

The role of the Churchwarden

Churchwardens are elected by the Annual Meeting of Parishioners (that is, all of those who are on the Church or Civil Electoral Rolls of a Parish) each year, and are therefore representatives of the people of the Parish. They have been thus elected since at least the mid-14th century, and the Office of Churchwarden is the oldest democratically-elected post in this country.

As well as representing the laity Churchwardens are also charged with co-operating with the Incumbent of the Parish, and in that role, they act as consultants and advisers to the Incumbent, and, at their best, they can support the Incumbent by listening, challenging, assisting and praying for and with their Incumbent.

Churchwardens also have a wider responsibility as Bishop's officers. In this regard they have the responsibility to work with the wider Church, especially if concerns arise regarding the life of a Parish or the health and wellbeing of an Incumbent and the parish; and the wider Diocese is there to support them through the Archdeacons, Bishops and via the Diocesan Registry.

Whilst a Churchwarden is annually chosen by the Annual Meeting of Parishioners, a person so chosen does not become a Churchwarden until admitted to office that year. Admissions take place at a time and place appointed by the Bishop and it is usually the Archdeacon who admits Churchwardens.

Text reproduced from a 2023 email by Canon Gary Philbrick, Assistant Archdeacon of Winchester