

# **NURTURING THE VOCATION OF RETIRED CLERGY**

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**A brief study undertaken by the Revd Tim Hurren  
as a sabbatical project with the support of  
Leeds Diocese and others.**

**Psalm 92:14**

***They will still bear fruit in old age  
they will stay fresh and green.***

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1) With up to 40% of stipendiary clergy expected to retire over the next decade or so, it is both vital and timely that Leeds Diocese recognises the challenges and opportunities this presents for reviewing the role of ordained leadership in relation to mission and ministry for the future. This study highlights some of the patterns emerging in just a few parts of the country and there are almost certainly many more examples to draw upon from elsewhere. In particular the Leeds diocesan strategic framework should specifically include the creation of a dynamic partnership with the growing number of ordained retirees.
- 2) Developing the role of the increasing cohort of retired clergy can best be achieved when full account is taken of other initiatives such as a more ambitious and radical approach to lay leadership and training. The ministry of retirees has the potential to become more effective when expressed within the wider leadership context at parish, deanery and diocesan levels.
- 3) Nurturing the vocation of retired clergy includes reviewing and implementing appropriate policies and procedures. Good personal support arrangements, recognising the essentially voluntary nature of ordained ministry beyond retirement, also need to be in place. Representative retirees should be encouraged to become involved in development processes which affect the nature of this ministry.
- 4) Detailed common procedures pertinent to many aspects of the engagement of retired clergy have recently been issued by the House of Bishops. However the way these are implemented and any additional arrangements, will necessarily need to integrate with and support missional strategy and vision at all levels, as these vary greatly from place to place.

## INTRODUCTION

A recently retired teacher moves into an area but there is no expectation that they will take part in running the local school. Likewise, a newly retired bank manager who started interviewing people looking for a loan would certainly raise eyebrows and rightly lead to complaints in that community. The situation with retired priests is however much more complicated for a variety of reasons. Although their continued involvement in church leadership can lead to great blessing, it can sometimes be a cause of misunderstanding.

This was highlighted for me when I asked directions to the home of a retired clergyman who had agreed to be interviewed as part of this project. A little lost, I fortunately encountered a resident in the village street. The man was not quite sure when I gave him the name of the house but immediately I mentioned the name of the person I was seeking, he said without missing a beat, "Oh you mean the vicar" and I got my directions.

The cleric I was about to interview had been retired for over a decade and a half and was certainly *not* the vicar. Yet how was this resident to know the difference between a retired priest and the incumbent, with all the complications that might arise from such confusion? And how could the way we deploy retired clergy minimise the chances of misperceptions while maximising their effectiveness in the service of Christ's kingdom and their contribution to the vitality of the local church? That in essence is the focus of this modest research project.

## PURPOSE AND SCOPE

A year or so ago a document started circulating in Leeds Anglican Diocese under the title '2030 Vision'<sup>1</sup> It was intended to galvanise deaneries and churches to think and pray about the future shape of the local church, particularly in the light of the anticipated retirement of 40% of stipendiary clergy over the next decade or so. This prompted me to begin reflecting specifically on the future role of retired clergy in such circumstances.

I recognise that there are many other dimensions I might have included in my response, especially in relation to encouraging and equipping lay people and lay leaders. This huge opportunity is however now prominent on the Church of England's agenda since the issuing of the General Synod paper *Setting God's people Free*<sup>2</sup>. Many others are exploring new ways of collaborative working at every level and anything I could add, certainly in the time available, would be very limited indeed. In principle I could have included the future role of licensed Readers but I felt that there were some distinct issues that arise from the continuing ministry of retired (and House for Duty) clergy which ought to be addressed. Telephone conversations with Tim Ling, who at that time was Ministry Development Officer the Church of

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<sup>1</sup> Ripon Episcopal Area Vision 2030 (Consultation Report) January 2017

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.churchofengland.org/SGPF>

England, confirmed that this specific question was in danger of being overlooked, probably because there were weightier and wider matters that required attention.<sup>3</sup>

On reflection I realised that, if 40% of paid clergy were retiring in the near future, not only are the challenges and opportunities in relation to *current* retirees quite significant, but that this would be magnified by the presence of all the many who will soon come on stream. Leeds Diocese described this as ‘the tsunami of retirements’.<sup>4</sup> So maybe it really was worth starting a conversation about the effective deployment of retired clergy. I summarised the position as follows:

**Thesis 1:** As 40% of serving clergy are expected to retire over the next 10 years the deployment of retired clergy is a *strategic* rather than *marginal* issue for the Church of England in most areas, particularly outside the suburbs.

**Thesis 2:** It is therefore important that deployment of retired clergy, and that of House for Duty priests over 65, contributes to the long term development of church congregations as effective missional communities, rather than simply postpones addressing this necessity through filling short term gaps in liturgical and pastoral provision (valuable though that may be in the short run).

**Thesis 3:** Recognising that deployment of retired and older House for Duty clergy can inhibit or enhance the Anglican response to contemporary challenges and opportunities, it is vital that the church learns from best practice and encourages fresh thinking in this respect as it looks to the future.

My proposal was a pilot study to explore this issue based on limited research and face to face enquiry followed by analysis and tentative recommendations. The Ripon Episcopal area within the Diocese of Leeds, a largely rural setting, would be the test location. In this sort of situation does the church let retirees simply contribute to the management of decline, or could they play a more important supportive role by joining with others to develop sustainable and potentially growing missional church communities? Furthermore what specific actions might be necessary to set this all in motion?

Recently the Diocese of Leeds began to develop a strategy framework<sup>5</sup> with three key enabling factors summarised as:

- Clergy and Lay Together
- Purposeful Resourcing
- Dynamic Partnerships

This is of course a huge agenda, but a significant part of that could be developing a more purposeful partnership with the growing number of retired clergy present in many communities. I was interested to learn that the Methodist Church was somewhat further down the line in making this happen in respect of what they term as supernumeraries, which in Methodist language means ordained ministers who

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<sup>3</sup> During the gestation period of this project Tim Ling moved from London to Sheffield and his current role in Church Army.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.leeds.anglican.org/content/introducing-strategy-framework>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.leeds.anglican.org/content/introducing-strategy-framework>

have retired from paid posts. The initial impetus for this came from a report to the Methodist Conference a couple of years ago called *To serve and to be served*.<sup>6</sup>

So the purpose of this project is to generate a series of suggestions to encourage effective deployment of retired and older House for Duty clergy in the years ahead, particularly in the light of the imperative to develop sustainable local church communities fit for mission and ministry in the coming decades. By 'effective' I mean successful in producing desired or intended results, whilst the word 'deployment' implies intentionality encompassing appropriate, discriminating and assessable placing based on local needs and aspirations. This may of course be accompanied by ad hoc help that happens to be available to fill liturgical or pastoral gaps but, I contend, this should not deflect parishes, deaneries or dioceses from positively planning the deployment of the increasing number of retirees where this is practicable.

One of my interviewees pointed out that in many ways the phrase 'deployment of retired clergy' is an oxymoron as they are all volunteers. Another said that being, as they put it, 'ordered around' or regarded as 'unpaid curates' was inappropriate and can have negative consequences. Nevertheless I believe it is arguable that developing a purposeful framework in which the retired may be invited to participate could still be considered a form of deployment. I have not therefore dropped the term, although I do accept its limitations. When I refer to deployment this must therefore be understood as intentionally nurturing the vocations of those who have ceased the stipendiary stage of their ministry.

There will I believe be four major characteristics which will necessarily be part of any move towards more effective engagement with what is actually a rich and growing resource with great potential. It will be:

- ✓ **Positive** – it doesn't just happen on a random basis but is based on identifiable future opportunities and requirements.
- ✓ **Appropriate** – it takes into account the concerns and aspirations of the local church and the skills and calling of the retired clergy themselves.
- ✓ **Discriminating** – it intelligently matches people with places in a prayerful manner.
- ✓ **Assessable** – it includes broad agreement regarding monitoring development and progress in a supportive and discerning fashion.

## REFLECTION ON KEY ISSUES

With this context, plus the stated objectives of this project and the responses collected, it became possible to identify some of the key issues surrounding the role of retired clergy within the Church of England today. In the final section I move on to some suggested guidelines for effective partnership and engagement.

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<sup>6</sup> Methodist Church *To serve and be served: the Role and Ministry of Supernumeraries* (Report on Conference discussion) 2016

## 1) VOCATION

The theology surrounding ordination presupposes that priesthood is for life, apart from exceptional circumstances. It does not cease at retirement from any particular office. In the words of the advice issued by the Archbishops' Council in June 2014 '*Ordination to the Priesthood, in the Church of England, is understood as a life-long vocation, as is presumed in the Bishop's Introduction, at the beginning of the Common Worship Ordination Service*'.<sup>7</sup>

Alternative but complementary views also exist. In an article in the *Church Times* in the same year, the newly retired Revd Philip Welsh wrote that retirement '*offers us the chance to re-join the Church's principal order of ministry, the laity, to which we were ordained at our baptism.*' The article reaches back to Canon 6 of the Council of Chalcedon and a commentary by Edward Schillebeeckx in support of this view.<sup>8</sup>

Clergy tend to wear special clothes when in action leading worship, they get a specific prefix before their name and have what most would consider to be esoteric expertise relating to many of the deep things of life. In sociological jargon they have 'status ascribed' regardless of whether they are licenced or retired from office, as witnessed by the brief encounter I mentioned in my introduction. It is not surprising therefore that their continuing presence and activity in a worshipping community may raise very particular challenges, as well as providing abundant opportunities. Such opportunities may include specialist contributions such as acting as spiritual directors, mentors and active listeners.

## 2) SUPPLY

The good news may be that many more retired clergy will come on stream over the next decade and could in principle be present to support the worshipping and missional life of local churches. The less good news is of course that they individually *choose* where to retire and this naturally tends to be in retirement hot spots, rather than in the areas of greatest need. For many the rural deanery I used as a case study is a desirable place to settle in old age. Even here the retirees are largely clustered together where there is easy access to medical and other facilities. There is reputed to be a deanery on the south coast with nearly 100 retired clergy and the dynamic there will be very different from large city areas where there may be very few or even none at all. Within limits, clergy will choose where to retire to places that most suit their needs at that stage of their lives, and that is very unlikely to fit neatly with where the Church of England could in theory make the most of their support.

The 40% figure for clergy retirements over the next decade may apply on a national basis, but in some areas it will be significantly greater or less. It is not clear whether planning at diocesan, let alone deanery level, is taking into account such variations.

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<sup>7</sup> Church of England *The Deployment of Clergy with licences and permission to officiate* (PTO) June 2014

<sup>8</sup> Philip Welsh *Why I don't take services now* Church Times article 25th July 2014

For example in Leeds Diocese the total percentage of stipendiary clergy between the ages of 60 and 70 is 24% and in the Ripon episcopal area this increases to 26.5%.<sup>9</sup>

The problem is of course that in the natural course of events church authorities have limited ability to manage the decline in clergy numbers through retirements and so make long term plans for a sustainable church presence in many areas. There are ways of taking some control over the change process but typically this has been through House for Duty posts which are usually hard to fill and may often raise some of the complications surrounding the activities of retirees generally.

I was intrigued to learn that Peterborough Diocese has a more radical approach and intends to “hold the line” in terms of stipendiary clergy, as one of their archdeacons put it to me. It is taking control of the situation at both ends with a drive to ordain more clergy, and especially younger clergy, but also to work with those around typical retirement age offering part time and other manageable arrangements where appropriate. This has involved a significant reconsideration regarding diocesan finances and especially about the use of reserves to help drive through this strategy. Time will tell how this will work but the initial signs are said to be good. The diocesan bishop has been involved in a roadshow to explain this alternative way of thinking and is summarised in videos on the diocesan web site.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the large numbers of stipendiary clergy who will retire over the next decade or so, there will of course be numerous Self Supporting Ministers (SSMs) who move from having a licence to Permission to Officiate (PTO). Some will continue to live in the same area and probably serve in the same church with reduced responsibilities. Several examples may be found in the Harrogate Deanery, which is within the same Episcopal Area as Wensley Deanery but is of course more urban in nature.

Other SSMs will move house on reaching retirement or a new stage of life and may be seeking fresh avenues for ministry. Most of the recommendations at the end of this report also apply to older SSMs (or indeed Ministers in Secular Employment). The special circumstances of these categories of clergy should not be overlooked in planning for the future.

### 3) ALIGNMENT

Some of the difficulties that may arise from a free market approach to the continuing official ministry of retired clergy stem from the potential for misalignment of their style in relation to parish, deanery or diocesan missional strategy. This is perhaps not surprising as typically most retirees were trained many years before and indeed may have ministered in church situations and community cultures that are no longer

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<sup>9</sup> This is based on the total number of stipendiary clergy in post in February 2018 which is 294, while in Ripon Episcopal Area under scrutiny for this project the number is 49%. Emailed information from Leeds Diocesan office 24<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

<sup>10</sup> See Roadshow videos at <https://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/bishop-of-peterborough/sermons-articles-and-talks>

current, for example where the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* was the primary form of public worship.

One diocesan leader was very frank about this and stated that: “Over the last 5-10 years...the utilisation of retired clergy on a regular basis has increased due to the overwhelming workload of our stipendiary ministers. This has stopped a gap in the provision of Sunday services but has resulted in the problem of the workload of clerics not being addressed. It has also caused a number of issues within parishes as the old ways of working adopted by some of our more senior clergy have led to confrontation in some places with congregations preferring to stand with the retired cleric rather than adopt new ways.”<sup>11</sup>

Encouraging alignment with the demands of today’s missional context can easily be overlooked as the local church simply breathes a sigh of relief that at least there is someone to preside at the scheduled communion services. However aligning retired ministries with the leadership of lay leaders and incumbents is a firm foundation on which effective deployment can be based and unity of purpose fostered. One way in which Wensley Deanery encourages this is by involving retirees in about half the meetings of the clergy chapter, while Carlisle Diocese recently held a special workshop style conference for retired clergy. The methodology for best enabling alignment will naturally vary and depend on timing and local circumstances.

To take just one example, Carlisle Diocese is committed to a deep ecumenical partnership with the Methodist and United Reformed Churches which will have implications for how retirees from all three traditions work together. This may be quite a steep learning curve for clergy who move in from another diocese whether they be licensed or retired.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4) ACCOUNTABILITY

At licensing services it is often pointed out that the structure of the liturgy recognises that before authority is *given* to an incumbent, he or she *accepts* the authority of the bishop and ministers in the context of the wider church. Retired clergy are essentially volunteers so the lines of accountability, if made explicit at all, can be somewhat hazy. The June 2014 *Deployment of Clergy* advice includes those with permission to officiate (PTO) and provides a vital underpinning for local arrangements. An opening rubric includes the words ‘*When it (the advice) uses must, this refers to a specific legal requirement. It uses should for items regarded as minimum good practice, which should be followed unless there is good reason not to*’.<sup>13</sup> Following this official advice will certainly provide a sound underpinning for future effective deployment of retirees but adapting this to local individual circumstances is also vital.

Bringing historic arrangements and practice into line with these guidelines, while not always easy, is certainly desirable for the individual retiree, the incumbent and fosters proper understanding amongst congregations and within the community.

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<sup>11</sup> Email to writer dated 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.godforall.org.uk>

<sup>13</sup> Church of England The Deployment of Clergy with licences and permission to officiate (PTO) June 2014



Where this does not happen things can sometimes go badly wrong as witnessed in one parish within the research deanery, where a necessary attempt to follow recommended guidelines for engagement of a retiree resulted in a breakdown in relationship and the complete withdrawal of that person from ministry in that area.

With good will on all sides reference to any formal accountability structure becomes invisible and simply provides the bones that lay beneath the surface of day to day activity. Without those bones in place, in times of change or stress, things can easily fall apart through misunderstandings. Confusion over status generally has consequences. A clear framework reduces the scope for conflict. To highlight this In Peterborough Diocese the Bishop meets with all those who are seeking PTO before that is put in place.

## 5) CONTEXT

Any ministry, including that of the retired ordained, has to be contextualised. One aspect of this will be whether the initiative encouraging involvement primarily comes from the parish/benefice, the deanery, or even from the diocese. Licenced clergy usually revisit contextualisation at their annual review and are kept up to date with the range of training programmes and learning opportunities through continuing ministerial development. This raises the question of how this might work for the retired, bearing in mind that, as volunteers with more limited responsibilities, a much lighter touch is generally appropriate.

No doubt most clergy on reaching retirement will balk at the idea of too much training beyond basics such as safeguarding. However deliberate and ongoing orientation opportunities would seem to be one key to effective partnership. In many cases this could be alongside lay leadership development, learning in community with others. There is some evidence that many retirees would indeed welcome this approach.<sup>14</sup>

How extensive such ongoing learning needs to be, will depend on the nature of the duties to be undertaken. There is a significant difference between simply going on a service rota and playing an active role in parish mission. St David's Diocese have come up with a local initiative to address this difference. They are in the throws of transition from parish ministry to 23 new Local Ministry Areas (LMAs), which is a journey that started around ten years ago.

As they move into LMAs, the Bishop has decided to offer a new role to ordained retirees if they feel they would like to participate on a regular basis, which would make them a part of the ministry team of a LMA. They are calling it NSM-AR 'Non stipendiary actively retired'. The usual role of PTO will still stand for those who just cover holidays and sickness on an occasional basis. However for those who are happy to be more active it means that they are required to be updated through the

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<sup>14</sup> For example see Ven. Penny Driver's report to Bishop of Carlisle following a workshop with retirees in June 2018.

ministerial development process and in other ways, to bring them up to speed regarding the transition and the changing role of ordained ministers.<sup>15</sup>

As mentioned before, the Methodist Church in England faces challenges that are in many ways similar to the Church of England. Recent reports to Annual Conference alerting them to the fact that over 50% of their clergy (presbyters and deacons) were now supernumerary, and they are now developing relevant guidelines and procedures. Some of these could provide lessons for Anglican deaneries and parishes, although of course in the Methodist Church there is in principle a closer collaboration in leadership between clergy and laity, so the dynamic is somewhat different.

Part of current Methodist thinking on leadership in the Yorkshire North and East District may have relevance for retired clergy in other denominational contexts. They aspire to match leadership style and capabilities with local congregational needs and opportunities wherever possible. So individual chapel communities may be characterised as:

- a) Churches strong enough and healthy enough to reproduce new churches.
- b) Churches that are already healthy and need to grow.
- c) Churches that are currently in decline but can be renewed into growth.
- d) Churches that are beyond the point of growth but still meet a vital spiritual need for those who attend making them in need of 'palliative' leadership.<sup>16</sup>

To which we might add:

- e) Pioneer situations and fresh expressions.

Obviously some retired clergy could fit any of those situations but the District Chair recognises that supernumeraries (retirees) might well have a special role to play in d), thus releasing younger and more active colleagues for the other categories. In the book *Setting the Church of England Free* Amiel Ormaston asserts that '*We cannot know what kind of leadership is required (or how it can be enabled) until we know God's purposes for his church.*'<sup>17</sup>

## 6) DEPENDENCY

The Church Times article by Philip Welsh referred to in section 1) on VOCATION above, also includes a warning '*Clearly, there is a problem for any organisation that becomes dependent on its retired workforce; and, clearly, there is a problem for any clergy who become dependent on a pastoral position they no longer have.*'<sup>18</sup> A third dimension of dependency can be on the part of congregations who may slip into seeing an active retired priest simply as their chaplain. One interviewee also flagged up the possibility of loss of co-operation from retirees if they are overused.

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<sup>15</sup> Emailed information from Diocesan Transition Missioner 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018

<sup>16</sup> Graham Horsley *When the Going Gets Tough* The Connexion Magazine Autumn 2017

<sup>17</sup> E Mills-Powel (ed) 2003 p.181.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Welsh *Why I don't take services now* Church Times article 25th July 2014

Although there is nothing wrong in itself with expecting ministerial support, dependency can hinder rather than help the collaborative leadership development that must surely become a common feature in most areas with the decline in fulltime clergy numbers. Apart from the practical issue of creating sustainable church communities, collaborative leadership based on a variety of spiritual gifts working in unity, would seem to be in line with the New Testament vision for church, in contrast to the Old Testament temple model.<sup>19</sup>

It is arguable that the *Setting God's People Free* (SGPF) report presented to General Synod in 2017 marked a desire for a real shift from over dependency on clergy in the life and mission of the church. To quote from the Church of England web site '*The proposals seek effective ways to build up the whole people of God, with a confident faith and vision for the Kingdom of God, which is lived out in homes, schools, communities and places of work. SGPF looks beyond and outside 'Church structures to the whole people of God at work in communities and wider society - not to 'fixing' the institutional Church. SGPF challenges a culture that over-emphasises a distinction between sacred and secular to a fuller vision of calling within the all-encompassing scope of the Gospel – not to limit vocation to church based roles. SGPF seeks to affirm and enable the complementary roles and vocations of clergy and of lay people, grounded in our common baptism - not to blur or undermine these distinctions.*'<sup>20</sup>

Given the increasing number of retired clergy, we need to explore how they may best be part of helping rather than hindering change and transformation. More lay involvement in mission and church life may appear to leave less space in which the retiree can operate, but in fact it may actually enlarge their scope to be part of the change process. Some retired clergy may see this more clearly than others, depending on background and attitudes. The Diocese of Carlisle has around 110 active retired clergy (230 altogether) compared to 100 stipendiary, and as the Retired Clergy and Widows Officer Ven. Penny Driver said at a recent training day: '*I challenged them to stop just plugging the gaps...it is false support, in a way it prevents the church adapting and waking up*'.<sup>21</sup>

## 7) SUPPORT

Categories of retired clergy include those who just want to stop, those who quietly worship privately at their local church, some who cease attending church, those who fill gaps on an ad hoc basis and those who take responsibility during a vacancy or other circumstances.<sup>22</sup> So despite the fact that many clergy who retire may be looking for a complete change from previous responsibilities, the reality is that for a variety of reasons many choose to continue in active service to a greater or lesser extent. Although some might dispute the terminology, those who do so join the ranks

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<sup>19</sup> See Romans 12-8, 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, Ephesians 4:11-13 & 1 Peter 2:4-10

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.churchofengland.org/SGPF>

<sup>21</sup> Church Times article 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018. 36 retired clergy attended the training day while 17 more offered their apologies. It resulted in a positive report to the Diocesan bishop with numerous suggestions on how to help retirees become more effective in the context of reshaping the local churches in that area. Most of the observations and recommendations reflect those developed in this report.

<sup>22</sup> As summarised in an interview with the Bishop of Wakefield Tony Robinson.

of volunteers alongside the great majority of laity. Clergy, just like other volunteers, have a wide range of motivations and the support provided will need to take that into account.

It was clear from my interviews that some wanted to play a background support role, while others were willing to take on quite substantial responsibilities. Often this depended on developing local circumstances. For example one interviewee retired on the assumption he and his wife would at last be able to go to church and sit together without responsibility for liturgical leadership and was ready for something completely different. However local church circumstances altered over the years and he ended up much more active than originally anticipated. It is clear that the situation is not appropriate for a 'one size fits all' approach.

Some are only too pleased to continue in roles with which they are familiar and have expertise. Others will be passionate to participate in missional opportunities and in fact may gain a new lease of life, freed from the responsibility of office. A few may be looking for modest financial support through honoraria or obtaining a house for duties, depending on their pension provision.<sup>23</sup> Status in church and community may be another factor, or a feeling of being involved in future church growth and development. A continued element of collegiality with the active clergy may also be a reason. Two-way communication between the network of retirees and the stipendiary cohort is desirable and the involvement of the spouses of retired should not be overlooked as there is some evidence that they can feel left out or abandoned.<sup>24</sup> Several dioceses are working on how to ensure that retirees are more integrated into leadership teams, usually consisting of both lay and ordained.

All these elements point to the imperative for dioceses to think carefully through and plan well their policies for supporting those clergy who are called and able to play a role beyond normal retirement age. Good practice would also suggest that the network of retirees is invited to get involved in the decision making processes as far as practicable in order to encourage effective outcomes.

### **SOME GUIDELINES FOR ACTION**

Proposals arising from this study are mainly common sense. But as common sense is not always common practice, I suggest that recommended guidelines are required and agreed upon by Diocesan Synod following consultation. Some dioceses are already adopting this approach and could provide benchmarks or even models which might be adapted to the particular circumstances of Leeds Diocese and its Episcopal Areas. My recommendations relate to five distinct stages in the process.

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<sup>23</sup> Anomalies in some areas can surely be demotivating and national guidelines may need to be reviewed. For example one of the clergy interviewees has now retired to another diocese where, because he agreed to take on responsibility for two churches on a non-stipendiary basis under license, he will not be able to claim a proportion of the diocesan element of fees for occasional offices. If he had reduced his commitment to Permission to Officiate he would be entitled to such fees.

<sup>24</sup> Highlighted in a recent report to the bishop from a diocesan officer responsible for retirees wellbeing and deployment.

Running through every stage in this process is the necessity for effective and consistent communication to be both initiated and maintained amongst all stakeholders. This means involving incumbents, parish lay representatives and of course the cohort of active retired themselves.<sup>25</sup> An important new official resource is the substantially revised and developed guidelines document recently issued by the House of Bishops.<sup>26</sup>

#### 1) PREPARATORY STAGE

- Have basic policy and procedures in place relating to the role of retired clergy, with any refinements related to particular Episcopal Areas.
- Encourage deaneries to supplement such frameworks where appropriate and desirable.
- Check that any pre-retirement courses on offer take into account the issues raised in this report.
- Draw on the expertise and experience of the *Retired Clergy Association* in developing support for retirees.<sup>27</sup>
- Make diocesan and any more local strategies available to all retirees, whether already in the Diocese or moving in from outside.
- Have a model pathway to engagement available for the newly retired, unless of course they plan not to seek PTO.
- Include topic of how to get the best from retired clergy in first incumbent training.
- Have welcome packs in place which include the topics raised by this report.<sup>28</sup>

The aim of these measures is to provide an overview of the context in which retired clergy will serve if they choose to offer their services. It should be clear from the references I have made to the ways other dioceses are working that, although there are basic common guidelines provided by the Church of England centrally<sup>29</sup>, the strategies of dioceses vary greatly and this will impact on how retirees fit in to the bigger picture.

#### 2) INDUCTION STAGE

- Normally trigger when PTO is granted but in some cases it may be appropriate before that step is taken.
- Include initial discussion with Area Dean, Archdeacon or Area Bishop, but probably also involve local incumbents at an early stage.
- Develop model agenda to include pastoral, vocational, contextual and other relevant areas but with plenty of opportunity to range over other matters through prayer and listening to the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>25</sup> Being kept informed, up to date and heard were recurrent themes at the important Carlisle Diocese retirees meeting in June 2018. Interestingly and from a different perspective, two of the lay leaders interviewed highlighted this as important in order to get the best from their retired clergy.

<sup>26</sup> *Policy on Granting Permission to Officiate* approved by the House of Bishops Delegation Committee July 2018.

<sup>27</sup> See [www. https://rcacoe.org](https://rcacoe.org)

<sup>28</sup> This might include additional material for those moving into the diocese from elsewhere.

<sup>29</sup> *The Deployment of Clergy with licences and permission to officiate* (PTO) June 2014 and *Policy on Granting Permission to Officiate* approved by the House of Bishops Delegation Committee July 2018.

- If appropriate offer further meetings if there is to be a gap before any involvement starts or if it appears other church leaders, lay or ordained, should be brought into the process.
- Ensure DBS checks are completed and related training updated as required.
- Explore and address any relevant issues relating to spouse and family situation.
- Assess whether it is pertinent to develop any specialist roles (such as spiritual direction or mentoring).

The purpose of this stage is to open up possibilities and discern the best way ahead. It may also help to match the gifts, calling and experience of the individual to particular church or community situations.

### 3) AGREEMENT STAGE

- Draw up an appropriate written agreement and share non-confidential content with all those who might be involved, including the PCC and perhaps Deanery Synod if the retired minister is to range across parish boundaries or play a specialist role.
- Agreement may take the form of a letter of understanding such as used by parts of the Methodist Church.<sup>30</sup> Details will vary with circumstances but it should include lines of accountability, a broad description of the scope of anticipated ministry, details of expenses and any other financial arrangements, plus a timescale and procedure for review. Include a note of who will give advice if things go wrong.

### 4) ORIENTATION STAGE

- Discuss and implement a programme for bringing the retiree up to speed and equipping him or her for their anticipated role. The contents of such programmes might start to take shape at the pre-retirement phase and certainly needs to be highlighted in any agreement.
- Match orientation with the situation. It might be very informal and take the form of meetings with key figures in church and community but it could include elements of training or participation in study days and similar on offer in the Diocese.
- Explore the relationship with clergy or leadership team, Chapter, PCCs and any other bodies established, bearing in mind that most retirees will want to minimise their involvement in formal meetings as a welcome change from previous responsibilities.

### 5) REVIEW STAGE

- Model agenda for review agreed in advance and possibly provided by the Diocese or Episcopal Area.
- Interim informal discussion after six months with incumbent(s) followed by annual meeting involving relevant clerical and lay leaders which might, for example, include church wardens.

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<sup>30</sup> Methodist Church York and Hull District draft papers and guidelines relating to ministry in retirement May 2018.

- Full review every three years involving Area Dean as well as incumbent. One of my interviewees reminded me that “people age in retirement” and expectations have to be managed on all sides. Revise agreement as necessary.

Having spoken with a good number people at ground and official level, it is notable that, although the issues relating to the ministry of retired clergy are pretty much the same everywhere (with some even developing similar policies quite independently), there seems to be little sharing of best practice across boundaries. Maybe this is something that could be encouraged or even facilitated by the Ministry Division of the Church of England. The Methodist Church is pursuing these issues at the level of circuit, district and connexion. A parallel for the Church of England would be to explore and implement best practice for deanery, diocesan and provincial levels.

On the home page of the Ministry Division web site there is a summary of its prime task which is stated to be *‘to renew lay and ordained ministry throughout the Church of England. We do this by providing advice and support to dioceses, the CofE’s Bishops, and numerous Theological Education Institutions.’*<sup>31</sup> With the anticipated wave of clergy retirements in the near future, it is perhaps timely and appropriate to include the nurturing of the vocations of those who wish to continue to be actively involved in ministry and mission in their later years

## **APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY**

The scale of this project was limited by the resources and time available. It does not pretend to be an exhaustive exploration of the topic but I believe it touches on the main issues relating to active retired clergy. I collected views from those with relevant responsibilities in four Anglican dioceses and one Methodist District. Most of this was undertaken through face to face discussion, although some was over the telephone or by exchange of emails. Nine people were involved in this process and I was provided with a number of informative and relevant background documents. The results were recorded, noted and summarised in each case.

I also wanted to gather insights from some retirees, stipendiary clergy and lay people at ground level and decided to focus on a single rural deanery for this purpose. Nine people took part in what was billed as semi-structured interviews but in truth tended to take the form of structured conversations. Without exception my interviewees were keen to share their views and experiences and in each case I returned at the end of those hour long sessions to the question of lessons that might be learned for the future. The interviewees included leading lay people, retired and house for duty clergy, stipendiary clergy and the Area Dean. They were selected to give varied and complementary perspectives.

The deanery under the spotlight consists of an extensive and picturesque Yorkshire Dale through which the river Ure runs from the high fells to the flatter land just to east of part of the A1(M). It covers roughly 500 square miles being around 40 miles from East to West but only averages 12 miles or so from North to South. It contains three

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<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/diocesan-resources/ministry-division>

modest sized market towns but for the rest it is deeply rural. The total population is around 21,000 and seems, from a comparison of rough figures for 1991 compared to today, to have been pretty static. Currently the deanery has 32 parishes and 45 church buildings, many of which are listed.

The Diocesan Directory for 1999/2000 indicates that in 2000 there were sixteen stipendiary clergy covering roughly the same area and this had reduced to eight by 2018. Three of those benefices were in vacancy at the time of this survey which serves to highlight the importance of the role of retired clergy in such a situation. This particular deanery is beginning to make plans for a further reduction of stipendiary posts from eight to five, or even four, by 2030. Also located in the deanery are 12 retired priests, one House for Duty and 14 licenced Readers. Over the past few years 20 lay people have been trained as liturgical leaders but it is not clear how this initiative will be developed in future.

Why choose a rural deanery as a case study for this project? My answer would be that, although similar issues are present in urban and suburban areas, they are highlighted more vividly in country areas with multi-parish benefices, where the remaining stipendiary clergy are stretched to cover large geographical territories and several dispersed congregations. On the whole the presence of active retired clergy plays a more prominent role in such situations and alternative ways of resourcing are generally less available. In addition a more traditional understanding of the nature of church leadership amongst the laity as a whole, serves to bring attention to the challenges and opportunities which often emerge in relation to the presence and ministry of retired priests. However the suggestions I offer for consideration in my conclusions are applicable in city, town or country parishes.

## **APPENDIX 2: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Desk research in this area yields few clues as the presence of retired clergy is rarely addressed. At best some of the literature on the future of the parish church provides a context for reflecting on where retired clergy might come into the picture as the Church of England faces the missional challenges of the future. However a number of reports and reference documents have been helpful and these are listed in Appendix 2, together with a very limited background bibliography.

To get to the heart of this matter there is really no alternative to engaging in semi-structured conversations and this is what, on a limited scale, I have attempted. My thanks are due to all who have shared their thoughts and illuminated this important and sometimes sensitive topic, chiefly through face to face interviews but also over the telephone and by email.

Many of those I contacted hold positions of authority in a variety of parts of the UK and I am grateful that they have taken time out from busy schedules to share their insights and plans for the future. I am also immensely grateful for the select band of individuals from Wensley Deanery in North Yorkshire who allowed me to probe below the surface in some detail and enabled me to relate the general issues to a



particular local situation. The encouragement of my own archdeacon, diocesan bishop, vicar and others in Leeds Diocese is greatly appreciated and has enabled me to set aside time for this project. Financial support was gratefully received from the St George's Trust, Lady Hastings Trust and Diocesan sources. The guidance and supervision of Tim Ling, Director of Research, Church Army from start to finish, is much appreciated.

### **APPENDIX 3: RESOURCES AND REFERENCES**

- P Bayes & T Sledge *Mission Shaped Parish* CHP 2006  
James Bell (ed) *Reshaping Rural Ministry* Canterbury 2009  
Stephen Croft (ed) *Future of the Parish System* CHP 2006  
Graham Dow *Leading Rural Churches for Growth* Grove Leadership 19 2015  
Andy Griffiths *Refusing to be Indispensable* Grove Leadership L31 2018  
J F Hopewell *Congregation* Fortress 1987  
G Horsley *When the Going Gets Tough* The Connexion Magazine Autumn 2017  
J Martineau et.al. *Changing Rural Life* Canterbury 2004  
Rebecca Paveley *We might be pensioned, but we've not been pensioned off* Church Times article 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2018  
M Mills-Powell (ed) *Setting the Church of England Free* John Hunt 2003  
Bishop Tony Robinson *Keeping In Touch* (early draft of Welcome Pack) May 2018  
Andy Ryland et.al. *A Theological Reflection on Models of Ministry in Rural Parishes* (unpublished paper by three Rural Church officers) June 2015  
Alan Smith *God Shaped Mission* Canterbury 2008  
Nick Spencer *Parochial Vision* Authentic 2004  
Philip Welsh *Why I don't take services now* Church Times article 25<sup>th</sup> July 2014  
Church of England *The Deployment of Clergy with Licences and Permission to Officiate* June 2014 & *Policy on Granting Permission to Officiate* July 2018  
Methodist Church *To serve and be served: the Role and Ministry of Supernumeraries* (Report on Conference discussion) 2016  
Methodist Church York and Hull District draft papers and guidelines relating to ministry in retirement May 2018.  
Diocesan web sites for St David's, Peterborough and Carlisle plus *God for All* (Cumbria ecumenical)  
Ripon Episcopal Area *Vision 2030* (Consultation Report) January 2017

**Biographical note:** Ordained in 2002 and served in various capacities at St Peter's Harrogate, a busy eclectic town centre church. Retired as Associate Vicar September 2018. Most of his life has worked in a variety of secular settings including financial services, leading a management training centre and acting as environmental sociologist in local government. Church roles have included chairing a Diocesan Council of Mission (Ripon & Leeds), establishing Harrogate School of Theology & Mission and running a Diocesan Conference Centre (Sheffield). First degree in Social Science (Upper second honours York), qualified as Fellow of the Institute of Bankers and completed a three year diploma course prior to ordination (NEOC). Active over many years in the governance of local charities, has served on Harrogate Borough Council (chiefly as Chair of Finance) and was a parliamentary candidate (1992). British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to church and community in Harrogate awarded 2019. Married with two sons and five grand-children.