

Media Questionnaire: Priests

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

Answer: Amy Bland, 25, Comberton which is a village just outside Cambridge.

The church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving:

Answer: Euxton Parish Church

Tell us about your family:

Answer: I'm single. My parents live in Comberton and I have a brother who lives in Norwich.

If applicable, your former job before entering ministry?

Answer: I worked at a church in Blackpool called Freedom Church Mereside. I was taking part in the Blackpool Ministry Experience, which is part of the Ministry Experience Scheme, run by the Church of England.

What led you to take the steps towards ordination?

Answer: The short answer is I think God told me to. The slightly longer answer is, after a few people had asked me if I'd ever thought about being a vicar, I decided that this was something I should pray about. After a number of amazing answers to the things I'd been praying about, I felt like this was the direction God was calling me to go in. I then spent time finding out what vicars *actually* do; by spending some time shadowing priests, talking to people and then spending a year in Blackpool working full time in a church. I realised that being a vicar combines many of the things I enjoy doing and the things I think God has given me gifts in. After having been reluctant to want to do this, I realised God knows me better than myself and has exciting plans ahead.

What's been the best thing about your training?

Answer: I trained for two years in a college in Cambridge, which I really enjoyed. Since moving to Lancashire and starting my curacy, the training has continued. I've loved learning from my Training Incumbent who has shown me all aspects of what 'being a vicar' involves. I've also met up with other curates at our training days and residentials on specific areas of church life. Learning with others and being able to chat about how things are going and how we can do things differently has been great.

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

Answer: It's often said that people aren't really into Christianity that much anymore, but I've seen how untrue this is. I've noticed how open and interested people are to faith, how they often want to talk to me about my faith or their experience of faith. I've learnt to be more open, to listen well and to expect that I'll have many opportunities to share my experience of transforming power of Jesus Christ.

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: Life seems to be always changing. Plans get flipped on their head last minute when someone has tested positive for Covid, different rules and guidelines have meant what we can do in church changes, people have had time to re-evaluate what is important in their lives. Coping with this constant change has been tiring for everyone. It's also helped us to be flexible and not get obsessed with things that aren't essential. Singing is great in worship, but we can still worship God even if we aren't allowed to sing. Having refreshments after church is great for community, but we can still worship and get to know each other in different ways. The pandemic has been hard, but it's allowed for new creativity and some new opportunities.

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

Answer: People have lost some connection with each other over the pandemic. Good friends may have continued to go on walks together, but it's been difficult to make new friendships or keep in contact with those we only know a bit. I'm excited to see how communities and especially church communities reform and grow, how new people are welcomed into God's family and can feel like they've come home.

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

Answer: Since moving to Lancashire, I've got into indoor bouldering (rock climbing) and made a number of new friends through it.

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

Answer: Being called an 'honorary northern lass' by the church I worked at in Blackpool

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

Answer: In February, we spend four weeks in church exploring the strands of Vision 2026 and gathering ideas about how we can move forwards as a church. This has helped inform what we are doing as a church, as we've tried to listen to what God is calling us to do. I'm excited to be part of a church and diocese that is focussed on growth and transformation.

How would you express your own vision for the church?

Answer: A place where all people can meet together to worship God. People should feel safe and welcome and can explore who Jesus is, encounter his love and listen to what God is saying to them.

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

Answer: I love walking in the hills, camping and all kind of adventurous things.