

Part Two in a Two Part Series

Why Should I Offer Myself for Service on the Vestry?

Have you ever been asked, “*Would you consider being nominated for election to the Vestry?*” If so, what was your response? Did you feel (*as you should*) honored by the question, or was your reaction more tentative? How we answer that question says a lot about ourselves, our individual priorities, our understanding of God’s purposes for us, and our vision of the mission of the Church.

So, why do people offer themselves as candidates for service on the vestry? Maybe more importantly, *should* they serve on the vestry?

I believe service on the vestry should be viewed as a calling, a commitment to Christian as well as business principles. As a vestry person, we are asked to share gifts that are required in both the secular and religious world, including helping to identify and evaluate mission opportunities and their related funding requirements. However, when I think of the criteria necessary to be successful in that mission, I am always drawn to the Baptismal Covenant, the founding principles upon which our life as a Christian is governed.

Our Baptismal Covenant is our shared job description as Christians. Remember the questions we are asked?

Do you believe in God the Father?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

Will you continue in the apostle’s teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers?

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?

If, as a leader in the church, we want to be successful, we can never forget our Baptismal vows – all of them. Nowhere is this more important than when we are discerning the mission of the church and the necessary time, talent and financial resources to accomplish that mission. Vestry service should be viewed as a calling, in service to God and God’s people. Vestry service is a commitment to a sacrificial seeking of the best for others.

Vestries work as colleagues with the rector in identifying the vision and strategic plan of the parish and then in prioritizing the objectives and resources needed to be successful. Having committed ourselves “*to strive for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being,*” vestry members need to reflect on both the sacrificial nature and example of their service, as both enablers and active participants.

Why do we serve? Why *should* we serve? As people of faith, vestry members' responsibilities run far deeper than just a monthly meeting to review the church's financial status, or approve a calendar of events. Although a vestry members' knowledge, experience, and specific skills are vital for the work they do, their commitment to their baptismal vows is the true motivation for why and how they serve the mission and ministry of Christ's Church.

And what are the specific responsibilities of a vestry member? Among them are:

- **Regularly preparing for, attending, and participating in vestry meetings.**
- **Learning about the mission, goals, programs, services, activities, strengths, and needs of the congregation, Diocese, and Episcopal Church.**
- **Maintaining confidentiality on sensitive topics.**
- **Serving the congregation as a whole rather than any specific group.**
- **Encouraging complainants to talk directly with the person(s) involved; avoid taking sides; and inform the rector or senior warden of serious concerns.**
- **Avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest.**
- **Study financial statements and ask questions.**
- **Take on leadership roles or other tasks willingly and enthusiastically.**
- **Help identify new leaders.**
- **Contribute to the congregation's well-being (time, talent and treasure).**
- **Assist in stewardship education.**

That's not all they do, of course, but those are among the essential responsibilities.

One last comment. Lest this call to service on the vestry sound a bit like forsaking all the other commitments and relationships in your life, it isn't. Service on the vestry is important work, but it's also a lot of fun. Sharing the gifts God has blessed you with in service to God's purposes and God's people is always a great joy.

The next time someone says to you, "*Would you consider being nominated for election to the vestry?*" remember your baptismal vows, and then respond, "*I will, with God's help.*"