

Farewell Epistle from Revd. Keith Thomasson - May 2011

As I write this at the start of May I am awaiting the completion of contracts on a new house in Romsey. At the end of the summer term, and after five years in Bristol and the birth of two more children, we shall move to our own home in Romsey, which like Bristol is once again a completely new place and area for us all.

The house is from 1885 and is an extended terrace with a back yard. Anne Claar can finish her cup of tea in a morning and be sitting on the train to Salisbury for her work just five minutes later and the Abbey (where I shall work) and the children's school (next door to the Abbey) will be ten minutes walk away for us. The other school where I shall also work as a chaplain and teacher is three miles away, in beautiful grounds that include a golf course and the house where Florence Nightingale was raised and received her calling. Here I shall teach RE, and develop artistic and faith life amongst the small boarding community. I shall also restore a very simple room to being a creative chaplaincy space. Both posts are completely new and so I can shape them.

We as a family are responding to a call to be all at home together more. Anne Claar is responding to a call from the churches of the south and south west, United Reformed, Methodist, Baptist and Anglican, to continue her role as a theological educator preparing amongst others Chris Evans and Anja Thompson for ordained ministry at the theological college (at STETS based at Sarum College) in the cathedral close at Salisbury.

I shall continue to help people to come to faith and to grow in faith, with an emphasis on using the gifts I have so that others are affirmed in using the gifts they have. Creative worship, growing leaders, exploring questions of faith and community music will all be the basis by which complementary expressions of church are grown afresh in Romsey. I shall work with all sorts of partners and also of course enjoy developing the educational work of the Abbey and officiating at more traditional services such as choral evensong. I do hope the children, Susannah, Reuben and Johan will become choristers at the Abbey, combining this with a very rich musical life at the primary school which has an extensive musical programme (whilst being in special measures, but nearing the end of this now), and be a part of the new mid-week church I shall start from scratch in their primary school (a musical-messy church, combining the best of Tiny Tots, Music for Toddlers, T Service and Music School) to

cater for children and young families. Susannah, Reuben and Johan will enjoy cycling with us in the New Forest and dancing too, and no doubt will wish to play football on Sunday mornings too.

I shall have the pleasure of working alongside numerous colleagues at school and at the Abbey who have a rich collective experience (from being diocesan missionaries to cathedral and abbey deans - should be quite an interesting and lively experience!) and a current Sunday 10am congregation of over three hundred (not to mention the fifty that attend 8am holy communion and the seventy that go to evensong).

It has been good to be in Bristol. It has been challenging in both helpful and at times unhelpful ways. We had hoped to be around for longer but diocesan redundancies including Anne Claar's eighteen months ago have led to real pain as well as fruitful yet unexpected new opportunities.

I had a real calling to serve the people of the EBP-the newspaper advert leapt out and grabbed me. I am so pleased to have done so.

Thank you to those of you, and there are many across the seven churches, who have openly accepted my being amongst you and to those of you who have made the effort to come round and accept my calling amongst you. The shape of the EBP and the exercise of ministry here has changed in many ways over the last five years and will continue to do so. What we have learned is I believe of crucial importance to how church can be now and in the future. Please continue to ask the priests and others with this gifting to resource you in ministry and to help you to grow in discipleship: this is a good way forward.

Please remember our family in your prayers now and as we begin afresh in Romsey. Please make the effort to say goodbye well to us and please be kind and generous to your current leaders, all of whom within the creative diversity bring so much to you all in East Bristol and who remain faithfully serving God and you. Please be realistic.

Keep reading your bibles together. Focus on God. Keep singing (new songs). Keep trying to love one another more and be gracious to one another. Serve the communities where you are and WORK TOGETHER ie *in partnership*.

best wishes Keith