

# VOCATION VOICES

PERSONAL STORIES OF GOD'S CALL TO CHRISTIAN MINISTRY + 2021 / 2022



The Diocese of  
Peterborough

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# Bishop John's welcome

In the Oscar-garlanded film "Chariots of Fire" about the 1924 Olympics in Paris, gold medal winning athlete Eric Liddell says "God made me for a purpose but he also made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure". Liddell, who later died as a missionary in China, wrestled with his dual calling as a Christian disciple and a sportsman. It took some time for him to see both as God-given opportunities for service and both as proper responses to the amazing gifts that God had given him. He could preach and he could run (and play rugby at international level)!

What has God made you for? What are you good at? What are your particular gifts? What might be your special contribution to the world? These are all vitally important questions. Indeed, they are some of the most important questions any of us will have to answer.

Athletes face particular pressure to justify themselves by achievement. If they win, they're a success. If they fail, they can feel valueless.

Sports writer Stuart Weir comments; "We are loved by God for who we are not because of what we can do. If an athlete understands that they are significant because God created them and loves them, they are free to compete and use the gifts they have been given." The Australian silver-winning high-jumper, Nicola McDermott, says; "Jumping with the peace that you are loved can take you to heights you have never seen before."

This echoes Jesus' promise: "I have come that you may have life in all its' fullness".



I'm delighted that you are exploring God's purpose and calling for your life. The Vocation and Formation team are here to help you in your exploring. Discovering God's plan for your fulfilment is the greatest challenge of our lives and one of the most exciting.

With my prayers and very best wishes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'J' followed by a smaller 'B' and a flourish.

+John  
Bishop of Brixworth

***"Be who you were created to be and you will set the world on fire"***

*Catherine of Siena*

# Stepping into the unknown

**M**y name is **Marta Brothers** & I am currently in my second year of training as a pioneer ordinand at Trinity College Bristol. I am a vicar's child and due to this, honestly, I think it meant I was more reluctant to explore ordination than others. However there comes a point where trusting in God just becomes fundamental.

I started exploring ordination while I was living in Bath, and I got through the pioneering panel in that diocese, but as our family felt called to Northampton where my husband's family are all from we moved there. This did prolong exploring ordination, but it also deepened my call. Unlike in Bath where it's a very white British middle class place Northampton was a very multicultural vibrant place and as a Latina this helps me understand who I was in my call. As a woman and ethnic minority these are two aspects of my identity which I personally felt I had to understand in a calling within the Church of England which I saw as mainly white middle class men; I needed to ask the deeper question of how I would fit in.

What I found reassuring is that I came across people who were very encouraging and supportive and gave a deeper insight into why I was called and that the way I am was not going to be a hindrance but instead would be a spiritual joy to others. This gave me the confidence I needed to start my training. Though at times I was anxious how I would handle the academic side (I have dyslexia and ADHD) what I have found is that Trinity allowed me to use my creative side to demonstrate my thoughts when writing the essays. The hunger to learn and to know more about God and his creation and how to be equipped to lead his church has only grown in a way I did not expect. What I have learned is that it's about more than learning theology; it's also about learning pastorally and gaining a deeper understanding of myself, equipping me for what comes next.

**“The hunger to learn and to know more about God .... has only grown”**



Being in Bristol has also allowed my whole family to understand and be part of this new chapter in our lives. I was worried how the children would settle into new place & school and how my husband would feel having a very different role than he had prior to my training. However, despite the pandemic, God's goodness has shone through in a way I had not expected. I am definitely not the

finished product, but I can see how his hand was on placing me here at this time. One last thought - do not be afraid of the unknown; do not plan the unknown; stepping out generally means stepping into the unknown and with every part of your being trusting entirely in God for He is good.

**Marta Brothers**

# A journey



I have embarked on this journey to train as a Lay Reader. Why me? Why not me? Why now?

## *Why me?*

I must admit, on first appearance, I would not have chosen me to do this course. I am not your typical Anglican. My background is Free Church. Beginning in Methodism in my native North East, I have trawled around a fair number of Church styles. From Baptist, to the wilder extremes of the House Church movement in the 1980's. As a student in the late 70's/early 80's, I attended a charismatic Anglican Church in Lancaster. As a teacher in the West Midlands late 80's/90's, my church was again Baptist. Even after my move to Northampton when I married, I was Free Church. But something happened...I went through, a difficult time. I gave up teaching. I nearly stopped going to church altogether. But, my daughter had started as a Choral scholar at St Matthew's Church in Northampton. And to support her, my wife and I started attending. What a culture shock! High Anglo Catholic worship. Smells and bells and all! But, strangely, I found a welcoming home there. They asked me to do the readings during services. I even started to enjoy the choral music they do so well there. And this brings me to my second thread...

## *Why not me?*

In my past, I was a Methodist Local Preacher. I had attended Cliff College, a lay training bible college in Derbyshire. Theology and preaching was lurking in my past, hiding in plain sight. But it was at a Lenten study course at St Matthews; I was challenged to think about Lay Readership by Andrew Ward who was himself was undergoing Reader training. This was about three years ago. But more recently a mutual friend again challenged me to think about this. So, I attended a vocations day last year. And here I am about to start the course. Which brings me to my third and final point...

## *Why Now?*

It could be argued that this is just a retirement project for me. And this is a valid point. I have just retired from my job at Northampton College. I am 66 in October. But on the other hand I note that many figures in the Old Testament did their best work for God in their later years. And if not now, when? God gives us talents and gifts. I want to make this offering to him now of any gifts I have. While I still have time to do so.

I have no idea where this journey will take me. But as I "boldly go", trekking pole in hand, I am strangely excited. God does indeed move in mysterious ways. His wonders to perform in our lives!

**Ray Douglas**

# From a migrant nurse to an Ordinand

**M**y name is **Shilo Varughese**, married to Bincy and we have two daughters. I was born and brought up in a traditional Christian family, back in a south Indian state called Kerala. My Christian faith has been rooted and nurtured by the doctrine and doxology of Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, which has the profound heritage of Apostle St. Thomas. I dedicated my life to Christian Ministry and prepared myself for that goal from Childhood.

I regret, I slipped away from God's calling to his mission and ministry and instead began a nursing career, because I thought that was the best way to make my life secure. The same way prophet Jonah did, as he was asked by God to go to Nineveh, but he travelled to Joppa instead. I graduated as a nurse in 1999 and gained experience from various hospitals in India before moving to the UK. My relationship with the Church of England began with the relationship between the Anglican Churches and the Mar Thoma Churches in the UK and worldwide as both churches are 'in full communion with' each other. I found Anglican Churches in UK opened their door for migrant communities to use for their worship places.

I was attracted and sustained by local Anglican Church's adaptability and by its welcoming nature. I had felt very strongly that I was being called by God which led me to explore the possibility of a vocation in the service of Christ. But my main concern was, am I competent enough to serve God in a foreign country because my cultural and spiritual traditions are totally different. What I have learned so far in my spiritual journey is that when God leads us to discern His plan in our life, everything is possible and our competence comes from the grace of God. The holistic image of the process of discernment involved my constant prayer and numerous conversations with the Diocesan Director of Ordinands and an assistant DDO for more than two years.

The time I spent discerning the vocation was the time of my personal growth



## Shilo Varughese

through self-awareness, the development of a disciplined prayer life, and the acquisition of knowledge of the ministry in the Church. I was recommended for a Diocesan Panel and subsequently a Bishop's Advisory Panel interview in May 2020 and was recommended for training for priesthood. I started two years training in September 2020 at St Mellitus College, Nottingham under Durham University and context based supervisory training with Revd Jackie Bullen at St Botolph's, Longthorpe.

**“when God leads us to discern His plan in our life, everything is possible”**

# As we explored, doors opened

**H**ello! My name is **Emily Taylor**. I have lived in Oundle for the past seventeen years and worship at St Peter's Church in Oundle. I am hoping to become a Reader and am part of Cohort 12 of the Lay Ministry Course, which means I have just started the second of three years training. I am also a local GP and have spent over thirty years working in the NHS.

Many years ago, my husband and I had a very strong sense of calling to work as missionary doctors in Uganda. I remember being asked, "How do you know God is calling you?" In many ways it felt quite straight forward. The calling started with a deep yearning inside to offer myself to God and be used in any way He wanted. This sense of call seemed to be confirmed through conversations with wise Christian friends and as we explored, doors opened. We ended up having three years in Uganda- years that remain very significant for us. So that calling seemed to be an unfolding, rather than anything particularly dramatic.

And now I find myself approaching the end of my paid working life. I'm not sure "retirement" is a Christian way of thinking about life – seasons would be better and I journey towards this next season with a blank canvas. I want to be open to what God wants from me. This has caused me to ponder and pray. Over the years I have seen so many examples of God's faithfulness to myself, my family and others. I have a deep longing for others to come to know the love of God in Christ. I think my calling to Reader ministry stems from that longing for others and the desire to use any gifts that I may have for His service. So, this inner desire has felt very similar to the sense of calling that I had all those years ago. Conversations with friends, family and Stephen Webster (my Vicar), were helpful in encouraging me to explore further – doors have opened and here I am!

So for me, calling has involved listening to the stirrings within me, listening to the wise counsel of others and then waiting for doors to open. God has graciously opened those doors and this next season feels exciting! A blank canvas with paints, brushes and pallet on the easel, waiting to be used!

**"I remember being asked, How do you know God is calling you?"**



**Emily Taylor**

# Exploring Lay Vocation

**T**essa Oram and Chris Peck have recently joined the diocesan Vocation & Formation Team and share the work of encouraging lay vocations, Tessa in the Oakham Archdeaconry and Chris in the Northampton Archdeaconry.

**Tessa writes:** I have very much enjoyed settling in, meeting people and walking the first part of this particular journey with individuals who are in the process of discerning whether a form of recognized lay ministry might be the way God is calling them. I come from a background of lay ministry myself – having worked for the diocese of York as Faith in Education worker for ten years finding ways to surprise schools with the relevance of faith, and running a mentoring project with a team of Christian volunteers who weekly met and built relationships with a variety of young people on the edge of exclusion from Hull secondary schools.



## **Tessa Oram** **Lay Vocations Officer for the** **Oakham Archdeaconry**

**Together they write:** Throughout Scripture God calls the most surprising people to step out in serving his kingdom. That means God may well be calling you, yes *you*, whatever your age, background, situation, to take a further step in His service. That may be in your place of work, in your local community or in the church. Each of us only has a finite amount of time, energy and availability; we are passionate about seeing people offer their own

personal version of ‘five loaves and two fish’ to Jesus and seeing how He multiplies and feeds and creates wonderful miracles through them. It has been great to see this part of life in process – and being able to talk and pray with people to support what the Holy Spirit is already doing.

The church has been through a tough time – but our influence is far from over, and as



**Chris writes:** My work for 28 years was to train, support and encourage lay people in their call to ministry and help clergy to be leaders of every member ministry in their parishes. I did this for three different Dioceses before getting an unexpected call to ordination out of the blue in my sixties, so I know all about the God of surprises. Having recently retired from being a Vicar I am thrilled to have the opportunity to continue walking alongside lay people who are exploring how God is calling them.



## Chris Peck

### Lay Vocations Officer for the Northampton Archdeaconry

Jesus' body on earth, there is still much to do, whether leading people into worship, teaching and discipleship, leading a pastoral care team, finding new relevant ways to reach those who wouldn't give the pre-pandemic church the time of day, being a voluntary chaplain and being agents of God's Kingdom in our homes, local communities and places of work. It is so exciting to see this in process as individuals choose to step out in following Jesus' call.

We look forward to connecting with you to help you discern how God may be calling you further in his service – the most exciting journey that you can imagine. Why not talk

with your incumbent and then speak to Tessa if you are in the Oakham Archdeaconry or Chris if you are in the Northampton Archdeaconry. Let us together, to quote the Unicorn from C.S. Lewis's *The Last Battle* – 'Come further up, come further in!'



# The Lay Ministry Course

The pandemic had a huge impact on the Lay Ministry Course. Suddenly everything had to be delivered remotely online. We already had a Moodle site (what is known as a Virtual Learning Environment), which all our students use in their studies. But we had to make courses self-sufficient online, so that students could find and work through all that they needed remotely. This was not done entirely through Moodle: tutors used varying combinations of Zoom, YouTube and pre-recorded audio files to supplement what was available on the Moodle site.

In terms of technology, the legacy of the pandemic has been a mixed one: on the one hand we came to realize in a new way how vital 'face-to-face', 'live' contact is for both teaching and fellowship; no technology, however user-friendly, can really be a substitute for that. Zoom has its limitations.

However, there has also been a legacy in terms of helping people from different parts of the diocese to access courses. Our 'Introduction to the Bible' module can now be done totally remotely via Moodle, with tutorials on Zoom to support students through it. People can do it in their own time in their own homes however far from Northampton or Peterborough they are and see if the sort of training we offer might be useful to them where they are.

But on a much more ambitious level, thanks to Revd Helen Bent, the Lay Worship Leaders' Certificate course has been re-launched as a totally 'blended' course, with students doing mid-week evening sessions on Zoom, followed up by various 'live' study Saturdays based in different churches across the diocese, over the

course of one academic year (September-July), in order to receive the Bishop's certificate in Lay Worship Leading. For some, this course will give them everything they need for a ministry of leading worship in their home benefice; for others, this will be just the start of their training as they follow it up by coming on the Lay Ministry Course to train as Licensed Lay Ministers (two years) or Readers (three years).

So we are more flexible and more accessible and, hopefully, more useful to churches and parishes across the diocese than we have ever been before.



**Andrew Coleby**  
**Ministry Training Officer**

# Igniting the passion within

**Y**ou always get asked when you start a new job where do you see yourself in the future. 15 years in Banking and 17 years as a Childminder I'd built up quite a set of life skills, mapping processes to mapping children's development. But little did I know on God's future plans for me.

We journey through life with families and careers, and big milestones, that sometimes we reach with trepidation. For me it was my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, surprisingly a gift that led me straight back to God. With a new baby I found a weigh-in clinic, and was invited to a breakfast group. Unbeknown to me this was a church plant locally in Grange Park. I started to attend along with my daughter and minded children...well who couldn't resist a coffee and croissant. Stories and songs captivated me and ignited this ember that had been buried deep inside me, I could not get enough.

With a new incumbent at my church, St Edmunds, Hardingstone, and the opportunity to attend another toddler praise group, it kept the ember burning and allowed me to involve myself in my local parish. I was encouraged by my incumbent to join the ministry team, using some of my skills in a different environment. Was this where God was leading me?

Still the ember burned and it felt like God was calling me to do more, and after a tearful and frank conversation with my incumbent I was introduced to the Director of Ordinands Steve Benoy. I joined Cohort 11 on the Lay Ministry course as a 'ministry explorer': an opportunity to study, learn, and grow, meet some lovely individuals and discover more about myself as a Christian. As my thirst for knowledge and

confidence grew, I was still questioning where God was taking me, until one morning at a bible study group...

We sat around a table with a Bible, candle, loaf of bread and meditated for a time, after which we all spoke of our instant feelings. My hands were heavy, they were burning and all I wanted to do was take the bread, break it and share it. To my amazement nobody else felt the same, and I realized the path God was planning for me. Having completed the discernment process around Easter 2021, here I am having just started my training as an Ordinand on part time pathway with St Mellitus College in Leicester.



**Angie Milne**

**“where do you see yourself in the future?”**

# Making the connection



**Dawn Bell**

**M**y name is **Dawn Bell**, I am married with two children and four grandchildren. I worship at St Mary's church, Bozeat.

My journey has not been easy, lots of ups and downs. As I am writing this, it has been exactly ten years since my life changed. I lost my dear mother, and I was distraught, and I was angry with God. I didn't understand why he couldn't save her. I became withdrawn, fearful, I held a lot of pain inside me that I didn't allow to surface or show for many years. I had no self-worth and I turned away from God, I pushed him away.

A few years passed and I was invited by my sister to join her for breakfast at Café Connections (a café church) in Bozeat where I live. I loved Café Connections because it was so relaxed and friendly, a very different kind of church. I learnt something new each time and it was something that seemed relevant to me on my new faith journey. I was encouraged to attend Alpha and Freedom in Christ; I began to regain some self-worth. My journey took off and I soon found myself joining the Bozeat Worship Band and home group. I renewed my baptismal vows on Easter Day 2018. That was the first time I experienced love and peace inside me. I felt the Holy Spirit's warmth that day inside me.

That summer I had some difficult work issues and since then several personal traumas I

struggled to cope with. I wasn't facing these, or talking to God, I had turned to alcohol to block out feelings of hurt and pain. Thankfully I had my church family who helped me find the support I needed, and I fully surrendered my life over to God, and am now in recovery from alcoholism and I help others who have had

**“I felt the Holy Spirit's warmth that day inside me”**

similar issues. My experiences have taught me so much about the Christian faith. I have learnt to deal with issues and not push them aside; I have learnt to talk to God all the time and listen for a response taking time to pause before I respond, and it's great to help others at support groups in the way I was first helped.

I joined the PCC a few years ago and have watched how our church has changed and grown. It feels like home now. I felt God had been prompting me to do much more, and I had given testimony in church and I had talked of my journey in a men's breakfast. The calling got stronger over the last couple of years particularly in lockdown, I have been gently encouraged by Chris Brett in Bozeat for a while, and this year I felt that I had heard God's voice and that I needed to explore this further.

After many years of struggles and finally realising God's wonderful word and finding a relationship with God that I never thought was possible, I am very excited to be answering his call and starting my Licensed Lay Ministry training this year with a view to being a Reader.

# A sense of peace

**M**y name is **Rob Wood**, I'm 31 and I am writing this after finishing my first year as an ordinand. I'm studying at St Mellitus College in Nottingham and serving my placement at St John's Corby.

When people have asked how the last year has been my reaction has always been overwhelmingly positive. I think that's because there's a sense of peace that comes from responding to God's call on your life.

I responded to the gospel when I was around 10 years old. I started attending an Anglican Church in my early 20's. I felt called to Christian ministry, but like many people, never felt I measured up to it. When working in internet marketing, the desire to enter ministry didn't subside. I ended up serving in a para-Church ministry and the calling into ordained ministry grew stronger. I finally entered the discernment process, which was helpful in three major ways.

First, I appreciated the space to properly test the desire for ministry (1 Timothy 3:1). There are, of course, commands in Scripture—such as in the pastoral epistles—for what we should take seriously in Church leadership. Having time to wrestle with those was helpful. Interacting with Steve (our Director of Ordinands) and the breadth of traditions in the Church helped me to realise that ministry is not just something we do, but our service flows out of who we are. I grew as a disciple of Jesus through the process.

Second, it was helpful to have different people—my vicar, the DDO, and the national Church at the BAP—endorse the calling. We're placed in a Church, and I wanted to be sure this wasn't just my thinking. Those concentric circles of confirmation helped me to realise that maybe the calling was from God.

Third, at the start of the discernment process, I couldn't say much more than 'I feel called to ministry.' Not only did the process test my desire to enter the ministry, but it also helped to grow my vocabulary to explain it. That ability then helped me to better understand God's call on my life.

This first year of training has been great! I think that's because there is a sense of peace that comes from responding to God's call on your life.



**Rob Wood**

**“ministry is not just something we do, but our service flows out of who we are”**

# Simply becoming

I'm Claire. I'm married to Scott, and we live in Kettering with our two secondary-school age children. Growing up, church was a place where you were quiet while you were taught stories of the bible, not a place to ask questions. I drifted away as a teenager but returned to my childhood church at Great Harrowden with my husband shortly after my son was born. I believed in God, but I didn't read the bible or pray outside of a Sunday and didn't feel a connection with Him. But the people there showed us God's love through their welcome and encouragement of our whole family.

I started to do things in church, but this was mainly due to me being unable to say 'no! I noticed many occasions when I felt out of my depth and stumped for ideas, even feeling physically sick with nerves before running messy church or leading a family service, but suddenly everything would 'miraculously' fall into place.

I signed up for the diocese Gen2 team's Children's Ministry Certificate but felt sure someone would spot I was a fraud! However, the course and the people I met changed me. I started to pray, I started to read the bible and had lightbulb moments when you realise that yes! God *is* speaking to me through scripture! It fuelled my children's work and I felt that finally I was living it, rather than just doing it. A couple of people asked me if I'd considered ministry and my first reaction was to laugh and dismiss it, but inside I was wondering 'is this God speak-

ing to me and what does this mean?'. It was unnerving and I pushed it away.

Some of my peers on the course signed up for the diocesan internship programme. I made excuses and invented reasons why I shouldn't or couldn't consider it: family commitments; age; my faith wasn't strong enough; I wasn't 'that sort' of person. I stalled for over a year. I googled all sorts of training – politics, teaching, social work. But there was always a nagging feeling that I should be doing *something* to do with God.

The turning point came during a walk with a friend during the pandemic who suggested the internship again. I immediately defaulted to 'I can't do that'. She looked at me and said 'But *why* can't you?'. And I found that I didn't have a good answer! So I finally stepped out in faith and accepted that God is in charge. The immediate relief I felt was overwhelming. I applied for the scheme, and

an exciting new adventure has begun, based at St Andrew's church in Kettering. I still struggle with the idea of calling because I can't get my head around God finding a place for me in His big plan. Someone helpfully pointed out that perhaps it's better to think of calling as simply becoming the person that God always planned you to be, which is less intimidating. I don't know what the future holds, but I know that I'm in the right place with some amazing people.



## Claire Barber

[www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/becomecommunity](http://www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/becomecommunity)

# Grace and Gratitude

**T**hroughout all of the pandemic one book has consistently been in the top 10 best-selling fiction books in the country. It's a beautiful collection of captioned drawings, painting a picture of kindness, friendship & courage in the face of anxiety, loneliness & fear. You may have heard of a book by the Christian artist & author Charlie Mackesy about *The Boy, The Mole, the Fox and The Horse* who meet on a walk, encounter a storm, tell each other about themselves and find solidarity in each other's company.

Towards the end of the book, the boy asks "So you know all about me". "Yes" said the horse. "And you still love me?" "We love you all the more" they said.

What a lovely picture of how God is. Many people wonder if God could ever use them in his work, thinking they are not worthy. God's love sees beyond our sense of unworthiness. His forgiving, restoring love helps us all grow in new ways as we follow Him. And as the stories in this booklet demonstrate, this leads to some unexpected and wonderful ways of serving Him.

The church in Corinth gave the apostle Paul quite a few sleepless nights. Ministry was not easy even in his day, and even for him! What was the source of his stickability? "Christ's love urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14) he said.

Sometimes in our lives, something or someone gets a hold of us, captures our heart so that nothing is too great a thing to ask or to do. Have you noticed how often those who have *needed* help for some reason end up being the most fervent champions for a cause or a charity which has helped them? It's not simply a calculated decision to 'give something back'. There's a heartfelt compulsion, a kind of inner urgency - I cannot help but devote my time and

energy to giving as I have received. We see this in the celebrities who have come to prominence during the pandemic, remembering where they have come from and using their position and influence to make a difference and inspire others to do the same.

The great command is to love God, our neighbour and ourselves with everything that we have – heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30-31). We do this not so that God will love us. We do this because God has already shown how much he loves us. As has been said: salvation is grace, lifestyle is gratitude. As you reflect on what you have read, let these words from Psalm 116 murmur within you in the coming days:

*"What can I give back to God for the blessings he's poured out on me?...  
I'll complete what I promised God I'd do, and I'll do it together with his people...  
Oh, God, here I am, your servant, your faithful servant: set me free for your service!"  
(Psalm 116: 12,14,16)*



**Revd Canon Steve Benoy**  
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# To Explore Further



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