

Revd Sheila Swarbrick, Parish of Central Exeter and Healthcare Chaplain

Memories of the weekend 14-15 May 1994 and of ministry

Pink cherry blossom, a bouquet of flowers, smiles all round - some of the memories as I greeted friends and family after my ordination to the priesthood service in St John the Baptist, Tideswell. Derby cathedral is small so there were two ordination services that weekend for the seventeen women deacons. After serving for four years at St Augustine's, Derby (1988 - 1992) I was in my second curacy at St Thomas', Brampton, Chesterfield. This meant that I could enjoy a party on the Saturday evening and a first communion on the Sunday morning while the southern group were being ordained in Derby cathedral.

Also, I was interviewed that Sunday morning on Radio Derby. Obviously, the vicar presenter questioned me about the service and my emotions. However, I remember him asking if I had thoughts about my future ministry and I first laughed. Then I think I said that there could be great variety. Having served in inner city Derby and then in suburban Chesterfield with two daughter churches I had no idea what I might do or where I might go next.

In the thirty years since I have found myself serving in a great variety of roles, often to do with personal circumstances and times when I have wondered what next and needed to wait for opportunities to arise. There have been three 'gap' years where I have helped in vacancies both in parishes and at a hospital for 10 months (never imagining I would later become a paid hospital chaplain and do further studies in healthcare chaplaincy). I volunteered as a workplace chaplain at a factory and became an advocate for a woman with learning difficulties as she left an institution to move into supported living. Now in Exeter I am a trustee for Exeter City Centre Chaplaincy and one of the leaders for Celebrate Together, a monthly service especially for adults with special needs. I was a tutor for St John's Extension Studies and in Leicester was involved with setting up and leading some of the modules in the Exploring Christian Life and Faith course. From the varied parish ministry in Derby, I spent two years as the part-time priest-in-charge of 6 parishes in north Bedfordshire, all Grade 1 buildings, and a total population then of 1100. My final stipendiary parish was on the edge of Leicester - a large housing estate with a modern church which had damp problems.

