

An Experience of Vocations Ministry

*“Happy to bring Jesus to every street, to every town square and every corner of the earth”
(EG 106)*

“Contagious joy that comes from saying yes to God’s call”

My name is Teresa Carvalho, I am from London, my mother was from Malta and my Dad from Goa in India.

I have worked in catholic youth ministry all of my life and have recently been invited to bring this experience into the National Office for Vocation as Discipleship Promoter. The National Office for Vocation is an agency of the bishops conference of England and Wales and has the mission to promote the culture of vocation.

As for me, I was brought up a Catholic and as a teenager had a lot of questions about my faith so I got involved in the church as much as possible, in the hope that I would somehow find the answers I was looking for.

God is good as he not only answered my questions as he revealed himself to me, but he continues to lead me through the adventure of life.

I’ve been involved in different types of Youth Ministry and have met so many people who have experienced the Joy that comes from saying ‘Yes’ to Jesus. I would like to tell you three stories that show how promoting discipleship and promoting vocations can work together.

[first image of pascal]

I first met Paschal on a coach trip at the World Youth Day in Sydney. He jumped into the seat next to me with the question ‘what am I doing wrong?’ Everything I had heard about Paschal was very positive so I asked him what he meant by his question.

He went on to explain that he really wanted his new found friends to meet Jesus and receive the Joy he had. He could not understand why the deep conversations he was having were not having an impact. He wanted to know a way of evangelising that would help his friends encounter Jesus.

As we spoke, I asked him, ‘do you love your friends because you want to evangelise them, or do you want to evangelise them, because you love them?’ It is a subtle but vital different emphasis that can make all the difference.

Discussing this question helped Paschal to realise that we must first love those we want to encounter Jesus Christ. We must meet people where they are and be prepared to journey with them if we are sincere about introducing them to Jesus, who is already present in their lives.

[change image]

A few years later, Pascal told me that he was prepared to give everything to God and become a priest. He reminded me of our conversation and said that being prepared to meet people where they are was a constant challenge that he would take into his formation for the priesthood. He is currently in his first year of seminary in England.

[Sr Walburger]

The second person I would like to tell you about is Sr Walburger, a Benedictine nun who has just taken her final vows.

She looks very much like what you expect a nun to look like, but this was not the case when she first turned up to take part in a discernment programme that we run. If you look closely at her picture here, you might spot what remains from one of her piercings.

She was a social worker, who lived and worked in a deprived area. Having been brought up a catholic, like so many she had drifted away. When her faith was revived, she also felt drawn to religious life.

At first, she thought that God might be calling her to an apostolic community, where she could dedicate her life to helping others, but as she went through the discernment programme, to her surprise, she realised that she was called to contemplative prayer and contemplative life as a Benedictine.

Very rarely have I met such a contented and joyful spirit. The last time we met I had the opportunity to interview her and would like to show you the clip of her answering the question, 'what would you say to a young person who is considering their vocation?'

[Show clip]

From what I have said so far, You would be forgiven for thinking that I am here to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life, but in fact it is in my heart to promote Discipleship, to encourage and enable young people to follow Jesus and discern what good purpose; God has called them to. One such young person is Ryan

[ryan]

I first knew him when he came for confirmation preparation at 15 years old. He later became one of our young leaders in my parish, a lovely guy who is always willing to help.

When he turned 16 and was facing important exams at school, his father died. He stopped coming to church and turned to drugs to numb the pain. I was getting more and more concerned for him, so I enlisted the help of his best friend to reach out to him. Just at the point I thought there was no hope, he turned up at church, to help out at a youth event.

When I asked him what happened, he told me that as he laid on his bed, stoned on drugs, but still in pain, he realised that this was no way to live, so he called out to God for help. In that moment he encountered Jesus and wanted to come back to church. He remembered that his friend told him that we had not stopped asking about him, so he came back. I cannot tell you how happy I was to see him.

This was the beginning of a long journey with Ryan, who for many years, struggled with anxiety, with his grief and was burdened by the expectations of his family to do his father proud.

[ryan]

But last spring something changed. He took a week in prayer, specifically asking God what he should do with his life and discovered a desire for knowledge and has now gone to Oxford University, to study theology and philosophy. He is open to God's will and more than anything else wants to be the presence of Christ to those he meets. He has begun to discover his vocation, and is prepared to follow Jesus wherever it may lead him.

I am sure we can each think of people like these beautiful people I have mentioned. They illustrate how discovering a vocation begins when a person turns to a life of human wholeness. Through their encounters with Jesus, they allow him to turn everything in their lives towards good, and in daring to follow him, they have embarked on a journey of discipleship that takes them beyond the limits of their own imagination.

I conclude by this challenge of Nelson Mandela;

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”