



The Rev Paul Chamberlain heard God's call to get ordained. Both clergy and lay people can feel a similar sense of vocation

HE started his career as a scientist – but felt God calling him to use his scientific skills as a vicar.

The Rev Paul Chamberlain is just one of many lay and ordained people in our diocese who has followed God's call. For some, that sense of vocation led them to join the clergy or pursue a career with a Christian organisation. Others have sensed God calling them to a voluntary position serving others.

Paul grew up in a Baptist Church, and decided to embrace the Christian faith personally as a 13-year-old. He was baptised at 14 and first felt God calling him into Christian ministry a year later, as he heard American Christian Tony Campolo speaking at Spring Harvest in 1989.

"I spent most of that talk in tears, as I knew God was calling me," he said. "My grandfather had been a Baptist minister and I spoke to him about it. He suggested that

I get some other life experience first, until the call became so great that I couldn't ignore it."

He spent his gap year between school and university in Christian work, and then studied chemistry at Southampton University. But there was a damaging split in his church there, which knocked his desire to work for the Church. He then found himself studying for a PhD in Bristol.

'I could happily have been a scientist for the rest of my life'

"I joined an independent church in Bristol which had great leadership, and God put me back together again, in terms of accepting that I was called into ministry," he said.

Paul met his wife Becca in

Bristol, and they moved to Lancaster where he worked for an environmental science research agency, studying soil and the things that live in it. The couple got involved in St Thomas's Church – Paul and Becca ran Alpha and a home group, and Becca was employed as a children and families worker.

"I could happily have been a scientist for the rest of my life, as I loved going to work and finding out things that we didn't know about the world before!" he said.

At New Wine in 2005, the question came up again and, for the first time, he felt God confirming that he should pursue ordained ministry. He was worshipping in a Church of England church, so it seemed natural to apply to the C of E.

His vicar tried to talk him out of it, and Blackburn diocese sent him on placement to a church of contrasting tradition for six

months to see what happened.

"I had been praying since 1996 with two friends from university, so by the time we got to 2005, we'd been praying for nine years together," he said. "Neither of them were C of E, but they both prayed and could see that I was called to do it."

Ultimately, he was accepted for ordination training and went to study at Cuddesdon, near Oxford, where he was able to train with people across the Church's traditions. Paul and Becca's first son Noah was one when they moved, but there was ready-made community of spouses and children, and Becca was able to attend regular lectures too,

Paul became a curate in the town of Thame, just outside Oxford, in 2010, and joined our diocese as priest-in-charge of St Faith's, Lee-on-Solent, in 2014.

"My advice to anyone who feels called is to talk to people who know you well, and get their perspective, because your sense of calling needs to be grounded in reality," he said. "Also pray about it, and talk to your vicar who can think it through with you.

"I'm glad that I didn't go straight into it, because it meant I was ordained with the skills of a scientist, with the ability to analyse data. It's also an interesting talking point when people know that the vicar is a scientist, which I define as 'finding out how God did it'."

If you have a sense of vocation – to become a licensed minister or to serve God in another way – please contact our Director of Vocations and Ordinands, Canon Peter Hall. He starts work in this new role on December 3.

"I'm keen to emphasise that all sorts of people have vocations,"

'God's call took me out of my comfort zone'

JAN Fuller felt in her comfort zone dealing with accounts – but God called her to do something more.

She became a Reader, a licensed lay minister who can lead services, preach and offer pastoral care to others. But it took a while for her to be convinced that she should emerge from behind the treasurer's books.

Jan, from St Mary's Church, Portchester, first felt the call around 15 years ago, but says it all felt very scary at that point. She was encouraged by the Revs Connie Sherman and Julie Jones when they served at St Mary's, and went on the Bishop's Foundation Course.

"I felt I was not going to be good enough to do it – I have financial qualifications and felt uncomfortable when I wasn't in that box," said Jan. "I'd been PCC treasurer for 20 years and that was my comfort zone. I felt called to be a Reader, but it took me a long time to accept that I was supposed to have any role other than as treasurer."

Jan was working full-time as a management accountant, and had also managed to study for a business studies degree in her spare time.

That encouraged her to think she could cope with Reader training alongside her job. She started in 2014 on our old Exploring Christianity course, and her second and third years were on our current Portsmouth Pathway programme.

"God made it possible for me to study, but I had to be quite organised," she said. "I might get up at 4am to read a book, or try to study when I came home from work. The Pathway course was amazing – you are studying alongside ordinands



Jan Fuller, who became a Reader

and we supported each other as a group."

Because Jan's only experience of the Church of England was at St Mary's, she had a couple of placements at St Luke's Church in Southsea. Now she splits her time between the two parishes, and was encouraged by Jill Phipps in her work as an older person's pioneer minister to introduce A Different Day in St Mary's, Portchester.

"If you're feeling the first stirrings of a call, I'd encourage you to talk to your church's leadership and other people, and to explore what Reader ministry is like in different parishes – as it's not always the same everywhere," she said.

"What I have appreciated is that Readers can still work in the 'real world' alongside their church role, which gives them a different perspective and opportunity to discern God's calling along the way.

"I also think that what we're called to do comes out of our identity – God knows our gifts and talents and will call us to serve him in the way that suits us best."