

**Vestry 101**  
**Module 2: Expectations & Canonical Responsibilities**  
**Rev. Kim Seidman**

*The text of this section of the video is below. Please refer to it as necessary as you reflect on and answer the following questions.*

1. Read and review the national and diocesan canons to clearly understand the separate roles of clergy and vestry/bishop's committee members. Reflect and discuss the ways this defines partnership and mutual ministry in your congregation.
  
2. Beyond managing a regular review of the budget, a balance sheet, profit and loss statements, the vestry/bishop's committee has a responsibility to manage finances. How is your leadership team able to talk about stewardship both within and without its meetings?
  
3. In what ways does your vestry/bishop's committee communicate the work of leadership, and how it aligns with your congregation's mission and vision?

**How the constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church inform the work of vestries and bishop's committees**

When someone asks me what a vestry or bishop's committee does, one of my first reference points is our constitution and canons. The word Canon comes from the Greek, meaning "measuring rod, or rule." The constitution and canons of the Episcopal Church and of a diocese establish the rules that govern our common life.

For me, one of the great gifts of being part of a larger body is that individual congregations don't have to reinvent the wheel. Our organizational structure and essential responsibilities are already laid out for us. So, I've found it helpful over the years with each new vestry to spend some time together at the outset becoming familiar with the canons. They describe the key roles and separate responsibilities of the rector and the vestry, so it's a great place to begin conversation about our partnership in ministry.

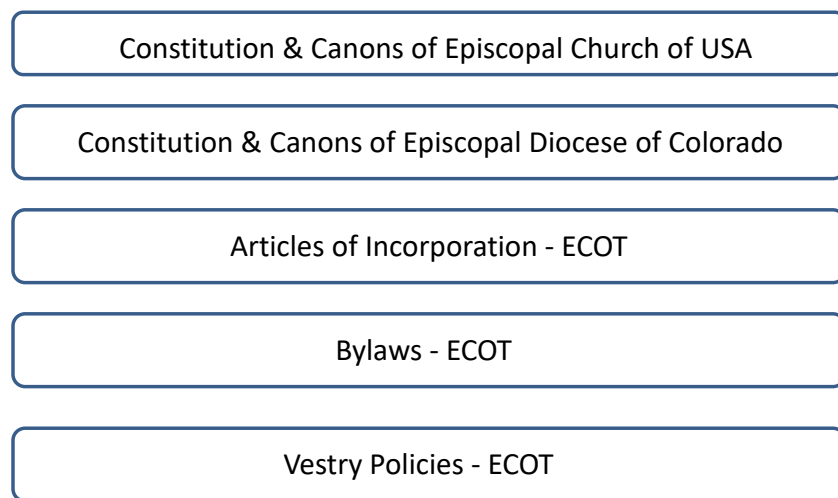
We also spend some time reviewing our parish by-laws and articles of incorporation. These documents ensure we're complying with civil law as well since the parish is also a non-profit organization.

You can download current versions of the canons as well as templates of parish by-laws and articles of incorporation on our website: <https://episcopalcolorado.org/congregational-resources/vestry-101/>

### How Canons Inform Expectations

All clergy promise obedience to the doctrine, discipline and worship of the Episcopal Church. As part of my ordination vows, I am bound to the constitution and canons. Vestry members, as legal representatives of the parish, are also subject to the constitution and canons, so let's spend look at specific responsibilities.

## Governance Hierarchy



This chart outlines the governance landscape in which the Vestry functions. The Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church of USA is the highest authority. Each subsequent level of governance authority derives its authority from above.

### National Canons

The Canons of the Episcopal Church are brief when describing the ministry of the vestry:

In Title I, Canon 14: “the vestry shall be agents and legal representatives of the Parish in all matters concerning its corporate property and the relations of Parish to its clergy.”

Other mentions include approving the annual parochial report and recommending persons for the Bishop to consider for ordination.

While the words are few, the scope of work is vast. To legally represent the parish, bear responsibility for the finances and property, and oversee the relationship between rector and congregation is tremendous.

### **Diocesan Canons**

Our diocesan canons provide more specifics:

**Canon 14 of the Episcopal Church in Colorado** addresses parish ministry:

- It says that every parish shall be incorporated under the laws of the state of Colorado as a non-profit organization.
- The articles shall accede to the constitution and canons of the Episcopal church and of the diocese and shall be approved by the ecclesiastical authority (bishop) and chancellor.
- A parish will comply to the laws governing non-profits in Colorado and shall maintain adequate property and liability insurance through church insurance. The policy needs to be approved in writing by the Standing Committee.

It goes on to say that congregations shall be governed by a vestry that functions as its board of directors with rector as chair. Vestry members shall be adult communicants in good standing, with terms set forth in by-laws.

It says that a parish shall not alienate or encumber real property or incur indebtedness secured by real property except with written consent of the Ecclesiastical Authority (the Bishop) and Standing Committee. This means that if you're considering anything that would permanently affect the value or risk real assets, you need written permission. This is because as Episcopalians, we hold our property in trust for the larger body.

The canon goes on to detail specific vestry responsibilities, such as:

- Raising funds from membership
- Holding an annual meeting that includes presenting an annual budget to members
- Submitting an annual audit, parochial report and any other reports as requested
- Maintaining copies of all governing documents, a parish register, and a set of policies regarding children and youth.

The Canons also lay out processes to address crises in leadership and sustainability.

How each vestry approaches these responsibilities makes all the difference. This is part of your formation as a leadership team. A rector and vestry that can prayerfully discern their work together will go a long way in furthering God's mission where they're called.