

A few words from the Vicar

11 He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice you doing here, Elijah?' (1 Kings 19:11-13 NRSV)



New Authorised Lay Ministers with the Bishops of Bolton and Middleton

For many years, more than I care to remember I worked as an Internal Audit manager; initially in local government but mostly in financial services. Indeed, I remain an accountant as I pay my subs and continue to be a member of the public sector accountancy body, CIPFA.

Although now ordained as a priest and engaged fully as a vicar and chaplain, it is a blessing occasionally to be able use my financial and internal audit expertise in God's service.

For example, for many years, long before ordination, I have served on the audit committee of the Co-operative College, an education charity linked to the Co-operative movement. Although the Co-op College is a secular charity with secular aims and objectives, I happily serve on their audit committee in the knowledge that we don't just serve God by engaging in churchy things or doing things directly and obviously associated with the life of the Church.

Indeed, at the end of our 10.30 Communion service I proclaim, "Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord." [By the way, you signal your complete agreement by responding, "In the name of Christ. Amen."] These words are no more and certainly no less important than any others we speak during the service for they remind us:

- We are called to love and serve the Lord 24/7 and Church membership isn't just about what we do during Sunday worship.
- God sends us out into the world at large to serve him by serving others.

More recently, I have begun to utilise my God-given talents as an accountant and audit manager in a way that more directly linked with the life of the Church; I also serve on the 'shadow' Board of the Churches' Mutual Credit Union (CMCU). CMCU is a joint initiative of the Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland. The 'shadow' Board is charged with steering the launch of the credit union, which initially will be for clergy and church workers but later will be open to other Church members. CMCU is just one aspect of the Church's growing interest in promoting Credit Unions as an alternative to 'Pay Day' lenders and the high interest rates they charge.

Needless to say, I'm not the only member of the clergy involved in this initiative with accountancy expertise or who previously worked in financial services.

So where is all this leading?

Well, this isn't a piece about the Co-op College or CMCU. Rather it's about vocation. In general terms, whether we are lay or ordained, through our baptism, God calls each one of us to serve him.

And sometimes he calls individuals to serve him in very specific ways. Not just as Priests, Readers or Authorised Local Ministers (ALMs) but also in a myriad of ways both within the Church in the secular world too.

Very specifically I have a calling to be a priest but previously on other occasions God called me to fulfil very different roles both inside and outside Church (Churchwarden, Reader, School Governor, member of The Gideons International to name a few). In all cases I have felt a sense of God's call.

God's call can come in many different ways but, as for me, I relate most closely to Elijah's experience on the mountainside that day when he encountered God through the silence. I appreciate that others have different experiences but for me there has never been anything dramatic. Indeed, my reading of Elijah's experience is that it took him quite some time (*When* Elijah heard it ...) before he realised that God was calling him through the silence and I can certainly relate to that. Rarely is there absolute certainty, just a growing conviction as the Holy Spirit gently stirs up my soul.

Sometimes this growing conviction is reinforced in some way, for example by a passage from the Bible or a word of knowledge spoken by someone else. But in all cases I have found myself tremendously blessed whenever I have acted upon the Holy Spirit's stirring.

So listen out for God in the quietness of your heart. You never know, he might be calling you to serve him in some way or another. And, if you are wondering whether that might be the case, then please arrange to see me for a chat.

Every Blessing

Dave