



The Churchwardens

The parish needs you

The end of the year is approaching and despite the impossibility to organize the elections of the churchwardens this year, of course because of the Covid-19, we would like to say a few words about the churchwardens and their function.

What is the churchwarden?

The churchwarden is a parishioner, a lay member of a parish's Fabrique Council. His or her term of office is three years, renewable once.

According to articles 36 and 39 of the Fabrique Act, to fulfill the role of churchwarden, one must reside on the territory of the parish and be 18 years of age or older. Sections 1.i and 1.j of the Fabrique law state that a parishioner is a person belonging to the parish or to the service where he or she can exercise the rights granted to him or her by the law. In a diocese, parishes are identified by their territorial boundaries. The election of a churchwarden who does not live within these boundaries renders the resolutions of the council null and void.

However, a person having a residence outside the territory of the parish may be admitted to the Fabrique assemblies. He will not be able to vote, but he may participate in the deliberations and share the responsibilities of the Fabrique provided that the Fabrique authorizes him to do so. Therefore, if for one reason or another, the parish does not find anyone for one of the positions of churchwarden, it remains vacant. After 60 days, the bishop may appoint a churchwarden on the recommendation of the parish priest.

The churchwardens are elected primarily to administer the material goods of the parish, which will be used to provide religious services to the parishioners. But beyond the search for good and sound administration, they do everything in their power to ensure that the parish has the necessary means to respond to its mission of evangelization.

Council of administration/ Fabrique Assembly

The Fabrique Assembly usually meets once a month. An extraordinary meeting may be called for an emergency or for a specific need.

The Assembly of the Fabrique is made up of six (6) churchwardens (that of a chapelry is made up of three (3)), plus the parish priest or priest moderator and the chairman of the assembly appointed by the diocesan bishop. Thus, eight (8) members for the parish and five (5) members for the chapelry. The pastor becomes the chairman of the Fabrique Assembly if the bishop does not appoint one.

Canon 1284 enumerates in detail the fundamental duties of all those to whom the administration of the temporal goods of the Church is entrusted. The first paragraph of this canon specifies that the members of the council of administration (made up of the churchwardens, the chairman of the Fabrique Assembly and the pastor) must fulfill their duties with the diligence of a good "father".

The second paragraph identifies their functions. They must:

- Ensure that the property entrusted to them is kept in a secure manner;
- Ensure that appropriate insurance policies are in place;
- Guarantee the ownership of ecclesiastical goods;
- Respect the intentions of donors;
- Respect the norms of civil law, especially with regard to directives on social life and work (see canon 1286, n. 1);
- To receive the income and profits of goods in a timely manner and to apply them to the purposes for which they are intended;
- To pay interest on loans or mortgages at the prescribed time and to see that the principal is repaid on time;
- To forward to the Diocesan Bursar's office any surplus funds;
- To keep in good order the books of receipts and disbursements;
- Prepare an annual financial report;
- Keep contracts and other legal documents and arrange for copies to be deposited with the diocesan bursar;
- Prepare annual budgets showing receipts and disbursements;
- Give an account to the faithful of the goods that have been offered to the Church (see canon 1287, §2). In addition, parish administrators are to ensure that a just and equitable salary is paid to employees (cf. can. 1286, n. 2).

It should be noted that the office of churchwarden is carried out on a volunteer basis according to the respective abilities of the members of the Fabrique council, mostly at monthly meetings and as needed from time to time. It should be noted that they could only act at a Fabrique meeting, section VII, art. 43 to 48. It is also important to recall, according to canon 1283, n. 1, that all members of the council of administration must take an oath before taking office. We will send you a note on it. From January 2021, all the administrators of the diocese will take the oath at the beginning of their mandate. (To be continued).