

# pioneering intentions

As one of the Church of England's first Ordained Pioneer Ministers, Tim Yau can look back on a career path – and faith journey – that is nothing if not varied. He shares his story with *CL* – and outlines his challenging new role.

**T**im, please tell us a little about your background.

Church wasn't a feature of my childhood and I guess my journey to faith began when I was about fifteen, in a Pentecostal church – and then continued in a house-church set up.

I trained as a nurse and enjoyed the challenge of daily facing life and death issues. And I guess my life continued very much within the 'church bubble' – I suppose I became well and truly Christianised!

Next came a spell in downtown Chicago with a Christian commune that had grown out of the hippy music scene:

people were trying to live out New Testament belief and practice, caring for poor people and drug addicts. The work was based in a former hotel, with 500 people living under one roof. I remember sitting out on the fire escape one evening and feeling an overpowering sense of individuals – and a whole society – facing a lost eternity. I felt God saying: 'You have to do something about this.'

Back in the UK I branched out into full-time Christian youth work under the umbrella of Youth for Christ – a very formative time, with YFC creating a 'safe space' in which I was suddenly preaching, doing drama sketches, leading others – and all at the age of twenty-four.

**How did your calling to ordained ministry emerge?**

I continued working with YFC in Norwich, Walsall and Aylesbury. I remember meeting a young man at that time who told me that he was thinking about training for ordination in the Church of England. I'm afraid my response was to laugh! My private reflection was: 'Why? The C of E is finished, isn't it?'

After that I seemed to have more contact with Anglican churches – and ended up worshipping at one!

After a sudden, shattering change in personal circumstances, I felt that I would have been justified in moving





The Rev Tim Yau is assistant curate at the Church of Christ the Servant King, Farcet Hampton, near Peterborough. He is married to Deborah and they have a son, Caleb.

If you're thinking about ordained ministry in the Church of England, please call Pauline Walden on 01926 458480 ([pwalden@cpas.org.uk](mailto:pwalden@cpas.org.uk)) to find out about the many resources that CPAS offers to help you.



on. But, strangely, through the kindness of the church members and through my experience of God (especially through Holy Communion) I felt impelled to stay.

It was around that time that I started to sense a call to ordained ministry. As a schools worker I'd felt frustrated when, after much nurturing, we would guide a young person to church – only to find that the church wasn't really able to 'be church' for the young person. I wanted to be able to have an effect on the church environment – to be contextual.

**And how did pioneer ministry come into the picture?**

I first heard about pioneer training at my selection conference (now termed 'advisory panel') when it was suggested as an option for me. I was attracted by the idea of intentionally missional training that recognises a person's gifts and gives her or him the space in which to develop them – in a role that's akin to that of a New Testament apostle

And even though, when I started at Ridley Hall in September 2006, I was one of only two full-time students on the pioneer stream, I am very glad that I made the choice. I relished the opportunity to read, think and simply mull things over – a great benefit to an activist like me. And I learned so much from course leader Dave Male whose recent pioneering experience as leader of Huddersfield's Net Church proved invaluable.

**And your current post?**

I'm curate at the Church of Christ the Servant King at Hampton on the edge of Peterborough. I'm working with incumbent Nick Devenish and, in many ways, this is a 'normal' first curacy post – but the circumstances of the new community mean that I have full encouragement to be 'intentionally missional'.

We meet on Sundays in a primary school hall at the centre of a large community of new housing – 4000 occupied of a proposed 10,000 homes. The area is attractive and well planned, but beneath the surface there's considerable loneliness and an absence of social cohesion.

I'm currently settling in to the community with my wife Deborah and our little boy Caleb.

Building community is a major commitment in our work at Christ the King. In some ways we can be counter-cultural almost without realising it. For example, the weekday small group that we have started is attracting people with little or no church background – mainly women. One of them said: 'I get invited to other home-based get-togethers – but usually people are trying to get you to buy something. This is different!'

The church itself is attracting a considerable number of people who could be described as 'de-churched' – they have had church links in the past, but for a variety of reasons, negative experiences have driven them away – and we are providing a 're-entry' point. That's great. But my dream, of course, is to go further and be a church for the people

who have had no links with the church at all. Perhaps this will be through creating 'niche groups' or 'pockets of church'. These will be lay-led – and the leader's role is to equip the men and women who will take on this work – low control and high accountability.

**I'm now convinced of the Church's God-given opportunity to be there at the heart of every community.**

**And your hopes for the future?**

My dream is that we should be fostering more and more Christian communities embodying counter-cultural ways to live, engaging with real-life issues, open to all and with Christ at the centre. I guess I've come a long way since the time when I laughed at a friend's intention to explore Anglican ordination. I'm now convinced of the Church's God-given opportunity to be there at the heart of every community. I'm excited by the way in which the Fresh Expressions movement is energized by similar intentions to the revolutionary aims of the long-ago creators of the *Book of Common Prayer*. They wanted to break down the barrier between the religious professionals and the rest of us. In a similar way, the Fresh Expressions movement is putting the church into everyone's hands.