

This is a difficult announcement to make.

In the life of any community, nothing remains the same for long. People come and people go, but the community continues. Those who leave, hopefully, supply us with happy memories and those who arrive bring freshness and new insights.

This is a preamble to saying that Ruth and I will be moving away from Ducklington at the end of May. Being the minister of this church for nearly sixteen years has been the most wonderful experience but we have been aware for some time that our energy levels are not what they were - and that, despite the short-term pain of goodbyes, it will be good for the church, in many ways, to have fresh leadership.

As many of you know, Ruth and I own a house in Witney which is there for our retirement. It has been in our thoughts that we would move there next year. However an opportunity has been offered to us, quite unexpectedly, which means that our move away from this village will be several months earlier than we had anticipated.

I have accepted an appointment to a very different job, starting in the summer. It's another house-for-duty arrangement - as chaplain in the school that I used to attend, Rendcomb College, which is near Cirencester. It promises to be a very interesting post and the long school holidays mean that it will be more 'part-time' than the role we have so enjoyed in Ducklington.

I am looking forward to this fresh and different challenge until, God willing, we return to Witney for retirement.

This has all happened very quickly for us and in such a way that Ruth and I feel strongly that it is the right thing for us to do and that God has been prompting us and opening doors for us. And if it is the right thing for us, then we can be sure that it is the right thing for St Bartholomew's and that God's will for Saint Bartholomew's is good.

Whenever you take on a role, whether as a football manager, a prime minister or a vicar, you are aware that one day you will have to leave it. Most of you know how deeply painful leaving St Bartholomew's will be for Ruth and me and we know that this news will create sadness for many of you - and we are sorry about that! To be honest, very sorry!

During a time of change, it is important that we support each other and that we hold together as a church community. I would particularly ask you to pray, every day, for our wardens: Gill, Peter and Edmund and that you will do all that you can to support them as they take on the demanding responsibility of leading the church through this time of transition.

In the meantime we have another three months to enjoy with each other, and another Lent through which to travel, so let's celebrate God's faithfulness and pray for his guidance and blessing as we sing together the hymn 'Great is Thy Faithfulness'.

Vicars, even those who evolve into rectors, come and go, but God's faithfulness and his loving purposes for us are eternal.