

ORDINATIONS 2017: Candidates prepare for their new life in licensed ministry

Stepping into the spotlight as ministers

FOR a self-confessed introvert, it can be hard to step into the public glare of parish ministry.

But that's what Sam Cullen will be doing after she's ordained in our cathedral next month. The mum-of-two will become a curate at St Peter's Church, Petersfield.

She is one of five candidates who will be ordained as deacons at our cathedral at 11am on July 1. Later that day, another six candidates who became deacons last year will be ordained priest by Bishop Christopher.

Sam Cullen had felt called to the priesthood for much of her life, but her upbringing as a Roman Catholic and her natural aversion to the spotlight had perhaps stopped her putting herself forward.

Her journey towards ordination included a year-long break from work as she tried to work out her calling by herself. In the end, she realised she needed others to help discern her vocation.

"I did take a break from work to devote myself to a disciplined, obedient prayer life, to see if that would confirm my calling," she said. "But I learned you can't do it by yourself. You need to share your experience with other people who are part of that discernment process."

Sam, now 44, grew up in a Catholic family in County Wicklow, Ireland, but her Catholic faith had started to drift after the age of 18. When she was 24 her younger brother was tragically killed in a car crash, which prompted her to re-find and redefine her faith.

She had been to university in Ireland, then studied for a Masters at Keele University and a PhD in health science in Newcastle. By the age of 30 she was working as an NHS researcher in the Wirral where her first daughter was born. "Part of my transition from

ORDINATIONS, July 2017

To be ordained deacon by the bishop in our cathedral (11am): **Matt Bray** (to serve at Portsmouth Cathedral and Harbour Church), **Sam Cullen** (St Peter's, Petersfield), **Richard Hutchins** (St Mary, Liss), **Mary Kells** (Bridgemary and Elson), and **Samantha Martell** (Droxford, Meonstoke, Exton and Corhampton)

To be ordained priest by the bishop in our cathedral (4pm): **The Revs Ben Bryant** (Harbour Church), **Adam Denley** (St Jude's, Southsea), **Edwina Fennemore** (St Alban's, West Leigh), **Katy Garner** (East Meon and Langrish, West Meon and Warnford), **Mark James** (Christ Church, Portsdown) and **Richard Wharton** (North End Team Ministry)

the Catholic church involved deciding that I wanted my children to be initiated in the Church of England," she said. "I wanted to give them a Christian tradition that would allow them to explore for themselves.

"I'd also had this strong sense of calling since childhood, which couldn't be fulfilled in the Catholic church – although that tradition has been valuable in terms of developing liturgical awareness, obedience, and a love

of the sacraments."

The family moved to Portsmouth in 2007, when Sam was just about to give birth to her second child. In 2008 the family moved to the Isle of Wight and Sam got involved with St John's Church, Ryde, Holy Cross, Binstead, as well St George's Church, Portsea more recently.

She led one of the teams running the Open Arms project, which provided a drop-in in Ryde for the homeless, became



Sam Cullen: learning to embrace the public spotlight

active with Women and the Church (WATCH) and Churches Together in Ryde, and chaired the mission sub-committee for her PCC.

Despite having gone back to work after the birth of her second daughter, Sam still felt a sense of calling. Then in November 2010, a clergy woman asked if she had ever considered ordained ministry.

"I felt embarrassed and exposed, as I had been trying to work it out myself, and this was the first open acknowledgement of my calling," she said. "But I did need to talk to others. When I did talk to family and close friends, they weren't surprised."

Sam was recommended by Bishop Christopher for

ordination, but suffered a setback when her marriage unexpectedly broke down just before enrolling for theological training at Ripon College, Cuddesdon.

"I thought that would be the end of the road, but the bishop and diocese gave me huge support and helped me to go forward," she said. "I've enjoyed the academic study at Cuddesdon, being part of the community, and leading poetry, gardening and Franciscan activities.

"I'm looking forward to being part of St Peter's parish and working with the vicar, Will Hughes. I have a sense of peace about going there, despite the fact that I am by nature an introvert. I'll just have to get used to being up front!"

Prodigal Son knows about forgiveness

MATT Bray knows how important forgiveness is after going through his own Prodigal Son experience.

The 27-year-old spent six months in "reckless living" away from God before discovering faith afresh.

He was so grateful to be welcomed back into the fold that it has given him a passion to reach those who also need to experience God's love and forgiveness.

And Matt will be trying to do just that as the new curate at both Portsmouth Cathedral and Harbour Church following his ordination in July.

He grew up in Brighton, attending a Baptist church where his dad was an elder. He learnt to play a variety of musical instruments including

guitar, drums, keyboard and bass, as well as singing and writing songs.

"Music was a big part of my life and I led worship at church and was in a band, but it made me quite arrogant and when I was 17 or 18, I wasn't fun to be around," he said. "Then when I was 20 I had a huge relationship breakdown, which was all my fault.

"I pulled out of church completely and thought I was done with God. I was angry with myself and with God for what happened, and had six months of reckless living.

"I had periods of depression and self-harm, although I don't think I was clinically depressed as some people are. I still have the scars from where I cut myself. I wasn't suicidal, but I think



Matt Bray

I was trying to take my anger out on something.

"The final time I cut myself, my dad happened to knock on my bedroom door and said 'Whatever you've

done, we'll always love you'. I burst into tears and thought if he could love me, then so could God."

He started going to St Peter's, Brighton, where he and his then girlfriend Fiona led work among students. He was suggested for ordination and has spent three years training at St Mellitus College in London.

"It's an incredibly creative idea to have a curacy at both Harbour and the cathedral," he said. "The C of E has such a broad range of worship that it's great to experience two very different styles. I've had placements at High churches, so it won't be too unfamiliar.

"It's going to be a busy few months too, as Fiona – who is now my wife – is expecting our first baby in September!"