

Now that 2009 has well and truly arrived, we are all looking forward so much to joining you at St Hilda's. And at the outset, Michaela and I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who has made us feel so welcome ever before we have arrived. In particular, we are so grateful to all those who have worked so hard to transform an empty vicarage into a warm and inviting home. Thank you.

The sense of home-coming we feel is down to the fact that Bearwood and Warley Woods is where we started out together. Michaela and I met nearly 18 years ago through a church group in Bearwood. Both of us came to the West Midlands to find work; Michaela as a nurse and I as a journalist. We soon fell for the area around the park, like many who settle here. Like the wonderful beeches of the woods, we put down roots and our family tree grew. Joseph (13) and Isobel (10) have loved the area like us. They learned to walk and cycle and sledge on the park, like so many who have gone before. It has always felt like home to them.

Walking round the woods 10 years ago, I first began to hear God's call to the ordained ministry. It was as we worshipped at Warley Woods Methodist Church that I also responded to another call of home-coming, this time to return to the Anglican Church after some years away. Then, following a gratefully thorough discernment process, it was off to Queen's College for some pruning and flourishing.

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For the last three and a half years we have been at St Giles, Rowley Regis. Here I have been inspired by the stories of faith and humbled by the faithfulness of folk from all walks of life. Sixteen years a journalist in the Black Country prepared me well! During this time in Rowley our family has grown. Firstly with the arrival of Aslan, our now three-year-old large and slightly cowardly ginger cat; and latterly through Charlie, Isobel's hyperactive hamster. Michaela found work in Blackheath, where she continues as a general and respiratory practice nurse. The children remained at school in Bearwood. Isobel is still at Abbey Junior and Joseph has moved on to a secondary school near the city centre. Our move to St Hilda's will at least mean the end of our 125-mile a week school runs from Rowley; as a result our carbon footprint will shrink a bit. Over the years we have also kept our links with the Warley Woods Community Trust and are looking forward to getting a bit more fit by walking in and around the park more often - perhaps even getting in the odd round of golf.

Joseph loves football and cricket, plays the tuba and supports West Brom. He is looking forward to being closer to his friends, as is Isobel, who loves animals, drawing, cooking, swimming, horse riding and being outdoors. Michaela enjoys amateur dramatics, singing, gardening, ecology and nature watching and has a particular interest in butterflies. She is looking forward to developing the vicarage garden for nature and would like to restore the pond. I will be following Michael's footsteps in one respect. I share a love of cricket and play for the clergy team - though I am not in the same class as he was, a very cultured batsman. In my spare time - which I am looking forward to having - I also enjoy singing, making bread, relaxing with friends and having a good laugh.

The call to St Hilda's has come as an unexpected and wonderful surprise. We had been preparing to look far and wide as the curacy was coming to an end. Indeed, God initially tested our willingness to uproot completely and go to another part of the country. But then, after obedience came the blessing. So here we are, excited and a little disbelieving that it is happening. We look forward to getting to know you, learning with and from you and living a full life of discipleship and community. Finally, we would like to be known as Michaela and Paul - no need to call us vicar's wife or vicar!