

Autumn Newsletter 2025

Focusing on Developments in PTO and Music



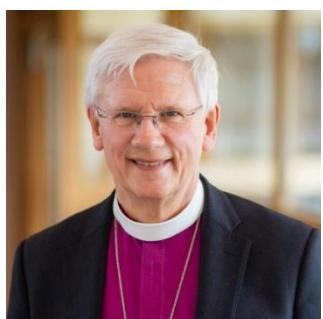
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From the Chair: The Rt Revd Colin Fletcher writes:



Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As you may know the first of our stated aims is that the RCA exists 'To foster the continuing ministry of retired clergy'. It will therefore come as no surprise to you that I, and other members of our Council, have been keeping a close eye on developments not only to do with housing and pensions, but also on the documents that have recently been published by the House of Bishops in relation to Permission to Officiate (PTO). They are available at

https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/hb_pto_policy_2025_final.pdf and
https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/hb_pto_guidance_2025_final.pdf

Now I would be the first to argue that 'ministry' should not be restricted to those things that we do specifically as deacons, priests and bishops, but I am also very conscious that those elements of 'ministry' that the PTO covers are also very significant indeed and it's those that I am going to focus this letter on.

The new documents have a new format though much of the content remains the same. The fact that they have been split in two, between Policy and Guidance on that Policy leads to greater clarity on a number of things. For instance, the Policy clearly states (and this is repeated in the Guidance) that 'Reaching a certain age is not in itself a sufficient reason for not renewing PTO' (Policy 5.1) and the Guidance backs this up by stating that 'Nor should annual reviews be required simply because someone has reached a particular age' (Guidance 6.7). In other words, those dioceses where there seems to have been a policy of not renewing PTOs beyond a certain age will have to change their customary usage and it will be interesting to discover what happens next.

It's also interesting that , whilst the issuing of a PTO firmly remains at the discretion of the bishop, if a decision is made to withdraw it, or not to renew it when requested to do so, then an explanation has to be given and the member of the clergy concerned, whilst having no formal, legal right of appeal, must 'be given an opportunity to put the case for why the PTO should be granted' (Policy 3.14).

Overall, I think it has become more pastorally sensitive than its predecessor, not least in the whole area of making accommodation for frailty and disability - recognising too that cognitive challenges may be just as significant as physical ones (Guidance 6.2).

It's good too that the Introduction to the Policy begins with the sentence 'The ministry of clergy with PTO is valuable and of enormous benefit to the Church' - something which has, I feel, not been as fully appreciated as it should have been at times in the past.

So, where do I feel it could still be improved? There is, I sense, something of a tension between an expectation that a member of the clergy with PTO will be 'able to officiate and to carry out related duties, for example to preside and preach, provide pastoral support, and take weddings and funerals to an adequate standard' (Policy 2.16) - something which, I guess, a large majority of clergy with PTO can do - and the much more nuanced recognition that some clergy, particularly those of us who are becoming more frail, will not be able to do all of these, nor might we want to, but we can still take a Home Communion or offer some pastoral support to a newly bereaved person. For the latter, under this Policy and Guidance, a member of the clergy clearly requires a PTO (with the requirement to have a DBS check and safeguarding training every three years (N.B not annual)), even if they only exercise these ministries occasionally and my hope is that all of us will be encouraged to apply for PTO to enable us to do so, whatever others may be advising.

I say the latter particularly because the documentation is quite clear that clergy may not robe or process during the Chrism Eucharist or robe to read a lesson or lead prayers in public worship (Guidance 8.14 and 8.15) unless they have a PTO. As the Guidance states (8.12) 'The ministry of clergy without a PTO is more restricted than the ministry of a layperson....The reason for this greater restriction is that ordination confers an authority and perceived trustworthiness that can give access into people's lives in a way which a layperson may not, including the lives of those who are vulnerable'. There is no doubt that some have used robes to abuse that position of trust in the past and my hope is that the House of Bishops will respond to these restrictions with a greater degree of generosity than seems to have been exercised in some dioceses recently in fostering the ministry of retired clergy and in giving PTO to clergy who may be frail and can only do a very few things, but who still value their ordination and vocation very highly and who still give so much to the life of God's Church.

Your Friend and Brother

+Colin Fletcher

Person in Profile

Peter Richmond writes, "I was born in Portsmouth in 1954. I am one of five children, so very much a boomer. I had asthma and eczema as a child but otherwise was very fit and loved outdoor activities. After school I went to Agricultural college. A career in farming seemed beyond my reach but ordination fitted my sense of vocation. I was part of the Gospel music scene in the 70's. We played at the first ever Greenbelt. I worked as a nursing assistant in mental health services before going to St John's Nottingham in 1977. Curacies were in Walsall and Stoke on Trent, my first incumbencies in Wolverhampton and Shropshire. I had long been committed to schools' ministry. I thought that a PGCE in RE at Exeter would be a good move for me and our family. However, it became plain that teaching at secondary level was not right for me. After an interview with the then Bishop of Taunton I was invited to offer my ministry to two parishes on the Somerset levels. It was the busiest and most varied ministry of my life including Reader training, Vocations chaplaincy, training incumbent, and mental health chaplaincy. I was also made curate of three more parishes to assist my neighbour who was being treated for cancer. It had become clear to me that I must follow my best interest which was mental health chaplaincy. In 2003 October 10th, World Mental Health Day, I joined the NHS trust in Kent as chaplain at St Martin's Hospital Canterbury. The National Spirituality and Mental Health Forum was a big part of my CPD. I have been its Hon President for several years. I retired from paid employment in 2012 following a stroke. I am left side paraplegic and have a great way of life".

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

My first memory is singing in the bathroom, sitting on the lavatory.

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

My parents.

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

I could not choose a specialist subject for Mastermind, even my own life and times.

4. *What is your favourite prayer?*

The Lord's Prayer is always my first recourse in prayer.

5. *When have you been most content?*

The herb garden in Canterbury cathedral is where I like to enjoy contentment.

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

If I were a vocations chaplain again, I would tell ordinands to take great care of their heart and souls.

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

Grieg's Piano concerto has been a favourite since my teens.

8. *Which part of the Gospels do you appreciate the most?*

I relish the weekly Gospel reading. To pick a passage would devalue what I find most inspiring, being the breadth and reach of their combined portraying of Jesus Christ.

9. *What is concerning you at present?*

My present concerns are long term health needs.

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

Retired blessedness lies in rest, time, writing, and being a congregant in a church that nourishes my faith.

11. How would you like to be remembered?

I would like to be remembered as a man who sang his whole life through and was grateful for the opportunities that ordained life brought to him. Rural ministry can become an amalgam in the memory with certain high points there to serve as markers along the way.

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Further thoughts on Clergy and Trains

I particularly enjoyed Robin Isherwood's musings under the title "What is it about clergy and trains?"

I think that the answer to the question that he poses lies in the era when that fascination about trains began. All clergy used the Book of Common Prayer 1662 and the Authorised Version of the Bible (AV) (even if some were using the Revised Version (RV) towards the end of the 19th century). When someone entered a railway terminus in the age of steam, particularly in London or another major city, they came into a large edifice of glass and iron. The steam trains belched forth a mixture of steam and smoke.

Clergy made a subliminal connection (and many will not ever have realised it) with Isaiah' vision in Chapter 6 of the Lord in the Temple . The relevant verses (AV) are 1 and 4:-

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple", and

"And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."

The highlighted words are the same in the RV. Much younger clergy, who never knew the age of steam and only use modern English translations have a very different experience of trains and cannot feel the same connection!

John Overton served in a number of parishes in the Diocese of Derby before his retirement in 2021.

Further thoughts, reflections and musings on this topic will be welcomed by the Editor.

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From the Secretary

A vacancy on the RCACoE National Council: We still 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.

RCACoE Website: At present this is a relatively simple Wordpress site, but we wonder if there are members with computing expertise who might be willing to help us give it a refresh over the next 12 months to be ready for our centenary year in 2028. Have a look at it rcacoe.org and let us know how it might be improved. secretary@rcacoe.org

New Members: Jennifer Gray, St. Albans diocese; Sally Lynch, Oxford diocese; Mark Wigglesworth, Sheffield diocese; Ian Scott-Thompson, Portsmouth diocese; Fiona Cotton-Betteridge, Lincoln diocese; Jacqueline Drake -Smith, Guildford diocese; Tony Walker, Leeds diocese; Linda Mudd, Coventry diocese; Limbert Chrichton, Salisbury diocese; Simon Brignall, Chichester diocese; Pamela Wright, London diocese; Richard Grigson, Worcester diocese; Brian Bodeker, Oxford diocese; Nigel Marns, Truro diocese; Carolyn Tibbott, Chelmsford diocese; Desmond Williamson, Bath and Wells diocese; John Coyne, Gloucester diocese; Ronald Farrell, Birmingham diocese; Andrew Bryant, Salisbury diocese; Stephen Niechcial, Rochester diocese; Diane Whittaker, Newcastle diocese; Graham Mayer, Winchester diocese; David Bell, London diocese; Philip Bullock, Newcastle diocese; Sheila O'Flaherty, Manchester diocese; Alice Goodall, Lichfield diocese; Robert Kenyon, Southwark diocese; Ludger Fremmer, Leicester diocese; Martin Parrott, Leeds diocese; Jonathan Huggins, Chichester diocese; Gillian Foster, Chester diocese; Sue Stewart, Sheffield diocese; Brian Williams, Canterbury diocese.

Malcolm Liles

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Fifty Years On ...

At Bradford Cathedral on 20th September 1975, Colin Fletcher, our Chair, began his ordained ministry as he was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop Ross Hook¹.

In the summer I interviewed him and invited him to offer some thoughts and reflections.

CC: *Did the Christian faith and church feature in your childhood and formative years?*

CF: I grew up in a church-going family, and we attended Saint Paul's Mill Hill in London, which was founded by William Wilberforce. I also attended school chapel services.

CC: *When did faith come alive for you?*

CF: At a Christian House Party in my late teens.

CC: *What led you to offer yourself for ordination?*

CF: During my final year at Oxford University, where I studied History and Economics, I felt quite strongly I should offer myself for ordination. A wise priest advised me, "When you make your decision, be



thinking of the angels" which I did then and have always tried to do since. I attended ACCM in September and ten days later I started at Wycliffe Hall, which I already knew well.

CC: *When you were first ordained, how did you see the Church of England and its future?*

CF: The Church of England was just part of the fabric of society, and my focus was on Saint Peter's Shipley and parochial work. My training incumbent, Brandon Jackson, was a very good parish priest and I was given the classic curate's role of the teenage youth work, which I loved.

CC: *How do you see the parochial system now?*

CF: I love it too. Having responsibility for the whole parish: its people, its fabric and its ecology is a tremendous privilege. Despite the demands and complexities of today it still has a lot going for it. Parish clergy are often the only professionals who live within their working place today.

CC: *What do you think has been the biggest change regarding the ordained ministry over the years?*

CF: in much of rural Oxfordshire, where I served as bishop for twenty years, the incumbent is still a persona in and for the parish, although I recognise that this less so in urban and suburban contexts. I love the breadth of the church. There is possibly more stridency in the tone in some of the matters under debate today than there was in the past. There has been enormous change liturgically since the early 1970s. There are fewer of us ordained now, although we now have many Self-Supporting Ministers, and we are much more dependent on the ministry of "retired clergy". I warmly welcome all that the ordination of women has brought. They have greatly enriched the life of our Church at every level.

CC: *How do you think people's perception of the Church of England has changed over the past 50 years?*

CF: People are much more distrusting of the Church of England than 50 years ago. The awful safeguarding scandals have done so much damage. Choice has now become the ultimate arbiter of everything. People's perception of what is true has changed over recent years. I think to compare our church with the NHS can be helpful. While the NHS as a national institution is viewed to be in a poor state, people's own local experience of the local health centre and hospital is often perceived to be very good. When parish clergy engage well with their local communities and people have good experiences through the pastoral offices, then people appreciate the church and its ministry.

CC: *What has most surprised you over how things have changed over the last 50 years, both in the country as a whole and in the church?*

CF: I have not been surprised that people do not change, and the fundamental human need is to love and be loved. From where and when I started fifty years ago, what has most surprised me has been the advent of female clergy and all the benefits that has brought.

CC: *Have there been any moments during the past 50 years when you have particularly sensed God?*

CF: Yes, but it hard to define them. In my call to ordination. In and through the moves I have made. Sensing I am a channel for God at confirmations and ordinations.

CC: *In what ways do you think modern technology is helping/hindering the sharing of the faith today?*

CF: It is very much double-edged. It has made a massive impact in how people communicate and receive information. However, speed can be an enemy of good sense. It is completely new world now with the ability of AI to create sermons.

CC: *Does the Church of England still influence public life?*

CF: Yes, in that the voice of faith communities is often sought and listened to. There are still openings for the church, both local and national. The bishops in the House of Lords can still influence matters as seen in Bishop James Jones chairing the independent inquiry relating to the Hillsborough disaster and the work by Bishop Alan Smith whilst Bishop of Saint Albans on gambling.

CC: *What do you most enjoy in your retirement?*

CF: Greater flexibility. Having more time for my family. It is very nice to have a reasonably free diary.

CC: *What advice do you have for clergy starting out in retirement?*

CF: Take time. Don't rush into saying 'Yes' to everything. Cultivate the need to let go. Realise you are no longer in the role.

CC: *Over time, how has your perception of our faith changed?*

CF: It has broadened over time, and I now believe that the love of God is far bigger and broader than I might have given him credit for in the past. I can still say the creeds with conviction. I appreciate that life can be complicated and am now much more hesitant about ethical hard edges.

CC: *Finally, what are you looking forward to?*

CF: Becoming a more proficient gardener and watching my three children and eight grandchildren develop in their lives.

CC: *Thank you very much for sharing your memories and insights.*

Charles Chadwick



A word from the Editor

Thank you to those who have kindly shared with us some interesting and amusing stories about music. On an occasion when I was helping a new team ministry to consider what it might mean for them to be a team; I asked them all to suggest a team that had inspired them. Along with sporting teams and the like, one person intriguingly suggested Bruce Springsteen and his E Street Band!

For the next newsletter I would be pleased to receive articles pertaining to Advent and Christmas. Any entertaining and interesting anecdotes will be welcome.

Items from members for the Winter newsletter should be with me please by January 9th, at cjpchad9@aol.com preferably in Word, Calibri 12-point narrow margin. Thank you.

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

Charles Chadwick

'If music be the food of love, play on ...'

A reflection on a life that loved and valued music

His parents gave Peter a violin for his twenty-first birthday; an instrument he learnt to play at Reading School. Whilst studying for his PhD at Imperial College, London in the late 1950's, Peter would often get a ticket for 'the gods' at The Royal Albert Hall to listen to the orchestral concerts. Beatlemania passed Peter by. Classical music was his joy. When I met Peter in the 1970's introduced me to Shostakovich and Chopin. One of our first dates was Beethoven- Symphony No. 6: The Pastoral Symphony at The Festival Hall in London. A Professor in Communications Engineering Peter's work was very much his hobby. Whilst I would occasionally accompany him on the piano it was more often at Christmas that Peter would get out his violin and we would play carols with our two boys: Chris playing violin and David cello. Years later, in August 2019 Peter was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and vascular dementia. As an Emeritus Professor it was only natural that we volunteered to take part in research. We were invited to join the University of London NIDUS project (New interventions for independence in dementia). The aim was to understand how to help both family and home carers to best care for a person with dementia at home. We were part of the intervention group. Goals were set and from a menu of modules we selected a few that included one on activities. Peter expressed a keen interest in getting his violin out again and so he did. It did not go well. But the exercise was the inspiration for booking a series of Oxford Philharmonic Orchestral concerts. We went to Cheltenham and Oxford Town Hall to hear the orchestra, but our favourite venue was The Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford. Peter was now in a wheelchair and front row seats were reserved for us. We were only feet away from the cellists! Tears of joy rolled down my cheeks as I watched Peter engrossed in the music. There were moments when he would raise his hand and gesture as if conducting the orchestra himself. The Oxford Philharmonic Orchestral concerts became a highlight in our calendar as we looked forward to them playing works by Bruch, Elgar and Tchaikovsky, to name just a few. It was so sad when I had to cancel our forthcoming concert tickets. I could no longer manage Peter on my own. I wrote to the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra to thank them for the inexpressible joy their playing had given us and such gratitude for the memories I had to treasure. I expressed a dream that one day members of the orchestra would visit Peter in his care home and give a concert for all the residents.

Leonora Hill was Rector of the Ridgway Benefice in the Diocese of Oxford from 2012 to 2021. She writes, "I retired in Advent 2021 to look after Peter. It may be a helpful read for families experiencing the day-to-day challenges of living with dementia. My husband died in September 2024, not that many weeks after he moved into the care home, so the dream was not realised but hopefully the article may inspire others to encourage more live musical events for their loved ones".

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Reflecting on music and its performance

As a student at University, I often went to concerts at Leeds Town Hall. In the absence of a city orchestra of its own we had a series of visiting ones, and a memorable occasion was one given by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under the Finnish conductor Paavo Berglund. The main work was Nielsen's 5th Symphony, and as it progressed the atmosphere in the Hall became increasingly electric. It was the first time I had ever heard this symphony, and it was quite clear from the atmosphere that it was also so for at least two thirds of the audience (this was the mid-1970s and Nielsen was not that well known in the UK). You could have cut the atmosphere with the proverbial knife and at one point there was a corporate 'jump' from the audience. For quite some time I listened to different recordings of the symphony to see if I could recapture that atmosphere, until I realised that even had the concert itself been recorded it would not

recapture the experience, because the experience was about hearing the work for the first time with a lot of other people doing the same, and I could never hear that Symphony for the first time again. But I could recapture the experience by hearing something else for the first time, and I am always happy if there is something on the programme of a concert, I am attending that I do not know, and excitement of discovery is still there.

As I have learned more music the law of diminishing returns has come into play, but even last year I was privileged to hear a previously unknown piece of Britten (suite from *Prince of the Pagodas*) at the first concert given by Kanchun Wong as Principal Conductor of the Hallé (based only just over the Pennines from where I live now). Again, I think many in the audience may have been new to this work and again there was an atmosphere you rarely get with a well-known piece. I think this is perhaps one of the reasons why in my ministry I never really liked having to celebrate the Eucharist twice (or more) on the same day, as the second time it was no longer the first time, I had celebrated that particular liturgy or preached on that Gospel.

Many of my favourite pieces of choral music are those I sang in choirs at school, University, and while at Theological College. Many of these I heard for the first time as we prepared them, and in rehearsing them you gain a much deeper knowledge of them than from simply listening. Many have become my favourites and even now I usually follow the score when listening to them. They include the obvious war horses like Handel's *Messiah* and Vivaldi's *Gloria* (twice!), along with such as Brahms *Ein Deutches Requiem* and Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. Mahler's Second Symphony (*Resurrection*) was already a favourite, and probably the one disc I would save from the Desert Island's advancing waves! To sing in the choral finale in Oxford Town Hall was a special occasion indeed.

One or two anomalies have been thrown up by this in that I still slightly prefer Beethoven's shorter and less well known *Mass in C* to the rightly more popular *Missa Solemnis*, much prefer Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* to *Sancta Civitas* which was recently performed at the First Night of the Proms, and Haydn's generally regarded as inferior Oratorio *The Seasons* to its much more well known cousin *Creation*. And this not only because I learned and sang in *The Seasons*, but because it was where I learned what a difference a professional conductor could make. This pair of concerts was a project of Alexander Goehr, then Professor of Music at Leeds University, where I was studying. His father had recorded it as conductor - I once had the LPs - and he was clearly using his score with the same cuts. The donkey work of rehearsals was done by our usual student conductor and doubtless we would have produced a reasonable performance, as we had of other works, but as the performances drew near Goehr himself began to conduct, and suddenly the whole thing moved up a gear, and then another. It wasn't only his ability as conductor, but his inspiration, along with occasional racy translations of the German text, that began to transform the whole experience, and the performances we ultimately gave were way above the



level we would normally have achieved. People often ask what a conductor does, and the answer is really in the rehearsal room, not the performance itself, as I learned in those weeks with Haydn.

With Sibelius at the Lahti Festival in Finland, celebrating Sibelius 150.

Bruce Carlin was ordained in 1978 and served in several northern dioceses before retiring in 2013.

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Talking of Music

Being pretty deaf, Fred, the midweek organist, was dependent on visual cues to determine where we were in the service. To see the priest at the altar, he had to swivel his upper body through a 90 degree turn. In middle age he'd been a great walker. Now in his 90's, stiff at the waist, he required leverage. This he gained by tightly gripping the woodwork of the organ's casing. This caused him to depress the top two notes of the keyboard, creating a painful, high-pitched whistle outside his hearing range. Sensing an imminent hymn, he squinted frantically – that expression old men adopt in the apparent belief that we can see better if we bare our teeth.

'I can never tell what's going to come out,' he'd cheerfully say of his playing. Some weeks he displayed all his old finesse; other weeks, he played with the precision of an elderly cat.

This week, the augurs were poor. As was frequently the case, he'd brought the wrong glasses. His toes searched the pedalboard for the opening bass notes. I noticed he had his shoes on the wrong feet. The priest, Fr John, was coming to the end of the Gospel reading. Not that you'd have known, for he refused to use the microphone. They hadn't had one in the spiky London parish where he served his curacy 60 years ago, and he wasn't about to use one now. He announced the hymn. Silence. Fred underwent a spasm of twitching as he sought to bring Fr John into focus. 'Fred!' A loud chorus from the worshippers on the other side of the chancel – not, I was as their vicar sorry to note, entirely free of rancour. Fred swayed on the organ stool. 'The hymn, Fred! The hymn!'

Indeed, this was not one of those Thursdays when Fred displayed all his old finesse.

There was a brief vogue in progressive circles of the 1960's and 70's for 'aleatoric' music. The marks the composer made on the score were chosen by chance, determined by the spin of a bicycle wheel, a pack of cards thrown in the air, the pattern of raindrops on a window pane. Fred – generally conservative in his musical taste – had, it seemed, waited until now to introduce the midweek Prayer Book congregation to the avant-garde. Mere playthings of his misfiring synapses, Fred's fingers operated in stubborn independence of each other. His Chaplinesque feet, pointing the wrong way, appeared to belong to someone else. Not only was it impossible to make out the tune, but there were no clues as to the tonality. I chose a melody to fit the metre and started bellowing it out. A woman on the middle row, a stranger, shot me a withering look. I learned later that she was the Diocesan Disabilities Adviser; she'd come to audit our access and diversity measures.

Before the end of the hymn, the overhead light gave out. It had been a bit on/off for a couple of weeks. Now it was definitely off/off. In the resultant gloom, even those who could see had difficulties reading the diminutive font of the hymn books.

Eventually Fr John whispered his way to the end of the Eucharistic Prayer. He picked up the paten and began the alarming descent to the communion rail. This involved first three shallow steps and then two deeper ones. Like a man on ice, he gingerly probed the indistinct ground with his Hush Puppies, which he wore as a kind of homage to sanctuary slippers. As he approached from above, Fred drew near with faith from below. He, too resembled a man on ice, shuffling forward in his contrary brogues as though on skates. Both men were blissfully free of the encumbrance of busybodies offering help or support. The woman on the middle row, I noticed, was writing vigorously in a small book.

I believe that it is impossible to talk about music, said Daniel Barenboim at the beginning of his 2006 Reith Lectures. Writing about music has famously been compared to dancing about architecture. I tend to agree with Barenboim, but I do think that when we attempt to talk about music – or God – we sometimes end up saying quite interesting things about something else.

Fred Mason (1914 – 2009) founded the music department at Alsager College of Education (now defunct). In his prime – a period that lasted a long time – he was an exceptionally gifted musician and teacher. In old age, his fingers didn't always respond to the commands of his brain, and his thoughts were periodically clouded. The sounds he sometimes produced at the organ baffled him. He was unsure about what he was hearing, and he was puzzled to know what the rest of us were hearing. There was an implication that in the jumble of notes he played on a bad day he could still discern the outline of the melody he had in mind.

Fred's case is particularly poignant. During the war, he worked for the Navy as an interpreter of aerial photographs. Where you or I see blurred gradations of grey, faint trails, black marks, Fred saw the shadows and outlines of troop trains, communications equipment, armaments. Even when he explained them, described them, traced them with his pencil, I still couldn't see it.



Royal Air Force- France, 1939-1940. Vertical photographic-reconnaissance view of Mouzon, France

For a long time, I've wondered what a piece of music is. (Not because I expect an answer, but because I find the wondering to be refreshing for my mind and my soul.) What's meant by *Clair de Lune* or *Turn, Turn, Turn*? How do we identify something that's not there, that has being but not locus? How far beyond the malfunction of Fred's neural networks do we have to reach before we can say, with certainty, 'That's not the tune'? When do we allow of a child's first fumbling at their instrument that what we hear is the tune they are willing? Precisely how many wrong notes, how many right ones, validate a piece's identity?

I remember walking through Martina Franca in Puglia during their music festival. Hearing a piece I'd seen mentioned on a poster I thought I was approaching a concert. Then the player repeated the passage. And again. Some kind of sensibility suspended my reverence, told me I didn't need to slow, to tread carefully, maybe to stand still. No, this was 'just a rehearsal'. Why such a reaction, a sense that it's not the thing itself? ('Is that the king?' 'No, it's just an actor.') But I believe I'm wrong, for I am 'in the presence' – even if I can't say of what. I ponder the grained smudges of Fred's photographs.

Robin Isherwood, Frome who was ordained in 1994, spent time serving in the Chester diocese and in retirement lives in Frome, Somerset.

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If music be the curse of life.

I love music. I listen to as much music as I can. Reading to music. Dancing to music (privately). Singing (privately) to music.

I have been ordained for fifty-six years. But I have never sung. Verses and responses a nightmare. One very kind organist asked me to say the verse because when I tried to sing, after the second verse, I would harmonise with the choir's response and by the end we were all out of tune, out of kilter and had lost the will to worship.

So I don't sing in public.

Which made my appointment as a Canon at Bradford as successor to the Canon Precentor challenging, both for me and the Cathedral. It was suggested that I be titled Canon Pastor a suggestion I refused on the grounds that it made me sound like an Italian supper dish. Which is why I became known as sub-provost.

At the Cathedral any singing in the daily offices or at the Sunday Eucharist was sung by one of the Choristers. The only exception was at the early vigil mass on Easter Day when I could offer a passable imitation of singing by chanting 'The Light of Christ' as the procession entered the Cathedral in semi darkness.

I have had some kindly offers of support and encouragement. But despite the voice coach commending the natural projection in my spoken voice, whilst adding, 'and don't lose your accent'. By the time I left Theological College it was generally accepted that as far as music and singing was concerned, I was a lost cause.

As I note in my novel 'Holy Disorder' ⁱⁱ(Published by Foreshore Publishing) as a working-class lad from Manchester it was a remarkable turn of events that led me to seek ordination especially as I wasn't particularly gifted academically and in fact left school by my 16th birthday.

In fact, it was music and singing that lay at the heart of my disinterest and rejection of school and all it represented.

I had passed my eleven plus at the second attempt and had been offered a place at Manchester Central Grammar School in Whitworth Street. My first year. Aged eleven. My first singing lesson. The school song which we had to learn was Non-Nobis Domine. The lesson started with us in lines of five or six, about six lines. The music teacher raised his conductor's hand and we began to sing. Immediately he raised his hand again and stopped us mid Non-Nobis Domine.

'There is a noise coming from you which will not be tolerated'.

He then proceeded line by line to rehearse those awful words Non Nobis Domine. Satisfied with that line he turned to the next until he reached the line in which I was standing.

His arm raised we sang.

He then walked down the line and, standing in front of me, demanded that I sing. 'N n n n o' was as far as I could get before he hit me on the right side of my head. As I fell to the left, he hit me again on the left. With a loud ringing in my ears, I heard him say 'Never sing in my presence again'.

I didn't of course.

And never have.

See my blog: www.myreversingmirror.blogspot.com

Geoff Smith was ordained in 1969 and severed in a number of parochial and other settings.

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Advertorial



Subsidised Pilgrimage Opportunities for Retired Clergy

A key part of our vision at McCabe is a commitment to enabling retired clergy to join a pilgrimage. The next subsidised tour for clergy runs from 16-23 November 2025. The price of £1,760 is subsidised by McCabe and retired clergy are eligible for the subsidy. Please do consider joining us - for full details [click here](#) or call 01252 226133.

St Paul's life and journeys enabled faith in Jesus' Resurrection to spread beyond the confines of the Holy Land 'to the ends of earth'. This is your invitation to engage imaginatively with Paul and his world as we travel through Greece along the route of his second missionary journey - visiting Philippi, Thessaloniki, Berea, Athens and Corinth (Acts 16-18).

Three other pilgrimages are available with a subsidy:

- Austria for Advent (subsidised price £2,700) [click here](#) for details
- Egypt & The Flight of the Holy Family (subsidised price £3,350) [click here](#) for details
- Italy & Carnival in Viareggio (subsidised price £2,190) [click here](#) for details

We have been serving the church for more than 40 years and we look forward to serving you in your retirement.

Call McCabe Pilgrimages 01252 226133 for more details.

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Book Review



Earlier this year Lamorna Ash's second bookⁱⁱⁱ '*Don't Forget We're Here Forever: A New Generation's Search for Religion*' was published^{iv}. In a gentle, reflective way she tells of her encounter with many different examples of Christianity across the British Isles from Walsingham to All Souls Langham Place, from the Quakers to YWAM, from Iona to One Church in Brighton. She explores the varied nature of conversion and helpfully describes faith as a reimagining of oneself. Her interviews demonstrate the skills of a good and sympathetic listener.

She considers a very wide range of stories related to conversion with perceptive observations on Jacob's wrestling with the stranger in Genesis, the conversion of Saul and the story of Augustine coming to faith, to name but a few. She offers interesting insights into Mark's gospel, drawing from it the concept that faith could meet the deep human need not to feel forsaken, to be made whole, that suffering is not the last word, and to have one's ears and eyes opened, to be ready to receive the word of God.

While of interest to many people, her book is, I think, principally aimed at those aged about 30 or under who she describes as being 'Characterised by a mood of increased tolerance and openness to religious frames of mind.'^v She notes how the pandemic may have contributed to people reassessing their lives and their priorities. The wellbeing of both the planet and humanity, with a potential approach to our ultimate purpose are areas into which our faith can speak wisely and helpfully. She maintains that religion still has a significant role to play, not least because most of the world's population identifies with a religion.

The insights, struggles, sorrows and joys of her interviewees make an impact on her both as a writer and as a person, and her readers too.

I can thoroughly recommend this book, not least as it has the potential to make one reflect on one's own beliefs.

An excellent way to learn more about Lamorna Ash and her exploration of our faith is to watch her interview with Ash Sarkar which can be found at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zdFhuv1V5c&pp=0gcJcdgAo7VqN5tD>

She was also interviewed by Madeline Davies for The Church Times earlier this year. See

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2025/16-may/features/features/interview-with-lamorna-ash-surprised-by-faith>

Charles Chadwick

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News from our Council

The Private Members Motion passed at General Synod in July called on the Archbishops' Council to commission a "comprehensive, independent review of what is needed to ensure that clergy and their dependents are supported in retirement with dignity and fairness". It requests that this be chaired by an independent lay person "with a working group representing all relevant interests, and engaging fully with clergy, clergy spouses, retired clergy and other stakeholders", and that it should report back to the Synod within 12 months.

So far, this review seems to be moving at a glacial pace, its members have not been disclosed, have they even been appointed? And no Chair has been made known. Is it likely to be able to report in a meaningful way by July 2026?

Nevertheless, the RCACoE has submitted the following topics for consideration by the review, if you are aware of other matters which might need to be considered please get in touch with our secretary at secretary@rcacoe.org

SOME AREAS OF CONCERN FOR SCOPING IN RELATION TO THE PENSIONS REVIEW RAISED BY THE RETIRED CLERGY ASSOCIATION (CHURCH OF ENGLAND)

- A. The need for the standardisation of certain Diocesan policies which have significant financial consequences for retired clergy.
1. Payment of reasonable removal expenses to a home at retirement - currently this is done by some dioceses but not by others
2. Further work is needed on the huge variations between dioceses in the payment of travel costs and the level of fees given for taking Sunday and weekday services (currently in some dioceses retired clergy are, in effect, expected to subsidise parishes or dioceses when they take services whether in the normal patterns of parish life or during vacancies)
3. Inconsistencies in the granting of PTO by some diocesan bishops leading to some clergy being precluded from receiving fees because of a decision not to renew a PTO solely on the grounds of their age
4. Retired SSM's being precluded from receiving fees when they move to PTO, as opposed to the retired stipendiary clergy who can receive them, when some former SSM's only have small pensions from their former jobs.

B. Housing

1. Consequences of the policy in at least 15 dioceses running from the 1980's until the early 2000's of requiring ordinands to sell their homes prior to entering training or being ordained.
2. Problems in finding a suitable house when needing to move during retirement for family or health reasons
3. Insufficient choice of accommodation at the point of retirement
4. The CHARM scheme and its various ramifications - particularly the balance of responsibilities and benefits that continue in shared ownership properties
5. The need for a supported living property in the North of England with good transport links and access to specialist hospital care
6. Housing for those who have had less than 15 years as stipendiary clergy - this affects both some of those who have served in sector ministries together with priests who have had periods when they have not been in stipendiary ministry for family reasons such as the care of children or elderly relatives
7. Housing for those who have had to retire through ill health

C. Pensions

Along with the level of pensions, which will clearly form a significant part of this review, concerns are regularly expressed about.....

1. Pension levels for early retirements due to ill health and the relation between them and rental payments to the Pensions Board (See Housing 7 above)
2. Clergy who move in and out of stipendiary ministry (See Housing 6 above).

D. Synodical representation of Retired Clergy

A nettle that needs to be grasped is the lack of a voice for Retired Clergy in the synodical structures of the Church. It's a strange organisation which makes a stress on the significance of synodical decision making which has created a system where, in practice if not in theory, those providing a significant percentage of its ministry are without a voice synodically. Perhaps we would not have got ourselves in the current position had a way been found for their voice to be heard though it is so good that the Review opens up the possibility of that voice being heard now.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive but will, it is hoped, contribute to the scoping of the Review. It has already been shared with the Pensions Board.

Malcolm Li

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Holy Dying

One aspect of being retired is that funerals become a more central part of life. Having been in theological education for a long time, I have not done many funerals for years, but suddenly I am asked to try to navigate for my uncle a funeral where his wife wanted to have in effect a pure cremation process. The lack of understanding by my uncle on what actually happened in a pure cremation, and the difficulty that makes for a viewing and a service that is a time when it is feasible to attend, was just a part of the confusion that this new approach is producing. It is certainly aggressively marketed on the television

without mentioning any of the pitfalls and this was my first experience of having to deal with the pastoral mess.

This raises in my mind the question of 'What is the Anglican way to die?' or as Jeremy Taylor would have called it 'holy dying'. Clearly the cultural assumptions at the beginning of my ministry, and the place of the church within the national approach to death, have changed considerably. As a curate I was doing sometimes 3 funerals a week. Our present curate is lucky to find 3 funerals in the year. I hear in the pews people saying where they want to be scattered but there is little mention ever of a churchyard or some sort of holy ground.

Is it possible therefore for me to set some sort of example, by thinking through what will happen to my body when I die, and perhaps preaching about this in the occasional services that I lead? This is not a particularly easy option and few of us want to talk about our mortality, but the older you get the closer it comes, and cultural delusions of immortality are usually by the people we hope will not be immortal in this life. The range of possibilities for disposal of the corpse seems to constantly increase with undertakers dreaming up more exotic ways of dealing with a body. Dissolving in an alkaline solution is around the corner, and turning some of my ashes into jewellery or firing them into the air in a rocket is already an option. To me this seems to reinforce the view that not believing in Christianity doesn't lead to an adoption of materialistic atheism, but rather a whole set of fringe beliefs.

So, I come back to my question for myself is there a way of holy dying? If so, how am I going to show that in the way that my funeral is conducted?

I was once asked by a Bishop what the Church of England would be like when I die. I answered that I think that somebody would be there, possibly an authorised layperson. I was at the time Warden of Readers, and that they would be available to do my funeral. From my experience with my mother, who is in a home, you need to have written down very clearly that a funeral needs to be conducted by an authorised minister according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, otherwise a civil celebrant might be assigned who has no interest in faith. To make clear such stipulations is perhaps a step in the right direction.



Ordained in 1987, Phillip Tovey spent 30 years in theological education for ministry, lay and ordained. He now continues to teach online, write, walk and watch rugby. He has written widely on liturgical issues, including a history of confirmation, and has had more than 20 Grove booklets published. Please see https://grovebooks.co.uk/book_author/phillip-tovey/ His next Grove booklet on the disposal of ashes will be published shortly.

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O Lord God, who hast called thy servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown: Give us faith to go out with a good courage, not knowing whither we go, but only that thy hand is leading us, and thy love supporting us; to the glory of thy Name.

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ⁱ See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-the-right-rev-ross-hook-1327231.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://foreshorepublishing.com/product/holy-disorder/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Her first book is Dark, Salt, Clear: Life in a Cornish Fishing Town

^{iv} Published by Bloomsbury Circus. ISBN 978-1-5266-6314-6

^v Taken from p.16.