

Media Questionnaire: Deacons

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

Answer: Andrew Downes, 38, grew up in Whitley Bay in North Tyneside until the age of 5 and then did more growing up in Horsham in West Sussex, until university back in the north.

The church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving:

Answer: Christ Church, Thornton

Tell us about your family:

Answer: My wife and I have two nearly-teen children and two rabbits. We enjoy being silly together, playing games and telling stories.

If applicable, your former job before entering ministry?

Answer: I've had a variety of roles within the learning and development industry, mostly on the technology side. Most recently, my job title is 'Market Evangelist' which means I spread the good news about using data to improve training. Day to day I mostly write blog content and occasionally speak at events.

What led you to take the steps towards ordination?

Answer: I've felt called to church leadership since I was 17, but after a Theology degree sandwiched by two church gap years there just wasn't a path open to me and the advice was to go and get some life experience and secular work. Then, a decade and a half later in 2015, I was praying about a career choice between two options. I was surprised when God clearly told me both to pursue one of those career choices and also to put myself forward for ordination in the Church of England. I then had four of the most rewarding years of my career (whilst also navigating the discernment process) before starting training in 2019.

What's been the best thing about your training?

Answer: I've especially enjoyed getting to know and learning from other ordinands. This was particularly valuable in person prior to March 2020, but my formation group continued and continue to be a fantastic support via WhatsApp too!

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

Answer: I've learned so much about the breadth of the church; the challenges of and expectations on clergy and the vital role of fantastic lay volunteers. The most important lesson I've learned in all of that is to love one another.

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: On a positive note, the pandemic has helped us reach new people in their homes and to re-evaluate many of our assumptions and priorities. For example,

Sunday services versus building community. In other ways the pandemic has been quite destructive to church life and many parishes are really struggling to re-build serving teams as services and ministries that had stopped re-start.

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 do think there's still a lot of work to reimagine church in this new world, which is not the same as before the pandemic. The 'Great Resignation', a collective re-evaluation of the philosophy of working as much as possible to make as much money as possible, alongside an accelerated move to remote work, will present many challenges and opportunities. Challenges, because the church must reflect on where we have fostered a culture of over-work, and opportunities because in this time of change we have a chance to point to Jesus whose yoke is easy and burden is light, and at whose feet we're invited to come, sit and listen.

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

Answer: At University I set up and captained our college Ultimate Frisbee team.

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

Answer: In a professional capacity I'm proud of my role in developing a new technical standard for the transmission of data about learning. However, while it sounds clichéd, I'm a million times prouder of my role in raising my children who, by God's grace, are growing up to be two of the kindest, most caring people I know.

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

Answer: Under the headings of 'Making disciples of Jesus Christ', and 'Growing leaders for Jesus Christ', I believe I have a particular calling to do what I can to help equip, encourage and release people in their gifting and ministry; whether that's a leadership role or not. I'm looking forward to seeing the Lay Majority Ministry framework in practice and doing what I can to support lay and ordained sisters and brothers in the work of the gospel.

How would you express your own vision for the church?

Answer: I think it's important that each local congregation has its own specific vision for its parish and mission field. And that vision needs to go deeper than a re-wording of the common 'Love God, the church and the world' formula. That said, thinking generally, I'd love to see the church develop a greater focus on Monday-Saturday and expend less attention and resources on Sundays.

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

Answer: I enjoy playing board games with family at home and video games online with friends far away.