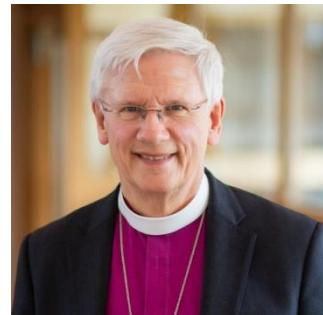


From our Chair – The Right Reverend Colin Fletcher.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

With the last days of Lent approaching, and Easter just round the corner, I am deeply conscious of the turmoil both Jesus and the Apostles faced as he set his face to go to Jerusalem, and as they went, with a mixture of emotions, with him. Though it is very different I am also very conscious of the turmoil currently facing many both in this country and around the world. President Trump has just unveiled his string of tariffs which will be charged on goods entering the United States with all the effects that they will bring for inflation and jobs both here and overseas. The earthquake in Myanmar has turned the world of so many people upside down, when they were already suffering during a civil war. Other civil wars, in Yemen, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have led to the deaths of many thousands and the displacement of many millions of people. Wars continue both in Gaza and in the Ukraine. And then there is the background of global warming resulting in forest fires and rising sea levels threatening to obliterate whole communities and even nations. The words of Jesus in Matthew 24 have an altogether too familiar ring to them when he spoke of wars and rumours of wars, famines and earthquakes.



As I write
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Closer to home, even though Spring has arrived, and long sunny days have, suddenly, become a daily pattern very much, there is also a degree of turmoil. The latest moves by the Chancellor to balance the Government's finances will bring uncertainty and hardship to many, including some of our own members, their families and friends. It was in that context that I had an interesting conversation with Ben Cahill-Nicholls, the Chief Executive of the Clergy Support Trust a few days ago. The Trust, as you may know, gave out over £6m in grants last year, almost 90% of which went to serving clergy. Indeed, one in every three stipendiary clergy have benefitted from the CST's financial help in the past two years. Given the fact that their grants go to widows and widowers of clergy as well as the retired clergy themselves I asked Ben if they know why they don't receive more requests for help from people like us. The answers to that question, and there are sure to be a range of different ones, is that at present they don't know for certain. It may be because those in their 70's and 80's, and indeed their 90's, are less inclined to ask for help than those of younger generations. Or it might be that they don't have the same pressures on family finances as they did when their children were growing up. Or maybe it's just that they are very skilful in surviving on less.

But the flip side of the equation is that I do hear stories of members who are having to cut back on food and heating bills as the pressures have grown on their budgets - or who lack the money to pay a substantial increase in Council Tax or to replace or repair the washing machine when it breaks down. If that's true for you, could I encourage you to consider applying for a grant from the Trust? Like every trust it has rules about who might qualify for a grant, and you can find these on their website:

<https://www.clergysupport.org.uk/> but Ben and his colleagues would love to hear from more of you.

Equally they would like to tell the stories more often of those who have received grants, and the difference that they made to their lives. Such stories are useful both to encourage more people to give to the work of

the charity, and to increase the number of applicants. If you have a story to tell then the person to contact is Catherine Cashmore at catherine.cashmore@clergysupport.org.uk .

Of course, as anyone reading the Church Times in recent weeks will have noticed, all of this links to the debates that are going on in Synod and at the Archbishops' Council and the Church Commissioners, to say nothing of the Pensions Board itself, about the appropriate levels of stipends and pensions. By the time of our next newsletter details should have emerged of the response to Ian Paul's motion put to last summer's General Synod which was met with such overwhelming support. With that it's a matter of 'watch this space' though I hope that not too much will be made of the argument made by some that the full Church of England pension, coupled with the state's Old Age Pension adds up to being roughly the same as the National Minimum Stipend. Whilst that is true, as we all know, our costs in retirement are very much higher when we lose the benefits of being provided with free housing, including not having to pay any rent or council tax or water charges and the like.

But enough of those matters, at least as far as this letter is concerned, though I am sure we shall return to them on other occasions as the debates continue. Below is a letter that I wrote to the Church Times about those ordinands who were required to sell their houses prior to entering training which I wrote a few weeks ago and which has produced a steady flow of emails and letters ever since.

As the Chairman of the Retired Clergy Association (Church of England) I am very grateful for the high profile you have given to the debate about the levels of clergy pensions in recent editions of your paper.

A subject that has also been touched on, and which is of particular personal interest to a number of our members, is the fact that ordinands entering training for stipendiary ministry were required or, at the very least, very strongly encouraged, to sell their homes, in part to pay for their training costs, particularly if their spouse was unable to pay money towards their living costs. The reasons given for doing this varied a little, very occasionally mentioning the burdens of a mortgage, or negative equity, but time and again they were told that 'you have no need to worry as the Church will look after you'.

To date I have first-hand evidence of this being common practice in about 15 dioceses, although I do not think it was ever a national policy, and it ran from the final decades of the 20th Century into at least the first decade of the 21st.

Sadly, those promises, although made in good faith, fell far short of what those clergy could reasonably have hoped for in terms of housing had steps been taken, as they were in a number of other dioceses, to find ways that they could retain a foot on the housing ladder.

As an Association we have been trying to find out just how many clergy were adversely affected but to date GDPR requirements have prevented that research from being undertaken.

If there are others of your readers who were and still are affected by these policies, I would be delighted to hear from them so that, as an Association, we can build up a clearer picture of what was happening down the years.

May I also encourage you to come to one of our two AGM's advertised elsewhere in this newsletter.

But back to the theme of turmoil. Some years ago, I remember visiting a very troubled part of the world. If my memory is serving me correctly it was Rwanda in the months shortly after the horrific genocide there. A very wise priest who had served in that part of the world over many years was reflecting on the fact that many in their churches particularly valued the Books of Daniel and Revelation. I asked why and the reason he gave was that they portray a world, seemingly out of control - one those congregants could readily

identify with - but that their message is quite clear - during the darkness, the chaos, and the seeming triumph of evil, God is still in control.

Our God reigns - Alleluia, Christ is Risen, He is risen indeed, Alleluia

Your Friend and Brother

+Colin

From The Editor – Charles Chadwick

Spring is traditionally the time when people start to plan for their summer holidays. For most parish clergy with school-age children to gain cover for one's break was always something of an art and best begun well in advance. There are many evocative books and stories about childhood including *Swallows and Amazons*, and *The Famous Five* and I recently read a fascinating book , which I warmly recommend, on the subject by Ysenna Maxtone-Graham, '*British Summer Time Begins: The School Summer Holidays 1930- 1980*'.

She writes well about how children were very largely unsupervised and left to their own devices. Entertaining oneself was the norm and principally done with one's siblings and friends. Time was spent on developing one's skills, hobbies and reading.

For those fortunate enough to go away it was usually one week in the United Kingdom nearly always in the same place. When my sister and I were growing up in the 1960s we always went to the same coastal town in Wales, to which members of my family had been holidaying in since 1912, and which my sister still goes to now with her children and grandchildren.

I would warmly welcome your personal recollections of the summer holidays. What stands out about them now? Who did you spend time with? Where, if anywhere, did you go? What was your parents' view of the long summer holidays? What were the best and worst parts of time away from school? Quirky and amusing anecdotes will be most welcome, as will photographs. Contributions of c.300 words will be ideal please.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England. Items from members for the July newsletter should be with me please, by 30th June at cjpchad9@aol.com preferably in Word, Calibri 12 point narrow margin. Thank you.



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Person In Profile - Ginny Thomas



Prior to ordination in 2000, I had lived abroad for 23 years due to my husband's business career, living in Germany (Düsseldorf, Frankfurt and Bad Homburg) Belgium (Tervuren/Brussels) and the United States (Fairfield, Connecticut).

During the time in Germany and Belgium I taught EFL (English as a foreign language) both at a language school and in the local community. In the United States I became involved in the running and organisation of an environmental charity working with local elementary (primary) schools, and with a group of youth symphony orchestras based in Norwalk, Connecticut. The ten years spent in the States was an important step along the path to ordination.

I served my curacy at St Luke's, Chelsea and after four years was appointed priest-in-charge and later vicar of St Mary The Boultons also in Chelsea. After ten years there I was appointed vicar to the Tew Benefice, near Chipping Norton, in the Diocese of Oxford, with its three churches; Great Tew, Little Tew and Heythrop. I retired in 2020.

1. *What is the first thing you can remember?*

Getting lost at a Fun Fair when I was about 4 years old. I remember looking up and not seeing my parents, looking for them and not finding them. Finally, I went and sat at the entrance to the Fair waiting for them to find me as they left, which they did.

2. *Who has been the greatest influence on your life?*

As we are celebrating our 55th wedding anniversary this year, my husband has had the greatest influence on my daily life with has included living abroad for 23 years. But regarding my spiritual life/life of faith, the professors and friends I made during my three years of study at Yale Divinity School have been the greatest influence.

3. *If you appeared on 'Mastermind' what would be your specialist subject?*

Hildegard of Bingen. She was the most extraordinary woman: an abbess, healer, politician, saint, theologian philosopher and visionary. She was a woman ahead of her time whose influence is still current.

4. *What is your favourite prayer?*

God be in my head,
and in my understanding;
God be in my eyes,
and in my looking;
God be in my mouth,
and in my speaking;
God be in my heart,
and in my thinking;
God be at my end,
and at my departing.

5. *What brings you contentment?*

Being with family, being outdoors (in reasonable weather!), gardening, listening to music, reading and poetry.

6. *What is your favourite piece of music?*

It's hard to choose a single favourite piece as there is so much music I enjoy. But if it must be one it would be Dvorák's string quartet nicknamed 'The American' which he wrote while on a happy holiday in Iowa during his time as Director of the National Conservatory in New York City. The quartet reminds me of the 10 happy years our family spent in the States.

7. *Who is your favourite fictional character?*

Currently my favourite fictional character is Persis Wadia in Vaseem Kahn's The Malabar House series. Set in 1950's India, Persis is India's first female police detective and as such faces a great deal of opposition, prejudice and resentment. But she is courageous, has a strong sense of right and wrong, can be fearless but also struggles with her personal feelings.

8. *What advice would you give to a new ordinand today?*

The same advice I was given 25 years ago: keep praying (especially the daily office and Scripture), go on an annual retreat, put your holiday first in your new diary, remember your ordination and keep a sense of humour.

9. What do you enjoy the most about being retired?

The opening lines of Kathleen Raine's poem 'Winter Paradise' come to mind; 'Now I am old and free from time, how spacious life'. I enjoy having the freedom and space to enjoy the pleasures of everyday life with family and friends, and to look back over my life with an increasing sense of wonder and gratitude.

10. How would you like to be remembered?

I would like to be remembered as someone who was kind, thoughtful and who cared for the natural world.

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Introducing the new lead Bishop for Retired Clergy

I am writing to introduce myself as I have recently volunteered to be lead for retired clergy taking over from the Bishop of Guildford in that role. This means, I understand, becoming President of the Retired Clergy Association.

My support of retired clergy began in 2007 when I became Archdeacon of Buckingham in the Oxford diocese. As part of that role I chaired the Buckingham Clergy Charity, set up to support retired clergy, widows and widowers. We appointed a charity visitor to help us as trustees and were actively support those in need both physically and pastorally. We also had an active network of active deanery officers to link retired clergy into the life of the deanery and all had their important part to play.



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In Dorset, where I have served as Bishop of Sherborne since 2016, we have a similar arrangement. However, no local charity although Salisbury diocese supports clergy widows and widowers by way of grants and has recently brought together some trust funds to offer financial help to clergy, if required, into retirement. We are expecting that fund to enable bridging loans to purchase property and other emergency finance to enable the smooth transition into retirement. This fund will also support two new part-time paid posts - a Dorset and a Wiltshire retired clergy officer who will co-ordinate the deanery network.

Retired clergy officers are vital. We have almost 400 retired clergy with PTO in the Salisbury diocese, so I am in touch regularly with those who move to the diocese on retirement and who have gifts to offer the local church and beyond. Many of our retired clergy offer spiritual direction and others support ministry development review, assist with clergy well-being through mentoring and training, as well as offering interim ministry. Our Nine deanery officers in Dorset offer ongoing pastoral support and my secretary oversees the process of PTO renewal every 3 years. She is a much-valued friendly voice on the end of the phone!

As lead bishop I will be working closely with the Retired Clergy Association to enable issues affecting retired clergy to be raised nationally if necessary. I will also have channels of communication with those employed nationally to support clergy in retirement. Currently that involves an update of the guidance for

PTO issued in 2019, which brings further clarity on the issue and renewal of PTO, in the light of safeguarding changes.

I continue to be grateful to all those who offer ministry in retirement, no matter how much or how little. In fact, I know from experience that the Church of England couldn't function without you!

I look forward to supporting the national work, particularly by sharing good practice, supporting the work of the Association and praying, giving thanks regularly for the gifts and ministries you continue to share.

+Karen Gorham

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The Pensions Board Welfare Advice Service

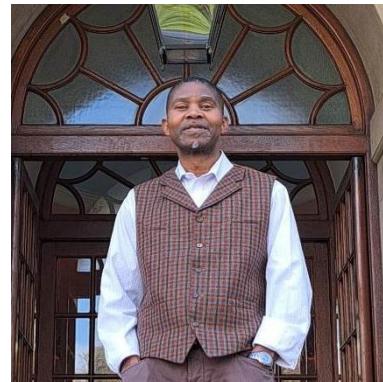
The Pensions Board offers support to retirees to help navigate financial challenges in retirement, including any concerns they may have about paying bills, managing tenancies and dealing with statutory agencies, amongst other things.

The Welfare Advice service is open to all retired members of the Board's pension schemes, not just Pensions Board Housing residents.

The service is overseen by the Board's Welfare Advisor, Daniel Williams, who explains more in this interview:

How long have you been with the Pensions Board?

I joined the Board just over three years ago. Before that, I have delivered welfare advice across a wide range of areas for Citizens Advice, the NHS, housing associations and other national charities.



What can you help with?

My work focuses on:

Supporting individuals to make informed choices about future housing

For instance, helping applicants to Church retirement housing and others to look at their likely outgoings in retirement, with Council tax, utility bills and rental payments, and what support might be available to them to manage those everyday bills.

Helping retirees to navigate welfare benefits

Applying for state benefits can be daunting. It's a complex area to navigate and to work out what you might be entitled to if you are struggling financially. I can help with checking what you might be able to apply for, covering a wide range of areas. For instance, offering advice about accessing sickness/disability benefits and other social welfare issues where you might have questions or need clarity.

I can also help with the process of starting to make a claim or an appeal. For instance, helping to advise on statutory rights and responsibilities, or working out where to start with forms to help get these right first time. Often, I find that just having someone to talk to about such matters, can help take a lot of the stress away from the process!

Helping with access to Charitable Financial Support Grants

There are several local and national charities that offer grants to help clergy and their spouses/partners in retirement, including the Pensions Board. Depending on circumstances, these charities might be able to help with general living expenses, emergency grants, moving costs, health and wellbeing, aids and adaptations, residential care and care at home fees as well as white goods and furniture. Through the Welfare Advice service, we can offer help to access some of these forms of support.

A big part of what I do is about making connections for individuals to agencies, charities and others who can help with their immediate challenge. Amongst others, I work with the DWP, clergy charities, other national and local charities, local authorities, diocesan officers (including retirement officers), and my colleagues in Pensions (who administer our charitable grants scheme) to get the best possible outcomes for those I am working with.

At what stage of life can you access support?

The Welfare Advice Service is available to members throughout their retirement. You are welcome to come back as and when the need arises about the same or a different matter. Indeed, we actively encourage that you do just that, as circumstances can change over time, and in some instances that might mean needing to take a fresh look at the support that can be offered (and/or updating details with DWP, if someone is in receipt of benefits, to ensure those are calculated correctly). All enquiries are handled sensitively and respectful of privacy.

How can someone get in touch to discuss Welfare Advice?

The best place to start, is to write to housingservices@churchofengland.org with your enquiry. A colleague will then get in touch to schedule an advice appointment.

If in reading this you think you know someone who could benefit from this help, then please know too that we can accept referrals from family and friends (as long as you have authorisation to speak on behalf of that individual e.g. through a Lasting Power of Attorney or similar).

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Annual General Meetings in 2025 We shall be holding two meetings this year, one in each province. The agendas of both will allow for discussion about pensions, stipends and housing as well as the usual AGM business. Come along to share your views about these matters.

We have booked **The Charterhouse, London EC1M 6AN** for our **southern** meeting on **16th June**. The meeting will begin with coffee, etc. at 10.30am to start at 11am, there will be a eucharist before lunch, finishing around 3.30pm. Those attending will need to bring their lunch with them.

The **northern** meeting will be at **Bishopthorpe Palace** on **5th June** with the kind permission of the Archbishop of York. Again the meeting will begin with coffee, etc from 10.30am till 11am when John Pritchard (former Bishop of Oxford) will speak about “Spirituality in retirement”, there will be a eucharist before lunch, and our General Meeting will take place in the afternoon with plenty of time for round table discussion about members concerns, ending at about 3.30pm.

I would be grateful for indications of attendance from members for either of these meetings by May 17th; please head emails “Northern” and “Southern” (this does not exclude members from the Midlands!!), those attending the Northern meeting need also to let me know of any dietary issues.
malcolm.liles48@gmail.com

RCACoE needs your help!! A vacancy on the RCACoE National Council We need a volunteer regional representative/trustee for Canterbury, Rochester and Chichester dioceses. Any offers or enquiries about the role from members living in these dioceses should be forwarded to our Secretary, Malcolm Liles at malcolm.liles48@gmail.com, as soon as possible. Council would especially welcome women priests in these roles to improve the gender balance of council. If there is more than one nomination an election will be organised.

The main role of a council member is to be a trustee of the association and to be in touch with the Retirement Officers in the dioceses they represent, to produce a regional report twice a year for consideration by council. These reports inform our actions and relationships with the national church institutions and other bodies. Also, to attend by zoom meetings of the national council on no more than 4 afternoons a year to guide us in our work. Unless we fill this vacancy the service we offer to our members will be much reduced.

Clergy Pensions Action Group

Many of you will no doubt be aware of this group, some will be a member as am I. At present it has about 2000 members, a presence on Facebook and a website <https://clergypensionaction.uk> Considerable growth since the middle of March which emphasises the amount of concern amongst both the retired and those soon to retire about the loss of value in the pension since 1998.

Our national council discussed the group and our response to it at its most recent meeting this month, and we have decided to support the campaign and encourage our members to join. CEECA/Faithworkers we understand have also taken a similar decision.

You may remember that in February 2024 Ian Paul brought a private members motion to the General Synod which was passed unanimously. It appears below, but since then there has been little information appearing about any progress on the exploration of ways to improve pensions and stipends. Indeed this year the stipend increase has been 3% when average wages increased by 5.9% in the last 3 months, it is further and further away from sustaining clergy adequately in their ministry. Last year the Clergy Support Trust paid a grant to 1 in 3 stipendiary clergy, expending over £5m. in total.

That this Synod

(a) request the Archbishops' Council, the Pensions Board, and the Church Commissioners to work together with dioceses to explore ways in which the level of clergy pensions and stipends might be improved in a sustainable manner, with reference being made to the impact of changes to clergy pension benefits and the National Minimum Stipend (NMS) since 1998, including the change in level of the pension benefit from 2/3 of NMS prior to 2011; and

(b) in doing this work to have regard to the findings of the Clergy Remuneration Review (GS 2247 and GS Misc 1298) and in particular the policy that the National Minimum Stipend should, in future, on average, increase in line with inflation (as measured by CPIH) subject to three yearly reviews and the need to review this position if high levels of inflation establish themselves

and request the Archbishops' Council, the Pensions Board and the Church Commissioners to consider what steps may be taken to remedy the fall in the real value of pensions for clergy retiring since 2021, and to avoid such a fall reoccurring in any future period of high inflation.

So, the RCACoE would encourage you to join the Clergy Pensions Action Group campaign, and contact your diocesan General Synod Synod members asking them now to sign the motion below from the CPAG, to raise the subject at chapter and deanery synod meetings so that more people know about it. Unless it achieves over 100 signatures it is unlikely to appear on the General Synod Agenda in July. It may also be necessary nearer July to write to the GS business committee to further ensure that it is debated. We want action during the next 12 months.

We will keep you in touch with further information about the campaign as it progresses.

Private Member's Motion

Title: Restoration and Future of Clergy Pensions

MOTION

Revd James Blandford- Baker to move:

That this Synod:

1. Notes the unanimous support given by this Synod in February 2024 to the Private Member's Motion brought by the Revd Dr Ian Paul, calling for improvements in the level of clergy pensions;
2. Laments that, more than twelve months and three sessions of Synod later, no legislative proposals have yet been brought forward for improving the level of clergy pensions — specifically addressing the impact of changes since 1998, including the reduction from two-thirds of the National Minimum Stipend prior to 2011 — as requested by Synod in part (a) of that motion;
3. Calls on the Archbishops' Council, in consultation with the Pensions Board and the Church Commissioners, to bring to this Synod no later than February 2026 a draft Regulation under the Church of England Pensions Measure 2018 to restore the clergy pension benefit to its 1997 level, to take effect from 1 April 2026 — including, but not limited to, setting the pension at two-thirds of the stipend and reversing the changes to qualifying years — with the cost of this restoration to be funded by the Church Commissioners, not by Dioceses;
4. Calls for the Archbishops' Council and Church Commissioners to bring forward either a draft Regulation or equivalent legally binding proposal no later than February 2026, to take effect from 1 April 2026, to provide fair compensation to all clergy who have been financially disadvantaged by pension changes since 1998, so as to place them in the financial position they would have been in had those changes not been made — with such compensation to be funded by the Church Commissioners, not by Dioceses;
5. Further recognises that, in addition to the urgent restorative measures set out above, a long-term, forward-looking approach is also required; and therefore calls on the Archbishops' Council to commission a comprehensive, independent review into what is required to ensure clergy are not merely provided with the bare minimum to live on, but supported in retirement with dignity and fairness — specifically regarding both pension provision and housing.

The review should be chaired by an independent lay member of the Church, with members appointed by the Synod's Appointments Committee from both within and beyond the Synod. It should be vision-led, draw on external expert input — particularly concerning long-term retirement needs and standards of living — and seek to define what constitutes a good and dignified retirement for clergy. The Commission should report back to this Synod with recommendations within 12 months.

PTO pathway or not?

We understand that in some dioceses retired clergy with PTO are being told that if they take more than 5 services a year they have to take the full leadership safeguarding course rather than the PTO Pathway. This is apparently the result of "national guidance". Is this happening in your diocese or do you have access to this "national guidance". If you do could you please let the secretary know on malcolm.liles48@gmail.com.

Printer inkjets: I have recently had to purchase a new printer and have a number of unused inkjets for the previous machine. They will fit any of the following printers: Canon Pixma TR7500 series, TR7550, TR8500, TR8550, TS6150, TS6151, TS8100, TS8150, TS9100. 5 are small black, one CL580 large black, 3 Yellow, 2 magenta, 2 cyan. I will be willing to post these for the cost of postage and a small donation if any member thinks they would be of use.malcolm.liles48@gmail.com

New Members: John Swanton, Gloucester diocese; Andrew Coe, Guildford diocese; Garry Ward, Hereford diocese; Ruth Harris, Leeds diocese; Derek Pamment, Sheffield diocese; Paul Peverell, York diocese; Glenn Coggins, York diocese; Jane Micklethwaite, Leicester diocese; Martin Thorpe, Liverpool diocese; Peter Richmond, Canterbury diocese; Eleanor Langan, Norwich diocese; Georgina Vye, Bath and Wells diocese; Sylvia Barron, Manchester diocese; Graham Anderson, Peterborough diocese; Mark Carroll, Leicester diocese; Bryan Knapp, Rochester diocese; April Beckerleg, Salisbury diocese; Pamela Davies, Rochester diocese; Richard Martin, Rochester diocese; David Dickinson, Blackburn diocese; Elizabeth Cox, Canterbury diocese; Diane Rees, Salisbury diocese; Alison Newman, Canterbury diocese; Christopher Wicks, Winchester diocese; Clive Edmonds, Gloucester diocese; Neil Smart, Portsmouth diocese.



Reflecting on a long ministry

A thousand ages in thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream~
Fades at the break of day.

As I begin retirement, I have been thinking a lot about the passage of time. The first Cuxton Parish Magazine was published on 1st January 1875 by Canon

Charles Colson. Among the burials recorded is that of Canon Robert William Shaw, Charles Colson's predecessor, who had been interred on 3rd January the previous year. He died at the age of 69 having served as Rector of Cuxton for 42 years (against my mere 37). He was also the first Rural Dean of Rochester and the first honorary canon of Rochester Cathedral. Canon Shaw's achievements included the restoration and refurbishment of St Michael's Church, the construction of the old Rectory, and the establishment of a National School.

When we held a service in which we celebrated a man's seventy years singing in the choir at Cuxton, I remember the preacher suggesting that this length of service in one place was perhaps peculiar to his generation. Generations before his didn't live long enough. Subsequent generations tend not to stay in one place for a sufficient length of time to accrue all those years of service. Having said that, however, there are people at both Cuxton & Halling who have put in highly creditable long stints of service to their parish churches.

I can remember myself going to Gillingham Grammar School on a bus like the one in the picture. Many readers will remember buses with conductors which, on most routes, were much more frequent than current services and kept more reliably to the timetable. Concomitantly, there were far fewer cars on the roads, the countryside was quieter, the air was cleaner, walking from place to place was much pleasanter and safer and, in my (not universally shared) opinion, our quality of life was much greater.

Having been Rector of Cuxton and Halling for so many years, it meant a lot for me to christen the children of those I had married and to marry those whom I had christened, to share life's most significant events with more than one generation of the same family. Not long before I retired, I christened the child of someone I had both christened and married. I was able to recognise the names on the stones in the churchyards and cemetery, people I had known personally and people whose names I recognised, although they died before I became incumbent, because their names were still fresh in the minds of those who loved them and still spoke of them.

I sometimes look around our churches and think of those whom we love but cannot see, *who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light* - members of my own family, friends, neighbours, parishioners. I also think of those many generations of Christians, who lived lives very different from our own, but worshipped where we worship, with whom we are one in the Body of Christ, and in fellowship with whom we shall share the eternal life which is God's free gift to all who believe in Him and repent of their sins.

Loyalty means a lot to me, my being loyal to other people, other people's loyalty to me, our loyalty to the place where we live (both our physical environment and our community), our faithfulness to generations past and our responsibility to generations yet to come – that we should be good stewards of our legacy, that we should be found faithful in our own generation, and, in our turn, pass on a rich inheritance to our successors.

I was interested in this piece in *The Times* following the participation of the England football team in the European Cup. (Libbie Purves (*The Times* 16/7/24): "But more interesting to me was the emphasis of history in Southgate's ideas about "how we conduct ourselves" in victory and defeat. He drew on the strength individuals can find in the past, telling each player their legacy number, the point where they stand chronologically in a 150-year procession of England players, starting in 1872 with the Victorian goalie Robert Barker. As each man goes out to take a penalty, he is told to speak his own name and his number: young Saka went out as 1,253, so looking at the goalmouth he was not alone but had invisible hundreds behind him, expecting and fortifying."

Apparently, coaches at the highest levels of sport are increasingly adopting this strategy. Encourage today's players to regard themselves in the context of history. Where do they stand in all of this? Where do they belong in the great scheme of things? Remember all those who've gone before. What inheritance will this generation pass on to those who come after? We can seek to follow the good examples of our predecessors. Hopefully, we can learn from their mistakes. We are inspired by our desire not to let them down. We are supported by our knowledge that they overcame all kinds of setback to achieve what they did. We feel a responsibility to pass on their legacy to those who will come after us.

After all, we ought not to see ourselves as individuals, ploughing a lonely furrow, self-sufficient, ultimately independent of other people, going our own way, looking to our own personal interests. We belong. We belong to our families, our community, our Church, our country, our world. We are members one of another. We belong to God. We have nothing which we did not receive. In Hebrews chapter 12 we are reminded of being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses.

Our time here is transient, but none of us is insignificant. We each have our own place in God's plan. One day, we'll be other people's memories. One day, most of us will have been forgotten by mortal men. But we shall all have had our part to play in God's purposes. (*We most humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in.*) There is an eternal inheritance laid up for us in heaven so long as we put our trust in Him.

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

Roger Knight was ordained in 1980 and, after two curacies, was the Rector of Cuxton and Halling in the Rochester diocese from 1987 to 2024.

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Return Unto The Lord Thy God

O Lord, who alone teaches us knowledge,
Lead me back to the one beginning that I may learn thy Truth.

After I have journeyed through the years, through the months,
(not less, at the end of each single day,) let me return unto the one beginning.

After I have read many books, and sought wisdom by study;
After much experience of joy and some of sorrow;
After long search for beauty, unsatisfied by the outward eye;
After exercising what authority has been entrusted to me, after performing the humble duties to hand;
In all perplexity of mind, vexation of heart, weariness of spirit, after failure and sin - make me return to the one beginning that I may begin again.

Yea, after I have loved the Faith,
And the place where thine honour dwelleth,
And thy Scriptures and Sacraments,
And have watched in prayer,

Bring me back always to the one beginning, to thyself, my Father, my Saviour, my Life, my Glory, world without end.

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