

Parochial Fees: London Diocesan Synod motion

Executive Summary

This paper sets out the background for the parochial fee in respect of funeral services taking place at a crematorium or cemetery.

Background

1. For many years until the end of 2019, Parochial Fees Orders provided for a Parochial Church Council (PCC) to receive a small fee in respect of funeral services which took place at a crematorium or cemetery. The majority of the fee in respect of such services was payable to the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF). This reflected the DBF's responsibility for paying the stipends and associated costs of stipendiary clergy, although it is recognised that some such services are taken by self supporting ministers, retired clergy or readers.
2. In 2019 the Archbishops' Council undertook work, principally through its Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee (RACSC), to prepare what became the Parochial Fees and Scheduled Matters Amending Order 2019. This prescribed the framework for parochial fees payable for the period 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2024. One of the changes made compared with previous practice was to allocate the whole fee payable for funerals taking place at a crematorium or cemetery to the DBF. The sum previously payable to the PCC was added to the fee payable to the DBF.
3. This change was made for the following reasons:
 - Firstly, one of the principles for setting fees agreed by the General Synod in 2011 (in GS1813) was that fees should be justifiable on the basis of some relationship to the actual costs incurred, taking account of real costs that cover most situations, for example training and paying clergy and maintaining church buildings. In respect of funerals taking place at a crematorium or cemetery, the main cost relates to the officiant. Thus it was considered appropriate for the DBF, which has responsibility for meeting the costs of stipendiary clergy, to receive the fee which relates to the officiant's time.
 - Secondly, it was considered that there was no clear justification for a PCC to receive a fee where a funeral takes place in a building or other place for which the PCC has no responsibility (unlike the position where a funeral takes place in a church or churchyard). An NCI staff member recalls finding it extremely difficult to justify the PCC element of the fee when a member of the public objected to this on the grounds that the PCC was not actually incurring any costs.
 - Thirdly, administration of the PCC element of the fee was far from straightforward because of the difficulty in identifying to which PCC the fee should go. The destination of the PCC element of the fee depended on

whether the deceased was on a church electoral roll – in which case the fee went to the PCC of that parish (or was split between PCCs if the deceased was on more than one roll). Otherwise, the PCC element of the fee was payable to the PCC of the parish in which the deceased resided.

4. It was hoped that the change would simplify the administration of fees: making this easier, clearer and more straightforward.

The motion before the General Synod

5. The motion gives General Synod an opportunity to indicate whether the parochial fee in respect of funeral services taking place at a crematorium or cemetery should continue to be payable to the DBF only or whether there should be a reversion to the practice followed prior to 1 January 2020 with a small element of the fee payable to the PCC.
6. If the motion is passed the Archbishops' Council and the Business Committee would need to consider when a draft Amending Order could be brought before the Synod and when it might come into effect if subsequently approved by the Synod and then made by the Council.
7. If this change were to be made DBFs would see a reduction in parochial fee income which would adversely affect their ability to meet their obligation to pay the stipends and associated costs of their stipendiary clergy unless PCCs receiving additional fee income increased their parish share contributions.
8. It will be helpful to get General Synod's view on this issue in advance of preparing a draft Parochial Fees Order to set the framework for parochial fees from the start of 2025.

William Nye, Secretary General
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