



From the Chair

Dear Colleagues,

Today, as I write this letter is Lady Day, the Feast of the Annunciation, a gloriously sunny and warm spring day in a week in what has been, hopefully, a foretaste of the summer to come. Both this annual reminder of the love of God to be revealed in human form and the lovely weather have lifted my spirits in what has been a bleak time for us all this year.

Living through crisis

Just as we thought we were over the worst in Covid terms, so there now seems to be another rise in those contracting the disease. The extraordinary events and tragedy of the Russian invasion of Ukraine over this last month have moved us all and we have witnessed a remarkable outpouring of compassion and practical assistance to the thousands of refugees from across the nations of Europe. Would that our government would show similar compassion and concern for all the refugees and asylum seekers from other areas of conflict and unrest in the world. Our faith surely asks of us to recognise the face of Christ in all who need our help, as surely as God saw our human need in reaching out to us in the person of his Son, who died and rose again for all.

Consequences

Another cause for concern is the steep rise in the cost of living. With the expectation of more to come there is genuine concern on the home front for those who will struggle to heat their homes and feed their families, not to mention the really depressing effect this can have on people's mental and physical wellbeing. Some retired clergy may well find themselves in this situation.

At our recent meeting with the Pensions Board we raised this particular concern having just received notification of the increase in our pensions for the next 12 months. The increase is based on statistics of the price and cost of living indices as they were last September, when inflation was much lower than it is now and is forecast to increase over these coming months. Of course, next September's figures will reflect this for 2022/23, but there may well be hardship for some meanwhile. Some extra funds are to be made available to dioceses to support particular cases of need amongst all the clergy and these should include retired clergy where appropriate. Contact with your archdeacon is probably the way to pursue this, if you wish. Also, the Clergy Support Trust may well consider making one-off specific grants to individual situations. May I also remind you of the Pensions Board Member Webinar to be held on 26 April at 10.00am. There will be opportunities to ask questions. Details of how to take part were given on the letter received in February about our pension increase.

The Joy of Music

Speaking personally, I have been taking part in our local Musical (sic) Festival here in Petersfield. It really has been a great uplift to participate in live music once again and I am looking forward to the wonderful music that will be on offer both live in church and broadcast as we approach the Passion and Easter season. I hope you too will find comfort, strength, nourishment and a true vision of peace as we celebrate the promise of new life in Christ that Easter brings.

God bless you all.

+Ian Brackley



From the Editor

Please accept apologies that this newsletter was prepared a little later than usual thanks to absence from home and a return with Covid! The absence was a few days away in the Scottish Highlands. I'd been with a group of friends, three of us retired clergy, working as a volunteer on an elegant 120 year old pleasure steamer on Loch Katrine currently undergoing major restoration.

The experience alongside some interesting full-timers put us volunteers back in the real world among dust and paint scrapings, the heady smell of new varnish, the sparks, noise and dirt of angle grinders and the casual effing and blinding of everyday language in the workplace.

It did us no harm and we had a great time. In a splendidly Anglican way it was also entertaining to see two Canons together for a few moments on the foredeck of the ship, turning her, momentarily, into a kind of notional warship...

As clergy, and maybe particularly as retired clergy, we generally live in a world that offers very different life experiences for those living around us with which we can hardly fully 'empathise'. Our world of words and spirituality, of ideas, books and ethical issues, rarely engenders effing and blinding! Although we may be acutely pastorally aware of other people's needs, our personal values can be completely divorced from the woolly hatted worker whose days are spent in the cold outdoors in grimy overalls, struggling with heavy, greasy, machinery and overcoming demanding physical challenges.

So, the unusual week away spoke to me quite loudly about my own personal engagement with the world as a retired priest, especially since that return home with Covid allowed some days in which to reflect at leisure.

What does the Lord require of us? Well, I guess if it's to do justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with our God it's good to be reminded from time to time just who it is we live alongside and with whom we are called to practise those disciplines within the love of Christ. I'm grateful to the SS 'Sir Walter Scott' for the reminder.

Others of our number will have had similar experiences and it's always good to hear from you about your volunteering or even other non-clerical activities that the privilege of retirement provides time to enjoy: I'm aware that Dr Hazel Whitehead's account of Police Chaplaincy in the last edition was well received. It was full of life!

So, as always, your contributions are welcome. Please try not to exceed 800 words – longer submissions will obviously have to be kept until we're short of material! I have to admit to concern about the baleful weight of negativity that comes over in some submissions but a newsletter exists to share the voices of those who share common interests and they need to be heard. I'm clearly not alone in having a deep love for the Church of England but also sometimes despairing of it!

Having said that I was rather sad to turn away an admirably short and sharply written piece which arrived in the immediate wake of the sudden firing of some 800 P&O Ferries workers in March. The piece imagined just such a scenario within the CofE and was intended to provide a smile around April 1st. However, since so many people, including clergy active and retired, report being victims of autocratic decisions from 'above' it seemed wise not to inflame any raw nerves by including something which seemed worryingly believable! I was grateful for the author's understanding of my editorial decision – but let's not be afraid of humour in these pages.

Please note, as always, that 'opinions expressed within these pages do not necessarily reflect those of the Association or the Editor': we're always happy to edit to fit but opinions expressed are entirely those of the contributors.

Mark Rudall



Former Archdeacon Adrian Harbidge picks up on thoughts in ‘From the Chair’ in our last edition:

Many thanks to Bishop Ian for his New Year Chairman’s message; it rang so many bells with my own recent experience.

Just before the first lockdown I found myself attending two funerals conducted by secular officiants. I have to say they were both done extremely well, carefully focusing on the life and character of each of the departed. I realised that, during the first forty-five minute ceremony and then the two hour ‘event’, they were giving a much more rounded picture of the two very special individuals in a way that I had never achieved (nor attempted to achieve) in forty two years of ministry. I began to worry that I had let down many, many, families.

And then, as Covid restrictions began to lift in the summer of 2020, I attended the funeral of a retired top-ranking diplomat whom we had known for twenty years as a genial and wise friend. Ordinarily such a service would have been at least in the Cathedral but, instead, restricted numbers gathered in his local village church. I was immediately reminded of that phrase ‘before the service begins it has, in a sense, already begun’. The old Norman church had been welcoming people in that village for nine hundred years, giving them a sense of hope and importance in God’s eyes.

The service itself was entirely on the right scale for a village, using prayers and hymns that would have been appropriate for anyone, rich or poor. The eminent preacher pitched his words at just the right level, saying virtually nothing about our friend’s career just touching on his life in the village, family and community; he almost implied that, because he shared our faith (and the faith demonstrated by that old building) it was we who were the ones giving him hope for the future.

With faith in my funeral ministry restored, I found myself feeling really proud of the C of E: yes, it has many faults, but we also get things right.



‘Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground’ (Exodus 3:5). *Gregory Clifton-Smith*

All of us will have certainly have had pastoral encounters that remain in one’s mind long after they have happened and probably will never be forgotten by us. One such encounter for me is what follows, and in sharing it with you, I hope it may stimulate others to share pastoral encounters that have had a deep effect on them.

Most of my ministry has been in healthcare chaplaincy which included working both in hospital and in our local hospice. I always found working in the hospice deeply moving as it was a place of hope which contained a huge gamut of emotions from laughter right through to sadness at the loss of a loved one, caused invariably by living intensely in the present moment. Whenever I entered an in-patient’s room, I had a sense of entering a holy place. I found myself metaphorically ‘taking off my shoes’, as Moses did literally when he encountered God in the burning bush; of emptying myself and of giving my whole attention to the pastoral encounter which followed and to sensing the presence of God in those whom I met there.

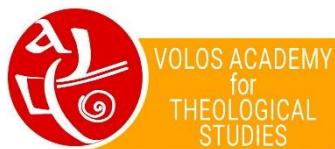
On one such visit I encountered a patient who was himself a Muslim and who had married a Roman Catholic wife. He knew he had not got long to live and was most concerned that a Christian priest should somehow be involved in his burial service. However, the priest could not read anything from the New Testament but could read something from the Old Testament. I’ve always felt that the involvement of a Christian priest somehow is a form of Christian witness.

The next time I visited this particular patient he was unconscious. In the room also were Muslim relatives at the head of the bed, and his wife with her Roman Catholic relatives at the foot of the bed. I made sure that I made myself known to the patient’s wife. The spatial separation of both groups of people spoke very powerfully of the spiritual gap that was fixed between them (rather like the gulf imagined between Dives and Lazarus in the afterlife). Soon after this visit, the patient died.

Because their own priest was unavailable and they'd met me at the patient's bedside, they asked me if I would be involved in the patient's burial service. In talking to his wife subsequently, I suggested that the reading at the burial service might be the biblical account of Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush. It was agreed that this passage ought to form the reading.

When the burial service happened, the very first thing that took place was Muslim men putting down their prayer mats around the grave side and taking off their shoes! I was blown away. The reading that we chose could not be more apt. I went out of my way not to cause any offence to Muslims present and the Muslim Burial celebrant went out of his way not to cause any offence to me or to the Roman Catholic family members present. Imagine my surprise then when after the burial had taken place he said The Lord's Prayer.

Truly God was in that place. The patient who died had indeed caused a bridge to be built albeit temporarily, between our two communities. And God was in our midst.



A Declaration from Orthodox Theologians on 'Russian World' (Russkii Mir) Teaching

Some will be aware of elements of faux theological thinking being disseminated by the Kremlin to justify the invasion of Ukraine which the idea of Russkii Mir proclaims is 'spiritually' integral with Russia.

A comprehensive statement has been produced and signed by a worldwide range of Theologians highlighting how 'Russkii Mir', is an iniquitous false ideology – hardly in any sense a 'theology' – which is effectively putting the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches over against each other. 'Russkii Mir' thinking has been described as a kind of religious blank cheque validating Russian Orthodox Church support of the invasion, as the opening paragraph of the Declaration indicates:



The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, is a historic threat to a people of Orthodox Christian tradition. More troubling still for Orthodox believers, the senior hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church has refused to acknowledge this invasion, issuing instead vague statements about the necessity for peace in light of 'events' and 'hostilities' in Ukraine, while emphasizing the fraternal nature of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples as part

of "Holy Rus", blaming the hostilities on the evil 'West', and even directing their communities to pray in ways that actively encourage hostility.'

The Declaration is lengthy and detailed – too much so for reproduction here, but is available on the web, is important reading, and concerned members are encouraged to take a close look [here](#), or here <https://bit.ly/3KF49nP> or here <https://bit.ly/3KD1HOC> (in English, soon in more languages)

If you wish to sign and support this Declaration, please follow the link <https://forms.gle/uCBo8YVhTupjafoA6> and add your name.



Philip West feels he has landed 'The World's Dream Retirement Job'

For the last six years my standard introduction to anyone I meet is, 'I am Philip. I am a retired Vicar and I have the world's dream retirement job because although I am licensed in retirement to 23 churches, I am not in charge of a single one of them.' At this point a knowing look comes into the eyes of anyone who has ever had any responsibility in life - 'So I can spend my time doing what I feel called to do and love doing.'

I am a Deanery Priest, helping the handful (literally) of my hard-pressed colleagues as assistant curate to the 21 villages and two towns of South Holderness deanery bounded by the Humber to the South, the North Sea to the East and Hull to the West. They were enlightened enough to ask for a House for Duty priest who could major on pioneering new areas of mission and ministry without being burdened by the normal round of ministry. Mainly this involves me saying, 'I did this in Sheffield (where I spent most of my 38 years full time). Would you like me to try it here?'

So I've led the production of an outdoor Passion play and outdoor nativity play we developed in Sheffield, and done some prayer teaching I developed there, and some Bible background courses. I lead a monthly prayer support and meditation groups, I dug out some Holy Week resources including monologues that we put on line during lockdown. I also enjoy leading worship, school assemblies, and occasional offices when required.

But I don't regard any of this as the most important thing I do. When I first retired, my wife and I spent over two years travelling by the fascinating and inexpensive means of housesitting, and during that time, I felt called to learn to share my faith without that great clerical prop: the dog collar. I found it hard at first, and my efforts were stumbling, but I became more determined after a conversation with two young women in which I failed to get the conversation round to faith. Later in the day I pondered on the fact that it might be years before they had another opportunity of hearing of the love of God.

A few weeks after arriving in South Holderness, I had taken a school assembly and midweek communion in a tiny village, and I felt a nudge to head to a nearby beach. Walking on it, I started to pray earnestly that I would become better at one-to-one evangelism. The answer was instant: 'Well go and speak to that man sitting on the rock over there.' I nearly chickened out but dragged myself across the sand.

'Nice day'... 'Lovely, isn't it?' (etc.) Then eventually he told me he had just come from a hospital where he had been told his disease was terminal and he would soon be returning to hospital and maybe never leaving again, so he was unable to walk on the beach with his wife. Time to reveal my calling, I thought, and when he learnt I was a retired Vicar he gladly accepted a prayer and some weeks later rang me to tell me he had come out of hospital. I never heard from him again so I don't know what happened to him. But the Lord does.

Nowadays when I head out for a walk I sometimes ask my wife to meet me with the car at my destination point. She has learnt to expect at least one phone call delaying the rendezvous time, because I will have got talking to so many people. I nowadays nearly always find an opportunity to share my faith, whether I've told them I'm a priest or not, and increasingly find it appropriate to pray for them.

A few weeks ago, as I was leaving a pub, I was drawn to talk to a couple at one of the tables: 'Nice pub'... 'We like it here... 'Great view'... 'Isn't it?' (etc.) They invited me to join them. At some stage I asked about their faith. They had lost it they said, and no longer believed. They had had two sons, both disabled, but to their joy, one of them had got married. Then the final blow: both had died, their deaths not far apart and both in their twenties. I don't remember much of the rest of the conversation, because I mainly just tried to listen while weeping inside for them, but somehow there was a connection, because I found myself confident enough to ask if they would like me to pray for them, which we did, there and then at the pub table, and when I opened my eyes, I could see the light of Jesus shining in their eyes again.

I have found in these experiments of sharing faith and praying with strangers, that there is a lot more faith around than we think. In 2019, in the 11 days of prayer between Ascension and Pentecost, I walked in prayer each day between my 23 churches, starting in the morning at the church I had reached the previous evening. I would walk on my own in prayer, and then meet in church with a few members of the church for prayer when I arrived, and then a few of them would join me walking round the parish in prayer.

Sometimes it had been arranged in advance that I would visit someone who was sick, to pray; or go in a shop, but mostly we turned up 'on spec', or asked people as we walked around, so either on my own or with others I prayed for people in fields, on the streets, in pubs and shops. I would tell people what I was doing and then say, 'Would you like me to pray with you now?' Most people agreed, some with enthusiasm, but the ones I liked best were those who looked doubtful and would say, 'Well, I'm not sure, I don't know whether I believe anything really.' But then they would look at me and their eyes would light up and they would say with confidence: '...but well, why not?'

During those 11 days, I was walking near the village of Easington, where one of the UK's gas terminals is sited taking gas from the North Sea. I was walking on a footpath between the terminal's fence and the cliff edge of the North Sea, and had stopped to talk to a man with his dog who insisted he had no faith and believed nothing. Suddenly an alarm started sounding in this huge facility which stores thousands of cubic meters of compressed gas and a loudspeaker announcement started evacuating workers from the site. Being in prayer mode I immediately raised my hand to the terminal and prayed something like, 'Lord please keep all the workers safe,' and I turned to the man and said, "There you are, they'll be all right, now," to which this man who believed nothing replied in some panic, 'Yeah, but what about us?!"

Living in the North, I used to be drawn to the great St.Cuthbert, but nowadays Aidan has become my favourite saint. He refused to ride, but always walked so that he could be on a level with all people and be ready to witness to them. He asked everyone he met if they were a Christian. If they said 'Yes' he would pray with them and encourage them. If 'No', he would ask, "Why not?" If my stumbling efforts could be a millionth as good as his, I would be content.



Geoffrey Johnson, researching the role of retired clergy in the contemporary Church, is seeking our help and insights as he asks: Are we gloriously out-of-date or potentially prophetic?

Two wonderful matrons stay in my thoughts from my almost fifty years in ministry. In my curacy I made weekly visits to the local cottage hospital. At Christmas and Easter, I was invited to the 'Matron's Parlour' - not too many of those remain - for refreshments and theological discussion.

The second was a ninety-year-old patient whom I visited on a ward; she was formerly matron in our hospital. She expressed outrage when the 'Director of Nursing' phoned the ward - to warn the staff of her intended arrival. 'That wouldn't have happened in my day' she fumed. 'I no longer recognise the way things are done in hospitals' was her lament. Perhaps some of us would share these or comparable sentiments, in relation to the Institutional Church!

In fact, I retired twice. On the first occasion, retirement from my role as a whole-time NHS hospital chaplain, was necessitated by ill-health. Ten years later, I retired finally from a subsequent part-time chaplaincy role. I experienced sensitivity and kindness on both occasions and those fifty years in the ordained ministry of the Church of England, divided equally between parochial and hospital chaplaincy appointments, concluded on a high note with well-wishes on all sides. You can well image my sense of sadness therefore, on hearing or reading about those in a Church setting whose retirement experience fails to match my own, in what was essentially a 'secular' one.

A small, but in all likelihood, representative body of church-located 'narratives of retirement' are honestly recorded in *'A New Lease of Life? Anglican Clergy Reflect on Retirement'*, edited by Tony Neal & Leslie Francis. More than a dozen retired clergy share their stories, each of which provides honest insights into hurt caused during this process. However, without exception, each narrative offers ample evidence of the resilience and courage of each retiree in times of adversity and their admirable imagination in facing the future. At the same time it hints at the experience and wisdom that is lost to ministry in the Church and the query in the title highlights that not all clergy who have retired from years of active service in the Church of England enjoy a 'new lease of life'.

While the contributors to the book, raise crucial questions around the whole process of retirement from Church duties, questions that suggest a significant overhaul may be required. Neal & Francis also draw attention to deeper issues provoked by retirement. Among these are existential questions such as 'Who am I? What matters to me?'

What can I hope for? Alongside these personal concerns, perhaps making these stories of even wider importance, is a simple statistical fact: In its own way an historic ‘turning point’ has been reached as there are now more retired clergy in active, part-time ministry, than there are full-time stipendiary clergy.

The facts and figures are spelled out in a research report carried out by Julian Hubbard for the RCA - ‘*Retired Clergy in the Church of England*’. From Hubbard’s report and the Neal & Francis book, along with a growing body of further research, it is becoming ever clearer that the Institutional Church is facing searching questions. Hopefully with the assistance of RCA members and other retired clergy, and with encouragement from both the Retired Clergy Association (RCA) and the Rural Theology Association (RTA), I shall be addressing just some of the questions being raised in this present ‘turning-point’ moment. Included are the following:

1. ‘Freedom to voice a more radical theology’ was a benefit identified by one retiree and hinted at by others in the Neal & Francis book. Does this comment resonate with your experience? Could institutional disapproval or a wish not to disturb congregations explain a limit to a sense of freedom of expression in ministry? Which issues would you have liked to have air but chose to avoid?
2. Do you feel you can still make a valuable contribution to the Institutional Church in its present guise? Do you experience the Church as willing and able to draw on your experience and skills? If not, what would it take to facilitate this possibility?
3. Statistics indicate that 30% of retiring clergy do not apply for a PTO - so are they doing the Church a service by choosing that option and is there evidence which suggests this is reasoned and reasonable view? Could the 70% who continue to exercise a ministry be merely allowing the Institution to ignore or put off much needed reform?

I will be delighted to hear from colleagues on these or related questions. Please contact me at g.johnson479@btinternet.com. At some future date I shall be interested in having Zoom conversations – but that will come a little later.



Paul Skirrow shares concerns about bullying in the Church of England and asks: ‘is it personal or institutional?’

Definition of bullying: *The abuse and mistreatment of someone vulnerable by someone stronger, more powerful, etc.. It is prone to or characterized by overbearing mistreatment and domination of others.*

The clergy of the Church of England, if asked directly, would probably be able to identify instances of personal bullying by the hierarchy, either of themselves or of others. Most however, would accept that this is not too common. However, it would seem that the identifiable mechanisms for direct one-on-one bullying have been embedded as part of the structures and systems of the Church. In that way they do not need to be personalised in any hierarchical figure as they become the normal practice of the management of the institution.

Also, while resenting this ever-encroaching managerialism, we find it hard to resist it, and to identify it in a way which reveals it for what it is. The hierarchy are engaged in bullying even without their activity being identified as such by them or others. Finally, when clergy suffer from bullying in this embedded form, it is difficult to pinpoint and identify a practice which is diffuse and permeates a whole system, and it is the nature of such a system that it is far from easy or safe for an individual to make a stand when isolated.

Below are some examples of the way bullying has become embedded, and is, in fragmented and generalised ways, experienced by most clergy.

- The removal of freehold. This paved the way for creating weaker and less protected clergy, making them easier targets. Employment rights were undercut severely through this process. The checks and balances built into the system were removed and a poor substitute, from the point of view of the clergy, was introduced: Common Tenure.

- The Clergy Discipline Measure is a fine example of what happens when the protection of freehold renders clergy vulnerable. Its destructive weaknesses have been identified but whether the Church has the will or the way to redeem the situation remains to be seen. The practice of being suspended and cut off from support and the exercise of one's vocation, is a definition of being guilty until being proved innocent. The process feels like being bullied by clergy who have had to go through it, and it hangs, like Cicero's sword of Damocles, over the heads of all priests going about their parish duties.
- The constant demand for responses to questionnaires from the 'centre', over and above what used to be the usual documents, seem like a deliberate 'checking up' process to make sure the clergy are doing what they should. This is demeaning.
- The proliferation of initiatives cascading from the 'centre' remind clergy that they are not really doing all they could to fulfil their vocation, and their practice of ministry needs remodelling. Belittling the vulnerable, persistently reminding them of their inadequacies, is an act of bullying.
- The devising of Diocesan strategies and plans into which parishes are expected to fit has the same effect, and reminds clergy that their traditional and faithful activities are inadequate. There's a comic/tragic exercise watching clergy persuade their PCCs to produce a mission statement that fits in with the latest alliterative straplines from the Diocese and its elaborately illustrated and verbose Mission Plan. Again, the message is to do it the Diocesan way, not the way of your parish and people. This undermines those in weaker positions.
- The constant money pressure through Parish Share could be described whimsically as stealing the parishes' dinner money, which is an old, traditional and established form of bullying. That aside, clergy are often made to feel as failures when they can't 'up the giving' to fund the extra staff, initiatives, and programmes of the Dioceses.
- The pressure to put bums on pews reflects a contempt for low numbers. Two or three gathered together represents a failure by the clergy. The message of failing is persistent and insidious. (See: *Attitudes to, and funding for, rural parish ministry* – Church Times Letters 11th February 2022.) Numerical growth is the key to 'success' and the only indicator of 'success'. There are instances of Church House seizing on apparent growth from the statistics and asking to learn how the church managed it. Demographic changes such as immigration from predominantly Anglican countries, or two or three Christian families moving in do not count as 'techniques'. Neither does proper pastoral care, or good funeral practices.
- The emphasis on the demography of the church is a criticism about the failure of clergy to fill the pews with younger people. However, when has the dominant age group been under 30? And for how many decades has the church been singing the same song about bringing in young people, without effect? That history doesn't matter when it comes to bullying today's clergy. Ironically, those who 'failed' in the past are now in a position to criticise those who 'fail' in the same ways now. Younger people have other things to do – visiting family, caring for elderly relatives, or taking the only opportunity for leisure together. Make sure they know we are there if they need us.
- The pressure to reinvent liturgy, to make it more 'relevant', 'attractive', or even inane, undermines clergy who are competent in doing what they have been doing well for years. Parish priests know as a rule what feeds their people and sustains them in Christian hope, if they listen attentively. Yet it would seem, according to the deluge of ideas from the 'centre', that they don't.
- Persistent pastoral reorganisation, or the threat of it, disturbs, threatens and worries clergy who have no way to resist, especially those without Freehold. It creates and sustains anxiety, increasing vulnerability and the desire to comply with the demands of the bullies. Some rural Parishes seem to be reorganised in their groups almost annually or every time someone locally moves on. One rural churchwarden told me recently, 'I'm not sure what there is to reorganise. We are down to one service monthly usually taken by a Lay Reader. There are 12 churches and one half-time priest.' The pressure to take on more is hard to resist because a refusal means that 'even that which you have will be taken away'. (A standard line of one Northern Archdeacon.)
- The constant widening and increasing of responsibilities takes away the focus of clergy on the essentials of ministry. The administration, the returns, the courses, meetings, the three-line whips to attend episcopally organised events. The essential Calling is reduced to the side-lines.
- Appraisals and Reviews often insult clergy in their approach to questioning their work, competence, and faithfulness. Done in the name of support they have been experienced as quite the opposite.

- There are increasingly rigid frameworks of safeguarding, health and safety, etc. which constrict initiative, have resulted in injustices to victims and alleged perpetrators, and create fear of sensitive practices and pastoral action.
- The recently stated aim to have lay-led churches is saying to priests, 'Your calling is outdated and not needed. It doesn't work'. It completely misses the point that the vocations of the laity are in their families, communities and workplaces. The church's role is to serve them and think with them theologically about that task. They are not to be co-opted as free labour to sustain an institution for the sake of its hierarchy.

All the above, in effect, outlines institutionalised bullying. It suggests that we have developed management practices designed to manipulate a weakened clergy in order to force them to do what the hierarchy wants through the structures the hierarchy controls. It is the practice of the powerful dominating weaker and more vulnerable people.

What is to be done? Many clergy quite rightly sit lightly to the above where they can, dismissing it out of frustration. This is still possible for those who have managed to hold on to their freehold. For others I would argue that a quiet resistance is required. A collective stance which allows such bullying to pass by or wither in the in-box. Alongside that, listen to our people and reassert the fact that those we serve have a different view and we are necessarily heeding their needs. Treat intrusive questions in questionnaires and assessments with quiet dignity, while indicating their irrelevance to your situation; a simple "N/A" works well. Use appraisals creatively to rediscover the excitement and hope of your vocation rather than follow a hierarchical agenda.

For the hierarchy: stop undermining your clergy in the name of 'Ministerial Support'. Have a moratorium on initiatives. Visit and affirm small churches without judging; just enjoy them. There are some wonderful clergy and people out there. Do more theology (or even *some* theology) on ministry, priesthood and the place of ordinary lay people in the world. Meet one-to-one with the clergy and listen, don't try and 'lead'. Reconsider the size and financial burden of the large bureaucracies now deemed essential to manage the church.

Much is spoken of bullying and the Church of England has policies and training programmes about how to deal with it. The church knows there is a problem and seeks to prevent it from becoming a greater problem at one level. That is good. However, essential though the prevention of direct one-on-one bullying is, we need to see how we have integrated bullying into the culture and management of the church over the past two or more decades. If the analysis above has some basis in fact then we need to rethink. We seek to serve God and God's people. We will never manage that with systems that allow the motives and practices of the powerful to dominate the servants. That's the way of the world and not the way of God and the Kingdom.



Bruce Carlin's PtO has been caught in a distressing administrative trap...

By the time you are reading this I will no longer have Permission to Officiate: Why? Because my safeguarding training is not up to date.

Now, I am fully aware of the importance of safeguarding, always implemented it in my parishes before retirement, and have kept up to date with it since. Until now. I had been told I needed to update my safeguarding training and had immediately booked a reasonable half day course in May 2020, but then Covid came along and of course it was cancelled.

Then sometime last year I was invited once again to do a safeguarding course, but this time it would be delivered virtually using Zoom, and what had been a reasonable half day course was now two full days on Zoom with work to do in between. Now I don't find Zoom at all a helpful platform on which to take part in something like this, and so I declined, saying I would be happy to do the training when the Diocese returned to delivering it in person. But it did also seem a somewhat disproportionate level of training for someone with no responsibility for parish policy and who merely offered a limited amount of worship cover.

I then read in this newsletter that a lighter training module was being approved for such as ourselves and asked the Diocese whether they were offering this. They said that they would in due course but were not yet doing so, so again I indicated my willingness to attend such training once it was available.

In the meantime, the entire Diocese's PTOs were about to need renewing (being a recently created Diocese, all PTOs were issued afresh at the same time, causing a logistical headache that will endure for years to come) and that these would only be renewed if our safeguarding training was up to date by the end of March this year. But as this new training has not been rolled out it is impossible to be up to date unless we are prepared to accept the onerous level of training mentioned above, which, despite lockdowns being long past, is still only being offered virtually.

Our Bishop is fond of pointing out (to me at least) that PTO is not a right, but rather something that is entirely in his control, that he can grant or withhold as he sees fit. In turn I have pointed out that I do not need PTO for personal status, nor for financial reasons (I have never accepted a fee for a Sunday Service, nor have I conducted any Occasional Offices), but rather to help clergy in impossible situations with unsustainable patterns of worship, along with others who have broken under this strain and need time off for ill health, or to cover parishes in vacancy that the diocese hasn't the money to staff.

So, I find myself in this almost Kafkaesque situation where I cannot have my PTO renewed until I have updated my safeguarding training, and I cannot update my safeguarding training because the diocese is not offering this at an appropriate level.

I have largely lost touch with the church during the pandemic anyway, and it may well be that by the time this situation is resolved I will feel so far out of things that I just simply don't bother. Not only will the Diocese lose one more active retired clergy person, but with no ministry to exercise I might be tempted to take the logical next step and resign my Orders altogether, leaving me free to supplement my pension and help pay my ever-rising gas bills by acting as a freelance celebrant.



Two brief Book Reviews from our Chair

Going to Church in Medieval England Nicholas Orme *Published by Yale University Press £20.00*

This is a marvellous book by the Emeritus Professor of History at Exeter University, sumptuously produced with many wonderful pictures and illustrations, bibliography and helpful notes of sources and references. It is both scholarly, entertaining and a delight to read and very good value for the price of this 480pp hardback. We are conducted through the origins of the parish system, how churches were staffed, the various social layers of the congregation, how the church seasons were observed and how the cycle of birth, marriage and death was treated. It is surprising to learn how so many of our customs and habits in church life have their origin in times before the Reformation (e.g. the throwing of soil into the grave at a burial). We also learn what changed over that time. I enjoyed the read and learned a great deal.

The Making of the Bible – from first fragments to sacred scripture Konrad Schmid & Jens Schröter *Published by Belknap/Harvard £28.95*

Having recently read John Barton's magisterial *A History of the Bible* I wondered whether this book from two eminent German scholars would cover the same ground. Well yes and no. Barton's book tells the story of the Bible, explaining how it came to be constructed and how it has been understood, from its remote beginnings down to the present. Schmid (Old Testament) and Schröter (New Testament) give us an erudite history of how the Bible came to be, covering the background context, the oral tradition, the ancient manuscripts, canon formation and the books that were left out.

We come to see how the Jewish Bible, Talmud and Mishnah evolved and how these influenced early Jewish Christian writing and thought. We learn how biblical story, culture and tradition have influenced our world and Christian inheritance. There are plenty of Notes, but these are not intrusive and a vast bibliography for those who might wish

to follow up the many points discussed. It is really worth the effort in case you were wondering if it were too 'heavy' a read. And, yes, it is in English!

Ian Brackley



INTERNATIONAL ECUMENICAL FELLOWSHIP



The International Ecumenical Fellowship (IEF) is to hold its 46th International Conference from 25th July to 1st August at Hope University in Liverpool on the theme of 'I will heal my people (Jer.33:6) - Together in hope, prayer and action for a renewed world'.

The Conference will focus on the idea of Encounter and will include visits to many exciting venues where we will witness projects of hope and social justice being undertaken by local churches and other groups working together in this exciting and vibrant city. It will reflect the progress made in recent years between members of many different churches in Liverpool and will be a real opportunity to see and experience hope, faith and collaborative work in action. The Conference will also provide the truly enriching experience of meeting with fellow Christians from many different countries across Europe and beyond.

IEF was founded in 1967 by ecumenically concerned Christians from across Europe. It now has a presence in many countries, with both lay and ordained members and people from every denomination and none.

For further information, please see our website <http://briefoecumenica.uk/> or send an email to iefliverpool22@gmail.com for further information on the Conference, including how to register and the price.

The closing date for registrations is Saturday 30th April (although late applications will be considered).



Clergy Support Trust Festival

You are invited to attend this event, the Festival is in its 367th year and will be held on May 24 at 5pm at St Paul's Cathedral, London. As well as being a highlight of the Church and City calendars, the service is a unique celebration of clergy. After two years without an in-person service, this year will be particularly special, bringing together the cathedral choirs of Liverpool, Southwark and St Paul's under the dome; and we are thrilled that the Dean of St Paul's, The Very Reverend Dr David Ison, will preach. As well as the opportunity to learn more about Clergy Support Trust, and the ways in which it continues to support clergy, the Festival also offers a special moment to pause and give thanks. The Festival is of course free of charge, but that tickets need to be booked via our website, at <https://www.clergysupport.org.uk/festival-2022>

Disciple Making Movements in the UK: *Ian Benson writes...*

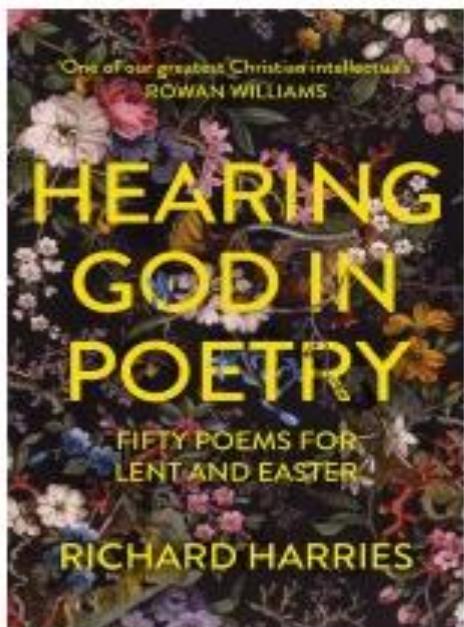
Worldwide, the only places where the growth of the Church is outstripping the growth of the population is where there are Disciple Making Movements. By God's grace there are 70 million people who have come to Christ through these movements in the last twenty years. Ian Benson, who worked formerly with the South American Missionary Society in Chile, is coordinating a network of those pursuing this type of work across the United Kingdom. This is with the 24:14 movement (www.2414now.net). Some of the methods are similar to Fresh Expressions. Please contact Ian if you would like more information and to participate in this work.

2414 UK Coordinator www.2414now.net – disciple-making movements for everyone by 2025

E-mail: i@evang.org | Tel. 01935 83562 WhatsApp: +44 7479 283759

SPCK have advised us of the publication of 'Hearing God in Poetry' by *Richard Harries*, former Bishop of Oxford.

We regret that notification in this newsletter is a little late for Lent and Easter 2022, but this attractive book of 50 poems for the season highlights how some of the best-loved poems in the English language communicate a sense of God' presence.



ISBN 978 0 281 08629 0

£9.99 | Paperback

Publishing 18 November 2021

From Maya Angelou and W. H. Auden to Phyllis Wheatley and Walt Whitman, *Hearing God in Poetry* invites you to take a closer look at fifty great poems by some of the finest poets in the English language. Some are well known, some deserve to be better known, but all say something distinctive that will lift your spirit.

This beautiful Lent book for 2022 offers six poems for every week from Ash Wednesday, leading up to Holy Week, with ten poems specially chosen for Easter. A short reflection from Richard Harries accompanies each poet and the poem, drawing out their spiritual insights and how they communicate God's presence.

Hearing God in Poetry is an ideal Lent book for poetry lovers and anyone interested in how some of the world's finest poets have expressed faith in their work. Its daily readings will introduce you to some wonderful poetry for Lent and Easter, and give you a deeper understanding and appreciation of these brilliant works of literature. It will also help expand your spirituality to see God's presence in the world around you as you prepare for Easter.

Full of riches, *Hearing God in Poetry* is a book that you will want to turn to time and time again – whether during Lent or in any other season of the year.



Did you know that the value of your church pension has declined and could continue to decline?

The February General Synod received a report on the latest remuneration review, in the summary of the report Bishop Richard Jackson noted that the value of all clergy remuneration has been declining in real terms over the last 20 years. Despite this the overall judgement of the Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee was that the package was still adequate: if it is adequate now, was it more than adequate 20 years ago? Yet from the survey of clergy that was carried out as part of the review 62% of respondents reported to be living comfortably or doing all right, 13% were finding it quite or very difficult to manage and 25% were just getting by. So, 38% of current clergy are either finding it quite or very difficult to manage or are just getting by.

When we look at clergy pensions it is clear that any annual increase depends on the level of RPI, if the level of RPI is low in September of the preceding year the increase in April of the following year will either be that level of RPI or 5% whichever is the lower. Therefore, in a year such as 2022 with a cost of living crisis and inflation forecast to rise to at least 8% in September, the highest increase to be awarded this September for the following year in the CEPMS and CEFPS Pensions schemes is 5%, and 3.5% in the CEFPS 3.5% Pensions Scheme. As a result our pensions will lose value by at least 3% the following April because of the way that the pension scheme is constructed, it is not fit for a period of high inflation.

There has been, between 2009 and 2019, a fall in stipend value against RPI of 10%, 6% against CPI, and this fall in value is reflected in pensions too. There needs to be a change of the scheme rules to restore the value of clergy pensions, unless there is a plan to reduce pensions by stealth, and it needs to be carried out soon rather than left for lengthy deliberation with action in 10 years time.

A question was asked at the same synod by Revd. Dr. Patrick Richmond (Norwich) of the Church Commissioners:

“Q111 Given the actuarial assessment on p45-6 of the Church Commissioners’ last annual report of 2020, that £1.6 billion of their £9.2 bn assets would be sufficient to cover all current and future contributions for which they are liable, what would be the cost of restoring the clergy pension to the level prior to the adjustment made at the time of the Government’s introduction of SERPS?”

Alan Smith replied as First Church Estates Commissioner:

“ Clergy pensions for pre-1998 service are met by the Commissioners. Post-1998 service obligations fall to the Responsible Bodies in the scheme. The Government introduced SERPS in 1978 and replaced it with the State Second Pension (S2P) in 2002. S2P was replaced by the higher rate State Pension in 2016. Clergy pensions were contracted into S2P in 2011 as a cost-effective way to provide additional benefits. At the same time, the full clergy pension accrual was reduced from 2/3 to 1/2 of stipend. We assume the question relates to this latter change.

Actuarial advice would be required to assess the cost of reverting to the pre-2011 benefit levels for future service. A rough estimate would be a 1/3 increase in pension contribution rates, i.e. an annual cost to the Responsible Bodies of over £25m.”

What Allan Smith is alluding to is a reduction of the value of the pension by what could appear to be a sleight of hand. When S2P was introduced, it was believed that this would offer additional pension to retired clergy, so that the Church’s own pension scheme could be reduced. The clergy pension was reduced from 2/3 of stipend to 1/2 of stipend, and at the same time the number of years needed to contribute to the full pension was increased from 38 to 43 years. If you do the sum then the value of the pension has been cut by a third, hence Allan Smith said it would need a 1/3 increase. At the time, the claim was made that this change would not affect clergy, since the loss would be made up by S2P.

But when the Church dropped being contracted-in to S2P that gain was lost and nothing was done to restore the value of the pension. “We cannot afford it” was the argument. But at the same synod the following question was asked “What is the current total of known diocesan reserves, and what is the likely or estimated value of total parochial reserves across the Church of England?”

Dr. John Spence answered on behalf of the Presidents of the Archbishops’ Council: “According to Diocesan Boards of Finances’ financial statements, at the end of 2019 the total of unrestricted funds held by dioceses was £798m, £184m of which was held in cash. Since then diocesan reserves have been adversely impacted by the pandemic, although deficits have been mitigated to some extent by sustainability fund grants totalling £24m across 2020 and 2021 combined.

According to data compiled for Parish Finance Statistics 2020 which will soon be made available on the Church of England website, at the end of 2020 the estimated aggregate of parishes’ restricted and unrestricted reserves were £1,545m, of which £824 was held in cash and £721m in investments.”

The other large holder of assets is the Church Commissioners, whose assets have doubled over the last 20 years to £9.2bn and saw growth in 2020 of £868m. The £25m that would be needed on increased contributions each year to restore the clergy pensions amounts to 2.9% of their *annual growth* in assets. If the Commissioners took on this additional contribution for the next 20 years, then the total cost would be no more than 5% of their total asset base. It is hard therefore to sustain the argument “we cannot afford it”.

Given the situation of 38% of clergy, given the historic unilateral reduction of the pension by one third, given the current cost of living crisis which will lead many of the retired clergy into fuel poverty, why cannot these historical wrongs be righted and the 5% limit per year on pensions rises be raised. Or can the Commissioners and Pensions

Board jointly come up with a temporary solution to carry us through this period of raging inflation? Or is the Clergy Support Trust supposed to pick up the tab? Maybe after reading this you might get in touch with your General Synod members, and or the Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee at Church House; if you do could you please keep us apprised of any responses. **Malcolm Liles**



A suggestion from David Woodhouse for Holy Week - <https://youtu.be/UikrGB96g9A>

I found this very moving version of Bach's St Matthew Passion presented as an Opera by a Ukrainian Orchestra and Chorus prophetically on 24 January 2022 exactly one month before the Russian invasion on 24 February. There are English subtitles.

The direction and choreography are superb making a greater impact than any film representation I have seen. The deep voices add an extra dimension making it so poignant in the context of their country's betrayal by Russia. I think this could be one of the most powerful tools for evangelism at this time as Holy Week approaches. It is almost a requiem for Ukraine. It makes me wonder where they all are today?



Questions raised and answered at our March meeting with the National Church Institutions

Three members of our national council meet twice a year with representatives from the Ministry Division, Safeguarding, and Pensions Board about matters of concern to our members. The following is the paper of questions and answers at the most recent meeting. If you have questions you would like us to put forward please send them to our Secretary, Malcolm Liles

Ministry Div.

1. We are aware from correspondence that the rate of giving up PTO seems to be increasing, possibly as a result of changes in safeguarding requirements, working agreements (some feel they are being treated as curates rather than occasionally "helping out") and in some areas of the country being asked to fill-in for sickness or vacancies far too often. Can the Statistics Dept. initiate a survey to provide a better picture of what is going on?

Patrick Shorrock - Unlikely to have resources to do this: PTO policy and Guidance has been issued to dioceses – the centre cannot police the application. There seems to be a difference in experience whether the retired priest is in a rural or urban area – suspect greater use in rural dioceses. In some dioceses the retired have not been involved in completing working agreements. The problem is obtaining clarity of reporting, people should be ready to say no. Maybe Archdeacons' articles of enquiry could obtain results on this or could the RCOs tell us.

Kevin Norris – spoke about the cost of living crisis which is being borne in mind for 2022/23. There will be a one-off allocation to dioceses for targeted relief for stipendiary clergy. This will be a light touch process and subject to decisions to be made in next few months.

Chris Goldsmith – we are on the threshold of reorganisation of NCIs. Ministry and Clergy HR and Leadership Development are to be the Ministry Development Team in April. The process of change will be disruptive, the goal is to deliver cost savings and be more joined up.

2. From our subscriptions analysis for the last 7 years it is evident that fewer dioceses are now offering to pay the life membership fee for the RCACoE. **19** dioceses have not paid for some years, do people not retire in them? This is not helpful to us or the retiree because it leaves us unable to relate newly retired clergy to their retirement diocese. It is also clear that from the number of retiring clergy who tell us they had not heard of us

that we are not being mentioned at retirement courses or that these courses themselves are not being offered. My own experience of retirement was that there was no exit interview by an Archdeacon or letter from the Bishop – the only contact was a fellow member of the Parsonages Committee who wanted to know when we would be leaving and would we be leaving our white-goods in the rectory for the next occupant. Without exit interviews how can an adequate parish profile be constructed when the main input is solely from the PCC – the result of this may be that the next incumbent discovers the parish is not what was described in the profile. How can we help create a better system?

This is a complex issue – retirement officers are not being kept in touch. GDPR still an issue. Problem revolves around the status, or lack of it, of RCOs in Diocesan structures. Can RCACoE do something about this?

3. What has happened to CDM reform,? Members are still finding that investigations are taking many months, if not years to complete.

A group is reporting to the House of Bishops shortly with a view to GS in July for approval, thence draft measure which will take at least 18 months before comes into effect.

Safeguarding

- 4.What has happened regarding the decision by General Synod last year to set up an independent Safeguarding Board, the proposed Board is not independent of the Church?

The ISB is independent of the Church, has 3 members, former Childrens Commissioner survivor advocate, former Save the Children Director.

- 5.Members have reported differing levels of quality in safeguarding training between dioceses, is there an accreditation scheme for trainers. Also there is often rapid turnover of diocesan safeguarding staff leading to a possible lack of organisational memory. Can anything be done about these matters?

There is a system of accreditation. The training of trainers is done in a way to ensure consistency of training quality. There is fidelity to the pathways.

Pensions Board:

- 6.It would be helpful for Retired Clergy Officers if there could be a box retirees might tick allowing the PB to notify the RCO of the retirement diocese of their names and contact details. Why can this not be done? Those who join RCACoE tick such a GDPR box but we only recruit some 30% of retirees.

Not willing to answer on the hoof but willing to give it some thought, reluctant to increase workload.

- 7.Members are expressing their concern about the approaching cost of living crisis, and especially rising energy prices. Those retiring now were ordained into a church which promised them two-thirds of national minimum stipend on retirement. Since then changes have been made in the scheme to effectively diminish the pension by about one third and lengthen the period of time to qualify for a full pension (SP2 was supposed to improve pension prospects for clergy but then the Church withdrew from the scheme). They note again that the percentage increase in pensions from is less than the expected inflation figure for April. We believe that between them the PB and CC have sufficient investment capital to enable a special uplift either this or next year in pensions to enable the recipients to face the inflation of the next, at least, two years with some degree of confidence. Increases of 5% or less are not acceptable when inflation is around 7% or more, if nothing is done we foresee many more applications to the CST for help. The scheme has been changed during the last 20 years to the disbenefit of the recipients and needs to be rewritten with fairness in mind. After all, the recent remuneration review revealed that 38% of clergy were finding difficulty or just getting by on stipend or pension whilst the satisfied majority will have included those in senior roles or have two incomes for the household. *Changes would require to be made in policy and rules through RACS and Synodical*

approval. (This question came up at the end and the answer may not have really addressed the question about the fairness of 5% caps when inflation is substantially more)

8.Those living in CHARM properties are asking whether the Pensions Board has plans to upgrade the EPC ratings of their properties in the near future, or will it in future be disposing of those properties when current tenancies end?

This is currently being investigated but will not involve small sums of money. Currently being considered amongst works at the time of letting or boiler replacement.

9.We understand that PB are setting up a residents panel, how will it be constructed and with what terms of reference? Can we help with recruitment for this?

This is seen as another forum for housing customers, it was announced in the December newsletter and consists now of 16 members with a range of experiences. We will see how it goes over the next few months. Also to help develop a strategic view of the service during the next few years.

10.When gas boilers can no longer be purchased what means of heating will be provided in CHARM rented properties?

Gas boilers are still being fitted, heat pumps not being considered at present.

11.Some members have expressed concern that the PB is still invested in fossil fuel companies under the pathway to transition initiative, given that Shell are now intending to spend increased sums on gas and oil exploration at a faster rate than their investment in renewables and energy efficiency how can the continuing investment be justified? Especially so since it is not clear how they understand responsibility for part 3 emissions from their products. Many dioceses and other churches have divested, were they wrong?

The July 2018 synod committed the NCIs to Climate Action 100plus and the setting up of Transition Pathway Initiative to invest in those companies demonstrating commitment to 1.5 degrees goal by 2023, to encourage oil or gas companies to set out on an alignment path. The demand side of the fossil fuel industry needs attention.

12.Do Board members declare an interest and not vote or speak if they are receiving pension or share benefits from fossil fuel companies the Board is discussing investment in such concerns?

They do declare when interests are concerned and do not vote on such matters.



Do you have something to say? Maybe a response to something you've read in this newsletter or encountered elsewhere? Perhaps something you think might encourage your retired colleagues? Write it up – in not more than about 6-800 words ideally - or contact the Editor:

The Revd Mark Rudall: markrudall@gmail.com or by post, 108 Prospect Road, Farnborough, Hants, GU14 8NS
Tel: 01252 645486