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**Autumn  
Newsletter  
2020**

## **from the chair**

Dear Friends,

Given the restrictions imposed on us all in varying degrees regionally and to keep you in touch we thought it might be a good idea to offer you an extra Newsletter this autumn. It will also allow us to publish some of the responses we have received from you over these last months. I expect many of you have experienced Zoomed meetings or have shared in worship online. Our recent council meeting was held by Zoom and so too our single AGM. It's amazing what you can get used to, even if it is never quite the same as actually meeting up together face to face.

I am very much aware of how quickly autumn and winter are now approaching and All Saintside will soon be with us. Two recent things have occurred for me that have helped me to gain a wider sense of what it is to share in the communion of saints. Firstly I have just finished completing a Visitation to an order of nuns to whom I have been their Episcopal Visitor for the past 25 years. They are an order originally founded in 1911 to work in Africa specialising in education and nursing. They returned to the UK in the 1990s having established an indigenous order that now flourishes and carries on their good work. There are now only five of the sisters left and two of those do not enjoy good health. All but one of them are in their eighties. Inevitably as I interviewed each of them and talked with them together the question of their future was never far away. What will happen when ...? What will happen if ...? Some of their concerns were practical, some clearly spiritual, but what shone through for me was their underlying faith and trust: "We are in God's hands, so whatever happens all will be well". This is not some fey resignation, but an affirmation of the loving purposes of God. It put my little faith to shame. I was in the presence of saints.

The second thing that happened was that I received an email from a priest I know well to inform me that his father, also a priest whom I had known in the diocese, had just died at the age of 96 after 69 years in holy orders. What a life and ministry! He was kind, generous, courteous and simply a lovely man. I can imagine him now among the angels and saints. I expect you could easily add your own experiences of walking and talking with saints, and they don't all have to be those ordained or in religious orders! But what fellowship we share with those in the world's eyes seemingly insignificant, yet who show us in their life and very being something of the wonder of God's love.

In this season of saints and remembrance may God bless you all as we walk together in retired fellowship.

Every Blessing **+Ian Brackley**

### **Where do I belong?**

How did I get here? Where do I belong? – Early retirement days.

I was diagnosed with colorectal cancer early in 2015 and then, following the usual full body scans, I was told that kidney cancer had been detected – this was not connected to the bowel cancer and there were no symptoms that it was there. Apparently it's not unusual to find another cancer after

the initial diagnosis once they start looking! I embarked upon the treatment pathways starting with radiotherapy and chemotherapy for the colorectal cancer, followed by surgery to remove my right kidney – on the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my deaconing (June 29<sup>th</sup> of all days), then major colorectal surgery on August 18<sup>th</sup> followed by five months of chemotherapy. My Bishops and senior staff in the diocese supported my wife and me personally by their prayers and visits. My parishes and Deanery all sustained and held me in their prayers – almost tangible, intensely felt, and made real by their visits and kindnesses.

I returned to ministry in May 2016 still feeling and managing the side effects of treatment. I introduced changes in the pattern of services in my three churches to make Sunday ministry (at least) less frenetic, and tried to be more sensible about how my time each day was used. I can't say I was successful in all these things but I did feel that life and ministry wasn't quite as 'busy' as it had been – although my wife may say something different! Then early in 2017 I began to ask myself (out of the blue) why not retire? Later that same year on June 29<sup>th</sup> I would clock up 38 years of ministry in the church – 7 years in the Church Army and 31 years ordained. My 65<sup>th</sup> birthday would also occur in November, so maybe it was time to consider the question of retirement seriously. I went to see my Bishop and in speaking to him I became a little more certain that to ask the question was not as scary as I thought. I chatted to colleagues and over the summer holidays decided that, all things considered, I ought to talk to my church wardens and prepare for the announcement to be made in the parishes and the wider church and communities. So on January 28<sup>th</sup> 2018 my last Sunday in active stipendiary ministry I said goodbye. In the Calendar it was Candlemas Sunday so it was quite something to hear the words of the ancient Simeon as the Gospel was read. Not that I am as old as Simeon and certainly not as holy! So I started in my new role of retirement. In those really early days my wife and I had a few short breaks – Stockholm and Riga and then Portugal with friends. I took a three month break from ministry (apart from near the end taking a few services when invited) and since May 2018 I have been delighted to be available and to officiate as required. The advice for retirement (which I've tried follow) was to do three things 1. Rest and relax; 2. Pray; and 3. Ministry. But the questions - 'Where do I belong? And how do I belong?' have been in my mind. For 38 years (42 including training) the life of the churches I have served in had been at the centre of my life and faith. I was involved in PCCs, Deanery and Diocesan Synods as well as a member of Diocesan Committees. In my role I have enjoyed being very much in a leading, pastoral, listening ministry – this experience has been central in each church I've been a part of. Now I've retired I can't join in any of the structural things the 'working' clergy and lay people of God can - PCCs and Synods are a tangible way of belonging to the church locally as well as in the bigger picture. It's not that I want to be involved in these things nor do I feel that I'm not welcome in my local parish church – the Rector and People have all been warm and affirming. But I can't join the Electoral Roll to show my belonging and to engage in sharing in the life of the local church. Again, not that I want to do these things – but the laity can as signs of belonging and sharing, I understand completely that stipendiary clergy in many parishes would find it challenging to have a retired priest involved in that way, and most retired clergy would not want to be. But the question remains 'where do I belong?' if I can't 'join' in the way that I have done over the years. How can I make or feel that my belonging is tangible, real and concrete?

I know that since being ordained I've not been allowed on the Electoral Roll but I have been at the centre of worship and witness. I've been able to listen, guide and lead the conversation of the local church in discerning its mission and ministry in and to the community it serves. Again I hasten to add that I'm not looking for this role again – like most retired clergy I'm glad not to be involved in the administration of the church even though that was in a sense 'belonging' in a tangible way. Lay people have a choice which they can exercise to join the ER and if they do they will influence the

life of their parish church and Deanery and through those they choose to serve on the PCC or Deanery Synod, to influence the life of the wider church.

It seems to me that retired clergy stand on the outside looking in – perhaps that is the ministry that we have and share together, to be in the life of the church but not influencing it, but rather leading the People of God faithfully in worship. To pray for the parishes where we live and where we minister each week. To keep those three principles in my heart, to rest and relax, to pray and to officiate when invited. Perhaps the RCACoE prayer sums it up:

***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.***

*Revd Canon Lindsay Dew*

### **Book Review**

October being Black History Month provides us with an opportunity to review *Two Triangles Liverpool, Slavery and the Church* by **Ken Pye** published by the Diocese of Liverpool and USPG ISBN 978-1-9161748-0-1 pp162 £14.99 Ken Pye is known as a most knowledgeable and entertaining lecturer. He has written this with the encouragement of the Bishop of Liverpool, it is a short but comprehensive account of the involvement of the city in the slave trade on which its prosperity was largely founded. It makes in places grim and harrowing but required reading. It is a kind of penitential confession aiming to make the public better informed about a discreditable party of history in the north-west of England. Of course, many other places such as Bristol, Glasgow and London also profited immensely from this cruel business. Slavery is not a peculiar fault of modern times. The economies of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans were built upon it.

Pye describes how ruthlessly efficiently it was organized, to extort maximum profit from the slave ships. The Triangle from which the book derives its title comprised three stages. Departing from Liverpool exporting goods to West Africa; collecting a cargo of slaves the next stage (the middle passage) made for America and the West Indies where slaves were unloaded.; the third stage from America back to Europe conveyed a cargo of raw materials.

The Museum of Slavery in Liverpool brings to life a sickening and unimaginable illustration of what the slaves had to endure – many of course perished en route. The author details the names of prominent Liverpoolian merchants whose fortunes were made from these activities. To be fair, they often used their gains to beautify the city architecturally. The Church of England received a share of the profits, too. John Newton, the author of the hymn “Amazing Grace”, was for years the captain of a slave ship sailing from Liverpool, until his conversion. Even blacks and Muslims were involved in selling their own people.

Then the tide began to turn. The most honoured names are of course William Wilberforce, who campaigned for over 30 years with his friend Thomas Clarkson, and Olaudah Equiano, and success came ultimately in 1833. Earlier on, a Bishop of Chester, Beilby Porteous, 1777-1787, spoke out in 1783 against slavery, calling on the Anglican church to stop its involvement in the slave trade. The abolitionists prevailed after a relentless struggle to change public opinion.

So much for history. It is regrettable that slavery still exists, in different manifestations, today. What is the C. of E. doing about it? In Liverpool, partnerships of love and trust are being set up with Anglicans in Kumasi, Ghana and in Virginia USA with mutual visits to each other to promote deeper understanding of modern issues. The Diocese seeks along with other agencies to deepen awareness of contemporary issues relating to slavery in its various forms. **Paul Conder**

**Alan Wolstencroft** was a member of the RCA council for many years following his retirement as Archdeacon in Manchester Diocese, his contributions to the work of the council were substantial. The tribute below is taken from that Diocese's website.

*We are sorry to hear that Ven Alan Wolstencroft died peacefully in Marley Court Care Home in Bolton on 15 September 2020. Alan served the whole of his ordained ministry in this diocese; as curate at St Thomas Halliwell and All Saints Stand, Vicar at St Martin Wythenshawe, St John the Divine Brooklands, St Peter Bolton, Chaplain at Wythenshawe Hospital and as Area Dean of Withington. In 1998 Alan was made Archdeacon of Manchester and Residentiary Canon of Manchester Cathedral, in which capacity he served until his retirement.*

*Alan must have served on every synod and committee of the diocese. That impressive roll call of posts and ministries, however worthy and commendable, does not begin to do justice to the indelible mark that Alan has left on this diocese. A priest and a pastor to his fingertips, Alan could also be forthright in expressing his views, without fear or favour but he was always motivated by his love of the Lord, the care of clergy and laity, the welfare of the church and the flourishing of God's Kingdom.*

*That care extended into his retirement as Bishop's Officer for Retired Clergy, a ministry he exercised with characteristic dedication and compassion. As an archdeacon, Alan had to make some difficult decisions but people always recognised him as a man of honesty and integrity who could be trusted. The Cathedral congregation still fondly remember the reverent way Alan led worship, as well as his thoughtful preaching and deep pastoral care.*

*We hold Alan's wife Christine (who supported him unstintingly throughout his ministry) their children, Jeremy and Elspeth, and their four grandchildren in our prayers.*

*I must add that Alan was a proud Lancastrian and a passionate Bolton Wanderers fan. We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude for his wisdom, humour, humanity, faithfulness and dedication. May he rest in peace and rise with Christ in glory.* **Ven David Sharples**

**Covid Contemplations 2020** John Powell has produced a booklet of thoughts, pictures and prayers which have been inserted in his local paper over the last few months. An email to [parchjohnpowell@btinternet.com](mailto:parchjohnpowell@btinternet.com) will secure a copy. An example follows his "Foreword" below.

These chapters came about as a result of the "Lockdown" imposed by the British Government towards the end of March 2020. For me, this meant that I could not minister as a cleric in the same way that I had been doing up to this time because The Church in Wales also put restrictions on clergy, especially those over the age of 70 years. Up to this time I had been actively involved in taking services in the churches of the Cardigan area and the LMA and doing other voluntary work

in the community. I had never felt like this before and never experienced such a loss of liberty and freedom that had been with me all my life. I felt the arbitrary classification of “elderly” as discriminatory and the restrictions of movement as frustrating. I therefore wrote to the Editor of the local Newspaper- the Tivy-Side to ask if I could write each week on my thoughts, in order to help others. This was especially so as all Church and Chapel services could no longer take place and the weekly column in the paper on Church Services would be empty. I have found this a great help in keeping me focused although I did not anticipate that I would be doing it for the length of time that I have! It then seemed a good idea to put these weekly thoughts together in a booklet so that I and others could look back on this extra-ordinary time in the life of our nation and the world. After all, nothing like this has happened in the United Kingdom since the “Spanish Flu” of 1918. I had been following the progress of Brexit that has great implications for our nation. Then the General Election and then the shock of COVID-19 and the Pandemic. As soon as “Lockdown” was announced I agreed with Professor Carl Heneghan, director of the centre for evidence-based medicine at Oxford University, that it would cause more harm than the virus itself and bring about physical, mental, social and economic suffering. This is now happening and I have personal knowledge of friends who have suffered mentally. It is in times like this that we need an anchor for the soul to keep us steady as the storms rage around us. This is when faith plays such an important part and allows us to navigate a safe passage through the events of each day. It is my hope that these meditations will have helped some to do this in all the circumstances of their lives. Clergy and Ministers have, I know, been busy ministering through the medium of Zoom, Youtube and other social media. This has been much appreciated but there are those who do not have electronic means to watch these and rely on the written word and the local newspapers. I hope that this selection has helped them to keep in touch with their local church or chapel. All the photographs in this booklet have been taken by me during this pandemic time and have brought me peace of mind. Many are taken of the natural world that has played such a large part in healing for so many people as we realize that we are all part of the natural order and each part relies on the other.

**Water** is basic to the existence of all life on earth. When I conducted services of Baptism in Wales, I always used to point out that the child was being baptized in the best water in the world- Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water. I believe that Dwr Cymru is a mutual company where all the profits go back into water management, One of our local residents, Dr. David Lloyd Owen, has written a wonderful book on the urgency of taking water and wastewater seriously. He is a world expert on this topic. The book is called “The Sound of Thirst”, published by Parthian Press. Water Aid does incredible work throughout the world. When coronavirus hit, its teams were already on the ground, providing clean water and promoting safe hygiene in countries throughout the world. You can follow the work at [wateraid.org/covid19](http://wateraid.org/covid19). The element of water has most profound healing qualities. It is no wonder that it is used for initiation into the Christian Faith. In John’s Gospel chapter 5 verses 2 to 9, we read of a man who had been an invalid for 38 years and had no-one to help him get into the healing waters of the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. Jesus was able to heal him. The Holy Wells of Wales and the world were (and still are) regarded as places of healing. God’s gifts to us are often shown by means of water. We see God at rest in Psalm 23. “He leads me beside still water.” We see a God of new life in Psalm 1. “That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season.” We see a God of power in Exodus 14. “Moses held out his hand and God sent a strong wind that drove the sea back.” We see a God of the past in 2 Peter 3. “Long ago, by God’s word, the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water.” This of course reflects the understanding of creation held at that time. We

see a God of now in Numbers 20. “The Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out and the community and their livestock drank.” I believe that there is a certain rock in the desert that can retain water. We see a God of the future in Revelation 22. “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clean as crystal, flowing from the throne of God.”

There is a lovely hymn written by Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877) based on Psalm 23. Where streams of living waters flow my ransomed soul he leadeth and where the verdant pastures grow with food celestial feedeth. - And so through all the length of days thy goodness faileth never; good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise within thy house for ever.

***A Prayer by Ruth Williams (World Day of Prayer 2020).*** God of rain and water, of stream and storm, of sea and silent pools, of waterfall and waterhole, of wells and waves, of aquifer and aqueducts. Hear us as we pray for water fresh and pure for all. And guide us to use your water wisely and well, ensuring that all your creation can share in your bounty. Amen. ***John Powell, Retired Vicar of Cardigan***

### **Forthcoming book by David Lowe**

“With Clouds Descending” is an unusual autobiography in which I place myself 130 years in the past and spend my main ministry in the Bedfordshire town of Ampthill where I was brought up, rather than in three Suffolk parishes, which, of course, include Felixstowe.

The paperback is published by Pegasus of Cambridge and is priced at £7.99. It will be available from main bookshops. I’m afraid postage and packing is an extra £3.65, so the cost may not be worthwhile just for a signed copy.

The book is beautifully illustrated by my friend Simon Merrett, who has sketched fine architectural buildings of Ampthill and nearby Maulden. Although the book is localised it is of general interest, containing social as well as family history. It is based on factual stories but also contains a degree of fantasy.

The reason for moving my time to the Victorian era, and the place to another county, is to tell the story of some of my ancestors and to relate to them as their parish priest. However, the book is not religious. In fact it is somewhat naughty, even bordering on impropriety in parts. I would strongly urge would-be buyers who might be easily offended or narrow-minded not to purchase the book.

For those who would like a copy signed by both the author and illustrator, please send payment (total £11.64) to me, David Lowe. Cash or cheques are acceptable (My address is 21 Firebrass Lane, Sutton Heath, WOODBRIDGE, Suffolk, IP12 3TS) but the best method is by BACS transfer. Details are:

Account name	D C LOWE
Bank sort code	20-25-28
Account number	50073571

Profits will go to the charity PANCREATIC CANCER UK. Below is the blurb that will appear on the book’s back page.

Set in Ampthill, Bedfordshire, *With Clouds Descending* is the story of the Low family told by a priest who himself is part of the Low clan, and presented as if he were the rector of Ampthill.

This semi-autobiographical book is set 130 years in the past and is mainly based on real events. However, there is also a smattering of artistic licence throughout the book. The often amusing and

sometimes risqué anecdotes throughout the book are inspired from the diaries of the author that he has kept for twenty-five years (1984-2019).

The Low family is quite a large family and full of diverse characters who deal with incidents ranging from floods and riots to murder and war, that are all loosely based on fact. Every family has skeletons in their cupboards; with some families those skeletons are deeply buried. This is not the case with the Low family which makes this book a fascinating read. *David Lowe*

### ***STREAMED LITURGY and "VIRTUAL CHURCH" DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC : SOME REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM AN ANGLICAN PERSPECTIVE***

For fifteen Sundays it was not possible to have services in parish churches and cathedrals, although it later became permissible to use them for recording streamed liturgy. Clergy very quickly had to learn about producing streamed services. Producing a weekly streamed service is time-consuming but it has been a god-send enabling members of a church to worship virtually, a community to pray together and to hear the Word of God proclaimed and expounded. It's impressive the way that choral music is being recorded remotely and incorporated into services. It has also facilitated Bible and prayer groups, PCC meetings, Alpha courses and other virtual gatherings to allow the work and witness of the church to continue. All this would not have been possible a few years ago. Earlier this year Zoom was unknown to most people.

Research reveals that considerably more people are tuning into on-line services than would be present in churches on a Sunday. It's been estimated that about 25% of the UK population has done this. A virtual congregation may well exceed the usual physically present community in a church on Sunday. Churches have now become more accessible to people and a virtual congregation may include those who would feel uncomfortable attending a service in church.

We can now return to our churches to worship but in a restrictive way. There will be some church members, particularly elderly people, who may not feel comfortable or confident coming to church. And they may be some who have joined "zoomed congregations" who will not worship in church but who wish to continue being part of a virtual church. This means that parish clergy will continue to stream services. For some churches this will be a church service. There could be a recurrence of the virus to the extent that churches will again be closed.

**Questions** There are important questions related to being a church that cannot be easily answered. Are there limits to the inclusivity of the virtual community through generational differences or internet poverty? The younger generation are generally more familiar with and at home with IT and social media than older people, some of whom may not be able to use Zoom or download You-Tubes. Poorer people may not have access to IT.

We live in a consumer society where there is abundant choice available to us through the internet. We can shop 24/7, acquiring what we want when we want and returning it if we don't wish to keep it. Whatever their merits and however necessary they are, are streamed services with virtual congregations reflecting this culture? We have a supermarket of liturgies available to us 24/7. We can choose the service we tune into, whenever we wish to do so, and if it doesn't appeal to us, find another one.

Many parish churches provide several different styles of worship on their monthly liturgical menu. People will probably have their particular preference. This may include a quiet BCP Holy Communion, a lively all-age service with a music group and contemporary worship songs or a Common Worship Parish Eucharist with chants, choruses with a range of instruments and some traditional hymns. It would be unreasonable to stream two or more different services each week. Providing just one weekly service means that liturgical needs of a minority, perhaps a large

minority, are not being met. Some may, indeed some do, worship virtually and anonymously with another community.

**Anglican Identity** Streaming enables us to “drop into” churches of many different traditions. It makes one aware of the wide variety of Anglican liturgy; more varied than at any time in the church’s history. For four centuries until the 1960s the Book of Common Prayer provided a sense of unity and continuity. For about a Century there was a common core of hymns with which Anglicans were familiar through using either Hymns Ancient and Modern or The English Hymnal when they worshipped in their parish church. This has helped give a sense of ecclesial identity. Watching or listening to streamed worship shows this is no longer so. Over the last generation there has been an explosion of new hymns, worship songs and choruses but only some, perhaps few, are known to members of Anglican congregations. Does a liturgical identity matter?

Streamed liturgy exposes good liturgical practice and effective and imaginatively-created services but also those that are not so. Do we need to consider ongoing liturgical formation of clergy and others responsible for the ordering of worship, especially in the context of evangelism and the encouragement of new initiatives like Fresh Expressions and Café Church?

**Koinonia** Unless it’s a Zoomed service where the names of the viewers are known to one another, we don’t know who is in the congregation, their age, their faith background or where they are living, how many are viewing the service at the time it is originally broadcast or whether they remain tuned in and attentive for the whole service? Are some “service-hopping”? How many regard the church associated with the service as “their church”? Are new scattered eclectic groups being established? “Members” can remain anonymous and drop in and drop out when they wish and don’t have personally to relate to any other people

Being a Christian necessitates belonging to a faith community characterised by a growing sense of koinonia, fellowship in Christ. If it remains a virtual gathering, how is this possible? Can the members effectively support, care and encourage one another?

More fundamentally, we are created as physical social beings, existing in time and space. Fullness of relationship requires being physically present to one another, to see, listen, hear, smile, laugh, sigh, cry and where appropriate, be tactile. This is so of any human community and especially the church. St Paul, when he is away from a Christian community, yearns to be physically present. On four occasions at the end of his epistles he invites the members of the local Christian community to greet one another with a holy kiss.

“The church is the people and not the building.” Excluded from our buildings this has been said many times. But the church is more than people. In the first place it’s the Body of Christ and comprises people because they have been baptized into Christ. We worship a God who has embraced our humanity in Jesus. Through the incarnation God has become physically present with us, not virtually so. His physical presence was essential to his ministry and without this his death and resurrection would not have been possible. The church is the visible extension in time and space of the incarnation. It is the community in which Christ is alive and through which his work continues. There is mutual dependence; we need one another. We each have gifts to offer to build up the body. How is this possible through worshipping virtually?

**Service and mission** It has been said that when the worship ends, the service begins. There is a close relationship between worship and service, so we are dismissed at the end of the Eucharist we are told to “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” Internet communication, especially social media, can draw attention to people’s needs, both near and far, and be used to organise a response to them. How can a virtual gathering become more effectively a serving community?

This is especially so if some of those participating have not met one another, are strangers to each other, and are perhaps living some distance from the parish from where the worship is being streamed.

A church should be a missionary community and IT provides a new missionary scenario, especially reaching out to the social-media absorbed younger generation. It can and is now being used effectively as a channel of evangelism. For example, through Face Book, Instagram, Twitter and other social platforms. Alpha courses are taking places virtually. People may make a personal commitment to Christ but that needs to be expressed through belonging to a church community. How can the Great Commission “to go and make disciples of all nations” be fulfilled by a virtual community?

**Virtual Communion** Much debate is taking place about virtual Communion. Many Christians feel spiritually starved through not being able to receive Communion, particularly those for whom the weekly Sunday Eucharist is important. Although spiritual communion is being advocated by diocesan bishops and the prayer of St Alphonsus Liguori commended, many don't feel this is in any way a substitute for receiving the Sacrament.

Essentially the Eucharist is the Christian community gathering together to hear and to respond to the Word of God proclaimed and expounded and to receive with faith the sacrament of God's self-giving love, presided over by a priest or bishop. representing the catholicity of the church. Writing about the nature of the Eucharist, Bishop Leslie Newbigin, a non-conformist minister who became a bishop in the Church of South India, said “We are not a “branch” of an entity whose centre is elsewhere. It is the one holy catholic Church which is present in the local happening.... What we are doing is not an event in which we – the local congregation – alone are involved.” The presiding minister is a sign of that truth.

Can a priest celebrate remotely and consecrate bread and wine in viewers' homes? If God is not spatial, this may be considered possible but is it desirable? It raises several questions. What will be consecrated? Who will be receiving the elements? Does it matter if the presiding minister can't see or doesn't know for whom he is consecrating the bread and wine? What happens to the bread and wine that is not consumed at the time of Communion? If someone tuned into the streamed Eucharist after it was originally broadcast, would the elements be consecrated? The priest is a custodian of the sacraments and is entrusted with ensuring that everything is undertaken in a reverent and orderly fashion in accordance with official Anglican practice. Can he/she exercise that role in these unusual circumstances?

Furthermore, the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. This is expressed through sharing the same bread and wine from the same cup. “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.” (I Cor. 10:17) Does sharing bread and wine that has been consecrated remotely in one's own home privatise Communion, especially if we are unaware of those with whom we are receiving Communion? The priest, with his representative ministry, performs visibly the dominical actions – taking, blessing, breaking - as the necessary prelude to receiving Communion. Remote consecration prevents this from being so. Does this matter?

**The Early Church** “We are now returning to the practice of the early Church.” Leaving aside what period of time we mean by “the early Church”, these or similar observations that have been made suggest that Christianity began as a home-based movement. There are references to Christians meeting in houses. “They broke bread in their homes.” (Acts 2:46) and “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her home.” (Col 4:14). This was out of necessity. Where else could they meet? They needed to meet safely, knowing the hostility they

may be facing. Yes, they were home-based but we need to recognise they were not gathering as individual, separated families, each one in their own home as we do during “lockdown”. The local communities were meeting together in one another’s homes; presumably as happened later, as we know from archaeological evidence, in the larger homes of members.

“The Church is the people and not the building,” “We are now returning to the practice of the early Church.” These statements can suggest a devaluation of sacred space. The first Christians didn’t suddenly desert the Temple. They continued to go there. “Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts.” (Acts 2:46). Paul and Barnabas worshipped in synagogues as part of their missionary initiatives. Sacred space mattered to them.

**Sacred space** We do know that from an early date space was set aside within larger homes to create a permanent meeting place for the Church, the Eucharistic community. Some of the churches in the old part of the city of Rome are built above houses dating back to the First and Second Centuries. Sacred spaces hidden within a domestic settings, where Christians gathered to worship, perhaps at risk to their lives, later become visible church buildings. And Christians still worship in them. Worshipping regularly in secular buildings which are not set apart as sacred space is a very recent practice. Although the Church may not essentially be the building and it can survive without them, it cannot be claimed to be true of the early Church that there was no concern with sacred space in which to meet, whatever length of time “early Church” refers to. On the day that churches were allowed to be re-opened for personal prayer, Cardinal Vincent Nichols said, “When we enter a church we are putting our lives into a different context.” A succinct affirmation of sacred space.

In these uncertain and restrictive times we must be grateful for the opportunities and blessings that IT is bringing to our Christian communities. We can be thankful and encouraged that so many are tuning into streamed services, including many who belong to what many years` ago Gerald Priestland referred to as “The church of the unchurched.”

We may feel isolated but that doesn’t diminish our being part of the communion of saints, uniting us, in the risen Christ, with Christian people throughout the world and those who have gone before us in the way of faith. In the words of Charles Wesley :

***One family, we dwell in him,  
One Church, above, beneath;  
Though now divided by the stream,  
The narrow stream of death.***

*Canon John Bundock*

### ***Notes on the Zoom meeting between members of National Council and Ministry Division, Pensions Board, and Safeguarding Oct. 7<sup>th</sup>***

For the first time this meeting was attended by a representative from the National Safeguarding Team because we had placed on the agenda concerns raised by members during the past few months about the delivery of [Leadership Safeguarding](#) virtually across the country. In the past, we were told, NST training had been based around a process however we are now in a new phase for the Church in relation to safeguarding and the new course was based not around training but learning, enabling safeguarding to become the Church’s DNA. C2 had previously been 39 powerpoint slides but the new version is a journey with 2 facilitators and 12 participants where dialogue is important. Its focus is around leadership and organisational culture including theological content. During the next few months the NST will be getting in touch with dioceses to assess how the new learning is going and where it has yet to begin. Whilst at present it is being

delivered by zoom they were aware of difficulties those without IT were having in joining in, and hoped to be able to capture solutions to this.

As the RCA we are aware that not all dioceses are delivering the course currently and some are adapting the course to make it more accessible for our members. We will be maintaining a watching brief on progress and implementation and would welcome comments from members about their experience of taking part. We have advice we can give to those considering giving up their PTO rather than participate about how to engage with it constructively. Also you will find a document issued by the NST to dioceses attached to this newsletter which may assuage some members fears. It is available on request if you are a hard-copy recipient of this newsletter.

The progress of [Clergy Well-Being](#) was also discussed briefly and the picture seems to be that dioceses are considering how it can be implemented for stipendiary, SSM, and retired clergy. Again, the RCACoE would welcome feedback from members about this to feed into our next meeting in March.

[Pensions Board update](#) this is also attached as a document to this newsletter. Covid had affected services provided for tenants early in lockdown but we were told that adaptations to services was enabling work to go ahead. Governance is being simplified as a result of the earlier consultation, and ethical investment work continues. We asked questions about how supported housing was changing as a result of Covid with the need to cut back on shared meals, etc., and also about the sustainability of pensions in the current climate of financial uncertainty. They were answered with strong re-assurance. Please let us know if you have any concerns in this area.

[Remuneration Review](#) Again, because of Covid, the consultation with dioceses was taking longer than originally anticipated and the report would probably be going to Synod in July 2021. RACSC are still evidence gathering and consulting with dioceses. A survey has gone out to serving clergy and some retired clergy, however [there is opportunity for more retired clergy to respond to the survey](#). The survey will remain open for responses until **Monday 9<sup>th</sup> November, possibly later**. The survey can be accessed using the link: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/TJLRBL6> Further information about the survey is provided on the first page of the survey, and if you have any queries then you are welcome to contact the Clergy HR Team at [hr.clergy@churchofengland.org](mailto:hr.clergy@churchofengland.org)). The Bishop of Hereford, Richard Jackson, who is chair of the RACSC, said: “The review of clergy remuneration provides a valuable opportunity to consider the adequacy and appropriateness of the stipends, pension, housing and other support that clergy receive to support them in ministry. “We need to carry out a listening exercise to hear the views of a good number of our diverse range of clergy on their remuneration and how the money for it can best be raised from giving in parishes. We are also consulting dioceses. “Acknowledging that clergy will have faced many challenges in the light of the current Covid-19 pandemic, I warmly invite you to take some time to share your views about your financial well-being and how the Church can support you in your ministry by responding this survey. Your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential.” It is probable that there will be no increase in stipends next year, and occasional office fees will be frozen.

[\*\*\*Notes on the zoom meeting of National Council 8<sup>th</sup> Oct.\*\*\*](#) This was attended by all the trustees in post, we still have two vacancies mentioned later in this newsletter. Only two dioceses, Oxford, and Sodor and Man, had responded to the circulation of the Hubbard report issued earlier in the year (it was sent out to members with the Spring 2020 newsletter). Covid and all that that meant for the dioceses was obviously getting their full attention, to the detriment of absorbing the

reports implications for the future ministry of the Church of England. We need to be alert for the right time to raise the matter again.

The Council officers reported back to the trustees on the meeting with the National Church Institutions the previous day. Particularly highlighting the opportunity for more retired clergy response to the Remuneration Review mentioned above.

The secretary reported that applications to join have so far fallen short of last year's total at this time, again probably the result of Covid affecting diocesan administrative processes. The proportion of applications from personal as opposed to diocesan payments had gone up which may mean that fewer dioceses are paying the £50 fee to their retiring stipendiaries. Trustees were asked to email the Retirement Officers in their regions to seek information on how preparation was currently being handled in the dioceses, to enable us to find a more informed way forward into 2021.

Our Chairman had met with our President, the Bishop of Guildford, during the summer and had passed on concerns raised by members about the zoom safeguarding courses and the number of retired members who were giving up PTO rather than take part in it. Concerns have come from Sheffield, Manchester, and Birmingham. We understand that some dioceses are not expecting retired clergy to undertake the zoom training regarding it as only suitable for clergy who are licensed. We need to have a common safeguarding training policy across the church, not one where there are 43 ways of delivering it. One member commented that it was not put together well for those with PTO but in a vacancy retired clergy will be asked about safeguarding issues, they do need to know what to do and what not to do. We are in a situation where there needs to be a change of attitude and culture in the church with regard to safeguarding including preaching and teaching and the exercise of power relationships.

Safeguarding is not just a task for the church but for the whole of our society and some felt that any new course should be developed with insights from those working in other fields, it should not be about guarding those in authority. One diocese has produced an introductory letter to enable more supportive understanding and participation in the course by the retired.

Members were helpfully facilitated by David Pritchard in looking at some of the Ministry Statistics for 2019 relating to the number of retired clergy. 7,370 with PTO at a time when there are 7,700 stipendiary clergy. 4.1% retiring in 2019 at an average age of 66.3 years. We seem to recruit about one-third of those retiring each year.

Regional reports focused on cancelled events, safeguarding training, CDM, and concern whether sufficient attention was being given by dioceses to the care of retired clergy. Some trustees were finding difficulty in obtaining information from the retirement officers in the regions they represent, especially where changes were taking place. We meet again by zoom, on 11th March 2021.

**[Notes on the zoom Annual General meeting of the RCACoE 8<sup>th</sup> Oct 2pm.](#)** Only two members had asked to join the council members in this meeting which was advertised in the Summer 2020 newsletter. It was held to fulfil the requirement, as a charity, to hold an AGM in the course of 2020.

Having received reports of last years General Meetings venues, one in the south and one in the north, for next year were discussed. It was suggested that one might be in July and the other in September, however, much will depend on progress in combatting Covid and finding safe venues. Suggestions would be welcome, but we cannot afford Lambeth. The secretary presented a report on 2019 and the accounts were unanimously approved.

The Chairman reported on our representations regarding Safeguarding Leadership training which had been referred to the House of Bishops via our President; also our discussion at the meeting with the NCI's the previous day. David Phypers referred to the fact that those accused under CDM suffer considerable distress and wondered if those who made vexatious complaints which are not upheld could have their names made public. There needs to be opportunity for redress for those falsely accused. Richard Orchard said the present system seems to be broken because too much time was being taken over investigations.

The vacancies for new trustees for two regions were again raised, Hereford, Lichfield, Worcester, and Birmingham, and London and Southwark. The secretary will write to newish members in those areas to ask about possible interest. Meeting ended after c.60 mins.

### **Vacancies for membership of the RCACoE National Council**

RCACoE is served by a Council of 13 members (plus the Chairman and the Secretary/Treasurer) each representing a group of dioceses. We currently have 2 vacancies for members to represent the Dioceses of:

#### **London and Southwark Birmingham, Hereford, Lichfield, and Worcester**

Council members become Trustees of the RCACoE on appointment. They are nominated by the Chairperson to the Council for a period of five years and their appointment is ratified at the next AGM. Their appointment can be extended for further periods in a similar manner.

Council members' primary task is to ensure that the Association keeps to its aim of caring for the retired clergy with a view to co-ordinating and forwarding their interests and encouraging fellowship amongst them. Members are advised to be in touch with the RCA Secretary to identify the RCA groups and their convenors in their allotted area, and then to find out the nature of the groups and their activities.

Council members should give a report of the activities of their respective groups, preferably written, at the twice-yearly Council meetings. They should also make enquiries concerning the care of the retired clergy in their area groups. This will entail contact with the Retirement Officer(s) and local RCA Secretaries where they exist. Council members should be able to travel to London for Council meetings, although currently our meetings are virtual. Travelling expenses will be met by the Association.

If you live in any of the dioceses listed above and would like to offer yourself to serve on the Council please contact the Secretary as soon as possible. Contact details are on the back page. You do not need to be nominated and seconded. If more than one person from each group of dioceses

offers, elections will be organised. Council will be particularly pleased to receive offers for Council membership from women members of the Association.

*Malcolm Liles*

**Please send items for the next Newsletter to**

**malcolm.liles48@gmail.com before the end of November**

### **Church of England Membership and Attendance Statistics 2019**

The Church of England has published its latest statistics and press release. Generally, the more upbeat the press release, and the further you have to go before it mentions church membership and attendance, the worse you know it's going to be. This year is no exception. After making a great deal of social action and digital engagement it is not until paragraph 15 of 16 that we discover that attendance was down a further 2% from the previous year. Here are the figures for 'Adult Weekly Attendance' (average no. of adults attending worship each week) for the last 5 years.

<b>Adult Weekly Attendance</b>		<b>Change 2014-2019</b>	
Lincoln	-2.9%	Chelmsford	-12.5%
Ely	-4.7%	Sheffield	-12.8%
Exeter	-5.8%	Bath & Wells	-12.9%
Southwark	-6.1%	Guildford	-12.9%
London	-6.8%	Canterbury	-13.3%
Hereford	-7.1%	St. Eds & Ipswich	-13.5%
Winchester	-7.2%	Carlisle	-13.6%
St. Albans	-7.3%	Manchester	-13.8%
Chichester	-9.6%	Leicester	-13.9%
Coventry	-9.8%	Liverpool	-14.1%
York	-9.8%	Worcester	-14.2%
Norwich	-10.2%	Salisbury	-14.7%
Leeds	-10.7%	Lichfield	-16.1%
Oxford	-10.8%	Newcastle	-16.3%
Birmingham	-11.6%	Truro	-16.3%
Derby	-11.6%	Chester	-18.3%
Peterborough	-11.6%	Gloucester	-18.4%
Church of England	-11.7%	Durham	-18.9%
Portsmouth	-12.0%	Blackburn	-19.7%
Rochester	-12.2%	Southwell & Nott	-20.7%
Bristol	-12.5%	Sodor & Man	-27.8%

There is a generational feed through into other church activity - we are baptising 9% of children, marrying 17% of couples getting married, and taking the funerals of 25% of those who die. Each of these is down 30-40% over the last 10 years, and there is a clear progression through the generations.

The report does find some good news - over 90,000 people joined an Anglican church in 2019, with a significant proportion being first time church members. 10% of parishes are reporting growth, but 40% report statistically significant decline. Overall growing churches are still a tiny minority, but some new churches have been planted - 90 recorded in the statistics, who have seen their membership more than double since 2016.

The next chart below gives a fascinating cross-section of what the 'average' church looks like:

Table 1: Church participation summary, 2019

	5th percentile	25th percentile	median (middle) church	75th percentile	95th percentile	mean (average) church
<b>Worshipping Community</b>	9	20	42	90	236	74
All age average weekly attendance	2	11	31	74	185	57
Adult average weekly attendance	2	11	28	64	154	49
Child average weekly attendance	0	0	2	9	33	8
All age Usual Sunday attendance	7	14	26	55	141	46
Easter attendance	0	23	49	98	245	79
Christmas attendance	0	30	75	188	558	159
Baptisms and thanksgivings	0	1	3	8	23	6
Marriages and services of prayer & dedication	0	0	1	3	8	2
Funerals in churches, crematoria, & cemeteries	0	1	4	10	27	8

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The top 5% of churches have an average weekly congregation of 185 or more, of which 1/6 are children. A church exactly in the middle of the 16000 Anglican churches in terms of size has 31, of which 6% - 2 - are children. The largest churches have a larger 'fringe' of non-members, sustainable numbers of children and youth, and enough people to comfortably fill the building. The one upside of social distancing is that the smaller churches can still meet as a whole congregation, since there is in most places, provided there are not too many funerary ornaments within the church, plenty of room in the average church for 20 people to sit on their own at the same time.

Half of our churches, 8000 of them, have 26 adults or fewer on a Sunday.

Covid will make the figures for 2020 such a mess that there probably isn't any point collecting them, and 2021 may not be much better. As many have observed, it is accelerating changes that were already happening. Businesses on the edge are shutting down. Trends towards online shopping have increased. What does that mean for the church? There is nothing in the statistics to suggest that we are about to turn

a corner. Or if we are, it's turning in the opposite direction to the one we want. There are islands - many islands (1600 according to the stats) of growth, many others holding their own, and making a life-changing contribution to local individuals and communities.

But how can the Church change and adapt to the context in which it is called to minister and remain the Church founded by Christ? I have listened to sermons as I watched on Facebook the live-streamed services at the church we used to physically attend. Whilst the preachers have done their utmost to expound the readings for the day they have failed to connect the Good News of Jesus Christ with life and the world as we are experiencing it, whether it was Brexit, Climate Change, Black Lives Matter, Bio-diversity, the growing gap between rich and poor. Are people losing interest in the church because for the most part it is saying nothing to the world in which we live? Last week the Archbishops of the UK wrote a letter to the Financial Times about the Internal Market Bill; the Financial Times is behind a paywall and inaccessible without payment, hardly the "public square". If they were serious about communicating their concern why could they not have used a broader range of media to share their concern with the people of this country.

A recently retired priest wrote this following the publication of the statistics " It seems to me that it has taken the present crisis to reveal a reality ignored by the Church for far too long, namely the long decline of 'churchgoing' as a *habit*. When I retired from active ministry three years ago, and also moved house to a different part of the country, I assumed to begin with that I would in due course find a suitable church locally to join. Time passed, and this did not happen; and after a while, I realised that in truth *I did not miss it*. I am now a lapsed churchgoer, despite over forty years of churchgoing including over thirty in ordained ministry. Churchgoing is a habit, and it can just take a certain change of circumstances to break it; Sunday attendances have been ebbing away for decades for this very simple reason. People stop going to church and discover, often to their surprise, that they don't feel any need to go back. The reasons for this may require more research, but at the very least the phenomenon suggests that 'church' has very often been a far from compelling, life-enhancing experience; indeed, sometimes there can be a sheer sense of relief at having managed to escape from it."

Perhaps members of the RCACoE who read this newsletter can offer insights about this sad state of affairs for succeeding editions of this newsletter by communicating them to the Secretary, they can be anonymised prior to publication if desired?

### [Newsletter circulation](#)

Our newsletter is now mainly distributed by e-mail which gives us a considerable saving. However, we can send out hard copies to those who need to receive it in that format. There are currently 80 distributed to members who have let me know that they wish to receive hard copies. If you know of any members who are now missing out on this mode of delivery could you please encourage them to write requesting a postal copy.

*Malcolm Liles*

**Please note that views expressed in this newsletter are those the authors and should not be understood as in any way reflecting the position of RCACoE**

**[Retired Clergy Association – www.rcacoe.org](http://www.rcacoe.org)**

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