

# Guidelines for Bell Ringing



Lincoln Diocesan Guild of  
Church Bell Ringers



# Guidelines for Bell Ringing

## Introduction

**The ringing of church bells proclaims the presence of the church in the community and is an integral part of the work of the church. Bell ringing requires considerable skill and dedication; it is essential that the ringers are acknowledged as church workers and that they are encouraged to recruit and train future generations of ringers.**

Many ringers see their ringing as an Act of Worship but it should also be recognised that bell ringing may be the first contact with the church for some new recruits and as such can be seen as a way of engaging with people not previously involved in the life of the Church and the community which it serves.

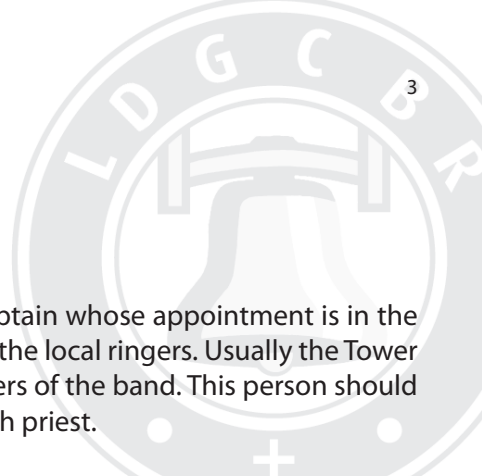
The responsibility for the overseeing of bell ringing in any parish rests with the parish priest and the Parochial Church Council (PCC). As the legal entity in the parish, a PCC needs to abide by legislation including the Protection of Young People and Vulnerable Adults, Health and Safety legislation and be aware of growing sensitivities concerning noise in a public place. The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers ([www.cccbr.org.uk](http://www.cccbr.org.uk)) advises on the normal practices operating around the country for bells and bell ringers and has a complaints help line.

Maintenance of good communications between the parish priest\*, the PCC and local bell ringers is essential. In addition to informal contact, it would be advisable to meet formally on a regular (annual) basis to discuss arrangements for ringing, tower officers etc. It is recommended that a member of the ringing team should be encouraged to serve on the PCC.

These guidelines have been issued by the Lincoln Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers (LDGCBR), [www.ldgcb.org.uk](http://www.ldgcb.org.uk), in consultation with the Diocesan Archdeacons for use by PCCs in the Diocese of Lincoln.

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\* The responsibilities of the incumbent may be delegated to a Churchwarden or other PCC member where this forms a more practical arrangement.



## **1 Officers**

### **a Tower Captain**

Bell ringing teams are managed by a Tower Captain whose appointment is in the gift of the parish priest, ideally after consulting the local ringers. Usually the Tower Captain is one of the most experienced members of the band. This person should be acceptable to both the ringers and the parish priest.

When a new parish priest is installed, it is his/her responsibility to decide whether to reappoint the current Tower Captain. During a vacancy/interregnum, the responsibility of the parish priest transfers to the Rural Dean who has the responsibility to appoint/reappoint a Tower Captain on a temporary basis until a new parish priest has been installed should the need arise.

The parish priest can, if there are sound reasons, terminate the appointment of the Tower Captain at any time, but this should be done in consultation with the Churchwardens and PCC and, in such circumstances, it is recommended that the Branch secretary of the Lincoln Guild is consulted in the first instance.

### **b Tower Correspondent**

The LDGCBR publishes an annual report containing a list of Tower Correspondents to facilitate contact with ringers in the Diocese. The Tower Correspondent is often someone other than the Tower Captain. Where there are no resident ringers, the tower correspondent may be a ringer from a neighbouring tower or the parish priest or a churchwarden. The parish priest must be happy with the named person and agree mechanisms for asking and granting permission to ring the bells.

## 2. Maintenance of the bells and fittings

The Tower Captain and bell ringers should report any faults discovered in the fabric of the tower, bells, frame and fittings to the PCC to ensure that they are kept in good order. If work is required to be undertaken on the tower, bells or frame, the matter should be referred to the PCC to ensure compliance with the Faculty Jurisdiction Measure.

Under no circumstances should any work other than replacement of ropes, stays, sliders or pulley blocks be undertaken unless it has been duly authorised.

Specific guidance can be found at [www.ldgcb.org.uk/admin](http://www.ldgcb.org.uk/admin) and [www.lincoln.anglican.org/churchbuildings](http://www.lincoln.anglican.org/churchbuildings) (follow links to Guidance Notes/Maintenance of Church Bell Installations).

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## 3. Regular Times of ringing

The times when bells are normally rung for divine worship or for practice purposes need to be agreed with the parish priest and PCC and publicised on noticeboards and in parish magazines.

Times that are generally considered acceptable are;

- i. Practice nights – usually the same single night every week, one and a half hours total ringing time not continuing after 9pm, but may be longer to accommodate local needs as permitted by local circumstances (e.g. sound control, location of the Church) and relationships with the local community.
- ii. Divine Service – ringing time before worship is usually between 30 and 45 minutes in length and does not start before 9 am (except for an early service e.g. on Ascension Day or where the service regularly starts earlier) or continue after 9pm.
- iii. Exceptions to ii - services for special occasions, e.g. the major Festivals, Patronal Festival, Remembrance Sunday, when ringing a quarter-peal may be appropriate, giving a ringing time of up to one hour. Also, the use of service ringing times to ring quarter peals to develop ringers and improve standards. In these cases prior notice should be given to the parish priest.

## 4. Additional ringing

There are a few exceptions to normal ringing hours or times. The duration of ringing must be agreed in advance with the parish priest and the PCC and publicised.

- i. Midnight Mass.
- ii. New Year's Eve. "Ringing in the New Year" breaks the 9pm rule but is a long-established tradition in many towns and villages.
- iii. State or Civic occasions; the suitability and duration of ringing on such occasions must be decided by the parish priest and the PCC.
- iv. Requests from visiting bell ringers; these take several forms:
  - A meeting of members of the LDGCBR; this usually involves ringing during a Saturday afternoon and/or evening and may include a service of worship. Requests to hold these have to be made to the parish priest who gives permission for the duration and times of the ringing.
  - Bell ringers from another area on an organised tour, usually visiting several churches and ringing for up to 1 hour at each. Permission is given by the parish priest; in those instances where requests are made to the Tower Correspondent, (s)he must refer them to the parish priest. Requests should be discussed with the tower captain, who may know the visitors' bona fides and capabilities and be able to advise accordingly.
- v. Peal attempts; peals are periods of continuous ringing lasting between 2¾ and 3½ hours (depending on the weight and number of the bells) and requests to ring these may be made by visiting teams and/or the local ringers. The PCC should have a clear policy on how many occasions are allowed in one year and how to apportion these between visiting and local ringers. Setting of the number to be allowed should take into account the position of the local Church, the availability of sound control measures and relationships with the local community. Advance publicity should be given on noticeboards and in parish magazines.
- vi. Ringing for weddings and funerals. On these occasions the request for ringing must be made to the parish priest by the families concerned. The parish priest should discuss the viability of being able to fulfill such requests with the local tower captain prior to informing the families that ringing will take place.

## 5. Health and Safety

- a) The PCC should protect against unauthorised access to the tower and bells, e.g. by fitting locks to the bell chamber and ringing chamber doors. It is the responsibility of the Tower Captain to ensure that the bells are left safely at all times as required by the church's Insurers. If access is required to the tower by, for instance, the Church Architect, the parish priest should arrange for the tower captain to be informed of this in advance to ensure that the bells are safe. The tower captain should check afterwards that it is safe to swing the bells before they are next rung (e.g. that there are no ladders blocking the path of the bells).
- b) The parish priest and PCC may decide to issue a key to a designated key holder who usually is the Tower Captain. The designated person must ensure that these guidelines are being followed and, where they are not, report the matter to the parish priest and PCC.
- c) Where there is a clock to be wound regularly in the tower, free and safe access must be allowed to the clock winder at all times.
- d) Where maintenance is needed to the bells or fittings, a minimum of two people should be in the belfry. Notices should be put in place in the ringing chamber to alert others that there are ringers in the bell chamber.
- e) Work should not take place in the belfry with the bells left in their "up" position.
- f) It is recommended that the Church's address and post code are displayed on a noticeboard, for guiding the emergency services should they be required.
- g) The PCC has a responsibility to ensure the highest standards of health and safety and will, from time to time, carry out inspections and risk assessments in consultation with the Tower Captain to ensure compliance with health and safety standards and with the requirements of the church's Insurers. Churches, including belfries, are subject to Local Authority inspections.

## 6. Child protection and the protection of vulnerable adults

(These arrangements are likely to change and be simplified once the new Independent Safeguarding Authority arrangements start in October 2009)

- a) When a tower has young people (under 18) or vulnerable adults\* as bell ringers or trainee bell ringers, the Tower Captain and any adult trainers should, with agreement of the Priest or PCC, fill out a confidential form to self declare that there is no reason why they should not work with Children or Vulnerable Adults, provide two references, and complete a Criminal Record Bureau check (CRB). If all these checks are in order the Tower Captain and Adult trainers should finally be approved by the Priest or PCC.
- b) A ringer organising/leading a bell ringing outing/visit or a visiting ringing trainer on a single or series of events should have carried out the checks listed in a) and state this on a "permission to participate" form to be completed by parents of children taking part in the outing.
- c) It is important to note that a CRB check on its own is of very little value as a protection measure, hence the need for self declaration and references. Most importantly two adults must be present whenever young people are taking part in ringing or being transported to or from ringing events.
- d) It is good practice for an attendance register to be kept, including the names of any visitors.
- e) Parents of new recruits should sign a consent form and should be encouraged to come to an early session to see what is involved.
- f) Concerns about issues relating to the protection of young people and vulnerable adults should be reported to the incumbent or the PCC's child protection representative. Further advice can be obtained from the Diocese of Lincoln Adviser [simon.payne@lincoln.anglican.org](mailto:simon.payne@lincoln.anglican.org) 01673 863280.

Further guidance can be found on the Central Council or the Lincoln Guild websites (see above).

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\* A Vulnerable adult is defined as: "Any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of him or herself, or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation"

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- A copy of the consent form can be found at: [www.cabr.org.uk/guidelines](http://www.cabr.org.uk/guidelines)
  - A sample permission to ring form can be found on the guild web site: [www.ldgcb.org.uk](http://www.ldgcb.org.uk)
  - A copy of the confidential declaration can be found at: [www.lincoln.anglican.org/pdf\\_view.php?id=166](http://www.lincoln.anglican.org/pdf_view.php?id=166)
  - A copy of the reference letter can be found at: [www.lincoln.anglican.org/misc\\_lib/47.doc](http://www.lincoln.anglican.org/misc_lib/47.doc)
  - How to obtain a CRB check is explained at: [www.lincoln.anglican.org/page.php?n\\_@CAC\\_182](http://www.lincoln.anglican.org/page.php?n_@CAC_182)



These guidelines for Parochial Church Councils will periodically be reviewed by the Archdeacons and the Guild Committee of the LDGCBR and amended where necessary.

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