

Media Questionnaire: Jean Kouacou

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

Answer:

I am 48 years old, originally from Abidjan, the economical capital of Cote D'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) where I grew up before moving to Morecambe 19 years ago.

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

Answer:

I am serving my curacy title at St Paul's Church, Adlington in Chorley Deanery.

Tell us a bit about your family:

Answer:

I am Married to Isabelle, and we have two children; Elizabeth, who is 18 and Kyran, who is 15.

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

Answer:

During my time in England I have had many jobs but, before entering ministry, I worked in the healthcare industry as a carer and support worker.

Tell us something about your journey towards ordination?

Answer:

I grew up in a traditional catholic family, where going to church and taking communion is very important. During my first communion I was so touched spiritually that I wanted to celebrate the Eucharist every day and show God's love wherever I was. Then in England the feeling of be call to ministry started again when I was serving in the sanctuary in 2012 and I tried to ignore it but people from the congregation started asking me if I had thought about being the priest and that was the scary bit; people could hear the voice calling me. The more I was involved the more the calling became louder and scarier! So, when I was on a pilgrimage at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, I spent hours in the holy house praying for the courage to say 'Yes' and it felt like a voice reassured me. So, when the same day my parish priest asked me if I would like to explore the vocation to the priesthood, I told him I was thinking about it. And it has been a long and worthy journey of testing, affirmation, confirmation and formation for me, my family and the church.

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:

The most important thing that I have learned is that God is at work in the world and our communities and that my role, as a Deacon, is to recognise where God is at work and join in.

The inspiring thing is that according to Acts 2:42-47, the first Christians community (the church) had fellowship with each other; edified each other; worshipped, ministered, and evangelised. Then ‘the Lord increased their number daily with those who were saved’. Therefore, our task is to fulfil these five purposes in our church community to grow a healthy church through fellowship, discipleship, worship, ministry (pastoral care) and proclaiming (evangelism) the Gospel.

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:

The pandemic has reminded us of our needs for one another and our dependence on God and thanks to technology we managed to keep contact with one another and with God through online worship. Therefore, the church (and my parish) is moving forward by offering opportunity for the community to get together and share the love of Jesus Christ (because nothing should separate us from the love of God) through the daily Mass, coffee morning and other missionary activities.

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

Answer:

A personal challenge for me will be moving from Preston which is multi-racial and multi-national to an area which is less so; but still with wonderful opportunities to work with young people through the church school and doing home visits and communion.

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:

In this world where we always try to be in control of everything, I can say my bigger achievement is to fully trust God and let Him be in control of everything as he forms, shapes and equips me with the gifts he has given me; and to be more Christ-like.

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:

I have been lucky to work with young people in our diocese and during my training I have spent time with a school chaplain for my alternate placement; so I have seen the importance of having young people voices heard in our churches to transform our communities. Therefore, I would support the Bishop by creating opportunities for our

children and young people by working with schools and uniformed organisations and by discipling them and involve them in the life of the church.

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

Answer:

People often think I am a woman before they meet me because of my French name which can be read as a man or woman's name.

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

Answer:

To relax and chill out I like to cook and visiting new places and nature.