

Vocation Voices

Winter 2008

True stories to help those
thinking about their vocation to
Christian ministry

An occasional
publication from The
Diocese of Peterborough



Unlocking the powerhouse

As Social Responsibility Adviser I meet people who are fulfilling their call to ministries in an amazing diversity of areas, whether that's the environment, rural or urban issues, talking with other faiths the list goes on.

In all these areas of ministry God has called his people to be a positive and transforming influence in the world. This brings out the practical dimension to real faith that St James had in mind when he said that faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. [James 2.14-26].

My own calling has always had a practical edge to it. I trained as a Reader whilst still working in a factory before becoming a Lay Chaplain with The Mission to Seafarers.

Through the years I have seen how the church can be a powerhouse for good within the communities it serves: whether that community is a town or village, or a more unusual one



like an industry, a hospital or a prison.

In 2009 our diocese will be looking at ways in which we can catch something of God's passion for transforming the world. It may seem a big task but often transformation happens at the local and individual level long before the effects are seen on the large scale.

We are now releasing ministry in all sorts of ways and we are really starting to see how such ministry can transform lives, transform communities, and indeed transform the world we live in to the glory of God.

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DIOCESAN STRATEGY

A diocese inspired by God's passion for the world
2009 theme: transforming the world

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In every corner singing



by Wendy Villette, a Lay Hospital Chaplain with Northampton Healthcare Trust and Pastoral Assistant at Ecton.

When I began as a chaplain in a psychiatric and learning disability hospital, someone said that the work would be as much about my journey as that of the people I would encounter. How true this has been! I have learnt so much, especially about myself and my relationship with God. The patients, staff and relatives have been my teachers.

I meet with people of all faiths and none. We meet on wards and in corridors, in car parks and offices, in the Chapel and in the canteen. Some meetings are planned, others just happen. I work in a small team and we meet regularly to support one another. Here are some of my experiences.

I met a retired minister who was staying on a ward for people with dementia. He had lost the ability to speak and so we sat in silence. I put out my hand. He put his hand in mine. We were in communion. We were as one in Christ. In the chaos that comes about when people with dementia feel lost and abandoned, he was an oasis of calm that radiated out to me and to others. I saw him many times during the time he was with us. It was his powerlessness that drew me to him. He listened as I spoke of the challenges of my work. He never spoke. However, he did look into my eyes and he did squeeze my hand. He nodded when I asked him to pray for me. His priestly ministry continued and he died peacefully in a nursing home.

I reflected on my relationship with God and meditated on Matthew 5 v3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven".

An occupational therapist asked me to see a Chinese woman, a practising Buddhist. She had a diagnosis of schizophrenia and was struggling to find a quiet place on the busy ward and in her head that was full of voices.

Together we found a quiet and peaceful area in the garden. We sat and shared our experiences of meditation. Later, she attended my meditation session on the ward, sitting with other women, listening to gentle music as we focused on our breathing. She is now well and at home.

I reflected that my action comes from contemplation and I meditated on Matthew 14 v23 "Jesus went up on a mountainside to pray".

As I entered another ward I was greeted and blessed by a Hindu woman. She came and sat in one of the chairs set out for the "songs of praise" service I had planned. I explained to her that this was a Christian act of worship. She said that it was not a problem and took a small book of Hindu prayers from her bag. As she read, she tapped her feet to the beat of the music. When her husband came to visit her, he joined in too. With support, she is now living at home with her husband.

I reflected on the major religions of the world and that we are all made in God's image. I meditated on the vastness of God's extravagant love.

I call to see a man who is so disabled and disfigured that his mother abandoned him when he was just a few hours old. He has been in care all his life and is so aware of his terrible deformities that he hurts himself. It has taken years to build the fragile relationship we have. Like many of his friends, he has no voice, yet it is as if he cries out through sounds and actions "Do you love me? Do you love me as I am?" I show him I love him by sitting with him and sharing some of his anguish and pain. I pray in the silence.

I reflected on the truth that able or disabled, God loves us as we are. I meditate on Mary the mother of our Lord standing at the foot of the cross.

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When we share our sufferings and joys without being judged we come to know that our life stories are precious.

I was asked me to see someone who was in a deep depression following a major bereavement. Hurting so much, this person had tried to end their life. The person's Christian faith was deep but they believed God would never forgive. Although proselytizing is forbidden, when asked I shared with this person my belief in a God of love who forgives everyone. We prayed together and thanked Jesus for dying on the cross for us. Later the person requested a visit from our Roman Catholic chaplain to receive the sacraments. This person is now very well and living at home.

I reflected on the precious nature of all my encounters and that when a man or a woman shares with me their deepest and most distressing pain I am standing on holy ground and meditate on Mary the mother of our Lord standing at the foot of the cross.

In August, I was licensed as a Pastoral Assistant for my home Church in Ecton. In the parish there are similar issues of loss and bereavement. I encourage people to talk. I believe that healing comes about when we are truly listened to. When we share our sufferings and joys without being judged or condemned, we come to know that we and our life stories are precious.

There is nothing in the hospital that I do not find in the parish. However, there is also joy and laughter in both places. In both places, I regularly hold "songs of praise" sessions, opportunities to sing familiar hymns. In both places, a favorite hymn is "Let all the world in every corner sing".

During these times people forget their cares and their mood is lifted by familiar and reassuring words and tunes.

(Names and circumstances have been changed to protect identities.)

Art opens doors

by Michael McIntyre, Pastoral Assistant at Kettering St Andrew.

I was brought up as a Roman Catholic but lost my faith at the age of twelve. For the next thirty two years I had no involvement with any church. Then a friend of my wife passed away and she felt she needed to attend church again. I decided to go with her and from that day on my life was changed.

There was no blinding flash of revelation but rather a slow journey along a path that I have now been walking for five years. The first step was a chat with the vicar at our Church of England church who was very supportive and has encouraged me greatly on my spiritual journey.

During the time that I was away from church I suffered a debilitating illness that left me with a lot of time on my hands.

It was during this period that I discovered that I had a talent for art.

I wanted to get involved more fully with church and the opportunity to help with the

"Mothers and Tots" group presented itself. I was asked if I would help and I saw an opening to form an art group for the older tots.

A year later I began my training as a Pastoral Assistant and at the same time started a second art group for adults and another group for older children.

As well as the church members who attend the art lessons there are many who have little or no involvement with church, so the



art group has developed into a powerful mission outreach opportunity.

There is now an evening art group for mums who are on the fringe of the church through their children attending church

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activities such as "Tiny Tots", Scouts or the Saturday night Saint and Drews service.

We now have nearly fifty people (not including the tiny tots) attending these art lessons each week with ages ranging from 10 to 98 years.

I have organised an "Art and Spirituality Quiet Day" in November as a time to pray and meditate about our relationship with God as expressed through our artistic gifts and we hope for similar events in the future.

If you had told me five years ago that I would be here doing this today I would not have believed you. My life has changed in so many ways and in such a relatively short time because of the love I have found through my personal relationship with Jesus. He has brought me to a new

Joined up thinking

by Keith Holland-Delamere, Parish Evangelist at Rectory Farm Community Church, part of the Emmanuel Group of Churches

I've lived in Northampton East all my life, a first generation Northamptonian with a London twang! I grew up on Rectory Farm, moved to Lumbertubs in 1998, then because I liked Rectory Farm so much moved back there in May 2001.

There were two key moments in my calling. First was at an away day when a member of the congregation challenged the church about its lack of participation in the life of the community. Then there was an encounter with God in worship at Soul Survivor which awoke me to his love and passion for my community.

I joined the new Rectory Farm Residents Association in 2001 at the age of 23. I got stuck in with others in helping to bring about change. At times my work in the community seemed to be very separate from the church.

This got me thinking and in 2004 my minister suggested the Parish Evangelist's course. I have come to realise that the distinctions I made between church work and community work were not helpful, wrong even!

The course helped me to think outside of the box I labelled "church". I'm more and more coming to understand that what

we should be about is Kingdom work! Working together we are developing the ways in which the church family carries out its mission as laid out in Matthew 28.

When we interact with the wider community sharing Jesus' love - through litter picks or free face painting, or through conversations - we have seen changed lives.

It can be slow going, it can also be very fast moving but it's always amazing when we see the Holy Spirit working ahead of us!



Office worker makes a difference



by Mary Dixie, Deanery Representative Co-ordinator for Family Care

As I turned 40 I realised that I really needed life to begin. I wanted to be involved in making a difference in people's lives but as an office worker I wasn't quite sure how. It turned out that answering an advert for a Receptionist/Secretary at Family Care in Peterborough was the beginning of that process.

There were no fireworks or fanfares as I went through the application process, but I was very aware of God working behind the scenes. When I took up the post in January 2002 I had a real sense of being exactly where I was meant to be, and from time to time found myself grinning from ear to ear just because of this!!

Family Care works with families in residential, community and day assessments with two guiding principles - protecting children and working to prevent family

breakdown. It also manages three Sure Start Children's Centres. It is 'David' in a world of 'Goliaths' as it fights for the safety and rights of some of the most vulnerable in society - children aged between 0 and 5 years old.

I feel privileged to be part of such a special organization. Not only has working for Family Care given me fresh vision and purpose, it has also opened up for me a whole new journey of faith - a move into the Anglican Church and support through bereavement and illness. It has

also opened up professional challenges and affirms my belief in Family Care's work. We have dedicated staff at all levels and the tremendous support we receive from individuals, parishes and deaneries throughout the Peterborough Diocese.

Rather like a microcosm of the body of Christ - as illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12 - I see each of us who is involved with Family Care playing our particular part in making Family Care the special, caring and professional cutting edge organisation that it is.

I believe God is using Family Care to give people the opportunity to change their lives, and for those who are willing, transformation is possible. Because as we bring what we have to Christ he is able to do with it so much more than we can imagine; that has certainly been true of my time with Family Care.

Reader's reality check

by Andrea McAuliffe, Reader at Billing

I would like to share a reflection on my 21 years working and managing Bellinge Community House and my role as Reader.

Bellinge is situated on the east side of Northampton near the A45 and is described as one of the 10% most deprived areas in the country. Looking at the surrounding wooded and green areas, with ponds, streams and wildlife, it couldn't seem further from that description.

But deprived it is, and that is why I work at Bellinge Community House, a registered charity, giving information and support in a variety of ways.



The 20th Anniversary celebrations at Bellinge Community House

Five mornings a week the House is open as a Coffee Shop and Drop-in Centre. Anyone who has a problem can come and talk in confidence. We can either sort the problem out then and there or refer them to another organisation. Either way the Community House supports them at all times. We deal with all life's issues from the cradle to the grave.

If anyone wants to come in just for refreshments then that is fine. For people feeling isolated it can be a welcome break from their own four walls.

We organise weekly activities such as a tots group, over 55's coffee morning, creative sewing group and we are a collection point for the Northampton Credit Union. Welfare Rights and the local Health Visitors also use the facilities.

We have a Breakfast Club for children from Bellinge Primary School, a monthly Breakfast@10 and community lunches on a regular basis.

Health is a real issue and obesity, heart problems and diabetes are common. I acquired funding for a "Healthy Life Project" so we can run Health Awareness Weeks on different topics. We recently held a Healthy Lunchbox Workshop for the parents of the Pre-school children, to aid them in providing a healthy lunch when their children start school. We also run "Best Foot Forward" from April to October, which is an hour long walk ending with a ploughman's lunch at the Community House.

So how does all this relate to my ministry as a Reader? The different lifestyles I come across in many cases cause moral dilemmas but I've learnt that I have to deal with the needs of the person – not the moral issues. When I am preaching or teaching I can bring real life issues into the picture and amplify the reality of the world as it is today – on our doorstep – not in a faraway place.

There are pockets of deprivation all through the diocese, not just

in Bellinge. When I preach about these things from experience I hope that people will hear God's call and that they, in turn, will respond.

At Christmas time I receive toys from the churches in The Billings, from Nene Valley Rotary Club and individuals. I distribute these gifts to families who are finding it hard to provide their children with gifts. I am privileged and humbled by the generosity of others.

My work at the Community House and as a Reader complement each other in many ways and I thank God for considering me to be part of his great plan.

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Finding a great God in the small print



by Peter Ievens, Immigration Judge and priest.

It all began when I was 18, had just left school, and was waiting to go to university. As a shy boy from rural North Norfolk, I felt daunted by the changes that were going on in my life. Fortunately I came across the curate of the church in the market town near where we lived and he changed my life.

He opened my mind to a whole new world of faith and thought and music and writing. Christianity suddenly seemed much bigger than the faith I had grown up with. That God was BIG is something that has remained with me ever since.

I realised that if what we say in church or in prayer is true, then God is Lord of all things, not just of what happens on Sundays. This idea that God is with us in everything and that he is outside everything and that nothing is outside him remained at the heart of all the twists and turns of the following 36 years.

I read law at university but it didn't really come alive until one summer vacation I worked at a Law Centre in Stepney in the east end of London. I came across people with real problems—rural Norfolk it was not.

The law became not just a set of rules or a means of keeping people under control; I realised it could be a way of helping people achieve better lives. So I've worked as a solicitor in police stations and prisons and psychiatric hospitals, as well as being a curate in a parish near Cambridge and later I was licensed to an Urban Priority Area parish in Peterborough.

God isn't only bigger than we can possibly imagine, he is smaller too because every person matters. God was there in every detail of my clients' lives and solicitors are about detail. You pay us to read the small print.

So these two ideas, that God is both vast and that he cares about the tiniest of things – what theologians call transcendence and immanence – come together not just in the text books but in my working life.

Now I'm an Immigration Judge and what is soon to be called a Tribunal Judge, as well as being in six rural parishes where my wife, Catherine, is Rector.

At work we deal with administrative law, and hear cases about people's relationship with the government. Much of this is about whether people can come to this country or stay here and sometimes what you hear is heart-rending.

You have to give people a fair hearing and decide according to the law that Parliament makes. Just because you think that someone is good and deserving is not always enough. But the important thing is that all judges are independent of the government and that says something about the uniqueness and value of each individual. I can't see how people can be unique and infinitely valuable without that coming from God.

So being in a courtroom and being in a parish aren't that different. Both can be fascinating, challenging, maddening, rewarding and very, very funny. Above all, in both of them, Jesus is there.

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God's love on the inside

by Jackie Weigman, Lay Chaplain at Peterborough Prison.

In January 2006, I found myself being asked to go in to Peterborough Prison and lead the first Alpha course on the male side. Although feeling completely out of my depth, having had no previous experience in a prison, I knew that God was opening the way and I had to trust that he would guide me.

I was immediately struck by how grateful the 15 men in the group

were for the opportunity to talk about faith and life and how respectful they were of me even though we did not share the same life experiences.

Listening to their stories I realised that I knew nothing about the sort of difficult childhoods most of them had experienced. Being brought up in homes and communities where poverty, abuse, degradation and parents with addictions were commonplace. They had little experience of consistent love, education and care as children. I could see how easy it would be for a youngster to slip into crime as a means of survival in a hostile world.

Underneath the bravado the truth was that they didn't want their lives to be a series of prison sentences - but they didn't know how to turn them around. It requires a great deal of determination on a prisoner's part to begin to the road to recovery, to overcome their addictions and to address the psychological and emotional damage inflicted in early life, not to mention the work in acquiring the skills and education necessary to be able to earn a living once outside. What has to come first is "a

change of heart" and this is what the chaplaincy is about. It has been my great privilege to be alongside prisoners, male and female, as they try to work out what their life has been about and where God is in it all.

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business, but when it happens the transforming nature of God's love can be seen and a real hope for forgiveness and a life worth living.

This was embodied by a young man named Darren who I met the day he came in. He didn't think he would survive prison and as far as he was concerned he had lost all that was dear to him. He didn't want to live. He had grown up watching his father beat his mother; he had become one angry young man and was now paying the price. Over the weeks I came to know him and his story and I could see that all he'd ever wanted as a child was to be loved. In finding love and acceptance through his work with the chaplaincy he began to believe that life could be different and that he was worth everything in God's eyes. This was life-



changing for him and now he is out of prison he has "turned his life around"; he has settled down with his partner and their child and has steady work. His whole perspective on life has changed and he has found "a life worth living". I'm very proud of him.

Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son is at the root of our work, which tells us that no matter where we have been or what we have done God loves us unconditionally and waits for us to turn for home; that through repentance we are forgiven though I don't pretend this is an easy process.

It is nearly three years since that first Alpha and my life has changed considerably in that time. I now work in the prison as a lay Chaplain and am in the process of discerning God's will for me in my vocation - this God who is so full of surprises!

HMP Peterborough is a private "local" category B prison, opened in March 2005. It is the country's only purpose built prison for men and women, who are kept separate at all times. The operational capacity is for 1,020 prisoners, 624 males and 396 females.

Being prepared to hear the answer

by Rob Gwynne, Reader at Oundle.

I was brought up in a family that did all the right “churchy” things. In my late teens I wondered whether I was being called to ordination. However, my desire to help communities grow through education led me into a teaching career instead. University days saw church participation diminish but the spiritual aspect of life found fulfilment through schools, youngsters and teachers.

A few exciting years later I pitched up as a community college principal in a tough part of Leicester and six years after that as principal of a very large community college in Cambridgeshire. A second marriage to Margaret, now also a very experienced secondary head, brought a mutual rekindling of a faith which, whilst never lost, had not been overt or church based for twenty years.

Then God came knocking at the door and I was easily persuaded to train for reader ministry. A move to advisory/consultancy work with failing schools and release from the 24/7 pressures of headship created the space and time. But God did not stop there. The company I worked for won contracts to set up the

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educational side of Church of England Academies. This led to a keen interest in what should be the difference between a good values based secular school (of which there are many) and a Christian faith based school. There are many answers to this and I welcome your ideas on a post card, please!

Through my work I was now helping the Church of England to realise the dream of establishing 100 new faith based secondary schools up and down the country. I was now well settled into lay readership, leading worship and preaching in our rural deanery. It was all just too good and my sense of vocation appeared fulfilled!

But then God came knocking on the door again. I thought he was saying that it was time to leave behind my work in education and become ordained as a priest. I began the discernment process to see if the calling was for real. The trouble was I couldn't get a clear answer— for a decisive and pacey sort of person, this was agony!



Then in his own time God laid it all out in front of me and the way became clear. I was appointed to the post of Head of School Development for the Church of England and Deputy General Secretary of the National Society. So as I write this I'm contemplating moving to a desk at Church House in London and a national remit on behalf of the one million children who attend C of E schools!

It's easy to discern a calling or yearning but not always clear what it is for. Time spent reflecting, waiting and praying is well spent and impulsive action is to be avoided. God will reveal all once we ask and become prepared to hear the answer.

After all, in Matthew 21 we are told how Jesus asked the blind men “what do you want of me”. We need to be clear about how we ask and then be prepared to act on the answer – even if it's not what we expect or when we