

6 October 2024

Dear Friends,

We write to update you on the present situation of our benefice, our six churches and our wider communities we care for. As you will likely be aware, we entered into a period of vacancy at the start of September, when our incumbent minister, Fr Andy Atkins, left us for a new ministry in Cornwall. Since Fr Andy's departure, there may have been a sense that no news has been widely shared about what the future holds for the South Tamar Mission Community, and in the space of no official news, sadly there have been tongues wagging and gossip spreading all sorts of misinformation about what is happening.

Firstly, the worshipping life of all six of our churches continues with very little change at this time. Between our Assistant Curate, Rev'd Phill Parker, our Licensed Lay Minister, Richard Searight, and other clergy and lay ministers from our wider deanery, we have full rotas planned right through to Easter at present. In a few places you might find that a service is at a different time to the norm, but largely we continue as was. For some of you, it might be quite exciting to come and enjoy worship with a guest minister or preacher who brings a different flavour.

Secondly, we are actively working towards the filling of our vacancy. The Bishop of Plymouth and Archdeacon of Plymouth have visited us and started the vacancy process with us, and we are already engaged in building the parish profiles that will form the main part of the advertisement for our new minister. Our PCCs will be reaching out to members of our communities as well as our churches for thoughts on what we would like from a minister to take us forwards. This will not be a protracted process – the Bishop and Archdeacon are proposing an ambitious timeline that will hopefully minimise the length of time we are without a priest-in-charge, so we are moving quickly to meet their timeframes.

Some of the comments that have filtered back to us with regard to the vacancy and the appointment of our new minister need clearing up. We are going to be

receiving a new, full-time minister for our six churches. There are no mergers with other parishes (what is known as Pastoral Reorganisation) or sharing of leadership from another benefice required before we will be offered our new minister. The appointment process is already underway. What will happen is that the newly appointed minister will start their time with us under the licence of a 'priest-in-charge', which offers scope for a period of time for the diocese, the deanery and our parishes to consider any reorganisation of boundaries that might be sensible for the long-term health of our churches. Should no reorganisation plans be brought forward, or once any plans have been consulted on and implemented, then our priest-in-charge could then be re-licensed as our incumbent vicar. Talk of reorganisation can cause concern, but this same pattern of licensing as priest-in-charge before vicar is what happened with Fr Andy ten years ago, so it is what can naturally be expected when a vacancy arises.

If any of you have questions during the vacancy period, we would much rather that you reached out to speak directly to us, rather than hearing more rumours and third-hand misinformation being spread around. The Churchwardens and the Rural Dean are the sequestrators with responsibility for the benefice during the vacancy, so are available to respond to any questions or concerns that may arise, as is our curate, Rev'd Phill Parker, while he is still with us. The wardens can be contacted via the telephone numbers published in the [Parish News](#), or by following the link to your local church on this webpage, and clicking on the warden's name: <https://www.southtamar.church/our-churches/>

The Rural Dean, Rev'd Andrew Thomas, can be emailed via:

[rectorwestdartmoor@gmail.com](mailto:rectorwestdartmoor@gmail.com)

Our curate, Rev'd Phill Parker, can be emailed via: [curate@southtamar.church](mailto:curate@southtamar.church)

This is an exciting, but challenging, time for us as a mission community. We hope you will support us in our search for a new minister, as well as continuing to support us in the life of our churches and communities. There are lots of wonderful services and events coming up through Harvest, Advent and Christmas, and we look forward to you joining us for these and our regular services.

Your brothers and sisters in faith,

*The wardens and curate of the South Tamar Mission Community.*