

Media Questionnaire: Andrew Downes

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

Answer: I'm 39 years old. I grew up a bit in Whitley Bay on the North East coast, and a bit more in Horsham in Sussex.

The church and location in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving:

Answer: I'm serving at Christ Church Thornton on the Flyde Coast. It's a busy parish church with lots of community activities.

Tell us a bit about your family:

Answer: I'm married with two children. They found the move to the north west coast from the south challenging but have begun to settle.

If applicable, what was your former job before entering ministry?

Answer: I worked as an Impact Measurement Consultant in the Learning and Development (L and D) sector. This background in data has been helpful as a deacon when I digitised the records for our churchyard which has over 6000 burials, and when evaluating the success of a pilot mission activity.

Tell us something about your journey towards ordination?

Answer: I think my biggest learning point from the journey towards ordination is to think about how I can serve God at every stage of the process, rather than seeing it as a set of hurdles to be completed before I can finally serve God.

What has been a) the most important thing you have learned and b) the most inspiring thing you have experienced during your training? (They can be different!)

Answer: My Training Incumbent is always giving me 'important curate training' on the best way to fold up a table, or the most efficient way to empty mugs from the dishwasher. The most inspiring times are working with children, especially in our 0-5 Playhouse midweek group, and seeing their little faces light up as we (daily) sing 'Our God is a Great Big God', or as I try to summarise our Sunday sermon as a two minute talk for people with toast up their noses and juice down their front (sometimes even the parents)!

As parishes continue to recover following the trauma of the pandemic, please give us some insight into how your parish is moving forward at this time (you could reflect how people have adapted and changed in the way they 'do church', including online, as part of this response).

Answer: Things at Christ Church have mostly moved on from the pandemic, though services continue to be livestreamed. We're focused more on the cost-of-living crisis and supporting the community with a warm spaces and food.

What are some of the personal challenges and opportunities you face in your ministry in the coming year?

Answer: In 22/23 I've been praying, planning and preparing for a church plant in the opposite corner of our parish to the Church building. In 23/24 the challenge and opportunity are to grow existing outreach activities and begin to build a church plant community.

What do you view as your most significant personal achievement? (This may be connected to your ordination training of course or it could be something else from another aspect of your life.)

Answer: I believe my work on impact measurement within L and D has been really impactful on a number of organisations and on professionals working in L and D. Designing training in a way that considers its impact is a huge change for a lot of organisations and my voice has been a significant one in presenting a vision for change.

When he was announced recently as the next Bishop of Blackburn, Bishop Philip said: *"I am committed to continuing the growth of the church in Lancashire, helping to build joyful Christian communities. I would love to see the Church of England in Lancashire being an ever-stronger voice for justice, especially for the poorest. And I believe children and young people need to be at the very heart of all that we do."*

How would you seek to support the Bishop in fulfilling these aims?

Answer: Children and young people are at the heart of our vision at Christ Church, and at the heart of our vision for the church plant into Burn Naze which aims to reach some of the poorer households in our parish. I'm hopeful that the work I do in Burn Naze can provide a useful model and resources for others in the diocese looking to reach children and young people in unreach communities.

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

Answer: During the pandemic, I appeared on one of the Prime Minister's TV briefings asking Boris Johnson a question about the vaccine rollout to University students.

Finally, when you get the chance, what do you do you chill out and relax?

Answer: Moving 312 miles north from everybody I know, I made it a priority to get involved in a social activity outside of church, so joined a Thursday night board game group that plays a different board game every week. I fiercely protect Thursday evenings from parish activities and it's been great to make friends amongst people outside of church.