

2023

# Q&A PACK

DEANERY MEETINGS MARCH 2023



ARCHDIOCESE  
OF ST ANDREWS  
& EDINBURGH



# Introduction

This document shows questions and answers collated from a series of presentations held for each deanery in March 2023.

The presentations gave an update to clergy and a lay representative from each parish about the 2021 Accounts of the Archdiocese. It also gave an update on the Aged & Infirm Clergy Fund. This document is being shared so anyone can find out more. For a quick overview of the questions please see the next two pages.

Thanks to everyone who attended the presentations. We hope you find this Q&A pack helpful.

**The Trustees of the Archdiocese  
of St Andrews & Edinburgh  
April 2023**

## Deanery meetings

Deanery	Date
Falkirk & Stirling	1 March 2023
West Lothian	16 March 2023
Fife	21 March 2023
Edinburgh	22 March 2023
Borders	30 March 2023

All meetings held at The Gillis Centre,  
100 Strathearn Road, Edinburgh, EH9 1BB

# Questions – quickview

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## **Is this Clergy retirement funding problem particular to this Archdiocese?**

The issue is not exclusive to our Archdiocese. Clergy retirement shortfalls are known to exist in other Catholic dioceses in the UK and beyond.

## **Are AICF contributions going to be ring-fenced for paying the priests retirements?**

Absolutely, they already are, and this will continue. The restricted fund is audited annually.

## **I still do not understand where the £56m is being used. What is it used for?**

As shown in the Balance Sheet of today's 2021 Accounts Overview, £56m is the net assets total. Nearly half of the £56m assets figure is tied up in properties which are in use and we are not going to sell either parish or central property to fund the AICF – that has been done from the centre over the last 50 years and is the wrong approach for retirement provisioning.

Financial Investments are the other large group of assets. £20m is in investments which could be liquidated. £4.2m of the investments are restricted and endowment funds and £7m belongs to parishes (as part of the parish central deposits arrangement).

That leaves about £8m of investments, which produce income which is used to cover central costs, reducing the amount of assessment required from parishes. It is important to emphasise that, if these investments were liquidated, the general assessment on each parish would need to be increased to back-fill for the resulting loss of investment income to the central fund. The loss of investment capital would also impact the balance of our internal parish deposit – loan process.

There is no big cash balance sitting waiting to be spent. Liquidating central investments is not the right way to fund the retired priests' allowances.



## **Regarding the statement that some fixed assets are not regularly valued. Are assets working as well as they should?**

If we do not need, or plan, to sell an asset that we are currently using, such as a Church building, then we do not need to know the value specifically.

Since there is a cost for valuations and they would need to be reviewed regularly (say, every five years), they are not commissioned where they are not needed.

Sr Mary Pierre, our Director of Properties is encouraging all parishes to undertake property health checks to help ensure assets are maintained properly.

Residential and rented properties that are rented out are evaluated regularly.

It is an ongoing project for all of us to maintain parish and diocesan properties. We review vacant properties to keep them in good condition and try and get them back into use as soon as possible. By agreement, some parishes sometimes sell their vacant property to fund big repairs to their church buildings.



## **Are the full retirement allowances shown in the AICF presentation granted to all incardinated priests?**

No. The presentation showed the full amounts awarded to diocesan priests who have served this archdiocese in active ministry for at least 40 years and who retire at the age of 75 years or over.

Late vocations are provided with pro-rated allowances based upon their actual years of service in this Archdiocese.



## **My parish is poor, we cannot afford this levy.**

As acknowledged in the 2021 webinars and again in these March 2023 Deanery presentations, there is a big disparity in both wealth (assets) and income across our parishes in this Archdiocese.

There are several parishes which are not self-sufficient and which depend on the financial support of the wealthier parishes, either through loans from the centre or by the use of tiered general assessments or both. In the Church of Scotland, where each church is a distinct charity, many of these parishes would have been closed.

If a parish cannot afford this AICF Levy, they are not going to be forced to pay a levy which would bankrupt them. Like the general assessment, the AICF assessment or Levy is tiered such that wealthier parishes will take a much larger burden to lessen the burden on poorer parishes.

This is clearly evident in the AICF presentation which shows that only 10% of our parishes were asked for £10,000 or more in 2022; 50% of our parishes were asked for £5,000 or less. That said, 2022 was the first year of this new AICF Levy and it may not be 100% right first time – it is being monitored closely and some ‘tweaks’ may be required. These will be picked up in the annual AICF Levy review promised in the Decree 09/22.





## **Were parish impact assessments carried out?**

Yes. Had impact assessments not been done, every parish would have been invited to contribute £10,000 in 2021 and there would have been no need for a tiered levy in 2022.

The tiers are based on general assessment tiers which already reflect the disparity in income across the archdiocese.

This clergy retirement contribution is a new expense and as such will be difficult to accommodate initially.

Previous Q&A responses state the overarching impact and context of the introduction of the AICF Levy on parishes – new income is required along with careful management of expenditure.

This is true for every parish.



## **Are the assessments intended to undo shortfall of past or deal with current?**

The new AICF parish assessment or regular income is to add to the retirement pot for active clergy retirement, that is, for present service.

The shortfall from past service will be funded by extraordinary income from legacies, donations and contributions to be sought from wealthy parishes and individuals.





## **Will the AICF assessment drop once the retirement pot is full?**

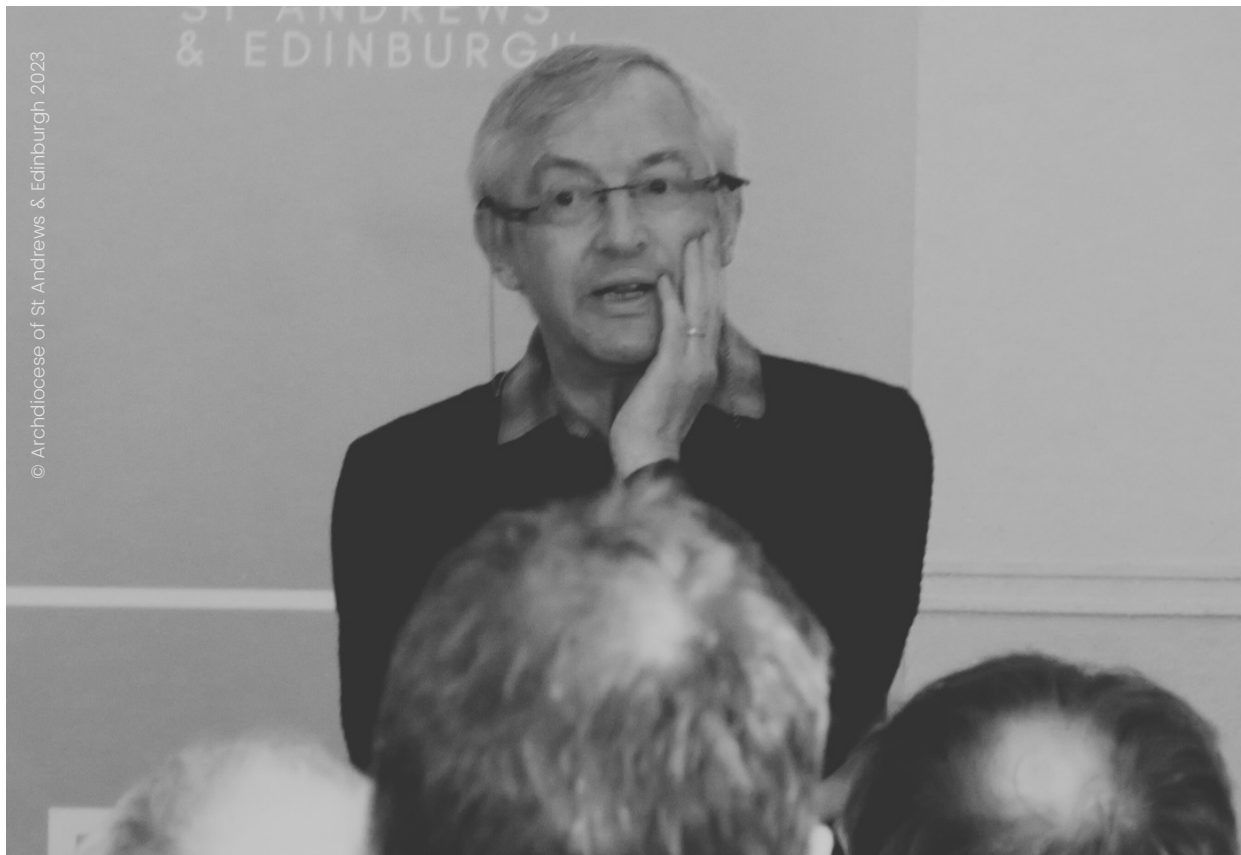
The AICF assessment is here for as long as there are incardinated priests.

The AICF Levy rates will be reviewed annually and amended as required.

The target AICF total balance will be reviewed by actuarial review every five years or so. This will inform the trustees about the amount of shortfall remaining.

The shortfall contributions should stop when the shortfall has been addressed as that need will be met when the pot is nearly full.

This may take a long time to achieve, as the shortfall has been created across 50 years at least and the donations / legacies being sought to address this shortfall are unpredictable in both amount and timing.



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## “Is the AICF a pension fund or just a bank account?”

The AICF is not a registered pensions scheme. It does not need to be. It is a restricted fund with a bank account and some investments. For the Archdiocese it has all the benefits of a pension scheme but has lower operating costs.

The Archdiocese is different to a commercial business because there is a lifetime commitment between the Priest and the Archdiocese, unlike in the business world where employees typically come and go between different employers.

This question is often asked and is best explained in the 2021 AICF Q&A (Q1) on the Archdiocesan website. Money in the AICF remains in the Fund if a priest dies before retirement or early in retirement.

Unused monies do not go to a pension provider's profits nor to the retired priest's familial next of kin –

but rather are reused in the AICF and go to the retirement costs of his priestly fraternity. In this way, application of AICF funds is very cost-effective.

The AICF is governed by the AICF Trust Deed, under Scots Law. In other Christian churches, clergy receive salaries and pensions, like many of us parishioners. In the Catholic church, our priests receive bed & board and a modest allowance or stipend.

Parishes pay these clergy living costs including National Insurance Contributions.

Until now, parishes have not paid retirement contributions – the annual AICF special collections used to contribute 50% or less of the annual costs and so were both unpredictable and insufficient as retirement contributions.

In the same way as our priests receive a modest stipend whilst in active ministry, they receive retirement allowances, not pensions, from their retirement (aged 75 years).



## **Are priests expected to contribute personally to the AICF?**

No. Parishes pay for priest's bed & board, a modest stipend and National Insurance Contributions.

Parishes should also pay the priest's retirement contribution, which is the recently introduced AICF Levy.

The priest's modest stipend is not a salary and therefore inadequate for the Additional Voluntary Contributions which some employees make towards their pension.



## **Does the AICF assessment take into account that some priests die before retiral age?**

Yes, the actuaries include that data in their model.



## **Can priests see what their 'pensions' would look like?**

No – it's not a defined contribution for one individual. Priests are aware of the size of the current, e.g. housing and living allowances.



## **Can priests see what their retirement allowances are worth, a projection?**

Yes – but only as a snapshot, depending on their years of service. The current retirement allowances are documented in the scheme rules.



**The AICF as a restricted fund: if a priest dies before the age of retirement is there a mechanism to be able to get his unused money out of the scheme for other uses?**

No. The money in this restricted fund is to be used for incardinated priests' retirement as defined under Scots Law in the AICF Trust Deed.

One parish has tested this principle by asking for some of their AICF Levy monies to be returned, which is not permissible.

Monies in the AICF Fund are pooled and not reserved on an individual basis. Funds not 'used' by one incardinated priest retiree will be re-used by other such retirees.





## **What about contributions from religious communities such as the Oblates?**

This needs to be looked at for an equitable solution. There will be follow-up conversations with religious communities.



## **What is the cost of priests who are in care homes?**


A Priest is assessed for a care home like any other person and the State usually carries some of the costs.

Some care homes are run by Religious Orders and therefore these costs can be lower. Each particular case is different. The AICF will carry all care home costs not covered by the State.



## **New priests' retirement planning will be dealt with in better way with this introduction of regular parish contributions. What about tax?**

There is no issue here because the allowances that priests will receive are largely unchanged – what we are doing is ensuring that money will be available to pay them in future. Money is not 'deposited' into the AICF for any individual priest but for all incardinated priests together.



## **If the AICF started now, the tiered levy and ongoing parish contributions is how the clergy retirement planning would have been done?**

Yes.

## **The Priest's living costs are being met by the parish. Does an International priest take back to their home diocese provision for their pension?**

Under Canon Law, every Diocese has the responsibility to care for their own diocesan clergy, just as a Provincial has responsibility for his religious community (such as the Oblates or Jesuits).

International clergy working here do not take AICF monies home as their own diocese or community is responsible for their retirement.

This Archdiocese is responsible for and pays retirement for our incardinated or diocesan priests whether they are working here or in another Diocese (home or overseas). The AICF Actuarial reviews and AICF fund estimates are planned only on the numbers of incardinated priests who belong to this Archdiocese.

But this does not mean that a parish with an international priest does not have to contribute, as all parishes have an obligation to the whole Archdiocese, including past and future incardinated priests in the parish.

## **Can we look at something to help International clergy working in this Archdiocese to be able to take some savings home?**

This will be dealt with differently and separately. The Trustees have previously considered doing something for our international clergy but need to address this long-standing diocesan clergy retirement issue first.





## **Are there quite a lot of priests under 60 who haven't paid anything to State Pension?**

Priests have always been expected to pay National Insurance contributions, and reminders have been issued and explanation documents provided. Missed contributions can be paid within six years. Generally Priests reaching retirement have a full state pension entitlement.



## **Retired priest housing or rent allowance has not changed in several years – will it be index linked?**

The housing allowance has not changed in recent years. It seems to have always been a flat figure and not index-linked.

Living allowances continue to be index-linked, but the annual rate is now set by Trustees and no longer by using Government data.

The housing allowance, and whether or not it will be index-linked, will be considered by the Trustees within the next year or two.



## **Costs paid to priests are higher than many pensioners receive?**

Typically, a Priest leaves his parish home when he retires and has to cover living costs previously borne by parishes and obtain living accommodation which he has not been able to save up for during his lifetime of service.

Given he retires at 75 years of age this is a difficult situation to suddenly have to manage. The AICF retirement allowances are not giving priests a lavish or comfortable lifestyle, based on independent market comparisons.



## **Will there be diocesan property for incardinated priests to retire into?**

The parish presbyteries are typically too large for one person – they were historically built to accommodate many (3-7) priests.

Retired priests generally do not want to live together as they are very independent and private individuals and have become used to living alone over many years.

A very few presbyteries have since been divided into flats and are therefore more suitable for consideration as clergy retirement accommodation.

Any available housing must also be compliant with current regulations. Where one parish (or a cluster of parishes served by one priest) has a vacant presbytery, an increasing number are choosing to sell it or to rent it out at market value. These actions make the extra property 'work' for the benefit of the parish, especially in current times when congregation sizes

are reducing and property regulations (and consequently costs) are increasing. Often the resulting income supports the cost of essential repairs to their parish church.

Therefore, the number of suitable diocesan properties available for retiring priests to occupy is reducing.

Of the currently retired priests, approximately 40% live in their own/family property; 30% live in care homes and 30% live in diocesan properties. In the recent past, retirees have expressed a wish to have the flexibility to choose where they retire to and not to be limited by which diocesan property is available.

The Trustees are supportive of retirees choosing to rent a modest property in the location of their choice, within their available income (AICF, State pension and other personal income – if any).





## **Will there be an AICF Levy of 0%?**

The first annual AICF Levy review will take place in the next three months or so, certainly before the 2023 invoices are issued. From this review, the minimum AICF Levy rate might move from the current 8% to as low as 0% and other rates may change. As now, the poorest parishes would be awarded with the lowest rate, but your parish may not qualify as one of the poorest parishes. It would be inappropriate to reset the AICF Levy rate for any single parish without considering all parishes to ensure an equitable levy application across the entire Archdiocese.



## **What if the total levy clears out the parish bank account?**

The levy is a percentage of Offertory Income. For the poorest parishes, the total levy in 2022 was 18%, of which AICF was 8% and 10% general assessment, most parishes also have other income which is not assessed so the percentage of total income is lower. Without doubt, this new levy is an additional financial challenge for parishes.

Parishes need to grow income and manage expenditure more carefully in order to achieve their former Income & Expenditure balance / level of affordability.

For example, the Trustees suggest parishes review whether there is scope for further increases in the use of Gift Aid, ask parishioners to review standing order amounts, ongoing view of expenditures, do fundraising, grow the congregation, use the Archdiocesan postcards to invite people back for Easter. The AICF Levy should be affordable, and each parish needs to consider their own situation.

The introduction of the AICF Levy is retirement planning for incardinated priests whilst they are in active ministry. It is not intended to close parishes and that will not be allowed to happen.



## **It was stated in the Annual Accounts presentation that money is loaned in and out of the Centre. Is the loaned money invested? Where does it go?**

Wealthy parishes deposit surplus monies into the central funds for investment in order to earn interest and to facilitate loans from the centre to poorer parishes. As at 31/12/2022 there were £7.7m of parish funds deposited in central funds. Some of these funds are held in central bank accounts and some are held in the General Fund investments. This is an historic arrangement. The deposits from Parishes are treated as if they were in bank accounts paying interest and are repayable either immediately for short term deposits or within six months for long term deposits. The interest rates paid reflect the rates available on the bank accounts that we use for part of the funds, currently a short-term deposit account and a six-month term deposit. During 2021 the rates available were very low and therefore the interest payments shown in the accounts were low. During 2022 the interest rates increased almost monthly to reach 1% for short-term and 3% for six-month deposits by the end of 2022. As the questioner noted, some of the funds are held in investments which may have a higher or lower return than these interest rates (hopefully over time) and are

also subject to increases and reductions in market value, as the stock market rises or falls. The approach currently taken by the Archdiocese is to accept this investment risk within Central Funds and to pay the deposit interest as described and protect the capital value of the deposits. If investments generate more income than is required to pay interest, the additional income is retained in the central general fund and enables the assessment paid by parishes to be kept at a lower level. Central Funds have deposits from parishes (£7.7m as at 31/12/2022) and also loans to parishes (£1.6m as at 31/12/2022). The loans to parishes are interest-free and repayments are negotiated with parishes. In some cases, parishes are only able to make minimal or nil repayments. Central funds are managed so that deposits “in” can be repaid, regardless of repayments of loans “out”. Monies deposited in from parishes are loaned out to poor parishes at 0% interest. Additionally, the centre absorbs the risk if a Parish is unable to repay its loans, rather than passing it back to the depositing parish.



## **Why not bring the Parish Finance Committees together? In this way they can learn from each other.**

We agree. The Curia Finance team has wanted for years to arrange this kind of meeting annually to share information. We have been working for several years to confirm that finance committees are in all parishes. There is a mixture of skillsets and experience across the parish finance committees, some are more knowledgeable than others. Covid impacted being able to get people get together. Some priests were reluctant to share their parish finance committee contact details with the centre and a lot of effort has been made to address this reluctance and we now have almost all that information. We need to be able to work together to resolve these financial challenges.



### **Does AICF income stay in the fund?**

Yes. Investment income arising from AICF investments stays in the AICF Fund. As the AICF Fund balance is relatively low just now, both the amount invested and the income are also low. The investment portfolios were reviewed in 2022 to ensure that portfolios are managed efficiently & funds invested ethically.



### **Regarding Finance committee members and needing authorised signatures for banking. How is this being improved?**

The aim is to get authorised members onto online banking. The Royal Bank of Scotland process is faster to facilitate this aim than the equivalent Bank of Scotland process. Finding a system which works is not straightforward. Banks do not respond to the church any more than individual customers – sometimes it takes time.

Parishes which use RBS can add finance committee members to view transactions and statements, and create but not approve payments. Approval authority is the same online as for cheques, the Parish Priest can approve and where a second approval is required this is done through the Director of Finance.



## **Surely parishes who need financial help should be able to retain funds by not paying the levy to the centre and decide their own fate?**

As evidenced in both the Annual Accounts and AICF presentations, there exists a great diversity in parish assets and parish income across this archdiocese.

Many parishes are simply not self-sufficient but are dependent upon support from wealthy parishes by the tiered general assessment or the use of loans. If these parishes did not ask the centre, they would need to identify the wealthy parishes and then ask them for support.

The Trustees have a central view of all parishes and we aim to balance what is being asked for and encourage Parishes to do a little bit more – some could do more than they think.

The overarching impact assessment was done to inform parishes that they should grow funds locally and closely manage expenditure in order to return to the cashflow levels enjoyed before the AICF Levy.

Everyone can propose ideas on how to help find new money. We each need to start with what can be improved within our own control, rather than looking elsewhere first.



## **How can parishes who have more do more?**

As has been said, the main approach is the tiered levy which assists with this – wealthier parishes are asked for larger amounts. Some parishes have already voluntarily given extra funding to the AICF.

Those parishes with large bank or investment balances will be approached in due course for contributions to the shortfall gap – over & above the AICF Levy.



## **What help is there from the Archdiocese to create new money?**

The Trustees are creating an initiative to encourage more legacies. Suggestions about the uses of legacies are due later in the year covering many subjects which need major funding, for example the training of seminarians and building maintenance along with the AICF.

Parishes can share successful initiatives on what works well for them. For example, one parish runs a very successful 200 club which raises around £6,500 per year.

We also encourage parishes to encourage new Standing Orders to replace loose plate donations and review Gift Aid – including loose plate gift aid claim (as noted in the Diocesan Clergy Handbook).



## **AICF special collections – Parishioners may think these were enough but we're realising they were not. What help from the Centre will be available to explain this funding situation to parishioners?**

AICF special collections have been replaced by the AICF Levy. The lesser-known historic Clergy Levy has also been replaced.

Provision for retirement of the Clergy should be an expense of the normal parish income (which probably needed to grow anyway for other reasons, e.g. building maintenance).

There will be a Q&A pack issued to cover all the questions which have been asked during these Deanery meetings. A pack of slides to explain the situation will also be provided.

The issue is best explained by laity-to-laity and priests should not have to ask their congregation for their own retirement monies.



## **Was previous AICF expenditure funded from sale of assets or was some from the general assessment?**

From 2009–2014 we do not have precise information as to where the money came from but we are sure it did not come from AICF and it was higher than the general assessment figures.

We also know that £1.5m of assets were urgently liquidated in 2013 and that many centrally held properties had been sold.

During 2015–2019 we know the extra AICF funding definitely came from central reserves and resulted in a deficit on the central fund.

The introduction of the named AICF Levy is to improve transparency to parishes regarding where exactly this assessment goes.

This Archdiocese general assessment, at around 17%, was previously the lowest average general assessment of all Scottish dioceses. Our combined (general, plus AICF) assessment rate (32%) is now in line with the average across other Scottish dioceses.



## **Have trustees considered utilising trust assets (such as sale of property) to assist with the AICF funding challenge?**

Sr Mary Pierre, the Archdiocesan Director of Property, has been working with parishes to get their empty houses or presbyteries occupied; some are occupied by retired priests; some rented out at market values; some are not in a fit state to be rented; Some parishes are choosing to sell their vacant presbyteries in order to repair their churches.

When a parish property is sold the proceeds go to the parish; there is a tiered windfall tax, but most of the monies go to the parish.

This is one of the central issues: the entire Archdiocese of St Andrews & Edinburgh is one single registered charity, so in Scots law, all the assets belong to the Archdiocese.

However, in Canon Law, once the Archdiocese gives the property to the parish for their church and the parish is established, the property belongs to the parish.

In 2013, the then diocesan finance director asked the Archbishop to liquidate £1.5m in assets to pay debts, but it was not clear to the clergy why this was needed. Most priests thought the problem was the expenditure of maintaining The Gillis Centre (the Curia or secretariat), but in fact, there is an external trust that largely pays for the Curia.

The problem was that clergy 'pensions' were being paid from central funds. Priests were 'brought up' thinking that there was full funding in the AICF. The volume of retiring priests (and hence expenditure) was going up and income going down.

Part of the problem was that parishes were retaining money 'for a rainy day'. The Centre does not have access to parish money; the tiered levy is a means by which the parishes with more money contribute more (a higher percentage of a higher balance) to shared costs.



**When investments and the fund have fully grown, is this when the AICF rates will reduce? So not to have money trapped in the fund which can't be used for other purposes.**

Yes, this is one scenario – but with an estimated AICF Fund shortfall at end of 2022 of £6.8m, it will likely be many years before this specific situation arises.

As the AICF is a restricted fund which can only be spent on clergy retirement, it will need to be managed to avoid overfilling. The Trustees are aware of this future risk.

As we make steps towards filling the AICF retirement pot, the Trustees can and will manage the pot to prevent it overfilling.

One obvious way of doing this is to reduce AICF Levy rates if the total fund gets close to the assessed target level.

Parishes need to pay for incardinated priests' modest income and retirement going forward for as long as there are incardinated priests.

However, if donations and legacies contributed to address the shortfall lead to the risk of the AICF pot reaching the assessed target level, then AICF Levy rates could be reduced.





**Good to hear this AICF Levy is not about closing parishes, but buildings are going through the ageing process and this has not been spoken about today.**

Health checks have not been performed on our properties over many years. Sr Mary Pierre RSM, Our Director of Properties, is managing a standard health check across the Archdiocese with an external firm of chartered surveyors to assess the whole property situation.

Four Churches have had to close recently due to structural problems where they are no longer safe to occupy, and three of these will not be reopening. The only parish to re-open is in a shared community building which is being paid for by West Lothian Council. Others are in dire situations.

One parish wants to retain a Mass in its own town and plans to hire the Church of Scotland property in the short term. This is new territory – it could be a greater collaboration effort and ecumenism opportunity with more creative solutions being found to these problems, which must be dealt with due to the health and safety danger they pose from unsafe buildings. We need to keep an open mind when considering alternative property solutions.





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