

## Frequently Asked Questions – Retired Clergy without PTO

*“The Lord has sworn and will not retract:  
‘You are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.’ (Psalm 110.4)*

As ordained ministers and as baptised Christians many clergy continue to exercise a Christian ministry in retirement after they have ceased to be licensed, and the Bishops of Sheffield and Doncaster, and the Archdeacons are warmly appreciative of that continuing ministry.

This document was designed to help clergy in their discernment about whether to ask for Permission to Officiate to continue public ministry by answering some of the most asked questions about what retired clergy are permitted to undertake in the Diocese of Sheffield. Inevitably, they cannot cover every eventuality and for any ministry which falls outside these guidelines, advice/permission should be sought.

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

All ministry by clergy (whether with or without PTO, in church or outside church) is exercised only with the permission of the relevant incumbent, or in vacancy the area dean or archdeacon.

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 previous parish).

Clergy without PTO are more limited in the ministry they can exercise. Ordination conveys the lifelong grace of orders, but in retirement the practical exercise of those orders in certain areas of ministry requires the authority of the bishop, given in the form of PTO, along with DBS checks and safeguarding training.

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

Without a PTO you cannot lead any public service.

When clergy retire, it is important for the parishes to “let go” of their former minister. Once a minister has left a parish, unless they have the permission of the incumbent, they should cease professional relationships with those formerly under their pastoral care and should not undertake any ministry in their former parish(es); nor should they take a funeral service at a crematorium/cemetery for a former parishioner. If they choose to attend a wedding or funeral in a private capacity, they should do so mindful that they have retired from professional relationships with those formerly under their pastoral care.

Clergy with or without PTO should not exercise any ministry in their former parishes, unless invited to do so by the present incumbent. It is particularly important that those who retire within easy reach of their former parish(es) observe this. If asked to do something in the parishes or at a crematorium/cemetery for former parishioners, they must direct the family concerned to seek the permission of the present incumbent. If he or she is content, the present incumbent (rather than the family concerned) should confirm the invitation directly to the retired minister. Thought should always be given to working together e.g., the present incumbent leading a funeral service whilst the retired minister gives the tribute. Nothing the retired minister undertakes should undermine the ministry of the present incumbent or prevent the incumbent from building their own pastoral relationships in those parishes.

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

Without a PTO you cannot normally lead any public service, even for a family member or friend. However, if you still have an up-to-date DBS and Safeguarding training, please speak to the Bishop's Chaplain for advice. It is likely that you can be granted a 'one-off PTO'.

- **So what can I do without PTO?**

This list gives a general idea of the activities clergy without PTO can undertake (with permission from the Incumbent):

- 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).
- Non-church related activities: Some things that you can do in retirement 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.

- **So what can't I do?**

As well as those things mentioned explicitly above, please note that those without PTO cannot officiate or lead any of the following:

- Communion by extension
- Home Communion from Reserved Sacrament
- Representing the Diocese or Church of England on bodies or visits
- Offer Spiritual Direction
- Mentoring as part of a Diocesan scheme
- Conducting retreats or quiet days
- acting as an outside consultant/teacher/facilitator for parishes (e.g. for PCC away days, stewardship campaigns, Lent groups, and house groups)

- **It seems that without PTO I can't even do as much as a lay person. Is that fair?**

That is correct - the ministry of clergy without PTO is more restricted than the ministry of a layperson.

The reason for this greater restriction is that 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 any of the above ministries 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. It is important to avoid this.

The purpose of all ministry is to further the Kingdom. Being true to your vocation in retirement should not be about retaining your status as minister or needing to feel busy. For retired clergy without PTO it might be difficult to accept your ministry will now take a different shape, but in time it is hoped that you will find new ways to serve God and his Church through the important roles of supporting and encouraging the Incumbents in the ways outlined above.

- **Can I robe?**

No. Clergy without PTO should always undertake public roles unrobed.

- **Can I attend the Chrism Eucharist and renew my ordination vows?**

Yes – you can attend the service, however you cannot robe or process. When it comes to renewing the vows you can stand to do so.

- **If I change my mind and want to apply for PTO, who should I speak to?**

You will need the support of your Incumbent, so speak to them first, and then the Bishop's Office for advice.

- **With PTO, can I only take services in Sheffield Diocese, or does it cover me everywhere?**

A PTO only allows you to undertake public ministry in the Diocese of Sheffield. If you are invited to partake in a service elsewhere you can do so at the permission of the incumbent of the parish at which the ministry is to take place. But you are only allowed to do so for a period of not more than seven days within three months.

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

Speak to your Incumbent, Archdeacon or the Bishop's Chaplain.

January 2026