

What I need to announce to you now is not easy for me or for you.

Serving God in this parish, and amongst all of you, for nearly 19 years, has been an absolutely massive honour, beyond my deserts. The way nearly everyone rallied round when Helen and I parted in 2015 was just marvellous, and some of you have become my friends in a deeper way. Our children grew up here and I now have grandchildren living in Rownhams. You and I have done and experienced – and suffered – a lot together. I will never forget you, and I will never regret the efforts I put into sharing the things of God here.

But for a long time, I have been wondering whether God was perhaps calling (or inviting, or permitting) me to step aside from the ordained ministry, at least for a time, and to use the gifts he has given me in other ways. Back in the summer I realised the time had come, and last week I sent Bishop Tim my resignation.

I've found a job, which I am looking forward very much to doing, and will be able to say more about soon, but it begins on Monday 7th January, which in the Church's rules means **that my last day in post as your vicar has to be Epiphany, Sunday January 6th**. I am painfully aware that this gives you less notice than you would have got if I had been moving to another clergy job. I will be able to live in the Vicarage till the beginning of February, though of course I am looking for somewhere to rent, so the goodbyes can take more like eight weeks than four.

The new day job should allow me enough time in the week to develop and promote myself as a musician: some of you have guessed at this part of the plan already.

I hope it's been clear to you all that I have not lost my faith, I remain fully signed up to the story of God's love for the world in Jesus as the Bible tells it to us, and I will certainly be part of a church somewhere – probably in town, hopefully somewhere where my playing can make a real difference.

Finally can I repeat that this step I am making is **in no way** due to any lack of support from the people of these two marvellous, lovely churches. It's my belief that during the coming year, someone good will be found to succeed me here, and if you support them as you supported me, they and you should do very well.

From the bottom of my heart: **Thank you; please let's have our best Christmas together – and may God bless you all.**