

Lizzie Davidson outside St Peter's Church in Bishop's Waltham

'I'm glad I waited to follow God's call'

LIZZIE Davidson first thought about ordination 10 years ago – but she's glad she waited until now.

She's gained experience of parish and secular youth work, worked as a church verger, and broadcast digital worship during Covid lockdowns. She now feels more equipped to become a Reverend after this summer's ordination services.

The 31-year-old will be one of 18 people ordained as deacons at a special service in our cathedral in June. A further six people who were ordained last year will become priests at a second service that day.

"Ten years is a long time, but it was mostly working out if I was sure this was the right thing to do," she said. "But I do think the life experience that I've gained from the past decade has been valuable."

Lizzie moved to Bishop's Waltham when she was just two, and her newly-arrived family became involved with St Peter's Church after a churchgoing neighbour offered them a pot of jam. Her mum became a Christian when Lizzie was four, and the children were baptised and went to Sunday School.

ORDINATIONS AND LICENSINGS 2024

Lay ministers (June 22):
Will Clarke (to serve at Ventnor and Bonchurch), **Lindsey Crowhurst, Kathryn England, Matt Lockwood** (all Crofton parish), **Tim Fitzgeorge** (Crookhorn) and **Sandra Rampton** (St Luke's, Southsea)

Deacons (June 29):
Emily Ashworth (Crookhorn), **Lorraine Collins** (St John's, Fareham), **Tom Cooper** (Buriton and Petersfield), **Lizzie Davidson** (Warblington with Emsworth), **Rosie Greenlees** (St Peter's, Bishop's Waltham), **Sandra Haggan** (St Faith's, Havant), **Polly Honeychurch** (St Wilfrid, Cowplain), **Charlotte Hudd** (West Wight), **Kevin Jones** (St Simon's, Southsea), **Jo Lorimer** (Bedhampton), **Sue Moss** (Hart Plain), **Jo-Anne Newton** (Holy Trinity and St Columba, Fareham), **Jo Nicholson** (Ventnor and Bonchurch), **Elizabeth Pearn** (Portchester), **Paul Pope** (Alverstoke), **Sr Teresa-Lucia Sutton-Becker** (North End), **Emma Taylor** (Cowes), and **Deb Vears** (Farlington)

Priests (June 29):
The Revs Will Alvarez (Lee-on-the-Solent), **Jenn Camirand** (West Leigh), **Jan Fuller** (St Luke's, Southsea), **Sue Jones** (Greatham, Empshott, Hawkley with Priors Dean; Steep, Froxfield and Privett), **Buffy Langdown** (Denmead) and **Jill Phipps** (Shedfield and Wickham)

Priests (September 28):
The Revs Karen Crowhurst (St Blasius, Shanklin), **Coleen Jackson** (Portsdown and Purbrook), **Clare King** (Holy Trinity, Bembridge), **Bevaly Rackett** (Haven benefice, Isle of Wight), **Richard Shurmer** (St Cuthbert, Copnor) and **Larry Stone** (Harbour Church, Portsmouth)

She helped plan church services as a teenager, and became immersed in the worship at Christian youth camps each summer. She envisaged studying English Language at university and becoming a speech and language therapist.

"Something inside of me was yelling that this wasn't the right thing for

me, and the summer after A-levels, I had an experience at a Christian youth camp," she said. "The final talk was about death swallowing us up, and saying that Jesus had overcome death, and that we should be telling others about it.

"I then got two rejection letters, as I hadn't got the right A-level grades for the courses I'd applied for. It was

a confirmation, as I hadn't really wanted to go. I also didn't want to defer, as the tuition fees were going up and it would cost more.

"I remember on A-level results day, my brother asking me what I wanted to do with my life. By the time he'd made a bacon sandwich, I'd found a theology course. By midday I had a place at Canterbury Christ Church. My anxiety disappeared. Looking back, I can see God's provision in that time of turmoil."

Lizzie became involved with the Christian Union at university, made great friends and felt like her faith crystallised. Studying theology in a secular context made her lectures fascinating. She joined a church, served at Canterbury Cathedral and was part of the chaplaincy.

"I saw a stole in the cathedral shop, and thought 'I'll wear one of those one day', so there was a sense of feeling called to ordination," she said. "It was being affirmed by chaplains and others. And opportunities popped up to speak at church and to lead small groups.

"I stopped the process of exploring ordination, as it felt too quick and I also felt called to youth work. But 10 years later, I'm going to wear a stole from the shop at Canterbury Cathedral at my ordination, as a reminder that God was speaking to me at that point."

Lizzie returned to Bishop's Waltham after graduation. She volunteered at the church for a year and then became its paid youth worker for another four years. She also worked in the local pub, and in secular youth work in the village.

"We built up the youth work, did some work in schools, and I was given opportunities to preach and lead services," she said. "We started alternative worship in the church hall and Messy Church. I enjoyed the work, and the secular work gave me another point of view."

Equipped for a new role

THE call to ordained ministry for Tom Cooper came pretty quickly after his conversion experience.

He had been brought up Catholic, but never felt comfortable with faith. One Christmas, he attended Midnight Mass in his village and felt a sudden conviction that God existed and that he should take Communion.

"It was as if the church filled with light," he said. "It was quite an intense experience."

Not long afterwards, he moved to Buriton and was walking past the church when he heard a voice from God suggesting that he should be presiding at Communion.

At the time, back in 2004, ordination seemed impossible. Tom's wife Bronwen worked full-time and he was the main carer for their young son Jamie.

"I mulled it over for a long time," he said. "I became a Reader seven years ago, and that has been a valuable ministry. But last year I was at a PCC meeting when the Michaelmas cohort was mentioned.

"It was almost as powerful as my



Tom Cooper in Buriton

conversion experience, as my heart burnt within me, and I felt this was my last chance to respond to God's call to ordination.

"Our son has grown up, and this would be self-supporting ministry in our church, so it feels manageable. Most importantly, I feel supported by God, who has got me there in the end!"

Lizzie got a job as verger of St Ann's Church in HM Naval Base, working alongside the chaplaincy to organise services and facilitate pastoral work. Six months later, the first Covid lockdown started, and she had to reinvent the job. It included broadcasting online services and even creating TikTok posts of the chaplain dancing.

During those two years, she explored ordination, mostly via online meetings, and ended up with a place at Trinity College, Bristol, starting in September 2021. Among her placements was time in a prison chaplaincy and time in two parishes in Bristol.

"The three years at Trinity have been amazing," she said. "You see God working in everything, including lectures, college services, and living in community. It's different to studying theology at university because we pray before lectures,

and we have chapel every morning. And everyone there is on a journey with God, and learning about our part in ministry and mission – not just theology.

"Looking back, I can see how God has worked to bring me to this point. It has been gentle veers in the road, rather than one big lightbulb moment, and each one has brought a sense of calmness and joy."

Lizzie will become a curate at Warblington-with-Emsworth after her ordination, which will give her further training in parish ministry.

"Putting a dog collar on for the first time was pretty terrifying," she said. "But I hope I can get to know the Emsworth and Warblington communities and see what God is doing there. I'm excited to live out my calling, and I know there is no way of me being able to do this without God's help."