

# “If God is calling, I will carry that through”

Anne Taylor

## Vocations through the lens of disability and neurodivergence

**Anne**

OK, so I'm 61 years young and did you want that information? Probably not.

And I've been worshipping at Christ Church, Long Furlong in Abingdon in Oxfordshire since 1992, and I got a calling to become a licenced lay minister in '95.

**Jane**

And tell me a little bit about your disability.

**Anne**

OK, I'd like to call it, rather than disability, I'd like to call it a different ability, because within our disabilities, we do have different abilities.

If you feel sick by people doing funny things to their joints, do turn away or close your eyes. But I can do that. I'm very hypermobile. I used to be able to do it in all of my joints. If I do it, I might do that in my thumbs. They pop out.

OK, so I'm so hyper mobility is my main one, and I think I've diagnosed myself, I'm an orthopaedic nurse and yeah, so I had diagnosed myself with EDS, which is hyper mobility with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, and the EDS part, it means that- it's a connective tissue disorder, so I've got a nod there. And so my blood pressure goes all over the place. One minute can be up, one minute can be down, and then I can bruise extremely easily.

I can turn my neck around and hear it creek as it goes around, same with a lot of my other joints. My skin is soft, velvety, they call it, and quite stretchy.

And what else? Chronic fatigue is the other big one. And actually to have to diagnose myself with it, because nobody can diagnose it, there is no blood test or anything to go with it. Then it means that now I know what's probably caused my tiredness all the time. Then that feels better. That makes sense. So there you go. That's my different ability.

**Jane**

OK. Thank you. And what have been the challenges in pursuing a vocation within the church?

**Anne**

I would say I've had absolutely no challenges whatsoever, which is brilliant, sounds really positive, and I know it's not positive for everybody.

But my call came and I was so determined. I'm very stubborn person, very. And very vocal. I was absolutely determined that if God's calling me to something, I am going to carry that out.

And I went through quite a lot to get to my- to get to start of my licenced lay Minister training, which started in 1996. It took a while.

My church weren't happy for me to go forward for selection. Absolutely nothing to do with my disability. They just felt I wasn't quite ready, so that was OK.

I went through later on and got through and so then I carried on. I was in the old Church House. How many people know the old Church House here? Only one person. Oh well, OK. Oh, you do as well. Brilliant.

So, yeah, I was in there and no steps at that point. I was using crutches all the time because I've had major problems with my both my hips and now my right knee. That is the right knee. Yeah, right knee, and it tends to sort of go inwards as I walk, which is actually quite awkward, especially when my job involves me standing up and teaching quite a lot.

And so it was easy to do that. Easy to do with crutches. And I was able to take painkillers, if I needed to. No problem. I've always been a bit self-conscious about taking tablets in front of people. I don't know why, it might be because I'm a bit introvert, but yeah. So absolutely no problem whatsoever.

Everybody was really welcoming, and I've moved up now. It's not really a promotion, but I'm now the deputy warden for readers in training in the Oxford Diocese. So it's not, I suppose it is official, because Bishop Govan said it's official. So yeah, so it must be, isn't it?

And so, yeah, it's all been great. I use crutches on and off, have been since I was 16. And yeah, so it's all been good.

The only problem I've had really is the steps at Christ Church Cathedral. Because I attend- obviously I was licenced, but I would attend a lot of licencings as well, and so all I do is, when I'm with somebody, I'll say can I just hold on to your hand and they help me up and down steps so it's fine.

**Jane**

And tell us a bit about the blessings of your ministry.

**Anne**

So I agree with what Tim was saying about how it really does enhance your ministry because I feel that I have an empathy for other people who have bone problems, joint problems.

Obviously not, oh, I totally understand what you're talking about, because we're all so, so different. And I've had cancer too, and I have a bit of an empathy now for other people who are suffering with cancer as well. I didn't suffer, mine was quite a breeze, really, thank goodness. I had chemo, but that was easy apart from losing my hair.

And one of the children at church said, Anne you look weird, and then ran off! And I love it, cause children are so honest. Adults aren't, are they? They don't- they worry about what they're going to talk to you about it. How do they relate? Well, they just say, what can we say? And I say, well, don't say anything. You know, if there's nothing you want to say, that's fine. Don't worry about it.

But I really feel that God has chosen me for this ministry because I can have an understanding.

Can I add as well that I did have quite a dramatic healing? I went- used to go to New Wine. I can't cope with the camping anymore because of my disabilities, I can't get on and off the floor very easy. It's nothing to hold onto. It's there really, so yeah, it's- and the caravan would have been a problem with the steps. So and I wouldn't have wanted to live off the field.

A job came up for me because I was a nurse at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre in Oxford. And so orthopaedic nurse there. I looked after the children there and children with exostosis as well, loads of them, and there was an opportunity for me to leave my teaching job, because I used to do half and half, and there was an opportunity to leave my teaching job and become the wards manager.

And I said to God. If this is- if this is what you want for me, I'm going to have to be able to walk because you can't nurse using crutches, it's just not possible, unless you're just sort of milling around. You can't physically do work.

And anyway I went up for prayer ministry at New Wine, and as I usually did anyway, and I just said look, there's a job opportunity come up if I'm not healed, I can't do the job, which is fair enough, I can't fulfil that job description, and I was on crutches as well, and I went up for healing.

I didn't really feel anything at the time, but I went to to have my latest epidural, done because I used to have epidurals for the intense nerve pain I was having, and so they worked really well.

The thing is that epidural, that last epidural I had about two weeks after coming back from New Wine is still working and that was 2006! So yeah, it was, yeah, 2006.

And yeah, I haven't had any pain since. And this hip is actually loose and I still don't have any pain. Apparently it's not dangerous for it to be wobbly. So because most of my joints are anyway. So yeah. I'm just leaving it as it is. So the other one is bad - it was bad, I've had it replaced just like Katie did and now my knee's bad, but yeah, so it's all good.

But now I'm fully at teaching in Oxford Brookes University for adult nursing students. And so yeah, that's OK. That's all good. Love it.

#### **Jane**

Final question. How do you feel your different abilities enable others to think of themselves in terms of how they can serve God?

#### **Anne**

OK. Yeah, definitely.

So I think because I'm involved in selection, or discernment as Quentin would put it, for licenced lay ministry, they might see me or notice me as having a different ability, and I'm happy to let everybody know that, and they say, well, if you managed it then I can manage it as well.

And I think that in my children, and we have had people with different abilities, definitely, quite a lot actually, at least that I've noticed, and there might be some that I haven't noticed, but also about me, I have a passion for children with disabilities.

Possibly the wrong way of putting that, but I am really drawn to children with any kind of learning difficulty, any disability, and since I became the children's work co-ordinator at my church, they've just swarmed in, loads of children with all sorts of disabilities, difficulties, they all come to us, and it's just wonderful. It really is.