



## Retired clergy in the Church of England now

A report from the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England  
[www.rcacoe.org](http://www.rcacoe.org)

- 1.1 The Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England commissioned this report as a first step in improving insight and understanding about retired clergy. For so significant a group, information about them is surprisingly patchy and incomplete. Accurate data and analysis need to replace anecdote and prejudice, particularly when the contribution of retired clergy is increasingly a key part of the overall ministry of the Church of England.
- 1.2 The Association acknowledges with gratitude the help and advice of staff in the Research and Statistics team of the Archbishops' Council and the Church of England Pensions Board. The report is largely based on information published in the Archbishops' Council's annual Ministry Statistics and the yearly report of the Pensions Board.
- 1.3 **This report provides an initial outline of what is currently known about**
  - **How many retired clergy are there in the Church of England?**
  - **Where do they live?**
  - **How many continue to contribute to the ministry of the Church of England?**

- 1.4 The report indicates where more research is needed. It then poses questions for further reflection nationally and in dioceses to guide a refreshed approach towards engagement with retired clergy in the Church of England.

### 2 Context

**There are around 12,000 retired clergy in the Church of England. Their number has doubled since 1990.** In the same period the number of clergy in the Church of England below retirement age has decreased so that retired clergy now easily outnumber them. This trend is projected to continue over the coming decade.

In addition, there are over 3000 other beneficiaries in the clergy pension scheme, most of whom are surviving spouses. This group should be acknowledged as deserving attention in a further study, but **the figures for pensioners in this report do not include them.**

### 3. Some key findings

- **The number of retired clergy has increased by 36% since 2000 while the number of stipendiary clergy has decreased by 22% in the same period**
- **More clergy are known to hold permission to officiate over age 75 than under 75**
- **Wide variation exists between dioceses in the ratio of retired to stipendiary clergy**
- **Out of 42 dioceses, at least 32 have more retired clergy than stipendiary clergy**
- **At least 30% of clergy pensioners under 75 are not known to hold permission to officiate (PTO)**

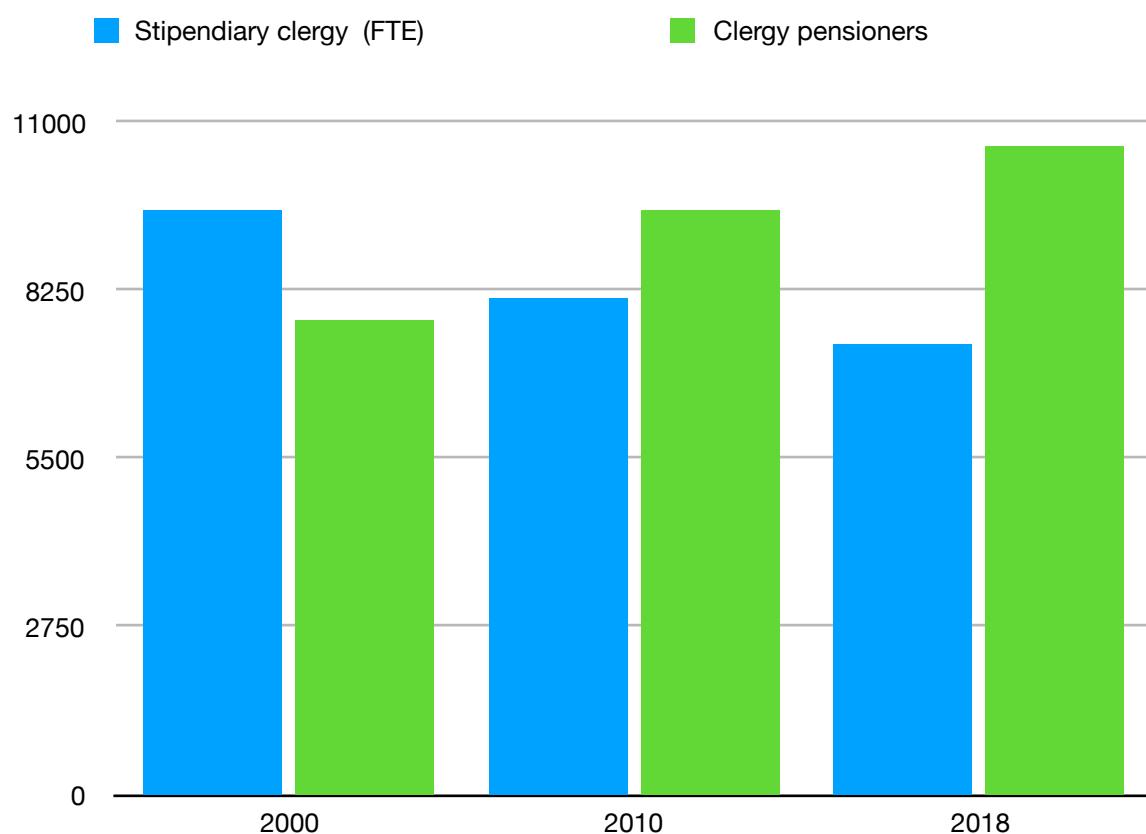
## 4. How many retired clergy are there in the Church of England?

4.1 There are currently an estimated 12,000 retired clergy. This figure includes two sets of clergy. One set is of clergy receiving a Church of England Pensions Board pension ("clergy pensioners"). The other comprises self-supporting clergy over the age of 70 who hold permission to officiate and are not in receipt of a clergy pension.

4.2 The information about clergy pensioners is fuller and more accurate. It has therefore been used widely in this report and particularly where comparisons are made with the number of stipendiary clergy, as for example in Figure 1 below. In other cases the total figure for retired clergy has been used where wider groups are being compared.

4.3 Most of the currently available information about retired clergy is about clergy pensioners. Work is underway in the National Church Institutions to improve the data on retired self-supporting clergy in particular, through the development of a national register of clergy. Further research is needed to build a clearer picture of retired self-supporting clergy and their place in the ministry of the Church of England.

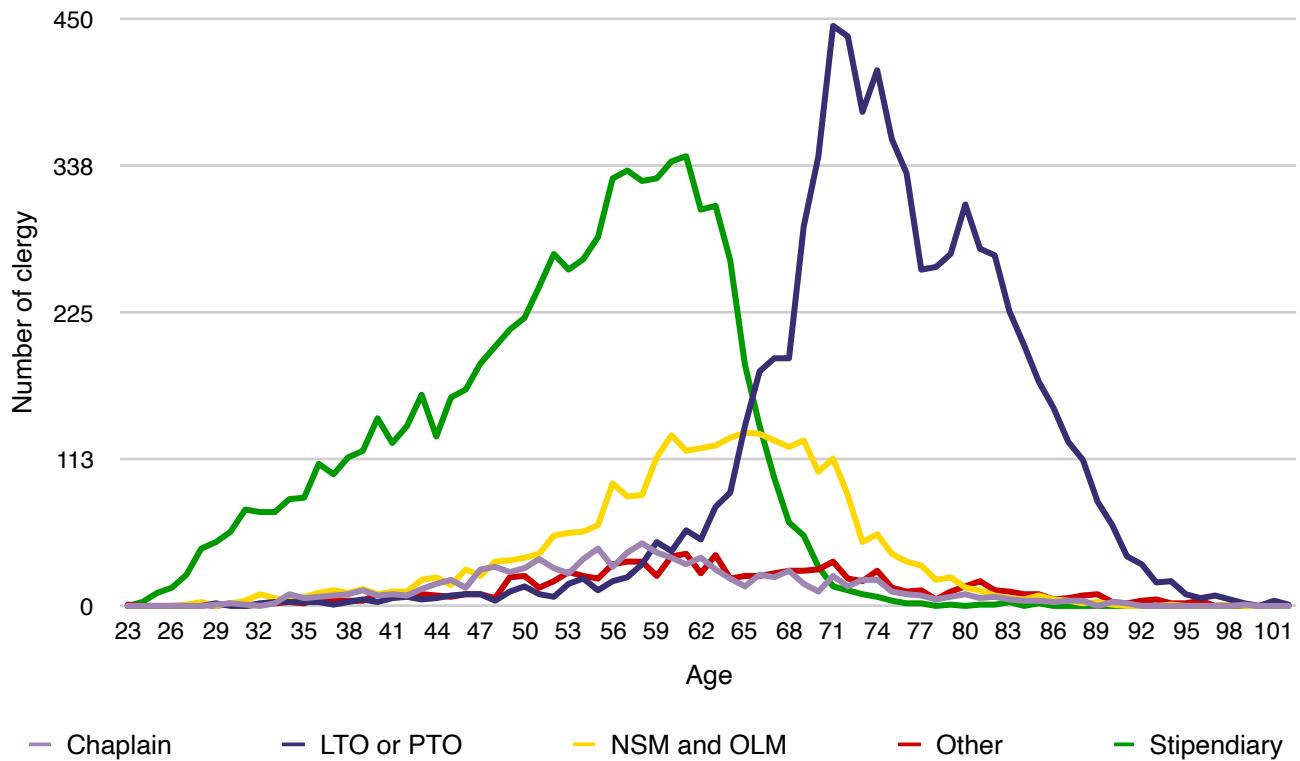
**Figure 1**  
**Numbers of clergy pensioners and of stipendiary clergy (Full Time Equivalent)**



4.4 Figure 1 shows that the number of clergy pensioners has been increasing steadily in the decades since 2000 both in absolute terms and in comparison with the numbers of stipendiary clergy.

Table 1 in the appendix has annual figures since 2000 for clergy pensioners, stipendiary and all licensed clergy.

**Figure 2 Age profile of clergy in the Church of England 2018**  
 (reproduced by permission of Research and Statistics, Church of England Central Services)



4.5 The current (2018) age profile of clergy shows a significant number in the age 55 to 65 cohort who can be expected to move into retirement over the coming ten years. So the trend seen in Figure 1 is expected to continue for at least a decade.

4.6 This will add a substantial cohort of clergy in early retirement to the current total number of retired clergy at a time when there are likely to be fewer stipendiary clergy, and especially those in incumbent or incumbent-equivalent roles.

4.7 Table 2 in the appendix has the figures for age profile of clergy by age bands.

## 5. Where do clergy live in retirement?

**Figure 3. Highest and lowest number of clergy pensioners in postcodes in June 2019**

| Post code         | Postal area  | Number of clergy pensioners |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Top Ten</b>    |              |                             |
| EX                | Exeter       | 303                         |
| YO                | York         | 275                         |
| NR                | Norwich      | 272                         |
| GL                | Gloucester   | 259                         |
| BN                | Chichester   | 257                         |
| OX                | Oxford       | 231                         |
| PO                | Portsmouth   | 217                         |
| NG                | Nottingham   | 202                         |
| IP                | Ipswich      | 198                         |
| PE                | Peterborough | 194                         |
| <b>Lowest ten</b> |              |                             |
| WC                | London       | 7                           |
| EN                | Enfield      | 10                          |
| EC                | London       | 12                          |
| IG                | Ilford       | 13                          |
| SM                | Sutton       | 14                          |
| LU                | Luton        | 17                          |
| SR                | Sunderland   | 19                          |
| RM                | Romford      | 21                          |
| HA                | Harrow       | 22                          |
| HX                | Halifax      | 23                          |

- 5.1 The factors affecting where clergy will live in retirement are not reliably recorded. Their geographical distribution appears to favour broadly more rural and suburban contexts. Further insight into the reasons for their decisions about location is needed.
- 5.2 The Pensions Board currently provides around 1200 rental properties to retired clergy households across all dioceses. A further 230 people live in the seven Supported Living schemes in different parts of the country. The remainder of pensioners (around 85%) find their own properties, of whom just over 700 have mortgages or shared ownership through the Pensions Board. A 2018 Pensions Board survey concluded that the number of retired clergy seeking housing assistance should be expected to remain steady. Further insight is needed into how clergy before retirement perceive and manage their housing needs and how this is evolving with a new cohort of those approaching retirement.

**Figure 4 Number of Clergy pensioners by diocese: highest and lowest totals**

| Rank                                | Diocese      | Number of clergy pensioners | FTE number stipendiary clergy | Number of licensed clergy |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
|                                     |              |                             |                               |                           |
| <b>Dioceses with highest totals</b> |              |                             |                               |                           |
| 1                                   | Leeds        | 490                         | 316                           | 473                       |
| 2                                   | Chichester   | 470                         | 268                           | 391                       |
| 3                                   | York         | 450                         | 200                           | 280                       |
| 4                                   | Bath & Wells | 430                         | 188                           | 264                       |
| 5                                   | Exeter       | 410                         | 200                           | 295                       |
|                                     |              |                             |                               |                           |
| <b>Dioceses with lowest totals</b>  |              |                             |                               |                           |
| 37                                  | Bristol      | 140                         | 112                           | 190                       |
| 38                                  | Liverpool    | 130                         | 179                           | 245                       |
| 39                                  | Hereford     | 100                         | 89                            | 134                       |
| 40                                  | Guildford    | 100                         | 177                           | 268                       |
| 41                                  | Sodor & Man  | 20                          | 21                            | 27                        |
|                                     |              |                             |                               |                           |

Note: The numbers of clergy pensioners have been rounded to the nearest ten.

5.3 Clergy pensioners are present in all dioceses but in widely varying proportion to numbers of other clergy. In 32 dioceses, pensioners outnumber the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) number of stipendiary clergy. In 22 dioceses they outnumber the headcount of all licensed clergy, including both stipendiary and self-supporting.

5.4 Table 3 in the Appendix gives figures for all dioceses.

**6. How many retired clergy continue to contribute to ministry in the Church of England?**

**Figure 5 Age profiles of pensioners vs clergy holding permission to officiate 2018**

| Age range    | Number of PTO clergy | Number of clergy pensioners |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 60-64        | 310                  | 414                         |
| 65-69        | 990                  | 1730                        |
| 70-74        | 2020                 | 2643                        |
| 75-80        | 1480                 | 2418                        |
| 80 and above | 2120                 | 3263                        |

- 6.1 A substantial proportion of clergy pensioners hold permission to officiate (PTO). These figures suggest that around 60% are known to hold PTO and that many seem not to hold PTO as their age advances, especially over the age of 75.
- 6.2 However, they also suggest that around 1500 out of 4800 pensioners below the age of 75, or just over 30%, may not hold PTO either. Continued improvement of the data on PTO holders is needed before it can be known whether this is an accurate figure.
- 6.3 Further insight is needed to understand the different situations and attitudes of retired clergy, both clergy pensioners and retired self-supporting clergy, around continuing ministry in retirement.
- 6.4 Anecdotal evidence suggests that retired clergy are vital in some areas for maintenance of worship and pastoral care. It suggests also that some may also wish to go beyond mere maintenance and to utilise their wider experience and expertise for growth and innovation. This offer, both current and potential, needs to be quantified and better understood.
- 6.5 Anecdotal evidence also suggests that retired clergy take up a range of commitments and forms of service in the community and wider society at or after the point of retirement. Further research is needed to show what these commitments are and their value.

**Figure 6**

**Number of Stipendiary clergy retiring in 2018 by age and new roles at end of year**

(reproduced by permission of Research and Statistics, Church of England Central Services)

| Age band (years)                   | Retired and not active | Active retirement: Permission to or Licence to Officiate | Active retirement: other or unpaid parochial role | Active retirement: other role | Total retired |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Under 45</b>                    | <10                    | 0  | 0   | 0                             | <10           |
| <b>45-49</b>                       | <10                    | 0  | 0   | 0                             | <10           |
| <b>50-54</b>                       | <10                    | 0  | 0   | 0                             | <10           |
| <b>55-59</b>                       | 20                     | <10  | 0   | <10                           | 20            |
| <b>60-64</b>                       | 90                     | 20   | <10   | <10                           | 130           |
| <b>65-69</b>                       | 90                     | 20   | <10   | <10                           | 130           |
| <b>Over 70</b>                     | 20                     | <10  | <10   | <10                           | 20            |
| <b>Total</b>                       | 220                    | 50   | <10   | 30                            | 300           |
| <b>% of those retiring in 2018</b> | 72.2%                  | 15.2%  | 2.6%  | 9.9%                          | 100%          |

- 6.4 The data in Figure 6 for 2018 retirements from stipendiary ministry show a range of pathways taken at this point.
- 6.5 Around 25% of those retiring had another ministerial role or PTO by the end of 2018. Previous annual statistics suggest that this figure rises to 50% by the end of the following year.
- 6.6 The figures also show that in 2018 almost 50% of those retiring are between 60 and 64, of whom about a third have PTO or some other role within the year of retirement. The 2016 percentage figure is similar to 2018: in 2017 it was 40%.
- 6.7 Research among those approaching retirement is needed to provide insight into the factors which currently influence the timing of retirement and the expectations and aspirations clergy have as they approach this point.

## 7. **Further research**

This initial review of data currently available has raised some specific questions which either improved data collection or further research can help to answer. These include

- a. How can we build a better and clearer picture of retired self-supporting clergy?
- b. How can we gain fuller data about those who hold permission to officiate?
- c. What are the attitudes of clergy about continuing active ministry in retirement?
- d. What commitments or service in society and the community do retired clergy take up?
- e. What are the factors currently affecting where clergy choose to live in retirement?
- f. What insight can we have into the factors which now influence a decision on timing of retirement and into the aspirations and expectations of clergy approaching retirement?

The Retired Clergy Association welcomes partnerships to work on these areas of research.

## 8. **Wider questions**

- 8.1 This review of some basic statistics about retired clergy makes clear that their current and future significance needs to be reappraised and that diocesan and national policy should be developed in the light of some changed realities.
- 8.2 A larger number of more active retired clergy are now in a position to make a greater contribution in parishes and dioceses as stipendiary clergy numbers decline, especially over the next decade. A culture which sees retired clergy as largely recipients of care and occasional “gap-filers” needs to give way to a more intelligent and proactive attitude to what they might contribute, particularly in the earlier stages of retirement.
- 8.3 The recent House of Bishops policy on granting PTO points towards this: clergy remain accountable in retirement as part of a diocese. It follows that the support given to them needs to suit the changed context and its expectations.
- 8.4 The following **wider questions** are offered for consideration by those who shape diocesan and national policy, as well as by retired clergy themselves.
  1. **Vocation:** how can clergy be helped towards good vocational decisions on retirement, how their priesthood and ministry continues, what they will do and where they will live?
  2. **Vision and calling:** how do the Bishop and the diocese see the ministry of retired clergy as sharing in the mission of the church? What scope is there for greater consistency in calling retired clergy to serve where the church sees a need?
  3. **Planning and sending:** what place does the potential offered by retired clergy have in pastoral and mission planning? Who in the diocese knows the retired clergy and can audit their skills? How aware of retired clergy are ministers responsible for oversight?
  4. **Support:** what is the right level and kind of continuing development for retired clergy? Is the current model of Clergy Retirement Officer now superseded by new requirements for training and accreditation as well as pastoral care? How can clergy avoid being “lost” at retirement, and how can a welcome be assured if they move diocese? How should retired clergy be included in communication and consultation, particularly during a vacancy or pastoral reorganisation?
- 8.5 There are already promising examples of good practice and wisdom around these issues. This report and the questions it raises are offered in a spirit of partnership, in the hope of understanding better and enhancing the important contribution which retired clergy make for the spread of the Gospel and the good of the church.

## Appendix

**Table 1.**  
**Clergy pensioners vs stipendiary FTE and licensed clergy in Church of England 2000 to 2018**

| Year | Clergy pensioners | Stipendiary FTE diocesan clergy | All licensed diocesan clergy |
|------|-------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 2000 | 7761              | 9538                            | 11758                        |
| 2001 | 7982              | 9340                            | 11599                        |
| 2002 | 8228              | 9200                            | 11588                        |
| 2003 | 8407              | 9100                            | 11506                        |
| 2004 | 8575              | 8900                            | 11922                        |
| 2005 | 8629              | 8820                            | 11904                        |
| 2006 | 8830              | 8630                            | 11913                        |
| 2007 | 8968              | 8450                            | 11945                        |
| 2008 | 9117              | 8360                            | 11658                        |
| 2009 | 9318              | 8250                            | 11658                        |
| 2010 | 9554              | 8120                            | 11622                        |
| 2011 | 9720              | 8030                            | 11418                        |
| 2012 | 9917              | 8006                            | 11650                        |
| 2013 | 10118             | 7816                            | 11430                        |
| 2014 | 10222             | 7681                            | 11280                        |
| 2015 | 10319             | 7661                            | 11300                        |
| 2016 | 10443             | 7490                            | 11020                        |
| 2017 | 10526             | 7420                            | 10800                        |
| 2018 | 10599             | 7385                            | 10620                        |

**Table 2.****Age profile of all licensed/PTO clergy in Church of England 2018**

(reproduced by permission of Research and Statistics, Church of England Central Services)

| Age (years) | Stipendiary | Self-supporting (NSM & OLM) | Permission or Licence to Officiate | Chaplain | Other |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|-------|
| Under 25    | <10         | 0                           | 0                                  | 0        | <10   |
| 25-29       | 140         | <10                         | <10                                | <10      | <10   |
| 30-34       | 360         | 30                          | <10                                | 10       | <10   |
| 35-39       | 530         | 50                          | 20                                 | 40       | 20    |
| 40-44       | 700         | 70                          | 30                                 | 60       | 40    |
| 45-49       | 920         | 140                         | 40                                 | 120      | 50    |
| 50-54       | 1260        | 240                         | 70                                 | 160      | 110   |
| 55-59       | 1600        | 440                         | 130                                | 200      | 140   |
| 60-64       | 1560        | 620                         | 310                                | 160      | 160   |
| 65-69       | 540         | 640                         | 990                                | 110      | 130   |
| 70-74       | 70          | 410                         | 2020                               | 90       | 130   |
| 75-80       | <10         | 150                         | 1480                               | 40       | 50    |
| Over 80     | <10         | 70                          | 2120                               | 50       | 130   |
| Unknown     | <10         | 60                          | 10                                 | <10      | <10   |
| Total       | 7700        | 2920                        | 7230                               | 1040     | 980   |

**Table 3.****Number of Clergy pensioners in 2019 by diocesan totals from highest to lowest**

| Rank     | Diocese           | Number of clergy pensioners | FTE number of stipendiary clergy | Number of licensed clergy |
|----------|-------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1        | Leeds             | 490                         | 316                              | 473                       |
| 2        | Chichester        | 470                         | 268                              | 391                       |
| 3        | York              | 450                         | 200                              | 280                       |
| 4        | Bath & Wells      | 430                         | 188                              | 264                       |
| 5        | Exeter            | 410                         | 200                              | 295                       |
| 6        | Oxford            | 390                         | 359                              | 585                       |
| 7        | Salisbury         | 380                         | 189                              | 282                       |
| 8 joint  | Lichfield         | 340                         | 249                              | 370                       |
| 8 joint  | Chester           | 340                         | 212                              | 303                       |
| 10       | Norwich           | 320                         | 183                              | 250                       |
| 11       | Southwark         | 280                         | 326                              | 454                       |
| 12 joint | Winchester        | 270                         | 153                              | 221                       |
| 12 joint | Blackburn         | 270                         | 169                              | 217                       |
| 14       | Gloucester        | 260                         | 117                              | 186                       |
| 15 joint | Chelmsford        | 230                         | 308                              | 480                       |
| 15 joint | Canterbury        | 230                         | 124                              | 167                       |
| 17       | Truro             | 210                         | 84                               | 121                       |
| 18 joint | Derby             | 200                         | 134                              | 204                       |
| 18 joint | Sheffield         | 200                         | 136                              | 180                       |
| 18 joint | St Edmudsbr & Ips | 200                         | 115                              | 185                       |
| 18 joint | Newcastle         | 200                         | 108                              | 163                       |
| 22 joint | Portsmouth        | 190                         | 99                               | 143                       |
| 22 joint | Rochester         | 190                         | 196                              | 252                       |
| 24 joint | Leicester         | 180                         | 121                              | 157                       |
| 24 joint | London            | 180                         | 532                              | 718                       |
| 26 joint | Southwell & Nottm | 180                         | 124                              | 157                       |
| 26 joint | Carlisle          | 180                         | 95                               | 134                       |
| 28 joint | Ely               | 170                         | 130                              | 191                       |
| 28 joint | Worcester         | 170                         | 108                              | 138                       |
| 30 joint | Lincoln           | 160                         | 157                              | 243                       |

|                |                  |      |     |     |
|----------------|------------------|------|-----|-----|
| 30 joint       | Manchester       | 160  | 195 | 330 |
| 30 joint       | Durham           | 160  | 138 | 189 |
| 30 joint       | Peterborough     | 150  | 143 | 181 |
| 34 joint       | Birmingham       | 140  | 143 | 178 |
| 34 joint       | Coventry         | 140  | 115 | 171 |
| 34 joint       | St Albans        | 140  | 237 | 306 |
| 34 joint       | Bristol          | 140  | 112 | 190 |
| 38             | Liverpool        | 130  | 179 | 245 |
| 39 joint       | Hereford         | 100  | 89  | 134 |
| 39 joint       | Guildford        | 100  | 177 | 268 |
| 41             | Sodor & Man      | 20   | 21  | 27  |
|                |                  |      |     |     |
| See note below | Europe           | <500 | 95  | 148 |
|                |                  |      |     |     |
|                | Northern Ireland | 30   |     |     |
|                | Scotland         | 180  |     |     |
|                | Wales            | 210  |     |     |
|                |                  |      |     |     |

**Note on the Diocese of Europe:** a total of 500 clergy pensioners live at postcodes outside the UK and Northern Ireland. The data for individual addresses is not available. It is assumed that a significant proportion of the 500 live in the Diocese of Europe but the data available does not provide an exact number.