



DIOCESE *of* OXFORD

A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world

INFORMATION ON AND CONDITIONS FOR PERMISSION TO OFFICIATE (PtO)

Presented in the form of FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Please note: This document is *an essential read* and was given to you when the Area Bishop granted you PtO. The information is also available on the Clergy HR pages on the diocesan [website](#). We would recommend that you refer to it when considering applying for or renewing your PtO as well as during your PtO. Alternatively, you can contact the area office to obtain another hard copy.

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1. WHAT PtO IS AND ITS DURATION?

Q What is Permission to Officiate (PtO)?

A All clergy who wish to exercise public ministry must be granted either permission to officiate or a licence by the Diocesan or Area Bishop.

PtO gives you authority to minister in any parish in the archdeaconry at the invitation of the Incumbent or Priest-in-Charge, subject to any restrictions in your PtO. Your ministry may include:

- occasional duties, for example, preaching, providing cover during temporary absence, and presiding at the Eucharist;
- performing the Occasional Offices;
- substituting during a vacancy;
- covering a period of authorised absence (such as sabbatical, maternity leave or sick leave).

PtO is given to clergy at various stages in life and ministry and is generally flexible in nature. Where ministry is being sought in a particular place for an extended time, such as Associate Priest in a particular parish, licensed ministry is usually more appropriate.

Q How long can I hold the PtO for?

A A PtO is not given indefinitely, it is for a fixed term of no longer than 5 years and a review should be carried out before renewal.

PtO is normally granted in line with the duration of the Disclosure Barring Service Certificate (DBS) up to the age of 80 years old. PtO's for those over the age of 80 can be renewed on a twelve-month rolling basis, up to a maximum of two years at any one time. There is no age limit, providing all the other requirements are met.

Q Can I hold PtO in two dioceses at the same time?

A Yes, you can, however, your information will be held by the diocese where you spend most of your ministry. The other diocese will also hold information about you and your ministry. When you no longer require a PtO, all information about you and your ministry will be sent to the diocese where your file is held.

2. APPLYING FOR AND RENEWAL - RELATED PROCESSES

Q How do I get/ hold a PtO?

A If you wish to hold a PtO you must apply to your Area Bishop by completing the [application form](#) downloadable from diocesan website. Alternatively, you can obtain a paper copy by contacting your Area Bishop's office.

Q What should I be aware of when considering applying or renewing my PtO?

A Every ministry is unique. There is always a vocational aspect to your application, taking account of your varied gifts and abilities. A section of the form therefore asks:

- whether you would be willing to consider a wider deployment than many PtO clergy have enjoyed in the past;
- willingness to travel to other benefices and deaneries (and how far);
- what sort of ministries you might be willing to explore, such as an interim role in a parish in vacancy; and
- what other skills and gifts you might be willing to offer the wider diocese.

Equally, it is not always straightforward to match the ministries of our clergy with permission to officiate and we, therefore, encourage you to continue praying and reflecting on where God may be calling you at this stage in your ministry.

Q How long does the application process take?

A Granting PtO usually takes about two months from the time when the Area Bishop's office receives the application form. The process can be extended when there are new Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly Criminal Records Bureau) checks to be done. As part of the application process, you will also be asked to meet with your Area Bishop.

Q What are the conditions of holding PtO?

A PTO is not issued as of right or because of your seniority. It is usually granted providing:

- your bishop is confident you are able to officiate;
- you continue to have a valid DBS;
- there are no safeguarding concerns;
- your diocesan safeguarding training is up to date;
- you have the written support of your bishop from the diocese you last served. This will reach us in the form of a CCSL (Clergy Current Status Letter);

- you are invited and recommended by the incumbent/ priest-in charge of the parish you will exercise ministry in and have informed the area dean.

Q Do I have to be of retirement age to apply for/ hold PtO?

A Not necessarily. You can apply for/hold PtO whilst you are working. Examples, where it might be appropriate to grant PtO to someone who has not retired, include:

- someone who has left parochial ministry in order to take employment outside the Church, but wishes to continue to offer help with the Occasional Offices;
- a cleric who requires a period of staged return to ministry following past difficulties; or a cleric who is licensed in one diocese but who may have occasion to minister regularly in another diocese such as someone who is a representative for a Church Mission agency.

If you are employed elsewhere (i.e. as a Chaplain) but would like to offer your ministry, you can apply for PtO in the parish you worship/live. Please complete an application form and send it to your Area Bishop, details are available on the diocesan website.

Of course, if you are retired, it is extremely important to stress that your freedom to enjoy retirement comes first! We are also very aware that people are carrying out their ministry in many different throughout their everyday lives and that is to be celebrated.

Q Can I apply for/hold PtO if I have served overseas?

A We welcome ministry of all, provided the conditions are met.

If you have served overseas, additional checks apply to comply with our safer recruitment practice. So, if you apply for a position that is eligible for a DBS check and are coming from overseas having never lived in the UK or spent a period of time (i.e. lived abroad), we will also ask for a certificate of good conduct/character from your relevant embassy/high commission (or police force).

This is in addition to the UK DBS check as it is required to cover the time you spent abroad. Further advice can be found on the Home Office [website](#).

Q What is the renewal process?

A The Bishop's PA or area office will contact all clergy with PtO three months prior to their renewal date, copying in their designated responsible person (if they have one) with instructions on how to renew if applicable.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES DURING THE PERIOD OF PtO

Q Who will have oversight of my ministry during the time I hold a PtO?

A A designated responsible person, usually incumbent or priest in charge of the benefice where you live or worship, or the area dean.

Q What are the responsibilities of the person who has oversight of my ministry?

A Every ministry is unique. The designated responsible person should:

- Meet and agree with you the activities that you will engage in, ensuring that you are not asked to do more than you are willing or able;
- Discuss regularly with you how you are doing in your ministry, whether any changes are required and whether you need any pastoral support;
- Ensure that the Area Bishop is kept informed about any issues or health problems, particularly when you might require additional pastoral support, or it might be necessary to consider withdrawing the PtO;
- Prior to your PtO being renewed, they will review with you the ministry you have undertaken. They will then either recommend renewal or explain why they are not able to make a recommendation for your PtO to be renewed to the Area Bishop.

Q How can I help to set the right mutual expectations?

A At the beginning of your PtO you will agree with the designated person (usually your incumbent, priest in charge or area dean) what you will do and help by sharing openly:

- your gifts and strengths;
- what you are not able to carry out;
- your availability (be realistic how much you can do); and
- any other commitments you have that might hinder your availability.

If you are carrying out regular duties in a parish, the duties you are expected to cover should be agreed and recorded in writing, as it is helpful for all involved if there is a common understanding of what you are willing and able to do. This may be agreed using a [mutual expectations written form](#).

Q How is my ministry reviewed? How flexible is my PtO in terms of the work I will complete?

- A** The agreement reached with your incumbent, priest in charge or area dean is not binding and it can be changed at any time. It is advisable that it is reviewed regularly. As part of this review, you may want to:
- expand your role or approach the diocese to see if you can provide further assistance;
 - consider whether it might be appropriate to find a mutually agreed way to vary or reduce your workload or to discuss a transition to full retirement, for example, if you are in poor health;
 - explore whether you have any particular training needs.

Q [What is a ministerial return?](#)

- A** It is advisable that you complete a ministerial review on an annual basis setting out briefly the ministry you have undertaken (the [review form template](#) is what we would recommend you use for this), agree it with the designated responsible person who has oversight and send it to the Area Bishop's office.

Q [Will, I be able to take funerals while holding PtO, where I am not the minister of the deceased person?](#)

- A** The Miscellaneous Provisions Measure allows holders of PtO to take funerals, where they are not the minister of the deceased person, provided that they have been asked to do so by the deceased person's family; and so far as practicable, they inform the minister of the deceased person and seek his or her goodwill.

Q [What about expenses and fees?](#)

- A** All expenses of formal ministry by retired clergy, including pastoral visits for weddings, funerals and other reasons, should be reimbursed in full by the PCC or equivalent.

Expenses should be the actual cost or mileage at the current rates of approved mileage allowance payments set by HM Revenue and Customs. Further details can be found in the Booklet; [The Parochial Expenses of the Clergy: A Guide to their Reimbursement](#)

It has been agreed in this diocese that the proportion of the fee due to the DBF that you may receive when carrying out the Occasional Office is 66.6%. You may find the following two links useful as they give general information and the respective procedure.

[Diocese of Oxford – Parochial Fees](#)
[Reimbursement of Fees for Retired Clergy During a Vacancy](#)

You are reminded that it is your responsibility to declare income from fees to HMRC.

Q Do I have to report to anyone when I am not feeling well?

A There is no legal requirement to report sickness, although you should inform the designated responsible person and keep the Area Dean informed so that they are able to reorganise activities in your absence.

Q What Continuing Ministerial Development (CMD) will be provided whilst I hold PtO?

A There is no specific legal requirement to participate in arrangements approved by the Diocesan Bishop. However, failure to participate in CMD matters such as safeguarding when required by the Bishop can be a disciplinary offence and could lead to the Bishop withdrawing your PtO.

Q Will the Clergy Discipline Measure apply to me when I hold PtO?

A The Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM) applies to all clergy.

4. SAFEGUARDING AND MINISTRY – RESPONSIBILITIES/ CONDITIONS/ REASONS FOR REFUSAL/ WITHDRAWAL/ NOT RENEWING PTO

Q What are my safeguarding responsibilities and conditions while I hold PTO?

A The Bishop will require all clergy with PTO to undertake appropriate diocesan safeguarding training before granting permission to officiate.

- You are required by law to have due regard to the House of Bishops guidance relating to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. Therefore, you must read and familiarise yourself with the House of Bishops' Safeguarding policies as well as those of this diocese, and undertake the relevant training as approved by the Bishop;
- You are accountable to and must share information with your designated responsible person or Area Dean or Archdeacon, on all safeguarding matters as soon as they arise;
- It is a disciplinary offence not to attend safeguarding refresher training in the diocese when requested by the Area Bishop;
- You must have a valid DBS check and the period of your PTO must not exceed the period of your DBS check;
- You must abide by House of Bishops' and diocesan policies and procedures on safeguarding children and adults, and observe the implementation of procedures in the parishes in which you serve;
- You are subject to the same processes as any other ordained person in the event of an allegation of past or current abuse by a child or an adult being made against you.

Q What are the circumstances in which my PTO may be refused/withdrawn or not renewed?

A Your PTO is granted at the Area Bishop's discretion and can be withdrawn or not renewed at any time. The Area Bishop will discuss with you the reasons for their decision and you may be able to express your reasons as to why it needs to be renewed, although there is no formal appeal process. Some of the reasons that the Area Bishop may use when considering withdrawal are listed below, but the list is not exhaustive:

- your incumbent/priest in charge/area dean (the person who has oversight for your ministry) does not consider that you are capable of exercising ministry;
- you are now too frail to be able to preside at the Eucharist;
- following an initial risk assessment of safeguarding concerns or allegations (in line with the practice guidance on responding) being identified in situations where suspension would otherwise be the usual response;
- following an allegation of abuse in your ministry pending the police investigation;

- you have failed to comply with House of Bishops' Policy guidance on safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, including failure to participate in safeguarding training.

Additionally, your PtO will be refused if:

- There have been substantiated concerns or allegations in relation to child or adult abuse, for example, when:
 - there has been a finding of criminal guilt or acceptance of a caution;
 - there has been a finding of fact as part of civil proceedings, or an unequivocal admission in the context of a civil settlement;
 - allegations have been found proven in disciplinary proceedings, for example under the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 (or its predecessors);
 - a cleric has been prohibited and/or barred from work with children and/or vulnerable adults;
 - a family court has made a finding of fact that a cleric has caused significant harm to a child and/or vulnerable adult, or when a cleric has had any such court made an order against them on the basis of any finding or allegation that any child and/or vulnerable adult was at risk of significant harm;
 - there has been a statutory and/or church investigation, including a risk assessment, in line with Responding Guidance, that evidenced the safeguarding concerns had been substantiated and there was an ongoing risk to children or adults.

Q **What is and how do I make sure I stay up to date with the safeguarding training?**

A All ministries in the Church of England are in service of God's people, including children and vulnerable adults. So that all may encounter God and worship in safety and confidence, all those applying for PtO are required to attend regular diocesan safeguarding training.

As part of the process, you will be reminded to book onto the next available workshop. It would be helpful to know when and where you last attended training.

Attendance records will be kept on an individual personnel record and PtO can be withdrawn if an individual's safeguarding training is not up to date.

5. INFORMATION HOLDING AND SHARING – DATA PROTECTION

Q What information will you be holding about me and my ministry?

A Personal Files in accordance with The House of Bishops' guidance on Personal Files relating to Clergy (May 2018), paras 86 and 88 apply to clerics who have PtO.

We provide below the provisions of these paragraphs for easy access.

(86). Where a cleric retires, the personal file should remain in the diocese in which he or she last served unless and until he or she is granted permission to officiate ('PtO') in another diocese.

(88). Where a cleric holds a licence or PtO concurrently in more than one diocese, the personal file should be held in the diocese where the cleric exercises the greater part of his or her ministry. A note should be kept on the file as to which other dioceses have issued a licence or PtO and arrangements put in place for the appropriate staff of those dioceses to have access to the file as necessary. The other dioceses should, in turn, keep a record of where the personal file is held.

Q Who will be sharing my information with and why?

A The information we hold for you and your ministry will:

- be held electronically on the CMS database system, a secure system kept by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Finance, accessible by its employees and officers which also enables us to share information with the authorised people within the Church of England;
- be shared with the diocesan clergy retirement officer for the purposes of providing you with pastoral support;
- be shared with the relevant archdeacon, area/rural dean, deanery lay chair;
- be shared with Deanery officers and officers from the Cathedral for the purposes of church administration and mission only;
- be shared with the Archbishops' Council for the purposes of maintaining the Crockford's database; and
- Clergy Personal File transfer - it is now a requirement of ministry in the Church of England that Clergy Personal Files (also known as 'Blue Files') will be transferred to the relevant diocesan bishop when they take up appointments or are given permission to officiate in dioceses of the Church of England. Files will not be transferred to provinces of the Anglican Communion outside the Church of England, but detailed references and copies of documents contained in the files may be requested by other provinces, and especially any information relating to good standing and safeguarding will be passed on.

You will be asked to give your consent for your contact details to be shared as above and sign to indicate your understanding of this.

Recording; retention and sharing of information will be done in line with the Data Protection legislation and the [Privacy Notice](#) for your attention.