

Diocese of Worcester: Guidance to Clergy on the receipt of gifts

Introduction

Clergy may be offered gifts or hospitality in the course of carrying out their duties. Although such gifts may be modest in nature, other gifts can represent a level that may result in a conflict of interest. Indeed, modest gifts may also be a cause of concern, depending upon the frequency or circumstances. Clergy should be aware of the perception of receiving gifts and hospitality as well as the potential implications.

Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of Clergy

"Serving in ordained ministry can be a difficult and challenging way of life, with many demands made upon themselves by conscientious clergy as well as by those to whom they minister." Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy (2015).

These guidelines can be accessed online:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/Clergy%20Guidelines%202015.pdf>

Section 10 of the guidelines relates to the expected life and conduct of all those ordained. It states:

"The clergy are called to an exemplary standard of moral behaviour. This goes beyond what is legally acceptable: a distinction can be made between what is legal and what is morally acceptable. There is no separation between the public and home life of the clergy: at all times and in all places they should manifest the highest standards of personal conduct".

It further considers the receipt of gifts, including:

"The clergy should never seek any personal advantage or gain by virtue of their clerical position. Those who receive personal gifts should keep a record in case of later misunderstandings or false accusations".

Clergy should consider the potential perceptions arising from their acceptance of a gift or hospitality and the possible consequences to their role and pastoral care.

Financial Abuse

The Church of England defines financial or material abuse as follows:

The wilful extortion or manipulation of the vulnerable person's legal or civil rights must be construed as abuse. Such activity may include misappropriation of monies or goods, the misuse of finances, property or possessions, or withholding money, the exploitation of a person's resources or embezzlement. Such abuse may involve the use of a position of authority or friendship to persuade a person to make gifts, to leave legacies or change a will.

Clergy should declare any gifts in order to ensure that there is transparency at all times. Accusations of financial abuse would trigger a Clergy Discipline Measure complaint to be raised.

House of Bishops' guidance on Safer Environment and Activities

The guidance provides the following information regarding the receipt of gifts:

Take care regarding accepting any gifts other than token items, to avoid misunderstandings or subsequent accusations from the person or their family. If courtesy demands that you accept a small gift, declare it to someone at church, for instance a church warden or the PCC Treasurer, to ensure transparency. If someone wants to make a donation to the church, put it in an envelope, mark it on the outside as a donation and obtain a receipt from the Treasurer.

Additionally, Section 3.3 of the guidance provides the following advice in relation to financial roles such as executor of a will or a Power of Attorney:

Good Practice Regarding Financial Matters: It is usually family members who assume this role and it would rarely be appropriate for a church officer to take on this responsibility. If such a request is made to a church officer, it should be discussed with the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor. It is preferable that if a family member cannot undertake this task, then a Solicitor or trust corporation should do so. The same applies if a church officer in that capacity is asked to be an Executor for a will.

Charity Commission

The Charity Commission provides useful guidance on the receipt of gifts by Trustees. Clergy should note that their role includes that of a Trustee of the PCC. Receiving gifts can be seen as a conflict of interest if the giver or receiver of the gift is able to influence decision-making or in a position where the gift could be construed as influencing a decision-making process. Further information regarding conflicts of interest can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/managing-conflicts-of-interest-in-a-charity>

Conclusion

Clergy should keep a register of any gifts or hospitality received in the course of their ministry. **Any gifts received over the value of £100, or any regular or repeated gifts (whatever the value) made by the same giver should be reported to the Archdeacon or Suffragan Bishop on the pro forma provided, within 14 days of the receipt of the gift.** A record of such gifts will be kept on your Clergy blue file.

If in doubt about whether to accept a gift or hospitality, clergy should consult their Archdeacon, or, in their absence, their Area Dean. Regard should be had to the frequency and number of gifts or hospitality from the same source as well as to the value. It is recommended, that for the sake of transparency, all gifts received through the exercise of one's duties should be recorded, for example with the churchwardens.

Notification of Receipt of a Gift

Please complete a separate form for each gift received. Please submit the completed form to the Bishop's Chaplain, by email, within 14 days of the gift being received.

bishopschaplain@cofe.org.uk

The completed form will be retained on your clergy blue file.

Name of person receiving the gift	
Position held	
Details of the gift including amount if financial (gift card / token / voucher) or approximate and value if non-financial.	
Name of the giver	
Date gift received	
Contact details of giver	
Is this the first gift from the giver?	Yes / No
If no, please list the previous gifts from the same giver within the last 2 years	
Purpose of gift	
Any other relevant information	