropriate to the laity for the furtherance of the Gospel, both within the church and the world at large. This would include; helping to define and articulate the mission of the congregation; to support the church's mission by word and deed, to select the rector, to ensure effective organization and planning, and to manage resources and finances. In particular, the vestry is the legal representative of the parish with regard to all matters pertaining to its corporate property. While the vestry serves as the Rector's helper, the spiritual concerns of the Church are under the exclusive direction of the Rector.

Expectations of a vestry member:

- Preparation for and attendance at all vestry meetings is a priority.
- Regular attendance at worship services.
- Regular attendance and participation in the life at SPEC.
- Vestry members are expected to be willing to serve on one additional vestry Committee.
- Vestry members are asked to be leaders in exercising faithful stewardship of time and money.
- Stewardship of money includes making and faithfully completing a responsible annual pledge and help fellow parishioners understand the need for resources to do God's work.
- Compassionately listen to the concerns and views of parishioners, especially their questions, suggestions, complaints, and compliments. Where appropriate, share these views with the rector and vestry.
- Pray for the clergy, leaders, and members of the parish.
- Attend the annual vestry retreat which will be announced at least 8 months prior.
- Complete the diocesan required Safeguarding God's Children online training annually.
- Attend the Annual Meeting held on or near the last Sunday of January.
- Attend parish-wide meetings as needed.
- Confidentiality in most matters of vestry business or when appropriate.

The number of vestry members and the term of office differs from parish to parish. St Peter's bylaws state (Article V-Vestry) that the vestry shall consist of not less than 12 members nor more than 17 members. Furthermore, one must have been a member of the parish for at least one year to be eligible for Vestry service.

The Constitution & Canons of the Diocese of Missouri provide additional guidance regarding the qualifications for service on the Vestry. With respect to the composition of the Vestry (Canon IV.5A) they state that Candidates shall be adult lay communicants in good standing who have reached their majority. Communicants in good standing means generally that they have been faithful in corporate worship and faithful in working for and contributing to the spread of the Kingdom of God, and has been neither suspended from nor refused Holy Communion. As with other spiritual concerns of the Church, the Cleric in charge of a Congregation shall be the initial judge of the standing of its members.

More specifically for St Peter's, a "Communicant in Good Standing" would actively participate in the life of the Church through worship (Canon IV1b. a least 3 times a year), financial contribution, extended participation in parish life (e.g. youth, formation, outreach etc.) and enthusiastically support others in ministry.

Roles Within the Vestry

Two wardens are typically selected to serve with members of the Vestry. The wardens are generally ranked "senior" and "junior." At St. Peter's, the Rector names the Sr. Warden and the Vestry elects the Jr. Warden. The senior warden is usually the primary elected lay leader of the congregation, and serves as a principal liaison between the parish and the rector. The senior warden leads the parish between rectors and is a support person for the rector. The junior warden is often given responsibility for the upkeep of the parish buildings and grounds but not always.

A Treasurer and a Secretary or Clerk may be chosen from among the other Vestry members, although these officers are not required to be vestry members. In the later case they would not be allowed to vote on matters before the Vestry. The Treasurer is responsible for reporting the finances of the Church, presenting and reporting on the annual operating budget and providing for an annual audit of the financial records. The Secretary or Clerk is responsible for recording and publishing the minutes of all vestry meetings.

Other roles and responsibilities of Vestry Members vary but typically involve various aspects of the life of the parish and the mission of the church.

Election to the Vestry

Election of the Vestry and Convention Delegates occurs on the first Monday of January each year or as soon thereafter as practical. The rules governing these elections are detailed in St Peter's Bylaws (Article V-Vestry, Section 4) and generally reflect the Canons of the Diocese (see below) with the exception of some aspects of the voting process.

Canon IV5A.SECTION 1. On the first Monday in January of each year, or as soon thereafter as practicable, every Parish shall hold its annual meeting to elect successors to any members of the Vestry whose terms of office have expired, and to transact any other business properly brought before the meeting. Except as otherwise provided in these Canons, the Rector shall preside at the meeting. The polls shall be kept open for at least one half hour. In the case of a contested election, voting shall be by secret ballot. Each elector of the Parish who is present shall be entitled to vote, but no proxies shall be permitted. *A preferential ballot may be used if so specified in the notice provided for below.* Whatever election procedures and method of voting are employed must be fair and democratic. Notice of the annual meeting shall be given to the congregation at all public services on the two Sundays immediately preceding the meeting. The notice shall specify the method of voting and the time and place of the meeting. The right of challenge shall be admitted; the Secretary of the Parish meeting shall make record of any challenge and its cause. Reference may be made to the Bishop, whose decision shall be final.

Terms of Office: (St Peter's Bylaws Article V, Section 3)

Each Vestry member is elected to a 3-year term and can serve two consecutive terms. The make up of the Vestry is to consist of 3 classes of Vestry members with overlapping 3-year terms such that we are electing approximately one third of the vestry at each annual meeting.

Nominations to Vestry: (St Peter's By Laws Article V, Section 6)

A nominating committee shall recommend candidates to the Vestry not later than the regular December meeting of the Vestry. Nominations may also be made from the floor at the Annual Meeting in January.

At St Peter's the Nominating Committee is comprised of the Sr. Warden, the past Sr. Warden and all members of the Vestry with expiring terms for that year. This committee seeks to identify members of the congregation that:

1. Actively participate in the life of the church through worship

2. Actively participate in parish life and the mission of the Church
3. Make an annual financial contribution to St. Peter's
4. Enthusiastically support others in ministry

Furthermore, the Nominating Committee seeks to provide balance within the Vestry such that specific needs and capabilities required for the healthy and efficient operation of the Church are represented on the Vestry and that the Vestry fully represents the diversity of the Congregation.

While the Nominating Committee members individually seek potential candidates from the congregation, they are also open to receiving recommendations for vestry candidates from the congregation at large. Requests for this input are made via the Service Bulletin in worship services in the fall. Thereafter, the Nominating Committee meets to discuss and select those candidates that in their judgment best fit the needs of the Vestry and the Church. They then have private conversations with each potential Nominee to insure they are willing and able to faithfully serve at least a 3-year term on the Vestry. Once the slate of nominees is completely vetted it is presented to the Vestry for approval. It is our practice to provide the list of these approved Nominees with the notices of the upcoming Annual Meeting.

It has been the practice at St Peter's to submit a slate of nominees for election to the Vestry at the Annual Meeting equal to the number of expiring terms, i.e. *a preferential ballot*, as described in the Canons (IV5.A. Section1). There are two major reasons for doing this:

1. We do not want to deter the service of potential candidates by requiring them to stand for election against friends and/or parishioners.
2. Given the challenge of providing for broad representation of the congregation as well as the specific needs and talents required by the incoming Vestry, finding at least two candidates for each opening on the Vestry would too often require compromising those two critical objectives.

In any case, the Bylaws of St Peter's also allow for nominations from the floor at the annual meeting (Article V-Section 6B).

References:

Much of the source material is used for this summary is derived from the By-Laws of St Peters (January 27, 2008, attached), the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese of Missouri and the website of the Episcopal Church.

http://www.diocesemo.org/download_file/view_inline/165/261/

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/glossary/vestry>