

Retiring from the Dorchester Team

A letter from the Revd Caroline King

'If I were you I wouldn't start from here". This is the punchline of a well-known joke. It seems apt when I think about what has brought about my retirement. As you know I am retiring on the grounds of ill health, my pension has been granted by the Church of England Pensions Board. Given the choice it is not how I would choose to leave. I was ordained a deacon in 1997, my ministry has always been in the Deanery of Aston and Cuddesdon and I have been in my current post since 2012.

My ill health arose in part because I did not take seriously enough the need to take good care of myself. By autumn 2022 on the face of it I was coping well and managing a heavy and complex workload. The truth behind the safe doors of home was very different. I was barely sleeping, my mind was racing, my self-esteem and confidence were at an all-time low. I felt I was doing a terrible job and that I wasn't present to my immediate family. They rightly gave me an ultimatum, deal with it! After much prevarication I contacted St Luke's charity for clergy and asked to be referred to a counsellor. This took only a few weeks to organise, and I received excellent help and treatment in a timely manner from a therapist who was familiar with church culture and with the challenges and joys that we face in ministry.

I was diagnosed quickly with burnout and advised (told) to take some time off immediately. This was a warning I couldn't ignore. As time went on I decompressed but didn't get better and went on to develop a serious form of trauma injury called CPTSD. It is very closely related to PTSD but caused by multiple traumatic incidents rather than say a single event like a car accident.

Over the ten years or so that I have been in this team there have been some special moments but there have also been some difficult and traumatic times. As clergy we are often on the receiving end of sometimes inappropriate and controlling behaviour. Over time this built up and has been costly.

I am recovering now but as with any serious injury or life changing illness I have to modify my lifestyle. For me this means giving up full time stipendiary ministry. Initially this felt a bitter blow but it does not mean that my ordained ministry has ended. I hope to return very slowly to some form of non-stipendiary ministry once we have settled into retired life.

Despite this I leave with much gratitude for my time in the Dorchester team. Parish Ministry is demanding, but it is a wonderful job, we are reliant upon the

many wonderful and committed laity who support our communities so well. Ministry can be costly but it is also a gift to be able to be there for people at the profound moments of their lives, to break and share bread and wine in the Eucharist and to pray in and for our communities and in return to be prayed for. This is a time of much change for the Dorchester Team. Please pray for Jane and for the wider ministry team as they take on extra responsibilities during the vacancies.

Our plan is to retire to Benson. South Oxfordshire is home for us and we would like to stay close to Sarah and hopefully to Josh as he prepares to begin a curacy next summer. I am grateful to the Diocese, to Bishop Gavin and Archdeacon David for their support and to Jane and all my clergy colleagues for unstinting support and of course to you all for friendships shared. I hope to be able to see many of you on 4th August for a service of thanksgiving and farewell.

With many thanks and best wishes

Caroline

Farewells, a welcome and prayers please

We will be saying farewell to Revd Caroline, along with Revd Teresa in a Team Service at Dorchester Abbey on Sunday 4th August at 10.30am. Teresa is moving on to a new post in the 'other Dorchester' team in Dorset.

We will be saying farewell to team curate Revd Catherine at the 10.30 service at the Abbey on Sunday 7th July. Having completed her curacy, Catherine is moving to take up the post of Priest-in-Charge at Kingston Bagpuize and Southmoor.

We will also be welcoming our new curate – by then the Revd Emma Firth, in that same service on 7th July. Emma is to be ordained deacon in Christ Church Cathedral on Saturday 29th June at their 10.30 ordination service.

Some of you may also know Teresa is having a hip replacement on Monday 1st July – this is great news for Teresa, but please do keep her in your prayers.

If you would like to make a farewell or welcome gift to any or all of the above, please make a payment to our team account.

And as Caroline has already said, please do keep our whole team in your prayers during this time of significant change.

Jane