

Media questionnaire and brief biography: **Joe Kochanski**

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

Answer: I am 48 years old, and grew up in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Since then, I have lived in Galway, Ireland; New York and for the last 18 years, glorious Lancashire!

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

Answer: Throughout my training, I have been on placement with All Saints' Church, New Longton, which has also been my home parish for the past 10 years. I will be serving my curacy title just down the road in the parishes of St. Mary's, Rufford, and Holy Trinity, Tarleton.

Tell us a bit about your family:

Answer: My wife Laura and I will have been married for 18 years in July. We have two sons, Kenny (16) and Bobby (9).

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

Answer: For the past 20 years I have worked in a variety of roles relating to finance, project management and regulatory oversight. Prior to that, I spent about 10 years as a chef.

Tell us something about your journey towards ordination?

Answer: I grew up in a Roman Catholic family, and first felt a call to the priesthood in my mid-teens. After graduating 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 for myself within the life and ministry of the Church of England, I began to hear God calling me to ordained ministry once again. I had loads of reasons why this wasn't a good idea and I told God all about them, but he didn't listen and instead, just 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 to me. 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: 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: I have been inspired by my classmates at Emmanuel Theological College. Seeing how God is active in their lives and calling people from such diverse backgrounds has been a source of inspiration to me.

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: Streamed services were such a blessing during the pandemic when we couldn't meet together – and they continue to be a valuable source of connection for those who cannot physically attend services in person. I love spending an hour or so on a Sunday afternoon having a snoop around local parishes to see who is preaching on what! Social media also provides a great opportunity for evangelism as we highlight the vibrant and Christ-centred life of our parishes. As Hebrews 10:25 tells us though, we must not neglect meeting together, and so our use of the 'digital space' should ultimately be aimed at drawing people into the corporate body of Christ and inspire their deeper discipleship therein.

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

Answer: Leaving New Longton and the amazing parishioners here will be a challenge as I love them dearly – however I am also so excited to get to know everyone in the parishes of St. Mary's and Holy Trinity. I cannot wait to meet everyone, to walk beside them, and to work with them as we grow in faith together and share that faith with the world.

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 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.

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 firmly believe that the natural state of the church is growth, and I hope to help build up the vibrant and joyful Christian communities we have here in Lancashire as we make known to more and more people the amazing freedom and hope which Christ offers to each of us. Children and young people are of course at the very heart of that. I have been so blessed and inspired by working with the children and young people in our youth groups and visiting the local schools, and I cannot wait to continue this ministry throughout my curacy and beyond.

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

Answer: Having done a couple of real ones, and a few of the boxed ones which you can do at home, I have come to realize that I am ridiculously bad at escape rooms. If these had been real life scenarios, I'd have been stuck there forever were it not for the skill and logical acumen of my teammates.

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

Answer: 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...