

Media Questionnaire: Joe Houghton

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

Answer: I am 39 and I grew in Lowestoft. The Anglican Church I worshipped in growing up was a two minute walk from the Ness Point, the most easterly point in British Isles. I loved growing up by the sea and summer holidays as a child were spent on the award-winning beach.

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

Answer: At the moment I am serving at St Andrew's Ashton-on-Ribble, in Preston. I have been a member there for seven years and loved it. I am going to St Christopher's Lea to serve my curacy.

Tell us a bit about your family:

Answer: I am married to Cathy, who is originally from Kendal although we met in Sheffield. Cathy was a mature student studying Occupational Therapy and she began to attend and help with the youth work at the Church where I was employed as the youth worker. We have now been married for 10 years and have two children who are great fun; Poppy, who is 8 and a football mad son called Lenny who is 6.

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

Answer: Before exploring ordination, I was working as a School Chaplain at Archbishop Temple school in Preston. My role there was to pastorally care for staff and pupils, lead and facilitate worship and help the school live out its Christian values.

Tell us something about your journey towards ordination?

Answer: I sensed a call toward Christian ministry from the age of about 16. My home Church in Lowestoft asked me to do one of the talks at their children's holiday club. I felt completely inadequate but gave it a go. I loved studying the part of God's word I was going to teach and, despite being nervous, enjoyed speaking about Jesus to lots of kids. From this moment on it was clear to others, but it took more time to be clear to me, that God was calling me toward Christian and, in the longer-term, ordained ministry.

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 I have over my training has been the need to prioritise reading God's word and prayer, coupled with making sure I care well for Cathy and the kids. Placed together they are about primary callings: devotion to God, and to the people He has especially charged me with nurturing and serving. If these two aspects of life are handled right, then ministry in the parish will be all the better for it.

Much of my inspiration during training has come from a group of people who I have developed deep friendship with. The way these people pray, serve, worship and have also dealt with incredibly difficult circumstances during training, has inspired my faith and encouraged me toward faithfulness.

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: We returned to normal as soon as the restrictions allowed, receiving communion and gathering physically as we had done pre-pandemic. Since returning we have discovered a love of singing together that perhaps has only grown due to it be taken away for a while. We have stopped streaming services to encourage people back to gathering in person, as we believe this what the new testament envisages by Church that gathering via screens can never replace. For those who are unable to attend an increased offer of visiting has been made. Our Church was where life returned to normal fastest for most people and this has led to steady growth in attendance over the last year.

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

Answer:

I will be undertaking a curacy-in-charge position so one of the biggest challenges will be to inhabit the extra responsibility with Christ-like servant heartedness. Meeting the lovely new Church family and seeking to love them well, pastorally caring for the congregation, building on all the good things going and seeking to reach out with the good news about Jesus to the community will certainly keep me busy. However, in all these things I can see God opening doors for growth in me as I depend on God, growth in the Church family's faith, and new people coming to trust Jesus or returning to him after time away. These are exciting opportunities to get on board with what God is doing in Lea.

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:

Persuading Cathy to marry me, even though she knew me really well, has got to be up there. I have won a load of table tennis competitions over the years although I can't say them seem that significant anymore. During my time as a school chaplain I pastorally cared for a number of children who were going through devastating personal circumstances. Seeing them keep going, and still thrive in school in small part to some of the input I gave, felt really significant.

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:

My hope is that this vision might be part of what continues to develop in Lea. Vibrant and joyful Christian communities are formed when people who love Jesus ‘do life’ together. I would love for St Christopher’s to grow into an even closer, yet welcoming, Church family who spend time together feeding on God’s word, eating communion and feasting on good food together at Church and in each other’s homes.

The parish is large and there are many needs, my prayer is that we will discern together what God wants us to do to reach the poor in our community by meeting spiritual, physical and emotional needs. Finally, one of my great passions is working with children and young people and I would love the Church become accessible and enjoyable to all ages.

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

Answer:

When I was in my 20s I travelled around Europe dressed as superman, to make a mockumentary of life as a retired superhero. I have always enjoyed dressing up and putting on accents as many at St Andrew’s will testify to if they have been at some of our all-age services. More recently I dressed up as a large orange filming around Preston, to tell the story of how an ordinary orange became a Christingle!

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

Answer:

I love sport, playing or watching. My son has caught the sport bug and so most weekends we play football, cricket, tennis or all three in the garden or at the park. We love watching films as a family and enjoy snuggling up with some popcorn. I also love walking up hills, kayaking, paddle boarding and camping. If I had a free day it would probably include a little bit of all the above with a chance to cook some nice food for the family as I fancy myself as a bit of a Jamie Oliver.