

Network of retired clergy is truly valued

Our retired clergy bring their vast experience and a sense of freedom from responsibility to ministry in our parishes

THEY have the experience of years in ministry, and the luxury of a little more time on their hands. And without them, many of our parishes wouldn't be able to offer a genuine range of worship services.

Our retired clergy do a great job - filling in during vacancies, leading services in churches of all traditions, preaching and doing pastoral work. They do so because they see being a deacon or a priest as a vocation, rather than a job they've retired from.

Our diocese includes more than 200 clergy who have permission from the bishop to lead worship. Some used to work in parishes within our diocese, others moved here from elsewhere in the Church. And our incumbents have good reason to be thankful for all those who offer to help.

Canon Peter Kelly, former vicar of Swanmore and the bishop's officer for retired clergy, said: "We do have a large number of retired clergy who support the life of the diocese, in our parishes and chaplaincies.

"They offer an informal ministry in a myriad of ways, including being a listening ear for those in our congregations or in hospital. Of course, many of our lay people also do the same, but the retired clergy have years of experience to offer. For the vast majority of retired clergy, it is a joy and



a privilege to offer this kind of informal role.

"They are also able to lead worship in a variety of parishes, which is really helpful for the maintenance of regular worship in

our churches. The diocese is really grateful to our retired clergy that they choose to go on ministering for as many years as they are capable of doing so."

The Rev David Wilson swapped

'It was really odd not to be upfront'

THE Rev Kath Abbott doesn't really see herself as retired. She stepped down from being rector of Wootton, and area dean, in December 2014.

She was aged only 54 at that point, but wanted to be available to care for her mother whose health was failing.

After an initial year off from ministry, she's now leading services mainly at Brading, Yaverland, St Helens and Seaview, as well as helping out elsewhere on the island. In 2018, she celebrated the Eucharist 80 times.

"I felt it was good to have the first year out of ministry and so joined the congregation at All Saints, Ryde," she said. "I did struggle a bit with not leading on Sundays - I felt less fulfilled somehow.

"It's really odd not to be part of the team upfront, and of course



The Rev Kath Abbott

the biggest sadness was that I was no longer part of the church community at Wootton. You miss seeing people that you know when you're out and about, and knowing what's going on.

"It was actually slightly less than a year after finishing at

Wootton that the archdeacon asked if I would take a service at Niton, and then it just went from there.

"I've focussed on the one benefice, as they were going through vacancies, and now I lead two Sundays a month at Brading and the other weeks at St Helens and Seaview, as well as some midweek services both there and at Wroxall.

"However, I drew the line at being involved in PCCs during the interregnum at Brading. My experience in parish ministry is that as soon as other PCC members see someone in a dog collar, they do defer to them.

"So it would be easy to do too much, and I had to keep reminding myself that I didn't actually have any authority in this parish. But 'retirement' does give one the freedom to choose what to do and what not to do."



The Rev David Wilson leads a midweek Communion service at St John's, Locks Heath, (above) sharing the Peace and (left) administering the bread

a busy London benefice and a role as Prebendary at St Paul's Cathedral for a role helping out in suburban Locks Heath when he retired 14 years ago.

David and his wife Jan, who

is a licensed Reader, moved to our diocese to be close to their daughter in Locks Heath, and found themselves joining a large team of retired clergy at St John's, Locks Heath. As well as helping on Sundays, he now

regularly leads the Wednesday morning Eucharist, which attracts a regular congregation of around 40 faithful worshippers - some of whom are unable to attend on Sundays.

"I was sure when I arrived in this area that I wanted to do no ministry for the first year," he said. "It was a sort-of sabbatical, or perhaps I would describe it as learning to be a lay person again.

"Sitting in the pews when I didn't actually have to be there enabled me to think again about that sense of choice. The sense of priesthood doesn't disappear, but the responsibility does.

"One of the joys of being here is that there is a large team of ministers, but we are all different. Despite there being quite a few retired clergy, there is still plenty to do, in terms of pastoral work, preaching, taking services, and we have had two interregnums as well.