

# Our local theological college is open to all

**We're training clergy and Readers together on a theological course based in our diocese. It means collaboration is natural**

If you felt a call from God to become a minister, it used to involve uprooting family and enrolling at a theological college far from home for two or three years.

Now those training to become clergy and Readers can study in our diocese, keeping their jobs and remaining part of their existing congregations. Responding to a vocation to licensed ministry has been made simpler.

Our diocese's course for training clergy and Readers is called the Portsmouth Pathway, and is based at St Luke's Church in inner-city Portsmouth. It aims to combine academic theology, the development of ministry skills and the encouragement of spiritual formation. When it was launched in September 2015, it was the first time that ordination training had been offered within our diocese.

There are currently 23 people studying to become clergy or Readers on the Pathway. Excitingly, they learn side-by-side, with only some marginal differences in the training given to ordinands and trainee Readers. This encourages collaborative leadership in our churches.

**'It's broadening my knowledge of Scripture and the Christian faith'**

Training typically involves a seminar on a Tuesday night, with some home learning and some residential weekends at Ripon College Cuddesdon – offering real flexibility for those who work during the day.

Among them is Charlotte Hudd, from **All Saints Church, Ryde**, who

began studying in September 2021 after responding to God's call to become a distinctive deacon. She studies while also working as a nurse at the Isle of Wight Prison, and is currently learning about being a deacon at churches in Seaview, St Helens, Yaverland and Brading.

"I'm really loving it," she said. "The evening studies are really diverse, and I'm learning from the lecturers and the other students. It's really broadening my knowledge and understanding of Scripture and the Christian faith. And to spend time at college in the countryside at Cuddesdon is really helpful, as the learning there is Spirit-led and involves the whole of Creation.

"I've been placed at the Haven Benefice to learn about the role of the deacon. I'm excited about the Eucharistic role of the deacon, who is on the threshold

of the church to invite people to come in, who brings the gospel to the people, who administers the sacraments, and then invites people to go into the world.

"Interacting with people at an important moment like Communion echoes the role I have with patients as a nurse. These are significant occasions for people, and involves you caring for all sorts of people, without any judgement. I'm also registered as a healthcare chaplain, which was a course I did before this one and which links those two aspects of my life."

Polly Honeychurch thought she would miss full-time employment when she started studying on the Portsmouth Pathway. In fact, she felt really peaceful about ending her 32 years in the teaching profession and 22 years as a headteacher in order to study for ordination.

Polly, who goes to **St Nicholas Church, Bedhampton**, stepped down as headteacher at Cottage Grove Primary School in Southsea last summer to enrol on the Pathway. She's also interim chief executive of the University of Portsmouth Academy Trust, and a foster carer.

"I ignored God's call for a long time," she said. "For the past 25 years, I've served in our church, leading services and so on. When the Diocesan Director of Ordinands joined our church and asked me if I'd ever considered ordination, I thought I'd better start looking at it.

"It seemed like the right time to make this move, and I guess I knew it was coming. I'd worked in education, and I'd always assumed that was my 'ministry' but it felt as though God was asking me to use those skills in a different way.

"I went through the process of



**Top left: the Rev Richard Wyld leads a session; top: students in a session; below: Charlotte Hudd talks to a colleague at the Portsmouth Pathway**

grieving for my career, and had to realise that my value was not in my role, but in me as a person. So I felt peace when I handed my notice in. My son has turned 18 and gone to university, so there was a possibility of doing this studying.

"I'm loving what I'm doing now. It really feels like I've come home. The people on the course are lovely, and on the first evening here I realised that I knew many of the other students already – they were involved with my school, or I knew them from other places.

"I'm excited about the course. I want to study more and to do theology. It's such a privilege to be on the course, and I can't believe the Church of England is funding me to do this training. It also gives me more time to be with family than being a headteacher, so it has made a real difference to my home life."

A typical Tuesday night in term-time begins with students sharing food together in St Luke's church hall from 5.30pm. Students then take it in turns to lead Evening Prayer in different styles in the church itself. During the