



An Introduction To Vestry Membership

We have a blessing in the Church of Ireland in that it is the right of all adult members – lay and clerical – to be democratically involved in the management and decision-making of their parishes. This **privilege** can be taken for granted though! With any privilege comes the **duty** to use it appropriately – in this case, so that God would be glorified and his Kingdom might be extended through the mission and ministry of our parishes.

The purpose of this leaflet is to help members of the Church to understand the governance of parishes in the Church of Ireland, their place in it, and how they might serve it in the future.

A leaflet like this can only be an introduction; if you would like to find out more about any aspects of what is briefly discussed here, there are lots of resources available. For example:

- Speak to the **clergyperson/Reader** officiating in your church.
- Speak to a **churchwarden or other Select Vestry member** in your parish.
- Explore the **Parish Resources** section on the Church of Ireland website: visit <https://www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources> or use this QR code here:



The General Vestry

At its annual Easter meeting, the General Vestry elects, from its members, a People's Churchwarden, a People's Glebewarden and members of the Select Vestry. To be a member of the General Vestry, one's name must be included in the parish's **Register of Vestry Members**. To be included on the Register, one must:

- be over 18 years of age,
- be resident in the parish or be an accustomed member of the congregation,
- and have made the relevant declaration.



Parish representatives at the annual meeting of the Diocesan Synod in Carrick-on-Shannon

Every three years (next in 2026) this annual meeting also elects Parochial Nominators and representatives to the annual Diocesan Synod. The Easter meeting of the General Vestry may often receive reports on the previous year in the parish (the Annual Statement of Accounts is required), but it should not deal with matters which properly fall within the remit of the Select Vestry for discussion and determination.

The Select Vestry

The Select Vestry is chaired by a clergyperson or a churchwarden. It is made up of the clergy in the parish, the wardens, and up to other twelve members elected at the General Vestry meeting.

The typical activities of Select Vestry members include:

- attending and contributing to meetings,
- seeking clarity on parish activities and finances,
- reporting any concerns or problems,
- and working well with fellow members and parishioners.

The responsibilities of the select vestry are customarily categorised as **the three Fs: finance, fabric, and furnishings**, to which is now often added a **'C': compliance** with state and church legislation and regulations.

How often the Select Vestry meets can vary from parish to parish, but generally it can range between twice a year and monthly.

Who is eligible to serve on a Select Vestry?

In short, those over 18 who are on the Register of Vestry Members, having made the relevant declaration, are eligible.



Who is not eligible to serve on a Select Vestry?

Anyone who

- has been convicted of an offence,
- is an undischarged bankrupt or has made an arrangement with creditors,
- or has previously been removed as a trustee by the Charities Regulator/Charity Commission or a court

is not eligible to be a charity trustee. By default, all Select Vestry members are charity trustees.

*Cathedral Church of St Fethlimidh, Kilmore photo
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What is expected of Select Vestry members

All individuals participating in the life of the Church have a duty under the *Constitution of the Church of Ireland* to uphold the Dignity in Church Life Charter – this can be found in the Parish Resources section on the Church of Ireland website (**see front page**). Under the charter, every Select Vestry member should be treated with respect, have the opportunity to express their views, and be listened to. It is important to appreciate each member's service.

As members of the Church with representative and decision-making responsibilities (especially in financial matters), it is imperative that Select Vestry members regularly join in public worship and “give generously, regularly, and proportionately, towards the mission and ministry of the Church, and to works of charity” – see **note 1 on page 75 and note 15 on page 77 of the Prayer Book**.

All Select Vestry members are charity trustees and (before serving) are required to declare that they will undertake the **duties and responsibilities of a charity trustee**. At all times, these include:

- understanding and performing their roles to the best of their ability,
- showing respect to other members,
- acting with honesty and integrity,
- seeking professional advice when appropriate,
- acting in the best interests of the charity,
- and giving adequate time to preparing for and participating in meetings.

But ...?

Will I be stuck with it for life?

Select Vestry members are elected for 1 year terms (as are wardens). No one is required to serve any longer, and should not be pressured to do so. The more people involved the better – your participation adds to that, and perhaps you could give someone a break from a role for a year.

Will I be liable if anything goes wrong?

As a Select Vestry is a non-corporate body, all members are liable both individually and collectively for any contracts made. However, when operating appropriately with an adequate insurance policy in place, members are indemnified (secure against liability).



*Cathedral Church of St Mary the Virgin and St John the Baptist, Sligo
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What next?

If you are a member of a Select Vestry:

Thank you! It is hoped that this leaflet has encouraged you to **commit** even more wholeheartedly to this privilege and duty.

If you are on a Register of Vestry Members:

Please **attend** the Easter General Vestry meeting for your parish, and consider putting yourself forward for service on its Select Vestry.

If you are NOT on a Register of Vestry Members:

It is hoped that this leaflet has explained more about the governance of your parish, and how it is a privilege and duty. Would you consider completing the relevant **declaration** for membership of the General Vestry?

Everyone!

Please **pray** regularly for your parish and its Vestries, perhaps using this prayer from page 330 of the Prayer Book:

Almighty God, you have given your Holy Spirit to the Church to lead us into all truth: Bless with the Spirit's grace and presence the members of our Vestries; keep them steadfast in faith and united in love, that they may manifest your glory and prepare the way of your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.