

Claire Beavis, PA to the Bishop of Derby

As a child I attended St Mary's Church in Chaddesden through my primary school and the Girl Guides. My immediate family are not church goers and as I got older I lost some of that connection, but it never fully went away. When visiting the city centre for shopping trips I would often feel 'drawn' to the Cathedral and would spend a few moments there quietly reflecting.

In my career I never had a 'plan'. I 'trusted my gut' and was happy to see where it would lead me. At times I wondered whether I was just floating through my professional life and decided to go to university at the age of 23. At a time when those around me had big ambitions I found it very reassuring during my graduation ceremony to hear the screenwriter Neil McKay talk of how he didn't have a plan when he left school and started working as a bricklayer with his father. He followed his nose and life took him in a very different direction to what he expected.

I reconnected with the Church through my job as PA to the Bishop of Derby and realised that 'being drawn' and 'trusting my gut' was actually me following my calling all along, but perhaps not realising it or being able to articulate it fully at the time. I now feel experiences I encountered along the way make much more sense and have helped me to realise my vocation.

Being in an administration position, still without a grand plan, may not sound ambitious to some people, but there is a very personal and spiritual element to my work as well the practical tasks. This is my vocation and I feel my skills, faith and commitment have been called for this purpose. There is always a bigger picture to the work I undertake and I am aware of how it ripples across the diocese to so many others. I feel confidence and confirmation in my vocation through the fulfilment I get and seeing the difference it makes to others.

At times I have felt challenged by vocation, but realised that on many occasions that the pressure I felt was from other's expectations or ambitions rather than my own. Reflection and finding new interests which have helped me grow as a person have helped me understand vocation as being about more than just work, and about being open to being called into new opportunities. This realisation has given me a lot of confidence in myself. My vocation may change over time and I am happy to embrace it when the time comes.

Janet Harris, School Chaplain

I have never really thought about what vocation and calling mean and whether they are different. I suppose if there is a difference I see vocation as long term – the theme or big picture and calling as specific roles and situations which grow out of this. They may be more short term and vary throughout our life. Different callings use our gifts, inner longings and experiences and allow our vocation to be developed and grown and used for others.

Vocation is the storehouse from which ingredients for our calling are selected by God. So, in my case my vocation has been teaching but one of the callings from this has been chaplaincy.

I went to a Derby City Centre Prayer evening that was focussed on education. I have been a teacher for 37 years and in the last 3 years have been working more flexibly. Although I did not set out that evening looking for a new calling God called me loud and clear! The evening included people sharing different ways to get involved in supporting education and children in the city. When someone spoke about being an education chaplain I felt a real excitement and sense of purpose. I'd felt a definite vocation to teach children but God had also used me in the past to teach listening skills. Knowing personally the enormous pressures and stress on teachers today I just felt God was taking my passion for listening and my personal experiences, and giving me the opportunity to use them for others. I had left my permanent job with a sense of failure and leaving earlier than I would have chosen. This was an opportunity to turn that into something positive and the timing seemed perfect.

Following a period of prayer and going through the processes the next exciting confirmation of my calling was when I realised the school that I was going to be a chaplain in was where I'd attended as a child. It is also very close to the school where I used to work with the same challenges and neighbourhood. God is wonderful that He uses our past to be part of our present. Living out this calling in the day to day activity of being a chaplain is fulfilling and exciting. Even on the days when it could feel routine and mundane it spurs me on to pray that God will use me despite how inadequate I may feel. There is always the possibility that He will do something new today! Being a chaplain has given me access to excellent training and being part of a network where I can grow and learn from others – all part of God developing and affirming His calling.

I have learned that when God calls us He works with our past, passions and experiences to do something new. It is all part of our amazing creative God.

David Holmes, Social Care Chaplain

Calling

To me calling is when God begins to plant thoughts in my thinking about what he wants me to do in terms of my ministry. This has happened at three key points in my life: when he called me to become a Reader, when he called me to move to another church and recently when he called me to Chaplaincy ministry.

Looking back each time it began with a restlessness within me and an acceptance that I needed ‘something else.’ God then put people and events in place that helped to develop my thinking and realisation that this was the path he was taking me down. This has not always been a comfortable process as it has involved both taking on a new role that I wasn’t sure I was able to do, and letting go of things in order to do that.

I cannot pretend that I haven’t tried to close my ears to what he has been saying to me as I have wondered whether it was what I was wanting God to call me to or God calling me to what he wanted.

I believe that when God calls us to a particular vocation, the Spirit works within us, and in a way that will be different for everyone because he knows what is right for *us*. He also opens us up to the Spirit when the time is right for us to say ‘Yes God, I will go where you lead me’.

Vocation

I believe this to be the living out and doing of what God has called us to be for him. Because God has chosen this particular role, my experience has been that he equips us to take it on board, drawing on who we are as a person so that it is a ‘natural’ thing for us to be doing. Vocation is living out something that is a part of the person we are, not something that we ‘put on’.

In relation to my role as a workplace chaplain it is about walking alongside people, developing a relationship with each other, supporting and sharing the Christian love that motivates and sustains me.

That, I believe, is the person God has made me, and my vocation is living that out in a specific way and with the group of people he has chosen me to be with.

As with all things it is challenging and a learning journey and I know I get it wrong at times. It is also deeply rewarding, fulfilling and makes me feel good – for which I say ‘Thank You God’, because that feeds me spiritually and is his endorsement that I am where he wants me to be and doing what he wants me to do at this stage in my life and journey of faith with him.

Caroline Carr, Fire and Rescue Chaplain

Over the years I have spent many hours trying to discern what is my vocation and what it is God calls me to. Along the way I have been left broken and wounded by believing the path I was following was one God called me to, but doors in that direction firmly closed.

Then I was approached five years ago to ask if I would consider becoming a Derbyshire Fire and Rescue chaplain. When I first discerned being called to this role I do not think I understood or knew enough about what being a chaplain meant.

I knew I was gifted at listening and walking alongside people pastorally but as time has passed I have come to learn just how much more serving the role entailed. As Chaplains we incarnate the presence and love of God when we serve God in the places he sends us.

We as chaplains offer ministry beyond the church walls, being an invited guest and not the host. We are an intentional presence and an authentic expression of Christian mission sharing in what God is doing in the world.

During these years I have learned about listening in new creative ways, having been blessed with fire crew members at the stations I serve in sharing with me as individuals and corporately within the stations.

I like baking so often take cake into the stations and have shared many cups of tea as they have shared their roles with me, helping me understand their job and how best I can be of help to them.

I have had the privilege of walking alongside these crews through some really difficult situations that have resulted in them dealing with fatalities. After those tragic call outs, I have been invited to sit in on debriefs and gain better insights into the challenges they face, which helps when someone then wants to share their personal struggle or pain with me.

They frequently refer to me as being one of the crew in their family and that makes serving as a chaplain much easier as opposed to feeling an outsider in their space. This was affirmed last year when I faced a serious illness, and the crews turned up at my home in their fire engine on two separate occasions bringing cards and flowers to wish me well. Their response that 'this is what they do for family' was very moving and I sensed it was God's affirmation too.

I have wrestled with God about their kind gestures as my understanding of a chaplain is that I am there to serve and not be served, so receiving from them has been a challenge for me. It was, in addition, a time of growth for me in understanding my vocation to this ministry.

When the fire crew meet people in the communities and share ways to stay safe in homes and workplaces, I have been invited to go along too, which enables me to be more missional in my role as a chaplain, taking the Church without walls to our communities. All this helps me discern and follow God's calling for me to go beyond the walls and share His story by my presence in the community.

I love being outdoors and walking, and following one of those walks, I sensed God reveal to me as I looked out into those beautiful hills of His creation that he calls me out, for I see His creation as His space. This discernment offers me freedom in a fresh way, enabling me to leave behind any thoughts that God could only be found in church buildings. It has released me to embrace my vocation as a chaplain with new insights and understanding.

Sarah Bradbury – Retail Chaplain

My background is in special needs, teaching young people with challenging behaviour, and it is amazing how God equips us to serve in chaplaincy with our skills, experiences, achievements and failures.

In Belper we have Education, Retail, Industrial Estate and Social Care chaplains and links with Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Trust. In fact, where there is a workplace, there could be a Chaplain: what a fantastic and inspiring concept! Therefore I see us with our churches as part of bigger mosaics or tapestries building God's Kingdom in our little patch of Belper – Derby – Derbyshire and onwards.

I am inspired in my vocation and calling to chaplaincy by the words of Luke 10v1: 'The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them ahead in pairs to all the towns and places he planned to visit. These were his instructions to them: "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields. Now go..."'

There is room for many different types of calling in our Christian life, lay and ordained. To be a workplace chaplain is a great privilege, giving us the opportunity to visit people in the places where they work. We are there as guests, to build up relationships and trust over time. We care about people and their stories; people can be fragile and vulnerable and we treat them with respect. People are aware of what we do by the silent witness of our chaplaincy uniform (jacket and shirt) and 'Chaplain' written across our backs. We are welcomed and given the opportunity to show that Christians are human too!

The fellowship of a church family is very important in our lives, but what about people who do not know and may never know this? Jesus said, Love the Lord God and love your neighbour as yourself. For me, to be a chaplain is to go to our neighbours where they work, to appreciate what they do, to be a smiling face for them and a listening ear. We can be there in the moment such as when someone has suffered bereavement, as yesterday when I was rushed into the back office to listen to and comfort a tearful member of staff. We are there to share the news of a marriage, a birth, a new grandchild. We can also sometimes repair relationships such as when someone is harbouring resentment and hurt about church or God from an experience many years ago: people initiate these conversations.

We know we have our vocation on the sure foundation and rock of God's love for us. We see that people are searching for meaning but they do not always know what they are searching for. In one of our training days as chaplains we considered the Road to Emmaus; that we are walking in the dust of the road with people; that life is sometimes messy and joyful and painful, but that we can be Jesus' hands and feet. We can say well done, or pray for them or their families if they ask. This compliments the ministry of our churches.

One of the first times I went out as a chaplain, a charity shop manager said to me, "What a wonderful idea – it's like bringing church into the community!" How fantastic that she could 'get' this idea on my first visit.

I believe that God calls us to chaplaincy; it is slow and steady work but it makes a positive difference, step by step.

Sophie Shields, Finance Officer (part-qualified accountant):

Usually when I start talking about my vocation, I see a glaze coming over the eyes of my audience as they drift into sleep – however to me, the world of accountancy is wonderful!

I had always liked the idea of being an accountant, but initially I was put off by the portrayal of accountancy; that “it’s boring” and that “accountants are dull”. However, when I first started volunteering at Derby Community Accountancy Service, I was blown away by the sense I belonged there.

I’ve always been a bit of an outsider, so it was life changing to find somewhere I fitted in! I found peers who also were very particular about things being spelled correctly, who also had a special place for their stapler and where it wasn’t odd to have a backup calculator! I don’t think I’d ever really experienced that before; it was like being a jigsaw piece that had finally been clicked into place.

I am just over half way through my training to become a qualified accountant, and I can’t wait to be qualified! I don’t know how accountancy got such a bad reputation, but to me it’s home, and I feel very fortunate to have stumbled into the wonderful world of accountancy.

David Meredith, Former Parish Resource Officer:

Contract, Covenant or an escape from the Rat Race?

I was working at the time in an Accounts Department with 200 staff in a large telecommunications Public Limited Company. The work was very specialised, working long hours, with high competition for promotion -an almost “dog eat dog” scenario. I was finalising my accountancy examinations and although study assistance was given, there was pressure on to succeed first time. I really was not happy in this atmosphere and had a strong sense that I was being ‘called’ elsewhere to use my talents. Did I really want to contribute to a large plc – making huge profits and paying dividends to shareholders?

I was really trying to discern God’s will and purpose for me when I happened to be visiting my parents one weekend and there it was, in the local paper, an advertisement for a job working for the Church in the local Diocesan Office Accounts Office. Was this to be my calling? I was successful in my application and was appointed to the position of Assistant Accountant and eventually became the Director of Finance.

We may not all called to be ministers, but I believe that administration is an important ministry in the life of the Church, contributing to its smooth running, a ministry that takes place in the background and is often overlooked. There are many volunteers in our parishes, giving their time to administration, who see this as their ministry, tirelessly contributing to mission and ministry of the Church as a whole. I think that I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to serve the Church with the talents that I have, in my career and outside of work.

My discernment journey has continued, and I now find myself in a stewardship role as Parish Resource Officer and I have really enjoyed the opportunity to be out and about in the Diocese encouraging PCCs and individuals to reflect on their stewardship of all that God has provided. I particularly enjoy encouraging others in their ‘ad’ministry to the Church, helping them to engage with their stewardship of time and talent. For all of us, discerning God’s will may take us in a different direction, and we need to be open to what we are called to do to help further the work of the Church.

Stella Collishaw, Community Action Officer:

Vocation means a role that goes beyond a simple job description or paid/ volunteer role to something rooted in community or association, going beyond the normal bonds of obligation e.g. family and also knitted in to if for me is the sense of meaningful service. It demands more of the essence of a person than a job or voluntary activity. It demands more of the whole person so you are committed because of the meaning / identity / orientation / belief/ world view.

Calling for me is linked to vocation and is often the present moment part of the vocation. Calling is also part of the group I am associated with. It's about who I am journeying to be in Christian terms my discipleship.

Being a long-term carer has clipped my ability to work out vocation for a number of years. Some of the normal family bonds of obligation have got priority from my vocation and calling. I try not to resent it and recognise this diminishing is part of all of our lives at some point and in some seasons. In my own church calling is largely frustrated by this as it has driven me to the periphery and to being a unhelpful person.

I feel I am able to work out my calling in part in my role in Derby Diocese within the streams of work I attend to and the flex of current oversight.

I relish being able to use all that I can - faith, learning, study, work & life experience, interests and personality in my working role. I have had times when I have questioned my calling here and times I felt more detached as a form of self-preservation. I feel honoured to have the range of opportunity in a part-time paid post that is deeply meaningful. This has always demanded a strong sense of managing the sense I feel of deficit- what I focus on and in turn what I therefore cannot focus on and who I can make alliance with.

Simon Taylor, Former Director of Curate Training, Area Dean of Derby City Deanery & Canon Chancellor of Derby Cathedral:

I think the time when I had the strongest sense of my vocation was during a time of real difficulty. I remember sitting in church one morning, alone in the chapel, trying to say Morning Prayer. It was a difficult time; I was struggling to deal with power games that were being played out within the church community. The APCM had been a really hard experience the previous year, leading to me taking some time off to recover myself. There was a personal cost to ministry at that time.

Sitting in the chapel that morning, trying to pray was very hard. I never managed to open the book. I simply sat on my own in the chapel and said to God, 'I'm here, I don't think I can manage much more.' But through that whole time, I had a very settled sense that this was the place that God had called me to serve. I learned an enormous amount about myself, about prayer, about ministry through that difficult time. It was hard, but it was clear to me that God had called me to this and would give me the strength to do what was asked of me.

None of this meant that I had a God-given plan for what needed to happen next. Nor did my sense of vocation save me from making mistakes. But that settled sense of God's call to a particular place and ministry was something that held me in the struggles and the difficulties. It enabled me to keep going at a hard task, to apologise for my mistakes, and to pick myself up when I was knocked down.

I suppose that I offer this as a reminder that vocation is not always easy, and that a sense of calling is not a blue-print for the future or a proof that I am right. Vocation can be a struggle; it comes with a cost. But God is good and calls us to what is life-giving for ourselves and for others.

Kat Alldread, Vocations, Learning & Formation Officer:

To have a vocation is something much more than finding a job or role that a person enjoys. A vocation goes beyond being a good match with skills and experience and meeting the 'person spec.' To find your vocation is to find how and where God wants you to be, to find your true purpose. Vocation takes a variety of forms- we are called to be parents, siblings, friends and neighbours as well as scientists, managers, builders and ministers. We are called to roles in the church and roles in our communities.

On a number of occasions in my life I have felt that God has called me to something. One common thread in these times is that in one way or another I never felt fully equipped to fulfil that calling- I could see that I had some skills or some experience or some connections that meant that I would have something to contribute, but I had a strong sense that it would only be with the reliance on God's help that I would be able to serve well.

Because answering a calling is a response to God, I have found that it is only in acknowledging my own weaknesses and having faith in God's strength that I can live out that calling. For me, it is a continual process of listening to God and responding- there has never been one big call, but I have seen a prompting to smaller steps along the way to the place that I was meant to be at any one time. I am certain that I have not always listened as well as I could have or that I have been faithful enough to respond as I should, but I keep trying. It has been a wonderful gift to have moments of realisation that I am where God wants me to be and doing what I've been called to do.