

Is God calling you into ministry?

JACKIE Twine felt her call from God in a very specific place – a multi-storey car park in Portsmouth city centre.

The 52-year-old mum was working for Portsmouth City Council and was on her way there five years ago. As she approached the lift, she saw an image of herself wearing a dog collar.

It wasn't something she had experienced before, but she talked to her vicar about it. He had been thinking along similar lines. Now she has responded to God's call and is training to become a priest.

Not everyone is called by God in such a dramatic way. But Jackie will be talking about her experiences as part of a vocations morning at St George's Church, Portsea, from 9.30am-12.30pm on March 18.

Those who have already responded to God's call to ordained ministry will share their experiences. Anyone who has felt the first murmurings of a calling is invited.

Jackie said: "I'd parked my car and as I went towards the lift, I felt as though I was outside of my body and looking down at myself. I saw myself wearing a clerical collar, which came as a shock.

"A couple of years later, the same thing happened in the same car park. I went to see my vicar, Paul Gully, who said he had been waiting two years to have a conversation with me about this!

"Looking back, there had been some difficult and painful times over the past 10 years. But all of those experiences had woven together to bring me to this place.

"I went to see a vocations adviser and said 'I don't want to be a priest', but I read lots of books, saw her each month, and began to realise what was involved and what gifts I could bring.

"Over those 18 months I thought many times about the story of Jonah, but ultimately I did respond to God's call.

"My mistake was that I didn't realise how supportive people would be along this journey. But the bishop, vocations adviser, vicar, family and friends were all helpful and encouraging. Perhaps



Called to ministry: Jackie Twine and Bryan Stephenson

'GOD WANTS ME TO WORK FOR HIM IN THE COMMUNITY'

BRYAN Stephenson has been a committed Christian for less than three years – but he is already training to become a Reader.

He had become a trustee of the St Cuthbert's Centre in Copnor but felt he wanted to know more about the Bible. His vicar, the Rev David Power, suggested he joined an Exploring Christianity course.

Halfway through the course he had an epiphany. As he read Mark's gospel, he had a real sense of Jesus's pain on the cross and ended up in tears.

From that day, he had an urge to talk to people about Jesus which got stronger over the weeks and months.

"For me it was a deep emotional feeling inside," he said. "It stopped being a story and I felt Jesus's pain, and that it was something he had done for all of us. I needed to be able to express

this to people. I heard about Reader ministry and wondered if this might be what I was called to do. Because of my social work background, I wanted to do something out in the community. The Church needs to be out there in the real world, where God's word can change lives.

"I went to a Reader selection conference and told them that this was something I couldn't put down. The idea of being a lay minister has never gone away."

Bryan is in his second year of Reader training and is just about to have a placement at St Luke's Church in the city centre.

The 61-year-old father-of-three is also continuing with his job as safeguarding manager for adult social services in Portsmouth. As a Reader, or licensed lay minister, he will keep his job, and work as a minister in his spare time.

I didn't trust God enough at first, but I've finally learnt to trust him with my future."

Bishop Christopher will be there to introduce the morning, which will also include worship, the chance to hear about ordained ministry, Reader ministry, the Portsmouth Pathway and the

religious life. Those attending will also be able to talk about their own sense of calling in small groups.

The bishop said: "The ministry in mission of us all flourishes when men and women offer themselves in many roles, using talents and time in Christ's service.

"Many of us have been surprised, even if reluctant at first, to discover God calling us in ways we hadn't imagined – as PCC members, churchwardens, treasurers, pastoral visitors and in many more ways. Thank you for stepping forward.

"The gospel calls some to step forward and consider ministry as priests, Readers, or deacons and to the religious life as nuns or monks.

"If you have the slightest sense of that then please come, and as well please encourage someone else to come who you think might be right for this ministry."

● Fareham deanery is holding a vocations evening this month for those who feel called to lay ministry.

'Discovering Lay Vocations' will happen at 7.30pm on March 8, in St John's Church, Fareham. The lay chair of our Diocesan Synod, Debbie Sutton, and lay pioneer minister Nicky Pybus will be among those talking about their experiences.

It's open to all from Fareham deanery. Contact deanery synod chair Liz Simpson for details on petersimpson969@btinternet.com.

Island singers to unite for musical

PROLIFIC Christian composer Roger Jones will present his latest musical on the Isle of Wight this month.

Barnabas will be performed at Ryde Methodist Church at 7.30pm on March 18 and St John's Church, Newport, at 3.30pm on March 19.

It tells the exciting story of Saul and Barnabas's trip across the island of Cyprus, as recorded in Acts 13, with songs, choruses and worship.

Roger will bring his own team, and choir members from across the island will also join forces to sing as part of the performance. It is free of charge, with a retiring collection taken.

Rehearsals are taking place at 7.30pm each Monday in St John's Church. Contact June Cox on if you are interested in joining via trebleclef@btinternet.com.

Roger will also lead a teaching seminar on March 21 at Gunville Methodist Church, about the work of the Holy Spirit. It's based on his new book *Spirit Works*.

Artists stage Easter art exhibition

AMATEUR and professional artists have been invited to contribute to an art exhibition on the theme of Easter.

All Saints Church, Botley, will host an Easter art extravaganza from March 27 until April 1. Children from Botley and Durley C of E Primary Schools will be among those with work displayed.

Budding artists have been urged to produce a painting, sculpture, photo, audio clip, or video that represents Easter for them. The church will then be open from 9am-5pm each day so people can see the artwork.

The curate, the Rev Amy Webb, said: "People have promised they will 'yarn bomb' the railings at the front of the church with knitting and pom-poms, make and decorate a cake, create an embroidered banner, and create a woven piece using cane from furniture restoration.

"One of our churchwardens is currently painting a full set of Stations of the Cross!"

For details, contact her on rev.amywebb@yahoo.co.uk