



To all Clergy holding the Bishop of Southwark's Licence

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Holding office beyond the age of 70

As you will know, under Common Tenure clergy have to resign their licences when they turn seventy, with only the possibility of a two year extension in certain cases. From July 1st, however, new rules came into force, which allow bishops a good deal more discretion to license clergy to offices beyond the age of seventy. In summary, the Bishop, in consultation with others, and with an occupational health review of the cleric in question, may extend a licensed ministry by one or more fixed terms beyond the age of seventy. There is no fixed upper age limit.

Bishops thus now have wide discretion which must be used fairly, transparently, and in a way that best serves the mission of God. I have therefore given the matter much thought, and have discussed it with Area Bishops, Archdeacons and others. I am writing now to explain how I intend to use this discretion.

Let me start by saying that I believe the principle of a clean break with a ministry at the age of seventy is a good one. I have too often seen clergy burnt out but feeling compelled to go on, or, perhaps even worse, clinging to the familiar ministry when it is time to lay it down. If it is understood that seventy is the point at which established ministry ceases, those in their sixties can pace themselves, and at the right moment be relieved of the burdens of office and be liberated to exercise their calling in creative ways.

It is certainly true that by God's grace, some clergy still have the necessary energy for full time ministry after their seventieth birthday. If they are called to continue serving in this way, if it will be good for them and for those whom they will serve, then it is right that they should do so.

The principle by which I shall be guided is that this service should take the form of a *new* ministry. It may involve having charge of a Parish. It may be an Assistant Priest role, or an interim post. But the Priest should be moving on to something new, appointed with a sense of hope and new beginnings. There should also be a change of location. Hopefully, this will all be life-giving and energising - and indeed, if the prospect of such a change seems daunting, perhaps that is a sign that the time for retirement has indeed come.

If a Priest who is seventy or over is called to such a new ministry, and those charged with discernment also perceive this calling, then I would consider using my discretion to give it effect by issuing a licence. This will normally be for a fixed period of three years, and I will be prepared to consider renewing the licence for a further two years, and always subject to consultation and a health assessment.

In addition, despite what I have said about keeping to the cut-off point of seventy, I will also be prepared to consider issuing a licence to continue an *existing* ministry



The Diocese of Southwark

beyond seventy providing that it was begun on or after the 67th birthday, and that at the time it was commenced, the hope that it might be continued in this way was indicated to me in a letter. The aim here is to give enough flexibility for the establishment of a new ministry, recognising that the right situation may not arise exactly as the Priest turns seventy.

I hope that what I have said provides clarity on this matter, which I know will be important to many clergy in this diocese. I am certain that this is the best way of guarding against the risk that existing ministries grow stale, whilst allowing scope for new and life-enhancing ministries to flourish, and for those to whom the yoke is still light to continue to bear it with joy. And I continue to be grateful to all clergy, regardless of age, for fellowship in this ministry with which we are all charged.

With thanks for our partnership in The Gospel and every good wish

**The Rt Revd Christopher Chessun
Bishop of Southwark**

Feast of the Transfiguration, 2017