

Notes for Vestry Visits

A meeting with the Vestry/Bishop’s Committee is required when I come for an official episcopal visitation. I would like to have a minimum of thirty minutes, preferably one hour, in which to engage in this conversation.

Here are some of the things I’d like to talk about:

* I want to meet you and deepen our relationship as bishop and people.
* Think back over the last year or so of life in your congregation. What have been the high points, the experiences of God’s wondrous grace, the events and observances which have deeply stirred you all? What stands out?
* Do you have a Mission Statement? Are you working on one? Tell me about it. What are the goals you have identified to pursue that Mission? How are you progressing on those goals and how can I or my staff support and assist you in pursuing them? Where are you finding stumbling blocks or obstacles? What plan(s) do you have for overcoming them?
* When was the last time your bylaws were reviewed? Is it time for an update? Are your important papers in good order? (records of property ownership, tax ID, and the like)
* Tell me how you and your congregation are involved in the community. What partnerships has the congregation made? What work are you looking forward to? Anything in the way or items of concern?
* Describe your ecumenical and/or community partnerships. Where are you finding God in your neighborhood?
* How can the diocesan staff help and support you in your ministry?
* What do you especially appreciate about your priest? Other clergy and staff members? How do you support your clergy in their ministry? How do you build and nurture open lines of communication as leaders, with one another, with your priest, deacon and with the people you serve?
* Let’s talk about whatever else is on your minds. Anything at all.
* I may have items to share “from where I sit” ~ larger church issues, the mission and ministry of our diocese and your support of it, upcoming diocesan events, or random musings on my mind.

I’ll wrap up our time together with prayer for all the things we have discussed and for the Spirit’s guidance and strength in your ministries of leadership.

Thank you for our meeting. Your time is precious, and I am grateful that you will share some of it with me.

**Roles and Responsibilities of the Vestry**

*Vestry service is a ministry: your dedication to leadership and the well-being of your congregation and the diocese is deeply appreciated. You are in my prayers!*

Vestries:

* are the legal representatives of the parish or mission,
* are charged with specific responsibilities under the canons and applicable state law,
* share leadership responsibilities with the rector or priest-in-charge,
* share in the life and ministry of the congregation as people of faith in concert with the clergy,
* hold regular meetings to communicate about the business of the congregation, and matters of mutual celebration and/or concern.

1. Vestries are agents and legal representatives of the congregation in all matters concerning its corporate properties and the relations of the congregation to its clergy (Canon I.14.2).

This includes:

* Payroll - according to diocesan standards, including annual clergy housing resolution,
* Health insurance, pension and other benefits,
* Contracts and services,
* Purchase and sale of property (in consultation with the Standing Committee),
* Loans/alienation of property (in consultation with the Standing Committee),
* Accounts payable and receivable,
* Insurance,
* Endowments,
* Enforcement of stated policies,
* Calling new clergy,
* Parochial reports,
* Bishop’s visits (official Episcopal Visitation).

1. Vestries ensure that standard business methods, as outlined in *The Episcopal Church’s Manual of Business Methods in Church Affairs*, will be used. (Canon I.7.1)

This includes:

* receiving and recording of gifts and pledges,
* accounts payable and receivable,
* record-keeping,
* compliance with IRS standards.

1. In the absence of a rector or priest in charge, the vestry is to provide the continuation of worship and to discern the call of a new priest. (Canon III.9.3)
2. Vestries are responsible for nominating and supporting persons for holy orders. (Canon III.5.2) and offer opportunities for formation and discernment for lay and ordained ministry.
3. Vestries and vestry members may be accountable for:

* accidents and other incidents on church property or at church events,
* violations of fiduciary responsibilities,
* violations of contracts, leases or other agreements,
* violations of diocesan policies especially Safe Church and Alcohol,
* discrimination and/or sexual harassment and misconduct.