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Dear Friends,

*Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!"
And he said, "Here I am!"*

We are truly blessed in the parishes of both St Fagans & Michaelston-Super-Ely and in Radyr. There are so many who share their time and talents (and also their riches) with both their communities and their churches. In our three churches we have two full time stipendiary clergy in Belinda and myself, and Gareth (whose ministry five days a week is in St Teilo's High School) also shares his many gifts with us. Additionally, we have two Licensed Lay Ministers, or Readers, in Colin and Cheryl; these are individuals with the gifts of teaching and preaching as well as having huge pastoral gifts and much wisdom to share with us. You will be glad to know we also have three other individuals exploring God's call on their lives - two considering a call to Lay Reader ministry and one to ordained ministry. In every place where I have served I have discovered more about what it means to be the Body of Christ as I have seen people who are blessed, broken and shared. I have also learned that this Body is made up of so many working parts and, as Paul reminds us, we cannot do without the small and sometimes invisible bits that make up the body. Hands and feet, eyes and ears, lungs and hearts conjoined to make the whole, holy. Even whilst separated from one another, the Body of Christ's heart still beats because so many people continue to serve even from their homes. How on earth would we manage without those who dash out when a roof is leaking (as happened in one of our halls this week) or an alarm is ringing on the roof of a church (as happened repeatedly before Christmas)? How on earth would we manage without those who pick up the phone in their homes and call those who are lonely, sick or grieving? My life would be the poorer without them. How would we manage if nobody got up and cleaned our hall so the child care group could gather and key workers serve us in the NHS or on the frontline in places we know so little about? How would we manage if there was no administrative support, relieving me of the burden, and keeping you informed week by week? How would our churches continue to function and serve the community if those we elected to serve us didn't gather, even on Zoom, to make decisions about installing Live Streaming Equipment (yes we are going to) or to get the Faculty Applications submitted to the DAC (Diocesan Advisory Committee)? And how would we cope in Christ Church if there were still no central heating? I, for one, am still giving thanks for a young boy who set up a Just Giving page, made some clay hearts and enthused us to be generous.



It is in times like this that we realise that the little cogs in our bodies and in The Body are so necessary for life. The contributions by the Junior Church in St Fagans and the Sunday Clubs in Radyr were, for me, the highlight of our Christmas services; the children and their leaders are at the very heart of our Body. Over thirty years ago a wise old Vicar, who I thought was crazy at the time, called by to invite me to open a Sunday school in St Martin of Tours, Epsom. At the time there were only a handful of children including mine but, over the next fifteen years or so, we drew in numerous children week by week sometimes seeing nearly 60 on a Sunday - most of whom went on to receive their First Communion and subsequently be Confirmed. For at least ten years of this time I resisted the suggestion by others that I should offer for ordained ministry and now and again I still wonder how this happened for I continue to believe that we should be pouring more love and energy into those who are new to faith. And yet I, who believed I was doing a reasonable job at home offering my own sons an introduction to the Christian faith, was jolted into a new way of seeing things by the words of my firstborn son. Each night before he slept we would read together, I would read to him and he, aged five, would try to sound out the words and read a little to me. At the end I



would sometimes say a little prayer with him. As a child Nannie, who cared for myself and my sister when my mother was at work, would sit on the bed and make us say "God bless mummy and daddy, Jan Jan and Pompa (my grandparents), God bless my aunties and uncles and God bless Katie and me. Amen. It was a demanding shopping list but at least it was over quickly....and when dinner was in the oven and William was little I think some days we also gabbled through something like this. Shame on me! But one fateful night everything changed in how I understood the fragile faith of a child as I began to say a prayer and he interrupted me with these words. **"Be quiet mummy, all of life is prayer"**. Oh yes he was so so right...out of the mouths of babes! I kissed him good night and rushed down to eat our evening meal feeling thoroughly ashamed.

Faith is so often caught not taught and our boy had observed that there is more to relationship with God than a quick one or two liner to satisfy our own longings. The children in our midst, in our churches and in our communities have much to teach us. For sure, they can teach us how to use computers, but that's not all. They teach us to love our planet better, to care for the poor, to work together for the healing of the world and to serve each other. They have lost out during this past year in ways that will affect them for years to come – lack of educational opportunities, lack of quality times with friends and grandparents, lack of exercise and shared meals. Yet they remain a blessing and a symbol of hope in our midst and, let's not forget, they are so often our teachers.

Old Eli had a little apprentice in Samuel. He probably imagined that he was the boy's teacher so no wonder when the little boy kept hearing a voice calling him he told him to get back to bed and go to sleep. Eventually, the old priest thought that maybe God had a word for the young lad. Deep down, old Eli already knew that the behaviour of his own family was disgraceful and offended God but he tried to ignore the behaviour of his sons and the problems in his own household. He tried to ignore God's call on his life. His wake up call comes when the child Samuel shares with him God's plan to do something entirely new. God intends to remove power from the old priest and to set up something new, entirely new. And, of course, you know this is the beginning of our story as God replaces the old priestly system with a new form of kingship through the ministry of a little boy.

But more of that on Zoom tomorrow morning at 10.30am when you will hear the whole storyand a bit more from me!

But, back to the here and now. Just as once upon a time God began to do something new through the words of a child even now new things are happening to us. And, like Eli, maybe we turn a blind eye to our own household for we don't like to challenge the status quo, we can't imagine there being any other way to do things. Our parishes are now on a journey to becoming a properly constituted Ministry Area; a charity with a new name within which our parish churches will operate. It is exciting and for some of us not a little scary. We are going to be working more closely with our neighbours in Taffs Well, Tongwynlais, Pentyrch and Capel Llanilltern. Week by week we will worship and give and serve in our own churches but there will be things that we can do better together too. That, I hope and pray, will come into being in the fullness of time. Some of the younger families are excited about the possibility of opening a shared Messy Church for them; a young person seeing the blessings of a confirmation group of 25 youngsters spanning all the parishes sees the prospect of a youth club for her. Another person has suggested new ideas for a shared senior members group.

The Body of Christ, as we currently know it, is going to grow and this means there will be more little cogs, more gifts and more talents and, just as the 1FamilyCardiff project set alight the hearts of many in the Deanery (and I am personally delighted that a Syrian family will arrive in the coming weeks), we will be able to dream new dreams together and some of the things we could not do as small parishes might just come to fruition. And I will not be in the least bit surprised if some of the ideas and new ways of working are led by the voices of children. Just like Eli, whose eyes had grown dim both physically and metaphorically, so often our children and grandchildren see what we cannot see - before us they already lived in a digital world and coming to church and doing a bit of sticking and colouring is no longer "cool" - maybe they will help us and perhaps lead us as we begin to imagine a Ministry Area and churches better fit to serve the world in the years to come.

With my love in Christ

Vicki

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