

PASTORAL LETTERCARING FOR OUR SICK AND RETIRED CLERGY

My dear people



Over the Christmas and New Year period I have had the opportunity to visit nearly all of our retired clergy. We greeted each other warmly. It was wonderful to see the light of priesthood still burning brightly in their eyes. At the same time, it was sad to see so many of them, who were once lively and active, now reduced in mobility, as advancing years take their toll. A Zimmer-frame sat next to a breviary (for saying the daily Prayer of the Church). An alarm-cord round a neck tangled with the chain of a crucifix. Photographs perched on shelves proclaimed family, friends, and former parishioners. Memories of good times were undimmed by the passage of time. Each priest could easily bring to mind those moments that had satisfied him in his priestly ministry. Each one joyfully recounted opportunities that the Lord had given him to care for people here and there in different parishes. These stories were sprinkled with events that had made them laugh, and still did so. Each one, without prompting, expressed appreciation for the care they now received. Some admitted that letting go had been difficult, but they had now adapted to it, with gratitude. For, one thing remained the same: they were able to continue their daily calling to celebrate Mass. Ingrained in all of them was the undiminished conviction that: *You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.* Melchizedek refers not only to Kingship, but also to one who is a High Priest serving the Lord God and his people in the Order of Priesthood. In Hebrew, Melchizedek also means *Prince of Peace*, and hence points to Jesus Christ, the Great High Priest (*Heb 4:14*) who is also the Prince of Peace (*Is 9:2*). In a humble and touching way, I could still see the spirit of Peace and Priesthood in these aging brothers. Each one continues to offer Mass each day for other people. For, a priest is not ordained for himself, but for others. They are *priests forever*, whatever their condition, in sickness or in health, still praying for us and mentioning us to the Lord at Mass, until the Lord makes that final call to them to join him in eternal happiness. I thanked them for what they were still able to do as priests through their prayers and Masses. They said it was the least they could do. It was part of their very being. It was now their ministry in retirement.

Our 10 Fathers in retirement continue to be a blessing on our Diocese. Most of them now live in care-homes run by Religious Communities of Sisters at *STELLA MARIS* in Swansea or at St Teresa's in Fishguard. I am struck by the care and love that they receive. It is truly outstanding. I extend to all the Sisters and Staff in each place my thanks for the generosity that they so selflessly show. Just as our priests pray for us, I ask you to pray for them. Others too will enter retirement in the coming years, and we need to prepare now for an increasing number. The numbers leaving active ministry will be greater than those being ordained. In a Special Second Collection today, I ask for your help in building up a reserve of funds, so that those who have served us so generously in the past will be able to enter retirement peacefully and calmly, knowing that they will be properly cared for in the years to come. So, today, I ask you to contribute as generously as you can – and then that little bit more! Thank you for, so often, your unstinting help and so many kindnesses.

*+Thomas Matthew
Bishop of Menevia*

This Pastoral Letter is to be read out in all churches and chapels of the Diocese at all Masses over the weekend of Saturday 14 and Sunday 15 January 2017.