DIOCESE OF BRISTOL
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FAQ Booklet

Parish Share 2027

Companion to Parish Share Explained 2027

Contents

These FAQs, in combination with the Parish Explained Booklet, aim to provide detailed context and explanation for the 2027 Parish Share request.

If you have a question that is not answered by the contents of these two resources, please get in touch with James Morrey, the Giving & Resources Advisor (parishshare@bristoldiocese.org).

FAQs

Why should we contribute to Parish Share at all?

Every parish wants to see its community served and the gospel proclaimed. Ordained clergy play a key role in enabling this through teaching, pastoral care, worship, sacramental ministry, and support for lay leaders and volunteers.

Parish Share is how we, as a diocesan family, raise the necessary funds to resource this ministry and ensure it is available in every community, not only those that can afford it.

Isn't this just paying for "our" vicar?

No. While the calculation includes an element of resourcing the clergy serving in your benefice, Parish Share is not a fee-for-service model. It is a shared contribution towards funding the overall ministry of clergy across the Diocese. Some parishes can give more; others give less.

Together, we ensure that ministry is available everywhere.

Why does ordained ministry cost so much?

For 2027, the full cost of a stipendiary priest is:

- Stipend, National Insurance and pension: £48,397
- Housing: £14,797
- Total: £63,200 per full-time post

In addition, the Diocese invests in:

- training curates
- supporting their formation
- preparing future clergy

These are essential costs if we are to sustain ministry for the next generation. Stipendiary clergy are freed from the need to earn a living elsewhere so they can devote themselves fully to ministry.

Why should we pay for leadership at all?

How much of a church's income should be spent on its clergy? These are good questions, as they show that we're taking our duty to be faithful stewards of God's resources seriously. By way of an answer:

- Firstly, all churches want to serve their communities and reach them with the gospel of Christ. A pastor, minister, vicar, priest (whatever you call your ordained clergy) is vital to this, either directly by being involved in the ministry or indirectly by supporting and teaching others who are involved. Churches aren't typically averse to employing staff when they can afford it, and although clergy aren't employees, they can be considered church staff.

- Secondly, although the New Testament never commands the hiring of a pastor, it does commend it and leans heavily towards paying them if possible. This is because paying someone frees them from the need to earn a living elsewhere, thereby allowing them to focus on teaching and discipling the congregation. In our tradition, the pastor who does most of the teaching and discipling is often the vicar, and many (but by no means all) receive a stipend that frees them from the need to seek employment elsewhere. Jesus said that the worker deserves their wages (Luke 10:7), so Scripture is open to the idea of paying a pastor.

- Finally, a 2014 study on church growth found a link between strong leadership (those with the time and energy to devote) and church survival and growth. Having dedicated leadership is vital to church health, which is why it is important to provide for it.

How is Parish Share calculated?

Since Parish Share is so important, we approach the calculations every year with care. We use a range of components designed to resource clergy ministry across the whole Diocese by asking those parishes most able to give to consider giving the most. We aim to illustrate what resourcing ministry in a particular locality looks like, providing PCCs with a foundation for prayerful consideration.

Ministry contribution
Called "Paid Clergy Costs" in 2026. For 2027, the full cost of a stipendiary priest is £63,200 for a full-time post. This amount is allocated to individual parishes based on how clergy are allocated.

For example, a parish with a half-time incumbent would be asked for half of the stipendiary clergy and housing costs.

This is one of the key variables, and we use data from previous requests, along with the Archdeacons' experience and their interactions with parishes and clergy, to estimate clergy deployment.

In some Benefices, this is more complicated. Those on the ground are the experts on their parishes, and we accept that our attempt to apportion the request might not be the best.

It is for this reason that some Benefices have accepted our offer of providing a single 'Benefice Share' request, allowing them to apportion the request in the way that suits them.

Community Adjustment
Called "paid clergy cost adjustment" in 2026. The National Church Data Services team maps data from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government onto Church of England parish boundaries. This allows us to assess the average household income (after housing costs) for a parish against the diocese's average.

This comparison yields a percentage which is then applied to the total paid clergy cost as either an additional contribution (where household income is above average) or a discount (where the household income is below average).

The diocesan average is £30,132.

Future Ministry

Called “contribution to shared parish support costs” in 2026. The diocese spends **£1.1 million** on the training of future clergy and providing the training of current curates.

On top of the above which is requested in Parish Share, the diocese spends £2.4m a year on directly supporting the ministry of clergy, curates, self-supporting ministers and licenced lay ministers. This money goes on the people and teams that enable and support parish ministry across the diocese. This includes help with buildings, recruitment, safeguarding and other day-to-day support. This is not included in the Parish Share request but is included here for context. The future ministry component only aims to cover the £1.1m for the support and training of curates.

The amount requested of a parish towards this shared support is calculated by asking for 10.5% of a parish’s average unrestricted income (with Local Ecumenical Partnership costs subtracted where necessary).

Average unrestricted income is taken from the returns of parish finance completed each year. We take the total unrestricted income, and then exclude grants, trading income and legacies.

We use the average of the 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 calendar years to arrive at the figure used in the parish share calculations. We omit the 2025 figures because the data was not available in time to prepare the calculations.

Lowest income community funding

When applied, this serves as a discount on the parish share request and targets parishes with the 25% most deprived populations in the country. This is measured by a population-weighted Index of Multiple Deprivation score.

During 2026, the National Church have encouraged Dioceses to review how they allocate Lowest Income Community Funding to ensure that it supports the most deprived. As a result, for 2027, we have reduced the number of churches eligible for this funding. The diocese has £587,294 to distribute in 2027.

Large income adjustment
Called “parishes with large income” in 2026. Using the adjusted average parish income for the previous four calendar years (as described above), we calculate the diocesan average and compare each parish to it. Where a parish has an income of more than 150% of the diocesan average, they are asked for an additional contribution of 11% of its average unrestricted income.

The diocesan average unrestricted income is £64,156.

Generous giving adjustment
If the request subtotal for the above components is less than the parish's 2026 pledge, we request the difference as an additional, generous contribution. The intention is to ensure that no parish is asked to give less in 2027 than they pledged in 2026.

Why has Transitional Relief been removed?

Transitional Relief has been removed because:

- It was not a separate fund but drawn from Diocesan reserves.
- It introduced subjectivity into the calculation.
- It obscured the true level of funds required to resource the current level of clergy ministry.
- Transparency is important for good stewardship.

What if we can't afford the suggested gift?

Please speak with the Giving & Resources Advisor. We recognise that some parishes face financial pressures, and support is available. Open conversation helps us plan well and offer appropriate guidance.

What is the "Suggested Gift"?

Each parish will receive, alongside the calculation, a suggested gift figure. It is intended to be an achievable and realistic contribution after all adjustments — a starting point for prayer, conversation and faithful response. We hope and pray that parishes will respond generously — and where possible, give at or above this level.

What about lay ministry and self-supporting ministry? Isn't that just as important?

Absolutely. Both self-supporting and lay ministry are essential to the life of every parish. Parish Share does not diminish this; rather, it supports the ordained leadership that equips, encourages and sustains this ministry. Healthy churches depend on both working together.

How is church income calculated?

We use the average unrestricted income from the last four available years. Grants, trading income and legacies are excluded. For 2027, we use 2021-2024 data as the 2025 submission window has not yet closed.

How are poorer communities supported?

In two ways:

- Community adjustment reduces the cost for parishes in lower-income areas.
- Lowest Income Community Funding provides targeted support to parishes serving the most deprived communities

Why are curates included in the cost when we don’t have one?

Curates are still in training and are not expected to fulfil the full role of a minister. Once trained, they serve the whole diocese. Supporting curates is an investment in future ministry for all parishes.

What about self-supporting ministers and licensed lay ministers?

To keep the calculation simple and transparent, SSMs and LLMs are excluded from the costings. Where a parish benefits from its ministry, it may be able to contribute more than the suggested gift.

Why do large and wealthy churches contribute more?

Parishes with income exceeding 150% of the diocesan average are asked to contribute an additional 11% of their income. This reflects the biblical principle that those with greater resources can support those with fewer.

What about vacancies?

The calculation assumes all posts are filled. Over time, vacancies occur in every parish, and the savings balance out. If a vacancy creates short-term difficulty, please speak to the Archdeacons.

How is the Diocese funded?

Like parishes, the Diocese has several income streams. In 2024, around 53% of diocesan income came from Parish Share. Other income includes investments, grants and fees. Full details are in the annual report and accounts filed with the Charity Commission.

Are parish or diocesan reserves considered?

Parish reserves are not included in the calculation. Diocesan reserves are held in line with the reserves policy (typically six months of operating costs) and include funds held on behalf of others.

They are not sufficient to cover long-term deficits.

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Get in touch

Questions, support and conversations are welcome.

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