



## **Frequently asked questions about Church of England funerals for Funeral Directors in Coventry and Warwickshire**

These FAQs are designed to assist Funeral Directors in the arrangement of Church of England funerals.

- ***Who can have a Church of England funeral?***

Church of England bereavement care is provided to all people without distinction, not just to those who refer to themselves as “religious” or “churchgoers”. While we do have some regulations around some of the form and content of a funeral service (a Bible reading, Lord’s Prayer, commendation and committal) this does not preclude spending time focussing on the life of the deceased, adding in other content such as prayers or poems, listening to “non-church” music or inviting other people to speak. Rather than being for religious people, a C of E funeral is for anyone who would like “a proper service with a hymn and a prayer” and the possibility of some follow up afterwards. Church of England services can be taken anywhere, not just in a church, although services in church can often allow more time for the service, more people to attend and can be much more atmospheric than crematoria chapels.

- ***Who should I call when arranging a Church of England funeral?***

The first places to look for contact details of the local parish if you do not have them on file are the Coventry Diocesan Yearbook and at [www.achurchnearyou.com](http://www.achurchnearyou.com) and it is usually the vicar (sometimes called the parish priest, the rector or the priest in charge). Some vicars may have a preferred way of being contacted, such as email, or parishes may have someone else designated to receive such calls and they should notify you themselves of how they can be contacted.

- ***Why doesn’t the vicar ever answer their telephone?***

There are a number of reasons why it may prove difficult to get hold of the relevant minister. Vicars may well be busy elsewhere when you call as they work in schools, hospitals, retirement homes and other settings right across the areas they cover, and only a very few have administrative support. Or the parish may be in vacancy. Or it might be the vicar’s rest day and so they may not be monitoring their telephone on that day. Sometimes the churchwardens will take calls on the vicar’s rest day.



- ***I spoke to the parish and was told the vicar isn't available to take the service.***

It is clear that there will be some dates or times that the vicar cannot take the service due to other commitments so some flexibility in the timing of the service might help, but even then there will be times when they just can't make it. At those times we hope that they will still assure you that the service can go ahead as planned and Archdeacon Sue shall be writing to all the clergy early in 2019 to ask them to try to find suitable cover.

- ***I really need an answer but I can't speak to anyone from the local parish.***

This must be very difficult for you as you arrange a service, not knowing who to call and whether they will get back to you. Consequently we are launching a new service whereby you can speak to someone Monday-Friday 9-5 to leave the details of the funeral. We will then ensure that someone is available to take the service, either from the local parish or from elsewhere if necessary. The answer to "is a minister available to take a service at..." will almost certainly be "yes", although we cannot guarantee that a particular church building will be available exactly when it is requested.

*Please call 02476 521342 to speak to Joe Grayson, the Administrative Assistant to the Archdeacons. He will take a message and someone will be back in touch with you within 24 hours whenever possible.*

- ***Can ministers receive a fee directly from a funeral director?***

No. Since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013 the Church of England rules have made it clear that the only legal recipients of Statutory Fees are the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF). Church of England clergy or anyone conducting the service on behalf of the Church of England (whether retired or not) must not therefore receive any part of these fees. Funeral Directors should pay the whole Statutory Fee and related expenses to the PCC. It is then for the PCC to pay the expenses to the minister and to pay the full DBF portion of the fee to the DBF.

- ***What is the process if an authorised minister is approached by a funeral director and asked to take a service?***

Strictly speaking Funeral Directors should only arrange Church of England funerals through the relevant parish concerned and this should ideally be attempted first.

In our experience some funeral directors will contact a minister other than the parish priest directly from time to time to ascertain their availability. If this happens you need to be aware that there are some factors that the minister must be able to clarify before they can agree to take the service so it is possible that they may not be able to give an answer immediately.



**Firstly**, they should ask you why they have been contacted and not the parish priest. If there is a good reason such as knowing the family or being requested specifically then they are more likely to be able to take the service.

**Secondly** they need to know which parish the deceased lived in. This can be found by putting their address into [www.achurchnearyou.com](http://www.achurchnearyou.com).

**Finally**, they need to know if the parish is in vacancy (or prolonged absence). If it is vacant then the minister can agree immediately to take the service and should instruct you to pay the full Statutory Fee to the relevant PCC and to send a copy of the arrangements to the parish for their records. The minister can then claim their travel expenses from that PCC and their service fee from the Diocesan Board of Finance.

*Please note that if the parish is NOT in vacancy then the minister cannot agree to take the service until they have made contact with the parish and informed them of the request.*

***Can clergy or readers become independent “funeral celebrants” and bypass the parochial fees system?***

No. If someone is ordained in the Church of England or is a Reader, they come under the authority of the Church, irrespective of the kind of service they take or where the service takes place. The only way someone could become an independent celebrant is by resigning their orders or licence which would mean that they cease to be a priest or Reader in the Church of England. All fees from services taken by clergy or Readers in the Church of England are payable to the PCC of the relevant parish.

***How much will the parish charge?***

There is a standard rate for funeral services set centrally by the Church of England. This can be found on the Church of England website and is attached to this document. These are revised each year.

***Is there an additional charge for extras?***

These parochial fees do not include payment for extras. Examples of the items for which a parish may decide to make an extra charge include: heating; the services of a vergger; the services of an organist, choir or bell-ringers; sheet or recorded music that has to be specially purchased; the provision of recorded or taped music; the taking of films, video or sound recordings (where permitted); flowers; and special furnishings.

Extras can only lawfully be charged for items over which those receiving the ministry have been given a genuine choice.

Charges for extras are normally payable to the PCC or to the person providing the item (e.g. the organist or choristers). The level of such charges is a matter for local agreement, from time to time, between the incumbent and the parochial church council and should take account of any guidelines laid down by the diocese.



***What about travel expenses? Should I add a standard amount to the parochial fee?***

Travel expenses of the minister taking the service should **not** be offered at a flat rate. For legal reasons it must represent the actual miles travelled and so cannot realistically be claimed in advance of the service. This makes things a little complicated administratively for you as travel expenses can legitimately be claimed from the funeral director, so as an act of goodwill Archdeacon Sue Field intends to write early in 2019 to every licensed minister in the Diocese of Coventry and advise them that, while they are entitled to claim this expense through you, they should instead claim the travel expenses from the PCC of the parish. There may be exceptional circumstances in some rural areas when the travel expenses of the minister exceed the fee retained by the PCC and in those cases an additional claim may be made.

***Who can be buried or have their ashes interred in a Church of England graveyard?***

Anyone who has been resident in a parish, died in the parish, or has been on the church electoral roll can request to be buried in a churchyard, although there may be local restrictions if there is limited space.

***Is there anything the family need to know before choosing a churchyard burial or interment of ashes?***

The Church of England has some specific rules around burials and memorials that differ from those in municipal cemeteries or burial grounds. These regulations are enclosed. To avoid possible future upset for families when they come to install a memorial to their loved one, could you please ensure that they are aware of these regulations before they choose a church burial? As a matter of equity we cannot make exceptions without special permission (called a faculty) and we really don't want to exacerbate the grief felt at the time of loss by surprising someone with a refusal of their application for a non-regulation memorial.

***I want a burial in the churchyard but there is no vicar to approach for permission.***

There are times when a parish church has no vicar so it can be unclear who to approach to gain consent for a church burial. In the absence of a vicar the Area Dean (who will be another local minister) must be involved and the parish should take responsibility for putting them in contact with you. Again, if there are any complications with this please contact the Archdeacon Pastor, Sue Field.

***Who should I approach with questions or with feedback?***

Please contact The Archdeacon Pastor, Sue Field, or the Assistant Archdeacon, Clive Hogger, both of whom are on **02476 521337**