**Barbara Houghton**

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

**Answer:**

My name is Barbara Houghton. I’m 48 years of age and was born in Manchester (Chorlton-cum-Hardy), moving to Blackpool when I was 13 and living there ever since.

The church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving:

**Answer:**

I will be serving at Preston St Stephen.

Tell us about your family:

**Answer:**

I am a mum of two children: Georgia who is 19 years old and is currently in her second year at York St John University studying politics which she loves as well as cooking; and Ben, aged 15, who is in his final year of high school studying for his GCSEs. He’s a typical teenager who loves football and playing his Xbox.

If applicable, your former job before entering ministry?

**Answer:**

For the last twelve years I have worked as the Children and Youth Pastor at St Thomas Blackpool.

What led you to take the steps towards ordination?

**Answer:**

Although people had suggested I should explore ordination, this was something I think I purposefully tried to ignore for some time. I really loved my job as a Children and Youth Pastor and knew that a move towards ordination would be a huge life-changing decision.

I eventually decided to go through the ordination process to see if I was hearing God correctly and see if other people discerned this calling too. Thinking I could possibly be being led in this direction took a huge leap of faith.

What’s been the best thing about your training?

**Answer:**

Training has certainly taken me out of my comfort zone on many occasions but I am quickly appreciating that these are the times in our lives that we grow the most. During training I have met a lot of ordinands who have come from different social backgrounds, cultures and also from a wide variety of church traditions.

It has certainly been a true reflection of how fantastically diverse God’s church really is and developing new friendships has truly been a gift to me personally. My book collection has also increased considerably too!

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

**Answer:**

Training has encouraged me to reflect – a lot! So often we can think we don’t have the time to stop and pray or try to listen to where God is in a given situation and discern His voice.

When things have seemed difficult or overwhelming, pausing and taking that time to reflect has been incredibly important and invaluable to me during my training. No matter where life takes me, I sometimes need to be reminded that God is right there with me too all the time.

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) …

**Answer:**

My final year of training has been such a contrast to that of my first. During my initial year of training I was able to physically be around people – I was able to ask questions and have conversations as well as to form friendships with and learn from others as we spent time together in worship, lectures and at college residentials.

Having to do training predominantly online this past year has not been easy. Not only has it been mentally draining spending so much time in front of a computer, it has also been incredibly isolating. I have often wondered about what sort of minister this would make me. What I do take away from this time is that I am not alone in experiencing this and how incredibly blessed I am to have still had this experience.

I think it has also forced us all to look with fresh eyes at what we are doing and how we can do it differently. It has especially shown me how much I might have taken for granted in the past, especially in being able to go to church and to be around people, and particularly the people we love.

Meanwhile, what are some of your personal reflections on ministry in the post-pandemic period that lies ahead; the challenges and the opportunities?

**Answer:**

I don’t think I need to say how these past few months have been devastating for so many in so many ways. When I read that there is beauty for ashes, to me this is a reminder of God’s truth showing me that He was there, in the midst of it all. It has made me realise that I can often live each day almost with blinkers on, striving to complete the set list of tasks for that day.

I have often not stopped to really notice what is good and how much I am blessed. This past year we have been given a new perspective, a new way of looking at life. I think we now notice and are more present to what we do and why. This fresh outlook is very exciting, particularly in terms of ministry. Hopefully our experiences over these strange past months will help us connect with others in a way we never could or might have before.

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

**Answer:**

Now surely that would ruin the surprise?! Yes I know you know I am completely avoiding the question by responding in that way so I asked a couple of my friends. One said: I like to evangelise in nail salons. (Personally I would say you should feel free to evangelise whenever and wherever you can!)

Another said I am like an armadillo – I may look tough on the outside but I’m really a huge softie. Another said that I hate camping – never take her camping! Make of that what you will!

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

**Answer:**

To have completed training! For many this may not seem such a significant achievement but for me it has been, particularly surviving two years of studying Greek! Being a Chair of Governors, a mum, as well as continuing my role as Children and Youth Pastor whilst training has, at times, been a little challenging shall we say.

It’s been during such times that I have really appreciated those people around me who have been there supporting and helping. I have also appreciated God’s grace very much when I have felt inadequate or maybe have gotten it wrong.

Your favourite literary quote (it can be from the Bible or elsewhere) and, briefly, why?:

**Answer:**

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Maya Angelou

We all have such an incredible ability to make a difference to others. No, we can’t fix all of life’s problems, but we can be there, we can be present. Even if it seems like what we are doing is the simplest, most insignificant of things such as smiling at someone or sitting with them during particularly difficult times. This quote reminds me that we all have the ability to have a greater impact on others than we may ever know.

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

**Answer:**

It was only through the encouragement and support of others that I dared to step out in faith and really see where God was calling me. I hope to support the Diocesan Vision 2026 at parish level by doing the same to others – to help others see their potential and God-given gifts and to realise that all things are possible with God, often beyond our own imagination.

How would you express your own vision for the church?

**Answer:**

I hope that I will be a pointer or a reminder to others about Jesus, showing we have a God who is very much alive and who loves us all very much, particularly when we might not be feeling so lovable! I wasn’t always so confident in talking about my faith so I understand how difficult this can be. My vision would be that we all develop such confidence in talking about and showing the love of Christ to others.

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

**Answer:**

I love listening to music or going for long walks, especially besides water. I have been really fortunate to live by the sea for many years and love walking down the seafront. I also really enjoy going to the cinema and I also have to admit a slight obsession with coffee – which of course is great when you share it with friends.