



‘Ordination training revealed my dyslexia’

Rajiv Sidhu discovered he was dyslexic while studying theology. He'd like churches to cater for neuro-diversity more effectively

It was only at the start of his ordination training that Rajiv Sidhu was diagnosed as dyslexic.

That came as a surprise, as he'd worked as a teacher for 10 years and hadn't had any issues. It was his challenges studying Hebrew that prompted the diagnosis. It gave him a deeper insight into who he was, and also into why some people struggle with Christian teaching that can often be based on words, rather than images or symbols.

He was one of seven people ordained deacon at our cathedral this summer. They've gone on to serve as curates in parish churches around our diocese. And Rajiv is especially pleased that he'll be a curate at St Cuthbert's Church, Copnor, as his vicar the Rev Allie Kerr is an old friend – and is also dyslexic.

Rajiv, who is aged 32, is a lifelong Anglican. He spent some of his childhood growing up with his grandparents in Malaysia, where Christianity is a minority religion and traditions are very different. He trained as a geography

ORDINATIONS AND LICENSINGS 2021

<p>Deacons (June 26): Derek Johnston (to serve in Cosham and Wymering), Kate Lloyd Jones (Greatham, Empshott and Hawkey with Priors Dean), Anthony Lawrence (Ventnor and Bonchurch), Katherine Message (Harbour Church, Portsmouth), Heath Monaghan (pioneer minister, Bembridge and All Saints, Ryde), Rajiv Sidhu (St Cuthbert's, Copnor) and Alison Waterhouse (Petersfield and Buriton)</p>	<p>Priests (June 26): The Rev Hannah Barraclough (Newport and Carisbrooke), the Rev Catherine Edenborough (Portsmouth Cathedral) and the Rev Matthew Grove (Christ Church, Portsdown, and St John, Purbrook)</p>
<p>Readers (July 3): Karen Crowhurst (St Blasius, Shanklin) and Jo Nicholson (Ventnor and Bonchurch)</p>	

teacher and worked in a school in Dagenham before heading to the Isle of Wight. He went to St James Church, East Cowes, where Allie was the vicar.

He taught at Christ the King College, which is a joint Church of England and Roman Catholic secondary school in Newport. He was moved by the daily rhythm of prayer there and talked to a colleague who was also a non-stipendiary minister.

"I had always assumed that my vocation was to be a teacher, although I now realise that you can

have different vocations at different points in your life," he said. "I was happy doing the church website and dealing with the technical side. One day, I met Allie in a pub to talk about starting a Bible group in the parish and, out of the blue, she suggested that I should think about becoming a vicar.

"I spoke to the Diocesan Director of Ordinands and we explored that vocation for a year. Discerning vocation was a rollercoaster of experiences. But throughout it all, I had a strong sense of God calling through the most unexpected ways. So in 2018, I was accepted for

Conference provided the catalyst for lay vocation

IT was at a diocesan conference on mission that Karen Crowhurst was asked if she had considered becoming a licensed lay minister.

Karen was attending our **Leading Your Church Into Growth (LYCIG) conference** in Liphook in October 2017 as chair of the mission group at St Blasius, Shanklin. At one point the Rev Tony Richards asked her if she'd thought about being a Reader.

It was the validation Karen needed, as she'd been thinking along those lines. She is one of two people being licensed as Reader by our commissary bishop, Bishop Rob this July. The other, Jo Nicholson, is from nearby Ventnor.

The cathedral licensing service on July 3 also gave other Readers a chance to renew ministerial vows.

Karen had previously been a Salvation Army officer in Hertfordshire – so she had experience of ministry anyway.

After switching to the Church of England, she was part of the Cursillo movement in St Albans Diocese, which enables lay people to enrich their discipleship through prayer, study and action.

She moved to the Isle of Wight five years ago when her husband retired early, and started attending St Blasius. Among other things, she sang as part of the robed choir, served on PCC, led Lent groups and preached in church.

"I felt I might be called to licensed ministry, but I hadn't had time for the training before this point," Karen said. "So when I came to the island, I deliberately didn't get a job, thinking that God might want me to do something. But I wanted the call to be very clear.

"I was asked to go on the LYCIG conference with Tony, as I was chairing the mission group, and – without any prompting – he asked if I'd thought of being a Reader. I applied, was selected, and have spent the past three years in training on Portsmouth Pathway.

"My involvement with the Cursillo movement had helped me to appreciate how important lay ministry is. They have so much to offer.

"The training on Portsmouth Pathway reinforced that, as those training to be clergy and Readers study alongside each other. It



Trainee Reader Karen Crowhurst

provides a model of genuinely collaborative ministry.

"It has been hard work, but enormously worthwhile, to do the studying and to experience the placements. More recently, it has been harder to have that sense of community with the limitations on meeting up, but we've made the best of it.

"I'm looking forward to formally being part of the ministry team, and contributing where I'm needed. I'm still open to God's call, in terms of my involvement with preaching, teaching, funeral ministry, leading small groups and pastoral care – I'll do whatever God calls me to do."

ordination training and I resigned as a teacher.

"I studied at Oxford and learnt a lot about the breadth of theology, the Church and about the different perspectives and priorities that people have. My experiences have probably made me difficult to pigeonhole, as I am as comfortable with incense as I am with open prayer.

"I was able to go on placement to a prison ministry in Malaysia, which was amazing. What stayed with me was the importance of loving Christian action – loving your neighbour is an active thing. In a world of social media and pressures around, it's easy to lose sight of what is 'right'. Yet here we were, driving in 4x4s to remote locations

to deliver essentials to those who needed it most.

"In 2019, my uncle, grandfather and mum all died separately and suddenly within a few months. I learnt first-hand the importance of someone offering you a loving, listening ear, as that's what I needed. I learnt how vital loving pastoral ministry is, and also found solace in the Anglo-Catholic tradition of praying for those who have died.

"And it was my Hebrew tutor who suggested that I might be dyslexic, which gave me a deeper insight into myself.

"We are all created in God's diverse image – and this applies as much to our minds as anything else. What

does this look like for church? How can we include, welcome, and celebrate neuro-diversity in Christian spaces and places? We often shy away from the images and symbols in church, though these can be the most effective teachers of the faith.

"I'm excited about being at St Cuthbert's, partly because Allie and I think alike, and also because our set-up here is unique, with the community hall, café and GP surgery making it the heart of the community. I'm also keen on exploring ways that we can offer even more pioneering ministry."

Rajiv and his wife Freya have moved into Portsmouth with their twins Ranjini and Rajvir, who are both six.