

Media questionnaire and brief biography: **Cornelius Asghar**

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

Answer: I am 44 years old. I was born and raised in Nowshera, a city in the northwest of Pakistan.

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

Answer: St. Laurence's Church, Chorley

Tell us a bit about your family:

Answer: I come from a family with deep roots in service and education. My father, a retired Archdeacon of Peshawar Diocese in Pakistan, dedicated his life to the church and community. My mother, a retired schoolteacher, now serves as the Diocesan treasurer in Peshawar Diocese. My wife, Shumaila, known as Mona, is a dedicated General Practitioner in Leigh, UK.

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

Answer: I have spent 20 years in the Church Education Sector and assisted some non-governmental organisations during natural disasters in Pakistan. I was the Head Teacher at one of the Peshawar Diocese's oldest schools before moving to Blackpool in 2019.

Tell us something about your journey towards ordination?

Answer: My journey towards ordination has been unique and transformative. Growing up in a vicarage and serving in the diocesan education sector, the call to ordained ministry was always present in my life, yet I grappled with fear and uncertainty. Upon relocating to the UK from Pakistan in 2019, I found a spiritual home at St Paul's Church Marton in Blackpool, where I was commissioned as an Authorised Lay Minister in 2021. The Diocesan M:Power course helped me rediscover Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and strengthen my bond with God the Father.

Guided by prayer and the Holy Spirit, encouragement and support by my Vicar in Blackpool and an Asian Missionary priest from Preston, I finally heeded God's call to ordained ministry. In September 2022, my vocational training began at Emmanuel Theological College and my placement at St. Laurence's Church Chorley; I am grateful for the spiritual growth and clarity that have marked this significant journey. As I continue to discern and prepare for ordained ministry, I am filled with a sense of purpose and peace, knowing I am following the path God has set before me.

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!)

A) The most important thing I have learned during my ordained ministry is leading others by example. I have come to understand the importance of embodying Christ's teachings in my daily life and being a living example of love, compassion, and grace to those around me. This has highlighted the significance of authenticity and integrity in ministry, enabling me to inspire and make disciples by faithfully reflecting God's love.

B) The most inspiring thing I have experienced during my training is the remarkable openness and inclusiveness within the Church of England. Witnessing the Church's commitment to welcoming all people, regardless of background, beliefs, or identity, has been truly uplifting. This emphasis on embracing diversity and fostering unity has been a powerful testament to God's grace's transformative and inclusive nature. It has encouraged me to strive for a more inclusive and welcoming ministry that reflects Christ's boundless love for all.

Since the pandemic many more parishes have also embraced online opportunities to engage with their local communities alongside their existing services. Please indicate ways in which you may have done this already or what plans you may have to explore ways to reach people in the 'digital space' in the future ...

Answer: During the Covid pandemic, I embraced the opportunity to connect with the local community through online platforms. Moving forward, I recognise the importance of integrating online services and prayers for individuals who may be housebound or unable to attend church due to personal or professional reasons. To expand on this, I plan to explore ways to enhance the online experience by incorporating interactive elements such as virtual prayer groups, online Bible studies, and digital outreach programs. Using various digital tools and platforms, I aim to create a more inclusive and accessible environment for anyone seeking spiritual connection and community participation in the digital space.

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

Answer:

One personal challenge I am excited to tackle in the upcoming year is mastering the art of saying 'No' to certain opportunities to prioritise my well-being and effectiveness in ministry. It's a challenging skill to hone, but I am determined to strike a balance and avoid spreading myself too thin.

On the bright side, I see an incredible opportunity as I transition into ordained ministry. Since my time as an Ordinand, I have had an established relationship with the church community. This foundation of trust and camaraderie will undoubtedly pave the way for meaningful and impactful ministry experiences in the future.

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: My most significant personal achievement is transitioning from Pakistan to British society. I have grown profoundly in adapting to a new culture, building relationships, embracing the Lancashire lifestyle, and, most importantly, nurturing a personal relationship with Jesus as a saviour and God as Father.

Through prayer and introspection, I have discerned a calling to ministry that drives me to serve others with love and compassion. This journey has not only enriched my own life but has also empowered me to positively impact those around me as I continue to seek spiritual growth and meaningful connections in my vocation.

Bishop Philip has 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 will you seek to support the Bishop in fulfilling these aims?

Answer:

I will actively build joyful Christian communities, advocate for justice, and prioritise children and young people in the Church of England in Lancashire. I will work alongside Bishop Philip to strengthen the church's voice for the poorest by organising events, fostering partnerships with local organisations, and promoting outreach programs. By embodying these values in my actions and words, I aim to contribute to the growth and impact of the church in Lancashire. I will prioritise the involvement of children and young people in all aspects of our work, ensuring they are valued and included.

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

Answer: Cooking, prayer walks, and watching movies are my favourite ways to chill out and relax