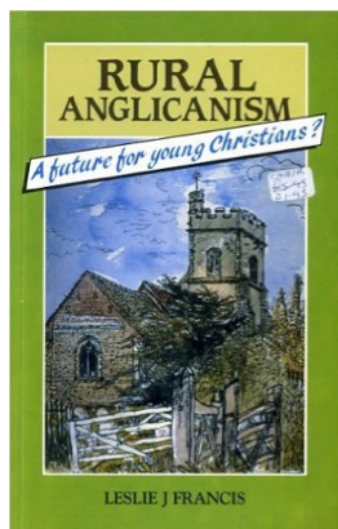




Rural and Retired Clergy: Research and support

At the October 2016 annual residential symposium, the new research initiative was launched into listening to the experiences of retired clergy who are currently offering so much to keep the rural church alive and well. The research is intended to identify how retired clergy in rural areas may be better supported.

The Rural Church has been at the heart of Leslie J. Francis' research agenda since his foundational study, *Rural Anglicanism: A future for your Christians?*, published in 1985.



Dwindling resources and declining membership are placing increasing strains on resourcing ministry within rural dioceses in the Church of England and the Church in Wales. The general strategy is to re-group rural churches under the leadership of fewer full-time paid clergy and locally authorised lay leadership. Within this context retired clergy are becoming increasingly important in maintaining eucharistic and professional pastoral ministry.

Against this background the St Mary's Centre has initiated research into the current experiences of retired clergy living and serving in rural areas. Phase One of this research is based on qualitative methodology listening to the stories of retired priests.

Phase One of the project has been designed to lead to Phase Two, a quantitative study shaped by the insights drawn from the qualitative study. The quantitative study will be run throughout a number of rural dioceses within the Church of England to test to the extent to which insight developed from the qualitative study can be safely generalised. The outcomes from the survey will then be used:

- To draw attention to the gifts that retired clergy are bringing to the rural church.

- To help rural dioceses draw on the skills of retired clergy in a more systematic and productive way.
- To draw attention to the needs of retired clergy living in rural areas for professional development and personal support.
- To help rural dioceses support the professional work-related health of retired clergy and promote their personal wellbeing.

Currently the Saint Mary's Centre is seeking sponsorship for Phase Two of this research. See below for a fuller account of Phase one.

Research in progress

Reflecting on Retirement: Content and discontent among Anglican clergy

Edited by Tony Neal and Leslie J. Francis

Overview

Current church statistics show that the Church of England now supports more retired clergy than clergy engaged in active stipendiary ministry. Evidence suggests that it is some retired clergy who may be keeping ministry afloat (especially in some rural dioceses), while some other retired clergy may feel their experience and expertise is no longer valued by a changing Church. In this stimulating (and at times disturbing) book the editors have drawn together the voices of fourteen retired clergy from across the breadth of the Church of England.

The Editors

The Revd Canon Tony Neal was ordained deacon in 1968 in the Diocese of Ripon. After his curacy in 1972 he trained as a teacher and worked at the Church of England High School in Leeds for eight years. In 1981 he moved to the Diocese of Truro, where he joined the Education Team alongside parish ministry. Tony retired in 2006 from being Team Rector of Godrevy and Chair of the House of Clergy. In retirement Tony completed a research degree, while also serving as part-time hospital chaplain. Then he re-entered part-time parochial ministry as Associate Priest and Mentor to a priest serving his first incumbency.

The Revd Canon Professor Leslie J. Francis was ordained deacon in 1973 in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. Then in 1977 he took up an academic post in London and was licensed as non-stipendiary priest in charge of two villages in Suffolk living in the Rectory. Currently Leslie works as Professor of Religions and Education at the University

of Warwick, serves as a self-supporting priest in the Diocese of Bangor and is Honorary Canon in Manchester Cathedral. He is author and editor of over thirty books, the most recent of which is *Anglican Cathedrals in Modern Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

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Note: Another four chapters are still under negotiation.

Chapter 1: What is retirement?

Interviewee 1

Interviewee 1 was ordained in 1976, the year in which the Church of England passed a measure requiring all priests to retire at the age of seventy. Now retired he reflects on the changing face of the Church of England and what it means to be a retired priest in today's world and in today's Church. A priest retires from a specific function or specific post, but not from priesthood itself.

This chapter has the following sections:

- A changing church
- Does a priest really retire?
- What does a priest relinquish?
- What does a priest experience?
- What is ministry like after retirement?

Chapter 2: Retirement or bereavement?

Interviewee 2

Interviewee 2 had worked as a primary school teacher and for three years in self-supporting ministry before serving as a stipendiary parish priest. She made history as the first woman priest to serve in the parish in which her father had served before her. For her retirement was a four-fold bereavement. She had lost the job: for which she had been called and trained; her daily contact with all the people with whom she had been working, and loving; her home; and much of her past as she emptied the rectory to live in a much smaller house.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Incumbency
- Retirement?
- The first few months
- Interim duty
- Relaxing into retirement

Chapter 3: Vocation versus retirement

Interviewee 3

Interviewee 3 had been ordained into self-supporting ministry. She remained living in her own home and commuted eleven miles to the parish in which she served for nine years, first as curate and then as associate priest. Then after retirement she struggled to re-enter her own parish church in which her vocation had been formed. The best that could be offered was going back on the coffee rota, and she wept. Then in retirement she developed her home to attend to a vocation of monastic hospitality.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Experiencing bereavement
- New beginnings
- Precarious new identities
- Beyond retirement

Chapter 4: Hospital chaplaincy and mentoring

Interviewee 4

Interviewee 4 spent much of his active ministry in the Diocese of Truro. Immediately before retirement he had established a Team Ministry and served as Chair of the House of Clergy. He tells an honest tale of finding a small house for retirement, engaging in some serious academic study, and serving as part-time hospital chaplain, before responding to the call to re-engage with part-time parochial ministry, serving as Associate priest in a cluster of eight rural churches, and as mentor to the Rector serving his first incumbency.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Finding a home for retirement
- Beginning retirement
- Exploring hospital chaplaincy
- Becoming a mentor
- Facing illness

Chapter 5: Mission Partners and the Retired Clergy Association

Interviewee 5

In 1985 interviewee 5 retired from school teaching on health grounds, having been ordained in 1979 as a self-supporting minister. In 1988 he accepted the stipendiary post as priest-in-charge of two small villages. At that point he made his first mistake. He sold his house. He now lives in a house provided by the Pensions Board that takes 30% of the joint gross income of him and his wife. In retirement he has been very active supporting CMS Mission Partners in Nepal, serving as Treasurer for two local voluntary organisations, and serving as Treasurer of the Retired Clergy Association of the Church of England.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Settling into retirement and paying the rent
- Retired Clergy Association
- Continuing ministry
- The grace of humility

Chapter 6: Coming out and getting a life

Interviewee 6

Interviewee 6 retired after 37 years in full-time stipendiary service. Twelve years earlier he had been challenged by a couple of his parishioners to invest in a house for retirement; and they had helped him to do precisely that. Now in retirement he reflects on his experiences as a single gay priest in the Church of England. The immediate experience of retirement was one of pain and loss, especially on Sundays. But from these painful beginnings he tells the creative experience of getting a life, getting a life in the Church, and getting a life in the community.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Finding a house
- Preparing a home and settling in
- Facing Sundays
- Getting a life
- Getting a life in the Church

Chapter 7: Reflecting on outsiderness

Interviewee 7

Having left schools with two O levels and after working for 12 years in local government, interviewee 7 began training for ministry at King's College London in 1972. Brought up in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, interviewee 7's ministry has been inspired by a passion for working among the poor, the powerless, the dispossessed, and the disadvantaged. He spent most of his ministry serving within the Church, but outside the Church of England's structure. Now having retired at the age of seventy, he remains actively engaged in broadly the same spheres of ministry. In particular he speaks of his involvement with prisons, his involvement with cathedral chaplaincy, and his involvement with The International Metropolitan Community Church, founded to serve people who are gay, transgendered or otherwise perceived as sexually 'different'. He describes himself 'As a priest in the Church of England who happens to have been born gay'.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Reflecting on training for ministry
- Reflecting on early years in ministry
- Reflecting on institutions
- Reflecting on ministry in retirement
- Reflecting on retirement activities
- Reflecting on the Church of England

Chapter 8: We shall not cease from exploration

Interviewee 8

Interviewee 8 was ordained in her fifties, having earlier in life tested her vocation in the novitiate of The Sisters of the Love of God in Oxford, and having taught at Grey Coat Hospital in Westminster with its close links to Westminster Abbey. Her ministry was served in hospital chaplaincy, continuing to live in her own home with her husband. In retirement she has been learning about handing responsibilities over to others and about the quality of wisdom that used to be associated with the elderly. She is aware that the future will hold significant losses. There will be bereavements as family and friends die and she will have to learn to live with loss. Learning to face up to this with courage and faith

is one of the tasks ahead.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Exploration in ministry
- Exploration in retirement
- Time and space to be

Chapter 9: Being busy and realistic

Interviewee 9

Following her divorce interviewee 9 moved to Cornwall (with her natural son, her adopted son, and a huge Airedale) to take up a teaching post in a boys' grammar school. She was ordained deacon in 1987 and three years later took over running a large country parish. Now in retirement she remains very active within the charity she started 25 years ago working with children in Romania (visiting Romania four times a year) and works as a self-employed study tutor supporting university students with special needs in order to help fund her work in Romania. Now 75 years old, she talks openly about death: 'I want a good death. I don't want to be afraid and so I know I must prepare carefully'.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Life and ministry before retirement
- Maintaining a charity overseas
- Ministry in retirement
- Keeping abreast of change
- Dealing with illness
- Preparing for death

Chapter 10: Homecoming

Interviewee 10

Interviewee 10 was ordained deacon in 1966 and served his curacy in a new church on a Cambridge housing estate. From there he was appointed to an academic and pastoral post at Trinity Hall, Cambridge and subsequently to a post at St John's College, Oxford.

Then after ten years as Head of The King's School, Canterbury he retired at the age of sixty. Coming back home to retire in Cornwall (where for many years he had been Canon Theologian) has given him good opportunities for finding ministry in retirement and for taking up new interests in retirement. As his eightieth birthday approached, he faced exile from Cornwall for a second time to move closer to his daughter in Oxford and to prepare for the final homecoming.

This chapter has the following sections:

- Finding a vocation
- Shaping a ministry
- Finding ministry in retirement
- Taking up new interests in retirement
- Reflecting on retirement