

God is calling and using young people - Danielle McCullagh

The Rev Danielle McCullagh, a Carnmoney parishioner, was ordained a priest for the Parish of Lisburn Cathedral on August 27.

The 27-year-old has a BA in Childhood Studies and Professional Practice Studies and before training for ordination worked as a Classroom Assistant with children with special needs.

“People used to joke even when I was a teenager that I would end up working in the Church in some capacity,” Danielle said. But when Bishop Alan first raised it with her she was certain it was not for her.

“During the next year, God pursued me. I started a journal of all the occasions when I felt God was nudging or prompting me, or when other people were saying things, or sharing verses of scripture which made me start to realise that God was calling me to ordained ministry. When God speaks like that it’s very difficult to ignore it.”

Danielle admitted she was worried about the academic demands. “When you believe that God has called you to something, you have to learn to trust that He will equip you with whatever you need to do it.”

For the first two years of her full time course, Danielle drove to Dublin on Sunday evening and stayed until Friday lunchtime.

She had four assignments each term

Course very beneficial - Richard Cotter

Richard Cotter is Finance and Administration Manager for Connor Diocese. He and his wife Andrea are both fully immersed in this year’s Foundation Access Course.

“Andrea is considering ordination and I decided to do the course too to give her a bit of encouragement,” Richard said. “For me, the foundation course is a good way to become a Diocesan Lay Reader.

Both Richard and Andrea are parishioners at St Patrick’s, Ballymena. He admits sacrifices have to be made. “Two to three hours study in the evening is not always enough time as the course does involve a lot of reading to prepare for assignments. We have found that as much as we didn’t want to do it, we have had to give up some of our church activities.”

But Richard is well used to study. After university he did accountancy at night classes followed by a Technology BSc, an

and two practical placements in first year. Danielle did her first placement in St Brigid’s, Glengormley, for eight Sundays and her second in Madi West Nile Diocese, in Arua, Uganda, a three week placement organised by CMSI. In her second year she spent 10 Fridays and Sundays in St John’s, Malone, leading services and preaching and doing pastoral visiting.

Danielle did her deacon internship in St Brigid’s, Glengormley, for three weeks of each month and the other week was spent in college, writing her dissertation.

Danielle said: “There were moments when I wondered why I was putting myself through the rigor of a Masters. There are times when the academic exercises are tough, so it’s good to be reminded of the purpose and the end goal of it all.”

She is now delighted to be curate of Lisburn Cathedral working alongside Dean Sam Wright.

Danielle encouraged anyone thinking of ordination not to let their age hold them back. “What the Church needs is wise and godly leaders and so often we assume that you can’t be either of those things if you’re young. Interestingly when I began training there were 10 people in my year and five of us were under 30. It seems to me that God is still calling and using young people!”



Richard and Andrea Cotter are both doing the Foundation Access course.

AS Level in psychology and through home study has Level 5 and Level 7 qualifications with the Chartered Managers’ Institute!

“I have found the course very beneficial in how I look at and study the Bible. If anyone is interested in ordination or being a lay reader I would highly recommend it.”



Pictured following the ordination of the Rev Danielle McCullagh on August 27 are, from left: The Rev Clifford Skillen, Bishop’s Chaplain, and Rev. Canon John O’Connell, Archdeacon.

Considering

Every year, people from different backgrounds – all have one thing in common, a deep faith through ordained ministry.

But the path to ordination can be challenging as well as rewarding. No one knows better than Canon Will Murphy who has been Diocesan Director of Ordinands for 25 years.

Will’s own ministry has not been parochial. He has run a specialist ministry for deaf people for 38 years. He was a Chaplain in the Maze Prison for almost 20 years, and a TA chaplain for 10 years. Not all ministries are the same.

For some, the journey towards ordination may take a detour, or go in a totally different direction. Some may find their ministry is not as an ordained member of the clergy. A Foundation Access Course, now in its ninth year, is designed to not only prepare people for ordination training in the Church of Ireland Theological Institute, but to help them make an informed choice.

This 14 month part-time course with three major modules is the biggest change in ordination training since Will became Director of Ordinands. He says it is excellent.

“It is intensive and is a great sifting process because a number will leave when they see what is involved, and it is better to take an informed decision at this stage than starting college and finding out half way through that this is not what you want to do,” Will said.

The course is divided into groups of 10-11 students. Of those students currently doing the course, six are from Connor Diocese.



McCollagh as a priest for the Parish of Lisburn Cathedral on Sunday. From left: Archdeacon Stephen McBride; the Rev Danielle McCullagh; Canon Stephen Forde; Bishop Alan Abernethy and Dean Sam Wright.

ordination?

Students will come forward seeking ordination as a sign of their Christian faith and a desire to share that faith.

Students begin with a weekend at CITI, followed by two full Saturdays in June and November. Most of the work has to be undertaken at home and online.

"It is hard work for them. You can come home from your job knowing you have to have those modules submitted. Deadlines are taken very seriously. It encourages self-discipline and is a very good foundation for the MTh," Will said.

The cost of the course is split three ways between the diocese, the Church of Ireland and the student. Students currently contribute 700 Euro.

The initial training may have changed, but the way in which potential ordinands are recruited has not. Anyone interested must be referred to the Director of Ordinands by their rector, and it is the role of the Director of Ordinands to recommend them for the foundation course.

The Bishops' Selection Conference is held in April each year, a month or so before students finish their course. Students can either be accepted for ordination; their application can be deferred for a year and they may be asked to revisit a specific area, such as experiencing a different type of parish or doing further study; or they may not be accepted.

Will was keen to stress this does not mean a student has failed. "It is hard for them, but everybody has a ministry. They may be encouraged to consider being a diocesan

Biggest failure would have been not to trust His call - Peter Blake

Peter Blake, 44, is a music tutor. He is married to Denise and has a 10-year-old daughter Lauren. Peter is currently doing the part-time ordination training at CITI.

"I had long felt the urge to preach and teach but felt really unsure about whether I would be up to meeting the academic requirements and the demands of ministry," he said. "It was Bishop Alan who encouraged me to consider a role in church leadership. I remember getting incredibly emotional when he suggested it. I'm so glad that he did. I feel very privileged to be at this stage of training."

Peter had to overcome his lack of confidence about his academic ability before taking the decision to go for

or parish reader. This takes away their negativity and says you do have a ministry. Not everyone has to wear a collar."

Even those students who pass their foundation course may not be accepted for training. "There are different reasons why a person is not suitable for ministry," Will said.

Anyone signing up for the course needs to be aware this is more than academic. It is a vocation. "It requires discipline, time. There is sacrifice, things like family time and leisure time."

But Will said the selection process was so thorough that most people who do the foundation course will go forward into ministry. That means two years training at CITI to do the course full-time, or four years for part-time (this has just been reduced from six years). These schedules include a year as a deacon intern.

"At the back of it all is the call of God," said Will. "Are you to be obedient to it?"

"We have no students from Connor for next year's course yet, but I am sure there are going to be some come forward. God is not going to leave us adrift!

"Across the diocese we need rectors to be more aware of people looking for the call of ministry. Sometimes people will go and talk to their rector, but their rector needs to be looking out for people too."

Anyone who is interested in applying for the foundation course starting in February 2018 needs to speak to their rector before the end of this year.



Peter Blake with his wife Denise and daughter Lauren.

ordination. "I dropped out of school at 18 and was worried that I might not make the grade. It was much easier to stay where I was rather than put myself forward and face the possibility of failing," he said.

"I now realise that the biggest failure would have been not to trust His call."

Peter meets other part-time ordinands in Dublin one weekend a month for the residential part of training. "The part-time weekends are a great place to be. It's flat out but the craic and food are mighty. I've made many wonderful friends and learned a great deal about myself and God," he said.

"Fitting everything in is certainly a challenge but when I first put that collar on it will be one of the greatest moments of my life."

Peter has particularly enjoyed being out on placement. "When the essay deadlines come I just remember how wonderful it is to preach, serve and administer the sacraments to God's people," he said.

He encouraged anyone considering being ordained to follow their heart.

"The greatest lesson I have learned during training has been to trust that this is God's work and not mine. To know that He is with me and that through the Holy Spirit He will equip me for every challenge," Peter said

"I was nervous about stepping out in faith too. But if you feel the call you must answer. The Church needs leaders who love Christ above all else and have a pastoral heart for His people. Training at CITI will help you with the practical and theological skills you need to live out that calling."