

New-style course to offer specialisms to laity

SHE is an authorised lay pioneer minister - and therefore a forerunner of the kind of new lay minister's role we're looking to create from September.

Ali Mascarenhas has been involved with St Mary's, Brighstone since 2022. She has led community projects including working parties in the churchyard, nature talks, a group creating mosaics and outdoor Celtic worship.

Last year she was given a role as a lay pioneer minister after several years of study into theology and pioneering. It was a recognition of her role inspiring creativity and spirituality.

Now we're looking for other people who might want to become Authorised Lay Ministers within our diocese.

Candidates would enrol on a year-long theological course from September 2026, which would include some specialism in areas such as preaching, leading sung worship, working with children and young people, or church-planting. They could serve in their own parishes and neighbouring ones. It therefore falls between

the courses we already offer for licensed lay ministers and the locally-recognised ministries organised in parishes.

Ali has shown how this might work in practice. Having created some Easter mosaics that tell the story of Holy Week with a group of volunteers in Brighstone, she then took those mosaics to Christ Church, Totland, and All Saints, Freshwater.

They were created by the community mosaic group in Brighstone, which has also made a Tree of Life mosaic and a Celtic Cross mosaic from fragments of glass. The Easter ones show scenes depicting Palm Sunday, the Last Supper and Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection.

Originally a dietician, Ali worked for the National Trust before coming to the Isle of Wight and using her skills in glasswork and gardening.

Her first involvement with St Mary's, four years ago, involved inspiring volunteers to clear an overgrown part of the churchyard to create a reflective space for the Queen's Jubilee.

She was one of the first people to attend the Pioneering Parishes' 'First Steps' course, an online four-session introduction to pioneering led by the Church Mission Society (CMS).

Our Lay Ministry Discipleship Officer, the Rev Matt Grove, said: "Ali provides a good example of how some theological training combined with specific specialist skills leads to a really creative type of lay ministry."

"I hope our new Authorised Lay Ministers will be similarly inspiring. We aim to give them a theological grounding, and it blends online, in-person and independent study.

"Each person will have a specialism in an area they feel called to. For some, that specialism might seem obvious now. For others, it might develop as they begin the course."

For more details about Authorised Lay Ministry and how to apply for the course, see: www.portsmouth.anglican.org/ALM



Ali Mascarenhas with one of the mosaics that her group in Brighstone created for Easter this year

a woman cannot hold a formal position in a church. So legally becoming a **Licensed Lay Minister** is highly significant.

Elena and her husband Rodelf only arrived in the UK from Iran three years ago. She had been in charge of 400 employees in an engineering firm when she was offered the chance to study for a second Masters degree at Portsmouth University. She was then offered a role as senior specialist technician in its power and renewable energy labs.

She and Rodelf became part of the congregation at St Luke's Church in Southsea, after trying several other churches first. They were part of a small Bible study group meeting in the church of the then vicar, the Rev Annie McCabe.

"Our church in Iran is traditional and women aren't allowed formal roles," she said. "I'd recognised God calling me to his service for many years, but couldn't live that out in Iran. My vicar did allow me to speak to his church, but it wasn't formal ministry."

"Annie encouraged me to think about becoming a lay minister, and I have already been preaching, reading and leading children's work, as well as being involved with healing services. I managed to get onto the course to become a lay minister."

"The course at Sarum College has been fantastic. I already had



The Rev Matt Grove, Lay Ministry Discipleship Officer

some confidence in my knowledge of the Bible, but it helps to go deeper and discover other people's perspectives. The group of students is like a family, and it's great to share our experience and contexts together.

"One thing about being in Iran is that there are restrictions on Christians and some persecutions

of priests and bishops. Here, the church is open to everyone, and there is a lot more diversity as we seek to share the love of God."

Elena will continue to volunteer in lay ministry at St Luke's after

her licensing on June 20. Oyin and Elena will be joined by Steven Smart, who will become a different kind of **Licensed Lay Minister** - a lay pioneer. Steven has always been drawn to the idea of pioneering ministry, perhaps because he was already living it out in his everyday work.

As the children, youth and families minister at St Matthew's, Bridgemary and St Thomas the Apostle, Elson, Steven has been exploring creative and unconventional expressions of church. Among these are Bubble Church, designed especially for toddlers, and Muddy Church, which uses gardening and animal care as hands-on ways to explore faith.

Motivated by this passion, Steven enrolled with the Church Mission

'I hope training makes me a better preacher'

NIC Driscoll hopes that studying on our diocese's newly-created course for lay ministers will make her a better preacher.

She is employed as operations manager of Haven Church in Gosport, and already leads worship services and acts as a vocalist for the worship group. She hopes to enrol on our Authorised Lay Ministry course from September, which will give her a better grounding in theology.

And the specific specialism that she'd like to focus on as part of the course is preaching. As she is married to the vicar, the Rev Ray Driscoll, she not only has a good role model, but also someone who supports her ministry.

"I've been involved in churches since the age of 16," she said. "I've taught young children in Sunday School, especially when I had children of my own, and I've led Youth Alpha."

"And by being married to Ray, I've supported him practically in his ministries while in a Christian band, working as a youth worker, and then becoming a priest."

"I also see the operations manager role as a type of ministry, as you get to see and do so much behind the scenes that's involved with making church activities happen."

"At Haven Church, I've been a vocalist with the worship band since the church was launched in 2021. And I also lead the worship as the 'host', which involves being open to how God's Spirit is leading us."

"I'd like to apply for the course because I'd like to learn more theology, and also to take the specialism in preaching."



Nic Driscoll, who hopes to be on the Authorised Lay Ministry course in September

"I'm naturally introverted, so I know that I'm not really an evangelist. But I do feel that imparting God's knowledge through teaching is something that I could do."

"I have tried it already, and the process is terrifying - all the way through from preparing something to delivering the sermon. But I really enjoy preaching, and enjoy learning from others, including Ray. I also feel that preaching is a way of imparting what God is teaching me."

"I do feel that God has called Ray and I to this parish at this particular moment, so I don't feel that I'd like to preach or offer ministry in other places."

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