



From the Chair: the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher writes:

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I have just completed my first year as your Chairman of the RCA's Council and, looking back, I simply want to record what a privilege it has been and, I hope, will long continue to be.

One of my joys this autumn has been to attend two conferences for Retirement Officers and Council Members - the first, a one day one at Sarum College drawing from dioceses across the South of the country, and the second, for 24 hours, at the Pleshey Retreat House for those from East Anglia and a bit beyond. Both were characterised by good humour, good food and great creativity - typical attributes I have come to discover amongst Retired Clergy, and ones that also showed themselves at a lovely day at Launde Abbey with the Retired Clergy and their spouses from the Leicester Diocese, as well as the excellent AGM we had at Bishopthorpe, led and hosted by the Archbishop himself.

Looking back over these months has led me to reflect on the seven key aims of our Association, and how far we are fulfilling them currently. Where things are going well, that is always something to give thanks for, and to acknowledge that without the work of Malcolm Liles, David Pritchard, and our Council Members, we would be much the poorer. And if other things are lower key, is that because we haven't focused on them, or perhaps that's just their nature. So here's my 'starter for ten' and it would be lovely to get some feedback on what I am identifying in relation to those aims at present.

1. To foster the continuing ministry of retired clergy.

As I said in another of my contributions to this newsletter I think that we need to be very careful not to identify 'ministry' with the number or the variety of services that we take. The ministry we were ordained to was never intended to be confined to the liturgies we led and celebrated but was always centred on the life of the whole community. But fostering ministry in all its diversity remains very important to the life of the church. Sometimes that will involve the removal of barriers (I think, for instance, of the excessive demands for safeguarding training that were being made in some dioceses some years ago) or reminding those responsible for developing diocesan strategies that retired clergy have a great deal of wisdom to share and are very often are crucial to the delivery of such strategies as well. Here it remains a challenge to get our voice heard, whether synodically, or in Bishops' staff meetings, but it is good to see some progress being made.

2. To support and encourage retired clergy.

One of the things that I have encountered on several occasions is the fact that many retired clergy feel undervalued. As those of us who have run parishes or worked with volunteers and work forces in other capacities, valuing our colleagues, particularly, perhaps, when they are volunteers, is crucial to the well-

being of any organisation. I was very interested, therefore, that both at Sarum and at Pleshey, these emerged as major themes. From Sarum came a pledge from Julian Hubbard to do some more work on best practice as a retirement officer, and at Pleshey a list of 20 things was drawn up with respect to ways that bishops, retirement officers, archdeacons and others could show their appreciation of retired clergy. Much that is good is already happening but I sense that this aim will remain as a challenge for the future.

3. To encourage Retired Clergy to meet.

Currently I would say that this seems to meet with limited success around the country, important as it is, and it very much depends on local initiatives, whether at diocesan, archdeaconry or deanery level. One key question is whether there is some modest financial support either from a bishop, or a trust, or the diocese itself. Invitations to a meeting with the Diocesan Bishop or to a cathedral service are also greatly appreciated. However, the other thing I've noticed is that many of our retired colleagues seem to be more interested in meeting with groups like Deanery Chapters, or having CMD opportunities, rather than just gathering as retired priests (especially when they are far from retired as far as their liturgical ministry is concerned), and I sense that we ought to be encouraging these as well.

4. To represent the needs of retired clergy at national level.

Here I cannot speak highly enough of the relationships that have been developed down the years both with the Pensions Board and those who focus on ministry, safeguarding and the like in working for the National Church Institutions at Church House, Westminster. Recently we asked if we could have a representative to serve on the Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee (RACSC). Sadly this was declined, partly because of the danger that other interest groups would want to follow where we had led and that would imbalance the committee, but it was agreed that we would be consulted at a much earlier stage on advice/policies where we have a particular interest and expertise e.g. PTO requirements, and fees for Sunday Duties - subjects where I understand we have not had our voice heard in the past. These are early days but I feel that things are moving in the right direction, as they are in the dialogues with the Pensions Board for their responsibilities with pensions and housing. Mind you, watch this space for what the pension increases will be next April.

5. To keep retired clergy aware of changes in liturgical usage and professional conduct.

My suspicion, but do disagree with me, is that this may be something which is impractical in terms of the resources we have available. I'm sure we can do a bit through this newsletter (and I suspect that Malcolm might add at this point that all contributions on liturgical changes or best practice in professional conduct would be gratefully received) but the structure of the C of E also militates against any 'one size fits all' approach. I think, for instance, of the prayers the House of Bishops has been wrestling with through the Living in Love and Faith process and I would be surprised if a variety of responses to their usage did not appear in the different dioceses.

6. To encourage and support bishops in their pastoral responsibilities

Although it has always been true that there are clergy who like it best when their bishop leaves them well alone, and that applies in my experience to some congregations as well, the pastoral responsibilities as laid down in the ordinal are huge as they are, as you well know, not limited by anything other than geography. Given how impossible the task is for any bishop every bit of collegiate help, in my book, is a bonus, whether that is being done through Sunday Services and the Occasional Offices, cover during a vacancy, or the magnificent work of Retirement Officers and Widows and Widowers/Spouses Officers. In a few dioceses it has been a matter of deliberate policy to make sure that the retired clergy are represented at meetings of the Bishop's staff and the more that that can be encouraged the better.

7. To become a community of prayer.

If you are anything like me retirement has brought with it a number of spiritual challenges and I was reminded of that by the Archbishop of York when he said that he had found at every major stage in his life and ministry there was significant deconstruction before reconstruction could begin. Praying with and for each other is vital to the life of the Church. It will be expressed in many different ways but let's not forget our own prayer in the life of this Association as we seek to serve the retired clergy of the Church of England.

Lord, my support in ministry, may I be a support to others;
Lord, my strength in times of frailty, may I be a strength to others;
Lord, my companion in times of loneliness, may I be a companion to others;
Lord, my rock, my confidence and my joy, protect me in despair and dismay,
that I may complete my pilgrimage which began, continues and will end,
with hope, in you. Amen.

Your Friend and Brother, +Colin Fletcher



PLESHEY CONFERENCE FOR BISHOPS' RETIREMENT OFFICERS IN THE EASTERN REGION

Fourteen retirement officers from the eastern region met at Pleshey for a 'first ever' residential conference on October 9-10. Organised by Simon Hill the conference began with lunch and the programme for day one covered:

'Ministry in retirement' Bishop Colin Fletcher reflected on how ministry in retirement can/should evolve.

'Challenges and Opportunities' Natasha Gray and Joel Ryan (Pensions Board) and Sarah Funnel (Housing Officer) gave us an overall perspective on the issues currently being addressed at national level and gave us an update on CHARM.

'Preparing for retirement' Canon Dave Gardner (Director of Mission and Ministry, St Edmundsbury and Ipswich) spoke about the regional pre-retirement courses he has led and how dioceses can best prepare clergy for retirement.

'The Role of Bishop's Retirement Officer' Joe Hawes (Dean of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich) invited us to list the key issues for all diocesan retirement officers.

The second day's programme began with:

'Caring for the Wellbeing of Retired Clergy' Catherine Cashmore (Head of External Relations, Clergy Support Trust) gave us an overview of the grants and support services available from the Clergy Support Trust for retired clergy families. She also explored how best CST can equip Retired Clergy Officers to share news about the charity.

Simon Hill led a final discussion before lunch on the following questions: What are we trying to do?

What's stopping us? What can we do about it?

For many this conference was the first post-Covid residential conference. As with all such conferences there was the added benefit of being able to enjoy meeting informally over coffee/lunch breaks.

We are grateful to Simon for arranging the conference agreed to meet up again in two years time.

Canon David Pritchard (Vice Chair & Council Member)



OVERLAPPING CIRCLES

The Theology of the Kingdom: thoughts from the evening of a marriage and ministry

I've noticed that much of the content of this Newsletter relates more to the younger, more active, members of the retired clergy community: those with Permission to Officiate who are in their 70's, perhaps, or early 80's, who choose to contribute much of their time and experience in support of the often hard-pressed local parochial ministry.

'Overlapping Circles' is rather different. I'm a ninety-four-year-old, no longer in the PTO category. This is what I'm I thinking about; it's what's on my agenda as 'the shadows lengthen and the evening comes'. The busy life may be nearly over, but God willing my work is not yet quite done.

Yes, I will be 94 years of age in September 2023, having been ordained deacon in 1957. By decree of Joost de Blank, the then Bishop of Stepney, my fiancée Margaret and I were required to get married *at once* – or wait two years. Much to the consternation of her mother, we chose the first option, and so have recently celebrated our 66th anniversary both of marriage and ministry - with thanksgivings for such a long and fulfilling life together.

Twelve years ago we moved from a Pensions Board property into *Wyggestons*, a well respected charitable foundation here in Leicester. It provides in Lancaster House and nearby cottages - new award winning additions - together with the older *William House*, sheltered homes for about eighty residents including me. On the same campus is *Agnes House*, a care home for 26 residents needing constant night and day support. These *italicized* names all derive from our historic benefactors, William and Agnes Wyggeston, who founded their almshouses or 'hospital', as it was then called, in 1513.

Now after recent surgery my wife Margaret has serious health issues and advancing Alzheimer's. As a result she has moved from William House into Agnes House, where the level of care she now needs can be provided.

So after 66 years of living together we were suddenly 'put asunder' by our differing needs, all painfully confusing if you suffer from dementia. We are thankful that we are so near to each other – it's about two minutes over a covered bridge from my flat to her room. Sometimes Margaret fleetingly understands what's happening and why. At other times it is confusion for her and occasionally heart-wrenching for us both. My hope now (DV) is to see this journey through.

I have been adopted as a guest at Agnes House with encouragement to visit Margaret as often as is helpful to her and possible for me. We share in a number of activities such as weekly worship, exercises, and an occasional outing, and I am invited to lunch with her every day. We say our prayers together at bedtime. Margaret is also able at times to visit me for short periods in the William House flat. Travel backwards now to the 1950's when I was trained for ministry at a conservative evangelical college. I left there with a very

sparse understanding of the theology of the kingdom. It was not talked about or preached about much. Priority was given to the need for conversion from sin to a personal faith in Jesus.

And so it was not until 1980 when I was appointed chair of the Leicester Diocesan Board for Social Responsibility that I began to see how important it was to give attention also to the Biblical teaching about the kingdom, which includes not only a personal faith in Jesus but also where *caring love* takes a central place.

Margaret Thatcher was then prime minister, who, unlike God, did not have a bias towards the poor. (Readers will remember the book with this title by Bishop David Sheppard.) The Thatcher government provided many reasons for us to *do* our theology – a phrase rather popular at that time.

It was also in 1980 that Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated in El Salvador. This drew attention to Liberation Theology originating in South America. I was given a week away to read about it. The chair of the Leicester BSR was quite a hot seat to sit on, but I was appointed and encouraged by the then Bishop of Leicester, Richard Rutt, who generously said he saw me as the still centre in the middle of the storm. And the going *was* sometimes quite stormy.

Move forward again now to 2023 where here at Wyggestons on Sundays and Thursdays a good number of residents gather in the chapel for worship. Serving the kingdom in no way reduces the importance of the local Christian community gathering for praise, thanksgiving, intercession, sacraments, and absorbing the Word read and preached. Indeed I suggest it enhances it. It helps us to know what we are about.

I think it was David Monteith, formerly Dean of Leicester, who reminded us that when we are feeding the hungry we can then polish the candlesticks. Caring love and public worship – kingdom and church - are like two circles, overlapping in different contexts to different degrees. Sometimes there may be no overlap at all. On occasions I have experienced a warm feeling that what we are doing in one circle is a foretaste of the other. Charles Wesley captures the moment: *And if our fellowship below in Jesus be so sweet, what heights of rapture shall we know, when round his throne we meet?*

When in parish ministry I used to encourage the congregation to be “kingdom spotters” on the look-out for signs of the kingdom. I see Agnes House, the new home for my wife Margaret, as a *harbinger* of the kingdom. And I’m sure there are many other similar Care Homes up and down the country of which the same could be said.

I have rarely experienced before such a cheerful team of workers. I call them the Agnes Angels. Washing feet, a New Testament symbol of service, is nothing compared with the task these carers have to perform. They are constantly reminding residents to “press the orange button if you want anything”. I’ve never yet heard any of the carers say “I’m too busy”. The most frequent response is “you are most welcome!” They comfort those who weep, and are generally cheerful with everyone, both those who can smile, and those who can’t. Here is support for the wobbly and rest to the weary. It’s a sign, and more than that, of the present reality of God’s kingdom.

Agnes House has received awards from the Leicester Hospice for the quality of its end of life care. As midwives assist us and our mothers as we enter this life, so do our carer/midwives assist those who are departing from it. It’s holy work.

There are, then, two overlapping circles: church and kingdom. The amount of overlap can vary. The kingdom is what the good news of Jesus is about - and the church we still love is there both to worship and serve the kingdom. The sacrament we share is the foretaste.

In answer to the Lord's Prayer, one day the two circles will become one. Although they – the circles - are slightly different in Revelation 11: 15 we can recall (or sing): *(pp)* “The kingdoms of this world will-ill become... *(ff)* the Kingdom of our God, and of his Christ.... And he shall reign forever and ever...*(tutti)* Hallelujah. Ha-le-lu-jah!

These thoughts, then, are on my agenda as the shadows lengthen and evening comes. **Revd Canon John Seymour, Wyggestons Leicester, Summer 2023**



A response to the Chairmans July letter

Our Chairman's letter about active ministry in retirement for me coincided with a conversation I had fairly recently with my own Bishop about the renewing of my PTO. Following 36 years of paid and then stipendiary parish ministry I had to take slightly earlier than expected retirement on health grounds in 2003 since when I have had a continuing active ministry conducting services, both Eucharists as well as all the occasional offices. In a discussion with my Bishop about my desire to reduce driving, sustaining local vacancies and to reduce the amount of Sunday services - even in my own parish, and whether this required a PTO and all the safe guarding training now attached, my Bishop affirmed that it did due to my agreement with my incumbent I was still exercising 'a public ministry' (listed contact details, photo on parish website etc).

Throughout my ministry I have always seen it as wider than taking services or being within church buildings. Having served in just two dioceses, lived in 12 houses (of which two were curate's houses, one a vicarage and four rectories) I have engaged in local government as well as chaplaincy in sport.

My interest in serving as a councillor in local government was suggested to me when first moving to my current diocese as a young priest. It continued, having failed to be elected, when my then Bishop in the early 70s persuaded me to 'give up teaching and become a proper priest' (having found myself having moved here from my first diocese to returning to teaching with my family needing more income) inducted me into two tiny villages with a total population of less than 500. To fill my time constructively this led to my being elected as a district councillor and then as a Health Authority member. Subsequently I took on roles in education, becoming for seven years Chairman of the Diocesan Board and in a wide variety of volunteer roles in the NHS and until abolished by a new Government in 2010, by the Standards Board for England.

The different aspects of ministry have not only been mainly enjoyable and fulfilling but have continued into my 23 years since being granted a PTO as well as aided by the privilege of both living and working in the centre of the diocese as well in the same parish for more than 24 years (4 as the incumbent) where I suppose some know me as both 'the old rector and also the old mayor' **Roger Knight**



A Briefing on GS2307 for the Retired Clergy on the Governance Reform of the National Church Andrew Watson, Bishop of Guildford, July 18th 2023

Prior to the debate on Governance at General Synod in July 2023 I was invited to write a brief report outlining the thinking behind it. Here is what I wrote: *Imagine yourself as the Church Warden of a large church with a somewhat complex governance structure. On Monday you attend the PCC, which discusses the next stage of implementing the exciting new vision recently unveiled by the Vicar following considerable consultation.*

On Tuesday you attend the 'Growing Faith' Governance Committee, since part of the exciting new vision – developing a new discipleship initiative across the church and church school – falls outside of the PCC's remit.

The Vicar has got some separate ideas of his own, which he plans to implement with the help of a private funder – thus bypassing the PCC structure once more. You meet with him on Wednesday to discuss his plans and how they might fit, or not, with the PCC's agreed direction of travel; and then meet with the Associate Vicar on Thursday who has also found funding and developed new plans of her own.

Where's the money for the PCC's vision going to come from? Fortunately, the church has a considerable endowment fund, but that's under a separate governance body which meets on the Friday. Various questions about pensions emerge during that meeting, which are added to the agenda of a sixth governance body the following day.

And meanwhile the church has put in place a central secretariat to help service the other governance bodies, and requires separate arrangements of its own. The governors of the Central Services Board meet on the Sunday afternoon, so neatly rounding off the Church Warden's week.

The analogy is inexact, of course; but the current situation with the governance of our seven National Church Institutions bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the imagined scenario above, with all the duplication, frustration, lack of clarity/accountability, and waste of time and money it implies. There are sound reasons why the mission of the National Church cannot simply be brought into one single governance structure: some of the arrangements relating to the Church Commissioners, Pension Board and National Society are tampered with at our peril, not least given the legal and regulatory frameworks in which they operate. But to seek to bring the national support of the work and mission of the Church – or at least as much of it as possible – within a single governance structure still seems a worthy aim, with vision being developed by the Bishops-in-Synod (in consultation with a much wider range of stakeholders) and with the implementation of that vision falling to a new governance body known as *CENS* (or *Church of England National Services*) - so creating four National Church Institutions (NCIs) out of seven, each with a clearer and more focussed remit.

Given the expanded field of operation, it is going to be vital that CENS is of a size and shape that enables it to be both nimble and informed, drawing together a wide range of expertise without becoming too large and unwieldy. Experience from other organisations has highlighted the value of diversity – especially, in our context, a diversity of experience, skill, gender, age, ethnicity and church tradition – in good and creative decision-making, a vision which the Church of Galatians 3:28¹ and 1 Corinthians 12² should champion. Consistent and expert chairing will also be required – a very significant role in itself, and one which the Project Board believes should be remunerated. And, given the endemic trust deficit across the Church, there should be innovative approaches to scrutiny within our Synodical structure, preferably in the spirit of critical friendship rather than outright antagonism!

To achieve the above, the Project Board believes that CENS will need to be rather smaller than the current Archbishop's Council, with a real, if modest, rebalancing of its membership in favour of those appointed for particular skills (and with diversity in mind), together with a small reduction in ex-officio and elected roles. Some comparably-sized charities have gone considerably further, even reducing the elected membership to nil, but the Project Board has considered that and rejected it as inconsistent with the Church's ecology/ecclesiology. Meanwhile the proliferation of councils, committees, sub-committees and working groups within the national Church have also been explored, not least because a lack of Terms of Reference have frequently contributed to the opacity of the Church's decision-making and accountability; but the

¹ 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'.

² Paul's image of the Body of Christ.

Project Board has resisted putting a fully-formed committee structure in its place, recognising that that will be ultimately be the responsibility of the CENS Trustees.

There have been regular encouragements from some quarters to expand the work of the Project Board to look at governance issues beneath the NCI level, but these have been resisted, given the size of the existing task. Similarly, there has been no attempt to reform General Synod. By focussing on the governance of the NCIs, the Project Board believes that we have put together a positive and coherent package, which will help to engender trust and articulate for the first time that the sole role of the NCIs is 'to serve, support, encourage and enable the mission of the Church' through its churches, schools and communities.

This has been a long and painstaking process, with very wide engagement with stakeholders across the Church, both in its initial stage, headed up by the Bishop of Leeds, and in more recent times. In particular the Project Board has deliberately not moved straight to legislation, as originally envisaged by General Synod in February 2022, but has taken its time to refine its proposals in conversation with others, including regular meetings with the Synodical Reference Group. Decisions have had to be made in the end, in amidst widely divergent opinions. Not every view has been accepted. But each has been carefully listened to and given proper attention.

Given that the Project Board believes that the proposals hold together, there is some concern that a potential raft of amendments at this stage would unbalance what is proposed, and even – potentially – lead to greater muddle than we already have (and 'better the muddle you know...!'). Were Synod to agree to the proposals as they stand, however, that would not be the end of the story. Instead, it would simply give the green light for us to proceed to the legislative phase and to significant, detailed conversations with interested Synodical parties as we tweak and refine the proposals further.

The Synod debate was positive, and I felt able to accept three of the tabled amendments, though not two others. The result was as follows: The motion was carried by 328-17, with ten recorded abstentions,

That this Synod:

1. welcome the recommendations of the National Church Governance Project Board set out in GS 2307 as the basis for the reform of the National Church Institutions and Governance Structures of the Church of England

(i) except in respect of recommendation 13, where specific provision should be made so that a majority of the members of 2 the CENS board are either elected or appointed from the members of Synod;

(ii) except in respect of recommendation 14, where specific provision should be made so that two members of the Audit and Risk Committee are members of either the House of Laity or the House of Clergy of the General Synod and are jointly elected by the members of those Houses;

2. request the introduction of draft legislation to give effect to the necessary statutory changes for the implementation of these proposals no later than the February 2024 Group of Sessions.



Canonical Hours

In October 2022 I was admitted for surgery in The Freeman Hospital in Newcastle upon Tyne.

The surgery was a Whipple Procedure (named for the surgeon who first designed it not the clerical outfitters!) to remove a Tumour in my Bile Duct. The surgeon removed quite a few other parts of me

including my duodenum and my pancreas. I was in hospital for a month. Despite being a licensed priest in the Diocese (House for Duty) I was not visited by anyone from the Diocese no Bishops and no Archdeacons. Because of Covid my wife had to 'phone each day for a one hour slot. This involved her in a one hour drive each way.

Following my return home I did receive pastoral and Eucharistic support from the Rural Dean. Despite this pastoral neglect one member of the congregation was in regular contact and on one occasion sent me a link to a broadcast on Radio 3 (The Canonical Hours).

I listened to the programme and reflected on my situation as a priest unable to exercise my ministry, I was confined to bed and following the surgery was placed on a nil by mouth regime for three weeks.

I then thought that the one 'ministry' available to me was the ministry of prayer and so following the pattern of the canonical hours I began to reflect prayerfully on the patients around me, the staff and the hospital

Canonical Hours in Ward 5

Matins, the first hour.

Sung as the hospital day

commences as the day shift

Switch on the Ward lights.

At 6 00 am observations begin

Blood Pressure, temperature

heart rate. Good Morning, Good Morning

echoing the Beatles.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.

Lauds, celebrates the new day

Between each burst of activity

Respite follows. The common mood

follows the common good. Resting

before a change of shift. Smiling eyes

bring light, beds are made, bed baths,

showers for the ambulant.

My leaking pancreas flushed.

My neighbour sighs with pain.

During the night bed 4 has received

A new patient from surgery.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.

As sun arches through hospital

windows, Prime, is intoned.

Food containers opened.

Breakfast served, soft foods for

Delicate stomachs, cereals

Or porridge brought to bedsides

Give us our daily bread. Forgive our

Sins. Hail Mary, full of Grace.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.

Terce takes us through the hours.

Doctor's rounds. Prognoses

Are shared, further diagnoses written

On the computerised adding machines.

From bedside-to-bedside patients

Wondering. Is this the day I hear

that wonderful word of solemn blessing,

'It is time for you to think of home'.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.

Sext marks the day shift's halfway point.

In these hours of never ending

days minds turn to gratitude for physical

recovery. The stress of a surgeon's knife

remains but wounds heal. Yesterday's pain

become tomorrow's blessing.

Grandma's advice, don't scratch the scabs

just let them heal, be strong.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.

None marks the mid-afternoon pause

before observations, lunch.

Menu's chosen just a day before

May be less appetising as covers

are lifted. But a switch from nil

by mouth to pasta with fish is a blessing.

Give us this day our daily bread and fishes.

Let miracles occur, generosity shared.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.

Vespers, evening draws in again

I simply fail to notice the shift

In time from summer to winter but my

iPhone had it covered. As if by magic

an evening meal is served. Bloods fine,

medicine prescribed, pain controlled.

Anticipate the solemn watch, ethereal

music lifts our spirits to the divine.

The lights are dimmed.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.

At compline the hours draw close

Ward 5 gathers for handover.

Day-shift to night-shift, a night of silent watches,

of unsteady steps, relieving

oneself, walking like a man wired for sound.

Machines beeping as you walk

under the cautious watch of the night shift.

You return to the day's challenges

Continued healing is a blessing claimed.

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus.



There is a vacancy on the RCACoE National Council

One of our council members has decided to stand down so there is a vacancy on the national council to represent York, Leeds, Newcastle and Durham.

We are looking for a volunteer, or nomination from members in those dioceses to replace Clive Harper. Any offers or enquiries about this should be forwarded to Malcolm Liles at malcolm.liles@gmail.com as soon as possible. Council would especially welcome a women priest to replace Clive if possible. If there is more than one nomination for the region there will be an election via the Winter 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 inform our actions and relationships with the national church institutions and other bodies.

Annual General Meeting We held our AGM for 2022 on 14th September at the Archbishops Palace, Bishopthorpe York, thanks to a kind offer by the Archbishop of York, attended by 46 members. This was our first in person meeting since Covid. Next year we hope to hold a General Meeting in each Province, again in York on a date yet to be fixed, and In London at St. Andrew's Waterloo on 12th September so do book that date in your diary to come along. Further details will be in the Spring newsletter.

The AGM brought up the following issues, which the national council will try to work with during the next months: Exclusion/lack of welcome at Deanery Chapter gatherings; continuing resources for spiritual growth; Not being part of CMD; lack of consistency of experience across dioceses; Offer/used for spiritual direction; early retirees rents rise faster than their gross pension + benefits; GDPR; CMS database use by dioceses can exclude the retired; PTO/licence to Area Dean- which would be better; levels of fees vary between dioceses (be careful where you retire!); the future provision of retired clergy and dependants housing; why is the rent formula not transparent?; is Sanctuary profiteering?; can we get PTOs onto General Synod?



Charm and Clergy Retirement Living

You will have seen in the July newsletter the statement to the General Synod by Clive Mather, Chairman of the Pensions Board the comment that the PB were facing a “perfect storm” this year. Some of the reasons for this are set out below:

1. The demand for rented housing has been above the level budgeted for in this financial year and looking forward is higher than in the past. 100+ houses were needed rather than the predicted 60, as a result the Archbishops Council had to provide £9 m. in emergency funding to enable demand to be met.
2. Until 2010 funding for retirement housing came to the PB from the Church Commissioners. This change in 2010 led to the PB seeking loans on commercial terms, some of these have interest rates related to inflation so are costing the PB more than originally envisaged.
3. Despite a rent increase of 10.1% in April for the tenants of the Charm scheme (1800+ households) the rental income only covers 75% of the PB's service on its debt. Rents are not set at the level of social housing but to be affordable nevertheless. Some retired clergy and their partners, and especially those who receive a smaller clergy pension because of short service or ill-health retirement, are finding that paying the rent is consuming most of their clergy pension, often being faced with making applications to clergy charities to enable them to get by.

The PB as a result are launching a consultation between now and April about changing the present offer in order to support future generations of retiring clergy and their partners to enable choice at retirement. We were shown some slides of the consultation at our recent meeting with the NCIs in October, we would have liked to have had the slides we saw then to put in this newsletter, but they have not been made available to us.

They say that Clergy Retirement Living will have no impact on their current tenants who have a lifetime assured tenancy. One of the features of this tenancy has always been the option to move within the

scheme should the situation of the tenants change. However, I have already been made aware of tenants who have been told that they cannot move out of their current property to a less expensive one elsewhere in the country. And some in their 60's have been told to delay their retirement until a house is available.

There was in the presentation a hope that the focus of the PB could more effectively be on those who are currently in ministry to enable them to purchase their own property either before or around retirement and to reduce the proportion of tenancies over time. I would suggest that whilst that aim may be a noble one it does not reflect reality for the following reasons:

- The PB seems to believe that their help with early retirement planning will enable more retiring clergy to afford to buy a house on a stipend in the current market. Yet over the last few years stipends have fallen in value as a result of stipends rising more slowly than average pay.
- There are very few sources of mortgages for people in their 60's to purchase housing without a substantial deposit, and mortgage rates are unlikely to fall much in the next few years, certainly not back to less than 1%.
- Clergy are able to make additional payments (AVCs) to their pensions whilst in ministry, the PB advocates this as a way of saving more money. Some of us remember the encouragement we had to invest in Equitable Life, this collapsed in 2000 and investors received very little back following the event.
- During the last financial year over 50% of clergy applied for help with living costs to the Clergy Support Trust, so where is the money for house purchase going to come from? It would require a working and pensioned partner.
- It may be that the retiree would wish to live in the south of England to be near family members, but would they be able to afford southern purchase prices?

I am not at all sanguine that the way ahead offered by the PB is a viable one for the future of the proportion of retired clergy currently needing to rent, either from them or other providers. The increased demand for property to rent this year may well reflect an inability of retired clergy being less able to purchase property.

There is I think a better way forward, next week my Deanery Synod is going to debate the following resolution:

In view of the problems being currently experienced by the Pensions Board in providing sufficient housing for retiring clergy, their partners, dependents and/or widow/ers, within their current funding constraints. This Synod requests that:

- a) The Church Commissioners invest in the provision of rented housing for retired clergy, widow/ers and others eligible , that is currently provided by the Pensions Board under its CHARM/Clergy Living in Retirement scheme.**
- b) That this investment should be sufficient to discharge the current debt held by the Pensions Board in this respect and should also fully fund the future purchases of all retirement properties for the scheme.**

It would be good if members could promote this resolution to their Deanery and then Diocesan Synods so that it can actually be debated by the General Synod. Or maybe you could persuade one of your diocesan General Synod members to sponsor this as a private members motion. Do please let me know if you are adopting this course of action. ***Malcolm Liles***

Journeying to the Light

Daily readings through Advent and Christmas – this has recently been published by Messenger Publications in Ireland, written by John Mann, one of our members and former Dean of Belfast Cathedral. In its preface Bishop Brendan Leahy writes “John is a realist. Not everyone finds the weeks of Advent-Christmas easy. What comes across in this book is John’s conviction that the miracle of the incarnation has something very deep to say to us: God has come down to us and dwells with us. We have not been left abandoned or alone in life “John offers vignettes of his own life, not to focus on himself but rather to evoke in us memories of Christmases past and then to make the links between the light of hope and our everyday lives.

On God’s Train

‘I dropped a clanger on my first day at the seminary.

One of the priests wanted to know where we’d all been before coming to Womersley. Thinking I was being amusing, I replied, “I’ve come from the wicked world.” That was it: I was labelled a troublemaker.’

In this candid memoir, Francis Pole, son of refugees from Austria, takes us on his entertaining life’s journey, from Catholic boarding school at the age of six, to working on the railways, to being ordained in the Roman Catholic Church, to being a probation officer, to finally finding his calling as an Anglican priest. Throughout it all, he has always forged his own highly individual path.’



Taken from the blurb of Memoirs “On God’s Train” published by Amazon and available in paperback and Kindle.

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

Items for the Winter newsletter should be with the editor

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