



Frequently Asked Questions – Retired Clergy without Permission to Officiate (“PTO”)

“The Lord has sworn and will not retract:

‘You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.’ (Psalm 110.4)

This document was designed to help retired clergy, or those about to retire, in their discernment around whether, and if so how, to continue their public ministry. We seek to answer some of the most commonly asked questions around how such continued ministry might best work, and what actions a PTO would enable retired clergy to undertake in the Diocese of Hereford. Inevitably, it will not cover every eventuality and for any ministry that falls outside these guidelines, please contact the Archdeacons or the Bishop’s Office for further advice. You can also read online the [House of Bishops’ Policy on Granting Permission to Officiate, July 2018](#), or the [Guidance on Supporting the ministry of clergy after retirement from office](#). Other directions have been necessitated by changes to the Canons of the Church of England.

Foremost, as an ordained minister and as a baptised Christian, you, of course, continue to inhabit your priestly or diaconal identity. There are plenty of opportunities to exercise a Christian ministry in retirement after you are no longer licensed, and Bishop Richard and the Archdeacons are warmly appreciative of that continuing ministry and the blessings it can bestow.

Due to changes in governance compliance and statutory requirements around Safeguarding training, there are certain activities that now require either a licence or PTO. It is of course important that we comply with all such requirements and hopefully by providing answers to the questions posed below we can help guide you through these requirements.

- **Can you please give a quick reminder of what a PTO entails?**

PTO includes both the permission to officiate at services (i.e. preside at/lead them) and permission to preach. Clergy with PTO have a Designated Responsible Person who has oversight of them, and a Statement of Agreed Expectations setting out the scope of their ministry. Sometimes they have geographical restrictions placed on their PTO (e.g. not to minister in a parish where they were previously the Incumbent).

- **Who can decide what ministry I undertake?**

Firstly, it’s worth remembering that all ministry by clergy (within a parish context, whether with or without PTO) needs the permission of the relevant incumbent of the parish/benefice where it is to take place, or in vacancy the Rural Dean or Archdeacon). That should, therefore, be your first discussion when considering if and how you might wish to continue in your ministry. Experience shows that such discussions can be of enormous benefit in shaping your ongoing ministry.

Clergy without PTO are naturally more limited in the ministry they can exercise. As previously mentioned, ordination conveys the lifelong grace of orders, but in retirement the practical and public exercise of those orders is limited, unless PTO is held. All of this can be discussed with the relevant incumbent.

- **I've been asked to take a funeral/baptism/wedding of a previous parishioner - is that allowed?**

This is the most common question received. With a PTO you can certainly take a funeral/baptism/wedding with the permission of the relevant incumbent, however it is unlikely that a retiring incumbent will be granted a PTO for their former parishes. This can sometimes seem unfair, but it is for good, pastoral reasons – once a member of clergy retires history shows that it is important for the parishes to “let go” of their former minister. The new incumbent needs space to grow into their new role. For similar reasons, it is unlikely that permission would be granted for retired clergy to take a funeral service at a crematorium/cemetery for a former parishioner.

This boundary of professional and personal friendships can feel like a grey area, and you may quite understandably be keen to say yes when asked, but please adopt the following principle as an initial guide - if taking a particular service might in any way undermine the ministry of the present incumbent or prevent the incumbent from building their own pastoral relationships in those parishes, you should politely decline.

If in doubt, discuss the situation with the incumbent, and if you both think it appropriate, seek their express prior agreement. Please remember that there are always alternatives to leading a service e.g. the present incumbent leading a funeral service whilst the retired minister gives the tribute, and it may be helpful to discuss such alternatives with the incumbent.

- **I've been asked to take a funeral/baptism/marriage of a family member or very long-standing friend. It's a one-off in a different parish - is that allowed?**

Yes, it might well be, and such services can often be much valued by the family concerned. You will though need a relevant PTO. If you don't have one, but still have an up-to-date DBS and Safeguarding training, please speak to the Bishop's Chaplain for advice. A one-off specific PTO may be possible for such a service. See question below regarding taking services outside Hereford Diocese.

- **What other activities can be undertaken without a PTO?**

There are many ways in which you can help continue building the Kingdom. This list gives a general idea of the activities clergy without PTO can undertake (please note that, if within a parish context, prior permission from the Incumbent would be required):

- Holy Communion services: Read the lesson, lead prayers, administer communion if authorised to do so by the Incumbent and PCC.
- Service of the Word: Read the lesson, lead prayers.
- Midweek said MP/EP in church: Read the lesson, lead prayers
- Baptisms/Weddings: Read the lesson, lead prayers
- Funerals (in church/cemetery/crematorium): Read the lesson, lead prayers, give a personal tribute (not a sermon).

- Bible study/House group: attending as a member, but not leading
 - Non-church related activities: There are a wide range of hugely valued activities that you can do in retirement which do not involve public ministry, are not directly connected with the diocese, and do not require permission to officiate, for example, writing books, doing voluntary work for Christian and other charities, or working for missionary societies at home or abroad.
- **What are the other areas that I now need to leave to others (assuming no PTO)?**
We do hope you will understand that following retirement you will no longer be authorised to lead or officiate at any of the following:
 - Presiding at Holy Communion services, including Communion by extension
 - Home Communion from Reserved Sacrament
 - Conducting retreats or Quiet Days
 - Acting as an outside consultant/teacher/facilitator for parishes (e.g. for PCC away days, stewardship campaigns, Lent Groups/Bible Study/Home Groups/Alpha Groups, etc
 - Participating in missions, participating as a peer reviewer in MDRs, or staffing CMD or ordination courses
 - Representing the Diocese or Church of England on various bodies or visits (e.g. an overseas diocese linked with the diocese, a charity or a secular organisation)
 - Spiritual Direction/Mentoring/Accompanying: A PTO is a normal requirement, but there may be some exceptional circumstances to continue offering spiritual direction within a long-standing arrangement (speak to your Archdeacon for permission).
 - Pastoral visiting in an official capacity as a priest (as opposed to as a neighbour or friend).
- **Can I robe?**
With a PTO, yes absolutely.
Without a PTO, you should always undertake any public roles unrobed. This is a change to the Canons (please see Canon 8.6, Of ministers exercising their ministry).
- **Can I attend the Chrism Eucharist and renew my ordination vows?**
Yes – you can attend the service and we will be delighted to see you there. You can wear clericals, however you should not robe or process. When it comes to renewing the vows you may stand to do so.
- **If I change my mind and want to apply for PTO, who should I speak to?**
Firstly, you should seek the support of your Incumbent, so please speak to and discuss it with them. You can then seek advice from the Retired Clergy Officer or Bishop's Office. The Bishop's Office will be able to provide you with the PTO paperwork, and arrange a DBS and/or Safeguarding training if your certificates have lapsed.
- **With PTO, can I only take services in Hereford Diocese, or does it cover me everywhere?**
Any PTO allows you to undertake public ministry in the diocese in which it was issued but not elsewhere. If you are invited to partake in a service elsewhere, you may need

to request an occasional PTO from the Bishop of the other diocese. There have been recent changes to the 'Safe to Receive' process, so if you have questions, please speak to the Bishop's Chaplain.

- **It is a real shame that I can't do more – it might help ease my retirement.**

That is a perfectly fair and worthy sentiment. It is true that with current guidelines and compliance the ministry for a member of clergy who doesn't hold PTO or a licence is more restricted than the ministry of a layperson. This may seem strange, even annoying – after all you are still deacon, priest and/or bishop. But it is for this very reason: ordination confers an authority and perceived trustworthiness that can give access into people's lives in a way which being a layperson may not, including the lives of those who are vulnerable. To exercise public ministry could convey the impression that the minister has the Bishop's PTO (and hence has had a DBS check and safeguarding training) when they do not.

Perhaps think of it this way. As we know, the purpose of all ministry is, of course, to further the Kingdom. This is a time to explore how to remain true to your vocation in retirement. And know that you are not alone - many clergy have reported experiencing challenges around these changes, including letting go of the status as a parish minister or needing to feel busy, but over time your ministry will take a different shape. In this new season of ministry, we pray that you will find new ways to serve God and his Church through different activities, as well as supporting and encouraging your local Incumbents in the ways outlined above.

- **I have other questions – who can I speak to?**

Speak to your Incumbent, the Retired Clergy Officer, Archdeacon or the Bishop's Chaplain. All will be pleased to discuss with you how best to continue your journey as a faithful minister, serving God and his people.

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