

A vocation is a call to follow Jesus in a specific way and in a specific context. Growing Vocations is one of the nine Renewal & Reform workstreams, with an aim to foster a culture in which the vocation of each member of the Church can be identified, nurtured and celebrated so the whole Church can grow and flourish.

There wasn't anything happening for the community youngsters,' says 74-year-old Mary Rodgers. 'I started to pray for something 15 years ago. I that would make that possible. I never doubted it would happen.'



Mary's prayers have been answered. And they've been answered in the form of the Revd Gail Rogers, a 42-year-old mum-of-three. Not that Gail is the answer herself, more that she has a way of drawing the best out of people and enabling them to do things that they would never have considered.

It's a wet Friday morning in Bournville, and we are at St Francis' Church, next to the chocolate factory. This is a leafy part of Birmingham, with well-maintained houses with neat front gardens, parents who smile at you in the street as they walk along with their children, and parks where – if it were dry – you could sit and play.

Instead, the activity is all going on within St Francis' Church. Friday morning is the regular parents and toddlers' group. It's been running for just nine weeks and already there are 71 children on the books. More than 30 are here today.

Gail is telling the story of the workers in the vineyard and their pay to a group of attentive toddlers. The floor of the church is covered with soft play areas. There are bricks and abundant toys.



Diddy Disciples songs are sung to the accompaniment of a pianist on a grand piano, rendering *The Lord's Prayer* to the tune of *Frere Jacques*. It's like *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue* for the under-fives.

But it's the genuine warmth of welcome that gets you. People look you in the eye, ask you how you are, mean it, and fetch tea.

The group came about because Gail asked the local mums what they needed. Answer: a parents and toddlers' group.

'I thought, "You are joking?" I don't even like children! I've got three of my own. That's enough,' she laughs.



...s. They're getting encouragement.

Gail's encouragement means that young mums Becky and Sarah will be taking on some of the group's leadership in September.

'I never thought I would take an active role in church,' says Becky. 'I just came to church to sit and listen. But here, Gail is really good at getting people to be part of the church, part of the service. That's been lovely.'

Sarah agrees. 'Since having children, I've lost my old identity,' she says. 'It's about finding a new sense of who I am. Helping run this group is both enough. I wanted to do something. This is where I can help.'



'Lay ministry excites me,' says Gail. 'What they do is really important. I want to see every single one of the people here be encouraged. I want to grow disciples who can share their story and share their faith.'

Mary's prayer has been answered. I wonder what she's praying for now?



Wondering what your calling is? Learn more about [vocations](#).

[Growing Vocations](#) is just one of many projects supported by the [Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme](#), creating a growing Church for all people and for all places.

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