

# Vocation Voices

Winter 2011

For anyone thinking about their vocation to Christian ministry

An occasional publication from The Diocese of Peterborough



## Everyone is called

I was browsing the second-hand book section of our local OXFAM Shop when the call came through on my mobile phone from 10 Downing Street. Her Majesty the Queen had approved my



At a recent parish visit someone asked me how I came to be ordained. My answer was that it matched how I became a Christian and that it was a matter of the head, the heart and my experience.

nomination as your new Bishop of Brixworth. They wanted me to phone them back and so I had to ask the shop assistant for a pen and paper whilst resisting the almost overwhelming temptation to tell her who was on the line!

The really good news is that everyone is called by God to share his work in the world. Not everyone's call is quite as dramatic as my phone message but God reassured his people many centuries ago: "Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43.1).

One of the greatest signs of life in the Church today is the way in which so many members are sharing in an amazing variety of ministries, as Readers, Evangelists, Pastoral Ministers, Youth and Children's Workers, Administrators, Worship Leaders and many other roles. As a diocese we are committed to helping every Church member discover their individual calling or vocation.

My head was convinced that Christian faith made the most sense of the world and offered the clearest vision for living.

My heart was captivated by Jesus. It wouldn't be going too far to say that "I simply fell in love with him" and reckoned that if he loved me, then nothing I could do for him would be too much. My experience of attractive Christians and credible ministers of all shapes and sizes who demonstrated the difference faith made in their lives and were making a real difference in the world inspired me.

I pray that you too may know the excitement of discovering where God is calling you and might have the courage to follow him.

With my love and prayers,

Bishop John

Rt Revd John Holbrook  
Bishop of Brixworth

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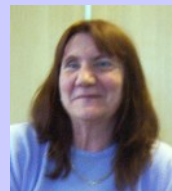


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# You ... a vicar!

by Simon Kaye



## What am I doing? What's it all about? You .... a vicar!

I'm sitting here in my study at Ridley Hall Theological College where I am currently training as an Ordained Pioneer Minister (OPM) to hopefully become an ordained priest in the Church of England sometime in the near future.

So what brings me here?  
The questions above are still questions that I think about and reflect on almost every day, sometimes with a chuckle and sometimes with what I can only describe as a certain sense of panic. But the one thing I cling to which is an absolute certainty is .... I didn't get me here.

Let me tell you a bit about my life prior to attending Ridley. After working for the RAF as an Engineer for 22 years, I felt the call to full time Church ministry and was offered an opportunity to do this at the very Church through which I came to faith on an Alpha course - St George's in Stamford, Lincolnshire.

I began working for St George's as a Ministry Apprentice. This enabled me to sample the many different aspects of Church ministry, from school assemblies and children's clubs

to teaching, preaching and leading an outreach congregation. This congregation, called Kings Café, was in an area of Stamford where many people did not have a Church background or any interest in Church.

**I would observe many of the ordained ministers I knew and kept asking the question "where do I fit in with this line up?"**

I also had the privilege of leading and sustaining a congregation in Wittering in the Peterborough Diocese. Wittering is a village with a big RAF population and it is where we have our home.

During those three years serving in Church ministry I would take the time to observe many of the ordained ministers I knew and kept asking the

question "where do I fit in with this line up?" For some time I couldn't see where I was meant to fit in.

Then one day another Ministry Apprentice gave me a DVD called "On the Edge". It was a DVD looking at a new ministry venture that the Church of England was investing in. It contained 14 individual accounts of Pioneering Church Ministry.

My initial reaction was "THAT'S ME". After controlling my excitement (not easy for me) I gave the DVD to my mentor and my Church minister and they both confirmed that they too saw this was where I did indeed "fit in".

And so the rest as they say is history or should I say "the future".

**Simon Kaye is training for Pioneer Ministry at Ridley College, Cambridge.**

# What a DDO looks for

by Steve Benoy, Diocesan Director of Ordinands

I began training for the ordained ministry in 1991, some twenty years before taking up the post of Director of Ordinands in the diocese. My training involved both some time on a non-residential course as well as full-time at college. I remember taking stock back then and realising just how many people had encouraged me along the way in the previous five years since my first hesitant conversation with my curate. I resolved to make sure, from that point onwards, that I spoke to one person every year about whether the Lord was calling them to be ordained. Now, that is a daily privilege.

## What am I looking for?

It is not at all unusual for those considering God's call upon their lives to be overwhelmed by a sense of being unworthy and ill-equipped. In fact, these prove a great head-start, for this sends us back to depend on God and his grace.

A determination to grow in Christ-like character is the healthy starting point of desire for Christian ministry. Even the child Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:52).

Youth is not a barrier to seeking God's will for you in ministry – teachability, a dedication to

God's wisdom and God's ways is more important. The church is looking for people with potential, not people who have "done it all".

A dedication to Christ-centred convictions forms an essential core for Christian ministry. Often this is forged through experience ... "we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, and character produces hope" (Romans 5:4).

Age is not a barrier to seeking God's will for you in ministry. The older we are, the more we will have experienced. The church is looking for people who have learned and changed, who can show how their life-story has led them and others closer to Christ.

**Obedience to Jesus may well ask of us things which are far from convenient or desirable to our natural inclinations.**

A demonstration of Christ-like calling is possible at any age. It is a life lived in service of others, an illustration of the self-giving and humility at the heart of the gospel. "Your attitude should be the same as that of



Christ Jesus ... who ... made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ..." (Philippians 2:1-11). Obedience to Jesus may well ask of us things which are far from convenient or desirable to our natural inclinations. In thinking about ministry are you already counting the cost?

There is no more exciting question than to ask "Lord, what do you want with the rest of my life?" The answer may be far from predictable, nor even close to what we might have first imagined. But there is never a bad answer to that question, for this kind of obedience and availability is just what he is looking for.

## CONTACTS:

**The Revd Steve Benoy**

Director of Ordinands

01604 887047

steve.benoy@peterborough-diocese.org.uk

**Maggie Taylor**

Co-ordinator for Vocations

Advisors. 01733 265739

maggie27@btopenworld.com

# Finding the

by Cathy Brazier

**We are wives and mothers. Both of us have responsibilities outside the home. Both of us have roles and duties in our local church and wider community. So how on earth were we going to find the time to train for ordination!**

Although the idea of going away to college may have been initially appealing – who wouldn't want their meals cooked for them and the day ahead open to study free from distractions – full time residential college really wasn't a viable option.

I had already secured a place at Westcott House Theological College in Cambridge but the more I thought about it, the more I realised it wouldn't work with my need to be available at home and as a director in our business (says Jenny Opperman).

I have young school age children and I was not prepared to leave them in the hands of childcare, however excellent it might be, for extended periods of time (says Cathy Brazier).

Were there any other ways in which we could fulfil our need and desire to train for ordination? Fortunately, yes.

We have just begun the third year of ordination training with the Eastern Region Ministry Course (ERMC).

What we have found to be so wonderful about studying with

the ERMC is that it offers part-time and part-residential training that understands the need to balance work, family, ministry and training.

Although there is an element of isolation in studying at home we are very fortunate to have a wide range of teachers, support staff and local church supervisors who support us and all the students.

The ERMC year kicks off with an eight day Summer School in August followed by six further weekend residentials throughout the year. Then there is the home study time and a weekly tutorial which takes place as either a 1:1 or small group session.

We attend a weekly tutorial with a local tutor together. A tutorial requires a certain amount of preparation which includes prior reading and notes



# time to train

and Jenny Opperman

taken in lectures at weekend residentials. However, there are two centres of learning, one in St Albans and one in Norwich. So if you can travel to either of those places on a weekly basis, the opportunity to come together with others for study is a wonderful learning experience.

Studying with ERMCM is not the easy option. It requires self discipline and motivation and is still demanding on time and family and other commitments. We have found though that it is the best way for us to train.

Students on the ERMCM course come from Evangelical, Catholic, Liberal and Charismatic traditions of the Church and from a large area in the Eastern Region of

England. From Northampton to Cromer and from King's Lynn to St Albans as well as students from continental Europe, we are all preparing for lay or ordained ministry within the Anglican and Methodist Churches.

We have found that being in such a diverse and inclusive community is very formational to our lives as people – we are being changed and renewed as we live and study along side others very different from ourselves.

**ERMCM offers training that understands the need to balance work, family, ministry and training.**



The Eastern Region Ministry Course has its office in Cambridge and is a member of the Cambridge Theological Federation. ERMCM works closely in partnership with the Norwich Diocesan Ministry Course and the St Edmundsbury and Ipswich Diocesan Ministry Course. We are also part of the Eastern Region Training Partnership and the London and South East Methodist Training Forum.



**You can read more and contact ERMCM through their website: [www.ermc.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ermc.cam.ac.uk)**

*Above: Cathy Brazier and Jenny Opperman.*

*From left: A tutorial group at ERMCM.*

*The core staff team at ERMCM in Cambridge.*

*Learning together during a weekend residential.*

*Photos: ERMCM*

# Sharpening our thinking

by Chris Walker, Reader at St Botolph's, Longthorpe



"Hmmm..." It wasn't the most encouraging response, to be honest! Of all people, you can be sure that your children will be aware of your flaws and only too willing to share their insights into them. This "hmmm" came from one of my brood when I told them that I was thinking of training as a Reader.

The idea that their distinctly imperfect and not overtly "holy" mother might get into a pulpit and preach – well, "hmmm..." just about summed it up. And, to be fair, I shared their reservations.

When Bill, our vicar, first asked me to consider Reader training, it seemed to have come at the right time. We had just come through an incredibly difficult time as a family. We had been very vulnerable, and our Christian faith had been hugely important to us throughout. Things had begun to settle down and I was keen to undertake some kind of formal study

to deepen my understanding of the Christian faith. I also had some experience of helping to lead worship at our monthly All Age service.

So far, so suitable. But the thought of preaching – particularly to other Christians with a much broader experience of life and faith than I had – made me quake. And was I the right sort of person? Our church had a Reader already, someone (although she'd snort to hear me say so) of great serenity, gentleness and thoughtfulness. Not much like me, in other words!

Even so, with the prayers and support of my husband Tony, of Bill and the PCC, I went ahead and applied. This was a leap of faith in more ways than one since, as a non-driver, I had no way of getting to Northampton for the training (necessary under the old system). The Lord provided rescue in the form of Marion, Kath and Tom, who swiftly went from being strangers to being very dear friends. It would be impossible to overstate the importance of those regular get-togethers during our travelling time. If we felt personally or intellectually challenged, or were struggling

with an assignment, it was such a relief to be able to talk.

There was a lot of nurturing and encouragement from the training team too, with feedback framed in positive terms. They really wanted us to succeed. In our second and third years the assignments were more demanding and the feedback aimed at sharpening our thinking and honing our skills. We had to get used to a more critical and challenging response.

We were also beginning to preach in our home churches with feed-back from the clergy.

This could be hard and there were times

when I felt a bit "skewered". But looking back I wouldn't have had it any other way. Constructive criticism throughout my time as a Reader will be vital, though I may not always like it!

Fourteen months on from licensing there is still plenty to challenge, stimulate and develop in my role as a Reader. If you think this ministry may be for you, you have nothing to lose (and so much to gain) by giving it thought and prayer.

**Chris Walker is a Reader at St Botolph's, Longthorpe.**

**The thought of preaching – particularly to other Christians with a much broader experience of life and faith than I had – made me quake**

# Sharing God's light

by Jane Emerton, Licensed Evangelist at St Mary's, Northampton

My story begins when I was a nurse working in the psychiatric field. I had lots of questions that arose concerning suffering, pain and premature death. These questions led me to a local church where I was introduced to Jesus and so began a relationship with him.

A few months after becoming a Christian I developed an irreversible eye condition which within six short weeks robbed me of 80 per cent of my vision.

My new found faith was severely tested as life was turned upside down. However Jesus proved his love as he gently drew me to a place of trust. During my nurse training I learnt listening and counselling skills, both of which proved useful when telling others about Jesus. Visual impairment is no barrier to sharing the Gospel and in some instances has opened doors.

I came to a point when I knew that I needed to tell others about Jesus. My own life has been so radically transformed and I wanted others to know of God's love for them despite their past. I heard about the *All are Called* day held in November 2008 and decided to attend.

**Visual impairment is no barrier to sharing the Gospel and in some instances has opened doors.**

Listening to the various presentations on that day I felt my spirit stirred and an excitement rise. Before the end of the day I was convinced that God wanted me to apply for training as a licensed evangelist.

I then went through a period of doubt and uncertainty. This was in no way doubting God's call, but was rather about my own abilities to cope considering my visual impairment. I was concerned that I had no access to a computer modified for my use, which limited my capability for research and study.

I felt sure that if God wanted me on the course then he would remove any obstacles. Imagine my absolute delight when I heard of a charity that provides funds for people with a disability who wish to attend training.

My application for a grant was approved and as a result I was able to convert my computer to operate in a speech format. Nothing is impossible for our

God, he has always proved his faithfulness. During the process of applying I was given an opportunity to share my faith with those processing the application, what a joy!

I nervously attended the course induction day in September



2009. My anxiety was groundless as the presence of God was evident from the start and peace soon settled in my heart.

Week by week I found that I was stretched and challenged, learning of God's love for his creation, and his heart to reach the lost, broken and excluded. Through the teaching and times of worship I found my own relationship with Jesus deepened, and my passion for his word increased.

God's word is precious light to those in darkness. Those who lose their sight really know how precious light is. Light explains everything around; without it the world becomes dangerous. My desire is to share his wonderful light with those I come into contact with.

The course has equipped me with the tools and skills necessary to carry out God's calling on my life.

**Jane Emerton is a Licensed Evangelist at St Mary's, Northampton**

# Go on, just do it

by Doug Beedie



When asked if I would write something for “Vocation Voices” my first thought was why me, what can I offer? I then thought WHY ME GOD!

Writing doesn't come easy to me and even the simplest passage necessities several drafts, rewrites and discipline. The request also caused me to reflect on how God demonstrates a certain amount of irony by confronting us with challenges that cause us to step outside our comfort zones.

I've often felt quite envious of people who have had “a road to Damascus experience” (Acts 9:3). To have had such a dramatic encounter must be wonderful, although slightly startling.

Instead of an overnight rebirth, my story is more about a slow journey of ongoing conversion and discovery. It's also a story of slowly heeding those niggles in your stomach, the words in your heart or the feedback from

those around you. Although there was no dramatic event, I can look back and see where God has been nudging and, like the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-23), is still patiently waiting for us all to come home.

I left school at 16 and my formal education ended with very little in the way of a recognised qualification. To suggest I should go forward for training as a Lay Pastoral Minister was in my opinion a no win situation and a bad call for God. I am not academic and I am too busy with work, church and even play.

**To suggest I should train as a Lay Pastoral Minister was in my opinion a no win situation and a bad call for God.**

However, I did have that persistent niggle and a persuasive priest. And I did take heart through Biblical examples where ordinary people responded, though not always immediately, in following God's path (see Jonah). I believe God has a way of gently nudging things back on track especially when we think our ideas are better and I now recognise my putting off as merely delaying tactics; I was more interested in “burying the

dead” (Luke 9:59-60) and holding on to my lifestyle.

Eventually I responded to the nudging and although I do find the academic side of the course challenging it is also stimulating. And it is very comforting to be in a fellowship where these feelings of self doubt and fear are not uniquely yours. I also consider it a privilege to be sharing my journey alongside this cohort of students, support staff and teachers; I cannot over emphasise the importance of these developing friendships.

God will not write the assignments for you but, providing you bring your contribution with prayer and determination, I believe he will inspire. Don't be put off by self doubt. Take it to God and watch your confidence grow (Matt 14:13-21).

We have been given free will and I firmly believe the moral choice is ours to make when heeding and responding to God's call, however dramatic or gentle that call may be. I also firmly believe that, through grace, God will provide the means to support, encourage and sustain us once we take that leap of faith.

Go on, “just do it”.

**Doug Beedie, from St George's, Wootton, is in training to be a Lay Pastoral Minister.**