

# Ten stories from one confirmation service

## Ronald Tweed

I WAS born in Bradford, Yorkshire and lived near to a congregational church which I began to attend as a teenager as World War II came to an end. I was attracted by the Young People's Fellowship and a young, forward-looking minister of whom I am sometimes reminded by our present vicar!!

I became the scout master and fell in love with the cub mistress whom I married as soon as there was enough money. Sheila was strongly religious and taught me a great deal. She passed away in November 2011, but would have been delighted to see me to confirmation.

When my career brought us to Portsmouth, we attended the United Reformed Church in Cosham until it failed due to lack of funds. We then came to Christ Church, drawn by its connection with World War II. I had never been baptised and began to think that I should be. After discussing this with the vicar, I was baptised at Christ Church in April 2013. Confirmation is the next step.

## Jaimie Way

I THINK back to when I first sat in Christ Church with my children 18 months ago, feeling a little out of place. I was at a very low point in my life.

I started going every Sunday and joined the worship band. I spoke to people about my situation and they began to pray. I could not believe what a support network the church was. This was better than any counselling and it was free! Then suddenly I was offered my dream job as a singing teacher at the local school; an answer to the prayers that had been spoken.

I'd come home from church singing loudly the songs that I'd been singing in church. I even started watching Songs of Praise! I felt stronger, but the next day I'd be low again. Church was giving me such a good feeling but I wanted to find out how to make that last all week!

That's why I decided to come for confirmation. The people I know at church have become good friends. It's like having another family. Always there with a listening ear, non-judgemental and so supportive. The people at Christ Church are amazing as are my own family here today to support me in my decision to be confirmed.

## Helen Love

The first time I really felt and needed God's presence was the day my baby daughter Georgina died in my womb. In the past I never allowed myself to feel God's love or look into faith as a Christian. I thought I could handle things my own way. Something that day made me call Andy Wilson, the vicar at Christ Church, to come.

When I arrived home from hospital I felt lost, alone and wondered how I could carry on living with my heart broken in a thousand pieces. The only place I felt peace and calm was at Christ Church. It was the only place I could leave the house to go to.

Grief throws your emotions all over the place. At one point I felt really angry. I had no answers as to why Georgina died and did question God why? It took me a while to realise that God isn't to blame and started to see all the blessings that I have and be thankful. I think I will always have the question "why did my baby die?" One thing for sure is I am stronger with my faith in God than without it!

I have been blessed with the gift of another beautiful child. The way I see and appreciate things in life are so different. I look at the world in a whole new way. The Bible really has told me things I never really paid any attention to. Now I have direction in my life I am proud to be a Christian.

● HELEN'S FULL STORY: see page 12

## Callum Wheatley

I WAS baptised on Easter Sunday 1998 at Christ Church. Throughout my life our family have played a role in church.

I always wanted to help the church and the people around it. That included making teas and coffees, being in the nativity and making banners with the junior church!

At around the age of 13, I started to shun church and put it to one side. I would later realise that church played a major role in my life. I felt empty without it, so I started going back to church and realised that I wanted to stay.

One week there was an advertisement for confirmation classes in the pew sheet, so I went along and did the classes. It was decided that I wasn't quite ready and I agree with that!

The next year I went on a weekend away with all the youth groups around the diocese. This really opened my eyes. This February I decided that I was ready to be confirmed, talked to Andy and we sorted out a way to do the classes and that really helped me. I really feel I have matured spiritually and mentally.

## THE Christian journey of faith is different for each and every follower.

For some of us, there may have been a defining moment when God suddenly became real, sometimes called a 'Damascus Road experience', while for others belief in God may have been a more gradual process that took place over a period of months, even years.

Each of these 10 confirmation candidates from Christ Church, Portsdown, chose to follow God at different stages of their lives.

Some had been raised in the Christian church but had drifted away due to family and work commitments while others found God in the darkness of personal tragedy.

For some there was a long journey to faith – others had only recently started coming to church. But all of them had stories to tell ahead of their confirmation by Bishop Christopher last month.

To celebrate and commemorate the personal commitment made by the 10 candidates, the church compiled their personal faith stories in a special booklet called *The Journey to Confirmation*.

Copies were presented to all those who attended the service.

The Rev Annie McCabe, assistant curate at Christ Church, said: "We simply asked those who were being confirmed if they would be willing to write their story about their reasons for being confirmed and how they came to be at Christ Church.

"I made it into a little booklet of their stories which we gave out to those who attended the confirmation service. Our parish magazine editor, Ruth Fowler is also planning to include these personal stories in future magazines.

"Apart from the joy of each individual story, it also seems to capture something of the unique diversity of entry points to faith that the Anglican parish system continues to offer."

The *Pompey Chimes* is also proud to reproduce the faith stories of all these candidates – in their own words – to celebrate the varied ways people come to Christian faith. This pattern is repeated throughout our diocese as our parishes reach out to those outside their congregations or on the fringes.

## Richard Hutchins

FOR me, confirmation is a step of obedience and a waypoint along the path I believe God is leading me.

I gave my heart to Jesus at the Mercy Seat of the Salvation Army City Temple in Newcastle as a child. Recently I have had the pleasure of reflecting on life so far and found that faith had been there throughout, no matter the circumstance.

Through a range of denominations, I arrived with my family at Christ Church around 2006, following a challenge from God about keeping the promises I had made at Jonathan and Angus' baptisms.

At the same time, I recognise that God has been calling me for a long time – I just haven't listened.

Having unblocked my ears, I sense a clear vocation to ordained ministry... although why He would choose me with all my shortcomings is beyond me! Anyway, I am pursuing this call, which I believe will lead to full-time service in the Anglican Church and confirmation is an important step that I must take.

I admit to questioning the point of confirmation at the outset because I was baptised of my own volition as a young adult – but as the preparation has gone on I have 'got it' and am so looking forward to affirming my faith in this way.

## John Hadley

I was brought up as a child during the Second World War and taught by Baptist and Church of England grandparents.

My father and mother had my brother and I baptised in 1941 while father was on leave. I went to Sunday School (becoming a teacher) and was a member of the church choir until I joined the Royal Navy.

Other pursuits then took precedence such as getting married, joining IBM, having children, sport and many other interests but still with some connection to church.

In more recent years I have been involved with Christ Church Good Neighbours as a co-ordinator, volunteer and committee member, which has meant that I have got to know many of the congregation and others within the parish. The needs of those people have opened my eyes to what is required to help those in need and that I can assist them.

My maternal grandmother taught me "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" and that tenet has been my way of life ever since.

I wish to become a true member of the church and its community and that is why I have come for confirmation.

## Rachel Deane

I grew up going to church with my family but fell away from faith in my teens. I got married to Tom and we started a family.

My beautiful daughter Kiera was born with a rare medical condition. She was with us for 13 special months before she died.

During that time, we were supported by the vicar at Denmead and the chaplain where Kiera spent her last days.

Her death made me ask big questions of God. I was angry and turned away from Him at first. Then I became pregnant again and we have been blessed with the gift of a son, Aiden.

We came to Christ Church earlier this year for Aiden's baptism and to commit to God as a family again. Every time I went to church, I came back feeling stronger.

The anger began to go and I found some peace. Christ Church is a safe place, a place to open up. I have felt accepted here.

I wanted to be confirmed because I feel that God has repaired what was broken in me.

Since I have come back to faith, I live differently. I've found a way that works and I want to keep going on that path.

## Tracy Hawkins

MY first memories of church are of attending Sunday school and of my granddad, with his Bible near him as he looked for and found his faith. As most people do, I was brought up with church always in the background: weddings, funerals, christenings.

Having lived a transient working life for 24 years, I have now settled in this area with my fiancé with a future ahead of us. Whilst we were deciding where and when to get married, we met Andy and his team at Christ Church.

Although important to us both to get married in a church, it had not occurred to me HOW important it was to me personally until I was aware of the prospect of possibly not being married in church. I realised how much the sanctity of church and marriage meant to me.

Throughout my life there have been moments where I have pondered faith and spirituality and felt a pull. This pull has become stronger.

With the permission granted to us to be married at Christ Church next year, I felt this was the moment and the place to put down roots of faith and spirituality for our future.

## Dave Cherrington

I CAME to Christ Church last July. My daughter contacted Andy Wilson to ask if my wife Carol's ashes could be buried in the graveyard. Andy's kindness and the genuine welcome I received made me start coming on a Sunday. The last time I went to church before that was during National Service. I was busy with work and with my family.

I go to the 8am service regularly. I like the quiet. I was looking for something and I found God here.

When I went to the Confirmation preparation group, I'd never read the Bible before and didn't know much about God. But I realised I wasn't the only one!

At the end of the session about Holy Communion, I experienced such a sense of unexpected joy. It felt as if something came over me, filled me up and made me feel complete. When we learned about the Holy Spirit; maybe that is what happened to me that night. I've started to read the Bible for myself. I have lots of questions and want to understand more.

I wondered what my family might think about me going to church after all these years, but they have been really positive.

## Jonathan Hutchins

SO why have I decided to be confirmed?

I was baptised as an infant and have been coming to Christ Church with my mum and dad since about 2006.

I have learnt a lot about what God has done for me at church, at school and at home and gave my heart to Jesus a little while ago.

Confirmation is the right next step in my relationship with God as well as being an important step into greater fellowship with the church.

Also, since I decided to be confirmed I met closely with God at the New Wine Summer Conference – he is calling me and that makes confirmation even more special.

