

## Called as a teenager to serve God

RICHARD Shurmer decided to commit his life to serving God at the age of 14 – and has been thankful for his guidance ever since.

His vocation was to teach RE at secondary school, retiring after 36 years. He has also spent 37 years as a Reader. Now he's following God's present call to be ordained as a Church of England priest.

Bishop Jonathan will ordain him deacon in our cathedral on September 30 alongside six others – the first cohort of Michaelmas ordinands who have spent the past year in theological training.

Richard, now 64, grew up in the Sunday School at St Mary's, Fratton. He was part of a youth group at St Simon's, Southsea, and was trusted to lead worship at an early age. Then, aged 14, he was challenged by a direct call from God.

"It was an incredibly strong call," said Richard. "We had a visiting Church Army captain one Sunday who said from the pulpit there were some present who the Lord wanted to work for him.

"My first reaction was 'It can't be me'. Each time I thought of a reason to say not me, the exact thought was spoken back word-for-word and my objection overturned.

"I became convicted. I was being spoken to directly, and I knew it was God asking me to give my life to work for him. And ever since then, every time anything has happened, I've known God guides."

Gradually, it became clear that the initial call was to teach RE. He studied at Leeds University, and then did teacher training in London. He taught RE in Derbyshire from 1983-87, and



Richard Shurmer

in 1984 started training to be a Reader, based at St Martin's, Alfreton. Richard and his wife Leah returned to Southsea to care for his parents, and he became RE teacher at Bishop Luffa C of E School in Chichester from 1987 until 2018.

Richard was a Reader, or lay minister, leading worship at St Cuthbert's and St Aidan's, Copnor, from 1988 until 1994.

He switched to perform a similar role at St Simon's, Southsea, until 2002, and subsequently returned to St Cuthbert's with St Aidan's in that year. The moves were linked to caring for his parents – his dad died in 1998 and his mum in 2014.

He and Leah also had to cope with the loss of one of their children, James. He died in 2013 at the age of just 25.

"That was a very hard time," he said. "All we could do is rely on the Lord to help us through. We

received wonderful support from our Christian friends." They have two other children, Anthony and Emily.

When it came to ordination, Richard said: "I was certainly content with being a Reader and being an RE teacher, and that combination felt like what God was pleased for me to do. Once I'd retired from paid work, I did think I could devote more time to Reader ministry.

"I've been leading services, preaching, offering pastoral care and prayer for healing, as well as being involved in all sorts of other groups at St Cuthbert's. The former vicar, the Rev Allie Kerr, and I also helped in local schools.

"It was during a confirmation service at St Cuthbert's where I opened myself up to God, asking him what he wanted me to do.

"After the service I chatted to Bishop Jonathan and he told me about the Michaelmas ordinations. That was the beginning of God's answer to my silent prayer.

"I went home and told Leah. She thought and prayed about it and three days later she said: 'If you've got the gifts and God wants you to use them, then you'd better use them!'

"Whenever I've mentioned ordination to people, they've said 'of course'. Each time I've needed some reassurance about this calling, the Lord has been gracious to provide and guide.

"Like others, I have special Bible verses. Matthew 28: 20 'I am with you always' is an important promise.

"Throughout my life, there have been many occasions and varied ways I've read and heard those words, just when I've needed the Lord's reassurance."