

HOW DOES THE GOVERNMENT OF AN REC PARISH WORK?

In a local parish there are certain responsibilities that belong solely to the Rector and there are other functions which belong to the Vestry.

The Rector is solely in charge of the Worship in the life of the Parish. This also includes the Music. What services, when, and the kind of services, the music sung at those services all fall under the authority of the Rector along with the teaching ministry of the Parish and the administration of the sacraments. This also includes the administration of any Church discipline. All of these areas belong to the Rector. These matters are not put to votes by the Vestry or the Parish Council.

The Rector is never a member of the Parish. His Church membership is held by the Diocese. On that level the Bishop Ordinary is the highest authority. He exercises discipline and authority over the Rectors. If problems between a Rector and a Parish arise, the Bishop Ordinary or one of his assistant bishops mediates and makes the decisions concerning relationship and appropriate actions to be taken. Especially in disciplinary matters, any action of A Rector, or Bishop, can be appealed all the way up to the General Council, so there is a "Check and Balance" that is very consistent with the Reformation. It should be noted that the "Check and Balance" in the Churches established at the time of the Reformation, whether Geneva, Lutheranism or Anglicanism, **never** made the laity the final determining authority in matters of Worship, Teaching and Discipline. It was always the eldership (Priesthood) and hierarchy.

The Vestry is responsible for the Care of the corporate affairs of the Parish. The Vestry calls the Rector in a full parish setting. In a mission Parish situation, the Bishop of the Diocese appoints the Vicar (Minister in charge). The Vestry of a Parish administers the financial affairs. (In a Mission this is handled by a Bishop's Committee which is appointed by the Bishop Ordinary or his appointee.)It can make decisions as to whether or not to rent the building to some group or other. It takes care of the Building and Grounds. It can decide what to spend money on. The Rector chairs the Vestry, but the Vestry has the responsibility in these areas. Often times the Vestry is utilized by the Rector to organize a variety of committees in the Parish such as Christian Education, Outreach, Evangelism, etc. These committees are not cast in stone. They can be appointed by the Rector in order to facilitate the growth and organization of the Parish. The Parish Meeting is the "Check and Balance" on the Vestry Decisions.

The Parish Council, made up of the Senior or Rector's Warden and the Junior or People's Warden, is a committee of advice to the Rector. He can discuss parish problems with the Wardens at a Parish Council meeting. He can also consult with them over any Church discipline matters. The Parish council does not vote on matters, they simply advise. It follows the biblical admonition that in the council of many there is wisdom. Ultimately though, the Rector has to weigh that advice in those areas and then make his best decision.

The Parish Council works best when the Wardens and Rector (Vicar) meet frequently. Together they lay the plans for Parish life. The Wardens can be most helpful to the Rector (Vicar) when they remove from the Rector unnecessary duties and oversee their discharge by others. In other words, the Wardens implement the smooth running of the Parish. Prayer for each family of the parish should be a part of the regular meetings of the Wardens with the Rector (Vicar). Then follows honest talk about Parish life and solutions to whatever issues are important to the welfare of the Parish. Because the Wardens are trusted advisors to the Rector (Vicar), they may hear things relating to church discipline and order. They will be expected to give advice to the Rector (Vicar) about those matters. It is imperative that the Wardens understand that what is discussed in the Parish Council is privileged information and **may not be shared with anyone else** including their wives.

The Sr. Warden also has a special responsibility on the Vestry. In addition to being the principal Lay Officer of the parish, He is to be the advocate of the Rector concerning his needs to the Vestry. This is to help the Rector so that he doesn't have to be constantly asking on his own behalf for matters that concern his welfare and that of his family. In the absence of the Rector (Vicar) the Sr. Warden has the responsibility to chair the Vestry meetings. Also, in the event of the parish having no pastor, the Sr. Warden consults with the Bishop about plans for filling the Pulpit and conducting of services, etc.

The Jr. Warden also has a function on the Vestry. He is to represent the concerns of the Parish family to the Rector first and then, if determined by the Parish Council, to the Vestry. He also watches over the accounting of the finances of the parish. This is why the Jr. Warden is responsible to have the parish financial books examined each year. He also oversees the care of property and insures that necessary repairs are made.

Both of these men in this capacity are not supposed to vent their opinions or likes but to represent faithfully the facts and concerns of all they represent. Neither Warden is to be adversarial to the other or to the Rector or to the Vestry. There is never to be the attitude of party factions or an "us vs. "They" mentality.

This system works extremely well and happily when everyone sticks to their designated area of responsibility, but what sometimes happens is that the lines get blurred. When that happens, conflict arises.

Where problems seem to most frequently arise in Parishes is over the authority question. Does the Rector really have his assigned authority or can Wardens or the Vestry impose their authority over his? Do Wardens have the right to contend with the Rector in areas of his assigned responsibility? Can they be disrespectful to the Rector if they don't like what he decided? The answer to these is of course, no! It would be equally wrong for a Rector to impose his office of Pastor and try to dictate all the financial and corporate decisions to the Vestry.

What seems to often occur in parishes is that there have been those who feel very strongly that their opinions about worship and the function of Pastoral Ministry are the ones that the Rector should follow. These have been at times, very strongly put to their Pastor. The result of such conflicts often results in either the Rector or some of the parishioners leaving the Church.

The solution to preventing this problem from arising is for the Clergy, Vestry and Congregation to understand the various duties and functions of the Officers of the Church. When and if conflict arises, it should be lovingly dealt with from the beginning. Furthermore, the Bishop should be apprised at the beginning of trouble. Far too often, Clergy and or Wardens try to deal with these conflicts on their own until it becomes unmanageable, and then the Bishop is made aware of the situation. It is always appropriate for the Clergy and or the Wardens to contact the Bishop Ordinary about concerns in the life of the Parish.