



THE DIOCESE OF SOUTHWARK
Annual Parochial Church Meetings and Meetings of Parishioners for 2020 & 2021

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Our parish has already held its parish meetings for 2020. What does this mean for our parish?

If you have already held your meeting, that's great. You have only to complete the administration if you have not already done so: submit your annual report, financial statements, election results and electoral roll numbers to the Diocesan Secretary.

People chosen to be Deanery Synod reps took up their positions on 1 December 2020 if you'd had your meeting by then. Those chosen after 1 December take up their positions immediately.

Persons chosen as Churchwardens will take up office when they are sworn in. If Churchwardens are waiting to be sworn in, please see Question 8 below. If you held an informal annual meeting at which churchwardens were chosen, see Question 11 below.

2. Our parish has planned to hold its 2020 and 2021 parish at the same time, is this possible?

Yes. The meetings will still be parish meetings for the year 2020, even though they are held in early 2021. This means that parish meetings will need to cover the agenda items that would have been held in 2020, including the election of lay parochial representatives on Deanery Synods and the presentation of reports and financial statements that were due to be presented this year.

An electoral roll revision exercise must be carried out prior to the APCM. Because this needs to be completed no more than 28 days prior to the APCM. A new date calculator will be available on the Diocesan Website shortly that will help with this. Or you can speak to Charles Hudson-Beddows who can help you.

Your new lay parochial representatives for Deanery Synod must be reported to the Diocesan Secretary's office. They will be added to the database as quickly as possible, and usually within two weeks. They will take up office once they have been added to the database. Until this time, the term of office of your existing representatives will be extended.

The rules on postal voting have not changed and a resolution must have been made at a previous APCM to allow this. This does not affect electronic voting as members are considered to be present at the meeting.

The current Churchwardens will continue to serve until their successors are chosen and sworn in. Please see Question 8 below about the process for swearing in Churchwardens.

Any person who was due to retire from a Parochial Church Council at a parish meeting in 2020 will retire at the 2020 parish meeting held in early 2021.

4. Can we hold parish and deanery meetings electronically (via Zoom or similar)?

Yes. Bishop Christopher has given permission for parish meetings to be held electronically. Where this is intended, parishes should make clear on the notice of the meeting how people may join electronically. Parishes need to plan electronic meetings carefully and be confident that the systems they propose to use will allow people to hear and be heard simultaneously and to allow those chairing the meeting to administer voting procedures rigorously.

Bishop Christopher has also given permission for Deanery Synod meetings to be held electronically.

5. Who should decide on when and how to hold meetings?

It is usually for the minister to convene parish meetings. The ‘minister’ is the Incumbent or Priest-in-Charge, or a Team Vicar with special responsibility for parish meetings. If there is a vacancy and no Priest-in-Charge is yet appointed, the APCM is called by the vice-chair of the PCC and the meeting of parishioners is called by the Churchwardens. In any case, Bishop Christopher asks that decision-makers consult with colleagues on the Parochial Church Council wherever practicable.

The decision about whether to hold a Deanery Synod meeting by electronic means rests with the joint chairs of the Deanery Synod.

6. What happens to lay parochial representatives on Deanery Synods?

Bishop Christopher’s first Instrument in March 2020 provided that new lay parochial representatives on Deanery Synods, chosen in 2020, would take up their office on 1 December 2020.

If a parish has already held its APCM and reported the election results by 17 November 2020, its lay parochial representatives will have taken up office on 1 December 2020.

Otherwise, the existing lay parochial representatives will remain in post until the new representatives have been registered by the Diocesan Secretary’s office. Parishes should report election results to the Diocesan Secretary’s office as soon as possible after APCMs. The Diocesan Secretary’s office will endeavour to register new representatives within two weeks of notification.

Parishes holding their APCMs towards the end of the extended period (i.e. in May 2021) should take extra care to return their results to the Diocesan Secretary’s office as soon as possible after the APCM. It is very important that all elections for 2020 are notified to the Diocesan Secretary’s office by 14 June 2021 as Deanery Synods will very shortly thereafter take part in the elections for Diocesan Synod and General Synod.

7. What happens to elected representatives of the laity on PCCs?

At each APCM, at least some of the elected representatives of the laity on each PCC retire. These retirements will take place when the 2020 APCM is held, even if this is delayed to early 2021. Until that time, the elected representatives of the laity remain in office.

8. What happens to Churchwardens?

Churchwardens will hold office until their successors are admitted to office.

Normally, Churchwardens are admitted to office by Archdeacons in ceremonies known as 'visitations'. These are large services and sadly were not possible in 2020.

Bishop Christopher has therefore devolved authority to admit Churchwardens appointed in 2020 (or in early 2021 but as part of a rescheduled 2020 meeting of parishioners) to the Incumbent or Priests-in-Charge of the parish concerned, or if they are unavailable the Area Dean. Churchwardens should be admitted as soon as possible after they are chosen. The Archdeacons (through the Archdeacons' PAs) will advise on the procedure for Churchwarden admission. The Archdeacons hope that for Churchwardens elected at the Annual Meeting of Parishioners 2021, visitation services will be held, but of course we cannot yet confirm this.

The admission of Churchwardens, by the Archdeacons or delegated incumbent/Area Dean must still happen face to face and cannot be done virtually. The appointment of a Churchwarden, however, happens when they are elected, and if otherwise qualified, they can sit on the Parish Council at that point even if not formally admitted to that office.

If you held an informal annual meeting in 2020, please see Question 11 below.

9. Can our parish hold its 2020 parish meetings and its 2021 parish meetings on the same day?

Yes. The 2020 parish meetings must be held by 31 May 2021. A parish which defers its 2020 parish meetings into the year 2021 may, if it wishes, hold its 2021 parish meetings on the same date.

However, there must still be a 2020 meeting dealing with the agenda items required for the 2020 meeting. The circumstances should be carefully explained to parishioners to avoid confusion.

Election as a Churchwarden in the rescheduled 2020 meeting will count as a 'period of office' even though the 2021 Churchwardens will be chosen immediately afterwards. The meeting of parishioners may wish to consider whether or not Section 3 of the Churchwardens Measure 2001 (which limits the number of periods of office that a person may serve successively) should apply to the parish in these circumstances.

Similarly, a representative of the laity elected to a PCC in the 2020 APCM will immediately be deemed to have served a year in office at the conclusion of the 2021 APCM, even if that is later the same day. The APCM may wish to consider whether or not to make decisions under rule M16(7) and (8) of the Church Representation Rules relating to maximum terms.

10. What about our Charity Commission requirements?

Financial statements and annual reports are primarily the responsibility of the PCC. The view of the Diocese is that parishes should not delay making any filings with the Charity Commission in order to await the APCM. Parishes should keep records of decisions taken using the flexibility provided by Bishop Christopher's decision.

11. What if we held an informal annual meeting?

We realise that some parishes held informal annual meetings in 2020 at which new, acting, churchwardens were chosen as a temporary measure. These must now be formally elected at the Annual Meeting of Parishioners. We know that many of you explained this to your acting churchwardens at the time and so we hope it will not come as surprise to them that they must be elected a second time. You will understand that the reason for this is that the Annual Meeting of Parishioners belongs to a wider group of people than the Annual Parochial Church meeting which is, as it says, primarily a church, not a [geographical] parish meeting.