

Visiting Ministers – a summary

The conventions about visiting clergy have tightened up considerably in the last three years. Canon C8 (2) states that a visiting priest must be 'of good life and standing' and that steps must be taken to verify that before s/he visits a parish to officiate. This used to be very simply done by a phone call or letter asking permission, and the Bishop's office checking with the 'sending' Bishop that the person was indeed in good standing.

The Canons say that a minister may invite someone 'in good standing' to officiate *occasionally* in his or her parish without them needing PTO. It has been an established convention that a priest who wishes to minister in a diocese in which he has no licence or Permission to Officiate (PTO) should, as a courtesy, inform the Bishop of the 'receiving' diocese. A courtesy note (these days, an email) to the Bishop from either party has served as a way of ensuring the visitor is in good standing. If the visiting priest was unknown to the 'receiving' Bishop, a quick call or email to the 'sending' Bishop would ensure the visitor is not under discipline, or banned from active ministry for any reason.

Until relatively recently, that would be all that was required. However, the whole Church of England has now strengthened its approach:


- The government has introduced requirements for CRB/DBS procedures
- the Archbishop's commission of enquiry into PTO arrangements in the diocese of Chichester found that there were no proper records of who had PTO, and who had been denied it for disciplinary reasons

We now have to be much more careful about checking whether occasional visiting clergy are in good standing or not.

1. We expect clergy (either the host incumbent where there is one, or the visitor) or those preparing service rotas to inform the Bishop's Office that they would like to invite the Revd XYZ for a one-off parish visit, conduct a wedding, or whatever.
2. The Bishops Office now invariably contacts the diocese where the Revd XYZ lives, and asks for confirmation that s/he is in good standing and holds a licence or PTO.
3. If so, then the Bishops Office will inform the person enquiring that there is no problem.
4. If they do not, it is only in very exceptional circumstances (e.g. a family funeral) that 'one-off permission' would be given.

All this is not for bureaucracy's sake, but as part of the Church's commitment to those who come to worship that they can be confident that they are in safe hands when a visiting priest conducts public worship. It is a national requirement, and we are under strict rulings to allow no exceptions.

As regards fees, the finance team at the diocesan office work on the basis that parishes can not use clergy who are not licenced or who do not have PTO. Therefore they will not pay if an 'unauthorised' person claims fees. It is therefore important that someone from the benefice adopts the practice of checking a 'one-off' visiting priest's current status via the Bishops Office, so that the Bishop can instruct the finance team to pay the appropriate fee.



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NB: A fuller note about the details of this matter is available from the Bishops' Office.