



## **From the Chairman, David Jennings**

'I love this time of year, it is such a special time for children.' How often have we heard comments like that during the years of our public ministry!

When I heard and still hear those and similar comments, I have a number of reactions - first, that for some children this is not a wonderful time of year at all - it will be pretty awful. Then, of course, it is a wonderful time, and I delight in seeing our grandchildren open their presents and the joy on their faces, just like anyone else.

But I also want to say - there is so much more to it than just a special time for children. The real wonder is that what we are celebrating at Christmas in the child Jesus being born at Bethlehem, is that God took our humanity. The real wonder is that Jesus was not just a baby, but that He grew up, lived our life and eventually died for us on a Cross and was then raised to new life. This is such good news because it transforms the whole of our lives, if only we will allow Him to do so.

This is why Christmas is such a truly wonderful time of year.

Each one of us, now in retirement, finds ourselves in different situations - some are virtually working full time, others are helping out when needed, others are no longer able to do so publicly but are still able to share the good news in a one to one situation.

It was St Francis who said 'Preach the Gospel, use words if you have to'.

As we celebrate this wonderful good news this year – let's all be doing just that!

+David.

## Bassi Mirzania and the Persian Christian Community

**B**assi Mirzania is Iranian and became a Christian there. In 1979, after the Iranian Revolution she fled to Britain as a refugee. She worked for the Church of England for 25 years in the field of Social Responsibility. She sensed God calling her to ordination and to ministry among the Persian community in this country. In 2004 she was ordained by the Rt Revd John Gladwin and two former bishops in Iran.

During the last ten years Bassi has travelled extensively throughout England, Scotland and Wales, offering training to churches with Iranians and Farsi-speaking people in their congregations. She visits and encourages converts, and often presides at baptisms, weddings and funerals. She also tries to help asylum-seekers; an area of ministry she often finds very challenging.

Bassi reports that over 3500 Iranians in Britain have become Christians in recent years. Most of them speak English and fit in well with local congregations. But new arrivals need particular help with their new faith. Therefore, training is vital. The Alpha Course (now translated into Farsi), and other discipleship training is one of her current areas of work. She leads a monthly fellowship at St Luke's Church, Redcliffe Gardens, London. This

attracts many Persian Christians and Muslims from Greater London and beyond.

**I**n 2007 and 2008 Bassi was Chaplain to Women's Conferences in Turkey and Armenia attended by over 150 women, many of whom are leading underground churches/house groups in Iran. 'Meeting those brave and courageous women was indeed the assurance that God is at work with my people,' says Bassi.

Bassi joined RCA in September 2013 when she 'retired' from the staff team at Christ Church, Guildford. She continues to minister to the Iranian community and is a CMS Mission Partner. We commend her to your prayers.



**Bassi Mirzania with Iranian Christians in Stockton-on-Tees.**

To hear an interview with Bassi see <http://www.cms-uk.org/Resources/ChurchMissionSocietyresources/TabId/785/ArtMID/3925/ArticleID/2031/Middle-East-stories-Prayer-Focus-February-2014.aspx>

Tell us about your ministry in retirement. Write to [david@phypers.co.uk](mailto:david@phypers.co.uk).

# THE CHARM RENTAL SCHEME

Over two years ago Owen Barraclough, our Vice Chair, David Phypers our Secretary and myself met with the Secretary of the Pensions Board to express some of the concerns that members of the Council of the RCA had picked up. One of the matters that we discussed at our first meeting was the fact that members who were in the rental scheme found it intrusive to have to declare both their own, and their spouse's, financial situation on an annual basis.

It was a helpful meeting and since that time we have met about twice a year and were included in the initial discussions for the changes to the CHARM rental scheme before the publication of the proposals.

Members who are in the scheme will know that a number of changes have now been approved following a presentation at General Synod in July. It will no longer be the case that those in the scheme and their spouses will have to declare their income on an annual basis. Instead the rent for a property will be a Target Rent, which is widely used in social housing. There are a large number of other changes but it is this one that has caused the most comment.

Putting it simply, there are about equal numbers who are paying more, and less, than their target rent. The transition to get everyone onto the right rent will, for some

people, take a very, very long time (the longest is thought to be 55 years or more!!)

When the RCA Council met in October, it was this issue that was the focus of concern coming from Council members from what they had picked up from retired clergy and clergy widows in the dioceses that they represent. There was particular concern from the northern representatives. It was therefore agreed that I should ask for a meeting with the Chair of the Pensions Board, the Chair of the Finance Committee of the Archbishops Council and a member of the Church Commissioners.

Getting everyone together has not proved easy! The meeting will now take place on the Epiphany, Wednesday January 6th at Church House, Westminster. Alan Wolstencroft, the former Archdeacon of Manchester, and Malcolm Grundy, the former Archdeacon of Craven, will be accompanying me. We would be grateful for your prayers for all of us who are going to be meeting that day.

David Phypers, our Secretary is preparing for us a briefing paper of the concerns that have been raised with him particularly over the last six months. If you have anything that you would wish us to hear, please let David have it as soon as possible.

+David Jennings.

# GET HECKLING! by Francis Wood

**R**emember Walter Wolfgang? He made news when he heckled Jack Straw at the Labour Party Conference. I know how Jack felt for I too was once heckled - in the pulpit.

It was Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve and I was well into my subject of the Babe at Bethlehem. Suddenly a man in the congregation rose to his feet and bawled out for everyone to hear, 'Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?'

I saw the Churchwardens grab their staves and begin to advance from the West End. In our Church we even have a pair of metal dog jaws for grabbing and ejecting unruly animals! 'This could be ugly,' I thought.

Raising my hand and my voice at the same time, I said (as any good politician should) 'The gentleman has asked a good question. Yes, indeed I believe in the Holy Spirit. I shall preach about it at Pentecost. So come back then. But now we're not thinking about the Holy Spirit of God but the Son of God. Any more questions?' As there weren't any I went on, feeling quite exhilarated at my neat handling of the situation.

**H**eckling in church has a history going back to King Charles I. He tried to introduce the English Prayer Book into Scotland. This prompted a market trader, Jenny Geddes, to throw a stool at the Dean's head in St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh. She accompanied her action, shouting, 'I don't want the mass in my lug!' By good fortune there were no pews,



tables or even dog-jaws to throw or it could have been much worse.

**A**ll who communicate by press or pulpit hope for some reaction to their message. Politicians like to be heckled so they can be seen handling tough questions. Personally, I'd welcome a bit of heckling during a sermon. The pulpit has been described as the Coward's Castle and the preacher 'six feet above criticism', but there's no need for it to be like that all the time.

I once met another problem in Whitley Bay when the vicar banned me from preaching in his pulpit again. I'd been invited to preach but on my way to the Church, I lost my sermon notes. Thinking I knew the subject well enough, I preached extempore. Later the vicar said, 'Never again! That sermon wasn't worth the paper it was written on!'

**S**o when Dr John Sentamu became Archbishop of York he impressed me when he called on the Church to take more risks. I think he meant, 'Let the heckling begin!'

## Retirement in Canada – Michael Pitts



**F**ollowing Ordination in Durham Cathedral, I served the first half of my ministry in Europe: three parishes in England, a posting with the Mission to Seafarers in Dunkerque, France, and chaplaincy with the Diocese in Europe in Helsinki, Moscow and Ulan Bator, and then Stockholm. In 1988, my wife, Kyllikki, a Lutheran priest, was appointed as chaplain of the Finnish community in Montréal and so began the second half of adventure in priestly work.

After three years divided between the Mission to Seafarers and a small parish on the edge of downtown Montréal, I was appointed as Dean and Rector of Christ Church Cathedral, where I surprised myself by ministering for nearly twenty years. But it was after retirement in 2009 that the fun really began. I spent five months of pre-retirement sabbatical leave in studying the interface between faith communities and secular society and

culture. This was partly an academic exercise and partly practical observation and interaction using skills drawn from anthropological methodology which I had studied as my educational and personal development project during my final years of stipendiary ministry. I travelled through Cuba, Turkey, Estonia, Finland, France and England in this project.

I had intended to pursue this direction into retirement, and try still to do so. But it soon became clear I was being drawn in other directions, particularly eastward into the neighbouring diocese of Québec. Outside of Québec City, this Diocese covers a huge, mostly rural territory, with over seventy five congregations widely scattered. The five regions which make up the diocese are economically and socially very different. For this work of ministry there are only four full time and four part time stipendiary priests.

**T**he region in which I serve as non-stipendiary Archdeacon and Priest stretches along the north shore of the St Lawrence River and its estuary. From Montréal to Bradore, the furthest point is, as the crow flies, 850 miles. The first two communities, Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles are deep water ports with an industrial hinterland. Here we are, of course, deep in francophone Québec, and the small Anglican churches mostly count as their members older, retired people.

Fishing boats in Harrington Harbour



Travelling north-east, the next community, Kegaska marks the end of the road. Kegaska and the seven communities beyond depend on fishing as their only source of livelihood.

Following unbridled over-fishing by the factory ships of Britain and the European nations, from the 1980's the cod fishery collapsed and is now closed. This resulted in rapid depopulation and the remaining families fish mainly for crab and lobster, high value catches, but only open for a few. Here the granite of the Canadian Shield comes down to the water and other than a few trees, there can be neither farming nor other economic activity.

I visit these communities four times a year, and occasionally in between for funerals and other pastoral emergencies. Travel is by air, sometimes by boat, by helicopter, by hovercraft and in winter by snowmobile. The persistent fog at all times of the year makes air travel uncertain. Sometimes I can be trapped for four or five days. Funerals can be particularly demanding. There are no funeral homes or cold-storage facilities, so I sometimes have to leave Montréal at

less than twenty-four hours' notice.

These communities arrived from Newfoundland in the 1880s and, in dialect and culture, remain in contact with "The Rock" and with the Irish and Scottish roots of their ancestors. Also along the coast are French and Innu communities, but these are served by the Roman Catholic Church. I do serve one first nations community a two hour flight north from Sept-Îles. The people of Kawawachikamach are Naskapi, a branch of the Cree family of nations. My latest visit there was during hunting season, and I spent time visiting people in their camps and eating goose, ptarmigan and moose.

The depopulation and scattered nature of the whole diocese of Québec has brought us into both financial and administrative difficulties, and as well as my pastoral work, I have also been called up to help in a process of education and re-organisation. The cost of travel precludes bringing people together, so a lot of this work is being done by electronic communications.

Who knew that retirement could be so much fun?

The congregation at St Augustine



## NEWS AND NOTES

Do you have experience building and maintaining **websites**? At our last Council meeting, some members suggested that the Association should have its own website. Might you be the person to undertake this work for us? If you have experience in this area and would like to help us, please contact the Secretary.

Are you living in London or Southwark Dioceses? We have very few members in the Capital because, we are told, housing is expensive, and many retired clergy like to go and live on the south coast! We are looking to appoint a **Council member** to represent retired clergy in these Dioceses. Revd Canon Nicky Tredennick is Retirement Officer in Southwark, but, as far we know, there is no RO in London, nor in any of its episcopal areas. If you would like to establish links with retired clergy in the whole of London, and would like to join the Council, please contact the Secretary.

Do you enjoy sharing in activities for retired clergy in your area? One of RCA's aims is to encourage retired clergy to meet. Local branches of the Association thrive in many areas. Some Retirement Officers promote regular meetings. Yet, in many areas provision can be quite patchy, and meetings limited to once or twice a year.

Please let us know what you are doing in your area. A few years ago one group sent us a glowing report (with photographs) of an inspiring Quiet Day they had enjoyed together. Or you may have had an enjoyable social occasion together. Either way, we'd like to hear from you.

We plan to publish our **next Newsletter** to email members in March. Please let the Secretary have your contributions by the end of February. Besides news and book reviews we shall welcome any reflections on the Passion and/or the Resurrection.

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### Retired Clergy Association Prayer

Lord, my support in ministry, may I be a support to others;

Lord, my strength in times of frailty, may I be a strength to others;

Lord, my companion in times of loneliness, may I be a companion to others;

Lord, my light in times of darkness, may I be a light to others;

Lord, my guide in times of confusion, may I be a guide to others.

Lord, my rock, my confidence and my joy, protect me in despair and dismay,  
that I may complete my pilgrimage which began, continues and will end,  
with hope, in You.

# Retired Clergy Association

**President:** Rt Revd Robert Atwell, Bishop of Exeter  
**Chairman:** Rt Revd David Jennings  
Laurel Cottage, East End, Northleach, CHELTENHAM, GL54 3ET  
Telephone: 01451 860743  
Email: [bishopdavidjennings@gmail.com](mailto:bishopdavidjennings@gmail.com)

**Secretary and Treasurer:**  
Revd David Phypers,  
15 Albert Road, Chaddesden, DERBY, DE21 6SL  
Telephone: 01332 239134  
Email: [david@phypers.co.uk](mailto:david@phypers.co.uk)

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## SUMMER GENERAL MEETINGS, 2015

As in previous years we are looking forward to welcoming members to two General Meetings next year. These are occasions when all members and their spouses can worship together, renew old friendships and acquaintances, and contribute to the work of the Association in the business meeting. The pattern of each day runs as follows:

10 30 am	Gather for coffee
11 15 am	Eucharist
12 15 pm	Lunch (no charge but a freewill offering)
1 00 pm	Address by the bishop/archbishop
2 00 pm	General Meeting
3 00 pm	Depart



**Thursday 11 June**      **St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Bury St Edmunds**  
Come and meet Bishop Robert, our new President

**Friday 26 June**      **Bishopthorpe Palace, York**  
with the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu  
The general meeting will be the Annual General Meeting

**To register an interest in attending either or both of these meetings please email, or write to, the Secretary, as above.** You are not committing yourself to come at this stage.



### Email or Snail Mail?

Over 1400 members now receive their Newsletters in colour by email, saving us time and expense. If your letter has come by snail mail and if you have an email address, please send it to [david@phypers.co.uk](mailto:david@phypers.co.uk).

