

SHOULD LLMs AND SSMS BE OFFERED A PARTIAL FEE FOR OCCASIONAL OFFICES?

- A briefing paper for Diocesan Synod by the Area Dean of Cowley on behalf of Cowley Deanery

Why? A recent Ministry Division meeting of SSM advisors highlights the issue:

'Entitlement to receive payment of parochial fees varies across the country. Whilst acknowledging that not all SSMS seek to be paid, others have made considerable sacrifices for ministry...

All but 6 dioceses offer an equal proportion of the DBF fee to Stipendiaries and former Self-Supporting Ministers with PTO.

The Cowley Deanery is asking for a change to make arrangements more equitable, whilst minimising the fiscal impact for the DBF.

A consultation. In a 2019 diocesan questionnaire 73% of LLMs and SSMS argued for change allowing SSMS and LLMs to be dealt with in the same way as retired clergy. Those advocating no change argued; that there would be a loss of diocesan income, that people had signed up to the current system and that exceptional provision could already be made. Those arguing for change believed the current system was unfair, exploitative and did not express the biblical principle that a 'worker was worth their wage'. The current arrangements were seen as particularly hard on those ministers who have a lower income and those who have no 'spouse supported' income entering the home. Comment was made that some families receiving the ministry of unpaid LLMs and SSMS were shocked to discover the current arrangements, seeking themselves to remunerate the minister in person.

The current model portrays LLMs and SSMS as 'helpers', not 'partners in ministry', indicating a different value and creating an unhelpful divide in status. Overall, by reducing the availability of ministers there is a reduction in the number of pastoral services, particularly funerals, that might be taken. GS Misc 1298 suggests we consider 'Greater flexibility for remunerating part time roles e.g. vary between individuals on a needs basis, blurring the boundary between SSM & Stipendiary'

Retired ministers: There is inconsistency in the current policy. Those who have been stipended and those who have not are treated differently. Both have reduced income yet, only those previously stipended receive a fee. Is the assumption that all retired LLMs and SSMS are on good pensions? Is the assumption that you can only have a ministry if you are wealthy?

Case Study: Until recently one BAME SSM minister found he was unable to offer pastoral support to members of his BAME community because he could not afford to take the time off work. He was paid hourly, on rates slightly above minimum wage. Whilst his employers were happy for him to take time off unpaid, he could not afford it. In recent months, the minister has moved to a stipendiary post in another diocese.

Change in focus: The Ministry Division now considers recommendation on systems not based on stipend.

What impact might the change have on diocesan funds? Some individuals will choose to take up an offer of a fee, others will not. This is to a degree unknown but will have some effect. Chelmsford Diocese adopted a system allowing SSMS and LLMs to receive the same fee as retired stipendiary clergy. That diocese has seen a subsequent reduction in fees of 15%, due not just to this practice but also to a reduction in occasional offices. They are unaware of the percentage of fees that are donated directly back to the parish but are aware this occurs. What currently happens to the fee collected? In Oxford diocese, it currently goes back to the source deanery. It is deducted from the deanery share in the following year. This system is however under review. Some deaneries return the monies to the original parish as a Parish Share reduction.

In conversation with individuals across the Diocese, I have discovered that 'current practice' is not uniform and does not always fit diocesan expectation. If only from a practical end, I believe we need to address this issue.

Encouraging LLM and SSM ministry: The numbers currently offering for LLM and SSM ministry are very low. You can financially gain from being; an organist, bell ringer, choir member, family worker, cleaner, administrator, gardener, verger, stipendiary minister who has stepped down from post, but not as an LLM or SSM.

Key arguments. The primary argument for a change in policy is theological, not financial; it is about fairness and the need to support all in ministry. It is clear that the practitioners, SSMS and LLMs themselves, in general, consider the current model to fall short.

Thank you for reading this.

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