

Name: William Shepherd

Age: 51

Original Home Village, Town or City: Abbots Bromley

The Church in Blackburn Diocese where you are serving: St Thomas' Lancaster

Church Address: 1 Marton Street

 LANCASTER, LANCASHIRE, La1 1XX

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

Tell us something about your journey towards ordination?

I left my job in 2017 with the desire to “do something beautiful for God.” Initially, I thought this might mean redirecting my professional skills into the third sector, but God had other plans. Immersed in parish life, I found myself increasingly inspired by the ministry of my wife, Clare, and the day-to-day calling of a parish priest. It was there I began to sense a deeper vocation—bringing God to the people, and the people to God. Along the way, there were several promptings and affirmations that helped me discern this path. One particularly significant moment came when Archdeacon Paul Davies (Guildford) pointed to me and said, “God’s got a calling on your life. You need to explore it.” That moment stayed with me—it was both a challenge and a confirmation.

Now, a year into my curacy, I find myself more convinced than ever that this is where I am meant to be. Through preaching, pastoral care, and simply walking alongside people in all seasons of life, I want to help create space for others to encounter the love, joy, peace, and hope of Jesus Christ. This vocation continues to be a source of deep joy, stretching my theological understanding and shaping my heart for service in God’s Church.

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:

The Power of Presence: While giving a Christmas talk to the children at Bowerham School, I found myself searching for a way to express the profound mystery of the incarnation in simple, child-friendly language. The phrase I landed on was: “God shows up.” In its simplicity, it captures something utterly unique about the Christian message—that in Jesus, God doesn’t remain distant or abstract, but enters into our world, our mess, our humanity. This truth carries seamlessly into the priestly vocation. Presence—just showing up, being there with and for others—is often the most powerful way to reflect the love and care of Christ. In a world that craves authenticity and connection, our presence can speak louder than any sermon.

Answer for B:

One of the most inspiring moments I’ve experienced during training came from an unexpected place: the quiet confidence of a 9-year-old girl in our church who, with clarity and sincerity, expressed her desire to follow Jesus for herself. It happened after a Maundy Thursday Tenebrae service—a gathering marked by solemnity and stillness, a striking contrast to our usual high-energy Sunday worship.

Her response reminded me that spiritual maturity is not bound by age. Faith can take root deeply in the heart of a child just as profoundly as in an adult. It also affirmed for me the value of variety in worship; different forms create different kinds of sacred space, and sometimes it is in the silence, the shadows, and the slower pace that hearts are stirred and life-changing decisions are made.

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

One of the key personal challenges is sustaining the priestly disciplines of prayer, Scripture, reflection, and spiritual direction within the lively rhythm of a busy city centre church, where there is always much to do and many people to serve. Yet these practices are not optional extras—they are the wellspring of faithful ministry. We serve not out of our own strength, but from a deep, disciplined relationship with God. It's not always easy to maintain that balance, but I'm learning, growing, and making steady progress.

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:

During lockdown, I drew on my liturgical, creative, and digital skills to help sustain a sense of spiritual rhythm and community connection. I led daily prayer online, brought the parish together through shared musical projects like The Blessing, and wrote and produced a nativity play that respected social distancing by keeping participants in their household bubbles—while still involving children and adults from across the community. We even collaborated with a local alpaca farm for a memorable Magi visitation scene! - <https://youtu.be/sjZlxd7-zY?si=SlEzI9pVTkkmIgE>

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 wholeheartedly share Bishop Philip's vision and am deeply committed to helping bring it to life. Joy and energy are central to who I am, and I delight in communicating the message of Jesus in ways that are engaging and memorable—whether that's running around the church during an all-age talk or creating moments of wonder in worship. I am also passionate about placing children and young people at the heart of church life, creating spaces where they are seen, heard and disciplined to follow Jesus with courage and joy. Time and again, I've found that they teach me as much—if not more—than I could ever teach them. I also seek to be a voice for justice, standing with the vulnerable, challenging inequality, and helping the church reflect the radical compassion of Christ. This year, it has been a privilege to walk alongside asylum seekers—supporting their applications for leave to remain and welcoming them as guests on our Alpha course. With prayerful leadership, faithful presence, and a heart rooted in mission, I hope to play my part in seeing this vision flourish across Lancashire.

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.)

In my first year of curacy, I've been especially grateful for the opportunity to craft and communicate powerful, imaginative themes that have helped shape my preaching. Drawing on my background in advertising, I've sought to capture attention and stir hearts with bold, memorable concepts—whether it was "The Jesus Diet" in a sermon on gluttony, "Death Got Jesus-ed" in a punchy 10-minute resurrection message for young people, or "The Day That Changed Everything" as the unifying campaign for our Easter celebration, from banners at the gate to the pulpit's call. I thank God for redeeming these creative instincts for His kingdom purposes.

Tell us about your family/ loved ones:

I am married to Clare who is my best friend, a great laugh and an inspirational priest. She is my rock and the epitome of forgiveness and grace. She has to be! I have so many people who are loved friends in different walks of life. From my best mate, James, who I've played bands with to more recently Paul, who was my compadre at Ridley Hall, to my prayer triplet, Tom and Karen, who have been superb supports in

this first year of ordination. There are simply too many to mention. This is the power of kingdom living. You are surrounded by saints.

What do you do to chill out and relax?

I go running. I play guitar. I feed the birds. I sometimes garden. I love watching true crime documentaries. I love cooking.

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

I met Paul McCartney when I was 16 after winning a 'Buddy Holly Lookalike' competition in The Sun newspaper.