

ST ALBANS DIOCESAN SYNOD

11 October 2025

Review of SSM, PtO and Reader Fees for Occasional Offices and Divine Worship

Introduction

This paper covers recommended changes to paying fees for SSM's, PtO's and Readers for both Occasional Offices and Divine Worship. Passing of a resolution is not required as this is not for Synod to mandate but we consider it to be good synodical governance for Synod to agree to it.

For Occasional Offices, fees are currently offered to all retired clergy, whether SSM or not. Bishop's Staff and DBF have discussed a proposal that this should be extended to all SSMs, PtOs and readers. This fee is taken from the fee normally payable to the DBF, with the fee payable to the DBF being reduced by the amount of the fee paid to the officiant. This extension will therefore mean a small drop in parochial fees received by the DBF, which we estimate to be around £35k. There are no recommended changes to the level of fees offered. This change has been approved by the DBF.

For Divine Worship, fees are offered to retired stipendiary clergy. In conjunction with the review of fees for Occasional Offices, Bishop's Staff and DBF discussed a proposal to extend the offer of fees to all SSMs and Readers and to include circumstances not solely related to vacancy. This fee is payable by the PCC so has no direct impact on DBF finances. However, there is a recommendation, from the Diocesan Secretary and Finance Director, that the decrease in the stipendiary element of the fee be increased from 20% to 25% to accommodate this extension. This will mean a small drop in the parish share request as a result of vacancies. This will be around £38k.

Neither the DBF nor Diocesan Synod can mandate a payment scheme with which all PCCs must comply. However, this is being presented to Synod in the form of a simple synodical motion welcoming these changes to encourage the maximum buy-in from parishes.

Changes to fees offered for Occasional Offices

A) Reasoning

The extension of fees to retired SSMs has brought a request from SSMs who have not yet reached retirement age. Given that they only differ in their retired colleagues in terms of source of other income, this extension is responding to what is currently perceived as being an unfair situation. Extending this to all SSMs means it would then be unreasonable not to include Readers as well. Other Dioceses (e.g. Hereford) allow all voluntary ministers to claim fees.

This change means it is a condition that, in order to claim, an SSM or Reader must have an up-to-date working agreement/statement of arrangements which stipulates the level of occasional

offices and Sunday services they will be offering, so that only those services provided beyond the agreement will be admissible for fees.

B) Financial impact

The cost to the DBF cannot be assessed with certainty because it would depend on take-up. The stipulation in working agreements/statements will help to restrict it. On this basis, we modelled a take up of between 10% and 25% of funeral services from the current numbers available. The table below sets this out:

Service	Number of services	DBF payment per service	Cost at 10% level	Cost at 25% level
Funeral in church	1,625	£85	£13,813	£34,531
Funeral in crematorium	943	£162	£15,276	£38,192
All Funerals	2,568		£29,089	£72,723

This gives a range of between £29k and £73k. We believe that is likely to be of the lower order, probably around £35k.

Changes to fees offered for Services of Divine Worship

A) Reasoning

National church guidelines allow for the payment for fees for retired stipendiary ministers for Divine Worship. They leave the decision to pay such fees to other ministers to individual Dioceses. The National Network of SSM Officers and Advisers produced the results of a Fees Survey in February 2022, which showed that 11 Dioceses were already making provision for the payment of fees for Divine Worship. Without having repeated the survey, it appears that a number have begun to do so since then.

There is anecdotal evidence that Parishes, being aware of the cost of asking a retired minister to preside, are looking to SSMs and Readers to preside as appropriate. This trend and the movement of a number of Diocese to offering fees more widely has encouraged Bishop's Staff to propose the same extension.

We have also received a number of questions relating to other situations when there may be a longer-term absence of clergy other than vacancy. DBF agreed to include circumstances where as well as being in vacancy, where a PCC's principal stipendiary member of clergy has, for at least three months, been:

- On maternity, adoption and surrogacy, shared parental or parental leave;
- On sick leave; or
- Suspended or has voluntarily stepped back from ministry.

The figures suggest that parishes should be able to accommodate this change within the 20% reduction of the stipend contribution. However, it is an increase in costs for the parish on current practice. Further parishes do not readily understand the relationship between the two. Increasing the reduction by a small amount will strengthen communication and avert objections that this move will be seen as being an extra cost to parishes.

B) Financial impact

The cost to parishes in paying for Divine Worship fees is shown below assuming that a parish is without an incumbent for a year and that a fee is paid for one in three services. The fee for 2025 is £63.50 and this is used here.

Stipend allocation	Value of 20% reduction pa	Cost of required cover for Sunday services pa		
		1 service pw	2 services pw	3 services pw
1.0	£7,642	£1,101	£1,651	£2,201
0.5	£3,821	£1,101	£1,651	£2,201
0.3	£2,292	£1,101	£1,651	£2,201

The cost of a 5% increase in the reduction to the DBF would be around £38k, working on the assumption of a 10% vacancy rate and a Stipendiary Contribution of around £38k.

Request to Synod

Diocesan Synod is asked to agree and welcome the change, noting that it is not for this Synod to mandate that change. We will work with Bishop's Staff to communicate the changes to parishes, which will start on 1 January 2026 to be consistent with the introduction of the Parochial fees for 2026.