

Announcement made at St. Mary's by Guy Bridgewater

Sunday 29th July 2018 :

"I have some news that I don't trust myself to give out informally, so I have written it out to read to you – and the full text will be put up on the Church website after this service.

It will come as something of a shock to many, as indeed it has been a genuine shock to Jebs and I, that after much prayerful thought we will be leaving St. Mary's in early November this year. Having been truly & wonderfully happy here in Horsham for the last 11 years, after much prayer and seeking the Lord's guidance we feel it is time to make way for someone else to bring fresh wisdom and leadership, and a new set of pastoral and mission gifts, to serve as the Vicar of St. Mary's & Team Rector of Horsham.

We believe that God has graciously made his leading very clear – but even so it has been a hard decision for us to make, and this is a very hard announcement to give. Parting from you will be very painful for Jebs and I, because we have loved St. Mary's most deeply - and to be honest, a very large part of us would truly & quite simply want to stay here for ever.

We will miss you all most terribly – and I'm very sorry for Rebecca in particular, that I won't be able to see her further into her curacy as we had planned and expected to happen. I am supremely confident in her wonderful ministry gifts and calling, and all the many ways she and St. Mary's and the Team Parish will bless each other in the years to come. Beyond November, you need to know that Reverend Bernard Sinton will give oversight to her training during the vacancy (supported by our splendid Team Vicars Natalie & David). Also of course, Alan will be a fantastic, wise & very hard working support as always – although as a retired priest he mustn't work *too* hard, and Bishop Martin will be arranging for extra ministerial support to join St. Mary's in the period between vicars.

As a congregation I know you will be in expert and very spiritually gifted hands going forward, both those of our clergy and our magnificent churchwardens & team of lay leaders.

I can absolutely guarantee that there will be an extremely strong field of candidates, lining up and eagerly hoping to be the next Vicar of St. Mary's in due course. This is without a shadow of a doubt, one of the most attractive jobs in all the Church of England.

Meanwhile our own situation is that Jebs & I find that we will be moving back to the west country. In obedience to a gracious call by the Bishop of Bath & Wells, we will be serving a parish in Somerset, in the city of Bath in fact. There will be a service in Bath Abbey probably in late November, at which I will be licensed as the Rector there, and to which you will all be most warmly invited.

Jebs is unfortunately away on a Christian conference this weekend, which is when the public announcement of my appointment has had to be made simultaneously - at St. Mary's and our other three team churches this morning, and also at the five Bath Abbey services being held today. Of course she and I will want to have many conversations with you all personally, over the coming weeks – and we will be immensely grateful for your support and prayers especially (not to mention big hugs when we are struggling) as we try to prepare

over the next 3 months for the fearful wrench of leaving Horsham, and for the transition and challenge of our new ministry calling.

I will give a few more details about the new role that we are moving to after this service, for those who are interested to stay & find out more at this point. If you would like to stay on over coffee after the service this morning, I will also do my best to answer any practical questions that you may have about the vacancy at St. Mary's, and the prayerful process for finding my successor.

For now, I simply want to express what an immeasurable privilege it has been to serve as Vicar of St. Mary's for these eleven years since July 2007 (in fact it is eleven years to the day since I preached my first sermon from this pulpit). I also want to ask your forgiveness where I have failed you, or contributed anything that has not been helpful; and I really want to say a huge and deeply heartfelt thank-you to you all, and to the Lord whom we worship, praise & adore, for all your amazing love and patience and graciousness toward us as a couple and as the Bridgewater family.

May each one of us keep our eyes fixed simply and firmly upon Jesus :

"Be Thou my Vision O Lord of my heart

Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,

Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all"

- to him be Glory, Praise and Honour; and Lord Jesus, may you reach out & bless St. Mary's, and our beautiful town richly & deeply, both now and *more and more and more* in the years to come - all and only for your great Glory's sake, all and only for the building of your Kingdom. Amen.

*And now would you please join with me in saying The Lord's Prayer once more together :
Our Father ...*

Let us Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord ...