



GUIDANCE ON HOLDING VESTRY MEETINGS IN 2021 THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF NIAGARA

With the pandemic persisting and restrictions on in-person public gatherings continuing for the foreseeable future, in-person vestry and special vestry meetings remain prohibited at this time.

In the last year, many people have become accustomed to participating in virtual meetings and online worship services. The diocesan synod council has even been holding virtual meetings since April and synod convened virtually in November. Several vestry meetings have also convened in this manner.

This document with the appended regulations approved by synod council is intended to provide guidance to parishes as they plan for their 2021 annual vestry meetings, and to those parishes which may require a special vestry meeting while pandemic restrictions on public gatherings remain in place.

Annual Vestry Meetings

Under Canon 4.1, section 4, parishes are required to hold an annual vestry meeting no later than March 1 each year, or on such day as may be fixed by the synod.

At annual vestry meetings, financial statements for the previous year are received, churchwardens, lay representatives and parish council members are elected and/or appointed, a budget for the coming year is passed and any other business connected with the temporalities of the parish is transacted.

Parish corporations faced with extenuating circumstances may request in writing an extension to the prescribed annual vestry meeting deadline. The request, signed by the cleric-in-charge and churchwardens, should describe why additional time is necessary and indicate the proposed date of their annual vestry meeting. Such requests must be received by the executive officer and secretary of synod no later than February 1, 2021.

Special Vestry Meetings

Canon 4.1 also allows the cleric-in-charge to call a special vestry meeting “whenever it is proper to do so”. Special vestry meetings are required to be held to deal with significant parish or property matters, or for the election of churchwardens or lay delegates to synod.

In May of 2020, synod council authorized the Bishop to waive the requirement for vestry consideration, as set forth in the Canon 4.6 regulations, for all regulated building projects that are deemed necessary to proceed during the current pandemic while restrictions on in-person gatherings remain in place.

A special vestry meeting need not be called solely for the purpose of appointing a rector’s warden. The cleric-in-charge may instead nominate and appoint a churchwarden, provided that the appointment is made within one month of the office being vacated from any of the causes listed in Canon 4.1(9), and provided that notice is communicated to the parish by any reasonable means available.

Additional Guidance

Prior to the actual meeting, it is strongly recommended that parish leaders hold a practice meeting using the technology chosen to conduct the meeting.

All elections and/or appointments of churchwardens, lay representatives and other dignitaries should be promptly reported through the diocesan online reporting platform. For assistance, please contact Jane Wyse at jane.wyse@niagaraanglican.ca.

If you have any questions arising from this guidance or the regulations which follow, please contact Archdeacon Bill Mous at bill.mous@niagaraanglican.ca.

REGULATIONS FOR HOLDING VIRTUAL VESTRY MEETINGS

1. In light of the health crisis caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, in-person vestry and special vestry meetings are prohibited until further notice. These regulations therefore apply to all vestry meetings prescribed by Canon 4.1
2. The cleric-in-charge, together with the churchwardens, shall select a virtual meeting platform that is most appropriate and accessible for the members of their parish vestry. Virtual meetings may be held by teleconference or videoconference. Some video conferencing platforms (eg. Zoom, GoToMeeting) also permit participation by audio alone, if the person does not wish, or does not have the means, to participate by video. Parishes are responsible for any costs associated with the use of such platforms.
3. Notice of the annual vestry meeting or special vestry meeting must be given to all members of vestry at least twice within the two weeks immediately preceding the date on which the meeting is to be held. For special vestry meetings, the notice must also specify the business for which the meeting is being called. Notice may be communicated by any reasonable means available, including a verbal announcement during in-person and/or virtual worship services, parish-wide email or mailing, individual phone calls and/or posting on the parish website. The cleric-in-charge and churchwardens are responsible for taking all reasonable steps to reach every household on the parish vestry list and must keep a written record of the steps taken to provide notice of the meeting to the members of vestry.
4. The vestry list must be made available for inspection, upon request, at least two weeks prior to the date of the scheduled meeting. For privacy reasons, the vestry list must not be posted online unless it can be posted in a section of the parish website accessible only to members of vestry.
5. The Certification Committee referred to in Canon 4.1(1)(b) shall determine the eligibility of those who are to be voting members at any virtual vestry meeting. At the discretion of the cleric-in-charge and churchwardens, any voting member attending a virtual vestry meeting may be asked to certify, in writing, that they have not voted as a member of any other vestry during six months preceding the meeting.
6. The method of voting during vestry meetings shall be at the discretion of the chairperson and may include polling, visual cues, an audio roll call, or votes taken in the negative. Confidential voting is not permitted.
7. Pursuant to Canon 4.1(3), a written record (minutes) of any vestry meeting must be entered in a book kept for that purpose and preserved in the custody of the churchwardens. The minutes must include a list of those present for the virtual vestry meeting, including both voting and non-voting participants. A member of vestry will be considered to be present at a meeting if the member establishes a communication link to, or votes at, the meeting.
8. These regulations will expire on December 31, 2021 unless an extension is authorized by Synod Council and approved by the Bishop.