



www.rcacoe.org

Registered Charity No. 1172186

Autumn
Newsletter
2021



From the Chair

Dear Friends,

As we emerge from the restrictions which Covid placed upon us, there is quite a mixed picture of how our parishes and churches have coped, not to mention how local groups of retired clergy are responding to a return towards what we used to regard as normality. To wear a mask or not to wear a mask? To keep a social distance or not? To receive the chalice or not? To receive communion in a line, in a queue, in the pew or at the rail?

Sensible, local improvisation has been the response to guidelines from the centre. Services available online are being continued alongside a return to church and they seem to be greatly valued. So it's all very mixed, very C of E! Nonetheless there is still anxiety around and fear of what a harsh winter may bring.

Genuine concern

Anxiety and fear can enter into so many aspects of our daily lives. I am not exactly overconfident in my use of a computer and get cross and anxious when it doesn't do what I think it should do (it's nearly always my fault!). It has taken me a long time to pluck up the courage to start banking online. I live in fear of something going wrong with my access to Zoom meetings – especially when I am meant to be chairing them! On a more serious note there is currently great concern and anxiety about what may be planned for our parishes and churches as dioceses struggle with reduced stipendiary clergy numbers and limited finance.

As so often happens the rumour factory can create unnecessary fears, but I must say that offering much better consultation, participation and communication would really help. People can feel very aggrieved if they feel they are not being heard.

An offering we can make

As retired clergy we carry our Anglican history, breadth of tradition and experience with us and it is important that we play our part in the emerging church, not as those who are seen to pour cold water on any development, but to offer wisdom, counsel and critical encouragement.

It is so important that as clergy we are not seen as stumbling blocks but as assets that can be approached, consulted and deployed. We may well feel a certain anxiety and fear for the future of the church we love and have served, but I am reminded that at moments of perplexity or crisis for the disciples, Jesus says to them 'Have no fear. Take heart. It is I'.

A church of resurrection must take our Lord at his word.

God bless you and yours and keep you over these coming months.

+Ian Brackley





From the Editor

Remarkably few contributions have come from members for this edition. As I started assembling it at the end of September, just two letters had arrived, one typed, one handwritten and both via Postman Pat: that's fine, I was happy to write them up, but felt there must be a lot of stories to tell in the wake of 18 months of lockdowns: so where are they?

Before submitting the completed newsletter however, a long piece arrived from an RCA Committee member in NE England which, hopefully, will set some hares running because it contains lots to agree or disagree with, and shortly afterwards a second Committee member submitted his thoughts on that creeping ailment that affects us all: growing older. But still no real lockdown insights...

After each edition I get messages, around half of which say: 'I absolutely can't bear it when the newsletter is presented in two columns' and the other half say something amounting to 'Oh no! Must you split it into columns...?' Either way is no skin off my nose, as they say, but 'sans columns' is currently winning on points!

I receive book reviews which can be quite helpful, but it would be good to have news of real people who do interesting things and not necessarily accounts which elevate us into the realms of the spiritual. So please write - and rouse those slumbering hares so that our RCA newsletter can inform, intrigue, inspire reflection and reflect the range of interests that I know are embraced by my clergy colleagues!

Most magazines, journals and newsletters carry what is often called a 'flannel panel' that appears at the beginning of every edition giving publication details and usually a line that says something like: 'Opinions expressed within these pages do not necessarily reflect those of the Association or the Editor' That, of course, is always the case for this RCA publication, which exists to inform and to give Association members a voice. We're happy to edit to fit but opinions expressed are those of the contributors. **Mark Rudall**



Is the Church 'institutionally Racist?'

From Paul Conder (Chester)

Sirs

With reference to the report 'From Lament to Action' published on 23 April, I found it a strange experience to be informed by the Archbishop of Canterbury that the section of the Body of Christ which I love, and to which I owe so much is 'institutionally racist'.

In the 63 years since my ordination, and having served in all sorts of parishes in the North East, North West and South of England as well as on the staff of the theological college where Justin Welby himself was trained, that description does not correspond to my experience at all. In fact, I would consider it a slur on the folk to whom I have been privileged to minister.

Granted, there are many individual grievances relating to injustice, insensitivity and even prejudice and lack of appreciation but one does not have to be a person of colour to experience those. As Archbishop Sentamu pointed out on 'Any Questions?' last year, there is only one race: the human race. I realise that even by expressing these sentiments I risk incurring trolls from the 'woke' brigade and supporters of critical race theory, but some flaws in the report need exposing.

Setting target quotas is a flawed system: ask the South African Cricket Board! Appointment to responsible bodies should be according to ability and talent, not arbitrary criteria. Suppose there is a lack of appropriate candidates for the various participatory posts envisaged. What then?

Has any thought been put into the costing and financing of these measures? Diocesan budgets are increasingly stretched, but they are supposed to provide extra posts such as Racial Justice Officers. At the same time, more and more parishes are being surrendered, their clergy not being replaced.

The recommendations read like an administrative quagmire, a bureaucratic nightmare. How much energy will be sucked out of the church's diminishing resources in this exercise?

Doubtless a number of Task Force proposals can be put into effect relatively speedily and many of them are well meaning. Overall the flavour smacks of being politically driven, with anyone daring to point out objections finding themselves backed into an unfashionable and indefensible position.

Paul Conder



Roy Howe is concerned about issues arising from the Church's concern for rigorous safeguarding practise

Dear Editor,

I am prompted by the article about Safeguarding in the (last) RCA newsletter to air two related issues.

At the last Safeguarding training session I attended I asked how someone from a congregation convicted of misbehaviour and having served their time in prison should be treated if and when they resume their church attendance. The answer I was given is that they should be supervised whenever they come on to the premises.

I was left feeling uneasy and sensed that I had touched on an aspect of the scheme which has not been fully thought through. How should the Church express God's love for? Is there any room for forgiveness? Are we all to be suspicious of one another 'just in case'? I think we need to engage in a wider debate.

My second unease centres around the effect on the incumbent when some key member of his lay leadership team is reported to the congregation's Safeguarding Officer and finishes up in gaol. I heard of one instance when the incumbent was off sick for an extended period following such an episode. Has any other RCA member experienced anything similar? If this is a consequence of our present safeguarding procedures it may indicate that there are wider issues to be considered.

Roy Howe



A note from the Editor

I was intrigued by this letter from the Revd Roy Howe because for some years, although an ordained member of clergy, but a former journalist, I handled media relations for a diocese which had its usual share of unpleasant stories of abusers being brought to justice and, my goodness, how the media loves a 'church going wrong' story! Comments had to be written very carefully.

Previous local ministry experience had uncovered disturbing tales from years ago of clerical sexual abuse of vulnerable young people, a number of unsavoury choir master stories and sad historical instances of 'pillar-of-the-Church' men, years ago, impregnating vulnerable women – even daughters - *and getting away with it*. The young women's lives might be utterly ruined, ever after forced to maintain a lie about the parentage of their child, but the men's reputations remained gloriously intact.

Of course these things happened in every area of society and across all Christian denominations, but now we live, quite rightly, with the demand that we should be completely accountable and that relationships at every level within church life should be transparently safe. Furthermore, we live in a non-prudish age where people can talk freely

about sex, sexuality and all kinds of things that were formerly taboo. They can also see for themselves that they don't have to live with horrible secrets, and that justice can more easily be visited on abusers without the once inevitable vilification of the abused. The other side of that coin of course is that unjust ministry-destroying accusations can occasionally be made by those with a mind to do so. Those can be very hard to handle.

It seems to be accepted that sexual offenders, because sexual proclivities are so tightly intertwined with personality, tend to be recidivist. Prison life is unlikely to bring about change, which is one very good reason for having our national Sexual Offenders' database. But prison takes such people out of circulation for a while and serves, from the perspective of society at large, as a form of punishment, an outworking of justice. Of course a Church can and should be a welcoming place for a released prisoner, but part of the justice process has to be that such a person is helped to acknowledge that 'trust', after a such an appalling failure, can never be fully granted. Thus supervision there has to be: but it should be supportive and helpful rather than simply being expressed in draconian limitations.

And yes, when such a case emerges in a church - very few of us will have not have seen something of the kind in the course of years of ministry - it will always profoundly affect the incumbent. The more so if the accused is a Church Warden or other significant office holder. It only takes one huge, looming, pastoral challenge to completely skew a ministry and drain away the joy of being a minister of the Gospel. I'm afraid that's just one of the stresses of ministry and those stresses compound all the time as society gets to grips with difficult ethical legacies it should have faced generations ago alongside the huge range of newly emerging mental health challenges. As I write this I am between the two sessions (a week apart) of my triennial Safeguarding training renewal for PtO (already booked before a special renewal session for PtOs was announced very recently in my Diocese) and the case study to be considered next time is a highly complex and completely 21st century pastoral horror story. It'll be a good discussion...

Ministry was perhaps a lot easier 40 years ago when I began and its cost today is seen in what seems to me to be the inordinate numbers of clergy taking time out with stress related conditions or simply moving out of ministry altogether.

A small boy was once asked how he would define a 'saint'. He thought quickly and remembered the stained glass windows in his parish church: 'A saint is someone the light shines through', he said. He was dead right. There are no quick answers to any of the host of pastoral challenges that lurk at our church doors, but any tools that become available to enable us to maintain complete transparency should be grasped, with thanks. **MR**



Saving the parish

Committee member Clive Harper has submitted the following lengthy piece that caught his attention written by John Pearce of Holy Saviour, Tynemouth, about the emerging 'Save the Parish' movement of which members might be aware. What is reproduced here is even more abridged but possibly of interest to RCA members who may want to submit their own comments on the matters raised.

John Pearce wrote: 'The Save the Parish' movement is a pressure group formed by the Revd Marcus Walker, Rector of St Bartholomew the Great in London. On principle, I am very wary of pressure groups, because, far too often, essentially worthy causes are liable to be hijacked by fanatical individuals with their own agenda, their principle being that 'if I don't want to, then you mustn't' – read Matthew Parris on Stonewall, for example.

That said, it is a truism that top-heavy and unresponsive hierarchies are all too common in large organisations like the Anglican Church and, if the mitre fits, Stephen Ebor and Justin Cantuar are duty bound to wear it. That said, read on and form your own view. If you would like to support the movement – or even stand for General Synod on the Save the Parish ticket – then please look at the Save the Parish website, <https://savetheparish.com/> where you will find much of interest.

During August, a meeting in London launched a campaign; over 100 people attended, and thousands more have watched online. The movement was begun with the aim of electing its members to the General Synod, with people committing to stand under the banner Save the Parish. They will pledge to: *Resist plans to redirect money away from parochial ministry and Resist further centralisation of power and authority away from parishes towards dioceses*

The Revd Marcus Walker, who began the campaign, had issued a rallying cry in the pages of the 'The Spectator' magazine in July, reading (in part) as follows:

'This is your church. This is not the Archbishop of Canterbury's, nor the House of Bishops', nor the clergy's, not even the General Synod's. It belongs, in a broad sense, to the people of England (regardless of your faith or lack of it (which is why Parliament is still its ultimate decision-making body) and very specifically to the laity of the Church of England. You have a say.

'There are about to be General Synod elections. So, stand. Stand and write in your manifesto that you are standing to 'Save the parish'. Stand whether you are an Evangelical or an Anglo-Catholic or a High Churchman. Stand if you're a female priest or a woman who doesn't think women can be priests. Stand if you want to save the parish, because these are your parishes and this is the only important question for the next five years. Stand because this might really be the last chance to save the church we love...'

The meeting also saw publication of a letter with 400 signatures from supporters of the campaign, to be sent to the Church Commissioners on behalf of the laity, asking for a Royal Commission to be appointed to look into a lay-led reform of the Church's structure and finances. The letter is far too long to print here in full, but the (abridged) summary below attempts to give a true flavour of the whole document... I would urge readers to consult the full version at <https://savetheparish.com/> before coming to any conclusions as to what the document leads them to think. As follows:

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN CRISIS: we approach the Commissioners on behalf of many congregations, particularly in rural parishes, beset with difficulties in maintaining and expressing their faith in the face of falling revenues, declining congregations and seemingly inept management by the hierarchy. If we failed to draw these concerns to the attention of the Commissioners we should be letting down the Supreme Governor of our church. As active members of our Churches we observe at close quarters the difficulties faced by our incumbents in holding together congregations, and preserving vulnerable church buildings.

Recent interest in various newspapers suggests that the Church really is facing a serious crisis across the nation about which nothing constructive is being done by a heedless hierarchy. Support that we have received from parish volunteers around the country confirms that there is a groundswell of dissatisfaction with how the Church of England is being managed

THE CENTRAL CHURCH: We feel that the Church is top-heavy and unwieldy, with authority too widely spread to initiate the reforms which are necessary. These would involve cuts in staffing, at first of the seven bodies charged with governance, and then, later, of the 42 dioceses. We have seen no move to simplify organisation, improve decision making and reduce costs.

THE DIOCESES: The dioceses are not interested in the reforms needed to reduce their costs – which are being loaded on to parishes and slowly suffocating them. Congregations have shrunk, revenues have fallen and more and more parishes are unable to pay the Parish Share, putting huge pressure on incumbents. Many now manage multiple parishes with no help from the dioceses, who choose to cut stipendiary priests and close parishes rather than axe diocesan jobs.

200 years ago there were 26 diocesan bishops, today there are 42. The number of parish clergy fell from over 25,000 in 1820 to fewer than 7000 last year. Almost all 42 diocesan bishops have at least one suffragan bishop – making 112 bishops altogether. All have staff, including proliferating archdeacons and assistant archdeacons, few of whom noticeably support the parishes. We believe that:

There are too many dioceses

Their administration could be centralised – all diocesan administrators do the same jobs

Many posts – often paid far more than parish clergy – are set up purely for promotional activities: they should be abolished as not adding value to the parishes.

An example of this kind of expenditure is the £90,000 salary offered for a Chief Executive Officer in Chelmsford Diocese, where 26 churches are being closed. Relieved of these administrative and marketing tasks, dioceses could focus on spreading Christ's gospel through ministry and pastoral work in support of the parishes. Bishops and archdeacons should concentrate on helping existing parishes to grow rather than smothering clergy and volunteers with ever increasing administrative demands. This would reduce the burden on parishes whilst helping them to grow.

THE PARISHES: A fundamental belief is that our church should have a presence in every parish, but it is apparent that parishes are threatened by the financial burden imposed by the dioceses. We are witnessing closures, and incumbents forced to take on additional parishes with no additional support. The central church and the dioceses should recognise this, reduce their costs and reduce the Parish Share. Incumbents should not be dispossessed of their vicarages while they are still living in them. Sacking middle-aged clergy with families, with no alternative jobs in view, seems callous and un-Christian. Very few parish priests care to state this publicly, so lay members, with less at stake, must argue for them.

RECOMMENDATIONS: with the exception of the estate, the growth in central and diocesan costs should be reversed. This view is fully supported by a financially distinguished member of the General Synod who wrote: 'It is time to plan for reconstructing the arrangement of the Church of England's finances and, in particular, financial responsibility for Diocesan Church House activities across the country'. He went on "From the expenditure perspective this will motivate the Church to reduce significantly the duplication of administration across our 42 dioceses, as was requested by the General Synod in 2018'.

Any change will have to be imposed from above because the bureaucracies naturally have no interest in reforming themselves, but the Church of England must reduce the financial burden on the parishes. The process of doing this will take time, but for the meantime, the Church Commissioners should support the rationalisation of the dioceses, forcing them to support the parishes by reducing Parish Share, using central funds to subsidise those who need it.

If our Church is to survive and flourish again, it can only be done by the parishes, freed from our shackles by the measures above. Or, if it is not saved, what is to be done with all the parish buildings we have loved, a network which we should never be able to put back, once lost, for any future generations of Christians?'

John Pierce added: In the interests of balance, an article from the **UnHerd** website by James Mumford, a post-doctoral research fellow in philosophy at the University of Virginia. An Englishman, he has been associated in this country with the Vineyard Church movement, and has also worked for the think-tank the Centre for Social Justice. The title of his article, '**What the 'Save the Parish' campaign doesn't understand**', makes plain his misgivings.

As to the case he makes, I leave it to readers to decide. To me, his response seems not only selective, but also makes rather more use of the 'straw man' fallacy than is healthy. At the same time, the Save the Parish manifesto and letter also contains its fair share of undistributed middles and casuistry, and so needs to be read sceptically too:

Some fighting spirit, at last, from Church of England traditionalists. Last week, they launched a campaign, [Save the Parish](#), vociferously attacking Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby's attempts to save the church. But although Save the Parish is right in what it seeks to defend — the local church is, I believe, the hope of the world — it is wrong in what it is intent on attacking. Welby, more than anyone, wants churches in every corner of the country. Up and down the land he longs for churches opening, reopening and, crucially, filling.

Save the Parish seems to have missed this. Giles Fraser writes that: ‘the centre of gravity in church affairs – as well as the funding – has shifted from the local parish towards an increasingly bureaucratized and centralised church structure.

Yet in fact, as one Suffragan Bishop informs me, the vast majority of the Church of England’s church planting initiatives in recent years have been into existing parishes. Many church closures have been fought (the once-doomed St. Peter’s Brighton, for example, now boasts a congregation of 800 people). Last month, meanwhile, the Church Commissioners’ Strategic Development Fund (SDF) awarded £24 million to eight dioceses (making the total £166 million since 2014).

What was July’s cash injection to be spent on? Inter alia refurbishing churches (the Diocese of Manchester will allocate its share to the Church of The Ascension, Hulme) and renewing mission in extant congregations in particularly deprived areas (the Diocese of Chelmsford is to invest its new share in All Saints, West Ham). Alongside these moves, larger churches in one city have sponsored smaller ones in another, in a kind of reverse social Darwinism. New wine — that is, clergy, cash and lay people — has been poured into old wineskins.

What is frustrating about the traditionalists is that they don’t seem to be willing to make room for secular 21st century Britons. Father Marcus Walker, Rector of St. Bartholomew’s in London, at the launch of Save the Parish dismissed ‘a style of church set up in a cinema or bar or converted Chinese takeaway,’ but these words have the whiff of snobbery about them. It seems to suggest that people exist for the sake of the church, not the church for the sake of people. Jonah felt the same way about the Ninevites; he, not they, were engorged by the obliging whale.

Then there’s the criticism that any ecclesial attempts to innovate, to do things differently, to experiment, are, as academic **Alison Milbank** puts it, ‘a capitulation to market values’. This, again, simply isn’t true. The church is merely trying to reach as many souls as it can.’

Jesus of Nazareth clearly saw his mission as a ‘de-sacralising’ one. Instead of hallowing one particular place in which to worship, Christ tells the Samaritan woman in John 4, ‘*a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks*’. It wasn’t about stones any more, he taught, it was about people.



Committee Member David Pritchard muses on the business of growing older:

Faithful is the One who calls

It happened at Gatwick airport. A few years ago, while I was waiting for my wife to pick me up, I chatted to the young lady standing next to me (she was, maybe, in her late twenties). Her phone rang. It was her boyfriend; she told him where she was, and added, ‘I’m standing next to an elderly gentleman.’ Well, that brought it home. At least, I thought, she didn’t call me an old man!

We may recoil at being called an old man, but T. S. Eliot has some insightful things to say about old men. One of the seductions of age is to believe that we’ve got things worked out. In his poem East Coker Eliot warns against relying on experience as a source of knowledge. Don’t deceive yourself, he says; the pattern of life is ever-changing; experience is an imperfect guide; every moment brings a new valuation of all we have been. Old men, he says, should be explorers, both still and still moving into a deeper communion with the greater reality in which we live and move and have our being.

Retirement is not a time to rest on our laurels, but to keep moving forward. That speaks to me. So, what have I received from the exploration of my elder years?

I would describe it as a deeper understanding of how basic are the values that Jesus taught and lived to a true human life, and how relevant they are to the challenges we face. I endeavoured to show this in a book entitled 'Light in the Darkness'. Writing it, I felt that I was being led on a journey into the depths of my own faith. As I reflected on Jesus' life and teaching, time and again I was faced with a radical generosity of spirit, even to the point of self-sacrifice, that challenges the nostrums of our age, whether they be about personal fulfilment, social cohesion or economic wellbeing. Life is not about personal gain and advantage, but about seeking what is best for each other and for all, as Paul said.

Experience teaches us rationally that what's important is to have the right ideas, and that is true; but Jesus teaches us that it's more important to have the right spirit, allowing the radical generosity that characterised his life to shape our lives and the way our ideas are put into effect.

The need for generosity of spirit is very evident as we seek to take effective action on climate change, and also for the future of our society, and for each of us individually, as we find our way out of this pandemic. Faith is vital to our future because what we believe in shapes our spirit. Christian faith is not, first and foremost, a set of propositions to be believed, but a way to be followed: a way of living and relating to other people and to the planet. Faith is an affair of the heart; an affair of the spirit, not of the mind.

The first people to follow Jesus were fishermen, moved by personal encounter, not by intellectual ideas or powerful oratory. Their hearts were touched when Jesus called to them: 'Follow me!' To Peter and Andrew, James and John, and to everyone he encountered, Jesus posed the basic question: 'Where is your heart fixed? If you want your heart fixed on values that are true and life-giving, follow me.'

We should heed his call because underlying all the crises that face us is the crisis of values. Our problems are spiritual before they are social or economic, and I have come to see how Jesus shows us the way to overcome the moral deficit of our age. Many people reject Jesus' invitation because they're hung up about God. There is no God, they say, and put their faith in something else.

Another thing I've learnt is that we shall never get God sussed. Puzzling about the existence of God is not the best place to begin a journey of faith. Like the fishermen, begin with Jesus. He has been

described as the true and living way. You don't have to get God worked out to take to heart the values of Jesus, to let his life touch your life. Follow him and he will lead you. You won't get all your questions answered; you never will.

What is more important than having all the answers is to be on the right journey, to travel with a faithful guide, and, as I have found, if you're going in the right direction you will be able to live with your questions. The fishermen whom Jesus called lived at a time when religious faith was universal. Times have changed, but people haven't. We still need a faith to live by, but today our faiths are secular. Even so, we feel that there's more to life than we can weigh and measure – a feeling that the pandemic has emphasised. Growing older we should explore that feeling, and I believe we shall discover a greater reality that enfolds us in love, desires our good, and delights in our flourishing, that goes before us and calling us to follow.

Take to heart the words of St Francis: 'I have done what was mine to do. May Christ teach you what you are to do.'

Faithful is the One who calls.

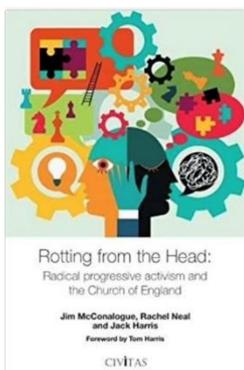
Book Reviews



Dear Mark

I help at St Bartholomew's, Leigh, Surrey and Tom Harris, who provided the foreword, has given me access to copies of this book (released in June). I was amazed how much I and my past lay readers had already discussed the issues in this book. I thought our members might like to read it.

Best Wishes **John Scott**



There is a growing concern that the great institutions of British national life are falling prey to 'institutional capture'. Whether it is Archbishops, Bishops, Chief Constables, Vice-Chancellors, or the leadership of our national arts, museums, heritage, cultural and broadcasting organisations, there is a significant crisis in leadership in British civic life, such that the head has been severed from the body that supports it.

This report on radical progressive activism in the Church of England serves as a broader 'wake up call' to set about restoring leadership into our civic institutions that not only understands their central purpose but regains the trust and support of the British public they serve.

In this research, Jim McConalogue, Rachel Neal and Jack Harris have set out to investigate the scale of support for ultra-progressive radical activist agendas alleging 'systemic racism' in English society, the understanding and use of 'unconscious biases' and prescribing a 'climate emergency' doctrine within the Church of England. By surveying the growing adoption of ultra-progressive values by the Church of England, the research examines the reported instances of clergy involvement in campaign messages which supported those beliefs across the 42 dioceses of the Church.

This research finds that over 80% of all CofE dioceses appoint clergy who have promoted racial justice activist claims or expressed concerns for institutional or systemic racism. It further finds that over a quarter of all the dioceses appoint clergy who appear very supportive of the use of unconscious bias training within the Church. And over 70% of all dioceses appoint clergy who promote climate activist warnings or calls for recognition of a 'climate emergency'.

As Tom Harris writes in the Foreword, this 'complete departure from the Church's central purpose risks making it unrecognisable to the grass roots members who support it'. It marks a 'separation of the head from the body that is becoming alarmingly recognisable in so many of our national institutions'.



Death, where is your sting? Dying and Death Examined by Robert Reiss

Published by Christian Alternative Books £10.99 ISBN 978-1-78904-247-4

As part of our pastoral studies at theological college I remember having to read a book with the lugubrious title 'Dying, Death and Disposal'. It was practical, helpful and realistic but of course being written in the 1960s would not have dealt with issues that have come to the fore in the last 60 years.

Robert Reiss's new book deals not only with such issues - assisted dying, the discoveries and opinions of neuroscience and aspects of modern philosophical understanding of life and death, as well as recent biblical interpretation - but also challenges the reader to re-examine our Christian view of life, death and eternal life with God.

Reiss has had a wide experience as a college chaplain, heading up what we now call Ministry Division, a parish priest, an archdeacon and a residentiary canon of Westminster and in all these demanding roles he has always had the ability to ask the searching question and make one reflect searchingly on one's understanding of and relationship with God.

He writes lucidly and I found it surprising how much was covered in the 180 pages. I found his willingness to share his honest faith deeply attractive. He writes: 'I certainly hope for a better world, but that is not *why* I do not believe in life *after* death...Rather I believe in life *beyond* death, not in the sense of a temporal hope but in a conviction about the nature of eternity...I am a Christian because I believe the Christian faith conveys truth about eternal values. That certainly does not mean I believe every doctrinal statement the

Christian Church has made over the two thousand years of its history – some of them plain daft – we must be discriminating about our theological tradition. But there are eternal values worth stating...’ And he goes on to do just that.

Ultimately, it seems to me, it all comes down to what one believes the nature of God to be, and for a Christian that means Jesus Christ as the human face of God and what we learn from his life and teaching and our life in communion with him – ‘in Christ’ as St Paul put it.

We are here and now of eternal value in God’s hands (if I may use such an anthropomorphic image) yet what we shall be is still to be revealed. I am grateful to Robert Reiss for making me think seriously about what is to come to all of us and in what our faith in God will mean. You may not agree with him but you will have been given a chance to assess your own faith within the Christian tradition.

+Ian Brackley



Pensions Board update

This is a synopsis of an update shared by the Pensions Board with the officers of the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England at our meeting in October 2021.

Continued response to the pandemic: All the Pensions Board contact points remain open and our teams can be reached via: pensions@churchofengland.org or 020 7898 180

housingservices@churchofengland.org or 020 7898 1824

By post: The Church of England Pensions Board, PO Box 2026, Pershore, WR10 9BW.

The ‘third wave’ of Covid infections at the start of 2021 was a tough time for staff, residents and pension scheme members, and for a period this affected housing moves and non-urgent repairs work. However, since the summer, we have been pleased to restart moves and other events, such as open days at **Supported Housing** have restarted. We have also recommenced some in-person visits, subject to appropriate risk assessments.

Governance Legislative changes relating to the Board’s governance came into effect from 1 July this year. The changes reflect best practice in governance, including delivering a smaller Board of 12 trustees. We are blessed by the quality of these trustees who give their time freely and generously to the Board. They include professional pension scheme trustees, former senior leaders of housing associations, investment professionals, serving clergy, and – for the first time – retired clergy. A list of the trustees can be found on our website.

Pensions The next statutory valuation of the Church of England Funded Pension Scheme (commonly, if not entirely accurately, known as the clergy scheme) is due as at 31 December 2021. This will be a focus of our work in 2022, and we are already talking with Responsible Bodies about how the process will work next year.

At the end of June, we launched Pensions Online, a web-based service allowing scheme members to access pensions payslips, update contacts and other details.

We are progressively writing to members, starting with clergy pensioners and beneficiaries, with an invitation to join Pensions Online. So far almost 1,500 have done so, the feedback has been very encouraging, and we’ve already seen members using the system to update contact details, saving a call or a letter to the helpdesk.

Where an individual might need a little bit of extra help to get online, the Board is signposting to **AbilityNet**, a charity which offers help to older people and those living with disabilities to access online services safely.



AbilityNet has a network of volunteers who provide free IT support anywhere in the UK. Their volunteers are all DBS-checked and can help with all sorts of IT challenges, from setting up new equipment, to fixing technical issues, showing individuals how to stay connected to family and using online services. Information on **AbilityNet** is included in all of our Pensions Online registration letters.

Ethical and Responsible Investment Ethical stewardship continues to be at the heart of the Pensions Board’s approach to investment. Earlier this year, the Board published its first **Stewardship Report** which is

available on the website. One of the major achievements of the last year was the launch of a new stock market index, the first to take into account companies’ progress in transition to a low carbon economy, based on analysis from the Transition Pathway Initiative, which was cofounded by the Pensions Board and is now used by investors responsible for trillions globally. The Board allocated £800m to tracking this new index, as a result of which, the carbon intensity of the Board’s shareholdings fell by 42% (see the Stewardship Report for more detail.)

In September 2021, following a rigorous assessment by the Financial Reporting Council, the Pensions Board was accepted as a signatory to the new UK Stewardship Code. The Board and the Church Commissioners were two of just 23 asset owners accepted as signatories and this provides an independent assessment of our work in this area.

Housing The recent increases in gas prices are a concern for everyone. At the time of the meeting, we are preparing a mailing to housing residents with advice from Age UK setting out tips to save energy, and potentially pay less on bills.

In early September, we switched on our new ‘housing management system’. This system puts all of the information on our housing services in one place. As with any new system there are bound to be a few teething troubles, but as we get used to it, it will progressively free up time from administration tasks in favour of contact with residents. It will also help our planning and management of the property portfolio.

The programme of electrical testing across all rental properties continues.

Meanwhile, the approach to gas testing is changing. Residents will know that gas tests used to take place at any time in the year. We have now changed the approach so that all tests will be completed outside of the winter period. Hopefully this will avoid any need for customers to be without heat for testing purposes on a winter day.

This is one of a number of changes to services as a result of the pandemic. Others include a new on-line portal to allow prospective housing customers to view properties on the bulletin on an interactive map (this replaces what was previously an expensive and time consuming mailing). Another is a more active process of ‘matching’ prospective customers to properties we know are available or coming available, which may meet their needs.

We have recently written to serving clergy over the age of 60 to advise them of the Board’s retirement housing services and encouraging them to register potential interest. This all helps in our aim that clergy should approach retirement confident of where they will live in the next phase of their ministry.



SILENCE: a film discovered and a book rather late reviewed John Schild 24th October 2021

Looking for a summer holiday 'flick' I chanced upon a film available only for a short season on BBC iPlayer. The name was 'Silence' and I was intrigued. Could it be the book by the Japanese writer Shusaku Endo which had grabbed my attention soon after its publication fifty years ago? Indeed it was the 'Silence' I remembered; I still had the book and soon I was watching the film.

'Silence' was directed by legendary film maker Martin Scorsese, aided by Liam Neeson of Schindler fame. Its release in 2016 was so quiet it simply passed me by, so I thought 'a failed launch must mean a crappy film'. But not a bit of it. Now that I've re-read the book and watched the video I offer my verdict that the film is remarkably honest and faithful to Shusaku Endo's 1966 seminal work. Placing the audio and video side by side, I found myself compelled to make some observations about the story and ponder its importance for 21st C. mission-field Britain.

'Silence' is fiction, but the narrative has strong historical roots. It follows the 1640 journey of a young Jesuit priest from Portugal to Japan in search of a colleague who had gone before him to Japan and was rumoured to have 'apostatized' and abandoned his faith. Unable to believe this of his much loved former tutor, Sebastião Rodrigues must go and find out for himself. Film and book walk comfortably together accompanying Rodrigues through his landing in Japan, finding and ministering to a community of 'hidden' peasant Christians, and suffering betrayal, arrest and trial. His betrayer was lapsed(?) Japanese Christian Kichijirō who haunts the novel as a kind of narrative *idée-fixe*. Rodrigues is made repeatedly to observe the torture and death of Japanese peasants who had illegally stayed Christian after Japan closed its borders and outlawed Christianity in 1637.

It would be out of place here for me to try to trace every step of the journey which Rodrigues was made to take by the Japanese inquisitor Inoue. Unsurprisingly, the film does what film does best and we are not spared stomach churning close-ups of beheadings, burnings and drownings which Rodrigues is made to witness. This is where I think the film strays a little. The book draws us further away from the physical torment of the Christian peasants towards the deep spiritual torment of the missionary. Equally in both the book and the film Rodrigues is repeatedly pressed to understand that his stubborn refusal to apostatize is responsible for the death of these people whom he had loved and made his friends.

Shusaku Endo is Catholic and the Japanese journey of Rodrigues is an undisguised echo of Christ's Holy Week journey to the cross, with Kichijirō standing in for Judas. The inquisitor finally brings Rodrigues face to face with his forbear Fr. Ferreira – who has indeed apostatized and is living under a new name with a Japanese wife and children. But there is no resurrection: Rodrigues is unable to reclaim Ferreira to the faith, while Ferreira persuades Rodrigues to step on the *fumi-e* (a brass plaque placed on the ground foreign missionary insurgence has cost too many innocent lives. There, I suppose, I could lay the matter to rest, and commend to you the very readable book and – if it turns up again – Scorsese's film, as a history of faith and conflict that deserves displaying a likeness of Christ) signalling his renunciation of faith, because his holding out as an agent of to be heard and heeded.

But there is more: the key question which Endo wants to explore with us is the mis-match between 17th C. catholic Christianity and Japan's historic culture. The book asks what is 'wrong' with Christianity? About this Inquisitor Inoui is clear: the catholic mission in Japan is the unwanted advances of an ugly woman who can never be a true wife because she is barren – an invasive species which can never grow in the 'swamp'

that is Japan. A pivot point in the narrative is where the Japanese interpreter taunts Rodrigues with “Does no one come to help you? To your right and left are there nothing but voices of derision? And to think that you came to this country for them; and yet not a single one feels that he needs you.”

To bring this distant narrative home, while precious CofE funds are currently being spent all over the place on various aspects of ‘transforming mission’ Endo’s central argument feels uncomfortably close. Is the culture gap too wide? Can our best efforts of evangelism appear to our culture as ‘unwelcome advances’ peddling goods which are no longer needed or wanted, fumbling for answers to questions no-one is asking?

Locally, funds are being poured into Truro Diocese to encourage and resource selected parishes to create projects for numerical growth. In my own corner the project is to develop the big town church as a resource centre for the surrounding villages. Imported stipends and salaries are financing specialist ministries for growth among the young. But there is a catch: because money has been poured in from the centre the project is accountable. Its success is to be measured statistically by ‘head count’ – more conventionally ‘bottoms on pews’ except that we have chucked out the pews and upgraded the church into a species of sacred cinema.

I emphatically do not want ‘Transforming Mission’ to fail but I am haunted by this image of the unwanted love of an ugly woman. Surely quiet, one-to-one, non-invasive telling of the gospel story can never conform to that brutal image, and indeed it cannot. But neither can it succeed if the cultural divide is too wide for our best tools of evangelism to recognise the problem and bridge over it.

A final touching point brings Shusaku Endo’s 17th C. story into the 21st. In Japan the fierce and unrelenting oppression of Christians by the state did not obliterate the Christian church and when Japan opened up again in 1873 the ‘hidden church’ was still there, isolated and changed, but not destroyed by 250 years of oppression. In Japan, faith was amazingly durable. Conversely, in 21st C. Britain it is un-faith which is proving persistently durable.

In over 50 years in parish ministry I have become increasingly aware of the presence – just below our line of sight – of a ‘hidden church’ of not-quite believers, who have left organised religion behind and are not available to be drawn back into it as long as it remains as it now is. These ‘other sheep’ deserve a shepherd, and I pray that ‘Transforming Mission’ may have the vision to step away from the head-count and feed these sheep also.



The item below is a letter to the Archbishops Council from one of our members, David Brown, he has published this on the Sheldon Hub because he has met with rejection from the Church Times in setting out his views. We are publishing it because we believe there are important issues which are not receiving the attention they deserve.

“Leaders of any institution have a fundamental task to gain the trust of those they serve. Without achieving this, the institution inflicts a “death penalty’ upon itself. It cannot survive. ‘Reputation management’ fools no-one, as the Post Office has discovered, and maybe the Metropolitan Police is now discovering. It has degraded profoundly the Church I have loved and sought to serve faithfully all my adult life for 65 years, yet now no longer recognise.

[Bishop Peter Selby's article in the 8 October Church Times](#), if heeded, can open a way forward. He articulates powerfully the issue at stake for our Church today, speaking of two current situations, Fr Alan Griffin and Professor Martyn Percy. Sadly, these are simply the visible tip of a scandalous iceberg. There are many others equally harmed by a culture of collusion, isolation and gaslighting; and an impoverishment of pastoral care. The research report from Sheldon and Aston University details at length the way in which clergy have been isolated, confused, bullied and traumatised by the CDM system used or threatened against them. The report is, highly appropriately, entitled "[I was handed over to the dogs: Lived experience, clerical trauma and the handling of complaints against clergy in the Church of England](#)".

Diocesan bishops chose to ignore the evidence from the Sheldon Report of the harm caused to fellow labourers in the Lord's vineyard, focusing only on revising the CDM.

Fiddling with the provisions of the CDM process will not solve the problem of the way that whispered allegations and lack of evidential scrutiny can break a clergyperson's spirit and resilience in the name of "clergy discipline". This happened to Fr Griffin in the London Diocese leading to his suicide. We now hear that no-one is to be held to account.

The findings of the IICSA team showed the Church of England systems to be woefully inadequate in matters of safeguarding, pastoral care and clergy discipline. It is clear from the IICSA report, the Sheldon research as well as the responses to the working groups on reforming the CDM system, that attempting to change the scope of the CDM measures is little more than 'moving deckchairs on the Titanic.'

The Coroner presiding over the Fr Griffin inquest revealed the shocking way in which the Church had dealt with innuendo, supposition and trivial tittle-tattle, leading to the fateful end of a highly respected priest's life. Archbishop Justin, you have received the Coroner's "Notice for the Prevention of Future Deaths", and the Church awaits your response.

Through the work of the Sheldon Hub, I have been approached by many clergy and their families who have been ripped apart by the "clergy discipline" process, unfairly and without evidence. In the wake of Fr Griffin, Martyn Percy's appalling treatment by the dons of Christ Church Oxford, and the IICSA revelations, those people traumatised by the Church and its processes are no longer able or willing to remain silent in their brokenness. They are gathering and supporting each other and telling their stories. The Church's collusive policy to leave them isolated is no longer working.

The practice of Non-Disclosure Agreements/Confidentiality Clauses/gagging clauses must end to stop systematic abuse by process. Archbishop Justin did well to speak out against their use. It is abhorrent for a Christian organisation to seek to silence truth. NDAs prevent any meaningful learning from mistakes. They also prevent the healing process for those abused. The whole Church needs to hear the extent of the trauma caused by the processes used and abused by diocesan senior officers, both clergy and lay, and their advisors.

The extent of sexual harassment in schools and colleges was exposed by the *Everyone's Invited* movement. Until that point, individual victims/survivors had to try to rebuild their lives on their own. The bravery of these young people in telling of their abuse has allowed these educational establishments to address reality. The Church of England is moving, inexorably, to its own *Everyone's Invited* moment where the ugly and unacceptable mistreatment of clergy and laity at the hands of abusive processes, and people, will be exposed publicly.

No amount of reputational management will be able to stop the shame and degradation of this episode for the Church of England.

I write on the basis of first-hand testimonies I've heard from 17 clergy in 11 dioceses. There are six more I have heard about. None of these involved valid evidence of any illegal conduct. The decisions, in far too many cases, followed grossly improper processes: neglect of the CDM Code of Practice, episcopal delegation of responsibility to inappropriate persons, making judgements based on crude opinion rather than any obtaining and testing of verifiable evidence. This is a clear abuse of unaccountable power. There are damaged clergy whose health and futures have been broken, and families harmed. These testimonies are now known across countless parishes and deaneries, across our nation.

I would urge you to bring pressure to bear on the House of Bishops to address the cultural failings which have led the Church to this point. I would urge you to seek forgiveness and repentance for the House of Bishops' part in this disgraceful situation. I would urge you to do this while there is still time to save the Church of England. Simply saying that the reform of the CDM system will "address these concerns" will no longer do. Peter, walking on the water, only began to sink when he stopped focussing on Christ (Matt 14: 25-31). Redemption can only come with acknowledgement of fault and repentance.

At the heart of the problem is a systemic failure of episcopal pastoral care, faithfully exercised in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ. It seems to have been replaced by legalism, managerialism and the undue influence of diocesan registrars and lawyers, insurance companies and reputation management consultants. Jesus excoriated the suffocating culture of the High Priests, Scribes and Pharisees through his ministry. Culture lies at the root of all these problems today."

Members are invited to respond to this in future issues.



Notes from the Secretary At our most recent Council meeting we received three documents from the Ministry Division setting out issues around **retirement and ministry in retirement**, they are attached to this mailing and will also be on our website. The documents have been approved by the House of Bishops and Archbishops Council but members may not be surprised to find that they are implemented differently in the 42 dioceses.

We also saw and discussed a survey by a member of the National Safeguarding Team regarding the implementation of the **PTO pathway** for safeguarding training, the result was variable. Some dioceses had made it available for retired clergy with PTO, others were planning to do so over the next few months, others had no intention of deviating from the "leadership" safeguarding training, and other failed to reply.

So we think that the way ahead is for members to press for the availability of the PTO pathway in their dioceses if it is currently not being made available.

We also discussed what to do next year given the cancellation of the 2 **General Meetings** we had planned for this year due to lack of interest among the membership. For London we had 3 expressions of interest, for York 10. We are in something of a quandary over what to do for 2022 in the light of this. Normally we would meet at a venue, celebrate the eucharist, share lunch together, listen to a speaker, and give a series

of short reports on our activity in the previous year followed by questions and discussion, roughly 10.30am to 3.30pm somewhere reasonably accessible for each province. We would like members to let us know whether the content needs to change, or what else we can do to make these events more attractive. We know that Covid and the cost of travel was a dissuasive this year. But please e-mail or write to me with your views about future General Meetings so that our March Council meeting may be guided by your thoughts. We are looking at possibly meeting once in June and once in July.

As you read above, we have so far had no **General Meeting this year** so Council has decided to hold it by Zoom again as we did last year. It will be on **23rd November** starting at about 10 am and ending by lunchtime, if you would like to attend by zoom please write or e-mail me by the 19th November so that I can send out the necessary papers and zoom link to you to enable your full participation.

Hard copies of this newsletter We can send these out by mail to those who need to receive it in that format. About 75 of each edition are printed and distributed freely, but at a cost of about £2 each to the organisation. If you know of members are missing out on this mode of delivery please encourage them to write to me requesting a postal copy. Malcolm Liles (malcolm.liles48@gmail.com)

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



Do you have something to say? Maybe a response to something you've read in this newsletter or encountered elsewhere? Perhaps something you think might encourage your retired colleagues? Please contact the Editor: The Revd Mark Rudall: markrudall@gmail.com or by post, 108 Prospect Road, Farnborough, Hants, GU14 8NS Tel: 01252 645486