

Ministry Team Letter

Revd Sue's Retirement and Revised Support Contacts

As you will know, the Revd Sue Wharton has now retired from the Benefice, her final service having taken place on Sunday 26th July 2026.

Following Sue's retirement, and to ensure that pastoral matters, together with enquiries about baptisms, weddings and funerals, are dealt with efficiently, and to avoid the possibility of double bookings, we ask that all enquiries are now directed to either Fr Martin, our Assistant Curate, or Geoff Peckham, our Licensed Lay Minister. Their contact details can be found on the Who's who page.

Although both Fr Martin and Geoff are available to deal with enquiries relating to any of our three churches, it would be helpful, where possible, if enquiries concerning Cowfold were directed to Fr Martin, and those relating to Lower Beeding and Coolhurst, to Geoff. However, either will be pleased to assist with enquiries for any church within the Benefice.

Sue was licensed to the Benefice in December 2019 and has therefore been with us for just over six and a half years. Shortly after her arrival, we entered the Covid pandemic, which had a profound and lasting effect on all our lives and on the life of the Benefice. Despite those challenging circumstances, under Sue's leadership we have emerged stronger, learning to work more closely together as three churches serving one Benefice. That journey has been a real blessing.

During her ministry, Sue has offered countless acts of pastoral care and support, much of which, by its very nature, has remained unseen and confidential. She has also introduced a number of significant initiatives, including *Open the Book*, the Bible storytelling programme now well established in our two church schools. This has become a valued part of school life and is much appreciated by pupils, staff and volunteers alike.

We also have Sue to thank for introducing the revised pattern of services, which has provided a firm foundation as we move forward during the vacancy.

We have now entered the period which, in Church terminology, is known as an '*interregnum*' or vacancy. This simply means that we are currently without an incumbent (Vicar). During this time, many of the responsibilities normally undertaken by the Vicar are shared between the Rural Dean, the Churchwardens and other clergy licensed to serve within the Benefice.

The Churchwardens and the Ministry Team will be working closely together to ensure that the worship, ministry and pastoral life of the Benefice continues as smoothly as possible. The regular pattern of services will remain unchanged. However, as we shall at times be dependent upon visiting clergy and other ministers, there may occasionally be unforeseen circumstances which require a last-minute change. Should this happen, every effort will be made to give as much notice as possible.

As we begin this new chapter in the life of the Benefice, we ask for your prayers, your patience and your continued support. Vacancies are times of both challenge and opportunity. They provide space to reflect, to discern God's will for the future, and to prepare for the ministry of the person whom God is already calling to serve among us.

With God's guidance, and by continuing to work together in faith and fellowship, we look forward with confidence and hope to all that lies ahead.

With every blessing,

The Churchwardens and the Ministry Team

in the Benefice of Lower Beeding with Coolhurst and Cowfold

A prayer during our vacancy

Heavenly Father, we hold before you all who live and work in this benefice, and all who gather to worship you in these three churches.

We know you have plans for us and we trust that those plans are good. Fill us with vision, energy and faithfulness in prayer that we may be true to our calling to bring new life to our community.

Sustain those with interim responsibilities, and guide those who are seeking the right priest for our benefice. Prepare the heart of the right person seeking the next step in their ministry.

Together may we discern your way for the future and be further equipped to grow your kingdom in this place, to the glory of your name.

Amen