
Woodard Voice



Welcome to this edition of the Woodard Voice which explores the concept of Vocation, of being called by God.

Over the years our schools have helped thousands of young people discern their vocation to serve others, in education, in medicine and in the sacred ministry. Here are seven articles in which the writers seem to express how a Woodard Education formed them. I hope that you enjoy it.

The illustrations have been created for us by Fr Matthew Askey, Chaplain of Worksop College, who is an artist of national standing. Put his name into Google and see what comes up! The illustrations depict the seven sacraments. We leave you to ponder them.

Fr Brendan



When asked to write this article, two quotes instantly came to mind. One from a Scottish philosophy 'Blessed is he that has found his work! Let him ask no other blessedness' Thomas Carlyle (1843) and one from the sixth book of the New Testament 'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' Romans 11:29.

Finding my 'vocation' had a lot to do with a deep desire to do something purposeful, discovering the person I believed I should be, and more importantly the type of person God was calling me to be. A tall order indeed, but happily for me working at St Peter's CofE Academy (SPA) and being a member of the Woodard family for so many years has helped me to find a fulfilling role that helps others, fits my personality, utilises my talents and embraces my gifts.

To me the Woodard vision encompasses all the things that I believe are vitally important and should be at the heart of an education based on Christian values. Who wouldn't want to be part of a family of educators who are instrumental in positively influencing and transforming the lives of young people by inspiring them to make a difference? The Principal asked me back in 2016 to work with a group of students to come up with some Christian Core Values and a motto. These Core Values of Service, Thankfulness, Peace, Empathy, Trust, Endurance and Reverence and motto of 'Every Life Enriched' now run through the Academy and my sense of vocation are deep rooted within them.

I enjoy a most privileged position at St. Peter's, as the Student Welfare Officer and Worship Co-ordinator (Lay Chaplain). It certainly isn't your usual Dolly Parton's '9 to 5' and can be hard work and emotionally challenging. My life at St. Peter's is dedicated to serving others in all that I do and is guided by my Christian moral compass in following our afore mentioned Christian Core Values.

It is difficult to define a typical day in the role of Maria, as no two days are the same, but typically my day begins early and is a whirlwind that comprises of providing students with 1:1 emotional and bereavement support; promoting positive mental health; coordinating and organising collective worship and prayer events; engaging in supporting charities within the local community; offering and facilitating prayer; collaborating with outside agencies and local clergy in providing appropriate support for our young people and working alongside the Student Development Team in prioritising and providing support for our most vulnerable students and families. All of which is interspersed with a whole lot of prayer and little time for a coffee or comfort break.

Like all families St. Peter's has its challenges, our Academy is located within an area of high social deprivation in Stoke on Trent and we have many young people whose home lives are far from 'sunshine & roses'. Many of our young people experience horrific home lives and face daily challenges and to some of our young people we are the only stability they have in their lives. The role I play is more than just a job, it's a vocation. It is all about building positive relationships and there is no 'clocking off' time. If a student needs my help, I give my time unreservedly and am always willing to 'go the extra mile'. I endeavour to be instrumental in planting little seeds of hope and positivity each day, I thank God that within my role I can share my faith and have the capacity to nurture, guide, encourage and impact the hearts and lives of so many young people.

The Academy Chapel, fondly known within the Academy as OASIS, provides a safe, quiet, and homely environment. Here along with my furry friend Rocky (the Academy Therapy Dog, named aptly after St. Peter the Rock) we listen without judgement or prejudice, offer comfort, reassurance, and a time for reflection. Often managing to "turn that frown upside down". With a little patience and understanding, we encourage resilience and rewardingly begin to see students flourish and grow in confidence.

St. Peter's has always been a beacon of light in our community, contributing regularly to foodbank and

local charities. Now, more than ever is a time for us to demonstrate Gods love by showing compassion and empathy towards one another. I am so proud of all we have achieved thus far in helping and supporting our families throughout the pandemic. Woodard believe in unrivalled pastoral care and as an Academy this is exactly what we have delivered unconditionally throughout.

Our Academy staff has raised around £3000 towards provision for vulnerable students and since the start of the pandemic and I have been humbled by the amount of donations we have received. Working around the clock, my team and I have had the privilege of delivering 100s of food parcels to our most vulnerable families and we have literally made 1000s of phone calls to support the wellbeing of all our students regardless of need, more than ever following in the true spirit of Nathaniel Woodward's vision we are doing what it takes to make a difference. It has been heart-warming to receive emails from families expressing their appreciation.

United in Prayer, I am extremely blessed and thankful to our local clergy and of course my senior leadership team whose encouragement and support is invaluable in helping me to fulfil my role effectively. I often use the term 'love' in relation to my career, which after 18 years of working and supporting young people has brought much joy and immense blessing. Many years later I am still reaping the rewards of the impact I have had on former students, who routinely contact me to say thank you or to share their latest personal accomplishments. It makes it all worthwhile and inspires me to continue in my work.

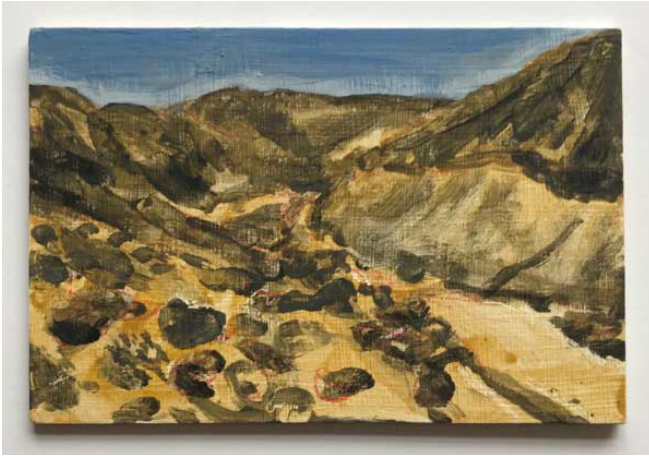
I began this article quoting Thomas Carlyle and the Bible, but would like to end it with a reference to one of my favourite books for children 'Frederick the Field Mouse' by Leo Lionni. Like Fredrick, I like to think that I too am able to see the bigger picture and reflect on what really matters in life. When all the other mice were too busy 'just doing stuff' Frederick was busy gathering colours so that the mice could have them during the winters when it's dark and grey. He was gathering words so they could have poems in the winter and gathering light so they could have light in the darkness.

May I continue to serve and honour God's purpose for my life by bringing a little bit of sunshine after the rain.

God Bless

Maria Rubin

St Peter's CofE Academy



Hi, my name is Hugo Walker. I'm 14 years old and currently in the 3rd Form at Denstone College.

For me, there are 3 areas of college life that help me foster my Vocation.

The first of which would be the Chaplaincy. One of the greatest gifts of being at a Woodard school is that of the Chaplaincy. I just think that for a Priest, a person chosen to devote their entire life to the service of others, giving both Pupils & staff alike their time and effort, is just such an honourable & Christ-like thing to do! The Chaplain gives us counsel, encouragement, advice, reassurance, & most especially: Jesus.

To have the Eucharist available all the time is simply marvellous for anyone finding their vocation: we come to the Lord, as a community, asking forgiveness for our sins, then we hear the scriptures (imagining the events it speaks of unfolding in our minds) & we try to apply what it asks of us in our daily lives. Then bread and wine are consecrated among the splendour of bells, incense, candles, chalices with precious stones, & vestments that have beautiful images woven into them.

And as we receive our Lord (Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity), he lives within us. Something we need, not just for our school life, but for our daily life.

So the Chaplaincy is an Instrument of the good Lord! And this closeness to the Father, through Christ, is just wonderful for anyone asking him "What sort of instrument should I be to you?"

Secondly, another great thing is of course is the chapel building!

I think that Woodard chapel buildings probably lead, not just the country, but the world in terms of school chapels! The most famous & largest of which is of course Lancing Chapel (or rather 'The Cathedral!')

However my own College Chapel, I would argue, is just as magnificent!

Yes the Chapel of Saint Chad, Denstone is one beauty that is sure to lift one's eyes to the heavens,

to the roof (that my peers & I all think of as an upside down boat!) This is of course the place where Mass takes place, but also probably the only place in college where the doors never lock. And I think this communicates to everyone that God does not 'switch off'. He isn't a games console. And no, there isn't an angel with a desk in the narthex that's informs visitors saying "prayer are to be submitted between 9 & 5".

The chapel is available any time, everyday. To be entered and just to sit in. I love praying in there. It becomes a sort of second home for me.

The best seat in the God's house has to be in front of the tabernacle (at Denstone, it is in St Benedict's Chapel).



I feel the presence God physically & mentally. And the tabernacle lamp is a symbol of that.

And lastly, I find the opportunities that Denstone offers me help me as you discover what your good at, what you enjoy. And your gifts help you fulfil your vocation.

I feel that my vocation is Priesthood.

I have a deep desire to distribute the sacraments as an act of service out of love for Christ & his Church, as I see the world we live in and what ails me terribly sad is not just that they need the sacraments (because they have chosen other things they believe will fulfil them), but also they don't know they need them, desperately.

There is of course a lot more to my story, but meanwhile, Denstone helps me grow in my gifts. A few things I do are:

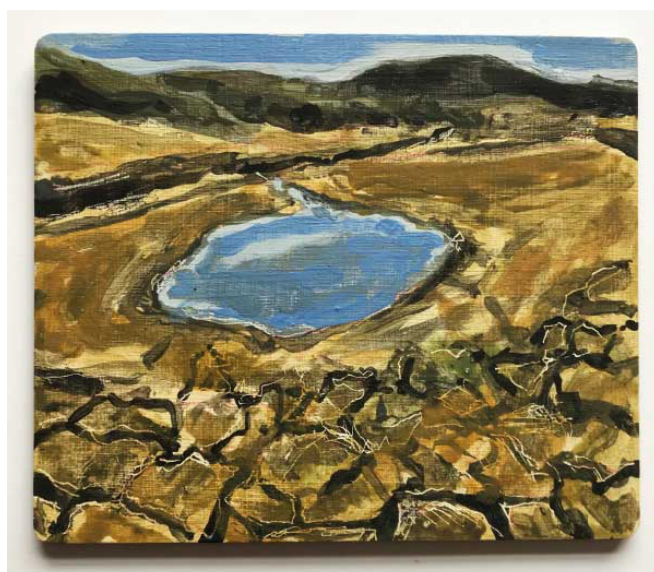
- Drama – I love doing drama. It is very similar to Mass in terms of dressing up, remembering lines, using props, standing in front of people, doing actions, & singing along to music.
- Debating society – the Priesthood is a life that requires to meet with people who think differently to you (hence why I have chosen GCSE RS) so the Society is great way to be confident in what you say, but also listening (a thing this world needs to do so much).

- Sacristy – Sacristans must work as a team, as one, & so must priests. We must remember what Jesus said in the garden of Gethsemane: “that they may all be one, so that the world will believe, that you Father have sent me.”

So I think that Woodard schools are great for pupils to really become close to the Lord. And I really believe the Lord uses the schools of instruments. He really does work in mysterious ways. And I’m glad he does because that only encourages awe!

I will never forget what one of the priests I know said to me once:

“God has put you in Denstone for a reason.”



‘What made you choose this?’. It takes me a moment to work out whether I’m being asked about the obscure item from the world foods aisle I’m purchasing (lockdown has encouraged culinary derring-do), or whether the person behind the counter means something else. And of course they do: I’m wearing a clerical collar. Clergy – perhaps especially the young among us – get used to that sort of question, since we retain a capacity to fit so oddly into everyday life, even when we think we’re just popping out for a pint of milk.

It’s not a bad question, actually, and – invariably – it’s a doorway into a much more interesting conversation about what matters to whoever poses it. But I sometimes worry that it makes me feel a bit too special. The language of vocation (from vocare, ‘to call’) is appropriate enough, and we rightly use it to express something of the principled ideals attached to the major caring professions – doctors, nurses, teachers, vicars – which act as a summons to service. Yet of course this is really too

narrow, and too neat, at least for most of us. One thinks of W.H. Auden comparing the phrases ‘I will love you forever’ and ‘I will love you at 4.15 next Thursday’, and concluding that the latter is much more difficult to say, because it asks how the ideals that summon us – love, self-sacrifice, service – are actually to be discerned and performed in the messy concreteness of daily life. We all want to do something noble and satisfying and worthwhile, and I dare say we all envisage a legacy of goodness, of one sort or another. But we can’t all be doctors (or even curates). What if our ‘choices’ don’t seem to fit into the neatly prescribed route maps which now seem to stake such an early claim on young people’s lives? What if we are completely unsure about our professional path? Has ‘vocation’ passed us by?

It’s probably worth noting that all of this is at some considerable variance with the biblical picture of ‘calling’, which begins not with getting a job, but with playing our part in a great mixed ecosystem purposed to reflect and share in God’s endless loving delight. God ‘calls’ the whole cosmos in the vivid poetry and allegory of Genesis, and this call is foundational to the particular story and self-understanding of a people, Israel, as recorded in the sweep of the Hebrew scriptures. True, individuals receive their summons, and prophets get their marching orders, but it’s interesting enough to note that this is often directly connected with human error. In a passage which must surely resonate with sleep-deprived parents everywhere, Samuel hears a voice addressing him, and hauls himself sleepily out of bed three times, to wake up Eli and ask why he had called. Eli has to explain, patiently, that he didn’t, and that maybe something else rather different is going on here (so go back to bed). Being called by God is not really a matter of accessing a divine blueprint, or being cast in the great celestial script – at least as we imagine we ought to be put to use or cast. Rather, it is more like an

acknowledgement of the 'pressure' of the divine love – that love which sustains and summons the whole sweep of creation – in the particular circumstances of one's finite existence. Eli, a wise and gentle guide, has to help Samuel to see that answering God's call requires careful listening, and a willingness to be put to use in unexpected, unanticipated ways as this 'pressure' is discerned. And it is precisely this surprising, subversive transformation of expectation which is drawn to its most outrageous paradox in the New Testament, as God's summons to abundant life and love cuts through every imaginable distinction, hierarchy and prejudice, in the figure of Jesus Christ.

I mention all of this because it would seem that attending to the classical Christian picture of vocation – which one would expect a Woodard school to have some interest in doing – will always involve something more than identifying prospects for a future career (as important as that remains). It will, at its heart, involve cultivating an environment in which a wonderfully diverse group of young people can sense their own lives to be utterly astonishing, fascinating and loveable, beyond any sort of valuation or statistic. This is, we might say, the work of 'being an Eli'; and it must involve helping people to overcome the sense that being uncertain about one's direction, or trying and finding oneself at a dead end,

is never simply a 'failure', but rather part and parcel of discerning that divine 'pressure' of love, which is always summoning us, here and now, into reflecting God's glory by being *ourselves*.

I realise I'm in no position to lecture from the sidelines (a clerical vice!), but in this case, I can at least speak from some experience. For I was just one of those young people, who had very little idea, really, of what I 'ought' to do, when I entered the sixth form at Lancing College. There were some Samuel moments – up I leapt, chasing what I thought might be a future in one career or another, only to sense a dead end – and so many deeply nourishing, unendingly generous moments of Eli-like counsel. My time at Lancing transformed my life, because it was an environment passionately committed to my life – to helping me become far more fascinated by who I was, by the depths and byways of my being. And it was only as I sensed something about how deeply worthwhile and loveable that life was – quite apart from any of its 'achievements' – that I sensed within it how it was that I might inhabit the world fittingly. Here was my 'call', and in time came my 'choice'; but all of it began with a community which marvelled, simply marvelled, at the free gift and blessing each and every one of us was already made to be.

Taylor Wilton-Morgan



As I enter retirement from full-time ministry, to be asked to reflect on Vocation might seem a little strange. Actually I find that my mind has been drawn back to my moments of calling as I go through the process of winding down. Full-time ministry for me has lasted 45 years, beginning when I stepped off a Greyhound bus in what was then a small town in South Carolina's Low Country, 14 miles inland from the bustling vacation city of Myrtle Beach.

That was for a pre-ordination placement, but to all intents and purposes it felt like an additional first curacy before being ordained to my title parish in the Diocese of Oxford (Bicester), five months later. There is of course an element of calling involved in every move to a new role or position in the life of the church – even if, as is now normally the case, one is responding to an advertised post. Sometimes, people will put specific possibilities in front of us and then you have to try and work out if there is a genuine call from God there as well.

Ironically for someone who is now a Woodard Provost, there were in the early years a number of suggestions about school chaplaincy. I could always see that I might have a call in that direction, but the timing never felt right, so none of them materialised. I did take a post that involved full-time teaching but that was in a Theological College in Barbados. The three years I spent there helping others understand more of what their vocations might mean for them was a hugely rewarding time. It's one thing to know you have had a call; it's quite another understanding what that might actually mean in and for your life!

The way in which a vocation might come will vary enormously between individuals. That's pretty clear in both the Old Testament and the New. The last chapter of St. John's gospel points to significant

differences in what vocation will mean for two very close disciples of Jesus', but the calls to follow had come in very similar ways at the beginning.

Many of the prophets will give some kind of description of their calls, and they vary a great deal. Amos gets his whilst he's about his very secular business; Hosea, through the ups and downs of a complicated love life; Isaiah of Jerusalem through a mystical moment in the splendour of the Temple; the one priest who became a prophet by contrast is by the bank of a river when he is caught up in a startlingly clear vision of God in glory; Ezekiel then hears a voice calling him to deliver what will be a deeply unpopular message.

It seems that a large number of the prophets felt called to deliver unpopular messages – but not all of them. Some change their tune through the course of long ministries, but there are a few whose message is consistently one of hope – who realise they are called to give consistently good news. The anonymous prophet whose words are recorded in the second half of the book of Isaiah (hence the name Second Isaiah) is the most obvious example. Interestingly, Jesus understands his own vocation to be most closely allied to Second Isaiah.

Mostly, even where there is a specific moment that we can point to when a sense of vocation takes root in a very obvious way, there will be a long process through which the calling will emerge. My own calling to ordination, as opposed to the callings to particular responsibilities, had both a specific moment, and a longer process.

I was aware of a process starting when I was confirmed in my prep school chapel in Salisbury. Although he had died just a few months before I was born, I was aware that my paternal grandfather had been an Anglican priest, and I knew of two great grandfathers who were priests. I remember wondering if this is what I should do. Christian faith was simply a part of who I understood myself to be – I am one of those who can't remember ever being anything other than a worshipping Christian follower. To be truthful, though, the worship in early childhood was definitely on the sporadic side!

By the time I got to Lancing the impulse to be more committed to worship had increased, but any sense of calling to ordination had receded. Instead, I became convinced that what I wanted to do was act professionally. Over my first two years in Fields House, my sense of commitment both to chapel life and to the stage grew. The latter was certainly helped by a House Play in which Jeremy Sinden and

I both played major roles, and the former by the glories of Lancing Chapel.

You can't ignore the chapel at Lancing: it was the biggest building in the school and demanded a reaction one way or the other. I once calculated that from our intake year, 5% ended up as priests. Without me realising it, even as I sought to persuade my parents that being an actor would be ok, the chapel was having more effect than I realised.

Then, during my O levels year, a group of about 6 of us gathered in a friends' pit in Fields one break time. We were drinking coffee, playing records and telling schoolboy jokes. I gradually found myself withdrawing from them as they talked, until I was completely unaware of anyone else. When I came to, everyone else had gone, and I had an absolute conviction that God had crooked his finger and called me to follow.

I felt rather an idiot and said nothing for about a week. Then my younger brother, who had been one of that group with me, suddenly asked me what had been happening the week before. I replied cautiously: "why are you asking?" "Because we had to go," he said, "there was someone else in the room and we had to go." I don't know whether I would ever have got to the point of thinking, "that must just have been my mind wandering", but after my brother's comment, I couldn't doubt the objective reality. Through the rest of the school, at university and Theological College, and then through these last 45 years, that moment of Vocation has stayed with me.

Of course, this was a calling to ordained ministry. There are endless other kinds of callings and vocations, both within the church and way beyond it. I once took a Memorial Service in Rochester Cathedral for a man who clearly had a calling to bring light, life, laughter and loving companionship to his regulars in the pub down the road. We have seen, thank God, the fruits of other peoples' sense of calling to dedicated nursing, community support and involvement, teaching in radically changed circumstances, love of one another, medical research and so much more, in the last 12 months.

At the root of all senses of vocation is a conviction: this is what I could try and do to live out my life in the way that conforms to God's purposes for me; this is how I came to be part of the outpouring of God's love for the world.

Bishop Jonathan Meyrick

Provost of Ardingly, Hurstpierpoint and Lancing



Vocation and Trolleys.

Do you remember the days of travel? Journeys for work or pleasure, in a rush or with plenty of time. Like many things in these days, I for one took these opportunities to see new views and meet new people for granted.

One of my early memories of travel before trolley bags was the different types of airport trolleys around the world. My naive mind argued that surely there is one type of trolley that works best and someone must have found out which one it was and then all the airports should have the same one. Simple. (I thought the same about electricity pylons but don't get me started)

But as I journeyed more and listened better and looked wider and thought deeper I realised my "simple" answer squashed the chance of creativity in others. It's this inbuilt creativity within all of us, a reflection of the divine creator, that gives us different trolleys and pylons and phones and music and art and talks and books and and and...

To me vocation is just that. A creativity within, that bubbles out through our life journey as we hear, see and think about situations or people or challenges. We try and respond with love, care, compassion or inspiration using the gifts we have within or learning new skills, to match the passion we have found.

I write this on the day after Captain Sir Tom Moore has died. When you read his obituaries, you see an average life responding to the needs of the day be it war, business, family and retirement. Then suddenly in his 100th year an accident happens were his love and care and compassion collide with a journey around his garden. A calling? A vocation? A responsive to something within. When you read his words you hear hope

'We will get through it in the end but it might take time, but at the end of the day we shall all be OK again... the sun will shine on you again and the clouds will go away.'

Is not that our vocation. To bring hope in what we do?

On his 100th birthday, he added: *'The past three weeks have put a spring back in my step. I have renewed purpose and have thoroughly enjoyed every second of this exciting adventure, but I can't keep walking forever.'*

Is not that our vocation. To make the most of each moment we are given?

'My legs may be tired, but my mind is racing and I'm hoping to be back very soon with other ways in which I can help people, help others.'

Is not that our vocation. To serve others and help where we can?

In my role as a Woodard School, chaplain trying to boil down to what is my calling, can be tricky.

Love has to be in there.

If we don't love what we do, get out.

So many still believe that you must suffer in your calling and enjoyment leads to guilt. On my travels around the world I meet many a missionary I renamed a misery. They were adamant they were called to this country or people but hated what they did. You could see it in their work and their words. Good news they were not, to quote Yoda. There are rubbish days, sometimes weeks, but I still love what I do and the role I play. When that love stops, I am out of here.

Hope has to be in there.

If we cannot bring hope then get out of the way. Sir Tom brought hope to millions around the world. We need to recognise the pain and the doubt and the loss but if we cannot paint a picture of a better day then we miss the point of the resurrection and the arch of our life taking us forward. Meaning has to be there.

I believe every interaction is special. Psychologist Dr Karen Triciman has been helping schools support students through the impact of lockdown. She says beautifully "Every interaction is an intervention" . Each phone call, email, conversation and look is an intervention. The person receiving this gets meaning from the person creating the interaction. With meaning comes hope and hope leads to love and love leads to purpose.

Purpose has to be there.

It does not have to be a five-year plan (look what happened to them!) But purposefully listening to God in creation and conversations. Dreaming of ways and ideas that help us love our neighbors and we wrestle with loving ourselves. And then allowing these plans these projects or these moments to reveal purpose in people's lives.

There are so many moments in the Jesus journey where he brought love and hope and meaning and purpose to people's lives. That for me was the Jesus vocation.

From a bleeding woman on the side of the road to a 12 year old daughter of a rich leader.

To a boy and a lunch box and some young fiery disciples.

To the lepers and the farmers and the lonely and the poor and the women his calling was sometimes subtle and other times in your face but always with love and hope and meaning and purpose.

We don't get to go to airports at the moment, but we can go shopping. Next time you grab a shopping trolley and while you are cleaning the handle think of

these next few minutes behind your mask picking up your supplies. Is there a chance to show love near the potato's? Is there someone in the next aisle crying out for hope? Is there something we can say down the wine section that would bring meaning to these moments?

Is that not our vocation?

To find ways that match our personality to show that all are valued, all are equal and all are created in the image of the divine.

Paul Sanderson

Chaplain at

The Littlehampton Academy

The Sir Robert Woodard Academy

Feb 2021



Christian Vocation: the beautiful risk

I can still remember the first time that I consciously felt the presence of God. It was on the day of my confirmation by the then Bishop of Shrewsbury, David Hallatt, in St Alban's Chapel at Prestfelde School. Not only the sacrament of confirmation, but the whole service felt somehow very special and very different from anything I had experienced before. It is difficult to describe exactly what I felt: this was back in 1995, and I was only twelve years old at the time. There was a sense of closeness to God and closeness to tears, I do remember that much. The latter was a little hard to navigate at the time, surrounded as I was by dozens of schoolmates and their parents.

Why do I start with this recollection? At first sight it appears more like a memory of a conversion than a calling. Perhaps it was both. Having been asked to reflect on what my time at a Woodard school meant for my sense of vocation I begin where anyone's sense of vocation must: encounter with God. As Jesus tells His disciples in John 15:16, 'You did not

choose me, but I chose you'. Vocation is something that is given to us, rather than achieved solely by our own strength or desire. This feels as true for those called to medical or teaching professions as for those called to holy orders. It isn't difficult to tell if someone's heart is in their work, or if they are just going through the motions.

My memories of St Alban's Chapel are of an echoey building with a black and white chequered floor and simple wooden altar; exceptionally cold in the winter and exceptionally hot in the summer. The building is sadly no longer there; its prefab design meant it was never likely to be permanent. It was not necessarily the most promising of venues, but it was a place where I encountered what I would later think of as the beauty of God: an attractive quality drawing us into relationship with Him, inviting us to find out more, and to think about what it might mean for how we live our lives. That was true on the day of my confirmation certainly. At Prestfelde also began a love of music, which has been an integral part of my life of faith. I still hold very fond memories of chapel choir: candlelit carols in the chapel before Christmas Dinner in the dining hall; coming out of a carol service at nearby St Giles's Church to find two inches of snow had fallen; an introduction to the world of Anglican choral music with a heavy focus on the work of Benjamin Britten.

Alongside the beauty of God, at Prestfelde I also encountered something of the risks we are asked to take if we are to embrace the Christian faith fully. The chaplain throughout my time was the Reverend John Waddington-Feather. I remember being captivated by the stories he told us in confirmation classes. He had been a teacher and missionary in Sudan at a time when local Christians were being crucified by the military dictatorship. He returned to where he was staying one evening to find deep slash marks in his rucksack: an attempt had been

made on his life, which had been saved only by the additional layers of fabric added to his pack to stop it chafing. As well as chaplain to the boys at Prestfelde John was also a volunteer chaplain at Shrewsbury Prison, and we would listen wide-eyed to his stories of sitting with convicted murderers covered in scars and tattoos. I later read that John's calling had come about through his time as a volunteer in the prison chapel before he was ordained: it was a prisoner who first suggested to John that he be ordained a priest.

Sudan, death, prisons, murderers: such things couldn't have been further from the shelter and privilege of a prep school's green playing fields, kindly schoolteachers, and overcooked cabbage. Five years at Shrewsbury School did little to burst that bubble. It was only after the experience of teaching in Africa between school and university and many more years' thought and reflection that things started to shift for me, and I contemplated doing something with my life that wasn't motivated by money, power or position. This was accompanied by an increasing realisation that the world is a place that is broken and hurting (and goodness knows we are all aware of that at the moment), and that the Gospel is central to the healing the world needs.

The American author and Presbyterian minister Frederick Buechner wrote that, 'Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world's deep need'. Pursuing a vocation from God - to anything, not just ordained ministry - means not remaining at the level of abstractions of concepts such as beauty, important as they are, but getting involved in the depth and earthiness of real people's lives, with all the risk and danger that involves. We follow a Saviour after all who took on our fragile flesh, and whose blood was poured out into the dirt of 1st century Palestine. It is only by grounding ourselves in the grittiness of reality and embracing our limitations as creatures that the beauty of God starts to shine through.

Did my experience of attending a Woodard School foster a vocation in me to holy orders? It feels a bit more complicated than that. I grew up in a Christian family, and attending a Christian school was part of that. As I reflected above, I gained an appreciation both of the beauty of God, and the risks that are asked of us when we follow the Christian faith. Prestfelde also fostered in me a love of learning, which continues now in the work of ministry. Christianity is often written off as anti-intellectual, but that has not been my experience at all. After initial movements of faith, there follows an unending intellectual journey into the mysteries of God. I doubt I would have been able to give voice to much of this whilst still at prep school, though. I think as is so often the case, seeds were sown at that young age, which did not produce much in the way of fruit until many years later. Whenever I talk now to school-age children or young people at university, I'm passionate

that people think about pursuing what they really feel called towards. I know so many people (including myself) whose career choices have been motivated solely by money, and it does little for their personal happiness or to improve the world.

Of course there were particular people who inspired me at Prestfelde too. I was lucky to have some really wonderful teachers, and if I hadn't gone into the church I would probably have retrained as a teacher. Teaching and ministry are perhaps not all that different from one another. When I contemplate what a life of ministry holds in store for me, I think of John Waddington-Feather quite a lot, particularly how sorry I am that I was never able to talk to John about the mark his spiritual care made on me. He sadly died just a few months before I started at theological college. I wonder if he knew the impact he had on the lives of pupils and staff at Prestfelde. Perhaps it is in the nature of 'seed planting' vocations such as teaching and chaplaincy that you do not always see growth or fruit-bearing. I hope that John and everyone involved in such ministries may be reassured by God's promise that where they have sown, others will water, and God will make things grow (I Corinthians 3:6).

At a personal level, John was deeply influential in sharing how his ministry shaped his life, and took him to places and situations he must never have thought possible. Faced with an array of placements at theological college, I chose to do a week's placement at HMP Whitemoor partly because of what I had heard about John's ministry in Shrewsbury Prison. I went in wondering what prison ministry was all about, and came out wondering seriously if I was being called to prison chaplaincy. God does, it appears, move in mysterious ways.

This prayer of Francis Drake speaks of the perseverance needed when following God's call, and I know it was a prayer that John used. It feels like a fitting place to end.

O Lord God, when Thou givest to Thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end, until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory; through Him who for the finishing of Thy work laid down His life, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Revd Alastair Newman

(Alastair Newman was a pupil at Prestfelde School from 1987-1996. After reading chemistry at university he worked as a patent lawyer for 11 years, before training for the priesthood at Westcott House in Cambridge. He was ordained deacon in Southwark Cathedral in 2020 and is currently serving as assistant curate at St Matthew's Church in the parish of Wimbledon, where he lives with his wife and two young children. He is due to be ordained priest in July 2021.)



And finally...

This is the last edition of the Woodard Voice that I shall be responsible for. I have been wrestling with a sense of a call to return to parish life and to be part of a more local and settled community. Laying down my role as Senior Provost, which I have often described as the 'best job in the Church of England', brings with it great sadness and a huge mix of emotions. I'm thrilled to carry on at the schools in Llandaff and Taunton.

The trouble is that when God calls you, and as it becomes clearer and clearer what he is calling you to... you have no choice but to obey. And this is what I am doing as I move to Clevedon to care for a parish there. This is an extraordinary group of schools with so much latent possibility, and I rejoice in what has been achieved.

I hope that this collection of Woodard experiences will kindle the flame of love in all our hearts.

Brendan