

The Role of The Bishop's Officers for Retired Clergy, and Clergy Widows & Widowers [BRCWOs]

[NB This is an extract from the complete document, and refers only to the Officers' ministry.]

- 1) The local parochial clergy have the primary responsibility for the care of retired clergy, widows and widowers resident in their parishes as part of their cure of souls. It follows that the BRCWO's responsibility is to support and supplement the ministry of the local parochial clergy. This should assure retired clergy, widows and widowers that they have not been 'forgotten' by the Diocese because they have retired, and that they still 'matter'; it is also a way of affirming the validity and value of the ministry they have retired from.
- 2) There might be uncertainty as to what the BRCWO is adding to the ministry of the parish clergy by way of support and supplement. Clergy in licensed ministry are accountable to the Bishop, whose pastoral care and support they have the right to expect. The BRCWO's contact and interest in the welfare of clergy continues this affirmation and support of clergy in retirement, and their spouses and widows or widowers, on behalf of the Bishop. It follows that it would not be part of this ministry, say, to take Holy Communion to someone who is housebound: this would be for the parish clergy and those undertaking this ministry in the parish in the usual way; but it would be part of the ministry to visit and take an interest in the priest, widow or widower and the family, especially if there is illness or incapacity.
- 3) This support and supplementary ministry may be expressed in the following ways, depending on opportunities and local circumstances...
 - a. Ministry which, while not of course being 'mandatory', is highly desirable, and might be thought of as the base-line ...
 - i. The Officer should contact those newly retired, or moving into the Diocese having begun retirement elsewhere. This contact could be by telephone or e-mail where these are known, but a visit is preferred where possible;
 - ii. The Officer may at that contact offer information to the clergy and widows about the Diocese, which may include information about how to obtain Permission to Officiate, the local Retired Clergy Association branch, the Pastoral Counselling Service, and about the support which

is available from charities and trusts should a need arise; a simple booklet for this purpose is available;

- iii. The Officer should maintain contact with clergy or widows/widowers at least annually, and more frequently where there is illness or a specific need. Annual contact might be a card at Christmas, a telephone call or e-mail, or a visit may be appropriate and welcomed;
 - iv. The Officer is asked to send Christmas cards and greetings together with any message from the Archdeacon of Barnstaple, who oversees this ministry;
 - v. The Officer should be aware of charitable and other financial help which may be of value in a case of hardship; see the information booklet and diocesan web-site;
 - vi. The Officer should be a spokesperson for those retired, and their voice at gatherings such as chapters and synods; it follows therefore that the Rural Dean should be aware of the officer's existence, role and ministry.
 - vii. The BRCWO should liaise when there is the death of a retired priest or a spouse; and when they hear of such a death should make sure that the local parish clergy, the Rural Dean, and Peter Rapsey the BRCWO administrator, are aware of this; it is easier for timely contact to be made with a widow or widower when the couple has already been visited and the BRCWO is known to them;
 - viii. The Officer(s) should liaise with the Archdeacon when there is an archdeaconry gathering for retired clergy, widows and widowers; in practice, it is often Peter Rapsey (as clerk to the team meetings) who supplies lists for invitations.
 - ix. Every other year there is a gathering at Exeter Cathedral for retired clergy, spouses, widows and widowers; and BRCWOs are asked to attend.
- b. Ministry to supplement the above, which might be appreciated ...
- i. The Officer may arrange social gatherings, perhaps over lunch or tea, from time to time if this seems appropriate and viable;
 - ii. It is not expected that the BRCWO should act as a go-between with the Pensions' Board, but some knowledge of how it works, particularly in relation to housing, might be appreciated. The Archdeacons are better placed to liaise more effectively with the Pensions' Board, and difficulties can be referred to them.
 - iii. It is not expected that the BRCWO should monitor whether clergy have PtO or not; that is a responsibility of the Rural Dean.