

The Church of England

Guild of Vergers



A Form of Admission to the Office of Verger



Leading the way since 1932

Presidents: The Archbishops of Canterbury and York

NOTES

It is assumed that this form of admission will be used as part of a larger public act of worship, which is preferably one of the principal services of that Church. In the Eucharist, this could either be during the Gathering at the beginning of the service or immediately before the Peace. During Morning or Evening Prayer, it may either happen at the beginning, replacing the opening responses, or after the Office itself and before the prayers.

This form of words is a template from which appropriate sections may be used as required in each setting; how much is used will be entirely at the discretion of the incumbent or officiant and the candidate and will depend on whether it is used at an Office or at the Eucharist, and at which point in those services it is decided to have the admission. The order allows for the robing of the new verger as well as the presentation of symbols of office, which can be used, adapted or omitted as local situations require.

When used, any locally produced order of service should acknowledge the source as that of: The Central Council of The Church of England Guild of Vergers

It is suggested that the candidate and his/her sponsor should follow any customary incoming procession after all the robed ministers etc..., but after the admission has been completed the verger should assume the customary role in the liturgy from then on, and virge the outgoing procession at end of the service if appropriate, as local custom requires.

Where appropriate the full name of the candidate should be inserted.

The full title of the office to which the candidate is to be admitted (e.g. Head Verger, Honorary Verger, Sacristan, Verger etc...) should be inserted in the text as appropriate. Ideally the sponsor should be a Church officer (e.g. Churchwarden or Chapter Clerk) or any member of the Church community who was a part of the appointment process.

The investiture with robe, virge and keys can be shared with fellow vergers (if any) or other assistants, Church officers or volunteers as appropriate who might present the symbols as the officiant reads the words or vice versa.

SUGGESTED READINGS

*Old Testament - 1 Chronicles: chapter 9, verses 21 - 29
or Exodus: chapter 40, verses 1 - 16 [or 1 - 33]*

*New Testament - Romans: chapter 12, verses 1 - 18
or 1 Corinthians: chapter 12, verses 12 - 27*

Psalm 84

FOREWORD BY

DR DAVID STANCLIFFE, FORMER BISHOP OF SALISBURY AND CHAIRMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND'S LITURGICAL COMMISSION FROM 1993 TO 2005

The Admission of a new Verger is, or ought to be, a significant moment in the life of a Church.

It is an ancient office and those who hold it bear significant responsibility, not only for maintenance - of the plate and the fabric etc... – but also for mission, entrusted by God to his body, the Church. For, in preparing the building for worship, and in serving the liturgy that is offered, the Verger enables the Church to fulfil her vocation and draw people to celebrate together Christ's transforming presence.

This Order will allow the Admission of a Verger to be marked in a proper manner. I commend it warmly and hope that its use will be both regular and widespread.

THE OFFICE OF VERGER

The office of Verger is an ancient one and, some might say, older than the Christian Church itself, possibly tracing its origins all the way back to the Temple Servants of the Old Testament. The Jewish priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi, and within that tribe further limited to one family, the house of Aaron. To the non-priestly Levites were assigned all the sundry lesser duties associated with the sacred office. The Priests and Levites were assisted by a third, specialist group of temple servants and "Gatekeepers".

'The gatekeepers were in charge of guarding the gates of the house of the Lord; entrusted with the responsibility for the rooms and treasuries in the house of God. They had charge of the key for opening it each morning. Some of them were in charge of the articles used in the temple service. Others were assigned to take care of the furnishings and all the other articles of the sanctuary, as well as the flour and wine, and oil, incense and spices.' [from 1 Chronicles: chapter 9]

The early Church, therefore, had a very good precedent for appointing ministers to care for the practical needs of the worshipping community, to guard the holy sites, and to assist the Elders and Presbyters.

By the end of the fourth century AD the role of these ministers had been formalised, which resulted in the "minor orders" of *Ostiarius* (*Doorkeeper*), *Exorcist*, *Lector* and *Acolyte*, into which they were ordained, to assist the "major orders" of Bishop, Priest and Deacon.

These so called "junior clergy" were set to work not only as the door keepers and readers, but also as sacristans, clerks, and beadles. Many of them appear in the mediaeval liturgical formularies known as the *Use of Sarum* and include on various occasions instructions such as:

"Procedat minister virgam manu gestans, locum faciens processioni"

[A minister goes before, bearing a virge in his hand, making room for the procession]

"Imprimis Sacriste, virgas in manibus gestantes, deinde...."

[Firstly sacrists, bearing virges in their hands, then....]

We can see from this that these *Sacristis* took on a ceremonial role as well as caring for the sacred vessels and vestments, guardianship of the building and its keys. Eventually the virge-bearing sacristan became known as *virgarius* [rod-bearer] and then through Middle-English as *virgifer* [as *crucifer* is to cross-bearer] and later variants such as *virgerer* (shortened to *virger*) or through French to *verger*.

A FORM OF SERVICE

A hymn may be sung; the vergger designate [in his/her cassock] may be led in by a Church officer [his/her sponsor] behind the usual procession, and they stand before the officiant.

OFFICIANT: In the name of Christ
who calls us to offer ourselves in the service of his people,
we welcome you; Grace to you and Peace.

There are varieties of gifts:

ALL: but the same spirit.

OFFICIANT: There are varieties of service:

ALL: but the same Lord.

OFFICIANT: There are different kinds of working:

ALL: but the same God is at work in all.

OFFICIANT: To Him be glory and dominion;

ALL: now and for ever, Amen.

OFFICIANT: Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are gathered here to admit the new [Head] Vergger of this Church, to pray for his/her ministry here and to welcome him/her [and his/her family] as [a] member[s] of the Church community.

SPONSOR: [Reverend Father] I present to you [NAME], who has been duly chosen and appointed as [VERGER, HEAD VERGER, etc...] of this Church, and I ask you now to admit him/her to that office and into the fellowship of this Church.

OFFICIANT: [NAME], we welcome you in the Lord's name to serve here as [VERGER, HEAD VERGER, etc...] Before you are admitted to this office, you must publicly declare your intention to undertake the duties of this ministry.

[NAME], are you willing to become a/the Vergger of this Church, and in that ministry endeavour to fulfil the work committed to you with diligence, faithfulness, reverence and courtesy?

ANSWER: I am willing.

OFFICIANT: Will you strive to further our mission and ministry to those who worship in this place and those visit here, and strengthen our common life by taking your part in the ordering of our public life and common prayer?

ANSWER: I will, with God's help.

OFFICIANT: Will you be diligent in your care for this building; in the preparation and performance of the liturgy, in your care for the sacred vessels, vestments and treasures of this Church, that the worship offered in this place may always be at the centre of its life?

ANSWER: I will with God's help.

OFFICIANT: Will you endeavour to promote peace and goodwill among your colleagues and, with them, exercise care and guidance to all those, who by their voluntary help, assist in the care and mission of this place; and by your example maintain the dignity and honour of this Church?

ANSWER: I will, with God's help.

In Cathedral and Collegiate Churches, the following oath may be administered:

OFFICIANT: Will you swear to be faithful in upholding the laws, statutes, ordinances, privileges and laudable customs of this (*Cathedral/ Collegiate*) Church so far as in any way they concern you, and pay due respect and obedience to those in authority in all commands lawful and honest; and that you will not reveal to others matters confidential to the Church authorities?

ANSWER: I so swear, with the help of God.

OFFICIANT: Members of this congregation, will you uphold (*NAME*), in his/ her new ministry in your work and by your prayers?

ALL: We will.

OFFICIANT: (*NAME*), I admit you to the office of (*VERGER, HEAD VERGER, etc...*) of this Church of (*NAME OF CHURCH*) in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord prosper your work done in his name and guide and govern you evermore.

ALL: Amen.

The Verger may be vested in a robe of office with these words:

Remember the trust of those who have appointed you to this ministry and strive faithfully to uphold the responsibilities of this office to the very utmost of your ability.

Keep in mind always that this is the house of God wherein his honour dwells, and that this is none other than the Gate of Heaven.

Show hospitality in Christ's name; strive to maintain the reverence and dignity of this place, and may the Lord guide you in all your work done here in his name. **Amen.**

The Verger may be presented with a virge with these words:

From the earliest days of the Church it has been the customary practice to present ministers of the Church with symbols of their office.

Therefore, receive this virge as an outward sign of the dignity of your office and a symbol of the authority committed to you.

The Verger may be presented with the keys to the church with these words:

Receive these keys as a symbol of your guardianship of this holy place and the responsibility committed to you herein.

May the Lord give you wisdom and courage, strength and love to do his will; and may the Lord protect your going out and your coming in, now and for evermore. **Amen.**

The Verger may be led to his/her seat where he/she may be blessed with these words:

Blessed are those whom you choose, and draw to your courts to dwell there; they will be satisfied by the beauty of your house, by the holiness of your Holy Temple. **Amen.**

From Psalm 65

Or this prayer for the whole assembly may be said:

Almighty and everlasting God,
by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church
is governed and sanctified;
hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people;
that each in their vocation and ministry
may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your Name;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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