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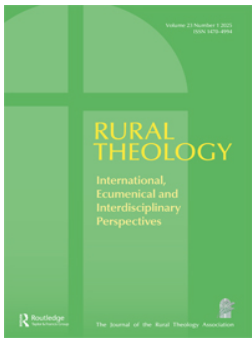
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How are Retiring and Retired Clergy Supported? Mapping the Provision that the Church of England Offers to Ministers Facing Retirement and in Retirement

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ABSTRACT

The present study scopes the current provision made by the Church of England to prepare and support clergy approaching retirement and in retirement. Engaging with the literature on clergy and ministry, it addresses the following questions: What can be learnt from the support that the Church of England provides to retiring and retired clergy? Are there examples of good practice? It ascertains if differences between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy are considered. It reports on the review of the 42 websites of Anglican Dioceses across England and the Isle of Man employing documentary and thematic analysis. The websites draw attention to provision for retiring and retired clergy. Diocesan initiatives provide examples of good practice, not necessarily making a distinction between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy, but addressing individual needs with the help of Designated Responsible Persons (DRPs) and officers like retired clergy officers (RCOs).

KEYWORDS

Retirement; clergy; ministry; PTO; flourishing; wellbeing

Introduction

In 2018, the Church of England estimated that there were around 12,000 retired clergy (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019). This figure comprised two groups: ministers that received a pension from The Church of England Pensions Board and self-supporting ministers over the age of 70 that held permission to officiate (PTO) and were not in receipt of a clergy pension (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019). The following section provides an analysis of key sources on retirement in turn.

Profiling retired clergy and their ministry

Considering the distribution of retired clergy across the dioceses of the Church of England, Hubbard and Grundy (2019) make two points. The first point shows that in 32 dioceses, there are more retired ministers than the full-time equivalent. The second point highlights

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that in 22 dioceses, pensioners exceed the headcount of all licensed clergy including both stipendiary and self-supporting. Over time, this pattern is likely to increase across dioceses. For instance, in 2017 the Diocese of Leeds anticipated the retirement of 40% of its stipendiary clergy over the next decade (Hurren, 2018). In 2024, retired clergy represent the largest group among the ordained ministry across the Church of England; in nearly every diocese they outnumber licensed clergy (Hubbard, 2024).

In the context of ministry after retirement, around 60% of clergy pensioners hold PTO; this percentage decreases as age advances especially among those over 75 (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019). In 2020, the ministry statistics reported a figure of 7,210 clergy with PTO, which shows an increase of 12.8% from 2012 (Hubbard, 2024). Most ministers with PTO are retired (Hubbard, 2024). According to the Rt Revd Colin Fletcher, chairman of the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England, retired 'clergy and their families continue to contribute to the life of the church, and in some contexts are an indispensable part of its ministry' (Hubbard, 2024, p. 1). Anecdotal evidence suggests that retired ministers are key in the maintenance of worship and pastoral care (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019). For example, a study in the Diocese of Truro about the contribution of retired ministers to supporting ministry in rural contexts reports anecdotally that some multi-church rural benefices are maintained by a crucial ministry provided by retired clergy (Francis, Rolph, Rolph, & Windsor, 2013). In the case of pastoral care, retired clergy can offer skills in working with older people as in the instance of Anna Chaplaincy (Thrower, 2024): this community-based charity provides spiritual and emotional care to older people. Retired clergy can act as interim ministers in vacant parishes (Neal & Francis, 2020a). They may also be better placed to offer mentoring to those serving their first incumbency as highlighted by a case study in the Diocese of Truro (Neal, 2015; Neal, Francis, & McKenna, 2017) and showcased in 'Mission, spiritual direction, and research' (Holmes, 2020). In their book, *A new lease of life? Anglican clergy reflect on retirement*, Neal and Francis (2020b) draw together narratives from 14 retired clergy, who reflect on their personal experiences of retirement. McKenna, Neal, and Francis (2022) make two considerations about this book. Firstly, it was published to encourage research in the experiences and expectations of retired clergy. Secondly, they draw attention to the question mark in the title because it pinpoints competing experiences of retirement. More specifically, for some ministers it indicates a new lease of life, but for others it connotes a challenging experience of retirement.

Challenges for retired clergy

In the closing chapter of *A new lease of life?*, Bishop David Walker (2020) reflects on narratives of individual retired clergy, drawing out themes from which the Church of England could learn. For example, he identified reoccurring problems, which had made retirement difficult for some ministers. They include: overcoming the initial stage of retiring and dealing with loss of motivation, purpose and recognition, loss of social life, feeling excluded from their previous parish and people with whom they had established pastoral relationships, facing financial and housing constraints like downsizing to smaller properties, and fluctuating between feeling helpful and useless.

Because ministers in the Church of England are disproportionately introverts (Francis, Littler, & Robbins, 2010; Littler, Francis, & Robbins, 2014; Village, 2013), these challenges

may have an impact on the wellbeing of retired clergy. For example, Walker (2020) considers the loss of a social life to be a significant issue in retirement. This happens at a time when the Archbishops' Council (2021a) expects clergy to move an appropriate distance from their last parish when they retire to enable the new incumbent to establish their own ministry without feeling inhibited. This guideline may also indirectly entail distance from a network of parishioners.

Acknowledging introvert clergy, Walker (2020) makes three points that could hinder a social life amongst retired clergy and contribute to isolation. The first point suggests that many retired ministers may choose to engage with existing relationships over the making of new ones because in parochial ministry social lives are often linked with parishes and deaneries. The second point indicates that making new contacts may be difficult in a parish where someone retires, especially if it takes time before the local bishop considers giving PTO. The third point highlights that some retiring clergy may struggle long and hard before finding a place and a congregation where they belong in the Church. These problems may lead to feelings of isolation, which can have an impact on the mental wellbeing of clergy. For example, in the report 'Holding things together: Church of England clergy in changing times', Tweedie and Graveling (2024) suggest that PTOs may struggle with their mental wellbeing. More specifically, the report shows that respectively 11% of them may be affected by probable clinical depression and 11% by possible clinical depression. These percentages were elaborated using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS; Tennant et al., 2007), where a low score can indicate depression. In the previous study "Assessing the personal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on retired clergy: Listening to their experiences", McKenna et al. (2022) reported that most answers related to mental wellbeing were positive except from cases of pre-existing diagnoses of anxiety or depression or to anxieties generated by the pandemic. In the specific case of introvert clergy, they have been found to experience higher level of stress in relation to the burden of isolation (Muskett & Village, 2016). Rural clergy are significantly more introverted than clergy serving in non-rural areas (Francis, Smith, & Robbins, 2004). The fact that retired clergy tend to live in rural contexts (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019) may contribute to isolation, which has an impact on their mental wellbeing.

Supporting retired clergy: the role of retired clergy officers

In view of the challenges for the wellbeing of its clergy, the Church of England shows commitment to work with retired clergy and their significant others (Hubbard, 2024). For example, most dioceses rely on retired clergy officers that provide care and support to retired ministers. Hubbard (2024) defines a retired clergy officer (RCO) as a person that has a lead responsibility in a diocese for the support and care of retired clergy. He then makes three main points, which are relevant to assessing the role of RCOs. The first point shows that in general, RCOs have a more informal and casual set of working arrangements than other diocesan appointees. This may depend on the fact that they are mostly voluntary and retired and should not face extensive demands. This brings some challenges, which are explained in his second point: most RCOs work in a silo. This means that they liaise with their diocesan colleagues, but relationships with other dioceses and groups or organisations interested in the care of retired clergy are

undeveloped or inexistent. They pursue a model of keeping in touch with retired clergy, which is outdated. This is reflected in their working conditions, where their job descriptions may need clarifications and improvement especially when it comes to accountability, resources and budgets. They lack the authority and responsibility, which are normally associated with the role of a diocesan officer. The third point focuses on their job specifications and their reported practice: most RCOs are tangential to diocesan structures and their work is unrelated to diocesan strategies or any wider aims. This may hinder support for retired clergy.

Supporting retired clergy: the role of bishops and designated responsible persons

The guidelines about ministry in retirement are addressed using a life-long approach. For example, in the introduction of 'Ministry after retiring from office' (Archbishops' Council, 2021a), the Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee of the Archbishops' Council conceptualises ordination to priesthood as a life-long vocation. This shows that ministers remain ordained as a priest after retiring from office, and they have a vocation to ministry even if it takes a different form in retirement. Furthermore, this document describes retired ministers as 'a reservoir of theological, spiritual, pastoral and other experience' (2021a, p. 3) and sees their ministry as beneficial to the mission of the Church.

Drawing from this theological framework, the Archbishops' Council (2021a) advises that the ministry, which clergy exercise after retirement from office, depends on the needs of the Church in a particular place and the talents and capacity of retired clergy while having permission to officiate (PTO). It also suggests that bishops are responsible for ensuring oversight of clergy with PTO (Archbishops' Council, 2021b). This may be achieved by appointing a designated responsible person (DRP) who has the responsibility for the ministry of each cleric with PTO (Archbishops' Council, 2021b). A DRP can be an incumbent/priest, an area or rural dean, a member of the bishop's staff team or someone appointed by the bishop (Archbishops' Council, 2021b). They carry out the following supervisory and supporting duties (Archbishops' Council, 2021b): they meet ministers with PTO and agree, discuss, and review regularly the work and expectations of the ministry that they undertake; they ensure that a written record of the ministry provided by clergy with PTO is sent to the bishop, which may comprise changes in expectations; subject to the relevant safeguarding checks, they can recommend to their bishop if a PTO can be renewed and inform them of any issues or health problems especially when ministers with PTO require additional pastoral support, or it may be necessary to consider withdrawing PTO. In the case of pastoral support, which may be required during grievances, bishops will consider making it available independently and confidentially for people involved in the grievances process; this may include retired clergy (Archbishops' Council, n.d.).

Bishops should keep up to date the records of who the DRP is and make sure that someone will carry out their role during a vacancy in the parish when the minister with PTO may provide more assistance; this role should be possibly covered by the area dean (Archbishops' Council, 2021b). More broadly, deaneries and stipendiary ministers are encouraged to be inclusive and imaginative about the skills that retired clergy can

offer in their ministry; this means to move away from the assumption that retired clergy are only available to provide cover and take occasional offices (Archbishops' Council, 2021b).

Supporting retiring and retired clergy: flourishing in ministry

The Archbishops' Council (2021a) shapes retirement according to a theology of priesthood marked by PTO, the notions of Church locality, skills and interests. This comes with challenges that may be reflected in the role of ministry in retirement. In the guide 'Preparing for your retirement' (Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England, n.d.) Bishop Peyton suggests that retired clergy can struggle to find a retirement role that satisfies how much ministry they may undertake. For example, some ministers may decide that they do not want to take services as they used to. This suggests that their ministerial role in retirement may be at risk of a sacramental disconnect between 'filling in as a retired priest and actually having a particular cure for souls' (n.d., p. 3). In terms of ministry in retirement, and more specifically PTO, the Archbishops' Council advises that:

Most clergy, on retirement, will exercise ministry on permission to officiate, but ministry on PTO should not be seen as limited to providing cover and taking weddings and funerals. It may be an opportunity to refresh someone's ministry, try something new, and develop new skills. (Archbishops' Council, 2021c, p. 5)

Promoting flourishing in ministry (Diocese of Oxford, 2018; Graveling, 2018) as an approach to continuing ministerial development, is reflected in the role of RCOs where around 25% of their job descriptions include learning; in some cases, this entails the provision of a programme of learning, which is extended to those preparing for retirement (Hubbard, 2024). More broadly, Graveling (2018) suggests that flourishing in ordained ministry entails two components: the flourishing of the person (i.e. well-being) and the flourishing of the ministry (i.e. ministerial outcomes). According to Graveling (2018), these two aspects are inextricably intertwined.

Although dioceses encourage ministerial education, some bishops are concerned that retired clergy may lose touch with the developing shape of ministry within a fast-changing church (Neal & Francis, 2020a). On the other hand, if dioceses rely heavily on retired clergy, they may miss on the long-term strategic issue of planning for sustainable ministry (Neal & Francis, 2020a). This point shows the need for dioceses to implement an effective deployment of retired ministers in the context of an ongoing audit of ministry needs and resources, which comprises an integrated vision for retired clergy alongside stipendiary, self-supporting clergy, and lay ministry (Neal & Francis, 2020a). It may be difficult to embed this approach because the body of knowledge on religion and aging shows a lack of significant qualitative research, which enables the voices of retired clergy in the Church of England to be heard (Francis, 2020). From a quantitative research perspective, the views of retired clergy were valued in the study 'Enabling Choice' (The Church of England Pensions Board, 2023b, 2024). In this study, retired ministers represented 8% of a larger cohort that offered feedback on ideas for how the Church of England might rethink its model of support with retirement housing in the future (The Church of England Pensions Board, 2024). Aiming to enable choice and empowering clergy to plan retirement housing much earlier in their ministry, this study explored

four principles: sparking planning and encouraging saving, enabling home ownership during ministry, opening doors to different retirement housing options, and offer quality Church retirement homes (The Church of England Pensions Board, 2024).

In the context of ministry, Hubbard and Grundy (2019) suggest that research is needed to develop a clear picture of retired self-supporting clergy and their place in the ministry of the Church of England and, more broadly, on continuing ministry in retirement.

In pre-retirement, Walker (2020) highlights that little support is provided to ministers in the years before retirement. For example, pre-retirement courses do not unlock the potential of retirees (Walker, 2020). This may be related to a lack of insight into the factors that currently influence the timing of retirement and the expectations and aspirations, which clergy have when they approach this stage of their lives (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019). In this context, pre-retirement courses do not fully explore their participants' strengths for opportunities beyond retirement (Walker, 2020). Walker (2020) suggests studies to gather data on retirees' skills and experiences, which can be matched with future Church's needs. This kind of research would indicate if clergy needed additional support in preparation for ministry after retirement with tailor-made training programmes. It also would facilitate a smoother transition into retirement and create additional resources for the Church.

On an ecclesiological level, Walker (2020) advises on research that focuses on the theology of priesthood because it may change according to individual faith journeys especially in retirement. The conclusions of the report 'Retired clergy in the Church of England now' complement his point of view: it suggests studies that focus on good vocational decisions and how priesthood and ministry continue in retirement (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019). The research findings would be beneficial for those who have the authority to provide retired clergy with space and opportunity to minister (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019; Walker, 2020). This shows some of the difficulties that clergy face in retirement.

Research question

Against this background, the present paper aims to scope the current provision, which is made by the Church of England to prepare and support clergy approaching retirement and in retirement. More specifically, what can be learnt from the support that the Church of England provides to retiring and retired clergy? Are there examples of good practice? The literature on Anglican clergy makes a distinction between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy; these two groups may face different challenges (Neal & Francis, 2020b). Therefore, this paper ascertains how these differences are taken into account. Drawing on a method employed by the science of cathedral studies (Francis, 2015), the enquiry is based on a review of diocesan websites across the Church of England.

Method

The present study is informed by documentary analysis, which is a flexible method that can be employed with or without theory and using a wide range of analysis approaches

(Grant, 2022). It draws from the analysis of the content of the Church of England cathedral websites (McKenna, Francis, & Stewart, 2023). This kind of analysis represents a small but growing field of research (ap Siôn & Edwards, 2012; Bondi & Sezzi, 2021; Curtis, 2016). This study applies it to the context of the dioceses of the Church of England employing thematic analysis (Grant, 2022).

In this study, data were collected between 12 and 14 August 2024 from the websites of the 42 Anglican dioceses across the Church of England and the Isle of Man. In the websites, information on retirement were normally located under ‘support for ministers/clergy’, ‘wellbeing in ministry’, ‘ministry in retirement’, ‘permission to officiate’, ‘clergy retirement’, ‘retirement’, and ‘retiring’. When website-searches signposted to relevant documents, they were included in the data collection.

The analysis focused on the examination of the current provision, which is made by the Church of England to prepare and support clergy approaching retirement and in retirement. Information on preretirement and retirement were located and saved into a separate Word document employing the facility of cut and paste. This datafile was subjected to thematic analysis consisting of reading, re-reading, and grouping the data in categories and themes. Data were categorised within two main groups respectively preretirement and retirement. The former comprised the themes of practical and personal aspects of retirement. The latter entailed the themes of ministry and wellbeing in retirement.

In the case of retired ministers, the analysis employed the definition of retired ministers, which was provided by the website of the Diocese of Southwark. In its handbook for retired clergy (Diocese of Southwark, 2022) this group includes those priests that have retired from full time stipendiary ministry and receive a clergy pension and self-supporting ministers, who no longer hold a licence. Following this definition, some retired ministers are in posts, which require a licence as in the case of House-for-Duty posts. Some receive Permission to Officiate (PTO) when they retire, some others may no longer hold PTO.

Results

Pre-retirement: practical aspects of retirement

Practical aspects of retirement entail planning retirement from a financial and housing perspectives, and the diocesan process for retirement. The financial and housing components are informed by The Church of England Pensions Board. In the document ‘Planning for retirement’ (The Church of England Pensions Board, 2023a), the Pension Boards employ as a framework a set of sequential questions, which help prospective retirees to plan respectively pension and finances, housing, ministry and retirement, inheritance, and receive advice from the Ecclesiastical Financial Advice Services Ltd (EFAS). This document does not make a specific distinction between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy. Its framework is person-centred. For example, the point on housing provides the option of community living for those ministers that would like to live independently within a Christian community. The section ministry and retirement explores the notion of continuing ministry beyond retirement. Within this context, the websites generally advise that ministers should take a break of six months before making themselves

available for ministry in retirement after securing permission to officiate (PTO). For example, the Diocese of Hereford (2024) designed the document ‘Frequently asked questions-Retired clergy without permission to officiate (PTO)’ to help clergy in their discernment around whether to continue their public ministry and what activities PTO would enable them to undertake in the diocese. This document makes a distinction between the priestly identity that an ordained minister continues to inhabit after retirement and a licence to minister, which is granted by PTO.

On the other hand, the document ‘Permission to Officiate. A step-by-step guide’ (Bishop of Winchester, 2019) provides details on the PTO process. For example, it advises that a Designated Responsible Person (DRP) will be responsible for the ministry of retired clergy. A retired minister should meet with a DRP to discuss the ministry that they will be offering and review it with a DRP at least once a year. It also provides information on safeguarding training, which needs to be reported on the PTO application form. More specifically, this form asks to give details of the safeguarding training that has been recently completed. If the required modules have not been completed within the last three years, the retired minister will have to undertake them before PTO is granted. The safeguarding training modules webpage of the Diocese of Peterborough provides a grid, which sets out the expectations for various roles in the diocese with the respective safeguarding modules that need completion. Ministers with PTO are required to complete the following courses: basic awareness, foundation, domestic abuse, and a tailored leadership course for PTOs. The Diocese of Carlisle defines this specific course as a condensed version of the leadership pathway, which has been adapted for those who minister less frequently. Anyone holding or applying for a PTO licence needs to take this module unless they have completed either this course or a leadership module within the past three years.

Dioceses may also refer retiring clergy to regional online events with subject experts from The Church of England Pensions Board, clergy pension and housing teams, and independent advisers from the Ecclesiastical Financial Advisory Services as in the case of the Diocese of St Albans. Its advertisement of the Zoom seminar for retiring clergy within the Eastern Region did not mention stipendiary or self-supporting clergy. On the other hand, the Diocese of London runs regular residentials called ‘Preparing for retirement’, which target stipendiary clergy over the age of 58. They give ministers and their partners an opportunity to reflect on retirement and to understand and explore some of its practical implications.

The diocesan process for retirement is a pathway, which is triggered when a minister plans to retire. In the case of the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham, this process is interlinked with the component of housing. The retiree is invited to write to the Bishop and Archdeacon in advance of retirement to signal intention to retire and provide a provisional retirement date. This process can be activated up to twelve months before retirement according to the degree of certainty about a retirement property.

For housing purposes, the Dioceses of Oxford and Worcester categorise retiring clergy into five groups respectively those who: have a property and wish to retire in it, have enough money to buy their property, have some capital and want to make use of The Church of England Pensions Boards’ new shared ownership scheme, have limited capital and would like to rent a property from the Pensions Board, want to relocate

into supported housing. Signposting to the webpages on retirement housing of the Pensions Board, these two dioceses advise that the Pensions Board can provide affordable retirement housing for clergy through the Church's Housing Assistance for the Retired Ministry (CHARM) schemes if they meet their eligibility criteria. More specifically, they summarise three types of housing schemes: shared ownership properties, rental properties, and supported housing. The shared ownership scheme applies to those ministers that cannot afford to purchase on the open market, but have enough savings to buy a 25% share of a property. In these cases, the Pension Boards buy the remaining percentage, up to £150,000. Rental properties can be available for clergy who do not have enough savings to purchase a property through shared ownership. They can rent a modest, unfurnished home under a tenancy agreement. In England, there are seven schemes that enable supported housing where clergy can live semi-independently.

The Diocese of Peterborough encouraged its clergy and retired ministers to engage and share their views on 'Enabling choice. New choices to support clergy with retirement housing. A discussion document.' (The Church of England Pensions Board, 2023b) and provide their feedback by 31 January 2024.

Pre-retirement: personal aspects of retirement

Personal aspects comprise transition to a new stage of life, finances, and aspects of well-being like self-care, health and spiritual needs. Websites briefly describe these points, but they generally signpost to a website or a course. They also encourage liaison with diocesan officers like a retired clergy officer as in the case of the Diocese of Guildford. The Diocese of Ely signposts retiring and retired clergy to the website of the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England (2020) to find specific information on retired clergy charities like the Clergy Support Trust. In its financial support webpage, the Diocese of Bath and Wells states that serving and retired clergy can seek support in time of need from the Clergy Support Trust.

In terms of courses, the Dioceses of Peterborough and Chelmsford promote a pre-retirement course in the form of a conference, which follows a liturgical framework. Its programme is designed to address personal and spiritual issues around the question: 'What do I hope for in retirement?' It is facilitated by specialists like a psychotherapist, a retired priest, and the Diocesan Clergy Retirement Officer. This conference targets retiring clergy in a broad way. It does not make a specific distinction between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy.

In the leaflet 'Information for retiring clergy' (Diocese of Truro, 2024), the Ministry Team at the Diocese of Truro advertises the reflective practice group 'Preparing to Retire Well and Beyond', which targets ministers that are approaching retirement within the next two years and those who have retired within the last two years. Focusing on the questions of the meaning of priesthood and spirituality, this group addresses issues of identity, emotional and spiritual wellbeing in retirement. This perspective on retirement follows the guidelines provided by the Remuneration and Conditions of Service Committee in the document 'Supporting clergy to prepare for retirement: guidance for bishops and archdeacons' (Archbishops' Council, 2021b). Describing the reflective practice group, The Revd John Eatock, Dean for Retired Clergy, suggests

that a lot of ministers in retirement experience a grieving process because their entire identity has been tied up with being a priest. When they retire, it can be challenging for them because they are no longer a significant public figure. However, they are still priests forever. The dichotomy between the secular notion of retirement and the theological concept of priesthood forever underpins group discussions, which address the meaning of being a priest in retirement.

Preparing to Retire Well and Beyond, the diocesan spirituality network (i.e. spiritual direction), pastoral care and counselling services are components of a holistic diocesan approach to wellbeing and flourishing, which aims to support clergy throughout their ministry and during their retirement. This lifelong approach acknowledges challenges, which are specific to working ministers and retired clergy that continue to exercise an active ministry. Preparing to Retire Well and Beyond does not make a distinction between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy, but individual spiritual and emotional needs are addressed in the context of reflective practice.

Retirement: ministry after retirement

Across dioceses, retirement is conceptualised within the context of flourishing in ministry. This framework helps to portray retirement in a positive way. For example, the website of the Diocese of Coventry adopts the guide ‘Preparing for your retirement’ where the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England ([n.d.](#)) collects different experiences of life in retirement. In this document, Nigel Peyton, sometime Bishop of Brechin (Scotland), suggests that in ministry terms, clergy do not retire, rather they reinvent themselves.

Following the pattern of portraying retirement in a positive way, the Diocese of Sheffield employs the framework of a course designed by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (2022) to challenge the implicit understating of retirement as the beginning of a downward slope. It defines it as a time of repurposing, or a season within which ministers can flourish. Based on the assumption that retirement will look different for different people, it does not make a specific distinction between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy. This course is based on three theological assumptions that support ministry after retirement:

First, ministers may retire from paid employment, but they do not retire from following and working with Jesus. Following this assumption, God has always good plans for people at any stage of their life. In the case of ministers, God may work through them in their later years. For example, in the Bible, some significant characters are introduced later in life as in the case of Elizabeth and Zechariah.

Second, people are all different, but whatever their situations, God has good plans and purpose for people. This assumption provides the background to suggest that retirement is different for everyone, and it will be influenced by a whole range of factors like physical and mental health, family arrangements, housing, interests and past careers. However, God has a purpose for retired clergy.

Third, the whole of life matters. This assumption draws from the notion of whole-life discipleship, which is based in the Scriptures. If God made it all (Colossians 1:16), and Christ died to ‘reconcile to himself all things’ through the cross (Colossians 1:20), then everything people do is significant to God. This includes life in retirement.

Retirement: wellbeing in retirement

The wellbeing of clergy in retirement is informed by forms of support based on introspection, which help ministers to flourish as persons and in their ministry. In the case of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (2022), support is designed in the form of sessions, where groups reflect and share experiences based on specific topics related to retirement.

Every session introduces the topic with a question, which starts a group discussion. This is followed by a case study with group reflections. Each session ends with a liturgical moment of Bible reflection and prayer. Participants are provided with take-away activities. For example, session two tackles the issue of identity in retirement inviting participants to reflect on the question: 'In retirement, who am I?' It helps ministers to recognise that they may face questions of identity in retirement and that they need to be sure of their identity in Christ to negotiate this stage of their life. Session five addresses growth in retirement. This topic is introduced by the question: 'In my retirement, how can I keep growing?' It dismantles the idea of retirement as a time of decline and helps to recognise that it is a season when growth can happen.

In the case of the Diocese of Leicester, growth fits with its long-term vision 'Shaped by God' (Diocese of Leicester, n.d.), which is described in the welcome document for ministers that retired in the diocese. Shaped by God is a strategy that wants to see every church growing in the depth of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. It is a framework where all mission and ministry exist in the Diocese of Leicester. Drawing from the parable of the Mustard Tree, retired ministers are supported in their growth using the idea that God has placed them in a specific diocesan context. They can grow thanks to the training and development opportunities offered by this diocese. This document acknowledges that retirement will look different from person to person and context to context, but it does not categorise clergy into stipendiary and self-supporting.

The example of the Diocese of Leicester reflects a broader pattern of inclusivity across the dioceses, which is normally associated with the work of officers. For example, the Clergy Retirement Officers in the Diocese of Blackburn enable networks of friendship, support and encouragement that affirm the value of all retired ministers. This helps to tackle isolation. Inclusivity is extended to partners of retired clergy: this is reflected in the names and roles of officers across the dioceses in the Church of England. For example, in Manchester, these officers are defined as 'Bishop's Officers for retired clergy and clergy widows/widowers'. In the Diocese of Worcester, the Deans for Retired Clergy support retired clergy and bereaved clergy partners.

Discussion

The aim of the present paper was to map the provision that the Church of England offers to retiring and retired clergy and to address three main points: what can be learnt from the provision provided; examples of good practice; and whether the provision makes a distinction between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy.

To assess these three points, the following discussion will engage with three points identified in the introduction: support provided prior to retirement; ministry in retirement; and challenges in retirement, most specifically the component of wellbeing.

In dioceses, the availability of support prior to retirement represents good practice. For example, retirees can be referred to events, which offer help with pension, finances, housing, and with personal and spiritual aspects. More specifically, the Dioceses of Peterborough and Chelmsford organise a conference, which is designed to address personal and spiritual issues around the question: ‘What do I hope for in retirement?’ This kind of person-centred intervention could be expanded and employed as an opportunity to gather insights into the expectations and aspirations of clergy facing retirement (Hubbard & Grundy, 2019). It could explore the theology of priesthood in retirement (Walker, 2020). It also represents a springboard for pre-retirement courses that can explore retirees’ strengths for opportunities beyond retirement, which can be matched with future Church of England’s needs (Walker, 2020).

Priesthood in retirement is contextualised using the concept of flourishing in ministry. This framework helps to portray retirement in a positive fashion as in the example of the course designed by The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (2022). In this programme, the vocation of ministry in retirement is anchored to the notion of whole-life discipleship and is rooted in the Scriptures. This view on ministry fits with the positive notions of clergy as a reservoir of experiences, and of retirement as a time of reinvention as suggested respectively by the documents ‘Ministry after retiring from Office’ (Archbishops’ Council, 2021a) and ‘Preparing for your retirement’ (Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England, n.d.).

In terms of the ministry in retirement, the Diocese of Leicester (n.d.) shows in its strategy ‘Shaped by God’ that retired clergy are included in its long-term vision of growth, which is anchored in discipleship. In the case of retired ministers, inclusivity is implemented by the work of DRPs and RCOs. Following Hubbard’s (2024) assessment of RCOs, their practice is unrelated to diocesan strategies and any wider aims. Whilst inclusivity lays the foundations to apply Neal and Francis’ (2020a) suggestion of an integrated vision for the deployment of retired ministers, the fact that the work of RCOs is not embedded in strategies may lead to a disjuncture in diocesan policies, which aim to support retired clergy.

Flourishing in ministry entails the component of wellbeing. In pre-retirement and retirement, wellbeing is informed by reflective practice as in the cases of ‘Preparing to retire well and beyond’ and events that use the course of The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity. Dealing with the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of clergy, these two initiatives may be useful to tackle problems like loss of motivation, purpose and recognition, and isolation (Walker, 2020), which fit within the context of studies of clergy personality type and their mental health.

These initiatives represent examples of good practice. Clergy are not clearly categorised into stipendiary and self-supporting except for the case of the Diocese of London where regular pre-retirement residentials target stipendiary clergy over the age of 58 and their partners. However, individual needs are addressed across initiatives and with the help of DRPs and specific officers RCOs.

Conclusion

The websites of dioceses across the Church of England offer provision for retiring and retired clergy. These initiatives include examples of good practice, which do not

necessarily make a distinction between stipendiary and self-supporting clergy, but they address individual needs with the help of DRPs and officers like RCOs.

Programmes that support the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of retiring clergy like ‘Preparing to retire well and beyond’ and the course of LICC could be used as examples of good practice to mainstream spiritual and emotional support for retiring and retired clergy across the dioceses of the Church of England. These interventions could be upscaled targeting specific groups of retiring and retired clergy like stipendiary and self-supporting clergy. The upscaling and mainstreaming of these initiatives would benefit from the involvement of Anglican Cathedrals because they capture the notion of episcopal identity. In this episcopal model, ministers would retire and flourish in an ecclesiastical environment where they could work and worship with fellow clergy. Routine evaluations of these interventions would inform better practice.

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