

Why we give parochial fees to diocese

Q: Why do we have to pay income we receive in fees to the diocese? Can't parishes keep that income themselves?

A: Parochial fees are fees set by the General Synod and Parliament for certain occasional offices conducted by the Church of England. People pay fees to the Church for marriages, funerals, burials and placing monuments in the churchyard, and for searches in the parish registers.

You may wonder why we charge people for these things, when the Church's ministry is usually free. Partly it's a recognition that burials, weddings and funerals create extra work for our clergy, and that should be valued by a payment.

And one reason that parishes can't just keep all the fees that they generate by performing these functions is to do with fairness.

There are some parishes – like St Mary's, Fratton, and St Mary's, Portchester – that host a large number of weddings each year, and others that host very few. There are some of our parishes where there are many

frequently asked questions

Last year's Archdeaconry consultations gave you a chance to ask central diocesan staff questions about their work. Those questions were noted down and are the basis of this Pompey Chimes feature – in which we try to answer the questions that you're asking.

more funerals than others. Paying part of those fees to the diocese means that that income can be shared out more evenly across all our parishes.

The actual amount that is payable in fees is revised at the start of each calendar year, and usually increased in line with inflation (the Retail Price Index), which is announced in the September before the new fees come into force. The fees have two parts and these are divided between the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) and the PCC.

The amount payable in DBF fees is based on assumptions about the costs of ministry (taken from published statistics) and the likely number of hours clergy would need to spend on preparing

a wedding or funeral to provide a good ministry to the families involved. Some of that DBF fee is used to pay honoraria to the many retired ministers who support our funeral and wedding ministry.

The amount payable to the PCC includes an element based on national statistics for the overall cost of repairs and maintenance of church buildings and the number of hours they are in use. PCC fees for burials and monuments also include an element to provide for long-term maintenance of the churchyard.

Heating the church and the work of vergers or musicians are not covered by the statutory fees, and so PCCs are able to charge for these items as 'extras', if the person paying the fees wishes to

have them. So if your organist is paid a fixed amount each year, he or she might charge a small, one-off amount for also playing at a wedding. Your PCC will decide how much that should be.

There are no fees payable for baptism services, or for funeral services or burials of a child who is aged under 16.

In our diocese, PCCs collect the whole fee at the time of the service and submit the DBF part of the fees to the diocese on a quarterly basis. The DBF part of the fees makes a significant contribution to the costs of ministry in the diocese – around £400,000 a year. If the income from fees wasn't sent to the DBF, it would otherwise need to be raised via parish share (about eight per cent more than we currently raise in parish share).

For full details of the level of parochial fees, see www.portsmouth.anglican.org/fees.

Since 2014, a member of our diocesan staff has supported parishes on this issue, offering advice and helping parishes with their quarterly returns. If you would like help with parochial fees, or have any questions on

the administration of fees, please contact David Cain on 023-9289 9687 or executive.assistant@portsmouth.anglican.org.

Q: Why can't you keep the diocesan directory up to date?

A: The diocesan directory is our database of contact details for all those clergy, Readers, churchwardens, PCC officers, deanery and diocesan synod members and diocesan staff across the diocese.

It contains just over 1,000 names and is currently available at www.parishinfo.org. Anyone who is listed in that directory can log in via their email address and create their own password, which will then give them access in future.

The database is updated every day, as our diocesan office receives alterations to contact details or changes of role. If you notice that something is wrong, please tell us and we can then change it. Unfortunately we don't necessarily know if someone has taken over as (say) PCC treasurer unless the parish tells us. Do let us know on jane.dobbs@portsmouth.anglican.org.

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