

Media Questionnaire: Deacons

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

Answer: Lloyd Etheridge, late 30s. Grew up in the Chichester diocese.

The church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving:

Answer: St Andrew's Church, Leyland.

Tell us about your family:

Answer: Happily married with children.

What led you to take the steps towards ordination?

Answer: I was unsure about discerning ordination, even though people were urging me forward. My Vicar suggested that I attend an event on why someone might seek ordination in the Church of England. There were two talks that morning. First, the bishop stood up and listed the statistics for the Church of England in decline, showing that one in three churches were looking for, but unable to appoint an ordained minister. The second talk was given by a minister who had served his congregation for the majority of his life, and he showed pictures of real-life people who were crying out for the love of Jesus. He said: "People like Sharon are sitting in churches crying out for an ordained minister to share with them the love of Jesus, but few are willing to go." At that moment my heart longed for these people I had seen, and I said to myself, "Okay God, you got me. I'll go."

What's been the best thing about your training?

Answer: Having the space set aside to drink deeply from experienced ministers and teachers who desire to see ordinands equipped for a lifetime of ministry.

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

Answer: That we are broken before God and that all we can do is by his strength alone. This broken awareness keeps our delight in God, our trust in him, humbles us from pride, and gives us a confident resolve that we can by his grace meet the needs of his people.

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: This really feeds from the previous answer. The pandemic has been a very difficult time, stretching one's capacity, testing one's resolve and ability, forcing people to retreat back into the God who loves, gifts and equips both his ministers and his people for service. There has been an acute awareness of the finitude of humanity and the existential need for God. Those combined have seen people pouring into churches and seeking God, as well as his people becoming ever more reliant on him. This I feel has been especially pertinent in the arena of gathering together. I feel that

in our individualised western culture, being forced apart helped drive home just how much we love and need to be with one another.

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

Answer: A 2009 publication envisioned a ‘fictitious’ scenario in which a global pandemic forced all churches to close for a prolonged period, and then asked the question, what would you do differently when you reopened now that you had a ground zero to work from. It feels like a lot of churches have a ground zero, because many of those who attended now go elsewhere, or have stopped attending, while anecdotally I’m hearing how many churches have received an influx of new attendees. The challenge and opportunity therefore both lie in the ability to reshape what was previously present, casting away and remoulding things which were unhelpful while retaining all that has been good. The challenges come in a new church makeup which may cause friction, as people learn to live with and love one another, and their community, while opportunities arise with churches becoming something new in order to reach their communities, which they perhaps wanted before the pandemic, but never saw how they could make these changes with existing programmes in place.

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

Answer: A wife of another ordinand said to my wife recently: “When you talk to your husband, you discover he isn’t as boring as you might first imagine when looking at him.” Thanks for that!

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

Answer: Meeting and marrying my wife. We have two masters degrees in our household, and they both belong to her. She also worked at Lambeth Palace Library for six years, before heading up north. She is my companion, my friend and my advisor, and I praise God for her.

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

Answer: By loving the people in front of me, so that the church continues to grow in both maturity and number, which in turn will transform our communities as they act out the love of Christ in their everyday lives.

How would you express your own vision for the church?

Answer: To share the love of Christ with the church and the local community, so as we continue know God better and are transformed by his Spirit, we will be seen by all as a safe place in which people can love and live for Jesus, loving both God and neighbour in word, thought and deed.

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

Answer: I have young children. What is this strange thing you refer to when you say, “When you get the chance...”?