

# Former nurse is back on the island



**Olly Mitchelmore** followed God's call into nursing, then ordination. Now he feels called to help revitalise churches on the Isle of Wight

WHEN Olly Mitchelmore was training to be a nurse on placement in East Cowes, he never imagined he'd return to the Isle of Wight in a dog collar.

But 12 years later, he'll become the team vicar responsible for launching brand new congregations in Ryde. The Rev Olly Mitchelmore has been appointed to lead contemporary congregations aimed at families and young people, based at the historic All Saints Church.

Olly was born in Cornwall, but moved to the Falkland Islands at the age of 11, when his father became the minister of a church in Port Stanley.

"We had to leave everything and everyone I knew to live somewhere we had never even visited," he said. "There were roughly the same number of islanders as there were Armed Forces personnel – and we were all outnumbered 10 to one by sheep! I found it quite an isolating experience. If I wanted to contact

friends in the UK, or use the internet it cost £1 a minute, so that wasn't an option. I do feel God used that experience to help me empathise with people who are longing for community or feel left out."

After a couple of years on the Falkland Islands, Olly and his family returned to Cornwall. He later went to university to study Computer Science with IT and Business Management in Plymouth.

"During my time at university, I had a bit of a faith sabbatical," he said. "I thought I knew best how to live my life and I felt my faith was holding me back. I tried everything society tells us will make us feel happy and complete, but in the end, I just felt empty. I was suffering from anxiety and depression and felt I had nowhere to go. One day, I found myself in a church in Exeter, the last place I expected to find myself at that time in my life.

"There was a time of sung worship, and I remember feeling a tingling

sensation – an overwhelming sense of peace, hope and joy which I knew did not originate from me, as I hadn't felt any of those things in a long time. I knew it had to be the Holy Spirit. I found a personal relationship with God through his grace. The poor decisions of my past didn't exclude me from experiencing his presence."

After graduating, Olly moved to Exeter to work for Toshiba and attend church there. It was during this time that he felt God calling him into the healthcare profession.

"One day while praying, I felt this strong sense that God was calling me to be a nurse," he said. "I knew it wasn't my idea because I thought it was ridiculous: I had no experience in healthcare and no desire for a career change! However, every time I sat down to pray for the following six months, I kept getting this strong feeling. Finally, I applied and was accepted to train at Southampton University. It was one of the best decisions I made and has led to a

lot of other positive things in my life – none of which would've happened had I ignored the call to nursing. It really taught me the importance of trusting God."

In his final year of training, Olly spent time with the district nurses in East Cowes caring for patients in the community. "I look back on my time on the Island fondly," he said. "The people were so lovely and always had time to talk over a cup of tea. I was staying in Newport during my placement and the Isle of Wight Festival was on. After work I remember sitting on a grass verge, hearing the main stage from across the valley and thinking 'this must be a really fun place to live'."

When Olly graduated, he moved to London to work in one of the largest cardiothoracic intensive care units in Europe. "I really enjoyed working in intensive care – it was very rewarding," he said. "Typically it's one nurse per patient. I enjoyed being able to give individual treatment and my knowledge of technology helped, as a lot of machines are involved in keeping patients alive.

"It was a privilege to support family members going through an emotional and stressful time. Sometimes there was the opportunity to gently share a bit of my faith and pray."

He was worshipping at a New Frontiers church in London when he met Rebekah, a lawyer from New York, who is now his wife. While they were engaged, Rebekah left the law firm she'd been working at to start a role at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), and encouraged Olly to worship there with her. The couple married there in 2018 and felt a sense God might be calling them to ordained ministry and church-planting.

"Ordination hadn't really interested me, largely because I had such a hard time as a pastor's kid in the Falklands," said Olly. "But Rebekah



Left: Olly and Rebekah Mitchelmore on Ryde Pier; above: at All Saints Church

was working in an operational leadership role at HTB and felt an increasing sense of call. She mentioned a few times that she felt we might be called to ministry as a couple. She'd been praying that if God really was calling us, he'd make it clear to me as well.

## 'We can't wait for the next phase of what God is doing in Ryde'

"In 2018 I heard Nicky Gumbel – the then-vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton – speak about how the church needed more practical people, such as the disciple Peter as well as the more academic apostle Paul. I don't fit neatly into either category, but felt a strong sense of calling to ordination."

Olly was ordained at St Paul's Cathedral in 2022 and has been working at HTB as a church-planting curate. He heard about the opportunity in Ryde when Heath Monaghan spoke about it on a HTB conference last summer, and it reminded him of his time on placement in East Cowes.

"I was excited to hear about the project in Ryde and the sense of what God is doing on the Island," he said. "Of course there are challenges, but we believe in a God who is both willing and able to do what seems impossible

by human standards."

One challenge they faced was ensuring the availability of medical treatment for Rebekah, who paused her own ordination training to receive a kidney transplant in 2023. She had suffered with a rare kidney condition since the age of eight. Her new kidney was donated by a friend, Giulia Restivo, from the HTB congregation.

"Giulia was part of our Connect group and Rebekah had been discipling her, had developed a friendship with her, and watched her faith grow," said Olly. "Her offering to donate her kidney was an unbelievable blessing. So far the transplant has been a huge success. You can't out-give God."

Olly was appointed as team vicar in Ryde earlier this year and will be licensed by Bishop Jonathan on April 24. He's looking forward to working with the team, including team rector the Rev Heath Monaghan and team vicar the Rev David Morgan.

"Rebekah and I are really looking forward to working with the whole team at Ryde," he said. "We love the work the congregations have already been doing – pop-ins to combat loneliness and Messy Church, which is attracting local schoolchildren. We can't wait to join them for the next phase of what God has already started doing through the Church in Ryde."