**From the Chair: the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher writes:**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Recently I was at a meeting where one of the speakers referred, when speaking about those of us who are retired, to those who are in 'Active Ministry' and, by implication, to another grouping who are not. Now on one level I can understand that very easily. After all it is now widely accepted that, as we grow older, most of us at some point transition from a Third Age, when we are still engaged in all

kinds of activities, to a Fourth Age when we become much more dependent on the help we receive from others. The boundary between the two is, inevitably, fairly fuzzy, and often, where a couple are concerned, one member can balance the other with the things that they each are able to do individually.

However, the use of that phrase 'Active Ministry' led me into thinking a lot more about the nature of priestly, and diaconal ministry, and how those are exercised in retirement. For the speaker I think he was defining 'Active Ministry' as being about those who, with PTO, are taking Sunday services, covering vacancies, officiating at the Occasional Offices, and so on and so forth. As we all know those ministries are of vital importance to our Church and without the ministry of the Retired much of what we have experienced as the parochial system in this country would swiftly become unrecognisable.

And yet, if I think about the Ordinal and the conversations I have had down the years about people's vocations, it is far too narrow to restrict Ministry to doing those things, important as they are. It has always been a joy to me to remember that as clergy we are there to serve the whole community, and not just those who come to church. The ministry of presence in community organisations, whether or not exercised in an official capacity or with some sort of label attached, is very much a part of parish ministry, and I have lost count of the number of times that colleagues have said that one of the things they are looking forward to in retirement is getting back to the role they believed they were ordained to do. For some this has meant being involved in a school, helping children to read, and for others being a trustee for a charity. I think too of a friend of mine who would simply go for a regular coffee in a local cafe and people would know he was there and that they could ask him to pray for them.

And where does prayer fit into what people describe as 'Active Ministry'? After all I was always taught that the stipend was given to those of us in stipendiary ministry to release us from monetary worries and to give us the freedom to spend more time in prayer - something which I suspect most of us will have struggled with at some stage or other but which has also been foundational to our ministries. And, in my experience, the ability to pray carries on for many clergy long after they are able to take services and the like.

All of which leads me to conclude that we must be very careful not to confuse 'Active Ministry' with ecclesiastical activities. As ever in our vocation there is a lot more to 'Active Ministry' than doing

quantifiable things. Prayer and presence are at the heart of so much of priestly ministry and they can continue well into the Fourth Age of life and must not be marginalised in our understanding of our call by God to be ordained in His Church.

With every blessing

+Colin Fletcher



## Taking Time

One of the things that I realized when I retired from active ministry is that I had time; there is a time 'for every season under Heaven' as the writer of Ecclesiastes has it; and I had that time. So, what to do with it? Since moving up to the North East Coast I realized that we had the whole of Northumberland spreading out before us and, beyond that, the virtually unknown, to me anyway, land of the Scots; no longer separated by Hadrian's great wall, I/We could explore at our leisure.

So it was that, a few weeks ago, my wife Valerie and I pointed the car northwards, filled it with petrol, packed our bags, and set off.

Of course, it was not quite like that as we had, prudently, arranged accommodation in advance; footloose and fancy free is scarcely our condition as we enter the later stages of our life here on Earth, but mercifully, we are blessed with the ability to 'get about' and it seems sensible to do so!

Our destination was the ancient City of Stirling; that there were road works in the centre did complicate our navigation but we soon found our hotel where we settled in for our four-night stay; not very long you might observe but our budget was limited and we needed to be comfortable so, that is all we could manage. We had three full days before us and we wanted to use them wisely; suffice it to say that, wherever we went, our northern neighbours treated us well and welcomed us.

Day one took us to the castle, the ancient home of the Kings of Scotland; as you might imagine, it was a very steep climb to get there and my old legs suffered; it proved to be everything we could have hoped for, a formidable fortress which was virtually impregnable in its time and yet, evidencing signs of opulence and of gracious living for those in power.

After the castle came the Church of the Holy Rood, spelt 'rude', just down the hill. In this ancient Church, Kings were baptized and crowned; it is beautiful inside with wonderful stained-glass windows, old and new. We were informed that the church might have become a Cathedral but there was one just along the road in Dunblane! **Clive Harper**



## Film Review – 23 Walks

'The course of true love never did run smooth' – Shakespeare's words, spoken by Lysander at the start of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', are frequently quoted, particularly in relation to teenagers and young people. But the same can equally well be said of adults later in life. '23 Walks' a film currently available on Netflix starring Dave Johns as Dave and Alison Steadman as Fern, charts their relationship from its inauspicious beginnings through their shared commitment to walking their dogs on the 23 Walks of the title.

Whilst the dogs, despite their vast disparity in size, hit it off at the very beginning, and remain close friends throughout the movie, their owners find that the challenge of building a friendship, let alone a relationship, is a much more complex proposition.

I won't give the game away by describing in detail some of the challenges they face, and what results from them, but my experience as a parish priest and, indeed as a bishop certainly leaves me in no doubt at all that there are things that couples forming new relationships later in life need to be open with each other about. As Fern says to Dave later on in the film 'We've both lived a lot of life haven't we!'

So what are some of the key issues that I have noticed that are highlighted in the film that help to give such relationships a better chance of success.

1. Friendship – Whilst a friendship may deepen into a relationship the film is strong in its message that for a relationship to succeed it is crucial to nurture friendship at every opportunity. Where this becomes doubly important, for instance is where one member of the couple wants to advance rapidly physically, the other, for whatever reason wants to hold back. As Fern says to Dave at one point, 'I was bitten before and I need to protect myself'.
2. Risk – Defensive positioning, however understandable that may be, given a person's own history, is usually the result of emotional hurt. Both Dave and Fern have experienced considerable hurt in their lives prior to their meeting and both are held back by this. Crucial to making a change is first to acknowledge to themselves, and then to be able to express their past hurt to the other. Equally important, as portrayed, is for both to have the capacity to respect what they reveal to each other.
3. Honesty – Quite a lot is made in the film of the need for honesty in relationships. Mysteries will always be present – after all one of the excitements in forming a new partnership is discovering new things about each other. But holding back secrets at whatever stage a relationship may be in can be immensely destructive – and certainly Fern and Dave experience the difficulties of finding that out for themselves.
4. Compartmentalising – closely linked to the need for honesty is, as presented, the danger of compartmentalising. Dave, as a former mental health nurse, says at some stage that the only way he managed to do his job for as long as he did was to leave behind the experiences of the day when he went home in the evening. But the attempt to do that in a relationship is a futile one. However much we may want to say that the past is in the past and that we don't want to bring it into the present, the fact is that it is always there, often lurking in the background but needing to be acknowledged if it is not going to turn round and bite us. Nowhere is this more true than in the physical side of a relationship and the intimacy of sex.
5. Forgiveness – in the stuttering ups and downs of their relationship the significance of forgiveness, both of each other and of others they are in contact with, is a recurring theme – one which, it is implied, dogs do rather better than their human counterparts.
6. Hope – the film is suffused with hope from start to finish. The music, the pictures of the natural world where Spring follows Winter, the restorative powers of canine friendships, the powerful portrayal of loyalty tested under pressure, are all shot through with hope in a beautiful, understated way.

And that could be the caption that summarises the whole film by the time the twenty-third walk is reached. In many ways it doesn't say anything new but what it does say, it says well. It's a film that many starting a relationship later in life would benefit from seeing together and might then enable them to reflect on some of the challenges which many such relationships face. **+ Colin Fletcher**



## **There is a vacancy on the RCACoE National Council**

One of our council members has decided to stand down and Gregory Clifton-Smith, whom we thank for his years of service on council.

Gregory represented Guildford, Portsmouth, and Winchester dioceses. We are looking for a volunteer, or nomination from members in those dioceses to replace him on council. Any offers should be forwarded to Malcolm Liles at [malcolm.liles@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.liles@gmail.com) as soon as possible. Council would especially welcome women priests to replace Gregory. If there is more than one nomination for the region there will be an election via the Autumn newsletter.

The role of a council member is to be in touch with the Retirement Officers in the dioceses they represent and to produce a regional report twice a year for consideration by council. These help inform our actions and relationships with the national church institutions and other bodies.



## **Fees-the survey so far**

This is the most up to date list we have, a couple of members wrote in after the last newsletter giving us figures that were missing and one reader contacted his Bishop and Archdeacon and achieved an increase in their home diocese. So, if your diocese is not mentioned below could you please let us know what the appropriate figure is.

Gloucester £78, Derby £62, Liverpool £62, Lichfield £62, St. Albans £62, Leicester £59, Bristol £56, Ely £55, Oxford £48, Coventry £45, Hereford £45, Guildford £42, Exeter £41, Worcester £40.91, Southwark £40.40, Salisbury £40, Chelmsford £38, Bath and Wells £38, Leeds £37, Norwich £37.50, Winchester £35.50, Sheffield £35, Portsmouth £32.50, York £30, Birmingham £30, Newcastle £30, Lincoln £28.50, Durham £27.50, St. Eds+Ips £25, Carlisle £25



**Annual General Meeting** We shall be holding our AGM for 2022 on 14<sup>th</sup> September at the Archbishops Palace, Bishopthorpe York, thanks to a kind offer by the Archbishop of York, beginning at 11am and ending around 3-3.30pm. Numbers are limited to 50 so I would be grateful to receive indications from members about attendance at this event before the 14th August. Papers for the meeting will be sent to attendees by the end of August. We hope that members will attend to share their important issues with us so that we can give those priority in the coming year. We have not been able to hold in-person meetings for some time so it will be good to actually MEET! [malcolm.liles48@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.liles48@gmail.com)

## **PENSIONS BOARD – Questions asked at the July General Synod**

The Revd Canon Andrew Dotchin (St Edmundsbury & Ipswich) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board: Q227 What steps are the National Investing Bodies taking to encourage other investors to divest from fossil fuel companies, invest in climate solutions and refocus their engagement on other key sectors such as electricity utility companies, car manufacturers and banks that are financing the fossil fuel industry?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** Through its recently published Stewardship Report and the report to this Synod, the Board has been transparent about the approach taken to divestment from fossil fuel companies. We have also set out our priorities for future engagement with energy demand side sectors and companies. The Board is legally not in a position to offer advice to other investors as to how they should invest. It is the duty of each fund to independently make such decisions in line with their respective fiduciary duties. We do though hope that other funds can learn from the experience of the Board as a result of the transparency of our reporting. The Board also continues to lead the Transition Pathway Initiative (TPI) which is supported by 130 funds with over \$50 trillion in assets under management; the Paris Aligned Investors Initiative which governs the Net Zero Investment Framework, which is used by 135 funds with \$33 trillion in assets under management; and continues to lead the Initiative for the Responsible Climate Lobbying Standard that was supported by funds with \$130 trillion in assets under management.

The Revd Joel Love (Rochester) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q228 What steps are the Pensions Board taking to increase investment in climate solutions, given the International Energy Agency statement that investment in renewable energy must treble by the end of this decade?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** In line with the Board's fiduciary duties and our use of the Net Zero Investment Framework to help guide our investment decision making, we already invest in climate solutions and will continue to seek opportunities for future investments which meet our criteria. Specifically, we are considering this in private markets, infrastructure and in emerging markets as well as encouraging companies in which the fund is invested through our active stewardship.

The Very Revd Joe Hawes (Deans) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q229 Following the National Investing Bodies' significant and welcome decision to divest from fossil fuel companies, have the NIBs ruled out future investment in oil and gas companies that are pursuing new fossil fuel developments, given the International Energy Agency statement that new fossil fuel projects are incompatible with limiting global heating to 1.5°C?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** The position of the Church of England Pensions Board was set out in the report that we have provided to General Synod. The Board is divesting from oil and gas companies that do not have short, medium and long term targets aligned to 1.5°C. As a result, it is exiting the oil and gas sector as no companies meet these criteria. Should a company increase the ambition of its targets, demonstrate that its capital expenditure is aligned to those targets, and evidence a credible track-record against those targets, then in principle the Board would consider reinvestment. We do not expect this to be a situation likely to occur any time soon given recent backward steps by a number of companies and the high bar we have set. So, for the foreseeable future we will have to seek other ways to engage with these companies as a key part of the international effort needed to address climate change.

The Revd Rachel Wakefield (St Albans) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q230 What investments in climate solutions have the Pensions Board made in emerging markets?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** The Board has an existing allocation to Emerging Market Debt of £79 million as at 31 March. However, this allocation is not explicitly in support of climate solutions, and we are currently developing our approach in this regard. To aid our understanding we have convened an initiative of eleven UK pension funds, which was supported by the UK Pensions Minister, to explore how we can do this impactfully and result in real world emissions reductions. As a consequence of this initiative, we have developed and consulted on a set of 'emerging market just transition

principles' to guide any future allocations. We will continue to review our approach and seek opportunities that meet our investment criteria.

Mrs Vicky Brett (Peterborough) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q231 What examples of investment in climate solutions have the Pensions Board made during the first six months of 2023?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** The Board will report on investments in climate solutions as part of the 2023 Annual Report and Stewardship Report. One area we anticipate being able to report further on will be our approach to emerging and developing markets. In addition, the FTSE TPI Climate Transition Index – used for our passive equity allocation – has built into its methodology a prioritisation on weighting (increasing) investments in companies that offer green solutions. The Board also continues to look for climate solutions through our private market allocations.

Dr Neill Burgess (York) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q232 Please can you supply a table showing overall annual Diocesan contributions to the central clergy pension fund, with rows showing actuals by year from 2010 to 2022 plus 2023 budget, and with 3 columns of data: "base contribution", "deficit reduction" and "total"?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** The information requested is not readily available exactly as requested, however, hopefully the tables on the Notice Board provide sufficient information to be of assistance.

Table 1 sets out the total employer contributions to the Church of England Funded Pensions Scheme (CEFPS, commonly called the 'clergy scheme') in cash terms as set out in the Scheme accounts from 2011. Table 2 sets out the contribution rates over the same period. Following the latest valuation, deficit contributions were halved from April 2022 and removed entirely from 1 January 2023. This represents a material cash reduction in pension contributions. The scheme remains well-funded. We are confident of the Scheme's ability to meet pension commitments, and the risk of future deficits emerging is low.

The strong funding position also enabled the Board to award a 10.1% increase to pensions in payment from 1 April 2023. This included a discretionary increase such that the total increase was double (or more) than the guaranteed increases in the Scheme Rules.

The Revd Canon Dana Delap (Gloucester) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q233 Will the Pensions Board confirm that it is still committed to providing housing for retired clergy who need it, through Pensions Board owned housing, equity sharing schemes such as CHARM, or other means?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** The Board is committed to providing housing support for retired clergy who need it. Specifically, we will offer retirement housing to new retirees for as long as the Church is willing to fund it. However, with costs having risen dramatically through inflation and interest rates, the current Rental offer has only been maintained by emergency additional funding. It is hard to imagine the Church could support the likely funding needed in perpetuity. As part of our continuing commitment to the Church in general and retiring clergy, we will be bringing forward ideas as to how all our housing services might best evolve to meet the needs of future generations, provide more choice, and be financially sustainable. The 'Shared Ownership' product was withdrawn because the market now offers better value alternatives, notably the Older Persons Shared Ownership scheme.

We continue to support those interested in home ownership at retirement through information, signposting and discounted mortgage/financial advice via Ecclesiastical Financial Advisory Services. We encourage clergy to consider

all their options at retirement including other faith-based charities and housing associations (and hopefully the Church's new Housing Association as it grows) alongside the properties the Board can offer.

The Revd Canon Ian Flintoft (Newcastle) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q234 Given that the nearest available property is sometimes 70 miles from the desired retirement location, and given the recent 10.1% increase in rents (well above the 7% directed for social housing by the government), what steps is the Pensions Board taking to improve both the availability and affordability of clergy retirement housing?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** The Board offers clergy the opportunity to reserve a property in advance of their retirement from a national portfolio. The shape of that portfolio is regularly reviewed based on demand from retiring clergy. I confirm we are continuing to buy for the portfolio in response to the current surge in retirement numbers, even though securing new properties is harder in the prevailing climate of a slowing property market. The portfolio offers a choice of locations and rents, which are set well below market for the local area. We carefully considered the rent increase this year and sought to keep this in line with increases to clergy pensions (see other questions on this). We encourage all applicants to consider the range of properties carefully and we can assist clergy to explore housing providers, including other faith-based charities and housing associations, as a route to broader choice. We continue to encourage anyone who might need help with housing in retirement to contact us up to 5 years in advance of retirement. The Board is already working on proposals for the future that would enable broader choice for clergy, whilst being financially sustainable for the customer, the Church and the Board.

Ms Fiona MacMillan (London) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q235 In the light of the findings of the Coming Home report, the Church Commissioners' reserves, and the Gospel imperative to bring good news to the poor, how does the Pension Board justify a 10.1% rent rise for CHARM residents during a cost of living crisis, when the poorest retired clergy and widow/ers are paying 50-100% of their church pension on rent?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** The Coming Home report sets an ambition that rents should be truly affordable. For many years, the Board has offered its homes at significant discount to market equivalents. Historically, the Board has increased rents in line with RPI and with reference to the increase in clergy pensions. All organisations face rising costs: the Pensions Board is no different. With the cost of debt service equivalent to c75% of rental income the impact of inflation and interest rates has been severe. Indeed, the current rental offer has only been maintained in the short term by emergency additional funding from the Archbishops' Council. In this context, the Board increased rents by 10.1%, which is lower than RPI and in line with increases for clergy and state pensions. I recognise that the cost-of-living crisis may be more acutely felt by those who retired early and/or who receive a partner pension. I encourage any resident struggling financially to contact the Board's staff to discuss their situation. Support can include assistance with state entitlements and the Board's own charitable grant scheme which offers an additional monthly payment towards living costs for those on the lowest incomes.

The Revd Canon John Dunnett (Chelmsford) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q236 The Government announced in late 2022 that it will impose a 7% rent ceiling to social housing rent increases in the 2023-24 financial year as a temporary measure amid the cost of living crisis. In view of this and the hardship being experienced by many retired clergy, on what grounds has the CHARM scheme raised rents by 10.1% in 2023?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

**A.** The current "cost of living" is challenge for everyone and the Board carefully considered what rent increase to apply in 2023. The Board is a charitable housing provider, not a registered social landlord. We do not have access to the same funding streams as social landlords. We operate a different rent increase policy. Historically, the Board has

increased rents for Church retirement property in line with RPI and with reference to the increase in clergy pensions. Like all organisations facing rising costs, the Pensions Board must be able to cover the costs of running the services to meet demand from retiring clergy and meet its landlord obligations. With the cost of debt service equivalent to c75% of rental income the impact of rising inflation and interest rates has been severe. Indeed, the current rental offer has only been maintained in the short term by emergency additional funding from the Archbishops' Council. In this context, the Board decided to increase rents by 10.1%. This is lower than RPI and in line with the increases in clergy and state pensions. I encourage any resident struggling financially to contact the Board's staff for 1-1 support and advice.

The Revd Robert Thompson (London) to ask the Chair of the Pensions Board:

Q237 Given that local authority/housing associations have had their rents capped at 7%, with no access to government funds except to build new properties, why is the Church of England charging CHARM residents 10.1% when the Commissioners have such large reserves?

Mr Clive Mather to reply as Chair of the Pensions Board:

A. The Board is a charitable housing provider. It is classed as a private landlord, not a registered social housing provider. The funding model is very different to that of social landlords. The Board is obliged to purchase properties at full market rate and financed through commercial borrowing. Added to this are the costs of running the service e.g. repairs, surveying and compliance. All organisations are facing rising costs and pressures from inflation: the Pensions Board is no different. With the cost of debt service equivalent to c75% of rental income the impact of rising inflation and interest rates has been severe. Indeed, the current rental offer has only been maintained in the short term by emergency additional funding from the Archbishops' Council. All rent increases are considered carefully. Rent increases have historically followed RPI, with reference to the rise in clergy pensions. In some years this will have been higher than that for social landlords; in other years lower. The 10.1% rent increase from April 2023 is lower than RPI while being in line with the 10.1% increase in clergy pensions this year. The state pension also increased by 10.1% this year. I cannot comment on the Commissioners' reserves.



## ***A Church Predicated on Patronage***

It seems that since my recent, final, retirement I am experiencing difficulties in achieving PTO. Permission to Officiate. There are two requirements, neither especially unreasonable, DBS of which I currently have three in my other roles as a volunteer. For some reason however they are not portable, so every new offer, whether as a volunteer or a priest, requires another 'disclosure'.

The other requirement is that I attend a safeguarding course. The most recent course I attended required that I spent time watching a TV programme about Bishop Peter Ball.

Interestingly I had an occasion to meet Bishop Peter. I can't now remember why but I was invited to his 'Grace and Favour' house in Somerset in my role as Director of Toc H, probably some connection with the founder of Toc H, 'Tubby' Clayton. My late wife, who needed a wheelchair as she had MS, accompanied me. As we drove away we both commented on how warmly and graciously we had been received by the Bishop and his brother. They had been charming hosts and extremely welcoming.

Watching the film as part of my safeguarding course I was able to reflect that of course, groomers are often charming, but more than that, Bishop Peter's ability to groom those he attracted was that he was simply above suspicion and his story believed by the hierarchy of the church against all other stories. The reason for that is quite simply that he enjoyed the patronage of the leadership of the Church and of course the then Prince of Wales.



The Church of England is a church that was and is predicated on patronage I have tried to describe this aspect of the church in my novel Holy Disorder.

The book was written over a period of thirty plus years. I began writing when I lived in Birmingham sometime around 1987. It existed as a computer file, edited from time to time, until my retirement in 2007. It was then that I began the long process of writing and rewriting which led to its publication by Foreshore Publishing in 2022.

The book started as a biographical reflection on my vocation and my life after ordination as a parish priest in Manchester and Newcastle.

Over time however it acquired a life of its own. As I wrote I reflected on the two themes with which my character David, struggled, these being homosexuality in the church, especially amongst the ordained leadership of the church and the ordination of women.

There is a very real sense that in the incredibly poor way that the leadership of the church has handled these two issues many people, including people that I am proud to have as friends, have been hurt, badly let down and rejected.

For all its apparent commitment to safeguarding I suspect as a recent meme on Facebook commented it would be safer for children to attend a drag queen's party than church.

My own experience is telling in that as a young man I was sexually assaulted by an older man on a selection conference I attended. Unfortunately for him he chose the wrong person because I instinctively reacted and caused him a degree of physical discomfort which I'm sure helped him to reflect on his actions and be more careful in future. But he was exercising his power and his privilege which he thought he was entitled to do.

The current leadership of the church is charged in these end days with managing what my publisher writes on the jacket note of Holy Disorder as 'the inevitable and possibly irreversible decline of the church' and sadly not making a very good job of it.

One reader of Holy Disorder commented: 'You also know about the appalling way in which the Church of England behaves, and particularly its leadership. In Holy Disorder you get it just right. You will be challenged for speaking truth to power'.

So there is a strong sense of *j'accuse* in the book for which I neither apologise nor seek to defend. It is what it is. My personal experience and the experience of the characters in the book is that the church, especially in its dealings with its own ordained and lay ministers, fails to be pastorally sensitive, it fails in its basic duty of care. As the Bishop says to the main character when he appoints him to his new job he doesn't want someone who will 'challenge the authority which is properly mine'.

Holy Disorder and my novella The Gorton Gospel both address the challenging life experiences of the fictional characters I introduce and my hope all along is that they will also connect with the reader's experience and make the Christian story real and accessible and true to that experience.

I'm not at all certain whether I will be offered the necessary permission to officiate. The Diocese where I now live seems to require support from either your parish priest or Area Dean along with an agreed statement of what duties you will undertake. For various reasons that is difficult for me because the most I am hoping for is to occasionally enjoy the privilege of celebrating the Eucharist.

Additionally as I will soon achieve a major age milestone I understand that PTO will be renewable annually which, if it takes six months to achieve each time you apply means that I will spend more time applying and completing the forms than actually officiating.

It will be interesting to see where all this leads and what kind of church emerges in the future. Writing Holy Disorder made me reflect that in offering for ordination in the '60's my timing was pretty good. I rather suspect that were my 18 year old self to offer today my offer would be unlikely to be accepted. As the curate who encouraged my vocation said when I first enquired you need some 'O' levels and it would help to attend church occasionally. I got the 'O' levels and still occasionally attend church. **Geoff Smith**



## ***Retirement - One Year On.***

The mixed emotions that greet the last few years of one's full-time working life are common to most of us fortunate enough to live to anticipate, and enjoy, a healthy retirement. The use of the word 'enjoy' in itself reflects my own state of mind, though I am conscious that there are clergy who view the prospect of retirement with a positive dread. A colleague of mine, who retired from the full-time stipendiary ministry just eight months before me, constantly reminded me not to use the "R" word in reference to him. It was just another ministry transition for him. Others, no less determined in their approach to the passing up of responsibility, are inclined to follow the pattern and outlook of Agatha Christie's Poirot, and step consciously and definitely off the treadmill to concentrate on their version of growing vegetable marrows.

I, like I suspect many of us who could be writing this article, fall somewhere in between. I wish to be of some use, but equally and at the same time, have struggled with losing the identification with a place and a role. I don't think my wife will mind me saying that she has struggled even more than I have in this regard, especially as she had to relinquish her own career as nurse and midwife, for medical reasons five years earlier.

So, looking back over this past year, how have things panned out? Before answering that I must set the context within the post-pandemic situation. There were no retirement courses being run just when I could have done with one, but I was saved by my very generous and understanding bishop who granted me a three-month pre-retirement sabbatical, "to sort yourself out!" I don't think her comment was to be taken pejoratively, just kindly! We were contemplating moving from Salisbury Diocese to Sodor and Man, having the benefit of an inherited family bungalow to live in. Critically, we would be moving away from our children and grandchildren who remained in the south of England, but we took the decision to return to the village in which my wife was born and grew up, and where we met nearly fifty years ago.

We had three months in the year before I retired, and before I need resign, to work out when and, critically, where, we would go. Thinking with paint-brush in hand, and in conversation with builders, plumbers, electricians, carpet-fitters and working in our quarter acre of garden all helped to crystallise our ideas. I was spending some time most days completing a book too, of which more later. In the end we decided that to retire sometime in the middle of 2022 would be the ideal scenario, especially as it could end with leading a (Covid-postponed) party to Oberammergau to see the Passion Play in June of that year.

Once again, the generosity of Salisbury Diocese, and the transitional situation of the Swanage and Studland team, seemed to indicate that this was the right decision, and the move happened over five days at the end of June and the very beginning of July. In prospect, we had a house to finish, a garden to plan, family arriving for their summer holidays, and about a hundred un-opened boxes waiting to be dealt with. It will not surprise anyone to know that the words, "We have brought too much" and, "I thought we had got rid

of that!” were frequently called from one room to another as the unpacking proceeded and our new shed, with its work bench ready for retirement activities was full to the roof and overflowing.

At the same time, I had a few things on the horizon. There was PtO to be sorted; and my determination not to ‘run a church’ in retirement became a mantra, especially as the local vicar was herself retiring in the August and, rumour had it, that she would not be replaced. Years ago my father-in-law had been churchwarden and my mother-in-law church treasurer, so we knew a few people, of course, and wanted to see the church continue to thrive, as it had been doing with a resident priest. Falling into a pattern of once a month in our village has worked out well, and much of the rest of the time we go to the cathedral on the Island, where the dean generously risks the pulpit to my charge once a month and I struggle to celebrate too, something I am not used to.

But, I am used to cathedrals. I was Dean of Belfast from 2011 to 2017, before returning very consciously to parish life, and experiencing once again the ordinary priestly things, many of which were fulfilled by others as I managed the organisational side of things. There was much that I missed in doing this, though never regretting the move to Swanage, including the enriching of the liturgy with a fine choir in St Mary’s under the direction of Simon Lole.

So, I was sitting last summer trying to work out how the various strings to my bow were going to be picked up, or not, as the case may be. Establishing a new routine took a while, and is still work in progress, but it is the division of time between the various elements that make up retirement life that are still not entirely resolved. We live on an Island where everything is familiar, but where we haven’t lived, until the last year, for forty-two years. I go into our village school to do an assembly, past a plaque that reads of the new extension having been opened by my father some years ago, and remind myself that my wife and my sisters were pupils of this school. It is a privilege to spend time with the house-bound too. Home Holy Communion is a blessing for us all.

Returning to what lay in prospect twelve months ago, through the help of a number of friends, and having been able to publish a Lent book in 2014, I was fortunate to find a publisher for the book I had completed on sabbatical, namely, *Journeying to the Light*, an Advent/Christmas book due out on 21st August 2023. That gave me one focus. TBN UK, the Christian broadcaster, gave me another, as I was invited to provide some input for a series of programmes from NI to be recorded last August in the “Sacred Harmony” series presented by Simon Lole.

To sum-up, the year has opened up possibilities, given me a chance to write a bit, garden and spend longer with my wife on long walks and leisurely coffees and meals. We haven’t had a holiday, oddly enough, but we live in a holiday place and can walk the beach any day, and travel to see family when we like. My next book, on the *Seven Words of Christ from the Cross* is complete and has been accepted for publication for next Lent, but the garden, as ever, calls for attention. Coffee first, then it’s planting out, “And I am feeding the pots”, comes a voice from the bedroom! **John Mann** was ordained in 1979 in the Church of Ireland serving most of his ministry in that Province moving to Salisbury Diocese. He was Dean of Belfast 2011-2017 and was awarded the Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 2018



***The Books of Jacob* by Olga Tokarczuk, translated by Jennifer Croft, published by Fitzcarraldo.**

I came to reading late – when my then teenage children started to read modern novels for pleasure and wanted me to enjoy them too. Now all in their forties they know that I always know what page I’m on in any book I’m reading and how many pages I’ve still got to read; they may not know that I know what

percentage of the book I'm yet to read. This may be why my daughter Sarah gave me this enormous book for Christmas – it has more than 900 pages numbered downwards – so I always know how many pages I've got left. Why? The author explains: "The alternative numbering of the pages used in this book is a nod to books written in Hebrew, as well as a reminder that every order, every system, is simply a matter of what you've got used to."

"The Books of Jacob" is a monumental historical and theological novel published in Polish in 2014 after seven years in the writing; it first appeared in English after a further seven years of translating by Jennifer Croft. It is set in the mid-18th century and is about a charismatic mystic self-proclaimed messiah, Jacob Frank, a young Jew from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who travels through the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires from Warsaw to Athens and Vienna to Istanbul, attracting and repelling fervent followers and powerful enemies in equal numbers as he converts first to Islam and then to Catholicism. Frank claimed that the end times had come and conventional morality needed to be turned upside down; he bragged about defiling the Torah and encouraged his followers to break all sorts of sexual and dietary taboos.

It was only when I'd got fewer than 400 pages still to read that I discovered that this novel is about real people and real places. I *Googled* an abbey in which Frank was imprisoned for 13 years, to discover that Częstochowa is a real city and its Jasna Góra Monastery attracts more than three million pilgrims every year, many of them walking the last 200 miles. I would love to join them.

The atheist (she claims, but I wonder) Nobel laureate's visionary epic takes on the biggest philosophical themes of the day: the purpose of life, the nature of religion, the possibility of redemption, the terrible history of antisemitism. But the awkward questions are asked quite simply. For example: "Who is this Saviour who allowed himself to be killed in such a cruel manner, and who sent him? And why must a world created by God be saved in the first place? And, 'Why is it so bad, when it could be so good?'"

Jacob Frank lived from 1726 to 1791. His story is narrated by Yente, a very old lady trapped between life and death ever since she arrived in Rohatyn (now in Ukraine) for a relative's wedding. But Yente is not the only narrator – Jacob Frank's contemporaries share their different perspectives of religion and science as they search for certainty while longing for transcendence. My favourite quote from one of them is "He who is full of himself has no space left for God." Let me give you some other examples.

Another character "realises that the plaintive rumble of the sea is a lament and that all of nature is taking part in this process of mourning those gods of whom the world has been in such desperate need. There is no one here. God created the world, and the effort of doing so killed him."

I loved this mixture of Hebrew and maths in a Bible study: "Father" in Hebrew is "av". We write that this way: *alef, bet*, from right to left. "Mother" is "em", or *alef, mem* ... "Av", "father", has a numerical value of three, because *alef* is one, and *bet* is two. "Mother" has a value of forty-one, because *alef* is one, and *mem* is forty. Now: if we add the two words up, "mother" and "father", then we get forty-four – the same value as "yeled", which means "child"!

Some of the characters visit Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, first the greatest church in the world but by then a mosque. One considers a huge picture of the Virgin Mary which I've known for 50 years "who was furthermore brazenly staring in my direction [and] I was overcome by a kind of breathlessness I had never experience before ... She is holding a child in her lap, as if she is holding a piece of fruit. But it is not the child that is important. Her mild face betrays no human affect except that which lies at the foundation of everything – a love that is absolutely unconditional. I know, she says, without moving her lips. I know everything, and nothing escapes my understanding. I have been here since the dawn of time, hidden in the smallest particle of matter ... Split a trunk in two, and you will find me; part a rock, and I will be there. This

is what that enormous figure seemed to be saying to me. It seemed to me that this majestic person was revealing a painfully obvious truth, yet I remained unable to understand it.”

So why is the novelist an atheist? Another character answers for her: “Moses and his *constitution* are frauds. Moses himself learned the truth, but he hid it from his people. Why? So that he could hold power over them, no doubt. And he constructed such a massive lie that it actually started to seem like the truth. Millions of people have believed in that lie, cited it, and lived by it ... What must it be like to realize your whole life has been an illusion? ... The World is a deceitful lie, rehearsed theatre. And yet, Moses had been given the greatest opportunity, he could have led the exiled nation ... to the true light, and yet he preferred to deceive them, and to present the injunctions he himself had invented as if they were divine. He kept that secret well, and it took us ages to realize the truth.” Ah, but who gave Moses his great opportunity?

All the sectarians in the story, however pilloried or persecuted, come to enjoy being different: “Once more we were other ... There is something wonderful in being a stranger, in being foreign, something to be relished ... It is good not to be able to understand a language, not to know the customs, to glide like a spirt among others who are distant and unrecognizable. Then a particular kind of wisdom awakens ... A person who is a stranger gains a new point of view, becomes, whether he likes it or not, a particular type of sage. Who was it who convinced us that being comfortable and familiar was so great? Only foreigners can truly understand the way things work.”

“The Books of Jacob” is an amazingly ambitious and demanding work; if you are patient and have the eyesight to cope with too much small print, you will appreciate how much it has to ask and answer about the issues of our times. It took me six weeks to finish it, but as the page numbers grew lower the faster I had to read. **Geoffrey Marshall**



**Any Issues?** Our next National Council meeting is on 12<sup>th</sup> October, prior to that we shall be having our usual meeting with the Pensions Board and NCIs earlier in the month. I would be grateful to receive from members any questions or issues they would like us to discuss at this meeting. In the meantime, please address any concerns to [malcolm.liles48@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.liles48@gmail.com)



***Gorton Gospel*** *an excerpt from a novel written by Geoff Smith one of our members, available on Amazon*  
I was born and brought up in Manchester. When I was five my parents bought a house in Gorton opposite Sunny Brow Park.

I have always been proud of my Manchester roots, the football teams, the Free Trade Hall, the Ship Canal and more recently the music. I went to school in the centre of the city Manchester Central Grammar School in Whitworth Street. I moved away from Manchester, where I was Vicar of St John the Baptist, Little Hulton, in 1978, two years before Shaun Ryder formed the Happy Mondays, also in Little Hulton, bad timing on my part?

The Gorton Gospel is a hymn of praise to the Manchester I remember it is also a challenge which stems from three concerns that I have:

What would happen if Jesus returned today in what some evangelical Christians describe ‘The Rapture’. Would he be welcomed rapturously? How would he present himself? Jesus brought a challenge to the spiritual leaders of his day as Grace Givens brings a challenge to the Church I describe today and the entirely fictitious Bishop.

My main inspiration for the story was Professor David Ford's commentary on John's Gospel with his emphasis on love at the heart of the Gospel. There is a story I love to tell about the elderly St John, asked to speak to his congregation in the first century AD, he simply says 'little children 'love one another'. In my understanding of the story the Gospels tell us that love is always redemptive and in the character of Grace Givens in the Gorton Gospel, I try to show that to be true.

I made my main character a non-binary woman using the pro-noun 'they' purposefully. I made Grace the person they are in my story because 'they' are a challenge to the church today. The world is changing and for the better. As an early Methodist Church report describes it, alongside tradition and scripture, the Church needs to recognise 'the spirit of the age'.

The Living in Love and Faith debate in the Church of England is so important to the future of the national church and the church is getting it so very badly wrong. I hope that my story helps people rethink their prejudices.

In the book Grace Givens is born and discovers Jesus in a mobile cinema showing a film about the life of Jesus. As 'they' grow older their understanding changes as they begin to cause a reaction in their neighbourhood by performing miracles.

Eventually Grace leaves Manchester but then returns to fulfil the mission they believe has been given to them by God.

The narrative follows much of the life of Jesus but has been translated into Mancunian.

### ***Approaching Jerusalem***

*Can life be lightly discarded?*

*For Grace, returning to Manchester, to Gorton, involved risk. They knew that ahead of them was the risk of rejection, like Jesus two thousand years before them, they were returning to the place they had left. They knew that it was time to witness the truth at the heart of a lie, shared all those years ago on a dusty road on the way to Emmaus.*

*The question: Who do you say that I am?*

*It was, as Grace knew, deep in their heart, an almost unanswerable question. But as they headed towards the City they were setting in motion the wheels that would lead to confrontation and possibly death.*

*From what they knew, had studied, had considered, they were fully aware, as Tim had explained in conversation, and declared from the pulpit, the church was called to discover ways of dying creatively in order to transform the world with love. Such a creative death was to be found on the cross, in the passion, this they both knew and yet feared, as they feared the consequences of returning to their home town and home City.*

*The Church's long history had somehow failed to convince the people that had rejected them for being non-binary, had rejected them for their gender difference, had rejected them for their apparent ability to perform miracles and share truth through simple stories that renewal, journeying, death, resurrection, formed a pattern of which they were a part and a history which they shared, of journeying forward in the potential transforming power of the creation of the word become flesh.*

*For Grace and their friends the road leading to the City had to be trodden in companionship with the Messiah of two thousand years ago. The one known as Jesus, as they were known as Carpenter.*

*The Son of a Carpenter who was driven out of the Village, as Grace was driven out of Gorton. Despite naming the one they followed, not as others named him, but as his disciples named him Christ. The decisive event of human history, the one in whom love became embodied in a person, in flesh and blood.*

*This decisive event for the Church then, was not a decisive event for the Church now, as the Bishop had made only too clear to Tim. There is, he had said, no need for the Church to take any notice of a girl, a non-binary girl at that, claiming to be the new Messiah.*

*Tim had protested Grace was not making any such claim. All that is happening is that Carpenter is making it clear that love will transform so much that is at odds with the world today. Love can still heal people, love can still help people as they work through the many problems that life throws in their way. Poverty, homelessness, sickness, a lack of confidence, evil spirits and possession.*

*Tim had argued with the Bishop as best he could, even quoting an earlier German theologian, saying that Grace, or Carpenter, had been given a vocational title by others and had not claimed it for herself.*



### **The Pensions Board and Charm**

During the past few months it has become clearer that the current CHARM housing model will be unsustainable into the future, as revealed in the last newsletter with rents only paying around 75% of housing costs. At the July General Synod the Chair of the Pensions Board, Clive Mather, spoke about the need to look for options for the future over the next few months and to consult with employers, dioceses and central Church agencies to find other ways of offering housing support. His hope is to give more choice and take better advantage of partnerships especially with other sources of housing. Our hope would be that this consultation will also include current and future possible CHARM tenants.

One issue on which we would like to have members views about, and examples of the practice where prior to ordination training dioceses asked prospective ordinands to sell any house they owned to help pay for training, we are told this happened in the 60s-90s, but some have claimed it went on later in some dioceses. We would like evidence of this, rather than anecdotes. [malcolm.liles48@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.liles48@gmail.com)



### **Archbishops' Commission on Re-imagining Care**

This was recently published and has been sent out to Retirement Officers but will also be of interest to members, it is a short report amounting to 50 pages with a number of pictures. It can be found at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/archbishops-commissions/reimagining-care/final-report-reimagining-care-commission>

Revd Canon Dr Joanna Collicutt, Supernumerary Fellow (Psychology of Religion), Harris Manchester College, Oxford has written a piece about this report on Modern Church at: <https://modernchurch.org.uk/joanna-collicutt-theological-reflection-on-care-and-support-reimagined>



### **Cases of hardship in the cost-of-living crisis**

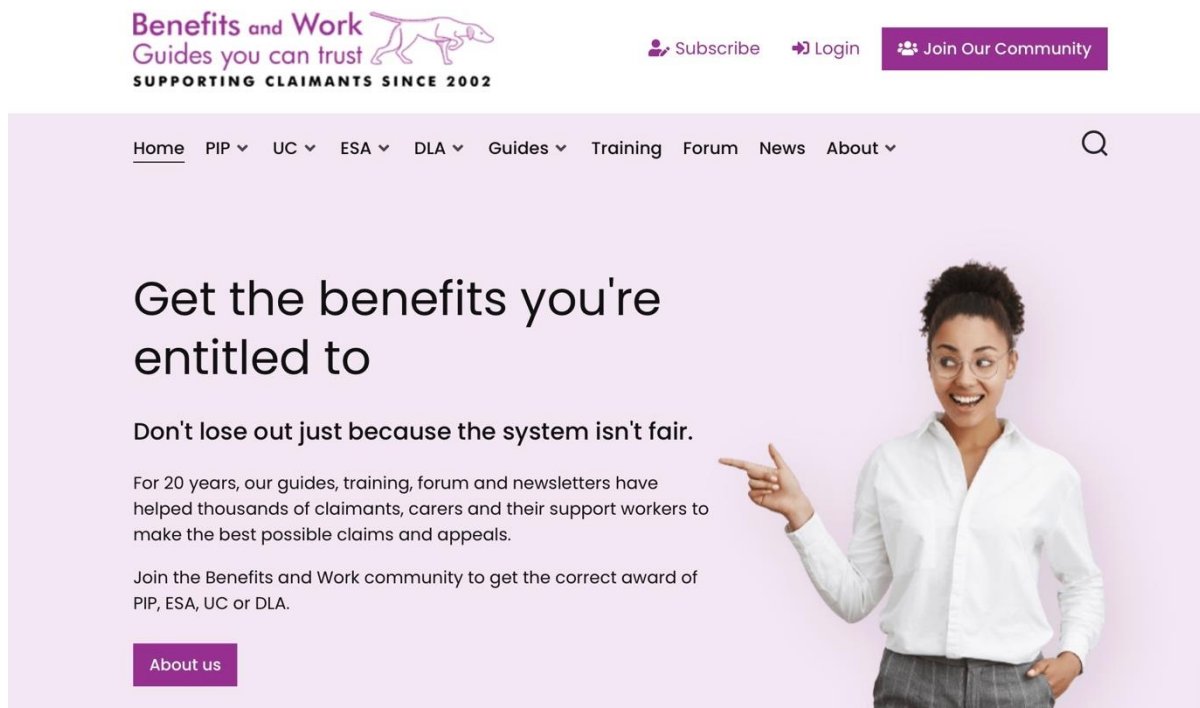
The July meeting of the RCACoE Council discussed some stories of members known to be suffering from hardship at the present time, it was mostly a matter of anecdote though. If we are to present a better case for a restoration of the clergy pension to the level it stood at before changes took place 10-12 years ago



and the losses caused by inflation since, we need to have anonymous but factual stories from our members.

So if you have a story to tell please send it on a confidential basis to me, I will anonymise it before using it to help prove our case for positive change.

Hopefully, the information below may be of help to some in applying for Personal Independence Payments from the Dept. of Work and Pensions



**“Benefits and Work”** is a Charity to help those who have mobility problems. Is a web site to help people claim Personal Income Payments. If you log onto the site it gives you a way of taking the PIP test that is independent to the Government claim site.

### How the PIP test works

Pip is divided into two components, the Daily Living component and the Mobility component. The number of points you score decides whether you get an award of either component or both and at what rate.

#### Daily living activities

The decision about whether you are entitled to the daily living component, and if so at what rate, is based on the number of points you score in total for the following activities:

1. Preparing food
2. Taking nutrition
3. Managing therapy or monitoring a health condition
4. Washing and bathing
5. Managing toilet needs or incontinence
6. Dressing and undressing
7. Communicating verbally
8. Reading and understanding signs, symbols and words
9. Engaging with other people face-to-face

Each of these activities is divided into a number of point scoring descriptors. To get an award of the daily living component, you need to score: 8 points for the standard rate 12 points for the enhanced rate



You can only score one set of points from each activity, if two or more apply from the same activity only the highest will count. So, for example, if:

- 4d. Needs assistance to be able to wash either their hair or body below the waist. 2 points
  - 4f. Needs assistance to be able to wash their body between the shoulders and waist. 4 points both apply, you will receive only the 4 points for the 'between the shoulders and
10. Making budgeting decisions
11. waist' activity. These can then be added to points for other activities, such as 'Dressing and undressing'
12. Making budgeting decisions
13. waist' activity. These can then be added to points for other activities, such as 'Dressing and undressing'

## **Mobility activities**

The decision about whether you are entitled to the mobility component, and if so at what rate, is based on the number of points you score in total for the following activities:

- 1 Planning and following journeys
  - 2 Moving around
- 
- Both activities are divided into a number of point scoring descriptors. To get an award of the mobility component, you need to score: 8 points for the standard rate 12 points for the enhanced rate

**As with daily living above, you only score the highest points that apply to you from each activity, but you can add points from mobility activities 1**

It's vital that, before you complete the PIP test, you understand that just because you can carry out an activity, that doesn't mean you are prevented from scoring points for being unable to do it.

You need to be able to complete an activity 'reliably' in order for it to apply. According to the guidance, 'reliably' means whether you can do so:

- Safely
- To an acceptable standard
- Repeatedly
- In a reasonable time period, no more than twice as long as a person without a physical or mental health condition would take to carry out the activity.

So, for example, if you can 'wash and bathe unaided' you will not score any points for that activity. But if it takes you hours to do so or it would be dangerous to leave you alone to bathe – for example, because you might have a seizure - then you may score points.

Or if you could walk 20 metres once, but afterwards you would be so exhausted that you could not do so again for hours or you would be unable to carry out other everyday activities after walking 20 metres, then you may count as not being able to do so.

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**Fluctuating conditions** You can score points in the PIP test even if there are some days when you can carry out an activity. The fluctuating conditions rules state that you are awarded points if you satisfy one or more descriptors under an activity on more than 50% of the days in the twelve-month qualifying period.

So if, because of depression, you are unable to motivate yourself to prepare and cook a simple main meal on four days a week, then you should score points for that even though on the other three days a week you can cook for yourself.



### ***St. Andrews Mickfield***

Is a grade one listed church in Suffolk. Although deconsecrated the church retains the chancel as a place of worship holding morning prayers on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday and Sung Evensong on the 4<sup>th</sup> of the month. Diocesan approval is given for these services.

St. Andrews is a place of worship and private home. They are seeking people to lead Sunday prayers. In return for this they offer 4 nights of bed and breakfast for 2 with two evening meals. The local Rector and Archdeacon are in support of this.

If you are interested please contact: [richard.hawkes0@gmail.com](mailto:richard.hawkes0@gmail.com)

**The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England**

**Items for the October newsletter should be with the editor,**

**Malcolm Liles,**

**by the end of September at 473 City Road Sheffield S2 1GF**  
**[malcolm.liles48@gmail.com](mailto:malcolm.liles48@gmail.com) preferably in Word Calibri 12 point**



