

Parish Offers 2025 – Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why do we need to pay a Parish Offer?

A: The Rochester Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) is responsible for meeting all the costs of running the Diocese of Rochester. Two-thirds of this is money which goes directly to supporting ministry in parishes across the diocese through the payment of clergy stipends and maintenance of parsonage houses. While the DBF generates some income through property rental and investments, it relies on parishes to provide it with the funds it needs to fulfil its responsibilities. Indeed, approximately 75% of the DBF's Common Fund income comes from Parish Offers. This has dropped as a proportion from 87% in 2019 and has had to be drawn down from reserves by the DBF to support parish ministry.

Q: What does the DBF do with the money we pay via our Offer?

A: As stated above, two-thirds of the DBF's expenditure relates to direct ministry costs i.e. stipends and clergy housing. A further 10% is expenditure on providing support to churches on such matters as safeguarding, finance, faculties and youth work. A further 15% goes on the training of future ministers and national church expenditure. This leaves around 8% for governance and income-generating activities e.g. the maintenance of the DBF's own properties. However, it must be noted that Parish Offers currently only just cover the direct cost of ministry, so all the other costs have to be met by the DBF from its own limited resources.

Q: The diocese has plenty of resources, it doesn't need us to pay our Offer?

A: The DBF does have almost £80m of assets, but just under half of this is represented by properties which are being used to house our clergy. The vast majority of the remainder are held to generate income which is used to support mission and ministry in parishes.

Q: The Church Commissioners have loads of money, they should be paying, not parishes?

A: It is true that the Church Commissioners have around £10bn of assets. In the last five years they have released significant amounts to dioceses through a number of funding initiatives, and these initiatives are set to continue into the medium term. Funding received in this way has gone to directly support ministry in parishes. At the same time, dioceses and diocesan Bishops are currently lobbying very hard for a more permanent settlement which will see funds released back into the dioceses to support mission and ministry on the ground. The intention of this push is to provide a less stressed financial system that allows dioceses and parishes to do what they do best, carry the Gospel as far as possible to serve and grow the Kingdom.

Q: Why shouldn't our own mission priorities take precedence over paying our Offer?

A: You benefit from the services of a priest in your benefice, so it's right that you should pay towards the cost of providing them. If all PCCs took the view that external mission giving was more important than paying for parish clergy, there wouldn't be any parish clergy as there would be no money to pay for them. Paying your Offer is not taking money AWAY from mission, it is paying TOWARDS mission in the diocese.

Q: Isn't there too much resource in the diocesan office?

A: The diocesan office is responsible for supporting parishes with their mission and ministry across a diverse range of areas which includes statutory responsibilities. The fact that these are managed by the modest level of staffing within the diocesan support team, a level which has remained consistent since 2019, even with the increasing costs of statutory and safeguarding responsibilities, is a testament to the quality of the people employed and the amount of effort which they put into their roles every day. Even so, the diocesan office is constantly scrutinising its budget, as evidenced by the fact that the deficit has been pegged at £1.3m in the face of 5% stipend and salary rises and inflation running at 10% in 2023.

Q: Why are you continuing to support vulnerable churches, which basically means wealthier parishes subsidising them?

A: The unspoken implication here is that vulnerable churches should be closed. But we're not in that business. One reason is that it costs a lot of money to keep a church closed, so it may not actually end up saving the DBF anything to close a church, however much support it requires. Another is that closing a church robs it of its potential for future turnaround, and we know that churches can be revitalised given the right assistance. And thirdly, it's surprising just how quickly a church's fortunes can change, and the fact that your parish is financially stable now doesn't mean it will always be so – wouldn't you want someone to help you if you were struggling?

Q: The Church Commissioners pay clergy stipends, so why do you keep bringing stipends up, surely they're irrelevant?

A: It is true that the Church Commissioners run the clergy payroll, but they recharge the DBF for the clergy it "employs". There is no option about this, the financial responsibility for footing the bill for clergy rests firmly and unequivocally with the DBF. Stipends are by far the DBF's largest item of expenditure, £5.8m in the 2025 budget, so they are far from irrelevant.

Q: Why are you so focused on parish offers anyway?

A: As we've mentioned before, parish offers make up almost 75% of Common Fund income. In 2019 parish offers were £9m. Our latest estimate for 2024 is that they will be no more than £7.5m. That's a fall of £1.5m in five years. Clearly the pandemic and the cost of living crisis played big parts in that fall, but now that those events are behind us the decline has continued. While the DBF has funded the fall in Offer from reserves in order to maintain mission and ministry in parishes, this isn't sustainable, and we need parishes to work towards getting their combined Offers back up to 2019 levels. It is a noteworthy that if this happened, the DBF's deficit would be eliminated.

Q: We've been in interregnum for months now, why we should we pay our Offer when we don't have a priest?

A: On the face of it that sounds like a reasonable question, but in reality the DBF's costs are averaged over the expected clergy complement. If PCCs stop paying because they are in vacancy, the Diocesan Cost element of the Indicative Offer would have to be increased to compensate.

Q: Isn't the deficit too big to plug without radical action?

A: No. Average adult weekly attendance across the diocese was almost 12,100 in 2023. If every one of those attenders gave another £2 per week and it was passed on to the DBF it would eliminate our deficit. Now, we understand that not everyone could afford to give another £2 per week, but it seems likely that there are many who could give more. At this point, we should acknowledge with much gratitude that giving in our diocese is above the Church of England average at £17.80 per week compared with the average of £16.20 (2022 figures).