



Cathedral Church of St Michael & St George Grahamstown

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Tuesday 21st March 2017

Dear AJ

Farewells are seldom easy. But they do give us the opportunity to express our appreciation and to say thank you!

I remember our first meeting with you, in the Cory Room, with (I think) Barbara Stout, perhaps the churchwardens, and others, as we listened with fascination and a fair degree of awe, and also growing excitement, as you spoke of music and choirs and organ pieces and landmarks in your own musical career and journey. It was the beginning of a new journey of discovery for many of us: a journey of excellence, of creativity, of inclusion, of diversity; as well as growing friendship, respect, and appreciation for you and for all that you are. And now we look back at all that you have done and accomplished during your time here with us.

What an immense gift you have been to us all over these past five years. You have been instrumental in shaping and deepening our life of worship here at the Cathedral; our choir has blossomed and is quite awe-inspiring in the quality of music that they produce; we have benefited from joyful worship, wonderful liturgy, a creative approach to so much; as well as helping us engage with diversity in language and music. You will be a very hard act to follow!

You have also been instrumental in moving the Cathedral further along the road to welcome and include those who are gay or lesbian, and to continue on this particular journey – and this has helped stir thought and discussion and engagement in the diocese and also in the Province.

The Cathedral worship has a very special feel to it these days: fun, crisp, profound, simple and straightforward, accessible, lively, musically inspiring, liturgically sound and theologically rich (or should it be theologically sound and liturgically rich – both work!); our services are not heavy and boring and tedious, but rather the reverse: they are filled with energy, they are interesting and thoughtful. So much of this has been your influence, work, care, planning, input, and leadership.

You are generous and humble and self-effacing. You probably are aware that you are one of the top church musicians in the country, but you have not thrown your weight around or let everyone know it; you are generous in your affirmation and praise and encouragement; you let us all bask in the appreciation and gratitude that comes our way, when in fact a great deal of what the Cathedral worship is, has been your doing. I stand at the West Door of the Cathedral after our various amazing services – those largely choir-led, as well as our normal Sunday acts of worship – and people are so appreciative, and moved, often beyond words. I have accepted their thanks on behalf of us all, knowing that a great deal of it is due to you.

You have frequently spoken of how the Cathedral has given you the space to try things, to introduce new ideas, to be creative. We are grateful to you, and deeply thankful, for your musical and liturgical leadership, and for your hard work and initiative throughout these five years, for your willingness to keep going, as you have poured your energy and creativity into the worship life of this community. There have been times when it would have been so easy to simply stop trying, to take your foot off the accelerator, and to coast along; to become disillusioned and cynical. In the face of deep disappointment and closed doors, you have not allowed yourself to become embittered or angry; you have remained open and generous in your relationships with us all, and particularly with me as Dean; you have been a sign and channel of God's grace.

And now we are to lose you. I wish that we could see you go to a top post elsewhere – certainly you are worthy of it, and then we would watch you go with sadness but also with great pride and joy! But our prayer is that the door will open, in due time, for you. And I know that wherever you are, you will contribute with wisdom and grace and humility and love to the life of the body of Christ, and to the upbuilding of the community.

There is so much that we have come to appreciate about you...

You are a person of deep integrity.

Laughter; a great conversationalist!

You enjoy a party!

Articulate, well-read; a person of insight.

A wonderful friend and companion; loyal.

Approachable.

A support and wise counsel for many, many people – old and young; as the time for your leaving draws near, I am increasingly aware of just how much the choristers are going to feel your absence, immensely.

As am I; as are we all.

You build community.

Self-aware; deeply reflective.

And so we say goodbye and farewell. We pray for God's blessing to rest upon you. Our prayers are with you, and will continue to surround you.

Thank you, AJ!

Easter blessings, warm regards and love from all at the Cathedral

Andrew Hunt