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Dear Friends,

***...Once upon a time,
...Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers***

For many priests and deacons their ordinations are indelibly etched upon their minds. We look back and remember the relief we felt as we came to the end of our theological training. We remember those final days as a lay person and the crazy things we thought about as we prepared for our ordinations. We remember those silent, or guide retreats that were a part of our final week of preparation and, of course, we remember rehearsals that took place days before the real thing. I shall never forget the Sub Dean demanding that ladies refrain from wearing noisy stilettos to process down the aisle!

As I look back over my journey to ordained ministry I remember so many people with thanksgiving who played a part in my story. I recall the numerous individuals who over a period of ten years suggested I should offer for ordained ministry. I remember the reasons I gave why this was not a good idea - I argued I was not academic, not male and certainly not grey and that I had two, three, four and eventually five children....then! I can remember, as if it were yesterday, the selection process - three days in a retreat house in

Chester being interviewed by those who were called upon to scrutinise my academic and pastoral abilities and suitability for a task I didn't much want. I can still remember receiving the call from the Guildford Diocesan Director of Ordination telling me that I had been recommended for ordination training and that, despite my poor attempt to complete the non-verbal reasoning test, I was considered to have an IQ very similar to that of most clergy. I still have no idea what that means but the supposedly rigorous selection committee wrote that comment in their report!

Today, I continue to give thanks for those people who supported me on my academic journey. I hated school, preferring to gaze out of the window and dream of my mornings "riding work" around the Epsom Derby course. I had refused the head teacher's plea that I might consider staying for the "Oxbridge term", got out of education after A levels at seventeen and had hoped never to write an essay again. I give thanks for the tutors at Sarum College, Salisbury and for Bob my local tutor who put up with my inability to take my studies or the traditions of the church too seriously. I still feel grateful to those priests and lay people who constructively appraised my first faltering attempt to preach a meaningful sermon when they probably wanted to tell me, as my school teachers always did, "she could do better if she tried harder". And I recall with deep gratitude Simon my training minister who tried to teach me that being ordained would not wipe out my true self - a daughter, sister, wife and mother. But most of all I thank Chris who in my hospital chaplaincy placement helped me see why I, of all people, had been called with all my faults to ministry.

Somehow with God's help, because it couldn't have been in my own strength, I came through three long years of juggling the joys of marriage, raising five children whilst attempting to preach, serve in the parish and write essays and now it was over. As 4th July 2004 drew near I remember standing in front of a mirror in a clerical shirt and thinking that a mistake had been made and that I would awaken from this silly dream. I want to tell you that I remember with clarity my ordination to the diaconate, but the truth is I don't. Maybe I've got a screw loose because it was just the same when Billy and I were married ...I remember the rehearsal with clarity but the marriage service passed by in an unremembered blur. I was ordained Deacon in a haze of shock and fear. Would my life ever be the same again? Would I ever fit the clergy mould? I could never be good enough and I'm not even sure I wanted to be! If you asked me now what was sung at the service I'd have to tell you that I have no idea. Yes really. But I know that before the service began in front of the Diocesan Registrar (lawyer) wearing a silly wig I swore my oath of canonical obedience to the Lord



Your tearful Vicar on the day of ordination emerging from the cathedral!

Bishop and his successors, so help me God. I only have three clear memories of the service. Firstly I know that I was the only woman amongst the five ordained for stipendiary ministry. Secondly I remember the moment when hands were laid on me; I remember the tremendous weight of prayerfulness, of love and of expectation that came crashing down on my head. It hurt so much I thought my knees would break. At the end of the service we processed out with our white stoles draped fetchingly across our shoulders and our flat rubber-heeled shoes moving soundlessly on the marble floor to gather in the Narthex for a final word from our Bishop. I have no idea what he said but I do remember standing there sobbing. Surely a mistake had been made, surely they had captured and trained the wrong candidate, and surely I was going to be found out very soon. Surely I should have been left to run a flourishing Sunday School. Why did nobody understand I could share my faith with children ...but adults are different animals and I was no circus trainer? With my red rimmed eyes and tears wiped away we emerged onto the steps outside the cathedral for photos with our families and, as I looked at all the others, all I could see were capable men who were going to be God's gift to the church. And then I saw Chris, his eyes telling me I would and could grow into this role and make a difference.

The following morning I awoke to serve my Title Post (as they call it, God knows why!) as Curate of The Bourne and Tilford, best described as a posh parish with four churches in Surrey. You may find it hard to believe, but once upon a time I used to sit in my study in The Bourne sobbing and banging on heaven's door with my lamentations "God, why have you done this to me". Before too long the joys and sorrows of parish ministry were upon me and within six months, swept along by the busyness of parish life, I knew why God had called me to be a stranger in a foreign land. A few years later I became a Vocations Adviser for Guildford Diocese, walking alongside those exploring a call to ministry, I have trained curates and lay ministers and now I understand that God's call, our vocation is to be where the needs of the world or the needs of the church and our own gifting collides.

In this week's gospel, Matthew's Jesus sees the crowds around him, helpless and harassed like sheep without a shepherd. He sees a harvest ready for reaping but insufficient people for the task. He tells those who would listen to have a word with God about this little problem..."therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest". Jesus calls together a group of twelve men, mirroring the twelve tribes of Israel and he sends them out to do what he has done; he goes from place to place proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing the sick. So who does Jesus call? As far as I can tell there are no grey academics or erudite preachers. Some of the group are named by association, "his brother" or "son of..." but three individuals described make us wonder why they are suitable candidates for Jesus' inner circle. Matthew, the tax collector, is among most hated of people ...he and his colleagues fleece the people and are in cahoots with the Romans. Then there is Simon the Cananaean, not known simply as being a man from Cana in Galilee but because he was a Zealot. Why did Jesus call a political enthusiast for the Romans and a sympathiser with the opposition? Just imagine the arguments they had as they walked the dusty roads together. And then we have "Judas Iscariot, "who betrayed him". Even those whom God calls have the capacity to oppose, perhaps even harm the one who calls them. Yet this little group is sent out empty handed, but for the example of their teacher. Like vulnerable sheep they go into a pack of wolves. They are to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves. You know how the story unfolds as well as me. None of them understands the task ahead; few of them get what Jesus is really trying to teach them. All, not one but all of them betray him and yet on these unlikely foundations the church of God is built. Hurrah! God has a job for you and me, frail, vulnerable and broken though we are.

This year the ordinations in churches and cathedrals across the globe will not look like any you have seen before. If they happen at all, supporters from the parishes who will receive their new curates are unlikely to be present, although perhaps they will see a live streamed service. But when and if they take place those whom God has called will be just as imperfect and inadequate as those who have gone before them and like me some will feel ill-equipped for the task that lies ahead. But this is not their ministry and it's not done in their strength alone. Their attempts to pursue lives of holiness will probably fall at the first



Your Vicar today

hurdle but, if the biblical narrative and history of the church tells us anything, God seems to be able to bring good out of evil, hope out of despair and even life out of death. When the world tells you that the church is dying...tell them that Jesus died. When the world tells you that you are not good enough to be a follower of Christ or a minister in his church, tell them that it was on the rock of Peter that the church was built. If your family or the demons in your head tell you that your behaviour betrays you and that you should not call yourself a Christian, tell them that the people whom Jesus chose to build the kingdom of God were just as bad as you are. Or, if they read the bible, reply with Paul's words to the Church in Rome, "Christ died for the ungodly....God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." Now that's good news. You don't need to be perfect for God to call you on to his team.

Yours in Christ

Vicki

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Last week I shared the following news with the parish by email - my sincere apologies to you. Unfortunately, I failed to send this message to all receive a hard copy of the parish newsletter.

Many of you will remember that, when I was appointed Vicar of Radyr, we expected that another colleague would be appointed to serve with me across the new housing development of Plasdŵr. That has not come to fruition as the building works began more slowly than the Diocese initially anticipated. It was recently shared with St Fagans that an incumbent to replace Peggy Jackson on her retirement might well share with our North West Ministry Area in serving the Plasdŵr development. However, earlier this year, Bishop June invited Archdeacon Peggy to relinquish her part time role in St Fagans and spend her final year in ministry as a full time Archdeacon. +June subsequently invited me to fill Peggy's role as a Vicar. Since none of us can be in two places at once we have reached a creative way forward as follows,

On 16th September – I will be inducted as the new Vicar of St Fagans and Michaelston-super-Ely. I will of course remain Vicar of Radyr but, from September, I will be incumbent of both parishes held 'in plurality'. This is feasible because, at the same time, **The Rev'd Gareth Rayner-Williams** will be licensed as self-supporting Associate Priest in the Ministry Area. He will be licensed as such in each of the parishes at the same time as I am inducted (possibly by Zoom!). He will continue in his full time work, as one of the Senior Teachers at St Teilo's Church in Wales School, but he will now be available to enhance many aspects of our life in the Ministry Area, including of course Sunday services, when they can be resumed. This is likely to mean that once a month and on alternative months twice a month Gareth is likely to conduct one of the services you attend in Radyr Parish.

So, while the pattern of clergy deployments in our Ministry Area will feel very different from September onwards, clergy ministry as a whole is being expanded. The ordinations of Deacons and Priests will not take place in Llandaff Cathedral as planned but Belinda Huxtable will begin her curacy serving her Title Post in The Parish of Radyr in three weeks' time.

Clearly St Fagans will enjoy many benefits from this new arrangement and, while you in Radyr are being asked to accommodate this change in my everyday responsibilities, I hope you will soon discover the advantages as you get to know Gareth and Belinda who I know will be a blessing to us all.

Please hold me in your thoughts and prayers as I prepare for this new ministry and all the joys and challenges it will bring, and please pray for Gareth and Belinda as they join us on our journey of faith.