The Revd. Canon Christine Dale

The Rectory, Woolton Hill, Hampshire, RG20 9QZ

[redacted]

5th December 2023

Dear Churchwardens,

It is just not possible to thank everyone by name but I write to thank you from my heart for the most wonderful of services last Thursday evening. Thank you for allowing me to hold the service in St Martin's Church, it was the church in which I was collated in November 2002 and I felt a completeness in holding my leaving service in the same place. We gathered from around our parishes to do what, in my view, together we do the best - join in a wonderful service of thanksgiving and celebration. As would have been the case in all our churches, everyone had a part to play, some roles seen and many unseen. There were those who prepared the church for worship, who arranged flowers, who printed orders of service, who rehearsed the music in advance and who prepared other details along the way. Then there were those who arranged parking, who announced the service through bellringing, who played the organ, who welcomed those arriving until - together from near and far we joined in the well-loved liturgy of Evensong, raised our voices in joyful hymns, listened to the scriptures, heard the Word and prayed together. All followed by a 'marvellous party' (Simon's words!) in which a further army of folk prepared and served drinks and food. It wasn't quite the feeding of the 5,000 but faithful sidesmen afterwards recorded 261 adults and six children in attendance… Dearest churchwardens, it was all I could possibly have hoped for in a leaving service, I will always remember the occasion and I 'couldn't have liked it more'!

It has been the most enormous privilege to have served you and these wonderful parishes in this beautiful part of northwest Hampshire for twenty one years. As you know over the years ministry grew as our partnership of parishes evolved. Change is always difficult, especially perhaps in the Church of England, but together we embraced the changes that came and I hope we grew in faith and fellowship because of it. Change now comes once more. For Simon and I, we must move home as I retire, I must find a different pattern to life and I must, for health reasons, slow down a bit! We will be praying for you and the parishes as you seek a new incumbent. I know you will welcome them, as you did me, and eventually Simon. We hope to keep in touch and we hope, next year at least, we will be welcomed to buy plants for our new garden at the annual round of fetes…

Now I want to thank you most sincerely for the wheelbarrow of gifts and the generous cheques I have received. For those who do not know: the wheelbarrow contained a number of gifts including various gardening themed items to go with the wheelbarrow, some art supplies (I intend to resume some currently rather rusty artistic interests), some edible treats… and some beer for Simon! I am rather overwhelmed by the generous cheques and I wanted you to know that Simon and I plan to use the money given to order a lovely new sofa for our new home and then, next year, we will take a short holiday and take the train to Edinburgh, stay in a lovely hotel – and think of you all as we explore the Royal Mile and the city around. Please pass on my sincerest thanks to everyone.

So my dear friends and companions in Christ, (at the risk of sounding like St Paul) I thank God for you all and I pray for the grace of God to be with you and for the love of Christ to unite us still, even though our earthly journeys now take a different path. I thank Simon too for, in his much appreciated speech last Thursday, giving us the language of 'a marvellous party'. May it remind us that church life, whilst united by the Christian faith, is not meant to be dull, after all Jesus loved a party too, but is meant to be the precursor to the most marvellous party of all – the heavenly banquet at the end of time. If we don't see you before, we look forward to seeing you there!

With every blessing to you all,

Christine