

The job of a vergger

It is almost impossible to define the job of a vergger in a few words - you could in fact say that there are as many definitions as there are churches with verggers. Many factors affect the job that a vergger is expected to do - size of church, traditions, volumes of visitors, ministerial set-up, type of employment etc. etc. Any church from the smallest, isolated village church to the largest city parish church; from the private chapel to a great abbey or cathedral can have one or more verggers. With decreasing numbers of ordained ministers and the changing expectations of congregations I believe that many more should look to having a vergger.

In general terms the vergger at the end of the twentieth century is, or should be, a key person in the life and work of a worshipping community. Being a vergger is not just like any other job, it is a vocation, a form of ministry and service, and a way of putting your Christian faith into action. If the minister of a church is seen as having as their primary responsibility the care of the souls in their parish the vergger can be said to have as their primary responsibility the care of the church and minister in their parish; the minister is primarily people centred but the vergger is primarily building centred.

Of course little in life is totally clear cut and this is true of the job of a vergger. A vergger does not solely have responsibility for and dealings with inanimate objects - inter-personal skills are vital too. Critics would say a vergger is "Jack of all trades but master of none" - this may be true but versatility is a vital asset to a vergger. Below is a list of duties which many verggers find themselves doing - I am sure that there are many more that I am not aware of but, as you will appreciate, my experience is limited.

- * Ceremonial duties - perhaps the most high profile thing a vergger does, usually robed and with dignity - leading processions and escorting people around the church building and its precincts in a formal manner.
- * Organising and planning - special services, ceremonies, rosters for various tasks, seating at events, teams of people for various tasks, and his or her own work.
- * Welcoming - visitors of all sorts; sightseers, those needing help, worshippers, special guests, visiting ministers, groups of all types, and enquirers after information and spiritual help.
- * Pastoral care - for fellow workers and church members, ministers, casual visitors, and even the local hooligans.
- * Cleaning - building and everything in it and used in it.
- * Maintenance - running repairs on almost anything, routine tasks like changing light bulbs, and even grounds maintenance in the churchyard etc.
- * Administration - record keeping, writing up registers, controlling stocks of consummables like bread and wine for the Eucharist, and ordering or purchasing anything that is needed.
- * Security - opening and closing the church, checking for signs of theft, damage and vandalism, and helping to maintain order.
- * Preparation - for services, concerts and events - moving furniture, putting out books etc.
- * Tidying up - after services, concerts and events - everything that was prepared has to be put back where it should be or was before; and keeping notice boards, childrens' corners etc. looking tidy.
- * First response - to whatever situation arises - the child who grazes a knee tripping up the step, the minister who forgets a book or something similar, the passer-by who has lost the local supermarket, or the elderly person who has locked their keys in the car, and many more.
- * Providing information - local, ecclesiastical, or more general - both historical and current.

Yes, most of these jobs can be done by anyone and many are in every church. A vergers would not seek to be the only person doing most of these jobs and it would be foolish of them to do so. Certain jobs need special training or knowledge that has been acquired from another person or a book, others just require the use of the gifts that God has given each and every one of us. The most important thing is that a vergers's vocation and ministry is recognised by the vergers and the church at which they work. The vergers should be a practising and committed Christian like any other person in that church with a personal rule of life centred around that faith, the Bible, and their own life of public worship and private prayer. The vergers is just another pilgrim on the way who has the same needs and temptations as any other but who has wider responsibilities than some.

The Church of England Guild of Vergers (CEGV) is not a trade union or anything like that but a body that exists to help its members. It provides a Training Course that can be undertaken like any other correspondence course, and annual Training Conference, national and local events, a newsletter, and mutual support. Members share together whether they are paid or voluntary, full or part-time, young or old, male or female, vergers or interested supporter and thus try to form a common bond - that of faith, fellowship, and fun. Membership is open to all who perform any of the functions of a vergers regardless of their title, and anyone who is interested in the job of the vergers. Local and national events are open to all and even the Training Course may be undertaken by those who are not vergers.

Vergers can not exist in isolation - they are and have been for centuries - part of the way of life in churches. Vergers need encouraging, people need encouraging to take on these jobs, and churches need encouraging to have vergers. It is just a part of identifying a person's gifts and recognising their vocation, and encouraging them in that. It is part of our Christian calling and responsibility and to those who do these jobs it is an integral part of their Christian Stewardship of talents, of time, and in most cases of treasure too.

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