

'Drains'

To you all,

Vacancy. It's a scary word, with negative connotations. Empty, void, hollow.

Following Michael's retirement in August, the churches of the Savernake Team are officially 'in vacancy'. This presents challenges, of course. But the Team Council and the Profiling Committee are busy developing a description of the Team and its parishes that we all hope will attract applicants who feel drawn to join us, serve our communities, and lead our churches into the future.

In the meantime, perhaps we should try to see around or beyond the negative associations of 'vacancy'.

I remember once overhearing an elderly priest telling off an altar boy who'd managed to make a muddle setting up for Holy Communion. From across the altar, the priest snapped irritably at the boy, 'When God was handing out brains, you thought he said 'drains' and asked for a big, clean, empty one.'

But I'm with the altar boy. I think even if the boy had heard God correctly, had heard Him ask, 'Brains?' he should still have put in the same request: big, clean and empty, please. Because brains, like drains, work best when they're big, empty and open.

Vacancy is a good thing. It's an emptiness, yes, but it's also an openness, a capacity.

Thomas Aquinas defined a human being as a *capax Dei*, a capacity for God. A capacity is, I take it, an emptiness, a space, a void to be filled; it's a vacancy.

I've had many conversations recently with parishioners wanting to know why the Church of England insists on these periods of vacancy following a priest's retirement. Why can't we begin the process of recruiting a new vicar *before* the previous incumbent leaves their post? After all, that's how it works in the real world.

But the Church doesn't look to the world, real or otherwise. Or oughtn't. Vacancy is a way of opening ourselves, not to the world, but to the will of God.

So it's my prayer that through the coming months, we prove able in the Savernake Team to remain big, clean, and open. Because ultimately, we don't want the post of Team Rector to be filled as much as we want our hearts to be filled.

Colin Heber-Percy