

**Dear members of Sawston Free Church, Little Abington URC and Castle Camps URC,**

I am Jacob Bali and I would like to introduce myself as the ministerial trainee who will be joining you for the coming academic year of 2018/19. I am 30 years old and I grew up in Kinston-Upon Thames in South-West London. I was raised in a Christian home and I was introduced to the church from infancy as my maternal grandfather was a Chaplain, uncle was an Anglican Canon and my mother was a URC Elder. I am the youngest of four siblings and I am married to my wonderful wife, Esther. Esther is from South-Korea and is a qualified nurse, with a second degree in music and theology. She is currently studying an MA in Music Therapy with a vision to work as a music therapist.

Regarding my call to ministry, I had a sense that God was calling me to be a minister since the age of seven years old and even when I pursued veterinary science in university, the feeling never left. A turning point came when I had news that a close friend of mine had died in an accident and I had many profound questions that I could not shake from my mind. After a conversation with my minister, I decided to take a gap year, while working as a youth worker in the KURC. During the year I studied TLS LITE and other theological short courses, while also taking Bible studies. I felt hungry to study more about God and the Bible, and my minister noticed. She asked me to lead a prayer service and from that experience I felt with every fibre of my being that I was doing, what I was meant to be doing, exactly where I was meant to be doing it, and I decided to give up on my dream to be a vet and to follow God.

While studying the TLS foundation course I thought that I may be called for some form of ministry and I started the candidating process. I was already familiar with a URC army chaplain and after a conversation he recommended that I put my candidature on hold and try getting some experience as a soldier first to test whether chaplaincy was what God was calling me to. Following prayer and many discussions, I applied for the British Army and was accepted to join the Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment. After working as a mounted dutyman for some time, I received a life changing injury in 2014. During my time at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre Headley Court, I discerned that it was the right time to recontinue the candidating process for ministry and my sense of calling to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament was strengthened. Upon completion of the candidating process in 2015, I was offered a place at Westminster College.

Following three years of academic studies, I am now entering my fourth-year placement and I look forward to joining you all soon.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Jacob Bali', written in black ink.