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Dear Friend,

Writing this letter at the beginning of a New Year, I am reminded that change is very much a part of life. I took over as Chairman of the RSCM Guildford Area committee last September, so I have only been in that role for a few months.

Sadly, our Area Secretary, Iain Nisbet, has to leave the committee due to his job moving out of the area. Even before I was asked to become Chairman, I was well aware of how efficient and tireless Iain is in carrying out the duties of an Area Secretary, and the meticulous care he takes over every detail. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

On a happier note, it was my joy and privilege to be present with many others at choral evensong in Guildford Cathedral recently when Katherine Dienes-Williams was admitted as Organist and Master of the Choristers. We welcome Katherine warmly and look forward to working with her in the future. We greatly value our ties with the cathedral, and I must thank David Davies, the cathedral Sub Organist, for all he continues to do, both for our Area Committee specifically and also for his musical work in the diocese generally. Many people, including myself, find his music-making inspirational.

So committee members, musicians and indeed clergy come and go, and change continues throughout the diocese, whether at the cathedral or in our parishes. But 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever' - and it is Him that we serve. As a small choirboy, I was taught that we should offer our very best to God, and I have never forgotten it. That is why the RSCM exists - to help resource musicians to offer their best to God, and to help them train others to do the same.

The RSCM Area Guildford committee has now produced our 2008 programme, which I hope you will find exciting, interesting and relevant. Please do support our events and encourage others to try them also. Change *is* here - not in a frightening way, but in a positive and creative way. For instance, the feedback that I have received from many people is that our 2007 Area Choirs' Festival was a very much more enjoyable and approachable event than previously. I would love to welcome you at our 2008 Festival and it does not matter whether your choir has only a few singers, or many - you are equally welcome, and I believe that you will receive a great deal from being part of it.

Looking ahead to 2009, I am keenly aware that we need to be putting on events that are relevant to your needs and interests as parish musicians. In order to do this, we need to have a much clearer idea of what is going on in the parishes, and what you would like from us. We hope to find out in various ways, and I would ask you to please help us. First, we are approaching all our parishes with a short survey of music facilities. You should hear from us shortly, and we would appreciate your help in carrying out this activity.

Secondly, I am hoping to gradually go round the diocese to continue a successful experiment that we tried in my own Leatherhead Deanery - an informal meeting of parish musicians, when we met for coffee and spent a couple of hours chatting to each other about our different situations, and how we could help each other. One colleague told me that this was the first time that she had ever been invited to such an event.

We want to listen to you. We then intend to respond to your needs so that our events are relevant to you. Please respond to our survey. Please come for a coffee/meeting, or even better arrange one in your area and invite me! Or contact me direct - my details are at the top of this letter and I am eager to hear *your* views, whether compliments or complaints!

May I wish you all a belated very Happy New Year.

Nigel Perona-Wright (Chairman, RSCM Guildford Area Committee)