

Name: Joe Kochanski

Age: 49

Original Home Village, Town or City: Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

The Church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving: Tarleton and Rufford

Church Address: Church Road
Tarleton, Lancashire, PR4 6UW

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

Tell us something about your journey towards ordination?

I grew up in a Roman Catholic family and first felt called to the priesthood in my mid-teens. After graduating from high school, I spent a couple of years in the seminary. However, I left to explore what felt like an equally strong calling to be a husband and father.

Years later, after moving to the UK and finding a home within the life and ministry of the Church of England, I began to hear God calling me to ordained ministry once again. I had plenty of reasons why this wasn't a good idea and told God all about them, but He didn't listen. Instead, He kept telling me to trust Him.

Eventually, when I spoke to my vicar about what I felt God was calling me to, he told me that if I hadn't approached him, he was going to suggest it himself. And so the formal journey began...

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 for A:

Psalm 127 begins: "if the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labour..." I've learned that ministry is not trying to do God's work, but rather, participating in the work which God is already doing.

Answer for B:

Since coming to Tarleton and Rufford, I have been inspired by the countless ways I have seen God at work in these parishes. I have been especially touched by the many people who have shared how good God has been to them and how knowing the love of Jesus has made all the difference in their lives.

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

I am incredibly excited to continue my curacy in the parishes of Rufford and Tarleton. Our challenge is to pray and ask God to reveal where He is at work—and then to follow His lead. I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit has inspired many initiatives to make Jesus known, and that in the coming year, there will be countless opportunities to introduce even more people to the life-changing love of Christ.

Many more parishes have embraced online opportunities to engage with their local communities alongside their existing services; especially since the pandemic. 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:

Streamed services were a tremendous blessing during the pandemic when we couldn't meet in person—and they continue to be a valuable source of connection for those unable to attend physically. I, for one, love spending an hour or so on a Sunday afternoon having a snoop around local parishes to see who's preaching on what!

Social media also provides a great opportunity for evangelism, allowing us to highlight the vibrant, Christ-centred life of our parishes. However, as Hebrews 10:25 reminds us, we must not neglect meeting together. Our use of the 'digital space' should ultimately draw people into the corporate body of Christ and inspire deeper discipleship.

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?

I firmly believe that growth is the natural state of the Church, and I hope to help strengthen the vibrant and joyful Christian communities we have here in Lancashire. As we share the amazing freedom and hope Christ offers to each of us, I pray that more and more people will come to know Him.

Children and young people are, of course, at the very heart of this. I have been so blessed and inspired by working with them—whether in our youth groups or through visits to local schools—and I cannot wait to continue this ministry throughout my curacy and beyond.

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.)

My first vocation was always that of a husband and a father, and every day, I am immensely proud of my wife, Laura, and my boys, Kenny and Bobby. Being there for them and loving them is by far the most important thing I have done, and I thank God daily for gifting me with the opportunity to do so.

Tell us about your family/ loved ones:

My wife Laura and I will have been married for 19 years in July. We have two sons, Kenny (17) and Bobby (10). We also have a very poorly behaved dog named Freya.

What do you do to chill out and relax?

I love spending time with my family. I love getting outside and taking long walks. I also enjoy a good game of darts, although I am considering retiring before my eldest, who is getting better and better, begins beating me on a more regular basis...

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

Anyone who knows me well, knows that I love a good spreadsheet. If I can reasonably find any way to incorporate a spreadsheet into a task, I will do so!