Dear lovely people of St Philip’s,

As I announced this morning at the 10am service, it is with a heavy heart that I inform you of my decision to resign as Rector of St Philip’s and for us as a family to return home to the UK. My last Sunday will be the 28th February.

To ‘return home’ is at the heart of our decision as a family. When Laura, Matilda and I decided to respond to the call to leave the UK and come to join you here at St Philip’s it was with the caveat that if it didn’t work for all, then it didn’t work for any. I’m sad to say that has become the reality for us.

Moving to a new country is always going to be a challenge and it takes time to settle in. I spoke last year in my statement to vestry about some of the challenges that had arisen as I was tasked to bring about much needed long-term change to the parish. Certainly, those challenges were far from settling for me, or indeed for us as a family. But moreover, as for many families, it has been the COVID 19 pandemic that has challenged us to question where our priorities lie as a family long term.

I am so very proud of what we have achieved together as a church family through some of the most challenging times in our church’s history! In particular, the successful Capital Campaign, ‘Under Our Roof and Beyond Our Walls’, raised much needed funds to enable outstanding physical changes to the church fabric. Even more so, it enabled a wider conversation in the congregation that envisioned a future direction for the church, one that looked outwards to how we could best serve the people of our parish.

None of us could have envisaged the pandemic or the lockdown that ensued. I for one could never have imagined having to make the decision to close the church and to move our services and everything else we do online. Yet again, I have been so proud of how we rose to the challenge together. We have learned so much through this experience about who we are and what we hold dear, about the nature of community, and about how we can reach new people, not only locally, but internationally through the wonders of the internet! And we saw, in the few happy months that we were allowed to meet in person, how having a wonderful and flexible worship space allows us to experiment with offering both new and traditional services. How fabulous it was to see familiar and new faces worshipping together under our environmentally friendly new roof!

But most importantly, I am proud to have served alongside you, the lovely people of St Philip’s, as your priest. You are a wonderful community of amazing people. You know, in the Royal Navy there are often two types of Captain. One gets the opportunity to take a ship out on operations to who knows where. The other is afforded the right to bring a ship in to dock for much needed refurbishment and training ready for operations. It turns out that I was afforded the privilege of being the latter for St Philip’s. Nonetheless, it has been my privilege and great honour to be your Rector. I know that whoever comes after me will inherit a wonderful community that has had a good refit and is waiting to set sail in a new direction!

Archbishop Melissa is fully aware of the situation. She is very keen that the interregnum should be a very short one. Indeed, she has asked that the task of seeking the next Rector should begin prior to my leaving. To that end the Wardens will send you an email tomorrow outlining who is involved with the Search Committee (formally known as the Canonical Committee) and the process moving forward as directed by the Diocese and with the support of Archdeacon Stephanie Shepherd.

Finally, I want to thank you all for your love and support of us as a family during our time with you. There are so many of you that we want to thank in person, which I hope we will be able to do in the weeks ahead. In particular, I want to praise the Staff, Trustees, Wardens and members of the Parish Council - working with you as a team has been an amazing and humbling experience. Your creativity and wisdom reassureme that the parish is in capable and safe hands to weather the interregnum ahead. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

My love and prayers to you all.

Stuart