

## EMMANUEL VESTRY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The duties and responsibilities of a church Vestry will vary from place to place and time to time. There may be certain traditions that develop in one congregation that are not found in a neighboring church, and the circumstances in any individual place may change over time or more dramatically. Here is a representative sample of descriptions that may help Emmanuel Church create its own Vestry customary.

1. From *An Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*: “The basic responsibilities of the vestry are to help 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.”

2. From the *Diocese of Georgia*: Serving on the vestry is a unique experience — similar to serving on secular, community boards in some ways, but different in other, important ways. The most obvious difference is that vestry members are first called to follow Christ and to work together in God’s name. The vestry has a responsibility for ensuring that the spiritual mission of the church is maintained, as well as for carrying out the more secular duties related to church property, finances, and personnel. The vestry functions under the concept of “shared ministry,” in which the rector and the vestry are part of an interdependent team that involves many other parishioners in a variety of leadership and supportive roles. Ultimately, service on the vestry can be a joyful experience that enriches both one's spiritual life and one's feelings of connectedness with other vestry members, the rector, and the entire church community.

### **Responsibilities of the Vestry**

- Help define and articulate the mission of the congregation
- Support the mission by word and deed
- Ensure adequate resources in leadership and in financial stewardship
- Manage resources effectively
- Determine that appropriate programs, policies, and procedures have been developed and are followed

- Oversee the upkeep of church property
- Oversee the business affairs of the parish
- Select parish representatives (e.g., for Diocesan Convention, community boards, etc.)
- Select a new rector, in the event of a vacancy
- Assess its own work and effectiveness

### **Responsibilities of Individual Vestry Members**

In order for the vestry to function effectively, each vestry member must actively participate in vestry activities and in the life of the parish. Specific individual responsibilities include:

- Regularly prepare for, attend, and participate in vestry meetings
- Be an active member of one of the parish's ministries
- Assist in stewardship education
- Attend the annual vestry retreat
- Attend the orientation session at the beginning of each term of vestry service
- Interpret decisions of the vestry and the rector to other parishioners in a supportive way
- Maintain confidentiality on sensitive topics
- Support the mission of the church, putting overall interests of the church above personal or group interests
- Be receptive to individual parishioner's concerns and, if necessary, be willing to discuss these concerns with the rector, wardens and/or vestry.
- Learn about the mission, goals, programs, services, activities, strengths and needs of the congregation, diocese, and the Episcopal Church
  - Regularly attend worship services
  - Lead a life that includes personal disciplines of prayer and Bible study
  - Faithfully contribute to the mission of the church through an annual pledge to the Church
- Serve in visible roles in parish worship (greeters, ushers, etc.)
- Take part in various ministries and missions of the church
- Share in the social activities of the church

**Some Observations:**

There are actually very few requirements of Episcopal Church Vestries, according to the Canons. That leaves room for flexibility according to local needs.

The primary obligation of the Vestry is to monitor and manage the financial status of the congregation. In times of financial difficulty, this will take up much more time and energy than in times of plenty. In recent years, when Emmanuel's income and expenses were in balance, the Vestry could and did set aside meetings to devote to just one topic, like worship, Christian Formation, or Outreach. In early 2019, as the congregation showed significant signs of growth, the topics of welcoming and incorporating newcomers were high on the list of agenda items.

Coming out of the COVID-19 Pandemic facing uncertainties in membership, attendance, and income, it is appropriate that these topics should take up most of the Vestry's time, as difficult as they are to discuss.

These conversations must always be inspired by the "holy hope" that the *Book of Common Prayer* defines at the end of the Catechism, rooted in the firm belief that God is present and active in the local community and in the congregation. It is important to remember that the most typical answer to questions we ask during the celebration of sacraments, such as Baptism, is "I will, with God's help."

And as is the case with any difficult topic or decision-making process, it is critically important to listen carefully to the opinions and questions of others, and to good will and (if possible) good humor to the proceedings.

**The Mission of Emmanuel Church:**

There is only one description of the Mission of the Church in the *Book of Common Prayer*, found in the Catechism section on the Church.

Q. What is the mission of the Church?

A. *The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.*

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?

A. *The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.*

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A. *The church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.*

Please note that this definition of the Church's mission does not focus on any one activity, but encompasses a range of pursuits. There are many ways to proclaim the Gospel in a community, and many forms of Outreach and Inreach that promote justice, peace, and love. Conducting these is the responsibility of the whole congregation. The Vestry's role is to encourage, manage, and fund the efforts that rise up from the people in the pews.

Emmanuel Church alone is responsible for shaping the work of its Vestry, within the broad outlines of the Canons and local needs. It is worth taking some time each year to look backwards and ahead to insure that these are adequately and faithfully addressed.

Emmanuel's unique mission statement is stated in every bulletin:

EMMANUEL CHURCH WELCOMES YOU TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S LOVE THROUGH OUR EDUCATION, FELLOWSHIP, OUTREACH, AND WORSHIP. WE STRIVE TO PROVIDE AN OASIS OF PEACE AND BEAUTY, A PLACE OF HELP, HOPE, AND HEALING FOR THE COMMUNITY AND EACH OTHER.

It is reinforced every Sunday through our mission prayer.