**Ian McGrath**

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

# Answer:

Ian McGrath. Age 40. I grew up in Bebington on The Wirral.

The church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving:

# Answer:

Ellel St. John the Evangelist.

Tell us about your family:

# Answer:

I’ve been married to Julie for ten years. She is from Northern Ireland and works as a Deputy Head of a local special school. We have two children, James (7) and Evie (4) and I have an elder daughter, Ellen (14) who lives in the north Lake District.

If applicable, your former job before entering ministry?:

# Answer:

During training I worked part-time as a Project Manager for a local structural engineering firm. Prior to that, I was a Youth Pastor for a church in Lancaster.

What led you to take the steps towards ordination?:

# Answer:

The question of whether or not God was calling me to explore ordination was there for a number of years, both through comments from others and my own wonderings. Eventually, after a New Wine conference where ordination was mentioned, I felt that it was time to try the door and see what happens.

What’s been the best thing about your training?:

# Answer:

Meeting a whole host of great and godly people from various different traditions and backgrounds. Their presence alongside me on the journey has been immensely valuable.

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

# Answer:

Don’t put God, or yourself, in a theological box. Be attentive to what God is doing outside of your own sphere of experience and background. Appreciate and celebrate difference whilst holding fast to who you are and appreciate the history that has shaped your faith.

Don’t try to be someone you’re not, whilst being humble enough to grow and change. Always seek to be gracious and loving towards others, even if you disagree with them and be prepared to admit your failings and mistakes.

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:

The pandemic has caused churches to re-think creatively about ways to worship and encourage one another in faith when meeting together isn’t possible. Online worship has been both a challenge and an opportunity to reach people with the good news of Jesus who may never set foot inside a church, and to be a voice of hope and comfort amidst so much suffering and uncertainty. Churches have been instrumental in providing services and support alongside other organisations for those most in need and vulnerable.

At the same time, this period of change and adaption has also taken its toll on ministers and church communities alike. All have been hit by the challenges of grief, illness, loneliness, financial hardship and uncertainty to name but a few. It’s the love and fellowship of communities and the hope of Christ that has sustained people.

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

# Answer:

One of the biggest challenges for the church ahead is how to balance the old with the new. There will be those desperate to get back to the way things were and others who never want to go back. Online services, Alpha Courses and the like have meant people who may have never set foot inside a church have encountered Jesus and his people in a way they may have never done otherwise.

To what extent these people will wish or even be able to become part of a local community that gathers together is yet to be seen.

A real strength for the church has been its involvement in community outreach, often in partnerships with other organisations. Whether that be running foodbanks, providing building space or both, the church has been a key community support for those in need at this time. The pandemic has forced the church to prioritise mission and to think creatively how it can continue to share the gospel and nurture disciples.

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

# Answer:

I play a number of instruments to a fairly reasonable standard and have always played in worship groups in church. However, my instrument of training is actually classical guitar, though it’s been a few years since I’ve played one.

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

# Answer:

The privilege of being a husband and dad; whilst not really an ‘achievement’ is what I am most proud of, despite my failings at both at times.

In terms of training, I’m proud to have survived the academic pressure whilst juggling various life responsibilities; it has been really tough.

Oh, and during lockdown I managed to run my first ever 10K. Those who know what a Level 5 Bleep Test result is will know just what an achievement this is!

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

# Answer:

I’m not much of a reader for pleasure, but this quote sticks in my mind:

“In your world I have another name. You must learn to know me by it. That was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia. That by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.” (Aslan, *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*)

In recent years, the Chronicles of Narnia films have been a means through which God has spoken to me and helped me wonder again at Jesus and the need to know him better.

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

# Answer:

For me, the heart of this vision is about making disciples of Jesus because everything in the church’s life flows from her relationship with the triune God made available through Christ. Mission and worship, social action, proclamation of the gospel, fighting for issues of justice or working for the protection or renewal of the environment are all tasks of a church of

disciples who are seeking to be followers of Christ and bearers of his Kingdom life in the world around us.

My hope is that I may use the gifts God has given me to encourage and nurture those whom I serve in order that individually and together, we may be a maturing people who reflect Christ and his love for this world wherever we are.

How we do this is part of the adventure to be discovered in our context, but it will be done together and with the leading of the Holy Spirit.

How would you express your own vision for the church?:

# Answer:

A quote I read recently that resonated with me is this: ‘The Church is the community of the Kingdom, in which Jesus is acknowledged as Lord of the universe and through which, in anticipation of the end, the Kingdom is concretely manifested in history.’ (C. René Padilla, 1984).

The Church for me is an all-age group of people from all walks and spheres of life who are seeking to live as imitators of God, loving one another as Christ loves, and seeking to make that love known and manifest in the life of the world around her in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

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

# Answer:

Relaxation for me is spending time with my wife and children, whether that be watching a film or playing at the local park. I’m definitely more appreciative of the fresh air than I used to be, and enjoy getting out for a walk, particularly by the sea. The north coast of Northern Ireland is a special retreat place for us as a family. I also enjoy playing drums/guitar/keyboard when I get a moment.