

Summer Newsletter 2026 – a second focus on Chaplaincy

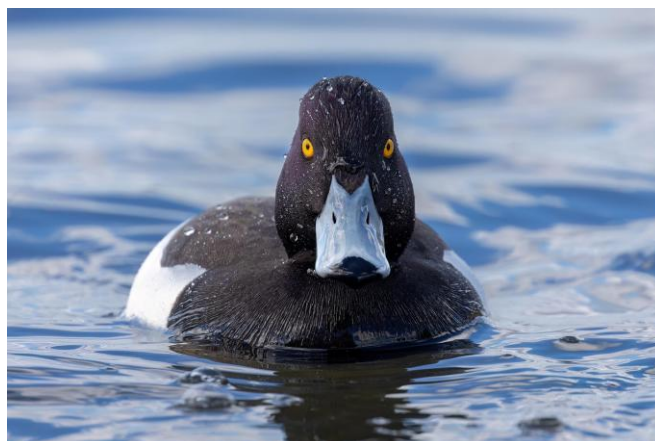
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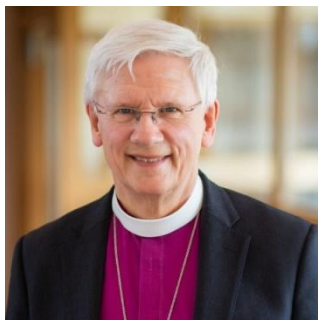


Contents

From the Chair	2
Person in Profile	3
Lord Richard Harries – an appreciation	5
News from the Secretary	6
Book Review: The Rest of Life: Biblical Perspectives on Retirement by Tudor Griffiths	7
The Third International Franciscan Conference	9
But Sir! Some memories of School Chaplaincy	11
On Being a Hospital Chaplain	13
Various Chaplaincies	13
Money, money, money (and hats, a Rubens (?) and children underneath the altar), and then an exhilarating theological college	15
A Reflection on Chaplaincies	16
A Word from the Editor	17
Stop Press	17
Prayer: The Divine Surprises	18



Our Chair writes ...



Dear Sisters and Brothers

Before beginning this letter let me start by advertising our annual in-person RCA meeting and AGM being held at Bishopthorpe by kind permission of the Archbishop of York on Wednesday 30th September. We will begin, as normal, with coffee and tea, a guest speaker and then have lunch after the Eucharist. The AGM itself will follow after lunch. What will make this year's meeting different is that our Guest Speakers will include one or more members of the Dignity and Fairness Review Group together with its Secretary, Kevin Norris. This will be the

one chance that many of our members will have to put their questions and make their reflections to the Group face to face so can I strongly encourage you to be there. Just contact our Secretary, Malcolm Liles, if you would like to come and, as ever, we encourage you to bring someone else with you if that would make your travel arrangements easier.

To the main substance of my letter which again has been shaped, as you will see, by some other reflections on the Review.

One of the things I have taken on since retiring is to be a trustee for a large Multi-Academy Trust. When I was Bishop of Dorchester, I was a trustee for the Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust, in those days an exclusively Primary-School based trust with its almost 50 schools, largely in Oxfordshire and Berkshire. On retiring I handed that baton on but I did become one of three diocesan nominees as trustees on the River Learning Trust which is largely based in Oxfordshire and Swindon with its 31 schools (10 Secondary, 20 Primary and one Alternative Provision), 16,500 pupils, 2,400 staff, a budget in excess of £150m p.a. and providing a great deal of Initial Teacher Training as well.

One of the things that attracted me to the role was the fact that, deeply embedded within the Trust's philosophy and ways of working is the principle of 'Aligned Autonomy' - in other words that schools are allowed and encouraged to develop themselves in ways best suited to the communities that they are placed in (not unlike parochial ministry at its best in fact). North Oxford, where RLT began, is very different from the Cowley area of East Oxford or Chipping Norton or Henley and their schools differ too. 'Aligned Autonomy' gives them the freedom to develop accordingly. However, as a member of its Resources Committee, I am well aware that there are downsides as well as many advantages to adopting this kind of philosophy rather than opting for a much more centralised structure. For instance, do you have a single supplier for heating and lighting, gaining all the benefits of centralised purchasing (which we have achieved) and do you do the same for cleaning, catering and grounds maintenance for similar reasons. Nor do the questions stop at those, fairly obvious, back-office functions. What about recruitment or business support in some of our smaller schools?

I was reminded that our Church faces similar questions when it comes to facing the challenges of consistency when historically dioceses, and diocesan bishops, have operated with a high degree of autonomy. Answering this question by the Ven Dr Adrian Youings at the July Synod (Q 227 Is there a national policy of paying the removal costs of retiring clergy moving from diocese-provided accommodation into retirement accommodation? If not, what steps will the Pension Board take to avoid a postcode-lottery?) the Bishop of Hereford replied 'There is not currently a national policy of the paying removal costs of retiring clergy moving from diocesan-provided accommodation to their retirement accommodation. This is a decision for individual dioceses. Where any such grants are paid, they are likely to be taxable. The Terms of Reference for the Clergy Retirement Dignity and Fairness Review include

considering 'inconsistent treatment across the Church of England, e.g. varying diocesan practice of supporting removal costs on the parish before retirement'. This is an issue that will therefore be considered as part of the Retirement Review'.

To this could be added such things as the level of fees offered for taking services during a vacancy or when providing cover to enable priests to take a holiday or when they are incapacitated due to ill-health or, simply, given ever-increasing demands in large multi-parish benefices. And then there are many other areas that are constantly being drawn to your Council's attention, whether that is safeguarding training, or the wearing of robes, or opportunities for Continuing Ministerial Development, or whether the relinquishing of a licence or Permission to Officiate should be linked to reaching a certain age, whether for stipendiaries, or SSM's or MSE's. On some matters (e.g. the fees for taking a wedding or a funeral in church and the requirement to have regular DBS checks and safeguarding training) there is much more alignment than there used to be but the Review provides a once in a lifetime opportunity to look seriously at a number of anomalies created by diocesan independence that contribute to the lack of Dignity which some priests feel that they are accorded - not least the practices that erode the fundamental principle that 'once a priest, always a priest'.

All of which leads me back to where I began with a strong encouragement that you consider coming to the AGM on September 30th.

Hoping to see you there.

Your Friend and Brother

+Colin Fletcher

P.S. May I also recommend a book of essays, recently published by Darton, Longman and Todd (ISBN 978-1-915412-40-9) edited by Janet Fife and Anne Lee entitled *Bullies and Bystanders: Understanding and Challenging Bullying in Churches and Christian Groups* that looks at the ways in which power can be abused by laity and clergy alike, and what can be done to challenge and remedy the damage that bullying does both to individuals and groups, including churches.

while likely to be intertwined

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PERSON IN PROFILE



Alice Goodall writes: I am married to Joe and have two adult daughters, one granddaughter and two cats.

After graduating in Biology and Psychology from Keele University in 1980, I trained as a clinical psychologist and worked in the NHS until 2012. Over the years I worked with older adults, then with adults of working age, and most latterly with young adults and their families as they grappled with their first

experience of mental illness. I found working so closely with people to be a real privilege, but I wasn't so keen on the ever-increasing mountain of administration!

In 2009, whilst still working full time for the NHS in Swindon, I began my theological training with STETS (Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme) in Salisbury. For three years I did little else than work and study. However, I survived and in 2012 moved to the Benefice of Bartholomew in Salisbury Diocese. I had been adamant that I didn't want to do rural ministry, but it turned out God had other ideas.

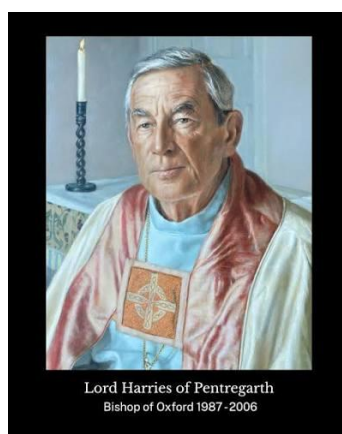
After 3 ½ years I had become passionate about it and took up post as Rector in the Shelswell Benefice in the Oxford Diocese which had 8 parishes, 10 small churches in small villages with small congregations, and all the challenges that go along with that. 9 ½ years later, somewhat exhausted, Joe and I retired to Lichfield.

1. *What is the first thing you can remember?* My Wendy house, made by my parents out of peg board with a door and window. Walking across a park in Nottingham with a row of poplar trees on the far side holding my dad's hand.
2. *Who has been the greatest influence on your life?* Apart from my parents and a couple of teachers, I would have to credit various fictional characters like Jo from Little Women or Ben Hur!
3. *What do you miss the most now that you are retired?* The close and meaningful contact with people that ministry enables. Also, if I'm honest, being busy and having goals that I am working towards (though it was a relief to lay both down).
4. *If you appeared on 'Mastermind' what would be your specialist subject?* I have always considered myself to be a jack of all trades and master of none, but I reckon I'd do pretty well if the subject were my granddaughter!
5. *What is your favourite prayer?* It varies. Currently it is the version of St Patrick's Breastplate in the Northumbria Community's Morning Prayer (Christ, as a light illumine and guide me. Christ, as a shield overshadow me. Christ under me; Christ over me; Christ beside me on my left and my right. This day be within and without me, lowly and meek, yet all powerful. Be in the heart of each to whom I speak; be in the mouth of each who speaks unto me. This day be within and without me, lowly and meek, yet all powerful. Christ as a light; Christ as a shield; Christ beside me on my left and my right.)
6. *When have you been most content?* Probably when I have had time and space to breathe - on retreat at Glasshampton Monastery, on top of a hill, on a windswept beach
7. *What advice would you give to a new ordinand today?*
 - take your time – you don't have to roll out all the new schemes you've come across in the first three months.
 - you don't have to change the world – God's already on that one.
 - pray, trust, live faithfully and do the best you can
 - and you will never really know what difference you've made.
8. *What is your favourite piece of music?* Joan Baez singing 'A hard rain's a gonna fall' really touches me, particularly the last verse. There is so much pain in the world that we need to keep on reaching out with the message of God's love, to 'tell it and think it and speak it and breathe it And reflect it from the mountain so all souls can see it'.
9. *Which part of the Gospels do you appreciate the most?* The humanness of the characters in them, particularly Peter and Thomas, and Jesus's acceptance of them.

10. *What is concerning you at present?* The state of the world. Humanity's failure to learn from the past. The polarisation of society. The potential threat presented by AI
11. *What do you enjoy the most about being retired?* Time and choice. Time with my granddaughter, time in the garden, in the gym. Time to see if I can remember how to play my viola (with thanks to the Eclectica orchestra from Coventry for tolerating me whilst I try to remember!!)
12. *How would you like to be remembered?* As someone who tried to make a positive difference in her bit of the world. Someone kind who dd her best. Someone who faithfully served.

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I was delighted when our Editor asked Richard Harries (Baron Harries of Newsletter following his death at the Soldier, Priest, Bishop, Broadcaster, Inter-Faith Specialist, Ecumenist, Art could be used to describe the many and interests.



me to write an appreciation of Bishop Pentregarth) for this edition of our end of April. Husband, Father, Friend, Ethicist, Theologian, Bridge-Builders, Historian, Lecturer - so many words facets of Richard's rich and varied life

The first time I got to know him well was on a visit I made as a Chaplain accompanying Archbishop George Carey to Russia, Armenia and Georgia. Those were difficult days for ecumenical relations, and the Russian Orthodox Church had shortened their section of the Archiepiscopal visit because of the moves that had been taken to ordain women to the priesthood. Richard was there as a senior bishop who had good relations with the Orthodox and his calm demeanour helped immeasurably in what could have been very difficult situations.

He showed the same skills in bringing people together in the relationships he developed with those of the Abrahamic Faiths, both in fostering Christian-Jewish-Muslim relationships between scholars here in Oxford, and, nationally, in his chairmanship of the Council of Christians and Jews. Ever courteous, he was someone who encouraged people to speak, and listened carefully to debates, whilst at the same time being prepared to challenge what he saw as misleading arguments and presuppositions.

Following on from my days at Lambeth I was surprised and delighted to be asked by Richard to become the Bishop of Dorchester. The interview process (and I'll leave others to judge its efficacy) consisted of a conversation sitting in his garden at Linton Road in Oxford. So far as I know I was the only candidate for the post and the appointment duly went through all the required hoops from that point onwards. When we moved to our new home, prior to my consecration, it was Richard who appeared on the day of our move with a bottle of wine, suitably chilled, to welcome me back to the Diocese.

One of the questions I asked myself on many occasions was how he knew so much about Oxford Diocese and communicated to so many across its length and breadth. Partly it was because he had already been the Diocesan Bishop for 13 years by the time I arrived and he was to serve for a further six in that role. There was too his prodigious memory for names and faces. And then there was the fact that people felt

they knew him, both through his books, but, more importantly, through his regular contributions to Thought for the Day. In appointing his suffragan bishops - people like Colin Bennetts, Mike Hill, Tony Russell, Dominic Walker and Stephen Cottrell - he trusted all of us to get on with the job and would never have dreamt of interfering, whilst always being available for advice, wisdom and reflection.

Those same attributes he showed in his outstanding work in the House of Lords both in the speeches he made, often on ethical issues, and in his work on committees. It was a mark of the esteem he was held in that he was made a life peer, a rare honour for any bishop other than the two Archbishops of Canterbury and York, on his retirement in 2006. Mentioning the latter I am reminded that when he was having his official portrait painted, he reached a compromise position with the artist as to which radio programme they would have on in the background as her tastes were rather more modern than his.

The major event to cast a shadow over those latter years was the controversy surrounding the proposal to appoint Jeffrey John as Bishop of Reading in succession to Bishop Dominic Walker who retired in 2003. Richard followed the new appointment process in a way that was meant to make things more transparent and democratic, and he received assurances that, despite Jeffrey's known beliefs, as shown in his writings, that he was living in accordance with the Church of England's teachings, as shown in the document, which Richard himself had given so much to, 'Some Issues in Human Sexuality'. For him it was a matter of justice that Jeffrey John should be considered for the post, and it was a sad day for him when it was announced that the consecration was not going to happen.

That experience did not stop him from speaking up for LGBT communities whether in supporting equal marriage or on other issues. It was perhaps his military background that meant he was more than willing to wage war with words, fighting against discrimination and for the cause of the good, whilst appreciating the complexities and nuances of issues such as embryo research and human fertilisation - and, at an earlier time in his life taking the Church Commissioners to task for their position on investing in Apartheid South Africa.

Following retirement his output, coupled with his contributions to Thought for the Day, continued to be prodigious, and every now and then he would get in touch to let me know that the most recent of his 26 books was about to appear in print.

As you'll gather, I'm an enormous enthusiast for Richard and for so much of the kind of episcopacy he demonstrated. Like many others I mourn his loss and ask you to join in my prayers for his wife, Jo, and his family following his death.

Colin Fletcher

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News from our Secretary

Dignity and Fairness Review Group

Colin Fletcher and I recently participated in a zoom meeting with the Chairman of the above group and Kevin Norris, its secretary and part of a Stakeholder Forum to consult on its progress so far.

The Stakeholder Forum is made up of representatives of the Pension Board Residents Panel, the Clergy Pension Action Group, Unite Faithworkers Branch and ourselves. It will have two more meetings as the review group progresses its work, next one in October and then November. This first meeting was to

basically update us on the work of the review group so far, it having met twice. In April the met for orientation, and to launch the call for evidence about which members were notified. Their most recent meeting was to take stock of the evidence supplied as a result of the call, although they are still open to further evidence of concerns being received. They are also looking at other evidence from the Pensions Board for instance.

The Review Group hopes, after a period of analysis, to be able to draw some conclusions on the way ahead by late autumn with a view to reporting to the February 2027 General Synod. There is a powerpoint presentation on the review groups website page if you would like to access that. The majority of responses to the call were from those already retired rather than stipendiary clergy, which is gratifying given the effort we made to publicise the Call for Evidence. Please feel free to contact Colin or myself if you want to contribute anything further to the Review.

A vacancy on the RCACoE National Council I am afraid we need a new volunteer regional representative/trustee for Guildford, Portsmouth, and Winchester dioceses following the resignation of Angela Townshend.

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 07702203273, 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 once 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 mornings a year to guide us in our work. Unless we fill this vacancy the service we offer to our members will be much reduced.

Annual General Meeting

This meeting will be at **Archbishops Palace, Bishopthorpe, York on 30th September** with the kind permission of the Archbishop of York. Please come to it!!.

The meeting will begin with coffee, etc from 10.30am till 11am when Kevin Norris, who is secretary of the Dignity and Fairness Review Group will speak about its progress and be able to hear any comments and issues members feel the group needs to consider, he may also be accompanied by Andrew Sentence who is Chair of the Review, there will also 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 and others who may be interested by September 20th; please head emails "Northern" (this does not exclude members from elsewhere), those attending also need to let me know of any dietary issues. malcolm.liles48@gmail.com

We warmly welcome as new members

Christine Allsop, Oxford diocese; Elaine Attack, Rochester diocese; Alyson Davie, Rochester diocese; Clive Russell, Chelmsford diocese; Jeremy Tear, Liverpool diocese; Jacqui Hyde, Gloucester diocese; Peter Stevenson, St. Albans diocese; Stefanie Hodges, Guildford diocese; Geoffrey Bayliss, Oxford diocese; Diana Young, St. Albans diocese; Lucy Thirtle, Oxford diocese; Andrew Keep, London diocese; Helen Kendrick, Oxford diocese; Annette Shannon, Oxford diocese; Hilary Shedlock, Manchester diocese; David Chamberlin, Norwich diocese; Karina Green, Portsmouth diocese; Simon Springett, Royal Navy; Roger Wiles, Chester diocese; Adam Carlill, Oxford diocese; Chris Wingfield, York diocese; Jane Brooke, Sheffield

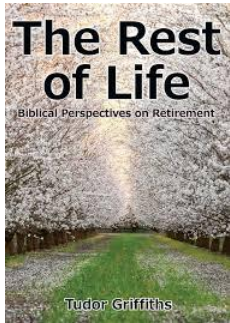
diocese; Rosemary Hicks, Oxford diocese; Tim Robinson, Chester diocese; Robin Lodge, Bath and Wells diocese; Robert Wainwright, Leeds diocese; David Burrell, Bath and Wells diocese.

Malcolm Liles

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Book Review: The Rest of Life: Biblical Perspectives on Retirement by Tudor Griffiths

Published by Kingdom Publishers and other booksellers.



This thoughtful and helpful book explores how on retirement, one might learn to navigate through a new landscape, which is likely to be both different and challenging compared with the past. It reminds us that while many clergy leave a specific role, within a structure or structures, with a broad range of responsibilities, one's identity, while likely to be intertwined with a role, is not coterminous with that specific role. Tudor Griffiths uses Biblical texts and examples, principally from Saint Paul, with sensitivity and skill as well as drawing on other helpful illustrations including one from the bracing television series *Succession*, to encourage informed thinking and reflection.

Three particularly insightful questions are offered early in the book. "*What is my history?*" is the first. Readers are encouraged to look back on their past activities and ministries with a healthy dose of honest self-reflection and realism. One might be reminded of the immortal line of Marlon Brando in the classic film *On the Waterfront* when he says, 'I could've been a contender', but circumstances and one's calling to a particular role at a specific time and being faithful to it, meant things turned out differently. In retirement the past has to be allowed to be let go of. This reviewer wonder if dioceses might want to consider having several people who could offer a sensitive listening ear to clergy at the transition into retirement.

Having reflected on the past, Tudor Griffiths encourages his readers to respond to his second question which is "*To whom do we belong?*" This might prompt one to think of all the relationships one has and the communities one feels part of. He helpfully offers this observation "Having one's roots firmly grounded in the Kingdom can... prevent disillusion with the present realities of church" (p.35).

He sets his third questions, "*What am I becoming?*" alongside Paul's words to the Philippians regarding pressing on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. He recommends discovering a new rhythm to one's life while still maintaining the discipline of prayer, scripture, worship and regularly receiving Holy Communion.

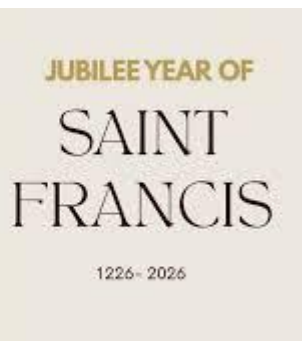
Amongst the topics covered are the wisdom of potentially setting, before God, realistic and ambitious goals, the merit of paying attention, appreciating the dynamics with other generations within one's family, and indeed, one might think with one's friends. (Interestingly as this review is being written the I Newspaper has a feature by Kate Mulvey who writes of finding fulfilment in rekindling friendships from her youth.)

Finally, insightful material is provided into wisdom, hope and resurrection and how they may speak to the retired. I can highly commend this thought-provoking book as a very helpful guide to engaging with retirement drawing on many of the riches of our faith.

Charles Chadwick

Ordained in 1979, Tudor Griffiths served in three Welsh Dioceses including a period as Canon Chancellor of Saint Asaph's Cathedral, six years with the Church Mission Society in Uganda, and has also had a ministry in Cheltenham in the Diocese of Gloucester.

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The Third International Franciscan Conference

Durham, April 14th – 16th

Last year Pope Leo XIV declared 2026 to be the *Jubilee Year of Saint Francis of Assisi* as it marks the Octocentenary of his Transitus which occurred on the evening of October 3rd, 1226. To mark this occasion over 150 Franciscans from around the world and all three

Orders – First, Poor Clares and Tertiaries – both Anglican and Roman Catholic (and others simply interested in Francis of Assisi) to attend the Third International Franciscan Studies Conference - '*Life and Love Transfigured: Exploring New Horizons in the Franciscan Tradition*' hosted by the Centre for Catholic Studies and held at Oscott College outside Durham. People came from many different countries, but all were concerned with the common theme of understanding what Francis and his charism offers today's world.

Being Franciscan

For 25 years I was a member of the (Anglican) First Order of the Society of Saint Francis followed by an almost equal number of happily partnered years. However, as many other former Franciscans would concur, the call which first brought me into the Franciscans in 1976 doesn't go away, and a time came when I needed to say 'Yes' to Francis once again so I tested my vocation to the Third Order. Whilst the First Order is for those consecrating their lives through the Evangelical Vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, the Third – shares similar inner 'Marks/Notes' of humility, love and joy as well as 'Three Ways of Service' – Prayer, Study and Work – and all of these have pulsed through my life for fifty years. Even after my release from Vows the Franciscan *Principles* continue to guide me, and Francis has challenged and encouraged me for nigh-on half a century reminding me that I'm called to be stretched by faith in order that I might know and reveal something of Christ's humanity and divinity.

What still attracts me to Francis? It's his faith-filled life and that he found Christ in the most unlikely of places: from the leprous man he lovingly kissed, to realising the Word in all creation – which he joined in praising God through the eye of faith. For Francis creation was (in St. Bonaventure's words) a 'ladder' by which he 'mounted to God' (*Itinerarium Mentis in Deum – The Mind's Road to God*); he realised its sacramentality, and the profound adoration he gave to the Blessed Sacrament was because, with the eye of his heart, he saw beneath these gifts of creation the incarnate Christ.



‘As He revealed Himself to the holy apostles in true flesh, so He reveals Himself to us now in sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by an insight of their flesh yet believed that He was God as they contemplated Him with their spiritual eyes, let us, as we see bread and wine with our bodily eyes, see and firmly believe that they are His most holy Body and Blood living and true. And in this way the Lord is always with His faithful, as He Himself says: Behold I am with you until the end of the age.’ (St. Francis, *The Admonitions*)

Francis’ charism

I still relish the Christ-centredness of his prayer as his eyes were opened to beholding, in the complexity of nature and brokenness of bodies, the presence of our en-fleshed God. As Bonaventure explained, ‘When (Francis) considered the primordial source of all things, he was filled with even more piety, calling creatures no matter how small his brother and sister ...’ (*Major Legend*, 8.6). So it is that I’m moved by the way he urged all creatures to praise God, leading to the *Canticle of Creation*, Francis’s Benedicite-like song – that great explosion of joyful wonder and adoration – reminding me of my need to develop ‘a heart to praise my God ...’.

This love of, and devotion to, Christ’s presence in creation becomes clearer as the heart becomes freed of sin, another aspect of Francis’ charism – for he founded an *Order of Penitents* (the first name by which the Third Order was known) but one the church can easily forget. After all Confession and Penance are costly but necessary on the way to Reconciliation. The fact that Francis inaugurated the Third Order as an ‘Order of Penitents (of Assisi)’ is something else that speaks to me.

In writing an earlier book (*What Do You Seek? Wisdom from Religious Life for Today’s World*, Canterbury Press, 2021) I was struck by the way the Franciscan charism has, from the start, emphasised the need for *metanoia*, repentance, turning around. Francis’ so-called ‘First Rule’ of the Third Order was addressed to: ‘All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbours as themselves, ... and produce worthy fruits of penance.’ Whilst Francis declared “Don’t speak to me of Benedict! Don’t speak to me of Augustine!” (*Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Vol. 2) his life and teaching make it clear that he realised the necessity of that continuous conversion we find expressed in the Benedictine vow of *conversio morum*. Just look at the world today and see how vital it is that this need is declared – and lived.

We know Francis loved the word of God but it’s easy to forget his commitment to both Confession to a priest, and the Divine Office. Francis saw the Office as a means of constantly informing and refreshing his life, something that led him to compose *The Office of the Passion*. That reveals his love of the psalms and scriptures as a means of rejoicing and praying constantly through a means dating back to the Desert Fathers. He wanted all to say the Office – and if some couldn’t they were to pray a certain number of Our Father’s instead.

Here, then, are some of the aspects of Francis spirituality that offer me a way to live. His:

- 1) Love of Christ for himself alone;
- 2) Wonder at Christ within creation;
- 3) Nurturing by the word, especially through the Office;

- 4) Commitment to the brethren as a lens for the love of God;
- 5) Desire for a clean heart; a heart that can praise as, gradually, it sees God in all things (*Matthew 5:8*);
- 6) Recognition of his sinfulness, and realising the need to make use of the Sacrament of Confession;
- 7) Being an agent of reconciliation;
- 8) Detachment which informs our poverty; chastity which illuminates celibacy, and listening for God's voice by which to know the divine Will;
- 9) seeing Christ in the poor and dis-advantaged, and
- 10) passion for the renewal of the church.

'Life and Love Transfigured: Exploring New Horizons in the Franciscan Tradition'

Much of this charism informed the Conference. Speakers came from many countries to present a variety of themes concerned with issues such peace-making and reconciliation, evangelisation in a digital age, prayer, spirituality, aging, and creation each concerned with exploring the valuable insights of Francis and his early followers – not least St. Bonaventure. Listening to the various rich and meaty lectures, not least that given by Fr Casey Cole OFM, Digital Evangelist and Creator of the popular *Breaking the Habit* podcast (<https://www.youtube.com/@BreakingInTheHabit>), meeting other Franciscans and sharing insights together was a great joy and a tremendous experience, and throughout the Conference many connections were made between participants who were stretched in their understanding of what Francis offers.

Opening Vespers was offered in the breathtakingly beautiful neo-Gothic Chapel of St. Cuthbert, designed by Augustus Pugin, and the Capuchin Provincial of Ireland, Br Richard Hendrick OFM Cap., preached. His theme was our call to let saints out of their sacred cages', not to trap them in the past, allowing them to speak into the present age. To let their 'sparks become a roaring fire' and let our 'too dry grass become enflamed'.

But we were also made aware that, whilst Francis sought reconciliation and peace, our world is full of suffering and pain for although HE Cardinal Pizzaballa OFM, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, was to have opened the Conference the crisis in the Middle East made that impossible. Instead, he addressed us via a video link from that Land so dear to *il Poverello* – the Little Poor Man – yet again ravaged by war. Such tragedy was also brought home to us through a short address given by an Iranian Christian at the Plenary Session.

Witness of Francis today

One of the reasons the Religious Life is still of fundamental importance to the church concerns its unique ability to speak across ecclesial (and national) boundaries and this Conference provided an opportunity to do just that. Together with reference to those insightful documents of Pope's Leo and Francis, *Dilixit nos* and *Dilexi te*, the Conference was reminded that the witness of Francis is as valuable and important for today's Church and world as it was eight centuries ago.

Fr. John-Francis Friendship TSSF

BUT SIR!

Some memories of a School Chaplain

I served as the Chaplain of Marlborough College with responsibility for Christian education for nearly twenty-eight years, from 1984 until 2012, after serving two curacies in Shepperton and Ely from 1977 until 1984. I am now a part-time associate priest working in a benefice of eight rural parishes scattered across the

Berkshire Downs in the diocese of Oxford. I originally read History and then Theology at Christ Church, Oxford.

Marlborough College was founded in the first part of the nineteenth century as a school for sons of the clergy and it grew rapidly into a large boarding school with the most beautiful chapel. It is now a leading coeducational boarding school. Its charter committed the school to teaching Christianity within the Anglican tradition, and the walls of the chapel record the work of many Anglican clergy and bishops across the British Empire, as well as in England itself. Historically, the spiritual and intellectual ethos of the school was in the *Lux Mundi* tradition associated with Charles Gore, William Temple, and Michael Ramsey.

During my time there, chapel was largely voluntary in that all pupils, apart from those in the first year with their own short services three times a week, had a three-way choice on a Sunday if they were in school: a said Eucharist before breakfast; a sung Eucharist with a choir at 10 am; and a presentation in the early evening elsewhere that was part of a programme to nurture an informed understanding of social issues and charitable needs within a Christian perspective. Pupils of other faiths were encouraged and supported in their worship and prayers, and they came on the occasions when the whole school was in chapel for Carol Services, Commemoration, or Remembrance Sunday, and to the services at the beginning and end of each term. A voluntary Eucharist was also celebrated in each boarding house each term.

Confirmation preparation was voluntary, attracting pupils from all year groups, who were prepared on a house basis with the help of older confirmed pupils called house sacristans. Catholics were prepared along with Anglicans, with suitable input from the Catholic parish priest. The course comprised around eighteen sessions, with an awayday to prepare for the Confirmation service itself. There was also an active post-confirmation programme supporting pupils who had been confirmed while they were at the school, and we used to confirm over eighty pupils each year.

Teaching in the classroom was the backbone of the Chaplaincy, enabling a steady flow of questions and answers that were prompted by a syllabus anchored in the gospel of Luke and relating it to moral and ethical issues in the modern world. A priest teaching the Bible to the young is also their pastor, and a chaplain should lead by example with an active pastoral responsibility towards all who work in the school, as well as to the families of pupils, past and present. The key to effective teaching and pastoral care of the young is the willingness to listen to them, and to encourage, hear, and answer their endless questions. Empathy is essential, as young people are sensitive and often far from confident, and they always need to be affirmed in a kind and consistent manner. They can never be compelled to believe in Christianity, however, for in the wise words of T. S. Eliot: 'A Christian education seeks to instil informed Christian categories of thought without ever trying to compel Christian belief.'

The ethos of Luke's gospel is perfect for teaching wider human sympathy and compassion, a recognition that social justice matters, and that human rights, accountability, and the rule of law are a vital concern for us all. It is not difficult to build bridges from this gospel to the ethical teaching of other religions, notably Judaism and Islam, as empathy and respect towards those of other faiths, or of none, is essential in modern society. Examples of those who stood for freedom and justice always appealed to the young and demonstrated the relevance of the gospel message: for example, Nelson Mandela, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or those still suffering under communism. My own frequent visits at the time to countries emerging from communism gave an immediate relevance to teaching in class. My memory of my years as their chaplain is a very happy one, and humorous and stimulating too: it was a privileged and fruitful ministry.

The substance of the Confirmation course I developed is available in two books published by the Canterbury Press: 'This is my Faith' and 'Prayers of our Faith.'

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On Being a Hospital Chaplain

Being a hospital chaplain has been less about having answers and more about learning how to stand on holy ground without trying to control it. Hospitals are places of astonishing skill and dedication, but they are also places where the limits of medicine are exposed daily. One sees the gaps between treatment and cure, hope and fear, life and death. In those gaps, the chaplain is invited to be present and human.

I came to understand early on that my role was not to explain suffering or to tidy it away with theology. Patients rarely ask why in an abstract sense; they ask where - where is God now, where is meaning now, where am I in all this? Often the truest response is silence that is not empty but companionable. Sitting at a bedside at three in the morning, listening to the rhythm of a ventilator or the uneven breathing of someone close to death, I learned that presence itself can be a form of prayer.

Hospital chaplaincy is intensely incarnational. One is immersed in overheated wards and quiet side rooms, in the smell of disinfectant and the beeping of monitors. It happens when a consultant has just delivered devastating news, when a nurse steps outside to cry for thirty seconds before returning to the next patient, when a family gathers around a bed unsure whether this will be the last goodbye. In these moments, faith is stripped of performance. What remains is attentiveness and compassion.

Some of the most sacred encounters I have known have involved very few words. A patient who asked me simply to hold their hand because they did not want to be alone. A person with dementia who began to recite the Lord's Prayer perfectly when nothing else remained reachable to her. A family who claimed no faith at all asked me to 'say something' after their father died - something that would help them breathe again. In such moments, chaplaincy is not about belonging to a particular religion so much as about honouring the deep human need for meaning and connection.

I have also learned that hospitals are moral communities under strain. Decisions about treatment, withdrawal of care, and dignity at the end of life all carry immense emotional and ethical weight. Chaplains are often trusted precisely because we are not there to fix or to judge. We listen across differences of belief, culture, and opinion and help people find words when language fails them. Sometimes that means helping someone to say I'm sorry or I love you.

Being a hospital chaplain has changed me. It has made me more patient, more realistic and more tender. It has taught me that hope is not optimism but faithfulness: staying when things are hard, telling the truth gently and refusing to look away. Above all, it has convinced me that even at the edge of life, especially there, something sacred of God is still unfolding. It is a privilege to be invited to stand in that place.

Kevin Parkes was ordained in 1988 and served in a number of parochial, diocesan and chaplaincy roles before his retirement in 2025. He leads retreats and is a trained psychotherapist.

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Chaplaincies

Chaplains offer pastoral, spiritual and religious care to a specified group of people, within a designated environment and outside the Parish system. They come in many different forms; ranging from hospital and hospice, the armed forces and veterans, prison and detention centres, schools and colleges, places of employment, both commercial and institutional (police, fire service) and for certain groups of people, for

example the homeless. Chaplains are not necessarily ordained nor are they always Christian, other faiths are frequently involved in chaplaincy.

I have experienced several chaplaincies. As a curate I acted as Industrial Chaplain based at Boehringer Ingelheim a pharmaceutical manufacturing company in Bracknell. Moving on to my Team Vicar post at High Wycombe, I was chaplain to the local branch of the Royal British Legion, and also part time chaplain to an independent school for girls, from pre prep to 6th form, continuing in that role after my retirement. Finally, I was appointed as Chaplain to the Homeless in Oxford, a post I held for around 12 years.

It can be lonely, particularly in chaplaincies where there are few clearly marked frameworks or boundaries. You are a bit of a lone wolf. I tended towards a system of 'lurk with intent' and 'make it up as you go along'. It is helpful, at an early stage, to find sympathetic persons working in the field, you can turn to for advice and guidance. It is a ministry where the ability to compromise and change is vital. You have to feel the pulse of a place, to see where God is guiding you, much like the early days in a parish, but often with little formal guidance to help you avoid the pitfalls. Some chaplains have a support group which they find very helpful.

Coming from a parochial background, I had a mental vision of my chaplaincies as a parish. It provided me with structure, validity and a reason to be there, and made me more confident in my dealings. But above all, and irrespective of the particular branch of chaplaincy, it is vital that one shows the love of God, and his goodness to all one encounters.

In my time as chaplain to the homeless in Oxford, I officiated at numerous funerals and memorial services; sadly, homeless people die at a far younger age than the rest of the population. I was a witness at a wedding and officiated at an adult baptism. I was fortunate too, to be able to link the school chaplaincy with the homeless one, particularly when I invited a previously homeless man to address the senior school assembly. It was moving with some of the girls in tears, and hopefully a salient lesson on avoiding drugs. The speaker had prepared well, observing the gap between the rich and poor – he started his talk with the words: "I come out of Speedwell Street (where the homeless hostel was located) and there is Christchurch, which owns much of Oxford." It was not meant as criticism, rather an observation on the gap between haves and the have nots.

I was fortunate to get to know a number of homeless individuals, and to learn about their lives. The role also taught me that each of them, made in the image of God, were different. They came from every kind of background, from a man who had been a Cambridge graduate and run his own business, to a young man who had been born into poverty and taken into care at the age of 8. My role as chaplain led to my setting up the Oxford Winter Night Shelter in 2018, and the day centre, The Living Room in 2021.

I have handed over the baton to another person, but still keep in touch through the night shelter and day centre. It has been a privilege to work with people on the margins, often fun and frequently life affirming, sometimes tragic. I hope that I have been able, not just to be alongside these people, but to be a voice for the voiceless. I am sad there is so little in the way of social housing, and that single men and women are street homeless for some time before eventually getting a room in a multi occupancy dwelling. It is not satisfactory. The whole system of housing is problematic, especially in an inflated housing market like that of Oxford. But it is worth mentioning that a lot of the voluntary provision for housing is led by faith groups. With declining numbers attending church regularly, there is still a hunger for meaning and hope in people's lives, and people of faith have stepped up to the mark.

Please remember homeless people and volunteers who work with them in your prayers.

Ordained in 1998, Mary Gurr has served in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxford.

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Money, money, money (and hats, a Rubens (?) and children underneath the altar), and then an exhilarating theological college.

I grew up wanting to be a vicar. Sad child. I'm long retired now, and I've never been one. My curacy was not entirely a happy one. I loved the people, but there were complications with my incumbent, and Peter, my new and wonderful suffragan bishop (he'd been my Principal at Westcott House), managed to prise me out after two years. I'd been assuming I would stay in parish ministry, but Peter thought I should be in education. He knew the Headmaster of Eton (they'd been dons at Cambridge together), and so it was I was interviewed for a post there, as a member of the chaplaincy team and number two in the brand new theology department.

I arrived at the start of 1974 not having had a day's teacher training, knowing nothing about the school (I didn't even know what the boys wore), and utterly unfamiliar with the world they belonged to. It was very demanding. I had a full teaching timetable, plus being responsible for running one of the three chapels seven days a week. My wife, Caroline, will tell you I was almost invariably ill at the beginning of any holidays.

Somehow, I enjoyed it. The services I most appreciated were the ones we set up for the families of the staff. The idea was Caroline's (and she's an atheist and was then). Bert and George, the College Chapel vergers would set out the Elizabethan altar table (Elizabeth I naturally), and I would preside with a large crowd of children around me, some even underneath the table. There was no fall, just a fair linen cloth, so we could see they were quite safe. Near the corner of the table was a beautiful painting of the crucified Christ, thought then to be a possible Rubens (it's now attributed to a pupil of his). It had its own alarm. On one occasion I managed to nudge it with my elbow as I was coming forward to administer the bread. The alarm was loud, but at least the painting swung back into position and the noise ceased. Then, sometime later, I did it again. They'd improved the system. The alarm didn't turn itself off. We had to finish the service the other end of the chapel, as far away from the noise as we could. The children thought it was brilliant!

Confirmation services were more difficult. Far too many boys got confirmed. In those days at Eton it was something you did. At the service itself it was the mothers who were the problem. Most were not used to receiving Communion and gave me no help when I offered them the chalice. They all wore hats with exceptionally broad brims. The chalice would completely disappear. At least I didn't spill any wine down their very expensive coats – unlike the first time I administered in my curacy, at Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve (I was an Advent ordinand); but that's another story.

Eton gave me a taste for teaching, but I wanted to teach adults, and I wanted to teach in a place where I wasn't told all the time, even in Confirmation classes, 'My main aim in life is making lots of money.' It took me a year to find somewhere that would have me, but in the end I got a job as Old Testament tutor at Salisbury and Wells Theological College. I *loved* it! I had to learn Hebrew (from my then New Testament colleague, the redoubtable George Brooke, soon to be a professor at Manchester University and a world-renowned expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls). It was the early 1980's, and I devoured the new literary and feminist studies that were coming out, particularly from the States. They transformed my thinking and teaching, but the students had an even more profound impact on me. Their age range was large, their educational and church backgrounds extremely varied, but what they all had was a deep commitment to their studies, wide-open minds, and endless curiosity. They made teaching a dream. One memory: we were exploring the prayer of lament and complaint in the OT, recognising how central and powerful it was.

Gordon, the Spirituality Tutorⁱⁱ, and I asked the students to write prayers of lament and perhaps complaint of their own, and we invited them to read them out loud the next day. They could pass if they wished, but in case anyone did choose to pray out loud, we imposed a strict rule of confidentiality. There were over 20 students in the room, and almost all of them prayed their prayers out loud. The silences between them grew longer and longer, and there came a point where we had to take a short break and draw breath outside the room.

Then there were the services. Friday night was the main Eucharist of the week, because on Sundays the students would be on placement. Each was devised from scratch by a group of students, which invariably would include evangelicals, Anglo-Catholics, and liberals. I remember one student telling me after he'd left that he'd explained this to the clergy of his Deanery when he became a curate, and they were amazed, almost bewildered. A lot of the services were in the round, and we academic staff, unless we were presiding or preaching, sat anywhere. None of the nonsense of designated seats.

A great privilege of the job was a three-month sabbatical every five years. Some of my colleagues were writing books, so I thought I'd have a go. I wanted to introduce people outside academia to the literary and feminist approaches to the OT that were lighting up my world, not by talking about them, but by exemplifying them, delving as deep as I could into a selection of passages. That started me off on a long road that meant I continued writing books when I moved to a post at Chester Cathedral, and for some years after retiring. Mind you, I sometimes think I was doing it for nothing. When I read the book that was produced for 'Living in Love and Faith' I was dismayed. There was no sign of the scholarship that has so excited me since the early 80's, let alone the abundance of queer readings.

Alas, Salisbury and Wells, then the most liberal and progressive of all the CofE's theological colleges, was closed in 1995. It was a great loss to the Church, and it remains so to this day. But I left my heart there, and I will always owe a great debt to my academic colleagues and most especially the students. And at least the boys at Eton, for all their preoccupation with making money, made me fall in love with teaching.

Ordained in 1972, Trevor Dennis taught at Eton College for seven years, Salisbury & Wells for 12 years and was a residentiary Canon at Chester Cathedral. His many books include 'Lo and Behold: The Power of Old Testament Storytelling' (1991) and 'Keeping God Company' (2002) and 'Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament' (2010).

ⁱ Peter Walker was Principal of Westcott House from 1962 to 1972, Bishop of Dorchester from 1972 to 1977, and Bishop of Ely from 1972 to 1989.

ⁱⁱ Gordon Mursell, later Bishop of Stafford from 2005 to 2010 and author of *Out of the Deep: Payer as Protest* (1989) and *English Spirituality* (2001).

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A Reflection on Chaplaincies

The extensive pieces on Chaplaincy ministry in our previous edition of Retired Clergy matters caused me to review my own valuation of these. I have been involved in the chaplaincies in addition to my parish ministry of two busy town parishes. Both have entailed a great deal of time and endeavour. I was asked to be chaplain at two cathedrals and two Air Training Cadet Squadrons both of which were unremunerated financially but rewarding in the fruitful contact with young and older folk alike. The question which remains in my mind is "How are these ministries evaluated at a time when there is such a dearth of man/woman power in the parishes and the joining up of so many parishes under one incumbent? Parish

ministry is continually being reviewed and reassessed by the ability to pay the parish share. In Northwich since my retirement some twenty-two years ago, I have witnessed three parish churches have been joined together and a fourth is under consideration. For those of us who have loved and served the Church of England and valued the priesthood and personal care of parishioners it has been painful to see. With increasingly limited resources, how might chaplaincy work and parish work be reassessed and evaluated.?

Ordained in 1964, Rowland Crook served in the dioceses of Lichfield, Durham, Manchester, and Chester.

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A Word from the Editor

Thank you very much to those who have kindly shared with us their experiences and observations on chaplaincy, which we have now run for two issues.

For the next newsletter I would be pleased to receive articles pertaining to readers' experience of journeys, travels and pilgrimages. Perhaps your destination was more or even less than you had hoped for. How were your companions, if you had any? What did you learn from the journey itself, about yourself and about God? Your thoughts, reflections and stories will be most welcome.

Items from members for the Autumn newsletter should be with me please by Friday 10th October, at cjpchad9@aol.com preferably in Word, Calibri 12-point narrow margin and up to one side of A4 or 1,400 words. Thank you.

If you feel you have a comment or an observation on anything you have read in this newsletter, do please write to me. The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England.

Charles Chadwick

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Stop Press

In a recent discussion with Kevin Norris, who is the RACSC Secretary (Remuneration), our Chair sought clarification as to why, in some dioceses, SSM's are being required stop being licensed and to become PTO when they reach the age of 70, whilst this is not the case everywhere, and whether there is a discrepancy here with the new (draft) PTO policy.

This is the reply. The PTO policy (I shall refer to the trial version until the new one is approved) does not require a self-supporting minister automatically to cease being licensed at age 70. It states that clergy who reach retirement age will normally move to PTO but recognises that some clergy aged over 70 continue to exercise extensive ministry with a leadership role. In such cases a bishop may consider the use of the Regulation 29A provisions so that the individual continues to hold office. The policy also envisages that some clergy on PTO will exercise significant leadership ministry. Therefore, I am not sure that there is an inherent contradiction between being over 70 on PTO and undertaking ministry that includes leadership responsibilities (and undertaking the leadership safeguarding training pathway). The question is whether the ministry is best authorised by PTO or by continued office-holding under the age-extension provisions, which is probably a matter for episcopal judgement in the circumstances of each case.

The Divine Surprises

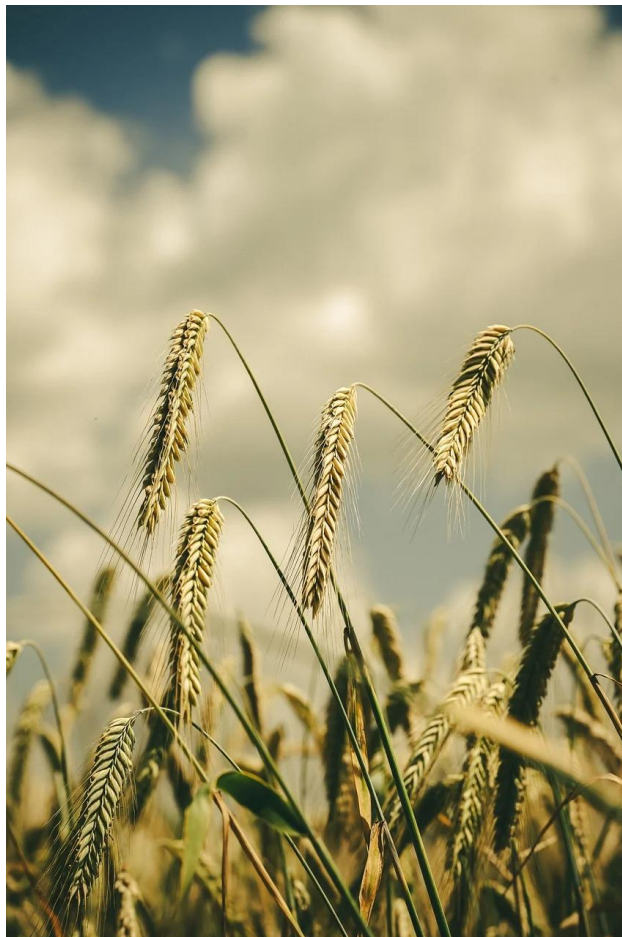
Blessed be thou, O Lord God, for the Surprises of Truth. Blessed thou who now as of old dost come suddenly into thy temple, to make thine abode with us, and all things new.

New every day is the Surprise that thou, God of all that is, shouldst call me son or daughter, and thyself my Father. Surprise, to mark thy hand at my helm always, down the sea of years.

Surprise, beyond conceiving, thy grace to one and all once shown, perpetually given: the advent of a human Babe; the spending once, the dispensing ever, of his Body and Blood; his lifting up to die, to draw all men to himself, yet never to depart from them; the Son whom having seen we have seen thee, O Father.

Every day thou dost come into thy temple suddenly, silently, bringing thy truth, thy joy, thy might, thy Spirit, thy self; deigning to love us within us, so that by thee we may worship thee in spirit and in truth.

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Thanks to Alexas_Fotos for this image, courtesy of Pixabay.