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Registered Charity No. 1172186

Winter
Newsletter
January 2022



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From the Chair

Dear Friends,

May I begin by wishing you all a very happy and healthy New Year. It has been quite a difficult few months and none of us quite knows what lies ahead. The necessary Covid restrictions can make us all feel somewhat depressed and we may well ask what normality we are ever likely to return to. So in wishing you well I am not expressing some vague generalised aspiration but a sincere prayer that you may really find encouragement and a real sense of hope as we move into 2022.

Ageing and looking forward

Having myself just entered my 75th year and clocked up 50 years of ordained ministry and 25 years a bishop it is good to look back and give thanks for all that has been, but I am very much aware of Dag Hammarskjöld (a former UN Secretary General) having prayed: *'For all that has been, Thanks. For all that is to come, Yes'*.

I have had cause recently to attend the funerals of several friends and acquaintances, some conducted by humanist or secular celebrants. There was inevitably a sense of looking back, remembering and giving thanks, not always helped by family tributes that although heartfelt would better have been left unsaid in this context or at least abbreviated. But there was very little on offer in the way of hope, even I have to say in those conducted by a Christian minister. 'It's what the family wanted' is what I often hear.

I do wonder whether we have sometimes succumbed to the temptation to accommodate our faith to the lack of expressed faith around us rather than seeing this as a springboard and an opportunity to express a real sense of hope and resurrection faith that will offer in a sensitive way a vision of God's love and redemptive power in Jesus Christ. I don't mean a hard line, bible-bashing approach that can so easily crush delicate and unexpressed faith, but the offering of a gentle vision of the wholeness of life and its purpose under God that can lift the spirits and inspire real hope. I wonder if this scenario is something you too have experienced?

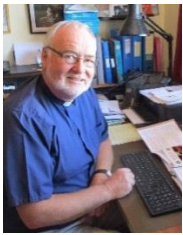
Do we believe what we sing?

Finding myself a member of the congregation more frequently these days I often reflect on the choice of hymns/songs from which so many people derive comfort, help and indeed their faith. There are some pretty dire examples around! Yes, it's a generational thing, I know, and is a matter of personal choice, but I continue to find inspiration in such words as these: *"One the object of our journey, one the faith which never tires, one the earnest looking forward, one the hope our God inspires"*. This is part of the hymn *Through the night of doubt and sorrow* and sung either to Martin Shaw's tune *Marching* or Parry's tune *Rustington* it never fails for me to express our hope as the journeying, pilgrim people of God. You no doubt have your own choice too.

May God bless us all as we journey in faith and hope and love into this New Year.

+Ian

+Ian Brackley



From the Editor

This edition of the newsletter has been compiled in the weeks leading up to Christmas and finished shortly afterwards. The arrival of the Omicron strain of Covid-19 was all over the news in early December and fears were being stoked by the tabloids that Christmas celebrations would have to be abandoned. Happily they weren't, although many family gatherings were much reduced because of forced isolations. Many of us are once again being very careful about close contact, masks and handwashing because this disease can be alarming.

Covid has also obliged us to hold two AGMs online: the Association's 93rd being held on the morning of the 23rd November 2021 attracting over participants on Zoom - an online tool for which many of us are extremely grateful.

In some ways, although not occupying the same physical space there was a remarkable ease of communication between participants. Those present were very disciplined with minimal background distractions and one real benefit was that we were all able to see the faces of those speaking in a way not possible when spread out in a room or a hall.

The success of these online gatherings certainly begs questions about how future meetings will be brought together and ordered. Yet another development born out of Covid lockdowns highlighting that we are currently caught up in a kind of flux between old, familiar, and radically new 'normalities'...

Please note, as always, that 'opinions expressed within these pages do not necessarily reflect those of the Association or the Editor': we're always happy to edit to fit but opinions expressed are those of the contributors. **Mark Rudall**



An important corrigendum: RCA Committee member David Pritchard has requested that it be formally noted that 'Faithful is the one who calls' was not in fact his personal reflection, but indeed a sermon by Canon Dr Peter Sills given at a Sung Eucharist on 8th October 2021 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of his Ordination, and coincidentally his 80th birthday. We ask Peter and David to please accept an Editorial apology.



A story of retirement ministry in Quebec

'The suggestions and regulations for retirement ministry are interesting and are similar to those of the Anglican Church of Canada, though more formal, says Michael J Pitts. 'Attached is my story of retirement ministry in Quebec.'

At the end of 2009, and after nearly twenty years as Dean of Montreal, I began retirement. As in England, continuing after retirement in the same parish is highly discouraged. I was already connected, by friendship with clergy and lay members, to five parishes where I was glad to take part in Sunday Eucharist, and sometimes to preside and preach in them for holiday, study and health break weeks for the clergy. For the rest I intended to study, read and try to write about my experiences and thinking during my ministry in seven countries.

But the best laid plans of mice and men... After a few months of settling into the new life of retirement, I was challenged to offer ministry in the neighbouring diocese of Quebec. This started out as a six-weekly visit to a remote fishing village on an island the north shore of the St Lawrence River. This rather quickly developed into ministry in six other parishes and then into ministry as Archdeacon to all twelve parishes in the region. Eleven of these small parishes were stretched out along the rugged north coastline of the St Lawrence.

The total distance from Montreal to Blanc Sablon at the easterly tip of the Québec Diocese is more than 1500km (932 miles). One of the parishes was same distance, but north rather the north-east. It was a community of Naskapi people of the first nations. In all this vast region there was only one resident stipendiary priest. After the hub community of Sept-Îles, there were no roads and my travel was by air in small planes and helicopters, by boat and, depending on the season, sometimes by ATV (quad) or snowmobile. There were no funeral homes in the whole region, and so burials had to be done very soon after death. When at home in Montreal, I always had a bag packed, ready to set out with a few hours notice.

At the outset of this ministry, I had promised to undertake it for five years until the age of 70. What was to be my final visit to say farewell turned somewhat into a disaster. I had been at a diocesan meeting in Quebec City and made my way to the airport there, early the next morning, only to find that the departure was delayed due to mechanical problems. The delay gradually became longer, until the airline told me that I could no longer make my connections along my planned route and they sent me to a hotel for the night.

Next day, at the same time, I was back in the airport. The plane left on time, but ten minutes into the flight, the cabin filled with smoke and we turned back to the airport to make an otherwise uneventful emergency landing. I spent the day in the airport waiting for a relief plane which arrived in the late afternoon. It was too late to get to Blanc Sablon that day, but I was sent to Wabush for another night in a hotel, before leaving next morning on a flight in the right direction, and a second change of planes in Goose Bay. The flight from there to Blanc Sablon, the starting point of my farewell visits, was only about 20 minutes, but as we came into land, at about 400 feet, the pilot retracted the landing gear and climbed again, telling us that there was too much mist and that we would continue to the next scheduled landing across the estuary in Newfoundland. He also mentioned that he did not want to try Blanc Sablon again as he was low on fuel. I thought I might be able to take a ferry back to Blanc Sablon, but it had already left and the next one was four days later!

So, it was back on the plane across Newfoundland to Deer Lake and St John's. I was told they would fly me back next morning to Blanc Sablon, and try to re-schedule my flights (by a different airline) for me, along the north shore. But I said that I was exhausted and had already missed five visits of a tight schedule, so I was just going to abandon the whole trip and return by a direct, one and a half hour, flight to Montreal. But this friendly airline insisted on taking me back to Montreal by their eight-hour route next day, without charge and with a refund of the whole outward journey and compensation for use of my cell phone to keep in

contact with the parishes I was supposed to be visiting. I spent the evening in the airport hotel writing e-mails to all the parishes, saying the farewell I had hoped to do in person.

At the pressing request of the Bishop of Quebec, I agreed to pay two or three more six monthly visits to the northern Naskapi community. But otherwise, I tried to return to my original plans for retirement. Shortly after my final visit there, unfortunately plans changed again when I was diagnosed with a form of lymphoma and had six months of chemotherapy. This focused my mind and in short order, I was able to complete the writing I wanted to do and it was later published by some good friends from the Montreal cathedral. 'Fifty Years of Ministry' is available at Amazon.

By this time two of the local churches, with which I had been involved, were no longer able to remain open for financial reasons and I was back to being at the Eucharist and occasionally presiding and preaching at the remaining three. But my wife and I now planned to move to an independent-living apartment in a seniors' residence on the south shore of greater Montreal. This turned out to be a good decision as I was now diagnosed with an incurable aggressive metastasized prostate cancer, which, thanks to the work of doctors and pharmacologists, brings me to the time of writing. Like the lymphoma, it has been held in check in this case after radiation treatment, by at-home medication. But there is no accurate prognosis of how long this may last. A few months is more likely than a few years.

When we moved across the river, I met with my successor but one at the Cathedral and he graciously agreed that 10 years of exile was sufficient, and he welcomed me back into the cathedral congregation. We both have experienced problems in previous ministries arising from interference by predecessors and I have remained as a member of the congregation without any pastoral or administrative involvement, which, in any case is as much as I can do, in my medical condition.

Of course, most of this time has also been the time of the pandemic. The administrative and nursing staff of our residence have kept the SARS-CoV-2 virus outside the doors and all the residents have now received two vaccine doses and a booster shot. By the same token, the cathedral and other parishes have offered digital worship. As I write they are beginning in-person worship again. I have been present at the cathedral when my cancers and their treatment have allowed, but further retirement ministry is no longer possible, about which I think I am glad.



John Powell, a former Vicar of Cardigan and still resident in the area, offers a positive report on the way a part of the Church in rural West Wales has risen to the challenges of Covid-19 before moving on make some observations about how the pandemic throws light on disturbing aspects of the relationship between Church and State.

The still quite new but proving highly effective 'Bro Teifi Local Ministry Area' (Teifi region LMA), includes Cardigan and is adjacent to the Pembrokeshire National Park and the Wales Coastal Path attracting thousands of visitors every year. Cardigan itself is a busy market town and is the centre for a thriving farming community as well as a focus for the Welsh language. The LMA's 'mother church' is the 12th Century St Mary's Priory Church that dates back to the 12th century.

The LMA is comprised of 18 churches. It has three full time vicars including an LMA Dean, a retired vicar of Cardigan and three local ministers. The LMA was newly organized just before the pandemic struck, and

effectively is one parish (although the many parishes still hold legal status) and has managed to centralise the financial accounting and its Council.

The Church in Wales observed Welsh Government regulations but I am pleased to say that our LMA Dean has been optimistic at all times and has been proactive in encouraging the churches to open and return to worship in the flesh. This has been a huge boost to our spiritual life at a trying time and those who have been brave enough to come to worship have encouraged others. At the same time there have been weekly YouTube services going out that have been faithfully followed by our parishioners with appreciation.

There has been a huge impact due to the restrictions. One church has been closed for two years and so it was a great thrill to join in its celebration of Midnight Mass at Christmas, when it was floodlit and beautifully decorated to allow 12 noble souls to worship and celebrate the Incarnation with the Vicar having to play the organ.

Our people have been very fearful and the Clergy have done a wonderful job in allaying fears and encouraging people to safely come to worship. This has of course been helped by the positive response of our shopkeepers and local businesses who have struggled against the odds. There is no doubt in my mind that a great deal of psychological damage has been done by the restraints of Government that will have long term effects.



John Powell goes on to consider the relationship between Church and State here in the UK in the light of two years of Covid-19 dictums.

He writes: 'I am still trying to get the Church to engage, because some top scientists are disappointed that the Church has not had a voice in this apart, of course, from its pastoral ministry to the people. There have been a few Roman Catholics who have engaged.'

The RCA is probably not the platform to do this but I felt that I had to say it because of the truly shocking times that we are living in. I had been looking for a book that addresses the relationship between Church and State and found a 1976 reprint of Archbishop William Temple's book, 'Christianity and Social Order' first published in 1942. The reprint contains an excellent introduction and analysis by Ronald Preston.

I am very concerned at the present day relationship between Church and State in England and Wales and found this book enlightening on some aspects of this relationship.

One aspect is the consideration of Natural Law. We are aware of Natural Laws of Nature such as in soil management and evolutionary laws but are confused regarding Natural Law. Preston points out that the Bible pre-supposes that this is what it means to be human as much as it presupposes the existence of God, but he thinks that William Temple relies too much on Roman Catholic 'Moral Theology' and is thus confusing regarding a basic moral insight of man, as such, or something more restricted. In today's world there is widespread confusion regarding an underlying Natural Law that governs human morality. The pandemic has made us re-examine this in the light of Biblical understanding.

One of Temple's central concerns is the regard for persons outside the social and group context. He writes about this in the context of his belief in 'original sin'. He acknowledges that we are 'fallen creatures' and writes: 'In other words, from the beginning, I put myself in God's place. This is my original sin'. He thinks that education helps, especially if it leads to devotion to truth or to beauty.

He then links this to politics: ‘The political problem is concerned with men as they are, not with men as they ought to be. Part of the task is to so order life as to lead them nearer to what they ought to be, but to assume that they are already there will involve certain failure and disaster’. He then qualifies this by saying: ‘it is fundamental to the Christian position that men should have freedom even though they abuse it’. He acknowledges that a final solution can only be found in the human response to the redemptive love of God and he agrees that no-one, from Plato’s ‘Republic’, onwards wants to live in the ideal state as depicted by anyone else!

The book is a stimulating look at the role of the Church to interfere in a nation’s social ordering. He draws up ‘Christian Social Principles’, examines the Natural Order and Principles and lays out a suggested programme.

In the context of this pandemic, I find his chapter on the derivative Christian Social Principle of Freedom, most interesting. He states that, ‘The primary principle of Christian Ethics and Christian Politics must be respect for every person simply as a person. If each man and woman is a child of God, whom God loves and for whom Christ died, then there is in each a worth absolutely independent of all usefulness to society. The person is primary, not the society, the State exists for the citizen, not, the citizen for the State; consequently, society must be so arranged as to give every citizen the maximum opportunity for making deliberate choices. Freedom is the goal of politics.’

Those words moved me greatly and made me look closely at the way Governments have acted in the last two years. I invite you to do the same.



Support for the old Bill

Canon Hazel Whitehead describes a lively ministry for retired priests



It’s October. It’s dark. It’s cold. The smell of burning petrol bombs lingers in the air and the shouts of the sixty-strong crowd of rioters are enough to waken the dead. ‘Ooareyer, ooareyer,’ the teenagers yell – which, being interpreted means ‘Who are you? Who are you?’

Why this question is threatening, I have no idea. Other more offensive things erupt from the voices of small gangs who take it in turns to hold the stage – rather like an audio Mexican wave. ‘A.L.I.B.I, you ain’t got no alibi. You ugly’ is followed by a variety of pork and bacon related epithets, mass banging on wooden walls and plastic barrels and the hurling of approved missiles. I’m not quite the oldest rioter but it’s a close-run thing. COP 26 is coming and this is part of the training.

It’s August. It’s just after lunch. It’s sweltering and I’m in the back of a police car racing through the streets of Fareham on the way to a bomb scare. It’s my first experience of joining a crew for the day to get to know them better and Steve, my minder, admits he is going to be given all the boring jobs to keep me safe and so I can’t be a liability. And then the call comes. Every officer in the Response and Patrol unit is out of the door and jumping into cars. ‘You’re with me, Hazel,’ Dave, the sergeant, yells. I tag along with two probationers as we cordon off the roads with the iconic orange tape, deal with the public (if you thought parishioners were difficult...) and watch the Royal Navy bomb disposal unit unload their version of K9. Fortunately, nobody is hurt, it’s all dealt with quickly and it’s ‘the best day we’ve had in ages.’ This was for real – though luckily the bomb wasn’t. Who would have thought being an honorary police chaplain would be such fun?

One of the joys of being PTO and retired is the ability to **do** some ministry without having to read or write policy statements, manage teams or work out stats and strategies. I've been a chaplain on and off (lockdowns permitting) for a year now and am attached to two stations – one rapid response, one neighbourhood and rural affairs. Both cover large patches and I drop in to each once a week. The ministry is best described as loitering with intent (pardon the pun).

If you like quick-fix ministry or need numerical evidence of converts and conquests, this is not the ministry for you; it's a slow burn job building up relationships, becoming known, being a presence. It's incarnational ministry in every sense and, after some initial frustration, I know these quiet appearances at briefings and chats in the rest room are paying off. I am nearly always greeted by name (no longer called Ma'am), always offered coffee and always welcome at the all-important beginning of shift briefing. I've assured the crews that whatever language they use, I will have heard it all before and it will be difficult for them to offend me.

I've chatted to young taser-armed graduates barely out of university, men in their 50s wondering what the future holds for them, experienced officers who are tearing their hair out over the new ways of training and women who are trying to juggle treatment for breast cancer with maintaining an active and demanding job. Apart from the tasers, it's just like being with a gang of clergy.

But the clientele is a moving target and hard to pin down. They work complex shifts, they get called away suddenly, they have hours of notes to type up, get seconded to other stations at the drop of a hat and there is limited time for personal conversation. It's not an easy ride, it's stressful and sometimes demoralising. And yet it's so refreshing to be engaging with professionals from a completely different walk of life and to learn about the variety and complexity of the work which police officers across the country are engaged in.

Just like the church, it's not a perfect institution, the reality doesn't always live up to the rhetoric and a few officers go off the rails; but the people I meet in my stations have my absolute admiration and respect as they work with limited resources to counter drug and alcohol misuse, mental health issues and downright nastiness. 'Trouble is,' said one officer last week. 'Nobody ever rings us up to tell us good news. It's always crap.' Which is why they need people like us to remind them that their jobs are worthwhile and that they are making a difference. And just occasionally, we might even be able to bring them some of our kind of good news. Happy to chat further to anybody or you can go to www.policechaplaincy.uk to find your local lead Chaplain.

Canon Dr Hazel Whitehead PTO Portsmouth diocese, Chaplain Hampshire Force.



From Pastor to Patient

Canon Geoff Smith offers a deeply personal pastoral reflection that will resonate powerfully with many of us

When I was a curate in the people's republic of South Yorkshire, before the days of data protection and safeguarding, a local member of the Deanery was awarded an OBE for services to patients. Each week he went through all the admission sheets for the Doncaster Royal Infirmary and sorted the names into the ecclesiastical parishes which each individual admitted came from and wrote to the parish priest.

In my parish the Vicar coordinated a weekly hospital visit usually on the afternoon of the mid week Eucharist and staff meeting. A car full of us, there were four on the team, would drive to the hospital and fan out across the wards each armed with a list of names.

One particular Wednesday I called by the bedside of an elderly miner, injured in an accident at Hatfield Main Colliery. He was breathing heavily through advanced pneumoconiosis as I introduced myself but he was singularly unimpressed by this callow youth: I was 24 years old, with long hair, denims and a dog collar. He was too ill to show me the door but made it clear that he had no truck with religion, do gooders or the church in general. So I moved on to the next person on my list leaving only the echo of a silent blessing.

A couple of weeks later there was a tentative knock on my door. I had never met the person before but he introduced himself as the son of the man I had visited in hospital. His father had died and had asked the son to seek me out in order to ask me to take his funeral. Of course my response was to agree and we settled down to discuss dates and the order of the service.

I was in hospital and you visited me! *'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?' And the King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.'*...

Over the years since my curacy I have visited many parishioners in hospital and the nature and style of those visits followed a pattern I would check with the hospital, I would arrange a time, I would visit, catch up on home and parish and I would say a short prayer or blessing. In my current role, at one point I had both Churchwardens in hospital, one in Durham and one in Ward 5 of the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle. I was a regular visitor to both. And then ironically I found myself as a patient in Ward 5 and moved from pastor to patient.

My first challenge was to do with names and titles. As a pastor I was the Revd Canon Geoff Smith. But since remarriage and an agreement with my new wife who wished to retain her maiden name, we became the Purcell Smiths. In hospital, as a patient, I was 'Bed 3' and variously Geoff Purcell, Geoff Smit, P Smith and G Purcell, but mainly Geoff, I was very aware of the risks of being mistaken for someone else, every procedure was preceded by the question, 'date of birth?' I recalled the story of a doctor making a request on behalf of a patient: 'Wart on middle finger, please remove', for the patient to wake to find his whole middle finger missing.

Also, rather than normally being focused on the one parishioner that I was visiting I was now one of six quite poorly men in the ward. In Ward 5, most of the men were local, Newcastle United supporters and spoke with 'Geordie' accents. So as we settled into our common existence with most conversations being conducted behind curtains and therefore open for all to eavesdrop, an uneasy sense of familiarity settled on the ward and between the six of us. My immediate neighbour in Bed 2 was scandalised when he was handed a pair of hospital slipper socks in red and white – Sunderland Football Club colours. He demanded black and white, the colours of Newcastle United...

My wife's visiting was subject to Covid restrictions, one named visitor for one hour, but I was visited by members of the Chaplaincy team and because of some vivid dreams, stressful nights and weird fantasies I requested and was visited by the psyche team from the hospital. As a result of two weeks' restrictions because of a leaking pancreas I was put on 'nil by mouth' where I experienced significant weight loss

together with what Ivan Illich described as 'iatrogenic' symptoms including never before experienced Migraine type headaches.

My wife observed that I was being institutionalised and one of my medical team observed on his morning round, 'You've been here too long, this is not doing you any good'. I suspect that it was at this point that efforts were made to ensure that I was discharged. Altogether I was in hospital for a month following a procedure called: pancreaticoduodenectomy or 'Whipple Procedure' (completely unrelated to Wipples, the Clerical outfitters!).

As a pastor I seek to preach and proclaim the concept of an incarnational faith. As St John's Gospel tells us: 'The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us'. Whilst the notion of incarnation speaks of lofty ideals, at the end of the day, well, flesh is flesh.

As a patient I had to get used to the idea of being 'flesh'. Blood tests, cannulas fitted and removed, picc lines, fitted and removed, in one case accidentally, and injections. My body was a specimen which had to be controlled and managed to allow to heal after some eight hours of surgery. Whilst I felt that that my 'flesh' was treated with respect it was still treated with an uneasy familiarity during observations, checks for bed sores and whilst mopping up vomit and other accidents 'of the flesh'.

But whilst I was a patient I was still a priest, a pastor and during an email conversation with a parishioner I discovered that Radio 3 was broadcasting the Canonical Hours and so I decided that, silently and under the cover of darkness, I would exercise as best as I might a ministry of prayer in my situation and for those I shared my situation with and for those who cared for us.

Canonical Hours in Ward 5

Matins, the first hour,

Sung as the hospital day commences

As the night shift

Switch on Ward lights

At 6 00 am observations begin

Blood Pressure, temperatures

Heart rate. 'Good Morning', 'Good Morning'

An echo of the Beatles

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus

Lauds, celebrates the new day

Between each burst of activity

Respite follows, the common mood

Follows the common good, resting

Before a change of shift, fresh eyes

Are raised, beds made, bed baths

Or showers for the ambulant

My leaking pancreas is flushed to dry

Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus

As sun arches into the hospital

Windows, **Prime**, is intoned

Food containers opened

Breakfast served, soft foods for

Delicate stomachs, cereals

Or porridge brought to bedsides
Give us our daily bread, forgive our sins,
Hail Mary, full of Grace
Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus

Terce takes us through the hours
Doctors' rounds as prognoses
Are shared, further diagnoses written
On the computerised adding machines
From bedside to bedside patients
Wondering 'is this the day I hear that wonderful word of solemn blessing:
It is time for you to think of home?
Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus

Sext marks the day shift halfway
In these hours of never ending days.
Minds turn to gratitude for physical recovery
The stress of a surgeon's knife:
The wounds will heal, yesterday's pain
Become tomorrow's blessing
Grandma's advice, 'don't scratch the scabs just let them heal: be strong!'
Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus

None marks that mid afternoon pause Before observations
lunch of menus chosen just a day before
May be less appetising as covers are lifted
But a switch from nil-by-mouth
To pasta with fish is a blessing
Give us this day our daily bread and fishes,
let miracles occur and generosity feed through
Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus

Vespers evening draws in again
I simply failed to notice the shift
In time from summer to winter
My phone had it covered as if by magic
An evening meal is served, bloods fine
Medicines prescribed pain controlled
Anticipate the solemn watch ethereal
Music lifts our spirits to the divine
Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus

At **Compline** the hours draw close
Ward 5 gathers for handover
Day shift to night, a night of silent watches,
of unsteady steps, relieving oneself,
Walking like a man wired for sound, machines beeping as you walk
Under the cautious watch of the night shift
You return to the day's challenges
Continued healing a blessing claimed
Ave Maria, gratia plena, benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus

An emerging pastoral opportunity?



Mark Rudall reflects on a new funeral trend gifted to us from Covid-19 restrictions

I was obliged to retire rather prematurely at age 60 struck by a medical condition I'd never heard of. It was new to my GP too: 'Myasthenia Gravis is quite rare,' he told me, 'and we don't know how it arises, but if the Big Man says you've got it, you've got it...!' And I had it, but still wanted to be a servant of my doctor's 'Big Man'!

Happily some nine years on, the MG, virulent at first, is in remission and life is remarkably normal. A renewal of PtO is also in hand because ministry opportunities keep presenting themselves and reasonably vigorous retirees can be quite useful.

One of these new opportunities doesn't seem to have been written about elsewhere but I am seeing it emerging directly from the ravages of Covid-19.

We are all aware that the pandemic has forced a change in funeral expectations: a limited number of attendees, short time slots at crematoria – usually 30 minutes to allow for chapel ventilation and cleaning between funerals – face coverings and no singing. At the same time the universal adoption of the useful Obitus system has meant that music of all kinds can be synchronised with picture presentations, and services or humanist ceremonies can be livestreamed to those unable to attend wherever they are in the world. But they aren't actually *there*!

Up to the recent past, the major pastoral 'closure' event was the funeral, hopefully in most cases a 'thanksgiving and celebration' of a life well lived. But if people haven't been able to attend a service, or it has been necessary to reduce its impact because of Covid restrictions, then mourners may feel that something has been lost: 'She loved singing and we couldn't sing!'; 'We would so much have loved his close friend Barney and someone from work to have been able to say something but there wasn't time...' Thus has arisen a gentle flow of demands for some kind of non-restricted memorial service.

I also note that out of the same sense of the funeral not being quite adequate seems to come a desire for more-than-usually significant ceremonies of burial of the ashes attended by more people than just immediate family. My past experience of these brief ceremonies has been that they were very brief but certainly not perfunctory opportunities for some final words of closure for the bereaved.

I've always been aware that the ashes of loved ones can sometimes hang around at the back of cupboards, even for years, waiting to be surreptitiously spread when busy relatives get a chance to take that favourite country, seaside or riverside walk that Grandma loved. At the same time, I'm also aware that disposal of ashes can be a problem. Snowdonia National Park, for example, has clamped down on ashes being spread at the top of its highest peak because their deposition has been upsetting the plant ecology of the summit.

Keeping this kind of scenario in the back of our minds it's important that disposal of ashes be handled responsibly and discreetly. Requested to do so by the Christian family of someone with a strong waterways link I recently used an open electric launch as a platform for such a ceremony/ brief service. Close family were with me in the otherwise perfectly silent craft while others contributed readings and so on from the bank nearby when we moored up at a quiet spot. I should probably comment that if on water make sure there's flow and be careful of wind direction...

The main thrust of this for me, however, is to highlight that the burial of ashes seems to be acquiring a new significance for bereaved people who felt that the 'Covid funeral' somehow failed to do justice to the one

they've lost. That's particularly so if we would have expected a funeral service to be a packed-out celebration of the life of a popular figure.

I have therefore found it rather a privilege to help families deal with ashes and also to plan and preside at some simple memorial events in 2021. In one case we held a mini 'Songs of Praise' of hymns that could not be sung at the funeral 15 months earlier, all taken with cake and some carefully chosen pastoral words and prayers.

Obviously, such pastoral occasions need to be individually thought through, mostly written creatively from scratch and delivered with great care and attention to detail. There is a wealth of source material out there to draw from as required.

As a retired priest with slightly more time to prepare than clergy in pastoral charge I'm happy to do that, and in the years to come I feel it's likely that such ministry opportunities will become much more common. There are no fees involved of course, but there is real satisfaction in seeing people lifted up and sent on their way if not rejoicing, certainly better equipped for the later stages of the bereavement process.

Furthermore, since so many funerals have been lost to secular celebrants, invitations to support bereaved people like this are to be treasured indeed, because we are ideally placed to do them honour.



Leaving a ministry: A liturgy of departing

Fr John-Francis Friendship wrote to our RCA Secretary in the wake of the last Newsletter commenting, 'I am sorry you don't have many contributions from members - and I cannot offer much although I know how important this stage of life is and it needs attention (I included reflections on it in my first book, 'Enfolded in Christ').

'However, there is one thing that's always puzzled me: the C of E gives a lot of attention to the start of a ministry - services of welcome etc. that seem to follow a common pattern - but offers absolutely nothing for a Liturgy of Departing I did write one (based on the Franciscan 'Praying our Farewells' - SSF knows how important those times are) and sent a copy to the Liturgical Commission (or whatever the group is now called) but never had a response. I attach a copy in case it's of any interest to those looking for something to mark their departure at 'retirement'.'

PRAYING OUR FAREWELLS

Before the Dismissal a suitable hymn is sung. Then:

Priest: We are God's people gathered here;

All: **let us kneel before God's footstall.**

Priest: Let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ,

we thank you that in this wonderful Sacrament

you have given us the memorial of your passion:

grant us so to reverence the sacred mysteries
of your Body and Blood that we may know within ourselves
and show forth in our lives the fruits of your redemption;
for you are alive and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen**

The Priest hands the sacred vessels and chasuble to a Server and says:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,

All: the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

Priest: God of all grace,
your Son fed the hungry with the Bread of his life and the word of his kingdom,
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness, sustain us by your true and living bread;
who is alive and reigns, now and forever. **Amen**

The Priest hands the Book of the Gospels to an appropriate person and says:

Your word is a lantern to my feet,

All: and a light upon my path.

Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life;

All: may they ever be on our lips and in our heart.

The Churchwardens come forward and say:

The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in;

Priest: From this time forth and forevermore.

Minister: Gracious God,
your Spirit hovers over the Church to guide and sanctify it;
hear our prayer which we offer for all your people,
that, in their vocation and ministry, each may serve you in holiness and truth
through Christ our Lord. **Amen**

The Priest says to the Churchwardens:

This is the House of God;

All: and the Gate of Heaven.

Priest: God of our pilgrimage, the desire of our hearts and longings,
may this place always be a well of holiness
and a sign to your presence in our midst.

Let all who seek you be welcome here and find their home with all your saints
in Christ, our hidden companion on the Way. **Amen.**

S/He hands back the keys of the church to the churchwardens who say:

May the Lord bless you in your continuing priestly vocation. **Amen**

The Priest says:

As I leave, I give thanks for all that you have given to me;
I assure you of my love and prayers.

**All: As you experience the pain of change, and the insecurity of moving on,
we pray that you may also experience the blessing of inner growth.**

The Priest says:

I know that God goes with me.

The minister says:

Let us silently offer our prayers to God and ask a blessing on ... (and ...)

S/He kneels for the blessing of the Church. The Churchwardens and others lay hands on him/her in a moment of silent prayer after which they invite the congregation to stand and extend their right hand as they join in the blessing:

To the prayers of our blessed Lady we commend you.

May (Parish patron), pray for you.

May all the saints of God, pray for you.

May the holy angels befriend you and watch around you to protect you.

May the Lord bless you and watch over you,

the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,

the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace.

The Priest:

Thanks be to God.

The Churchwardens lead the Priest to the entrance as the final hymn is sung

Minister: The Mass is ended, go in peace to love and serve the Lord!

All: Thanks be to God.

© John-Francis Friendship



David Head highlights a pressure that others may be feeling as Covid-19 puts a new priority on being tech-savvy. I retired early, at 64, just before Covid struck. One of the key factors in my decision to leave was my tech-phobia, and the increasing amount that was coming to me over the net, and the expectations that I would simply manage it all.

I'm a creative person, not a systems one. At school I could never comprehend why I got low marks for comprehension, when I was stellar at creative writing. In ministry, as far as IT goes, it didn't help being in a rural parish on dial-up web access when cities were getting ultra-fast broadband. I also found that the insouciance of those who sprayed unnecessary emails (with pictures!) to all and sundry - locking up time and the machine and involving extra cost - was a disincentive to engaging with tech.

I've had two key meltdowns of machinery, the second when my backup clone was destroyed at the same time as my hard-drive... You do the right thing and the machine still hates you. I feel a bit justified to be phobic!

I have tried to embrace tech. I have had quite a bit of training in the past, and I have a tech advisor I pay for to deal with my machinery and give me ongoing training. We have an agreement that when my brain goes into overload he'll stop, have a cup of coffee, and push off. It's not unwillingness to learn on my part, it's just panic.

In lockdown I didn't go online for my worship, I listened to LPs (yes, maybe I'm retro) of the mass, and read improving texts. There are ways of doing these things. I've found IT useful to think about in terms of the way that metaphors crystallise into dogmas, and as a challenge to the way that I use nouns in theological discourse - as well as IT being something so beyond my comprehension that it gives me an emotional metaphor for the incomprehensible vastness of God about whom I can on occasions be glib, so that I can feel the puzzlement as well as intellectualise it.

I had to start using contactless banking. The bank will set it up for you if you take your phone in and tell them about your phobia - when I've always used cash so that I can feel how much money I'm spending. Covid has suddenly given the internet extra power to dominate old-tech.

And now I've begun the process of applying for PTO but it's difficult to do this in any retro way. Some of the forms, thankfully, are on paper, but much of the material comes (or doesn't come until I chase it) online - at which point I often have to communicate with someone centrally to understand what I'm meant to be doing, or how to log on with a password that I'm supposed to remember from two years back. They're very helpful, but confused as to why I'm almost in tears.

But then, phobias work like that. You gain a little ground, learn something, but the new stuff beyond that is ineluctably threatening.

I *hope* that I'll be able to exercise a PtO ministry - I feel guilty not doing so - but it will need to be one that is really tech-lite. Maybe that's in a church where the most complicated thing is turning on a microphone, or a face-to-face conversation or two.

I don't know if this is the experience of others. I know it's not an age thing, there are many people much older than me who put me to shame with their ability to embrace and understand the new. But I'm wondering if there will be a time that the church's embracing of IT will make my ministry just too much of a bother, or make me incomprehensible.



Shades of Franz Kafka: Capability and CDM

An RCA correspondent, recently engaged in a House for Duty ministry and who prefers to remain anonymous, is concerned about an insidious change of culture he perceives within

the Church of England. This is a somewhat shortened version of a rather fuller paper but it reflects an alarmingly common story that even affects retired and semi-retired clergy.

It was suggested in a recent RCA Newsletter that the current demands of safeguarding training and DBS is causing some retired clergy to rethink their commitment to continuing ministry and PTO. And indeed I now find myself in the midst of a nightmare insofar as a letter of complaint about me has been received by the Bishop and I am now caught in the middle of a capability process under the Clergy Discipline Measure (CDM). I am embroiled in a 'conflict' which I believe, with open discussion, could have been easily resolved had it not become out of control because of CDM.

Resolving any conflict is not easy especially if the conflict assumes a life of its own and begins to extend beyond the initial limits and boundaries of the disagreements which lie at the root of a particular contested issue. The current psychology of the Church of England after years in which complaints about clergy performance, with particular reference to 'safeguarding', have not been pursued with sufficient vigour appear now to have changed dramatically.

It seems to me that the whole safeguarding industry has outgrown its boots and is now witch hunting. Two friends of mine both, now retired, have recently had PTO withdrawn on entirely spurious grounds and without the slightest compassion. Even the safeguarding team appear to have little or no idea how the procedures should work.

I don't believe that the complaint made against me is of a 'safeguarding' nature. But that might be because I do not know exactly what it is that I have done or failed to do.

Initially I was invited by the Bishop to a meeting with him and other diocesan figures to discuss 'healing in the parish'. However, before the on-line meeting ended I was offered an opportunity to undergo a capability procedure, a move to another parish as an associate priest or cash to leave my existing post I was told that I could not discuss matters with anyone. There was no suggestion of a meeting with the complainant or any form of mediation.

At the heart of this is one manipulative individual, and a number of letters of support written to both the Archdeacon and the Bishop by parishioners appear to have been ignored. Although told by the Archdeacon that I was not subject to CDM, the Bishop has nevertheless withdrawn pastoral support from me, because, I was told, that's the procedure recommended by the CDM.

There have been a number of suspensions recently including Archbishops, Bishops and Deans as well as parish and retired clergy where after unseemly and unnecessary delays individuals have been re-instated but with their ministry effectively destroyed.

The Society of Mary and Martha, Sheldon, undertook research into the Clergy Discipline Measure, their recent report states: *'a troubling and complex picture emerges of the handling of complaints against clergy, in many ways mirroring the institutional callousness towards survivors of clerical abuse. Too often clergy can feel, as one respondent to the survey noted, as if they 'have been handed over to the dogs'. Respondents may be ill-informed and isolated, they may have inadequate resources to defend themselves, and may be left with long term traumatic losses to reputation, home, livelihood, health and relationships even (perhaps especially) when found innocent of the charges laid against them'.*

In the matter of the capability measure and CDM generally, Sheldon Hub made a survey of individual clergy caught in the CDM process. One set of questions they posed asked the following about the nature of the complaint and the accusations. Were those accusations in connection with:

1. Something I know I did wrong
2. Trivial or vexatious charges without foundation
3. Part of a campaign of bullying or harassment
4. Result (ing) from me carrying out a mandate I understood I had been given (by parish or diocese)
5. Apparently motivated by a desire to remove me from my post
6. Brought by person/people I knew well and/or previously trusted
7. Something I did when I was vulnerable or under significant pressure myself
8. None of the above

Of these questions, were I completing the survey today, I would respond to the effect that the complaint was probably trivial, vexatious and without foundation, that it was part of a campaign of bullying. That it probably resulted from me carrying out a mandate I understood I had been given when I was appointed and was motivated by a desire to remove me by people I thought I knew well and had previously trusted.

The view of the Sheldon Hub is that the capability measure and CDM have been discredited, treat clergy badly and leave many clergy in distress and feeling suicidal. It is therefore in urgent need of review. Which is to say that the process I now find myself caught in is both inadequate and flawed.

This has been described to me by a retired Bishop as the new 'psychology' of the Church of England in the age of safeguarding. A complaint is assumed to be true unless it is proved to be incorrect. Although if the complaint is made in a letter and is not shared with you, you cannot prove your innocence because you have no idea as to the 'charges' laid against you which is of course in direct contradiction of the principle of jurisprudence that you are innocent until proven guilty, as Nicholas Coulton pointed out in an article on CDM published in the Ecclesiastical Law Review.

I now find myself in a situation where my guilt has been assumed. As the Sheldon report observes, it is too easy for the process to lead seamlessly from an informal conversation about 'healing in the parish' to a formal statement. In my case I was offered three stark choices, the implementation of the capability measure, being moved from the parish to another situation as an associate minister, or 'paid to leave' the parish.

This has been accompanied by the withdrawal of the pastoral support of the Bishop as Father in God, particularly difficult when I was also going through major health issues.

Given 20/20 hindsight, if it had been possible to undertake 'due diligence' before accepting the post I would have discovered three key things:

- a) that a vocal group had become 'out of control', had 'taken over' and was actively seeking to move the congregation towards a more evangelical style of churchmanship and worship.
- b) there was a deep animosity toward parish share, 'It's our money, we've raised it, they're not having it', another church (in a different diocese) pays less than us, this was raised frequently at PCC meetings by the same person and, 'with the subsequent drop in income from this and Covid-19 and your policy to pay the parish share no matter what, you will financially bankrupt the Church in the next three years'.

c) a church where the bulk of the congregation had little or no interest in either deanery or diocesan matters.

If this knowledge was available to the Diocese, as it must have been, I must ask why it was not shared with me. If it was not known then I must ask 'Why not'?

Any suggestion of mistrust, division, hurt and widespread misunderstanding and confusion has I believe arisen because of the letter of complaint and the diocesan response to the letter which has caused existing divisions in the parish to widen and further damage the public face of the Church.

The stark reality of Church of England life in the UK is that we are haemorrhaging both lay people and children. Indeed, Anglican congregations in the UK declined by over 50% between 1980 and 2015 to just 66,000 and most congregations are now made up of elders whose own children and grandchildren do not attend church. It would be my assertion that the Church in the UK is itself experiencing a major institutional breakdown and we can't afford to let the kind of nightmare I've described continue to be such a relatively common story.



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? Write it up – in not more than about 800 words ideally - or contact the Editor:

**The Revd Mark Rudall: markrudall@gmail.com or by post, 108 Prospect Road, Farnborough, Hants, GU14 8NS
Tel: 01252 645486**



Notes from the secretary It has been suggested to me that we should publish the names of those who have joined the Association since the last newsletter (do let me know if you feel this is a waste of space):

Nicholas Read, Edmund Betts, Mandy Brown, Richard Howlett, John Lewis, Carollyn McDonald, Frank Scammell, Graham Osborne, Graham Green, Edith Disley, Steve Davies, Paul Hardingham, Gillian Page, Robert Smith, Elizabeth Binns, Jonathan Coleman, Morley Morgan, Keith Justice, Alastair Low, Stewart Taylor, Gary Hiscock, Adrian Holdstock, Timothy Wood, David Foss, Frances Guite, Michael Beckett, Brian Prothero, David Felix, Mark Slater, Jane Rawling, Alison Bowman, Moira Wickens, William Marston, Keith Perkinson, Pamela Wise, Nicholas Fennemore, Paul Wright, Fiorenza Gibbs, Gordon Jeanes, Irene Warrington, Stuart Nairn, Stephen Mourant, Frank Gimson.

National Council meets again in early March by Zoom, and I would be glad to have matters of concern notified to me from the membership for the agenda so that we can be in touch with the pulse of our members. As usual the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and I will be meeting with representatives of the Pension Board and Ministry Division prior to this meeting. Emails by the end of February to malcolm.liles48@gmail.com

Those of you who live in **CHARM** properties may be interested to know of the formation of a fellowship of residents called **CHARMERS** a formative meeting took place in December and [there](#) is a private forum of members on the sheldonhub.org (visit [Welcome to the Hub](#), then click **View all forum threads, register or login**, scroll down to **private forums** and click the link for **CHARM residents group**.) **You will need to request membership since this is a closed board for residents only, say you are living in a CHARM property when you make this request.**

Malcolm Liles, Secretary/Treasurer RCACoE 473 City Road Sheffield S2 1GF 07702203273/01144537964

