



One of our foundational principles in the Episcopal Church is worship in the common language of the people as a way of binding us together as a community of faith. In spite of this, we do have a “foreign” language – “Episcopal-Speak” – with such words as “Narthex,” “Nave,” Ambry/Aumbry, “Vestry,” “Register,” “Warden,” – which sometimes causes confusion. This seems especially true when someone is invited to stand for election to the Vestry - “the what?” St. Paul, always an advocate for clarity in church, would say that such a word needs

interpretation; so, in what follows, I will strive to do just that by using a Question and answer format.

1. What is the Vestry?

Originally, as defined in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, the Vestry is a room in or attached to a church in which the vestments, vessels, and the requisites for...worship are kept and in which the clergy vest. From the fact that it was here that the parishioners formerly met to transact the business of the parish, the word came to be used both of the body of parishioners and of the actual meeting. Simply put, then, the Vestry is a group of persons elected from the congregation to transact the business of the parish. And, under our structure in the Episcopal Church, every parish is to have a Vestry.

2. How large is a Vestry?

In our Diocese of Southern Virginia, a Vestry shall include the member of the clergy in charge and not fewer than three nor more than eighteen adult confirmed communicants in good standing. Here at All Saints', 12 members of the congregation and I serve on the Vestry.

3. What is the term of office and how is the Vestry elected?

The term of office is 3 years, so each year we elect 4 new members to replace the 4 who rotate off. To stand for election, a person has to be an adult confirmed communicant of the parish (16 years of age or older) in good standing. The election, by secret ballot, takes place on the first Sunday in December during a Congregational meeting. The newly elected members then take office on January 1st.

4. What are the Duties of the Vestry?

Primarily, as listed in the Constitution and Canons of the Diocese, it shall be the duty of a Parish Vestry to

- Elect a Rector and cooperate with that person for the promotion of the spiritual welfare of the Parish cure and to see that this person is properly supported, and that salaries and pension fund premiums be paid with regularity and punctuality.
- Inform the Diocese on or before December 31st each year of the amount pledged toward the operating account of the Diocese and to see that the pledged sum is remitted to the Treasurer in regular installments.
- To make & execute all contracts for the erection, furnishing, & preservation of the church edifice & other church property.
- To regulate the use of the parish graveyard.
- To make proper provision for sacred music, subject to the control of the Rector.
- To provide for the appointment of Trustees under the code of Virginia to hold legal title to the Church property.
- And generally to act as agents of the Parish ...in its temporal business.

Next month, we'll talk about Wardens, Registers, and Treasurers!

—The Very Rev. Stanley W. Sawyer, D.Min.



In the June edition of the Spirit, I wrote about the Vestry, and at the end, I promised to talk about Wardens, Registers, and Treasurers. I will use the same question and answer format, beginning with some items left over from last month.

1. What is the first thing a Vestry does each year?

Each member must sign the Qualifying Declaration as found in the Canons of the Diocese: *I do believe the Holy Scripture to contain necessary to salvation; and I do solemnly engage to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church; and I promise that I will faithfully serve as a member of the Vestry of All Saints' Church in Virginia Beach, according to my best knowledge and skill.* Following this, the Vestry elects its officers.

2. Who are the Officers of the Vestry?

The Canons say that *the Vestry shall elect two Wardens, a Register and a Treasurer, who shall continue in office until their successors are elected.* The Wardens have to be members of the Vestry, but the Register and Treasurer do not.

3. What are the Duties of the Officers of the Vestry?

- The Wardens are tasked to *oversee church property and its use: to see that it is prepared for all occasions of public worship; to see that it is properly maintained and cleaned; to see that offerings are collected; to see that sacred vessels are cared for and safely kept; to see that, under Vestry direction, Parish Funds are used to provide the Eucharistic elements as well as an adequate supply of books and vestments for public worship; to assist in the seating of the congregation; and to maintain order and decorum during worship (yes, it does say that!).*
- The Register is tasked to *care for the Parish Records, and to keep minutes of all Vestry proceedings.* The name of this office comes from the name of the books in which Parish Records are kept, the Parish Register and the Service Register.
- The Treasurer is tasked to *take charge of all offerings and other income whether for operating expenses or designated for special purposes, except communion as outlined in the National Canons, and to disburse these funds under the Vestry's direction. The Treasurer shall make a report thereof to the Vestry.*

Next newsletter, we'll talk about the Church and its parts like: narthex, nave, sanctuary, ambry, sacristy, paschal candle, service lights...!

The Very Rev. Stanley W. Sawyer, D.Min.



Following the question and answer format begun in June, in this newsletter I am writing about the church building and some of the things we see in it.

1. What is the Narthex? In the early church this was a covered porch or vestibule which opened into the worship space. It was the place where "catechumens," those persons preparing for Baptism, would stand for the Liturgy of the Word – in our Sunday Eucharist, everything that happens through the Exchange of the Peace. At that point the catechumens would leave in order to attend a period of instruction. After Baptism, they were invited to share in the entire Eucharist.

2. What are the parts of the church?

- **Nave** – This is the body of the church. This word is derived from a Latin word which means "ship". This reference began very early in Christian history. Today, we apply it to the area where the congregation is seated.
- **Chancel** – At All Saints', this is the area between the front pew and the altar rail where the clergy are seated for the Liturgy of the Word.
- **Sanctuary** – From ancient times, this is the area behind the altar rail reserved for clergy around the altar. Today, this term is often used to describe the whole worship space. So, if someone requests to see the sanctuary, we won't just take them behind the altar rail; we'll invite them to tour the entire space.

3. What are some of the things seen when looking around the Church?

- **Font** – Used in the sacrament of Baptism, through which one becomes a member of the Body of Christ; it is the receptacle used to hold the water.
- **Pulpit & Lectern** – the pulpit is the place from which the Gospel is preached, and the lectern is the place from which the Old and New Testament Lessons are read each Sunday.
- **Paschal Candle** – The large candle to the left of the Font, it is lighted during the Great Fifty Days of Easter in celebration of the Risen Christ. It is also lighted for each funeral as a sign of the Resurrection and of our belief, as stated in the Book of Common Prayer that "*For to your faithful people, O Lord, life is changed, not ended; and when our mortal body lies in death, there is prepared for us a dwelling place eternal in the heavens.*" (p. 382)
- **Ambry** – This is the wall safe – on the right with a lighted candle above it – which serves as the repository for the consecrated bread and wine reserved for use at a later time to take communion to those who by illness or infirmity are unable to attend the regularly scheduled Eucharists.
- **Stations of the Cross** – These 14 stations around the wall represent incidents that occurred from the time of Jesus' condemnation by Pilate in Jerusalem to the body of Jesus being placed in the tomb. Here at All Saints', we offer this liturgy at 3:00 p.m. on Good Friday. Booklets are also available for individual use at any time.

I hope these three newsletter presentations have been helpful during this summer period. I plan to return to a regular front page format for the October Newsletter, but I will continue these Q&A presentations in the body of the newsletter.

—The Very Rev. Stanley W. Sawyer, D.Min.