

Media Questionnaire: Deacons

Your name, age and original home village, town or city (i.e. the place where you grew up):

Answer: Alan, 36, Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland

The church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving:

Answer: St Luke's Blackburn

Tell us about your family:

Answer: My wife, Beth, is a freelance journalist. We have a 4 year-old daughter called Ruby and a 7 year-old rescue dog. I grew up in Northern Ireland where my Dad was a (now retired) Presbyterian minister.

If applicable, your former job before entering ministry?

Answer: I was a youth worker for 12 years before training for ordination in Northern Ireland and then in two areas in London.

What led you to take the steps towards ordination?

Answer: Being involved in youth programmes as a teenager was a significant aspect of my faith journey. I had a sense of being called to some form of church leadership during my time at Queens University and the next decade was an exploration of what form that might look like while employed as a youth worker in various church contexts. It was during my time working in East London at an Assemblies of God (AoG) church that I first considered ordination with the Church of England. When I felt it was time to move on from the AoG church role, it felt right to look for a youth work position within the CofE to explore this further. The Lighthouse Church agreed to my entering the discernment process during my employment there and 18 months later I was discerning further to study at Ridley Hall.

What's been the best thing about your training?

Answer: I have enjoyed lots about the challenge of academic theological study. Having the space to read challenging thinkers, have my own ideas honed, was hard but helpful. I particularly enjoyed my own research projects. I took the opportunity to write a dissertation on physical beauty in the Hebrew Bible to help work through some issues in contemporary thinking that came to light in my work with young people.

Can you say what is the most important thing you have learned during your training?

Answer: In my final year I encountered the work of Lesslie Newbigin and have found his theology of mission really helpful and I think his work will prompt continuing reflection as St. Luke's seeks to reach out to young people in Blackburn.

Reflecting on the difficult past year, please share a few thoughts about how the pandemic has impacted on ministry at this time (you could reflect how people have adapted to the circumstances in different ways as part of this response) ...

Answer: One positive aspect has been the greater online provision that was necessary because of the pandemic but had long been desired by people who are disabled, ill or housebound for whatever reason. Churches were forced to stop all their programmes and, as we begin to emerge, key decisions will need to be made about what to restart. I wonder if there will be a desire to do less ‘stuff’, so as to be more present amongst communities.

Meanwhile, what are some of your personal reflections on ministry in the post-pandemic period that lies ahead; the challenges and the opportunities?

Answer: I think people are really tired; clergy, church staff and just people in general. The country endured a collective trauma alongside many individual traumas and the effect of that will be hard to unpack for a few years yet. The church needs to find a way to journey with people as those effects are discovered, offering spaces of rest, healing and restoration. I believe that the emerging generations exhibit a desire to be connected together, with a passion to see positive change in society which presents an opportunity for the church if it has ears to listen to the Spirit.

Tell us something people don't know about you that might surprise them?

Answer: I have skydived.

What do you view as your most significant personal achievement, before or during training?

Answer: Achieving a first in my Theology for Ministry Degree from the University of Cambridge.

How do you hope to continue to support the Diocesan Vision 2026 at a parish level?

Answer: St. Luke's is heavily involved in work with young people – I am passionate about what young people can teach us about being faithful witnesses to this generation. I would like to be involved in growing leaders who will instigate positive change in their spheres of influence.

How would you express your own vision for the church?

Answer: The church should be a community of messy people who bear public witness to the historical event that is Jesus Christ, inviting people into relationship with Jesus and others. Jesus did not leave behind doctrinal texts, or prayer books, but a group of imperfect people committed to him and each other and to bringing hope to the world.

Finally, when you get the chance, how do you relax?

Answer: I make time to exercise, and in the last year have really enjoyed running. I will watch most sports, but especially try and keep up with Man. United matches and Formula 1.