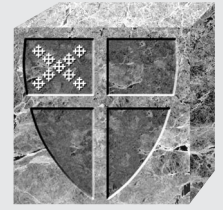


VESTRY PAPERS

To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations



CORNERSTONE

IS A MINISTRY OF

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

FOUNDATION

Vestry Members as Spiritual Leaders

by L. Ann Hallisey

"The spiritual leadership of the parish is the rector's job!"

"I don't know how to talk about it, I wouldn't know what to say."

"Now you're saying we have to worry about being spiritual leaders as well as overseeing the budget, and stewardship, and education, and buildings and grounds?"

These were some of the shocked reactions in a workshop focused on spirituality for vestry members attending a recent diocesan vestry training day. Clearly, they did not see a growing, active prayer life as an essential attribute of vestry leadership. However, quite the opposite is true. Vestry members are indeed spiritual leaders in their parishes. For the vestry is the Body of Christ, and not just in microcosm. In their gathering they represent the fullness of the church—one,

holy, catholic and apostolic. It is the holiness factor under consideration here.

When vestry members individually and collectively take seriously their leadership in the spiritual life of the congregation, their very functioning is influenced. An example: When I was a rector, at our annual mutual ministry reviews, we would ask retiring members to tell us how being on the vestry had influenced them the most. The first time I tried this I expected to hear about the demands on already busy lives or stress on the congregation as our local employer (a naval base) closed its doors.

Imagine the impact on all of us when we heard our most tentative believer say that *her faith had grown* because of being on

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What exactly are the responsibilities of vestry members? Here four writers explore that question—and all agree that sharing in the spiritual leadership of congregations is both essential and life-giving.

MY TOP TEN LIST

Vestry Responsibilities

by Scott Evenbeck

Just as the Great Commission—"Go therefore into the world to make disciples of all nations"—does not go into great detail on how exactly to accomplish that mission, so the canons of the Episcopal Church are not particularly specific about the responsibilities of vestries.

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" (Canon 14). That's the whole thing.

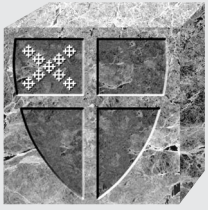
Being from David Letterman's Indiana hometown (I used to shop at the store where he carried out groceries) and to provide a little

more meat on the bones of how ought a vestry to act—here is my Top Ten list of how I understand the responsibilities of vestries:

1. Those of us on vestries should explicitly seek God's guidance in our work. While a vestry has legal and fiscal responsibilities (and must take them seriously), a vestry is not a board of directors for a business or a not-for-profit. The work of the vestry can be done only as it is grounded in the Spirit. Too often we are not intentional and reflective about our work.

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*This Issue:
Vestry Roles and
Responsibilities*



Vestry Responsibilities

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How then do we remind ourselves that the work of the vestry is God's work? We might light a candle to remind us of the presence of Christ. We might end the meetings with Compline. We might share spiritual reflections as a regular part of the agenda. We do begin and end the meetings with prayer.

2. The vestry must seek means to form community. A vestry is a group of individuals, called to work in the church, together. Most likely, vestry members will come from different services with different backgrounds and have various agendas. Finding common ground, centered on the spiritual life of individuals and of the vestry as a group, then, is fundamental to successful work as a vestry.

3. A vestry should act in concert with the rector. The rector is a member of the vestry. The rector chairs the vestry. The rector has canonical authority (e.g., use of space) for certain matters in the church. The rector is NOT a CEO hired by a board of directors to direct a staff carrying out the mandates of the board. Rather the rector is a *partner* with the vestry in the mutual discernment of mission.

In concert with the bishop, the vestry determines the means for calling the rector and negotiating a memorandum of agreement. But after that, it's a partnership.

4. The vestry is not a representative body. Thinking of vestry membership as one from Christian education, one from the choir, one from the Scouts, etc., where we vote *our* interests, will only get us into trouble.

The vestry is a group of individuals seeking to discern, with the rector, what the parish is called to do and to have oversight of that work.

5. A vestry must define its OWN mission, vision, values, and goals. There are many organizing principles for outlining the work of the vestry. Personally I like the SWEEPS model (stewardship, worship, education, evangelism, pastoral care, and service), partly because the acronym is memorable.

But what is more important is that the vestry moves away from automatic pilot to define its own direction. Vestries are well served by being intentional about their agenda and work.

6. Vestries must set strict time limits on buildings and grounds discussions. Vestries, in my experience, often move their attention to the concrete.

It is a lot easier to spend a year's worth of meetings hashing out the problems with the old carpet (which people may trip on as they enter meetings) than it is to decide to FIX the carpet and move on to what the parish is called to do. Set strict time limits on buildings and grounds discussions, form a committee—and get on with attending to the rest of the life of the church.

7. Hold yourself, and one another, accountable. Have vestry members committed to the tithe as the standard for giving? Does anyone talk about pledging in concrete terms?

The last vestry on which I served would probably have exceeded the giving of the entire parish if the vestry members had approached a “modern” tithe of 5%, let alone the biblical tithe. My own parish reinforces that a person's pledge is known only to the bookkeeper, not to the rector or anyone else. That sure keeps stewardship in the closet.

8. Vestries should celebrate. Annual picnics, receptions, outings, dinners, and other celebratory events should be part of vestry life.

9. Have formal rituals. We're a liturgical church. We like this stuff. It's meaningful to us. Begin (and maybe end) service on the vestry with a formal ritual in a worship service. It's what we do well. And it matters.

10. Seek continuity and embrace change. In many parishes, the “old guard” controls the vestry. In others, there is so much turnover that the continuity that allows for living out a mission is lost, with the parish reinventing itself every year. It is a delicate balance—to provide continuity and to bring in “new blood” and new ideas. But it's a balance we need to constantly work on. And being about balance...it's even Anglican!

A three-time senior warden at St. Paul's in Indianapolis, Scott Evenbeck is the dean of University College at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and was the first lay President of the Consortium of Endowed Episcopal Parishes. A longstanding deputy to General Convention, he chaired the House of Deputies' Committee on Education in 2000 and 2003.

“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:7-8

What might great Anglican thinkers from the past have to say about the responsibilities of today's vestries? We asked scholar and author Richard Schmidt to comment.

WISDOM FOR THE AGES

Richard Hooker on Conflict

by Richard H. Schmidt

The name Richard Hooker rings no bell for most vestry members. More than a few clergy haven't heard of him, either. It's a shame. Along with Thomas Cranmer, father of the Prayer Book, Hooker is responsible for the distinctive way Episcopalians "do church."

Richard Hooker was an English priest and theologian, born in 1554, during the reign of "Bloody Mary." He died in 1600, at the end of the reign of Elizabeth I. His age was like our own in that fighting and bickering had consumed much of the church's energy for about as long as anyone could remember.

Hooker is chiefly remembered as the author of a very long book which introduced a way of thinking, and more specifically of dealing with conflict, which has guided Anglicans ever since. His publisher, apparently unconcerned with marketing strategies, let Hooker give his book a singularly boring title: *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*.

The *Polity* is not, however, a boring book. Hooker's writing style, though plodding by modern standards, is a model of precision and clarity. Moreover, because he addresses a church exhausted by fighting, his message is as up to date as this evening's newscast.

Vestries are often caught up in church fights, and although it is nowhere stated that a vestry's responsibilities include conflict mediation, that's often what vestries do—or would if they knew how. Official job descriptions notwithstanding, conflict mediation is perhaps a vestry's most important task. Here are three observations on conflict mediation drawn from the wisdom of Richard Hooker:

Conflict mediation is essential

✚ **Most differences aren't worth a fight.**

The issues in Hooker's day differed from those today. They included whether to name

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EASING THE LOAD

Missionaries One and All

by A. Wayne Schwab

Is not God most concerned about how we live from Monday to Saturday? Are not Sunday and all of church life intended to provide guidance and power for our Monday to Saturday living? Therefore, congregations appropriately make their basic purpose that of supporting the members in their daily living as Christians.

The vestry does not legislate this purpose by a resolution. Rather, vestry and clergy together lead the congregation into living it. It takes time. It looks difficult but as congregational life moves towards this goal, vestry members feel the weight of leadership decrease. Their yoke becomes easier and their burden becomes lighter.

Unexpected missionaries

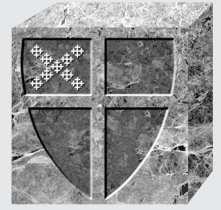
The change begins with the vestry. They look at what they are doing to make life better—more loving, more fair—in each

area of their daily lives. Next, they discover that what they work to accomplish God is working to accomplish with them. They are missionaries—agents of God's mission—and did not know it!

Their homes, their work, their local communities, the wider world, and their recreation, as well as the church are their "mission fields." These six areas are the places—the "mission fields"—where they work with God to make life better.

They had thought they would run the "business side" of the church, help the clergy get "jobs" done, and recruit members to help them. They find, instead, that their real task is to help the members discover their daily missions and live them well. And the vestry's work is far more rewarding as the members

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To view additional resources on the topics covered in this and other issues, visit our website at:

www.EpiscopalFoundation.org/research/resources.html

Missionaries One and All

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rejoice over being met where they are—in their daily living.

Reflection is key

How does this new kind of leadership occur? In hour-long sessions with small groups of six to eight, vestry teams lead members in reflecting on one of the six daily mission fields.*

- ✚ What is God doing in this part of my life now?
- ✚ What inhibits God's love and justice there?
- ✚ What change is needed?
- ✚ Knowing my own gifts, what will I do there to make life better?
- ✚ How will I get others to help me?
- ✚ How will I talk of God and being "fed"—empowered—at Jesus' table while we work together?

As members begin to see that God is working with them in one of their mission fields, they want to explore the other five as well. They enjoy discovering that they, too, are missionaries. And the vestry members enjoy deeper bonding with the people than they have ever known.

This works because God is on mission in the world everywhere, every moment to overcome whatever blocks love and justice—the public face of love. God's mission has a church. The church does not have a mission. The church is the visible instrument of God's mission. We join God's mission in baptism as we commit ourselves to make Jesus Christ known in deed and word; to love neighbor as self; and to strive for peace and justice—all with God's help.

Some examples of changes this new leadership brings:

Newcomers and people seeking baptism or deeper commitment discover their own daily missions and find that the congregation is there to support them in their missions. They soon discover they are not on the edge of God's mission, but at its center.

Sunday worship affirms the daily missions of the members. The Prayers of the People are reworded to invite specific petitions and thanksgivings in silence or aloud. The intercessor waits until silence suggests all have had their chance. Vestry members offer prayers about their own work, the local community, the wider world, and their leisure. In time, the rest offer their own prayers and

this time becomes more truly the prayers of the people.

In a mission-centered church school, the teachers meet the children and youth as peers. All are baptized agents of the mission of Jesus Christ. Classes begin with the Gospel, move to how it calls us to live, and end with what to ask God for to live this way. Teachers are easier to recruit because they see their knowledge of life, not church matters, is what counts.

Conflicts are easier to resolve when the congregation's purpose is supporting the members in their daily living. "Big" conflicts assume their proper proportions and compromises, while never pain-free, are easier to reach. Differences on worship, teaching, and program are settled on the basis of what best supports the members in their daily living.

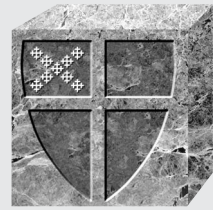
Staffing those onerous tasks few want to assume is easier when leaders can relate them to enabling the daily missions of the members. The mission field of church has its nitty-gritty jobs just like the other mission fields—from doing the dishes to improving communication.

Knowing stewardship is more than meeting a budget, one congregation will start their fall canvass in the spring. Every household will be asked by phone to give two concrete ways the church can serve them better in "their personal mission fields of home, neighborhood, workplace, and wider world." The results, then, shape next year's program.

For evangelism, discerning daily missions by vestry and parishioners includes how each draws others into their mission, and how each will talk of God's mission with the new teammates and invite them along to Jesus' table. All have looked into the heart of the best of evangelism—bringing good news in deed and word into every arena of daily life.

*For specific methods, see Appendices A and C of the book noted below.

After 21 years as a rector in northern New Jersey, the Rev. A. Wayne Schwab became the first full-time evangelism officer at the Episcopal Church Center. Still working in mission and evangelism as reflected above, he lives in upstate New York. See his book, When the Members are the Missionaries: An Extraordinary Calling for Ordinary People, at www.membermissionpress.org or www.amazon.com.



Canons state that when the congregation does not have a rector, the wardens function as the communication link with the diocese; preside at the vestry meetings; make provisions for Sunday worship; are responsible for the administration and maintenance of the congregation's properties; act as custodians of the congregation's registers and records; and convene vestry meetings. The Vestry Resource Guide

Richard Hooker on Conflict

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churches after saints, what vestments the clergy should wear, what happened to the bread and wine on the altar when the priest prayed over them, and how the church should conduct its business. Sex was not an issue in the late 16th century, but feelings were as hot then as now, and partisans on all sides were as gifted at name-calling as modern partisans are.

Although a few beliefs are central to the Christian faith, Hooker said, lots of things are less important than they seem, and on many hot issues there is no “right” or “wrong” way. It’s permissible for the church in different places and at different times to adopt different policies.

Trouble arises, Hooker said, when we fall in love with our own opinions: “Nature worketh in us all a love to our own counsels. The contradiction of others is a fan to inflame that love,” he wrote in the preface to the *Polity*. That hasn’t changed.

A few paragraphs later, Hooker wrote that “there will come a time when three words uttered with charity and meekness shall receive a far more blessed reward than three thousand volumes written with disdainful sharpness of wit.” We still await that time. We can pray for it, and when disputes arise in our parishes and dioceses, we can behave as Hooker did—with “charity and meekness” rather than “disdainful sharpness of wit” (of which he was more than capable).

Old and new together

✚ **The old and new both have their place.** The more extreme of the Puritans, Hooker’s opponents, wanted to junk 1,500 years of custom and tradition, dismantle the church as they knew it, and create a more biblical or “purer” church (hence their name). Hooker, tongue possibly in cheek, commented that “people in the crazedness of their minds possessed with dislike and discontentment at things present...imagine that any thing (the virtue whereof they hear commended) would help them, but that most which they least have tried.”

But Hooker was no foe of change, recognizing that traditions must evolve and adapt themselves to new times and circumstances. In particular, he said it is a mistake to expect the Bible to provide an answer to every question and then impose those answers on all future generations. The Bible left a lot of interesting questions, even important

questions, unanswered. One must not “make the bare mandate of sacred scripture the only rule of all good and evil in the actions of mortal men.” It is even permissible to act contrary to biblical injunctions, Hooker said, when the times and circumstances which called for them have passed.

Fallible leaders

✚ **All leaders are fallible.** In Hooker’s day, as in our own, some church members refused to accept a priest or bishop who held views contrary to their own, insisting on rigorous doctrinal purity. Hooker knew that some priests and bishops (and some lay people) entertain kooky notions now and then, but he saw it as a human failing not to be belabored since God is not limited by human foolishness. It’s easy to create a stir, he said, by pointing the accusing finger at someone in authority.

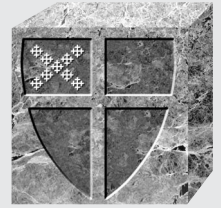
Writing specifically of bishops, Hooker said that Christ had placed them as the “chiefest guides and pastors of our souls” and that “we look for much more in our governors than a tolerable sufficiency can yield, and

Both the clergy and the laity like to gossip about the slightest failing in their bishop.

bear much less than humanity and reason do require we should. Too much perfection over rigorously exacted in them, cannot but breed in us perpetual discontentment, and on both parts cause all things to be unpleasant.”

Both the clergy and the laity like to gossip about the slightest failing in their bishop. If we’d exercise a little charity towards those in authority over us, give them the benefit of the doubt, cut them a bit of slack—in short, treat them as we’d like to be treated—things might be more pleasant all around, and we could then devote our energies to proclaiming the Gospel and following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

*The Rev. Richard H. Schmidt is a retired priest living in Chesterfield, Missouri. He is author of *Glorious Companions: Five Centuries of Anglican Spirituality* (Eerdmans, 2002) and a devotional commentary on the Psalms to be published this fall by Forward Movement Publications. For fuller citations, see our website at www.EpiscopalFoundation.org*



There are many ways to share in the spiritual leadership of parishes, not the least of which is coming to church every Sunday. Speak of your faith publicly, in church and at work. Teach a class. Be a missionary in your daily life. Pray for your parish, the clergy, your ministry and the vestry.

Next Issue: Church Budgets in a Bear Market



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Vestry Members as Spiritual Leaders

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the vestry, and this is what enabled her to volunteer to run the church school when that position became vacant. The sense of community within the vestry, regular Bible study with which we opened meetings and the time for silent prayer before a major decision had all deepened her relationship with God.

Sustaining their own spirituality

Vestry members become spiritual leaders by having their own spirituality sustained. What can we offer vestries—large and small—that nurtures and forms their inner lives? How do we transform the agenda of a business meeting into an opportunity for encounter with the living God? How do we nurture our chosen congregational leaders into spiritual role models for the whole congregation?

This does not imply that when one is elected to the vestry one must all of a sudden become a spiritual giant. It does not even suggest that only those with attractive and stellar personalities can assume congregational office. (There are certainly enough cranks

Vestry members become spiritual leaders by having their own spirituality sustained.

and oddities among the saints on the church calendar.) What it means is that one has an authentic relationship with God: a relationship nurtured by prayer, framed by some sort of daily discipline, and anchored by weekly participation in corporate worship.

When the vestry gathers to do its work, here are some practical ways to structure the process of getting the inevitable business of the church accomplished in a way that is also attentive to the spiritual life of the vestry:

- ✚ Mail out the agenda beforehand and invite those who will gather to see the meeting announcement as an invitation to prayer.
- ✚ Always do some Bible study at the beginning of the meeting, no matter how packed the agenda. Give it just 15 minutes if you are pressed, but do not ever skip it.
- ✚ Share a meal or Eucharist, perhaps once a quarter.
- ✚ Check in: How have I seen, felt, discerned God's presence in my life since the last meeting?

- ✚ Decision making: Before a decision is made, stop and spend time in silent prayer together.
- ✚ Make as few yea/nay votes as possible. Instead, utilize consensus.
- ✚ Sing.
- ✚ Have a designated "pray-er" during the course of the meeting, someone whose responsibility is not to talk, but simply to be in prayer and in the presence of the vestry, during the meeting. The task can be divided up, with changes made every 20 minutes, and an object silently passed from one pray-er to the next.
- ✚ In closing, talk about: Where have we seen God's presence in this meeting? Where have we blocked God's Spirit in this meeting?
- ✚ Close with Compline.
- ✚ Have prayer partners pray for one another in between meetings, and change partners each month. One of my field education students suggested we use plastic eggs, with enough for all vestry members, including the rector/vicar. Put them all in a basket and have people choose an egg without looking. Show the eggs when all have chosen one. Partners pray for one another before leaving the premises, and covenant to do so throughout the coming month, until the next meeting. Return eggs to basket for next time.

Not all of these suggestions can be implemented, nor should they. However, by choosing some of them you say to one another and to the congregation that you will not tend to the church's business without tending to your own and one another's souls.

The Rev. L. Ann Hallisey is Director of Cornerstone, a ministry of the Episcopal Church Foundation. Cornerstone's mission is to develop programs and publications that nurture the development of lay and clergy leaders, thereby strengthening local congregations for mission and ministry. Ann has been a priest for 19 years, serving the last nine years as the rector of Church of the Ascension in Vallejo, CA. She is also a licensed marriage, family and child therapist and an experienced spiritual director.

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