Dear new friends,

Jo and I are very thankful to join you at last. It took more than four months from the invitation to become your vicar until last week's service of licensing. We've all had to be patient and for me the long wait has sharpened my appetite for ministry here.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the service on Monday. Our friends have told us that they found a real welcome and joy here and this has been our experience too. It was a time of real Christian hospitality and fellowship. And it was also a service in which our focus on God was very clear. It is for his glory and to accomplish his purposes that we live and work. We can have no ambitions of our own nor can we seek visions which are not his. The ancient church of St Mary is a good reminder that even the most long-serving vicars have a walk-on part in God's great story of salvation.

I didn't choose the readings at Monday's service - they're simply the ones set for the day. When I saw that we would be reading these words from Paul's Letter to the Philippians, I knew it was right to use them.

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus... Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus...

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

These early days have been thankful and prayerful ones for me. They have been about finding my feet, meeting as many people as I can, and really listening to understand the life and work of St Peter's and St Mary's. Inevitably, it will take some time for me to have a substantial conversation

with everyone. If you particularly want to get in touch, please do contact me by email or phone, or catch me at one of the services. You may be wondering what changes lie ahead. Well to start with, please be assured that it is to our unique parish as it is, that I have been called. I am committed to offering leadership and support for the partnership of two different churches and the flourishing of worshipping congregations who pray and praise in different ways. Nick Alexander already offers clear and gifted leadership with the team at St Peter's and I am very glad to be working closely with him and with them. I also rejoice to be joining a parish in which there are strong choirs and in which contemporary worship is led by bands. We don't all have to be the same.

So I invite you to imagine what it is like to see our churches and our town for the first time, as I am now doing. Join me in noticing, wondering and appreciating things for the good that they are. Please take moments to look around and take delight in the different people that God has set us among and the different ways in which he makes himself known. Join me in praying with gratitude for all that is good here and seeking our growth to the glory and praise of God.

Yours in the fellowship of the Gospel,

Simon