



The Diocese of Algoma

Vestry Meetings in 2021 during the Amber Stage of “Loving Our Neighbours”

As we confront a pandemic that is persisting, living with restrictions on in-person public gatherings, we face a challenge in how to conduct the necessary activity of the church. Among this activity is the annual meeting of Vestry.

The annual meeting of Vestry plays an important role, both legally and missionally, in our life together as church. By nature, it is a gathering of qualified persons in a congregation to review the work of the past year, and chart a course for the year or years ahead. It is a way each member shares in discernment and decision-making via a forum of mutual accountability. Due to the risk of COVID-19 spread, however, such gatherings will be in most, if not all settings, inadvisable and perhaps even not permitted. Therefore, as a temporary measure, it is necessary for us to find other means to engage safely and effectively in our annual meetings as parish vestries.

Thankfully, over the last year, many people have become accustomed to participating in virtual meetings and online worship services. The Executive Committee of the Diocese, and other committees and commissions, have been holding virtual meetings since spring 2020, and in 2021 Diocesan Synod will convene virtually.

While irregular and not meant to set any normative precedent, in 2021 online or hybrid Vestry meetings should be held as long as the spread of COVID-19 remains a serious risk.

This document is intended to provide guidance to parishes as they plan for their 2021 annual vestry meetings. The greater part of the requirements and guidance below also is applicable to those parishes that may require a special vestry meeting while pandemic restrictions on public gatherings remain in place.

Annual Vestry Meetings - Requirements

The requirements for Vestry meetings are spelled out in Canon J-1. These requirements need to be met, though we recognize some may be addressed in an abbreviated or alternate way.

What remain as necessities in 2021 are the following items:

- Year-round congregations/parishes hold annual vestry meeting by the end of February.
- The reception and approval of all financial accounts for the past year.
- Approval of the budget for 2021.

- The appointment and election of churchwardens, Synod delegates, financial reviewers, and other officers for the ensuing year.
- Review by Vestry of the annual Screening in Faith report, and its prompt submission to the Synod Office following the annual meeting.
- The prompt submission of annual statistics for 2020 to the Synod Office following the annual meeting of Vestry.
- Business conducted at the annual meeting should be guided by, and serve a clear vision for discipleship formation and mission.

Congregations facing extenuating circumstances may request in writing an extension to the prescribed annual vestry meeting deadline. The request, signed by the Incumbent or 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 and approved by the Diocesan Archdeacon no later than February 1, 2021.

While Vestry meetings may be held entirely via an online video conferencing platform, it may prove more desirable to hold a “hybrid” form of meeting. Options for the latter include: a) officials for the meeting (ex. Incumbent/chair, wardens, vestry clerk or recording secretary, treasurer, others as deemed necessary) are together and physically distanced in one location; b) any or all of those just named and individuals who do not have access to the needed technology are together and physically distanced in one location, keeping in mind that such individuals may also be vulnerable and thus unable or unwilling to participate onsite.

For congregations in which members of Vestry are few in number, it may be possible for Vestry meetings to be held in person. However, even in such instances, it is likely that some individuals may be unable or unwilling to participate onsite. Therefore, it is recommended that, in whatever way possible, arrangements be made to hold at least a hybrid form of Vestry meeting.

Regulations & Guidelines for Holding Virtual or Hybrid Vestry Meetings

1. The Incumbent (or 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. Video conferencing platforms (e.g. Zoom, GoToMeeting) that permit participation by audio alone are most desirable, allowing for the participation of persons without the means, or not wishing, to participate by video. Parishes are responsible for any costs associated with the use of such platforms. Calling in to participate via telephone apart from the chosen video conferencing platform is not permitted.
2. Prior to the actual meeting, it is strongly recommended that parish leaders hold a practice meeting using the technology chosen to conduct the meeting.
3. As required by Canon J-1, notice of the annual vestry meeting or special vestry meeting must be communicated no less than 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 Incumbent/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 Incumbent's Charge, all reports, and financial documents should be circulated or otherwise made available prior to the Vestry meeting for participants to read in order to reduce the length of the meeting time, particularly if anyone is meeting in-person. It also is advisable to prepare and circulate a slate of nominees for elected positions and a list of appointments prior to the meeting.
5. As much as possible, items for discussion on the agenda for the 2021 annual meeting should be limited to those listed in the bulleted points in the requirements section above.
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 and abstentions. Confidential voting is not permitted.
7. 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.

Reminders and Final Points

All reports and forms required, including the Screening in Faith report, should be submitted to the Synod Office promptly following your annual meeting, and no later than February 28, 2021.

As described in our online Diocesan Information Sessions this month, the statistical form for 2020 will be different as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 on in-person worship during the past year.

Ensure that you compare the requirements and guidelines of this document, and relevant protocols in Algoma's other Amber stage documents with the regulations and recommendations of your local health unit, **always following the guidelines that provide the most protection.**

If you have any questions arising from this document, please contact Archdeacon Jay Koyle via 705.256.5061 (ext. 3) or congdevelopment@dioceseofalgoma.com, and he will respond to your inquiry or forward your request to the appropriate person for doing so.

Link to Canon J-1: <https://www.dioceseofalgoma.com/wp-content/uploads/library/downloads/Canon%20J1%20APPROVED%20SYNOD%202017.pdf>

Link to Parish Leaders Manual (2015): <https://www.dioceseofalgoma.com/wp-content/uploads/library/downloads/Diocese%20-%20Parish%20Leaders%20Manual%202015.pdf>