

2024 Parish Share Request

As we have shared with you previously, parish share receipts in our diocese have fallen significantly in recent years making it difficult to cover the cost of paid ministry and the associated support costs for parishes, school and chaplaincies. We are very aware that our request to help address that shortfall comes as we are trying to reach deeper into our communities and grow our church families, against a backdrop of a cost-of-living crisis, a fall in the number of volunteers, and the increased cost of maintaining our beautiful buildings.

Based on the parish share currently paid, only 20% of benefices cover the cost of paid ministry and support in their benefice, with the remaining 80% of benefices having their paid ministry and support subsidised through the Common Fund. This is not a sustainable financial position. If we want to maintain our ministry provision across our diocese we need to find ways to address this imbalance together.

A breakdown and explanation of your request is attached and reflects the need, as identified by the Finance Group, to increase parish share broadly in line with inflation. Bishop's Council are therefore recommending an increase of parish share by 10% for 2024. This recommendation will go to Diocesan Synod, on 25 November 2023 for approval. For parishes who pay monthly or in advance, discounts are applicable:

- 1.25% for full contribution received on or before 17 January
- 0.3% for full equal monthly contributions

Bishop's Council is also recommending a system of floors and ceilings to both minimise excessive changes to requests of parishes from 2023 to 2024 and to address the 20%/80% issue identified above. Further details are included in the accompanying breakdown.

Parish Share allocation considerations

Since January 2022, the Consumer Price index (CPI) has exceeded 5%, peaking at 11.1% in October 2022, which is causing significant financial pressures for us all. It means costs are inflating and any increase to parish share requests below CPI would in fact mean a cut in income to the Common Fund, which funds the costs associated with providing stipendiary ministry across Bath and Wells.

In recent years, stipends have increased at a greater rate than the parish share requests. In 2022, stipends increased by 2%, in 2023 by 5% and in 2024 it is anticipated that General Synod will again recommend an increase in stipend by 5%. In comparison, in 2022, there was no increase in our parish share request and in 2023 it was 2%.

In order to avoid suffering a real terms shortfall and to cover the costs of our stipendiary ministry in 2024, our Common Fund has to increase by 10%, compared with last year. Diocesan Synod will be asked to approve the diocesan budget, which reflects this increase.

To facilitate this increase across our diocese through the parish share allocation, the amount per regular worshipper has increased to reflect both the stipend increases and the reduction in regular worshippers experienced since the calculation was last prepared.

Such an increase is clearly a challenge and the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF), and many parishes, are expected to have to continue to draw on a significant amount of any remaining reserves in 2024 to cover inflationary increases in costs and parish share requests.

We are aware that much in this letter is generic when the reality is that there is a huge range of variation in the circumstances in parishes. We are grateful to parishes who, after prayerful consideration, feel able to generously commit to paying over and above the amount of parish share requested of them and thus help mitigate the challenges faced by others.

Equally, if, after prayerful consideration, your parish feels they are unable to pay the parish share requested of them, please contact colleagues in the Finance Team and the Giving and Funding Team. Please be assured that advice and support is available. An updated giving and funding infographic, summarising some of the support available to you, accompanies this letter.

You may have heard that discussions about changing our parish share methodology are happening. Therefore, it may help to be clear that this request relates only to your 2024 parish share rather than any new approach, which will be widely consulted upon next year.

With thanks for all that you continue to do to support God's mission across our diocese, sometimes in very challenging circumstances.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Hollingsworth', written in a cursive style.

Jenny Hollingsworth
Diocesan Secretary