Diocese of Rochester
called together

Parish Offers – Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the Parish Offer?
A: The Parish Offer is an amount paid by a church (whether at parish or benefice level) to the Diocesan Board of Finance. It goes into a pot called the Common Fund, from which are paid the costs of providing mission and ministry across the whole of the Diocese of Rochester.

Q: How is it calculated?
A: It isn't. Unlike a traditional 'quota' system it's a freewill offering, so it's for every parish or benefice to determine the amount of Offer it pays.

Q: But an Indicative Offer is sent telling us what we have to pay?
A: The Indicative Offer is simply a guide figure. It aims to quantify how much it costs to provide ministry, mission, and parish support in your parish or benefice. It is provided to help PCC's as they consider their Parish Offer. Ultimately, it's for a PCC to decide what it's Parish Offer will be – some may choose to offer more or less than the Indicative Offer.

Q: What's the Wider Diocesan Mission element of the Indicative Offer all about?
A: This covers such things as the cost of curates, including stipends and post-ordination training, the cost of Youth and Children's ministry support, and the cost of support with Community Engagement. It's all the things which enable ministry to happen across the diocese as well as providing the ministers for the future.

Q: Why should we pay when we're in a vacancy?
A: There are several reasons why PCCs are asked to continue paying their Parish Offer in full during a vacancy.

The first is that the DBF still incurs costs maintaining the parsonage, and often a vacancy is the time when any significant works (new kitchens, bathrooms etc) which are needed can be done.

Secondly, potential clergy looking at the parish will often want to assure themselves of the financial robustness and responsibility of the PCC, and the fact that the Offer has been maintained is a good indication of this. A curtailed or significantly reduced Parish Offer can be seen as a warning sign.

The third reason is that maintaining the Offer during a vacancy allows for the provision of ministry in other areas of the diocese where the resources are limited. We support others, knowing that at some point in the future we ourselves may need supporting. This is the most compelling reason and goes to the heart of who and what we are called to be as part of the body of Christ.

Q: Why aren't you renting out our vicarage while we have not got a vicar?
A: Property and landlord legislation has changed during 2025. This has made tenancies of less than one year very unattractive to landlords. Despite the current difficulties in recruiting clergy, it is our intention that wherever possible vacancies do not exceed 12 months, and within that time there is often a need to do extensive ingoing works to the vicarage. The opportunities for letting vicarages during a vacancy are therefore now very limited. Despite this we have been very successful in increasing our property rental income in recent years, which has been ploughed back into mission and ministry across the diocese.

Q: The Diocese is rich. Shouldn't it use its own resources rather than burdening parishes with unreasonable demands?
A: It's true that the DBF has around £80m of assets. That is not a lot compared with some of the other dioceses. Around half of this is represented by vicarages which are used to house clergy. The remaining assets generate income which is used to help cover the cost for mission and ministry across the Diocese.

This is because Parish Offers have fallen year-on-year for the last seven years; the DBF has been using its reserves, via the Total Return mechanism, to pay for mission and ministry where Offers have fallen short. This subsidy is not sustainable long-term and so we're grateful to parishes for considering the nature of their offer prayerfully, generously and realistically.

Q: What about the Church Commissioners, shouldn't they be paying rather than the parishes?
A: It was wonderful to be able to announce earlier this year that the Diocese has been awarded nearly £11m in funding from the Church Commissioners under their Diocesan Investment Programme in support of the diocesan Called Together vision.

However, there has also been a huge amount of effort put in recently by dioceses like ours in engaging with the Church Commissioners. This has been particularly around their Diocesan Finance Review (DFR), which has been only partly successful in delivering on its objective to ease the financial stress on dioceses and parishes.

While the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF) is very grateful for the respite that will initially be experienced through the recommendations of the DFR (see graphic below), it will be a very brief and insufficient respite. In fact, because of some of the additional cost that the DFR has loaded onto diocesan boards of finance, by 2030, we will be in a worse financial position than we are now.

That is why it is vital that parishes and Rochester Diocesan Board Finance work together - through Parish Offers - to create a more sustainable financial footing.

Q: So, if you've just got nearly £11m of funding from the Church Commissioners, why should we pay you anything?
A: This funding is over five years, and is specifically investment funding to fund the practical programme of work around the Called Together vision which is focused within four workstreams:

- Missional Leadership Development
- Missional Development Places
- Children and Young People
- Revitalise

Each one is being viewed through the lens of growing safe and healthy cultures. Each workstream has a fully costed, planned programme of work designed to bring long-term benefit across the whole Diocese, not just those that may receive direct funding. It means every parish has the opportunity to benefit.

The £11million is investment funding for growth, what it does not pay for is the 'business as usual' activities, so churches are still very much needed to partner with the Diocesan Board Finance on this.

For more about the Vision visit: www.rochester.anglican.org/about-us/ourvision/

Q: Surely our mission priorities must come before paying our Parish Offer?
A: Money from the Common Fund is used to support local mission and outreach, for example, through helping facilitate initiatives such as community projects, work with children and young people, and training for lay ministry. This ensures a parish can serve its community and enable encounters with God whether the church is large or small, wealthy or poor, more rural or urban.

It means that paying into the Common Fund should not be seen as a choice between supporting your local mission or church building over something else. Rather your local mission – your church's presence - is supported through the generous giving of all parishes into the Common Fund. Quite simply, without Parish Offers there would be little or no clergy presence and limited ministry. Parish Offers are paying for your mission in your parish.

Q: Are you really suggesting that we should subsidise poor parishes which can't pay for themselves?
A: Yes - it's a biblical principle, *"When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."* (Luke 18: 18-22).

Or *'All who believed were together and had all things in common;* ***45*** *they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds*[a] *to all, as any had need.'* (Acts 2: 44-45).

The unspoken implication behind the question is that poor churches which can't pay for themselves should be closed. There are three very good reasons why this is not the strategy of this diocese.

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Firstly, we believe that churches which are struggling can, with the right assistance, become strong again. Closing them denies them of that opportunity and denies the people who rely on them a vital source of comfort and opportunity to experience the love of Jesus.

Secondly, it is very expensive to keep a church closed. That is wasted money. It is better to spend that money to help revitalise the church rather than close it.

Thirdly, one day it might be your church that's struggling. Then you'd want someone to help you out, not call for your closure.

- You may like to watch this film from St Edmunds, Dartford which explains how the Common Fund has allowed them to continue to be a much needed presence within their community.

Q: Why is the DBF spending money on things like Net Zero and racial justice programmes when the money could be better spent on clergy?
A: We're spending money on them because they are important and are part of our commitment to seeking the Kingdom of God, which means we must reflect its values of righteousness, peace, wholeness, and fullness of life for all.

But to be clear, all the funding for these posts is coming from third party sources, not one penny of Parish Offer is being spent on them, although parishes directly benefit from the support and expertise colleagues in this area bring.

Q: What are you doing about those parishes which are withholding their Offer on the grounds of objecting to Living in Love and Faith (LLF)?
A: There are no parishes in the Diocese of Rochester that are withholding their Parish Offer on any grounds associated with LLF. We thank every parish, whatever its theological or church tradition, for continuing to stand with us, even though the process may at times be painful for many.

Q: What about those parishes which could pay but don't?
A: Thankfully there are very few on these, and we are engaging with them on an individual basis successfully.