

REVISION OF CHRIST CHURCH BY-LAWS

Christ Church is currently operating under two sets of governing documents: a “Constitution and By-laws of Christ Church, Exeter”, adopted in 1875 and amended in 1962, 1969, 1972, 1975, and 1989; and “Articles of Agreement”, adopted in 1990. These documents are outdated, occasionally conflict, and need to be brought into conformity with the Canons of the Episcopal Church and the Canons of the Diocese of New Hampshire. The Diocese of New Hampshire has provided Model By-Laws which are excellent. We have used these as a template for the proposed by-laws. Much of what the Model By-laws contain is, essentially, non-negotiable: the local church must conform to diocesan and national canons. We have followed the Model By-laws word for word in these areas. A section by section summary of the proposed bylaws follows, indicating where local congregations have discretion to make choices.

Article I specifies that Christ Church’s governing rules are subject to the Canons of the Diocese and of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA.

Article II sets out what constitutes membership and voting membership in the congregation. We have discretion to specify how disputes about voting membership are to be resolved and have chosen to specify that rector and wardens together shall resolve such disputes.

Article III governs congregation wide meetings. We have specified that 7 days notice is required, that 35 constitute a quorum, that absentee ballots are permitted, and that the rector, senior, or junior warden presides, in that order.

Article IV sets out the responsibilities and the authority of the rector. These are dictated by state and national canons.

Article V specifies that vestry officers are two wardens, a treasurer, and a clerk. There is no canonical requirement that there be two wardens or that one be a “priest’s” warden and one a “parish” warden. We have left that open, so that the gifts of the two people in those positions can be used where they best fit. To avoid confusion, we have specified in some places a hierarchy of decision making: rector, senior warden, and junior warden, but have otherwise left the duties of the two unspecified. All officers may serve two consecutive three-year terms but then must sit out a year. We have followed the model by-laws in enumerating the duties of each office.

Article VI allows for a minimum of 6 up to a maximum of 9 vestry members, again to provide flexibility. Vestry members are limited to one three year term and then must sit out a year. Article VI does provide for Standing Committees: Finance; Nominating; Personnel; Buildings and Grounds; and Stewardship. Vestry is responsible for creating these committees and overseeing their work, but there is no requirement that they be led by a vestry member. Ad Hoc committees may also be created. A minimum of four vestry meetings a year; one each quarter, is required. Vestry may meet electronically and may, in exigent circumstances, take action without meeting. Provisions have been added to fill vacant vestry seats between annual meetings, although removing the requirement that there be 9 on the vestry makes this optional. Provisions have also been added for removing a vestry member.

Articles 7 through 9 have to do with the handling of financial matters. Their language follows that of the Model By-laws, as local congregations have very little discretion in this area.

Article 10 sets out the requirements for serving as a diocesan convocation and convention delegate.

Article 11 describes the process for amending by-laws. Amendments may be proposed, voted on, and take effect at the same annual meeting.