

As a member of the Vestry of St Mary's Parish in the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, we acknowledge that we have been called by God to be leaders in His church, and we have been set aside to discern His will for our congregation. We will constantly strive to be examples of God's love in how we deal with one another, with each member of the parish, and in our lives outside the church. We will lead the way in participation in the worship life and financial support of the parish. In an effort to be examples of and to show evidence of Christ in our lives, we agree that we will continually strive to act in accordance with the following expectations, and we will look for that behavior from each other as we live out God's call as Vestry members.

1. Prayer: We agree that our relationship with Christ is strengthened through regular prayer and must be the foundation of our daily life and work as the Vestry. Vestry members are spiritual leaders of the congregation, called by God, and that dimension of our life and work must be constantly nurtured. We will offer more than a perfunctory prayer at the beginning of our meetings. We will take time to reflect and listen to God as we conduct the business of the Church. We will pray often in our daily lives as we discern God's will for us and for this church.

2. Regular Bible Study: We agree that regular study of God's Word is a vital part of an individual's growth as a Christian. We also agree to make the reading and study of the Bible a priority in our lives by participating in regular bible study. We will also incorporate Scripture study into our meetings each month.

3. Behavior: Our baptismal covenant commits us to respect the dignity of every human being. This includes our fellow Vestry members and the clergy. We are to speak the truth in love and to build up the body of Christ. As Vestry members, we are obligated to speak up at Vestry meetings. Everything that needs to be said should be said there and not in the parking lot after the meeting, in telephone conversations, or in emails. If we have differences with another Vestry member or a member of the clergy, we will address those concerns directly to the party involved. We understand that triangulating is complaining to a third person in order to enlist that party's support or simply to complain. We agree not to be a party to triangulation. We also agree that the relationship between the Vestry and the Rector is crucial, and that the fundamental characteristic of any healthy relationship is mutual trust. We agree that when trust is present, anything is possible.

4. Conflict: To be alive is to be in some degree of conflict. A certain amount of conflict is healthy and normal, but we agree that unacknowledged and unresolved conduct is destructive. We learn through conflict that grace abounds and that tensions need community. We agree that we will not let conflicts in our Vestry and in our congregation go unattended. We agree to resolve conflict in accordance with Matthew 18: 15-20¹. Conflict cannot be resolved unless all the parties involved talk openly and honestly with one another, thereby building up the body of Christ by speaking the truth in love.

¹ ¹⁵"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

5. Consensus Decision-Making: We agree that as Vestry members, we will always strive for consensus. A consensus does not mean that everyone wholeheartedly agrees with a decision, but that once a decision is made, everyone can live with and support it. The Vestry talks together and listens to what every one has to say long enough for clarity to emerge. If after genuine discussion and prayer there is no consensus, then the decision will be made by a majority vote.

6. Meeting Length and Attendance: As we are each called by God to be Vestry members, our participation in meetings is important. Regular attendance at Vestry meeting will be a priority for us. Vestry meetings should begin and end on time, and we agree to limit discussion to items that are on the published agenda. We will strive to keep meeting length to no more than two hours. After that time the energy level goes down and results in diminishing returns on the group's productivity. Should time run out before an issue of the agenda be discussed, that item should be first on the agenda of the next meeting.

5. Email: Email has proven to be a wonderful tool for informing and announcing. However, email can often lead to misinterpretation and confusion when used as a forum for discussion of important and complex issues. While we are encouraged to use email for announcing and informing others about parish and vestry events, and for summarizing meeting minutes, we agree to refrain from using email as a forum for discussing Vestry issues.

6. Stewardship of the Vestry: Stewardship involves not only maintaining but reaching out and giving resources away to meet the needs of God's people in the world and to extend the mission of the church. We cannot expect or ask others to do what we ourselves will not do. As Vestry members, we are called to risk and to have a vision of the mission of the church which is beyond the immediate interests and survival needs of the local congregation. As parish leaders and trustees of the church, we should exemplify responsible commitment in our own giving and in the management of the church's resources. We understand giving to be an essential element of the call of Christ's Gospel, and we agree that as Vestry member, we should give freely and abundantly. We also agree to give sacrificially, moving toward a tithe in our own giving, and we will make our intentions known to the treasurer.