

Dear Friends,

Recently I stood at the graveside of a friend who died prematurely at the age of 62. Peter wanted me to take his funeral, and I chose to read from the book of Ecclesiastes - Chapter 3, in which Solomon is declaring that there is a 'time under heaven' for everything. One phrase he uses is 'a time to seek and a time to lose'. I am 59 years old at present, and I have been considering over the course of this last year what to do with my future as far as I can surmise. Life is short, and as my Dad loved to say, 'it is already later than you think'. Tracey and I feel that I have one more job in me, and if there is a time under heaven to move, it is probably now, despite a global pandemic!

Leaving a place and people that are very dear to your heart is not easy, and certainly not something to be taken lightly, and so we have been considering this move very carefully for a while. I do believe that any incumbent reaches a moment in which they have done all that they are meant to do, and from that point on it can be a matter of maintenance rather than moving things forward. The plans that have currently been proposed for re-defining ministry in our Deanery are significant, and will require a concerted effort from all to see them work effectively and productively for God's glory. If we were to stay, there is no way I could continue to work in the way that I have up until now. Some things dear to my heart would have to go, and some parts of my gifts and calling would have to be modified in order to devote time and energy to this new way of ministry.

It was whilst contemplating this dilemma that the job which I have now accepted came to light. The Benefice in Somerset consists of three churches eager for growth and change, with a team of both Readers and Lay-Worship Leaders plus a part-time Administrator. It is a full-time post (this post is designated as part-time!) and the main church in Martock - All Saints - is the second largest Parish Church in Somerset. Having said that, I feel that the job is within my ability to handle (supported as ever by Tracey), alongside the Team that is already in place. The style of ministry required is similar,

but different, to here, yet some of the most important elements dear to our hearts lie at the centre of the longings of the people of that Benefice. I am excited that there are two thriving Church of England Primary Schools in the Benefice, both with newly appointed Head Teachers who are eager to forge a meaningful relationship with the church - plus another non-church affiliated Primary School. I would be delighted to help influence this young generation for God in whatever way I can. We can only trust in the providence and purposes of God in all this, firmly believing that what is good for us will be good for everyone involved.

An additional factor in our decision-making has been the fact that we are looking to return to Sandford when we retire. We own a cottage here, and this village is very much our home, however, currently it is not encouraged that a previous incumbent retires immediately into the Parish where they have served. It is not fair on the new priest, and not easy for the people of the Parish. A few years away will enable us to return here when it is finally time to pull up stumps and retire.

I truly believe that now is the time for a new priest-in-charge to take up post here and carry this Parish forward into the new ministry patterns that will emerge in the days to come. It will take time, patience, and determination to see change come and that is why the time is right for us to move on now. A new incumbent will bring the necessary energy, focus and adaptability required to see the next phase of change and growth in the Parish. I do have one request; that as we live out our last few months here that we can all pull together and re-focus our determination to seek all that God has in store for this Parish and the wider Benefice. The Kingdom of God is far bigger than any individual or couple, so do please continue to support Sandford Parish in every way possible, and pray earnestly for the next incumbent. Now is the time to reach out for more, not to pull back to something less.

I will work with Linda and Chris (our Churchwardens) the PCC and all in positions of responsibility throughout the Parish to ensure that all is left well prepared and ready for any vacancy; but I have no doubt that the Diocese will seek to fill this post quickly.

We can only reassure you all that this has been a difficult time of decision making and heart-searching for us, and the

outcome has been the subject of our most careful deliberations and prayers. We thank you all for your friendship and fellowship, and ask for your continued prayers as we contemplate our move to Somerset. I would also like to especially thank our Rector Matthew for his selfless and gracious support throughout this process of discernment; both Tracey and I are very grateful to him for his kindness and understanding during this time.

We trust God for our future and for your's, knowing that we are all safe in His hands.

With our love and prayers

Paul & Tracey x