

Changing seasons always come with mixed feelings, and as we are without doubt well in to autumn now, I confess to a sense of regret that the days are shortening, the temperature is dropping, and our abundant crop of French beans is dwindling fast! Although personally I'm fortunately not affected by 'SAD' (seasonally affected disorder), there may be some of you who are, or have neighbours or friends affected by the shortening days and lack of sun. Please be mindful particularly of neighbours living alone, and if we as a church can offer any support, let me know via the Parish Office.

I am conscious that a number of parishioners across the villages have suffered a bereavement this past year and assure you of my prayers. Let me know if I can support you in any way as winter approaches. Our prayers are very much with Hugh Wyatt and the family at their loss of Jane recently. Jane was a wonderful farmer in her time at Cissbury, alongside caring for her family, and will be much missed.

I'm sure that most of you will already know that I will be retiring in early January 2026. This was not an easy decision to make as I really love being your Vicar, but I am increasingly feeling my age (I will turn 70 in November), especially at busy times in the church calendar. Chris and I have bought a bungalow in The Chase, so I will still be around, but not as your Parish Priest! Lots of people have asked who my successor will be, so I thought it might be helpful to explain something of how the Church of England works when there is a Vacancy in a Parish.

A Vacancy (or sometimes referred to as an Interregnum) occurs when the Incumbent (the Priest Licensed to serve in a Parish on behalf of the Diocesan Bishop) either moves on to a new post or retires. Although the Bishop and his Senior Clergy Team will be aware of an upcoming Vacancy (the statutory notice period is 3 months) and may well have discussed possible ways forward, nothing is actually done until the existing Priest has gone. The first step is for Churchwardens to meet with the Archdeacon and Rural Dean, at which point Sequestrators are appointed to oversee the running of the Parish and the process of a new appointment, which is always at the Diocesan Bishop's discretion. Unlike in a business context, there is no 'handover' between the new person and the previous one, which many people from outside the church find hard to understand! I think the reasoning is that it gives the Parish a space between appointments, so it is like a fresh start when a new Vicar is appointed, as well as providing an opportunity for the Parish to run things as a team, with the help of retired and visiting clergy. From personal experience as a Warden in Durrington during a Vacancy some years before my ordination, this can be a time of growth for many people as they step up to take responsibility for a certain area and it really does bring the congregation together as a team.

We are of course fortunate here as we have our Associate Vicar, Colin, who will support the Worship and Mission of the Parish in the meantime, but please remember that he will not be able to do everything that currently he and I do as a team, when I have retired! Please pray for him as he prepares to work out what is possible for him to commit to once I've gone. I know you will all work together well, just as you did in the run up to Findon Sheep Fair and on the day despite the weather this year!

Every blessing

*Helena*