



CHELMSFORD
CATHEDRAL

Nicholas Henshall Dean of Chelmsford

20 November 2022

Dear friends and colleagues across the Cathedral Community,

PROFESSIONAL NOMAD

This morning - the Feast of Christ the King - it was announced that I will be leaving Chelmsford in the spring to take up a new post in the High Weald of East Sussex as half time parish priest of St Thomas the Apostle New Groombridge. Here I simply wanted to share with you some of the journey that Christine and I have been on.

This move has been on the horizon for some time. Part of the purpose of my sabbatical back in 2019 was to think about "what next?" I have typically spent around six or seven years in each post and I've always been clear that no one should stay in what we sometimes refer to as a "senior leadership role" for too long. By October 2019 I knew that I had done the primary task I had been called here to do - which was to complete the first stage of "stretching a parish church to become the cathedral for the Diocese beyond an existing comfort zone" (the words at the top of the role description I was given back in 2014).

I came back from sabbatical just two weeks before the first lockdown. That did not feel like a good time to be moving. The sabbatical had helped us to see that the shape of the next post needed to be different with space for many of those aspects of ministry which have been so much part of previous roles but which have not been possible as a Dean. After the final lockdown was lifted, things finally fell into place and eventually a strong call emerged to this new, quite remote context.

As you know, an unexpected factor in all of this was being diagnosed with cancer at the end of 2019 in the middle of my study leave. To be honest, that all simply deepened the experience, and I'm really grateful for all the support we've received. The cancer was found very early by accident when they were looking for something else. The prognosis is excellent. However, inevitably, it makes you reckon with your mortality.

It has been an extraordinary privilege being Dean of Chelmsford over the last nine years. I am hugely grateful for colleagues, lay and ordained, and also for the many invitations to work with people and communities across the Diocese. Ministry in such a large and diverse diocese has been deeply engaging, and it has been very moving to work across the spectrum of theology and church tradition. From leading a parish weekend for a conservative evangelical church one week, to the next preaching at a Forward in Faith church. Going from leading the worship on Easter Day in a New Wine church, as well as the Eucharist on St Cedd's Day at Bradwell Chapel, to taking a retreat at Pleshey. Working with the Dean of Brentwood and continuing to strengthen the relationship between the two cathedrals of Essex has been a real joy as well as renewing a commitment to the closer working together of our two traditions that has been important throughout my ministry. It has also been a particular privilege to do a lot of one-to-one

work with many different clergy and lay ministers, and especially with students and ordinands.

Alongside what might be called church-facing ministry, one of the particular gifts of Cathedral ministry for me has been its very outward facing nature, building partnerships and relationships in the city and region, and even preaching at Friday Prayers at Chelmsford Mosque. It was brilliant to see so many of those strands coming together during the recent Gaia installation at the Cathedral. And of course Gaia was a great example not of something I did but something that WE did together - volunteers, staff, clergy, partners, sponsors, voluntary sector organisations and so many more. Each member of the body making their unique and important contribution.

At the same time, one of the challenges of the role of Dean - and of many similar roles in the Church - is that it is really quite easy to forget you're a priest. It's easy - even inevitable - that Deans find themselves trying to manage a complex voluntary sector organisation, rather than exercising a priestly ministry. It's a common conversation among those in senior roles, especially where, as here, the mismatch between resources and opportunity is so extreme.

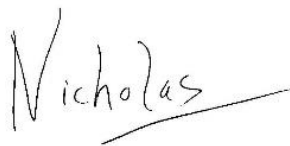
I remember my Dad saying, 10 years into being a Bishop, that he no longer knew what it was like to be a parish priest, and that was a problem. Over recent years it has been encouraging to see a range of people - including Deans and Bishops, and indeed one Archbishop - returning to parish ministry. I was very moved five years ago when my contemporary Mark Rylands decided to step down as Bishop of Shrewsbury to become a rural parish priest on the edge of Dartmoor.

A big moment for me just after Christmas this year was stepping in to take a funeral. As I got to know the family and walk with them through their grief, it was like re-discovering a muscle that I hadn't exercised properly for years. I knew I had to pay attention to that and - at a deep level - to re-discover my ministry as a priest.

Thank you to all of you who have been partners on this journey. Moving on is both exciting and costly. Christine and I are both clergy children and have been professional nomads all our lives. Between us we reckon we have lived in at least 38 different houses. We are therefore particularly grateful to those who have come alongside us over our time here - intentionally held us in your prayers, and walked with us as friends.

It has been a fascinating and illuminating time of our lives. Do pray for us as we pray for you as we all move into a new future.

With my thanks and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicholas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.