

# THE PCC – AN INTRODUCTION

## What is the PCC?

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) is the key decision-making body of a Church of England parish. It consists of clergy, churchwardens and others elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting (APCM) of the parish.

### A. IT IS THE EXECUTIVE BODY OF A CHURCH OF ENGLAND PARISH

The PCC is an ecclesiastical entity, defined as the executive body of a Church of England parish. An executive body exists to ensure a parish carries out its duties, and the PCC Measure lists what those duties are. So the PCC is responsible for sharing the leadership, management and administration of a parish with the incumbent. Technically it is what is called in law a 'body corporate'. This means it is a separate body from the people who serve on it, so no one on the PCC can be made liable for any of its debts, although it does have certain legal responsibilities (see below).

### B. IT IS A BODY OF TRUSTEES FOR A CHARITY

The PCC is also a legal entity, a charity, and the PCC members are trustees of that charity. As trustees there are certain legal responsibilities, and also guidelines for best practice in terms of governance.

### C. IT IS A PAROCHIAL CHURCH 'COUNCIL'

A council is a body of people elected to manage the affairs of a group of people. This is a body which is formally constituted and has an elected membership. These two things mean it is not self-determining (it doesn't decide what it does but has a formal constitution that directs its activities) or self-selecting (people are elected, not selected, onto the council).

## 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 minister 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.

- 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 matters 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 building or keeping the books. But the first stated purpose is about mission, and suggests a model of co-operation between the minister 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 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? (iii) What resources do we need for these ministries?

### It exists to co-operate with the minister 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 minister wants to do. Others' experience suggests it exists to rubber-stamp whatever the minister wants to do. But it exists to co-operate with the minister, 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 minister isn't the head of the church, nor any other member of the PCC. Jesus is the head of his church, and the minister and PCC together are called to take their lead from Jesus. Jesus sets the agenda for his people, and the PCC and minister 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 mean there is a 'buck stops here' element to the incumbent's role.



### **It exists to ensure legal compliance with charity law and ecclesiastical law, in particular in the areas of finance, employment and appointments**

PCC members are trustees of a charity and therefore 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 here are safeguarding, financial oversight (including receiving regular financial updates; ensuring procedures exist to appropriately approve payments and that all cheques are signed by two authorised PCC members; ensuring that the service offertories and other monies are appropriately supervised; generating the Annual Report and Accounts and submitting these documents to the APCM for approval), health and safety, disability, insurance, risk assessment, data protection, and acting as a good employer of any paid workers.

### **It exists 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, 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).

### **It exists to be a channel of consultation within the wider Church through synodical structures on matters that affect the local and national Church**

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, and decisions of the wider Church to be permeated down to local churches.

## **What is my role as a PCC member?**

Put very briefly, to work with the other members of the PCC to ensure the effective running of the parish. This will involve:

- **Prayer** Members are encouraged to pray for the meetings, other members and the life of the parish.
- **Attendance and preparation** PCC members should aim to attend meetings and to read minutes, financial statements and papers before each meeting, considering how best to contribute to the items to be discussed.

- **Contribution** Each member of the PCC is valued for what they bring: their gifts, skills, experience and knowledge. We expect people to offer these in service of the aims of the PCC, both in the meetings and outside the meetings in the wider life of the church. Inevitably new members can feel somewhat daunted at the outset of their time on the PCC, but be assured we will do everything we can to make you feel at home and quickly able to offer your unique contribution.
- **Values** PCC members are part of the leadership of the church, therefore they are expected to model the core values at the heart of church life in their own spiritual journey and the practical outworking of that in their daily lives. Whilst none of will do this perfectly, part of our way of working will be to help each other live as disciples of Jesus.
- **Connection** It also helps if PCC members attend major activities in the parish but also in the diocese and deanery, so that they feel part of the wider church family and are aware of what is going on.

## **How does the PCC operate?**

We meet around 10 times a year, normally from 7.30 to 9.00pm on a Tuesday night at the church.

The meeting is normally chaired by the minister and each member receives an agenda for the meeting along with accompanying documents at least seven days in advance of the meeting.

Our aim is to try and make the PCC meeting one of the best meetings you attend, and we hope you will join us with an intention to do all you can to make this true for others.

We have a big job to do, which is often complex and difficult. But through the years we have seen God at work, and we know he has called us to serve his purposes in the world. It will be great to have you as part of the PCC to shape the next chapter of Christ Church's story.

## **For further information**

You may like to get hold of one of the resources below:

- John Pitchford, *The ABC of the PCC*.
- Kenneth MacMorran and Timothy Briden, *A Handbook for Churchwardens and Parochial Church Councillors*.

