

Media Questionnaire: Priests

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

Answer:

Barbara Houghton, 49, originally born in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester but I have lived in Blackpool since the age of 13.

The church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving:

Answer:

Preston St Stephens

Tell us about your family:

Answer:

I am a proud mum of two. Georgia is 20 and in her third year studying politics at York St John (yes, we do have politics and religion under the same roof and still get along)! Ben is 16 and in his first year at Sixth Form – he enjoys football and going to the gym training in mixed martial arts.

If applicable, your former job before entering ministry?

Answer:

Before I began serving my curacy in Preston I worked as a Children and Youth Pastor for 12 great years at Blackpool St Thomas and before that I worked in publishing in the special educational needs department of the local high school.

What led you to take the steps towards ordination?

Answer:

Working with children, young people and their families in a church context whilst also serving as a Reader was, whilst challenging, also extremely fulfilling and where I believed I was meant to be. However, there was always this nagging feeling inside that God wasn't letting me settle where I was – particularly when it came to the spiritual lives of others. I truly believe that the most important thing in life is getting right with God spiritually and enjoy how God calls us to reach out to others so he can work.

What's been the best thing about your training?

Answer:

The best thing about my training has to be the daily embracing of unexpected and new experiences. Before moving to Preston, I had only ever moved house once before in my entire life – at the age of 13! Moving house and changing the whole direction of my life was, for me, a real step of faith. Everything was new - I was moving to a new town, living for the first time in a multi-faith community and worshipping in a completely new church. I have been doing things I have never done before – how much more exciting can it get?

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

Answer:

My training context has given me more opportunities to speak to Jesus to people of different faiths. Before I would have been reticent about possibly upsetting people, but my experience has been the opposite – I find that people love talking about their faith and like to learn about my faith too. This has helped build relationships as well as helping me live amongst others with different beliefs.

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) plus some thoughts about the time ahead post-pandemic ... challenges and opportunities ...

Answer:

The pandemic has certainly made us all think differently about how ministry is done. We all now recognise the importance of relationships and community even more than before. Many are still fearful as a result of their experiences during the pandemic and many are isolated so I think it has helped us identify what is crucial and how we can still serve others whilst, at the same time, keep them safe and abide by the rules. For example, the food market at our church had to take place outside in the car park. Despite awful weather people still queued an hour/hour and a half beforehand to ensure they got some fresh grocery products. This shows how important this service actually is. Personally, this has allowed me to talk with and build relationships. As well as learning more about the local community, I also have been taken to the Hindu temple by one lady as we have both shared about our faiths and have begun a weekly ladies' coffee afternoon to build upon these relationships.

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

Answer:

Many years ago, I used to be a kickboxer but gave this up when I gave birth to my daughter.

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

Answer:

What brings me real joy and life has to be when you get to share Jesus with others and you can see before your very eyes how it brings them life and they start to really fall in love with Jesus. I just love how we all able to do this! The honour of wearing a collar now seems to make it easier – it gives people that opening to come and talk even if we have never met – I just find it such a privilege to be able to do this.

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

Answer:

The Mission Action Plan for our local church has four areas of focus taken from the Diocesan Vision. This says how we, at parish level, intend to support the diocesan vision by stating how we will make disciples, grow leaders, be witnesses and inspire and actively engage children and young people.

How would you express your own vision for the church?

Answer:

This would involve equipping the church to lovingly and confidently talk about Jesus, and being able to share the Good news wherever they go.

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

Answer:

I love visiting the cinema – losing myself in a good film is my perfect way to relax – that and reading a good book! I also like to walk along the coast but don't get to do that as often as I once did.