



Lizzie Sykes-Little in her organic garden in Gosport

God's call had instant effects on my life

WHEN God acts in Lizzie Sykes-Little's life, the effect seems to be instant.

She was miraculously healed of a chronic health problem the first time she was prayed for. Then the first time she heard God's voice, it led to her quitting her long-term job. And her calling to ordination was similarly immediate.

She will be ordained as a deacon by Bishop Jonathan on June 27, at a special service in our cathedral with two other candidates. Later that day, another 11 deacons will be ordained as priests.

"A few years ago, I could never have imagined this happening," said Lizzie. "I had a 25-year career as a speech and language therapist and assumed that I would never leave. But it's hard to ignore God's voice when it is so persistent and obvious."

Lizzie, who worships at St Mary's and St Francis, Alverstoke, was a churchgoer as a child, but her faith wasn't active. When she married her husband, Gordon, neither were going to church, but they looked for a suitable venue and plumped for

ORDINATIONS 2026

Deacons (June 27, 11am):
Lindsey Crowhurst (to serve at Shedfield and Wickham), **Stuart McKerracher** (Portsmouth Cathedral) and **Lizzie Sykes-Little** (Liss)

Priests (June 27, 4pm):
The Revs Mary Ball (serving at St Faith's, Lee-on-the-Solent), **Nikki Bryant** (St John's, Locks Heath), **Nathan Hamilton** (Ryde churches), **Jane Kendal** (St John's, Fareham), **Abbie Lynch** (Newport and Carisbrooke with Gatcombe), **Chris Nicol** (St Mary and Holy Trinity, Cowes, Northwood and Gurnard), **Kitty Price** (St Simon, Southsea), **Rachel Rider** (Haven Church, Gosport), **Jane Shyvers** (West Wight), **Josh Thomas** (Harbour Church, Portsmouth) and **Deb Henning-Vears** (Farlington)

St Ann's Church in HM Naval Base. Part of the marriage preparation involved attending St Ann's, and they felt welcome. So when they moved to Gosport in 2014, they attended a Bible study course at St Mary's, Alverstoke, and Lizzie's faith clicked into place.

Shortly after that, Lizzie began to experience symptoms of fibromyalgia, a chronic illness that includes muscle pain and fatigue. From 2019, Lizzie experienced three years of profound symptoms. She had joined a team at St Mary's that prays for God to heal others, but had not been prayed for herself.

"I think I resisted being prayed for, as I felt God was teaching me about

patience and humility through it," she said. "I just carried on with work and family commitments, but often at home I was a mess – in pain, fatigued and really struggling.

"Our team was about to start public sessions of healing prayer and it felt strange for me not to be prayed for too. Amazingly, I was prayed for at a friend's house and God healed me. I've felt hardly any pain since that moment in February 2022."

Lizzie was also working as a speech and language therapist with adults, leading a multi-disciplinary team in two neurological wards in Southampton. By April 2022, when she was revelling in being pain-free, she heard God speaking to her as

she got into her car to drive to work.

"A voice said: 'I want you to quit your job.' I tried to ignore it, but the voice got more persistent and it was obvious it was God," she said. "But it wasn't obvious what God wanted me to do next.

"I was leading a team coming out of Covid and wondered who would replace me and who would take care of that team. But within 48 hours both questions were answered: someone was moving to Southampton with the skills to replace me, and two of my team decided to move on.

"So I quit the job, worked my three-month notice period and God still didn't tell me what he was planning. I helped a friend who was an Anna Chaplain. We were offering home Communion in a care home, and as I did so, I realised God was calling me to ordination. I was completely convinced by God in that instant.

"But I think that's how God works. I wouldn't have quit my job if I'd known that ordination was what God was calling me to."

Lizzie studied theology at Ripon College Cuddesdon. She was worried that her dyspraxia would make the academic parts of the course more difficult, but she enjoyed the challenge of going deeper theologically. She was also able to lead worship at St Francis, and has also had experience of being the schools and families leader in her parish.

After ordination, she'll become the curate in Liss. Lizzie will move into a house there while her husband, who teaches astronavigation at HMS Collingwood, will remain in Gosport, for the shorter commute.

"I feel called to Liss, but I don't know the specific purpose," she said. "So it will be exciting to find out what God has in mind."



Stuart McKerracher, who will be ordained in June

Church gave me real sense of the transcendent

IT was a fascination with the transcendent that prompted Stuart McKerracher to walk into All Saints Church, Ryde, during Choral Evensong, back in 2004. It set in chain a series of events that will result in him being ordained deacon at our cathedral this June. The 41-year-old will then serve as an assistant curate at Portsmouth Cathedral.

Stuart was brought up on the Isle of Wight in a family without faith, but was fascinated by subjects such as astronomy. It was a sense of curiosity that led to him walking into All Saints at the age of 19, and he became immersed in the words of the Book of Common Prayer.

"It was what I had been searching for," he said. "That sense of the ineffable. I started attending church and found the community there really supportive."

He went to Oxford University as a choral scholar, sang as a lay clerk at Worcester Cathedral, and then started teaching classical civilisation at an Isle of Wight sixth form, while also studying for a Masters. He took a PGCE and then started teaching RE in North Wales from 2018. It was then that his sense of calling intensified.

"Ordination had crossed my mind a couple of times, but it wasn't until I was teaching about faith that I realised I needed to be living and breathing a faith that was dear to me," he said. "I couldn't do that within the state system."

He worked at Bangor Cathedral as a lay succentor while he started a process to explore his vocation.

It was interrupted by the Covid pandemic, which actually gave him opportunities to run a Foodbank from the cathedral office.

"That was my first experience of direct ministry to the vulnerable," he said. "It was akin to 'breathing out' the gospel in deeds rather than words. It actually confirmed that I did feel a vocation to serve others."

Stuart fell ill with long Covid for 18 months and retreated back to the island to recover. For a while he was bed-ridden and unable to walk without a stick.

"I had a real sense of dislocation, but I also felt God was stopping me in my tracks, calling me out of education and asking me to choose faith," he said.

He helped his local vicar with administrative work, and ultimately re-started a process towards ordination. He found a paid role with the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO), and was also preaching and leading worship.

Stuart trained for ordination at the College of the Resurrection in Mirfield for three years. He helped lead its Holy Week programme and has worked with the homeless in the crypt of St George's Church, Leeds.

"It has been wonderful to be able to devote time to studying Scripture and theology, and it has helped to inform my discipleship," he said.

"It's also confirmed that sense that I sing to glorify God – I don't tend to sing in a secular setting. Music is so important to unlock the depths that go beyond words."