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Summer Newsletter July 2022

From the Chair



Dear Friends,

How welcome are these sunny days of summer after what we have been through over these last months! It's a real joy to be able to have the occasional meal outside in the garden and to savour these long light evenings. Another reminder of summer (besides Wimbledon, Test matches, Henley, Ascot ...) is that the Petertide Ordinations that have just taken place.

As I prepare to celebrate fifty years of priestly ministry this September I am conscious of how different things are now for the Church and clergy from when I was Ordained. Well, of course they are, because things move on and we believe the Spirit of God continues to guide and inspire his people, even if some of us find it difficult sometimes to adapt or accept changes. But I am always aware of the Israelites moaning nostalgically in the wilderness about how they wished they were still in Egypt as slaves and thinking of the food they enjoyed there. And remember Lot's wife!

Yes, our newly Ordained, most of them older than the 23 year old I was at Ordination, certainly face a challenge now in straitened times for the churches and in terms of the resources available. But they bring in their mature years much valuable and realistic experience and welcome gifts to their ministry. God is good and gracious and goes with us on our journey through good days and bad. We retired clergy can be a resource of wisdom, skills, learning and prayerful support for them as we continue to offer our time and willingness to serve.

Your next Chair of RCACoE

When I succeeded David Jennings as Chair in 2017 no one could have imagined how extraordinary three of those years would be because of the pandemic that still continues in variable waves and has put paid to so much activity and the possibility of meeting together.

The holding of AGMs on Zoom, and other such meetings, has been immensely helpful but I cannot feel it is quite the same as actually meeting and worshipping together and enjoying each other's company. Nonetheless it is time now to hand on the baton to a new Chair.

I was delighted to learn that our President, Bishop Andrew Watson, has appointed Bishop Colin Fletcher to succeed me in the autumn. Our AGMs this year will be a point of transition and handing over. Colin has had experience teaching in a theological college, in parish ministry, as Abp. George Carey's Chaplain and in 2000 was made the Bishop of Dorchester in

Oxford Diocese, during which time he has also been the Acting Diocesan during vacancy-in-see. He retired a couple of years ago so is still 'nearer the engine room' than me! I know you will want to support him with your prayers and respond to his encouraging leadership. He has written to introduce himself elsewhere in the Newsletter.

A final thought

At the moment I am enjoying reading Jeremy Morris's recently published book '*A People's Church – A History of the Church of England*'. It traces the path of the Church of England from its pre-Reformation days through the turbulent times of Tudor and Stuart monarchs and in 400 pages brings us through the 18th, 19th and 20th century and into the present.

It's a sobering read and certainly challenges common assumptions about 'Anglicanism and the Middle Way'. Yet Morris remains hopeful for the C of E. In a postscript he poses several questions amongst which is this: '*Is there a case...for a Church that values its historic heritage but also tries to adapt constructively to new contexts and situations, that resists the easy temptation of a powerful centralised polity, and that encourages local debate, but above all in its actual, local life bears witness to the truth of the Gospel? If the answer is yes ... there remains a clear vocation for the Church of England.*'

So that brings me back to where I started with the Ordinations. Whether active, retired active or fully retired, we all still retain our vocation, our response to God's call to be his people, to serve the Gospel and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

God bless you all for what you have already done and in what you continue to do for the Kingdom.

+ Ian



In September, a new Chairperson picks up the reins: the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher, formerly Bishop of Dorchester. He introduces himself:

Dear Colleagues,

As for all of you, retirement, for me, is proving to be a period of major transition. Diary commitments have shrunk; builders have to be negotiated; free, flexible weekends have become part of life for the first time in almost five decades with all that that means for being able to see more of my wife, children and grandchildren - Life has changed, and much of it is beneficial.

Having said that there have been times when I've also been deeply aware of the downsides of stepping out of my former role. I've missed the contact with people, made even sharper by the restrictions of Covid, and the ability I used to have to bring people together, both in the churches and the wider community, to make a real difference in their locality.

Some commitments I kept on after retiring, particularly chairing BRF's trustees in its Centenary Year, the Governorship of a school, and the trusteeship of a local theatre company but, like many of you, I resolved not to take on too many additional commitments too quickly. First, I wanted to judge what time I might have available, and second, I wanted to do a few things that might be both enjoyable and valuable at the same time. Becoming the Chairman of the RCACofE I hoped might be a fit on both counts and certainly it seems to be shaping up that way.

Members' priorities

Over the past few weeks I've been able to talk with Bishop Ian, David Pritchard, Malcolm Liles and a number of Council Members to find out more about what the priorities of members of the Association are at the moment. Many of those have been pretty predictable - pensions, in the face of rampant inflation; housing, both its provision and maintenance; GDPR, and all the difficulties that makes for keeping in touch with retired clergy; Safeguarding training; CDM's and the like.

What I hadn't anticipated as fully as I should have done are the very different experiences you and your colleagues have in retirement. Parishes and benefices and dioceses are so different to one another both in the pastoral care they offer, and in the roles that retired clergy are allowed/encouraged to take on.

Having served in Rural Oxfordshire for the last 20 years I am well aware that much parochial ministry liturgically would have collapsed had it not been for the volunteer ministry of many dozens of LLM's, SSM's and those on PTO's, including, in particular, the retired clergy.

Hopefully dioceses will increasingly honour them and I consider that part of my role, in addition to talking with the Pensions Board and other bodies in the NCI's, on your behalf, will be to follow Bishop Ian in waving the flag on behalf of yourselves whenever I get the chance to do so.

Retirement is retirement!...

But, finally, lest you should think that I'm forgetting a crucial fact, let me underline what I always planned to say when meeting with retired clergy in the Dorchester Area. Retirement is, in my book, retirement and those who want to spend their time doing things other than taking services and the occasional offices had my full support for doing so. For most of us that time will come sooner or later and it is quite wrong for priests and deacons to be made to feel guilty if they are not doing things in their parish churches any longer. Each of us has our own calling from God, to serve in our own vocation, and who are we to judge the service of another?

+ Colin Fletcher





From the Editor

A perfect storm

This is rather a thin edition! We'd love to have some more useful articles from members. We're not after sermons or lectures and while I know some would like us to, clearly it would not be practical to run obits (!) – a never ending task and all sorts of people would inevitably be missed...

So please put thinking caps one and apply fingers to keyboard – or even pencil to foolscap – and send us the rich fruits of your own thinking, reflection, experience and observation!

It can be quite useful to dig around in the attics of our minds from time to time to see what's lying about up there tucked away and forgotten. Indeed, in a recent rummage around my scarily real attic I unearthed a video. I can no longer play it because the VHS player has long gone the way of all flesh (or flesh's electronic equivalent) but the memories flowed back.

Back in the 1990s I worked for Tearfund as their Central Southern England Co-ordinator. At that time one of the resources on offer for children featured Terry Tearaway and his sister Tina. They were cartoon characters and I recall a scene where they're outside a rural African hut as apocalyptic thunder explodes around them, fearsome jagged lightning cracks across the sky and a relentless deluge of rain thrashes down, leading Terry to comment completely fatuously: 'We'd better go in Tina...There's a storm brewing up ...!'

Well, I suggest that for us there really is a storm brewing up – and, just like Terry Tearaway it's so obvious that I may be bit late in commenting! We're in the midst of a perfect storm that has broken on the whole world and it's been brewing a very long time.

Global warming –even advanced regions of the world like the West Coast of America and parts of Australia are admitting that they are not as resilient as they thought they were in the face of wild fires, floods and other threats.

Covid-19 – has created a loss of confidence for many, many people around the world and a nervousness about the possibility of other pandemics that might be lurking around the corner.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is making a deep impact on the whole world economy, including some of the already poorest countries in the southern hemisphere.

Across much of the world all of the above is creating a crisis in the cost of living for those who have to live with very restricted budgets...

Add to all that how instant, easily manipulated, social media can misinform and be used incredibly easily for propaganda, leading people into a loss of understanding of what is – or was – absolute truth. Even the most easily debunked conspiracy theories are creating havoc for the peace of mind of millions.

A perfect storm. We're living not in something that is merely brewing up: it's here, with a vengeance, all around us!

And all this is, in turn, is igniting and pouring petrol on to political crises all across the world... a rise in fear-driven 'me first' right wing politics and all that similarly fear-driven conspiracy thinking linked to lack of understanding of the wider world picture.

Given some of the characters occupying seats of power around the world it is not surprising that there now exists a catastrophic failure of trust in politicians. I have never understood why people seem to welcome demagogues and would-be dictators whose self focus threatens to overthrow long-lasting democratic systems.

Of course the world has been here before.

It was the effects of other world financial crises, including the fallout from WW1, that fuelled similar political processes to happen in 1930s Spain, Italy, Germany and elsewhere. Now it's happening in America and could very easily happen here at terrible cost to us all...

As I said: perfect storms for then and for our time But of course we know all that, don't we?

What about going back yet further – maybe to review 2000 years of wildly turbulent and supremely bloody history - to the First Century AD when the first Christians were emerging in the Middle East and spreading across the Roman Empire? They were caught up in an Empire in the throes of quietly losing its way, collapsing both morally and economically.

Some of those very early believers had actually been in the presence of Jesus as he taught and made clear how the Gospel would be received and what values God expects of his people: how we're expected to behave towards others.

They also lived in stormy times but the Gospel got through and far from merely surviving, it flourished to the point that I am writing this in 2022. But maybe I'd better stop and start to sound a little less like some mildly dotty Old Testament prophet!

But having done that, I'm still left with a powerful impression that retired or not – and I hear Bishop Colin's reminder that retirement does indeed mean retirement, and whatever our age, those of us still fairly sound in wind and limb may be being prompted currently to be more prophetically proactive than we might deem comfortable.

Having had, along with other retired colleagues, an extremely busy half year, filling in for vacancies and absences in various parish churches near my home, I've found that congregations have been extraordinarily grateful for attempts to encourage them, to get them thinking about the issues of the time, and to restore a measure of equilibrium in their understanding of events in the light of Gospel perspectives.

Once retired and out of the day-to-day mill, we can preach in a way that we never could when in pastoral charge. That motivation always was at the root of the preacher/proclaimer's task and there is, I believe, still a role for us out there. Indeed, it may be becoming rather more important than it has been for generations.

People seem to be longing for help in analysing and thinking as they live and work in what is so often a shallow 'soundbite' society.

The current 'perfect storm' is already very well 'brewed up'. Rain is pounding down, the thunder and lightning is spectacular, we're already soaking wet and it's not going away any time soon... Many thanks, Terry Tearaway, for the prompt!

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



Canon Peter Ballantine (Milton Keynes) urges retired colleagues to Keep the faith: there's hope ahead

Many of us, now that we are 'retired' have been (and are) no doubt reflecting on our experience of Ordained ministry.

I am about to hit 49 years since ordination at Chelmsford Cathedral in 1973 and have served in a variety of settings (Urban team, Country ministry and HE and often linked with education and training.) But when I say 1973, I am aware of very different situations in church and nation then as compared to now and that can be unnerving! I detect in some recent correspondence a sense of bitterness and anger, feelings which I find it hard to agree with.

Yes, it was different – inevitably. At theological college, we had nearly 60 single students in their 20s and the older and married students had a harder time. I was a graduate and my LEA still offered to pay half my college fees! I left college with virtually no money but no debt either!

I was Ordained to a large (informal) Team Ministry in the growing and more confident Evangelical tradition. Although I would say that for most of the time, I have lived on the edges of that tradition I remain grateful for it – and still feel that modern books about the CofE really ignore the growth that has happened there in my life time.

There was a trust and respect around for clergy – wearing a dog collar could get you into many places and folk would share their most private thoughts – all very humbling. Even then things were changing – we started a cooperation with a Methodist chapel and had joint services – my first vicar asked me to be in charge as a deacon of a small village, and within a couple of months I had run a PCC and taken a wedding. A great experience.

But that was some time ago! I would say that we have seen the virtual collapse of Christendom in England as fewer folk know much about the faith, fewer live it out and fewer go to church. When I was Ordained there were just over 13,000 paid parochial clergy but now it is about 8,000.

Changes have to be made and some are very creative. Some clergy did well out of glebe rents before (in my opinion) they rightly passed to the Diocese but others struggled in large difficult parishes. I never had a freehold: that did me no harm and sadly too many abused that freehold. I never sensed bullying though I have some sympathy about too many Bishops' initiatives. In my early years, there were a number of older clergy who could be very rude to new younger clergy but that is much harder with the average age of new clergy (with a first career) rising.

So where do we go from here?

Many of the paradigms we grew up with are now obsolete and with most outside the church, we are starting from scratch. There are no simple answers and I do not know what kind(s) of shape a revival would take.

It does demand willingness to think, pray and be creative. As I near 'gaga land' it feels daunting but exciting. I was at a chapter meeting recently and it was exciting (really!) as I heard some of the younger clergy speak of their work and the fact that in their churches there were going to be a number of adult baptisms at Easter. Praise the Lord!

Partly because there are fewer stipendiary clergy, I am noticing the stress level amongst many, and that's not good news. Models and expectations of work need examining as we cannot to tackle the level of work and responsibility that was around all those years ago. And there is so much to take on board – for instance, I have yet to take a wedding under the new registration details – help required!

So my message? Keep the Faith – we are living in changing times for Faith but use it to look forward to what will be something very different.



Trusts and funding sources that may be of use to retired Anglican clergy

The Church of England has compiled a very comprehensive and helpful list of organisations – available on the central CofE website - that are sometimes able to support clergy in the following areas:

- Spiritual and vocational wellbeing
- Physical and mental wellbeing
- Relationships
- Financial and material wellbeing
- Participation wellbeing

Some of these organisations have geographically limited charitable reach, while others are nationwide.

St Luke's: Perhaps most importantly, one of the best known medical charities with a focus on clergy is the St Luke's charity which is referenced on the CofE list and has recently announced changes in the way it operates.

St Luke's is now concentrating all its resources on improving mental health and psychological wellbeing for clergy. This means that they will no longer offer support and expertise to clergy for physical healthcare needs. You can find more information about the charity on their website (which is given on the CofE list).

Worth checking is any local diocesan discretionary funding:

Bishops and Archdeacons generally have access to modest discretionary funding for hardship and emergency response, and are happy to be approached by serving clergy who are in need of this additional support. Check your local diocesan website for this kind of information – or talk to your Archdeacon.

Patrons:

If your Parish or benefice has independent Patrons (i.e. Patrons other than a Diocesan Patronage Board) you might consider approaching them for additional financial support. Please do be aware, however, that most Patrons do not have access to discretionary or trust funds, and so may not be able to offer help no matter how much they may want to. If in doubt, check with your Archdeacon before making an approach.

The Frances Ashton Charity

The Frances Ashton Charity provides small one-off grants to serving or retired clergy of the Church of England and to their widows and widowers in cases where there is an exception or urgent need.

Examples might be:

- The cost of a new pair of glasses
- A respite care break or (exceptionally) a family holiday where urgent need can be shown
- Replacement household items in cases where parish or diocesan assistance is not available

Particular priorities for support include unforeseeable emergencies and on-off medical or care needs for the applicant or his/her family. The trustees will take into account individual circumstances, including levels of disposable income and savings.

Clergy Support Trust

The Clergy Support Trust provides support to Anglican clergy (serving and retired) as well as ordinands, and their families. The types of grants offered by the trust come under the following categories;

- Wellbeing Grants - holidays, retreats, respite breaks, sabbaticals.
- Financial support grants - If you live in tied clergy housing, grants are available towards costs of living.
- Emergency grants - designed to help in times of unforeseen crises or unexpected costs.

Clergy Stipend Trust

The Clergy Stipend Trust's aim is the prevention or relief of poverty among clergy and retired clergy of church of England and dependants of such clergy.

For more information about the support they can offer you can contact the trust via Phone: 07919 534207 or you can email cofeclergystipendtrust@gmail.com.

Society for the Relief of Poor Clergymen (and we guess clergywomen are included in that historic name!)

One-off grants are available for:

Evangelical clergy of the Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Church of Ireland and the Scottish Episcopal Church

Evangelical accredited lay workers (those who have been nationally selected, trained and licensed for Anglican ministry, and Church Army officers who have been commissioned and hold the Bishop's licence)

Widows and widowers of the above

Grants may be given to people in the following circumstances:

Bereavement

Illness

Family support to enable young people to participate in a 'ministry experience' during a gap year before university

Family support to enable children/young people of evangelical ministers to attend Christian camps, for their spiritual benefit and to develop leadership potential

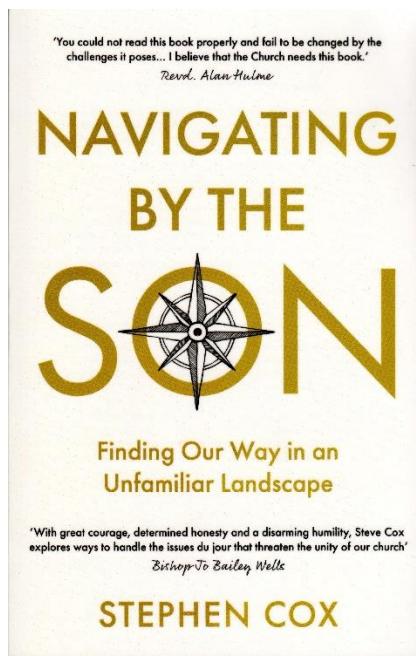
Other special needs (at the Committee's discretion)

Educational needs, such as special tuition or travel expenses



Book Review: **Navigating by the Son** [*Finding our way in an unfamiliar landscape*] Stephen Cox

Matador £11.99 ISBN 978 1800462 335 286pp



Stephen Cox is a former colleague. He is an evangelical with a wide experience of parish as well as diocesan ministry. He has a great love for people and a powerful desire to see the name of Christ represented with honour in a world where hostility, misunderstandings, and the fluidity of 'truth' are the order of the day.

These themes are worked out throughout, beginning with the arresting preface where the writer describes how a prayerful personal quest to understand issues of sexuality were answered 'in a way I could not have anticipated' when it became clear that his devoutly Christian older son was gay.

A good many conservative Evangelical clergy have been down this road, but Stephen's response was to write an account of his journey of exploration in 'making sense of what it means to be a fellow member of the body of Christ

with my son, whose Biblical interpretation I still do not fully share, but whose discipleship and Christlike character I admire and learn from.'

From that impressive root springs a book that really engages sharply with the idea of living in a Christlike way in what the author calls 'a divided, fractious Church'. He is very conscious of polarisation among those who profess Christ and as he discusses ways of navigating through all the icebergs and strewn ethical and moral wreckage he succeeds in delivering what I found to be a rather moving and transformative work of the heart.

It is a book that caused this reader to put the brakes on from time to time, to sit back and take the specs off to consider the implications of what is being said, although stylistically it is well written and readily leads the reader on. It is packed with salient contemporary as well as historical references and quotations, drawing readily from other authors making this very much more than merely a devotional work.

Theology is shown intertwined with praxis. Footnotes guide us as to the other influential material being drawn on and useful short italicised 'The journey so far' passages at the end of each chapter help keep things on track. That's needed because inevitability something like a blunderbuss of contemporary issues is being fired in each carefully-titled chapter. Just that feature alone would make this an absolutely ideal book for study over a long period by a small group keen to engage in serious theological reflection.

The praxis side of this work suddenly appears from time to time, such as when a description is given of how the author, in his last incumbency in London, sought to live without unallocated reserves. He tells, very honestly, how they had some 'worrying times' but also

saw amazing provision ‘that rejoiced our hearts, built faith, and encouraged generosity in a poor congregation’.

I was glad to see that he discussed ‘The Bible and dissonant experience’ and he is not the first to highlight that ‘if we pray with our Bibles in one hand and our newspapers in the other, we will hear the Bible more clearly’.

Towards the end of the book is a very helpful unpacking of the homosexuality debate which triggered Stephen’s impulse to write in the first place. He comments on what he calls the ‘ontological difference’ between civil partnerships and gay marriage, always returning to the human need for security and love. ‘...I have become convinced that it is not just one-way traffic. It is not just that gay people need healthy Christlike churches. Churches need the fellowship and testimony of gay Christians.’

In the midst of the ‘meat’ of this book, however, is a chapter on ‘disagreeing without being disagreeable’, which can only be useful in the present environment. More to the point, I spotted something there which highlights the spirit of this book. In this chapter, Stephen touches on the Anglican churches who have threatened ‘quota capping’ if their requirements are not met, wondering how they can expect to operate in this way ‘and still receive the Lord’s blessing on their ministry, however justified their original requests’

However, my eye was drawn to the footnote that said: *‘At first I wrote ‘demands’ instead of ‘requests’. The constant journalistic and political use of the word ‘demands’ is another of those uses of language that escalates conflict and reduces the scope for conversation and compromise’.* I quote that footnote in full because it highlights the very great pastoral care – and indeed the love – that has gone into making this book not just an excellent read but a potentially very useful one.

Mark Rudall



Retired Clergy Officers Maybe I am harking back to a “Golden Age” that never was, but there used to be a time when the role of the RCO in a diocese was relatively clear to those with whom they had to do, But increasingly it is becoming clear that the role of the RCO is very variable within the dioceses of the Church of England. It is also becoming more difficult to find out who they are and their contact details. My predecessor as Secretary compiled what was then the only comprehensive list of RCOs, no such list was held centrally. There has been considerable turnover in the last 4 years and despite my best efforts it has been a trial trying to keep the list up to date because dioceses fail to tell me who the new RCO is when the previous one retires. The list is very helpful in putting new members in touch with the appropriate RCO of the diocese into which they are retiring.

So, I would be very grateful to receive information from members as to whether they are aware of who their RCO is and pass on their address, phone and email details to me. Equally correspondence about what members feel the role of an RCO should be might help us

develop a conversation with the national church about the future of RCOs. Please send any information to me, Malcolm Liles, 473 City Road, Sheffield S2 1GF
malcolm.liles48@gmail.com

Have you retired to Wales? A few months ago I received an enquiry from the Church Support Trust about members who retire into Wales, the number is actually increasing at present. We discussed this at our March National Council meeting and have since endeavoured to find out from the Church in Wales what is the situation with regard to pastoral care and support for clergy from the C.of E. retiring into Wales.

The response has been less than overwhelming so can I ask members who have retired to Wales to let us have their thoughts on this matter so that we can have a more informed discussion at our October meeting. My contact details are above.

Cost of Living There was only a little response to my article on the decline of the Clergy Pension in the April newsletter but I do wonder how many of us are able to look forward in confidence to the next winter and the rising costs of food and energy to heat our homes. My own diocese of Sheffield has sent out a cheque for £150 to its retired clergy to help mitigate costs which has been very welcome. More welcome still would be an announcement that in view of the unusual rise in inflation this year the Pensions Board is willing to remove the 5% cap on the increase in the 2023/24 pension, especially since the govt. are still assuring us, as I write, that the triple lock will operate on the state pension next year and use the September inflation figure.

The Church Commissioners have allocated a sum of money to help stipendiary clergy faced with higher heating costs, available on application to Archdeacons. But nothing has so far emerged in the way of supplementary help to retired clergy from the Pensions Board to meet the challenges before us. Comment on this item would be welcome in the next issue.

General Meetings We hope to be able to hold in person meetings in the autumn, none have been possible since 2019. The Southern Province meeting will be on 27th September at St. Mary Redcliffe, near Bristol Temple Meads station; and the Northern Province meeting will be on 11th October in a venue in central Sheffield again near the station. Both meetings will start at 11am with coffee/tea, celebration of the Eucharist 11.30ish, lunch break 12.30 (bring a packed lunch), AGM for 2021 at 1.30 followed by a speaker or speakers till 3.30pm.

Would those intending to attend please let me know of their intention by the end of August, we need at least 40-50 to make the meetings viable. Information and papers will be sent out in early Sept. **Malcolm Liles, 473 City Road, Sheffield, S2 1GF** malcolm.liles48@gmail.com

If insufficient members register we will have to hold our AGM by Zoom later in the year.

The Home of Devenish, a charity offering free housing for single ladies who are widows of Church of England clergy, ordained ladies, or widows of officers of the Armed Forces who are in financial need. There are vacancies at the moment. We offer bungalows in Weymouth, Dorset, for independent living. Please visit our website for further details. dianaludlow@gmail.com