

# THE ROLE OF OUR PCCS IN TAKING FORWARD OUR VISION

As we enter a period of interregnum, the role of the PCC (Parochial Church Council) becomes more important than ever. It is vital for us to respond to God's call to inspire faith, hope and love in our communities as the problems in our world seem to increase and we continue to grapple with significant economic, psychological, social and spiritual issues. As the Church of England, it is our special role to care for and inspire all people in our communities and add value to their lives.

Leadership is necessary for churches to make visions a reality, and our PCCs (Parochial Church Councils) are important bodies for leading the shared vision of the Ross Parishes forward. As part of the Church of England, PCCs have particular legal structures and ways of working that are laid down to help everyone work together well and to fulfil the responsibilities PCCs and office holders have. This leaflet is a brief introduction to the history of PCCs, their role, and how they operate.

Please do pray for PCC members, and as we reach the time when we will be electing new or returning PCC members, please also consider whether God is calling you to offer your gifts and skills to your PCC in the year ahead. If you have any questions, or would like a conversation, please don't hesitate to ask!

## The parish system

A parish is the geographical area committed to the care of an incumbent or parish priest by the Bishop. Everyone in England lives in a parish, whether or not they attend the parish church.

The parish system developed gradually. By the end of the 13th century the country was covered by parishes which have been sub-divided as the population grew.

Each parish has two churchwardens (normally) and a Parochial Church Council.

PCCs were first given legal status in 1919. Prior to the legal recognition of PCCs, the administration and finances of the parish church were in the hands of the incumbent and churchwardens only, which gave scope for abuse or neglect, and often failed to use the skills and gifts of other members of the congregation.



## The role of the PCC

In summary, during the interregnum, the PCC exists to co-operate with the church wardens in sharing leadership of the parish so that we may all:

- Play our part in God's mission and ministry in this place.
- Steward our buildings and churchyard for the furtherance of God's kingdom.
- Contribute to the wider life of the Church of England.
- Conduct ourselves in ways which fulfil best practice in safeguarding, finance and employment.

## MEMBERSHIP

PCC members are elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meeting which is normally held between 1 January and the end of May. To be eligible you must be over 16, on the electoral roll, baptised, confirmed, a regular communicant and able to legally be a charity trustee. All clergy licensed to the parish, the churchwardens, and any members of the deanery, diocesan or general synods on the electoral roll are ex officio on the PCC. Readers are not automatically members, though they are often elected on.



## MEETINGS

Our PCC normally meets 6 times a year and has a standing committee to carry on routine business between meetings. The PCC secretary posts the agenda and minutes of meetings on the website and notice board before and after each meeting.

## What is the PCC responsible for?

Its powers and duties are defined by certain Acts of Parliament and other legislation, principally the Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure 1956. It states: 'It shall be the duty of the incumbent and the Parochial Church Council to consult together on matters of general concern and importance in the parish.'

### The PCC has the following functions:

- Co-operation with the incumbent in promoting in the parish the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical.
- The consideration and discussion of matters concerning the Church of England or any other matters of religious or public interest, but not the declaration of the doctrine of the Church on any question.
- Making known and putting into effect any provisions made by the diocesan synod or the deanery synod, but without prejudice to the powers of the council on any particular matter.
- Giving advice to the diocesan synod and the deanery synod on any matter referred to the council.
- Raising such matters as the council consider appropriate with the diocesan synod or deanery synod.



### **It exists to enable the church to play its part in God's mission to his world.**

This often surprises people. They think the PCC is about looking after the fabric of the church or keeping the books.

But the first stated purpose is about mission, and suggests a model of co-operation between the incumbent and the PCC. This is about helping a church fulfil its purpose, to keep before a church why it exists. Just as PCCs can easily lose their sense of purpose, so too can churches. On behalf of the church, a PCC constantly grapples with the questions of 'Why does this church exist?' and 'Where is God leading us at this time as we seek to fulfil Christ's mission and ministry in this area?'. Such mission planning involves having a clear vision and creating an up-to-date and active parish mission plan, which asks and answers the following questions:

(i) What is the mission of God in our parish? (ii) What ministries do we need for this mission and action do we need to take? (iii) What resources do we need to carry this out?



### **The PCC exists to co-operate with the incumbent in sharing leadership.**

Again, this often surprises people. Sometimes people's experience of a PCC has led them to think they exist to frustrate everything the incumbent wants to do!

Others' experience suggests it exists to rubber-stamp whatever the incumbent wants to do. But it exists to co-operate with the incumbent, to work alongside in sharing responsibility for discerning how it will enable the church to be about God's mission and ministry in that place. The incumbent isn't the head of the church, nor any other member of the PCC. Jesus is the head of his Church, and the incumbent and PCC together are called to take their lead from Jesus. Jesus sets the agenda for his people, and the PCC and incumbent are tasked with the process of discerning what this might be at this time in the life of a church, and how it might be lived out. However, the incumbent also has some unique responsibilities in the life of the church, including the 'cure of souls in this parish', which means there is a 'buck stops here' element to the incumbent's role.



**PCCs exist to ensure legal compliance with charity law and ecclesiastical law, particularly in the areas of finance, employment and appointments.**

PCC are trustees of a charity and under obligation to fulfil charity law with due care to governance guidelines. Whilst this should not be seen as overly burdensome, it is important that PCC members understand their care of duty. Key areas are safeguarding, financial oversight (including regular financial updates; ensuring procedures exist to approve payments and that cheques are signed by two authorised PCC members; ensuring that service offertories and other monies are appropriately supervised; generating the Annual Report and Accounts and submitting these to the APCM), health and safety, disability, insurance, risk assessment, data protection, acting as a good employer of any paid workers.



**PCCs exist to care for the buildings and churchyard so that they may be best suited for the purpose of the church's ministry and mission.**

The PCC is responsible for maintenance and repair of the church building, inside and out, especially work recommended by the inspecting architect in the Quinquennial (five-yearly) Report. The PCC looks after 'movable goods' e.g. chairs, rails, candlesticks, lectern, communion plate, vestments, and the upkeep of the churchyard and any buildings, trees or paths in it, and walls, fences or hedges around the churchyard. It is involved in any application to the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) for a faculty, (permission to effect a change to the church, or its contents, or the churchyard).



**To be a channel of consultation within the wider Church on matters that affect the Church locally and nationally.**

These structures were put in place to ensure a means by which the Church of England could 'talk' about important matters, enabling local churches to have a voice in wider Church issues.

**During the period of vacancy, the church wardens assume the role of the incumbent in the leadership responsibilities of the parishes, together with the Rural Dean.**

**The Vice Chair of the PCC will chair PCC meetings.**

